

## **Coping Strategies and Parental Attachment as Predictors of Academic Stress in Adolescents**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The present study was an endeavour to study relationship between Academic stress, Coping strategies and Parental attachment of Adolescents. The sample size consisted of 700 (345 boys and 355 girls) adolescents (age 17+ to 18 years) selected randomly. All the adolescents belonged to science stream. Stratified sampling was done for selection of schools out of which government and public schools were taken. The tools used were Bisht battery of Stress scale by Bisht, Ways of Coping Strategies by Folkman and Lazarus and Inventory of Parent and Peer attachment by Armsden and Greenberg .The results showed that there was significant relationship between variables of Coping Strategies and Parental Attachment with Academic Stress. It was also seen that Coping Strategies and Parental attachment were significant predictors of Academic stress of adolescents.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Academic Stress, Problem Focussed Coping strategy, Parental Attachment, Emotion Focussed Coping Strategy*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Stress is present at all stages of life but particularly more so at the adolescents' age. Student life for an adolescent can be a rewarding experience, as well as a time of considerable anxiety and stress (Dyson & Renk, 2006). The combination of the many stressors of student life, such as planning for the future, struggling with exams and assignments, meeting the demands of challenging teachers, deciding on a major, and transitioning into financial and emotional independence, can be an overwhelming experience for many of them. Further, in addition to these stressors, adolescents may wonder whether they will be able to meet their own expectations as well as those of their parents and friends (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1981). Even as institutions of higher learning churn out more and more batches of students every year, the quality of education has seriously declined (Dhawan, 2007). Given all these factors, adolescents' experience of anxiety and stress during their student years may be important to their overall functioning as well as to their academic performance. A multitude of variables such as frustration, conflict, pressure, and anxiety may be related to the academic related stress. These stressors have been appraised as taxing or as exceeding the resources that are available to an individual. In the present study attempt has been made to investigate the relationship among the academic-related stress experienced by adolescents and three selected variables that are likely to be relevant to their lives namely, Coping Strategies (employed usually by students during stressful times) and Parental Attachment.

Utilizing effective Coping Strategies can help alleviate the negative effects of stress. Coping can be described as the cognitive and behavioral efforts an individual uses to manage specific demands or stressors (Dressler, 1991). Coping strategies can also be viewed as what an individual actually thinks and does in a particular stressful situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). When selecting the Coping Strategies one has many options available to him/her. In a seminal work in the stress and coping literature, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguished between two types of coping strategies: problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping strategies tend to be employed when an individual has determined that a harmful, threatening, or challenging situation is amenable to change. In contrast, emotion-focused coping strategies focus on dealing with the negative emotions that are a product of the stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Snyder, 1999). Attachment is described as an enduring affectional bond of substantial intensity-the first and the most basic forms of love felt by the child towards another human. Bowlby (1982) has suggested that human beings at any age exhibit greater social and emotional adjustment when they have confidence in the accessibility and responsiveness of a trusted other. Adolescent's benefit from parental support that encourages autonomy development yet ensures continued monitoring and emotional connectedness. Parental support during stressful periods predicts positive adolescent adjustment. Given the potential importance of this relationship, the manner in which parental attachment is associated with academic-related stress deserves further study. A number of studies have suggested that there is a relationship between parental attachment during childhood and a number of behavioral outcomes and patterns related to students' functioning, including stress and depression, self-esteem, self-perception, self-actualization, levels of perfectionism, and performance goals during school (Dominguez & Carton, 1997; Flett, Hewitt, & Singer, 1995; Gonzalez, Greenwood, & WenHsu, 2001;

Klein, O'Bryant, & Hopkins, 1996; Oliver & Berger, 1992; Renk, Klein, & Rojas, 2005). Secure attachment has been increasingly recognized as central to adaptive functioning over the life span. More recently attention has turned towards understanding the role of attachment with parents in healthy adjustment during adolescence. Parents play a significant role in supporting secure attachments (Laible et al., 2000). Human Development forms a significant constituent of the Home Science curriculum. Stress in the pre-schoolers and adolescence has always been the subject of interest to Home Scientist, especially those concerned with the Child Development. Most of the studies investigating Stress and Coping have concentrated on the aged population. As far as the Academic Stress and its correlates among adolescents are concerned, more empirical concerted work needs to be done in this area.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

- 1) To examine the relationship of Coping Strategies with adolescents' Academic Stress.
- 2) To study the relationship of Parental Attachment with adolescent's Academic Stress.
- 3) To assess the relative and conjoint predictability of Coping Strategies and Parental Attachment for the Academic Stress among adolescents.

### **II METHODOLOGY**

The study was advanced with the help of descriptive survey method by involving the description of Academic Stress as well as its relationship with the variables of Coping Strategies and Parental Attachment . In order to have the analytical picture of relationship, bivariate correlations (product moment) were employed by including the sub-variables along with the main variables. That is, eight sets of scores were taken (along with the total score of Coping Strategy) on Coping Strategies, namely Confrontive Coping, Planful Problem Solving, Distancing, Self-Controlling, Seeking Social Support, Accepting Responsibility, Escape Avoidance and Positive Reappraisal. The variable of Parental Attachment had three sub-sets of scores, namely, on Parental Trust, Parental Communication and Parental Alienation, in addition to the total score on Parental Attachment. In this way each of the fourteen sets of scores obtained on Coping Strategies and Parental Attachment was correlated with the variable of Academic Stress (totals) as well as with each of its four areas, namely, Academic Frustration, Academic Conflict, Academic Anxiety and Academic Pressure. In order to ascertain how best and with what combination of variables, the Academic Stress among adolescents could be predicted, application of multiple Rs was made. This was performed by taking Coping Strategies (along with its ten sub-variables), Parental Attachment (along with its four sub-variables) as independent variables. The predictive efficiency of these variables was examined for the criterion variable of Academic Stress. Various types of regression models were developed to locate the best predictor of Academic Stress. Selection of sample was resorted to at two stages, firstly at the level of schools and secondly for the selection of sections in a class. Following Sapsford and Jupp (2006), stratified sampling was used for the selection of schools. Out of various types of schools, two types (strata) that is Government and Public schools were taken. Further, out of various schools in each stratum that is twenty Government schools and twenty two Public schools, seven Government and eight Public schools were selected through random sampling method. All these schools had science stream at the higher secondary level.

At the second stage of sampling, twelfth grade students studying in these selected schools and belonging to science stream. (both medical and non-medical) were drawn randomly by taking section as a unit of randomization. At least two sections were drawn from each of the fifteen schools. Thus, the total sample consisted of 700 (345 boy and 355 girls) adolescents (age 17+ to 18 years).

### **Tools used for the study:**

Following tools were used for the purpose of data collection

- (1) Bisht Battery of Stress Scales **by Bisht, A.R (BBSS-1987)** was used to measure the Academic Stress.
- (2) Ways of Coping Strategies **by Folkman, S and Lazarus, R.S. (WOC-1984)** was employed to measure Coping Strategies.
- (3) Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment **(IPPA-1987) by Armsden, G.C and Greenberg, M.T** was used to assess the perceived attachment of adolescents with their parents. Scores were only taken on the Parental Attachment.

### **Statistical Analysis:**

- 1) Product-moment correlations were used to examine the inter-relationship between the variables of Coping Strategies and Parental Attachment on the one hand and the variables of Academic Stress on the other.

- 2) Use of multiple R and regression equations was made to assess the predictability of Coping Strategies and Parental Attachment taken as independent variables for the dependant variables of Academic Stress as also to identify the most potential predictor of adolescents' stress, taken singularly and conjointly.

### III RESULTS

#### CO RELATIONAL ANALYSIS:

#### Coping Strategies and Academic Stress:

**Table 1**  
**Product Moment Correlations (rs) Between Coping strategies and Academic stress**

Coping Strategies	Academic Stress				
	Frustration	Conflict	Pressure	Anxiety	A. Stress Total
<b>Confrontive Coping</b>	.048	-.070	<b>.120**</b>	-.072	.068
<b>Planful Problem Solving</b>	-.010	-.050	.001	<b>-.175**</b>	<b>-.078*</b>
<b>Problem Focussed</b>	.027	-.073	<b>.081*</b>	<b>-.138**</b>	-.005
<b>Distancing</b>	<b>.297**</b>	<b>.266**</b>	<b>.383**</b>	<b>.214**</b>	<b>.419**</b>
<b>Self Controlling</b>	<b>.279**</b>	<b>.265**</b>	<b>.355**</b>	<b>.149**</b>	<b>.390**</b>
<b>Seeking Social Support</b>	<b>.276**</b>	<b>.296**</b>	<b>.399**</b>	<b>.279**</b>	<b>.477**</b>
<b>Accepting Responsibility</b>	<b>.212**</b>	<b>.303**</b>	<b>.189**</b>	<b>.193**</b>	<b>.307**</b>
<b>Escape Avoidance</b>	<b>.244**</b>	<b>.349**</b>	<b>.343**</b>	<b>.217**</b>	<b>.442**</b>
<b>Positive Reappraisal</b>	<b>.248**</b>	<b>.209**</b>	<b>.288**</b>	<b>.079*</b>	<b>.322**</b>
<b>Emotion Focussed</b>	<b>.344**</b>	<b>.376**</b>	<b>.444**</b>	<b>.232**</b>	<b>.524**</b>

\*\*Significant at .01 level

\*Significant at .05 level

From the results submitted as above, it can be inferred that a mixed picture of results of relationship between Problem Focused Coping Strategy and Academic Stress has been obtained. Problem focused has a significant positive relationship with one area of Academic Stress namely, academic pressure, but negative significant relationship with another area of Academic Stress, namely, academic anxiety. It doesnot relate significantly with remaining areas of Academic Stress. The use of Problem Focused Strategies builds up academic pressure, but it simultaneously decreases academic anxiety. It doesnot lead to significant increase or decrease in the total academic stress.

Confrontive coping, a constituent of Problem Focused Strategy, is significantly and positively related to academic pressure. Greater the use of confrontive coping strategy by adolescent more is their academic pressure .Planful problem solving another component of Problem Focused Strategy, decreases academic anxiety and total Academic stress.Emotion Focused coping strategy significantly and positively relates to total academic stress as well as to all of its four components, namely academic frustration, conflict, pressure and anxiety. In other words greater is the use of emotion focused strategies greater is the academic stress. There is a consistently significant positive association of each of the six types of Emotion Focused Strategy, namely, Distancing, Self controlling, Seeking social support, Avoiding responsibility, Escape avoidance and Positive reappraisal with total Academic Stress as well as with all its sub-variables namely ,academic frustration ,academic conflict, academic pressure and academic anxiety.From these results it may be inferred that problem focused coping strategy does help to reduce the level of academic anxiety but it simultaneously builds up greater academic pressure. Somewhat similar results were obtained by Kaplan, Samuel and Struthers (2000) and Anuradha (2001) who state that planful problem solving involves bi directional interrelationship between individual and the environment. This means that an individual tries to remove the stress by studying hard, which normally reduces stress but also gives impetus to hard work.

. The prominent use of Emotion Focused strategies among adoescents such as Distancing, Self controlling, Seeking social support, Accepting responsibility, Escape avoidance and Positive reappraisal in overcoming the Academic Stress is associated with greater stress.This vicious circle continues till steps are taken to actively solve the problem and alter stress.The experience of emotional distress has a particular influence on the use of palliative and disengagement coping strategies. Although intended to alleviate stress, Carver et al. (1989) argue, focusing on emotions over time may exacerbate distress. Students may be distracted from employing active coping efforts in dealing with demands and moving towards demand resolution.

**Parental Attachment and Academic Stress**

Table 2  
Product Moment Correlation Between Parental Attachment and Academic Stress

PARENTAL ATTACHMENT	ACADEMIC STRESS				
	Frustration	Communication	Pressure	Anxiety	A.Stress Total
Parental Trust	-.035	-.051	-.064	.031	<b>-.084*</b>
Parental Communication	-.041	<b>-.113**</b>	-.047	.022	<b>-.094*</b>
Parental Alienation	<b>.158**</b>	.018	<b>-.110**</b>	-.052	-.002
Total Attachment	-.030	<b>-.093*</b>	-.047	.017	<b>-.089*</b>

\*\*Significant at .01 level

\*Significant at .05 level

From the above table it is seen that there is a significant and negative relationship between perceived Parental Attachment and Academic Stress. It implies that Parental Attachment decreases stress by providing strong foothold to resolve academic conflict and to effectively deal with academic stressors. Parental trust and communication, both constituents of Parental Attachment, are also significantly and negatively related with Academic Stress. Effective communication with parents helps in reducing academic conflict and distressing the adolescents. A mixed picture of results emerges with respect to relationship between alienation with parents, a third sub-variable of Parental Attachment and Academic Stress. Parental Alienation has a positive and significant relationship with academic frustration, but its relationship is negatively significant with academic pressure. That is with increase in alienation, adolescents become more academically frustrated but feel less stressed as far as academic pressure is concerned. Armsden and Greenberg (1987) also reported that strong parent-adolescent attachment relationships allowed adolescents independently to seek out and thrive in new situations. Leondari.A and Kiosseoglou.G (2000), too, reported that as compared with the insecurely attached students, the securely attached students also score lower on measures of anxiety and loneliness.

**Multiple Regression**

Table 3  
Multiple Regressions Between Various Variables of coping strategies and Parental attachment.

Model	Independent Variable	R2	F	R2Change	F
I	Emotion Focussed(EF)	r=.524	263.742**	r2=. 275	
II	EF+Seeking Social Support(CSS)	.296	146.224**	.021	21.100**
III	EF+CSS+Planful Problem Solving(CPP)	.311	104.768**	.016	15.750**
VI	EF+CSS+CPP+Escape Avoidance(CEA)	.321	81.850**	.009	9.265**
V	EF+CSS+CPP+CEA +Distancing(CDG)	.330	68.33**	.010	10.014**
VI	EF+CSS+CPP+CEA+CDG+Total Parental Attachment(PATOT)	.339	59.067**	.008	8.862**
VII	EF+CSS+CPP+CEA+CDG+PATOT+Positive Reappraisal(CPR)	.343	51.627**	.005	4.958*
VIII	CSS+CPP+CEA+CDG+PATOT+CPR+Self Controlling(CSC)	.348	52.686**	.005	4.870*

It is seen from the above table that the predictive efficiency of Emotion Focused Coping was greatest for Academic Stress. The total percentage of variance attributed by the conjoint effect of all eight variables, namely, Emotion Focused coping, Seeking social support, Planful problem solving, Escape avoidance, Distancing, Total Parental attachment, positive reappraisal and Self-controlling for prediction of Academic Stress is higher (34.3%) than their separate contribution (the maximum being 27.5% by Emotion Focused Coping strategies) towards Academic Stress. The total percentage of variance attributed by the conjoint effect of all eight variables namely Emotion Focused coping, Seeking social support, Planful problem solving, Escape avoidance, Distancing, Total Parental attachment, positive reappraisal and Self-controlling for prediction of Academic Stress is higher than their separate contribution towards Academic Stress. The seven Coping strategies shown in the table here are Emotion focussed which seems to explain significant predictability of Emotion Focused coping strategies for Academic Stress. This type of coping behavior, when used by adolescents, becomes instrumental in continuance of stress. The concern to manage one's emotions, rather than focusing on the source of stress,

it seems does not solve the problem. In fact the dominant use of Emotion Focused strategies among adolescents to overcome Academic Stress leads to furtherance of greater stress and this vicious circle continues till steps are taken to alter stress. Carver et al (1989) also stated that the experience of emotional distress has a particular influence on the use of palliative and disengagement coping strategies. They further argue that although intended to alleviate stress, focusing on emotions over time may exacerbate distress. The results of the present investigation have clearly highlighted the role of type of Coping Strategies and Parental Attachment in Academic Stress of Adolescents. Considering that lack of effective Coping Strategies and inadequate Parental Attachment have an effect on the Academic Stress of Adolescents, the findings assume special significance. The results of the present study have implications for adolescent development, which formulates a basic unit of curriculum of Home science. The subject of Home science is taught in schools with a view to generating knowledge, skills and attitude in various areas such as Human Development, Foods and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles Home Management and Extension Education. The study of Human Development is closely related to physical, emotional, social and cognitive development of a child from infancy through adolescence till old age. While framing the curriculum, the home scientist could aim at developing wholesome personality by way of focusing on the outcomes which includes the attainment of developmental related tasks, and appropriate coping behavior among adolescents to handle the life stress in general and academic stress in particular. The study can also be useful for schools, counselors and parents

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