

Optimism in stress & coping among Adolescents (correlational study)

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Abstract

This study is outlined to find out the connection between optimism, stress and coping among adolescents (boys & girls) of Srinagar Jammu and Kashmir. Current study comprised of a large sample of 250 Adolescent students belonging to different degree colleges of Srinagar. Psychological tools like the perceived stress scale by Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein (1983) the "COPE" inventory by Caver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) & Life orientation test Revised by Scheier and Carver, (1994) were administered among participants. The research findings show that there is a slightly negative correlation between optimism and stress. Overall, the negative correlation between optimism and stress implies that individuals who are more optimistic generally tend to experience less stress, although the strength of this relationship may be weak and influenced by various other factors. Use of instrumental social support, acceptance, active coping, positive reinterpretation, planning and suppression of competing activities were found to be positively related to optimism. Mental disengagement, behavioural disengagement, denial, emotions and religious coping were found to be negatively related to optimism.

Key words: Optimism, Stress, Coping .

Introduction

Optimism plays an important role in stress and coping among adolescents in Srinagar, Kashmir. Adolescence is a period of immense changes and challenges, and the unique socio-political context of Srinagar, Kashmir adds additional stressors to the lives of adolescents living there. However, optimism can act as a protective factor, influencing their coping strategies and overall well-being.

Resilience and Adaptability: Optimistic adolescents are more likely to exhibit resilience and adaptability when faced with stressors. They tend to view challenges as temporary setbacks and believe in their ability to overcome them. This positive outlook helps them bounce back from adversity and navigate difficult situations more effectively.

Positive Appraisal: Optimistic adolescents in Srinagar, Kashmir tend to interpret stressful events and situations in a more positive light. They focus on potential opportunities for growth, rather than dwelling on the negative aspects. This positive appraisal allows them to maintain a hopeful outlook and reduces the impact of stress on their mental well-being.

Problem-Solving Skills: Optimism is often associated with proactive problem-solving skills. Adolescents with an optimistic mindset are more likely to actively seek solutions to the challenges they face. They approach problems with a belief that they can find viable solutions, which enhances their ability to cope effectively with stressors in Srinagar, Kashmir.

Social Support: Optimistic adolescents are more likely to seek and receive social support from friends, family, and other individuals in their community. They believe in the availability of support networks and have confidence in the positive influence of interpersonal relationships. This social support system acts as a buffer against stress and provides additional coping resources.

Emotional Well-being: Optimistic adolescents generally experience better emotional well-being compared to their pessimistic counterparts. Their positive mindset helps regulate negative emotions and reduces the likelihood of developing symptoms of anxiety and depression. This emotional resilience enables them to handle stressors in a healthier and more constructive manner.

Future Orientation: Optimism is closely linked to having a positive future orientation. Adolescents who are optimistic in Srinagar, Kashmir are more likely to have goals, aspirations, and a sense of purpose for their lives. This future focus provides them with motivation and direction, helping them cope with present challenges while keeping their eyes on a brighter future.

It is important to note that while optimism can be a valuable asset in stress and coping, it is not a magical solution to all challenges. Adolescents in Srinagar, Kashmir still require comprehensive support systems, access to mental health services, and a nurturing environment to effectively manage stress and enhance their well-being.

Students enrolled in the colleges experience life as a complex and mixed bag of feelings, emotions & life challenges. Although it gives them many

new chances to grow personally and explore different stages of life. They are exposed to different new challenges during their college life. This brings a lot of stress in their life, sometimes they know how to cope up with different stressors but some times they are totally unaware as stressors vary from person to person. Their expectations for the future (expecting to get succeed or anticipate failures) in their lives & their life cognitions depend upon two determinants. The former is known as "Optimism" whereas the later is known as "Pessimism".

Optimism is considered a positive psychological trait that influences an individual's perception of stressful events and their ability to cope effectively. The study explores how optimistic tendencies may impact stress levels and the choice of coping strategies in adolescents.

Adolescence is a period characterized by numerous stressors, including academic pressure, social challenges, and identity development. These stressors can have a significant impact on adolescents' mental health and well-being. Coping strategies play a crucial role in how individuals respond to stress, influencing their ability to adapt and maintain emotional balance. Optimism, defined as a general expectation that good outcomes will occur, has been linked to positive health outcomes and effective coping in various populations. However, limited research has explored the specific relationship between optimism, stress, and coping among adolescents. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the correlation between optimism, stress levels, and coping strategies among adolescents.

Optimism

Finding the positive and good in every situation is the essence of optimism. If you believe that future will always give you bright outcome, it will be positive, pleasant and full of happiness despite the fact that your current situation is not good then you are definitely an optimistic person.

Expecting the best from future no matter what the current circumstances are is defined as optimism. While Pessimism is an opposite term that believes that everything will go wrong or negative and things will never turn good or positive.

The premise underlying expectation-value theories of motivation believe that behaviour is structured around the pursuit of objectives (Austin & Vancouver 1996; Carver & Scheier, 1998). These objectives are some behavioural

reactions that individuals consider either undesirable or desirable.

According to expectancy based theories, behaviour can be predicted more accurately when expectations and behaviour are at the same level. Optimism typically adopt the way full of confidence & conviction while facing a challenge, even if progress seems to be slow, impossible & challenging. Pessimists are more likely to suffer from hesitation. In extreme threats and violence this gap might even become more pronounced. Optimists are more prone to believe that in one way or other way difficulty can be overcome. Pessimist people tend to see the negative outcome of every future aspect. These variations in how people respond to adversity have significant ramification for how people manage stress (Scheier & Carver, 1992).

There are two basic methods for measuring optimism, and each one is based on a different concept of optimism (Peterson, 2000). Optimism has been conceptualised in one extreme as a broad personality trait characterised generally by optimistic expectations that is referred to as "explanatory style" by Seligman (1998), although Scheier & Carver (1985) refer this as dispositional optimism."

Dispositional optimism approach asks people to rate how can they anticipate the future outcomes either positive or negative for the future (Scheier & Carver, 1992). Generalized expectations or expectations that roughly cover a person's entire life space, are referred to as pessimism and optimism. The majority of people actually lie some where in the middle, ranging from extremely pessimistic. This method refers optimism as a dispositional optimism. According to Scheier and Carver, optimism is the belief that only positive will happen in the future rather than negative.

One another perspective based on optimism is that expectation of people for their future are influenced by how they perceive the reasons behind past events (Peterson & Seligman 1984; Seligman 1991). Optimism and pessimism were conceptualised by Seligman and his colleagues in terms of explanatory style, or the distinctive approach of understanding unfavourable situation is described as such by Peterson (2000),

Reivich & Gillham (2003), Seligman (1990). The person's expectations for the future in the same domain will be for negative outcomes if explanations for past failures focus on causes that are (global) rather than (specific), (internal)

rather than (external) & (stable) rather than (unstable).This happens because one views his past bad experiences relatively permanent that impact his or her every aspect of life bringing no change. This basically originates from person's beliefs and genetic traits.

Stress

Everyone experiences stress, which is a typical human reaction .Every human can experience stress in his or her life and response to it naturally. Our body responds physically and psychologically to all these changes, stressors, and challenges itself. Human body adjusts to new surroundings with the aid of stress reactions. Stress can be positive and negative. It can help us to stay motivated, awake and prepared to avoid upcoming dangerous situations in life. But when stressors are prolonged without any relief or relaxation these can cause problems that become difficult to cope up .Stress is a by product of ineffective or subpar coping frustrations, conflicts, & pressures .These types of situations give rise to many adjusting demands or stressors. Frustrations can result from a variety of challenges ,both internal and external. A person may find it particularly challenging to deal with frustrations since they frequently result in self-devaluation, making the person feel as he or she has failed in some way or is not having or showing the necessary skills to do something successfully. Stress frequently comes from the occurrence of two or more motives or conflicting demands at once, where the needs of one prevent the fulfilment of the others. Due to pressures or stressors our coping mechanism extremely gets low or even results in maladaptive behaviours.(Carson, Butcher, Mineka & Hooley,2008).

Stress and coping

The main determinants of a persons coping mechanism are internal, such as their frame of reference, motivation ,skills and stress tolerance capacity. A transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC) was created by Richard Lazarus and tested (Lazarus 1966; Lazarus & Folk man) .1984).According to Lazarus (1966) "Stress is a product of a relationship between an individual and their surroundings rather than something that existed in the event itself). As a result stress is made up of a variety of emotional, cognitive and coping mechanism. Direct action and palliative coping are the two types of coping described by(Lazarus in 1966). These two types of coping were later on renamed by as problem focused and emotion focused, respectively by Lazarus and Folk man in (1984). Problem focused

coping techniques and problem solving techniques are same. These strategies include efforts to identify the issues, that mostly come up with the potential solutions, compare the pros and cons of different options, act to change what is changeable, and if needed acquire new abilities. Emotion focused coping techniques work to lessen down all the emotional distress. As per the previous research work conducted by (Carver & Scheier 1981) Scheier and Weintraub (1989) set out to develop a measure of coping based on the previous models of stress (Carver & Scheier,1981).''COPE'' inventory is made up of following scales.

(1) Planning: contemplating how to deal with the stressor ,and organising pro- active coping strategies.(2) Active coping: is an attempt to get rid of a stressor or stress like condition.(3) Social support: looking for help, guidance, information.(4) Suppression of competing Activities : Refraining from engaging in other potential activities so that one can focus entirely on handling the stressors.(5) Seeking emotional social support; seeking for emotional help and sympathy from others. (6) Religion; More practicing of religious activities.(7) Restraint Coping: Passively coping by delaying coping actions until they become.(8) Positive Reinterpretation & development; making best of the situations by growing or learning from it in a favourable way. (9) Concentration and venting of Emotions: A tendency to vent or release one's emotions together with a heightened awareness of their suffering. (10) Acceptance; Realising that the stressful incident has actually happened & is real in natural.(11) Denial : To reject the reality of the event that is stressful.(12) Mental Disengagement :Often known as self distraction, sleep or day dreaming ,is the psychological act of disengaging from the objective that the stressor is interfering with. (13) Drug/Alcohol use: Starting use of Alcohol and drugs in a way to Disengage from the stressor.(14) Behavioural Disengagement; Stopping to make any real effort to achieve the success or aim. 15) Humour; Making fun about the stressors. The purpose of this study was to determine whether similar situation rely in srinagar kashmir of India, specifically among the Adolescents of various colleges of srinagar. This study sought to ascertain the relationship between optimism, stress and coping. Whether the optimism makes coping easier, whether the coping strategies help in reducing the stress levels. Many studies done previously have

focused on the correlation between these variables among people who are going through different crises or difficulties in their life (common) in every day life. Hence this research was intended to discover whether these relationships also exist in college going students of srinagar when youth are already facing a lot of family stress and academic stress.

Research Methodology. A correlation research design was used to find out the connection between optimism, stress and coping. The sample of 500 students was selected on the basis of random sampling method. Age group(18-19) years. Study sample comprises of Male: 246 and female: 254 .All the students were informed regarding the study prior the participation. Three measures employed by the researcher were,

- (1) "Perceived stress scale" by Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein (1983) as a measure of stress. The past month psychological stress faced by students was measured by PSS. Students rate each of 10 items on a 5- point response scale ranging from 1(never) to 5(very often).
- (2)"LOT"-Revised or life orientation test-Revised by " Scheier; Carver & Bridges."(1994) . This inventory contained of 10 item scale with four filler items and six scale items.
- (2) "COPE" by Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub (1989).This is a 60-item multidimensional coping instrument constructed to assess 15 coping methods. Students were instructed to rate how often they were engaged in the strategy by each item when they faced difficulties on a 4-point Likert scale. The results were obtained using SPSS 22.

Result: According to the analysis done through the spss(statistical package for social sciences) there is moderately significant negative correlation between optimism & stress($r=-.480, P<0.01$).According to these findings students who reported higher levels of optimism are having lower levels of stress and vice versa. The variables of positive Reinterpretation & Growth ($r=.278, P<0.01$). utilisation of instrument special support. ($r=.110, P<0.05$).Active coping ($r=.217, P<0.01$),and optimism. When coping with stress is concerned ,optimism showed a weak positive relationship. Mental Disengagement ($r=-.212, P<0.01$), Negative weak relationship was found between optimism & Dimensions of Mental disengagement . Focus on and venting of Emotions ($r=-.108, P<0.05$),Denial ($r=-.234, P<0.01$),.Religious coping ($r=-.121, P<0.12$).Behavioural Disengagement ($r=-$

$.278, P<0.01$).There was no statistically any significant relationships found between Optimism, Humour, Restraint coping, seeking emotional social support, & Substance or Drug abuse.

Discussion:

prior research ,on optimism has shown that optimism is associated with reduced levels of stress because optimistic people typically expect good things from future .On the other side, pessimists, who always expect failure or negative outcome, typically endure higher levels of stress. According to this study there is a negative correlation between optimism and stress. Students with higher levels of optimism show lower levels of stress. The impact of optimism on stress was found in many previous research studies. (Scheier, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986; Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Fontaine, Man stead and Wagner, 1993) has shown that with the help of coping strategies or stress- reduction techniques used by optimists help to deal with stress. This study, revealed that optimism has weak positive relationships with the variables of positive reinterpretation & growth, use of instrumental social support, active coping, acceptance, Suppression of competing activities & planning. Some of the current findings are associated with past research work. Scheier, Carver, Weintraub (1986) has also shown a positive correlation between optimism and acceptance. Taylor & Aspinwall (1992) has shown that optimism is showing an effective relationship with active coping. Man stead & Wagner (1993) after studying a sample from undergraduate students have found that optimism was positively correlated with active coping & reinterpretation. According to Harju & Bolen (1998) have reported that people with less optimism were found to consume Alcohol and drugs. Thus we found that more positive attitude towards life that optimists have may contribute to show the more effective stress coping. In addition there is an evidence to support the idea that optimism helps people to pay attention towards negative things, and there by play an active role in coping with all the stressors. As per the studies of Aspinwall & Burn hart (2000) based on their three study analysis processing of health-risk information suggest that people with positive mind set have an ability to attend & elaborate self- relevant negative information in relation with their more active coping efforts. This may thus explain how the wide range of optimistic beliefs help in coping with wide range of stressors or stress releasing factors.

Conclusion;

This study supports the previous findings, that show that optimism has a similar association with stress & coping in the Indian context especially in srinagar kashmir. According to this research optimism is associated with lower levels of stress & more effective coping mechanism or strategies . Thus optimism plays the key role of a mediator to effectively manage the stress or stress full conditions in the life of college going students who are facing academic stress, family related issues and peer group pressures.

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