

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND COPING STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Through the findings of this research, we aim to contribute to the research community on the role of emotional intelligence towards coping strategies; - approach/avoidance (beneficial or harmful) adopted by individuals and the differences between genders in the coping strategies they adopt. Over the last couple years emotional intelligence has proved to be crucial in an individual's emotional as well as financial success in life. Through this research, the researchers intend to reveal whether one's emotional intelligence is related to the coping strategies employed by male and female, adolescents and adults. The results will be useful in preventing mental health issues caused by stress through further research on methods to improve emotional intelligence. Adolescent and adult participants completed a questionnaire on emotional intelligence and coping strategies using EIS (Emotional Intelligence Scale by Anukool and Hyde) and Brief-Cope Inventory. The differences between genders and relation between both variables was measured.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; coping strategies; gender differences; avoidance, approach

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of the human mind and its integral role in shaping our lives is more evident now than ever before. As the human mind evolves it is of utmost necessity that researchers in the field of psychology keep up to this continuous change. With today's cut-throat, competitive lifestyle, emotional intelligence and coping strategies play an indispensable role in the overall well being of an individual. Through the findings of this research, we aim to contribute to the research community on the role of emotional intelligence towards the coping strategy (beneficial or harmful) adopted by individuals. We further aim to understand the differences between genders in the coping strategies they adopt when life throws a difficult situation at them. A better understanding of the relation between these two factors (emotional intelligence and coping strategies) will enable us to become more aware of how males and females cope in adverse situations.

1.1 DEFINITION OF COPING & COPING STRATEGIES

Life is beautiful but it is not easy. No matter how mentally healthy and optimistic we are sometimes life doesn't go according to our plan and we all experience certain incidents that break us down both mentally and physically. Hence, coping, which refers to the process by which an individual attempts to manage stressful demands, plays a vital role in our lives. Adopting the right coping strategies can help us navigate through challenging and tough obstacles in life. There are several coping strategies like problem focused coping, emotion focused coping, appraisal focused coping which are mostly based on two coping styles, i.e. approach coping and avoidance coping.

- Approach Coping

In the approach coping style individuals confront the problem directly and try to eliminate the source of stress or try to do something constructive about the stressful event.

- Avoidance Coping

In avoidance coping style individuals may either be aware there is a problem or may be in denial about the problem. Hence they prefer to ignore the problem and sit and sulk about it and do nothing but blame their luck or the people and situations around them.

1.2 EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

We all have two minds, one that thinks (rational mind) and the other that feels (emotional mind). Intelligence or Intelligence Quotient (IQ) assesses the rational mind which involves the ability to solve problems, use logic

and communicate and grasp complex ideas. Emotional intelligence or Emotional Quotient (EQ), on the other hand, is described as a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide our thinking and action. (Salovey and Mayer,1990)

Emotional intelligence has five key elements that is self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. As humans we tend to give a lot of emphasis on the value and importance of the rational mind (IQ measures) however, we all know through our own experiences that intelligence can come to nothing when emotions like anger, sadness and fear hold sway and overwhelm reason.

We must remember that emotional intelligence (EQ) skills can be learned through understanding and practice. Observing our reactions to others, evaluating our emotions, and taking responsibility for our actions, are a few examples of sound emotional intelligence.

1.3 IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND COPING

Emotional intelligence affects the quality of our life and influences our behaviours and relationships leading us on the path to a more fulfilling existence. Individuals with higher emotional intelligence are better equipped to work cohesively with a team and deal with work pressure effectively. They tend to self motivate themselves and hence are more successful in achieving their goals. Ability to manage emotions well helps them realize their true potential and makes them self aware and confident to deal with any situation.

Use of effective coping skills can improve mental and emotional well being which play an important role in our lives. Learning to cope with life's difficult challenges increases resilience and maintains an emotional equilibrium making us happier, healthier and more productive. Being able to bounce back from adversity will help us increase self confidence and self esteem and develop a brighter outlook on life. Individuals with good coping skills are found to live life to the fullest.

1.4 INTERRELATION BETWEEN COPING AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Both, high emotional intelligence and healthy coping strategies are necessary for the well-being of an individual. Studies have found that individuals with poor emotional intelligence are unable to handle situations that induce stress and emotional turmoil and this inability can lead to conflicts, guilt, poor relationships and deteriorated mental as well as physical health.

Similarly, high emotional intelligence leads to adopting adaptive coping strategies which is a necessity for self growth and the overall positive well-being of an individual. As emotional intelligence is the ability to understand what one is feeling emotionally it becomes a key factor to handling difficult situations in life such as a failure in a competitive exam, rejection, a heartbreaking relationship or the loss of a family member. Sound emotional intelligence therefore will lead to choosing the most beneficial and productive coping strategies to challenge life head on!

1.5 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN COPING STRATEGIES USED

Research has indicated that women use a emotional – focussed coping strategies compared to men, who are more likely to use problem – focussed strategies when faced with adversities. Thus, women are more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression. Females tend to seek social support and reappraisal, whereas men tend to seek acceptance of responsibility. These differences can be attributed to one's physiological make – up, such as how sex hormones interact with stress hormones such as adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol. Conflicting evidence also suggest that men are more likely to experience mental illnesses due to their vulnerability to self – criticism and performance, in contrast to women being vulnerable to interpersonal relationships and support.

1.6 GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Gender differences in emotional intelligence may be due to social and emotional factors. (Singh, 2002; Ryff, Singer, Wing & Love, (2001); Petrides and Furnham (2000). Socially, females tend to be more emotionally intelligent compared to males. Perhaps because certain traits are more desirable in one gender, compared to another; or otherwise considered masculine or feminine. For example, assertiveness is considered more of a masculine trait compared to empathy, which is considered more of a feminine characteristic. One reason for such dissimilarities could be because both genders are socialized differently. In the socializing process, society encourages females be more cooperative, expressive and attuned to

interpersonal relationships; whereas males are led to be competitive, independent and instrumental. Consequently, females pay more attention to nurturance and their interpersonal connectedness, compared to males.

From the biological perspective, researchers have claimed that the female chemistry is more suitably adapted to the individual's own and other's emotions as a vital factor for survival. In female brains, certain areas of emotional processing are larger than the corresponding areas in males (Baron-Cohen, 2003) besides males and females are different in cerebral processing of emotions (Craig et al., 2009) giving rise to the differences in EI.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This paper postulates a consideration into the realms of how the quality of one's emotional intelligence can assist in gender – determined coping strategies. Through this understanding, one can determine appropriate strategies that can be implemented to promote, or facilitate stress – induced coping strategies. An understanding of this paper can simplify the objective of improving quality living.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This is a survey design. The data was collected online using the snowball technique via Google forms. The form consisted of both, the Brief Cope Scale and the EIS Scale.

2.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 198 participants. There were 99 females and 99 male participants. The participants were Indian citizens. Out of the 99 male participants 46 were in the age group of 18- 24 and 53 were in the age group of 25-31. Amongst the females 63 participants were in the age group of 18- 24 and 36 were in the age group of 25-31.

2.3 Materials

Data was collected with the use of Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory (Brief-COPE) and Emotional Intelligence Scale by Anukool Hyde, Sanjyot Pethe and Upinder Dhar (E.I.S).

2.3.1 Brief Cope Survey

The brief cope survey comprised of avoidance coping and approach coping consisting of 28 statements while the emotional intelligence survey consisted of 34 statements. The Brief COPE is comprised of 14 scales, each of which assesses the degree to which a respondent utilizes a specific coping strategy. Respondents rate items on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 – “I haven't been doing this at all” to 4 – “I've been doing this a lot.

2.3.2 Emotional Intelligence Scale

The EIS contains 34 statements, each to be rated on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' (5) to 'strongly disagree' (1). The statements relate different components of emotional intelligence like self-awareness (4 items), empathy (5 items), self-motivation (6 items), emotional stability (4 items), managing relations (4 items), integrity (3 items), self- development (2 items), value orientation (2 items), commitment (2 items), and altruistic behaviour (2 items).

2.4 Procedure

Participants were administered an online survey which comprised of both scales. There was no time limit.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The male participants aged between 18 – 24 attained a mean for coping strategies of 57.76 with a standard deviation of 8.86; while for emotional intelligence, the mean was equal to 137.47; with a standard deviation equal to 12.58. For female participants aged between 18-24, the mean for coping strategies was evaluated at 57.30

with a standard deviation of 8.10. With respect to the emotional intelligence of females, the mean was equal to 137.90 and the standard deviation equal to 14.99.

For the male participants aged between 25- 30, the mean for coping strategies was calculated at 55.01, with a standard deviation of 10.02. With regards to their emotional intelligence, the mean equals to 137.50, with a standard deviation of 14.28. For females aged between 25 – 30, the mean for coping strategies was summed at 55.5, with a standard deviation calculated at 8.76.

The z – value for coping strategies for gender differences in relation to the coping strategies of adolescents was calculated at 0.28, with a p – value at 0.77; and emotional intelligence calculated at 0.15 with a p – value of 0.87; it has been understood that both hypotheses have been rejected at 0.05 level, indicating that no significant differences exist between both genders.

The z – value for coping strategies for gender differences in relation to the coping strategies of adults was calculated at 0.23, with a p – value at 0.81; and emotional intelligence calculated at

1.07 with a p – value of 0.28; it has been revealed that both hypotheses have been rejected at 0.05 level, indicating that no significant differences exist between both genders.

These values indicate that no significant gender differences exist in ones coping strategy in relation to their emotional intelligence, regardless of the age window.

3.2 DISCUSSION

The statistical analyses of both tested variables indicate a rather small and insignificant difference, in terms of both, gender or age group. Some of the reasons for the above results are as follows:

In today's world, males and females use different tactics to cope with stress. Several studies have found that women tend to use coping strategies that are targeted at switching their emotional responses to a stressful situation, whereas men use more problem-focused or instrumental methods of handling stressful experiences [Endler and Parker, 1990; Matud, 2004; Ptacek et al., 1994]. It has been hypothesized that sex differences in the way women and men typically cope with stress could be one reason why women tend to report more psychological distress and symptoms of depression and anxiety than men [Matud, 2004; Mazure and Maciejewski, 2003], which could in turn be reflected in higher prevalence rates of depression and anxiety in women [Kuehner, 2003]. Indeed, women tend to use emotion-focused coping strategies to manage stressors that are more associated with depression and anxiety than men [Mezulis et al., 2002].

Females place greater attention on their emotions than males do (Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera, & Ramos, 2004; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995), are more emotional (Grewal & Salovey, 2005), and are more skilful at dealing with and understanding their emotions, while males are more competent at regulating impulses and withstanding pressure (Sanchez-Nunez, Fernández-Berrocal, Montanes, & Lattore, 2008). Nasir and Masrur (2010) found male students had higher scores in stress management on the Emotional Quotient Inventory. A study carried out in Andalusia, Spain, on 12- to 15-year-olds found females have greater perceived attention to emotions, lower ability to clearly perceive their emotions, and less skill in repairing negative emotional states (Gomez-Baya, Malesdoza, Paino, & Matos, 2017). A study on Canadian university students found that in expression and recognition, and caring and empathy scales, females had an advantage, but the males had the benefit in the control of emotions. In the same way, females gained significantly higher scores on the ability model (Day & Carroll, 2004). Females exhibit more dexterity at guiding and managing emotions, of both self and others. Occasionally, females exhibit superiority at emotional attention and empathy, whereas males display higher emotion regulation (Bindu & Thomas, 2006; Goldenberg, Matheson, & Mantler, 2006).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, no gender differences were revealed with relation to emotional intelligence and one's coping strategies. Men and women are both, biologically and socially developed differently, which contributes to healthy coping and emotional intelligence, which is why no significant differences could be revealed.

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