

Gender differences in coping behaviour among adolescents

Satadeepa Som¹, Sunil Kumar Giriappa Patil^{2*}

¹Clinical Psychologist, ²Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, MVJ Medical College and Research Hospital, Hoskote, Bengaluru, Karnataka-562114, INDIA.

Email: drsunilgp@gmail.com

Abstract

With a good number of literature suggesting coping styles to be one of the major factors that happen to be the cause of vulnerability during the Adolescent period, it becomes important to study the types and gender differences in coping styles that the Adolescents indulge in. This study thus considered seven different types of coping styles upon which adolescents were assessed and it was seen that there exists a gender difference in the way they exhibit these coping behaviors. Certain influencing factors like culture, societal roles and socio-economic status (the middle class income group-as considered in this study) which happen to create a versatile amount of stress in the life of adolescents formed the background of this study. A total sample of sixty adolescents (mean age=15years) were chosen with boys (n=30) and girls (n=30) belonging to the middle class income group. Data was collected with the help of Coping Checklist (CCL-1). Data was analyzed on SPSS by conducting simple independent t-test. The results that were obtained, suggested that girls indulge in more of Blame/Denial type of Coping whereas boys tend to engage more in Emotion Focused way of Coping. In the other styles of Coping (Problem Focused, Social Support, Acceptance/Redefinition, Destruction Negative and Religion/Faith) they do not show a significant difference. This remained beneficial for parents, educators, facilitators and all the support groups that cater to adolescent needs. Understanding the specifications of coping owing to their gender has helped these facilitators bridge the gap. In future, parents and teachers will be able to perceive situations in reference to the study and help better. Also as have been mentioned in the literature that have been reviewed, adolescents' issues of alcohol and substance dependence can be dealt with more efficacy. Therefore this study has a fair amount of worthy implication in the larger society.

Key Words: Gender, Adolescents and coping behaviour

*Address for Correspondence:

Dr. Sunil Kumar Giriappa Patil, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry, MVJ Medical College and Research Hospital, Hosakote, Bengaluru-562114, INDIA.

Email: drsunilgp@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

“Adolescence is the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood.” (WHO, 2003). It is the time of emotional turmoil, heightened storm and stress (Rosenbum and Lewis, 2003). There is an uncertainty that individuals go

through due to the considerable changes that take place in physical, social and psychological sphere (Santrock and W. John 2007). This is when adolescents go through the Eriksonian conflict of “Identity versus Role Confusion” which they find difficult to resolve or face and often get directed in the ways which have negative effect on their overall development (Piko, 2001). They struggle to meet the changing demands of social roles, peer pressure, domestic and self-adjustment in this phase of development. It is only through proper coping strategies that they can effectively meet the challenges of this stage. Thus coping behavior during adolescence that are exhibited by adolescent boys and girls become very important. “Coping refers to transactional process that people use to deal with everyday problems.” (Aldwin 1994; Skinner and Zimmer-Gembek, in press, 2007). It comprises of lots of emotional strategies, thought processes and behaviors. Coping contributes to an

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individual's physiological reaction to the stressful stimulus, his evaluation to events, his goal or outcomes of his desires (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). It is availed by an individual when he is exposed to stress and challenges in which he finds it difficult to meet with already available resources (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). These stressors can be both internal and external. The purpose of coping is to keep the stress causing stimuli under control. There several types of coping styles or strategies. These are defined by Weisz, McCabe and Denning (1994) as Problem Focused coping which is defined as a dynamic activity to maintain resistance and combat against stressful situations or stimulus. Next is Emotion Focused coping that mainly regulates their emotions and expressions. The focus of the process of coping is to keep a positive outlook towards the problem and help people in solving problems. The third coping style is Acceptance or Redefinition that refers to the process when one is ready to go through a situation, and obtain an adverse way of dealing it without changing it or trying to protest it. (Marianne Russo, 2013) The Social Support way of coping describes tendency to ask support in terms of information, resources and emotions. (Bardwell and Dimsdel, 2008). Denial is one of the most common defense technique that people use when they cannot accept the naked truth. It is a direct rejection of the idea to accept the few things that have taken place or are taking place. It helps people to protect their ego when they find it difficult to cope with stress (Cherry. K, 2014). The next style of coping that has been considered in this study is Destruction Negative. It involves dealing with stress with much unhealthy way and channelizing one's negative emotions into negative and maladaptive behavior. (Scott. E, 2014). The seventh coping style is Religion or Faith. It involves handling issues in religious ways through prayer, community support, priestly care, and religious faith for healing and repair of loss or combating a threat. Each individual indulge in a coping behavior as per his or her perception of threat. Whether gender here place a role or not in coping style preference is what this study looks at. The background for studying adolescents in Indian context, lies with works of recognized scholars like Sudhir Kakar and Alan Roland who point out cultural influences that determine the way they grow up and adapt certain social roles. Since childhood, their bond with the mother or caregivers, the ritualistic customs of family and various social relationships including expected gender roles add on to such factors (Indian Children and Childhood, 1995). Moreover, authors like Gielen and Roopnarine (2004) focus on the moderation factors of deviance, abuse and poverty on the growing children in India, along with evident factors like patriarchy and gender inequality. Such factors have different impacts on

girls and boys and the way they meet challenges in life. On such a theoretical framework this study stands to explore the mentioned dynamics with regard to its rationale.

Rationale

From the perspective of helping Indian adolescents cope better and meet the challenges of this age the study has been taken up. Literature has (Erica Frydenberg, 2004) pointing out the need for coping strategy guidelines for adolescents. Counsellors, facilitators, peer education programs can take up the responsibility of helping the adolescents for indulging in healthy coping (Forsythe, Pacific University, 2010) and keep them away from the risky coping styles.

Review of Literature

The existing literary works in this field, reflect certain findings that provide an objective base to this paper. Evidences from scientific work conducted by Piko (2001) suggest passive and risky coping behaviors act negatively on adolescents whereas problem analyzing and support seeking coping act positively on them. Girls show more of passive and support seeking style of coping while for boys the support seeking style correlates more to their psychosocial wellbeing. Also, no significant difference was found in the frequency in which avoidance and approach oriented coping are shown by them. There have been indications that a positive correlation between uses of avoidance-oriented coping among adolescents and deteriorating pathological conditions (Forsythe, 2008). Problem solving, and non-productive styles of coping. Gender and academic achievement had a significant variance in non-productive type of coping styles and social coping style respectively (.Alumran and Punamaki, 2008). In a Swedish study, it was found that gender differences exist in risk taking and altruistic behavior and it is very likely that coping behavior in similar context would also show a difference owing to gender among adolescents. One paper that appeared to be most relevant in the context of this study, was the one conducted by Gala and Choudhary on Indian adolescents. The study concluded that more boys as compared to girls (30%) show Emotion Focused coping. Also majority of both the population prefer Escapism than being Problem-Focused where girls again report a higher percentage (90%) as compared to boys (80%). The current research derived a strong rationale from a qualitative study of Erica Frydenberg, "Whom to Teach" that brings out the adolescent need for support in terms of coping mentioning how boys and girls have separate challenges. Therefore need corresponding distinct guidelines that might help them survive better and deal with their kind of problems in specific ways.

METHODOLOGY

Problem Statement: Studied the gender differences in coping behavior among adolescents in India

Objectives

1. Studied the coping style of adolescent boys.
2. Studied the coping style of adolescent girls.
3. Studied gender differences in the coping styles of adolescent boys and girls if any.

Research Design

Quantitative research. This can be defined as the study “Explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed by using mathematically based methods” (Aliaga and Gunderson, 2000). It helps to elicit empirical data that can be quantified and statistically represented and concluded. This study a quantitative one because other than a statistical calculation of the data that was received from the sample group, it would have been difficult to judge the hypothesis as true or false. A subtype of the quantitative research is Expost Facto which was suitable for this study as here the researcher did not have a direct control over the independent variable.

Variables:

- Gender- Boys and Girls
- Coping styles (Problem Solving, Emotion Focused, Social Support, Detraction Negative, Acceptance/Redefinition, Religion/Faith, Denial/Blame)

Operational Definitions

Adolescents. “The period of physical and psychological development from the onset of puberty to complete growth and maturity.” Adolescence is the time of emotional turmoil, heightened storm and stress (Rosenbum and Lewis, 2003). There is an uncertainty that individuals go through due to the considerable changes in physical, social and psychological sphere (Santrrock and W. John 2007).

Coping. It refers to transactional process that people use to deal with everyday problems” (Aldwin 1994; Skinner and Zimmer-Gembek, in press, 2007).

Hypothesis:

1) There is no significant gender difference in the style of coping behavior exhibited by adolescents in India.

Sample:

A group of adolescent boys and girls (30 each) from a few randomly chosen schools of Kolkata.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Indian Adolescents between 13-17 years of age with the ability to read, write and speak English.

- Adolescents who belonged to the middle class income group (Rs10,000-25,000 per month).

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals with learning disability or any mental health issue.

Sampling Technique:

Purposive sampling which is defined as a type of “non-probability” sampling method. It involves determination of persons as per the requirement of the researcher. The requirement is generally based upon several criteria which also include information about the research issue, or ability and motivation of the sample group to participate in the research.

Data Collection tool

- Rao’s Coping Checklist

Description of the tool

The Coping Checklist (CCL), a self-administered questionnaire which was developed by Rao in 1989 is an open-ended questionnaire that consists of seventy items that relate to people’s behavior at the time of stress in order to cope with such situations and has a “yes” or “no” scale of measure. The “Test-retest reliability” of CCL happens to be “0.74 (p 0.01). The checklist aims at assessing nine coping strategies: Cognitive Positive, Cognitive Negative, Problem solving, Distraction, Magical Thinking, Avoidance, religious, help seeking, and external attribution. The subject has to answer “yes” if he she agrees with the statement or question and a score of 1 is allotted for every yes while that of 0 is allotted to an answer of “no” which indicated subject’s disagreement to that particular item statement.

Procedure

Some schools were chosen and visited where adolescents from middle class income group attended. Thirty boys and thirty girls of the required age group were selected and consent forms were given. The next day instructions were given and they were asked to fill up the questionnaire. After collection of the data, the responses were scored and analyzed.

Data analysis technique. Independent sample t-test was chosen to analyze the data. A t-test analysis does compare the difference in mean values of attributes between two groups. Therefore it helped to study data yielded by each of the two groups in a comparison with each other which provided the final findings.

Ethical Consideratio

Informed consent and ascent were taken from the participants. Confidentiality of the participants was maintained. They were free to leave the study any time they wanted. Participants were not harmed at any cost.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overall 60 participants (30 males-50% and 30 females-50%) were included in the study with a mean age of the 15 as per the sample criteria. There were 30 (50%) females and males with 6 (10%) individuals from each age group. The data was collected and scored manually according to the CCL-1 norms. To obtain a statistically sound conclusion about how the coping styles differed among adolescent boys and girls, a t-test was conducted on Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 16.0). Data has been explained with help of the following table and graph.

Independence Sample t-test

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of variables

Coping Styles	Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD)	
	Boys	Girls
Problem Solving	7.93 (1.557)	7.32(1.423)
Acceptance/Redefinition	7.03(1.592)	6.87(1.607)
Social Support	4.45(1.404)	4.29(1.371)
Emotion Focused	9.34(2.256)	7.87(2.742)
Denial/Blame	4.28(1.750)	5.52(2.682)
Destruction Negative	1.83(1.441)	1.87(1.544)
Religion/Faith	4.00(2.104)	3.74(1.924)

Independent Sample t-test was conducted to see the difference between males and females on seven coping styles. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics of the collected data. On Problem Solving coping, boys (M=7.93; S.D = 1.557) scored almost the same as girls (M=7.32; S.D=1.423). So the difference stands significantly negligible. On Acceptance/Redefinition coping, boys (M=7.03; SD=1.592) scored more than the girls (M=6.87; SD=1.607) but the difference did not stand significant at the P<0.05 level. On Social Support coping, the scores of boys (M=4.45; SD=1.404) and girls (M=4.29; SD=1.371) were again similar with a very significant negligible difference. For Emotion Focused

Coping however, the boys (M=9.34; SD=2.256) significantly scored more than the girls (M=7.87; SD=2.742). On the other hand, the Coping style of Denial/Blame saw higher scores being reported by girls (M=5.52; SD=1.740) than boys (M=4.28; SD=2.682) which was significantly accepted. On the coping style of Destruction Negative again no significant difference was seen between boys (M=1.83; SD=1.441) and girls (M=1.87; SD=1.544). Also, the Religion/Faith style of coping did not record a significant difference between the scores of boys (M=4.00; SD=2.104) and girls (M=3.74; SD=1.914).

Table 2: t-value and Significance of difference

Coping Style	t-value	Significance Value (2 tail)
Problem Solving	.320	.119
Acceptance/Redefinition	.721	.694
Social Support	.696	.661
Emotion Focused	.131	.027
Denial/Blame	.076	.040
Destruction Negative	.822	.911
Religion/Faith	.486	.621

The t-test revealed the inferential statistics of the data. There is a significant difference among adolescent boys and girls for Emotion Focused (t=0.131; P=0.027) and Denial/Blame (t=0.076; P=0.040) styles of Coping. The other styles of coping (Problem Focused, Acceptance/Redefinition, Social Support, Emotion Focused, Denial/Blame, Destruction Negative and Religion/Faith) do not show a significant difference as per the t-value reading. So it can be concluded that girls show more of Denial/Blame related Coping whereas boys show higher degree of Problem Focused Coping. However, the groups do not exhibit significant differences in the degree to which they indulge in the other types of coping that were considered in this study.

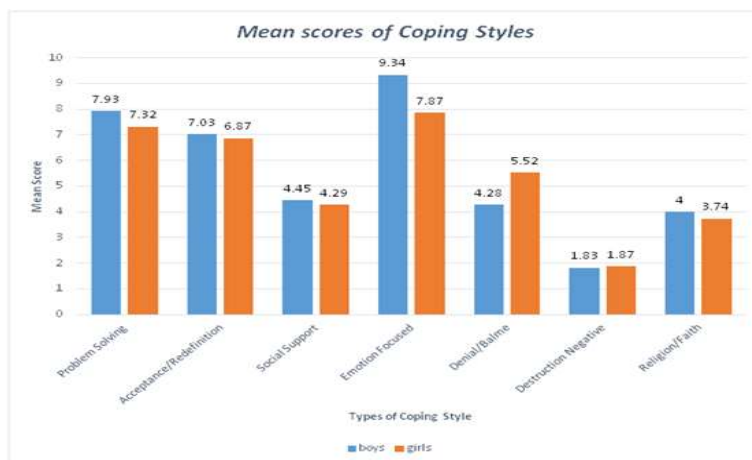


Figure 1.1: Graph showing mean scores of Adolescent boys and girls on Coping Styles

As per the graph, the first two bars represent mean scores of adolescent boys and girls on Problem Solving style of coping which according to the t-test value does not hold a significant difference. Next is the mean score for Acceptance/Redefinition which does not see a significant difference. Coping with the help of Social Support is shown by both girls and boys at a similar rate as the graph's depiction. Hence the mean score as per the collected data do not hold a significant difference. Further is the representation of the mean scores of Emotion Focused way of coping which after the Independent sample t-test analysis can be seen to be significantly different ($p < 0.05$) in the two groups. Boys are found to show more of an Emotion Focused coping style that involves managing and controlling one's emotional responses and expressions to stressors in life. Such a difference may possibly exist due to certain cultural specifications in the way boys are brought up in Indian society (Mander, 2014). Thus as a result, percentage of girls is lower than that of boys who indulge more in emotion focused coping style. The next pair of bars show the mean difference in scores of adolescent boys and girls as exhibited in respect to Denial or Blame type of Coping. The t-test results conclude a significant difference (at 0.05 level) to be present between the chosen groups. This study fails to trace any difference among the two sample groups pertaining to the Destruction Negative type of coping behavior. The last type of coping upon which the samples were assessed is Religion/Faith. As far as this coping style is concerned the t-test results do not show a significant difference in the mean score of the groups. Some studies have been conducted to check whether religion or faith is used by adolescents to deal with daily stress, but there has been no such finding regarding the existence of gender difference in this kind of coping mechanism.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to check the coping styles of adolescent boys and girls and to check if there exists any difference in the way they cope. After reviewing a fair number of literature existing in this field, it was hypothesized that "There is no gender difference in the Coping Styles of Adolescent boys and girls". After a meticulous process of data collection and statistical procedure, the results were generated and interpreted

Major Findings

The study yielded results which showed that significant gender difference exists in the Emotion Focused and Denial/Blame styles of coping as exhibited by the sample group. The boys appeared to indulge in Emotion Focused way of coping, while girls were more prone to Denial/Blame type of coping. However, the groups did

not exhibit any significant difference in the context of other coping styles (Problem Focused, Social Support, Acceptance/Redefinition, Destruction Negative and religion/Faith) upon which they were assessed. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected in the case of Emotion Focused and Denial/Blame coping styles of adolescents and got accepted for the other five types of coping styles.

Implication

This paper will remain beneficial for parents, educators, facilitators and all the support groups that cater to adolescent needs, deal with them and their issues in the fields of Education, Sports or at home. It shall also provide more insight to the target group itself. Moreover, as have been mentioned earlier, adolescents' issues of alcohol, substance dependence and other negative or risky way of coping can be dealt in a better way if the support groups are well intimated about the nature of coping and vulnerabilities that accompany them. Therefore this study has a fair amount of worthy implication in the larger society.

Limitation and Scope

This study however, bears a few limitations. The first among which is the lack of heterogeneity in the sample. Secondly, there is limited demographic information that has been obtained from the participants which do influence their coping behavior to some extent. Adding on to it, there always exists a room for discrepancy in the data given by the sample and the behavior that they really indulge in, which again might have influenced the study to some extent. As a scope for further research, the sample can be manipulated otherwise in terms of the sample size, age and demographic factors and seen if the results are consistent. Hereby this study can be concluded with the expectation that it finds a beneficial use in the respective areas of concerned.

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