

## **Defense Mechanisms and Stress Coping Among Deprived and Non-Deprived Adolescent Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Adolescents today are living in an increasingly stress-ridden atmosphere. They feel dissatisfied, unhappy and deprived of so many things in various situations. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, the present research investigated the relationship between Defense Mechanisms and Stress among deprived and non-deprived adolescent students. The sample was selected from the different secondary schools of Amritsar City affiliated to CBSE having sections for deprived students. It consisted of 200 students (100 deprived and 100 non- deprived) from classes IX and X. Defense Mechanism Scale and Stress Scale were used to assess Defense Mechanisms and Stress respectively. Results revealed a significant difference in the use of defense mechanisms and stress level between deprived and non- deprived adolescents. No significant gender differences were found. A mixed type of relationship between the usage of defense mechanism and stress was found among deprived and non- deprived students. Although every individual uses these mechanisms in constant struggle for survival in their environment but excessive use leads to feeling of inferiority, insecurity and lack of confidence, which cripples the individual in the long run. The judicious use of mature defense mechanisms may help to prepare them for the challenging social life at present and in future.

*Key Words: Defense Mechanisms, Stress, Deprivation, Deprived and Non-deprived Adolescents*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Deprivation constitutes a significant problem for approximately two third of population in India. Literally, it denotes dispossession or loss of opportunities, privileges, etc. but in research practice it has been virtually synonymously used for “privation”, i.e. lack or insufficiency of the basic necessities for the survival of the individual. Deprivation includes both lack as well as loss of factors considered in terms of growth and adaption of the individual. More the number of factors involved, greater would be the level of deprivation. Be it about self, career, academics or any other issue, the youth undergo feelings of anxiety at some phase of their lives. When the level of deprivation increases, they can't rise up to their expectations or are in a process of meeting it, adolescents suffer from frustration, physical stress, aggression, undesirable complexes, anxiety and depression (Alam, 2010). Adolescents today are living in an increasingly stress-ridden atmosphere.

## **Stress**

Stress is a state of mind where negative thoughts overcome positivity and the person's mood tends towards pessimism. Stress is an internal state which can be caused by physical demands on the body (diseased conditions, exercise, extremes of temperature and the like) or by environmental and social situations which are evaluated as potentially harmful, uncontrollable or exceeding our resources for coping life events and pressures of everyday life. Stress is the combination of psychological, physiological and behavioral reactions that people have in response to events that threaten or challenge them. Stress is often not helpful and can even be harmful when managed not effectively. The physical, environmental and social causes of the stress are called stressors (Morgan, King, Weisg & Schopler, 1993) and reactions to stressors are known as stress responses.

In the present era, stress has become more attention-catching for a student. Academic stress has increased more with the increasing awareness of education (Puri & Dubey, 2011). Academic stress refers to the pressure to perform well in final school examinations. Mental health professionals in India, however, have identified academic pressure as an acute stress factor that leads to mental distress, and in extreme cases, to suicide in children" (Rao, 2008). Adolescents usually involve higher number of physiological, social and psychological changes. During these years the choices that are made and the behaviors that emerge have the potential to influence the rest of one's life (Eccles, Brown, & Templeton, 2008; Mortimer, Zimmer-Gembeck, Holmes, & Shanahan, 2002; Schraml, 2013). Stress processes include three components, an internal state of the organism (strain), an external event (stressor) and an experience that arises from a transaction between a person and the environment (Mason, 1975). Strain refers to physiological, emotional and cellular reactions. For example, emotional reactions include negative affect, emotional numbing and lower positive affect. Stressors refer to trauma, life events, hassles/daily stressors, aversive physical environment, chronic role strain, and cumulative adversity. The third component focuses on how stress is perceived, including threat, harm, loss, challenge, or benign, and the severity of the stress (Aldwin, 2007).

## **Coping Stress**

Stress requires harmony irrespective of its sources. Psychologists discriminate between two types of harmony: direct and defensive (Fehr, 2000). Direct coping refers to any behavior demonstrated to change a disturbing situation. For example, when our needs or desires are hindered, we either try to remove the obstacle between our goal and ourselves or give up. Similarly, when we are threatened, we try to avoid the danger either by attacking or by escaping. Defensive coping is known as ego-defense mechanisms or as subconscious efforts for adaptation. Ways for defensive coping are subconscious efforts to protect the self, to avoid any damage to ego or to decrease anxiety and tension (Fehr, 2000). Defensive coping includes internal and mostly subconscious conflicts that occur when we cannot emotionally tolerate either bringing an intensely threatening problem to the level of consciousness or dealing directly with that situation. Defensive coping, a kind of self-deception, refers to different ways of convincing oneself of the fact that one is not really threatened or do not really want something that he/she cannot get. Freud described the typical attitudes demonstrated by individuals to decrease or avoid anxiety. He called them defense mechanisms.

## **Defense Mechanisms**

Defense mechanisms are “one way of looking at how people distance themselves from full awareness of unpleasant thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Grohol, 2014). It is a coping technique which reduces anxiety arising from unacceptable or potentially harmful impulses. Therefore, defense mechanisms serve the function of protecting individuals from anxiety. These mechanisms could be psychologically healthy or unhealthy, yet in either case, the basic purpose is to decrease the tension (Allen, 2000; Allport, 1961). Freud defined three main types of anxiety: reality anxiety, neurotic anxiety and moral anxiety. Reality anxiety occurs due to the ego and real situations likely to be encountered in the environment. In this type of anxiety, the most popular method for decreasing the tension is to leave the environment which could lead to damage. Neurotic anxiety refers to subconscious fears that occur when especially subconscious sexual desires take control over ego. This type of anxiety results from the fear that might occur when subconscious desires are not met appropriately. As for moral anxiety, it occurs as a result of the fear for violating the current moral or social values. Moral anxiety occurs in the form of feeling oneself guilty and embarrassed. A comprehensive list of defense mechanisms was prepared by Anna Freud, the daughter of Freud (Fehr, 2000; Allen, 2000; Allport, 1961). Use of Defense Mechanisms As mentioned above, in case of any type of stress, human mind reacts in two ways. The first one involves increasing the problem-solving efforts, which is called direct coping. The second involves putting the defense mechanisms into effect. All defense mechanisms have two common characteristics, the individual is not aware of the fact that he or she uses these mechanisms and these somehow damage, transform or ignore the reality. It would be beneficial here to remember that the function of defense mechanisms is to change the perceived reality for the purpose of decreasing the psychological tension experienced by the individual.

## **2. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study was delimited to the students of IX & X class of two Senior Secondary Schools of Amritsar city affiliated to C.B.S.E having sections for deprived students.

## **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are following:

- (i) To compare the defense mechanisms used by deprived and non-deprived adolescent students.
- (ii) To compare the level of stress in deprived and non-deprived adolescent students.
- (iii) To see the gender differences on all the measured variables.
- (iv) To study the relationship between defense mechanisms and stress among deprived and non-deprived adolescent students.

## **4. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY**

In the light of above stated objectives following hypotheses were designed:

- H<sub>1</sub> There are no significant differences in defense mechanisms used by deprived and non-deprived adolescent students.

H<sub>2</sub> There are no significant differences in the level of stress in deprived and non- deprived adolescent students.

H<sub>3</sub> There are no gender differences on the measured variables.

H<sub>4</sub> There is no significant relationship between defense mechanisms and stress among deprived and non-deprived adolescent students.

## 5. SAMPLE

A sample of 200 students (100 deprived and 100 non- deprived) from IX and X standard was selected from the two Senior Secondary Schools of Amritsar City affiliated to CBSE having sections for deprived students.

## 6. MEASURES USED

(i) Defense Mechanism Inventory for both Male and Female (Mrinal & Sigal; 2012)

(ii) Stress Scale (Lakshmi & Narain; 2014)

## 7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 7.1. Comparison of Means

In an attempt to examine significant differences on the measures of defense mechanisms and stress between deprived and non -deprived adolescent students, as well as gender differences, the t-test was applied on the obtained data. The means and standard deviations of all the measured variables along with their t- ratios and level of significance are presented in Table 1.

#### 7.1.i. Defense Mechanisms between Deprived and Non-deprived Adolescents

A glance at the Table 1 clearly indicates that there is a significant difference between deprived and non-deprived adolescent students with regard to turning against object (TAO). The values in the table clearly show that deprived adolescent students have scored significantly higher [M=39.78, t=2.455, significant at 0.05 level] on turning against object (TAO) than non-deprived adolescent students [M=38.29].

It means that deprived adolescents deal with their conflicts more through attacking real or presumed external frustrating objects or direct their frustration toward external objects or toward themselves as compared to non-deprived adolescents.

Hence, our hypothesis, “**There are no significant differences in defense mechanisms used by deprived and non-deprived adolescent students**”, is partially accepted. It has been found that low-income youths attributed the primary causes of deprivation to their family background, current socioeconomic status, sudden life changes, and contextual factors. Material and social deprivation was associated with various kinds of negative psychological, social, and material consequences (Mikkonen, 2011).

**7.1.ii. Stress between Deprived and Non- deprived Adolescents**

It is evident from the values in the Table 1 that there is a significant difference in anxiety between deprived and non-deprived adolescent students. The deprived adolescents have scored significantly higher on anxiety [M=7.77, t=5.922, significant at 0.01level] as compared to non-deprived adolescent students [M=5.64]. It means that deprived adolescents experience more unpleasant emotional state along with apprehension and guilt feeling as compared to non-deprived adolescents. Hence, our hypothesis, “**There are no significant differences in the level of stress in deprived and non-deprived adolescent students**” is partially accepted. Olpin (1996) perceived levels of stress experienced by college students. The chief stressors that the students experience had to do mainly with their academic life. These stressors included many responsibilities, struggling to meet academic standards, time and money management worries, and concerns over grades. As the number and intensity of these hassles go up, so do individual’s levels of stress.

**Table 1:** Showing Means, Standard Deviations of Deprived and Non-Deprived Adolescent Students along with t-ratio &Level of Significance

Variables	Dimension	Deprived		Non-deprived		t-ratio	Significance Level
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Defense Mechanism	TAO	39.78	4.433	38.29	4.183	2.455	0.05
		7.77	2.416	5.64	2.665		
Stress	Anxiety	7.77	2.416	5.64	2.665	5.922	0.01

**Significance value at 0.01 level = 2.60 Significance value at 0.05 level = 1.98**

**7.2. Gender Differences**

**7.2.i. Defense Mechanism in Deprived Boys and Deprived Girls**

There is no significant difference between deprived boys and deprived girls with regard to defense mechanisms.

**7.2.ii. Stress in Deprived Boys and Deprived Girls**

The t-values reported in the Table 2 show significant differences in frustration (Dimension of stress) between deprived boys and deprived girls. It is evident that girls have scored significantly higher on frustration [M=4.24, t=2.398, significant at 0.05 level] than deprived boys [M=3.35]. It means that deprived girls are more frustrated than deprived boys.

**Table2.**Showing Means, Standard Deviations of Deprived Boys (N=55) and Deprived Girls (N=45) along with t-ratio &Level of Significance

Variables	Deprived Boys		Deprived Girls		t-ratio	Significance Level
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Frustration	3.35	1.624	4.24	2.123	2.398	0.05

**Significance value at 0.01 level = 2.60 Significance value at 0.05 level = 1.98**

On the contrary, Kai-Wen (2011) investigated the sources of stress among college students and suggested that male students feel stronger stress from family factor than female ones; students in

higher grades feel more stress from physical/mental, school, and emotional factors; students who take a student loan also feel more stress from physical/mental, school, and emotional factors than those who do not.

### 7.2.iii. Defense Mechanism and Stress in Non-Deprived Boys and Non-Deprived Girls

The values reported in the Table 3 clearly show that there is no significant difference between non-deprived boys and girls with regard to defense mechanisms and stress. Hence, our hypothesis, “**There is no gender differences on the measured variables**”, is accepted.

The results of the present study coincide with the study done by Kurlan (2007), who found that there was no major difference in the total amount of stress symptoms reported by males and females, although there were gender differences in specific types of stress symptoms reported. Male and female students do show some differences in the quality of stress reported in response to counseling.

### 7.3. Co-relational Analysis

Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation was used to find out the relationship between defense mechanisms and stress among deprived and non-deprived adolescent students. The inter correlation matrices are reported in Table 4 and Table 5 for deprived adolescents and non-deprived adolescents respectively.

The notable findings from these correlation matrices are summarized below:

**Table 3: Showing Means, Standard Deviations of Non-deprived Boys(N=55) and Non-deprived Girls (N=45) along with t-ratio & Level of Significance**

Variables	Dimensions	Non-Deprived Boys		Non-Deprived Girls		t-ratio	Significance Level
		Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
Defense Mechanism	TAO	38.31	4.553	38.27	3.64	0.043	0.966
	PRO	39.58	4.039	39.88	5.478	0.317	0.752
	PRN	38.58	3.239	38.71	3.823	0.185	0.854
	TAS	38.85	3.647	38.1	4.346	0.934	0.352
	REV	38.02	5.419	38.66	4.316	0.631	0.529
Stress	Pressure	6.83	2.78	6.63	2.457	0.364	0.717
	Physical stress	1.9	1.227	1.85	1.108	0.186	0.853
	Anxiety	5.59	2.841	5.71	2.421	0.21	0.834
	Frustration	3.8	1.998	3.39	1.595	1.084	0.281

Significance value at 0.01 level = 2.60

Significance value at 0.05 level = 1.98

#### 7.3.i. Deprived Adolescents

The inter correlation matrix reported in the Table 4 clearly shows that Turning Against Object (TAO) has a significant positive correlation with Physical Stress( $r=0.248$ ) and Reversal (REV) has a

negative significant correlation with Frustration ( $r=-0.196$ ) among deprived adolescents. It means that deprived adolescents suffer from physical stress reflected in the form of headaches, fatigue, muscular tension etc. and higher the stress more there will be use of defense mechanism TAO i.e. they deal with conflicts created by physical stress by attacking real or presumed external frustrating objects.

A negative correlation between Reversal and Frustration shows that increase of frustration among deprived adolescents reduces the use of Reversal i.e. deprived adolescents do not respond in a positive or neutral fashion to a frustrating object.

**7.3. ii. Non-Deprived Adolescents**

The values of correlation reported in the Table 5 clearly indicated that Turning Against Object (TAO) has shown a significant negative correlation with Anxiety ( $r= -0.245$ ) and Reversal has a positive significant correlation with Anxiety ( $r= 0.198$ ) among non-deprived adolescents. It means that non-deprived individuals reduce their unpleasant emotional state by attacking real or presumed external frustrating objects to resolve their conflicts.

**Table 4. Co-relation Matrix (Deprived Adolescents : N=100)**

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		TAO	PRO	PRN	TAS	REV	Pressure	Physical Stress	Anxiety	Frustration
1	TAO	1								
2	PRO	.411*	1							
3	PRN	-.353*	-.525*	1						
4	TAS	-.293*	-.125	.036	1					
5	REV	-.347*	-.154	-.024	.098	1				
6	Pressure	-.014	.035	-.090	.142	-.166	1			
7	Physical Stress	.248*	.024	.002	.049	-.062	.079	1		
8	Anxiety	-.014	.011	.052	-.003	-.018	.332**	.272**	1	
9	Frustration	-.087	.010	-.040	.114	-.196*	.346**	.186	.421**	1

**\*\*Correlation Significant at 0.01 level=0.254\*Correlation Significant at 0.05 level= 0.195**

**Table 5 : Co-relation Matrix (Non-deprived Adolescents : N=100)**

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		TAO	PRO	PRN	TAS	REV	Pressure	Physical Stress	Anxiety	Frustration
1	TAO	1								
2	PRO	.110	1							
3	PRN	.024	-.247*	1						
4	TAS	-.261*	-.114	.101	1					
5	REV	-.437*	-.364*	-.070	-.006	1				
6	Pressure	-.086	-.037	.163	-.011	.064	1			
7	Physical Stress	-.040	-.121	.172	.160	-.063	.316**	1		
8	Anxiety	-.245*	-.036	.063	.021	.198*	.530**	.160	1	
9	Frustration	-.067	-.062	.185	.072	.116	.565**	.389**	.348**	1

\*\* Correlation Significant at 0.01 level = 0.254\*Correlation Significant at 0.05 level = 0.195

The significant positive correlation between Reversal and Anxiety indicates that non-deprived adolescents even under increased anxiety, deal with conflicts by responding in a positive and neutral fashion to the frustrating objects.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Deprived adolescents deal with their conflicts more through attacking real or presumed external frustrating objects and experience more unpleasant emotional state along with apprehension & guilt as compared to non-deprived adolescents. They also suffer from physical stress reflected in the form of headaches, fatigue, muscular tension etc. Deprived boys, in comparison to deprived girls deal with their conflicts and frustrations in a positive or neutral fashion and deprived girls are more frustrated than deprived boys. On the other hand, non-deprived adolescents even under increased anxiety, deal with conflicts by responding in a positive and neutral fashion to the frustrating objects.

The results of the present study clearly established the fact that parents and teachers should try to provide their children all the necessary amenities of life so that they should not feel deprived. Regular class teachers must be given some training of individual psychology to make them aware of students' psychology to understand cause of students' behavior. It's helpful to be able to identify different ego-defense mechanisms used by students particularly in the classroom. Most importantly, teachers should convey to students that they can make mistakes without being humiliated or put

down. They must be told that if they try something and it doesn't work, they should stop it and try something new. In persuasion, teachers should offer learners with logical reasons that people can use to rationalize their compliance with their arguments. Thus, students should be given reasons to focus on the substance rather than the persuader. Stress has direct link with deprivation which arose due to frustration and failure is the root cause for frustration. So, teachers must create conducive teaching-learning environment to provide situations helpful for success. Schools should make provisions for good training program for personality development. Schools should make provision for individual counseling as it can serve as an effective intervention to improve the self-concept of students.

Equalization of educational opportunities for all sections of society, rich and poor, urban and rural, socially disadvantaged as well as advantaged, has been envisaged as one of the major instruments for upward social mobility of the disadvantaged mass and the development of more balanced personalities.

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