



A study on Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Coping Strategy among College Students

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Abstract: Depression, anxiety and stress are common mental health conditions in India. It can affect physically, emotionally and cognitively when performing daily task. The study aimed to examine the relation between depression, anxiety, stress and coping strategy among college students. A sample of 35 college going students was taken from the age group of 17 to 30 year. Standardised tools were used. The Depression, anxiety and stress scale (DASS-21) and coping strategies inventory scale were used to measure the variables. The study reveals that depression, anxiety and stress are significantly positively correlated. Psychological distress and coping strategies (primary scale) variable are strongly interconnected. In coping strategies inventory scale, eight primary scale items are positively correlated. There is also significantly negatively correlated with stress, DASS score and problem solving.

Keywords: *Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Coping Strategy, College Students*

1. Introduction

College is the most beautiful phase of a student's life, but today's education sector is becoming a competition platform for students. College students face enormous challenges and obstacles like academic pressure, adjustment issue, finance problem, homesickness, teacher-parents expectations and future dubiety so on. However, when students facing barrier that need to enhances in problem solving skills, resilience, responsibilities, discipline and time managements. The experience of college life isn't equal for every student, it differs based on learning environment and other factors influencing students' perception towards study.

Depression in college students is common problems in India. It is a complex feeling of sadness, loss of interest and irrational thoughts can cause issue like suicide, substance abuse, mental illness, work pressure, discouragement and self –harming behaviour.

Anxiety is a sudden feeling of frequent, excessive and persistent worries of fearful situation's or places, involving general symptoms such as shortness of breath, sweating, tension, trauma, dread, or specific stressful events.

Stress is a natural feeling of worry and mental tension that occurs from different situation. It promotes challenges and life-threatening experience at a point, cause headache, muscle tension, irritability and sleep disturbance.

Coping strategy are individual conscious and unconscious psychological, behaviour and cognitive tactics aroused at stressful situation to tolerate or manage internal and external crises and emotional distress. It need to effort overwhelm by adjusting negative events and handling both on personal or professional challenges in life.

A research was conducted on Bagalkot undergraduate government college. The result showed that undergraduate students had high level depression, anxiety and stress. However, it also indicated that emotional distress reported high in females as compared to males. The researcher suggested to go for early interventions for improving quality of life and to reduce stress among college students (Mutalik et al., 2016).

Depression

According to Beck's cognitive theory (1967) depression is defined as "a feeling of sadness that typically starts after an unpleasant or unwanted event."

According to American Psychological Association (2018) Depression is defined as an "it is a negative affective state, ranging from sadness to extreme despondency, interfering with daily life, and causing physical, cognitive, and social changes."

Depression defined as "a mental disorder characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, and an inability to carry out daily activities for at least two weeks" (WHO, 2015).

As per the study conducted by Shah and Pol (2020) on prevalence of depression and anxiety among college students. The study explains about the depression and anxiety impact on personal life, academic pressure and social living expectations among college student. The sample size was 400 college students at age group of 18-25 years respectively. The result found to be moderate and severe level of depression and anxiety exist in college students. Additionally, the study suggested for clinical treatment and diagnoses for welfare of the college students.

A research was investigated by Das and Sahoo (2012) on stress and depression among postgraduate students. The study was conducted on a sample of 51 (27 males and 24 females) post graduate students. The result stated that male have higher stress and depression as compared to female. It is associated with stress and depression among male and female post graduate students. Perhaps, it indicated that both gender is been affected by depression among post-graduation students.

According to Donahue (2015), a study was conducted on gender, coping mechanism and depression severity among adults in university students. The results found gender is a weak predictor for depression prevalence and severity. Instead, the study suggests that increase an increase in disengagement or avoidant coping strategies can lead to moderate depression predictors and greater reliance on high depression predictors in students. It recommended for better mental health program & service for students health.

Anxiety

According to David Barlow (2004), anxiety is defined as an "uncontrollable, diffuse, unpleasant, and persistent state of negative affect, characterised by apprehensive anticipation regarding unpredictable and unavoidable future danger, accompanied by physical tension and hyper vigilance."

Conceptualized anxiety as a sense of difficulty or personal inefficacy in coping with a situational challenge (Irwin Sarason, 1978).

As per the study conducted by Dalky and Gharaibeh (2019) to measure the psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress) and needs of mental health services in Jordan. The results found that anxiety is higher as compared to depression and stress among college students. It also indicated that half of the college students were not aware of available mental health support service and 54.4% were experiencing psychological problem related to mental health support.

According to Sharma and Kirmani (2013) was conducted research to examine the depression and anxiety by using Beck Inventory in a group of college going students. The results found that girls and professional students had high levels of depression and anxiety symptoms as compared to boys and non- professional students. respectively. Furthermost, the researcher imposes to create awareness on mental health intervention in college students.

Stress

According to Dhabhar and McEwen (1997) stress is defined as "constellation of events, consisting of a stimulus (stressor) that precipitates a reaction in the brain (stress

perception), which activates physiological fight-or-flight systems in the body (stress response).”

Stress is defined as “a bodily reaction to a change which needs response, regulation, and physical, psychological, and emotional adaptation. Stress could drive from any situation, condition, thought, or state; just need to cause frustration, anger, nervousness, and or anxiety” (Silverman et al., 2010).

According to Shalev et al. (2000) Stress is defined as “a normal psychophysiological response to events which result in the sense of threat, sadness, dysphoria, and imbalance in people.”

According to Mosley et al. (1994) a study was conducted on stress, coping and well-being among third year medical students. The total sample was 69 third year medical students. The result showed mild depression, high distress and stress among medical students. Furthermore, they found that engagement strategy coping has fewer depression symptoms and disengagement has higher depression symptoms in students. The researcher suggest for coping intervention for negative consequences of stress among medical college.

A study was conducted to understand exam stress and anxiety among arts, science and commerce college students. The impact of stress is negatively lead to anxiety before and during academic examination. It also found positive relationship between exam stress and anxiety among college students. Furthermost, the result indicated that arts students have higher stress and anxiety as compare to science and commerce during examinations in college students (Kumari & Jain, 2014).

Coping Strategies

According to Yu et al. (2020) coping strategies are defined as “the specific efforts, both behavioural and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events.”

According to the American Psychological Association (2018) coping strategies is defined as “ an action, a series of actions, or a thought process used in meeting a stressful or unpleasant situation, or in modifying one’s reaction to the situation.”

Coping is defined as “the thoughts and behaviours mobilized to manage internal and external stressful situations” (Algorani & Gupta, 2022).

A research was conducted on coping strategies and quality of life among emergency service employees in Goa. The study consisted of 90 samples from different departments (police, fire-fighters and ambulance). The result found that engagement and disengagement with coping strategies are higher than quality of life. Additionally, these are associated with a

significant difference in coping strategies and a partial significant in quality of life along with different department employees. The researcher suggested having necessary interventions for personal and professional employees (Matonkar, 2019).

According to Cook and Heppner (1997) was conducted a study on psychometric coping inventories. The study used three coping inventories: the coping inventory for stressful situations, the COPE & coping strategies inventory. The researcher used confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis to study the coping mechanism. The result indicates specific factor structure for each coping measure and obtained limited data source. It identified three general coping factor instruments: problem engagement, avoidance & social/emotional support. It is suggested to have more complex conceptualized coping mechanism in individual stress reduction.

The study was investigated on stress and coping strategies among college students. The total sample was 550 students. The result indicated stressors on family expectations, competitive pressure, teacher expectations and workload among college students. It also found that academic stress create high impact on social and financial stress. However, the study reported negative and positive coping strategy for college students (Jain & Verrma, 2016).

1.1 Purpose

The purpose is to study the relationship between Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Coping Strategy Among College Students.

1.2 Hypothesis

There will be a significant positive relationship between depression, anxiety and stress.

There will be a significant relationship between coping strategies within primary scale.

2. Method

2.1 Sample

A sample of 35 graduate and post graduate college students were collected between the aged groups of 17-30 year, India.

2.2 Measures

Depression, Anxiety And Stress (DASS-21): The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale were used to measure three negative emotional states among college students for the study. The scale was developed by (Lovebird & Lovebird, 1995). The scale consisted of 21

items with three dimensions: depression, anxiety and stress, under each subscale comprises of seven items with four responses. The scale had four-point likert scale from 0 to 3, for Never (0), Sometimes (1), Often (2), Almost Always (3).

Coping Strategies Inventory: The Coping Strategies Inventory was used to measure coping thoughts and behaviours in stressful situations among college students for the study. The scale was developed by Tobin (1984, 2001). The scale consisted of 32 items. It included eight primary scales with factors are (problem solving, cognitive restructuring, express emotions, social contact, problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self-criticism and social withdrawal), four secondary scales with factors are (problem focused engagement, emotion focused engagement, problem focused disengagement and emotion focused disengagement) and two tertiary scales with factors are (engagement and disengagement). The scale had five-point scale ranging from, Not at all (1), A little (2), Somewhat (3), Much (4), Very Much (5).

2.3 Procedures

The participants were informed about the purpose of research study. The questionnaires were filled out through Google Forms and circulated among college going graduate and post graduate students. Standardised psychological tests were administered for the participants. All the participants were assured about the privacy and confidently for honest responses. Each participant was thanked and valued for their cooperation and coordination for the help.

3. Analysis of data

Results

Table 1: *N, Mean and Standard Deviation*

	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Total DASS	Problem Solving	Cognitive Restructuring	Express Emotions	Social Contact	Problem Avoidance	Wishful Thinking	Self-Criticism	Social Withdrawal
N	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
Mean	6.77	5.83	6.54	38.3	11.8	12.0	11.5	10.9	10.7	11.9	11.6	11.2
SD	4.73	2.90	3.09	18.9	3.65	3.57	3.06	4.07	3.50	3.75	4.41	4.13

Table 2: *Correlation between Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Problem Solving, Cognitive Restructuring, Express Emotions, Social contact, Problem Avoidance, Wishful Thinking, Self Criticism and Social Withdrawal.*

	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Total DASS	Problem Solving	Cognitive Restructuring	Express Emotions	Social Contact	Problem Avoidance	Wishful Thinking	Self-Criticism	Social Withdrawal
Depression	—											
Anxiety	0.554***	—										
Stress	0.735***	0.671***	—									
Total DASS	0.912***	0.804***	0.902***	—								
Problem Solving	-0.261	-0.306	-0.372*	-0.347*	—							
Cognitive Restructuring	-0.258	-0.113	-0.241	-0.243	0.804***	—						
Express Emotions	0.009	-0.293	-0.263	-0.171	0.586***	0.357*	—					
Social Contact	-0.237	-0.089	-0.153	-0.196	0.520**	0.528**	0.234	—				
Problem Avoidance	-0.066	0.018	-0.233	-0.104	0.481**	0.511**	0.427*	0.273	—			
Wishful Thinking	0.126	0.052	-0.121	0.040	0.545***	0.574***	0.551***	0.249	0.744***	—		
Self-Criticism	0.108	0.089	-0.046	0.067	0.564***	0.659***	0.408*	0.336*	0.690***	0.843***	—	
Social Withdrawal	0.121	0.128	-0.013	0.096	0.486**	0.503**	0.579***	0.248	0.647***	0.697***	0.675***	—

4. Discussion of Results

The result found out that there is a significant positive correlation between depression and anxiety ($r=0.55$, $p<.001$); significant positive correlation between depression and stress ($r=0.73$, $p<.001$); significant positive correlation between anxiety and stress ($r=0.67$, $p<.001$). In addition, the result found out that there is a significant positive correlation between total DASS score with subscales, including depression ($r=0.91$, $p<.001$), anxiety ($r=0.80$, $p<.001$) and stress ($r=0.90$, $p<.001$). However, the result also found out that there is a significant negative correlation between stress and problem solving ($r=-0.37$, $p<.05$); significant negative correlation between total DASS score and problem solving ($r=-0.34$, $p<.05$). Further, the results showed that there is a significant positive correlation between problem solving with cognitive restructuring ($r=0.80$, $p<.001$), express emotions ($r=0.58$, $p<.001$), social contact ($r=0.52$, $p<.01$), problem avoidance ($r=0.48$, $p<.01$), wishful thinking ($r=0.54$, $p<.001$), self-criticism ($r=0.56$, $p<.001$) and social withdrawal ($r=0.48$, $p<.01$); significant positive correlation between cognitive restructuring with express emotions ($r=0.35$, $p<.05$), social contact ($r=0.52$, $p<.01$), problem avoidance ($r=0.51$, $p<.01$), wishful thinking ($r=0.57$, $p<.001$), self-criticism ($r=0.65$, $p<.001$) and social withdrawal ($r=0.50$, $p<.01$); significant positive correlation between express emotions with problem avoidance ($r=0.42$, $p<.05$), wishful thinking ($r=0.55$, $p<.001$), self-criticism ($r=0.40$, $p<.05$) and social withdrawal ($r=0.57$, $p<.001$); significant positive correlation between social contact and self-criticism

($r=0.33$, $p<.05$); significant positive correlation between problem avoidance with wishful thinking ($r=0.74$, $p<.001$), self-criticism ($r=0.69$, $p<.001$) and social withdrawal ($r=0.64$, $p<.001$), significant positive correlation between wishful thinking with self-criticism ($r=0.84$, $p<.001$) and social withdrawal ($r=0.69$, $p<.001$) and significant positive correlation between self-criticism and social withdrawal ($r=0.67$, $p<.001$). The study reveals that there is a strong intercorrelation between psychological distress (depression, anxiety and stress) and coping strategy (primary scale). It is a mixer of adaptive and maladaptive behaviour in the sample studied can cause high external and internal pressure further and need to be use effective managing method to reduce problematic situations

According to Leitenberg et.al. (2004) a study used to determine adverse and abusive experiences in childhood by undergraduate women. A sample of 828 women was taken, it found that disengagement and engagement coping strategies used to compare different types of adverse and abusive childhood experience, increased in disengagement method of coping in childhood abuse and corresponding decrease in engagement method for coping strategy. It demonstrated high risk of cumulative adverse and abuse childhood coping strategy for different stress.

Haruna et al. (2025) stated that first year undergraduate students are prevalence group for mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and stress. The study was conducted on 688 sample for college students. DASS and academic stress questionnaire were used for the research purpose. The key findings are majority of the student feels depression (49%), anxiety (75%) and stress (73.2%), females reported high level of DASS. There is a significant positive correlation between academic stress and DASS. It is recommended on urgent needs of mental health intervention for first year undergraduate students and impact of individual had influenced at a range of many factors. In addition, Multani et al., (2024) in their study 30 college student found that there is a significant positive correlation between psychological distress and academic stress.

5. Conclusion

The present study focused on the correlation between depression, anxiety, stress, problem solving, cognitive restructuring, express emotions, social contact, problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self-criticism and social withdrawal among college students, between the age group of 17 to 30 years. The data were collected through Google Forms by the help of college going students. They voluntary participated in the study and confidentiality was maintained. The questionnaire was used are depression, anxiety and stress

scale -21, it consists of 21 items and coping strategies Inventory scale is used, it consists of 32 items. In this study statistical correlation method was used to determine the relation between the variables. The study findings showed that depression and anxiety were significantly positively correlated, depression and stress were significantly positively correlated, anxiety and stress were significantly positively correlated, Total DASS score are strongly correlated with its subscale, problem solving with cognitive restructuring, express emotions, social contact, problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self-criticism and social withdrawal were significantly positively correlated, cognitive restructuring with express emotions, social contact, problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self-criticism and social withdrawal were significantly positively correlated, express emotions with problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self-criticism and social withdrawal were significantly positively correlated, social contact and self-criticism were significantly positively correlated, problem avoidance with wishful thinking, self-criticism and social withdrawal were significantly positively correlated, wishful thinking with self-criticism and social withdrawal were significantly positively correlated, self-criticism and social withdrawal were significantly positively correlated, stress and problem solving were significantly negatively correlated, total DASS score and problem solving were significantly negatively correlated. The study suggested that student should take early intervention for improving their mental health that can reduce distress, self-criticism and social withdrawal and need to conduct workshops for coping skill and emotional regulation faced by college going students for performing daily routine. Usage of problem-solving and cognitive skills reduces stress and depression in college students. The study was limited by sample size and it did not specify gender whether the participants were hosteller or day scholars participants.

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