

## A Study on Coping Patterns of Junior College Students

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to examine the coping patterns followed by the junior college students. Further, an extensive effort was done to study the gender differences in coping patterns used by the students. This study was conducted in Christ College, Bangalore and on the first and second-year students of pre-university studying in either of the branches (Bachelor of Arts, Science, or Commerce). A total of 120 samples were collected from study population of junior college students using the random sampling method. The sample comprised, 40 students from each group of Arts, Science, and Commerce, including both of the sexes. The tools such as, socio-demographic data sheet and coping checklist, were used. The study findings 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.

**Key words:** *Coping patterns, junior college students, gender, problem focused coping, emotion focused coping*

### INTRODUCTION

Today, education has been assigned as an industry for human resource development for different walks of life. The students constitute the heart of the education system and they are the most affected ones by the strengths and weaknesses of the education system. The students form an identical subgroup compared to others in the society. Some of the most common risks faced by a student during his/her college days are psychological, emotional, social, academic, and career risks.

Stress is a very familiar condition faced by the students when they are unable to bear the risks involved in higher education. The main sources of stress are academic and time concerns, fear of failure, classroom interactions, and economic issues. Apart from this, the parental system also affects a lot to these students. The parents have unlimited expectation from their children and therefore they impose their own desires on them. The impact of these influences results in a number of students reporting emotional problems, anxiety,

stress, and other neurotic problems. They are often found in frightening, abusive, depressing, threatening, competitive, unpredictable, and confusing situations. The percentage of suicides is more among the college students compared to the other ones and these suicides are mostly associated with academic failure or under achievement.

Majority of the 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 should be studied from a development perspective. The coping could be at an emotional, cognitive, or social support seeking level. The emotional responsiveness grows out of the simple reflexes of playful emotional responsive behaviour, by the age of two or three years. Kopp (1989) described five types of behaviour: Visual or physical avoidance, distraction, self-soothing, problem-oriented, and care-eliciting.

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A coping style can be effective at one age but may be totally unsuitable at another age. In the similar way, a particular coping style may be totally appropriate in one situation while inappropriate in another. The flexibility and situation appropriateness of effective coping should be explored further. This may be determined to a large part of cultural expectations on the other hand, individual vulnerabilities set limits to ones coping. Therefore, it is mandatory to understand that how coping ways adopted by college students differ from other students who experience the significant stress; their perception of handling the psycho-social problems effectively, might help in the planning of intervention services.

Thus, the present study was made to understand the ways in which college students differ in coping with significant stress experienced by the students and to examine the different ways of coping strategies adopted by them.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study examines the coping patterns adopted by the junior college students with respect to stress in the academic area, and to study the gender difference in coping patterns among junior college students. The research was conducted at the Christ College in Bangalore city. A descriptive research design was used for this study. The universe considered for the study was, I PUC and II PUC students, who were studying either in Bachelor of Arts, Science, or Commerce. In the investigation process, a coping checklist with 70 diverse coping pattern, prepared by Rao *et al.*,<sup>[1]</sup> was used. The items were scored on a 'Yes'-'No' format and they described a broad range of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive response that may be used to handle stress; and a socio-demographic data sheet was also used. In order to compute the difference between the means of two groups (male and female), frequency, percentage, and *t*-test were used; and to compare the frequencies of certain variables in the two groups, chi-square was used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-demographic profile of college students

The study was conducted on I PUC and II PUC college students. With regard to the socio-demographic characteristics of the college students, it was observed that majority of the students were aged between 17–18 years, and number of females was slightly more than males. With respect to the religion, a majority of the students were Hindu, and the least were Islamic, compared to the students belonging to other religion; because most of the people from Islam do not tend to pursue higher education. With regard to birth order of the child, majority of the students were middle born.

A multilingual pattern was seen among the students. It was also noted that, a majority of the respondents spoke other languages at home than Kannada. This proves that respondents' families belong to various states, but they have settled here. It was seen that most of the students were from nuclear families, which is a very common trend in urban areas. With respect to education background, a majority of the students were from well-educated families, with their fathers being postgraduate and mothers being educated up to higher secondary. The studies also revealed that, the fathers of the respondents were businessmen, whereas mothers were housewives. However, approximately one-third of the respondents' mothers were employed.

### Coping strategies adopted by college students

The coping strategies adopted by college students with regard to stressful events, i.e., academic area were assessed.

The results revealed that most of the students (approximately 90%) used appraisal-focused coping strategies such as, "going over the problem again and again", "trying to understand it, to make the situation light", and "refuse to get too serious about it". Also, majority of the college students reported that they frequently adopt problem-solving coping strategies such as, "knowing what has to be done, so doubling the efforts and trying harder to make things work", "analyzing the problem bit by bit", "seeking reassurance and emotional support from family members", and "coming up with different solutions to the problem".

In the current study, it has been observed that the students used a combination of appraisal-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. Whereas, study by Lazarus<sup>[2,3]</sup> revealed that, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies were used in virtually every stressful encounter. In the present study, it was found that the students used appraisal-focused coping strategies such as, "analyzing the situation", "cognitively redefining", and "cognitively avoiding the situation". This proves that the students in adolescence stage were still confused and were not able to choose those coping strategies which were of positive approach to encounter any stress.

The present study revealed that the students resorted to the coping strategies such as "seeking sexual comfort (24%)", "taking analgesics or minor tranquilizers without medical advice (15%)", "to make themselves feel better by having a drink or two (10%)", and "to make themselves feel better by taking mood elevating drugs (10%)". These findings were supported by the study by O. Languhlin (1984), who also reported that resorting to drugs, alcohol, tranquilizers, and sex are more characteristics of inefficient cooperers. The findings

by McCormack (1996), stated that 23% to 36% of the students advocate drinking when under stress; however, even a small percentage of students using this coping strategy may form a high risk group.

In the current study, the sample comprised college students belonging to I PUC and II PUC, who were still in adolescence stage and these students were not fully exposed to the evils of the society.

In the study, distribution of the coping strategies adopted by the college students was examined with respect to their gender background. The results also revealed that the students irrespective of their gender, used combination of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. It was found that, out of 70 items, 16 significant responses were used by the students.

The coping strategies adopted by female students were, “talking to a friend who can do something about the problem”, “analyzing the problem bit by bit”, “consoling themselves that things are not that bad and could have been worse”, “visit places of worship, go on a pilgrimage”; while male students resorted to coping strategies such as, “seeking reassurance and emotional support from family members”, “engage in vigorous physical exercises”, “talking to a friend who can do something about the problem”, and “taking a big chance or doing something very risky”. It was observed that the female students used emotion-focused coping strategies and sought more social support than males. These findings were supported by the study done by Frydenberg and Lewis, (1991) and reported that females sought more social support and employed strategies related to, “hoping for the best” and “wishful thinking”, than males. Also, Hobfall, *et al.*, (1994) reported that when faced with problems of professional and interpersonal situations, support seeking was employed more by women than men. The findings by Mike and Thoits (1993) suggested that men experience a stoic style of responding to stressors and women have an emotional expressive style.

The distribution of coping strategies adopted by college students was examined with respect to different faculties, such as Arts, Science, and Commerce. It was observed that the students used a combination of appraisal-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. Out of 70 responses, 17 significant responses

were used by students belonging to various faculties. The frequently used coping strategies by the students belonging to different faculties were problem-focused, for example, “pray to God”, and “knowing what has to be done, so doubling the efforts and trying harder to make things work”, were displayed by more than 90% of the college students.

Majority (90%) of the students belonging to Science and Arts faculties and 75% from Commerce, used appraisal-focused coping strategies such as, “console yourself that the things are not at all that bad, it could be worse”, “make light of the situation, refused to get too serious about it”, “refusing to believe that it happened”.

Also, 43% of the students from Commerce and Science faculties used emotion-focused coping strategies, whereas 35% from arts faculty used emotional-focused coping strategies, such as, “preparing themselves for the worst to come”, “feeling that other people are responsible for what has happened”, And “trying to feel better by eating/nibbling”.

Overall, the total coping repertoires of students belonging to Arts, Science, and Commerce faculties were 37, 38, and 35, respectively. With respect to gender, the total coping repertoire for male and female students, were 36 and 37, respectively. Murthy (1995) found in her study of working women that they have a coping repertoire of approximately 21. Ganjendragad<sup>[4]</sup> reported a coping repertoire of student and students’ leaders approximately 34. Karen (2000) reported that the total coping repertoire of unsuccessful college students was 37.

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