

STRESS, COPING AND SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at exploration of stress, coping and social support among female college students. The sample consisted to 88 female college students from degree colleges, affiliated with Punjabi University Patiala. The data in the present investigation was collected with the help of Life Experiences Survey, Proactive Coping Inventory, and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. The results of t-test revealed that rural and urban female college students experience almost same level of positive stress and negative stress as well as same level of social support. But, the rural female college students are significantly better in coping than urban female students thereby meaning that they have a better way of dealing with life situations in pursuance of the studies for a better life. In other words, it indicated a personal strength of female college students to go ahead in life. The results are discussed in the contact of the government policies to promote gender equity in education and employment of educated youth.

Keywords: Stress, Social Support, Female College Students

Introduction

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in our Constitution which guarantees equality to women, and empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favours of women for removing the socio-economic and educational disadvantage faced by them. The Constitution of India, guarantees to all women, equality (Article 14); no discrimination by the state (Article 15(1)); equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d)); renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(a)c). The constitution also allows the state to make special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15(3)) and securing just and human conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42). The government of India declared 2001 as the "Year of Women's Empowerment" and The National Policy for Employment came into force from 2001.

After that provisions female student of degree colleges face new and different stress in their study place. The main sources of stress are academic and time concerns, fear of failure, classroom interaction and economic issues. Apart from this, the parental system also affects a lot to these students. The parents have unlimited expectation from their girl children and they impose their own desires on them. The impact of these

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influences results in a number of students reporting emotional problems, anxiety, stress, and other psychological problems. They are often found in frightening, abusive, depressing, threatening, competitive, unpredictable, and confusing situations. The percentage of suicides is more among the female college students compared to the other groups of population and these suicides are mostly associated with academic failure or underachievement.

Majority of the female college students strive and try to handle the stress in a positive way. Whereas, some of the students do not know the ways to cope up with their problems and; therefore, adopt unhealthy ways. Thus, the dimensions of coping behaviour need to be studied from a developmental perspective. The coping can be at an emotional, cognitive, or social support seeking level. The emotional responsiveness grows out of the simple reflexes of painful emotional responsive behaviour, by the age of two or three years and emerges as a life style in later years of childhood and adolescence.

Social support as a form of coping, vis-a vis stress can be theoretically linked together that have been previously viewed as conceptually distinct. This allows for the elaboration of traditional constructs using theoretical developments in the other area. Second, conceptualization of social support as coping broadens the concept of coping as it has traditionally been defined to include interpersonal and relational skills. Third, this approach recognizes the importance of resources in others which can be incorporated into the behavioural and cognitive coping repertoire of the individual. Moreover, according to the present reformulation, interpersonal strength and relational skills are conceptualized as positive coping strengths, which can be developed.

Review of Literature

Asberg (2000) suggests that reducing emotional and financial stress-related costs may be possible through increasing public and professional awareness of moderating variables, such as social support and coping resources. The college students completed measures about perceived stress, life events, satisfaction with social support, coping strategies, and psychological functioning. Results from correlational, regression, and structural equation modelling procedures indicated that stress, inadequate social support, and escape-avoidance coping were related to higher levels of depression and lower life satisfaction in both males and females. Social support functioned as a moderator of stress in determining negative outcomes, primarily during high stress.

Lijuan Zhai (2002) indicated that international students experienced significant challenges in adjusting to academic stress, cultural differences, and language challenges within the U.S. higher education system. Adjustments to academic demands tended to present the greatest difficulty for international students. Friends and family were the preferred sources to seek help for personal issues.

Arla et al. (2003) examined the relationship of self-efficacy, social support, and coping strategies with stress levels of university students. Significant correlations were found for stress with total number of coping strategies and the use of avoidance-focused

coping strategies. As well, there was a significant correlation between social support from friends and emotion-focused coping strategies. Gender differences were found, with women reporting more social support from friends than men.

in study conducted by Heiman (2004) multivariate analysis of variance revealed that younger students used more emotional strategies and perceived having greater social support from friends than did older students. Students who did not work reported experiencing higher levels of stress associated with daily life and work-related issues. Women used more emotional and avoidance coping strategies. The findings of the regression analysis demonstrated that task-oriented and emotional coping modes, work stress, and family support explained 30% of the variance of sense of coherence.

Catherine E. Mosher et al. (2006) examined mechanisms through which optimism might influence psychological adjustment among black college students. Avoidant coping and social support mediated the relation between optimism and depressive symptoms, whereas active coping did not mediate this relationship. Results partially replicate those of prior research and illustrate the need for culturally sensitive theory regarding the combined effect of personality, coping strategies, and social support on psychological adjustment to stressful situations.

Crocket et al. (2007) examined the relationship between acculturative stress and psychological functioning, as well as the protective role of social support and coping style, in a sample of 148 Mexican American college students. In bivariate analyses, acculturative stress was associated with higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms. Moreover, active coping was associated with better adjustment (lower depression), whereas avoidant coping predicted poorer adjustment (higher levels of depression and anxiety).

Hashimah (2007) conducted a study on 209 students from schools in Penang. In this study, a semi-structured interview covering questions on demographics, a 12-item measure of self-esteem, and a 20-item measure of well-being was conducted. To assess stress, coping and social supports, respondents were given a list of possible stressors (e.g., problems with relationships at home and school) and were asked to indicate whether or not they were bothered by these stressors, the type of coping that they had used in dealing with these stressors, and the type of social supports that they had received in relation to these stressors. A higher proportion of respondents (77%) identified issues related to academics and lessons as a problem compared to other issues (relationships at home, 34%, and relationships at school, 31%). The number of stressors related to everyday life was significantly related to well-being, but not to self-esteem or academic performance.

Renk Kimberly and Smith Tara (2007) suggested that anxiety, problem-focused coping, and support from significant others may serve as potentially important predictors of the academic-related stress experienced by college students. Thus, identifying college students' experience with these variables and addressing these variables in practical settings may help college students alleviate their experience of academic-related stress and have a less stressful, and possibly more fulfilling, college

career.

Honghong Wang (2009) found that positive correlations exist between stressful events, negative coping style and the total scores of SCL-90 ($r=0.487, 0.462, p<0.01$), while negative correlations related to positive coping style, social support and the total scores of SCL-90 ($r=-0.192, -0.135, p<0.05$). The stressful factors, negative coping style and social support all have significant main effects on mental symptoms ($F=34.062, 16.090, 20.898, p<0.01$), and positive coping style has no significant main effect on mental symptoms ($F=1.853, p>0.05$), but interactions relate to stressful factors and positive coping style ($F=14.579, p<0.01$), as well as negative coping style and social support.

In study conducted by Hefner Jennifer and Eisenberg Daniel (2009) results support the hypothesis that students with characteristics differing from most other students, such as minority race or ethnicity, international status, and low socioeconomic status, were at greater risk of social isolation. In addition, it was found that students with lower quality social support, as measured by the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, were more likely to experience mental health problems, including a six fold risk of depressive symptoms relative to students with high quality social support.

Ramya and Parthasarathy (2009) revealed that majority of the students adopted emotion- and problem-focused coping strategies. Most of the female students adopted emotion-focused coping strategies, whereas the male students mostly used problem-focused coping strategies.

Krister (2011) Results demonstrated gender differences in the experience of many variables studied as well as the prediction of depression. High levels of perceived stress factored in as an important predictor of depression for both genders. Prediction models of best fit for females also included low mastery and low social support, while few coping resources along with high perceived stress appeared to be the most important factors in depression prediction for males. Mastery was also found to moderate the relationship between social support and depression for males.

Objectives of the Study

Following objectives were framed for the present study:

1. To study the difference in stress among female college students in relation to their locale.
2. To study the difference in coping behaviour of female college students in relation to their locale.
3. To study the difference in social support of female college students in relation to their locale.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. **There is no significant difference in stress of female college students in relation to their locale.**
2. **There is no significant difference in coping behaviour of female college students in relation to their locale.**

3. There is no significant difference in social support of female college students in relation to their locale.

Method and Procedure

The study was conducted on only female students of degree college affiliated to Punjabi university, Patiala. Descriptive survey method was used in the present study. In the present study random sampling technique was used. A sample of 88 female college students 26 urban and 62 rural students was raised through random sampling technique from different degree colleges, affiliated with Punjabi University, Patiala. For the present study Life Experiences Survey (James H. Johnson and Irwin G. Sarason, 1978), Proactive coping inventory (PCI) (Greenglass Esther, Schwarzen, Ralf, Jakubiec Dagmara, Fiksebawm Lisa and Toubert Steffen (1999) and The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Sheung-Tak Cheng, Alfred C.M. Chan, 2004). After the collection of data t-test was used to study the differences in stress coping and social support among college students across location.

Result and Discussions

Table 1
Mean SD and t-value for Positive Stress Level of Urban and Rural Female College Students

| Locale | N | Mean | SD | t-value |
|--------|----|------|------|--------------------|
| Urban | 26 | 2.13 | 0.53 | 0.27 ^{NS} |
| Rural | 62 | 2.10 | 0.53 | |

NS= p>0.05

Table 2
Mean, SD and t-value for negative Stress Level of Urban and Rural Female College Students

| Locale | N | Mean | SD | t-value |
|--------|----|------|------|--------------------|
| Urban | 26 | 2.41 | 0.48 | 0.96 ^{NS} |
| Rural | 62 | 2.12 | 0.65 | |

NS= p>0.05

The table 1 and 2 shows that the mean values for positive stress of urban and rural female college students are 2.13 and 2.10 respectively and negative stress of urban and rural 2.41 and 2.12 female college students respectively. The t-value of positive and negative stress of female college student is 0.27 and 0.96 which is not significant at both levels of significance.

It indicates that there is no significant difference between urban and rural female college students on the variable of stress.

Hence, the first hypothesis stating that "There is no significant difference in stress of

female college students in relation to their locale” is accepted.

Table 3
Mean, SD and t-value for coping Behaviour of Urban and Rural Female College Students

| Locale | N | Mean | SD | t-value |
|--------|----|--------|-------|---------|
| Urban | 26 | 113.42 | 22.46 | 2.10* |
| Rural | 62 | 124.09 | 23.20 | |

* Significant at 0.05 level

The table 3 shows that the mean values for coping behaviour of urban and rural female college students are 113.42 and 124.09 respectively. The t-value of coping behaviour of female college student is 2.01 which is significant even at 0.05 level.

It indicates that there is significant difference between urban and rural female college students on the variable of coping.

Hence, the second hypothesis stating that “There is no significant mean difference in coping behaviour of female college students in relation to their locale” is rejected.

Table 4
Mean SD and t-value for Social Support Level of Urban and Rural Female College Students

| Locale | N | Mean | SD | t-value |
|--------|----|------|-------|---------|
| Urban | 26 | 48.8 | 10.16 | 0.25 |
| Rural | 62 | 48.9 | 6.40 | |

The table 4 shows that the mean values for social support of urban and rural female college students are 48.8 and 48.9 respectively. The t-value of social support of female college student is 0.25 which is no significant even at 0.05 level.

It indicates that there is no significant difference between urban and rural female college students on the variable of social support.

Hence, the third hypothesis stating that “There is no significant mean difference in social support of female college students in relation to their locale” is accepted.

Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis and interpretation of data following conclusions were drawn:

The experiencing of both positive and negative stress by female college students to a good degree is an indication that both the stresses go together in human life. Also the moderate level of coping shows a better condition of living that college students have. The availability of social support is a good indication of family life and community life inspite of the fact that life is perhaps becoming more and more difficult in current era. The relationship of coping and social support is another major finding. These need to

be taken care of in educational programmes, both formal and non-formal.

Educational Implications of the Study

- Students, who use more coping strategies in their daily life, should be encouraged to help others who are facing similar kind of stress and are unable to cope with them.
- Teachers should adopt teaching methods that will help the students to develop better coping mechanisms.
- A positive relationship of students coping skills and social support provides teachers with important information that can be used in formative evaluation of their own teaching to promote use of learning strategies for enhancing achievement of learners both in academic and social aspects. Teachers need to make necessary and timely adjustments in instructional practices and thereby support students' academic learning and enhance their performance.
- Teachers can encourage the students to use more and more coping strategies to cope with any kind of stress in life.
- Coping strategies can help a student reduce the stress and promote the good social relationships, not only in college life, but in life at later stages.

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