

Extent of Coping Strategies Adopted by the University Youth in Managing their Stress

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Abstract: An attempt has been made in the present descriptive research to find out the extent of coping strategies adopted by 250 university youth pursuing their higher education in different faculties of The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara. The study was limited to the youth who had experienced stressful situations in their past life at the time of data collection and belonged to the age group of 18 to 24 years. The samples were selected purposively based on the set criteria and on the basis of co-operation and the willingness extended by the respondents in sharing the needed information. The data were collected personally by the investigators on a pre-validated and pre-tested scale developed and questionnaires through survey method. The raw data were further subjected to coding, categorization, tabulation and analysis. The major findings of the study revealed that among all the four coping strategies “adapt the situation” was found to be more popularly used by the respondents in managing their stress. Very few respondents had adopted the coping strategies related to stress “to great extent” in managing their stress..

Key words: Stress, coping strategies, youth, extent, adopted.

I. Introduction

Unlike stress, coping is a term, which is more practised in day-to-day life than used in language expression (Hariharan & Rath, 2008). The purpose of coping is to reduce stress. There should be an action, initiated in order to reduce stress. Initiation of any action precedes a drive originated from motivation.

Coping strategy refers to a technique of coping adopted in a specific context. As the person grows in age and experience, one may go on acquiring new skills or strategies of coping. What determines the psychological well-being is the style of coping one adopts.

There are individual differences in coping stress. Certain factors such as personality, intensity of the stress and the resources available determining the attributions of the individual, affect the impact of stress taken (Hariharan and Rath, 2008). The coping of stress is also determined by the quality of the relationships, a general outlook in life and one's emotional intelligence, and genetics [13].

Lazarus and Folkman (2008) have identified the factors associated with the ability to cope up with stress as “health and energy”, “positive belief”, “problem solving skills”, “social skills” and “material resources”.

The ability to cope up with stress depends on many other factors too. A strong network of supportive friends and family members is an enormous buffer against life's stressors of the youth. On the other side, the more lonely and isolated one is, the greater is the vulnerability to cope up with the stress.

The sense of control plays an important role in coping with stress. The confidence and the ability to influence events and perseverance through challenges assist in managing stress. It is advisable to take stress in stride. People who are vulnerable to stress tend to feel that things are out of their control. Stress-hardy people have an optimistic attitude. They tend to embrace challenges, have a strong sense of humor, accept that change is a part of life, and believe in a higher power or purpose. The ability to bring ones emotions into balance helps one cope up better from adversity. The more one knows about a stressful situation, including how long it will last and what to expect, the easier it is to cope.

While unchecked stress is undeniably damaging, there are many things one can do to reduce its impact and cope up with the stress. Managing stress is s about taking charge; taking charge of one's thoughts, emotions, schedule, environment, and the way one deals with the problems.

One cannot completely eliminate stress from life, but can control how much it affects them. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the stress response. When practiced regularly, these activities lead to a reduction in everyday stress levels and a boost in the feelings of joy and serenity. They also increase the ability to stay calm under pressure.

Everybody has the power to reduce the impact of stress as it occurs in that moment. With practice, one can learn to spot stressors and stay in control when the pressure builds. Sensory stress-busting techniques give a powerful tool for staying clear-headed and in control in the middle of stressful situations. They give the confidence to face challenges, knowing that one has the ability to rapidly bring life back into balance^[1]. The college youth who undergoes a delicate but most important phase of their life on which their total future depends a lot, need to identify, control and learn to cope with their stress for their individual, family and the nation's health.

The review of literature highlighted that studies have been conducted on coping behaviour of adolescents, school going children and college students outside India(Compas, Malcarne and Fondacaro,1988, Halstead, Johnson, and Cunningham,1993,Prinz and Blechman,1994, Smith, Compas,Wadsworth,Thomsen and Saltzman,2000,Cunningham, Brandon and Frydenberg,2002, , and Frydenberg and Lewis,2004). Few studies have also been found on coping styles and coping strategies of adult college going students (Albuquerque, 1987, Jaiprakash and Bhogle, 1994, and Verma, Duggal and Supriya, 1995) conducted in India at a different locale other than the present one and with different coping strategies as undertaken in the present research. Thus, the present study was conceptualized with the following objective.

Objective of the Study

- To determine the extent of coping strategies adopted by the youth to manage their stress.

Delimitations of the Study

- The university youth for the present study were those who were falling in the age group of 18 to 24 years.
- The youth selected were the ones studying in different faculties of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara and who were willing to co-operate.
- The present study was limited to the youth who had experienced stressful situations in their past life at the time of data collection.

Hypothesis of the Study

- There exists a difference between personal(age, class of study and gender), family(type and size of family and monthly family income) and situational variable(support received) of the respondents with the extent of coping strategies adopted by them.

II. Method of Procedure

The research design of the present study was descriptive in nature. The study comprised of 250 youth pursuing their education at either graduate or post graduate level in various faculties of The Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, Vadodara. The respondents were selected through purposive convenience sampling method. The data were collected through survey method by personally distributing the questionnaire to the respondents who willingly agreed to give the data. The pre-validated and pre-tested scale ($r=0.85$) with 54 items was used to collect information on the extent of coping strategies adopted by the respondents. The extent was judged at three degrees as “to great extent (scored as “3”), “to moderate extent”(scored as “2”) and “to low extent”(scored as “1”). The minimum possible score was “54” and the maximum score as “162”. The final scores were arrived at by summing the scores of each respondent. An equal interval method was used to divide the scores on the scale into three degrees. The obtained data were further coded, tabulated and analyzed by employing descriptive (frequencies, percentages and means) as well as relational statistics (‘t’ test and Analysis of Variance).

III. Results and Discussions

The findings of the research are discussed under three subheads. The first subhead elicited information on the demographic data of the respondents. It covered information on their age, gender, education, type and size of the family, monthly family income in Rs. and the source of support received during stress. The second subhead focused information on the extent of coping strategies adopted by the respondents while managing their stress. The third subhead covered information on the statistical analysis of the hypothesis of the study.

Demographic Data of the Respondents

The mean age of the respondents was 21.07 years. The gender of respondents revealed that the female students outnumbered the males. Little less than two-third of the respondents were undergoing graduation. Majority of the respondents lived in nuclear family. Most of the respondents had a small sized family. The mean income of the respondents per month was found to be Rs. 33,444. Majority of support was received from parents when youth experienced stress in their life.

Extent of Coping Strategies adopted by the Respondents

Coping Strategies were the coping methods adopted by the respondents for their physical and psychological well being. Four heads of coping strategies namely “Avoid the situation”, “Alter the situation”, “Adapt the situation” and “Accept the situation” were presented before the respondents and they were asked to put their responses against each of them as adopted by them to cope up with their stress. The extent of coping strategies adopted was determined on three point continuum scale i.e “To great extent”, “To moderate extent”, and “To low extent”. Higher the scores obtained by the respondents on the scale, higher would be the coping strategies adopted by the respondents as all the items in the scale were positive.

The findings reported in the section were interpreted based on the weighted mean scores obtained by the respondents and the frequencies arrived at on the responses registered by the respondents on each item of the coping strategies adopted by them under four categories of it presented before them. Weighted mean scores mean the intensity index. The higher weighted mean scores obtained was ranked by the researcher to facilitate the description of the data. The findings were also described in terms of popularity and the order of importance designated to the items on the basis of higher weighted mean scores obtained on them.

I. Avoid the situation: An overview of the data as seen in table-1, regarding the coping strategies adopted by the respondents on the basis of weighted mean scores obtained under the main head of Coping Strategies adopted i.e. “Avoid the situation” indicated that the most popular coping strategy adopted by the respondents was found to be “withdrawing themselves from the stressful situation”. The second most popular coping strategy that the respondents were adopting was that they “avoided unpleasant task” followed by that they “avoided people who gave them stress”. The coping strategy i.e. Avoiding spending more time “in drinking and Smoking” and in “eating and Sleeping” was found to be adopted by more percentage of the respondents to a lower extent.

Table-1: Distribution of the respondents according to the coping strategy - ‘Avoiding the situation’ adopted by them.

Sr.No	Coping Strategy – Avoid the situation	Respondents n=250						
		To great extent (3)		To moderate extent (2)		To low extent (1)		Weighted mean scores out of 3
		f	%	f	%	f	%	
1	Withdraw oneself from the stressful situation.	80	32	111	44.4	59	23.6	2.08
2	Avoid unpleasant tasks.	67	26.8	121	48.4	62	24.8	2.02
3	Avoid people who give stress out.	66	26.4	118	47.2	66	26.4	2.00
4	Know ones limits and stick to it.(learn to say ‘NO’)	61	24.4	117	46.8	72	28.8	1.95
5	Avoid engaging oneself into doubts and unbelief and stay in a positive frame of mind.	68	27.2	94	37.6	88	35.2	1.92
6	Avoid too much of time planning	55	22	122	48.8	73	29.2	1.92
7	Avoid the events/situation that constantly triggers the stress.	56	22.4	116	46.4	78	31.2	1.91
8	Avoiding too much of activities (schedule)	37	14.8	154	61.6	59	23.6	1.91
9	Eliminate the unimportant tasks from ones “to-do list”.	41	16.4	140	56	69	27.6	1.88
10	Seek out positive thoughts to overshadow the negative thoughts and the stress one is	46	18.4	119	47.6	85	34	1.84

	dealing with.							
11	Avoid hot discussions on sensitive topics	49	19.6	114	45.6	87	34.8	1.84
12	Adopted a planful problem solving (Controlled ones emotions. Thought rationally. Identified the source of the problem and followed a specific action plan to solve it. Planned several alternative approaches to the solution of the problem.)	39	15.6	123	49.2	88	35.2	1.80
13	Learn to block negative emotions	33	13.2	108	43.2	109	43.6	1.69
14	Avoid spending more time in eating and sleeping	24	9.6	78	31.2	148	59.2	1.50
15	Avoid spending more time in drinking and smoking	14	5.6	18	7.2	218	87.2	1.18
Total								1.83

II. Alter the situation: While reviewing the coping strategies adopted by the respondents based on the weighted mean scores obtained by them under “altering the situation” (table-2), it was found that “getting into a habit of smiling” was ranked first by them.

Table-2: Distribution of the respondents according to the coping strategy - ‘Altering the situation’ adopted by them.

Sr.No	Coping Strategy – Alter the situation	Respondents						
		n=250						
		To great extent (3)		To moderate extent (2)		To low extent (1)		Weighted mean scores out of 3
f	%	f	%	f	%			
1	Get in the habit of smiling	101	40.4	100	40	49	19.6	2.20
2	Manage ones time better.	66	26.4	153	61.2	31	12.4	2.14
3	Release emotions by sharing with someone	77	30.8	127	50.8	46	18.4	2.12
4	Keep ones sense of humor	85	34	109	43.6	56	22.4	2.11
5	Focused ones energy on positive things in life by ignoring if it is not significant.	64	25.6	136	54.4	50	20	2.05

6	Do something to enjoy everyday	79	31.6	98	39.2	73	29.2	2.02
7	Express ones feeling instead of bottling them up.	64	25.6	125	50	61	24.4	2.01
8	Be willing to compromise.	51	20.4	149	59.6	50	20	2.00
9	Think of some situation and end by being pretty humorous	62	24.8	127	50.8	61	24.4	2.00
10	Play relaxing music	67	26.8	115	46	68	27.2	1.99
11	Be more assertive	54	21.6	137	54.8	59	23.6	1.98
12	Engage in any other work	56	22.4	114	45.6	80	32	1.90
13	Do regular exercise	40	16	96	38.4	114	45.6	1.70
14	Sought social support from others	34	13.6	108	43.2	108	43.2	1.70
15	Engage in the work of ones likings (devote time in hobbies)							1.70
16	Set aside relaxation time	34	13.6	86	34.4	130	52	1.61
17	Do breathing exercises	22	8.8	66	26.4	162	64.8	1.44
18	Do yoga regularly	10	4	58	23.2	182	72.8	1.31
Total								1.70

The second popular coping strategy adopted by the respondents was “Managing their time better”. The third most important coping strategy adopted by the respondents was reported to be “Releasing emotions by sharing with someone”. “Doing breathing exercises” and “practicing yoga regularly” were found to be adopted at lower extent by the respondents in coping with their stress.

III. Adapt the situation: The most popular coping strategy adopted by the respondents under the third coping method (Adapt the situation) was reported to be “to learn to motivate themselves to make things better in life”. The second coping strategy as adopted by the respondents in order of importance was found to be “to focus on the positive side of the situation”.

Table-3: Distribution of the respondents according to the coping strategy – ‘Adapting the situation’ adopted by them.

Sr.No	Coping Strategy - Adapt the situation	Respondents						Weighted mean scores out of 3
		n=250						
		To great extent (3)		To moderate extent (2)		To low extent (1)		
f	%	f	%	f	%			
1	Learn to motivate oneself to make things better in ones life.	103	41.2	115	46	32	12.8	2.28

2	Focus on the positive side.	80	32	150	60	20	8	2.24
3	Develop an optimistic view in life	75	30	156	62.4	19	7.6	2.22
4	Gave wise thought in identifying the problem and then search for its solution.	70	28	137	54.8	43	17.2	2.10
5	Positively analyze the stressful situation	54	21.6	157	62.8	39	15.6	2.06
6	Adjust ones standards	42	16.8	161	64.4	47	18.8	1.98
7	Reframe problems	35	14	118	47.2	97	38.8	1.75
							Total	2.09

“Develop an optimistic view in life” was the third important strategy adopted by the respondents to cope up their stress. “Adjusting ones standards” and “positively analyzing the stressful situation” as the coping strategies under “Adapt the situation” were adopted by most of the respondents to moderate extent in coping their stress (Table-3).

IV. Accept the situation: The findings on the fourth method of coping strategies i.e. “accepting the situation” (table-4) revealed that the respondents “learnt to forgive the people in life”. This was the most prominent coping strategy adopted by them. The second important strategy adopted by them was by “Sharing their feelings to feel light” and “viewing the problematic situation as an opportunity”. The “maintaining self control” was reported to be the third most important strategy adopted by the respondents in coping their stress under this major category of stress coping strategy. “Taking the stress easy” and “being optimistic in coping with the stress” were the two most prominent coping strategies adopted by most of the respondents to moderate extent.

Table-4: Distribution of the respondents according to the coping strategy - ‘Accepting the situation’ adopted by them.

Sr.No	Coping Strategy – Accept the situation	Respondents						Weighted mean scores out of 3
		n=250						
		To great extent (3)		To moderate extent (2)		To low extent (1)		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	
1	Learn to forgive.	102	40.8	124	49.6	24	9.6	2.31
2	Look it as an opportunity	97	38.8	117	46.8	36	14.4	2.24
3	Share ones feelings to feel light.(talk to a friend)	98	39.2	115	46.0	37	14.8	2.24
4	Maintain self -control (Felt hurt / annoyed, but never expressed and felt that it is, after all, ones problem and only one must handle it.)	87	34.8	126	50.4	37	14.8	2.20
5	Accept and work out to solve the stress calmly.	80	32.0	138	55.2	32	12.8	2.19
6	Thought, whatever	86	34.4	114	45.6	50	20.0	2.14

	happened was for ones own good. It's all God's plan for ones benefit.							
7	Be optimistic	64	25.6	156	62.4	30	12	2.13
8	Accept the stress positively	65	26.0	140	56.0	45	18.0	2.08
9	The thought that one brought it on to oneself and take it easy.	37	14.8	174	69.6	39	15.6	1.99
10	Do not view the situation as a serious problem.	33	13.2	151	60.4	66	26.4	1.86
11	Keep distance from the problem (Did not give much thought to the problem, brushed it aside and carried on as if nothing happened. Waited for the problem to get resolved by its own.)	43	17.2	133	53.2	74	29.6	1.87
12	Put the whole burden on God and prayed. Attended religious places. Indulged in rituals like fasting, offerings at places of worship etc.	30	12.0	107	42.8	113	45.2	1.66
13	Underwent meditation	9	3.6	77	30.8	164	65.6	1.38
Total								2.03

The comparison between the weighted mean scores obtained by the respondents on the extent of coping strategies adopted by them highlighted that among all the four coping strategies “adapt the situation” was found to be more popularly used by the respondents in coping their stress. The second most important coping strategy adopted by the respondents was “to accept the situation”. The coping strategy “alter the situation” was used least by the respondents in coping their stress “Fig-1”.

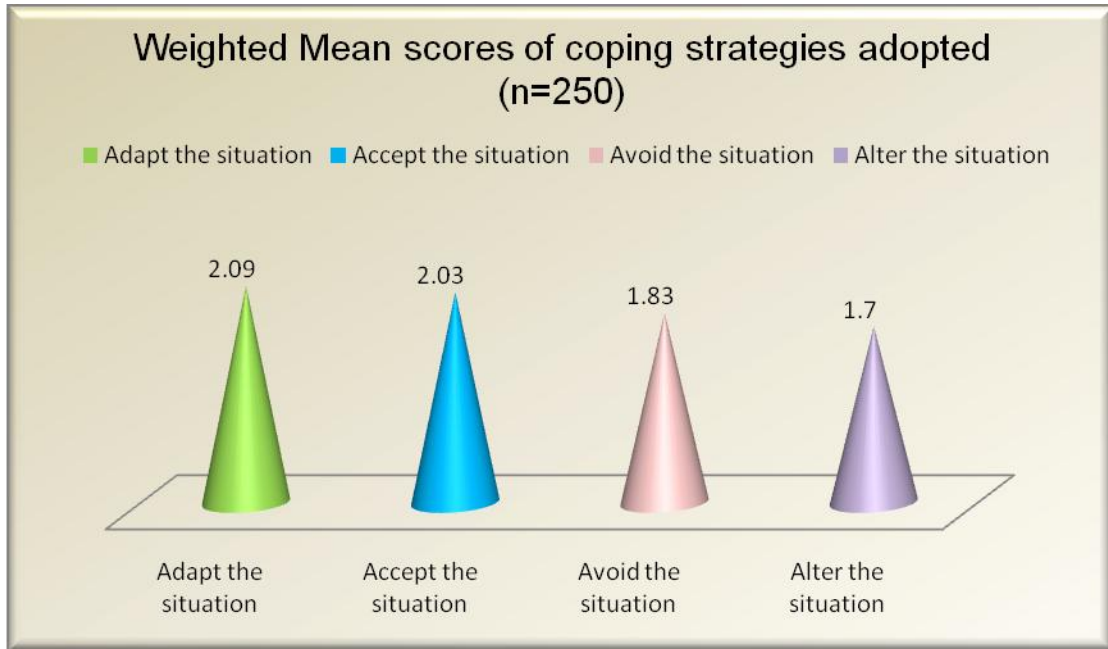


Fig: 1 Distribution of the respondents according to the weighted mean scores obtained on the extent of coping strategies adopted by them.

The findings revealed that majority of the respondents had adopted the coping strategies related to stress “to moderate extent”. It was also found that more than one-tenth of the respondents had adopted the coping strategies related to stress “to low extent”. On the other hand very few respondents had adopted the coping strategies related to stress “to great extent” “Fig-2”.

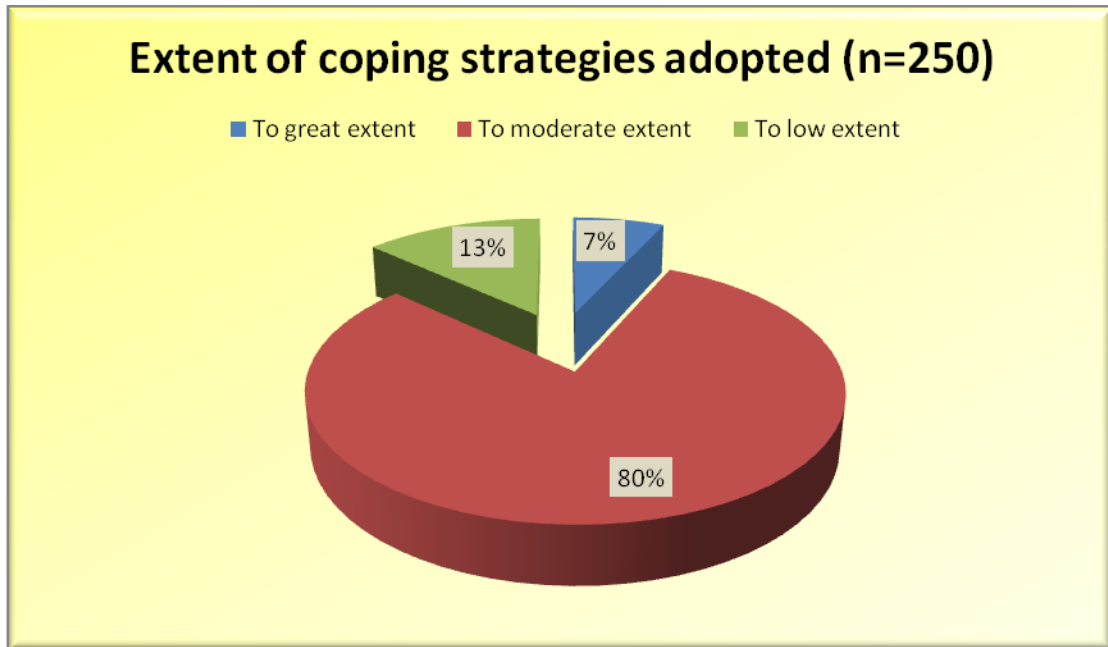


Fig-2 Distribution of the respondents according to the extent of coping strategies adopted by them.

Statistical Findings :The finding of ‘t’ test revealed that the respondents did not vary significantly by their personal variables (age and gender) and their family variable (type of

family) with the extent of coping strategies adopted by them. The results while computing “Analysis of Variance” further elicited that the respondents did not vary significantly in their extent of coping strategies adopted by them by their personal variable (class of study), family variables (monthly income of the family in Rs. ` and size of family) and situational variable (support received).

IV. Conclusion

Among all the four coping strategies “adapt the situation” was found to be more popularly used by the respondents in coping with their stress. Very few respondents had adopted the coping strategies related to stress “to great extent”. The need is to develop managerial competencies among the youth through intervention programmes or personal advisory approach planned for them or some mandatory relaxation exercises practiced at the zero hour regularly along with the academic sessions at the higher educational level because it will improve the quality of life of youth, an important human wealth of the nation.

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