

Research Paper

Coping with COVID 19: A Study in the Telangana and Andhra Pradesh States from a Psychological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Dealing with COVID 19 is probably the most challenging state of affairs that the world has faced in recent times. Investigations are still underway for developing suitable drugs to control the pandemic having a detrimental effect on the economy, social relations, and health – both physical and psychological- of the populations. To date, the worthwhile means have been vaccination and preventive strategies such as lockdown, maintaining social distance, using masks, etc. There is no other way for the society at large and individuals, in particular, to cope with the pandemic except by adapting to these strategies. In this context, the paper discusses the different coping approaches that people from different regions of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh have adopted in the COVID scenario based on the responses of 184 individuals for an online survey conducted during November – December 2021. Of the three copying styles, emotion and problem focused and avoidant, the respondents had chosen emotion focused style of coping mostly and it is related to the demographic factors like age, gender and level of education.

Keywords: Covid 19, coping, psychology, interventions.

The Pandemic situation which began in December 2019 in the state of Wuhan, China (Li Qun 2020) has been an ongoing in sporadic waves. With the passing of days, more knowledge has been gained regarding the viral structure, mode of spread and treatment practices. Though pandemics and natural disasters are not new to the human race, this particular situation of this time and age is unique for a few reasons. The prime reason being wide spread communication among the people across the globe due to technological advancements. As much as being a blessing in being able to receive information and take necessary precautions, the effect of it being a curse in causing panic due to the minute-by-minute updates regarding fatality and spread of the virus cannot be denied. Global transport both is the means as well as modes playing a significant role in the spread of the COVID 19 virus. Another important feature that differentiates this pandemic from the others is the level of psychological stress it has caused around the world. Although the previous pandemics must have had a great impact on the psychological health of the then human population, the means of recording, studying and assessing them were not as they are today because of the increased awareness among people regarding the importance of psychological health and

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Received: November 18, 2022; Revision Received: December 25, 2022; Accepted: December 31, 2022

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even the development of the discipline of Psychology as a science backed by scientific research and study has increased in vast measures.

From the beginning of the declaration of COVID 19 as Pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 2020?, (Cucinotta D & Vanelli M 2020), psychologists around the world have been busy gathering data and analyzing human behavior and mental health affected due to the restrictions that the governments of various countries imposed for containing the virus. Studies related to COVID 19 and Mental Health are several among which almost all of them identify stress, anxiety, depression and fear being the most prominent mental health issues (Vindegaard N & Benros ME 2020.). According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984), stress is inextricably related to the coping ability and stress in turn is responsible for a number of mental health problems. This paper seeks to identify and elaborate on the coping styles that the Telugu speaking populations of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states of India have adapted to deal with the novel COVID situation. Identifying the coping mechanisms are related to socio demographic factors such as gender, age, socioeconomic back ground and education; these aid in formulating appropriate intervention strategies for specified groups so as to restore and enhance their mental health.

Coping, in general, is a mechanism used consciously or unconsciously by individuals to face and deal with unfavorable circumstances. It is an adjustment process that varies from individual to individual and is dependent upon several factors such as the person's personality, environment, and belief system. In this specific case, the focus is on the individual's coping mechanisms about Covid 19 from a psychological perspective that would address the psychological health of the individuals. The understanding of coping mechanisms sheds light on how to provide suitable interventions to those having faulty coping strategies so that they might be able to adopt the right coping strategies. In the case of others, the analysis help identify the factors that have played a positive role in coping with the Covid 19.

Theoretical Background of Coping

Coping and its relation to mental health is a two directional interaction as Aldwin, C. M., & Revenson, T. A. (1987) observed. The analysis of the study reveals that there are different styles of coping and among them the primary ones are (1) emotion focused, (2) problem focused and (3) a mix of both approaches. It is inferred, the emotion focused coping style had little or negative impact on the mental health whereas the role of problem focused method on mental health depended on the individual perception of the problem and how they believed to have handled the situation.

Individual differences are noted in considering an incident to be stressful as well as the coping mechanism used in dealing with it. Three primary areas of difference are hardiness, locus of control and the transactional model of stress (Cox, T., & Ferguson, E. 1991). According to the transactional model, challenge and threat are two ways an individual can respond depending upon the individual's cognitive perception of a situation and ability to respond. David. (W. Putwain 2021)

Coping strategies and styles differ with age, but even more so, they differ based on the contextual interpretation. Even though there are changes associated with respect to age, among those of the same age, as people grow senile, the way they comprehend the

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situational changes plays an important role in the style of coping they choose to adopt (Folkman. S et.al., 1987)

Gender differences are also observed in relation to the coping style adopted. Females were more prone to adopt emotion focused coping and problem oriented focusing whereas males used task oriented coping styles (Omid Shokri et al., & M. Pilar Matud,2004).

Of the different coping styles, problem focused coping style has proven to be associated with better mental as well as physical health (Park, C. L., & Adler, N. E. (2003) whereas emotion focused coping style is associated with good mental health according to some studies, (Park, C. L., & Adler, N. E. (2003) and poor mental health associated with others (Sherly. L. Whatley et al., 1998)

Susan Folkman (1984) notes that perceived control over a situation neither increases nor decreases the stress and threat associated, rather there are three issues that are important in understanding stress and coping, viz., the belief that one has control over the situation, relationship between control and coping and the pathways through which control might affect the outcomes of stressful situations.

Given the above theoretical background the present study attempts to find out the coping styles of the sample under investigation.

Design and Sample for the Study

Due to covid restrictions and lockdown, data has been collected online using google forms. The sample consists of 184 respondents from the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana of India among which 129 are male and 55 are female. The respondents are over 18 years of age and participated in the survey voluntarily and very well knowing that the information given would be used for research. Demographic details such as gender, age, education level and socio economic back ground constituted the first part of the questionnaire, while the second part consisted of information regarding individual perceptions and beliefs regarding the incidence & spread of covid, and the third part formed a Brief COPE inventory used to identify the type of coping style that the responded is adapting.

The Brief COPE is a self-reporting inventory consisting of 28 statements spread over three broad coping styles. The answer to each statement gives a measure of the coping style the individual has been following. The Brief COPE is a shortened version from the original scale consisting of 60 statements and is used primarily in health care settings to understand how an individual is coping with the stressors (Carver C.S 1997).

Findings of the Study

The sample distribution by age and gender is shown in Table 1. Among 185 respondents, 55 are female and 129 are male. Age of respondents varies from 20-80 years among which those belonging to 30-40 years are 42.4%.

Table 1 Showing the Gender by Age and Education of the Respondents

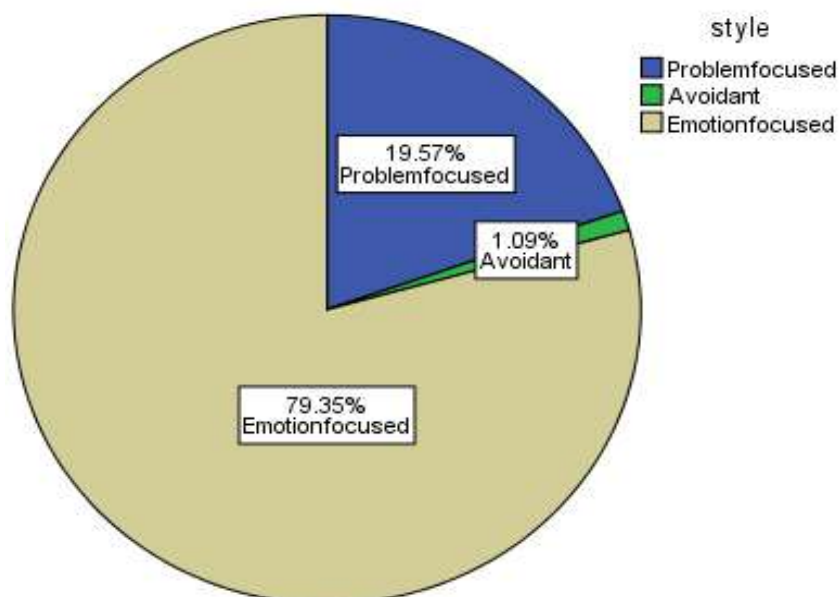
S.No	Age and Education	Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Age in Years				
1	20 – 30	47 (25.5%)	22 (12.0%)	69 (37.5%)

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2	30-40	60 (32.6%)	18 (9.8%)	78 (42.4%)
3	40-50	11 (6.0%)	9 (4.9%)	20 (10.9%)
4	50-60	6 (3.3%)	3 (1.6%)	9 (4.9%)
5	60-70	4 (2.2%)	2 (1.1%)	6 (3.3%)
6	70-80	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)	2 (1.1%)
7	Total	129 (70.1%)	55 (29.9%)	184 (100.0%)
Education				
8	Primary	1 (0.5%)	5 (2.7%)	6 (3.3%)
9	Upper Primary	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)
10	Secondary	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)
11	Intermediate	4 (2.2%)	2 (1.1%)	6 (3.3%)
12	Graduation	43 (23.4%)	13 (7.1%)	56 (30.4%)
13	Post-Graduation	81 (44.0%)	33 (17.9%)	114 (62.0%)
14	Total	129 (70.1%) (82.8%)	55 (29.9%) (60%)	184 (100.0%)

The education status reveals that all are literate and a majority 114 (62%) of them educated to the post graduate level regardless of their gender though women are fewer compared to men.

The majority of the sample respondents has adapted the emotion focused coping style followed by problem focused coping style. Only a small portion of the sample has used the avoidant coping mechanism for dealing with the novel COVID 19 situation.



The table 2 provide the details coping style which varies with age, gender and education. Both the genders predominantly prefer emotion focused coping followed by problem focused coping style. Irrespective of age, all the respondents prefer emotion focused coping. In case of education, emotion focused coping predominates in sample population with higher education levels followed by problem focused coping method.

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Table 2 Showing the Coping Styles by Gender, Age and Education

S.No	Demographic variables	Coping Styles			Total
		Problem focused	Avoidant	Emotion focused	
By Gender					
1	Male	26 (14.1%)	0 (0.0%)	103 (56.0%)	129 (70.1%)
2	Female	10 (5.4%)	2 (1.1%)	43 (23.4%)	55 (29.9%)
3	Total	36 (19.6%)	2 (1.1%)	146 (79.3%)	184 (100.0%)
By Age					
4	20-30	14 (7.6)	0 (0.0%)	55 (29.9%)	69 (37.5%)
5	30-40	15 (8.2)	2 (1.1%)	61 (33.2%)	78 (42.4%)
6	40-50	6 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (7.6%)	20 (10.9%)
7	50-60	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (4.9%)	9 (4.9%)
8	60-70	1 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (2.7%)	6 (3.3%)
9	70-80	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.1%)	2 (1.1%)
10	Total	36 (19.6%)	2 (1.1%)	146 (79.3%)	184 (100.0%)
By Education					
11	Primary	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (3.3%)	6 (3.3%)
12	Upper Primary	1 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.5%)
13	Secondary	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)
14	Intermediate	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (3.3%)	6 (3.3%)
15	Graduation	14 (7.6)	2 (1.1%)	40 (21.7%)	56 (30.4%)
16	Post-Graduation	21 (11.4%)	0 (0.0%)	93 (50.5%)	114 (62.0%)
17	Total	36 (19.6%)	2 (1.1%)	146 (79.3%)	184 (100.0%)

Statistical analyses such as t test, Pearson’s correlation as well as linear regression have been done to find out the significance of the demographic variables such as age and gender and education on the style of coping adapted.

The sample means of both genders related to emotion focused coping as the table 3 reveals.

Table 3 Pearson’s correlation for Gender and Emotion

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Emotion	Male	129	27.47	6.755	.595
	Female	55	25.00	8.158	1.100

The independent samples test result indicating that there is a significant difference between the means of genders who adopt the emotion coping style at .05 level with a p value of .35 (Table 4).

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Table 4 Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
emotion	Equal variances assumed	3.303	.071	2.126	182	.035	2.465	1.159	.177	4.753
	Equal variances not assumed			1.971	87.042	.052	2.465	1.251	-.020	4.951

Pearson’s correlation test is used to analyze the relationship between age and Style of coping as well as Education level and the style of coping (Table 5). The results of the analysis indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between the education level and all the three coping mechanisms at .01 level. However, correlation between age and only emotional coping style is significant at .05 level. The relationship between age and the other two coping styles are not statistically significant.

Table 5 - Pearson’s correlation of Variables Age and Gender related to the style of coping

variable	Emotion focused coping	Problem focused coping	Avoidant coping
Education level	Pearson’s correlation significant at .01 level, p<.000	Pearson’s correlation significant at .01 level, p<.000	Pearson’s correlation significant at .01 level, p = .005
Age	Not significant	Pearson’s correlation is significant at .05 level, p= .02	Not significant

Regression Analysis is done using education, gender and age as predictor variables to identify if the coping style might be predicted by any of them. The results of the analysis indicate that only education is statistically significant to predict the coping style adapted by an individual.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change
1	.315 ^a	.099	.084	6.189	.099	6.600	3	180	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Education, Gender, Age

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ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	758.273	3	252.758	6.600	.000 ^b
	Residual	6893.640	180	38.298		
	Total	7651.913	183			

Dependent Variable: problem

Predictors: (Constant), Education, Gender, Age

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	16.843	3.383		4.978	.000	10.167	23.519
	Gender	-1.313	1.018	-.093	-1.290	.199	-3.321	.696
	Age	-.642	.439	-.106	-1.461	.146	-1.508	.225
	Education	1.493	.466	.238	3.206	.002	.574	2.412

a. Dependent Variable: problem

DISCUSSION

The review of literature implies that the style of coping is based on a number of factors such as physical and mental health, age, gender etc., of the individual. Another prominent influential factor in adapting a particular coping style is the perception of the circumstance as a threat (W. Putwain 2021). This study is related to the coping styles of individuals pertaining to the COVID situation and the results agree that even adapting to a novel situation vary depending on the demographic variables such as age, gender and education level.

Gender and Coping style: The results of the study indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the genders adapting the emotion focused coping style. This difference of means is not significant regarding the other two coping styles. Men do prefer problem focused coping styles and women emotion focused coping style, though both men and women agree that problem focused coping is more effective (Ptacek J.T et al., 1992). This is valid even today according to the present study.

Age and Coping style: The result of the study shows that the relationship between age and problem focused coping is statistically significant. This agrees with other studies such as Raphaël Trouillet et al, (2011) that the problem focused coping increases with age, citing the development of cognitive abilities with age as a reasonable influence on development of this coping style and Yweie Chen et al., (2017) that age does have a role to play in adapting problem focused coping.

Education level and coping style: Education level acts as a predictor for the coping style adapted according to the statistical analysis of the study. This might be due to the increased reasoning which develops with education (Lehman, D. R., & Nisbett, R. E. 1990). People educated to a higher extent must be more aware of the COVID 19 disease spread and pathology hence, their perception regarding being infected be affected differently compared to those having lower education levels. Susan Folkman's theory (1984) emphasizing the role

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of perceived stress is important in this context as the cognitive perceptions of individuals change with education.

CONCLUSION

In unexpected situations like Covid 19, when people do not have access to information and there is wide spread uncertainty of when things can return to normal, learning to cope up effectively is of vital importance. The study concludes that demographic variables such as gender, age and education level do play a role in the coping style of an individual in case of Covid 19. The choice of coping mechanism that an individual makes in the study with emotion focussed style is found to have relationship with education level, gender and age. Not all coping styles contribute to the mental health. The importance is emphasised even more so now because research shows that the stress levels caused by anxiety due to Covid 19 have a negative role, both in the incidence as well as the progress of the disease. In order to effectively combat this anxiety and uncertainty, providing intervention to the general public regarding the various types of coping mechanism, when and how to engage in that particular style would be of great benefit. The study, however, does not address the gap as to how to provide the intervention. Would a lecture mode or practical workshop approach be more beneficial is something to be further studied and analysed. The fact that this study is done in a limited sample and only few demographic variables are considered forms a limitation to this study, but it does point out to the relationship between the demographic variables and coping styles.

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Acknowledgement

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Sucharitha Gold, N. S. (2022). Coping with COVID 19: A Study in the Telangana and Andhra Pradesh States from a Psychological Perspective. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 10(4), 1682-1690. DIP:18.01.160.20221004, DOI:10.25215/1004.160