



Coping and Spirituality as Predictors of Psychological Wellbeing

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Abstract: Well-being can be considered as a combination of happiness, function effectively and to think positive. To deal with day to day life hassles an individual require different coping skills to eradicate these hassles and to maintain well-being. Spirituality is one of the traditional means of coping used from past generations to strengthen one's belief. It motivates individual to deal with life stressor and maintain the equilibrium between mind and soul. The present study is designed to examine the relationship of coping and spirituality with psychological well-being. A sample of 62 participants was assessed on psychological well-being scale, coping checklist and spirituality questionnaire. Results reveal that the measures of coping and spirituality correlate significantly with some measures of psychological well-being. Multiple regression analysis indicated that spirituality contribute substantially in psychological well-being.

Keywords: Psychological wellbeing; spirituality; coping strategy.

In past few years, a number of studies have pinpoint the issue of mental health among university students (Macaskill, 2013; Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007; Extremera & Berrocal, 2006). Particularly, going further into the higher education is characterized by a process of varying academic, emotional and social demands which require psychological preparedness (Nelson, Quinn, Marrington, & Clarke, 2013). Wynaden, Wichmann, & Murray (2013) reported university students as vulnerable population because the typical age at which most young adults enter higher education, also coincides with the age of onset of numerous psychological problems like anxiety, depression and substance abuse. Among other things, mental health problems in students have been found to be associated with poor academic performance, increased rates of drop-out, fewer days devoted to study, suicidal thoughts and disordered eating (Kugu, Akyuz, Dogan, Ersan, & Izgic, 2006).

Most studies on university students have examined mental health mainly by using measures of illness or distress. Instead of that Seligman and Csikszentmihayli (2000) stressed on the fact that psychological health should not be seen merely as absence of illness rather it involves overall



physical growth and healthy functioning of an individual. Therefore, it is important to identify both the psychological as well as physical correlates of mental health.

Psychological wellbeing (PWB) represents “the achievement of one’s full psychological potential” (Carr, 2004). While different opinions exist regarding its conceptualization, but Psychological Well-Being is explained mainly through two perspectives-the Hedonic and Eudemonic. The former indicates emotional well-being and the latter indicates social well-being. A hedonic view of well-being equates wellbeing with pleasure and happiness (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Alternatively, a eudemonic view of well-being conceptualizes well-being in terms of realization of one’s true potential, clarity of purpose and meaning in life, harnessing personal strengths and striving for better goals, and to back oneself and take responsibility on their own (Ryff 1989).

Hedonic and eudemonic approaches to well-being can also be differentiated on the basis of two separate criterions: subjective wellness and objective wellness. Hedonic approach’s centric focus is on experience of pleasure which is a subjectively described affective state. Eudemonic perspective comprises of wellness which results from fulfillment of objective needs (Fromm 1947). In short, the hedonic approach focuses on subjectively-determined positive mental states, whereas the eudemonic approach focuses on experiences that are objectively good for the person (Kagan 1992). Existing empirical research suggests, that eudemonic approach may be relatively more important for well-being than hedonic approach. To illustrate, partying at disco and trekking with friends may have similar hedonic experiences such as enjoyment, fun and pleasure but trekking will definitely provide more opportunity for exploring personal domains of growth and development and adjustment in unfamiliar situation as compared to just partying in a disco. Moreover, eudemonic approach include activities that are essentially good for individual, and remained for relatively longer duration, whereas the sense of well-being derived from the simple pleasures likely to dissipates in the short-term (Steger, Kashdan & Oishi, 2008). Therefore, researches on well being mainly focuses on eudemonic approach and in the literature of positive psychology psychological wellbeing is often used as synonym to eudemonism (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Psychological well-being theory assumes that individual’s psychological health depends on his positive functioning in certain aspects of his life. Individual should be self sufficient and can take his/her decisions independently; should readily accept himself and his past in totality;



should have close relationship with others; should have awareness about his surrounding environment (Özen, 2005). Ryff (1989) conceptualizes componential model of psychological well-being which is a positive component of mental health. It comprises of six distinct measures namely; purposeful living (purpose in life), quality relations with others (positive relations with others), capacity for self-determination (autonomy), positive self-regard (self acceptance), continued growth and development (personal growth), and mastery over surrounding environment (environmental mastery).

Various researches have shown that as students progress in their academic careers, academic stress increases and it reaches to its highest level during university studies (Putwain 2007; Schaufeli, Martínez, Marqués-Pinto, Salanova & Bakker, 2002). Academic stress has been associated with physical and psychological symptoms such as anxiety and depression; reduced performance level and productivity (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein & Hefner, 2007; Wong, Bheung, Chan, Ma, & Tang, 2006).

The ability to manage with any psychological distress depends upon one's choices among available resources and selection of effective coping strategy. That's why coping strategies are a key factor in determining psychological well-being of an individual. The most widely accepted definition of coping strategy is that of Lazarus and Folkman (1986), who define it as an adaptive response to a specific stressor. When a problematic situation arises it induces tension and this tension is countered by using some behavioral or cognitive strategy called coping strategy. Now the tension induced in personal space of individual may interferes with psychological wellbeing of him/her. Regarding this Lazarus and Folkman (1986) stated that coping has two functions to follow one is to address and solve the problem originated and another one is to modify the expression (emotional aspect due to physiological arousal) in order to reduce the tension and stabilize the emotional state. It was evident in past researches that some coping strategies are more effective than others in maintaining psychological well-being, but still researchers are not able to draw a clear picture due to complex nature of relationship between coping, stressors and psychological wellbeing (Hayat & Zafar, 2015).

Spirituality has diverted the attention of researchers towards a concept which is metaphysically explained till today but now turned to be more objective. Well-being includes evaluation, both affective and cognitive of person in terms of functionality which is the result of interaction



between complex subsystems such as biological, sociocultural psychological, economic and spiritual factors.

Furthermore, psychologists proposed that religiosity and spirituality cannot be explicitly differentiated from each other (Pargament, 1998; Hill, Pargament, Wood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson & Zinnbauer, 2000) rather they are being used interchangeably (Spilka & McIntosh, 1996). Religiosity refers to an organized system of beliefs, practices, and submission to God or almighty whereas spirituality includes more objective way of living in terms of search for meaning, purpose in life and connectedness to other beings. Researches in the past have reported that religiosity and spirituality contributes efficiently in enhancement and growth of spiritual, physical and psychological well-being (Plante & Sharman, 2001; Rowe & Allen, 2004).

Pargament (2005) observed that people tend to use spiritual coping when they have little control over situation as compared to highly controlled situation. In case of clinical patients like schizophrenia and cancer some aspects of spirituality seems to help patients to adjust with their ailment and improve their quality of life (Balboni, Vanderwerker, Block, Paulk, Lathan, Peteet & Prigerson, 2007; Mohr, & Huguelet, 2004). People used spiritual coping strategies to strengthen their ego and to make way out of problematic situation (Pargament, Smith, Koenig & Perez, 1998). Further it is observed that spiritual coping is associated with a number of positive outcomes, including better physical health, improved life satisfaction, increased mental health status and decreased levels of depression (Kim & Seidlitz, 2002; Mofidi, DeVellis, DeVellis, Blazer, Panter & Jordan, 2007; Emmons, Cheung & Tehrani, 1998).

Studies published to date confirm that coping strategies and spirituality are key variables in the process of reducing stress. The ineffective selection of coping strategies may elevate the levels of psychological distress and affect the student's psychological wellbeing and overall mental health. The present study is an attempt in this direction to explore the relationship among study variable and to examine the role of coping and spirituality in psychological wellbeing.

Method

Participants – The sample for the study consist of sixty two PhD research scholars (mean age= 27.37 years; S.D. = 2.35). They were selected from various university teaching departments of Kurukshetra University, Haryana, India. Only those participants were included in the study who



has given their consent to participate. Most of participants belong to middle socio-economic status and they were free from any chronic ailments.

Measures Used

Ways of Coping Checklist-Hindi Adaptation (WCC-HA) - This checklist was originally adapted by Scazufca and Kuiper (1999) and translated in Hindi by Chadda et al. (2007). This checklist consists of 13 items which are rated on 5 point rating scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The items in the checklist represent three ways of coping strategies; problem focused, seek social support, and avoidance. Coping strategies in the problem solving group include assessing the problem, deliberating on various actions which could be taken to reduce or working out the solution. Seek social support methods refer to taking advice and support from specialists, friends or relatives; sharing one's feelings with others, and meeting other people with similar problems. Avoidance strategies in the list include wishing a miracle could happen and solve the problem, resorting to smoking, acting out, and avoiding meeting others. The total score for each scale was derived by summing the score of each item of the scale. The suitability of the scale was judged on 30 caregivers by the author in the local population (Chadda, Singh & Ganguly, 2007).

Psychological Well-Being Scale: This scale was developed by Ryff and Keyes (1995) and its shorter version consists of 42 items. These items include six dimensions of psychological wellbeing: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Respondents rate these statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement. For negative items the scoring was reversed. Responses are totaled for each of the six categories. For each category, a high score indicates that the respondent has mastery in that area in his or her life and vice-versa. The scale has test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.82. The subscales of Self-acceptance, Positive Relation with Others, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth were found to have reliability coefficients of 0.71, 0.77, 0.78, 0.77, 0.70, and 0.78 respectively. For the validity, correlation coefficient of psychological wellbeing scale with Satisfaction with Life, Happiness, and Self-esteem were also found to be: 0.47, 0.58, and 0.46, respectively (Bayani, Koochekya, Bayani, 2008).



The Spirituality Questionnaire: This questionnaire was developed by Hardt et al. (2012). It consists of 20 items which are rated on 5 point rating scale from “not true at all” (1) to “absolutely true” (5). All the items are divided into 4 subscales retaining 5 items each. Subscales are; belief in God, search for meaning, mindfulness and feeling of security. The psychometric properties of the questionnaire are of satisfactory level with Cronbach alpha ranges from 0.78 to 0.97, convergent item-test score and lower discriminant correlation for all items which are measure of reliability and validity respectively.

Administration of the tests: The tests were administered on participants in a group setting. They were made to sit comfortably and rapport was established. The instructions were imparted to them as per respective manual. They were assured that the obtained data will be kept confidential. After that a set of questionnaire was given to the participants to record their responses. They were told that there is no right and wrong answer and mark your response what you actually feel about the statements. There was no time limit but participants were asked to complete as soon as they can. After completion of the questionnaire it was taken back.

Results and Discussion

The perusal of table 1 reveals that problem focused coping has significant and positive correlation with autonomy ($r = 0.32$ $p < 0.05$), environmental mastery ($r = 0.33$ $p < 0.01$), positive relation with other ($r = 0.29$ $p < 0.05$) and self-awareness ($r = 0.37$ $p < 0.01$) that are measures of psychological wellbeing. It shows that those who look forward for constructive efforts to deal with problems are self-dependent and determined. They are well aware of their strength and weakness and possess a good sense of external environment which make them use it effectively in meeting out their needs. So people who are ready to face and solve the problem are well aware of themselves and their potentials. They use all available resources in their most effective way to deal with the problem keeping in mind the welfare of others. Seeking social support, another coping strategy has no significant relationship with any measure of psychological wellbeing in the present sample. But the direction of obtained coefficients of correlation between the measures are negative which implies that those who rely on others for support in problematic situation conforms to social pressure. They find themselves less sufficient to take their own decisions independently. Avoidance coping strategy showed negative correlation with personal



growth ($r = -0.28$ $p < 0.05$) and positive relation with other ($r = -0.3$ $p < 0.05$). This relationship suggests that people who run away from problematic situation or turn their face away seeing an obstacle enjoys living in isolation. They don't believe in close relationship and are not ready to compromise their comforts for the benefit of others. They are stagnated in life and has no will to progress or enhance their potentials. The perusal of table 1 also reveals that the relationship between measure of coping strategy and psychological wellbeing is in expected direction. Problem focused coping strategy correlates positively with psychological wellbeing ($r=0.34$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly avoidance coping strategy correlates negatively with psychological wellbeing ($r= 0.29$, $p < 0.05$). The findings are in tune with some earlier studies (Hayat & Zafar, 2015; Carnicer & Calderon, 2013; Carrasco, Campbell, Lopez, Poblete & Garcia-Mas, 2015).

Table 1 correlation between coping strategies and psychological welllbeing

	AUT	EM	PG	PR	PiL	SA	PWB
P.F	0.32*	0.33**	0.18	0.29*	-0.01	0.37**	0.34**
SSS	-0.21	-0.06	-0.04	0.20	-0.03	0.08	-0.01
AVD	-0.24	-0.09	-0.28*	-0.30*	-0.17	-0.18	-0.29*

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

PF-Problem focused coping; SSS-Seeking social support; AVD- Avoidance; AUT- Autonomy; EM-Environment mastery; PG-personal growth; PR-Positive Relation with others; PiL-Purpose in life; SA-Self awareness; PWB-Psychological wellbeing.

Table 2 represents the correlation coefficients between measures of spirituality and psychological well being. Belief in god has found to be correlated positively with autonomy ($r = 0.35$ $p < 0.01$), environment mastery ($r = 0.32$ $p < 0.05$) and self awareness ($r = 0.27$ $p < 0.05$). This implies that those who show firm belief in God are more self reliant and vigilant toward their surrounding environment. They have a positive attitude toward themselves and fully satisfied with their past and present life. Search for meaning showed positive correlation with measures of PWB i.e., autonomy ($r = 0.31$ $p < 0.05$), environment mastery ($r = 0.34$ $p < 0.01$), personal growth ($r = 0.43$ $p < 0.01$), positive relation with others ($r = 0.50$ $p < 0.01$), purpose in life ($r = 0.29$ $p < 0.05$) and self awareness ($r = 0.40$ $p < 0.01$). These relationships suggest that those who have sense of



purpose in life they are more sound and active psychologically. They are independent thinkers who can resist social pressure to think in a certain way. They are self sufficient and praises what life has given to them. They believe in progressive development in oneself by honing their skills and minimizing shortcomings. Mindfulness showed positive correlation with autonomy ($r = 0.27$ $p < 0.05$), environmental mastery ($r = 0.29$ $p < 0.05$), personal growth ($r = 0.32$ $p < 0.05$), positive relation with others ($r = 0.35$ $p < 0.01$), purpose in life ($r = 0.26$ $p < 0.05$) and self-awareness ($r = 0.47$ $p < 0.01$). The relationship between the measures indicate that conscious people are aware of what is happening around them. They are independent and do not let any disturbing thought affect them. If a problematic situation arises they assess it and try to figure it out at their own capacity. They are firm believer that obstacles and struggle are part of life and has to be faced with smiling face. They always maintain a positive attitude towards life and believe in personal growth and development. Feeling of security has found to be correlated positively with autonomy ($r = 0.30$ $p < 0.05$), environmental mastery ($r = 0.27$ $p < 0.05$), personal growth ($r = 0.42$ $p < 0.01$), positive

Table 2 correlation between spirituality and psychological well being

	AUT	EM	PG	PR	PiL	SA	PWB
BiG	0.35**	0.32*	0.20	0.17	0.12	0.27*	0.32*
SfM	0.31*	0.34**	0.43**	0.50**	0.29*	0.40**	0.52**
Mind	0.27*	0.29*	0.32*	0.35**	0.26*	0.47**	0.45**
FoS	0.30*	0.27*	0.42**	0.40**	0.24	0.51**	0.50**
SPR	0.39**	0.38**	0.41**	0.42**	0.27*	0.49**	0.54**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

BiG=Belief in God; Sfm- Search for meaning; Mind- Mindfulness; FoS- Feeling of security; SPR- Spirituality

Relation with others ($r = 0.40$ $p < 0.01$) and self-awareness ($r = 0.51$ $p < 0.01$). This implies that people those who have homely feeling in this world are mentally healthy because they feel friendly and safe in their surrounding environment. They possess strong belief on their potential



and are ready to mould as per the demand of the situation. They are not concerned about themselves only but for the goodwill of others also.

In order to ascertain the extent to which weighted combination of coping and spirituality account in psychological wellbeing, stepwise multiple regression was worked out. The stepwise analysis was preferred over standard one to find a subset of those independent variables which are useful in predicting dependent variable, by eliminating those who don't contribute to that already predicted by the variables in the equation. The stepwise regression was conducted with parameter, p of F-to-enter = 0.05 and p of F-to-remove= 0.10. Table 3 shows the results of stepwise regression analysis for the dependent measure psychological well being. Results indicated that two significant predictors of psychological wellbeing emerged with an overall multiple R of 0.563 which is significant at 0.04 probability level. Search for meaning being most potent predictor of psychological wellbeing, it entered the equation at step one. The multiple R for this variable equals to 0.518 which suggests that search for meaning accounts for approximately 27% of the variance ($R^2= 0.269$). The F being 22.06 is highly significant ($p<0.001$). It indicates that search for meaning is a very strong predictor of psychological wellbeing in the selected sample. Mindfulness appears to be another potent predictor which took entry at step two. Multiple R increased to 0.563 with the entry of mindfulness in the equation after search for meaning. The F being 13.68 ($df = 2/59$) is significant at 0.05 probability level. It means that search for meaning and mindfulness jointly account for approximately 32% of the variance in psychological wellbeing and mindfulness 5% (R^2 change =0.048) when taken alone.

Table 3 Stepwise Regression Analysis

Step	Variable entered	R	R^2	R^2 Change	Beta	F	df	Sig. Level
1	SfM	0.518	0.269	0.269	0.518	22.06	1/60	0.001
2	Mind	0.563	0.317	0.048	0.255	13.685	1/59	0.046

SfM- Search for Meaning; Mind- Mindfulness



The results of stepwise regression analysis revealed that the linear combination of search for meaning and mindfulness account significant proportion of variance (i.e., 32%) in psychological wellbeing among university research scholars. Here it is important to note that despite significant correlation with psychological wellbeing, coping strategies did not join the set of potent contributors of psychological wellbeing. It seems that coping strategies having relatively higher association with spirituality and it did not add much to prediction of psychological wellbeing after the entry of variables of spirituality in the regression equation. It can be inferred as spirituality in itself is a coping strategy and it supersedes all other coping strategies when it comes to contribution in psychological wellbeing. Further research needs to explore spirituality as construct and its contribution in psychological wellbeing for different age, culture and ethnicity.

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