

STRESS AND COPING PATTERNS IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD-AN EXPLORATION**Rinju George, Research Scholar****Department of Psychology, University of Calicut, Malappuram District, Kerala****Dr. Baby Shari P.A, Associate professor****Department of Psychology, University of Calicut, Malappuram District, Kerala****Abstract**

The years which lead to adulthood has received special attention from many scholars. Theorists call this distinct period which begins after adolescence and before early adulthood as emerging adulthood stage. Emerging adulthood is considered as the age of identity exploration, age of instability of life choices and exploring possibilities in love and work. Researchers view this transitional stage as an increasingly problematic enterprise. Issues of youth are increasing in this fast driven society. India being a young nation a study about youth is very apt in this present day. Lack of studies which explored the stressors and coping of this group also motivated the investigators to explore on their issues. The present study is a quantitative way of exploring into the stressful experiences of emerging adults and the various coping strategies used by them when faced with stressors. The role of social support in stress coping mechanisms is also explored. Sample consisted of 100 males and females, age ranging from 18-25 years, from various districts of Kerala State. Data was collected after administering youth stress rating scale (YSRS), Coping pattern inventory-defense mechanism (CPI-DM) and perceived social support assessment scale (PSSA). 16th version of statistical package for social sciences was used to analyze the data. Results of the study found a significant positive correlation between stress and coping but not extending to mature coping patterns and also a significant positive correlation was observed between the use of mature coping patterns and social support. A significant negative correlation was found between stress and social support. Males and females were found to differ significantly in total stress, level-I coping known as pathological defenses and level-II coping known as immature defenses and social support. Use of four levels of coping patterns and social support of emerging adults were found to differ significantly as per their levels of stress (high, average and low). Study highlighted the importance of developing mature and positive coping mechanisms and support systems so as to manage stress effectively.

Key Words: Defense style coping pattern, Emerging adults, Social support and Stress.

Emerging adulthood

Many scholars have given considerable importance in studying the years which leads to adulthood (e.g., Arnett, 2000, Tanner, 2006). According to Arnett, (2004 & 2007) young adulthood period has changed. Arnett (2007) stated that this change takes place in lives of young people from China to South Africa and from India to Chile and this includes longer education, later marriage ages, and late entry to parenthood. Finishing school, leaving parent home, financial independence, getting married, and parenthood are found to be the milestones linked with achieving adult status (Furstenberg, Rumbaut & Settersten, 2004). It was observed that becoming an adult is associated with a variety of rights, privileges, responsibilities and competencies which is found to be an important outcome of the developmental maturation process (Hockey and James, 1993, Jenks 1996). Arnett and Schwab (2012) observed that today's young individuals believe that adulthood is reached only when they have learned to stand alone without depending on parents and others and only after that young adults are prepared for married life and parenthood obligations.

This distinct period which begins after adolescence and before early adulthood is called as emerging adulthood stage (Arnett, 2004). Theorists state that emerging adulthood is different from adolescence and early adulthood. Arnett (2000) first proposed the term emerging adulthood for the period from the late teens through the mid to late twenties (ages 18-25 years). According to theorists emerging adulthood is conceptualized as a prolonged time span that exists to explore opportunities before taking up adult roles (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry & Tanner, 2011). Arnett (2004 & 2000) described five features that makes emerging adulthood distinct from other stages and this include the age of identity exploration, the age of instability of life choices, the age of exploring possibilities in love and work, the self-focused age, and the age of feeling in between. Emerging adulthood is the self-focused age; this means that this is the time of life in which there is the least social control from binding relationships and the greatest scope for making independent decisions (Arnett, 2004).

Arnett stated that the experiences an emerging adult go through are individualized and they influence individual perceptions of adulthood. Development of intimacy in friendships and romantic relationships, and development of the sense of efficacy and individuation are found to be among the most salient adjustments during the period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2007, Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron, 2004). Aquilino, (2006) reported emerging adults as less egocentric than adolescents and much better at taking others perspective, especially their parents.

It was also observed that when compared to several decades ago, today's emerging adults have the opportunity to select from a wider range of identity choices and take a more active role in their own future planning (Arnett, 2000, Bynner, 2005). Studies also reported that even though today's youth have wide choices confusion occur for young people who lack personal resources. As a result of this they encounter obstacles such as having difficulties in transitioning to work or in finding a suitable job on the road to adulthood and thus resulting in disequilibrium (Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, et al., 2008). Studies also noted that even among the most advantaged emerging adults, who graduate after college life, has an extraordinarily high expectations for the workplace, and also high aspirations of finding work that pays well as well as provides a satisfying and enjoyable identity fit. But they face difficulty when the reality doesn't match with their hopes and dreams (Arnett, 2004).

Studies also reported that among emerging adults, some individuals experience serious mental health problems such as major depression and substance use disorder (Schulenberg & Zarrett, 2006) & emerging adulthood is the peak age period for many behaviors most societies try to discourage, such as binge drinking, illegal drug use, and risky sexual behavior (Arnett, (2000, 2005). Arnett (2007) stated that emerging adults face serious mental health problems as they have fewer

social roles and obligations than children and adolescents, whose lives are structured by their parents and other adults.

Thus today, researchers view this transitional stage as an increasingly problematic enterprise (Arnett 2000, Booth, Crouter and Shanahan 1999). Study by Cote, 2000, also found that entering into the labor market is often stressful and frustrating for emerging adults with their limited educational credentials. With reference to the previous studies on this new area emerging adulthood through the present study investigators explored in detailed regarding the various stressors experienced by this group when they face with life challenges.

One of the concept which is closely linked with stress is coping (Lazarus, & Folkman, 1984). Coping is referred as a person's active efforts to resolve stress and create and new ways of handling new situations at each life stages (Erikson, 1959). Stress is considered as a universal feature in human life and coping with life stressors is important for positive development (Lazarus, 1998). Studies reported that use of adaptive coping strategies reduced stress of individuals and avoidant coping strategies increased stress levels of individuals (An, Chung, Park, Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2012). Through the present study investigators focused on the psychoanalytic approach of coping which concentrated on the use of defense mechanisms as a coping means among the emerging adult population. Study by Vaillant, (1977) reported that use of mature defenses results in adaptive functioning, but the same author earlier reported that excessive use of defenses by an individual or using of immature defenses by an adult is linked with psychopathology. That is using age-inappropriate defenses leads to maladaptive functioning (Vaillant 1992, 1994). Considering the importance of defense mechanisms in today's world the present study intended to see the relationship between various stressors and the use of different defense mechanisms as coping pattern among the emerging adults.

Reviewing related studies found that social support is another variable which is closely associated with stress and coping research. Researchers found that social support influence coping with stressful events (Schreurs & de Ridder 1997). Studies by Arnett (2007) also support the fact that emerging adulthood is a period for development of friendship and intimacy. Hence present study also investigated the role of social support in stress coping mechanisms of emerging adults.

Hence the present study serves an important purpose as this group is the greatest wealth and strength of any nation. This study is very relevant to India, as India is above every developed nation with regard to its youth resources which most of them will be facing the burden of a fast ageing population in the coming decades (Ber, 2010). Padma, P. (2013) also stated that in about seven years the median age in India will be 29 years. This all show the importance of dealing with the issues of powerful youth group. Thus the findings of the present study can help government and non-governmental organizations (UNO, UNESCO, Ministry of youth affairs in India and abroad etc.) to empower the youth to enable them to realize their full potential, tackle their issues in transition to adulthood, and there by contributing to the progress of the nation. Findings of the study can also help trainers and professionals working with youth to understand the group in better manner and help them face the challenges of life using positive and effective coping means to move forward and lead the nation.

OBJECTIVES

1. To find the inter-correlation among the variables of stress, four levels of coping & social support in emerging adults.
2. To do a sex-wise comparison on stress, four levels of coping and social support
3. To study and compare the coping patterns and social support of emerging adults as per their differences in the level of stress.

HYPOTHESES

1. There will be significant correlation among the variables of Stress, four levels of coping Pattern and social support.
2. There will be significant difference between young males and females on stress, four levels of coping pattern and social support.
3. There will be a significant difference in coping patterns among the groups based on the classificatory factors of stress (High, Average and Low).
4. There will be a significant difference in social support among the groups based on the classificatory factors of stress (High, Average and Low).

METHOD

SAMPLE

A sample of 100 youth (30 males and 70 females); age ranging from 18-25 years participated in the study. Participants were selected from various districts of Kerala state. Purposive sampling technique was used here.

TOOLS/INSTRUMENTS

Youth Stress Rating Scale: This tool was developed by Rinju, G & Baby Shari, P.A (2014), in department of psychology, University of Calicut. Tool consisted of 65 items which comes under ten factors. Sub-factors are named as personal, environmental, social, financial, familial, health, intimate relationships, job related, study related and emotional. Reliability and validity of the tool was established.

Coping Pattern Inventory-Defense Mechanisms: This tool was developed by Rinju, G & Baby Shari, P.A (2014), consisted of 48 items which comes under four levels. Level-I, pathological defenses, level-II, immature defenses, level-III, neurotic defenses and level-IV, mature defenses. Reliability and validity of the tool was established.

Perceived Social Support: This tool was developed by Zimet, G.D., Dahlem, N.W., Zimet, S.G. & Farley, G.K. (1988). Tool consisted of 12 items which comes under three sub-factors like support from significant others, family & friends.

PROCEDURE / ADMINISTRATION

As an initial step researcher introduced themselves and purpose of the research to participants which comes under the age group of 18-25 years. Youth who showed interest in the topic and who showed willingness to be a part of the study were met again. After establishing good rapport with all the participants the researchers presented the participants with Youth Stress Rating Scale (YSRC), Coping pattern inventory-defense mechanism (CPI-DM) and perceived social support assessment scale (PSSA). They were also provided with all needed instruction for filling all the three tools. Participants were given enough time to fill the forms. After the participants have filled up the form, tools were received back thankfully and it was checked to verify whether all the responses were provided or not. None of the participants were forced to be a part of the study. All the participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point. Researchers also made sure that by being a part of the study the participants do not face any personal and psychological harm.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Correlation of total Stress, four levels of coping patterns and social support of youth (N=100)

To verify the hypothesis (1) which stated that "There will be a significant correlation among the variables of Stress, four levels of coping Pattern and social support" Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed for three scales namely Youth Stress Rating Scale (YSRS), Coping pattern inventory-defense mechanisms (CPI-DM) and Perceived social support assessment (PSSA). Sample of 100 youth (30 males and 70 females) were taken for analysis. Results are given in table (1)

Table (1)
Correlation Matrix of total Stress, four levels of coping patterns and social support and its Sub Factors of youth (N=100)

Variables	YSRS-T	CPI-1	CPI-2	CPI-3	CPI-4	PSSA-1	PSSA-2	PSSA-3
CPI-1	.402*							
CPI-2	.385**	.466**						
CPI-3	.258**	.369**	.560**					
CPI-4	.111	.052	.277**	.456**				
PSSA-1	-.289**	-.067	.026	.050	.216*			
PSSA-2	-.291**	-.010	-.088	-.086	.219*	.471**		
PSSA-3	-.184	-.041	-.130	-.008	.196	.593**	.673**	
PSSA-TT	-.299**	-.044	-.079	.051	.248*	.794**	.856**	.893**

YSRS (Youth stress rating scale) - YSRSTT-Youth stress rating scale Total

CPI-DM (Coping pattern inventory-Defense mechanisms)-CPILEVEL-I- pathological defenses, CPILEVEL-II- immature defenses, CPILEVEL-III- neurotic defenses, CPILEVEL-IV- mature defenses

PSSA (Perceive Social Support assessment) = PSSA1- Significant others, PSSA2- Family, PSSA3- Friends, PSSATT- Total social support

Correlations were computed for total stress, four levels of coping pattern which includes level-I, pathological defenses, level-II immature defenses, level-III neurotic defenses and level-IV mature defenses & for three sub-factors of social support which includes support for significant others, family & friends and for total social support. Table (1) shows that there are 36 correlations between the variables. Among this 23 are positively correlated and 13 are negatively correlated. 16 correlations are found to be statistically significant at 0.01 levels and out of this 3 are negatively correlated. Three correlations are found to be significant at 0.05 levels.

When total stress was compared with other variables of the study it was found that there exists significant positive relations between stress and level-II defenses-immature defenses and level-III defenses- neurotic defenses which is significant at 0.01 levels. But with social support and

its sub-factors stress was found to have a significant negative relation which is significant at 0.05 levels indicating that when social support decreases stress tend to increase among the sample. Another striking feature is that level-IV defenses, mature defenses have significant positive relations between social support and its sub-factors indicating that when use of mature defenses as a coping pattern increases social support as a whole increases and vice versa also. Studies by Vaillant, (1977) also reported that use of mature defenses results in adaptive functioning and the excessive use of immature defenses by an adult person is linked with psychopathology. Studies by Brotheridge 2001 & Meadows, Brown & Elder, 2006 also found that social support from different sources including parents and peers helps young adults to cope and manage stress effectively. Result discussed above shows there exists significant correlations between stress, coping pattern and social support.

Result availed indicated that hypothesis (1) is accepted.

2. Comparison Between Males And Females

To verify the hypothesis (2) which stated that "There will be a significant difference between young males and females on stress, coping pattern and social support" t-test was computed. A sample of 100 youth was compared for stress, four levels of coping and social support dimensions. Results are given in table (2).

Table (2)

Mean, Standard deviation and t-value of youth stress rating scale, Coping pattern inventory- defense mechanisms and perceived social support assessment

Groups Variable	Male (30)		Female (70)		t-value
	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	
YSRSTT	156.60	64.75	123.20	57.33	2.57*
CPI DM- LEVEL1	11.43	4.81	9.54	2.44	2.61**
CPI DM- LEVEL2	29.13	6.98	26.33	6.18	2.0*
CPI DM- LEVEL3	41.33	8.51	38.19	6.94	1.94
CPI DM- LEVEL4	47.20	7.65	44.53	8.20	1.52
PSSA1	19.90	4.41	17.37	4.71	2.50*
PSSA2	22.47	6.14	21.71	5.26	.623
PSSA3	23.27	4.63	20.90	5.32	2.12*
PSSATT	65.63	13.53	59.99	12.71	1.99*

YSRS (Youth stress rating scale) - YSRSTT-Youth stress rating scale Total

CPI-DM (Coping pattern inventory-Defense mechanisms-CPI-DM LEVEL-I- pathological defenses, CPI-DM LEVEL-II- immature defenses, CPI-DM LEVEL-III- neurotic defenses, CPI DM LEVEL-IV- mature defenses

PSSA (Perceive Social Support assessment) = PSSA1- Significant others, PSSA2- Family, PSSA3-Friends, PSSATT- Total social support

Table (2) indicated that t-value obtained for total stress scale is 2.57 which is significant at 0.05 level. Comparing means showed that males scored higher on total stress indicating that young males of the present study experienced more stress when compared to females. When four levels of coping patterns was compared, it was found that there exists a significant difference between males and females in using level-I of coping which is known as pathological defenses and in level-II known as immature defenses. For level –I t-value obtained is 2.61 which is significant at 0.01 level. Comparing mean scores showed that male sample used more of pathological defenses when compared to young females. For level-II defenses t-value obtained is 2 which is significant at 0.05 level. Mean scores showed that males use more of immature defenses when compared to female samples. But in use of level-III defenses known as neurotic and level-IV defenses known as mature defenses there exists no significant differences between the two groups.

When total scores of social support and its sub-factors were compared, it was found that there exists significant difference between two groups on support from significant others and friends and total social support. For the sub-factor significant others & friends t-value obtained is 2.50 and 2.12 respectively. This shows both scores are significant at 0.05 level. Mean scores indicated that males are higher than females in both the sub-factors. For total social support obtained t-value is 1.99 and arithmetic mean score is 65.63 for males and 59.99 for females indicating that males are higher than females in receiving social support.

A study by Dwyer & Cummings (2001) found a positive correlation between increased stress and avoidance focused coping strategies which supports our findings. And the same study found no significant difference between men and women students on their stress. This is against the findings of present study which found men experiencing more stress than women participants. Study by the scholars also found a gender differences in social support from friends with women reporting more social support from friends than men which is a contradictory finding from the present study.

From the evidences availed from the present investigation, the hypothesis (2) is accepted.

3. One-Way ANOVA – Groups Classified On The Basis Of Youth Stress Rating Scale

This section examines whether there are significant differences between the coping and social support of youth due to their levels of stress. For this purpose, the sample was divided into 3 groups based on youth stress rating scale (YSRS) namely, high YS, Average YS, and Low YS and the differences among these groups on the above variables were tested using one way ANOVA. The total sample of 100 young men and women was divided into three groups according to their scores on stress (high YS, average YS and low YS). Mean was 133 and standard deviation was 61. Low YS group was formed as mean less than $M - \frac{1}{2} \sigma$ (it was below 102). High YS group was formed as mean above $M + \frac{1}{2} \sigma$ (it was more than 163). And finally average groups comes between $M - \frac{1}{2} \sigma$ and $M + \frac{1}{2} \sigma$ and their mean score was to between 103 and 162. Accordingly sample was divided into three groups on the basis of stress and was compared for coping and social support using one way ANOVA. In cases where significant F-values were obtained, further multiple comparisons of the group means were made using Scheffe's post hoc-test.

3.1. Coping Patterns Of Emerging Adults

To test the hypothesis (3) which stated that "There will be a significant difference in coping patterns among the groups based on the classificatory factors of stress (High, Average and Low)" ANOVA was computed.

Table (3)

**F-Value of four levels of coping for
various groups (N=100) formed on the basis of youth stress rating scale**

Groups Variable	Between groups		Within Groups		F-Value
	Sum of squares	Mean squares	Sum of squares	Mean squares	
CPI –DM Level-1	176.24	88.12	979.55	10.10	8.73*
CPI DM -Level-2	530.74	265.37	3683.37	37.97	6.99*
CPI-DM Level-3	188.65	94.33	5446.66	56.15	1.68
CPI-DM Level-4	57.64	28.82	6434.47	66.33	.434

*Mean difference is significant at 0.05 levels

CPI-DM (Coping pattern inventory-Defense mechanisms- CPI-DM LEVEL-I- pathological defenses, CPI-DM LEVEL-II- immature defenses, CPI-DM LEVEL-III- neurotic defenses, CPI DM LEVEL-IV- mature defenses

Table (3) shows the result of ANOVA. F-value obtained indicates that there exists a significant difference between three groups formed on the basis of stress for level-I defenses, pathological defenses and for level-II defenses, immature defenses, both are significant at 0.05 level. This indicates that three groups formed on basis of stress differ in use of level –I and level-II defenses.

When Scheffe test was computed among the groups, it was found that for level- I defenses, group low and high stress differ significantly and also group with average stress and high stress also differ significantly. In order to find which group scored higher and which group scored lowest stress, mean and standard deviation for the variable coping was calculated. Results are given in table (4).

Table (4)

Mean scores and standard deviation of coping for various groups formed on the basis of stress

Groups Variables	Low Group, N=37		Average group, N=33		High Groups, N=30	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
CPI DM - LEVEL-I	8.81	1.96	9.82	3.15	12.03	4.25
CPI-DM LEVEL-II	25.38	6.16	26.0	6.19	30.67	6.13
CPI-DM LEVEL-III	37.81	7.21	38.79	8.70	41.13	6.30
CPI-DM LEVEL-IV	44.41	7.11	45.55	8.44	46.23	8.97

The mean scores of level-I, pathological defenses for group I, II and III are 8.81, 9.82 & 12.03 respectively. In this groups use of level-I defenses is found to be highest for group with high stress and the groups differ significantly.

Scheffe test computed for level-II defenses showed that there exists a significant difference between low stress and high stress groups and average stressed group differ significantly with high stress group on the use of level-II defenses, known as immature defenses. The mean scores for level-II, immature defenses for groups I, II and III are 25.38, 26 & 30.67 respectively. Here high stress group scored highest and low stress groups scored lowest for level –II defenses indicating that use of immature defenses increases stress of participants. But no significant difference was found for the level-III, neurotic and level-IV mature defenses for the three groups of young adults. This indicates that young adults are less likely to use more mature defenses. Similar results were found by a study done by Whitty, M.T. (2003). According to the study youngest participants (17-23 years) used significantly less mature defense mechanisms and significantly more immature defense mechanisms than middle aged (40-47 years) and oldest group (63-70 year olds). Results availed indicated that hypothesis (3) is accepted

3.2. Social Support Of Young Adults

To test the hypothesis (4) which stated that “There will be a significant difference in social support among the groups based on the classificatory factors of stress (High, Average and Low)” ANOVA was computed. Results are given in table (5).

Table (5)

F-Value of sub-factors and total perceived social support assessment for various groups (N=100) formed on the basis of youth stress rating scale

Groups Variable	Between groups		Within Groups		F-Value
	Sum of squares	Mean squares	Sum of squares	Mean squares	
PSSA1	104.85	52.45	2126.41	21.92	2.39
PSSA2	373.89	186.94	2643.75	27.25	6.86*
PSSA3	89.88	44.94	2601.91	26.82	1.67
PSSATT	1478.77	739.38	15642.99	161.27	4.58*

*Mean difference is significant at 0.05 level

PSSA- Perceived social support assessment- PSSA1- Support from significant others, PSSA2- Support from family, PSSA3- Support from friends, PSSATT- Total perceived social support

Table (5) shows the result of ANOVA. F-value obtained indicates that there exists a significant difference between three groups formed on the basis of stress for sub-factor family and for total social support. F-value obtained for sub-factor-II, family is 6.86 which is significant at 0.05 level. In order to find which groups formed on the basis of stress differ significantly scheffe test was computed. Scheffe test found that groups I and III and groups II and III differ significantly in sub-factor family. For total social support F-value obtained is 4.58 which is significant at 0.05 level. Scheffe test computed showed that groups I and III and groups II and III differ significantly. In order to find which group scored higher and which groups scored lower, mean and standard deviations for three sub-factors of social support and total social support was computed. Results are given in table (6).

Table (6)

Mean scores and standard deviation of social support for various groups formed on the basis of stress (N=100)

Groups Variables	Low Group, N=37		Average group, N=33		High Groups, N=30	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
PSSA-I	19.03	4.01	18.52	3.58	16.60	6.19
PSSA-II	23.76	4.18	22.48	4.69	19.10	6.72
PSSA-III	22.76	4.53	21.36	5.41	20.47	5.65
PSSA-TT	65.54	10.41	62.36	12.35	56.17	15.38

When means scores were compared for sub-factor-II, family it was found that groups with low stress scored highest and groups with high stress scored lowest. When total social support was compared it was again found that low group which indicated low stress scored highest with a mean of 65.54 and high stress group with a mean of 56.17 scored lowest. This indicated that for individuals with high support from family and friends their stress tends to be low compared to others. Study by Siu, A.F. & Chang, J.F. (2011) also indicated family support as the most widely used means to cope with stressful events. Results available indicated that hypothesis (4) is accepted.

FINDINGS

- Significant positive correlations were found among stress and coping but not extending to mature coping patterns.
- Significant negative correlations were found between stress and social support indicating that when social support increases stress tends to decrease.
- Significant positive correlations were found between mature coping and social support.
- Males and females differ significantly in total stress, level-I, pathological defenses and level-II, immature defenses and in social support.
- Use of four levels of coping patterns and social support of emerging adults differ significantly as per their levels of stress (high, average, low).

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