

Original Research Article

Adjustment and coping skills among adolescent school children

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ABSTRACT

Background: Adolescents often face adjustment difficulties that impact their emotional, social and educational development. Understanding their coping styles is essential for designing effective support systems.

Methods: The study sampled 207 high school students (143 boys, 64 girls) aged 10–19 from a Diwakar Model School of Ghaziabad. After obtaining informed consent and demographic details, participants were assessed using the Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS) and the Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (COPE) inventory. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, Levene's test and independent samples t-test.

Results: Findings indicated adjustment challenges across emotional, social and educational domains. Both boys and girls predominantly preferred problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. No significant gender differences were observed, except in the educational adjustment domain.

Conclusions: Adolescents represent a psychologically vulnerable group. Their adjustment issues and coping preferences warrant careful attention from educators, counsellors and policymakers to foster healthier developmental outcomes.

Keywords: Adjustment, Adolescents, Coping, Emotion-focused, Problem-focused

INTRODUCTION

Adjustment and coping skills among adolescent school children

Adolescence is an important developmental phase characterized by sudden physical, emotional and social development. Adolescents face a variety of challenges in the process of identity formation, peer relationships, academic stress and family demands. The capacity to adapt well and manage these stressors directly contributes to a teenager's overall well-being and subsequent mental health. With increasing worries regarding youth mental health globally, the processes of adjustment and coping have gained ever-growing importance. Additionally, gender-based differences in coping mechanisms and patterns of adjustment tend to determine how adolescents

perceive and react to stressful situations. The current research aims to examine adjustment and coping processes among school students with a focus on gender-based differences. Through an understanding of these patterns, the research hopes to inform gender-sensitive psychological interventions and mental health programs in schools. The considered variables include adjustment and coping skills among adolescents, where adjustment is an internal process between a person and the environment in which either he/she adjusts or change it (Lehner and Cube). Research suggests that adjustment is greatly affected by the family environment of an individual.¹ A study was done in various schools of Ahmedabad District of Gujarat state with the help of random sampling method. The results revealed Urban area adolescent show lower level of school-adjustment in comparison to rural area adolescent and there is significant interaction effect

between the urban and rural area adolescent in relation to their school-adjustment.² On other hand, coping mechanisms also play a crucial role in regulating the potential consequences of stress during adolescence. They involve a combination of actions and cognitive processes that help adolescents tolerate, avoid or minimize the impact of stressful events. Productive coping strategies, which reduce stress and promote long-term well-being, are preferable to maladaptive ones that provide short-term relief but may harm health over time. The development of these coping mechanisms is influenced by childhood experiences and can significantly impact an adolescent's psychological well-being and overall life. Research examined if social media are beneficial for adolescents to cope with feelings of anxiety and loneliness during the quarantine. 2165 Belgian adolescents (13-19 years old) tested how feelings of anxiety and loneliness contributed to their happiness level and whether different social media coping strategies (active, social relations and humour) mediated these relations. It was found that social media can be used as a constructive coping strategy for adolescents to deal with anxious feelings during the Covid-19 quarantine.³

METHODS

The aim of this study is to assess the adjustment and coping skills of school-going adolescents, along with focusing on identifying gender-based differences.

Hypothesis

H1

There is significant difference in boys and girls within their adjustment and coping skills.

H2

There is significant relationship in the adolescents' adjustment and coping skills.

H0

There is no significant relationship and gender differences in level of adjustment and coping skills among school students.

The study design is cross-sectional. It has been conducted in Clinical Psychology Department of Santosh Hospitals, Ghaziabad. 207 students were taken from Diwakar model School, Ghaziabad, via purposive sampling, which included 143 male and 64 female adolescent students (10-19 years old). The students who were able to understand English language were taken into consideration, the students who were unable to participate due to any mental health condition or not providing consent, were excluded. For purpose of data collection, physical consent form, preliminary identification sheet, AISS and COPE inventory were chosen.

Adjustment Inventory for school students

This standardized Adjustment Inventory for School Students (AISS) was used in the present study to assess the level of adjustment among school-going adolescents. Prof. A. K. P. Sinha and Prof. R. P. Singh had developed in 1993 an Adjustment Inventory for School Students to suit the Secondary School students who are Hindi speaking & ranging between 14-18 years. This Inventory segregates the well-adjusted from the poorly adjusted based on three important areas of adjustment: Emotional, Social and Educational areas.⁴

Coping orientation to problems experienced inventory

The COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier and Weintraub, 1989) is a 60-item self-report questionnaire assessing coping strategies on a 4-point Likert scale. For this study, the subscales were grouped into three domains based on prior research^{1,5}

Problem-focused coping

Active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping and seeking instrumental support

Emotion-focused coping

Seeking emotional support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance and religion.

Dysfunctional coping

Denial, behavioral disengagement, mental disengagement, venting and substance use. Composite scores for each domain were computed by averaging the relevant subscales.

While the COPE does not provide a single overall score, these domains offer a meaningful framework for analyzing coping styles.

Statistical analysis

Upon taking responses from students, the data was tabulated and analyzed through SPSS software (version 23). In which following procedures were taken into consideration.

Descriptive statistics

To acknowledge the student ratio and demographic variability.

Pearson correlations

To determine the correlation between the adjustment and coping domains.

Levene's test

To acknowledge unequal or equal variances in both the genders while comparison.

Independent sample's "t" test

To find any statistically significant differences among boys and girls of school.

Ethical considerations

Institutional ethical approval was obtained. Written informed consent was collected from all participants.

RESULTS

The Study involved 207 students of local schools of Ghaziabad which included 64 females and 143 males. The research was conducted with the aim of assessing and comparing the status of adjustment and coping skills among adolescent school students and the correlation within domains.

The findings indicated adjustment challenges are present across emotional, social and educational domains (Table 1). Both boys and girls predominantly preferred problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies (Table 2). No significant gender differences were observed, except in the educational adjustment domain (Table 4).

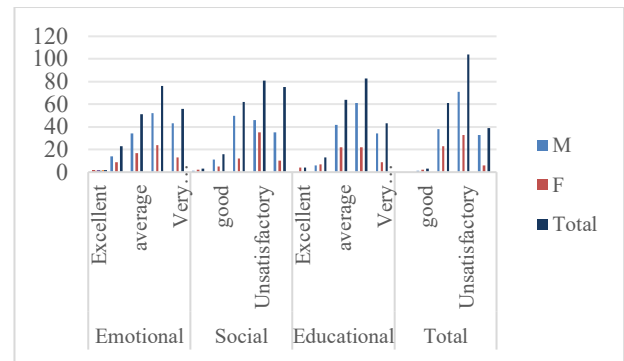


Figure 1: Overall and domain wise status of school adolescents on adjustment profile.

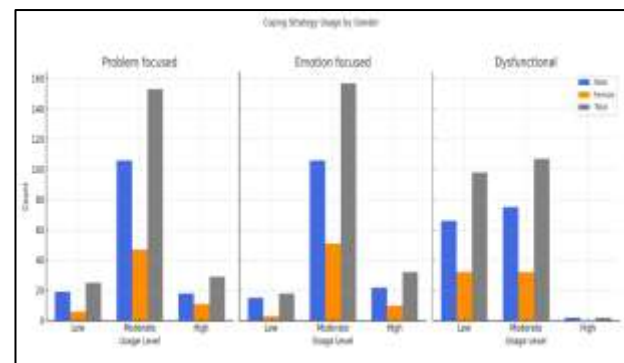


Figure 2: Overall and domain wise status of school adolescents on coping skills profile.

Table 1: Status of overall adjustment among school adolescents.

Gender	Excellent	Good	Average	Unsatisfactory	Very unsatisfactory	Mean S.D	t test
Female	0	2	23	33	6	24.34±6.003	-1.561
Male	0	1	38	71	33	25.86±6.653	
Total	0	3	61	104	39		
%	0	1.4	29	34	19		

Table 2: Coping profile of adolescents.

Coping profile					
Problem-focused coping					
Gender	Low (Count)	Moderate (Count)	High (Count)	Mean SD	t test
Female	6	47	11	52.08±8.702	1.478
Male	19	106	18	50.15±8.634	
Total	25	153	29		
Emotion-focused coping					
Gender					
Female	3	51	10	52.75±8.149	1.118
Male	15	106	22	51.27±9.111	
Total	18	157	32		
Dysfunctional coping					
Gender					
Female	32	32	0	39.83±6.281	-0.575
Male	66	75	2	40.45±7.640	
Total	98	107	2		

Table 3: Correlation in females and males.

Correlations (females)	Total adjustment	Problem-focused coping	Emotion-focused coping	Dysfunctional coping
Total adjustment	1	-0.27*	-0.066	0.04
Problem-focused coping	-0.27*	1	0.56**	0.26*
Emotion focused coping	-0.66	0.56**	1	0.26*
Dysfunctional coping	0.04	0.26*	0.26*	1
Correlations (males)				
Total adjustment	1	-0.28	-0.15	0.26**
Problem-focused coping	-0.28	1	0.49**	0.47**
Emotion focused coping	-0.15	0.49**	1	0.45**
Dysfunctional coping	0.26**	0.47**	0.45**	1

Note: *-p<0.05, **-p<0.01. All correlations are Pearson's.

Table 4: Independent t test value.

Domain	Emotional adjustment	Social adjustment	Educational adjustment	Overall adjustment	Problem-focused coping	Emotion focused coping	Dysfunctional coping
T test value	-1.512	1.337	-2.878	-1.561	1.478	1.118	-0.575

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of concerned profiles of demographic variables

The entire school adolescent sample included 207 students of local schools of Ghaziabad belonging to certain age categories, i.e. early adolescence (11-13 years) n=67, middle adolescence (14-16 years) n=97 and late adolescence (17-19 years) n=43. In this sample, both male and female gender have been considered, where 64 females and 143 males were taken as participants. As we know that the schools don't promote the policy of admission of equal genders in classes, thus equal no. of students of both genders cannot be taken. The sample is male dominated as the no. of students studying in the schools were in majority and unequal variances were considered. There are certain supporting researches that have utilized similar distribution.⁶

The sample had students from different educational class (grades) and are categorized into 3 levels. i.e. Upper primary (7th-8th grades) which had 33 students, lower secondary (9th-10th grades) which had 88 students, higher secondary (11th-12th grades) which had 86 students respectively. Moreover, 3 branches of a local school of Ghaziabad were taken, by taking consent from the management of the school administrators. the participated students were 108, from Sahibabad branch, 50 from Shyam Park branch and 49 from Brij Vihar branch of D.M.S respectively. As certain supporting study are available using data from local schools including the one done in VIT university.⁷ As per the data collected, 34% of students belonged to joint families and around 66% of

students belonged to the nuclear families. Certain study has been done on its basis, where the results indicated that students from joint families show better adjustment compared to those from nuclear families.⁸ This data indicates that about 53% of the school adolescents, including both male and female face high adjustment problems. Certain research has been done, which found similar kind of results (Table 1).⁹ the status of emotional intelligence reflected that a majority of students faced high emotional adjustment problems while ones with excellent adjustment were rare to be found, 32% percent of the students had average social adjustment, while 61% of the school adolescents faced problems in emotional adjustment (39% unsatisfactory and 22% very unsatisfactory emotional adjustment) (Figure 1) Certain studies also support this data.¹⁰

the status of educational adjustment reflected that approximately 31% percent of the students had average educational adjustment, while 61% of the school adolescents faced problems in emotional adjustment (40% unsatisfactory and 21% very unsatisfactory emotional adjustment) (Figure 1). The overall analysis of adjustment profile, including of domains revealed that adjustment on excellent level is rare, even adjustment of good level is less.

However, unsatisfactory adjustment is more noticed in this exercise, even very unsatisfactory level of adjustment is also marked high. Certain studies also support this data.¹¹ As far as problem focused coping skills of the adolescent students is concerned, 12% of students are using problem focused coping at lower levels. 74% of students are using moderately and 14% of students are highly preferring the

problem focused coping. Whereas, in Emotion focused coping skills, 9% of students are using emotion focused coping at lower levels. 76% of students are using moderately and 15% of students are highly preferring the emotion focused coping (Figure 2, Table 2). Supporting study also indicate that adolescents predominantly use emotion-focused coping strategies.¹² In dysfunctional coping skills, 47% of students are using dysfunctional coping at lower levels. 52% of students are using moderately and only 1% of students are highly preferring the dysfunctional coping (Figure 2). researches have revealed that girls scored higher in seeking social support and problem solving, whereas boys scored higher in avoidant coping.¹³

Among female participants, a significant negative correlation was observed between problem-focused coping and overall adjustment, indicating that greater engagement in problem-focused coping was associated with better psychological adjustment. In contrast, emotion-focused and dysfunctional coping strategies did not show a statistically significant relationship with adjustment scores in females, suggesting a potentially more neutral role of these coping styles within this group (Table 3). For male participants, a significant positive correlation was found between dysfunctional coping and overall adjustment, indicating that higher reliance on maladaptive coping strategies was associated with poorer adjustment outcomes.

Although problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies were negatively correlated with adjustment scores, these relationships did not reach statistical significance in the male group (Table 3). Independent samples t-test results revealed gender-based differences across various domains of adjustment and coping. Although no significant gender differences were observed in emotional, social or overall adjustment, a statistically significant difference was found in educational adjustment.

Results revealed that boys performed worse in this domain compared to girls. For coping strategies, no significant gender differences were observed in problem-focused, emotion-focused or dysfunctional coping, implying relatively similar patterns of coping across genders (Table 4). Certain studies also indicate that significant difference exists in the emotional adjustment of boys and girls and no significant difference was found between male and female secondary school students with regard to Family, Social, Educational and Financial adjustment.¹⁴

Limitations

The sample size for boys and girls is not equal, due to lesser availability of female students in school. thus, making results less accurate in comparative study. The p-value for educational adjustment is marginally significant but doesn't meet the standard threshold ($p < 0.05$). This could be explored further with a larger sample.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine how school adolescents adjust and cope with the various challenges they encounter, with a focus on gender differences. Adolescence is a critical period marked by emotional, social and academic changes and the ways in which young people manage these pressures can significantly impact their overall development. By exploring the differences in adjustment and coping strategies between boys and girls, this research provides important insights into their unique experiences within the school environment. As gender to some extent, mediates the factors attributed to mental Health.¹⁵

This research focuses on evaluating the adjustment of school adolescents in three domains, i.e. emotional, social and educational. Moreover, it also aims to assess what kind of coping strategies are preferred by the school adolescents to deal with their daily life stressors. The research is done in the Department of Clinical Psychology; Santosh college and hospitals and 207 adolescent students were taken as a sample from branches of a local school of Ghaziabad.

This research employed a cross-sectional study design to investigate the adjustment difficulties and preferred coping skills among school adolescents, on gender basis. The findings showed that about 53% of the school adolescents, including both male and female face high adjustment problems. Where majority of the students reported an unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory adjustment, a good or excellent level of adjustment was rare to be found. Considering the coping skills profile of students, students preferred using problem focused and emotion focused coping more than the dysfunctional coping strategies.

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Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee

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