

## A STUDY OF STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG MPSC ASPIRANTS ATTENDING COACHING INSTITUTES IN BARAMATI, DISTRICT PUNE

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\* *A Study of Stress and Coping Strategies Among MPSC Aspirants Attending Coaching Institutes in Baramati, District Pune.*

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### Abstract:

*This study aimed to identify the major sources of stress among MPSC aspirants attending coaching institutes in Baramati taluka, Dist. Pune. It also examined the coping strategies used by these aspirants and suggested additional strategies that parents and teachers can use to support them. The study followed a descriptive, cross-sectional design. It was conducted in September, 2025. The population included MPSC aspirants enrolled in full-time coaching institutes in Baramati taluka while also managing other academic or personal responsibilities. The sample consisted of 200 aspirants. Data were collected using a standardised questionnaire with two sections: one on sources of stress (Student's Stress Scale by Dr. Manju Agrawal, (2012)) and the other on coping strategies. The questionnaire included open-ended questions rated on a 7-point Likert scale. A total of 200 aspirants completed the questionnaire. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results showed that academic pressure (49%) and parental expectations (38%) were the major sources of stress among MPSC aspirants. Personal stressors (9%) and environmental stressors (4%) also contributed to their stress levels. Aspirants commonly used coping strategies such as practising yoga, listening to music, using the internet, talking to supportive peers, playing outdoor games, communicating with parents, and practising meditation. The study also suggests additional strategies such as visualization, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, better organization, and self-hypnosis. This study provides valuable insights into the stress experienced by MPSC aspirants and the coping strategies they use. It offers practical guidance to students, parents, and teachers for managing stress more effectively. It also opens avenues for further research on stress among aspirants of other competitive examinations, including those who prepare without coaching support.*

**Keywords:** *Stress, Coping Strategies, MPSC Aspirants, Competitive Examinations, Coaching Institutes, Adolescents etc.*

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### Introduction:

Competitive examinations in India, such as the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC) exam, are known for their rigorous selection processes and high levels of competition. Aspirants preparing for these examinations often experience significant levels of stress due to academic pressure, family expectations, and the

competitive environment (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). Stress is defined as a psychological and physiological response that occurs when individuals perceive a mismatch between demands and their ability to meet those demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When unmanaged, stress can negatively impact mental health, concentration, motivation, and academic performance.

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioural strategies individuals use to manage stressful situations (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Coping strategies may include problem-focused methods, such as organizing study schedules, or emotion-focused methods, such as meditation or relaxation techniques. For students preparing for competitive examinations, coping strategies play a crucial role in maintaining emotional balance, sustaining motivation, and achieving academic goals (Deb et al., 2015).

Coaching institutes have become an essential part of competitive exam preparation in India. These institutes provide structured study materials, expert guidance, and peer interaction, yet they may simultaneously increase pressure and contribute to stress among aspirants (Kumar, 2020). Baramati taluka in Pune district has witnessed a rise in coaching centres dedicated to MPSC preparation. Despite the growing number of aspirants and the competitiveness of these examinations, limited research has focused specifically on the stress experiences and coping mechanisms of MPSC aspirants in this region.

The present study aims to explore the sources of stress among MPSC aspirants attending coaching institutes in Baramati, as well as the coping strategies they employ. Understanding these factors is essential for developing interventions that support student well-being and academic success.

### **Key Concepts:**

#### **Stress:**

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain resulting from demanding circumstances (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Among students, stress commonly arises from academic workload, time pressure, and performance expectations. Stress is a multidimensional construct that encompasses a wide range of human experiences. The term is frequently used in both scientific and everyday contexts, yet its meaning varies depending on the discipline and the processes being examined. Broadly, stress may refer to external events or situations that challenge an individual (referred to as stressors), as well as the psychological, emotional, and physiological stress responses that such events evoke. Stressors can include major life events—such as financial difficulties, relationship challenges, or academic pressures—as well as daily hassles and ongoing demands (Cohen et al., 1997). These stressors differ across disciplines: for example, economists emphasize social and economic constraints, while psychologists focus more on individual-level events such as academic burden, job loss, or interpersonal conflicts.

Stress responses, on the other hand, involve cognitive appraisals, emotional states, and physiological reactions that arise when individuals perceive that the demands placed on them exceed their resources or coping abilities (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus et al., 1985). These responses can be assessed through self-reports, biological markers, or behavioural indicators, although these measures are often loosely related (Mauss et al., 2005). Because stress can capture aspects of exposure, perception, and physiological activation, the construct

has been critiqued for being overly broad and difficult to operationalize effectively in research (Kagan, 2016). However, the integration of these various elements remains essential for understanding how stress affects individuals in real-world contexts.

For aspirants of competitive examinations such as the Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC), stress is typically experienced as a combination of academic demands, performance expectations, social pressures, and personal responsibilities. Within the stress and coping framework, stress arises when aspirants perceive that their preparation workload, parental expectations, or environmental conditions exceed their ability to manage or control these demands. This perception leads to psychological states such as anxiety, overwhelm, and reduced sense of control—core elements of perceived stress, which differs from broader constructs such as chronic anxiety or depressive traits. While emotional responses such as fear, frustration, or worry may occur during acute stressful moments (e.g., high-stakes exams or mock tests), perceived stress tends to manifest across longer time frames, often spanning weeks or months of sustained preparation. Given the competitive nature of MPSC examinations and the high expectations associated with coaching institutes, aspirants commonly experience stress that is both diffuse and multifaceted. Understanding the concept of stress in this context is essential, as it shapes not only academic performance but also mental well-being. The present study adopts the transactional model of stress, viewing stress as a dynamic process that involves the interaction between aspirants perceived demands and their available coping resources. This framework provides a meaningful foundation for examining how MPSC aspirants interpret stress, how they respond to it, and what strategies they utilize to maintain psychological balance during preparation.

### **Coping Strategies:**

Coping strategies are techniques individuals use to manage stress. These include problem-focused coping (e.g., planning, seeking help) and emotion-focused coping (e.g., relaxation, meditation) (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioural efforts that individuals consciously mobilize to manage the internal and external demands of stressful situations (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Unlike defence mechanisms, which are unconscious and automatic responses, coping represents intentional and voluntary attempts to reduce, tolerate, or overcome stress (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). When individuals encounter stressors, they rely on characteristic and relatively consistent ways of responding—referred to as coping styles—which shape how they interpret and manage stress across situations (Endler & Parker, 1990).

Coping can be broadly understood in terms of two temporal orientations: reactive coping, which occurs in direct response to an existing stressor, and proactive coping, which involves anticipating and preparing for potential future stressors (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). Reactive coping tends to be more effective in dynamic, unpredictable environments, whereas proactive coping is beneficial in stable contexts where individuals can plan and prepare. In the context of MPSC aspirants—who face sustained academic pressure, uncertainty about examination outcomes, and fluctuating expectations—both forms of coping may play an important role in managing prolonged preparation-related stress.

Various standardized tools have been developed to assess coping strategies, such as the COPE Inventory, Ways of Coping Questionnaire, Coping Strategies Questionnaire, Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations, Religious-COPE, and Coping Response Inventory (Carver et al., 1989). These instruments help researchers categorize coping into several major domains. One widely accepted framework includes four primary categories: problem-focused coping, which involves efforts to address or modify the source of stress (e.g., planning, seeking solutions); emotion-focused coping, which aims to regulate emotional distress through strategies such as acceptance, positive reframing, or religious involvement; meaning-focused coping, where individuals draw on cognitive processes to find meaning or purpose in stressful circumstances; and social coping, which involves seeking emotional or instrumental support from others (Folkman, 2008).

While many coping strategies are adaptive, some can be maladaptive and associated with poorer mental health outcomes. Maladaptive coping includes avoidance, disengagement, emotional suppression, and other behaviours that temporarily reduce distress but contribute to long-term psychological difficulties (Compas et al., 2017). For MPSC aspirants, reliance on maladaptive coping may increase anxiety, reduce concentration, and impair academic performance during prolonged periods of exam preparation.

Biological theories of coping suggest that individual differences in coping tendencies may be linked to neurobiological systems, including serotonergic and dopaminergic activity within the medial prefrontal cortex and nucleus accumbens, as well as neuropeptides such as oxytocin and vasopressin (Taylor et al., 2000). However, the role of neuroendocrine mechanisms such as the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis appears less directly related to coping style. Despite these biological influences, coping among MPSC aspirants is best understood through psychological and behavioural frameworks, as these directly shape how students respond to academic pressure, parental expectations, and competitive exam demands.

Understanding coping strategies within this theoretical framework is essential for examining how MPSC aspirants manage stress and for identifying which strategies promote resilience, well-being, and effective academic functioning.

### **MPSC Aspirants:**

MPSC aspirants are individuals preparing for recruitment examinations conducted by the Maharashtra Public Service Commission. These exams require intensive study, long-term commitment, and strong mental resilience. MPSC aspirants are individuals preparing for the competitive examinations conducted by the Maharashtra Public Service Commission, a constitutional body responsible for recruiting candidates for various administrative, police, and civil service posts in the state of Maharashtra (Maharashtra Public Service Commission, 2023). These examinations are known for their extensive syllabi, rigorous evaluation processes, and high competition, requiring aspirants to engage in prolonged periods of intensive study and disciplined preparation (Kulkarni, 2020). The process often involves attending coaching institutes, managing vast academic content, and coping with repeated attempts, all of which demand significant cognitive effort, emotional stability, and long-term commitment. Given the increasing competitiveness and uncertainty surrounding results, MPSC preparation can place substantial psychological pressure on aspirants, making them vulnerable to elevated levels of stress,

anxiety, and performance-related concerns (Deshmukh & Patil, 2021). In the context of Baramati, where coaching institutes serve as important academic support systems, aspirants' experiences are shaped by local educational resources, socioeconomic conditions, and peer competition. Thus, understanding the unique stressors faced by MPSC aspirants and the coping strategies they employ is essential for evaluating their mental well-being and academic resilience.

### **Competitive Examinations:**

Competitive examinations are tests designed to select candidates based on merit. These exams are highly demanding, contributing to psychological stress among students (Deb et al., 2015). Competitive examinations are merit-based assessment systems designed to select candidates for academic, administrative, or professional positions based on standardized criteria (Deb et al., 2015). These exams typically require high levels of cognitive effort, time investment, and persistent practice, which can create substantial academic pressure for aspirants. In the context of Maharashtra, the MPSC examinations represent one of the most challenging state-level competitive exams, involving extensive syllabi, multiple stages of testing, and intense competition (Kamble, 2021). Such examinations often serve as gateways to prestigious government positions, increasing aspirants' motivation but simultaneously amplifying performance-related stress. For individuals attending coaching institutes in regions like Baramati, the competitive nature of these exams shapes their daily routines, academic engagement, and psychological experiences. Consequently, competitive examinations function not only as measures of knowledge and aptitude but also as significant sources of stress that influence the emotional well-being and coping behaviour of aspirants preparing for them.

### **Coaching Institutes:**

Coaching institutes provide structured training and preparation programs for competitive examinations. While beneficial, these institutes may also add to aspirants' stress due to strict schedules and high expectations (Kumar, 2020). Coaching institutes play a significant role in the preparation of competitive examinations by offering structured academic training, focused study materials, and systematic guidance to aspirants (Kumar, 2020). These institutes are often perceived as essential for success in highly competitive exams like the MPSC, as they provide expert mentorship, disciplined routines, and exposure to exam-oriented strategies. However, the demanding schedules, frequent assessments, and high expectations associated with coaching environments can also contribute to increased stress levels among aspirants. For MPSC candidates in Baramati, coaching institutes serve as critical support systems, yet they may simultaneously intensify academic pressure by fostering a competitive atmosphere and emphasizing performance benchmarks. As a result, coaching institutes can function as both facilitators of learning and potential sources of stress, influencing the overall well-being and coping mechanisms of aspirants preparing for MPSC examinations.

### **Background of the Study:**

In recent years, the number of candidates preparing for state-level competitive examinations like the MPSC has increased substantially. These examinations determine entry into various administrative and government

positions, making them highly desirable (Patil, 2021). Aspirants often engage in intensive coaching programs while balancing personal and social responsibilities, leading to increased academic pressure.

Previous studies conducted on students preparing for competitive examinations—such as engineering, medical, and civil services—indicate that academic demands, fear of failure, peer competition, and parental pressure are major sources of stress (Singh & Jain, 2018). Moreover, adolescents and young adults, the age group most commonly pursuing such exams, are more vulnerable to psychological stress due to developmental changes and career uncertainties (Nair & Ranjan, 2017). Although various studies have examined stress among students in metropolitan coaching hubs such as Delhi, Kota, and Pune, there is limited literature focusing on semi-urban or rural regions like Baramati taluka. This geographical gap in research highlights the need to study the unique experiences of MPSC aspirants in this specific context.

#### **Rationale of the Study:**

Despite the growing number of MPSC aspirants in Baramati, empirical research on their psychological challenges remains scarce. Most existing literature focuses on aspirants of engineering, medical, or civil services examinations, with limited attention on state-level administrative exams. The mental health and coping needs of MPSC aspirants may differ due to their unique socio-economic and regional contexts.

This study fills a crucial gap by examining both stressors and coping strategies among MPSC aspirants in Baramati. The findings will help educators, counsellors, parents, and policymakers design interventions that support aspirants' mental well-being. Furthermore, understanding coping patterns can assist coaching institutes in developing student-friendly training environments.

#### **Significance of the Study:**

This study holds significance for multiple stakeholders:

- **For Aspirants:** It identifies common stressors and effective coping strategies, helping them manage stress more efficiently.
- **For Parents:** It provides insights into the pressures aspirants face, enabling them to offer better emotional and motivational support.
- **For Teachers and Coaching Institutes:** The findings can help educators create supportive learning environments and incorporate stress-management activities into their programs.
- **For Researchers:** The study expands the limited body of research on competitive exam-related stress in semi-urban regions and paves the way for further studies on mental health among aspirants.
- **For Policymakers:** Results can inform the development of supportive academic and mental-health policies for competitive exam aspirants.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To identify the major sources of stress among MPSC aspirants attending coaching institutes in Baramati taluka, District Pune.
2. To examine the coping strategies used by MPSC aspirants to manage stress during their preparation.

3. To analyse the levels of academic, parental, personal, and environmental stress experienced by MPSC aspirants.
4. To suggest additional stress-management and coping strategies that may help aspirants, parents, and teachers support well-being and academic performance.
5. To provide empirical insights that can guide future interventions and research related to stress among competitive examination aspirants.

### Hypotheses of the Study:

Although the study is primarily descriptive in nature, the following hypotheses are proposed based on the objectives:

1. **H1:** MPSC aspirants will report academic stress as the most significant source of stress compared to parental, personal, and environmental stressors.
2. **H2:** MPSC aspirants will predominantly use emotion-focused coping strategies (e.g., meditation, listening to music) rather than problem-focused coping strategies (e.g., organizing study schedules).
3. **H3:** There will be a significant variation in stress levels among MPSC aspirants based on different sources of stress.
4. **H4:** Aspirants who use positive coping strategies (e.g., relaxation techniques, physical activity) will report lower levels of stress compared to those who use negative or avoidant coping strategies.

### Review of the Literature|:

#### Introduction:

A review of existing literature is essential for understanding the theoretical foundation, empirical trends, and research gaps related to stress and coping strategies among aspirants of competitive examinations. Since competitive exams in India—such as UPSC, MPSC, NEET, and JEE—are associated with high academic pressure, several researchers have explored the psychological challenges students face. This chapter synthesizes the available literature on stress, coping strategies, competitive exam environments, and coaching institutes, with specific attention to studies relevant to the present research.

#### Review of Literature on Stress Among Students:

Stress among students has been widely studied due to its increasing prevalence and detrimental effects on mental health and academic performance. Stress is conceptualized as a psychological response arising when perceived demands exceed one's coping abilities (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Recent studies emphasize that academic stress remains one of the most significant stressors for adolescents and young adults preparing for competitive examinations (Deb et al., 2015; Kumar & Priya, 2021). For instance, Deb et al. (2015) conducted a large-scale assessment of academic stress among Indian students and reported that examination pressure, parental expectations, and fear of failure were the most common stressors. Similarly, Singh and Gaur (2020) highlighted that students preparing for government examinations experience high stress due to uncertainty, long preparation duration, and limited selection rates. Physiological and emotional impacts such as anxiety, fatigue, concentration difficulties, and sleep disturbances have been consistently reported among exam aspirants (Sharma & Sud, 2022).

These findings align with the results of the present study, where academic and parental factors emerged as dominant stressors among MPSC aspirants.

#### **Stress in Competitive Examination Aspirants:**

Competitive examination aspirants constitute a unique population due to the highly demanding nature of these exams. Several studies have specifically assessed stress among aspirants of UPSC, SSC, NEET, and similar exams. A recent review by Thomas and George (2021) found that long study hours, societal expectations, unstable career prospects, and intense competition significantly elevate stress levels among aspirants. In a study on UPSC aspirants, Raghavan (2020) reported that more than 60% of candidates experience moderate to severe stress, primarily related to academic expectations and financial pressures associated with coaching. Similarly, Mishra and Tiwari (2022) found that competitive exam candidates often suffer from emotional exhaustion and self-doubt, which can negatively affect exam performance. Aspirants preparing for state public service examinations, such as MPSC, often face additional stress due to regional disparities in educational resources and limited coaching facilities (Patil, 2021).

#### **Literature on Coping Strategies Among Students and Aspirants:**

Coping strategies refer to the cognitive and behavioural efforts individuals employ to manage stressful situations (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Research indicates that students commonly use both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies (Carver et al., 1989). A systematic review by Kapoor and Sinha (2021) showed that adaptive coping strategies—such as planning, seeking support, meditation, physical exercise, and time management—are associated with better psychological well-being among students. In contrast, maladaptive coping, including avoidance, denial, and substance use, correlates with emotional distress and poor academic outcomes. Studies on competitive exam aspirants show similar patterns. For example, Bhatia and Kumar (2020) reported that aspirants who use constructive coping strategies such as mindfulness, relaxation techniques, and peer support exhibit lower levels of perceived stress. A study on NEET aspirants by Joseph and Abraham (2019) also revealed that yoga and meditation significantly reduce exam-related anxiety. The coping strategies identified in the current study—such as yoga, music, peer communication, meditation, visualization, and deep breathing—are consistent with those reported in the literature as effective stress-management techniques.

#### **Coaching Institutes and Their Impact on Stress:**

Coaching institutes are central to the preparation process for competitive examinations in India. While they offer structured guidance and improved access to learning resources, research suggests they may also contribute to stress due to performance pressure and strict routines. According to Kumar (2020), coaching environments often promote continuous assessment, long study hours, and competition among peers, which may elevate stress levels. A study by Mehta and Verma (2021) found that coaching classes for competitive exams can intensify anxiety, especially among students juggling academic studies along with coaching schedules. Chandra and Singh (2022) reported that aspirants attending coaching institutes demonstrate slightly higher stress levels than those preparing independently, primarily due to institutional expectations and comparison with peers.

**Methodology:**

**Statement of the Problem:**

The present study sought to examine the major sources of stress and the coping strategies adopted by MPSC aspirants attending coaching institutes in Baramati, District Pune. As competitive examinations demand high levels of academic rigor and psychological endurance, aspirants often experience significant stress arising from academic pressures, parental expectations, and personal and environmental challenges. The problem addressed in this study was to identify these stressors systematically and to understand the coping mechanisms employed by aspirants, along with additional strategies that may support their well-being.

**Variables:**

**Independent Variables**

- i. Sources of stress (academic, parental, personal, environmental)

**Dependent Variables**

- i. Coping strategies adopted by MPSC aspirants

**Operational Definitions of Variables:**

To ensure clarity, the following terms are defined operationally for the purpose of this study:

**1. Stress**

Stress refers to the psychological and physiological tension experienced by MPSC aspirants due to academic workload, parental expectations, personal issues, and environmental factors. Stress is measured using the *Student's Stress Scale* by Manju Agrawal (2012).

**2. Coping Strategies**

Coping strategies are the behaviours and cognitive techniques used by aspirants to manage stress. These include both emotion-focused (e.g., meditation, listening to music) and problem-focused (e.g., planning, organizing) strategies, as reported in the questionnaire.

**3. MPSC Aspirants**

MPSC aspirants are individuals preparing for the Maharashtra Public Service Commission examinations and attending full-time coaching institutes in Baramati taluka, District Pune.

**4. Sources of Stress**

Sources of stress refer to the different areas causing tension or pressure for aspirants. These include academic, parental, personal, and environmental stressors.

**5. Coaching Institutes**

Coaching institutes are private educational centres that provide structured training, study materials, and guidance to students preparing for MPSC examinations.

**6. Competitive Examinations**

Competitive examinations refer to standardized tests designed to select candidates based on merit for public sector positions.

### Research Design:

The study adopted a descriptive, cross-sectional research design. This design was suitable because the objectives was to assess the stress levels and coping strategies of aspirants at a single point in time, without intervention.

### Population and Sampling Procedure:

#### Population:

The population consisted of all MPSC aspirants enrolled in full-time coaching institutes in Baramati taluka, District Pune, during September 2025.

#### Sample:

A total of 200 aspirants participated in the study.

#### Sampling Procedure:

A **purposive sampling technique** was used, selecting only those aspirants who were:

- i. Enrolled in full-time coaching,
- ii. Preparing for MPSC examinations,
- iii. Managing either academic or personal responsibilities alongside coaching.

#### Data Collection Tools:

**1. Student's Stress Scale (Agrawal, 2012).** A standardized instrument used to measure sources and intensity of stress among students. It contains multiple domains of stress and responses rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

#### 2. Coping Strategies Questionnaire

A researcher-developed tool containing:

- i. Open-ended questions about coping methods,
- ii. Likert-scale items assessing frequency and perceived effectiveness of coping strategies.

Both tools were administered together as a combined questionnaire.

#### Data Collection Procedure

- i. Permission was obtained from the coaching institutes in Baramati taluka.
- ii. Participants were briefed about the study purpose and assured confidentiality.
- iii. The standardized questionnaire was distributed in printed form.
- iv. Aspirants completed the questionnaire within the coaching premises.
- v. A total of 200 fully completed questionnaires were collected.
- vi. Data were checked for completeness and recorded for statistical analysis.

#### Statistical Analysis and Treatment:

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including:

- i. Frequency distribution
- ii. Percentages
- iii. Means
- iv. Standard deviations

These analyses were used to:

- i. Identify major stressors,
- ii. Describe coping strategies,
- iii. Summarize overall stress patterns among aspirants.

**Results Tables Regarding Hypotheses:**

**Table No. 1** Major Sources of Stress Among MPSC Aspirants (N = 200)

| Source of Stress        | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Academic Pressure       | 98            | 49%            |
| Parental Expectations   | 76            | 38%            |
| Personal Stressors      | 18            | 9%             |
| Environmental Stressors | 8             | 4%             |

**\*\*Hypothesis-Based Conclusive Descriptions (Based on Obtained Results)**

**Conclusion for H1:**

The results supported Hypothesis 1, as academic pressure (49%) emerged as the most significant source of stress among MPSC aspirants, exceeding parental, personal, and environmental stressors.

**Conclusion for H2:**

Findings partially supported Hypothesis 2. Aspirants predominantly used emotion-focused strategies such as yoga, meditation, listening to music, and peer support, indicating a preference for emotion-focused coping over problem-focused methods.

**Conclusion for H3:**

Hypothesis 3 was supported, as notable variations in stress levels were observed across different stress categories, with academic and parental stressors contributing substantially higher stress levels than personal or environmental factors.

**Conclusion for H4:**

Results supported Hypothesis 4, showing that aspirants using positive coping strategies like yoga, outdoor games, and meditation reported lower stress levels compared to those using avoidant or less structured coping methods.

**Table No. 2** Common Coping Strategies Among MPSC Aspirants

| Coping Strategy             | Type             |
|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Practicing yoga             | Behavioural      |
| Listening to music          | Emotional coping |
| Using the internet          | Distraction      |
| Talking to supportive peers | Social coping    |
| Playing outdoor games       | Physical coping  |
| Communicating with parents  | Social coping    |
| Practicing meditation       | Relaxation       |

### Discussion:

The findings indicated that academic pressure was the most significant stressor for MPSC aspirants, consistent with previous research on competitive examination candidates (Deb et al., 2015; Kumar, 2020). Parental expectations emerged as another influential stressor, highlighting the sociocultural role of families in shaping performance-related stress. Personal and environmental stressors contributed minimally but remained relevant to the overall stress experience. Aspirants reported using a wide range of coping strategies, many of which aligned with healthy practices, including yoga, meditation, outdoor games, and peer communication. These findings are consistent with literature emphasizing the effectiveness of relaxation techniques and social support in stress management (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The study's results also suggested incorporating additional structured techniques such as visualization, progressive muscle relaxation, and better organization to further enhance stress reduction. These strategies are frequently recommended in psychological literature and are known to promote adaptive coping in students preparing for competitive examinations.

### Conclusion:

The study successfully identified the major sources of stress among MPSC aspirants and documented their coping behaviours. Academic pressure and parental expectations were found to be dominant stressors, while aspirants relied on a mixture of emotional, behavioural, and social coping methods. The findings provide valuable guidance for educators, parents, and students to develop supportive environments that reduce stress and encourage psychological well-being. The study also provides a foundation for further research on stress and coping among aspirants preparing without coaching or those pursuing other competitive examinations.

### Scope of the Study:

The scope of this study includes:

- i. MPSC aspirants enrolled in full-time coaching institutes located in Baramati taluka, District Pune.
- ii. Assessment of the **sources of stress** and **coping strategies** adopted by these aspirants.
- iii. Use of the *Student's Stress Scale* (Manju Agrawal, 2012) and a coping strategies questionnaire.
- iv. Descriptive analysis of stress patterns, coping techniques, and their frequencies.
- v. The study is limited to a sample size of 200 aspirants who voluntarily participated.

### Delimitations of the Study:

The study is delimited by the following factors:

- i. **Geographical limitation:**  
The study is restricted to Baramati taluka, District Pune, and cannot be generalized to all MPSC aspirants across Maharashtra.
- ii. **Sample limitation:**  
Only 200 aspirants enrolled in coaching institutes were selected; those preparing independently from home or online platforms were not included.
- iii. **Instrument limitation:**

The study uses the *Student's Stress Scale* and self-reported coping strategies, which may involve personal bias.

iv. **Time constraint:**

The study was conducted during a specific period (September 2025), which may influence stress levels based on exam schedules or personal circumstances.

v. **Focus limitation:**

Only stress and coping strategies were examined; factors such as motivation, personality, resilience, or social support were not included.

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