

Exploring Coping Mechanisms in Hospitalized Patients

Tapasya Lakhia^{1*}, Dr. Deep Pathak²

ABSTRACT

Being in a hospital can be a tough time for patients as it is accompanied by many challenges especially, physical and mental discomfort. This leads patients to seek alternative solutions for the stress, anxiety, and tension surrounding their experience. This study incorporates both surveys and interviews to reveal some typical coping mechanisms patients tend to turn to - such as talking or asking friends/family to help them, practising relaxation techniques and sometimes even trying to avoid certain thoughts or situations. This study incorporates data from 75 medical patients of neurology and nephrology etc. and surgical patients of TKR, THR, Debridement, ACL and general surgery. The data will be obtained via a questionnaire consisting of items related to the role of social support, calming activities, positive thinking, and information-seeking as strategies for maintaining emotional and psychological well-being in a hospital setting. The assumption for this study is that these coping mechanisms lead to better psychological and emotional resilience in patients throughout their hospitalization period.

Keywords: *Coping Mechanisms, Hospitalized Patients*

For patients dealing with serious problems including stress, anxiety, despair, and strain, figuring out how to handle the psychological and emotional difficulties of hospitalization is essential.

Stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.)

Anxiety- an emotion characterized by apprehension and somatic symptoms of tension in which an individual anticipates impending danger, catastrophe, or misfortune. (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.)

Depressive disorder, or depression, is a common mental health condition that can happen to anyone. It is characterized by a low mood or loss of pleasure or interest in activities for long periods of time (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.)

Medical aspects of treatment can cause patients to feel uncertainty and discomfort regarding their health outcomes. Patients are usually apprehensive about their recovery from surgeries.

¹Graduate, L.D. Arts College, Ahmedabad

²Clinical Psychology, Shalby Multispeciality Hospital

*Corresponding Author

Received: March 29, 2025; Revision Received: May 09, 2025; Accepted: May 12, 2025

Exploring Coping Mechanisms in Hospitalized Patients

Fear of IV drips, infections and even death are commonly found. Coping mechanisms are personal strategies that help individuals to reduce their emotional burden and counter challenges. Individual styles of dealing are marked by personality traits, past and personal experiences, as well as medical situational details.

Coping strategies can be of two types. 1) Problem focused- this strategy focuses to directly solve or remove the threat or stimulus that is causing the problem. An example could be a person eating healthy, exercising regularly, and avoiding sugar when detected with diabetes. 2) Emotion focused – this strategy focuses on the emotional regulation that is affected due to the problem, rather than the directly dealing with the problem itself. Examples of Emotion focused strategies could be talking to a friend, meditating, or changing the perception about the problem when faced with challenges. Examples of Emotion focused strategies could be talking to a friend, meditating or taking breaks when faced with challenges. The way people manage their hospitalization stress can greatly influence their self-care treatment and recovery. Hospital patients encounter various distinct difficulties that necessitate emotional, physical and psychological adaptation to their conditions.

These coping strategies become even more important to study in the context of hospitals. Coping in hospitalized patients becomes crucial as they are in pain, uncertainty of their recovery, and feelings of helplessness which immensely affects their physical and psychological health. Coping strategies if used correctly can be effective in speeding up the recovery process and improving mental health but if they are misused, they can be proved to be ineffective and might also result in depression, stress, or anxiety. Healthcare providers can provide personalized care by analysing the coping mechanisms of patients, which includes both their psychological and physical needs. A healthy hospital environment that encourages positive coping can enhance the patient experience and their recovery.

Research on coping mechanisms in hospital settings shows that strategies such as relying on social support, maintaining a positive mindset, and using relaxation techniques can enhance patient's satisfaction with hospital care and lower their anxiety levels. Patients who connect with others and openly express their emotions typically deal better, whereas those who suppress or ignore their true emotions may suffer more and heal more slowly. A person's capacity to cope is also influenced by their age, the nature of their illness, its degree of severity, and their cultural background. For instance, younger patients might require their primary caregivers for comfort, while older patients may find peace and solace in their personal rituals or spirituality. Identification of these differences aids healthcare providers in implementing more custom and tailored care plans to each patient's emotional and psychological needs.

Coping mechanisms' impacts extend beyond the hospital environment. As patients learn coping skills and begin to anticipate a long-lasting recovery, the hospital stay can have a big influence on their experiences after leaving the hospital. Professionals, friends, family, and loved ones providing post-operative home care encourage recovery and emotional support. By identifying patient's responses during hospitalization, this study aims to recognise the patterns that can benefit both short-term and long-lasting care. Effective knowledge of right coping mechanisms aids in managing stress of the current as well as future health challenges.

Through the current paper, I attempt to explore and identify various ways that hospitalized patients cope with the psychological and emotional discomfort that is caused by their

Exploring Coping Mechanisms in Hospitalized Patients

condition and/or inside the hospital. Information regarding the same will be obtained using both surveys and interviews that will help me identify patterns of the most common strategies patients employ, such as relying on emotional support, distracting themselves from their condition, or practising relaxation techniques.

The study will also explore the potential downsides that certain coping mechanisms carry such as avoidance strategies, especially when used in abundance. Such strategies provide instant, but temporary relief which is why it is easy to overuse them. However, these strategies prove to be harmful in long run. Hospitals and healthcare centres providing psychological support can have significant impact upon the motivation of patients to adopt effective and healthier coping strategies. Positive and empathetic hospital environment can also enhance patient's well-being and emotional resilience thus leading to improved patient recoveries.

The goal of this research is to improve knowledge of the difficulties that patients encounter while in the hospital and the strategies they employ to overcome these difficulties. These results will help future medical practitioners create ways that will help patients cope and prevent them from creating negative coping mechanisms. By incorporating these techniques into medical practice, hospitalized patients may receive emotional support throughout their trying time and experience a successful recovery.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Coping strategies in patients with acute myeloid leukaemia

This study signifies coping methods that patients with high-risk acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) use for their psychological health and quality of life (QOL). More than half of the patients had employed approach-based techniques, such as active concentrating (43.1%), acceptance (47.5%), and emotional support (56.9%), which were linked to a better quality of life and lower levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, sadness, and PTSD. Conversely, a significant number of patients (38.8%) employed avoidant approaches, including denial (56%) and self-inflicted blame (26.3%), which were linked to greater distress and fewer positive outcomes in their lives. Some patients displayed both coping mechanisms, despite the challenges of handling a sudden and severe diagnosis like AML. Findings suggest while keeping in line with research on patients with solid tumours, that unique coping challenges are faced by patients with hematologic cancer. In order to offer better supportive care, the need for healthcare providers to understand and evaluate how patients are managing is stressed. Healthy and positive coping strategies like journaling, cognitive reframing etc, may be effectively promoted by palliative care. More study is required to better understand how coping mechanisms change over time and how focused care can enhance these patient's emotional health and clinical results. (Amonoo et al., 2022)

Relationships among hope, coping style, and social support for breast cancer patients

Hope can be an essential component for those suffering from serious illnesses like cancer. To navigate the uncertainties, pain, and loss associated with diagnosis and treatment, patients often use hope as a psychological tool. As the study suggests, cancer patients are encouraged to develop hope since it can enhance their emotional resilience and aid in coping with illness. The usage of positive psychological strategies such as optimism, confrontative action and self-reliance is associated with hope in patients with breast cancer since it leads to improved outcomes. Compared to strategies such as emotional and fatalistic coping, that prioritize avoidance and helplessness are linked to a lack of hope, emphasizing the advantages of active, problem-based resiliency.

Exploring Coping Mechanisms in Hospitalized Patients

Another important aspect of hope is social support. Social support provided by family, friends and medical teams makes patients feel higher hope levels which can in turn enhance their overall well-being. Family members are especially a crucial role in providing strength and hope that help patients cope with the emotional burden of their illness. Studies of other patient populations such as those undergoing heart or bone marrow transplants, suggests that emotional and social support is greatly beneficial. By examining the interdependence between hope, strategies for coping and social support, this study adds to our understanding of how hope contributes in an area that has been previously less explored by Western populations.

However, there are still areas for improvement in the current research. Convenience sampling and the focus only on the patients undergoing chemotherapy limit the generalizability of the study findings. For future studies, random sampling would be a better option to maintain a larger sample size so that it is representative of larger population. Advancing longitudinal approaches may be advantageous in understanding how cancer patients' optimism and their adaptive mechanisms change throughout the course of treatment. The results of extensive studies that cover multiple regions within China would be advantageous, enhancing their relevance and usefulness throughout the country. Eventually, this would lead to better psychological support networks for patients with breast cancer in a larger society. (Zhang, Gao, Wang, & Wu, 2010)

Correlation between medical coping style and mindfulness level of hospitalized elderly: implications for enhancing psychological well-being

The findings of this study offer valuable information on the mindfulness of hospitalized elderly patients, indicating that their level of mindfulness is typically moderate, with an average score of 59.71 and 13.90. Feelings of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem can lead to decreased mindfulness due to the impact of factors such as physical ailments and the hospital environment on the mental health of older adults. The majority of elderly patients exhibit passive coping behaviours, such as avoidance and acceptance-resignation, rather than active ones. As the research suggests negative coping styles such as avoidance strategies can lead to reduced mindfulness. Higher mindfulness levels can be found in those people who actively address their health concerns without being avoidant. Other factors such as age, gender, personal beliefs, religion, muscle strength etc. can affect mindfulness. Elder women patients without religious beliefs and weaker muscle strength were all found to have lower scores on mindfulness tests. Religious beliefs in contrast seemed to have a positive impact on mindfulness, perhaps because of the emotional support they provide. Study suggests that healthcare providers should focus on encouraging positive coping strategies, particularly for vulnerable groups, to improve mental health and mindfulness. However, limitations of the study are that it is carried out in one hospital and that they use self-reported data which does not necessarily reflect complex coping styles and mindfulness. These relationships need to be studied more closely in order to understand how they interrelated, over time. (Yang, Bai, Aliswag, et al., 2024)

METHODOLOGY

This study is an amalgamation of descriptive and exploratory research, carried out in Shalby Multispeciality Hospital located in the city of Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The purpose of implementing a mixed-method study was to gain unbiased information about the various coping strategies employed by inpatients. The study population was sampled using the convenience sampling method that included medical patients of neurology, nephrology, etc and surgical patients of Total Knee Replacement (TKR), Total Hip Replacement (THR),

Exploring Coping Mechanisms in Hospitalized Patients

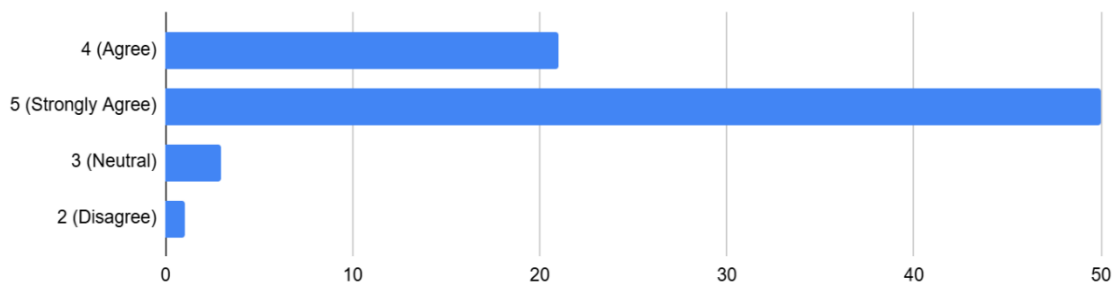
Debridement, Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) and general surgery. A total of 75 patients were incorporated. No specifications were taken into account such as the age or gender of the patients to make a broader scope of representation. All inpatients who were available and willing to participate were incorporated with thorough consent.

Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire created through Google Forms. This questionnaire was designed to specifically probe the psychological and emotional coping styles that patients used during their hospital stay. Questions were primarily of multiple-choice format using the Likert scale the frequency and intensity of coping strategies. Problem-focused and Emotion-focused coping mechanisms were explored through these questions.

Patient's level of Agreement and Disagreement regarding various statements were taken into account giving insight into their coping behaviour. A Likert scale with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree" was employed. Included were questions about cognitive reframing, such as "I try to focus on the positive aspects than the negative ones of my condition to feel better," or social support, such as "Talking to family, doctors, nurses, or other patients makes me feel comfortable."

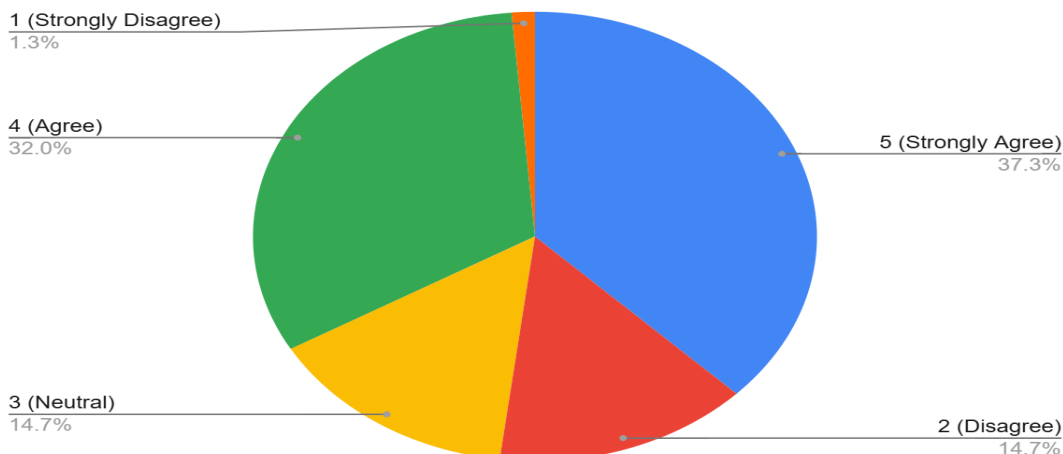
This study was ethically conducted by taking thorough informed consent from the participants and all patients took part enthusiastically. Consent was taken from each participant to record their Name, Age and Gender in Google Forms. Ethical approval was taken from the hospital as well.

1. My family and friends help me feel comfortable during this difficult time in hospital.



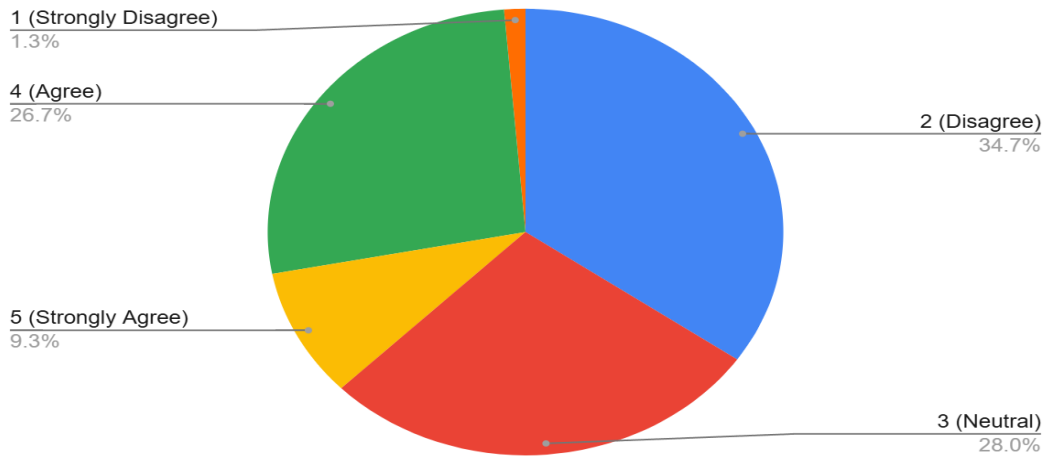
1. My family and friends help me feel comfortable during this difficult time in hospital.

2. I watch TV, read books to take my mind off the pain.



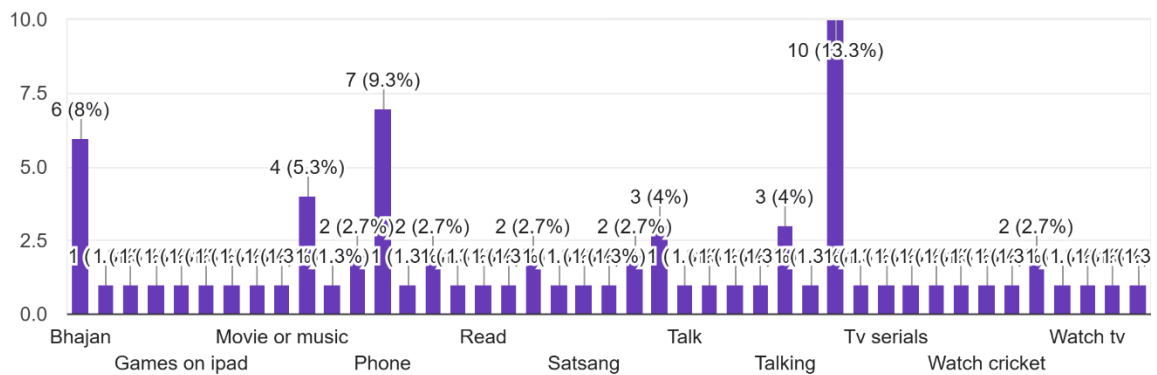
Exploring Coping Mechanisms in Hospitalized Patients

3. Meditation makes me feels relaxed and calm while being here.

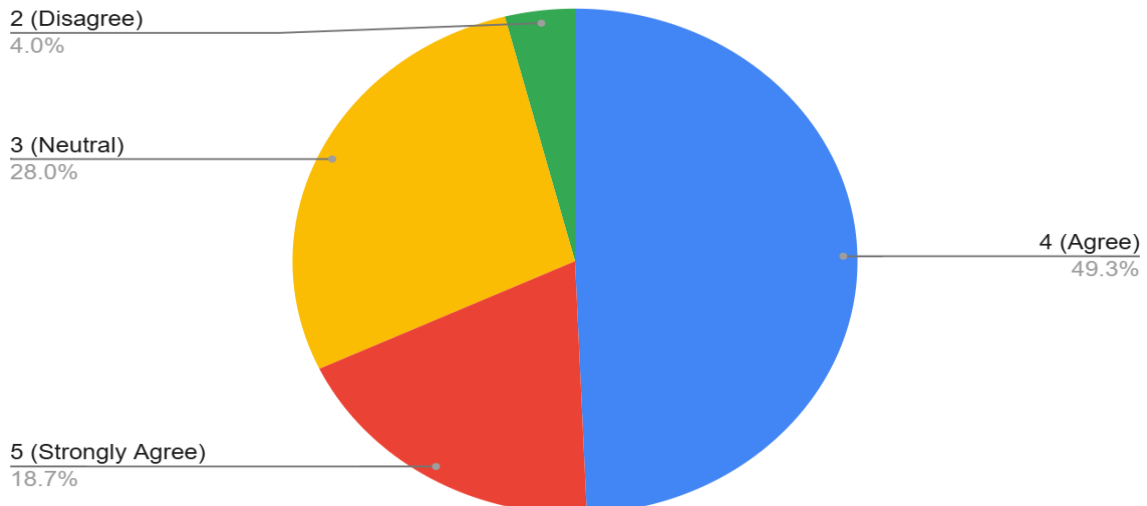


4. Favourite activity to do when bored.

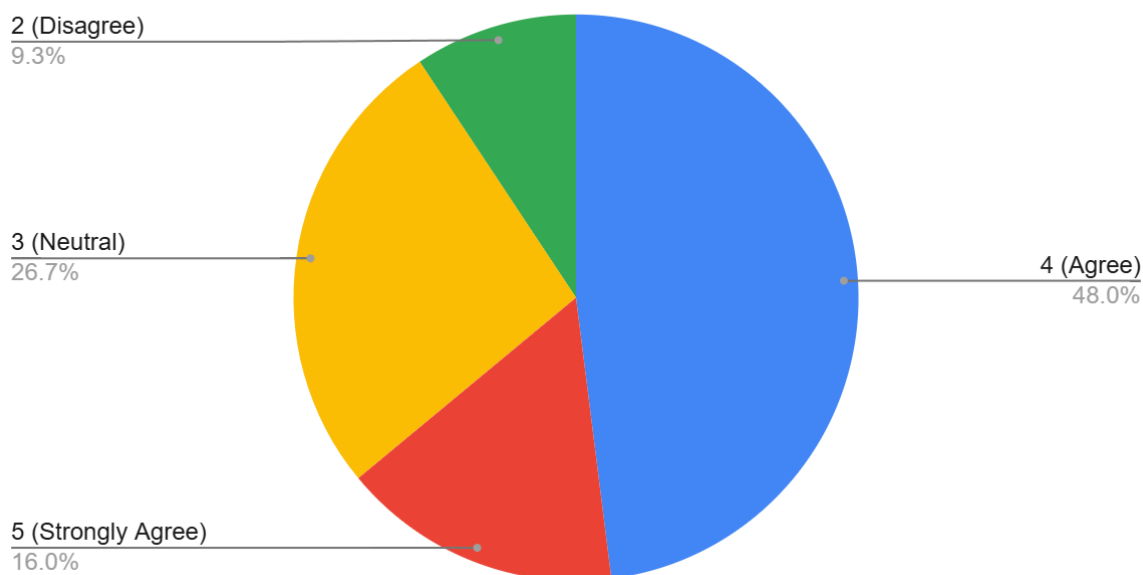
75 responses



5. I listen to music, draw or do other calming activities to feel less stressed.



6. Talking to fellow patients facing similar issues makes me feel less lonely and more supported



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study incorporates data from 75 hospitalized patients across ages, including both men and women. Patients from different departments, including neurology and nephrology, as well as the surgical specialties of Total Knee Replacement (TKR), Total Hip Replacement (THR), Debridement, Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) reconstruction, and general surgery were interviewed. The varied population facilitated a comprehensive examination of how patients coped with various medical conditions and their treatment.

A significant proportion of patients (94.7%), agreed that they depend on social support from their loved ones and acquaintances to cope with hospital challenges. Thus, social support plays a critical role in helping patients manage their hospital-related stress and worry. Emotional resilience can be boosted by having people that patients trust and love around them. Hence the study demonstrates the importance of emotional bonds that can act as a buffer against illness and hospitalization.

Approximately 66% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that reading, watching TV, or taking up a hobby helped them take their minds off the stress and discomfort associated with their condition. Engaging in creative and distracting activities can be beneficial and maintain a sense of normalcy and mental well-being in their struggling circumstances. Hence distraction becomes a means of managing or coping with their condition-related issues.

In contrast, the use of relaxation methods such as deep breathing or meditation was not as prevalent, with only 36% of respondents stating that they resorted to meditation to cope with their circumstances. It suggests that relaxation may be a helpful technique for some patients, but not for all. It might be because they find it difficult to learn and retain these meditation practices while going through their condition in the hectic environment of the hospital.

Approximately 68% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that engaging in relaxing activities, such as breathing techniques, painting, or music listening, enhanced their mood and reduced stress. This indicates that incorporating sensory stimulating and creative

Exploring Coping Mechanisms in Hospitalized Patients

activities can be extremely beneficial to patients so that they can find a window of relief from their usual and monotonous hospital routine.

The findings also showed that patients felt less alone and more supported when they spoke with other patients or those who had experienced similar health issues. 64.7% of participants agreed on this notion. Loneliness can be a huge part of distress when going through difficult situations. Meeting other people sharing similar experiences can be relieving and would lead to lower catastrophizing of their condition.

DISCUSSION

Findings from this research indicate that social support, distraction, and calming activities are important coping strategies for hospitalized patients. Social support among all seems to be the most effective coping mechanism in an anxiety-inducing environment of the hospital. This also implies the importance that valued interpersonal relationships hold in helping an individual survive their challenging times. Loneliness and feelings of isolation can make patients feel helpless and trigger even more anxiety and stress.

Distracting activities have also proven to be impactful in reducing the uneasiness created by a patient's condition. Diverting their attention to something that gives them happiness and a sense of satisfaction breaks their loop of constant distress. Thus, it proves to be therapeutic in providing an escape from worry and pain while enhancing positive aspects of life.

While the less frequent use of relaxation techniques could be attributed to the hasty environment of the hospital. Patients might be unable to direct their focus while meditating. They might also lack knowledge of mediation practice. This may suggest the requirement of healthcare professionals who could properly direct patients to practice the correct form of guided meditation to ease their anxiety.

The results imply that social support, relaxation techniques and a sense of community and interaction are beneficial for hospitalized patients. Since they experience a lot of discomfort, helplessness and uncertainty relating to their condition, these coping mechanisms become extremely helpful in maintaining their mental balance and looking at the positive aspects of their recovery without catastrophizing their condition. Thus, a positive environment that enhances emotional and social support can significantly impact a patient's recovery and emotional resilience.

CONCLUSION

This research examines the emotional and psychological experiences that patients go through during their time at the hospital and in what ways they manage their mental state in difficult times. Social support becomes a significant factor in coping, as many patients find comfort in interacting and being around their family, friends, supportive hospital staff or fellow patients. Patients also found it beneficial to focus on more positive aspects of their recovery than the negative ones to manage their emotions during their stay.

This research concludes that managing emotions during difficult times using various coping mechanisms is a vital component of the hospital experience. Hospitals can improve their assistance by identifying the coping mechanisms that each patient resorts to and creating a better treatment plan depending on their personal coping styles. Patient's recovery can be facilitated by providing a hospital environment that promotes the use of coping techniques.

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Anxiety*. In *APA dictionary of psychology*. Retrieved March 19, 2018, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/anxiety>
- Amonoo, H. L., Bodd, M. H., Reynolds, M. J., Nelson, A. M., Newcomb, R., Johnson, P. C., Dhawale, T. M., Plotke, R., Heuer, L., Gillani, S., Yang, D., Deary, E. C., Daskalakis, E., Goldschen, L., Brunner, A., Fathi, A. T., LeBlanc, T. W., & El-Jawahri, A. (2022). Coping strategies in patients with acute myeloid leukemia. *Blood Advances*, 6(7), 2435–2442. <https://doi.org/10.1182/bloodadvances.2021005845>
- Hospitalized, in. “Coping Mechanisms in Hospitalized Patients.” *Google Docs*, 2024, docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd6CO-9Jaso-stVHu5X3-ZZZ9ZdjYleGF28J66u8yvuiHnlug/viewform?usp=sf_link. Accessed 12 May 2025.
- World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Depression*. Retrieved March 31, 2023, from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>
- World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Stress*. Retrieved February 21, 2023, from <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress>
- Yang, K., Bai, J., Aliswag, E. G., et al. (2024). Correlation between medical coping style and mindfulness level of hospitalized elderly: Implications for enhancing psychological well-being. *BMC Geriatrics*, 24, 823. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-024-05437-9>
- Zhang, J., Gao, W., Wang, P., & Wu, Z. (2010). Relationships among hope, coping style, and social support for breast cancer patients. *Chinese Medical Journal*, 123(17), 2331–2335. <https://doi.org/10.3760/cma.j.issn.0366-6999.2010.17.009>

Acknowledgment

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

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Lakhia, T. & Pathak, D. (2025). Exploring Coping Mechanisms in Hospitalized Patients. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(2), 1635-1643. DIP:18.01.151.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.151