

RELATIONSHIP AMONG COPING, DEFENSE MECHANISMS, AND MENTAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

The present study was an attempt to study the relationships among different coping strategies, defense styles and mental health in adolescents. This study was initiated in the context of understanding different means of mental health through searching the conscious and unconscious effort of individuals in dealing with stress. The participants of the study were a randomly chosen one consisting of 120 adolescents whose age's ranges from 13 to 18 years. The variables were measured using different questionnaires like Mental Health Status scale, Defense Style Questionnaire, and coping strategies scale. The study concluded that there was relationship between the study variables.

Keywords: *Mental Health, Coping, Defence Mechanisms.*

Introduction

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well being. It affects how we think, feel and act as we cope with life. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from child hood and adolescence through adulthood. Many mental health problems emerge in late childhood and early adolescence.

In last two decades there has been an explosion of research in the area of stress, coping and consequent strains. It has been well established that stress results in a variety of psychological and somatic pathologies. It has also been recognized how a focal person cope with the stress situations is more important than the experience of the stress itself in determining the severity of the consequent strains. The coping process in its broadest sense refers to any attempt to deal with stressful situation when a person feels he must do something about it. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) have defined coping at psychological level of analysis as "the process of managing (mastering, tolerating or reducing) external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person. The ultimate function of the coping is to get relief from the pressure of the feeling of stress.

In Freudian psycho analytic theory, defense mechanisms are psychological strategies brought in to play by various entities to cope with reality and to maintain self image. Healthy persons normally use different defenses throughout life. The purpose of the ego defense mechanism is to protect the mind/self/ego from anxiety, social sanctions or to provide a refuge from a situation with which one cannot currently cope. They are more accurately referred to as ego defense mechanisms and can thus be categorized as occurring when the id impulses conflict with super ego values and beliefs, and when an external threat is posed to the ego.

Defense mechanisms and coping styles are dissimilar in terms of the cognitive operations involved. The present study aims to explore the pattern of defense mechanisms ad coping styles and its association with mental health in adolescents.

Objective

The major objective of the study is to find out the relationship between coping strategies, defense styles and mental health in adolescents.

Hypotheses

Some major hypotheses formulated for the present study is mentioned below.

- There will be significant relationships between the study variables coping, defence mechanisms and mental health.
- There will be significant differences in major study variables on the basis of different socio demographic variables such as age, gender and academic status.

Method

Participants

The sample for the present study was selected using purposive stratified sampling. A sample of 120 adolescents belonging to the age group of 13-18 was selected. The participants were selected from both genders. They belong to Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala.

Measures

M.H.S. Scale (P. Gireesan & H. Sam Sananda Raj, 1988)

This scale measures the mental health status by calculating different sub scales namely, attitudes towards self, self actualization, integration, autonomy, perception of reality and environmental mastery. A scoring sheet is not scored if there is more than one response category chosen for a particular item or if there are three or more omitted items, a score of three is given for each. The total count obtained in each category is taken, and is multiplied by its respective score (weight) the scores thus obtained for the separate categories (subscales) are then summed to obtain this total mental health score of an individual. The maximum score obtained for each subscale is 100 minimum score is 20. The maximum score for the whole test is 600 and the minimum is 120. The M.H.S. Scale has been validated against another scale, measuring the same variables, viz. Mental Health Status Scale (Abraham & Prasanna, 1981) as an external criterion. The split half reliability coefficients of the sub scales varied between 0.73 to 0.89. All these coefficients are significant at 0.01 level.

Defense Style Questionnaire (Malayalam Adaptation) (Menon, M, et al, 2009)

The original version of the DSQ was developed by Bond, et al (1989) with the objective of assessing conscious derivatives of defensive functioning, the intention being to elicit manifestations of subjects characteristic style of dealing with conflict, either conscious or unconscious based on the assumption that persons can accurately comment on their behavior from a distance. There are four defense styles have been named, immature, mature, image distorted and action oriented defense styles. The validity for the original version of the scale has been well established with both content validity and concurrent validity. The validity established for the original scale may be claimed for the present adaptation also on the basis of the fact that no major changes in the context has been made in the adapted version. The reliability of the Malayalam version was estimated using two methods; viz, the Spearman Brown Split half and the co efficient of alpha. The reliability co efficient computed revealed that the questionnaire is reliable.

Coping Strategies Scale (Srivastava, A.K., 2001)

The present measure of coping strategies comprises 50 items, to be rated on five-point scale, describing varieties of coping behavior underlying following two major categories of coping strategies based on the combinations of "operation" and "orientation" of the coping behavior, Problem focused (active/approach coping) and emotion focused coping (avoidance coping). The

reliability for the scale is 0.92 (re-test reliability). The scale also possesses content and concurrent validity.

Personal data schedule

A personal data schedule was also used to collect the details regarding age, gender and educational status.

Statistical Techniques Used

The statistical techniques used were *t* test, Anova, Duncan procedure and Pearson product moment correlation coefficient.

Discussion and Results

From the statistical analysis of different study variables, it was noted that the group divided based on gender was not significantly different from each other on the study variables. It might be the change of equality in gender principle which evolved around the world after a long policies that put forwarded by many political leaders and feminists.

The group which divided based on age group showed significant difference only in the image distorted defense style. Table 1.1 showed that the second group (16-18) got higher mean score (120.14) than the mean score (106.60) of the first group (13-15). The image distorted defense style refers to the apparent derivatives of defense mechanisms namely omnipotence, reaction formation, denial, withdrawal, primitive idealization and consumption. This age group is more prone to use such defence mechanisms especially when they are feeling the freedom from the child hood barriers and family control. This period of life is very important as they are putting a step to become the adult. This might lead to lots of ego problems which in turn converting in to image distorted defence style because of the inexperience in different life situations.

The group divided based on the academic status (above average, average and below average) showed significant differences in the variables problem focused coping and mature defence styles. The above average group got the lowest mean score (46.73) and different from below average group which got the highest (55.63), while average group (53.48) was not significantly different from any of the other two groups. This finding can be concluded that the below average learners use their practical intelligence effectively when dealing with stress and it is evident from our society that the educationally backward group succeed with daily confrontations.

The academic groups were also different in the case of mature defence styles. Table 1.2 showed that the above average group got highest mean score (20.06) and also differ from average group which got the lowest mean score (16.16), and the below average group was not significantly different from any other groups (17.33). The mature defense style consisted of apparent derivatives of defence mechanisms namely sublimation and humor. Among all the three groups, average group is being the fluctuating group which can become either below average or above average. This instability can be a reason behind the lower usage of mature defenses like humor and sublimation by the average group.

The relationship between the variables was more evident from the analysis. Table 1.3 showed that the variable mental health showed positive correlation with problem focused coping (.331**), mature defense style (.698**) and action oriented defense style (.559**); which is significant in 0.01 level. Mental health also had negative correlation with variables like emotion focused coping (-.584**), immature defense style (-.736**) and image distorted defense style (-.504**); which is also significant at 0.01 level.

The other major relationships also observed from the analysis. The problem focused coping showed positive correlation with mature defense style (.182*), which is significant at 0.05 level; and showed negative correlation with emotion focused coping (-.334**), immature defense style (-.249**) and image distorted defense style (-.184*). The emotion focused coping showed positive

correlation with immature defense style (.574**) and image distorted defense style (.340**). It also showed negative correlation with mature defense style (-.614**) and action oriented defense style (-.523**).

It was observed that the overall study put lights towards a lot of possibilities in the field of mental health and different mechanisms which try to reduce the stress or tensions, consciously or unconsciously.

Table 1.1 Data and Results of Age differences in the Study Variables

Variables	Age	N	Mean	S.D	t value	Sig.
MHS	13-15	56	266.00	43.41	.687	.493
	16-18	64	260.54	43.35		
Problem focused	13-15	56	50.63	17.40	-1.016	.312
	16-18	64	53.59	14.42		
Emotion focused	13-15	56	45.62	15.93	.750	.455
	16-18	64	43.51	14.87		
Immature DS	13-15	56	203.78	78.40	-1.641	.103
	16-18	64	227.00	76.32		
Mature DS	13-15	56	17.82	6.67	.323	.748
	16-18	64	17.43	6.34		
Image distorted DS	13-15	56	106.60	32.74	-2.29	.029*
	16-18	64	120.146	34.10		
Action oriented DS	13-15	56	21.75	8.35	.862	.390
	16-18	64	20.40	8.66		

Table 1.2 Data and results of different Educational Status on the Study Variables

variables	Source	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
MHS	Btwnggrp	7859.05	2	3929.56	2.137	.123
	Withn group	215140.94	117	1838.81		
	Total	222999.992	119			
Problem focused	Btwnggrp	1522.963	2	761.48	3.127	.048*
	Withn group	28493.40	117	243.533		
	Total	30016.367	119			
Emotion focused	Btwnggrp	832.85	2	416.425	1.791	.171
	Withn group	27203.15	117	232.506		
	Total	28036.00	119			
Immature DS	Btwnggrp	19065.167	2	9532.584	1.588	.209
	Withn group	702171.499	117	6001.466		
	Total	721236.667	119			
Mature DS	Btwnggrp	311.76	2	155.88	3.892	.023*
	Withn group	4686.602	117	40.05		
	Total	4998.367	119			
Image distorted DS	Btwnggrp	2710.229	2	1355.114	1.174	.313
	Withn group	134995.096	117	1153.804		
	Total	137705.325	119			
Action oriented DS	Btwnggrp	66.454	2	33.227	.455	.636
	Withn group	8553.413	117	73.106		
	Total	8619.867	119			

Table 1.3 Correlation between the different Variables Under Study

Variables	MHS	Problem focused coping	Emotion focused coping	Immature DS	Mature DS	Image distorted DS	Action oriented DS
MHS	1	.331**	-.584**	-.736**	.698**	-.504**	.559**
Problem focused coping	--	1	-.334**	-.249**	.182*	-.184*	-.005
Emotion focused coping	--	--	1	.574**	-.614**	.340**	-.523**
Immature DS	--	--	--	1	.669**	.563**	-.581**
Mature DS	--	--	--	--	1	-.453	.612**
Image distorted DS	--	--	--	--	--	1	-.437
Action oriented DS	--	--	--	--	--	--	1

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