

# LIFE SATISFACTION, STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL SETTING

Divya Puri<sup>1</sup>, Dhanvir kour<sup>2</sup>, Sarita Sood<sup>3</sup>

<sup>123</sup>P.G. Department of Psychology, University of Jammu (India)

## ABSTRACT

*The present study was carried out to assess the relationship between life satisfaction, stress and coping strategies among students in higher education. Purposive sampling was employed and data were collected from 107 students enrolled in higher education in University of Jammu. Demographic information was obtained from the participants. Pearson's Product Moment Method was applied for statistical analyses of the data. Significant and negative correlation came out between life satisfaction and stress, the correlation between life satisfaction and dimensions of coping strategy came out to be non significant. There was significant and positive correlation between stress, cognitive avoidance, acceptance resignation and emotional discharge. From the results it can be concluded that with decrease in stress level there will be increase in life satisfaction of the students. There is more usage of avoidance oriented coping strategies by students to deal with the stress. However, use of coping strategies was not related to their satisfaction with life. Findings can be taken into consideration for developing certain interventions/solutions focusing specifically on the use of coping strategies that helps not only in reducing stress but also in promoting life satisfaction among the students in higher education.*

**Keywords:** Coping strategies, Higher education, Life satisfaction, Stress, Students

## I. INTRODUCTION

Learning environment can either enhance well-being and satisfaction or can lead to dysfunctional emotions and withdrawal from studies [1]. Students studying in higher educational institutions have been found to experience a great amount of stress in their lives [2] that can have positive or negative consequences for them depending on how well it is managed [3]. Selye [4] held that stress can be beneficial in promoting well-being (Eustress) or can be detrimental leading to negative effect (Distress). However, stress becomes dangerous when it interferes with ability to live a normal life over an extended period of time causing poor concentration, irritability and negative impact over health [5].

In university life, students are required to adjust to more demanding and hectic academic routines which can be highly stressful [6]. They have to take hard decision of choosing their vocation or courses [7, 8], manage relationships with faculties and other students [9, 10], face problems relating to submissions and completion of their assignments, projects, thesis etc. [11], deal with department culture, financial issues [12], experience disengagement including inefficacy, cynicism, and sometimes exhaustion [13]. Students also come across

problems in different settings such as completing tasks within a specific period of time and speaking in front of an audience [14, 15]. A study [16] reported challenges faced by students which included general working processes, domain-specific expertise, supervision, the scholarly community and resources. Other stressors that have been faced include low finances, examinations, fear of failing, being anxious, not able to sleep [17, 18]. All these factors can have negative consequences on the students if they are not managed well [3].

Life satisfaction [19] is defined as "an individual's personal judgement of wellbeing and quality of life based on his or her own chosen criteria". According to Chang [20] lesser the stress experienced by the students, higher is their level of life satisfaction. Students' perceived positive stress has been found to be positively related to their life satisfaction whereas perceived negative stress correlated negatively with their satisfaction of life [21]. Students' satisfaction level is found to have a direct impact on performance [22]. Gilman and Huebner [23] found relationship between low life satisfaction and higher level of intrapersonal and interpersonal distress and less positive academic experiences. Serin, Serin & Özbas [24] found that the student's level of life satisfaction could be significantly predicted by their anxiety, depression, satisfaction with their department and socio-economic level. Moreover, anxiety, depression and socio-economic level were found to be the most important predictors of life satisfaction of students.

Individuals have been found to use different coping strategies to deal with stress like avoiding the stressful situation completely or reacting excessively towards the stressful situation such as eating a lot, being angry or hurt [25]. According to the transactional model of coping [26], an individual responds to any stressor by first evaluating the extent to which the stressor can cause harm to him/her and secondly, by assessing whether he/she possesses the resources and abilities to deal with the stressor. This model suggests two main types of coping strategies that is, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Previous studies revealed students who use problem solving and emotion-focused coping strategies (acceptance and resignation) experience higher level of well being [27, 28, 29]. A study by Pritchard, Wilson, and Yamnitz [30] on college students showed that use of avoidance as an emotion focused coping strategy was linked with negative outcomes such as poorer health and increased negative affect. Use of maladaptive coping strategies among students has been found to be related with higher levels of depression, anxiety and greater dissatisfaction with life, whereas use of adaptive coping was not related to any one of them [31]. Tamini and Ansari [32] found significant relationship between life satisfaction, task focused and avoidance focused style and non significant relationship between emotion focused style and life satisfaction. Avoidance coping has been found to be accounted for 9.4 percent variance in life satisfaction among students.

Previous studies have been conducted on students belonging to specific vocational areas like nursing students, medical students and social work students [33, 34, 35, 36] however, not much work has been carried out on students enrolled in higher educational institutes with regard to their life satisfaction, stress and coping strategy, therefore the present study was undertaken with this perspective.

## **II. HYPOTHESES**

H1. There will be significant relationship between life satisfaction and stress among students enrolled in higher education.

H2. There will be significant relationship between life satisfaction and dimensions of coping strategies among students enrolled in higher education.

H3. There will be significant relationship between stress and dimensions of coping strategies among students enrolled in higher education.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Sample**

Data were collected using purposive sampling technique from 107 students pursuing higher education from University of Jammu.

### **3.2 Tools**

3.2.1. Satisfaction with life scale [37]: Life satisfaction scale was used to measure respondent's global life satisfaction. The scale consists of 5 items on a 7 point rating scale ranging from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Reliability (Cronbach alpha) of scale is .87. Stability coefficients over a period of several weeks for the satisfaction with life Scale found to be .80 [38].

3.2.2 Perceived stress scale [39]: Perceived stress was used to measure respondent perception of stress over last month. The scale consists of 10 items on 5 point likert type scale ranging from 4(very often) to (0) never. The scale measures the degree to which events in one's life are appraised as stressful, uncontrollable, unpredictable and overloaded. The scale has internal reliability of .78 (alpha coefficient) and has found to be valid with scales of life satisfaction, job responsibility life events [40].

3.2.3. Coping Responses Inventory-Adult [41]: Respondent's coping strategies were measured using 48 items self report coping response inventory for adults. Responses are to be indicated on a 4 point likert type scale ranging from 'not at all' to 'fairly often'. There are total eight scales including approach coping responses i.e. (1) logical analysis, (2) positive reappraisal, (3) seeking guidance and support (4) problem-solving, while avoidance coping responses include (1) cognitive avoidance, (2) acceptance or resignation, (3) seeking alternative rewards and (4) emotional discharge. Reliability (alpha co-efficient) of the scale is 0.80 on Indian students [42].

### **3.3. Procedure**

The study was carried out on students enrolled in higher education in University of Jammu. Purposive sampling was employed and data were collected from students engaged in research activities from 36 departments of University of Jammu. At the outset, the purpose of carrying out the research was stated and then questionnaires were administered to the students. Specific verbal instructions were given for greater clarity. Confidentiality was assured. Care was taken to ensure that only the students who were willing to participate filled in the questionnaire on their own. The data were collected within period of one month. Out of 140 questionnaires, 107

were filled in fully and were taken into consideration. Pearson product moment method was used for carrying out the statistical analysis of data.

### **3.4. Statistical Tools/Techniques**

Depending upon the sampling procedure sample, hypotheses, and need of the study, the data was subjected to Pearson's Product Moment Method, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (20<sup>th</sup> version) was used for the analysis of data.

## **IV. RESULTS**

**4.1. TABLE. Demographics characteristics of the sample**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender	Male	33	30.8
	Female	74	69.2
Age	23-35 yrs	107	27.13
Marital status	Married	25	23.4
	Unmarried	82	76.6
Course pursuing	M.Phil.	17	15.9
	PhD.	90	84.1

TABLE 4.1. shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. On analyzing the demographics, it was found that there were, 33 male (30.8%) and 74 females (69.2%). Participant age ranged from 23 (minimum) to 35 (maximum). Mean age of the participants was 27.13 years. There were 25 married (23.4%) and 82 unmarried (76.6%) students. Seventeen students were pursuing M.Phil (15.9%) and 90 students were pursuing Ph.D (84.1%).

H1. There will be significant relationship between life satisfaction and stress among students of higher education.

TABLE 4.2. shows the relationship between life satisfaction and stress came out to be negative but significant ( $r = -.432$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). The strength of relationship came out to be moderate, which shows that the relationship between life satisfaction and stress is neither too high nor too low. The result shows that with increase in stress there will be decrease in life satisfaction among students in higher education. Hence, the hypothesis that there will be a significant relationship between life satisfaction and stress among students enrolled in higher education

is accepted. The results of the study have been found to be consistent with another study [43]. The researcher explored the relationship between stress and life satisfaction of college students and found significant and inverse relationship between stress and life satisfaction among students.

H2. There will be significant relationship between life satisfaction and dimensions of coping strategies among students enrolled in higher education.

There is non-significant relationship between life satisfaction and dimensions of coping strategies (logical analysis  $r= 0.67$ , positive reappraisal  $r= .059$ , Seeking guidance  $r=.134$ , Problem solving  $r=.033$ , Cognitive avoidance  $r=-.030$ , Acceptance resignation  $r=.010$ , Seeking rewards  $r=-.029$ , Emotional discharge  $r=-.098$ ),  $P>0.05$ . Hence, the hypothesis that there will be significant relationship between life satisfaction and dimensions of coping strategies among students enrolled in higher education is not accepted. The results are inconsistent with the previous studies [44, 45].

#### 4.2 TABLE

**Correlation between Stress, Life satisfaction and Coping strategies**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Stress	1									
2.Life satisfaction	-.432**	1								
3..Logical analysis	.069	.067	1							
4..Positive reappraisal	.048	.059	.430**	1						
5..Seeking guidance	-.078	.134	.053	.264**	1					
6.Problem solving	.006	.033	.471**	.553**	.326**	1				
7.Cognitive avoidance	.238*	-.030	.283**	.207*	.172	.282**	1			
8.Acceptance resignation	.199*	.010	.269**	.172	.159	.119	.493**	1		
9.Seekig rewards	.067	-.029	.402**	.393**	.104	.384**	.406**	.256**	1	
10.Emotional discharge	.283**	-.098	.477**	.171	.142	.318**	.542**	.442**	.458**	1

\*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

H3. There will be significant relationship between stress and dimensions of coping strategies among students enrolled in higher education.

There was a significant and positive relationship between stress and dimensions of coping strategies, that is, cognitive avoidance ( $r=.238$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), acceptance resignation ( $r=.199$ ,  $P<0.05$ ), emotional discharge ( $r=.283$ ,  $P<0.01$ ). These findings suggest that with increase in the level of stress there is more usage of avoidance coping strategies. Hence, the hypothesis there will be significant relationship between stress and dimensions of coping strategies among students enrolled in higher education is partially accepted. A study [46] on 363 university students of Iran also showed a positive relationship of coping avoidance with psychological stress and anxiety. Blalock and Joiner [47] in their study on 179 men and women found out that there was a link between cognitive avoidance coping and increase in depressive and anxious symptoms in women than in men under conditions of stress. A significant and positive correlation was found between psychological distress, emotional discharge,

acceptance resignation and cognitive avoidance in a study [48] on 98 undergraduate students of University of Barcelona.

## **V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The results show that negative relationship exists between life satisfaction and stress, positive relationship exists between stress and some of the dimensions of coping strategies (cognitive avoidance, acceptance resignation and emotional discharge), and no relationship exists between life satisfactions and all dimensions of coping strategies among students enrolled in higher education in University of Jammu. Results suggest that students experience moderate level of stress and life satisfaction. Reason for such relationship can be because of congenial work environment, satisfaction with supervision, good social support, balance between research work and private life, moderate workload etc. The results are consistent with the previous study [8]. Another study [49] revealed female research scholars face higher level of stress and found negative correlation between conflict, heavy workload, lack of autonomy with all satisfaction dimensions. Another study revealed negative but significant correlation between life satisfaction and stress in students, suggesting that overall life satisfaction in students is adversely influenced by stress [50].

Previous studies supported the positive relationship between stress and avoidance coping styles among students [47, 46]. The relationship could be justified on the basis that avoidant-focused coping might provide short term relief to the students under higher level of stress [51]. Lyrakos [52] found higher levels of stress were positively associated with the negative ways of coping. The usage of avoidance coping strategy depends on how well students perceive that they can control and manage the stressors experienced by them. Further students experiencing of higher level of stress correlated positively with acceptance resignation and emotional discharge. It might be that when encountered by any problem that increases their stress level, students make cognitive attempts to accept the problem and resign oneself from it without taking any steps with the belief that nothing can be done about the problem. They try to reduce the build up tension by expressing and venting out their negative emotional state. Similar result has been reported [48]. They examined the relationship between coping strategies and psychological wellbeing on undergraduates in teacher education system and found that approach-oriented coping is positively associated with psychological well-being whereas avoidant focused coping may be a strong predictor of psychological distress. Lastly, there was non-significant relationship between life satisfaction and dimensions of coping strategies. Hardly any study has been found the support this finding of the present study. Majority of the studies revealed positive and significant correlation between life satisfaction and coping among students [53, 54]. The results could be explained on the basis that although under higher level of stress there is usage of more avoidant focused coping strategy that might helps in reducing psychological distress for short period of time. Decrease in the stress further promotes the satisfaction in life; however coping strategy does not directly leads to satisfaction in life. This finding of the study can be taken up for further research where the role of coping strategies as a mediator or moderator between stress and life satisfaction could be assessed.

On the whole it can be concluded that the findings of the study are important as it draws our attention toward developing certain interventions/solutions for promoting coping strategies that might play a crucial role in combating stressful situations that will lead to better concentration in carrying out their research activities and increasing their satisfaction with life. Higher educational administrators should provide campus environment to the students that will increase their satisfaction and retention [55]. Research oriented programmes should be planned in a way that provide balance between social and academic lives of students and better integration of students in their departments [56]. Universities should have psychological counselling and guidance expert in their respective departments who are sensitive to the needs and problems of students and who can guide them in stressful situations. Low sample size, possibility of biasness, and data collection from only one institution could be regarded as some of the limitations of the study. In future, research can be carried out on larger sample size and rigorous statistical technique can be applied. More importantly role of other essential factors such as social support, positive personality traits, and decision making styles can be assessed.

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