Chapter VI
OVER VIEW
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CONCLUSIONS
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OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The main aims of the study were to determine the effect of sex on some indices of positive mental health as well as to explore the association of the degree of life stressors, gender role identity and gender role attitude with indices of mental health among young adult college students. In addition to that, prediction of mental health variables from stressful life events, gender role identity and gender role attitude of young adult college students was also attempted.

The dependent variables of the study were two aspects of mental health, namely 1) subjective wellbeing (SWB) of young adult students. 2) Ego functions (EF) of young adult students. The independent variables were 1) Stressful life events and 2) Gender stereotype. The latter included in turn two components namely, (a) Gender role identity such as (i) Masculinity (M), (ii) Femininity (F) and (b) Gender role attitude or traditionality-modernity dimension (GRA).

The control variables selected for the study were classified under four subheads. 1) Demographic variables consisted of age, sex, locality, religion, language and marital status. 2) Health variables comprised of physical health and mental health. 3) Family variables included structure of the family and economic and educational status. The structure of the family consisted of size and internal structure of the family. Economic and educational status included income of the family, education of the parents, occupation of the parents of the students and work status of the mother. 4) Social and cultural variables comprised of culture of the educational institute.

Seven scales were administered for the measurement of the independent, dependent and control variables. For the measurement of independent variables a) The Presumptive Stressful Life Events Scale by Singh et al. (1984) to assess the stress in life, b) a cultural adaptation of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) originally constructed by Bem (1981) to determine gender role identity and c) Sex Role Attitude Scale developed by Scanzoni (1975)
to determine the degree of gender role traditionality or modernity were administered on young adult college students.

For the measurement of dependent variables a) The Subjective Wellbeing Scale by Sell and Nagpal (1992) to assess individual's feeling of being at ease and free from subjectively felt distress and b) The Ego Function Assessment Scale (Modified) by Bellak (1989) and adapted by Basu et al (1996) to determine the cognitive, affective and effective functions of the ego were administered to all the subjects. For the assessment of control variables a) A detailed information schedule for personal and familial information and b) The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) by Goldberg and Hiller (1979) adapted by Basu and Dasgupta (1996) to identify any physical and psychological disturbance were used.

The sample was collected by the stratified random sampling technique and following some general inclusion and exclusion criteria. The sample comprised of 330 Hindu Bengali, middle class college students. Among them 165 were women and 165 men. Data were drawn in group situation from different colleges in Kolkata.

In view of the inconsistencies of the prior studies, six main hypotheses were formulated for the present study. The first two hypotheses were concerned with the effect of sex on subjective wellbeing and ego functions. Hypotheses no 3 and 4 were connected with the association of life stressors and gender stereotype on subjective wellbeing. Hypotheses no 5 and 6 were connected with the effect of the gender stereotype and life stress with ego functions. It was also decided that if significant associations were found between the independent variables and dependent variables then accordingly prediction of mental health variables from all the gender variables and life stress variables taken together would be stated. From the main research hypotheses a number of statistical hypotheses were formulated.

The statistical computations were done under 4 subheads. For the Descriptive statistics section the means, standard deviations and the skewness of the scores of SWB and 12 Ego Functions were computed separately for women and men. The second section consisted of exploring the interrelationship among the dependent variables. Factor analyses of the 12 ego functions was done to group the ego functions for: easier conceptualization and application purposes. The analysis yielded three factors. To determine the interrelationship between
SWB and all ego functions factors, Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed. All the EFs were significantly and positively associated with SWB. The third subsection attempted verification of the hypotheses. For the verification of hypotheses no 1 and 2 initially independent t tests were conducted to assess sex difference in the dependent variables. On the whole difference was not highly significant for the present sample except for SWB and 2 ego functions namely EF8 and EF9. Therefore it was decided that subsequent analyses would be done for the total sample. For the three variables that showed sex difference the analyses would be done separately for the women and men. For the verification of hypotheses no 3 to 6 correlation coefficients were conducted to determine the relationship between variables. In the fourth subsection the predictability of each dependent variable from the independent variables was investigated by Backward Stepwise Regression Analyses.

The analyses revealed small but significant sex difference in mental health of college students. On the whole mental health variables were positively associated with masculinity and modernity and negatively with stressful life events. Femininity had ambiguous association with mental health, depending on the situation and the variable studied.

CONCLUSIONS

From the statistical analysis the following conclusions were drawn.

1) There was significant sex difference in case of SWB, defensive function (EF8) and stimulus barrier (EF9) and men revealed better mental health than women for these three variables.

2) Subjective wellbeing was negatively correlated to stressful life events and positively correlated with masculinity indicating that well being was impaired along with greater stressful life events and facilitated by higher masculinity in self identity. About 18.3% of the variance in SWB could be predicted from the above mentioned independent variables.

3) The following conclusions were drawn for the Ego function Factor 1:

a) Stimulus barrier was negatively and significantly related with stressful life events and femininity, though it was positively and significantly related with masculinity and
modernity of attitude. This revealed that stimulus barrier was disturbed by greater stressful life events and greater femininity. However masculinity and modernity of attitude affected stimulus barrier favourably. Approximately 19.2% of variance in stimulus barrier could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

b) Defensive function was negatively and significantly associated with stressful life events and femininity, but positively related with masculinity indicating that defensive function was inhibited by stressful life events and femininity whereas it was facilitated by masculinity. Approximately 18% of variance in defensive function could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

c) Autonomous function was negatively and significantly correlated with stressful life events and was positively correlated with masculinity and modernity of attitude, revealing that this function was hampered by stressful life events and was supported by masculinity and modernity of attitude. Approximately 21.3% of variance in autonomous function could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

d) Thought process was negatively correlated with stressful life events and positively associated with masculinity indicating that thought process was disturbed by greater stressful life events and helped by masculinity. Approximately 11.5% of variance in thought process could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

4) The following conclusions were drawn for the Ego function Factor 2:

a) Judgment was negatively correlated with stressful life events and positively with femininity, that is stressful life events had negative impact on judgment whereas femininity affects it favourably. Approximately 9.2% of variance in judgment could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

b) Drive control was negatively related with stressful life events and positively associated with femininity. This showed that drive control was influenced unfavourably by stressful life events and favourably by femininity. Approximately 5.7% of variance in drive control could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.
c) Reality testing was negatively associated with stressful life events, revealing that reality testing was hampered by greater stressful life events. Approximately 2.2% of variance in reality testing could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variable.

d) Sense of reality was negatively associated with stressful life events and positively related with masculinity. This indicated that sense of reality was hampered by greater stressful life events and favourably influenced by masculinity. Approximately 6.6% of variance in sense of reality could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

e) Object relation was negatively correlated with stressful life events and positively related with masculinity. This revealed that object relation was supported by masculinity and impaired by stressful life events. Approximately 7.7% of variance in object relation could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

5) The following conclusions were drawn for the Ego function, Factor 3:

a) Mastery competence was positively and significantly associated with masculinity and modernity of attitude causing facilitation of mastery competence by masculinity and modernity of attitude. Approximately 18.6% of variance in mastery competence could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

b) Synthetic integrative function was positively and significantly correlated with masculinity and modernity of attitude indicating that this function was supported by masculinity and modernity of attitude. Approximately 9.7% of variance in synthetic integrative functioning could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

c) Adaptive regression was positively and significantly related with masculinity as well as modernity of gender role attitude, that is adaptive regression was facilitated by both the masculinity and modernity of attitude. Approximately 7.5% of variance in adaptive regression could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

6) Separate sex wise analysis revealed that subjective wellbeing of women and men was positively and significantly correlated with masculinity, however this was negatively related with stressful life events indicating that stressful life events inhibits and masculinity facilitates subjective wellbeing. Approximately 10% of variance in SWB in
women and 22.1% in men could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

7) Defensive function of women and men was positively correlated with masculinity and negatively correlated with femininity. Stressful life events were negatively related with this function in case of men. This function of women and men, was related positively and significantly with masculinity and negatively with femininity but stressful life events were harmful in the case of men. Approximately 7.7% of variance in defensive function in women and 22.8% in men could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

8) Stimulus barrier was positively and significantly correlated with masculinity for both women and men. Though femininity was found to inhibitory in case of women and stressful life events was negatively contributory in case of men. Moreover modernity of attitude was facilitated in case of men. Approximately 11.1% of variance in stimulus barrier in women and 18.4% in men could be predicted from the abovementioned independent variables.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study suffers from the following limitations:

1) The present research sample was not large enough (N = 330) and involved Hindu middle class urban college students only. Considering the diversity of our culture, it may be said without hesitation that inclusion of individuals from other religious groups, sociocultural background and locality would have yielded different patterns of relationship. Undoubtedly, this would have enriched the methodology and enhanced the meaningfulness of the findings. In partial defence of the limitation, it may be noted here that a major portion of the total study time was expended for the cultural adaptation of the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Thus, availability of the subjects within the stipulated time period was somewhat restricted.

2) Only early adult college students were used as subjects. The age range was also restricted (19-22 years only) and all were unmarried. Inclusion of older and married subjects would have added important information, particularly because gender role is susceptible to variations in social roles imposed upon the person.
3) All the measures used were self-report inventories. The possibility of faking and response biases is ingrained in such measures. These errors could have been taken care of by the use of supplementary tools, projective tests, qualitative measures, detailed interview or external criteria. These were not resorted to owing to shortage of time.

4) The study incorporated only one gross index outcome variable namely subjective well being. The detailed nuances of this construct were not explored. Also other indicators like happiness or feeling of peace were not utilized. So far as the resource variables were concerned, the issue of ego functioning was studied in sufficient detail. But the study would have been enriched if other variables like coping strategies and locus of control had been explored.

5) Gender role development both in its identity and attitudinal aspects is based on the early parenting and subsequent environmental factors. These could not be controlled properly in the study.

6) The study design was correlational in nature and the findings suffer from the usual limitations of such designs, including the uncertainty about causation.

**ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE STUDY**

1) The major achievement of the study is its attempt to unfold the relation of various gender role variables with mental health in the context of sex difference. As is evident from Chapter II, there are a large number of study reports on sex difference in mental health. The present study contributes to understanding the dynamics of this difference by focusing on the perceived meaning of sex in terms of gender role stereotype.

   The attempt has yielded two unexpected results. In the first place it has been demonstrated that sex difference in outcome index was apparent but there was little sex difference in resource variables. Thus a gap between potential and expression of mental health has been hinted upon and this gap has been linked to gender constructs. This has important implication for social reformation and clinical fields.

   Secondly, it has been observed that, unlike in the West femininity has certain positive contribution to social maturity factors. This fact, used in conjunction with knowledge of our
culture may have significant implication in the domain of intervention and clinical management.

2) Another significant aspect of the study is that it focuses on the early adult college students. These individuals just out of their teens would form the bulk of our work force within a few years. Our findings relating their mental health and gender role orientations may serve as important guidelines for their future.

3) The study endeavored to relate the findings to the theoretical models and suggested mental health policies (Chapter V). This was facilitated by the statistical approach of predicting mental health variables incorporated in the study. Thus it has a pragmatic outlook throughout.

4) Last but not the least the present study may claim merit for the cultural modification and adaptation of the Bem Sex Role Inventory. As has already been stated, the masculinity and femininity items are highly culture dependent, and any serious research work using these constructs require careful definition of these items. The adaptation of the test in the context of Bengali culture therefore is valuable from a utility point of view so far as it can be used for any subsequent research work in this culture.

APPLICATION OF THE STUDY

Clinical Application:

The major application of the study is undoubtedly in the clinical field. In Chapter V suggestions for mental health policy have been provided in detail.

Besides the findings may be used for planning psychotherapy, understanding the dynamics of symptom formation and predicting prognosis. The study highlights the salience of gender role factors in mental health and specifies their differential impact. The findings should make the clinician sensitive to the implicit gendered ‘meaning’ of symptom.

The study has particular implication in the area of women’s mental health issues, because the findings revealed that on the whole, women suffer more. It has also been demonstrated that masculinity and modernity promotes mental health. These aspects may be considered as integral part of women’s mental health management.
Application in mental health programs of the educational institutes

The focus group of the present research was college students who have recently attained adulthood. As future work force of the country, maintenance of their health quality and promoting their receptivity to knowledge is of utmost importance. The findings of the present study highlights the fact that gender stereotype, so deeply ingrained in the society has considerable relationship with mental health status including potential for cognitive and affective responses. This information needs to be utilized in the mental health program of the educational institutes to ensure management of at least one major determinant of effective living.

Social Application:

Since development of gender role is a cultural-social requisite, its attention in any form implies a social reform of a lesser or greater degree. In a society like ours where women are often in a deplorable position, and where, as is evident from the findings, experience less wellness, the need for altered perception of self and society is imperative. In the first place, the women need to know that although they may feel less well, they have the available resources and ego strength to cope with problems. They also need to understand how gendered perception of themselves within a gendered social milieu renders them vulnerable to distress. At the same time men also need to understand how the dynamics of mental health is regulated by gender stereotype, particularly the positive role of femininity.

Thus the social worker may incorporate the essentials of the findings in her gender awareness program and assist in rendering the social inequalities. With a more ambitious aim she can move at least a single step forward to the realization of an ungendered society.

GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1) The present study was conducted only on the positive indices of mental health. Incorporation of negative indices would enhance its comprehensiveness.

2) Extension of the sample to include other religions, social and cultural contexts would give it a broader perspective.
3) The gender role orientations and attitudes change with age and so does the resources available for mental health management. In the present study a very limited age group was incorporated. It would be worthwhile to explore whether the pattern of relationship changes at various developmental stages.

4) The present study dealt with the non clinical subjects only. It needs to be verified whether similar results may be obtained for subjects with clinically diagnosable disorder, particularly those suffering from disorders that are more common for either sex (e.g., depression, addiction etc.).

5) The present study depended entirely on self report inventories. Even if we do not take into account the possibility of direct distortion, there still remains the fact that there is a gap between what one thinks one does and what one really does. Especially in case of variables like gender role attitude there is likely to be an incongruity between expressed attitude and real action. In future research the findings should be validated from indirect measures including projective tests.

6) Apart from exploratory studies action research plan could be designed on the basis of the present study findings. These could relate to awareness development as well as executing desirable changes in the gender role stereotype of target individuals.