

Impact of Gender on Life Event Stress and Coping Behavior among Graduate Students

Kantariya Ashok S.^{1*}

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to know the differences of gender on life event stress and coping behavior among graduate students. The random sampling method was used in this study. The total sample consisted of 160 subjects out of which 80 were graduate boys and 80 were graduate girls. Students were from the various colleges of Bhavnagar District. Stressful life events inventory developed by Rao, K., (1986) and the coping check list (CCL) developed by Rao, Subbakrishna and Prabhu, (1989) used to measure life event stress and coping behavior. The data were analyzed using t-test. The result showed that there is significant gender difference on life event stress among graduate students. There is no significant gender difference on coping behavior among graduate students. There is significant negative correlation between life event stress and coping behavior.

Keywords: *Life Event Stress, Coping Behavior, Gender, Graduate Students*

According to Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend (1978), "The stressful life events are causally implicated in a variety of undesirable effects on our performance and health." Life events are those events which cause significant change. They can be either positive or negative, but they all demand adjustment to new circumstances. It is also called stressors. Stressors are those events which cause distress. Stressors are of basically two types - episodic and continuous. An episodic stressor is that event which happens around us less frequently although it has tremendous impact on us. Such events have temporary impact. Our body system is capable enough to withstand episodic events. Major stress related problems arise out of continuous type of stressors. Life events appear to precede a number of physical and psychological health problems. They can trigger or exacerbate psychological disorder and may lead to clinical anxiety or depression. Stressful experiences have been associated with early adulthood, especially with the college entry process. Some of the challenges faced by freshmen students include the transition

¹Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Saurashtra University, Rajkot, India

*Responding Author

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to adulthood, individuation (Dyson & Renk, 2006), academic overload, financial problems, less time with family, and pressure to succeed (Tosevski et al., 2010). Higher levels of stress were related to risky behaviors in college population such as alcohol abuse (Weitzman, 2004). The association among college career stages, negative life events and psychological distress, negative experiences in peer relationships were most predictive of distress and that younger students were vulnerable to negative life events (Braboy & Finney, 2002). Studies among college students suggest that higher stress level generally related to greater symptomatology, including anxiety (Sarason, Johnson & Siegel, 1978) depression (Lustman, Sowa & O'Hara, 1984), lower levels of general well-being (Cole, 1985) and low self-esteem (Guinn & Vincent, 2002; Abouserie, 1994; Youngs & Rathge, 1990; Mullis, Youngs & George, 1993; Marcotte et al., 2002). There is ample evidence for gender differences in response to stressful life events. For example, Karanci, Alkan, Balta, Sucuoglu, and Aksit (1999) found greater levels of distress and more negative life-events for women than for men after the 1995 earthquake in Dinal, Turkey. Ben-Zur and Zeidner (1991) found women reporting more anxiety and bodily symptoms than men, as well as higher tension, fear and depression during the Gulf war. BarTal, Lurie, and Glick (1994) came to a similar result when they investigated the effects of stress on men and women Israeli soldiers.

Coping means to invest own conscious effort, to solve personal and interpersonal problems, in order to try to master, minimize or tolerate stress and conflict (Weiten, et al., 2008; Snyder, 1999; Zeidner, et al., 1996; Cummings, et al., 1991; Lazarus, et al., 1984). The psychological coping mechanisms are commonly termed coping strategies or coping skills. In coping with stress, people tend to use one of the three main coping strategies: either appraisal focused, problem focused, or emotion focused coping (Weiten, et al., 2006). Coping style plays an important role in mediating between a stressful experience and the psychophysiological reactions to that experience, but research into the relationship between gender and coping style has produced mixed results. Some researchers have found no consistent differences between men's and women's coping styles (Pritchard & Wilson, 2006; Hamilton & Fagot, 1988). Research indicates that style of coping is one moderating influence in the stress-distress relationship (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). Research on coping is representative of the important role that coping is seen to play in mediating between antecedent stressful events and outcomes such as anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and somatic complaints (Billings & Moos, 1981, 1984; Coyne, Aldwin, & Lazarus, 1981; Endler, 1988; Endler & Parker, 1989; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Research indicates that style of coping is one moderating influence in the stress-distress relationship (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986).

OBJECTIVE

1. There is no significant difference of gender on life event stress among graduate students.
2. There is no significant difference of gender on coping behavior among graduate students.
3. There is no significant correlation between life event stress and coping behavior.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of 160 subjects out of which were 80 graduate boys and 80 were graduate girls selected from various colleges of Bhavnagar District. All the subjects were randomly selected keeping in view the control variables of the study.

Instruments

1. Personal Data Sheet

A personal data sheet developed by the investigator was used to collect information about gender (graduate boys/graduate girls) as well as to collect some other demographic information.

2. Stressful life events inventory

A modification of the tools used by Rao, K., 1986 was used. It is open ended and consists of 56 discrete events covering 7 different areas of stress. A one year time was used and events were dated to the nearest month. Scoring of the inventory is most easy. You have count the number of response where the individual has tick mark YES only. The stressful life events inventory possess high reliability. The reliability Coefficient were determined Split-half and test-retest method. Similarly, in case of test-retest method, the inventory was again administered on a sample of 100 students after a period of 14 days. The reliability coefficients are 0.84 (split-half) and 0.87 (test-retest). The content validity was ensured through method of selection and classification of items. It is widely used scale and consistency coefficient are satisfactory.

3. The coping check list (CCL)

Coping behavior were measured using the Coping Checklist (CCL) (Rao, Subbakrishna and Prabhu., 1989). Coping check list has 70 items, which covers a wide range of behavioral, cognitive and emotional responses to handle stress. Items are scored dichotomously in a yes/no format, the responses indicating presence or absence of a particular coping behavior. The test retest reliability (over a month) is 0.74, indicating adequate reliability and the internal consistency is 0.86.

Procedure

The testing was done on a group of graduate boys and graduate girls. The whole procedure was explained to them clearly. Obtained data were analyzing using t-test for comparing graduate boys and graduate girls on life event stress and coping behavior.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The main objective of present study was to know the differences of gender on life event stress and coping behavior among graduate students. The t-test was used to find out whether gender (graduate boys/graduate girls) has an impact on life event stress significant difference was found between graduate boys and graduate girls on life event stress ($t=2.63$, $p<0.05$). There is no significant difference of gender on coping behavior among graduate students ($t=0.89$, $p>0.05$). There is significant negative relationship between life event stress and coping behavior ($r = -0.36$).

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Table 1 Showing the Mean, SD and t-value of life event stress among graduate boys and graduate girls

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t
Graduate Boys	80	33.20	14.72	2.63*
Graduate Girls	80	40.40	19.51	

*p < 0.05

Results of the study showed a significant gender difference on life event stress among graduate students. Graduate girls have more life event stress than graduate boys. There is ample evidence for gender differences in response to stressful life events. For example, Karanci, Alkan, Balta, Sucuoglu, and Aksit (1999) found greater levels of distress and more negative life-events for women than for men after the 1995 earthquake in Dinal, Turkey. Ben-Zur and Zeidner (1991) found women reporting more anxiety and bodily symptoms than men, as well as higher tension, fear and depression during the Gulf war. BarTal, Lurie, and Glick (1994) came to a similar result when they investigated the effects of stress on men and women Israeli soldiers. The results for stressful life events show sex differences among college students in Puerto Rico, especially in relocation, breakup of a significant relationship and illness, with females been more affected by these stressful life events (Mae Lynn et al., 2013). The difference between men's and women's social roles is another important factor that affects the relationship between stress and gender (Aneshensel, Frerichs, & Clark, 1981; Cleary & Mechanic, 1983). Women report family- and health-related events experienced by themselves and those in their environment as more stressful compared to men (Stein & Nyamathi, 1999) whereas men report work events experienced by themselves as highly stressful (Matud, 2004). Women's situational stress assessment as well as stress experiences were higher than those of the men. Differences between men and women are primarily mediated by the social support they seek and receive.

Table 2 Showing the Mean, SD and t-value of coping behavior among graduate boys and graduate girls

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t
Graduate Boys	80	67.31	14.67	0.89NS
Graduate Girls	80	69.28	13.38	

NS=Not Significant

The result showed that there is no significant gender difference on coping behavior among graduate students. Coping style plays an important role in mediating between a stressful experience and the psychophysiological reactions to that experience, but research into the relationship between gender and coping style has produced mixed results. Some researchers have found no consistent differences between men's and women's coping styles (Pritchard & Wilson, 2006; Hamilton & Fagot, 1988), while others have found that women use more emotion-focused coping strategies whereas men use more problem-focused strategies (Miller & Kirsch, 1987; Matud, 2004; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986; Day & Livingstone,

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2003). In general, problem-focused coping has been found to be more effective than emotion-focused coping, which is associated with psychological distress (Sigmon, Stanton, & Snyder, 1995).

Table 3 *Correlation between life event stress and coping behavior*

Variables	N	r
Life Event Stress	160	-0.36**
Coping Behavior		

**p < 0.01

The result showed that there is significant negative correlation between life event stress and coping behavior. The table 3 revealed that the correlation between life event stress and coping behavior is $r = -0.36$. It is a negative correlation and found to be significant at 0.01 level. It means, if life events stress more in the students then coping behavior is less. In other words, a students who experience more life event stress in their life, they used less coping behavior. Studies have pointed out that there were significant negative correlation between the stressful life events and individual alcohol (Xia, F. & Ye, B.J. 2014), drugs, (Yang, Q., Ye, B.J., 2014) use and suicide rate (Li, H., Zhang, W., 2011).

CONCLUSION

1. There is significant difference of gender on life event stress among graduate students.
2. There is no significant difference of gender on coping behavior among graduate students.
3. There is significant negative correlation between life event stress and coping behavior.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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