

Research Paper

## Emotional maturity and ways of coping among job applicants at the time of selection

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### ABSTRACT

An emotionally mature behavior is characterized by taking responsibility of one's emotions for flexible adaptations to a given situation in dynamic environment and not blaming others for causing them. Emotional maturity of job applicants at the time of selection is reflected in task, contextual and counter-productive performances. The emotional maturity is a function of coping especially when job applicants compete themselves to perform in time bound tasks and engage in a taxing situation. Coping is defined as the cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the individual. The sample of 100 job applicants were administered the Emotional Maturity Scale and Ways of Coping Questionnaire after completion of their personality tests for the job. Among eight ways of coping, only escape-avoidance way of coping was found significant ( $F=3.09$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) between emotionally mature and immature job applicants. *Escape-avoidance* describes wishful thinking and behavioral efforts to escape or avoid the problem. It was also found that escape-avoidance way of coping was positively significantly correlated with emotional instability, emotional regression, social maladjustment, personality disintegration and overall emotional maturity. The job applicants tend to become wishful in utilizing their intelligence to cope with practical and independent solutions to problems of varying complexities. The study concluded that escape-avoidance way of coping (wishful thinking) is the decisive coping to differentiate between the emotionally mature and immature job applicant.

**Keywords:** Emotional Maturity, Ways of Coping, Job Applicant, Selection, Escape-Avoidance

Whenever the job applicant submits oneself into the recruitment and selection process, the environment not only sought for test anxiety but also trait anxiety. Selection process is characterized by highly evaluative and competitive situation which evokes feelings of anxiety, frustration and distress (Rynes, Bretz & Gerhart, 1991). The job applicants while putting their best efforts in performance become worried about the result because of the stake involved in it and remain anxious most of the time. Feeling restless, difficulty in

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concentration or mind going blank, easily fatigued, increased muscle tension and difficulty in falling asleep are common symptoms of anxiety among job applicants in the process of selection. This emotional and physiological experience is highly individualized, unique for each person at a given moment, but in a deeper sense a person experience a threat to his or her own sense of identity and survival which may give rise to mature or immature responses by the applicants which can play an important role in securing a job applied for or being rejected.

The job applicants who are emotionally mature will have a better chance of getting selected because it presents an image of balanced personality. The emotional maturity is a function of coping especially when job applicants compete in a group to perform in a time bound tasks and engage in a taxing situation. Coping is defined as the cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A process-oriented approach to coping is directed toward what an individual actually thinks and does within the context of a specific encounter and how these thoughts and actions change as the encounter unfolds. While, trait approach to coping assess stable person characteristics that operates as dispositions applicable across diverse life situations. The maturity among job applicants is shaped by how they perceive and respond to selection tools (e.g. personality tests, interview, ground test, situational judgment test etc.) on the basis of their applicant experience and apperception. It is also reflected through perception of fairness and justice, feeling of anxiety, level of motivation, self-efficacy and others.

### ***Emotional maturity at the time of selection process***

Number of researchers have conceptualize the emotional maturity, such as a continuous process of personality to strive greater sense of emotions and health (Smitson, 1974), a state of emotional control in social situation (Young,1996), major determinant in shaping personality, behavior, and attitudes to enhance self-worth and emotional stability (Anand, Kunwar & Kumar, 2014), , ability to deal constructively with reality (Menninger, 1999), a process to determine for better sense of emotional well-being and capacity to make effective adjustment (Rajeshwari & Raj, 2015), and ability to bear tension and tolerate the frustration (Cole, 1954). Emotional maturity is an effective determinant of personality which means as to maintain self-control during times of adversity, stress, anxiety, and perceived failure. It includes taking responsibility for one's own feelings and not blaming others for causing them. It is reflected in three major aspects of performance, 1) task performance – delivering activities relating for the job requirements, 2) contextual performance – behaviours that support the social and psychological functioning of group to which applicant belong, and 3) counterproductive performance – behaviours that distract one and other group members from the achievement of desired goal. The emotional maturity of job applicant is characterized by their reactions on selection tools that reveals effective use of resources with logical reasoning, conveys coherent thoughts with ease, displays tact and empathy while cooperating, supporting and collaborating with group members without ulterior motive, exhibits sense of responsibility, shows leading, influencing and dynamic personality and finally focus to achieve goals in the face of adversity. The meta-analytic study emphasized that job applicant reactions are significantly and meaningfully associated with performance on selection tests (Hausknecht et al., 2004; McCarthy et al., 2009, 2013; Oostrom et al., 2012).

### *Ways of Coping at the time of selection process*

Becoming a job applicant is a proud and challenging state for an individual, proud being an applicant for a job and challenging as to compete with an unemployed group to secure a job. This is a major life event which decides the rest of the course of life. Thus, from a job applicant point of view, appearing and undergoing recruitment and selection process is highly stressful situation. A high stake is involved not only for oneself but also for family. Journey of an individual from being job applicant to earning employee is like dream come true. Even though an individual works hard to learn, study, and equips with skills, one needs to use coping mechanisms to deal with such a stressful situation. Different perspectives to define coping by researchers were as, dynamic process that shifts in nature from stage to stage of stressful transaction (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985), all purposeful attempts to manage stress, regardless of their effectiveness (Compas, 1987), involve a range of behavior e.g. adaptation, mastery, defense or realistic problem solving (Cohen & Frydenberg, 1993), and actively involving and engaging in problem solving techniques (Seiffge-Krenke, 2000).

Coping, especially emotional coping is not same as defense mechanisms. Coping is cognitive in nature which operates consciously, used intentionally and revised when needed whereas defense mechanisms are unconsciously employed to justify the acts (Miceli & Castelfanchi, 2000). The process approach of coping has an advantage on trait approach of coping; the latter has limited predictive value, ignores the unique context of innumerable situations which a person could encounter and assumes coping consistency across different transactions (Scherer et al., 1994). On the other hand, people make use of various coping responses based on the nature of events or their own resources (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). Coping is an ongoing process of cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage psychological stress to protect psychological and physiological well-being (Lazarus, 1993). Coping strategies are generally clustered into two broad categories: problem focused and emotion-focused ways of coping. Problem-focused coping involves actively working to alleviate the stressful person-environment relationship by changing circumstances. Emotion focused coping, in contrast, involves efforts to regulate the internal emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful events rather than change the events themselves. This strategy involves thoughts and/or actions that relieve or lessen the emotional impact of stress. A coping strategy cannot be called as purely problem focused or emotion focused. In reality, any coping thought or act can serve as both. Effective coping generally involves combination of problem and emotion focused coping but use of both strategies can either facilitate or impede each other. Coping strategies were also classified as functional (active and internal coping) and dysfunctional (withdrawal coping) style (Seiffge-Krenhe & Shulman, 1990). They commented that effectiveness of any particular coping style may vary over time, or even become maladaptive if used continuously. Most commonly used coping styles based on goals at the time of selection are active coping and avoidant coping. Active coping involves an awareness of the problem or situation causing stress and conscious attempts to either reduce the resulting stress, eliminate the source of the stress, or both while avoidant coping may or may not be accompanied by an awareness of the problem, engage in ignoring or avoiding the problem altogether.

### *Aim*

The aim of the research was to study emotional maturity and ways of coping among job applicants at the time of selection.

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### *Null Hypothesis*

- There will be no significant correlation between emotional maturity and ways of coping among job applicants at the time of selection.
- There will be no significant difference between emotional maturity and ways of coping among job applicants at the time of selection.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sample*

The data was collected on a sample of 100 male job applicants appearing for selection from all walks of the country, India at the assessment centre, Bhopal. The criteria to crack selection process for job was personality assessment through three different testing tools viz. psychological, interview and ground tests. They have undergone personality assessment for selection. Their average age was 21 and half years.

### *Tool used*

Emotional maturity scale developed by Singh & Bhargava (1999) was administered to measure emotional maturity. It consists of 48 items under five categories, i) emotional instability, ii) emotional regression, iii) social maladjustment, iv) personality disintegration, and v) lack of independence. Test-retest reliability was 0.70 and validity of the test was 0.46. The items were scored on a 5 point likert scale weigh 5 to 1 (very much, much, undecided, probably and never). Higher the score on the scale, lesser is the degree of emotional maturity and vice versa.

Ways of coping questionnaire developed by Folkman & Lazarus, (1988) was administered to measure the coping response. The ways of coping scale consists of 66 items divided into eight factors – i) confrontive coping, ii) distancing, iii) self-controlling, iv) seeking social support, v) accepting responsibility, vi) escape-avoidance, vii) planful problem solving, and viii) positive reappraisal. Reliability in terms of internal consistency of the eight factors of coping was estimated with Cronbach's coefficient alpha .Factors wise alpha was found as 0.70, 0.61, 0.70, 0.76, 0.66, 0.72, 0.68 and 0.79 respectively. The validity of eight factors was found to range from 0.17 to 0.47. The low correlations were found due to use of problem focused forms of coping influenced by the situational context. The items were scored on a 4 point likert scale weigh 4 to 1 (used a great deal, used quite a bit, used somewhat, and does not apply or not used)

### *Procedure*

Each job applicants have underwent three personality test of different nature; these were projective test, ground tasks and interview for the selection process. The emotional maturity scale and ways of coping questionnaire were administered to the job applicants after attempt of all three tests of personality but before final result announcement. A rapport was established with job applicants. It was clarified that responses on these tests will not have any effect on the final result. Their responses were independent of the result of their performance to be recommended or not recommended for the job. All job applicants have appeared before an assessment centre situated in Bhopal, India. They were briefed about the purpose of the study and assured about confidentiality of their response on the test.

## **RESULTS**

Table 1 reveals the descriptive statistics of the sample. The whole sample falls into four levels of emotional maturity – extremely emotionally mature, moderately emotionally mature, emotionally immature and extremely emotionally immature. The 45 percentage of

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the sample falls into the category of extremely emotionally immature and 36 percentage into emotionally immature. Only 19 percent of the sample falls into mature category.

<b>Table 1: Descriptive Statistics</b>					
<b>WAYS OF COPING</b>	<b>LEVELS OF EMOTIONAL MATURITY</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SE<sub>M</sub></b>
<b>1.Confrontive Coping</b>	Extremely emotionally mature	10	9.10	2.68	.84
	Moderately emotionally mature	9	10.33	3.12	1.04
	Emotionally immature	36	9.66	3.07	.51
	Extremely emotionally immature	45	11.24	2.97	.44
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10.38</b>	<b>3.06</b>	<b>.30</b>
<b>2.Distanceing</b>	Extremely emotionally mature	10	10.20	3.29	1.04
	Moderately emotionally mature	9	10.77	3.41	1.13
	Emotionally immature	36	10.11	3.04	.50
	Extremely emotionally immature	45	10.00	2.69	.40
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10.13</b>	<b>2.91</b>	<b>.29</b>
<b>3.Self-Controlling</b>	Extremely emotionally mature	10	12.70	4.13	1.30
	Moderately emotionally mature	9	14.00	3.84	1.28
	Emotionally immature	36	11.88	4.57	.76
	Extremely emotionally immature	45	12.04	2.86	.42
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>12.23</b>	<b>3.76</b>	<b>.37</b>
<b>4.Seeking Social Support</b>	Extremely emotionally mature	10	9.80	3.48	1.10
	Moderately emotionally mature	9	10.55	4.39	1.46
	Emotionally immature	36	10.58	2.88	.48
	Extremely emotionally immature	45	10.38	3.74	.56
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10.41</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>.34</b>
<b>5.Accepting Responsibility</b>	Extremely emotionally mature	10	7.10	2.13	.67
	Moderately emotionally mature	9	9.22	3.30	1.10
	Emotionally immature	36	7.75	2.66	.44
	Extremely emotionally immature	45	8.06	2.31	.34
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7.96</b>	<b>2.53</b>	<b>.25</b>
<b>6.Escape-Avoidance</b>	Extremely emotionally mature	10	8.80	2.20	.69
	Moderately emotionally mature	9	10.44	4.09	1.36
	Emotionally immature	36	9.62	3.55	.60
	Extremely emotionally immature	45	11.56	3.27	.48
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10.49</b>	<b>3.47</b>	<b>.34</b>
<b>7.Planful Problem Solving</b>	Extremely emotionally mature	10	12.80	3.22	1.01

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics					
WAYS OF COPING	LEVELS OF EMOTIONAL MATURITY	N	Mean	SD	SE <sub>M</sub>
	Moderately emotionally mature	9	13.00	3.70	1.23
	Emotionally immature	36	10.25	3.40	.57
	Extremely emotionally immature	45	11.33	3.54	.52
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>11.25</b>	<b>3.55</b>	<b>.35</b>
<b>8.Positive Reappraisal</b>	Extremely emotionally mature	10	14.40	4.29	1.35
	Moderately emotionally mature	9	16.00	2.87	.95
	Emotionally immature	36	13.77	3.36	.56
	Extremely emotionally immature	45	13.33	3.78	.56
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>13.84</b>	<b>3.64</b>	<b>.36</b>
<b>Overall Ways of Coping</b>	Extremely emotionally mature	10	84.90	19.15	6.05
	Moderately emotionally mature	9	94.33	16.04	5.34
	Emotionally immature	36	83.11	18.62	3.10
	Extremely emotionally immature	45	87.73	14.99	2.23
	<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>86.38</b>	<b>16.95</b>	<b>1.69</b>

*Table 2 reveals that homogeneity of variance in adopting ways of coping was found equal in all four groups except for self-controlling way of coping.*

Table 2: Test of Homogeneity of Variance					
Ways of Coping	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.	Remarks
Confrontive Coping	.36	3	96	.78	Variances were equal for all four groups.
Distancing	.36	3	96	.77	Variances were equal for all four groups.
Self-Controlling	2.46	3	96	.06	Variances were <b>not equal</b> for all four groups.
Seeking Social Support	1.95	3	96	.12	Variances were equal for all four groups.
Accepting Responsibility	.371	3	96	.77	Variances were equal for all four groups.
Escape-Avoidance	.66	3	96	.57	Variances were equal for all four groups.
Planful Problem Solving	.164	3	96	.92	Variances were equal for all four groups.
Positive Reappraisal	1.28	3	96	.28	Variances were equal for all four groups.
Overall Ways of Coping	.72	3	96	.53	Variances were equal for all four groups.

Table 3 reveals the Pearson correlation between ways of coping and emotional maturity among job applicants. Following positive correlations were found significant at 0.05 level,

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between confrontive coping and emotional instability ( $r = .21$ ); confrontive coping and personality disintegration ( $r = .22$ ); accepting responsibility and emotional instability ( $r = .21$ ); escape-avoidance and emotional instability ( $r = .22$ ); escape-avoidance and emotional regression ( $r = .25$ ); escape-avoidance and social adjustment ( $r = .21$ ); escape-avoidance and personality disintegration ( $r = .22$ ); escape-avoidance and overall emotional maturity ( $r = .24$ ).

**Table 3: Correlation between Ways of Coping and Emotional Maturity**

Ways of Coping	Emotional Maturity					
	Emotional Unstability	Emotional Regression	Social Maladjustment	Personality Disintegration	Lack of Independence	Overall Emotional Maturity
Confrontive Coping	<b>.21*</b>	.12	.14	<b>.22*</b>	.009	.15
Distancing	-.02	-.02	-.02	.02	.09	.05
Self-Controlling	-.03	-.11	.06	-.11	.08	.01
Seeking Social Support	.05	-.007	-.05	-.09	.10	.05
Accepting Responsibility	<b>.21*</b>	.07	-.006	-.09	.11	.12
Escape-Avoidance	<b>.22*</b>	<b>.25*</b>	<b>.21*</b>	<b>.22*</b>	.05	<b>.24*</b>
Planful Problem Solving	-.07	.006	.037	-.09	.02	-.010
Positive Reappraisal	-.18	-.06	-.11	-.15	.07	-.05
Overall Ways of Coping	.06	.04	.05	-.02	.10	.10

Table 4 reveals analysis of variance in total, between and within job applicants' ways of coping with respect to emotional maturity. All ways of coping except escape-avoidance were found not significant, there was no significant difference in ways of coping among job applicants' emotional maturity. Hence, null hypothesis were accepted except escape-avoidance way of coping, which was found significant ( $F=3.09$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). Thus, job applicants showed significant difference in escape-avoidance way of coping. Mean of extremely and moderately emotionally mature ( $M=19.24$ ) was less than mean of extremely and moderately emotionally immature job applicants ( $M=21.18$ ), this difference was found significant at the time of selection.

**Table 4: Analysis of Variance**

Ways of Coping		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Result
Confrontive Coping	Between Groups	68.34	3	22.78	2.53	.06	$H_0$ Accepted
	Within Groups	863.21	96	8.99			
	Total	931.56	99				
Distancing	Between Groups	4.59	3	1.53	.17	.91	$H_0$ Accepted
	Within Groups	836.71	96	8.71			

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Table 4: Analysis of Variance							
Ways of Coping		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Result
	Total	841.31	99				
Self-Controlling	Between Groups	36.14	3	12.04	.84	.47	H <sub>0</sub> Accepted
	Within Groups	1365.56	96	14.22			
	Total	1401.71	99				
Seeking Social Support	Between Groups	5.01	3	1.67	.13	.93	H <sub>0</sub> Accepted
	Within Groups	1157.00	96	12.17			
	Total	1162.02	99				
Accepting Responsibility	Between Groups	23.83	3	7.94	1.24	.29	H <sub>0</sub> Accepted
	Within Groups	614.00	96	6.39			
	Total	637.84	99				
Escape-Avoidance	Between Groups	105.64	3	35.21	3.09	.03	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
	Within Groups	1081.10	96	11.38			
	Total	1186.74	99				
Planful Problem Solving	Between Groups	86.40	3	28.80	2.37	.07	H <sub>0</sub> Accepted
	Within Groups	1150.28	96	12.10			
	Total	1236.68	99				
Positive Reappraisal	Between Groups	56.818	3	18.93	1.44	.23	H <sub>0</sub> Accepted
	Within Groups	1258.62	96	13.11			
	Total	1315.44	99				
Overall Ways of Coping	Between Groups	1058.30	3	352.76	1.23	.30	H <sub>0</sub> Accepted
	Within Groups	27387.25	96	285.28			
	Total	28445.56	99				

### DISCUSSION

Transition from student life to job applicant needs to cope with changes and restructure oneself in many areas to get a job. The stress is due to many expectations of goal fulfillment like gain of income, potential identity, self-esteem and valuable role in society etc. According to Bell, Ryan, and Wiechmann (2004), such expectations can play an important role in determining the extent to which applicants experience high level of test taking motivation, anxiety and fairness. Coping with this stressful life event of job applicants can be seen not only as an individual demand but also as a family or community one. Therefore, the aim of the study was to throw some light on emotional maturity and ways of coping among job applicants at the time of selection. The 100 male job applicants participated in the study, out of which 19 were found emotionally mature and 81 were emotionally immature. Homogeneity of variance in adopting ways of coping was found equal except for self-controlling way of coping. Since job applicants were operating in dynamic problem-focused coping which is likely to bring out emotional response in terms of maturity.

Pearson correlation between ways of coping and emotional maturity among job applicants was calculated. Following positive correlations were found significant at 0.05 level, between confrontive coping and emotional instability ( $r = .21$ ); confrontive coping and personality

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disintegration ( $r = .22$ ); accepting responsibility and emotional instability ( $r = .21$ ); escape-avoidance and emotional instability ( $r = .22$ ); escape-avoidance and emotional regression ( $r = .25$ ); escape-avoidance and social maladjustment ( $r = .21$ ); escape-avoidance and personality disintegration ( $r = .22$ ); escape-avoidance and overall emotional maturity ( $r = .24$ ). Results of the study confirm the findings of the Shan and Thingujam (2008), in which emotional regulation of the self was positively correlated with planful problem solving, confronting coping, self-controlling, positive reappraisal and distancing, but negatively correlated with escape-avoidance.

*Confrontive coping* describes aggressive efforts to alter the situation and suggests some degree of hostility and risk-taking. *Accepting responsibility* acknowledges one's own role in the problem with a concomitant theme of trying to put things right. *Escape-avoidance* describes wishful thinking and behavioral efforts to escape or avoid the problem. *Emotional instability* is a broad factor representing syndrome of lack of capacity to dispose off problems, irritability, needs, constant help for one's day to day work, vulnerability and temper tantrums. *Personality disintegration* includes all those symptoms which represents reactions formation, phobias, rationalization, pessimism, immorality etc. such a person suffers from inferiority and hence reacts to environment through aggressiveness, destruction and has a distorted sense of reality. *Emotional regression* represents syndromes such as feeling of inferiority, restlessness, aggressiveness and self-centeredness. *Social maladjustment* shows manifestation of hatred, seclusive but boasting, liar and shirker.

All ways of coping except escape-avoidance were found not significant, there was no significant difference in ways of coping among job applicants' emotional maturity. Hence, null hypothesis were accepted except escape-avoidance way of coping, which was found significant ( $F=3.09$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). *Escape-avoidance* describes wishful thinking and behavioral efforts to escape or avoid the problem. Thus, job applicants showed significant difference in escape-avoidance way of coping. Mean of extremely and moderately emotionally mature ( $M=19.24$ ) was less than mean of extremely and moderately emotionally immature job applicants ( $M=21.18$ ), this difference was found significant at the time of selection. The findings are in partial synch with the research carried by Wagde and Ganaie (2013), in which they found no significant difference between level of emotional maturity and ways of coping among the students pursuing master courses in rehabilitation studies. Since the present study has been based on recruitment and selection setting that is why escape-avoidance way of coping was found significant. The job applicants tend to become wishful in utilizing their intelligence to cope with practical and independent solutions to problems of varying complexities. They become wishful in finding solutions when in a tight corner, find difficulty in improvisation of solution or not able to use available means to desired end. Therefore, emotionally immature job applicants were found significantly differ in using escape-avoidance way of coping (wishful thinking) than emotionally mature job applicants. It was also found that escape-avoidance way of coping was positively significantly correlated with emotional instability, emotional regression, social maladjustment, personality disintegration and overall emotional maturity. Thus, it can be concluded that escape-avoidance way of coping (wishful thinking) is the decisive coping to differentiate between the emotionally mature and immature job applicant.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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