

Coping Strategies used by Adults and Adolescents in Distressing Parenting Style

Saima Parwez¹, Malghalara²

1,2.Department of Psychology, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Peshawar, Pakistan.
For Correspondence: Saima Parwez. Email: seemipervez82@hotmail.com

Abstract

Objectives. The aim of the present study was to investigate coping strategies (problem-focused and emotion-focused) of adolescents and adults with respect to distressing parenting style. It was assumed that adults will score high on problem-focused engagement while adolescents on emotion-focused disengagement Coping Strategies Scale. Another assumption was that adults having parents with authoritative parenting style will use problem-focused engagement coping whilst adolescents will use emotion-focused disengagement coping strategies.

Method. A sample of ($N=300$) participants was included in the study out of which ($n=150$) were adolescents and ($n=150$) were adults. The sample was taken from different institutes of Peshawar. Coping strategies of both groups were investigated by using Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) (Tobin *et al*; 1984) and their parents' parental style through Parenting Style Inventory II (Darling & Toyokawa 1997).

Results. Result of the study showed that adults use problem-focused adaptive coping strategies more than adolescents, whereas, adolescents have higher score on emotion-focused maladaptive scale of coping strategies as compared to adults. Results also showed that coping strategies of adults is not affected by parents' authoritative or authoritarian parenting style, however, for adolescents' authoritarian parenting style was distressing and lead them to use emotion-focused disengagement coping strategies.

Conclusion. It is concluded from the present study that adults choose adaptive while adolescents choose maladaptive coping strategies. Parenting style does have major effect on coping strategies selection of individuals.

Keywords. *Coping strategies, adolescent and adults, distressing situation, parenting style.*



Introduction

Life is not a stress-free entity. Every individual has to experience stress to a certain degree. An intense feeling of mental and bodily strain and pressure due to overwhelmingly negative effects of one's environment is known as stress. Stress was defined as biological process by Selye (1936) as "imprecise reaction of the body that is shown due to some demands made on it". Stress can also be good known as Eustress because it works as a motivator for the person to get through a specific exam or task, however, distress is known as bad stress which is restricting one's productivity and ability to go through the stressor and achieve balance (Mark Le, et al., 2006).

Dealing with distress means confronting and evaluating its agents by either adapting to it or altering the stressful situation. Using coping strategies are inevitable in distress in order to eliminate extreme disturbance and harmful effects it has on emotional and physical wellbeing of individuals. According to Lazarus (1993) coping is the means of handling psychological stress both mentally and physically. Coping strategies are specified attempts at reducing, mastering, and with standing the pressures exerted externally and internally due to the stressful transaction between an individual and its surrounding (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; 1985). Individuals' use of skillful acts upon facing various stumbling situations is known as coping (Sarason & Sarason, 2002). Degree of distress one is experiencing can be understood by coping strategies one uses to handle stress; therefore, coping is an essential clinical construct to study because it can help us to understand the distress level, as well as, the preventing measures for symptoms of distress induced by environmental, biological and psychological aspects (Segal, Hook, & Coolidge, 2001). Manne (2002) was also of the view that persons' overall life's worth can be defined by the coping skills they use to deal with illness. Coping procedures are greatly affected by social situations and interpersonal relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011).

Coping strategies has two major types: "problem-focused coping" and "emotion-focused coping" (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Problem-focused coping strategies concentrate on actively resolving the problem causing distress and take actual steps to control the stressor by altering the distressing situation or finding a way of adjustment.

Emotion-focused coping strategies focus on changing one's thoughts and feelings towards the stressor and managing emotional responses in terms of stress.

Ickes, Brown, Reeves, and Martin (2015) stated no imperative differences among stress levels of adolescents and adults but there were significant variations among their coping strategies that were displayed, and these distinctions revealed that adolescents usually undergraduates use maladaptive coping to deal with stress such as drug abuse while adults graduates opt for more adaptive approaches e.g. social support, pets, and exercise. Drug abuse is a cognitive and behavioral coping approach; adolescents use to combat distressing situations (Wagner, Myers, & McIninch, 1999). Hamarat et al. (2001) observed that as age increases, coping resources also increases whilst degree of apparent stress decreases (Hamarat et al., 2001, as cited in, Monteiro et al., 2014). Aldwin (1991) explained that it is the persons' age that influence their selection of coping strategies, for as compared to adolescents adults make use of adaptive and problem-focused coping styles greatly when confronted with distressing situations and this is because of the skills adopted with age and awareness that enable them to differentiate between events that require problem-focused coping and uncontrollable circumstances that need emotion-focused coping (Aldwin, 1991 as cited in, Richard, 2003). Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2011) was also of the same view in their developmental research on kids and teenagers, individuals' strategies to administer stress managing techniques becomes efficient when they grow older because the maturity and experience, they gain facilitate them to employ such strategies of coping that are the demands of the given situation and will work effectively.

Monteiro, Balogun, and Kutlo (2014) examined the effects, emotional control, age and sex has on coping strategies of individuals. To 128 students with ages from 18-29, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) and Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) scales were administered. Results showed that use of problem-focused engagement/adaptive coping were found more among adult students specifically problem solving, emotional expression and mental reconstruction.

Furthermore, it was also found that female students employed problem-focused disengagement coping and wishful thinking more than male students. Parenting plays a major role in shaping children behavior towards stress. Parental behavior of assisting and regulating their kids to thrive ahead is called as parenting style (Gafoor & Abidha, 2014). But if that parenting style restrict a child's conduct and choice from availing opportunities to learn, practice and handle events by their own, then such parenting style becomes a distressing situation that hinder a person capabilities to employ adaptive coping strategies during stress; instead, they acquire denial or withdrawal as coping or adopt maladaptive coping styles. Societal regulations and cognition of adolescents are greatly influenced by parental conduct (Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, Hiraga, & Grove, 1994) that also takes part in shaping their adult lives. Ghafoor and Abidha (2014) believed that parental rearing practices are deeply affected by one's culture which determines social, moral and behavioral limits by stating socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

According to Lipps et al. (2012) adolescents with authoritative and permissive parents have lesser symptoms of depression but authoritarian and neglectful parenting lead adolescents to show greater depressive symptoms. Individuals having authoritative parents are confident with self-worth and autonomy which facilitate them to use adaptive coping strategies such as problem-solving and support seeking, on the other hand, kids with authoritarian parenting develop dependency and lack of self-esteem that is why make use of avoidant and less active coping strategies (Nijof & Engels, 2007). Many researches support the notion that authoritative parenting is associated with adaptive problem-focused coping while authoritarian parenting is related to emotion-focused disengagement coping strategies. Wolfradt, Hempel, and Miles (2003) conducted a study to explore the correlation between adolescents coping styles, their perception of parental rearing styles, depersonalization and anxiety. Correlation analysis of data obtained from a sample of 276 adolescents proved that students who perceived their parents as authoritative scored low on anxiety and depersonalization scales while higher on problem-focused engagement coping strategies.

Scores on depersonalization and anxiety scales were noticed greater for adolescents with authoritarian parenting and scored minimal on adaptive and problem-focused coping.

Rationale

The aim of the current is to distinguish the problem and emotion-focused coping strategies of adolescents and adults under distressing parenting style. Coping strategies are set of defense and resistance mechanisms used against stressful situations that can be affected by number of factors in which parenting can be considered as a primary factor which is inevitable. Parenting styles can make distressing environment when children feel confined and restrained from using their prime autonomy and freedom to become effective in their selection and decisions. They are hindered from using their best possible options to overcome a situation or solve a problem by their own in a highly demanding and firm parenting.

The present study will be useful for parents to understand the consequences and effects of their parenting styles on children. They will be able to assess their rearing styles and to make it effective for the growth of their kids. Adolescents and adults will be benefited to know about their weaknesses and events that are restricting the emergence of their adaptive form of coping. It will enable them to better communicate their choices and strategies to their parents and find a collective solution to stressors.

Objectives

To investigate coping strategies used by adolescents and adults in distressing situations. To find out distressing parenting style of adolescents and adults.

Hypotheses

1. Adults will score high on problem-focused engagement scales of CSI as compared to adolescents in distressing situation.
2. Adolescents will score high on emotion-focused disengagement scales of CSI as compared to adults in distressing situations.

3. Adults raised by authoritative parents will obtain higher score on the problem-focused engagement scale of the CSI as compared to those with authoritarian parenting style.

4. Adolescents having authoritarian parenting style will use emotion-focused disengagement strategies than those with authoritative parenting style.

Methodology

Sample

The sample of the present study was consisted of 300 participants ($N = 300$) out of which 150 were adolescents and 150 were adults ($n = 150$) with age range from 16-28 years. They were selected through random sampling technique from different organization of Peshawar including educational institutes, economic and banking sectors. Although greater part of sample encompasses of student population particularly adolescents, some of adult subjects were also on job in the above mentioned-organizations.

Instruments

Demographic Sheet

Semi-structured interview was designed to obtain information about participants' demographic by asking questions about their age, name, religion, gender, educational qualification, occupation and marital status. It also asked about family status, relationship with parents and family members.

Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI)

Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) is a 72 item self-report questionnaire used to measure coping strategies both emotionally and behaviorally in response to certain stressors. The inventory was developed by Tobin et al. (1984) whose format was adopted from Folkman & Lazarus's (1981), "Ways of Coping" scale. The scale incorporates 14 subscales having *eight primary, four secondary and two tertiary* scales. Subjects used to respond on the format of five point likert scale that is to say a=not at all, b=a little, c=somewhat, d=much, e=Very much.

Four main domains of CSI were problem-focused engagement with alpha coefficient reliability of .83, emotion-focused engagement having a reliability of .75, *problem-focused disengagement* containing alpha coefficient of .79, and *emotion-focused disengagement* with reliability coefficient of .90.

Parenting Style Inventory II (PSI-II)

Parenting style inventory II (PSI II) was designed by Nancy Darling and Teru Toyokawa (1997) for measuring parenting styles. This is 15 item self-report questionnaire consist of three subscale named *responsiveness, autonomy granting and demanding*. Response format was five-point likert scale such as from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Alpha coefficient reliability of subscale assessing authoritative parenting style is .823; moreover, authoritarian parenting style has a reliability of .789.

Procedure

Officials' of different institutes were contacted for authorization of data collection. Subjects were randomly selected from different institution of Peshawar. Subjects were briefed about objective of the study and procedure for answering questionnaires. They were explained about their doubts and queries regarding study and Performa, and were requested to respond honestly and impartially. Before the questionnaires distribution, participants were given a consent form and were asked to read and provide their signatures to ensure their willingness to participate in the study. The Coping Strategies Inventory and Parenting Style Inventory II were given to the participants to measure their problem and emotion-focused coping strategies and distressing parenting style. Participants were appreciated and thanked at the end for their time and efforts. Privacy of their provided information was ascertained to be used only for research purpose.

Results

The independent sample *t*-test was used for the analysis of data.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviation and t-values scores of Adolescents and Adults on Problem-focused and Emotion-focused engagement scale of CSI. (N=300)

Groups	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% confidence interval of the difference		<i>Cohen's d</i>
						<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Adolescence Problem-foc	150	6.36	6.36	-10.08	.00	-11.56	-8.60	1.55
Adults		6.65	6.65			-11.56	-8.60	
Adolescence Emotion-foc	150	40.29	9.61	17.05	.00	15.36	19.37	1.97
Adults		22.92	7.94			15.36	19.37	

Note. Problem-foc = problem focused engagement scale of CSI. . Emotion-foc = emotion-focused disengagement scale of CSI

Table 1 shows that there is highly significant difference between scores of the adolescents and adults on problem-focused and emotion-focused engagement scale of coping strategies. Result shows that adults scored higher on problem-focused engagement scale as compared to adolescents and the obtain score of the adolescents is higher on emotion-focused disengagement scale of the Coping Strategies Inventory. These findings support first and second hypotheses of the study.

Table 2

Mean Standard Deviation and t-values of the scores of Adults on Problem-focused engagement scale of CSI with Authoritative or Authoritarian Parenting Style. (N=150)

Groups	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% confidence interval of the difference		<i>Cohen's d</i>
						<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Authoritative	61	30.77	7.01	-1.59	.11	-5.28	.57	0.35
Authoritarian	32	33.12	6.24	-1.65	.10	-5.19	.48	

Note. Problem-foc = problem focused engagement scale of CSI

Table 2 shows insignificant difference between the scores of adults on problem-focused engagement scale of the CSI and authoritative scale of parenting style inventory II. The results revealed that use of problem-focused engagement coping strategies by adults is same regardless of authoritative or authoritarian parenting style. These results do not support the third hypothesis.

Table 3

Mean score, Standard Deviation and *t*-values of the scores of Adolescents on Emotion-focused disengagement scales of CSI with Authoritative or Authoritarian Parenting Style. (N=150)

Groups	N	M	SD	t	p	95% confidence interval of the difference		Cohen's d
						LL	UL	
Authoritative	42	38.00	7.16	-7.40	0.000	-11.56	-6.66	1.60
Authoritarian	43	47.11	3.67	-7.35	0.000	-11.59	-6.63	

Note. Emotion-foc = emotion-focused disengagement scale of CSI

Table 3 shows highly significant difference between scores of adolescents on emotion-focused disengagement scale of the CSI and authoritarian parenting style. Result shows that adolescents reared under the authoritarian parenting style scored higher on emotion-focused disengagement scale of the CSI. These results support forth hypothesis of the study.

Discussion

The present study was aimed to compare the use of coping strategies (problem-focused and emotion-focused) of adolescents and adults under distressing parenting style and whether age and maturity has an effect on coping strategies of both the groups.

First hypothesis of the study stated that adults will score high on problem-focused engagement scale of the CSI in comparison with adolescents in situations of stress. The assumption is based on the fact that adults emerging with experience of all the teenage years become adapted to dealing with stressors either adaptively or in maladaptive ways. They have learned about the affectivity of certain engagement coping strategies and deficiencies of other disengagement styles of coping; therefore prefer instrumental and adaptive coping strategies. Present study results (table 1) indicated a highly significant difference between the scores of adults and adolescents, which shows adults having higher scores, thus proving the hypothesis. A study by Monteiro et al. (2014) also concluded that adults showed higher use of problem-focused engagement coping such as resolving problems, as well as emotion-focused e.g. expression of emotions and also cognitive reconstruction more often than adolescents.

Blanchard-Field, Mienaltowski, and Seay (2007) study was also in line with our results, stating that adults reported greater utilization of problem-focused coping in situations of instrumental problems, while day by day difficulties are resolved more efficiently as compared to young adults who make use of passive emotion-focused coping in response to stress that are mainly maladaptive. Blanchard-Fields and Irion (1988) found that adults exhibit capability of using problem-focused coping in conditions that can be handled instrumentally and emotion-focused coping in irrepressible events, in contrast, adolescents largely employ emotion-focused and defensive coping strategies in both controllable and non-controllable situations and hence confirming our hypothesis.

Second hypothesis of the study states that adolescents will score higher on emotion-focused disengagement scale of the CSI in distressing situations. It was hypothesized on the basis of explanation that teenagers are dependent, juvenile and temperamental creatures who are undergoing a transitional stage and are easily stressed by life events and have adjustment problems. A lack of supportive and cohesive environment makes them to adopt maladaptive coping strategies that are frequently emotion-focused because of their inexperience to solve the problem actively.

A highly significant difference was found in the results (table 2) which showed greater score of adolescents on emotion-focused disengagement scale as compared to adults and hence support our hypothesis. Raheel (2014) concluded that adolescents apply emotion-focused coping strategies that are primarily maladaptive including withdrawal, overeating, crying, isolating oneself and engaging into fights and argumentations. Furthermore, they have a far less use of problem-focused coping which approve our research hypothesis. Halstead, Johnson and Cunningham (2010) study results also show consistency with our findings suggesting that emotion-focused disengagement coping strategies are largely used by adolescents in situations of parental and family conflicts or stress regarding school life and social events. Horwitz, Hill, and King (2011) conducted a research to study adolescents' precise coping strategies in relation to depression concluded that their usage of emotion-focused disengagement and avoidant coping is high which elevate depression and suicidal ideation i.e. maladaptive behavior and self-blame.

Third hypothesis assumed that adults when raised by authoritative parents score high on problem-focused engagement scale of the CSI in comparison to those reared by authoritarian parents. Authoritative parenting carries obvious qualities of support, warmth and constructive supervision that allow individuals to solve their problems both instrumentally and emotionally with the guidance of their parents yet having the autonomy to work on their preferences which make them productive. They remain positive upon confrontation with a problem and strive for active solutions. Nonetheless, results (table 3) found no significant relationship between adults' use of problem-focused coping strategies and their parenting style (either to be authoritative or authoritarian). So, result does not support our hypothesis. A probable justification for irrelevant results may be most adults have moved out and are not under the influence of the parents. They are mostly on job and are independent plus being on their own make them to sought out their problems and cope with stressors in ways that have long term effectiveness irrespective of parenting stimulus.

That is what Vescio (2016) found out revealing that perceiving one's parents as authoritarian does not promote disengagement coping styles nor does the perception of authoritative parenting inculcate engagement coping styles. Seeley (2009) also arrived at analogous results signifying that children selection of different coping strategies are not influenced as of parenting styles which indicates that they may apply varied types of coping strategies (adaptive or maladaptive) irrelevant of rearing under authoritative or authoritarian rearing style. Similar results were found by Meesters and Muris (2004) suggesting that perceiving demand and controllability by parents lead people to make higher use of active coping strategies whereas no correlation was found between coping strategies and parental affection/warmth.

Last hypothesis of the study state that adolescents with authoritarian parenting style will score high on emotion-focused disengagement scale of CSI as compared to those having authoritative parenting. Authoritarian parents exercise excessive control and harsh evaluation of children which on one hand making them extremely dependent also make them reluctant to accept new challenges, adapt and adjust to new situations due to restrictions. That is why the only safe options they can think of is choosing to adopt emotion-focused maladaptive coping strategies such as drug abuse, isolation, restraining oneself from communicating feelings, social withdrawal etc. Table 4 showed a highly significant result ($p < .001$), with adolescents reared by authoritarian parents scoring higher on emotion-focused disengagement scale than those of authoritative ones; thus supporting the hypothesis. McGrew (2016) findings are in line with our results asserting that authoritarian style of fathers develop disengagement emotion-focused copings, such as frequently involving in anxious thoughts and behaviors, while authoritative mode of fathers is meant be eliminating maladaptive elements of coping strategies. Sarwar (2016) found consistent results disobedient and disruptive behaviors emerge in children due to authoritarian style of parenting which often result into delinquent conducts.

Hypothesis is also supported by Kritzas and Grobler (2005) results affirming a positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style (as perceived by adolescents) and maladaptive emotion-focused coping that create psychological disturbance. On the contrary, authoritative parenting direct adolescents to build resilience and active coping skills.

Conclusion

Current study was designed to contrast coping strategies of adolescents and adults (mainly two types i.e. problem-focused and emotion-focused) to understand the effect of age on coping skills, furthermore, to examine the coping functionality of both age groups under the impact of a stressful parenting style. Present study attempted to ascertain that adults have a higher use of engagement coping strategies especially problem-focused coping whilst adolescents make higher use of maladaptive emotion-focused coping. Research outcomes confirmed that adults does scored significantly superior on problem-focused adaptive coping and adolescents scores were larger on maladaptive emotion-focused coping verifying the age effects and proving that coping strategies do gets improve with age mastering careful selection and practical affectivity.

To see the effects of distressing parenting style we compared authoritarian parenting style (known for its distressing properties of undue demand, coldness and freedom restrictions of children) with authoritative parenting method (associated with parental support and warmth towards children). So it is also concluded from the present study that adults will choose coping strategies independent of distressful or supportive parental style but adolescents will make use of emotion-focused maladaptive coping strategies under the influence of authoritarian parenting style while authoritative ones will prefer adaptive coping style.

Limitations

The first limitation of the present study is that the sample size is small and the data is collected only from Peshawar. Secondly the study did not measure gender differences regarding coping strategies and distressing parenting style. Thirdly the uneducated people were ignored in the present study.

Recommendations

For future research it is recommended that the sample size would be large, focus on gender differences to know differences between male and female use of coping strategies and study more variables in distressing situations.

Implications

In recent years, substantial gains have been made in our understanding of the influence of parenting behaviors and styles on adolescent emotional and behavioral outcomes. Empirical work focusing on the associations between parenting and adolescent outcomes is important because the influence of parenting during adolescence continues to affect behaviors into adulthood.

The development of insight among educationists, parents, health and educational psychologists regarding coping strategies of adolescents and adults is one of the most pertinent implications of the current research. Obviously, adolescents' and adults relationship with their parents impacts multiple areas of their development. So it is also concluded from the present study that adults will choose coping strategies independent of distressful or supportive parental style but adolescents will make use of emotion-focused maladaptive coping strategies under the influence of authoritarian parenting style while authoritative ones will prefer adaptive coping style.

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