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Impact of Problem Focused Coping Strategy on Female Principals Stress Management

1. Humaira Tabassum, 2. Dr. Shumaila Malik

1. Principal, Ecole Fatima Alfehri Model School and College, Mardan, Pakistan

humairakhan.khan@gmail.com

2. Controller of Examinations / Assistant Professor, Northern University, Nowshera, Pakistan

controller.exams@northern.edu.pk

Abstract

The stress facing the educational leadership as school principals are required to deal with administrative management, supervision of staff, academic performance and institutional development. There are specific issues that may affect female principals in addition to the other factors listed above: Interpersonal demands, competing professional demands, and work–life balance. Problem-Focused Coping Strategies (PFCS) may be a way to cope with stress by identifying the sources of stress, planning and problem solving, prioritizing and making positive decisions. The present study investigated the correlation between PFCS and Stress Management (SM) of female school principals. The method of quantitative research was employed and data was gathered from 74 principals (females). Analysis of the correlation showed a weak negative correlation between PFCS and SM ($r = -.117$). The regression model accounted for about 1.4% of the variability in SM ($R^2 = .014$). The overall regression model was not significant ($F(1,72) = 1.005$, $p = .319$). The regression coefficient for PFCS was also negative and not significantly different from 0 ($B = -.254$, $\beta = -.117$, $p = .319$). The results of this study suggest that there was no statistically significant predictive relationship found between the female principals who participated in the study and PFCS and SM. The results do not show that problem-focused coping is not effective, however; it does imply that it may be insufficient to account for variations in stress management in this sample. The results indicate

that there is a need to explore further individual and organizational factors, such as workload, institutional support, leadership experience, resources, and work–life balance. More research is needed using larger samples, measuring instruments that have been established and validated, and using longitudinal or intervention designs to investigate the role of problem-focused coping in stress management. Other professional development programs that could be beneficial for educational authorities include those related to problem solving, time management, delegation, and conflict resolution. The research brings insights from the sphere of stress amongst female educational leaders to the discussion and provides some insights for future research directions.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Problem Focused, Female Principal, Stress Management, Job Satisfaction

1. Introduction

The role of a school principal is crucially important in schools, as they are expected to supervise the school staff, allocate resources, plan school activities, guide the teaching and learning process, and engage with the parents and education authorities. These duties can generate high work demands, especially if principals are faced with high workloads, lack of resources, conflicting expectations and inadequate institutional support. More recent studies recognize administrative burden and poor support as other key factors that increase principals' stress and mental health issues (Elomaa et al., 2023; Tahir et al., 2026). In addition, previous studies in the field of principal stress profiles have shown that principals' coping patterns are related to their wellbeing, job satisfaction and health (Sebastian et al., 2024).

Combined pressures on female principals may be created due to the intersection of professional demands, gender expectations, interpersonal stress and family obligations. They should not, however, be taken for granted that they are the same since the level of stress may differ depending on the institutional context, leadership experience, resources available, and individual stress-coping abilities. The review performed by Tahir et al. (2026) revealed that the stress of female principals was more common than male principals, thus highlighting the importance of studying gender in educational leadership studies. Likewise, Suleman et al. (2021) studied the stress of secondary school principals in Pakistan and found work overload, low salary, and institutional challenges to be correlated factors of stress. Problem-focused

coping strategy (PFCS) is defined as intentional actions taken to solve the source of the stress in addition to coping with the feelings of the stressor(s).

PFCS can involve problem identification, prioritization, feasibility of solutions, delegation, effective time management and information or institutional support. Elomaa et al. (2023) identified problem-focused coping strategies, including work management, systematic task completion, and keeping boundaries between work and personal life, as coping strategies utilized by school principals. Dawous et al. (2025) studied leadership stress and coping strategies among school principals, and noted that practices like task prioritization and time management were emphasized as coping strategies. Stress Management (SM) in this study is the ability to identify, control and adapt to workplace stresses in a healthy and effective way. It is crucial to the effective coping because, over time, principals' stress and coping profiles have been linked to the health and job satisfaction of principals (Sebastian et al., 2024).

Thus, studying PFCS among female principals could help to understand if there is a relationship between practical, problem-oriented solutions and stress management. The proposed study will explore this relationship and provide evidence which may contribute to professional development, institutional support, and leadership for female school principals.

1.1. Research Gap

Recent research has explored stress, coping strategies and mental health in school principals but there are some areas that need to be explored further. Most of the previous studies have focused on general stressors, coping mechanisms, and principals' psychological and emotional health, but not specifically on the effect of problem-focused coping on stress management for female principals. For instance, Elomaa et al. (2023) explored the nature of work-related stress experiences and coping responses of elementary school principals, and Sebastian et al. (2024) analyzed the relationship between principals' stress and coping profile and professional well-being. While these studies offer a valuable backdrop, they are unable to define the direct impact of PFCS on stress management for principals of the opposite sex. Another area of unmet need is the need for gender-specific and context-specific evidence.

Tahir et al. (2026) found significant differences between the experiences of stress for principals, and they recommended further investigation into what factors impact their mental health. Suleman et al. (2021) studied stress among secondary school heads in Pakistan, however, they did not focus on individual stress of female school principals due to PFCS. Thus,

there is a need for further research to explore the relationship between problem-focused coping and stress management in the target population. This study aims to fill this gap by specifically examining female principals and investigating if there is an association with better stress management in the specific educational context using a practical problem-solving approach.

1.2. Problem Statement

The stress of female school principals is related to the administrative work, workload, interpersonal relationship and dual career burden. However, there is limited research specifically that looks at the effect of problem-focused coping strategies on their stress management. This research was examining the effects of PFCS on stress management of female principals and will help inform how to better support and develop them.

1.3. Aims and Objective

The aim of this study was to assess the role of problem-focused coping strategies in stress management of female school principals. This study aimed at investigating the correlation between the problem-focused coping and management of stress among principals (women).

2. Literature Review

In the context of educational leadership, stress is a significant issue since school principals need to handle academic performance, staff supervision, institutional administration, student discipline, and relationship with parents and educational authorities. Responsibilities often overlap and principals are asked to respond to a number of demands within a limited time frame and resources. Elomaa et al. (2023) conducted research on work-related stress of 76 elementary school principals in Finland, and found that workload, interpersonal conflict, lack of resources and internal pressures were significant stressors. Their results show that there is an organizational and personal component to principal stress. Likewise, research by Sebastian et al. (2024) investigated stress and coping among school principals, and found that principals vary in their blends of stress and coping resources. These results suggest both work stress and coping styles should be taken into account when considering stress management. Principals' stress can also affect their professional effectiveness as well as the wider school community. High stress may make it challenging to focus, work relationships, make quick decisions and be motivated.

Sebastian et al. (2024) concluded that principal stress and coping profiles were associated with principals' and teachers' well-being and professional outcomes. Furthermore, the scoping review conducted by Tahir et al. (2026) looked at the stress and mental health of principals in the literature from 2014 to 2024 and found that there were common stressors in principals' occupations and a few studies that focused on coping strategies. The results indicate that, appropriate organizational support and leadership development programs should be designed with a grasp of the principals' response to stress. While the environment for female school principals shares much in common with that of other principals, it can also be influenced by gender stereotypes, inequalities in the workplace, family duties and access to support for their leadership. These factors must be examined and not assumed to impact all women.

Tahir et al. (2026) summarized the literature on the stress and mental well-being of school principals and examined the evidence related to gender differences, as well as the competing demands of family and school. The review notes the need for demographic and contextual factors to be taken into account when examining occupational well-being. Likewise, Elomaa et al. (2023) found workload and interpersonal relations to be important stressors, and they highlighted the role of social support and coping strategies in principals' occupational health. All of these studies add to a body of knowledge that could be used to explore the challenges of managing the demands of the professional role for female principals. Stress management involves the ways one identifies stressors, controls reactions and implements actions to minimize or mitigate their impact when stressed. These processes may include: planning administrative activities, addressing conflicts among staff, assigning duties, seeking outside help, and setting parameters between work and life for female principals.

Elomaa et al., (2023) reported that principals employed problem-focused, emotion-focused, and social coping strategies, indicating that stress management can be multi-faceted intervention strategies. Sebastian et al. (2024) demonstrated that it is key to consider stress and coping at the same time and not as separate experiences. Therefore, the study of stress management in female principals should not only consider how they manage the stress but also what strategies they use and how effective these strategies are in aiding them to respond to stress in a positive way. Problem focused coping strategy involves thoughts and actions that people take to identify, change, or confront the situation that causes the stress. Do not focus solely on emotional responses, but try to recognize the issue, resources that may be available, options for solving the problem and take action. In schools, this could involve planning for

school leaders, prioritizing urgent tasks, allocating tasks to other staff, communicating and resolving conflicts, or asking for support from education authorities. The problem-focused coping strategies that school principals reported were identified by Elomaa et al. (2023) as work management and balance between work and personal life. Their research shows that principals take proactive measures to cope with stressors instead of just reacting to them emotionally.

Many of the stressors in education demand direct intervention, making PFCS relevant to educational leadership. For instance, a principal who has too much paper work can set up a task schedule, a principal who has a problem with staff disagreements can setup meetings and have established procedures for conflict resolution. Likewise, when there is limited supply, a strategy needs to be developed, and coordination with authorities and efficient use of available facilities is needed. Similarly, Elomaa et al. (2023) identified principals' workload and interpersonal relations as stressors, which made practical problem-solving relevant to the principals' work. In addition, Sebastian et al. (2024) showed that principals' coping profiles were not uniform, suggesting that coping needs to be studied in conjunction with the nature of the stress, and not taken to be equal across all people. The connection between PFCS and stress management is demonstrated by the idea that people can minimize the effects of stress if they take proactive steps to respond to manageable workplace challenges. For instance, good planning can help to minimize uncertainty, delegated tasks can help to share workloads and structured communication can help to avoid interpersonal misunderstandings spiraling out of control.

Elomaa et al. (2023) found that principals' coping strategies included problem-focused coping as well as emotion-focused coping and social coping, indicating that problem solving is one of a range of coping responses to stress. Sebastian et al. (2024) also explored the link between coping profiles and principal stress and their professional correlates. These results collectively suggest a justification for exploring the relationship between increased PFCS use and better stress management for female principals. However, it is not always effective in all situations to use problem-focused coping. It may be only useful when the person can influence the source of stress, has enough time, information and institutional resources to make the change. A principal, for instance, might be able to reshape day-to-day operations, but might not have as much influence over government policy, staffing, or funding. In the literature on principal stress, the issues identified as concerns are important workload and lack of organizational

support (Tahir et al., 2026). Elomaa et al. (2023) noted principals' need for problem-focused support and social support. Thus, PFCS can have the greatest benefit when used in conjunction with good organizational support and realistic opportunities to deal with work challenges. Empirical studies of these issues have been provided in recent years.

Elomaa et al. (2023) examined stressors, coping strategies, and support needs of 76 principals in Finnish elementary schools by analyzing their responses to a questionnaire and applying qualitative content analysis. They found stress related concerns to be workload, interpersonal conflict, lack of resources, and internal pressures. The participants identified problem-focused, emotion-focused, and social coping strategies, suggesting principals engage in varying strategies when they are called upon for professional needs. A major insight of this research is the focus on principals' experience and the organizational support required to foster occupational well-being. Sebastian et al. (2024) investigated stress and coping styles of 125 principals and looked at the relationship between stress and coping types and outcomes for principals, teachers and students. The researchers were able to distinguish among the various combinations of stress and coping, and found a group with both high stress and high coping to be the largest group. This is particularly significant since it implies that individuals with high coping responses do not necessarily have low levels of stress, and can have high levels of stress despite having high coping responses.

Tahir et al. (2026) discussed some of the themes in a broader review of 38 studies from 2014 to 2024, including administrative workload, resource constraints, coping strategies, and demographic disparities. The results of these studies provide an impetus for additional research about coping strategies that might be most beneficial for specific groups of principals. The literature indicated that the effectiveness of coping strategies should be studied based on school principals' professional and personal situations. There can be some workload demands, interpersonal issues and competing pressures that can be experienced by female principals, but may vary from person to person and institution to institution. In their research, Tahir et al., (2026) noted that gender was a relevant demographic concern related to principals' stress and mental health. Elomaa et al. (2023) also showed the significance of practical coping strategies and organizational support in the occupational well-being of principals. The results provide a foundation to further explore this issue with female principals specifically, rather than extrapolating results from a mixed-gender sample to generalize to female principals. This review also suggests that the research examining principals' stress is more advanced than

research that specifically investigates the impacts of individual coping strategies on principals' stress management is female principals.

Sebastian et al. (2024) focused on general patterns of principals' coping and their general pattern of principal stress, while Elomaa et al. (2023) investigated elementary school principals' coping experiences and their support needs. The conclusions from either of these studies is not sufficient to make a causal claim for PFCS in the context of female principals. The present study, therefore is aimed at examining the relationship of PFCS to stress management among female school principals in the context of the study. It may inform leadership training programmes to focus on problem-solving, time management, positive communication and suitable institutional assistance.

3. Theoretical Framework

The present research was based in the premise of Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. The job demands-resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) were both used as the frameworks for elaborating this. This schema provides a lens to analyze how work strain and coping strategies of public sector school principals relate to leadership and psychological well-being. Stress is a common occurrence at work and the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) has been one of the most widely applied in predicting work stress. The idea of stress is not a single response to the environment, but rather a dynamic and interactive process between the individual and the environment. Stress is perceived to occur when environmental demands are appraised as exceeding an individual's resources, these demands are appraised as a threat or a challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The transactional model also incorporates the idea of coping flexibility, or the ability to draw from problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies as the situation and one's perception of controllability changes. In the beginning, for instance, a school principal might adopt emotion-oriented answers to his/her school's problems, such as asking for help from other school staff members to address anxiety, or in turn, he or she might adopt problem-oriented answers, such as delegating to ease the load. The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping offer a positive lens for examining the management of public-school principals when considering their role as educational leaders, particularly as they navigate the high stressors of their role: their need to handle administrative matters, to meet accountability standards, to manage staff discontent,

and to work in the context of limited resources. This theoretical perspective views stress as a transaction and therefore emphasizes that coping strategies are adaptive to the stressor, but they are also related to the individual's perception of the constraints and resources he/she has to deal with the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Maslach et al., 2001).

The theory is supported by experiences conducted in the educational context. Studies show that principals who combine problem-focused coping with emotion-focused coping are most successful at maintaining their psychological health, job satisfaction, and leadership efficacy when under stress (Grissom et al., 2015; Whitaker, 1996). Maladaptive and/or avoidance coping, on the other hand, can be counterproductive to stress and increase the likelihood of burnout, low organizational performance, and low motivation (Maslach et al., 2001). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is the model developed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) that can be used to describe the work stress, burnout and engagement of the employees in an organization. The model also states that all work and workers have demands and resources, which interact with each other influencing work stress, motivation, and job performance. The JD-R model has also been applied extensively in the context of educational leadership in studies of how school principals manage their professional stress and manage to perform well in difficult workplace environments.

The JD-R model also focuses on the relationship between demands and resources to predict coping. Stress and proclivity towards problem-focused and emotion-focused coping might be greater among supported and overworked principals. Conversely, adequate resources could enhance the effectiveness of problem-focused coping as needed resources to cope with stressors can be acquired. When resources are lacking or demands overwhelming, maladaptive coping and/or evasive coping may be used, which can lead to emotional exhaustion and/or dysfunctional organizational functioning (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Knowledge management (KM) has been most theoretically understood from the resource-based perspective (RBV). The theory says that when humans feel it is reducing their resources, they have actually reduced their resources, or they feel that they have invested resources and have not gained resources, they are stressed. Resources can include material things (objects), qualities of a person (personal characteristics), situations (conditions) or activities (energies) that the individual values or that are a means to obtain other resources. COR theory offers a practical framework to explore how public sector school principals cope with stress by safeguarding, securing and investing in resources.

4. Research Methodology

This study was carried out using quantitative method to explore coping strategies and their impact on stress among public sector lady head. Correlational research design was used in this study. The correlational design was appropriate for this study as it allows to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. The population of this study was consisting of 163 principals of public sector secondary schools of district Mardan. A random sample of 74 female principles were taken. The Coping Strategies and stress management Inventory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) was used which was adapted for a structured questionnaire. It assessed the frequency and nature of coping responses of principals including problem-focused, emotion-focused and mixed coping. Items were included in the questionnaire to see if the participants were stressed and to make Likert scale items easy to quantify. Data were gathered using various methods. The researcher went to the selected schools and personally interviewed the principals using the questionnaires. All participants gave informed consent prior to participation; adequate time was allowed to complete questionnaires. Google Forms was used to gather some information with an online questionnaire. The link was sent to the District Education Office who then sent it to the principals via the WhatsApp group and they were able to fill the questionnaire while being on the go. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and presented in tables to fulfil the objective of this study. Data were analyzed by one of the widely used professional statistical software SPSS (version 25) which is commonly used in social research and education for advanced analysis of data to generate reliable result.

5. Results

Table 1 shows the demographic information of the 74 respondents who participated in the study on the relationship between Problem-Focused Coping Strategies (PFCS) and Stress Management (SM) of female principals. Regarding age, 35 respondents (47.3%) were above 49 years, 32 (43.2%) were between 40 and 49 years, and 7 (9.5%) were between 30 and 39 years. This suggests that a large proportion of respondents were experienced and mature professionals, as most of the respondents were from the older age groups. Rural school principals accounted for the majority of the respondents as they represented 56 (75.7%) and urban school principals accounted for 18 (24.3%). In terms of academic qualifications, 50 respondents (67.6%) had masters, 14 (18.9%) had MPhil, 9 (12.2%) had PhD and 1 (1.4%) had

bachelors. This indicated that the majority of the participants had academic qualifications in the post-graduate level. In terms of professional qualifications, 62 respondents (83.8%) had an M.Ed., 7 (9.5%) had both B.Ed. and M.Ed. qualifications and 5 (6.8%) had a B.Ed. qualification. In terms of administrative experience, 23 respondents (31.1%) had 5–10 years of experience, 22 (29.7%) had less than 5 years of experience, 19 (25.7%) had more than 15 years of experience and 10 (13.5%) had 11–15 years of experience. Professionally, 36 (48.6%) were in Scale 17, and 19 (25.7%) in each of Scale 18 and Scale 19. Lastly, 69 (93.2%) respondents were married while 5 (6.8%) were single. The overall picture of a sample is that it was mainly married, post-graduate-qualified female principals working in rural schools. The following characteristics also offer context to the results presented in the PFCS and stress management sections, but would need additional statistical analysis for results concerning the main variables.

Table 1: Demographic Information (N=74)

Variable	Categories	*f*	%	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	30-39 Year	7	9.5	3.42	0.662
	40-49 Year	32	43.2		
	> 49 Year	35	47.3		
Location of School	Urban	18	24.3	1.76	0.432
	Rural	56	75.7		
Academic Qualification	Bachelor	1	1.4	2.42	0.722
	Master	50	67.6		
	MPhil	14	18.9		
	PhD	9	12.2		
Professional Qualification	B.Ed.	5	6.8	2.31	1.227
	M.Ed.	62	83.8		
	Both	7	9.5		
Administrative Experience	< 5 years	22	29.7	2.35	1.164
	5-10 Years	23	31.1		
	11-15 Years	10	13.5		
	> 15 Years	19	25.7		
Scale	Scale 17	36	48.6	1.77	0.837
	Scale 18	19	25.7		

	Scale 19	19	25.7		
Marital Status	Single Married	5 69	6.8 93.2	1.93	0.253

The results of the correlation between Problem-Focused Coping Strategies (PFCS) and Stress Management (SM) are presented in Table 2. Among the 74 respondents, there was a weak negative correlation between PFCS and SM with correlation coefficient (r = -0.117). The results indicate that there was slightly less SM present in the collected data when PFCS was higher. The strength of the relationship, however, was very small, meaning that a change in PFCS was not strongly related to a change in SM. A perfect correlation of each variable with itself is indicated by the diagonal values of 1.00. The negative correlation must be interpreted with caution as the table does not give a significance value, but is given in the regression analysis in Tables 4 and 5. In addition, the substantive interpretation is dependent on the coding of the PFCS and SM scales. The relationship between the two would imply some negative correlation between the scores if the higher scores on the SM scale meant better management of stress, otherwise the same. Overall, the correlation suggests that PFCS was only moderately correlated with SM in this sample.

Table 2: Relationship Problem Focused Coping Strategies (PFCS) and Stress Management (SM)

	PFCS	**SM**
PFCS	1	
SM	-0.117	1

Table 3 shows the regression model summary which explained the association between Problem-Focused Coping Strategies (PFCS) and Stress Management (SM). The model's correlation coefficient was (R = 0.117) and the coefficient of determination was \(R^2=0.014\). This implied that roughly 1.4% of the observed variation of SM in the fitted regression model was due to PFCS. The adjusted R^2 was .000, showing that there was virtually no improvement in the model after adjusting for the number of predictors and sample size. The standard error of the estimate was 0.82122, which is the average size of the errors from the regression in the units of the SM outcome measure. The results imply that PFCS, taken alone, was not a strong predictor of stress management among the respondents. Other factors including workload, organizational support, leadership role, personal factors and other coping strategies might also

be relevant but were not included in this model. Thus, the findings are not evidence that differences in stress management among female principals can only be attributed to the factor of PFCS.

Table 3: Model Summary: Relationship Between PFCS and SM

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.117[a]	.014	.000	.82122

Notes: Predictors: (Constant), PFCS

Table 4 shows the result of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) analysis for the regression model to determine if there was a significant effect between Problem-Focused Coping Strategies (PFCS) and Stress Management (SM). The regression sum of squares was 0.678 and the residual sum of squares was 48.557, which gave a total sum of squares equal to 49.235. The model had an F-value of 1.005 with 1 and 72 degrees of freedom, and significance value of p = .319. The overall regression model was not significant because the significance value was above the conventional value of .05. These mean that the data were not adequate to show that there was a significant relationship between PFCS and SM for the 74 female principals. The regression model accounted for a small percent of the variance in stress management, but this was not statistically significant. This result therefore does not allow the rejection of the null hypothesis that PFCS does not significantly predict SM. Caution should be taken regarding the lack of a significant finding as a proof that PFCS has no effect, but rather the present sample does not provide enough evidence of a statistically significant predictive relationship.

Table 4: Overall Regression Model Between PFCS and SM

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	.678	1	.678	1.005	.319[a]
Residual	48.557	72	.674		
Total	49.235	73			

Notes: a. Predictors: (Constant), PFCS b. Dependent Variable: SM

Table 5 shows the regression coefficient values that were measured to determine the direction, magnitude, and statistical significance of the relationship between Problem-Focused Coping Strategies (PFCS) and Stress Management (SM). The unstandardized regression coefficient for PFCS was B = -0.254, meaning that for every unit increase in the PFCS, the estimated SM score decreased by 0.254 units. The standardized beta coefficient was β = -0.117 implying a

weak negative relationship between the predictor and the outcome. The \(t\)-value for PFCS was -1.003, with a significance value of p = .319. This value was greater than .05, so the regression coefficient for this regression was not statistically significant. The constant was 4.214, which represented the score for SM that is expected at PFCS = 0, if zero is meaningful on the scale. So, the regression equation that is fitted is:

$$SM = 4.214 - 0.254 (PFCS)$$

The findings show that in this sample the PFCS was not significantly related to stress management. Thus, the results indicate a possible negative effect of PFCS on SM but it is not statistically significant. The interpretation of this direction will vary based on the coding of the stress-management scale. The results should be interpreted, therefore, in light of the definitions of these scales and the limitations of the study.

Table 5: Effect of PFCS and SM

	Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardize Coefficients**	***t***	**Sig.**
	B	**Beta**			
(Constant)	4.214	1.123		3.754	.000
PFCS	-.254	.254	-.117	-1.003	.319

6. Discussion

This study is aimed for exploring the effect of Problem Focused Coping Strategies (PFCS) on Stress Management (SM) in the sample of 74 female principals working in secondary and tertiary schools in the city of Mardan. The results showed a slight negative correlation between PFCS and SM (r = -.117)). In addition, regression analysis showed that the regression of PFCS on SM accounted for about 1.4% of the variance in SM and the overall regression model was not statistically significant, (F (1,72) = 1.005, p = .319). Likewise, the regression coefficient for PFCS was negative, but not statistically significant (B = -.254, β = -.117, p =.319). These results indicate that the study failed to find a statistically significant predictive relationship between PFCS and SM for the principals that participated in the study. The findings can be related to the study by Elomaa et al. (2023) which explored elementary school principals' experiences of work stress, coping strategies and support in Finland.

Among the factors that contribute to stress they found workload, interpersonal problems and organizational stress to be important sources for them. The researchers also identified problem-focused coping and social supports as pertinent coping styles in the workplace. Their results indicate that principals use coping strategies, but in the present study a correlation between PFCS and SM was not found as statistically significant. The difference may be due to variations in participants, institutional settings, measurement instruments and type of variables examined. Further, it indicates that the effectiveness of problem-focused coping can be influenced by the degree of control principals have over the problems they face (Elomaa et al., 2023). Results also were related to Sebastian et al. (2024), who examined principal stress and coping patterns and their concurrent and prospective associations. Their study showed that principals' stress reactions and coping are a combination, suggesting that no single type of coping is independent of stress demands placed on individuals.

In the current study, the weak relationship between coping strategies and stress management suggests that other factors besides coping might contribute to variation in how stress is managed. Female principals can face administrative demands, lack of resources, staff issues and work demands that sometimes are not easily addressed through problem-solving and pair work. Consequently, organizational resources and institutional support may also be important considerations when interpreting the relationship between PFCS and SM (Sebastian et al., 2024). In addition, Tahir et al. (2026) pointed out in the scoping review of school principals' stress and mental health that stress and its associated factors are critical to consider regarding principals' well-being. Their review further offers a wider perspective on the present findings, by highlighting that the factors impacting on stress are many and varied in the professional and organizational environment.

This research is an extension of this discussion by examining the female principals more directly and statistically analyzing the relationship between PFCS and SM. The results, however, do not support the hypothesis that PFCS is an independent predictor of stress management in this sample due to the nonsignificant regression model. The results of the study overall suggest that further research is required to explore coping strategies in conjunction with institutional or individual contexts. Due to the small sample size ($n = 74$) and the fact that PFCS was the only predictor used in the analysis, the results should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, other factors can be explored in future research, such as workload, social support,

leadership experience and organizational resources, to gain a deeper understanding of stress management for female principals.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of Problem-Focused Coping Strategies on Stress Management among 74 female principals in schools. The correlation showed that there was a weak negative correlation between PFCS and SM ($r = -0.117$). The regression analysis also revealed that PFCS accounted for about 1.4% of the variance of the stress management variable. The overall regression model was not statistically significant, ($F(1,72) = 1.005$, $p = .319$) and the regression coefficient for PFCS was not either statistically significant ($B = -.254$, $p = .319$). Thus, the study was not able to find statistical evidence of the significant prediction of stress management by PFCS among the female principals involved in the study. The results point to the complexity of stress in educational leadership. Problem-solving, planning, and task prioritization are possible coping strategies, but they could be related to stress management and this could be influenced by institutional factors, resources, workload, and individual factors. The findings also highlight the need to understand stress management in more complex explanatory models, rather than using a single coping variable. However, the findings are not to be seen as a sign of the lack of effectiveness of PFCS. Conclusions are limited because of the small number of cases studied, the possible measurement considerations and using only one predictor.

Further studies could be conducted on a larger and more varied sample of female principals in both urban and rural schools to enhance the generalizability of the results. Valid measures of problem-focused coping/stress management strategies should be used and the direction of the relationship between the scale scores and coping/stress management should be clearly defined. Additional predictors, such as workload, institutional support, leadership experience, work–life balance and resources should be explored further. A longitudinal study or an intervention design might also be used to see if training in problem-solving, time management, delegation and conflict resolution has measurable effects on stress management. Educational authorities should provide professional learning, mentoring, counselling and supportive administrative supports to empower female principals to deal effectively with workplace issues.

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