

The Study on Relationship Between Learned Helplessness and Adjustment among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

One of the major challenges to mankind in today's world is the unending need to adjust to the rapidly changing and often conflicting social intuitions such as the family, peer group networks, occupation, economic changes, wars and even various ideological changes that are sweeping the world. In fact, the whole course of evolution is a process of adjusting to the ever-impinging changes. The word "adjustment" became popular in psychology during the 1930s. Shaffer (1936) in his book, *The Psychology of Adjustment*, assigned biological adaptation as the central meaning of the term adjustment. This somewhat mechanistic view represents the then predominant view of behavior held by behaviorists. Learned helplessness is thought to contribute to feelings of anxiety and may influence the onset, severity, and persistence of conditions such as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). When you experience chronic anxiety, you may eventually give up on finding relief because your anxious feelings seem unavoidable and untreatable. Because of this, people who are experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety or depression may refuse medications or therapy that may help relieve their symptoms. Therefore, both these topics and their relationship with each other are studied in this research for young adult population. The study focuses on studying the relationship between learned helplessness on adjustment and differentiates the relationship based on Gender, Socioeconomic status, Habitation (hosteller or day scholars). The study is conducted on 129 students from the age group of 19-21 pursuing their under-graduation degree in arts, engineering and medicine. The study is conducted using 2 questionnaires, 1. Learned Helplessness scale developed by G.P Mathur and 2. Adjustment Scale by Dr. D.N Srivatsava and Govind Tiwari. The samples are collected using purposive sampling method from the above-mentioned sample group. Pearson's correlation was done to study the relationship and except for male population, every other division (female, low socioeconomic status, high socioeconomic status, hosteller, day scholar) showed insignificant or weak direct type of relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment, for male population showed insignificant or weak indirect type of relationship for the same. (Keyword: Adjustment, Learned Helplessness, Young Adult)

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Young Adults

According to Erikson, in the wake of the adolescent emphasis upon identity formation, the young adult, emerging from the search for and insistence on identity, is eager and willing to fuse their identity with that of others. He [or she] is ready for intimacy, that is, the capacity to commit, to concrete affiliations and partnerships. To do so mean the ability to face the fear of ego loss in situations which call for self-abandon: in the solidarity of close affiliations, in orgasms and sexual unions, in close friendships and in physical combat. Avoidance of such experiences because of a fear of ego-loss may lead to a deep sense of isolation and consequent self-absorption.

Adjustment: Adjustment is the interaction between the environment and the individual of a particular set up; the set up includes every institution of the societal environment (e.g.: marriage, school, family). The interaction is caused due to the needs of the individual and the demands of the environment. This demand can both be internal and external of the environment. Psychologists talk majorly about the 2 perspectives of adjustment. Firstly, the efficiency or the quality with which they adjust to the environment.

Definition “Adjustment is effectiveness of individuals’ attempts to maintain balance between satisfaction of needs and environment.” (James Coleman, 1941) “The process of finding and adopting modes of behavior suitable to the environment or to the changes in the environment”. (The Dictionary of Education)

Adolescence and Adjustment: Adjustment in young adulthood is a compulsion as lot of changes takes place. Various factors affect the ease with which the young adulthood population adjusts to the newer situations in their life, this includes:

- Parental Relationship
- Parental method used
- Relationship between the parents
- Emotional Maturity
- Family condition
- Sibling relationship
- Familial Communication.

Most dimensions of adjustment take place during this phase, starting from biological, relationships, educational, family and work adjustment. These are also the various factors that are happening in any individuals’ life span at most given phase. Therefore, adjustment at this age is very tricky and is dependent on many factors but it is almost a compulsion.

Helplessness: When an organism is prevented from avoiding some aversive stimulus repeatedly, the organism will reach a state where they become passive and depressed because they believe that there are no solutions to avoid the aversive stimulus. Therefore, helplessness is a mental state in which organism is forced to bear aversive stimulus or stimuli that are painful or otherwise unpleasant. Definition “Motivational, cognition and emotional deficits due to prolonged exposure to uncontrollable events” (Seligman, 1975).

Theory of helplessness: Martin Seligman coined the term “Learned Helplessness” to describe the expectation that outcomes are uncontrollable. Learned helplessness has since become the basic principle of behavioral theory demonstrating that prior learning can result in a drastic change in behavior and seeking to explain why individuals may accept and

The Study on Relationship Between Learned Helplessness and Adjustment among Young Adults

remain passive in negative experiences, other consequences may accompany the inability or unwillingness to act including, low self-esteem, chronic failure, sadness and physical illness. This theory of learned helplessness also has been applied to many conditions, behaviors including clinical depression, ageing, domestic violence, poverty, discrimination, drug and alcohol abusing.

Young Adulthood and Helplessness:

In young adulthood of life, helplessness can cause a personality change permanently, as it affects the emotional, academic and achievement aspects of the individual. Helplessness is caused due to repeated negative, stressful, unfavourable events taking place, which eventually affects the motivational, cognitive, emotional factors of an individual, ultimately leading to the feeling of helplessness. (Theory of helplessness, Seligman M., 1976)

Emotionally, young adults can become more vulnerable to clinical depression, anxiety and stress, caused due to unorganized family, parental conflicts, parenting style, broken relationship between parents etc.

Academically, if a student fails regularly in a particular subject, he/she will eventually lose the motivation to try succeeding in that subject and also to perform better in the other subjects. Achievement aspect is also very similar, the more the failure an individual faces, and the less he/she will be inclined towards achieving their goals. Following symptoms were generally found in learned helpless adolescents:

- Lack of cognitive efforts.
- Lack of confidence in their own skills.
- Inability to take initiatives.
- Demonstration of extreme negativism.
- Social isolation. • Lack of basic drives.
- Lack of motivation to learn.
- Low self-esteem.
- Poor coping skills.

Conclusion: Both adjustment and learned helplessness are results of a process. This process always includes past experiences. Among young adult population, parenting plays a major role for both adjustment and helplessness. The correlation of both can be viewed by studying how individuals with different levels of helplessness, adjust to various environmental set ups. Adjustment and helplessness can cause an effect on the motivational, emotional and cognitive aspects of an individual. These are therefore the similarities in the concepts and thus studying them can bring out a clear relationship between the two of them.

Need for the Study

The study aims to determine the effect of learned helplessness on the level of adjustment among adolescent population. This sample is selected because adolescents and young adults are known to go through a lot of transformation to which they have to adapt and adjust to also, since their childhood they would have had experiences through which they learn to be helpless; therefore, this is the right population to study the relationship between the two variables. They may have learnt to be helpless from a variety of situations like bullying at school, sexual abuse, parental issues, divorced parents etc. This study aims to assess the adjustment level of the individual in the different dimensions and then bring about a relationship with the level of learned helplessness for the same individual. Learned

The Study on Relationship Between Learned Helplessness and Adjustment among Young Adults

helplessness can drastically affect the level of adjustment and if students are not able to adjust to the changing scenarios in their environment, there is a possibility of slipping into various psychological disorders.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Floor L. & Rosen M. (1975) A study was done with the title “Investigating the phenomenon of helplessness in mentally retarded adults”, the study went on to say that helplessness, or the inability to take effective action in a problem situation, appears to involve both behavioral motivational and competence factors. As a personality characteristic, it may cause difficulties in community adjustment for mentally retarded persons. Helplessness in a group of mentally retarded adults was investigated through a set of behavioral and questionnaire measures specifically adapted for this population. Similar measures were applied to a CA control group. Both institutionalized and non-institutionalized retarded subjects exhibited significantly more signs of helplessness than did the non retarded control subjects. The results support the hypothesis that helplessness is a meaningful personality dimension among retarded persons and can be objectively measured. The research studied the presence of helplessness character and the extent to which it was present among the mentally challenged adults. The test went on to prove the hypothesis that the mental condition of the patient led them to learn being helpless.

Reinicke, Melinda June (1986) The Cultural Adjustment of International Students in the U.S.: A Revaluation Using Reformulated Learned Helplessness was studied and this study researched the effect of cultural shock, which causes helplessness, along with the academic pressure of the universities in the US that leads to difficulty in adjusting to the environment that is completely new to the international students who pursue their degree. Cultural shock characterized (irritability, loneliness, depression, rigidity) was observed, this thus leads to characteristics of helplessness to appear which makes adjustment harder. The study showed that the students coming from third world countries found it hard to adjust compared to the students from UK and other western countries. This is thus concluded to be because of the learned helplessness caused by cultural shock.

Ekechukwu R., Isiguzo B C. (2015)

A study with the title “Psychological Factors Associated with Learned Helplessness among Adolescents in River State” examined psychological factors associated with learned Helplessness among adolescents in Rivers State of Nigeria. Ex-post factor design was used for the work. Sample size of 200 adolescents was utilized for the study; a thirty-item questionnaire was developed by the researchers. Four research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. The study found out that psychological factors such as depression, locus of control and self-concept are associated with learned helplessness among adolescents. Based on the findings teachers and parents should always observe their children’s feelings and behaviors that are not part of them so as to detect early signs of depression and low self-concepts. Schools should employ qualified guidance counsellors who will educate the adolescent on maintaining and sustaining adaptive behaviors.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives:

- To study the relationship between Learned Helplessness and Adjustment among the Adolescent Population.
- To understand the difference in the relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment on the basis of gender.

The Study on Relationship Between Learned Helplessness and Adjustment among Young Adults

- To understand the difference in the relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment on the basis of socioeconomic status (Middle and low socioeconomic)
- To understand the difference in the relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment on the basis of whether the student is a day scholar or a hosteller.

Hypothesis:

- There is a significant relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for the female demographic division.
- There is a positive co related relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for low socioeconomic status demographic division.
- There is a significant relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for middle socioeconomic status demographic division.
- The relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for hosteller's demographic division will be positively corelated.
- There is a positively corelated relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for day scholar's demographic division
- There is a significant relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for male demographic division.

Research Design:

Correlation Research Design is used to study the relationship between Learned Helplessness and Adjustment through analysis of statistics, both descriptive and inferential. There is no cause and effect that is being studied, therefore the research design is correlation in nature.

Samples:

- **Sampling Method:** Purposive sampling method was used to collect samples from colleges, in the age group of 19 to 21, trying to balance the genders, socioeconomic status and hosteller, day scholar ratio.
- Samples consist of 19- to 21-year-old undergraduate students in colleges across Coimbatore, Chennai and Pondicherry.
- The samples were further divided on the basis of gender, socioeconomic status and hosteller/day scholar basis.

Area: The area covered included:

- Chennai
- Coimbatore
- Pondicherry

Exclusion Criteria:

- Students who are 18 and have joined for UG courses.
- Students who are above the age of 21, pursuing UG courses.
- Students who do not interpret English language.
- Students pursuing UG on distant education.
- Students belonging to high socioeconomic status.
- Students pursuing Vocational courses.
- Students living with their close relatives for the purpose of pursuing their degree.

The Study on Relationship Between Learned Helplessness and Adjustment among Young Adults

Tools:

- Learned Helplessness Scale developed by G. P Mathur consisting of 22 items with 5-point response scale, starting with “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” with a 26-reliability score ranging from 0.75 to 0.83 in test-retest method, validity of 0.76 to 0.81 was the ranging score in the concurrent validity coefficient.
- Adjustment Scale developed by D. N Srivatsava and Govind Tiwari, consisting of 80 items with “Yes” and “No” as response choices with reliability score of 0.95 in test-retest method, validity test was conducted by correlating the devised questionnaire to an already standardized questionnaire. The correlation score is 0.73, showing strong positive correlation.

Procedure:

Colleges were chosen with the purpose of focusing on the adolescent population and the questionnaires were asked to be filled after giving prior instructions about the questionnaires “The test below is given for the purpose of major project, please read each statements/question carefully and respond. Choose the response that suits you the best. If there are any doubts, it can be clarified; please do not skip any statements as all of them are mandatory. If the situation does not apply to you, try imagining yourself in the given situation and then choose the best response.” From the chosen colleges, male and female numbers were made sure to be equal. The collected data was further divided into the demographic details that are being studied (socioeconomic status and hosteller/day scholar division). After the data collection, the scoring was done; tables were formulated using the results obtained which were further discussed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study focuses on emerging adult from the age group of 19 to 21 to study the relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment. For this purpose, colleges were chosen from Coimbatore, Chennai, and Pondicherry. The main objective of the study is to study the relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment, other objectives included to study the difference in this relationship on the basis of gender, socioeconomic status and habitation (hosteller and day scholar). A total of 150 samples were taken out of which 21 were excluded on the basis of exclusion criteria and repetition in the responses, thereby getting a total of 129 samples. The 129 samples were further segregated into male, female, low socioeconomic status, middle socioeconomic status, hosteller and day scholar. Correlation study is done to determine the type of relationship on basis of these categories. The results revealed that there is weak positive (direct) relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for ever sub category other than male, for whom there is weak negative (indirect) relationship. The f test was done on the overall sample to determine the significance of the relationship and it was significant at 0.04 level, which led us to reject the null hypothesis that stated that there is no relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment. The tables were formulated and the discussion was done with the support of previously conducted studies on similar topics.

CONCLUSION

- There is weak positive relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for the female demographic division.
- There is weak positive relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for low socioeconomic status demographic division.

The Study on Relationship Between Learned Helplessness and Adjustment among Young Adults

- There is weak positive relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for middle socioeconomic status demographic division.
- There is weak positive relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for hosteller's demographic division.
- There is weak positive relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for day scholar's demographic division
- There is weak negative relationship between learned helplessness and adjustment for male demographic division
- The f test revealed significance at 0.04 level for the overall population between learned helplessness and adjustment.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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