

A Study of Cognitive Styles and Coping Skills among Adolescents

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Abstract

The cognitive process has faced deliberate changes among the adolescents, influencing their way of handling stressful situations and their coping skills. The aim of the study is to identify the cognitive styles and coping strategies among adolescents, as this age is full of complex, challenges and have bio-psycho-social changes. The sample of the study comprised of 110 adolescents aged between 14 to 17 years taken from the schools of Delhi/NCR. Cognitive Style Inventory and Coping Strategies Inventory were used to study the cognitive style and coping strategies among adolescents. The results of the study showed that in the cognitive style, adolescents were using systematic cognitive style more as compared to the intuitive cognitive style. In the coping strategies, adolescents showed more inclination towards wishful thinking, problem solving, cognitive restructuring and self-criticism coping strategies. Further, findings of the study found no significant correlation between the cognitive style and coping strategies variables but both these variables individually have a very important role in dealing with the complex and challenging situations.

Keywords: *Coping skills, cognitive styles, adolescents, problem solving, systematic cognitive style.*

Introduction

Adolescent is the time full of emotional confusion, stress and complex storm. There are so many uncertain changes that individuals go through like physical, psychological and social. It is the time when they pass through the psycho social developmental stages given by Eric Erikson of "Identity versus Role Confusion" that they find difficult to resolve and often get directed in the way that has a negative effect on their overall development (Piko, 2001). To cope with the stressful events one starts to form their own coping strategy that becomes component of their Intelligence and style. The strategies are developed by experiences that have cognitive and behavioural responses which further mobilizes and monitor's the resources (behavioural, cognitive and emotional) in an attempt to adapt towards any stressful or threatening circumstance.

These events force people to look for the best ways to cope with these stressful situations. These experiences will help them to form their own coping strategy which becomes one of the fundamental components in the intelligence style of the individual. These coping strategies are formed through life span based on one's experiences and his development. It refers to "cognitive and behavioral responses serving to mobilize, recruit, direct, coordinate, modulate and monitor one's behavioral, emotional and attentional resources in an attempt to adapt to stressful or threatening situations.

Adolescents find it difficult to meet with the changing status, demands of various roles, peer pressure, self-adjustment and assimilating in the new circumstances. It is through proper coping approaches and the cognitive style that one is able to deal with the challenges and pave their way out in a satisfactory way. The Scientists were interested and began to study the strategies of individual's coping behaviour from mid of 20th era. A lot of studies on the topic are connected with the study carried on by Lazarus and Folkman (1966; 1980-1984). Their researches contributed largely in coping behaviour mechanisms. They understood coping behaviours as a way to deal and handle the difficult circumstances and how to effectively adapt in any situation. Coping behaviours help to sustain harmony among the demands by the surroundings and resources that would fulfil the prerequisites. As a result, an individual lessens the ill results of a stressful event and even helps adapt it without trying to control it. Meanwhile these styles had been vigorously studied from the late 1950s by foreign scientists. Coping styles are considered as a secure system that emphasises on one's thought process, information along with perception that evidently helps in various problematic circumstances. They are the manners by which information is gathered and further processed (Witkin, 1971; Carrol, 1993). According to Witkin, Moore, Goodenough and Cox (1977) it is the way by which we understand, acquire, solve the problems, and relate with others around us. As people with different cognitive style, respond in a different way to their circumstances. Researches conducted in this field have reflected those cognitive styles do not seem to be related to intelligence so it may be urged that cognitive style differs from cognitive ability and this style may be one path that one adapts to make their preference by which they can learn better. This can affect learning which can further influence the performance level. Kirton (2003) remarked that individual differences are exclusive; there is nothing better or worse than one another (Sternberg & Zhang, 2005). Few studies had reflected a positive & significant influence of approach coping strategies with self-efficacy & learning among adolescence (Keefe et al., 1997). The other researches had also strived to understand the connection among styles and strategies. Appelhans et al., (2002) proposed that intellectual styles type I are related with the adaptive stress-coping strategies, and Type II are connected with maladaptive avoidance coping. Young (2005) opposes that Type II styles are associated equally with adaptive and maladaptive strategies. Hou and Colleagues (2007) conducted research to understand the relationship among thinking styles & coping strategies in adolescents in one child family. It was found that adolescents who use high dialectic thinking style adopt less self-awareness coping; whereas the one with low dialectic thinking style adopted more self-awareness coping and are more likely to adopt all types of coping strategies. Melinda, Luzelle, et al. (2014) has made a study to determine whether black South African adolescents with different cognitive styles (i.e., rational or experiential) differ in their levels of stress and coping. They found that adolescents operating from an experiential cognitive style experienced more stress regarding school performance, school attendance, financial pressure and emerging adult responsibility than adolescents operating from a rational cognitive style. Adolescents employing a rational style sought more alternative rewards as a coping strategy, whereas adolescents employing an experiential style relied more on emotional discharge. This has been analysed that a number of studies have been conducted on the variables cognitive style and coping style separately. No study has been conducted on these two variables together. Thus, in order to fill the gap in educational research it was needed to conduct the study on cognitive styles and coping strategies among adolescents. Findings of the study will be beneficial to students, teachers, parents and stakeholders.

Objectives: The research has the following objectives to study

1. To examine different cognitive styles of the adolescents.
2. To examine various coping strategies of the adolescents.
3. To examine the relationship between cognitive styles and coping strategies.

Methods

Sample:For the present study a total of 110 adolescents aged between 14-17 years were selected through purposive sampling technique from different schools of Delhi/NCR.

Tools Used: In the present research two tools have been used. They were as follows:

1. *Cognitive Style Inventory:*The inventory is developed by Dr. Parveen Kumar Jha. It is a 40-item questionnaire in a 5- point Likert format. It studies the two different type of cognitive styles that are Intuitive and Systematic. Systematic cognitive style refers to an individual who uses a systematic style adopts a well-defined step-by-step approach while solving a problem; makes wholistic plan for problem solving, whereas, intuitive cognitive style refers to the one uses an unpredictable analytical step while solving a problem, depends mostly on recognised patterns; explores and abandons alternatives quickly. Split-half and Test-retest methods were used to test the reliability that came to be 0.65 and 0.39 respectively for the scale.
2. *Coping Strategies Inventory:*The Coping Strategies Inventory format is referred from the Lazarus "Ways of Coping" Folkman & Lazarus, 1981. There are total 72-item in a form of self-report questionnaire on 5- point Likert format. The scale has 8 categories (Problem solving, cognitive restructuring, express emotions, social support, problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self-criticism, social withdrawal) The alpha coefficients for the CSI range from .71 to .94.

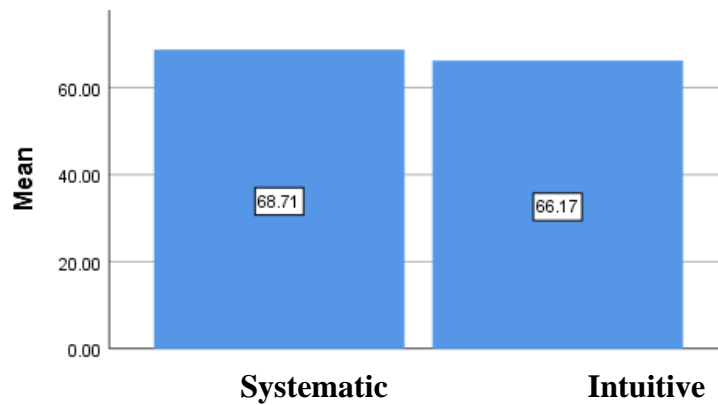
Procedure:

A brief introduction was given about the study to the participants and informed consent was taken from them. Participants were made ensured about the confidentiality of the test results. Each participant was contacted individually. The instructions were made clear about the questionnaire, the data was collected from 110 adolescents aged 14 to 17 years, both males and females. There was no time limit for the completion of the questionnaire. An online form was also made which was circulated among those participants who were not approachable personally. The participants were given proper instructions to complete the questionnaire. The individual had to choose the most appropriate option which suited them, no answers are right or wrong. The data was analysed using SPSS version 21.

Results and Discussion:

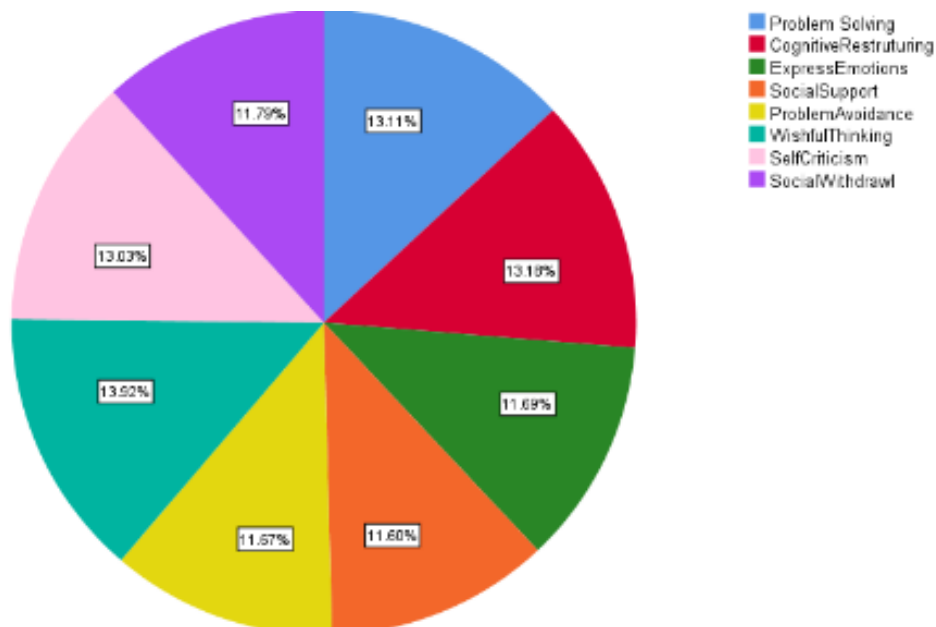
To measure the cognitive styles and different coping strategies used by the adolescents percentage and mean scores were taken out. Further, to study the relationship between coping strategies (problem solving, cognitive restructuring, express emotions, social support, problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self-criticism and social withdrawal) and cognitive styles (systematic and intuitive) correlational analysis was done.

Figure 1: Mean Scores of Systematic and Intuitive Cognitive Style



The first objective of the study was to examine the cognitive styles used by the adolescents. Results in the figure 1 showed that the mean score of systematic cognitive style (68.71) was high as compared to intuitive cognitive style mean score (66.17). It indicated that adolescents preferred cognitive style was systematic. Adolescents like to use a defined step wise approach for any problematic situation, looks for an overall method or pragmatic approach and then makes an overall plan for solving the problem (Klein, 1998, 2008; Lopes & Oden, 1991; Westcott, 1968; Zsombok & Klein, 1997). The findings of the other studies also yielded evidence that was in accordance with the findings of the current study (Hooda & Devi, 2018; Anil Jose & Sijin, 2021).

Figure2: Percentage of Coping Strategies used by the Adolescents



The second objective of the study was to examine the different coping strategies used by the adolescents. The analysis of the percentage scores showed that the most used coping strategies were wishful thinking (13.92%), cognitive restructuring (13.15%), problem solving (13.11%) and self-criticism (13.03%). The cognitive restructuring and problemsolving strategies are considered to be productive ones and constructive, so during adolescence the coping diversify, thus becoming more

A Study of Cognitive Styles and Coping Skills among Adolescents

effective. The findings are in support of other study conducted by Akeem Marsh(2021). The study suggested that adolescents under emotional distress (parting away from friends, breakup, losing a parent) adapt cognitive restructuring as a coping method, they start to evaluate themselves, in order to improve and modify their behaviour. Results also indicated that during distress or stress adolescents inclined more towards wishful thinking and self-criticism. These strategies are categorized as an avoidant type of coping strategy. It depicted that adolescent are unable to reframe the situation, in most of their stressful situations, they seem to hope and wish that the circumstances may get better by themselves. According to Petersen & Hamburg (1986), adolescents have lower acceptance so they use wishful thinking as a coping mechanism. Adolescents try to seek social support through hoping mechanism as they seek their circumstances very uncertain (Erica Frydenberg, 1991). Further, Heike Eschenbach,Kohlmann and Arnold (2007) predicted that adolescents use problem solving techniques while they face social and academic stress, they seek different ways by which they may overcome the stress which is the outcome of agitation in their social circle.

Variables	PS	CR	EE	SS	PA	WT	SC	SW	SCS	ICS
PS	1									
CR	0.173	1								
EE	0.014	0.12	1							
SS	0.087	0.087	.275**	1						
PA	0.041	0.096	.230*	0.143	1					
WT	-0.166	-0.03	0.176	0.047	-0.017	1				
SC	0.078	-0.027	.298**	0.184	0.091	.522**	1			
SW	0.106	-0.018	.481**	-0.033	0.054	.262**	.450**	1		
SCS	.238*	0.01	0.101	0.085	-0.171	-0.064	0.109	0.052	1	
ICS	0.17	0.042	0.038	-0.031	0.014	0.058	0.061	-0.028	0.037	1

Table 1: Correlation between the variables of Coping Strategies and Cognitive Styles

*0.05 level of significance; **0.01 level of significance

PR- Problem Solving; CR- Cognitive Restructuring; EE- Express Emotions; SS- Social Support; PA- Problem Avoidance; WT- Wishful Thinking; SC- Self Criticism; SW- Social Withdrawal; SCS- Systematic Cognitive Style; ICS- Intuitive Cognitive Style

The third objective of the study was to examine the relationship between coping strategies and cognitive styles. The results in the table indicated that only problemsolving coping strategy showed positive correlation with systematic cognitive style at 0.05 level of significance. There are other researches which showed different results from the present study. SarmanySchuller (1994) conducted a study where it was found that coping processes was only positively related with social support and it does decline as one grows older. Susana C. Marques(2016) conducted another research where he studied cognitive style of students and found that those adolescents who use a rational style sought more alternative rewards as a coping strategy, whereas adolescents using an experiential style

counted on more on emotional discharge. Further, results indicated that other coping strategies (cognitive restructuring, express emotions, social support, problem avoidance, wishful thinking, self-criticism and social withdrawal) have not found any significant correlation with cognitive styles. Many research findings have empirically confirmed that coping strategy is conceptually independent from the level types of cognitive constructs such as knowledge and intelligence (Kirton, 2003).

Conclusions: It can be concluded from the study that adolescents were inclined more towards wishful thinking, problem solving, cognitive restructuring and self-criticism coping strategies. In the cognitive style, adolescents preferred more systematic cognitive style as compared to the intuitive cognitive style. Further, results indicated that only problem solving coping strategy has significant correlation with systematic cognitive style.

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A Study of Cognitive Styles and Coping Skills among Adolescents

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