

## **Stress and Coping among Single and Non-Working Women**

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The study investigated the relationship of perceived stress and coping among single working and non-working women. 50 single working women, teaching at two government and private universities of Lahore and 50 non-working women were taken, age ranging 25-40 years. Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) and Brief Cope Scale (Carver, 1997) were used to investigate the association between the two variables. Results revealed that working and non-working women differ in terms of perceived stress ( $M=25.52$ ;  $SD=4.38$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) and supportive coping ( $M=15.34$ ;  $SD=3.21$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). Moreover, Perceived Stress in age range 35-30 and 31-35 years was higher than the later age range of 35-40 years ( $p<0.05$ ), whereas significant differences were found on all kind of coping at all ages. Findings are discussed in terms of identification and resolution of stress, along with teaching and strengthening of coping skills of single working and non-working women.

*Keywords:* stress, coping, single, working women

Marriage has been a significant milestone of human society. One cannot survive in isolation without a partner and wishes to be in a lasting relationship. So, personal human life has many phases to pass through, and marriage is one of them. Different cultures conceptualize this period in various ways. Pakistan is an Islamic republic state which is rich in customs and culture. In Pakistani culture, marriage is considered as one of the most arguable topics. Different taboos and traditions have been emerging and signified throughout the history along with religious, moral and cultural concomitants (Importance of marriage in Pakistan, 2016).

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Currently, marriage has become one of the apparent problems in the culture of Pakistan. In 2012-13 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS), fifty-four percent were married by age twenty and thirty-five percent of women of aged between 25 to 49 were married by age 18. It is evident that age of first marriage is rising among women in Pakistan. The median age of first marriage in 2012-13 increased from 19.1 to 19.5 years. In recent centuries increase in the average marriage age of female is an observable fact. It has not only influenced the eastern countries but also has targeted the Muslim marriage culture. At present mean age for the wedding of a female is supposed to be 22 to 28 in the society of Pakistan but many women exceed this age, and it becomes problematic to get a perfect match (National Institute of Population Studies, 2013).

In Asia late marriage has become one of the striking issues. Only 2% of ladies were single in most Asian nations in the last thirty years. The number of unmarried ladies has increased twenty more times in their 30s in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan. In Thailand, the number of ladies that are not married till the age of 40 is extended from 7% in 1980 to 12% in 2000. Rates of unmarried female are higher in few urban communities: 27% females in early thirties married in Hong Kong. 20% among ladies matured 40-44 in Bangkok; In South Korea, young males criticize that ladies are on the strike of marriage (Beri & Beri, 2013).

Because of the competitive economic situations of fast and modern society young girls wish to find financially stable partners so that they may support their spouses and kids. In early ages it becomes problematic for males to have stable monetary assets to have a partner. Indeed, even employments are given to the knowledgeable and exceptionally skilled individuals and one can't expect youngsters under 30 years old to come up. Many of the females wait for such a person who is economically well settled to upgrade their standard which is one of the reasons for delaying marriage as well as males take time to reach up to the desired standard of financial stability. Moreover, formal education has also set a standard which has contributed toward the rise of normal marriage age. The females normally engage in studies for the most years of their life, and until the completion of their studies it becomes necessary for them to delay their marriage till they finish their education. In Pakistan, India, Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico and Paraguay

and so on, the average period of marriage is more in educated people than the uneducated individuals (Average marriage age, 2012).

Marriage becomes a great concern for over-aged ladies leading them toward mental stress and a lot of pressures from the society. An essential part is additionally performed by the community in animating stress among the females who are having single marital status and surpasses the mean time of marriage. Pakistani culture depicts marriage as the only source of safety and prosperity for female's future mainly. Literature has shown that marriage has a broad range of positive effects on prosperity that include good physical and mental health, improvements in the economic well-being of individuals, and the welfare of their children (Shabbir, Nisar & Fatima, 2015).

Chances of getting a good match for girls become crucial with time due to increase in their age so time is a significant factor that should be taken into account to choose the right partner. Because of the increase in age, girls suffer from selecting a life partner who might not be suitable for her. In Pakistani culture, parents and family contributes a lot in selection of a spouse with matching background in terms of values, family and upbringing. It is also observed that families with top financial status do marriage of their daughters in their late years. They want a man equivalent in status to their girl and do not show any leniency regarding the status of the guy (Sathar, Kiani, & Farooqui, 1986). Morally upright young people would obviously look for morally upright life-partners, and they put extra efforts and time to find a reasonable match which is a leading aspect toward late marriages (Bari, 2014).

In India, Pakistan, and numerous Muslim nations some wedding traditions have additionally assumed a vital part in expanding average marriage age. The reasons for this new rising trend are identified with socio monetary changes in Bangladesh since 1971. In a late review (1998), a similar writer has expressed that dowry is one of the reasons for expansion in the number of young ladies staying unmarried. Another real issue is of caste system. Guardians consent to bring girl of another cast in their family for their child, however, delay to wed their girl to another caste. Therefore they sit tight for a perfect proposal regardless of how much time is taken (Sathar, Kiani, & Soomro, 1998).

Another major factor that may cause hurdles in getting married at an appropriate age is that the females start working. It makes them independent financially after completing their education. Fitzgerald and

Spaccarotella (2009) explained that purpose for staying single is a chance of building up career without depleting the huge amounts of energy that may be a lasting relationship require. Parents from low socio-economic status also start depending on the earning of their daughter to upgrade their lifestyle rather than thinking of their marriage. Postponing marriage becomes more evident when a girl wishes to get more education. About forty percent females in their mid to late twenties are single. Among university graduates of the same age range, fifty-four percent are single. Of the ladies in this age section with no more than high school education, just 25% have stayed unmarried (Rattani, 2012).

As to changing pattern towards marriage, work, training and single women, Kapadia (1954); Narain (1975); Desai (1959); Krishnakumari (1987); Ross (1961); Hate (1969); Borooah (1993); KrishnaMurty (1970); Merchant (1935); Salaff (1981); Rozario (1986); Rathaur (1990); Jethani (1994) and Palariwala; Rathaur (1990) have demonstrated that the behavior of educated ladies, have considered changed particularly as to claim status and as to marriage and the issues and limitations of the single ladies in particularly. In Bangladesh, Rozario (1986) found an expansion in the quantity of unmarried ladies among Hindus, Christian, Muslims and Bengalis since the mid-1970s (Beri & Beri, 2013).

Age of young females is much criticized when they cross the time of marriage and get a divorce or aged man to wed however then again the age of male is not considered as an issue of concern. Men are supposed to get a perfect proposal in any age. A single woman is always seemed to be available for him. Thus late marriages have become one of the major dilemmas of the modern age for females, particularly in our society. A trend has now set in Pakistani society where late marriages are now emerging as one of the main problem leading to stress and frustration (Sathar, Kiani, & Farooqui, 1986).

Dudhatra and Jogsan (2012) focused on Significant differences in and high correlation between mental health and depression in 80 working and non-working women. Studies depict that the stress has affected the female population in a bad way because of the environmental conditions threatening to their life satisfaction. A study was conducted among early and late married females on depression, stress, anxiety, and life satisfaction. 120 participants from Faisalabad (60 late married women and 60 early married females) were taken. The

results showed greater level of depression, anxiety, stress and life satisfaction level among early married females than late married females (Shabbir, Nisar, & Fatima, 2015).

Married women are found to be more satisfied with their life than unmarried females which show that status of their marriage has a major influence on mental health. A study was conducted to see the relationship between marital status and mental health of more than 25 years older women undergraduates. 584 of the 628 students were randomly selected and given questionnaires. Married students compared to unmarried students were found to be well adjusted and were less likely to be full-time students as well as major financial stress and poorer grades were found in single students than non-singles (Garima & Kiran, 2014).

Khanna (1992) studied a sample of 406 women in India and found out that among non-working women, positive life changes are related to anxiety and negative life changes to depression. Whereas among working women, positive life changes are related to depression.

Dealing with stress varies, depending upon the cognition of individual perception and the way how one takes the stress. Perception of stress is impacted by various social factors that a female is having. Among every one of those components marital status and their working status moreover, pick the level of their stress recognition. Ladies in working parts or the females at home see the stress level in their particular manner. Numerous ecological elements additionally indicate the perception of taking the stress. So the working females are having their intensity of stress, and as stated by it, their coping is distinctive and working adapt diversely as a result of their experiences that are different with non-working females (Patil, 2016).

Many females make work as their coping strategy to get rid of the stressors related to their marriage. Coping likewise relies upon those social components that are affecting as in the females who have crossed the mean age of their marriage. They will have marital status as the significant determinant of their stress and impact their coping contrarily. In working setup, there also come many stressors from the colleagues as well due to their marital status. Work related status is another variable that can upgrade or lessen their coping abilities. Females that are working will utilize distinctive coping skills than non-working females, and their level of stress will be diverse relying upon the stressors they are taking and how well they are beating those stressors.

For determining stress-coping behavior a study was done to explore the role on certain demographic variables of 150 female teachers. Significant determinants of stress-coping were found as age and marital status. Results have shown that married teachers between the age 40-60 years, experience better coping with their job stress (Chaturvedi & Purushothaman, 2009).

The study was done to investigate the sources and levels of stress among female teachers in four Chinese independent high schools in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on the variables such as age, marital status, length of teaching experience, coping strategies and the locus of control. Results of the study were that teachers perceived their stress level from mild to moderate however married female teachers were more stressful compared to single. It was found that marital status did not influence their choice of coping strategies. Teachers who were "internal" tended to utilize problem-focused coping than emotional focus coping (Bing, 1998).

Absence of encouragement by bosses, injustice in opportunities, imbalance among employment and power, strife with colleagues, part duties, long and tiring work hours, absence of sufficient equipment's, absence of time for family and pressures from the general public due to their single marital status with female workers makes them vulnerable toward stress. However the females that are at home having low coping skills, and because of that, they have high tendency of stress (Kumar & Yadav, 2014).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Pakistan is one of the developing countries in which the average age range of marriage for a woman is considered to be in between 18 to 28. Marriage becomes a problem for a female who cross this expected age with the concern of not getting the suitable match. Due to this factor women are suffering from stress that is perceived differently. This study will help to investigate the problems of single working and non-working women with reference to their single marital status and related issues. It will explore ways for the better understanding of the psychologists to help single women dealing with their perceived stress. Single women who are at home can get knowledge for the improvement of their coping skills through this study. Moreover, awareness programs can be developed for general population concerning marital status and expectations for a match, as why a man can get a young girl to get

married with at any age but a girl becomes a woman when crosses 30 years and faces extreme difficulties in finding a suitable match.

### **Objective**

To explore the effect of single marital status on the level of perceived stress and coping among the working and non-working women.

### **Research Hypotheses**

- 1) It is hypothesized that single marital status would have significant relationship with perceived stress and coping skills among working and non-working women.
- 2) It is hypothesized that single non-working women would have high perceived stress than single working women.
- 3) It is hypothesized that working women would have better coping skills than non- working women.

### **Method**

**Research design.** Correlation research design was used in the present study.

**Sampling.** Mixed methods of non-probability sampling technique ( $N=100$ ) were used in this study. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data of single working females ( $n=50$ ) teaching at two government and two private universities. Snowball technique was used to gather comparison group of 50 single non-working women. The age range of both groups was from 25-40 years. Educational qualification for non-working women was minimum intermediate excluding divorced and separated women.

**Assessment Measures.** Following measures were used in this study:

**Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983).** PSS is comprised of 10 items. It employs 5-point scale ranging from never to very often. PSS's Cronbach alpha is between .84-.86. Test-retest reliability for the PSS was .85.

**Brief Cope Scale (Carver, 1997).** Brief COPE (Carver, 1997), a 28-item self-report questionnaire with two items for each of the coping strategies, measures 14 theoretically identified coping responses including Self-distraction, Religion, Substance use, Planning, Active coping, Behavioral disengagement, Denial, Use of Emotional support, Use of Instrumental support, Venting, Positive reframing, Humor, Acceptance, and Self-blame. Overall it has four higher-order factors including Focus is on the Positive coping, Support Coping, Evasive Coping Active Coping.

### Procedure

All ethical considerations were followed for conducting the research. Formal permission for the study was taken through the concerned department/university to take sample of working females. Informed consent were taken and participants were having right to withdraw from participation any time. It was assured that there is no physical and emotional harm attached to the study All the participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided. A protocol was presented to the participants with clear instructions. After completion of every form the participants of the study were thanked and asked about any query related to the study.

### Results

This section enlightens the quantitative results of the study to explain the relationship between perceived stress and coping and comparison between single working and non-working females.

Table 1

*Correlation Matrix of Perceived Stress Scale and Brief Cope subscales*

Scales	1	2	3	4	5
1-Positive coping	-	.29**	.61**	-.09	-.25*
2-Supportive Coping		-	.33**	.32**	-.05
3-Active coping			-	-.16	-.11
4-Evasive coping				-	.05
5-Perceived Stress					-

*Note.*  $df=99$ .

Table 1 demonstrated that there is significant relationship between positive coping, supportive coping and active coping. Whereas there is significant negative correlation between positive coping and



perceived stress which means that individuals with higher level of positive coping will have less perceived stress.

Table 2

*Means, Standard Deviations and t-values of females on Perceived Stress and Brief Cope scale (N=100)*

Variables	<i>Working</i>	<i>Non-working</i>	<i>t</i>
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	
Positive coping	14.58(3.49)	13.74(3.20)	1.25
Supportive coping	15.34(3.21)	14.02(3.84)	1.97*
Active coping	11.52(2.65)	10.48(2.88)	1.87
Evasive coping	12.08(3.28)	12.84(4.08)	1.03
Stress total	21.76(4.75)	25.52(4.38)	4.12**

Note= \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Table 2 demonstrated that working and non-working females differ in terms of perceived stress and supportive coping. The perceived stress is higher in non-working females  $M = 25.52$  ( $SD = 4.38$ ) as compared to working females. The supportive coping is higher in working females as compared to non-working females  $M = 15.34$  ( $SD = 3.21$ ). Whereas there is no significant difference in terms of positive coping, evasive coping and active coping.

The main hypotheses of the study are accepted as calculated through the results of *t*-test that single non-working females have higher perceived stress than single working females. But significant differences are found only on supportive coping between single working and non-working females.

Table 3

*Means, Standard Deviations, Frequencies and p Values of the females in Different Age Groups on Perceived Stress and Brief Cope scales (N=100)*

Scales	Age						<i>F</i>	<i>p</i> <
	25-30yrs		31-35yrs		36-40yrs			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
	( <i>n</i> =43)		( <i>n</i> =46)		( <i>n</i> =11)			
Positive coping	.58	.71	-.58	.71	-1.61	1.14	1.07	.347
Supportive Coping	.28	.73	-.28	.73	-.91	1.15	.32	.792
Active Coping	-.33	.59	.33	.59	-.54	.95	.47	.628
Evasive Coping	-.25	.79	.25	.79	-.89	1.26	.42	.656
Stress Total	-2.81	1.01	2.8	1.01	3.38	1.61	4.69	.011*

*Note.* Between group *df*=2; within group *df*=97; total *df*=99, \**p*<0.05.

Table 3 demonstrated that working and nonworking females are having significant differences on perceived stress in all age groups. In the first two categories of age range 35-30 and 31-35 stress is higher than age range of 35-40 years. No significant differences were found on any kind of coping in any age group. Hence it rejects the secondary hypothesis and indicates that females with single marital status have different level of perceived stress but may have similar coping strategies.

### Discussion

In order to assess the association of single marital status with perceived stress and coping, the study was carried out by selecting 50 working (teaching in universities) and 50 non-working females of Lahore. For this purpose, 50 working females related to teaching profession, were taken from different private and government educational institutes of Lahore and 50 non-working females with single marital status; age ranging 25 to 40 years; were procured to compare the results between groups of single working and single non-working females. To evaluate the relationship, two scales were used i.e.

Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et al., 1983) and Brief COPE (Carver, 1997). The accepting outcomes of the main hypotheses revealed that single marital status has significant relationship with perceived stress and coping. The statistical analyses showed significant negative correlation between positive coping and perceived stress as well as single non-working females have higher perceived stress than single working females. But significant differences are found only on supportive coping between single working and non-working females.

A study was carried out by Garima and Kiran (2014) revealed that marital status impacts the mental health of working women to a significant extent. Another study conducted by Nevin (2007) resulted that working women have a higher level of stress than non-working women. In 2016, Patil showed that the working women have more stress than the non-working women. Another study revealed that the stress level was higher in non-working women as compared to working women but significant association between stress level and age of the participants. The association between stress level and marital status was non-significant among working women but significant among non-working women. However the current researches prove that non-working women have high stress level than working women which supports the main hypothesis of the study that non-working women have higher perceived stress than working women (Devi, 2016). A study attempted by Dhurandher and Janghel (2015) found out the coping strategy of stress in employed women and non-employed women age ranging 25-40 yrs. It was conducted on 60 women, 30 were employed women in different professions and other 30 were non-employed women. For assessment brief COPE Scale was used (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). It was concluded that employed women used more technique of self-distraction, instrumental support, behavioral disengagement, venting and positive reframing in comparison to non-employed women. The secondary hypothesis was partially accepted and revealed significant differences on ( $p < 0.05$ ) perceived stress in all the age ranges but no significant differences were found on any kind of coping. That may be due to the more social interaction of single working women and hence receiving more comments on their status of being single.

### Recommendations

This study will explore ways for the better understanding of the psychologists to help single women dealing with their perceived stress. Single women who are at home can get knowledge for the improvement of their coping skills through this study. Awareness programs through media, lectures and seminars in educational institutes etc. can be developed for general population concerning marital status and expectations for a match both for women and men especially why woman when crosses age 30 years, face extreme difficulties in finding a suitable match.

### Suggestions for Further Research

Sample taken for this study was only teachers as working women so data can be distended by adding more females working in other occupations and comparison can be made with non-working, on each occupation.

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