COPING STRATEGY

1.1. Theoretical framework of coping stress strategy
THEORETICAL FRAME WORK OF STRESS COPING STRATEGY

The popular starting point of the coping research is the conceptual engagement by Lazarus in 1966 on coping and stress. Lazarus argued that stress consists of three processes. Primary appraisal is the process of perceiving a threat to oneself. Secondary appraisal is the process of bringing to mind a potential response to the threat. Coping is the process of executing that response. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Although these processes are most easily described as a linear sequence, Lazarus has emphasized that they do not occur in an unbroken stream. Rather, an outcome of one process may re-invoking a preceding process. For instance, realization that an adequate coping response is readily available may cause you to reappraise a threat as less threatening. As another example, if a coping response is less effective than expected, you may reappraise the level of threat or reappraise what coping response is appropriate. The entire set of process, then, may cycle repeatedly in a stressful transaction (Carver, Weintraub & Scheier, 1989).

When people are exposed to a stressful demand, they respond by coping: coping attempts either to reduce the demand to reduce its effect, or to help one change the way one thinks about the demand. Coping can either help one in stressful situations or increase the kind and number of problems created by the demand. Coping includes all the possible responses to stressors in one’s environment. As a stressor makes demand on an organism and initiates a stress response, the organism initiates behaviours and thoughts which attempts to remove the stressor or to reinterpret its effects. Coping often reduces the negative effects of the stressor, but sometimes coping creates new and different problems.
Coping Strategies may emphasise the physical, social or psychological components of stress and the stress response. Coping strategies may attempt to eliminate or moderate the initial source of the stress reaction (stimulus directed coping) or change the way the stressor is perceived (cognitive coping).

The coping strategies directed towards the stressor itself in stimulus directed coping may eliminate the cause of the problem. The physical changes which occur in response to stress are very much like pain in that they warn that something in the environment is unusual and is a potential threat. Taking action to eliminate the threat not only removes the present demand but also reduces the possibility of continued stress.

Several stress management techniques are directed towards reducing the influence of the stressor itself. Improving problem solving skills and knowledge about the problem increases understanding and improves access to solution. Time management techniques can also reduce stress by eliminating its source. Solving the most important problems first and improving the quality of time spent on tasks reduce stress by eliminating the problem sooner. Sometimes stress reduction involves eliminating the stress producing activity or relationship. Even with good stimulus directed coping skills, it is not always possible to eliminate the stressor itself.

One physical approach to coping with stress involves increasing the level of exercise. Regular strenuous exercise has a wide range of benefits. It reduces tension in muscles, improves cardiac fitness and improves the functioning of the central nervous system. Exercise also improves the ability to think clearly, as it improves blood circulation to the brain. Athletic activities can also have a psychological impact, as they provide social support and distraction from stressful situations.
The importance of social factors in coping with stress was first proposed by John Cassel in 1974. Friends and family can make it possible to cope more effectively with stressful situations. The freedom to express feelings and to gain insight from hearing the problem described from another perspective can improve understanding of the stressor. The opportunity to gain useful information about problem solving and access to economic or material support makes coping with stressful events and circumstances possible. The impact of social support is reflected in research which suggest that a woman with no close relationships. Family gatherings, Recreation and community activities help to form a social support network which is then available to provide listeners when one needs to listen and the tools needed to accomplish the task of coping with stress.

Psychological coping strategies include techniques that change the way one thinks about the stressor or the stress response. Much of the stress response results from one’s emotional reaction to events. Cognitive appraisal and restructuring can help one to think of a stressful event as a positive challenge and can eliminate much of the arousal associated with stress. Imaging techniques are used to help the stressed individual see her or himself as healthy and as successfully coping with the source of stress.

Coping can also involve denying that the stressor exists or that it is a problem. Becoming emotionally detached can reduce the harmful effects of stress as physical arousal levels are prevented from increasing in the stressful situations, but this denial can also be harmful, if it lasts for a long period of time or if it replaces an attempt to deal with the stressor. Denial of stressful events is seen by many theorists as a major contribution to mental and physical illness.

When considering the many possible approaches to coping with stress it is important to remember that different individuals and different stressors
can make one strategy more effective than another. Each individual will need to explore the options to find the most effective coping strategy. Just as the stress response involves a general reaction of the body to a demand, many of the techniques used to cope with stress have an element in common. This common thread can be described as control. If one feels that one is in control of a situation, one is less likely to interpret it as threatening and therefore stressful. If one learns to control one's physical reactions to the stressor, one is more likely to be successful at coping with stress.

There have been two major approaches to the problem of coping with stress. One has involved the attempt to describe and define stress response in the hope of determining the causes and controlling factors. The second approach focuses on the control of the symptoms presented to doctors and therapists. Defining the stress and stress response includes not only Selye's Physiological definition of the stress response but also cognitive factors such as locus of control. Julian Ratter proposed that behaviour in and understanding of situations is determined by the perceived source of events. A person with an internal locus of control feels that he/she is the determining factor in success or failure in life. The person with an external locus of control is more likely to place responsibility on fate or luck and to feel that his or her action will not make such differences. These two interpretations of events have a number of implications for coping, as the coping strategy chosen may lead to a more effective or less effective solution to the stressful situations.

An external locus of control may lead to less active participation in coping and to more negative outcomes. An internal locus of control has been related to successful therapy and lower levels of depression, suggesting the use of effective strategies. Albert Bandura proposed a similar concept: self efficacy; individuals who are high in self efficacy believe that they can change things by taking action. They are more likely to choose coping
strategies which attempt to remove or reduce the influence of the stressor rather than withdrawing or denying that the stressor exists and thereby failing to remove its influence.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) coping strategies refer to the thoughts and acts used by individuals to manage the internal or external demands, or both that tax or exceed their psychological resources. Even though there are varied types of classification of coping strategies the present study deals with major three distinct strategies conceptualised and identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Compass (1984) and Zeinder (1995), which consists of problem focused coping, emotional focused coping and avoidance oriented coping.

- Problem focused coping: efforts to change the stressful situations.
- Emotion focused coping: Efforts to regulate emotional responses in response to stressors.
- Avoidance oriented coping: efforts to engage distracting activities in response to problems. It aimed at avoiding the stressor rather than facing it.

**COPING**

The results of uncontrolled stress are serious and costly to the individual and the work organisation. Therefore it is necessary to cope with stress. Coping is defined as “efforts, both action oriented and intra psychic (within the mind), to manage (that is, to master, tolerate, reduce, minimise) environmental and internal demands and conflicting among them which tax or exceed a person’s resources” (Lazarus and Launier, 1978). Thus coping can involve behavioural or cognitive strategies or both.

A model of the coping process by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) is presented
The coping process has 3 major components:

- Situational and personal factors
- Cognitive appraisal of the stressor and
- Coping strategies:- Both situational and personal factors influence the appraisal of stressors.

The first called a control strategy consists of using behaviours and cognitions to directly anticipate or solve problems. A control strategy has a take charge tone. An escape strategy amounts to avoiding the problem. Behaviours and cognitions are used to avoid or escape situations. Individuals use this strategy when they passively accept stressful situation or avoid them by failing to control the cause of stress. Finally the symptom management strategy consists of using methods such as relaxation, meditation or medication to manage the symptom of occupational stress. (Terry, 1994) Like stress response, strategies for coping with stress can be Cognitive, Emotional, Behavioural or Physical.

- **Cognitive coping strategies:-** It replaces catastrophic thinking with thoughts in which stressors are viewed as challenges rather than threats. Cognitive coping does not eliminate stressors, but it can help
people perceive them as less threatening and thus make them less disruptive.

- **Emotional coping strategies**: Seeking and obtaining social support from others are effective. The perception that one has emotional support, and is cared for and valued by others tend to be an effective buffer against the ill effect of many stressors (Taylor, 1995).

- **Behavioural coping strategies**: It involves changing behaviour in ways that minimise the impact of stressors. A time management plan can help control catastrophising thoughts by providing reassurance that there is enough time for every thing and a plan for handling it all.

- **Physical coping strategies**: They are aimed at directly altering one's physical responses before during or after stressors occur. The most common physical coping strategy is some form of drug use.

The eight strategies to cope with stress with the role of projective instrument for measuring coping styles, which involves a semi-projective to obtain profiles of coping styles adopted by a person while dealing with role stress situation. The instrument depicts 24 situations, three each for eight type of role stress in which one person narrates the role stress he is experiencing in that situation to another person, who is supposed to respond to the former's problems. The various responses thus obtained on this instrument are score in eight styles, which can be broadly grouped as ‘approach’ and ‘avoidance’ mode of coping. The scores on avoidance and approach mode is referred to as perceptive.

**I punitive**: - Statements indicating either simple admission of stress, or that stress is unavoidable and nothing can be done about it.

**Intropunitive**:- Statements indicating self blame or aggression towards one’s self causing stress.
Extra punitive: - Statements expressing aggression towards or putting blame on others for a particular stressful situation.

Defensive:- Statements indicating that the respondent is optimistic and hopes that time would solve the problem and things would work out well in future.

Introspective:- statements indicating that the role occupant himself or herself should take action to deal with stress.

Inter perceptive:- It is the opposite of defensive style. Statements indicating that a solution of the problem can be obtained by joint efforts in which the role occupant and others would be involved.

Impressive:- Statements indicating that the respondent is optimistic and hopes that time would solve the problem and things would work well in future.

Individual cannot remain in a continuous state of stress and tries to adopt some strategy to deal with the stress. Coping refers to the thoughts and acts people use to manage the internal and external demands posed by a stressful encounter.

It is the process of managing the internal and external demand that appraise as taxing or overwhelming. To study coping two different approaches have been used. One approach emphasised general coping traits, styles or dispositions while the other approach preferred to study the active ongoing strategies in a particular stress situation. Coping resources act as a precursor of behaviour and as background factor. Coping strategies on the other hand refer to the behaviour occurring after the appearance of stressors or in response to chronic stressors. Not only the stress and refilling emotions plays an important role in the process. The use of coping requires attention, concentration and efforts reducing the availability of these sources for other
tasks. Coping is influenced not only by internal resources but also by external resources like time, money, education, standard of living, social support and the absence of other stressors. Researchers have questioned whether resources affect coping directly by improving a person’s ability to cope with both low and high level of stress or whether resources act primarily as a buffer against stress.

Stress and coping are arguably the most widely studied phenomena in psychology today (Hobfoll et al.; 1996). Coping theory will be linked to three major influences in contemporary psychological research. The first is that of the interplay between nature and nature in development. Second theories that focus on an individual’s sense of self efficacy and the development of optimism and motivation can be integrated in to framework of coping. Finally learning and development within a social context are considered. In general terms coping consist of the thoughts, feelings and actions that are called upon to manage stress. Coping skills programmes have been offered as a panacea to overcome many of the problems young people face. Improved skills for dealing with the world that is coping are recommended. Seligman (1995) explains that self esteem is caused by an array of successes and failures. In addition to Seligman’s approach, the widespread interest in coping recent years and a search for the ‘cure-all’ for young people’s despair had led to the development of an expanding range of programmes that can be identified as coping skills programmes. Seligman and his colleagues tested a prevention programme designed to teach coping skills through the development of cognitive and social skills to 18 year old college fresher’s and 10 and 11 year old children who had been identified as being at risk for depression. It was found that there was a greater reduction of depression for the younger children than for the 18 year old fresher’s. College fresher’s and 10 and 11 years old who had been identified as being at risk for depression. It was found that there was a greater reduction of depression for the younger
Two years later there was 50-100% less depression in the adolescents in the prevention programme than those in the control group (Joy ox et al., 1994). The approach holds promise. Coping skills can be learned through shared experience in collaboration with others and through talk and communication with others. Social coping skills play a major part in determining the quality of inter-personal relationship across a range of contexts. Furthermore, relationships are a major source of happiness and the support of others is a way of coping with stress. For example, in the Frydenberg and Lewis coping scale (1997), coping strategies include seek social support, improve relationships, social action, seek professional help and seek relaxing diversions either alone or with others. The comprehensive training programmes in an interpersonal and other social skills, which facilitate the use of adaptive coping strategies programmes, also focus on the following:

- General problem solving skills
- Cognitive skills for increasing self control and self esteem
- Healthy coping strategies for reducing stress and anxiety; and assertiveness skills

Individuals and organisations cannot remain in a continuous state of tension. Even if a deliberate and conscious strategy is not adopted to deal with stress, some strategy is adopted. For example, to leave the conflicts and stress to take care of themselves. The word coping has two connotations in stress literature. It has been used to denote the way of dealing with stress, or the effort to master conditions of harm, threat or challenge when a routine or automatic response is not readily available.

Coping has been widely and long regarded as having a central role in adaptation, yet it has defined universal agreement on definition and has been the object of little systematic research. Because of coping has always been
linked to the concept of stress, its recent popularization has been occasioned by a marked growth of interest in the stress concept.

Murray-Harvey et.al. (2000) conducted a study among teacher education students and they identified four major categories of coping strategies:-

**Cognitive strategies:** such as positive thinking, setting realistic expectations, pragmatism and blocking the negative and included comments like: "I concentrated on the positive aspects more than the negative", and "Telling myself that I am not an experienced teacher and cannot be expected to perform like one".

**Physical strategies:** - some of which were active (recreation, sports and general exercise) while others were passive (listening to music, watching T.V, reading).

**Behavioural strategies:**- Include the reported practice of engaging in routines, like walking the dog, doing house work, activities that did not require thought. "I coped with stress by having a can of coke and a biscuit and recess times".

**Emotional Strategies:**- Include use of self depression, a capacity of students to laugh at themselves. "If you make a mistake, like writing a word incorrectly in front of the class, it shows you are human" and trying not to be hard on themselves. "I just did the best that I could".

**Rational or time organisation strategies:**- were identified by students in the way they clearly define their priorities for work and free time. On weekends I spent some time not thinking about anything involved with teaching. Students commonly stressed the importance of making time for themselves during the
teaching practicum. Finding the time to relax, either passively or in a physically active way, was a widely reported strategy.

- **Social coping strategies** :- Turning to family and friends in times of crisis or simplify for conversation and reflection, was widely reported as a significant coping strategy. Involvement in social events such as ‘partying’ and general socialising away from their practicum school were seen by the students as important. Thus, social coping included:-

  *Discussion with people who were identified as friends and family:* “I never had any stress. I made sure of this by socialising with staff and other students at a cafe after cool.

  *Involvement in social events:* “After school socialising, general socialising and partying”.

- **Institutional coping strategies**:- With this category were human and system related strategies involving both the school and the university. Considerable emphasis was given to the importance of talking to, and learning from, supervising teachers. Having other student teachers in the school with whom to share experiences was also regarded as helpful.

  At the school level, the support of the students, supervising teacher, other teachers and peers provided a human contact in times of stress. A system related school strategy was exemplified by the use of non instructional time that provided ‘breathing space’ in a hectic week.