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**Stress Coping Styles and Academic Achievement: A Correlational Study**

Syeda Omaina Mehak<sup>1</sup>, Ayla Khan\*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MPhil, The University of Haripur. Email: omehak4@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer & PhD Scholar, Psychology Department, The University of Haripur.

\*Corresponding Author Email: aylakhan3241@yahoo.com

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**Abstract**

Stress is a fundamental component of student life and has significant effects on the academic achievement of learners. The present research study attempted to find out the correlation between ways to cope with stress and academic achievement in university students. The correlational research approach was applied to gather information regarding a group of 500 learners who were participating in three different governmental universities: the University of Haripur, Abbottabad University of Science and Technology, and Hazara University in Mansehra, Pakistan. Respondents represent a broad spectrum of academic disciplines and program levels. The stress coping techniques were evaluated using standard methods, including problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, avoidant coping, and social support coping, while academic achievement was gauged through self-reported GPA. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis revealed a relatively favourable link between problem-focused coping and academic achievement ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ) showing that it indicates learners who effectively manage stresses seem to succeed better academically. Dealing with peer support has been associated to greater educational achievement ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ). Emotion-focused coping ( $r = -.28, p < .01$ ) and avoidant coping ( $r = -.35, p < .01$ ) exhibited substantial negative correlations with academic performance. Interrelationships between coping styles demonstrated that appropriate coping methods had a positive relationship to academic success, although maladaptive strategies were inversely related. The findings highlight the importance of supportive adaptive coping techniques to improve students' academic achievement and psychological well-being. The implications for counselling services and stress management therapies in university settings are explored.

**Keywords:** Stress, Academic Achievement, Coping Styles, University Students

**Introduction**

Academic stress is an ongoing experience for students globally, due to workloads, expectations for performance, and competition in classrooms (Kausar, 2025). Whether individuals manage stress through different coping styles—such as problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance strategies—can have an important effect upon both their mental health and their academic performance. Coping styles are intellectual and behavioural techniques utilized to cope with emotional and cognitive demands posed by stressful circumstances, and evidence demonstrates that adapted coping is related to greater academic engagement and accomplishments (Park, 2014; Kausar, 2025). On the other hand, dysfunctional techniques such as avoidant coping are linked with increased stress and lower academic performance in some student populations.

Though the connection between ways to cope and academic performance differs between situations, many empirical investigations reveal that learners who actively employ effective ways to cope perform better (IJRSI, 2025). Yet, the results are contradictory, emphasizing the need for a deeper examination of these relationships across different demographics of students. This correlational investigation intends to examine the connections between diverse ways of coping and learning outcomes among university students, thus facilitating an improved awareness of how strategies for managing stress influence student achievement in higher educational settings.

### **Literature Review**

Academic achievement is determined by a number of personal, educational, and environmental factors. Traditional research on education highlights the quality of instruction, size of class, involvement of parents, methods for assessment, faculty characteristics, and interactions among peers as significant indicators of student performance (Crede, Roch, & Kieszczynka, 2010; Richardson, Abraham, & Bond, 2012). However, current evidence indicates that psychological factors such as stress, coping styles, emotional intelligence, and academic motivation are important determinants of academic achievement (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008; Chang, 2020). How learners tackle stress can either help or impede academic achievement.

### **Conceptualizing Stress**

Stress is a dimensional concept that has recently been investigated across fields of study. Selye's foundational work (1956) described stress as a body's common reaction to any pressure placed on it, that involves physiologically and psychological responses. Subsequent research refined on this concept, emphasising the relationship between environmental factors and individual evaluation procedures (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). In accordance with Lazarus and Folkman's transactional framework, stress happens when perceived demands surpass anticipated coping resources, making it intrinsically subjective and context-dependent (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Based on current definitions, stress is a cognitive and emotional assessment of both internal and external demands that result in adaptive or maladaptive reactions (Ganster and Rosen, 2013).

Stress displays its presence in many different kinds of ways, including acute, short-term reactions to chronic, long-term stresses, each of which has a unique set of consequences for both behaviour and health (Schneiderman, Ironson, and Siegel, 2005). Stress that is acute can temporarily enhance attentiveness and efficiency, but ongoing stress has been associated with negative effects on both mental and physical health such as exhaustion and cognitive impairment (Bamber & Schneider, 2016). Stressful emotions can negatively impact the performance of students and adaptive functioning (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

### **Types of Stress and Their Relevance**

Various kinds of stress have been identified in the literature:

- **Acute stress** is triggered by rapid challenges and typically goes away quickly. Short relaxing and mindful meditation techniques successfully alleviate acute tension while enhancing performance on tasks (Jamieson, Nock, & Mendes, 2012; Phillips, 2016).
- **Chronic stress** is linked to burnout, anxiety, and depression, which adversely affect cognitive functioning and academic performance (Bamber & Schneider, 2016; Shukla, 2021).
- **Emotional stress** happens when interpersonal relationships or personal limitations surpass coping capacity, giving rise to frustration and reduced focus on study (Tennant, 2002).
- **Psychological and Psycho-social Stress:** Studies indicates that psychological and psycho-social stress, particularly emotional disturbances and social disputes, might significantly impact academic

engagement and performance (Compas et al., 2017; Stallman, 2010). According to Selye (1975) and Nelson & Simmons (2003), positive stressors may enhance motivation as well as achievement when seen as controllable and meaningful.

- **Eustress:** According to Nelson and Simmons (2003), stress that is beneficial may enhance productivity and drive when viewed as controllable and meaningful.

### **Stress and Academic Performance**

A substantial amount of evidence indicates that excessive stress has a negative relationship to academic ability. Stress levels that are elevated can lead to adverse effects like poor focus, academic avoidance, and lower grade point averages (Gadzella, 1994; Misra & McKean, 2000). Learners experiencing stress often complain of anxiety, sleep disruption, and decreased academic efficacy, all of which led to low grades (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008; Stallman, 2010).

However, moderate levels of stress could have a beneficial influence, as suggested by the Yerkes-Dodson law: moderate excitement enhances efficiency, while both low and high stress decrease learning and success (Yerkes and Dodson, 1908; Wright, 1996). This comprehensive approach suggests the correlation among stress and academic performance depends on individual assessment and capacity to cope (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz, and Perry, 2002).

### **Coping Styles and Academic Outcomes**

Coping relates to the behavioral and cognitive strategies that individuals employ to cope with stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Coping styles are categorized into two categories: adaptive (problem-focused and social support coping) or maladaptive (avoidant coping). According to research, young people who employ adapted coping methods do better in school, have better emotional regulation, and are more inclined to remain engaged in their studies. In contrast, depending on maladaptive coping has been linked with greater stress and poorer achievement in school (Salanova, Schaufeli, Martinez, & Bresó, 2000; Chang, 2020).

### **Theoretical Gaps and Rationale**

While current research shows relationships among stress, coping strategies, and academic performance, there are still shortcomings in understanding how one's coping mechanisms influence accomplishment throughout various educational environments. A few studies have examined at various ways of coping with respect to academic success in higher education (Affrunti & Woodruff-Borden, 2015). The present investigation addresses a vacuum by investigating the statistically significant correlations between stress coping strategies and academic achievement among college learners, demonstrating which strategies are most effective.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

It is descriptive correlational study, based on a quantitative approach as variables are going to be measured with numbers and analysed with statistical procedures.

#### **Population & Sample of the Study**

The population of the study comprised of students of public sector universities (University of Haripur, Abbottabad University of Science and Technology and Hazara University, Mansehra) of Hazara Division. 500 students were selected from public sector universities of Hazara division by using the stratified random sampling technique.

#### **Research Instruments**

The stress coping style scale was developed by the Calsbeek et al (2006) consisted of 21 items. Response

choices for each item were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents had enough time to answer questions, and they were free to answer questions as their identity was not going to be disclosed and the CGPA was collected to find out the academic achievement of the students.

### Procedure & Ethical Considerations

After obtaining formal approval from the concerned institutional authorities, participants were approached from selected universities. The researcher personally visited the data sources to collect data from the sample. The data was collected from students. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants in clear and simple terms. Data were collected through standardized self-report questionnaire measuring stress coping styles, and academic achievement through students GPA. The questionnaire was administered either in paper-pencil form or online, depending on participants' availability. Participants were instructed to respond honestly and were assured that there were no right or wrong answers. The average time required to complete the questionnaire was approximately 10-15 minutes. After completion, the questionnaire was checked for missing responses and coded for statistical analysis. Data were entered and analysed using SPSS, applying descriptive statistics and correlation analyses to test the study hypotheses.

### Results

*Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the participants (N=500)*

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	260	52.0
	Female	240	48.0
<b>Age Group (Years)</b>	18–20	140	28.0
	21–23	210	42.0
	24–26	110	22.0
	27 and above	40	8.0
<b>University</b>	University of Haripur	180	36.0
	Abbottabad University of Science & Technology	165	33.0
	Hazara University, Mansehra	155	31.0
<b>Department</b>	Psychology	150	30.0
	Education	140	28.0
	English	120	24.0
	MLT (Medical Laboratory Technology)	90	18.0
<b>Program Level</b>	BS	380	76.0
	MA / MSc	95	19.0
	MPhil	25	5.0
<b>Semester / Year of Study</b>	BS 1st–2nd	135	27.0
	BS 3rd–4th	160	32.0
	BS 5th–6th	120	24.0
	BS 7th–8th	85	17.0
<b>Residence</b>	Urban	285	57.0

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Family System	Rural	215	43.0
	Nuclear	310	62.0
	Joint	190	38.0
Socioeconomic Status	Low	115	23.0
	Middle	295	59.0
	High	90	18.0
Employment Status	Student only	410	82.0
	Part-time working	90	18.0
<b>Total</b>	—	<b>500</b>	<b>100</b>

The sample consisted of 500 university students with a slightly higher proportion of males (52%) than females (48%). Most participants fell within the 21–23 years age group (42%), followed by 18–20 years (28%). Students were recruited from three universities, including the University of Haripur (36%), Abbottabad University of Science and Technology (33%), and Hazara University, Mansehra (31%).

Participants represented diverse academic disciplines, with the highest representation from Psychology (30%) and Education (28%). Many respondents were enrolled in BS programs (76%), and most belonged to urban areas (57%) and nuclear family systems (62%). Regarding socioeconomic background, 59% of students reported a middle socioeconomic status, while 18% were engaged in part-time employment alongside their studies.

**Table 2 Correlation Between Stress Coping Styles and Academic Achievement (N = 500)**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Academic Achievement (GPA)	—				
2. Problem-Focused Coping	.42**	—			
3. Emotion-Focused Coping	-.28**	.31**	—		
4. Avoidant Coping	-.35**	-.22**	.39**	—	
5. Social Support Coping	.30**	.45**	.27**	-.18**	—

Pearson product–moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between stress coping styles and academic achievement among university students. Results indicated a moderate positive correlation between problem-focused coping and academic achievement ( $r = .42, p < .01$ ), suggesting that students who actively address stressors tend to achieve higher academic performance.

In contrast, emotion-focused coping ( $r = -.28, p < .01$ ) and avoidant coping ( $r = -.35, p < .01$ ) showed significant negative correlations with academic achievement, indicating that reliance on emotional regulation or avoidance strategies may be associated with lower academic outcomes.

Additionally, social support coping demonstrated a significant positive relationship with academic achievement ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ). Intercorrelations among coping styles revealed that problem-focused coping was positively associated with social support coping ( $r = .45, p < .01$ ), while avoidant coping showed negative associations with adaptive coping strategies.

## **Discussion**

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between stress coping styles and academic achievement among university students. The discussion is organized according to the study hypotheses and interpreted considering existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

### **Hypothesis 1: Problem-Focused Coping is Positively Related to Academic Achievement**

The first assumption suggested a significant positive association between problem-focused coping and academic accomplishment. Results supported this prediction, as problem-focused coping demonstrated a significantly beneficial connection with GPA. The study indicates children who deliberately recognize obstacles, prepare solutions, and take direct action surpass their peers intellectually.

This result coincides with Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of stress, that argues that problem-focused coping proves most effective when stressors are seen as manageable, such as academic obligations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Students at universities which employ problem-solving tactics, such as time management, academic clarification, and structured study planning, are more likely to effectively manage academic stress, resulting in improved performance.

Previous research investigations have shown that flexible coping methods, especially problem-focused coping, have been linked to higher academic engagement, persistence, and achievement (Richardson et al., 2012; Eisenbarth, 2012). Therefore, current research supports the idea that active coping protects and facilitates academic success.

### **Hypothesis 2: Emotion-Focused Coping is Negatively Related to Academic Achievement**

The second hypothesis predicted an adverse correlation among emotion-focused coping and academic achievement, and the findings confirmed this prediction. Emotion-focused coping showed a significant negative connection with GPA, demonstrating that learners who rely heavily on emotional regulation tactics such as rumination, emotional venting, or denial do worse academically.

Although emotion-focused coping is useful in unpredictable situations, excessive reliance in educational environments can divert attention away from problem solving and task involvement. This agrees with previous studies indicating that emotion-focused coping is frequently linked with increased anxiety, decreased concentration, and academic disengagement (Pekrun et al., 2002; Misra & McKean, 2000).

This finding also supports earlier studies indicating that overreliance on emotional coping may impair cognitive resources necessary for learning and academic problem-solving (Stallman, 2010). Therefore, while emotion-focused coping may temporarily reduce emotional distress, it may not be conducive to sustained academic achievement.

### **Hypothesis 3: Avoidant Coping is Negatively Related to Academic Achievement**

The third hypothesis stated that avoidant coping would be negatively associated with academic achievement, and this hypothesis was strongly supported by the results. Avoidant coping showed a moderate negative correlation with GPA, making it the most detrimental coping style in relation to academic performance among those examined.

Avoidant coping strategies—such as procrastination, disengagement, and behavioral withdrawal—are known to exacerbate academic stress by delaying task completion and increasing workload pressure. This finding aligns with existing literature that consistently associates avoidant coping with poor academic outcomes, lower motivation, and heightened psychological distress (Salanova et al., 2000; Compas et al., 2017).

The negative association between avoidant coping and both problem-focused and social support coping observed in this study further indicates that students relying on avoidance are less likely to engage in adaptive stress management strategies. These results underscore the maladaptive nature of avoidance in academic settings and highlight its role as a risk factor for poor performance.

#### **Hypothesis 4: Social Support Coping is Positively Related to Academic Achievement**

The fourth hypothesis proposed a positive relationship between social support coping and academic achievement, which was supported by the findings. Social support coping exhibited a significant positive correlation with GPA, suggesting that students who seek emotional, informational, or instrumental support from peers, family, or teachers tend to perform better academically.

Social support has been widely recognized as a buffer against stress, enhancing emotional wellbeing and academic resilience (Thoits, 2011). The positive association between social support coping and problem-focused coping observed in this study further suggests that students who seek support are also more likely to adopt constructive strategies to address academic stressors.

These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that social connectedness and help-seeking behaviors contribute to improved academic adjustment and reduced stress levels among university students (Wilcox et al., 2005; Credé & Niehorster, 2012).

#### **Interrelationships Among Coping Styles**

Beyond the individual hypothesis, relationships between coping strategies offer useful data. Problem-focused coping had a beneficial connection with social support coping, suggesting that adaptive coping techniques typically exist. Avoidant coping, in contrast, has been shown to be negatively correlated with adaptive coping strategies, indicating a separate maladaptive tendency.

These trends align with coping theory, which highlights that coping methods aren't used alone, but instead in adaptive or maladaptive clusters which impact results such as academic achievement (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

#### **Conclusion**

In general, the investigation indicated that adaptive coping styles (problem-focused and social support coping) are correlated with greater academic achievement, but maladaptive coping styles (emotion-focused and avoidant coping) have been associated with poorer academic achievement. The results presented demonstrate the vital role of stress coping methods in influencing academic results, highlighting the importance of promoting efficient ways to cope in higher education environments.

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