

Coping Skills – A Challenge before Adolescents

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Background of the study

During the 21st century globally life is undergoing significant transition and change. Among the most affected are the adolescents. Core life skills play an essential part of adolescents which are the future of our country. Rapidly changing social, moral, ethical and religious values have ushered in certain 'life styles' in the present society especially among the youth. The stress faced by the adolescent in such a current situation is enormous. This is reflected by raising suicide rates and growing crime among young persons. There is an urgent need to provide today's youth with a new set of ways and systems to deal with the demands of life. Since the 'individual' rather than the 'system' is recognized as the basic unit of the society, it is essential that the youth be helped to develop skills inherently to handle a wide variety of choices, changes and stressors.

Adolescence is often described, as an exciting transitory phase in the human life cycle but is perhaps the most challenging stage as well. This is a time when adolescents evolve into adults with newly discovered independence and renewed responsibilities. They are constantly in search of their own new identity. They tend to question and appreciate the values of the adult world and try to assert their identity. During adolescence they develop skills that will help them to grow into caring and responsible adults. When adolescents are supported and encouraged by caring adults, they thrive in unimaginable ways, becoming resourceful and contributing as members of their families and societies.

Conceptual Framework:

Education aims at an all-round development of students' life skills and academic Achievement in high school level. But if we consider in its broader sense it will be seen that life skills aims not only at physical development and organic health but also at developing social maturity and academic excellence which cultivate social qualities in the students.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Life skills as “the ability for adaptive and positive behaviors that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life”. Achievement is an essential aspect of human life especially in school life. Socially mature individuals have confidence to face reality for their integrity and are well developed in discriminating power to make appropriate decisions about their personal and social life

Coping skills meaning and need

Coping is “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resource of the person”. Coping is thus expending conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, and seeking to master, minimize or tolerate stress or conflict. It can lead to well being and happiness which give ultimate pleasure in life.

Coping skills are those skills that are used to offset disadvantages in day to day life. Coping skills can be seen as a sort of adaptation, such as the finely tuned hearing that many visually impaired people develop. Coping skills can be positive or negative. Positive coping skills help us get through situations at nearly the same level as those who do not have the disadvantage. Negative coping skills, however, may provide short-term relief or distraction, but ultimately worsen disadvantage.

Coping with Emotions

This involves recognizing effects of emotions on others and self. It means to become aware of how emotions influence behaviour, develop ability to respond to emotions appropriately and understand how to handle emotions. Emotion-focused coping strategies aim to reduce and manage the intensity of the negative and distressing emotions that a stressful situation has caused rather than solving the problematic situation itself. These coping strategies thus help us feel better but don't solve the source of our distress. Emotional focused coping often gets utilized when the problem is out of our control i.e. terminal illness or sudden death and we need to try to cope and accept the situation.

Coping with Stress

Coping with stress involves recognizing the sources of stress in life, understanding how these affect us and identifying the ways that help to control the levels of stress. There are

numerous strategies of coping with stress, but what works for one person may not necessarily work for another.

There are several things that one can do for self help -

- Don't suffer in silence! Feeling alone makes stress harder to deal with.
- Talking to somebody you trust can really help you to deal with stress and to work out how to tackle the problems that are causing it.
- Make a list of all the things in your life that are making you feel stressed– write them down on a piece of paper. Then take each one in turn and list all the things you could do to tackle it. This can help you sort things out in your head. Problems look easier to deal with one at a time than in a big jumble in your head!
- Take a break - do something that you really enjoy.
- Do something relaxing, for example take a hot bath or watch a film.
- Do some exercise. This produces chemicals in your body called 'endorphins' which make you feel good!

Need for the Study

A study of adolescent coping skills with respect to emotions and stress can help parents, teachers and other adults working with adolescents be aware of the signs and patterns that signal danger. Awareness of the way these risk factors pile up helps any adult living and working with adolescents to be sensitive when stress and depression are imminent. It is not always easy for one person to see the picture holistically. So it is essential that people who sense that something is wrong take the lead to gather perspectives from friends, family members and professionals who know the teenager. Too often the survivors of an adolescent suicide only 'put the pieces together' when they sit together and try to figure out what happened. This research study can open doors for constructive interventions on the part of teachers, parents and counselors to stimulate emotional development, cope with stress and nurture the adolescents to grow into mentally and emotionally stable and healthy adults.

Title of the Study:

“A Study of the Identification of Coping Skills among Adolescent Students”

Operational Definitions:

Following two terms are defined operationally to have common understanding-

1. **Coping Skills** – In this study, coping skills refer to those skills that adolescents can use to deal effectively with emotions and stress
2. **Adolescents** – Students in the age group of 11- 16 years approximately studying in class VIII.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To Study the extent to which coping skills are present in adolescent students
2. To compare gender wise the coping skills present in adolescent students
3. To study the relationship between coping with stress and coping with emotions

Hypotheses of the Study:

1. There is no definite opinion about the extent to which coping skills are present in adolescent students
2. There is no difference between coping skills with respect to stress found in adolescent girls and coping skills with respect to stress found in adolescent boys
3. There is no difference between coping skills with emotions found in adolescent girls and coping skills with emotions found in adolescent boys
4. There is no correlation between ability to cope with stress and ability to cope with emotions in adolescent boys
5. There is no correlation between ability to cope with stress and ability to cope with emotions in adolescent girls

Sample of the Study:

This study is based on a sample of sixty students (30 boys and 30 girls), between the age group of 13 to 16 years. The sample is selected from three schools namely Carmelite Convent English High School (Sandor), Holy Cross High School(Nirmal), Carmel English High School (Nandakhal). Twenty students were selected from the three schools randomly, studying in class VIII.

Variables of the Study

1. In this study, the dependent variable being investigated is coping skills of adolescents with respect to stress and coping skills of adolescents with respect to emotions.
2. The independent variable is the gender of the students.
3. Controlled variables are the age of the sample, their medium of instruction and the type of school

Methodology of the Study

Survey technique was used for the research. A representative sample of 60 adolescent students was selected from the entire population. The researcher administrated the survey tool for data collection with due instructions to complete the rating scale. The students put a check to mark their answer according to the rating scale given in the tool. At the end the students answered the subjective questions to express their views.

Tool of Research

A tool based on coping skills was prepared for the study by the researcher. The tool comprised of a four point rating scale and open ended questions. The rating scale had twenty statements of which ten each were pertaining to coping skills of adolescent students with respect to stress and emotions respectively. The wordings of the statements were alternated between positive and negative to minimize extreme response bias and acquiescent bias. Two open ended questions were included at the end of the questionnaire, one relating to coping skills with emotions and stress respectively.

Statistical Measures Used

In this research study, the objective was to compare the difference between the coping skills present in boys and girls. For this purpose, the 't test' was used. Another objective of the study was to correlate the skills with respect to stress and, those with respect to emotions. Hence the researcher used 'r', the coefficient of correlation.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of data pertaining to coping skills found in adolescent boys

Table 1: Classification of boys on the basis of coping skills for stress

Status of Coping	Poor	Average	Good	
N	3	18	9	30
%	10	60	30	100

Table1 shows that 10% of the boys show poor status of coping skills with respect to stress, 60% fall in average category and 30% have good coping skills with respect to stress.

Table 2: Classification of boys on the basis of coping skills for emotions

Status of Coping	Poor	Average	Good	
N	6	24	0	30
%	20	80	0	100

Table2 shows that 20% of the boys show poor status of coping skills with respect to emotions, 80% fall in average category and none of them have good coping skills with respect to emotions.

Analysis of data pertaining to coping skills found in adolescent girls

Table 3: Classification of girls on the basis of coping skills for stress

Status of Coping	Poor	Average	Good	
N	0	24	6	30
%	0	80	20	100

Table3 shows that none of the girls show poor status of coping skills with respect to stress, 80% fall in average category and 20% have good coping skills with respect to stress.

Table4: Classification of girls on the basis of coping skills for emotions

Status of Coping	Poor	Average	Good	
N	0	27	3	30
%	0	90	10	100

Table4 shows that none of the girls show poor status of coping skills with respect to emotions, 90% fall in average category and 10% of them have good coping skills with respect to emotions.

Hypothesis1: There is no definite opinion about the extent to which coping skills are present in adolescent students

As seen from tables 1,2,3 and 4, there is a marked difference between the coping skills of students both in case of coping with stress and coping with emotions. Students are distributed among three categories viz, those with poor coping skills, average coping skills and good coping skills. Hence the null hypothesis is not accepted.

Conclusion: There is definite opinion about the extent to which coping skills are present in adolescent students. A range with respect to coping skills is seen among adolescent students.

Hypothesis2: There is no difference between coping skills with respect to stress found in adolescent girls and coping skills with respect to stress found in adolescent boys

Table 5: Table showing mean and SD for coping skills found in adolescent girls

	Score for skills of coping with stress	Score for skills of coping with stress
Mean	27.1	23
SD	3.9	4.35

Table 6: Table showing mean and SD for coping skills found in adolescent boys

	Score for skills of coping with stress	Score for skills of coping with stress
Mean	27.9	25.9
SD	4.48	2.33

Table 7: Coping skills for stress

	Girls	Boys
Mean score for coping With stress	27.1	27.9
SD	3.9	4.48
N	30	30
t value	0.43	

The value of t is found to be 0.43. It is lower than the table value of t. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted. Thus it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between coping skills with respect to stress found in adolescent girls and coping skills with respect to stress found in adolescent boys.

Conclusion: Boys display higher coping skills with respect to stress. But the difference is not significant. Boys and girls do not differ with respect to the coping skills displayed by them with respect to stress.

Hypothesis3: There is no difference between coping skills with emotions found in adolescent girls and coping skills with emotions found in adolescent boys

Table 8: Coping skills for emotions

	Girls	Boys
Mean score for coping With emotions	23	25.9
SD	4.35	2.33
N	30	30
t value	1.86	

The value of t is found to be 1.86. It is lower than the table value of t. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted. Thus it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between coping skills with respect to emotions found in adolescent girls and coping skills with respect to emotions found in adolescent boys.

Conclusion: Boys and girls do not differ with respect to the coping skills displayed by them with respect to emotions.

Hypothesis4: There is no correlation between ability to cope with stress and ability to cope with emotions in adolescent boys

In case of adolescent boys, the coefficient of correlation for coping skills with respect to stress and coping skills with respect to emotions is **0.2**. The null hypothesis is accepted.

Conclusion: In case of adolescent boys, there is very low positive correlation between ability to cope with stress and ability to cope with emotions.

Hypothesis5: There is no correlation between ability to cope with stress and ability to cope with emotions in adolescent girls

In case of adolescent girls, the coefficient of correlation for coping skills with respect to stress and coping skills with respect to emotions is **0.5**. The null hypothesis is rejected.

Conclusion: In case of adolescent girls, there is moderate positive correlation between ability to cope with stress and ability to cope with emotions.

Main findings of the study:

1. There is definite opinion about the extent to which coping skills are present in adolescent students. A range with respect to coping skills is seen among adolescent students.
2. Boys display higher coping skills with respect to stress. But the difference is not significant. Boys and girls do not differ with respect to the coping skills displayed by them with respect to stress

3. Girls display higher coping skills with respect to emotions. But the difference is not significant. Boys and girls do not differ with respect to the coping skills displayed by them with respect to emotions.
4. In case of adolescent boys, there is very low positive correlation between ability to cope with stress and ability to cope with emotions.
5. In case of adolescent girls, there is moderate positive correlation between ability to cope with stress and ability to cope with emotions.

Implications of the study:

- From the responses for the open-ended questions asked at the end of the questionnaire, it is evident that the adolescents do try to find recourse in healthy coping strategies to deal with stress and emotions like recreation, reflection, meditation, healthy diet, confiding in parents, exercise and rest. Adolescents should be provided with support and encouragement to practice their coping strategies, so that it develop and become a habit.
- Again, drawing from the responses of the open- ended question, adolescents also resort to some coping measures which are harmful , for example, bottling up emotions; confiding only in friends who may mislead them by giving wrong advice. Many feel free to express only those experiences which they believe will be seen in positive light by others. Teachers, parents and counselors need to show unconditional positive regard to the adolescents to help them open up freely about both positive and negative findings

Suggestions for further study

1. An experimental study can be undertaken to develop coping skills among adolescents. An activity based strategies can be developed by the researcher. Parallel group design can be used to study the change in coping skills among adolescents.
2. A study of different coping mechanisms used by emotionally stable adolescents

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