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DEVELOPING A PROPOSED CONSENSUS-BASED COPING STRATEGIES MODEL FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' BURNOUT USING THE DELPHI TECHNIQUE

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify the factors contributing to burnout among university teachers and explore the coping strategies they used to overcome burnout. Furthermore, the study proposed a coping strategies model to understand how university teachers cope with burnout in their personal and professional lives. The population comprised university teachers from District Lahore. A sample of 20 university teachers from five public and five private universities in Lahore was selected for the Delphi panel using purposive sampling. The study employed three rounds of the Delphi technique using a qualitative approach and open-ended questions to identify consensus-based coping strategies among university teachers. Based on the findings, a research-informed coping strategies model was proposed. A focus group discussion was also conducted using background and open-ended questions. A tentative research-informed model based on effective coping strategies for overcoming teachers' burnout in the Pakistani context was shared with the focus group participants for their review and suggestions. The qualitative data were analyzed using an inductive approach to thematic analysis. The findings identified three major categories of coping strategies in the Pakistani context: problem-focused, emotion-focused, and self-relaxation strategies. Problem-focused strategies included problem-solving, self-awareness, self-management, planning, institutional support, seeking social support, and time management. Emotion-focused strategies included positive emotional strategies, such as behavior management, turning to religion, emotional support, stress management workshops, and internal motivation, as well as negative emotional responses, including denial, feelings of oppression, negativity, and self-isolation. Self-relaxation strategies included humor, exercise, taking a day off, spending time with family and friends, spiritual affiliation, improved workplace infrastructure and facilities, listening to music, and watching movies. The proposed model presents the reasons contributing to university teachers' burnout, followed by the coping strategies used to overcome burnout and the outcomes of these coping strategies in teachers' personal and professional lives. The model provides a research-informed framework for understanding how university teachers cope with burnout in the Pakistani context. The implications of the findings for university teachers, educational institutions, and future research are also discussed.

Keywords:

Teachers burnout, Delphi technique, Coping strategies, Problem-focused, Emotion-focused, Self-relaxation



1. Introduction

Teaching is considered as one of the best professions because it provides a base for all other occupations. Quality of teaching is depending on the quality of teachers, because this is the profession that builds the nation and no one can deny this fact (Kamran & Shahbaz, 2019). Teachers are the leaders of the education system and the ones who provide the foundation to improve the learning process (Aluede, 2009). They play an important role in improving the teaching and learning process and in the development of an educational institute, they are responsible to educate the future generations (Rasool & Mattoo, 2018). Universities are very important for human engineering and formulating human capital for all walks of life to accommodate the requirements of the public, private, and social sectors (Quraishi, 2018). As highlighted by Khan *et al.* (2019), most of the people consider that university teachers have less burden of work like teaching hours and other duties as compared to other professions. However, time has changed, and with the development of new administrative and political inclinations, now university teaching is considered a very demanding and hard occupation (Winefield *et al.*, 2003). The expectations from university teachers are very high. They have to perform many tasks simultaneously, such as teaching, supervising, research, and as well as administrative duties. To accomplish the demand of work, have to bear a lot of stress. This occupational stress has also become a cause of health-related issues. Persistent physical & mental stress, anxiety, and tension are caused by burnout. (Waltz, 2016) As Rajendran (2020) cited that

teaching is considered as a demanding and stressful profession and past studies supported that this stress can be the reason of emotional fatigue and burnout. There has been a lot of research on this topic in the West, but in Pakistan, it is not taken as a serious problem. But now higher education is paying serious attention to this issue and playing an active role (Malik *et al.*, 2017). As highlighted by Manzoor *et al.*, (2019) Teacher burnout is taken as an important problem and identified various personal and professional reasons behind it such as extra work load, teaching experience. And when teachers face constant stress and anxiety they get haunted by burnout. By reviewing the literature, several studies have focused on the stress or burnout of teachers. However, the teacher's strategy to cope with stress and burnout is an aspect found less researched (Lu, J *et al.*, 2024) Coping has been viewed as those actions that a person takes to maintain their emotions and its effects in stressful conditions (Amponsah, 2020). The present study was not only focused on the burnout, but it also focused on the coping strategies that help to overcome burnout.

2. Delphi Technique

The Delphi technique is known as a group-based decision-making approach that is generally used in social sciences (Ecken & Pibernik, 2015). The Delphi is a research method applied to reach an agreement by a sequence of rounds, usually two or three, where data and outcomes are given back to the participants between each round. Human experiences and decisions are identified by using this technique so reliable and refined input is

produced by participant's ideas and solutions (Murphy, 2008).

3. Research Objectives

- To explore the factors contributing to burnout among university teachers.
- To explore the university teachers coping strategies they used to overcome their burnout.
- To understand how these coping strategies help university teachers to overcome burnout in their personal and professional lives.
- To share the research-informed model based on best practices of effective coping

4. Research Design

The current study was qualitative in nature. The study comprised the three rounds of the Delphi technique by using qualitative approach and focus group interview was conducting with 8 participants from selected universities for validating the proposed model developed from Delphi findings.

5. Population of the Study

The population of this study consisted of teachers from all the public and private sector Universities of District Lahore. Lahore was selected because it is the capital city of Punjab; it represents maximum universities belonging to the whole province.

6. Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the current research comprised of 20 lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors, and professors from five public and five private universities of Lahore. At first, the list of all universities was obtained from the HEC website, and then ten universities five from public and five from the private sector were randomly selected by using lottery method. Data was collected by using

purposive sampling technique, from the faculty of natural and social sciences. Taherdoost (2016) stated that Purposive sampling is a technique in which participants are selected purposively to obtain the information that not conceivable to find another source. The following criteria were used to find different perspectives for the Delphi participants, by using purposive sampling technique:

- University Teachers with 1- 5 years of teaching experience.
- University Teachers with 5-10 years of teaching experience.
- University Teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience.

7. Data Collection

Consent letters were sent to the twenty-five participants from which twenty participants expressed their consent to be a part of the Delphi study, and all 20 participants were completed all three rounds. A letter of acknowledgment and first round questionnaire was sent to all the participants by the researcher. After that, the rounds questionnaire was emailed to all the participants who completed the rounds one by one. The Delphi round one consisted of five questions formulated by the researcher and validated by expert opinions from one associate professor and two assistant professors, was sent to all the participants through email. Then round two questionnaires which consisted of five questions was prepared on the bases of the information of first round data analysis and finalized with expert's opinion. The second-round questionnaire with summary of findings

derived from first-round data analysis was then sent to all the participants. Participants had the freedom to revise or examine the stated answers in all three rounds. The round two was completed almost in one month it took a lessor time than the first round of data collection. After analysis of the second round, the questions for the third round were prepared and finalized with expert's opinion and then sent to all the participants with a short description of round two results and also requested to send back the response as early as possible. The data was received from participants almost in 20 days.

8. Focus Group Panel

After completing three rounds of Delphi technique a focus group interview was conducted with eight participants selected from the 20 Delphi panel after their consent.

9. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed and then a tentative suggested model was formulated on the bases of results and Delphi panel participants consensus, participants responses of all the Delphi rounds were made available for all members. Original responses were categorized and listed to help the researcher to reach group consensus. Firstly, all the responses were read carefully one by one by the researcher to get familiarization with data and prepare some important points. Then the similar and different responses of data were highlighted which helped to eliminate the irrelevant elements. It should be kept in mind that all the collected data couldn't appropriate for coding. Codes were generated by using axial and open coding technique, reviewed all the basic themes, and merged them into major

significant themes. It was ensured, during all procedures that the codes and themes should reflect the current study research questions and data. After the successful completion of three rounds of Delphi technique, a focus group interview was conducted to generalize the study findings and finalized the suggested model of university teachers' coping strategies. The focus group participants were consisted of three professors, three Associate professors and two assistant professors. The researcher prepared questions for the focus group interview with expert opinions, experts are consisted of one professor, one associate professor, two assistant professors and one language expert, for gaining the comprehensive result.

10. Study Findings & Discussions

The model comprises the major coping strategies that were identified and finalized through the three Delphi rounds. The study explores the causes of burnout, which are categorized into institutional and personal burnout. The causes reported as personal burnout reason are, domestic issues, less social support, work-life balance, transportation issues, self-competence, income, higher expenses and family expectations. While the reasons of institutional burnout are, working hours, workload, work-conflicts, administrative issues, less-appreciation, institutional policies, less resources and low salaries. The study participants also reported that these factors can be the reason of an individual's physical as well as mental illness if not addressed. These strategies reflect the collective expert consensus regarding effective ways for university teachers to cope with burnout. The study revealed that teachers' face lot of physical as well

as psychological issues and having the responsibility of educating the young generation. And they agreed that university teachers should apply coping strategies to overcome all they issue and challenges they faced in their personal and professional life. The study reported various coping strategies that study participants used to overcome burnout. The most reported coping strategies were found, meet dead-lines, setting priorities, being task oriented, self-awareness, being self-discipline, planning, self-regulation, Problem-solving, making target shorts seeking social support, professionalism, deep breathing, deep trust on Allah, prayers, reading books, taking tea and avoiding irrelevant activities. Six coping strategies were assembled under the umbrella of problem-focused coping strategy, self-management, self-awareness, time-management, planning, and

problem solving and seeking social support. However, seeking emotional support and avoidance approach, was included into the emotion-focused coping strategy. The findings of the current study reported that emotion-focused coping strategy is categorized into positive emotions and negative emotions. Positive emotions consisted of seeking emotional support, behavior management, avoidance approach, internal motivation and turning to religion. It was decided on the bases of participants' suggestions that religious coping included in emotion-focused coping. The third major theme was the self-relaxation that includes, sharing concerns with family, spiritual affiliation, Physical activity, taking a day off and using humor. The following model is a small endeavor of the current study, and based on the context of the study findings.

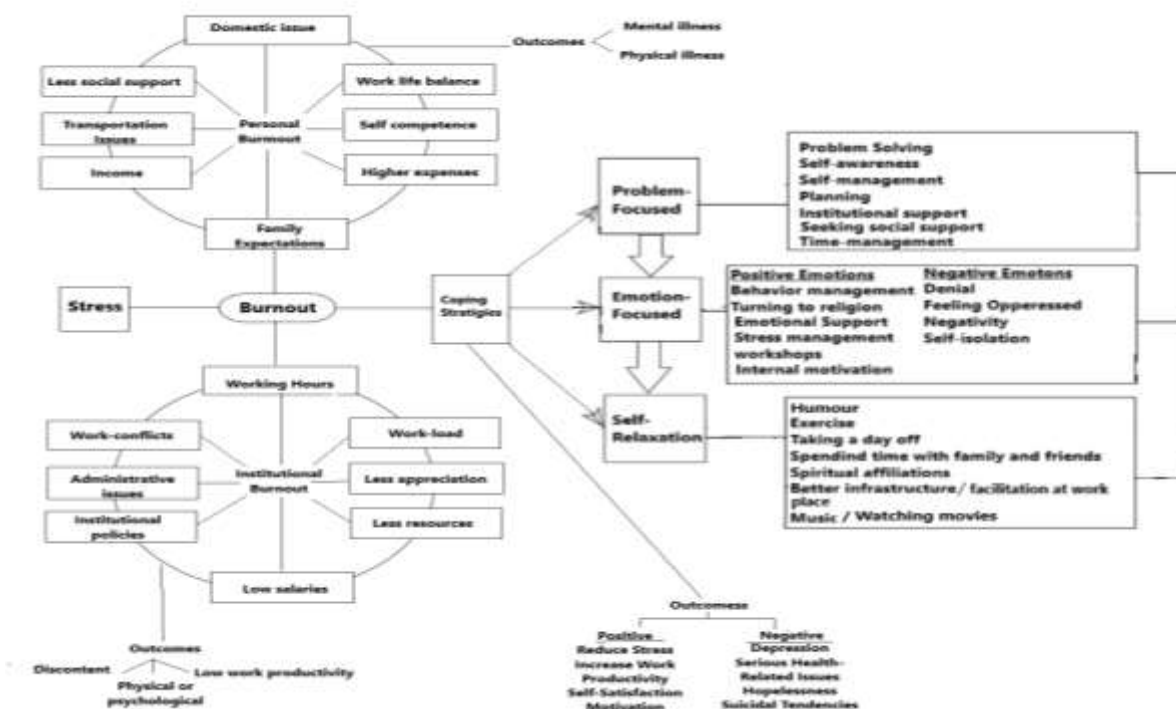


Figure 1: Problem-focused, Emotion-focused, Self-relaxation

Three major strategies were explored under the current study findings context, problem-focused, emotion-focused (positive emotions, negative emotions) and self-relaxation and much other sub-strategies work under these strategies, detail provided in chapter four. Quraishi *et al.* (2018) also provided a similar list of coping strategies including time-management, prayers, religious approach, task oriented, planning, seeking social support, avoidance, denial, acceptance and breathing. The findings are supported by Parven (2019) who reported the most widely used coping strategies by teachers are prayers, time-management, seeking social support, exercise, relaxation and socialization. Also highlighted one's routine of sleeping, proper diet, physical activities, stress management, socialization provides relaxation which helps to cope with stress. The study used the Delphi three rounds technique and discovered the university teachers coping strategies and developed a suggested university teachers coping strategies model. For a generalization of the Delphi results and finalization of the coping strategies model, the current study conducted a focus group interview and after process developed a suggested coping strategies model of university teachers' coping strategies. The conclusions are presented in the following section. The outcomes of three rounds of the Delphi technique highlighted that almost all teachers consciously or unconsciously using various coping strategies to somehow relieve themselves by stress positively or negatively. Three major coping strategies in which many other strategies work have been explored from the three rounds of the Delphi technique and from the

responses of focus group participants in the Pakistani context, including, Problem-focused, emotion-focused, and self-relaxation. Problem-focused coping includes (problem-solving, self-awareness, self-management, planning, institutional support, seeking social support and time-management). While emotion-focused coping involves two types of coping positive as well as negative emotions, (Positive emotion coping consisted of the behavior management, turning to religion, emotional support, stress management workshops and internal motivation, negative emotion coping contains (denial, feeling oppressed, negativity and self-isolation). However, Self-relaxation comprises of (humor, exercise, taking a day off, spending time with family and friends, spiritual affiliations, better infrastructure /facilitations at work place, music and watching movies). The study also reports that in stressful situation women used more religious coping and men more focused on problem solving. The study also reported that the use of various coping strategies helps university teachers to reduce burnout in their personal and professional life. Particularly female participants report these coping strategies to help to keep their personal life calm. Both males and females report that at the workplace these can be helpful to reduce stress and increase work productivity and self-satisfaction that enhance motivation. Paudel, *et al.*, (2024) reported similar findings, were coping strategies can be categorized into personal and institutional type. Stress can be reduced by applying different coping styles it can be positive or negative, such as spiritual affiliations, physical workout, sharing

concerns with family and friends, taking drugs, taking risks and negative thinking approach. It was found that continuous physical and mental illnesses develop despair and it can lead to an increase in suicidal tendencies. Song, *et al.*, (2025) also reported that coping outcomes have been examined as positive and negative. The negative coping outcome was oppressed feelings, negativity, and anxiety. While positive outcomes were self-satisfaction and positivity.

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