

COPING STRATEGIES OF YOUNG AND OLDER ADULTS IN TIMES OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: *In the recent years, psychology has witnessed a paradigm shift with the arrival of 'positive psychology'. It now looks at the positive approach rather than clinical approach. Emphasis is now placed on how psychology can be used as a means for more meaningful life. This calls for insight into various stressors experienced by different classes of people and therefore the various coping strategies used by them. Pandemic itself can be considered as stressful situation. Thus an attempt was made to discover the coping strategies between two generations during COVID-19 Pandemic. Two groups, one consisting of individuals of 27-34 age groups and another group consisting of individuals of 57-66 age groups was taken. The method of comparative study was used. Each group had 20 individuals (both males and females) each. A questionnaire with reference to COPE inventory was made. Five different coping strategies i.e. positive re-interpretation and growth, venting out of emotions, denial, substance use and social support were identified. Mean and other relevant statistics were found. A t-test was done to further substantiate the findings. It was found that both generations indulge in more or less same kind of coping strategies. Present study has implications for positive psychology, coping mechanism, stress management, gender studies, social psychology and health psychology.*

Keywords: *Positive Psychology, Stress, Coping Strategies, generations, emotion*

1. INTRODUCTION

Generation comes from the Latin word *generāre*, meaning "to beget" also, is the act of producing offspring. Also a parent-child relationship in Kinship term. It is categorized into various categories like baby boomer, generation x, y, z and Gen Alpha. And they are categorized base date of birth in terms of year. A baby boomer is a person who was born during the demographic Post-World War II baby boom between the years 1946 and 1964, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Baby boomers are associated with a rejection or redefinition of traditional values; however, many commentators have disputed the extent of that rejection. In Europe and North America boomers are widely associated with privilege, as many grew up in a time of widespread government subsidies in post-war housing and education, and increasing affluence. As a group, they were the wealthiest, most active, and most physically fit generation up to that time, and amongst the first to grow up genuinely expecting the world to improve with time. They were also the generation that received peak levels of income; therefore they could reap the benefits of abundant levels of food, apparel, retirement programs, and sometimes even "midlife crisis" products. Gen X is preceded by Baby Boomers and preceded by the Generation Y. Their year of birth range between (1965-1980). They are characterized by Critical Thinking and Self Reliant etc. Millennials, or the Millennial Generation also known as Generation Y. Their year of birth range between (1981-1994). Generation Y is considered to grow up with technology and rely on it to perform their jobs better. Below are a few common traits that define Generation Y. **Family-Centric:** The fast-track has lost much of its appeal for Generation Y who is willing to trade high pay for fewer billable hours, flexible schedules and a better work/life balance. While older generations may view this attitude as narcissistic or lacking commitment, discipline and drive, Generation Y legal professionals have a different vision of workplace expectations and prioritize family over work. **Achievement-Oriented:** Generation Y is confident, ambitious and achievement-oriented. They have high expectations of their employers, seek out new challenges and are not afraid to question authority. Generation Y wants meaningful work and a solid learning curve. **Team-Oriented:** They value teamwork and seek the input and affirmation of others. Part of a no-person-left-behind generation, Generation Y is loyal, committed. **Attention-Craving:** Generation Y craves attention in the forms of feedback and guidance. They appreciate being kept in the loop and seek frequent praise and reassurance. The others are Gen Z (1995-2012) and Gen Alpha will range between (2013-2025). However, in the article will refer Baby Boomers to Older Adult and Gen Y to Young Adult.

As over the generations have different features, so the way of coping with it will be diverge. Stress is the prime factor which affects most age group people with so some or other way. In simple form stress is defined as a feeling of strain and pressure. In biological terms, stress is simply a reaction to a stimulus that disturbs our physical or mental equilibrium. It is both a psychological and a physiological response to the environment. With the onset of COVID-19 Pandemic, the uncertainties has made people more anxious about future endeavours. And even most people had to loss their job, older adults are concern may

be their Son/daughter are outside for job/study and here may be if something happens older adult have to die alone and will be no one to carry out the rituals. Children's are missing out their schools and outdoor recreative activities. Symptoms of stress may include a sense of being overwhelmed, feelings of anxiety, overall irritability, insecurity, nervousness, social withdrawal, loss of appetite, depression, panic attacks, exhaustion, high or low blood pressure, skin eruptions or rashes, insomnia, lack of sexual desire (sexual dysfunction), migraine, gastrointestinal difficulties (constipation or diarrhea), and for women, menstrual symptoms. It may also cause more serious conditions such as heart problems.

With stress people also uses coping mechanism, is expending conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems, and seeking to master, minimize or tolerate stress or conflict. Psychological coping mechanisms are commonly termed coping strategies or coping skills. The term coping generally refers to adaptive or constructive coping strategies, i.e., the strategies reduce stress levels.

Types of coping mechanisms

Hundreds of coping strategies have been identified Common distinctions are often made between various contrasting strategies, for example: problem-focused versus emotion-focused; engagement versus disengagement; cognitive versus behavioral.

Broadly coping mechanisms can be divided into two categories-

1. **Problem Focused Coping:** It is aimed at problem solving or doing something to alter the source of the stress. Problem-focused coping targets the causes of stress in practical ways which tackles the problem or stressful situation that is causing stress, consequently directly reducing the stress. Problem-focused strategies include:
 - Taking Control – this response involves changing the relationship between yourself and the source of stress. Information Seeking –This involves the individual trying to understand the situation (e.g. using the internet) and putting into place cognitive strategies to avoid it in future.
 - Evaluating the pros and cons of different options for dealing with the stressor.
2. **Emotion Focused Coping:** It is aimed at reducing or managing the emotional distress that is associated with (or cued by) the situation. Emotion-focused coping involves trying to reduce the negative emotional responses associated with stress such as embarrassment, fear, anxiety, depression, excitement and frustration. This may be the only realistic option when the source of stress is outside the person's control. Emotion-focused strategies include
 - Keeping yourself busy to take your mind off the issue
 - Letting off steam to other people
 - Praying for guidance and strength
 - Distracting yourself (e.g. TV, eating)

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 the stressor is something that must be endured (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

The present study focuses mainly on emotion focused coping. Five types of emotion focused coping strategies have been included. These are:

- a) **Positive reinterpretation and growth:** This strategy involves making the best of the situation and from it. The individual may view the stressful situation in more favorable light and may interpret it as a learning experience.
- b) **Venting out of emotions:** By adopting this strategy, the individual may be increasingly aware of his/her emotional distress and may have a concomitant tendency to ventilate or discharge those feelings.
- c) **Denial:** This strategy involves an attempt to reject the reality of the stressful event. It is often suggested that denial is useful, minimizing distress and thereby facilitating coping (cf. Breznitz, 1983; E Cohen & Lazarus, 1973; Wilson, 1981). Alternatively, it can be argued that denial only creates additional problems unless the stressor can profitably be ignored. That is, denying the reality of the event allows the event to become more serious, thereby making more difficult the coping that eventually must occur (cf. Matthews, Siegel, Kuller, Thompson, & Varat, 1983). A third view is that denial is useful at early stages of a stressful transaction but impedes coping later on (Levine et al., 1987; Mullen & Suls, 1982; Suls & Fletcher, 1985).
- d) **Substance use:** Substance use involves the use of certain substances like alcohol, drugs, etc. The individual may turn to the use of alcohol or other drugs as a way of disengaging from the stressor. Substance use as a coping strategy may often prove harmful to the individual as it may lead to various kinds of addiction.
- e) **Seeking social support:** An individual can seek instrumental or even emotional social support from friends, relatives, etc. Instrumental support involves seeking assistance, information or advice about what to do. While, on the other hand emotional support simply involves getting sympathy from someone.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants and procedure

The method of comparative research is used in the present study. Comparative research, simply put, is the act of comparing two or more things with a view to discovering something about one or all of the things being compared. When it comes to method, the majority agreement is that there is no methodology peculiar to comparative research. Present study employs the variable generation gap in determining the coping mechanisms used by individuals to deal with stress. To achieve this goal two successive generations and hence two groups, one consisting of generation A (age 27-34) and other consisting of generation B (age 57-66) were used. They were kept same on all demographic parameters, except for their age, so as to effectively check the influence of their age, hence their generation on the coping mechanism they use. Both groups consisted of 20 individuals each, both male and female. As the questionnaire consisted of only one quantitative part, the means and Standard Deviation of each group and overall 't' is calculated and further details are provided in detail as well as in graphical representation.

2.2 Measure

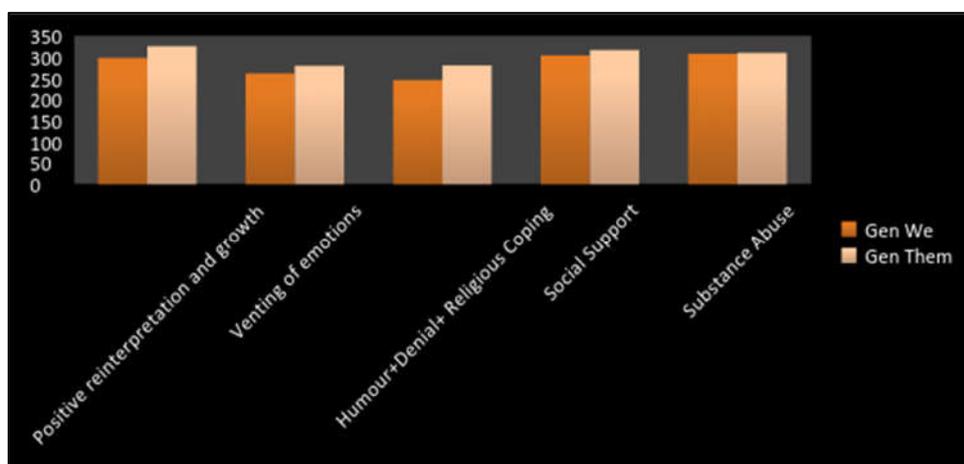
A questionnaire with reference to the COPE inventory (Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., & Weintraub, J. K. (1989). The COPE Inventory was developed to assess a broad range of coping responses, several of which had an explicit basis in theory. Five different coping mechanisms- Positive reinterpretation and growth, venting out of emotions, denial, substance use, seeking social support are used in the present study. Four statements each on every coping mechanism was constructed. Therefore a total of 20 statements were constructed. Then a pilot study was conducted and based on the responses the final questionnaire was made and administered to 40 participants. After administration of the pilot study, no further editing was required in the questionnaire, therefore the final questionnaire consisted of 20 statements on a five point rating scale. Responses were made on a 5 point rating scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". 1 being "strongly disagree", 2 being "somewhat disagree", 3 being "neither disagree nor agree", 4 being "somewhat agree", 5 being "strongly agree".

3. RESULTS

The aim of the survey was to establish a link between coping strategies and generations. Thus, a questionnaire consisting of 20 objective questions was designed to measure the responses of individuals on 5 types of coping mechanisms- ---positive reinterpretation and growth focus on venting of emotions, denial, seeking social support and substance use. This questionnaire was then administered to a sample of 40 individuals which was further divided into 2 groups on the basis of generations. Group gen-we consisted of individuals belonging to generation Y while group gen-them consisted of individuals belonging to baby boomers generation. After obtaining their responses differences were drawn out between the coping mechanisms used by both the groups by comparing their respective means for each coping strategy. Graphical representation was done for the same. An in-depth, factor wise analysis of the differences in the coping strategies for both the groups was done.

For the purpose of quantitative analysis the mean of all 5 factors for both categories was derived and graphical representation done for the same. Also, a graph comparing the five coping strategies for both the samples was drawn.

Figure 1: Showing coping strategies used by Gen them (Older Adults) and Gen we (Younger Adults)



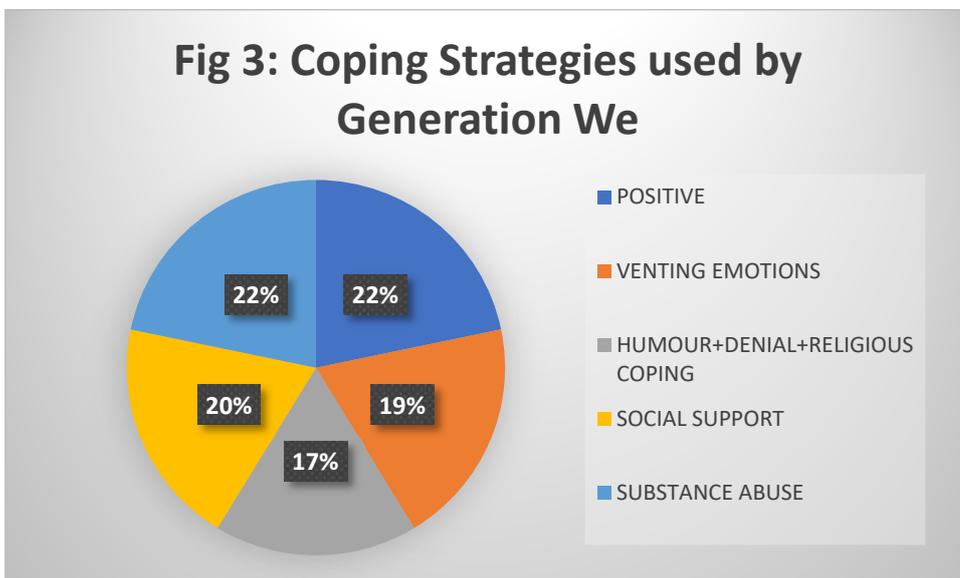
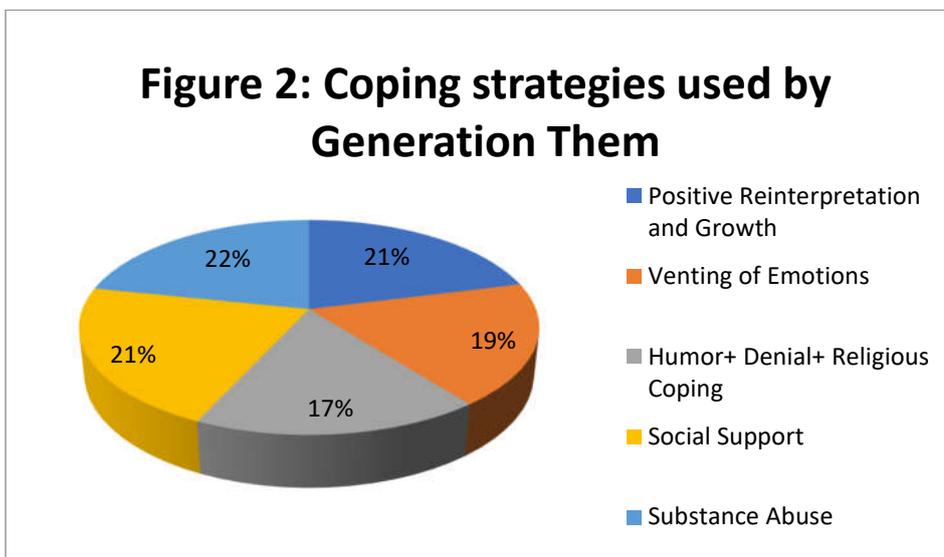
The aim of the survey was to study the difference between the coping mechanisms in two generations. A sample of 40 individuals was taken which was divided into two categories, generation them and generation we. The survey was quantitative in nature consisting of 20 questions marked on a 5-point rating scale.

The questionnaire measured the responses of the sample on 5 types of emotion- focused coping strategies. These were:

1. Positive reinterpretation and growth
2. Focus on venting of emotions
3. Denial
4. Social support
5. Substance use

The 20 questions of the questionnaire were divided in such a manner that 4 questions made up one single factor. For example: Question number 7, 16, 18 and 20 measured the responses of the participants on social support.

For the purpose of quantitative analysis the mean of all 5 factors for both categories was derived and graphical representation done for the same. Also, a graph comparing the five coping strategies for both the samples was drawn.



4. DISCUSSION

The aim of the survey was to establish a link between coping strategies and generations. Thus, a questionnaire consisting of 20 objective questions was designed to measure the responses of individuals on 5 types of coping mechanisms- ---positive reinterpretation and growth focus on venting of emotions, denial, seeking social support and substance use. This questionnaire was then administered to a sample of 40 individuals which was further divided into 2 groups on the basis of generations. Group gen-we consisted of individuals belonging to generation Y while group gen-them consisted of individuals belonging to baby boomers generation. After obtaining their responses differences were drawn out between the coping mechanisms used by both the groups by comparing their respective means for each coping strategy. Graphical representation was done for the same. An in-depth, factor wise analysis of the differences in the coping strategies for both the groups was done.

4.1 General Interpretation

For the purpose of finding the differences between the various coping strategies used in the study by both groups, the mean for each coping strategy for both groups was calculated and graphically represented. It was found that the majority of group gen-them used positive reinterpretation and growth(22%) as well as other coping strategies to deal with stress. This means that when facing stressful situations, maximum gen-them individuals are likely to interpret the stressful situation as positive. They would try and consider the situation in a positive light and may view it as a learning experience. They are also more likely to indulge in social support (21%) and substance use (20%) in order to deal with stress. This is also the case with venting out of emotions (18%), as group gen-we was found to be comparatively higher on this aspect.

When analysing the responses of the group gen-we, it was found that the maximum individuals here depended on substance use (22%) and social support (21%) as a coping strategy. They may indulge in the use of alcohol, drugs, comfort food, etc, as an escape. The respondents of group gen-we were similar to the respondents of group gen-them with reference to the use of social support as a coping strategy. Only 17% of the group gen-we said that in order to cope with stress they would prefer humor and denial.

Thus, one can say that not much difference has been found in the coping strategies used by both groups. However on close examination, it has been found that majority of group gen-we indulge in more of substance abuse (22%) and group gen-them indulged in more of positive reinterpretation and growth (22%).

4.2 FACTOR WISE INTERPRETATION

In order to give a clearer picture of the two groups, a factor wise detailed interpretation has been done.

Positive Reinterpretation and Growth

In the questionnaire, Question number 1, 3, 15, 13 measured the responses of the participants on positive reinterpretation and growth. This strategy means that the individual may view the stressful situation in more favourable light and may interpret it as a learning experience. Thus, this strategy involves making the best of the situation and from it. From the results obtained for the two groups of the sample-Gen-them and Gen-we, it was found that a higher number of individuals in Gen-them group used positive reinterpretation and growth as a coping strategy. This was found out as the mean of the responses of this group on the questions measuring this factor was 4.075 and the mean of the responses of Gen-we group on the questions measuring this factor was only 3.725.

VENTING OUT OF EMOTIONS

In the questionnaire, question number 11, 17, 6, 14 measured the responses of the participants on venting out of emotions. By adopting this strategy, the individual may be increasingly aware of his/her emotional distress and may have a concomitant tendency to ventilate or discharge those feelings.

From the results obtained for the two groups of the sample, it was found that comparatively a higher number of individuals in group gen-them depended on venting out of emotions to deal with stress. This was found out as the mean of the responses of group gen-them on the questions measuring this factor was 3.48 and the mean of responses of group gen-we on the same question was 3.27. Therefore, one can say that a higher percentage of the baby boomers generation feel that venting out of emotions and not bottling them up, is one of the best way to cope with stress as compared to generation Y people. However no stark differences has been found in this regard.

DENIAL, HUMOR AND RELIGIOUS COPING

In the questionnaire, question number 19, 5, 10, 8 measured the responses of the participants on denial. Denial is a refusal to recognize the truth of a statement; by adopting this strategy, the individual may refuse to accept or acknowledge a stressful event. From the results obtained for the two groups of the sample-Gen-them and Gen-we, it was found that a higher number of individuals in Gen-them group used denial, humor and religious coping as coping strategy. This was found out as the mean of the responses of this group on the questions measuring this factor was 3.5 and the mean of the responses of Gen-we group on the questions measuring this factor was only 3.075.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

In the questionnaire, question number 16, 7, 18, 20 measured the responses of the participants on social support. Social support, as the name suggests, includes providing and receiving emotional support from friends and relatives. By adopting this strategy, the individual may help his friends or family during their hard times and in turn receive support during his hard times. From the results obtained for the two groups of the sample-Gen-them and Gen-we, it was found that a higher number of individuals in Gen-them group were depended on social support to deal with stress. As the mean of the responses of this group on the questions measuring this factor was 3.9625 and the mean of the responses of Gen-we group on the questions measuring this factor was 3.8 only.

SUBSTANCE USE

In the questionnaire, question number 12, 4, 2, 9 measured the responses of the participants on substance use. Substance use involves the use of certain substances like alcohol, drugs, etc. By adopting this strategy, the individual may turn to the use of alcohol or other drugs as a way of disengaging from the stressor. From the results obtained for the two groups of the sample-Gen-them and Gen-we, it was found that a higher number of individuals in Gen-them group were depended on substance use to deal with stress. As the mean of the responses of this group on the questions measuring this factor was 3.875 and the mean of the responses of Gen-we group on the questions measuring this factor was only 3.85. The difference between two groups on this coping strategy is extremely minor and almost negligible.

A t-test was also done to further substantiate the finding. While employing the mean as a statistic, it was found that both groups indulge in similar kinds of coping strategies. However t was found to be significant at 0.005 levels of significance ($t=-2.280$). A two tailed test was done for this purpose. This means that there exists a significant difference in the coping strategies employed by both generations. And this difference is not due to chance factors. This discrepancy found between the result showed by the mean and the result showed by the t-test can be attributed to the fact that a rating scale was employed in this research and the therefore the mean can produce values which are elevated and also as noted above the means of group gen-them are higher on all coping strategies as compared to means of group gen-we.

The highest difference was seen in 'positive reinterpretation and growth' as individuals of generation baby boomers indulge in this more as compared to individuals of generation Y. This holds true as they are more experienced in terms of situations and difficulties which they have faced in their course of life, thus they are definitely higher on experience than compared to generation Y, who are still young and inexperienced. Another interesting finding was that both generations indulge in a lot of social support (21%) as their means to dealing with stress. This goes against the contemporary belief that young adults of today are more 'social'. It can be said that our older adults have formed more stable and reliable social ties and hence they also depend on their friends and family to deal with stress. Also with regard to substance use as a coping strategy both generations are likely to indulge in it in majority. This can be attributed to the fact that the use of alcohol, smoking and other substances has been prevalent in times of pandemic. This is not a by-product of the changing world and rather an idea which has been around for a long period of time. The generation baby boomers have perhaps accepted this as a part of their lives and hence use this to deal with their stressors.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the study was to compare and contrast coping mechanisms used by two generations i.e of age group between 27-34 (generation Y) and individuals of age between 57-66 (baby boomers) to deal with stress during pandemic. To do this a questionnaire with reference to COPE inventory was created. It was found that both groups indulge in similar type of coping mechanism, however on doing a t-test t was found significant at 0.05 levels of significance. The present study has implications for social psychology, statistics, anthropology and sociology.

Acknowledgements

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