

## **Demographic Characteristics, Coping Skills, and Parental Sense of Competence of Working and Nonworking Mothers**

**Muneeba Shakil, Rubab Aslam, Farzana Ashraf, and Memoona Idris**

COMSATS University

Demographics of Pakistani working and non-working mothers, coping skills and parental sense of competence was examined in this cross-sectional study. Two hundred (100 non-working & 100 working) mothers aged 20 to 50 years responded to demographic information, Brief Cope Scale (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) and Parental Sense Of Competence Scale (Gibaud-Walston & Wandersman, 1978). Results indicated that working mothers from nuclear family system used more positive coping skills and middle age working mothers were found to have more parental sense of competence than their counterparts. Interestingly, analysis of interactive effect revealed that young working mothers living in nuclear family system had more parental sense of competence than their counterparts. This study highlighted the importance of examining mother's demographics in their coping and sense of competence in parenting. Findings would assist social psychologists to guide suitable infrastructure to mothers in both roles to improve their coping with higher parental sense of competence.

*Keywords.* Demographics, working mothers, non-working mothers, coping skills, parental sense of competence.

In today's world, most of the mothers are working while maintaining their traditional roles at home as well. Performance of this dual role is a prominent reason for increasing stress in working mothers as compared to a stay at home mother. A working mother's role is not limited to office work only, instead she has to perform multiple tasks and responsibilities on returning back home after an 8 hours job. In addition, such mothers being caretaker of children,

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Muneeba Shakil, Rubab Aslam, Farzana Ashraf, and Memoona Idris, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University, Lahore Campus, Pakistan.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Muneeba Shakil, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University, Lahore Campus, Pakistan. Email: [muneebashakeel@cuilahore.edu.pk](mailto:muneebashakeel@cuilahore.edu.pk)

housekeeper for families and also the primary caregivers for elderly and with a very demanding schedule throughout the day (Adhikari, 2012). Like other South Asian countries, Pakistani working mothers always put their families forth neglecting own selves. As a working woman it is essential for her to feel comfortable and satisfied with her work life for her to be able to balance her family life. Those who are not comfortable, feel the need to defend their choice to work outside home (Almani, Abro, & Mugheri, 2012).

A person's ability to deal with such stressors is termed as coping. There are two main strategies of coping: changing oneself or changing the environment. These strategies are a person's active efforts to resolve stress and create new ways of handling situations. The two types of coping are emotion focused coping and problem focused coping. In emotion focused coping person deals with the stressors emotionally, whereas, problem focused coping involves handling or altering the stressor. Working mothers face adjustment problems at workplace, family life and married life as well. Within this context coping is regarded effective for dealing with various adjustment issues (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Several factors and parental characteristics that influence parental stress level and determine the coping skills they use include parental education, age, financial stressors, socioeconomic status, social support and spousal support. These parental characteristics are found to be resources contributing to the rearing practice of parents for their children (Cabrera & LeMonda, 2013; Castillo, Welch, & Sarver, 2011). Literature suggests that parent's age is related to their parenting behavior as there is more emotional stability depicted by parents of older age. They have more self-control and appear to cope with stressors better than young parents (Castillo et al., 2011; Verhoeven, Junger, Deković, & Van, 2007). Family related factors may also affect parental behaviors. Such factors may include joint or nuclear family system (Coleman & Karraker, 2000), social support of family members or institutional support (Kesselring et al., 2012).

Rearing children is always stressful and one other factor that affects the family climate is parental sense of competence. Belsky (1984) proposed a model that ascertained the determinants of parent's behavior towards their children. According to the model self-perceived competence and satisfaction with one's parenting practices are core to effective parenting. A parent's behavioral, emotional, and cognitive self-perceived sense of efficacy and satisfaction with their parenting, their patience, warmth and consistency are considered essential for healthy parenting but are not easy to attain (Gibaud-Walston, & Wandersman, 1978). Therefore, parental sense of

competence is a two-facet construct including perceived competence in parental role and parental satisfaction. A competent mother is the one who perceives herself as having control over her parenting and feels good as a mother (Belsky, 1984). Literature suggests that competent parents while raising their children report effective responses to their children's demands. While encountering difficult parenting situations parents with high sense of competence feel more able to cope with lesser stress felt (Hagekull & Bohlin, 1990). The transactional process of parental self-efficacy is an ongoing process that involves parents, parental behaviours, experiences and ways in which they interpret their behaviors and experiences. Parental self-efficacy increases as parents gain experience in raising their children (Weaver, Shaw, Dishion, & Wilson, 2008). Mash and Johnson (1983) suggest that parents of older children feel more competency in parenting than parents of younger children indicating an association between child's age and perceived parental self-efficacy. Experience also counts, for parenting expertise gained over time gives parents insight into their parenting behaviors and skills. With respect to demographics, Boyce and Behl (1991) reported a positive association among maternal stress, age, education level, income, and marital status.

The aforementioned literature from West indicates that demographics do play a significant role in coping with work and household stressors among mothers. It also indicates that demographics of parents play a significant role in perceived parental sense of competence. Both South Asian employed mothers and homemakers live in a very different environment. A working mother enjoys a number of benefits as compared to a stay home mother along with a number of drawbacks with respect to their age, and family dynamics. Pakistani literature is full of studies on the comparison between employed and stay at home mothers; however, studies pertaining to working and non-working mothers' demographic characteristics with their associations and role in mother's coping skills and parental sense of competence is lacking. Therefore, need was felt to explore such differences in South Asian context in general and Pakistan's cultural context in particular. The major objectives were to determine the differences in coping skills and parenting sense of competence of both groups living in joint and nuclear family system. In addition, to determine the difference in coping skills and parenting sense of competence of young and middle age mothers in both groups. It was also intended to examine the interactive effect of age, and family system on the coping skills and parenting sense of competence of both groups. In regard to hypothesis, it was assumed

that demographics would be significant predictors of coping skills and parenting sense of competence among working and non-working mothers.

## Method

### Study Design

A cross sectional study design  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  (work status  $\times$  family system  $\times$  age), is used to determine the differences in coping skills and parental sense of competence in relation to the demographics of working and non-working mothers.

### Sample

A sample of 200 (100 non-working & 100 working) mothers ranging in age between 20 to 50 years ( $M = 36.99$ ,  $SD = 5.11$ ) years was selected through purposive sampling from educational institutes of Lahore, Pakistan. Inclusion criteria was to include mothers in the study only if they had at-least one child of age between 3 to 17 years, working mothers whose minimum work experience was 2 years, and who worked only in educational institutes, to maintain homogeneity in the sample. On the other hand, mothers were excluded from the sample if they were old age adults, were single mothers and, had any diagnosed physical or mental illness.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=200)*

Characteristics	Non-working (n = 100)		Working (n = 100)	
	f	%	f	%
<b>Age groups</b>				
Young adults (20-35 years)	48	48%	51	51%
Middle age adults (36 to 50 Years)	52	52%	49	49%
<b>Family setup</b>				
Joint	48	48%	55	55%
Nuclear	52	52%	45	45%

### Measures

**Brief-COPE Scale (Carver et al., 1989).** The Brief-COPE is a 28 item self-report questionnaire designed to measure effective and ineffective ways to cope with a stressful life event on a 4-point Likert scale. There are fourteen subscales with two items each. Items

measured in subscales are on self-distraction, denial, active coping, substance use, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, behavioural disengagement, venting, positive framing, planning, humor, acceptance, religion, and self-blame. For the purpose of multivariate analysis among the study variables, coping skills are categorized into four groups in this study. The first category is active coping which includes items on, planning ( $\alpha = 0.62$ ) and acceptance ( $\alpha = .53$ ); while, aversive coping that includes self-distraction ( $\alpha = .58$ ), denial ( $\alpha = .71$ ), substance use ( $\alpha = .82$ ), behavioral disengagement ( $\alpha = .54$ ), venting ( $\alpha = .66$ ), and self-blame ( $\alpha = 0.61$ ). In addition, positive coping including positive reframing ( $\alpha = 0.61$ ), religious and humor coping ( $\alpha = .79$ ), and supportive coping including use of emotional ( $\alpha = .75$ ) and instrumental support ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

**Parental Sense of Competence Scale (Gibaud-Walston & Wandersman, 1978).** It is the measure of the extent to which parents perceive themselves as competent hence called sense of competence on two dimensions; that is, Satisfaction and Efficacy. It consist of 16 items with a 6-point Likert response scale range from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (6) with nine questions under Satisfaction Subscale and seven under Efficacy Subscale. The dimension of Satisfaction examines the parents' anxiety, motivation and frustration; while, Efficacy examine parents' competence, capability levels, and problem-solving abilities in their parental role. Reliability coefficient of .70 is acquired for Efficacy subscale, .71 for Satisfaction subscale, and .72 for the entire measure.

**Demographic information form.** A self-developed form pertaining to the objectives of the study containing general person information of the mothers was used. It consisted of questions on mother's age, ages of children, place of residence, education, marital and employment status, family system, monthly total income of family, work experience, and mother's birth order.

### **Procedure**

Firstly, working and non-working mothers were provided informed consent after which their verbal and written permission for voluntary participation in the study was taken. Afterwards they were invited to respond to demographic information form and questionnaires; while conducting the study, all ethical considerations were followed. In the end, results were obtained after applying appropriate statistics. Permission from concerned authorities and participants before collecting data was taken. Informed consent was obtained and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at

any time. It was made sure that there was no emotional harm attached to the participants who volunteered to participate. Moreover, the study was conducted after being approved by the Approval and Ethical Committee of Department of Humanities, COMSATS University, Lahore Campus.

## Results

Data was analyzed by using  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  (work status  $\times$  family system  $\times$  age), multiple analysis of variance. Table 2 represents main effects and interactive effects across work status, age, and family system.

Table 2

*Differences on Age and Family System Between Working And Non-Working Mothers (N = 200)*

		Main Effects					
Variables		Age Groups of Mothers		Family System			
		Young Adults	Middle Adults	Nuclear		Joint	
		<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	$\lambda$	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	$\lambda$
Active	NW	10.63(2.27)	10.69 (2.07)		10.63(2.27)	10.81 (2.30)	
Coping	W	11.62(3.02)	12.61 (3.04)		11.62(3.02)	11.19 (2.39)	
Aversive	NW	9.84 (2.19)	10.10 (2.60)		9.84(2.19)	8.78 (2.26)	
Coping	W	9.21(1.86)	9.09 (1.90)		10.10(2.61)	9.53 (2.44)	
Positive	NW	14.42 (2.52)	11.66 (2.88)	.01	14.42(2.52)	14.07 (3.10)	.02
Coping	W	15.19 (3.71)	15.22 (3.36)		15.19(3.71)	12.97 (3.14)	
Supportive	NW	15.68 (2.54)	14.07 (3.68)		15.68(2.54)	14.70 (3.90)	
Coping	W	16.48 (2.94)	16.61 (3.46)		16.48(2.94)	14.91 (3.71)	
Par. Sense	NW	67.00 (7.48)	60.31 (9.25)		67.00(7.48)	61.63 (8.13)	
of Comp.	W	64.10 (6.75)	63.35 (7.68)	.04	64.10(6.75)	61.31 (6.89)	
		Interactive Effects					
Active	NW	10.63 (2.27)	10.69(2.07)		10.63(2.27)	10.81(2.30)	
coping	W	11.62 (3.02)	12.61(3.04)		11.62(3.02)	11.19 (2.39)	
Aversive	NW	9.84 (2.19)	10.10(2.60)		9.84(2.19)	8.78 (2.26)	
Coping	W	9.21 (1.86)	9.09 (1.90)		10.10(2.61)	9.53 (2.44)	
Positive	NW	14.42 (2.52)	11.66(2.88)		14.42(2.52)	14.07 (3.10)	.04
Coping	W	15.19 (3.71)	15.22(3.36)		15.19(3.71)	12.97 (3.14)	
Supportive	NW	15.68 (2.54)	14.07(3.68)		15.68(2.54)	14.70 (3.90)	
Coping	W	16.48 (2.94)	16.61(3.46)		16.48(2.94)	14.91 (3.71)	
Par. Sense	NW	67.00 (7.48)	60.31(9.25)		67.00(7.48)	61.63 (8.13)	
of Comp.	W	64.10 (6.75)	63.35(7.68)		64.10(6.75)	61.31 (6.89)	.03

Note. Par. = Parental; NW = Non-Working; Comp. = Competence

Results presented in Table 2 depicted main effects and interactive effects for both working and nonworking mothers in relation to various types of coping and parental sense of competence (see Table 2). For main effects, Table 2 shows that working mothers from nuclear family system use more positive coping as compared to the one's living in joint family system. With respect to age middle age working mothers are found to have more parental sense of competence than their counterparts. For interactive effects, Table 2 shows that non-working young mothers living in nuclear family system use more positive coping style, whereas, young working mothers living in nuclear have more parental sense of competence than their counterparts.

The four figures of interactive effect reveal that young working mothers living in nuclear family system had more parental sense of competence than their counterparts (see Figures below).



Figure 1. Interactive effect of family system on mother's positive coping in both groups.

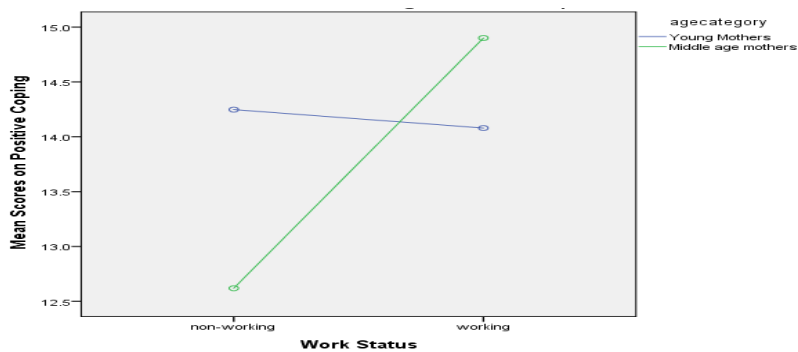


Figure 2. Interactive effect of age group on mother's positive coping in both groups.

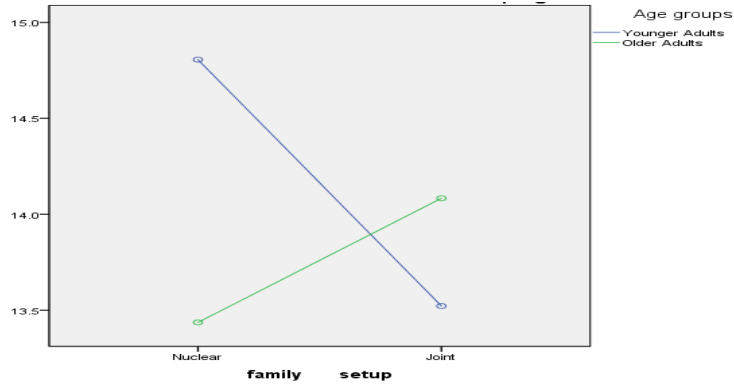


Figure 3. Interactive effect of age groups and family system on the positive coping of both groups.

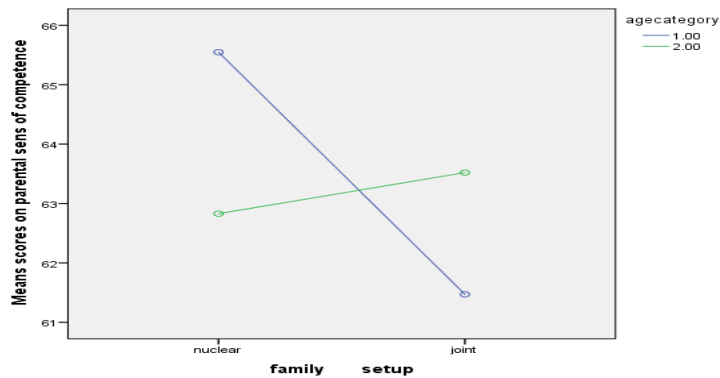


Figure 4. Interactive effect of age on mother's parenting sense of competence in both group.

## Discussion

A cross sectional study design  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  (work status  $\times$  family system  $\times$  age), is used to determine the differences in coping skills and parental sense of competence in relation to the demographics of working and non-working mothers. Results indicate significant main differences between variables where working mothers from nuclear family system use more positive coping as compared to the one's living in joint family system. With respect to age, middle age working mothers are found to have more parental sense of competence than their counterparts (see Table 2). Interestingly, analysis of interactive effect reveals that non-working young mothers living in nuclear family system have more positive coping style, whereas, young working mothers living in nuclear have more parental sense of competence than their counterparts.



With respect to positive coping as positive framing, religiosity and humor are being categorized within this category findings suggest that working mothers living in nuclear family system regardless of their age use these coping styles more as compared to non-working women living in nuclear or joint family system. These findings direct our attention towards the healthy frame of mind working mothers have. Akram and Khuwaja (2014) explored the level of differences among working and non-working married women from Gujrat, Pakistan and suggested that non-working women had more depression as compared to working women, with a positive association among their demographics and depression. It can be ascertained that due to their better mental health governed by a comparatively higher level of education, Pakistani working mothers use more positive coping strategies as compared to their stay at home counterparts. In connection to a better mental health these mothers also use positive coping strategies more, as compared to stay at home mothers. Such coping skills include immediate problem solving with skills to find out the root cause underlying the problem and fixing it, to never confront the problem again, looking for the positive amongst the bad and turning the problem into an opportunity to grow emotionally and spiritually. They also use religiously framed cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses to stress and humour as their stress coping mechanism.

Pakistani family system is considered to be an important factor contributing in many aspects to better coping skills of women. After 80's joint family system which was preferred at that time, is given less importance for living, and is perceived to have more cons than pros. Families of young Pakistani girls are more willing to marry them in a nuclear family system. Today's female from Pakistan's culture is more independent and does not tolerate interference in her personal life in general. Working in the said geographical area is compelled to think of their own household setup because of the intolerant negative attitude of their in-laws. For them, living in a nuclear family system is more satisfactory as compared to living with others in a joint family, where they have to adjust with the approach others have towards life, regardless of their own choices. In a joint family working mothers are expected to fulfill her work and household responsibilities in parallel, which is not the scenario in a nuclear setup where a well earning mother can keep a paid house helper for her housework. A working mother living in joint family is also expected to spend on her in-laws and share expenses contrary to nuclear family system which is a relief to these women. These other members with whom the children stay for most of the time can implant a negative picture of a working

mother making them believe that their mother does not give them time and care. Joint family system specifically becomes a curse for working women when the in-laws are not cooperative resulting in them preferring a nuclear family setup (Aamir, 2004).

With respect to young working mothers' better parental sense of competence, Pakistani literature lacks empirical evidence. However, on contrary western literature suggests that age does play a significant role with respect to parent's perceived level of competence in parenting (Kerestes, 2001; Salonen et al., 2009). Reason being the experience gained by these mothers in a couple of years spent in bringing up their children. Starting with Belsky's model (Belsky, 1984), the personal characteristics of the parent should be dominant parental determinants given that they have an indirect and direct effect on parenting through a wider context in which interaction is achieved in the parent-child relationship.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The current sample was limited as it exclusively included mothers from educational institutes of Lahore, Pakistan only. Consequently, generalization of results on women working in other areas and in other provinces cannot be made limiting its external validity. Based on the study findings and limitations, there are a few suggestions for future research. Future research should be focused on exploring other potential psychological and sociocultural demographic characteristics of working and non-working mothers especially in the context of the diverse culture of Pakistan.

### **Conclusion**

Working mothers from nuclear family system use more positive coping skills and middle age working mothers are found to have more parental sense of competence than their counterparts. Additionally, analysis of interactive effect revealed that young working mothers living in nuclear family system have more parental sense of competence than their counterparts. This study highlights the importance of examining the contribution of mother's demographics in their coping and sense of competence in parenting. Findings may help social psychologists to guide suitable infrastructure to mothers in both roles to improve their coping with higher sense of parental competence.

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