Stress Coping Skills of Senior Secondary Students and their Goal Orientation: A Study based on Kalmunai Educational Zone

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Abstract

This research investigation was conducted to find out stress coping skills of senior secondary students in relation to their goal orientation. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling from 1AB and 1C of Kalmunai Muslim Division of Kalmunai Education Zone. The total number of sample was 200. The tools used for data collection were standardized instruments selected after a comprehensive review of related literature. The two standardized questionnaires, Coping Skills Inventory by Jerabek (1996) and Goal Orientation Measure by Zweig & Webser (2004) were used to measure stress coping skill and goal orientation of senior secondary students respectively. The personal information schedule designed by the researcher was used to procure relevant demographic and socio-psychological information. All scales were pretested through a pilot study to reconfirm the reliability and validity prior to the final investigation. The primary method of the data collection adopted in this study. The informants were contacted individually by the researcher and data were obtained through questionnaire. The 't'-test, ANOVA, correlation were statistical analyses done. The findings of the study revealed that the students differ in their coping skills with regard to their gender, subject of specialization and parents' level of education. The learning and performance approach goal orientations are significantly associated with the students stress-coping skills. The performance avoidance orientation has negative correlation with stress-coping skills of the students.

Keywords: Goal-orientation, Stress-coping, self-reliance, resourcefulness, proactive attitude

1. Introduction

All human beings experience stress in their personal life as well as their career/social environment. Particularly students face a lot of changes and challenges due to modernization and globalization. They have to adjust themselves to the demands of the academic environment with reference to a constantly changing social environment. This causes a lot of stress on the students which in turn makes them to be dispirited in their academic endeavor. However they have to work hard effectively against time and within the parameter of various rules and regulations. It is not always possible to create a conducive study environment. Therefore, they should learn how to deal effectively with their stress to achieve their goal. Hence this study explores the relationship between the stress coping skills and goal-orientation of senior secondary students. It is necessary to explain the idea of stress-coping skills and goal orientation. Goal-orientations are behavioral intentions that determine how students approach and engage in learning activities (Meece et al., 1988). Coping with stress is the process by which a person consciously attempts to master, minimize, or tolerate stressors and problems in life. Coping ability varies to the extent that a

person perceives a situation as stressful (primary appraisal) and decides he/she has the necessary resources to deal with what has been labeled stressful (secondary appraisal). Coping is the process of spending conscious effort and energy to solve personal and interpersonal problems. In the case of stress, coping mechanisms seek to master, minimize, or tolerate stress and stressors that occur in everyday life. These mechanisms are commonly called coping skills or coping strategies. All coping strategies have the adaptive goal of reducing or dealing with stress, but some strategies can actually be maladaptive (unhealthy) or merely ineffective. Maladaptive behaviors are those that inhibit a person's ability to adjust to particular situations. This type of behavior is often used to reduce one's anxiety, but the result is dysfunctional and non-productive. The term "coping" usually refers to dealing with the stress that comes after a stressor is presented, but many people also use proactive coping strategies to eliminate or avoid stressors before they occur. Personal choice in coping strategies is determined by personality traits and type, social context, and the nature of the stressor involved.

Individuals with performance goal orientation view a challenging task as a threat because there is a risk of failure that would exhibit their inadequate ability. Individuals with learning goal orientation on the other hand, view a challenging task as an opportunity for growth and development (Vandewalle et al., 1997). Stress associated with challenges in the learning environment had a positive relationship with learning orientation and the stress associated with hindrances in the learning environment had a negative relationship with performance orientation (Jeffrey et al., 2004). Coping skills are also found related to students' motivation and performance to do their task. When coping resources, are inadequate, stressful situations may give rise to unhealthy outcomes (Wills, et al., 1995).

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Stress coping skill

Stress is an indispensable aspect of life. We experience stress in every walk of life and one such area is academic environment. Students perceive academic life as demanding and stressful (Hammer,et al., 1998). They experience emotional and cognitive reactions to this stress, especially due to external pressures and self-imposed expectations (Misra & McKean, 2000). Though eustress is necessary to challenge students to learn, it is found that stress influences the performance of students.

Stress exists in every part of our life. The prevalence of stress is increasing among students in recent years. This is due to various factors such as increased pressure, competition, decreased resources, inadequate family support, exposed to violence through media and increased use of alcohol as well as drugs. These would help students to be self-reliant, solve problems and make informed choices, which in turn promote their physical and psychological well-being to ascertain the efficacy of a stress coping program as a means for decreasing perceived stress and increasing the proactive attitude towards stress. (Kadhiravan & Kumar, 2012)

"Stress consists of any event in which environmental demands, internal demands, or both, tax or exceed the adaptive resources of the individual, social system" (Rita Agrawal, 2001). Coping refers to a process of constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies are grouped into three classes: task oriented, emotion-oriented and avoidance oriented (Higgins & Endler, 1995). Learning a specific skill/strategy helps an individual to cope more effectively in stressful situation.

2.2 Goal-Orientation

The concept of goal orientation was first proposed in 1980s in the studies that Dweck and his colleagues performed on the primary school children. They show that students follow two main goals in their activities: 1) development of abilities, 2) displaying the abilities. Goal orientation indicates a coherent pattern of individual's beliefs which causes the individual to have tendency for learning situations in different ways, to have activity in that field and finally to show a response (Ames, 1992, Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Dweck distinguishes between two kinds of goal orientation which are learning-focused goal orientation and performance-focused goal orientation. Learning-focused goal orientation involves prioritizing goals which contain new skills and learning skills for unfamiliar situations. Learning-focused goal orientation leads to an adaptive behavioral pattern in which the individual looks for challenges in the tasks. In order to gain the skill, they would show more consistency and less stress when they face any obstacle in doing the task. In contrast, performance-focused goal orientation involves prioritizing goals which help the individual to express his/her competency and qualification and to look for the desirable judgments and evaluations of others towards him/her. These individuals avoid engaging with challenges and prevent the challenging tasks due to the possibility of failure and they experience more stress (Brown & Gerhardt, 2006).

The individual who apply the approaches of performance-focused goal orientation either look for the admiration and approval from others or refuse to accept the admiration. Therefore, performance-focused goal orientation can be divided into avoidance and acceptance goal orientations. The individual who take acceptance goal orientation express their tendency toward progress through evaluation of their own competencies and qualifications; while individual who take avoidance goal orientation do not express their competencies with the aim of escaping critiques. The learners with learning-focused goal orientation mainly use learning and study strategies or in technical terms cognitive strategies (Button et al., 1996).

Goal-orientations are behavioral intentions that determine how students approach and engage in learning activities (Meece et al., 1988). Student's goal orientations are presumed to be important mediators and determinants of behavioral, cognitive and affective patterns in learning or achievement. Students with learning goal orientation seek to develop their skills; performance approach orientation demonstrate their ability and competence; performance avoidance orientations avoid tasks in order to avoid looking incompetent (Pintrich, 2000). The majority of goal orientation research primarily focused on the consequences including a variety of task-related behaviors and task/academic performance outcomes.

Stress and academic performance are omnipresent issues in college students' lives. A recent increase in the number of nontraditional college students has raised the possibility that traditional and nontraditional college students utilize different coping styles when confronted with stressful situations. Higgins & Endler, (1995) argue that people develop distinct styles of coping when responding to stressful situations. Coping style, as most commonly referred to in the literature, is the typical manner in which an individual will confront a stressful situation. Pertinent to the present study is the suggestion that academic performance and achievement goals might be related to an individual's style of coping.

2.3 Stress coping skill and Goal-orientation

Ahmad, A. (2013) conducted a study of stress-coping skills towards goal orientation among undergraduate students. The sample consisted of 300 students comprising male students (n = 150) and female students (n = 150) randomly selected from different constituent colleges of L. N. Mithila University to find out the relationship between stress-coping skills and their goal orientation. The study

revealed the fact that the students differ in coping skills with regard to their gender and parents' level of education. Findings also clearly revealed that the learning and performance approach goal orientations are significantly correlated with the students stress-coping skills, although, the performance avoidance orientation has negative correlation with stress-coping skills of the undergraduate students of L.N. Mithila University, Darbhanga, a well-known university of India.

Parvin Kadivar et al., (2001) examined the relationship between goal orientation and learning strategies with academic stress in university students (150 male and 150 female) which were selected among 4 colleges by cluster sampling method. Goal orientation questionnaire (Button et al., 1996) and learning strategies questionnaire (Pintrich and Degroot, 1990) and academic stress questionnaire (Gadzella, & Baloglu, 2001) were used as the research instrument. Finding show that there was a positive meaningful relationship between learning goal orientation with learning strategies (cognitive and met cognitive) and academic stress. Also there was negative meaningful correlation between performance goal orientation and learning strategies (cognitive and Meta cognitive). These finding also reveals that learning strategies (cognitive and Meta cognitive) have negative meaningful correlation with academic stress. Finally findings displays that academic stress is predictable through linear regression of goal orientation component and learning strategies. So totally these variables were explained 9/6 percent of the variance of academic stress.

Pekrun et al., (2002) find out that experiencing negative emotions like stress and anxiety would arise thoughts unrelated to the task and would lead to the thinking pattern based on details and superficial processing of information, so that experiencing the mentioned emotions seem to be among the reasons for using and reducing significant cognitive resources. According to what stated before, it can be concluded that the external elements which affect academic stress include: high expectations for achievement, performance-based goal orientation, class competition, lack of effective use of learning strategies and etc.

3. Problem of the Study

Sri Lanka Education System is a very competitive though it is said free, equity and equality. This competition and changing environments causes increasing stress among students in recent years. Stress exists in every part of human life. This is due to various factors such as increased pressure, competition, decreased resources, inadequate family support, exposed to violence through media and increased use of alcohol as well as drugs. Hence this research is an attempt to study Stress Coping skills of Senior Secondary students in relation to their goal orientation. Further it is also found that the necessity to find the relationship of demographic variables such as gender, subject, specialization and parents' level of education with stress coping skills. The outcomes and findings of this research will mitigate the lack of empirical data of Sri Lankan youth on the above arena and can be generalized to a larger population of Sri Lankan youth.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between the goal-orientation and stress-coping skills of senior secondary students

2. To study the relationship of the male and female senior secondary students on stress-coping skills

3. To study the relationship of the subject of specialization senior secondary students on stress-coping skills

4. To study the relationship of the parents' level of education senior secondary students on stress-coping skills

5. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to assess the relationship between the stress-coping skills and goal-orientation of senior secondary students.

H_1: There is a significant relation between the goal-orientation and stress-coping skills of senior secondarystudents.

H_2: Male and female senior secondary students differ significantly in their stress-coping skills

H_3: Senior secondary students differ in the stress-coping skills on the basis of their subject of specialization.

H_4: Senior secondary students differ in the stress-coping skills with regard to their parents' level of education.

6. Methodology

6.1 Sample

The population of this study comprises the senior secondary students from G.C.E (Advanced Level) Arts, Commerce, Science and Technology streams of selected schools of Kalmunai Education Zone. Schools are selected through lottery method. 220 students were selected through stratified random sampling. Out of 220 from whom data was collected, some were found to be incomplete. Only 200 data sheets were considered for final analysis. The sample was classified in terms of gender (male-100 and female-100) subject of specialization (Arts-50, Commerce-50, Science-50 and Technology-50). The t-test, one-way analysis of variance, and correlation co-efficient were utilized to analyze the data.

6.2 Materials

This study adopted Survey Method. The following standardized tools were used to collect the data along with the personal data sheet.

1. Coping Skills Inventory by Jerabek (1996): This inventory consists of 45 statements which follow 5 response categories. The 45 items are divided into 7 different dimensions such as reactivity to stress, resourcefulness, ability to relax, self-reliance, proactive attitude, adaptability and flexibility and ability to access situations. The split-half reliability of this inventory is found to be 0.82 and the test-retest reliability is 0.74. The content and construct validity of this inventory is established by the author using appropriate procedures.

2. Goal Orientation Measure by Zweig & Webser. (2004): This scale consists of 21 statements which explore the different dimensions of goal-orientation such as performance approach, performance

avoidance and learning orientation. There are seven response categories for each item. Reliabilities of the three: learning orientation 0.85, performance approach-orientation 0.82 and performance avoidance-orientation 0.69. These tools posses both content and construct validity. The convergent validities of the 3 subscales are: learning-orientation and learning is 0.87, performance approach-orientation and performance is 0.79, performance avoidance-orientation and avoid is 0.81.

7. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Relations between the stress-coping skills and Goal-orientation of senior secondary students

Stress-coping skill dimensions	Performance Approach-orientation	Performance avoidance orientation	Learning orientation
Reactivity to stress	0.005	-0.091	0.153*
Resourcefulness	0.181*	-0.037	0.349*
Ability to relax	0.137*	0.048	0.217*
Self-reliance	0.049	0.029	0.373*
Proactive attitude	0.116*	-0.073	0.097
Adaptability and flexibility	0.019	-0.076	0.113*
Ability to access situation	0.174*	-0.032	0.389*
Total	0.169*	-0.062	0.435*

*Significant at 0.05 level

Table 1 shows the correlation coefficients between stress-coping skills and goal-orientation. From the table it is found that the stress coping skills are positively correlated with goal-orientation which portrays that increase in stress coping skills leads to goal-orientation and vice versa among senior secondary students. Hence the stated hypothesis that there is a significant relation between the goal-orientation and stress-coping skills of senior secondary students is accepted. It is concluded that the stress-coping skills and goal-orientation are highly related to each other.

From the table it is observed that the performance approach-orientation is significantly correlated with the resourcefulness, ability to relax, proactive attitude, ability to access situation and the total score. To be goal-oriented requires resourcefulness on the part of individual because resourcefulness can minimize the negative effect of stress based on their performance; therefore, they can do better than less resourceful individuals under stressful condition (Rosenbaum, 1990). Proactive attitude is future – oriented which helps an individual to develop a better perspective about the uncertainty of the future. These in turn promote the ability to relax. Resourcefulness helps in the maximum use of environmental resources. Hence, the correlation between the different stress-coping skills and performance approach-orientation is appreciable.

The learning-orientation correlates with almost all the dimensions of stress-coping skills. A person who is learning-oriented would seek unfamiliar situation which he/she perceives as a problem. This attitude makes even the unfamiliar situation more enjoyable; the experience enhances the resources to face the stressful situation and hence the correlation between learning-orientation and stress-coping skills is

understandable. Studies reveal that students who adopt learning-orientation and performance approach-orientation coupled with learning-orientation are likely to lead to academic success (Roedel et al., 1994). It is observed that performance avoidance-orientation has the negative correlation with most of the stress-coping skills though it is not statistically significant. Coping skills are possible only when we accept and analyze situations and utilize the resources with respect to the demands of the environment which requires an ability to approach things rather than avoiding it. Hence, the negative correlation between the stress-coping skills and performance avoidance orientation is revealed. In general it is concluded that the stress-coping skills are highly related with the performance approach and learning goal-orientation.

Table 2: Gender-wise comparison of the Stress-coping skills of senior secondary students

Stress-coping skills	Male		Female		't' value
	M1	SD1	M2	SD2	
Reactivity to stress	22.55	4.04	23.49	3.31	2.567*
Resourcefulness	20.80	3.39	21.34	3.08	1.676 NS
Ability to relax	21.11	3.27	21.77	3.65	1.898 NS
Self-reliance	24.64	4.35	25.90	3.84	3.001*
Proactive attitude	18.56	3.18	19.04	3.20	1.536 NS
Adaptability and flexibility	22.38	3.17	23.43	3.07	3.338*
Ability to access situation	20.97	3.45	21.90	3.16	2.851*
Total	151.01	13.72	156.87	13.09	4.377*

*Significant at 0.05 level   NS - not significant

From Table - 2, it is found that the 't' values are significant for reactivity to stress, self-reliance, adaptability and flexibility and ability to access situation. It is also significant for total score. Hence the stated hypothesis that male and female senior secondary students differ significantly in their stress-coping skills is accepted. It is concluded that the male and female students differ significantly in the stress-coping skills. It is exhibited from the table that female students have shown higher score than male students in stress-coping skill dimensions such as reactivity to stress, self-reliance, adaptability and flexibility, ability to access situation.

Table 3: 'F' ratio for the stress-coping skills of the students with reference to their subject of specialization

Stress-coping skill dimensions	Subject of specialization Mean/Std.Deviation				'F' ratio
	1	2	3	4	
Reactivity to stress	23.30	23.15	23.43	22.16	2.523NS
	3.765	3.456	3.200	4.21	
Resourcefulness	20.67	21.26	22.16	20.47	5.348*
	3.448	3.272	2.929	3.223	
Ability to relax	20.34	21.73	22.35	21.14	5.485*
	3.289	3.272	3.596	3.493	
Self-reliance	24.75	26.18	26.34	24.14	6.127*
	4.48	3.945	3.441	4.302	

Proactive attitude	18.38	18.85	19.21	18.69	1.424[NS]
	3.643	3.201	3.018	2.873	
Adaptability and flexibility	23.02	22.17	24.35	22.15	9.005*
	3.273	3.147	2.718	3.083	
Ability to access situation	20.68	21.45	22.89	20.54	9.991*
	3.41	3.003	2.801	3.606	
Total	151.14	154.79	160.73	149.29	12.940*
	14.112	11.642	12.314	13.877	

*Significant at 0.05 level   NS - not significant
1-Arts, 2-Commerce, 3-Science, 4-Technology

From table 3, it is found that the 'F' values are significant for many dimensions of stress-coping skills along with the total. Hence, the stated hypothesis that senior secondary students differ in the stress-coping skills on the basis of their subject of specialization is accepted. It is concluded that the subject of specialization influence significantly the stress-coping skills of students. Science students have shown higher score than Arts, Commerce and technology students.

Table 4: Stress-coping skills of students based on Parents level of Education

Stress-coping skill dimensions	Illiterate		Literate		't' value
	M1	SD1	M2	SD2	
Reactivity to stress	22.59	3.62	23.08	3.71	0.808[NS]
Resourcefulness	21.24	3.61	21.09	3.21	0.294[NS]
Ability to relax	19.59	3.22	21.66	3.45	3.670*
Self-reliance	24.44	4.52	24.41	4.09	1.420[NS]
Proactive attitude	18.49	3.00	18.87	3.23	0.722[NS]
Adaptability and flexibility	22.44	3.72	22.99	3.08	1.053[NS]
Ability to access situation	20.27	3.33	21.62	3.32	2.478*
Total	149.05	13.99	154.71	13.55	2.524*

*Significant at 0.05 level   NS - not significant

From Table 4, it is found that the 't' values are significant for the ability to relax, ability to access situation as well as the total between literate and illiterate parents' student. Literate parents' children show high stress coping skills compare with illiterate parents' children. Hence, the stated hypothesis that senior secondary students differ in the stress-coping skills with regard to their parents' level of education is accepted. It is concluded that the parents' level of education significantly influences the stress-coping skills of the students. Normally the educated parents have much concern for their children's educational, vocational and recreational activities. They help the children by providing suitable opportunities, exposure and timely feedback. The literate parents have shown more interest and favorable attitude toward the development of their children which may help the children to enhance their coping skills.

8. Conclusion and Implications

The following conclusions were drawn from the analysis of the study. Goal-orientation is positively and significantly related to stress-coping skills of senior secondary students. Further the male and female students differ significantly in the stress-coping skills and female students have shown higher score than male students in many stress-coping skill dimensions. Moreover the subject of specialization influences significantly the stress-coping skills of the senior secondary students. The parents' level of education also significantly influences the stress-coping skills of the senior secondary students.

The research findings can be useful for future implication. In this way the result findings of this study emphasize that developing a proper goal-orientation among the senior secondary students should be the pivotal issue in learning and instruction. It is necessary to train the students to cope with the daily stressors, maintains the balance with the environment and sustains with their learning activities, which are essential in the current scenario. Hence education should help the students to develop to fighting spirit that will enable them to cope up with stress. The finding of the study also throw light on many issue related to students motivation, learning stress and coping. The school or senior secondary activities must be designed according to the needs and interest of the individual learner, which in turn motivate them to stick to their learning activities. Training programs may also be organized to develop different competency among students, which would enable them to utilize their potential to the fullest extent. The curriculum planners must consider the goal-orientation and stress coping skills construct while designing the curriculum and arranging activities to promote them.

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