



Humor as a Coping Mechanism for Stress

Dhwani Jain, *Masters, Clinical Psychology, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Noida, India*

Jaindhwani01@gmail.com

Abstract: Stress significantly impacts young adults, particularly during transitions, and coping mechanisms are crucial in moderating its effects. This study investigates humor as an adaptive coping strategy that enhances emotional regulation and reduces psychological distress. A sample of 162 participants aged 18 to 30 completed the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the Humor Coping Scale (HCS). Analysis indicated a significant positive correlation ($r = .281, p < .01$) between humor coping and perceived stress, suggesting that humor may help manage stress perceptions. These findings support humor's role in psychological resilience and stress management, advocating for its inclusion in mental health and well-being programs for young adults. Future research should explore causal relationships and cultural differences in this context.

Keywords: *Humor, Coping Mechanism, Stress*

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Stress has become a significant concern in modern psychology due to its pervasive impact on mental, physical, and social well-being, influenced by rapid technological changes, competitive environments, and complex personal relationships. It is now recognized as a chronic aspect of life, with substantial long-term effects on psychological adjustment and quality of life. Prolonged or poorly managed stress has been linked to various adverse outcomes, including anxiety, cardiovascular issues, cognitive decline, and burnout. However, responses to stress vary greatly among individuals, with coping mechanisms playing a critical role in determining whether stress leads to psychological distress or resilience.

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals use to manage perceived burdensome pressures. Among the various coping strategies, humor has gained attention as a versatile psychological tool that can alter emotional responses, reshape cognitive assessments, and strengthen social connections. Research indicates that humor can mitigate stress's negative effects by fostering positive emotional states, creating distance from adversity, reducing perceived threats, and assisting in cognitive reappraisal. Furthermore, humor often enhances social support, which serves as a protective buffer against stress-related discomfort.

Despite the recognized benefits of humor, the research in this area remains fragmented, hindered by inconsistent definitions, cultural representation issues, and reliance on cross-sectional studies. There is also insufficient emphasis on differentiating maladaptive from adaptive humor types and elucidating the psychological mechanisms through which humor impacts stress. These limitations highlight the need for a more thorough and theoretically grounded exploration of humor as a coping mechanism for stress reduction.

1.2 Definitions

1.2.1 Stress

Stress is a dynamic process resulting from interactions between individuals and their environments, shaped by cognitive assessments of perceived danger and coping abilities. The evaluation process includes primary appraisal, which assesses the potential harm of a situation, and secondary appraisal, which evaluates one's ability to manage the stressor. Physiological, behavioral, and emotional reactions occur as a result of these assessments. Stress is categorized into acute stress, which is short-lived and related to immediate demands, and chronic stress, which arises from prolonged exposure to stressors and can lead to health problems. Additionally, eustress represents positive stress that motivates and enhances performance, while distress occurs when demands are perceived as excessive. Effective coping strategies are vital, as poorly managed stress is linked to various mental and physical health issues.

1.2.2 Humor as a Coping Mechanism

A complex concept, humor encompasses social, emotional, and cognitive elements, serving not only to amuse but also as a psychological coping mechanism that fosters resilience and emotional control. It operates through cognitive reappraisal, allowing individuals to reframe stressful situations, which mitigates negative emotions and promotes emotional flexibility. Research identifies four humor types: affiliative humor improves social connections; self-enhancing humor aids emotional health; aggressive humor can harm

relationships; and self-defeating humor compromises self-esteem. The impact of humor varies significantly based on its style and context, with positive outcomes linked to adaptive humor types and negative outcomes associated with maladaptive humor types.

1.3 Relationship Between Humor and Stress

Cognitive appraisal and emotion regulation frameworks explain the relationship between humor and stress, emphasizing that stress responses depend on individuals' perceptions of events. Humor acts as a cognitive reappraisal strategy, permitting individuals to reinterpret threatening situations, thereby reducing perceived harm and emotional intensity. It aids in undermining negative interpretations by highlighting absurdities, fostering diverse perspectives that can enhance emotional regulation. Additionally, comedy generates positive affect, counterbalancing negative emotions and breaking cycles of emotional overload, which contributes to psychological balance and decreased physiological arousal, thereby enhancing coping skills.

Empirical studies support the stress-buffering role of adaptive humor styles. Individuals utilizing affiliative and self-enhancing humor report lower stress levels, greater resilience, and overall life satisfaction. Humor also plays a crucial social role, improving perceived social support and strengthening relationships, which in turn protects against long-term stress. Shared laughter promotes social connections that can mitigate stress. However, maladaptive humor styles, such as self-defeating humor, can damage social bonds and increase psychological vulnerability, highlighting the need to differentiate among humor styles in the context of stress reduction.

Despite evidence supporting humor as an adaptive tool, gaps remain in the literature regarding the mechanisms, cultural influences, and long-term effectiveness of humor in coping. Addressing these gaps is essential to develop a more integrated understanding of humor's impact on stress and psychological health.

2. Review of Literature

Craun, S. W., & Bourke, M. L. (2026) Professionals actively involved in the field of sexual violence frequently utilize comedy, particularly light humor and gallows humor, to address the detrimental effects of their work on wellbeing. Nevertheless, there is currently little empirical study on humor's ability to lessen secondary traumatic stress symptoms. In order to ascertain the degree of secondary traumatic stress and coping mechanisms for stress related to the workplace, the current study surveyed over 500 members of the Internet Crimes Against Children task force. The usage of light and gallows humor was found to be

significantly associated with the reported degree of secondary traumatic stress, even after controlling for a number of techniques. The nature of the association was different for the two types of humor.

Kuiper, N. A. (2026) The potential incorporation of humor into a resilience framework will be examined in this essay. After a brief introduction to resilience-oriented approaches and a few contributions from positive psychology, it will highlight a number of research lines that have been found to provide preliminary support for the role of humor in the promotion of resilience within a stress and trauma framework. Along with anecdotal case studies on the application of facilitative humor in extremely stressful situations (like emergency medical services), it will also go deeper into the role of humor as a mediator and as a component of cognitive appraisal in psychological well-being. Although these early findings are encouraging, it's also critical to acknowledge that a large number of resilience-based approaches to comedy have a tendency to highlight humor's positive aspects. In order to find more broad study paths from a resilience viewpoint and to take into account both the adaptive and maladaptive aspects of humor, a styles-based approach to humor will be used. This process-oriented approach acknowledges the critical role that control of both happy and negative emotions plays in shaping coping and development. The limitations and potential extensions of contemporary resilient approaches to humor, including interventions and programs meant to encourage the methodical use of comedy, will be examined in this research from this angle.

Capps, D. (2026). According to *Men and Their Religion: Honor, Hope, and Humor* (2002), I contend that there are two main forms of male religiosity: the religion of honor and the religion of hope. Additionally, I contend that since the two previous approaches do not always provide the intended outcomes, a third form of religiosity—the religion of comedy—has emerged for men. This claim is expanded upon in *Men and Their Religion*, where I demonstrate that, of the three types of male religiosity covered in *A Time To Laugh* (2005), comedy is the most unique. I have read a number of books and articles that explore the psychological advantages of humor as part of my research for a study on the subject. I contend that these sources are pertinent to the theory that engaging in religious activity can have positive psychological effects, even though they are not specifically mentioned in the book. This paper reviews the empirical research on the psychological benefits of humor in order to investigate the topic of whether a religion of humor is likely to offer psychological benefits—and if so, what these benefits may be.

Sliter, M., Kale, A. and Yuan, Z. (2026) Despite significant advancements in our understanding of occupational stress over the past three decades, traumatic stressors in the workplace have been comparatively underrepresented in this series of studies. People in occupations like law enforcement, emergency medical services, and firefighting frequently work in high-stress environments, so their absence is noticeable. Thus, examining the impact of traumatic stress on firefighters was the aim of the current study. The behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components were represented by the outcome variables of burnout, absenteeism, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), respectively. The study also looked into the usefulness of coping humor as a stress-reduction tool. The study highlighted the function of humor in social bonding and its potential application in stress reduction, and it drew upon the transactional theory of emotion and coping as a foundation for these variables. 179 firefighters provided the data, and following two rounds of survey administration, the dependent variables were examined at Time 2. The results demonstrated that exposure to stressful situations was a particularly strong predictor of burnout, PTSD, and absenteeism, and that coping humor reduced the association between burnout and PTSD. In addition to examining more professions that might be problematic in connection with traumatic stressors, we will talk about the consequences of these findings and suggest that more humor be included in work-related literature. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. All rights reserved

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

To examine the relationship between humor and perceived stress among young adults.

3.2 Objectives

1. To assess how stressed young adults perceive themselves to be.
2. To examine the relationship between the perception of stress and the use of humor.
3. To assess whether those who use humor more are less stressed.

3.3 Hypotheses

H1: Higher levels of perceived stress will be associated with greater use of humor as a coping strategy among young adults.

H2: Humor will show a statistically significant relationship with perceived stress, indicating that humor is more often employed under conditions of elevated stress.

3.4 Variables

- Independent Variable: Use of humor as a coping mechanism

- Dependent Variable: Perceived stress
- Control Variables (if applicable): Age, gender, and educational background.

3.5 Sample

About 100 to 150 young adults aged 18 to 30 will be recruited for the research through convenience sampling from colleges and universities. This method is chosen for its practicality, facilitating efficient data collection and rapid recruitment, given the target population's accessibility. While it may limit generalizability, convenience sampling is appropriate for identifying general patterns in exploratory behavioral research due to its feasibility.

3.6 Inclusion Criteria

1. Aged 18-30 years
2. Either currently employed or seeking further education
3. Capable of reading and comprehending English
4. Willing to give informed consent and participate voluntarily

3.7 Exclusion Criteria

1. Those currently receiving treatment for serious mental illness
2. Those who have been identified as having cognitive impairments that may influence understanding of the questionnaires.
3. Participants who give inaccurate or incomplete information

3.8 Description of the Tests

Humor Coping Scale (HCS): The Humor Coping Scale, developed by Herbert M. Lefcourt and Rod A. Martin in 1986, is a self-report scale designed to measure the degree to which individuals use humor as a coping strategy. The scale employs a Likert-type format to assess the tendency to use humor as a means of reducing tension, managing negative emotions, and cognitively reappraising stressful situations. The HCS has been found to possess good reliability and validity in psychological studies. The HCS demonstrates good internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from 0.70 to 0.85, indicating consistent measurement of humor-based coping. It has strong construct validity, showing positive correlations with adaptive coping, resilience, and emotional well-being, supporting its effectiveness in assessing humor as a coping strategy.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS): The Perceived Stress Scale, developed by Sheldon Cohen in 1983, is a common instrument designed to assess the degree to which individuals perceive their lives as stressful. In its 10-item form, the PSS employs a 5-point Likert-type

scale. The PSS measures the degree to which individuals perceive life events as threatening, unpredictable, and uncontrollable. The scale has been found to possess good psychometric properties. The PSS (10-item version) shows high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha generally ranging from 0.78 to 0.91 across populations. It has strong construct and criterion validity, demonstrated through significant correlations with anxiety, depression, and stress-related outcomes, making it a widely validated measure of perceived stress.

3.9 Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was employed to investigate the relationship between humor-based coping and perceived stress in young adults. This approach allowed for efficient data collection at one time point, utilizing standardized self-report scales for statistical analysis. While the method is suitable for exploratory research and uses validated instruments, it cannot establish causation and may suffer from response biases and limited generalizability due to convenience sampling. Despite these limitations, the design effectively meets the study's goal of examining the association between humor coping and perceived stress.

3.10 Procedure

Prior to data collection, permissions were obtained and participants were informed about the study's purpose, securing informed consent while ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Demographic data, including age and gender, were collected. The Humor Coping Scale (HCS) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) were administered in classroom settings or online, with standardized instructions for consistency. A controlled environment minimized distractions, enhancing response reliability. Participation was voluntary, allowing withdrawal at any time, with responses compiled for statistical analysis while maintaining data confidentiality.

3.11 Statistical Analysis

Data analysis using SPSS revealed a small-to-moderate correlation ($r = .281$) between humor coping and perceived stress, indicating a modest relationship. Assumptions of linearity and normality were assessed, with Spearman's correlation as an alternative if necessary. Statistical significance was set at the 0.01 level. It is noted that while demographic data were gathered, potential confounding variables were not controlled, representing a limitation of the study.

4. Result

The present study examined the relationship between humor as a coping mechanism and perceived stress among young adults. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation analysis were conducted to analyze the data. The findings revealed a statistically significant association between humor coping and perceived stress. The results are presented in detail in the following tables.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Humor and Perceived Stress*

	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Humor	21.45	3.512	162
Perceived Stress	24.13	7.051	162

Table 2. *Correlation Between Humor as a Coping Mechanism and Perceived Stress Among Young Adults*

		Humor	Perceived Stress
Humor	Pearson Correlation	1	281
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.000
	N	162	162
Perceived Stress	Pearson Correlation	281	1
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.000	
	N	162	162

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5. Discussion

The present study investigates the correlation between humor coping and perceived stress among young adults, revealing a statistically significant but modest relationship ($r = .281$, $p < .01$). While humor is often cited as a stress-buffering mechanism, the findings suggest its role is complex and context-dependent. The difference between adaptive (beneficial) and maladaptive (harmful) humor types highlights that not all humor effectively reduces stress. The modest effect size indicates humor might not be a strong predictor of stress but rather a coping mechanism that individuals resort to during stressful situations. Variability in humor and stress responses among participants implies that humor's effectiveness may vary widely. The study's reliance on a single humor coping scale limits

distinctions between humor styles, potentially diluting observed effects. Methodologically, a cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences about humor's impact on stress, and future research is suggested to differentiate humor styles and employ more complex analytical methods to clarify the relationship further. Ultimately, while humor is significantly associated with perceived stress, its role is nuanced, warranting a cautious interpretation in stress research.

6. Conclusion

The present study analyzed the relationship between humor as a coping mechanism and perceived stress in young adults through a cross-sectional correlational design. Results indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between humor and perceived stress ($r = .281, p < .01$), with humor accounting for around 8% of the variance in perceived stress. This modest association suggests that higher stress levels may lead to increased humor use, reflecting humor more as a reactive coping strategy rather than an effective preventive measure. The results challenge the notion that humor directly alleviates stress, indicating it may represent coping effort rather than confirmed effectiveness.

This study highlights the multifactorial nature of stress, influenced by various psychological, social, and contextual factors, such as academic pressure and emotional regulation. Humor, while contributing to this coping context, is a limited variable. The study's methodological limitations, including the use of a general humor coping measure and the cross-sectional design, restrict causal inferences about the humor-stress relationship. These limitations call for more robust methodologies, including longitudinal studies and humor-style-specific analyses.

Despite these challenges, the findings provide an empirically grounded view of humor in relation to stress, advocating for a nuanced interpretation that recognizes humor's association with stress without asserting it as a primary stress-reduction mechanism. Practically, humor could serve as a psychologically accessible coping resource, especially in demanding emotional contexts, but should be integrated with broader strategies like social support and adaptive emotion regulation. The study concludes that while humor significantly correlates with perceived stress among young adults, its role is primarily as a reactive coping response. Future research should focus on longitudinal designs and the differentiation of humor styles to better understand humor's functions in stress and coping.

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