



The Effect of Gender & Educational Level on Optimism, Self-Efficacy and Coping Responses of College and University Students

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to investigate the effect of gender and educational level on optimism, self-efficacy and coping responses of colleges and University students. A sample of 200 students (100 undergraduate male & female, 100 postgraduate male & female) was drawn through convenient sampling. Three instruments were used for data collection including Life Orientation Test- Revised (LOT-R) by Scheier, Carver & Brooks (1994), General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE) by Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995), COPE Inventory by Carver (1989). Data analyses were conducted using ANOVA and Pearson Correlation Coefficient. Result indicated that gender has an effect on optimism, self-efficacy, and focus on and venting of emotion coping response, and educational levels have an effect on optimism, mental disengagement, and active coping response. It also found that there is a significant gender by educational level interaction effect on denial, humour, restraint, substance abuse coping responses. And there is a positive correlation between optimism, self-efficacy, and coping responses.

Keywords: Optimism, Self-efficacy, Coping responses, Gender, Educational level

1. Introduction

Positive psychology is a science of positive aspects of human life, such as well-being, happiness, and flourishing. It can be summarised in the words of Martin Seligman, as 'the scientific study of optimal human functioning aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive'. This particular approach focuses on the potentials of human being; it is not targeted at fixing problems, instead it's focused on researching things that make life worth living. Its aspiration is to bring solid empirical research into areas such as flow, wisdom, personal strengths, well-being, creativity, psychological health. In this current scenario, College and University students face lots

of issues regarding their career, competition in academics, future prospects, relationship issues, identity crisis and many more that lead stress and anxiety among them. Optimism and self-efficacy are positive psychological traits which may help individuals to cope with stressful and adverse situations. Adaptive coping mechanism also plays an essential role in the development, success and happiness of the youths.

Optimism is defined as a tendency to expect favourable outcomes than unfavourable outcomes. Research has demonstrated that there are individual differences in global optimism –that is, some individuals are more inclined than others to expect good things across a variety of situations in life. Several studies have shown that optimistic temperament is a strong predictor of successful adaptation to stressful situation and is also related to positive adjustment (Ben-Zur et al. 2000; Herman-Stahl and Peterson, 1996).

Self-Efficacy (SE) is the belief or perception of a person that he or she is capable to perform a specific task. It is a dynamic element that influences other aspects such as performances, goals and is influenced by them. Self-efficacy plays a significant role in connecting motivation, goals and performance concepts. SE is a very significant persuasive belief about people's capabilities that they can control their own level of functioning and performance that affect their lives, people's behaviour are regulated by gradual acquisition of complex cognitive, social and physical skills by the experience which eventually manifest SE. SE is not concerned with individuals' skills, but with their perceptions of what they can do with their skills. SE has three main aspects that should be understood. Firstly, SE is one's perceived capability to perform a specific task; secondly, SE is a dynamic element because it changes over time. Finally, mobilization of efficacy beliefs affects performance. Thus, people with same skill may show different performance levels. Since it is a task specific concept, it is important to understand and measure SE for a

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specific task (Gist, 1992; Gist, 1987; Bandura, 1991; Mathieu, 1993).

Coping is often defined as efforts to prevent or diminish threat, harm and loss, or to reduce associated distress. Coping is a very broad concept with a long and complex history. Several distinctions have been made within the broad domain.

Psychological stress among college students has been getting a lot of attention recently, College students go through many stresses in their life like leaving family, feeling intense pressure to obtain high grades in connection with career aspiration, trying to establish romantic/social life, dealing with costs (often very high) of colleges etc (Reifan, 2010; The American Institute of Stress). Sometimes they are unable to deal with these stresses and may indulge in maladaptive behaviour. It is important to assess their level of self-efficacy to tackle difficulties in an efficient manner, how they use their coping responses to deal with these various stress and how much they are optimistic about their future in spite of various difficulties they face.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Monteiro, et al (2014) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between optimism, stress, and coping with stress. Optimism was found to be positively related to positive reinforcement and growth, use of instrumental social support, active coping, acceptance, suppression of competing activities, and planning, and negatively related to mental disengagement, behavioural disengagement, focus on and venting of emotions, denial, and religious coping.

A study was conducted by Sullivan (2017) to determine the relationship between Self-efficacy, Optimism and A study tested a career meditational model based on social cognitive theory and cognitive –motivational – relational theory. A different pathway was identified for females, with optimism directly influenced career goals, which subsequently predicted career expectations, which then directly influenced career planning and career exploration by bypassing career goals.

Prati et al (2008) conducted a study to examine the coping patterns followed by the junior college students. Further, an extensive effort was done to study the gender differences in coping patterns used by the students. The study findings revealed that majority of the students adopted emotion- and problem-focused coping strategies. Most of the

female students adopted emotion-focused coping strategies, whereas the male students mostly used problem-focused coping strategies

Lars Fallan & Leiv Opstad (2016) conducted a study to examine the self-efficacy levels and self-efficacy strength for male and female students in a course in Principle of Economics. The study revealed that female students have significantly lower self-efficacy level and self-efficacy strength than their male peers. However, this general conclusion does not hold for all gender-personality types.

Objective of the study: On the basis of literature review following objectives were formulated:

- A. To assess whether there is any difference in terms of (1) Optimism (2) Self-efficacy and (3) Coping responses between Male and female students irrespective of their educational level. College and university students irrespective of their gender.
- B. To assess if there any gender by educational interaction effect among male & female college & university students in case of optimism, self-efficacy and coping responses.
- C. To assess the relationship between optimism, self-efficacy and coping responses.

Hypotheses:

- i. There will be no significant difference between male and female students irrespective of their educational level in terms of optimism, self efficacy and coping responses.
- ii. There will be no significant difference between college & university students irrespective of their gender in terms of optimism, self efficacy and coping responses.
- iii. There will be no gender by educational level interaction effect among male and female college & university students in terms of optimism, self efficacy and coping responses.
- iv. There will be no relationship between optimism, self-efficacy & coping responses.

METHODS AND MEASURES

Characteristic of sample: In the present study, a sample of 200 students (100 male & 100 female) whose age range were 18-25 yrs were drawn through convenient sampling. The educational qualification ranging from under graduate (100 students of B.Sc.) to post-graduate (100 students of M.Sc.), students coming from nuclear family were

only selected whose family income ranging from 20 thousands to 90 thousand.

On the other hand, students whose age was below 18 or above 25 yrs and whose educational qualification were B.Tech, M.Tech, and PhD were excluded from the study.

Tool Used:-

Life Orientation Test- Revised (Lot-R)

Description: This test was developed by Scheier, M.F., Carver, C.S., & Bridges, M.W.(1994) Dispositional optimism is defined as a generalized expectation that good things will happen (Scheier & Carver, 1985). The most current version revised by Scheier, Carver, and Bridges(1994) consist of a total of 10, self-descriptive items (sentences) where participants are instructed to indicate on a form (self-reported)the extent of their agreement on a four point likert scale (0=strongly disagree, 1= disagree, 2=neutral, 3=agree, 4= strongly agree). Of the 10 items 3 items (1, 4, 10) measure optimism, 3 items (3, 7, 9) measure pessimism and 4 items (2, 5, 6, 8) serve as fillers meant to disguise the purpose of the test and are not calculated as part of final score. Scores range from 0-24 with higher scores implying greater optimism (19-24 high optimism, 14-18 moderate optimism, 0-13 low optimism (Glasemer. et. al. 2012). Test-retest reliability intervals assessed by Scheier, Carver, & Bridges (1994) were at 4 month (N=96), 12 months (N=96) 24 months (N=52), and 28 months(N=21). Test-retest correlations were .68, .60, .56, .79 respectively, suggesting fair stability over time.

General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE):

Description: This test was developed by Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M (1995). Self-efficacy is commonly understood as being domain-specific. That is, one can have more or less firm self-beliefs in different domains or particular situations sense of self-efficacy that refers to global confidence in one's coping ability across a wide range of demanding or novel situations (Sherer & Maddux, 1982; Skinner et. al.,1988; Schwarzer & Jerusalem,1999). This test consists of a total of 10, self-descriptive items(sentences) where participants are instructed to indicate on a form (self-reported) the extent of their agreement on a four point scale(1= Not true at all, 2=Hardly true, 3= Moderately true, 4= Exactly true). The total score is calculated by finding the sum of the all items. For the GSE, the total score ranges between

10 and 40, with a higher score indicating more self-efficacy.

A correlation of at least .80 is suggested for at least one type of reliability as evidence; however, standards range from .5 to .9 depending on the intended use and context for the instrument. Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) is found out to be .76 to .90, with the majority in the high .80s.

Cope Inventory (CI)

Description: The COPE Inventory developed by Carver (1989) is a multidimensional coping inventory to assess the different ways in which people respond to stress. Five scales (of four items each) measure conceptually distinct aspects of problem-focused coping (active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping ,seeking of instrumental social support);five scales measure aspects of what might be viewed as emotion-focused coping (seeking of emotional social support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, denial, turning to religion);and three scales measuring coping responses that arguably are less useful (focus on and venting of emotions, behavioural disengagement, mental disengagement).

This inventory consists of a total of 60, self-descriptive items (sentences) where participants are instructed to indicate on a form (self-reported) the extent of their agreement on a four point rating scale (1= I usually don't do this at all, 2= I usually do this a little bit, 3= I usually do this a medium amount, 4=I usually do this a lot). The total 60 items are divided into 15 categories, each category contain 4 items. The total score for each category has been computed by adding the four score. Cronbach's alpha for the 15 scales of COPE ranged from .37 to .93. With the exception of mental disengagement, the remainder of the alphas was all above .59, with the majority above .70 and the average alpha was .79.

Procedure: Descriptive survey method of research was employed for the present study. The tools employed in the study were administered on 100 male and 100 female college and university students. The data were collected individually from males and females who were studied B.Sc and M.Sc in Calcutta University, they were lived in urban area. The age range was 18-24 years. The response received was analysed through statistical applications (ANOVA, Pearson Correlation Coefficient).

Statistical Analyses: The data collected through quantitative measures were put to statistical analysis in order to answer the research question in hand. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0 for windows computer software was used for statistical treatment. Charts and tables were used to get a visual representation of the results obtained. All 200 quantitative data were treated using the following statistic:

- i. Descriptive statistic (Mean and Standard Deviation) for all the variable and for all the groups: Male college students(50), Female college Students(50), Male University students(50), Female University students(50)
- ii. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used find out the significant differences between the groups in terms of all the aforesaid independent and dependent variables were obtained.
- iii. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to find out the relationship among the dependent variables.

Ethical Concern: Informed consent was obtained from every participant before data collection. They were all informed regarding the procedure of the research. Confidentiality of the data of the participants was maintained. No human rights were violated.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) of the variables (Optimism, Self-efficacy and coping responses) among male, female, college and university student.

Variables	Gender			
	Male		Female	
	(M)	(SD)	(M)	(SD)
Optimism	14.22	3.69	12.23	4.02
Self-efficacy	30.46	4.49	28.85	5.05
Mental disengagement	11.00	2.49	11.47	2.59
Focus on venting of emotion	9.98	3.14	11.15	3.24
Active coping	11.80	2.47	11.46	2.46
Denial	8.13	2.68	7.95	3.14
Humour	8.80	3.36	8.37	3.51
Restraint	11.20	2.40	11.02	2.63

Variables	Educational Qualification			
	College		University	
	(M)	(SD)	(M)	(SD)
Substance use	5.56	2.59	5.01	2.27
Optimism	12.60	4.42	13.85	3.38
Self-efficacy	29.40	4.97	29.91	4.71
Mental disengagement	11.65	2.35	10.82	2.67
Focus on venting of emotion	10.42	3.53	10.71	2.92
Active coping	11.28	2.49	11.98	2.41
Denial	8.16	2.89	7.92	2.94
Humour	8.94	3.47	8.23	3.38
Restraint	11.00	2.47	11.22	2.56
Substance use	5.01	2.38	5.56	2.49

Table 2: Showing 2x 2 Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) [main effect and interaction effect] of Gender and Educational Level on Dependent Variables (DVs) [which are significant only]

Table 2.1: DV- Optimism

Variables	SS	DF	MS	F	LoS
Gender	198.005	1	198.005	13.547**	.000
Ed. Level	78.125	1	78.125	5.345**	.000
Gender *Ed. Level	14.045	1	14.045	.961	.328

SS- sum of squares, MS- mean square, LoS – Level of significance

** F significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed),

* F significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed).

Table 2.2: DV- Self-efficacy

Variables	SS	DF	MS	F	LoS
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Gender	129.60	1	129.60	5.62*	.019
Ed. Level	13.005	1	13.005	.565	.453
Gender *Ed. Level	6.126	1	6.125	.266	.607

Table 2.3: DV- Mental Disengagement

Variables	SS	DF	MS	F	LoS
Gender	11.04	1	11.04	1.73	.190
Ed. Level	34.44	1	34.44	5.40*	.021
Gender *Ed. Level	.405	1	.405	.064	.801

Table 2.4: DV-Focus on and venting of emotion

Variables	SS	DF	MS	F	LoS
Gender	68.445	1	68.445	6.66*	.011
Ed. Level	4.205	1	4.205	.410	.523
Gender *Ed. Level	4.805	1	4.805	.468	.495

Table 2.5: 2* 2 Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) [main effect and interaction effect; which are significant only] of Gender and Educational Level on Active Coping

Variables	SS	DF	MS	F	LOS
Gender	5.78	1	5.78	.955	.330
Ed. Level	24.50	1	24.50	.404*	.046
Gender *Ed. Level	.020	1	.020	.003	.954

Table 2.6: 2* 2 Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) [main effect and interaction effect; which are significant only] of Gender and Educational Level on Denial

Variables	SS	DF	MS	F	LOS
Gender	1.62	1	1.62	.258	.612
Ed. Level	2.42	1	2.42	.385	.536
Gender *Ed. Level	24.50	1	24.50	3.89*	.050

Gender	1.62	1	1.62	.195	.659
Ed. Level	2.88	1	2.88	.347	.557
Gender *Ed. Level	60.50	1	60.50	7.28**	.008

Table 2.7: DV- Humour

Variables	SS	DF	MS	F	LoS
Gender	9.24	1	9.24	.804	.371
Ed. Level	25.20	1	25.20	2.19	.140
Gender *Ed. Level	61.60	1	60.60	5.35*	.022

Table 2.8: DV-Restraint

Variables	SS	DF	MS	F	LoS
Gender	1.62	1	1.62	.258	.612
Ed. Level	2.42	1	2.42	.385	.536
Gender *Ed. Level	24.50	1	24.50	3.89*	.050

Table 2.9: DV- Substance Abuse

Variables	SS	DF	MS	F	LoS
Gender	15.12	1	15.12	2.66	.104
Ed. Level	15.12	1	15.12	2.66	.104
Gender *Ed. Level	51.00	1	51.00	8.97**	.003

SS- sum of squares, MS- mean square, LoS – Level of significance

** F significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed), * F significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed).

Table: 3 Product Moment correlation coefficient(r) between the variables

(Optimism, Self-efficacy and coping responses) among overall sample

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Optimism	1								
Self-efficacy	.36 0**	1							
Mental disengagement	-.16 4*	-.01 9	1						
Focus on venting of emotion	-.10 7	-.13 3	.23 0**	1					
Active coping	.18 9**	.36 7**	.05 4	-.01 0	1				
Denial	-.09 5	-.05 3	.23 3**	.18 8**	-.15 9*	1			
Humour	-.15 4*	.05 6	.27 0**	-.01 7	-.04 8	.35 1**	1		
Restraint	-.02 5	.26 7**	.22 8**	.07 5	.28 0**	.09 2	.20 3**	1	
Substance use	-.13 3	-.14 9*	.00 4	.09 4	-.17 4*	.32 3**	.27 7**	-.06 60	1
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).									
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									

1. DISCUSSION

Result Table 1 shown the Mean and SD of all selected variables in the present study. From the result Table 2.1 it is found that gender has a significant effect on optimism, males have significantly greater optimism than female. The results also revealed that educational levels have a significant effect on optimism; the post graduates students have greater optimism, than

undergraduate students. That means when educational level increases students become more optimistic about their future. This finding is in the line of previous study where it is found that the influence of optimism was stronger in grade 7, in comparison to grades third and fifth grade in an elementary and junior high school (Akama, Munakata, 1998). Result also revealed that the interaction effect of gender and educational level came out to be not significant.

Table 2.2 showed that gender has a significant effect on self-efficacy; males have significantly greater self-efficacy than female. In a study it is found that the academic self-efficacy was significantly higher among males, whereas women were found to have higher career self-efficacy (Burger, Raelin, Reisberg, Bailing, Whitman, 2010). Kumar, Lal (2006) in a study observed that significant gender differences were found, where female scored higher than their male counterparts. Result also revealed that there is no significant effect of educational level on self-efficacy. Although studies suggests that older students have more self-efficacy (Chen, Yu, 2014; Street, B.M., 2004). The interactional effect of gender by educational level on self-efficacy is also come out to be not significant.

A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal wellbeing in many ways. People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult task as a challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided.

Result Table 2.3& 2.4 showed the effect of gender and educational level on coping response came out to be significant for some of the coping responses and not significant for the other coping response. It is revealed that gender have a significant effect on "Focus on and venting of emotion" coping response, where females have a significantly greater "Focus on and venting of emotion" coping response than males. That's mean female are more likely to let their emotion out, talk to people to find out more about the situation and they talk to someone who could do something concrete about the problem or ask people who have had similar experiences what they did when they confronts stressful situation.

It is also revealed that educational level have a significant effect on "Mental disengagement" and "Active coping" coping response. It is found that undergraduate students have greater "Mental disengagement" coping response than post graduates students whereas post graduate students have greater "Active coping" coping response than

under graduates students, which implies under graduate students are more likely to turn to work or other substitute activities to take their mind off things such as go to movies or watch TV or sleep more than usual when they confront stressful situation.

The interaction effect of gender and educational level is came out to be significant for “Denial” “Humour”, “Restraint”, “Substance use” coping response. An interaction effect is the simultaneous effect of two or more independent variables on at least one dependable variable. That implies gender and educational level have a significant effect on “Denial” coping response, result reveals that males have greater denial coping response than females, and undergraduate students have greater denial coping response than post graduate students.

Gender and educational level have a significant effect on “Humour” coping response; result reveals that male have greater humour as coping response than female whereas as undergraduate students have greater humour as coping response than post graduate students, i.e. males and undergraduate students are more likely to laugh at the situation or make jokes about it in comparison to females and post graduate students.

Gender and educational level have a significant effect on “Restraint” coping response; result reveals that male have greater restraint as coping response than female whereas as post graduate students have greater restraint as coping response than under graduate students, i.e. males and post graduates student are more likely to restrain themselves from doing anything too quickly in comparison to females and under graduate students.

Gender and educational level have a significant effect on “Substance use” coping response; result reveals that male have greater substance use as coping response than female and post graduate students have greater substance use as coping response than undergraduate students i.e. males and post graduate students are more likely to indulge in substance use when confronts in stressful situation in comparison to female and undergraduate students.

In a study it is suggested that older students are more likely to use problem-solving, cognitive restructuring and express emotional coping strategies (Monteiro, Balogun, Oratile, 2014). In another study it is found that college student reported more frequent use of problem-focused coping, whereas high school students reported

more frequent use of avoidance coping (Zeidner,1996).That means with age students tend to involve in problem-focused coping such as active coping, restraint, planning, suppression of competing activities , as they realize avoiding or engage in other activities will not going to solve this problem which they confront.

The result Table 3 revealed that optimism is positively correlated with self-efficacy, several studies suggest that optimism is positively correlates with self-efficacy (Saleem, Saba, & Adnan, 2012; Dhatt & Rishi, 2015). It is also observed that optimism is positively correlated with positive reinforcement and growth, mental disengagement, use of instrumental social support, active coping, religious coping, humour, behavioural disengagement, acceptance, suppression of competing activities and planning coping responses.

Result also indicated that self-efficacy is also positively correlated with positive reinforcement and growth, active coping, behavioural disengagement, restraint, substance use, suppression of competing activities, planning. Those with high self-efficacy use active coping strategies that make use of direct problem-solving and stress-relieving techniques (Carver et. al., 1989; Cicognani et al. 2009; Shen, 2009; Hsieh et al., 2012).

2. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Thus it can be concluded that there is a significant effect of gender on optimism, self-efficacy and focus on and venting of emotion coping response, and there is a significant effects of educational level on mental disengagement and active coping response, there is a significant gender by educational level interaction effect on denial, humour, restraint, substance abuse coping response. And there is a positive correlation between optimism, self-efficacy, and coping responses.

There are some limitations of the present study like, the sample were taken from different cultural background; therefore it may affect the test findings; there might be some possibility of fake response in self-report inventories. This fake response can be decreases the reliability of the findings; this study only measures the general self-efficacy of the students, not any specific self-efficacy of them.

It is suggested that in future if similar study would be conducted then school students may be taken as

sample as this study conducted only on college and university students; further researches can be conducted by including other variables like depression, personality, personal-wellbeing, emotional intelligence etc.

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