

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STRESS & COPING STRATEGIES AMONG FEMALE AND MALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Dr. Nasreen Ansari

Abstract -

“Stress is disease of civilization”

The term stress is frequently used in many different ways. Stress consists of environmental demands that lead to physical responses (Cannon). The concept of “Stress” is highly studied nowadays. Stress is an inevitable part of psychosocial life of any individual, and youths are no exception to it. Stress is not age per se, rather transaction between environment, social life and personal characteristics.

The aim of the present study was to compare and correlate the Stress Level and Coping Strategies among Female and Male undergraduate students of Bhopal. The sample of the study consisted of N=40 female and N=40 male undergraduate students of Bhopal. Dr. M. Singh's Stress Scale and Prof. A. K. Srivastava's Coping Strategies Scale was used to measure Stress and Coping Strategies respectively.

Results indicated a non-significant difference between coping strategies and stress levels of two groups. Such results may be attributed to the fact that today's cut-throat competition and global economy has opened many ventures in all arenas and youth are expected to excel in the most. If the males have to strive for career, the story is same for females. And the options are limited under the sky. Social networking and maintaining social status quo have made the things even worse. Shortcomings in life are being tried to be made with owing and handling new and expensive gadgets. Frustration, pressure, conflict and endangerment of one's identity lead to high amount of stress among youths. The remedy is in monitoring their demands and being calculative while upbringing them. Change cannot be expected in a single day, but to start wholeheartedly, is to get the work half-done.

Key Words - Stress, Coping strategies, Youth

Introduction

Stress is a highly charged phenomenon of current times. **Stress** is a concept that has an impact on one's mental and physical well-being. It is basically a phenomenon of physical sciences, introduced to life sciences by extensive research of *Hans Selye*. He described it in form of *General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)*, which divides the body's reaction into three successive stages: (1) alarm and mobilization; (2) resistance-the state of optimal biological adaptation to environmental demands; and (3) exhaustion and disintegration-a stage reached when the body loses its ability to cope with prolonged demands.

Finally, some cognitive theorists defined stress not as stimulus or response but as the interaction between the stimulus and the person's appraisal of it, a process that determines the person's response. An optimum level of stress is

essential for performing one's work. This then acts as a drive and may be termed as “Eustress”. But, after a time limit, stress causes inverse effect and detrimentally affects work performance as well as organism's commitment towards completing the task. This is an alarming stage of stress as its increase may lead to deterioration of work done.

Responses to stress include adaptation, psychological coping such as stress management, and depression. Over the long term, it may lead to diminished health and proneness to illness. In order to overcome all this, stress must be managed. Stress management encompasses techniques intended to equip a person with effective coping mechanisms for dealing with psychological stress. Stress management is effective when a person uses strategies to cope with or alter stressful situations. In last two decades, there has been an explosion of research

□ Guest faculty, Department of Mass Communication, MCRP&SVV

मीडिया मीमांसा

Media Mimansa

Jan. 2016 - March 2016

in the area of stress and coping and consequent strains. It has been well established that stress results in a variety of psychological and somatic pathologies. A variety of coping behavior/strategies have been suggested by various stress researchers. It can range from the most causal manoeuvres to complicated form of problem solving.

Lazarus and Launier (1978), and Lazarus (1981) described four basic modes of coping:

- Instrumental strategies or direct action;
- Intrapsychic strategies aimed at regulating or minimizing the emotional distress;
- Inhibition of action to resist taking action to deal with the stressful situation;
- Information seeking involves the instrumental activities of gaining a basis for action and also in a form of support mobilization.

More broadly, coping encompasses cognitive and behavioural strategies used to manage stressful situations (problem-focused coping) or/and to attend negative emotions (emotion-focused coping) (Cohen & Lazarus, 1979; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). However it has now been proved that responses made in order to cope with stresses form several factors rather than just two (Aldwin and Revenson, 1987). These factors often diverge quite sharply in character, to the extent being inversely correlated. Pareek (1983b) suggested two basic categories of coping behaviour: approach (Functional coping) and avoidance (Dysfunctional coping). After combining two modes of coping and two major sources of stress, he suggested eight types of coping strategies. Latack (1986) suggested three categories of coping strategies, such as, action coping, cognitive appraisal, and symptom management.

One of the problems encountered in the literature is the multitude of definitions related to the concept of coping (Cohen and Lazarus, 1979; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984a, 1984b; McGrath,

1970; Pearlin and Schooler, 1978; Schuler, 1984; Yackel, 1983). Coping is primarily a psychological concept and although there are many definitions, mostly they share a basic thought that, coping is a struggle with demands, conflicts and emotions. However, Webster Dictionary (1984) defines coping as to fight or contend (with) successfully or on equal terms and secondly to deal with problems, troubles, etc. This is different than defense mechanisms. The important distinction is that coping involves some degree of thought by the individual.

Basically, coping is expending conscious effort to solve personal problems and seeking to master, minimize or tolerate stress of conflict. Cohen and Lazarus (1979) defined coping as the action-orientated and intra-psychic efforts to manage environments and internal demands, and conflicts among them, which tax or exceed a person's resources. Later, Lazarus and Folkman (1984a) revised this definition to be the constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person. Within this definition is the inclusion of both defensive and coping strategies. There are several ways of coping with stress, such as controlling the source of stress or learning to set limits and to say "no" to some of the demands that bosses or family members may make. A person's capacity to tolerate the source of stress may be increased by thinking about another topic such as a hobby, listening to music, or spending time in a wilderness.

Coping strategies can be grouped into two main types. They are- *problem focussed* strategy to deal directly with the stressors through overt action or through realistic problem solving mental activities. Secondly, *emotion focussed* in which people do not look forward to ways of changing the stressful situation, instead try to change feelings and thoughts about it. This strategy is called emotion regulation (Zimbardo, 1988). Further, personal coping

resources used by people are, recreation; self-care, social-support and rational coping (Osipow and Spokane, 1998).

Present era is the era of stress, and youths are no exception to it. It has long been assumed that this age is the most stressful age of life. Keeping in mind, the need of the hours, present study is framed to examine whether rising level of stress alter coping strategies. It's a study where the relation and affect of stress and coping strategies on female and male under-graduate students is assessed.

Objective

The objective of the present study is to examine the difference between stress and coping strategies among female and male undergraduate students.

Hypothesis

H₁ there will be a difference between stress levels of female and male undergraduate students.

H₂ there will be a difference between coping strategies of female and male undergraduate students.

METHOD

Sample: The sample of the study consisted of 80 various higher education students selected randomly from Bhopal, (N=40) as female students and (N=40) as male students. Their age ranged from 18 to 22 years.

Assessment Measure (s)

Stress Scale: developed by *Dr. M. Singh* (2002) was used to measure stress among various students. The test consisted of 40 items measuring the stress level. This scale is a five point scale ranging from "Very low" to "Severe". Higher the scores more the stress level and vice-versa. The score range is from 0 to 160 respectively. The reliability of the scale is, $r = 0.82$ and validity is, $r = 0.61$.

Scoring norm table for Stress Scale

Score	1	2	3	4	5
Stress level	Very low	Low	Moderate	Less severe	Severe

Coping Strategies Scale: It was developed by Prof. *A. K. Srivastava* (2001). It was used to measure the efficiency of coping strategies of various students. The test consisted of 50 items measuring five dimensions of coping strategies. The score range is from 0 to 200. The reliability of the scale is, $r = 0.92$ and approximate validity is, $r = 0.37$.

Procedure

The scales were distributed and administered on both the groups of higher education students. Each respondent was approached personally and was requested to fill up the questionnaires. Respondents were given the liberty to take their time for completing their questionnaires. The confidentiality of their responses was assured. Finally the questionnaires were collected and scoring was done. Raw scores were analyzed by applying t-test.

Results:

Table 1: Showing difference between *Stress levels* of female and male students

Group (s)	N	Mean	SD	T
Female students	40	16	5.56	n.s.
Male students	40	22	6.43	

Table 1 is showing difference between stress levels of female and male students. The mean of female students on stress scale came out as 16 with standard deviation as 5.56 and the mean of male students on stress scale came out to be 22 with standard deviation as 6.43 respectively. Their t-value came out to be non-significant.

Hence, hypothesis H₁ is rejected.

Table 2: Showing difference between *Coping Strategies* of female and male students

Group (s)	N	Mean	SD	t
Female students	40	84.35	10.25	n.s.
Male students	40	99.60	17.53	

Table 2 is showing difference between coping strategies of female and male students. The mean of female students on coping strategies scale is 84.35 with standard deviation as 10.25 and the mean of male students on coping strategies scale came out to be 99.60 with standard deviation as 17.53 respectively. Their t-value came out to be non-significant.

Hence, hypothesis H₂ is rejected.

Interpretation and Discussion

Keeping in view, the need of the hours, present study aimed to measure the stress levels and their corresponding coping strategies among female and male undergraduate students of Bhopal (MP). The results were computed using MS Office Excel sheet and formulas. Non-significant difference was computed between stress levels and coping strategies among both the groups. Results may be attributed to the fact that, today's global economy has opened many ventures in all arenas and, higher education students are no exception to it. If the female students have career plans, males also have to compete for the same.

Similarly, dating and relationship with friends is one of the major stressor for youth students. Break-up and hook-up have become part and parcel of life. Youth have made their inter-personal life so complicated that, it becomes difficult for them to hold and manage their relations. To add to the misery, tests; assignments; projects, i.e. academic overload and higher expectations of family and peer groups make things difficult to handle.

Reference-

- Aldwin, C., and Revenson, T.A. (1987). Does coping help? A re-examination of the relationship between coping and mental health. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Vol. 53, pp. 337-348.
- Cannon, W.B. (1936). *Bodily changes in pain, hunger, fear and rage*. New York: Appleton-Century.
- Cohen, F., and Lazarus, R. S. (1979). Coping with the stresses of illness. In G. C. Stone, F. Cohen, N. E. Adler, and Associates (Eds.), *Health Psychology - A Handbook: Theories, Applications, and Challenges of a Psychological Approach to the Health Care System* (pp. 217-254). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Latack, J.C. (1986). Coping with job stress: Measures and future directions for scale development. *Journal for Applied Psychology*. Vol. 50, pp. 571-79.
- Lazarus, R.S., and Folkman, S. (1984a). *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*. New York: Springer.
- Lazarus, R. S., and Folkman, S. (1984b). Coping and adaptation. In W. D. Gentry (Ed.), *Handbook of Behavioural Medicine*. New York: Guilford Press, pp. 282-325.

Social networking consumes a high percentage of youths' time. If someone is not a member of facebook /twitter, it is considered as social-backwardness. All-in-all there is too much to do for YOUTHS.

Due to cut-throat competition, present day youth not only has to study, but also has to engage in many co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Thus, enriching one's CV have a bearing on one's time and money too. The quest for employment lead to highest level stress as, hefty pay packages and being ahead in race of perks, promotions are to be achieved, that too, too fast. The monetary juggling is also a big stressor. Further separation/re-marriage and sexual-difficulties also cause stress. The agony of losing someone is painful and strenuous. Sedentary lifestyle and junk food; changed clothing pattern; pollution, fast life gives rise to impotency, infertility.

It is a well established fact that, if GOD has given the problem, there is a solution to it too. So there are factors which may support stressed youngsters in current world. Social support and healthy interpersonal relationships with parents is the first step towards youth de-stressing. The ability to act independently, purposeful future, positive self-esteem builds up a mature and responsible youth. Engaging in various hobbies and dialogue, that is, interaction with people not gadgets and internet will make all (youth as-well-as their family; elders) stress free and problem free. Let's start with a stress-free and problem free world with mantra of high interaction, high satisfaction.

- Lazarus, R.S. (1966). *Psychological Stress and the Coping Process*. New York: McGraw-Hill Publications.
- Lazarus, R.S. (1981). The stress and coping paradigm. In *Models for Clinical Psychopathology*, ed. C. Eisdorfer, D. Cohen, A. Kleinman, P. Maxim, New York: Spectrum, pp. 177-214.
- Lazarus, R.S., and Launier, R. (1978). Stress-related transactions between person and environment. In *Perspectives in Interactional Psychology*, ed. L. A. Pervin, M. Lewis, New York: Plenum, pp. 287-327.
- McGrath, J. E. (1970). Major substantive issues: Time, setting, and the coping process. In J. E. McGrath (Ed.), *Social and Psychological Factors in Stress*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, pp. 22-40.
- Osipow, S.H., and Spokane, A.R. (1998). Manual, OSI-Revised. Florida: PAR, Inc.
- Pareek, U. (1983b). *Organizational Role: Projective Instrument for Coping Strategies (Pics)*. Ahmadabad: Navin Publications.
- Pearlin, L., and Schooler, C. (1978). The structure of coping. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, Vol. 19, pp. 2-21.
- Schuler, R. S. (1984). Organizational stress and coping: A model and overview. In A. S. Sethi and R. S. Randall, *Handbook of Organizational Stress Coping Strategies*, Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, pp. 35-69.
- Selye, H. (1956). *The Stress of Life*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Singh, M. (2002). Stress Scale and Manual. *Aarohi Manovigyan Kendra*, Jabalpur.
- Srivastava, A.K. (2001). Coping Strategies Scale and Manual. Varanasi: *Manovaigyanik Parikchhan Sansthan*.
- Yackel, I. (1983). An Analysis of Leadership Styles and Stresses in the Rural Principalship. *Unpublished Master's thesis*, University of Regina, SK.
- Zimbardo, P.G. (1998). *Psychology and Life*, (XII Eds.). Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company.