

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES OF ADOLESCENTS BELONGING TO URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

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Abstract

Introduction: The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of Covid 19 lockdown on Stress and Coping Strategies of adolescents belonging to urban and rural areas. The objectives of the study were (i) To compare the Adolescent's stress and coping strategies of rural and urban adolescents during lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic. (ii) To assess inter correlations between various variables.

Method: The study was conducted on 200 adolescent's belongings to urban and rural areas with equal number of males and females. Standardized tools namely Student Stress Inventory (1) and Ways of Coping Questionnaire (2) were used for the purpose.

Results: The findings of the study revealed that urban and rural adolescents faced almost same issues like fear of death, emotional problems, separation from peer etc. during COVID-19 lockdown. Rural adolescents had more stress as compared to urban adolescents. Urban adolescents used more of problem focused coping strategies whereas rural adolescents used emotion focused coping strategies.

Conclusion: The present research has aimed to explore specifically how coping strategies have been impacting stress during an extended period of lockdown rules during the COVID19 pandemic in a healthy sample.

Keywords: COVID-19, Adolescent's Stress, Coping Strategies

This study was undertaken during lockdown period due to COVID-19 which has been the greatest global pandemic experienced in a long time, and it has impacted on a range of physical, mental and social health indices. The capacity of medical hospitals to deal with the pandemic had been thoroughly overwhelmed in many countries. The countries around the world as they continued their battle with the COVID-19 pandemic, it had become clear that people in some regions experienced repeated lockdown or quarantine periods. If this unfortunate reality was to be faced and endured, it was important that mental health providers were armed with correct information as to how to help the people survive these periods of isolation and inactivity with minimal psychological impact. When lockdown began, physical health was the top priority, but those who had knowledge about the consequences of isolation, loneliness, and unemployment on mental health braced for an additional threat.

The concern over uncertainty around when things would return to normal — and what that normal would look like — contributed to heightened anxiety for teens. For those whose family well-being had been negatively affected by COVID infection like loss of

lives, jobs, and financial instability, there's had been greater risk for adverse mental health outcomes. There was also an increased risk for youth who lived in homes with abuse and neglect during the quarantine. There was more exposure to violence during this time, but as reports of abuse were made by educators there had actually been a decrease in reports to

child protective services, which had been concerning . Additionally, substance use had increased for all age groups during the pandemic (3).

Adolescents have experienced lots of loss during these trying times like school, clubs, sports, friends, extended family and community which has contributed to change in their resiliency. They need more help due to the fact that they are developmentally growing and need help with regulation. While the pandemic took away a lot of the structure that helps with regulation, school and other safe activities can help them with their mental health (4).

As compared to other student groups, such as primary school students and middle school students, the traditional view was that senior students bear more pressure and have more serious physical and mental health issues. There is a strong belief that dealing with intimate relationships, financial difficulties, and fulfilling responsibilities and roles are the main sources of stress for adolescents. Latest social changes in the education domain (e.g., the sharing of educational resources and advances in communication technology), the use of distance education has become more and more, which changes the ways of communication between teachers and students, it also increased the isolation and independence of students, and thus became an important source of pressure for students. Three main stressors in this group has been contagion, Academic workload and being away from educational institution for long time.

Adolescents have been using different kind of strategies to cope with problems and stress of life during pandemic. Coping here is defined as cognitive and behavioral effort to master, reduce conflicts among them that tax or exceed the person's capabilities. Coping efforts are a manifestation of an individual's struggle for existence. Folkman and Lazarus (5) differentiate problem focused from emotion focused coping. Problem Focused Coping is aimed to problem solving or doing something to alter the source of stress. Emotion Focused Coping is aimed at reducing or managing emotional distress that is associated with the situation. Problem focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that something constructive can be done, whereas emotion focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that stressor is something that must be endured.

Given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, coping strategies had been affected by announcements of rules to be followed by citizens; social media communications and expert advice, which encouraged task- oriented coping. These factors helped people to try to behave appropriately. With this in mind, attempt was made as to whether various coping strategies had increased or decreased these symptoms and the degree of stress encountered by Adolescents.

Method

The present study was conducted in Government schools from rural and urban areas respectively selected purposively from Hoshiarpur District in Panjab, India due to easy accessibility. The adolescents selected for the study were from grade 11 belonging to middle income group in the age group of 16 to 17 years. The total sample consisted of 200 adolescents (100 Rural and 100 Urban) with equal number from males and females.

The selection of tools was done keeping in mind the objectives of the study and the effort was made to ensure that the tools have adequate psychometric properties. Tools used for measuring various variables of the study are given below:

Tools used to Measure different Variables of the Study

S.No	Variables	Tools
1	Student's Stress	STUDENT STRESS INVENTORY (Mohammad Aziz Shah, 2016)
2	Ways of Coping Strategies	WAYS OF COPING QUESTIONNAIRE (Folkman and Lazarus, 1988)

The sample was collected from District Hoshiarpur. An online survey was undertaken where adolescents in the age group of 15-18 years were invited to participate in the study. The survey was conducted by uploading all the tests on Google forms. The brief introduction was given via E-mail and consent was taken to administer the tests. They were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Results and Discussion

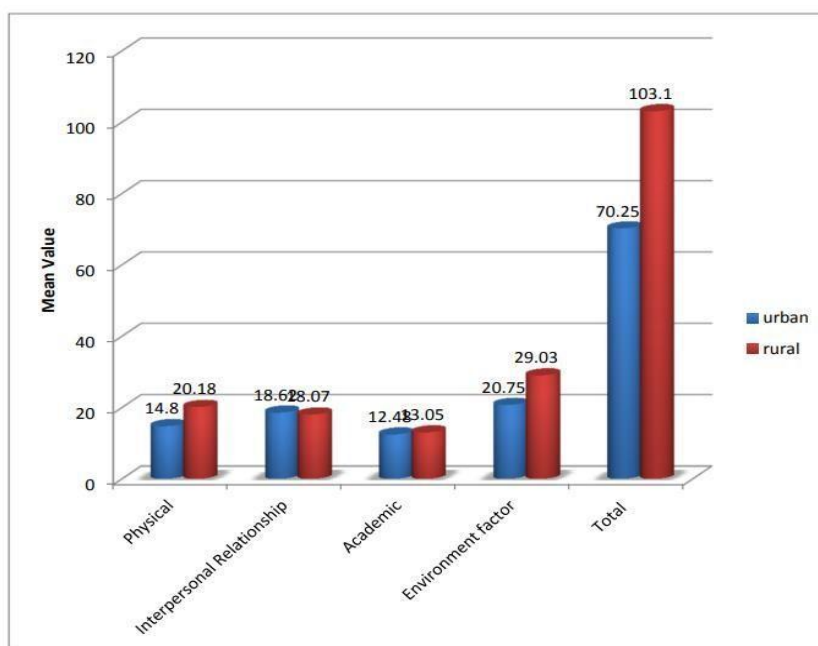
The main purpose of this section was to focus on the findings pertinent to the present study and their related discussions. Data collected during the investigation have been analyzed and discussed under the following sub-heads:

1. COMPARISON OF STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL ADOLESCENTS

1.2 Comparison of Stress in Adolescents during Covid-19 Lockdown: The Student stress has four sub-variables, namely (i) Physical, (ii) Interpersonal Relationship, (iii) Academic and (iv) Environment factor. The result differences in the mean and standard deviations of Student stress of urban and rural adolescents urban are presented in the table below:

Table 1: Comparison of Students' Stress between Urban and Rural Adolescents

Student's Stress	Background Status	Mean	SD	t-value
Physical	Urban	14.80	4.81	5.066**
	Rural	20.18	3.76	
Interpersonal Relationship	Urban	18.62	3.79	1.222
	Rural	18.07	3.19	
Academic	Urban	12.48	5.18	1.385
	Rural	13.05	4.32	
Environment Factor	Urban	20.75	6.05	5.747**
	Rural	29.03	5.74	
Total	Urban	70.25	19.83	12.575**
	Rural	103.10	17.01	

**Figure 1: Bar Diagram Showing Mean Stress of Urban and Rural Adolescents**

The values from the above tables show that there is a significant statistical difference (0.01 level) between the means of urban and rural adolescents ($t= 5.066$) for physical, environmental and total stress. It is seen that in all the significant sub variables of stress the rural adolescents are significantly more stressed than their urban counterparts. In all the above sub variables it is seen that stress is more in rural adolescents than urban adolescents. This difference might be related to the fact that in rural areas environment presents a social structure that often leads to inequalities and hampers the access to

adequate health care for specific populations. The findings are supported by a study (6) which revealed a significant association between background status and stress, where rural were significantly more stressed than urban adolescents.

1.3 Comparison of Coping Strategies between Urban and Rural Adolescents during Covid-19 Lockdown: The result showing differences in the mean and standard deviations of coping strategies among urban and rural adolescents is presented in the table below:

Table 2: Comparison of Coping Strategies between Urban and Rural Adolescents

Variable	Background Status	Mean	SD	t-value
Confrontive coping	Urban	10.76	3.67	14.776 **
	Rural	4.38	2.27	
Planful problem solving	Urban	5.83	3.52	2.456*
	Rural	4.88	3.08	
Problem Focused coping	Urban	16.59	7.19	12.334**
	Rural	9.26	5.35	
Distancing coping	Urban	10.74	3.75	14.055**
	Rural	4.42	2.49	
Self controlling coping	Urban	5.89	4.61	11.652**
	Rural	13.85	5.04	
Seeking social support	Urban	4.44	2.66	14.260**
	Rural	10.86	3.63	
Accepting Responsibility	Urban	6.53	1.85	1.259
	Rural	6.37	3.16	
Escape Avoidance	Urban	7.88	5.89	10.073**
	Rural	15.74	5.12	
Positive Reappraisal	Urban	7.89	4.10	3.264*
	Rural	10.75	4.28	
Emotion focused coping	Urban	43.37	22.86	14.849**
	Rural	65.99	23.72	

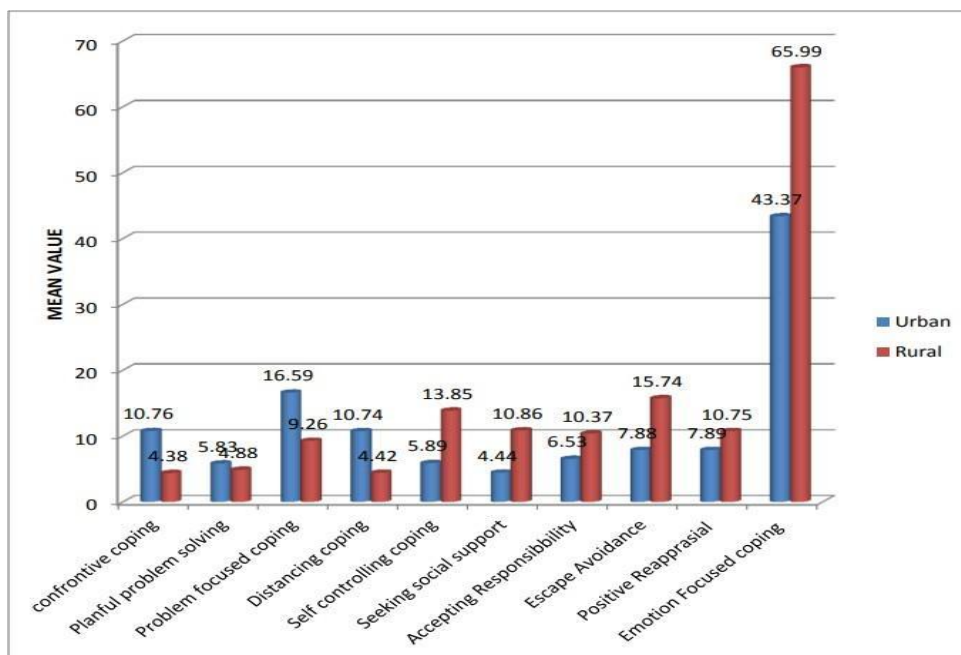


Figure2: Bar Diagram Showing mean scores of Coping Strategies of urban and rural adolescents

The variables of Coping Strategies has eight sub-variables namely (i) Confronting coping, (ii) Planful problem solving, (iii) Distancing, (iv) Self Controlling, (v) Seeking Social Support, (vi) Accepting Responsibility, (vii) Escape Avoidance and (viii) Positive Reappraisal.

Further, these eight stages, as recommended by the author (5), are grouped into two types of strategies, Problem focused and Emotion Focused. Problem focused contains two sub variable, confrontive coping and planful problem solving and Emotion focused has six sub variables namely Distancing, Self-Controlling, Seeking Social Support, Accepting Responsibility, Escape Avoidance and Positive Reappraisal. From the above results we can infer that there are significant differences in the problem focused coping strategies between Urban and Rural Adolescents with Urban Adolescents using more of Problem focused coping strategies as compared to their rural counterparts. In confrontive coping and planful coping strategies (sub variable of problem focused coping) significant differences existed. In all these coping strategies urban adolescents have shown better coping as compared to their rural counterparts.

As far as Emotion focused coping strategy was concerned there was significant differences in all the sub variables except Accepting Responsibility. The results were significant at.01 level for Distancing coping, Self-controlling coping, Seeking social support, Escape Avoidance and total Emotion focused coping strategy. The results were significant.05 level of significance for Positive Reappraisal. In all the sub areas of significant differences rural adolescents had better Emotion focused coping than their urban counterparts. It was shown in the result that Problem focused coping was more used by urban adolescents and Emotion focused more by rural adolescents during lockdown period. The findings were supported by a study(7) which found that urban adolescents used problem focused coping more because of their environment, in urban areas

adolescents think more logically and only focused towards the problem. Rural adolescents used emotion focused coping more because in rural areas, people are more spiritual.

2. CORRELATION BETWEEN STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES

Correlations between Student's stress and Coping Strategies has been shown in the table below:

Table 3: Inter Correlation between Student's Stress and Coping Strategies

Coping strategies	Total student stress	Physical	Interpersonal Relationship	Academic	Environment Factor
Confronting coping	-.509**	-.329**	-.423**	.089	.423**
Planful problem coping	-.181	0.23	.078	.234*	.045
Total problem focused coping	-.530**	-.533**	-.439**	.378**	.121
Distancing coping	-.203*	-.376**	.286*	-.423**	.189
Self controlling coping	-.476**	-.379**	-.433**	.379**	.237*
Seeking social support	.223*	.121	-.376**	.279*	.083
Accepting responsibility	.422**	.536**	-.428**	.438**	.387**
Escape avoidance	-.371**	.537**	-.378**	-.234*	-.378**
Positive reappraisal	-.496**	-.237*	-.357**	.346**	-.564**
Total emotion Focused coping	-.456**	-.533**	-.379**	.427**	-.567**
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).					

The above result table 12 shows that in case of Problem focused Coping Strategies there were significant negative correlation between Confrontive coping and Total Student stress, interpersonal stress and environment stress at.01 level. Total Problem focused strategy and Total Stress, Physical, Interpersonal and Academic were negatively related to each other at.01 level of significance whereas Planful Problem solving was positively related to Academic Stress.

In Emotion focused Coping strategy there were mixed correlations between Coping Strategies and Student's Stress. Most of the significant correlations were negatively related to each other except in case of Academic stress which was positively related to all the sub variables of Coping leaving Distancing and Escape Avoidance. Environment stress was also positively related to self-controlling coping and Accepting Responsibility.

Total Emotion focused coping was also negatively related to all the sub variables of stress except Interpersonal relationship.

On the whole from the above results it was seen that more the coping lesser the stress in students. As adolescents practice more coping strategies in their life, they are easily able to solve their problems.

Moreover, for those who had mental health problems during pandemics, coping strategies played an important role as this lead to positive or negative mental health outcomes. Coping strategies included cognitive and behavioral efforts an individual used to solve problems and to reduce the stress caused by these problems. On one hand, the proper use of coping strategies helped to manage stressful events and reduce negative emotions while on the other hand, inappropriate selection of coping strategies lead to severe stress or even suicide. A research (8) about emotional responses and coping strategies of nurses and nursing college students during the COVID-19 outbreak in China found that adolescents used problem-focused strategies more than emotion-focused strategies.

Adolescence has been widely defined as the time in life when the developing individual attained the skills and attributes necessary to become a productive and reproductive adult. Nearly all cultures recognize a phase in life when society acknowledges these emerging capacities of young people. During the COVID- 19 pandemic, it was very important to evaluate the difference between the effect caused by the physical distancing imposed by lockdowns and the extent to which adolescents subjectively felt lonely or he coping strategies used by them.

Various coping strategies appeared to have differing effects in preventing or fostering psychological symptoms. Some studies regarding the combined psychological responses and coping methods used by adolescents in past outbreaks has shown that coping strategies have included problem-focused coping (seeking alternatives, self- and other-preservation) and seeking social support to mitigate anxiety and depression. Given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, coping strategies have been affected by announcements of clear rules for citizens to follow; social media communications and expert advice which encouraged a task-oriented coping strategy. These factors have helped people to try to behave appropriately. With this in mind, attempt was made as to whether various coping strategies have increased or decreased these symptoms. The research aimed to explore specifically how coping strategies have been impacted stress during an extended period of lockdown rules during the COVID19 pandemic in a healthy sample. The results of the present study can be used to address stress-related problems beyond those caused by the pandemic, helping generate greater self-knowledge among university students. Students need to assess their own fear, stress, and anxiety levels to adopt coping mechanisms.

Conclusion

Rural Adolescents apparently had more stress as compared to their rural counterparts. It was also seen that significant differences existed between Urban and Rural Adolescents in use of Coping Strategies. Urban Adolescents used more of problem focused Coping Strategies whereas it was vice versa for Emotion focused Coping Strategies.

Conflict of Interest

There has been no conflict of interest during the conduct of this study.

Ethical Approval

The study was conducted with informed consent of all the participants. They were assured that their responses would be kept confidential.

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