AGE RELATED IMPLICATIONS FOR DIFFERENT FORMS OF COPING.

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Abstract: The present study attempts to study the differences of coping strategies used by different age groups. To analyze these differences, the sample taken was of males-females of adolescents, adult, & old age. High-low groups of hardiness and of social support were also compared in these different age groups. The tools used for coping was the Coping Strategies Inventory (Tobin), which has separate scales for engagement coping and disengagement coping as well as for problem-focused & emotion-focused coping. Hardiness, & social support were assessed by Dispositional Resilience Scale (DRS-ii, Sinclair & Oliver), and Social Provision Scale (Cutrona & Russell) respectively. The results show that there is a significant age difference in disengagement coping with old age being the lowest but there is no difference among the three age groups in engagement coping. Disengagement coping is significantly different in high-low social support groups, with high social support group being lower only for adolescents and adults. For all the age groups engagement coping as well as problem-focused coping has been found to be significantly different between high-low hardiness and social support, but emotion-focused coping has been found to be significantly different only for adolescents and old age group (between high-low hardiness and social support levels).

Keywords: Age differences, Engagement coping, Disengagement coping, Problem-focused coping, Emotion-focused coping, Hardiness, Social support.

I.　Introduction

The main purpose of the present study is to find out the differences in the kinds of coping behaviors used by different age groups, namely adolescents, adults, and old age group and to find the extent to which the high-low level of hardiness and social support are related to these coping behaviors at different age levels.

Age differences in the present study are the differences among three age groups, namely, adolescents, adults and old age persons.

Coping is the ability to handle any stressful situation. Lazarus &Folkman (1984) defined coping as an individual's way to deal with his/her external or internal environment by changing one's thought and/or behavior or the situation without being getting physically or mentally affected by it.

In the present paper coping strategies used are engagement coping where an individual approaches the situation, disengagement coping where avoidance is preferred, problem-focused coping where a problem is reviewed with different perspectives solve it, and emotion-focused coping where the problem is tried to be solved by taking support or sharing

Hardiness is a personality trait given by Kobasa (1979) which aids an individual to handle the stressful situations with ease. Maddi (2002) suggested that three C's form the components of hardiness namely commitment, control ,& challenge.

Social support has been given by Sarason (1983) and defined as the interpersonal relationships which provides supports that can be emotional, informational, tangible, instrumental, functional which acts as a buffer and helps in dealing with the stressful situation. Social support can either be received i.e. provided when asked for or perceived i.e. a belief to definitely get help from trustworthy sources when in need even without asking sources for help.

II.　Hypothesis

2.1 There shall be differences of coping among the three age groups. Adolescents will use more disengagement coping while adults and old age persons will use more engagement coping.

2.2In all the three age groups engagement coping will be used more by high hardiness and high social support groups and disengagement coping will be used more by low hardiness and low social support groups.

2.3 In all the three age groups problem-focused coping will be used more by high hardiness and social support group and emotion-focused coping will be used more by low hardiness and social support groups.

III. Method

3.1 Sample

For the present research the sample has been taken from the three different age groups. In adolescents age group, (16-22 yrs. with average age 20 yrs.) high school, higher secondary school of M.P. and CBSE boards were taken along with college students from different streams from Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore and from coaching institutes of Indore.

In adult age group, (30-50 yrs. of age) different occupational groups were taken namely lawyers, government-private school teachers of Indore region, clerks from travel agencies, banks, private offices, doctors, lab technicians, nurses from private clinics, hospitals were taken. Apart from working population house wives were also taken in this group.

In old age group, (60 & above yrs.) retirees, house wives were taken by going to temples, jogging parks, & house of familiar people by taking time accordingly.

In the sample overall there were 492subjects from which 231 were males and 261 were females.

3.2 Plan & Design

A 3x2 analysis was done for age and gender groups for analysis of differences in the different forms of coping while for the high-low groups of hardiness and social support, t-test was applied. High-low levels groups were formed on the basis of quartiles.

For data collection standardized tools were used and the tests were given to all age groups in random order. Adolescents were given the tests to be filled and returned the next day & the same procedure was used for adults for those who were busy in their pre-planned schedules and commitments. In adolescents and adult age group part of the subjects filled the form the same day. In old age group they were taken individually &the tests responses were taken by reading and explaining the instructions to them verbally.

To analyze the differences among the age groups, analysis of variance was applied for age x gender groups for the coping scores. To analyze the coping differences between high-low level of hardiness and social support, t-test was applied for high-low groups in each of the three age groups.

3.3 Tools

The description (in brief) of the tools used in the research are-

3.3.1 Coping- Coping Strategies Inventory (David. L. Tobin,2001) has been used to measure coping. It has 72 items with 5 options in Likert format. The calculation can be done on the basis of primary, secondary, or tertiary scales. For the present research Tertiary Scale of the test has been used which includes engagement coping summing up problem-focused & emotion-focused engagement coping and disengagement coping summing up problem-focused & emotion-focused disengagement coping.

3.3.2 Hardiness- Dispositional Resilience Scale (DRS-ii) given by Sinclair & Oliver (2003) has been used to measure the hardiness level. It has 18 items divided into positive (commitment, control, & challenge) and negative (alienation, powerlessness, & rigidity) components with 5 options -strongly agree. agree. don't know, disagree, strongly disagree.

3.3.3 Social support- Social Provisions Scale by Cutrona& Russell (1987) has been used to measure the social support. It has 24 items divided into 6 categories (with different number of items) namely attachment, social integration, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance, guidance, & opportunity for growth. For response ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). For the present study all the tests were given in Hindi.

IV. Analysis & Discussion

The mean scores & F-ratios for engagement coping & disengagement coping, for age and gender differences have been given in TABLE 1.

Table 1: Mean scores & F-ratios of engagement coping & disengagement coping .

	Adolescents		Adults		Old age		F-ratio		
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Age	Gender	Interaction
Engagement Coping	111.886	108.757	116.557	111.571	113.271	114.642	1.331	1.111	.783
Combined Means	110.322		114.064		113.957				
Disengagement coping	95.471	97.443	91.414	90.614	78.90	82.574	18.082 (p<.01)	.539	.352
Combined Means	96.457		91.014		80.737				

It can be seen that there is only one significant F-ratio, i.e. for the age difference in disengagement coping with the highest mean score found for the adolescent group and the lowest for the old age group. Gender differences have been found to be non-significant.

The mean scores and t-ratios for engagement coping, disengagement coping, problem-focused and emotion-focused engagement coping for hardiness have been given in TABLE 2.

Table 2: Mean scores & t-ratios in different forms of coping for hardiness in three age groups.

From the above result it can be said that in all three age groups engagement and problem-focused coping has been found to be significantly different between high-low hardiness groups. Emotion-focused coping has been found to show significant differences between high-low hardiness groups in adolescents and old age groups only. No difference was found for disengagement coping in all the three age groups.

The mean scores and t-ratios for engagement coping, disengagement coping, problem-focused and emotion-focused engagement coping for social support have been given in TABLE 3.

Table 3: Mean scores & t-ratios in different forms of coping for social support in three age groups.

	Adolescents		Adults		Old age		t-ratios		
Social support level	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	Adolescents	Adults	Old age
Engagement coping	121.292	106.018	121.131	105.094	117.695	102.139	3.825 (p<.01)	3.374 (p<.01)	3.081 (p<.01)
Disengagement coping	91.208	104.547	76.263	96.396	77.339	85.139	2.847 (p<.01)	4.424 (p<.01)	1.689
Problem-focused coping	63.833	54.377	68.132	54.981	62.542	54.806	3.517 (p<.01)	4.840 (p<.01)	2.394 (p<.05)
Emotion-focused coping	57.458	51.642	53	50.113	55.153	47.333	2.341 (p<.05)	1.057	2.858 (p<.01)

It can be said that in all three age groups engagement and problem-focused coping has been found to be significantly different between high-low social support groups. Emotion-focused coping has been found to show significant differences between high-

	Adolescents		Adults		Old age		t-ratios		
Hardiness level	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	Adolescents	Adults	Old age
Engagement coping	121.50	103.017	121.510	101.230	121.014	99.788	4.272 (p<.01)	4.293 (p<.01)	4.647 (p<.01)
Disengagement Coping	97.955	102.206	84.608	92.128	84.577	76.273	.948	1.511	1.70
Problem-focused coping	65.773	52.879	68.745	53.077	66.901	52.091	4.644 (p<.01)	5.705 (p<.01)	6.607 (p<.01)
Emotion-focused coping	55.727	50.138	52.765	48.154	54.113	47.697	2.023 (p<.05)	1.771	2.4662 (p<.05)

low social support groups in adolescents and old age groups only. Difference has been found for disengagement coping in the adolescent and adult age groups but not in the old age group between high-low social support groups.

V. Discussion

In the present study, significant age differences have been found only for disengagement coping (F-ratio 18.082). The mean scores show that old age group has the lowest level of disengagement coping which implies that old persons are less likely to use

avoidance, denial or distraction in their coping with problems. Thus the hypothesis is partially confirmed.This could be related to low exposure to stresses or lower emotional reactivity, as Almeida et.al. (2005) have reported. They found that older persons report fewer interpersonal tensions (related to family relationships) and find interpersonal tensions/ arguments less stressful than younger persons. Similarly, with age, enhanced cognitive maturity and better handling of problems has also been suggested by (Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, &Nesselroade, (2000); Carstensen, (1992); Carstensen, et al., (2000) in their socio-emotional reactivity theory, according to which the selective changes of social networks that occurs across adulthood functions in the service of emotion regulation; the number of relationships is reduced but close relationships are stabilized which leads to greater emotional satisfaction.

Social support and hardiness were also studied for their effects on coping, and high –low groups for each variables were taken to compare the differences in coping. In this context, disengagement coping has been found to be significantly different for adolescents and adults between high-low social support groups. The t- ratios are 2.847 & 4.424 respectively with mean scores for high social support in adolescents 91.208, in adults 76.263 and low social support in adolescents 104.547 & adults 96.396, which shows that low social support groups use more disengagement coping but only in the adolescent and adult groups. As Santrock, J.W. (2008) suggested that priority differs in all age groups, so it may be possible that adolescents with low social support (who already assume only a few supports) give more importance to the things that are not actually that much stressful. Instead of searching or getting the proper solution they opt for deviated behaviors that may lead to disengagement coping. A study by Markova, et.al. (2017) elaborated that deviated behavior among adolescents is related to disengagement coping behaviors (denial, avoidance). Moreover,this could be applicable for adults also. Adults with low social support may avoid others and try to avoid or remain away from social networks when in stress. As Mikulincer & Florian, (1995) have found that those who avoid stressful circumstances try to remain isolated or separated from others, that can be somewhere linked with disengagement coping. The study by Birditt & others reported above also found young adults reporting more tensions with interpersonal relations as well as had more emotional reactivity.

However hardiness does not seem to be pertinent to such strategies at any age. High–low hardiness were not different in disengagement coping at any age. Yet, it is interesting that in the present study, the old age group was highest in hardiness scores, (F- 11.742) with lowest level of disengagement coping, which again shows that the old age persons are probably facing their stresses more directly due to higher level of hardiness.

Further, another difference to be discussed is that among adolescents and old age groups, emotion-focused coping has been found to be significantly different between high-low hardiness and high-low social support groups. The t-ratios for hardiness level are in adolescents 2.023 & old age (2.462), in social support level in adolescents (2.341) & old age (2.858). In a study on different age groups on tots (Nachmias, Gunnar, Mangelsdorf, Parritz, & Buss, 1996), on adolescents and adults (Hardy, Power, & Jaedicke, 1993; Valentiner, Holohan, & Moos, 1994) it was found that those who lack in emotional attachment & interpersonal relationships use less suitable coping strategies. Adolescents may perceive a larger number of emotional events as stressful. As has been found by Hogan & DeSantis (1996) that children who had lost their siblings used more emotion-focused coping effectively. Thus social support and hardiness seem to be more contributory for adolescents in emotion focused coping.

As suggested by Folkman& Lazarus (1988), some stressful events sometimes have more than one option for coping, so it may be possible that individuals are likely to face numerous conflicting emotions, as adolescents feel threat & challenge together while preparing for exams (Folkman& Lazarus, 1985).So it may be possible that such circumstances are faced more by adolescents which lead them to more emotion-focused coping with higher social support.

But, in old age people have fewer demands, as well as fewer wants, as suggested by Akiyama, Antonucci, Takahashi, & Langfahl, (2003); Fingerman & Birditt, (2003); Okun & Keith, (1998); Rook, (1984); Walen & Lachman, (2000). In old age, individuals face less problems related to social relations (Akiyama et.al., (2003); Fingerman & Birditt, (2003). Yet, the high social support group has higher emotion-focused coping in this age as well. There may be some other factor of emotional reactions for the old age population to present higher emotional coping with higher hardiness/ social support.

The findings also suggest that in the three age groups, engagement and problem-focused has been found to be significantly different between high -low hardiness as well as high-low social support which probably means that these coping forms have no implications for age., but they are affected by hardiness and social support.That all age groups in the stressful situation tries to solve the problem by getting involved in it. It could be said that the stressors may not be common in all age groups but the coping criteria is somewhat related.

As has been reported in meta-analysis related to the personality traits & coping by Connor-Smith & Flaschbart (2007) that coping cannot be only considered as an individual's dimension but it needs to be considered as an act which might get affected by personality traits and the contextual situation. In present study hardiness can be said to be that personality dimension and social support can be said to be the contextual factor that affects coping in age levels (as a condition).

Problem-focused coping has been to significantly different in all the three age groups between high-low hardiness and social support groups. It may be because they feel they have control over the situation. As has been defined by Lazarus (1993) that coping is the way to change the stressful conditions by changing one's own thoughts and behaviors and/or external environment. In many studies it was found that those who appraise control over the situation use more problem-focused coping (Billings et

al.1983; Coyne, Aldwin, and Lazarus 1981; Folkman 1984; Folkman and Lazarus 1980, 1985;Folkman et al. 1986; Forsythe and Compas 1987; Stone and Neale 1984; Thoits 1991). In old age group, they may have life experiences of the stressors that have made them stronger enough to face the problems in late life easily. As Birditt & Fingerman, (2003) have suggested that in old age, individuals do not respond in anger or frustration towards the problems and remain focused to the problem.

VI. Conclusion

From the present study it can be concluded that age has an implication for disengagement coping and emotion-focused coping but not for engagement coping and problem-focused coping which however have been found to be important in differences for high-low hardiness and high-low social support, in all the age groups.

Disengagement coping has been found to be used more by adolescents and adults than old age persons, and especially by low social support persons. In adolescents and old age group, emotion-focused coping has been used to a greater extent.

High hardiness and high social support groups have shown more engagement coping and problem-solving coping than low hardiness and social support groups.

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