



Original Article

Maladaptive coping style and stress among married working and non-working adult women with independent children: A comparative study

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Date of Submission:

31 March 2023

Date of Acceptance:

28 May 2023

Abstract

Background

The outbreak of unwanted perceived stress in married women threatened their mental health. Generally, women have always been vulnerable to stress and have a maladaptive coping style. Thus, determining maladaptive coping styles and stress among married women with independent children is vital to reducing psychological disorders and illnesses. This study compared stress and maladaptive coping styles between working and non-working adult married women with independent children.

Methods

This study was conducted using a random sampling technique. 120 adult married couples, working and non-working, in the age range of 28 to 58 years, took part in the study. Both groups were assessed using the following instruments: The perceived Stress Scale by Seldon and Cohen and; Stress Coping Techniques Scale by Vijaya Lakshmi and Shruti Narain.

Results

There is a significant difference in maladaptive coping

Keywords:

Stress, Maladaptive coping style, Married, Working, Non-working, Adult women

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How to cite the article: Mishra R, Chandel NK.

Maladaptive coping style and stress among married working and non-working adult women with independent children:

A comparative study. *Indian Journal of Health, Sexuality and Culture*. 2023;9(1):51–57.

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8248694

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styles and stress between working and non-working adult married women with independent children. There is also a significant positive correlation between maladaptive coping styles and stress.

Conclusion

Married working women prefer to use maladaptive coping styles compared to non-working married women to decrease stress. If stress decreases, then maladaptive habits also decrease, and vice versa.

Introduction

Maladaptive coping refers to coping mechanisms that frequently have unfavourable outcomes, such as some problems with mental health and psychological problems. According to earlier research, unhealthy coping mechanisms can be grouped into two categories: avoidance-based and emotional. With avoidance mechanisms, people actively postpone responding to stressful situations or altogether avoid them by isolating themselves or engaging in other unhealthy behaviours.^[1] Maladaptive coping strategies include eating, drinking, smoking, using drugs, and other risky behaviours. These coping strategies have traditionally been linked to significant negative impacts on a person's life, including increased depressive symptoms, pain flare-ups, greater functional impairment, and lower self-efficiency.^[2,3,4] Teaching is seen as a hard profession; however, coping mechanisms may have an impact on how stressful people perceive their jobs to be. According to some theories, being disengaged and suppressing competing activities are maladaptive reactions in a classroom setting and may even increase stress at work.^[5] Everybody's life is impacted to some extent by perceived stress. Depression, anxiety, and other psychological illnesses are frequent negative repercussions of this stress and its contributing variables. People frequently use both mechanisms of coping to deal with this stress. Their chosen coping mechanisms may unfavourably or badly impact the quality of life of an individual. Adaptive coping styles are linked to higher life quality.^[6] Family members of female drug users may be at risk for stress-related health issues.^[7] Results imply that improved coping outcomes in chronic illness are connected with the relative balance of adaptive and maladaptive coping styles employed by compassionate people.^[8] Despite a wealth of literature on stress and coping, it can be challenging to identify coping mechanisms

that are typically adaptive or maladaptive. Stress is not the same for everyone. Men and women are exposed to stressful events in different ways and circumstances throughout all cultures. So, gender may be a crucial consideration for figuring out how the dynamics of the stress process work.^[9] Individuals' reported usage of escape-related methods did not differ by gender or role.^[10] The findings are consistent with the idea that stress at work has a detrimental effect on working women's physical and mental health. The outcomes are contrasted with those of earlier, pertinent studies on men.^[11] Women play various roles.^[12] Married professional women who learn useful coping mechanisms will regard juggling work and family as a positive experience.^[13]

Materials and methods

Design

A comparative study design was used.

This study aimed

- 1) To examine the stress and maladaptive coping styles among working and non-working adult married women with independent children.
- 2) To find the relationship between stress and maladaptive coping styles between working and non-working adult married women with independent children.

Hypotheses

- 1) There is no significant difference between working and non-working married women with independent children concerning stress and maladaptive coping styles.
- 2) There is a significant relationship between maladaptive coping styles and stress.

Sampling and participants

A total of 120 study participants were recruited: 85 working and 35 non-working

adult married women. They were selected using the random sampling technique, belonging to different educational backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. The age range of study participants was 28-58 years. Married women worked in different government and private sectors, and Non-working women were homemakers. A sample was collected from the different cities of Haryana, India.

Data collection

The researcher explained the study to married working and non-working women, and written consent was obtained for participation. General instructions were given to participants to complete the questionnaires. Proper seating arrangements were made to ensure the privacy of married women filling out responses. Questionnaires were distributed to all participants, the responding process was fully explained to participants, and doubts were clarified. Then, filled-out questionnaires were collected from participants for statistical analysis of the collected data. Participants' confidentiality was ensured. Participants could voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time. The participation of respondents was voluntary. Written and informed consent was obtained from all study participants, and approval from the Ethics Committee, Faculty of Behavioral Sciences, SGT University Gurugram, Haryana (SGTU/FBSC/ECC/2021/19).

Tools used

A socio-demographic sheet was used to collect

age, monthly family income, sex, marital status, job status, blood group, education, occupation, residential status, and number of children.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) is a 10-item self-reported questionnaire by Cohen et al. (1983). It assesses stress levels in young individuals and adults aged 12 and above.

The Stress Coping Techniques Scale by Vijay Lakshmi and Shruti Narain has been used to measure coping styles. The scale measures copying style on two dimensions: adaptive and maladaptive. There are a total of 61 item numbers. The scale applies to individuals 15 years of age and older. It takes 20 to 25 minutes for smooth completion. This scale can be administered by oneself or by the investigator or researcher. Test-retest reliability was calculated and found to be 0.82, and split-half reliability was found to be 0.79. All were significant at the 0.01 level. All items can be scored by assigning a score of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 for always, almost always, sometimes, almost never, and never.

Statistical analysis

Data were tabulated in Microsoft Excel and then analyzed in IBM SPSS, Version 26. Mean, SD, Karl Pearson's correlation, and the t-test were used. Then, the results were interpreted.

Results

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the maladaptive coping style and

Table 1: Group statistics

	Working status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Maladaptive coping style	working	85	69.40	25.924	2.812
	non-working	35	44.75	15.790	2.669
Stress	working	85	19.08	4.451	.483
	non-working	35	7.17	3.443	.582

stress for working and non-working married adult women with independent children, as shown in Table 1. There were significant differences ($t(100.999) = 6.356, p = .000$) in the scores, with the mean score for working married women ($M = 69.40, S.D = 25.924$) higher than non-working married women ($M = 44.75, S.D = 15.790$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 16.951 to 32.333), 95% maladaptive coping style was significant.

Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. For stress, there were significant differences ($t(15.752) = 81.324, p = 0.000$) in the scores, with the mean score for working married women ($M = 19.08, S.D = 4.451$) higher than non-working married women ($M = 7.17, S.D = 3.443$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 10.407 to 13.415), 95% maladaptive coping style was significant. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected (Table 2).

Table 2 : Independent samples test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Maladaptive coping style	Equal variances assumed	11.347	.001	5.231	118	.000	24.642	4.711	15.313	33.971
	Equal variances not assumed			6.356	100.999	.000	24.642	3.877	16.951	32.333
Stress	Equal variances assumed	6.347	.013	14.169	118	.000	11.911	.841	10.246	13.576
	Equal variances not assumed			15.752	81.324	.000	11.911	.756	10.407	13.415

Table 3 : Correlations

		Maladaptive coping style	Stress
Maladaptive coping style	Pearson Correlation	1	.553**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
Stress	Pearson Correlation	.553**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson product correlation of stress and maladaptive coping style was moderately positive and statistically significant ($r=.553^{**}$, $p<0.01$). Hence, H1 was supported. This shows that increased stress would increase maladaptive coping styles and vice versa (Table 3).

Discussion

There was less published literature comparing maladaptive coping styles and stress among adult married working adults and non-working adults with independent children. Our study mainly focused on maladaptive coping styles and stress among working and non-working women with independent children and found a significant difference in maladaptive coping styles and stress between working and non-working adult married women. The mean score and S.D. of working married women are higher than those of non-working married women concerning stress and maladaptive coping styles, and there is a positive relationship between stress and maladaptive coping styles. Working women prefer to use maladaptive coping styles to decrease stress as compared to non-working married women. Stress is higher among working women. Working women are responsible for both their jobs and their homes. In order to get rid of stress, they may prefer to use maladaptive coping as compared to non-working women. Working women are self-employed, so they may easily afford things. The extra burden of household work and work can be the reason for their high stress and use of maladaptive coping styles. But working married women may feel more self-dependent and confident than non-working women. A married working woman faces different challenges outside the home. So, this can be a reason for their high stress and involvement in maladaptive coping styles. Our findings indicate that maladaptive coping habits are important to consider when studying and possibly treating stress in women. Past studies support our current study's findings. A study was conducted on

women, and the findings revealed that working women had more stress than non-working women.^[14] A prior study suggested that working women had more stress and needed counselling on stress management.^[15] Previous studies have found that working women have higher stress levels as compared to non-working married women.^[16] The prior study showed a relationship between stress and maladaptive coping styles.^[17] A previous study suggested a positive relationship between psychological distress and avoidant coping.^[18] Current findings provide some insights into possible mechanisms to reduce stress. Further, this information may be useful in guiding the development of interventions to improve married women's mental health. Our study advances the literature by focusing on maladaptive coping among married, working, and non-working women, a rapidly growing population understudied in stress management research. A study was conducted on perceived stress and coping, and the findings revealed that maladaptive coping styles influence stress.^[19] Previous studies suggested a positive relationship between maladaptive coping styles and stress.^[20] A study was conducted among married women, and findings revealed a relationship between the level of coping and the level of stress.^[21]

Strengths and limitations

This study explores the maladaptive coping style and stress among married working and non-working women with independent children. Understanding stress and maladaptive coping styles among adult married women is important to reduce their perceived stress. The limitations of this study are: 1) Future research with larger sample sizes should replicate our analyses. 2) A study could be conducted on men.

Conclusion

Married working women with independent children prefer to use maladaptive coping

styles compared to non-working married women. Stress is also higher in married working women than married non-working women. There is a significant positive correlation between maladaptive coping styles and stress. If stress increases, maladaptive coping also increases, and vice versa. There is less stress among non-working married women because they may not feel the extra burden of job-related work compared to working women. Future studies should assess the effectiveness of adaptive coping style-based intervention studies in this population.

Future scope

These findings underscore the necessity for future research and clinical practice to use a holistic approach to stress evaluation and management. The findings can be used to build health promotion strategies that will influence lifelong health behaviours. In the future, treatments to educate people about adaptive coping methods should be carried out to see if coping styles might help prevent stress. This study backs up the importance of perceived stress in treating stress. Working married women may benefit from a program that enhances coping skills, thereby reducing stress. Future psychotherapies using advanced technologies to target vulnerable married women, promote adaptive coping patterns, and discourage maladaptive coping techniques are necessary. Counselling sessions and the guidance of a trained psychologist may be beneficial for stress management.

Acknowledgment: None

Conflict of interest: None

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