COPING BEHAVIOUR AMONG ARMY PERSONNEL
Shivalika Sharma*, Anup Sud** and Gayatri Raina***

ABSTRACT

The present study examines the coping behaviour among army personnel of officer ranks and other ranks for psychosocial stressors and life satisfaction. The sample comprised of 150 army personnel (75 officers ranks and 75 other ranks). The correlation analysis on all the variables has been done. The analysis revealed that for army personnel of officer ranks overall coping behaviour, problem focused coping and emotion focused coping have been found to be significantly and negatively related to psychosocial stressor of strained interpersonal relationships only. Overall coping behaviour and emotion focused coping have been found to be significantly and positively related to life satisfaction for army personnel of officer ranks. In army personnel of other ranks overall coping behaviour, problem focused and emotion focused coping have been found to be significantly and positively related to life satisfaction.

Keywords: Coping behaviour, Emotion focused coping, Interpersonal relationships, Problem focused, and Psychological stressor

INTRODUCTION

Coping consists of the cognitions and behaviour that people use to assess and reduce stress and to moderate the tension that accompanies it (Billings, Cronkites, & Moos, 1983). It follows that the relationship between coping and stressful event represents a dynamic process. Coping is a series of transactions between a person who has a set of resources, and particular environment with its own resources, demands and constraints (Lazarus & Launier, 1987). Thus, according to Taylor (2006), coping is a dynamic process and not an onetime.
action that an individual takes. It is a set of responses, occurring over a period of time, by which environment and person influence each other. A stressful circumstance can be rendered considerably less stressful if you know how to cope with it (Blonna, 2005; Corbin and others, 2006; Greenberg, 2006). According to Santrock (2006), coping involves managing taxing circumstances, expanding effort to solve life’s adaptational outcomes.

People using problem focused coping try to deal with the causes of their problem, by finding out information on the problem and learning new skills to manage the problem. Problem focused coping is aimed at changing or eliminating the source of the stress. Emotion focused coping on the other hand involves releasing pent-up emotions, distracting oneself, managing hostile feelings, mediating or using systematic relaxation procedures. Emotion focused coping ‘is oriented toward managing the emotions that accompany the perception of stress’ (Brannon, 2009).

Psychosocial stressors refer to acute or chronic events of psychological or social origin which challenge the homeostatic states of biological systems. Psychosocial stressors include, but are not limited to, exposure to adverse environments and life experiences such as natural disasters, crowding or isolation, relative position in a social hierarchy, stigma and discrimination, catastrophic/traumatic events (e.g. war and terrorism), loss of job, disease, family violence, deprivation, adverse social environment or situations.

Psychosocial stressors involve stressors from interpersonal relationships, arguments or conflicts with family members, neighbors, friends, employee or other people around us. If experience with family and friends are supportive and constructive, the individual who is exposed to stress will be able to react favourably to stressors, while the individual who has primarily negative and non supportive experiences will find stressors to be more disruptive and upsetting.

Research studies have reported that just living in a military environment can be overwhelming as it impinges on an individual’s overall functioning and test human limits (Cotton, 2001 & Moore, 2006). In Indian army, unfortunately occupation related stress and associated hazards are increasing day by day. Various statistical surveys show that the prevalence of stress among army personnel has been causing harmful impact on the society, the warning that cannot be ignored. Every third day a soldier commits suicide and every tenth day another is killed by a colleague running in mental illness, resulting in suicide and killing of fellow soldiers have caused an alarm among the army force (Tribune News, 2007).

Researchers have expressed that stress is a part of human life from which no human being can escape (Cooper & Dewe, 2004; Jones & Bright, 2001; Steptoe, 2000; Wong, 2006). Experience of stress varies among individuals and is inevitable at sometime or other in one’s life (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977; Taylor, 2006).
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Having effective coping mechanisms may be one of the important predictors of life satisfaction across the life span. Life satisfaction is an attribute of persons’ evaluations of social support, health, own thoughts and feelings and methods of dealing or coping with stress.

Life satisfaction was positively correlated with greater use of cognition self-control coping and negatively correlated with maladaptive escapism and solace seeking (Lewinsohn, Render & Seeley, 1991). Perception of control and future orientation (Dubey & Agarwal, 2004), using planning and reinterpretation of situation may be an important way to improve life satisfaction (Lewinshon et al, 1991).

Kampfe, Mitchell, Bayless & Sauecess (1995) observed a significantly more use of problem focused and seeking – social support strategies than of wishful thinking or avoidance strategies. Problem focused and seeking social support strategies have been found to positively related to various measures of psychological well-being.

METHOD

Sample

A sample of 150 equal numbers of army personnel from officer ranks and other ranks (75 each) were selected for the present purpose.

Tools

The tools used in the present study are as follows:

(a) Brief Cope: The brief cope measure was an abbreviated version of the Cope inventory developed by Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, (1989). It consists of 28 items, having divided into two sub scales, problem focused coping and emotion focused coping. It is a 4 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (I haven’t been doing this at all) to 4 (I have been doing this a lot). Alfa coefficients ranging from .41 to .85 for the sub scale and .86 for the total instrument have been observed. Estimates for test – retest reliability of the Cope scale ranging from .46 to .86 and .42 to .89 (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989). Further, the convergent and discriminant validity of the Cope has been reported.

(b) ICMR Psychosocial Stress Scale: Designed by “Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)” New Delhi, the scale consists of 40 items which covers following areas: Strained interpersonal relationship, excessive responsibilities, financial constraints, marriage related stress, health related problems, adverse situations and perceived threat. The reliability of the scale has been establish through Cronbach-Alpha (r= .88), split half (r=.88), test-retest (r=.72) and internal consistency.
(r=.65) method. Internal consistency of the tool on its seven subscales ranged from .24 to .77 (p< .05). This further established the content validity of the measure.

(c) **Life Satisfaction Scale**: The life satisfaction scale, developed by Alam and Shrivastava, (1971), consists of 60 items related to six areas, viz, health, personal, economic, marital, social and job. The responses are to be given in yes or no format, indicating satisfaction or dissatisfaction. There is no time limit yet it takes about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Reliability co-efficient was obtained as 0.84.

**Procedure**

A set of three questionnaires namely Brief cope, psychosocial stressors and life satisfaction were distributed to the army personnel. All the army personnel were asked to fill each questionnaire carefully after reading the instructions given on the top of the each questionnaire.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Correlation analysis on all the variables was computed separately for army personnel of officer ranks and in other ranks. The results are reported in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Officer’s rank</th>
<th>Other ranks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Life-satisfaction</td>
<td>Psychosocial Stressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Coping Behaviour</td>
<td>- .064</td>
<td>.300**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Problem Focused Coping</td>
<td>- .033</td>
<td>.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Emotion Focused Coping</td>
<td>- .096</td>
<td>.306**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Psychosocial Stressors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>- .333**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Life-satisfaction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vide Table 1, Pearson co-efficients of correlation indicate that in the present study:

(a) For army personnel of officer ranks (Table-1) life satisfaction has been found to be significantly and positively related to overall coping behaviour (r = .300, p< .01) and emotion focused coping (r = .306, p<.01). No such relationship was evident with regard to problem focused coping.

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(b) In other ranks (Table -1) life satisfaction has been found to be significantly and positively related to overall coping behaviour \((r = .316, p<.01)\), problem focused coping \((r = .284, p< .05)\) as well as emotion focused coping \((r = .302, p< .01)\).

(c) A negative and significant correlation was obtained between the coping behaviour and psychosocial stressors of both types of army \((r=-.333, p<.01\) for officer’s rank and \(r=-.308, p<.01\) for other rank) personnel in the present study.

However, overall coping behaviour and its sub scales (problem focused coping and emotion focused coping) were not related to any kind of psychosocial stressors of present study for the army personnel of other ranks. In case of army personnel of officer ranks only strained interpersonal relationship was found to be negatively related to the use of problem focused coping as well as emotion focused coping behaviour. Perhaps army officers under stress related to interpersonal relationship did not use any of coping mechanism (problem focused coping and emotion focused coping).

Hendix, Steel and Schultz (1987) proposed that since families are the main supporting agent in an individual’s life when such an agent is strained, it in turn adversely affects the coping capacity of the individual. Interpersonal relationships at work constitute the day to day interaction between co-workers, or managers and employees. These relations are natural part of the work environment and are usually pleasant and creative, but sometimes are the source of tension and frustration (De Dreu, VanDierendonck and De Best- Waldhober, 2003), thus perhaps the negative influence of strained interpersonal relationship is so great for army personnel of officer ranks that it may reduce their will to cope with these situations. Because of their seniority they may have had so much exposure to these threats over the years that they start accepting them as natural part of their life. They are no longer perceptive about the coping mechanism they may use, or may be because of their senior position, such threat cannot harm them any more professionally or otherwise, so the use of any type of coping is less. However, lack of supportive evidence highlights the need of much further research.

While among army personnel of other ranks (Table-1) life satisfaction has been found to be significantly and positively related to overall coping behaviour, problem focused coping as well as emotion focused coping. For army personnel of officer ranks (Table - 1) life satisfaction has been found to be significantly and positively related to overall coping behaviour and emotion focused coping and not with regard to problem focused coping.

Since coping involves managing taxing circumstances, expanding effort to solve life’s problems, seeking to master or reduce stress, coping is central to the stress process and its adaptational outcomes (Santrock, 2006). A stressful
circumstance can be rendered considerably less stressful if one knows how to cope with it (Blonna, 2005; Corbin, Welk, & others, 2006; Greenberg, 2006). Sharon, Hazel & Rebeca (2004) found that people with hope had greater coping efficacy and use more problem focused coping. Anubhuti and Adesh (2007) observed that active coping strategies were effective in promoting the level of life satisfaction. For army personnel of other ranks (Table-1) life satisfaction has been found to be significantly and positively related to overall coping behaviour, problem focused coping as well as emotion focused coping. Probably the army personnel of other ranks show more satisfaction with life when they are able to use both problem focused coping as well as emotion focused coping behaviours. Since they can’t say no to the decisions made by their senior officers (Shaim, 1998) this may create undue pressure on them and to deal with such stresses, they may use all possible strategies to be satisfied with life of army personnel

For army personnel of officer ranks a significant and positive relationship has been emerged between life satisfaction and emotion focused coping i.e. high emotion focused coping leads to high satisfaction with life for them. Probable reasons for this may be that the personnel on higher ranks have always confidential matters to handle and they have more attitude, they lack tendency to seek help from others, cannot discuss all the matters with others and they are always at the ‘decision-making’ positions where they can’t show their inabilities. Carver, Scheier and Weintraub (1989) observed that individuals commonly use venting (or releasing strong feeling about a stressful situation) to help to regulate their emotions. Emotion focused coping can be helpful because it temporarily reduces the threat and allows individuals to recharge by recognizing, processing and expressing their emotions (Austenfeld & Stanton, 2004).

REFERENCES


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