



## Gender Differences on Stress and Coping Strategies

Research Paper—Psychology

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The present world is said to be a world of achievements but it is also a world of stress. The present century has been called the “Age of Stress” because from birth till the last breath every individual is being exposed to various stressful situations. The word stress was first used in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but it was actually in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that social consciousness about life stress has risen dramatically. Hans Selye (1978) conceptualized stress as a broad and general concept like anxiety it is the organisms total reaction to environmental demands. Stress is a concept, which has universal appeal and is familiar to both layman and professional alike. According to the founder of modern stress research, Hans Selye (1978), “Stress is the physiological response of the body to physical and psychological demands.”. Hans Selye had called unpleasant stress ‘*distress*’ and pleasant stress ‘*eustress*’. Anything that causes a change in our life causes stress.

Lazarus (1971), had defined human stress as “Stress refers to a very broad class of problems differentiated from other problem areas because it deals with any demands which tax the system, whatever it is, a physiological system, a social system, or a psychological system and the response to that system.” Stress can therefore be defined as “a fairly predictable arousal of psycho – biological (mind - body) system, which if prolonged, can fatigue or damage the system to the point of malfunction or disease.” *Hovey, Joseph D and King, Cheryl A. (1996) studied the relationship between acculturative stress, depressive symptoms, and suicidal ideation in a sample of immigrant and second-generation. Results suggest that some acculturating Latino adolescents experience high levels of acculturative stress.*

Coping with stress may begin with the occurrence of a stressful event, during exposure to stressor and finally after it has taken place. However, successful coping with stress should depend on a number of factors such as individual attitude, perception of life stress and suffering and personal skills, capability of problem solving and decision-making. There are many different ways of coping but they all involve making some change in input – output relationships.

Defensive Coping is a way of dealing with stress – related problems by running away from them physically or psychologically, or by walling off reality or by becoming depressed. It was Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939) who emphasized use of defensive mechanisms as defensive coping to reduce stress. Repression is a type of defensive coping, it is an act of denying reality by refusing to become conscious of stress related thoughts or inputs. Direct Coping is a way of dealing with stress related problems by facing the issues and solving them. Direct coping involves taking at least three steps: Firstly, an objective analysis of what your problem is how it came into being and how you are personally responding. Secondly, a clear statement of how things might be better, which means deciding what will be the primary goal or adjustment. Thirdly, it is a psychological roadmap or list of new approaches to life, which you might engage in to reach to your goal. Direct coping is not always easy and is often time consuming. For it requires the person to stand back and look at things as emotionally as one can. Edwin Boudreaux; Cris Mandry and Phillip J. Brantley, (1997) found that the coping styles were most consistently associated with maladaptive outcomes were: Accepting Responsibility,

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Confrontive Coping, and Escape/Avoidance. **Francisco J. Mena; Amado M. Padilla and Margarita Maldonado (1987)** Acculturative stress and specific coping strategies were assessed in a group of 214 multicultural college undergraduates of both sexes who were divided into four generational status groups: early immigrants (immigrated before 12 years of age) and late immigrants (immigrated after age 12), second-generation and third-generation. Late immigrants coped with stress more frequently by taking a direct, planned action (individualistic) approach, while secondhand third-generation groups more often coped by talking to others about the problem (social network).

**HYPOTHESIS**—To achieve the prime objective of the study following tentative hypothesis were formed:

- Males and females will be significantly different from each other on Life Stress and its dimensions.
- Males and females will be significantly different from each other on Coping Strategies.

**METHODS—Sample**—The sample consisted of 400 subjects and was selected using quota random sampling. All subjects were matched on socio – economic status, educational level and belonged to urban setup. The males and females were selected from the M.K.P. (P.G.) College and D.A.V. (P.G) College, Dehradun, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), Defence Electronics and Applications Laboratory (DEAL) and Ordnance Factory, KV (OLF) Dehradun.

**Tools**—For- the present study, the following fairly established and standardized tools were used for the purpose of data collection:

- **Presumptive Stressful Life Event Scale (PSLE)** developed by Singh Gurmeet, Kaur Dalbir and Kaur Harsharan (1991) was used to measure life-stress.
- **Ways of coping Questionnaire (WAYSS)** developed by Folkman Susan and Lazarus S. Richard (1988) was used to measure the thoughts and actions individuals use to cope with stressful encounters of everyday life.

**Procedure**—The subjects were contacted individually and requested to cooperate for the

testing schedule. Good rapport was established with all the subjects and they were convinced that the result and the information they will give would be kept strictly confidential. The subjects were first given the Presumptive Stressful Life Events Scale. The subjects were requested to put a tick against all those events that may have happened during the past one year in column 1 and to mark those events that may have occurred with them during their lifetime in column 2. Secondly subjects were given the Ways of Coping Questionnaire. Subjects were instructed to think about the most stressful situation that they have experienced during the past week and circle the coping strategies according to what extent it was used.

**Results** —The raw data thus collected was consolidated and statistically analyzed with the help of Mean, SD,s and ANOVA'S and is shown in Tables 1 & 2. Table 1 shows the means and SD values of males and females of the total sample on Life Stress and its patterns as well as for Coping Strategies. On Life Stress males were found to have higher mean values than females. Males scored higher mean values on both the dimensions of Life Stress also: namely Past one year and Lifetime dimension. Table 1 also shows a comparison on Coping Strategies: Females possessed higher mean value as compared to males on Seeking Social Support, Accepting Responsibility and Planful Problem Solving dimensions of Coping Strategy. Furthermore, on Coping Strategies Females scored lower mean values than males on Confrontive Coping, Distancing, Self-Control, Escape Avoidance, Positive Reappraisal dimensions of Coping Strategy as well as on total Coping Strategy. Table 2 shows the F ratios for Life Stress and Coping Strategies and their dimensions. Obtained F-value was significant at 0.01 levels for total Life stress. Significant F- ratio (Table 2) showed that the males and females differed significantly from each other on only three dimensions of Coping Strategies: Accepting Responsibility, Escape Avoidance and Positive Reappraisal. Insignificant F – value revealed no difference between the two sexes on Confrontive Coping, Distancing, Self Control, Seeking Social

**Discussion**—To test the first hypothesis for Life Stress and its dimensions means, SD's and F ratios were computed. The obtained F- ratio for total Life- Stress (Table 2) was found to be significant at 0.01 level which showed that males and females differ significant from each other on Life – Stress variable. Mean value for total Life-Stress (Table 1) showed that males obtained significantly higher mean value than females. It means that significant difference occurred on the level of Total Life Stress between the two sexes or males possessed higher tendency of having Life Stress whereas females tend to have lower tendency of Life Stress. Significant F-ratio on past one year dimension of Life Stress the calculated F ratio was found to be significant at .01 level indicating that significant difference existed between males and females on this dimension. Males were found to have significantly higher mean values than females on the level of Past one year Life Stress. Therefore, it can be inferred that females have significantly lower tendency of feeling Life Stress of past one year. Insignificant F ratio on Lifetime dimension denoted that both the sexes have same level of Lifetime stress. In contrast to this Jhonston, Mary Anne; Page Stewart's (1989 - 1990) reported that males and females have no significant difference on all measures of life stress.

Insignificant F-ratio (Table 2) for total Stress Coping Strategies revealed that there was no significant difference between males and females on the tendency of using Coping Strategies. The obtained mean values showed that males obtained slightly higher mean scores than females although insignificantly indicating that no gender differences existed on this variable. On the various dimensions of Coping Strategies the insignificant F ratio (Table 2) were found on Confrontive Coping, Distancing, Self Control, Seeking Social Support and Planful Problem Solving. It revealed that both the sexes use these Coping Strategies in a similar manner. **The present findings supports the earlier findings of Ptacek, J. T. and Ronald E. Smith, Kenneth L. Dodge (1994) who reported that men and women were similar in their cognitive appraisal of the situation, they nonetheless reported**

differences in preparatory coping. Significant F ratio at 0.05 level (Table 2) was found on Accepting Responsibility dimension of Coping Strategies denoting that males and females differed significantly from each other on this dimension. The observation of mean values (Table 1) revealed that females obtained significantly higher mean value than males on Accepting Responsibility dimension of Coping Strategy. It can be derived that females used more of this Coping Strategy than males when dealing with stressful encounters of everyday life. This means that females try to acknowledge their role in a problem with the motive of trying to put things right as compared to males. Significant F ratio (Table 2) also revealed that there was real difference between males and females on Positive Reappraisal dimension. Males were found to have significantly higher level of Positive Reappraisal as compared to females. It can be said that males use more of this Coping Strategy as compared to females. This means that males put more efforts to create positive meaning by focusing on personal growth as compared to females. The findings stands in contrast with a study conducted by Folkman, S; Lazarus, RS; Pimley, S and Novacek, J (1987) who reported that females tended to use relatively more positive reappraisal than did men. Earlier findings of Rao K; Moudud S; Subbakrishna, D.K. (2000) also reported that gender differences existed in the use of emotion-focused coping strategies. Females preferred distress-reducing strategies and social support utilization, while males reported active behavioral methods including high-risk coping behaviors. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis was accepted partially claiming that males and females differed from each other on three dimensions of Coping Strategies namely; Accepting Responsibility, Escape Avoidance, Positive Reappraisal. The tendency of using Confrontive Coping, Distancing, Self Control, Seeking Social Support and Planful Problem Solving was found to be similar among males and females.

Finally, it can be concluded that both the sexes showed significant difference on total Life Stress and Past one year life stress. Males were found to

possess higher degrees of Life Stress as compared to females. On Coping Strategies significant difference occurred on Accepting Responsibility, Escape Avoidance and Positive Reappraisal dimensions of Coping Strategies. Females were found to use Accepting Responsibility strategy more as compared to males when dealing with stressful situations. Males were found to have higher tendency of using Escape Avoidance and Positive Reappraisal Coping Strategies than females to deal with stress.

**Table 1: Mean and SD values of Male and Female on Life Stress, Coping Strategy and their dimensions**

Variable	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Past One Year	6.32	4.10	5.55	2.76
Life Time	8.50	5.70	7.61	4.47
Tot Life Stress	14.82	6.62	13.20	5.05
Confrontive Coping	10.41	3.25	9.34	3.06
Distancing	9.55	3.53	8.16	3.18
Self Control	11.25	2.80	11.18	2.59
Seeking Social Support	10.10	3.45	10.27	2.73
Accepting Responsibility	6.31	2.89	6.48	1.63
Escape Avoidance	9.93	3.67	9.83	2.91
Planful Problem Solving	10.67	3.04	10.91	2.33
Positive Reappraisal	11.49	3.35	10.86	2.48
Total Coping Strategies	79.62	15.79	76.97	11.12

**Table 2: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Life Stress and Coping Strategies and their dimensions**

Variables	df	SS	MSS	F- Value
Past One Year	1	183.60	183.60	15.53**
Life Time	1	46.92	46.92	1.89
Tot Life Stress	1	408.04	408.04	12.69**
Confrontive Coping	1	24.01	24.01	2.51
Distancing	1	25.00	25.00	2.47
Self Control	1	0.90	0.90	0.12
Seeking Social Support	1	0.01	0.01	0.00
Accepting Responsibility	1	34.22	34.22	6.35*
Escape Avoidance	1	40.96	40.96	4.14*
Planful Problem Solving	1	0.00	0.00	0.00
Positive Reappraisal	1	42.25	42.25	4.81*
Total Coping Strategies	1	10.89	10.89	0.06

\* Significant at 0.05 level \*\* Significant at 0.01 level

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