

Discussion

The present study intends to examine the association of helplessness with some personality and self-concept dimensions. Besides, group differences have been investigated across these measures to identify the roles of setting, career span, and orientation. The main findings include the negative relationship of helplessness with most of the personality dimensions which can be clustered around interpersonal competence. Further, positive association of helplessness with some of the self-concept domains has been revealed. There are also some group differences across the three conditions on the measures of self-concept and personality dimensions. Specific findings are organized considering their rubrics.

Helplessness and Personality Dimensions

Helplessness is negatively associated with most of the personality dimensions (adopted in the present study), clustered around four broad categories. Specifically, it

is found that helplessness is a negative correlate of the personality dimensions of dominance (DO), sociability (SY), social presence (SP), and sense of well-being (WB), those come under the factor of interpersonal adequacy (role functions). This finding, which is consistent with our hypothesis, may be explained in terms of self-consistency and spill-over effects. It is likely that helpless persons experiencing uncontrollability in their work life may generalize it to interpersonal situations. Hence, individuals score high on these measures would have lower level of helplessness. Moreover, a sizable number of studies have explained the influence of interpersonal relationships on people's responses to a variety of stressful events (Burgess & Holmstrom, 1978; Cobb & Kasl, 1977; Kelman, Lowenthal, & Muller, 1966; Litman, 1962; Smits, 1974). It has been clearly suggested by these studies that there is a relationship between perceived social support and effective adjustment. People with better interpersonal adequacy are likely to develop better interpersonal relationships. Subsequently, this perceived social support would facilitate overcoming bad life events. The hypothesis pertaining to the negative relationship between helplessness and these personality measures, such as, DO, SY, SP, and WB is, thus, supported and comprehended.

The personality dimensions, such as, responsibility (RE) and socialization (SO), represent the intrapersonal structuring of values (character functions). The negative relationship between helplessness and these personality dimension may be analysed in the light of socialization emphasis and past experience. By the process of socialization and social interaction, individuals may come across several uncontrollable and bad events in the past. The persons, encountering bad situations in the past, are likely to become more vulnerable to uncontrollability, and subsequently it would weaken their responsibility level. On the other hand, by the process of interaction, people who acquired greater control and responsibility would not show helplessness. Langer and Rodin (1976), in an intervention design, have demonstrated the positive effects of control and responsibility. In their study, they induced responsibility in individuals; those persons exhibited more activeness, happiness, and were found to be more

participative. Thus, the negative association of helplessness with RE and SO appears plausible when their characteristics and several empirical studies are considered.

Further, the findings have revealed negative association of helplessness with, the CPI dimensions of, achievement via conformance (AC) and intellectual efficiency (IE). These personality dimensions are the constituents of, the factor, achievement potential and intellectual efficiency. The association is also consistent with our hypothesis. This negative association between helplessness and achievement potential and intellectual efficiency may be interpreted in line with the cognitive and motivational deficits of learned helplessness (see Abramson, et al., 1980). Moreover, analysis of adaptive vs. maladaptive learning strategy (Dweck, 1986) would be useful for the conceptualization of this relationship. According to Dweck ((1986), persons with mastery orientation, adopt the intellectual styles which are different from those of the persons with maladaptive orientation (helplessness). According to her, competent individuals place emphasis on learning goals; consequently the failures at performance point don't disrupt their effort completely. At the mid-stop failures the competent individuals make suitable changes in their learning and performance strategies. Helpless individuals, on the contrary, stress performance goals; consequently failure experiences bring about major disruptions in their future performance.

Apart from this specific distinction, a general syndrome, that characterizes help-less persons, concerns cognitive and motivational deficit of helplessness. As discussed earlier, motivational and cognitive deficits constitute the major deficiencies in helpless individuals. Helpless individuals find it more difficult to form new association to learn new skills and to make cognitive manipulations. Such difficulties are likely to be reflected in their reduced intellectual attainments and achievement potentials. Further, as it has been observed in several investigations that helpless persons show reduced motivation in learning situations. This motivational deficit would further affect individuals' learning and achievement in other situations. Thus, it can be conjectured

that helpless individuals would express reduced achievement potential and intellectual efficiency.

Helplessness and Self-Concept Domains

The result has revealed significant, positive relationship of helplessness with identity (ID) and behaviour (BE), the two domains of self-concept. This positive association of helplessness with these self-concept dimensions is not quite puzzling; all other domains including global positive self-concept (GPSC) have shown very low correlations (near zero) with helplessness. The positive association of helplessness with ID and BE appears to be perplexing *prima facie*, but its thorough examination, in the light of our culture, offers an interesting finding. In Western studies, the positive association between helplessness and depression has been widely documented (see Peterson & Seligman, 1984). The association predicts that, helpless persons adopt a depressive posture, and consequently they are likely to experience a loss of self-identity and show confused behaviour. However, this relationship is more likely to prevail in Western situations where persons experience more personal helplessness. Contrary to the Western situation, helpless persons in India demonstrate mostly universal or shared helplessness. Consequently, that depression level is fairly low; identity and behaviour confusions would be lower.

As discussed earlier, Abramson et al. (1980) have examined conceptually the distinction between personal and universal helplessness, and their linkage with internal versus external attributions. It refers to personal helplessness when the individual believes that his/her responses could not elicit desired outcome but others' can do. On the contrary, universal helplessness refers to the noncontingency of the outcome in general; neither the individual nor any other person could produce the desired outcome. Further, individuals with personal helplessness attribute failures and bad events internally, whereas, universally helpless individuals make external attributions. Moreover, the connexion between the personal-universal helplessness and self-efficacy

(Bandura, 1977a) would offer some valuable interpretation. The individuals with personal helplessness would have low efficacy expectation and high outcome expectations whereas universally helpless persons would have low outcome expectations. Considering the personal-universal helplessness dimensions, it can be conjectured that the depression level and loss of self-esteem would be more relevance to personal helplessness.

Although self-esteem is considered to be a stable personality factor; it may vary in certain circumstances. In several Indian studies it has been revealed that depressive individuals do not show loss of self-esteem. Thus, helplessness and loss of self-esteem would not go together always. Along with helplessness and depression, there might be some other factors for the loss of self-esteem.

Furthermore, it would be useful to examine our findings in the light of the theory of social comparison. It has been demonstrated by some investigations that when the individuals come across people of high status, they show loss of self-esteem. On the contrary, when they get people of low status around them, there is an increase in their self-esteem. In the Indian context, it may so happen that people may feel helpless but there is no loss of self-esteem due to this positive effect of social comparison.

Helplessness Predictors

The basic objective of delineating psychosocial correlates of helplessness is to identify the predictors. Although a large number of personality dimensions, self-concept domains, and sociodemographic variables are thought to be relevant, the regression analysis did not show any one as a strong predictor of helplessness criterion.

Of the seven predictors, identified so far, socialization and achievement via conformance constitute the two most important predictors. These two predictors combinedly account for 13% of variation. The role of socialization, as a predictor, stresses the significance of past experiences in the induction of helplessness. It is likely

that repeated exposure to bad events in past leads to unhappy socialization experiences and this induces helplessness. Apart from this aversive socialization experiences, achievement failures are also likely to be the antecedents of human helplessness. While these two variables do not provide predictive strength to a satisfactory level, their specification would help to conjecture the role of negative experiences associated with intellectual pursuits and interpersonal transactions.

The Role of Setting

The role of setting (industrial—INL vs. nonindustrial—NIL) is revealed, in terms of the differences on the personality dimensions, that include, sociability social presence, responsibility, achievement via independence, and intellectual efficiency. On these measures of personality, except AI, the INL individuals have maintained superiority over the NIL subjects.

The differences in the dimensions of SY, SP, RE, and IE could be attributed to a variation in environmental conditions. More specifically, there are differences with respect ^{to} the domains of social interaction, work-setting, and day-to-day life pattern that pertaining to their quality of life. The people in the INL setting have urban background and they experience a broader environment of interpersonal interaction. Besides, they come across several people of various cultural and socioeconomic status in their work life. In addition, they are exposed to an environment with several advanced facilities which are not available to the NIL individuals in rural areas. The better mass media, technically advanced communication system, and better entertainment programs are available to the persons living in townships. Moreover, they get better library, education, and training facilities. Several recreational facilities are provided to the industrial workers in their job settings. So far as it is observed, such amenities are not easily available to the people in rural areas.

So far as the nature of job is concerned, the work experiences of INL workers is composite in nature. They are involved with various technical and nontechnical tasks. But on the other hand, NIL workers carry on a particular stereotyped job through out their service career. The employees in the INL setting take much responsibility as it involves several risks of technical and responsible tasks. Moreover, the INL workers are more likely to face punitive measures when they show negligence of duties, than the nonindustrials. Thus, these factors would have been the far reaching effects for the development of sociability, social presence, responsibility and intellectual efficiency.

In contrast to the above findings, in the dimension of achievement via independence the NIL individuals have exhibited higher position than the INL workers. When the work structures of the two settings are considered, one could observe that the NIL individuals experience more independence and freedom in their work settings than the INL workers. On the contrary, the INL employees have less freedom in their job settings as it involves hierarchical structure. Further, it is very difficult to take an independent decision in the part of an individual worker in an industry; all important decisions are taken by the high officials by the process of official paraphernalia. People getting repeated negative feedbacks for doing things independently, as likely to prevail in industrial settings, would have developed uncontrollability in the modes of independent achievement potential.

The nonindustrial participants have shown higher level of self-concept in the domains of identity, self-satisfaction, behaviour, moral-ethical self, personal self, family self, social self, and in global positive self concept in comparison to the industrial participants. The INL workers have urban setups where mixed culture, more or less, prevails. On the other hand, the NIL employees have rural setups, and as it is observed in Indian villages, where the interpersonal bondage is stronger than the urban areas. Besides, people living in villages are found to be more orthodox and give more emphasis on cultural heritage and moral-ethical values. The teachers, those comprise the NIL sample, are believed to be in a prestigious position in society, and in comparison to

other people, they might have evaluated themselves in a more positive manner. But the people in townships are exposed to a wider range of environment where they came across many people of high status. As a result, they might have appraised themselves in a less positive manner and they consider themselves inferior to others in several respect. These factors, along with other factors might be contributing for the lower level of self-concept in these domains.

The interaction between setting and career phase with respect to the dimensions of capacity for status and sociability has shown almost similar patterns in the INL setting. The CS and SY level reaches at peak during mid-phase. However, the scores at early career phase (ECP) is higher than that of the late career phase (LCP). The higher level of CS and SY at middle career phase (MCP) may be attributed to an increased level of experience and social maturity. The lower score at ECP is an indication of less experience and problems concerning initial accommodation with job demands. The lower score at LCP is indicative of the negative effects of old age.

The interactions between setting and orientation for the dimensions of femininity, self-satisfaction, personal self, and family self have not reflected any consistent pattern. However, in the INL setting, there is an increase in FE, SS, and FAS scores when the individuals are more helpless. The increase in FE level may be explained in line with dependency level which is crouy to both helplessness and femininity of interest. The increased scores in self-concept domains may be analysed in terms of social comparison; even the individuals feel helpless, they would have higher level of self-esteem when they consider themselves superior to others in many or some respect.

The Phases of Career

- The differences across the three career phases (early, middle, and late) on each of the personality dimensions, such as, sociability, social presence, socialization, achievement via independence, and femininity are found. In the domains (self-concept)

of self satisfaction, social self, and self criticism, the differences are also detected. In the domain of SY and SS, the individuals of MCP are placed at the highest level, and the individuals of LCP at the lowest. With respect to SP, AI, SOS, and SCR, there is a gradual decrease in scores with increasing job experiences and age.

In old age, there is a decline in physical as well as psychological functioning which leads to loss of personal autonomy. In several observational and empirical studies, it has been documented that, lack of personal autonomy would account for, some of the negative effects observed among the aged (Schulz, 1976, 1978; Schulz & Brener, 1977). Subsequently, the participative activities and social contacts would be reduced due to the loss of autonomy and the feeling of uncontrollability. By the process the individual may establish certain personal norms to perceive the response-outcome independence. These negative effects may result in reduced SY, SP, AI, SS, SOS, and SCR in late career phases.

In contrast, the SO and FE level is increasing with the increase of job experience. As we have found, helplessness is positively correlated with femininity, in some subgroups. It can be explained in terms of dependency proneness which is common to both, femininity and helplessness. Moreover, in the later phases of life the dependency level rises due to lack of personal autonomy and several negative effects. Further, the literature on sex stereotypes has clearly shown that dependency is a feminine trend found in a large number of cultures (Williams & Best, 1982). Hence, there would be an increase in femininity of interest in late career phases. The increase in socialization score in late phases may be explained in line with social maturity and increased experiences.

The interaction between career and orientation has shown that, with respect to WB and AC, the mastery oriented (MO) subjects exhibit increased level from early to mid-career; but there is a fall in their scores during LCP. The helpless (HL) subjects have shown an increasing trend from early to late career; the only deviation is that, there is a little fall in AC scores at MCP. This trend would be explained in the light of

the negative effects of old age and on the contrary, increased experiences and social maturity may be considered.

The interaction between career and orientation with respect to SS, FAS, SOS, and GPSC has shown a decreasing trend towards the late career when the subjects are mastery oriented. This depiction may be linked with the feeling of uncontrollability caused by decreased personal autonomy and increased dependency level. On the other hand, the helpless individuals have not shown a consistent pattern with respect to these self-concept domains.

The Orientation Consideration

The group differences in setting and career phase have already been examined in the measures of personality and self-concept dimensions. The objective of the present study would be incomplete if we don't focus our attention on the differences emerged between helplessness and mastery orientation on these measures.

In support of our previous findings that, helplessness is negatively associated with the domains of sense of well-being, responsibility, socialization, achievement via conformance, and intellectual efficiency, the significant orientation differences have been found in these personality measures. It is also substantiated that MO individuals have scored higher than the HL participants on all these personality dimensions. As it has already been discussed, in the context of correlations, this variation between MO and HL subjects can be explained in terms of interpersonal interaction, socialization emphases, and cognitive and motivational deficits of learned helplessness. Apart from this, there is a significant difference between the MO and HL subjects with respect to the self-concept domain of the family self. It is also noticed that the HL individuals exhibit higher level of family self than do the MO participants. As indicated earlier, this finding may be explained in the light of Indian sociocultural parameters of social

comparison. Individuals may feel helpless, but they consider themselves as adequate members of the family, when surrounded by more helpless individuals.

In addition to these group variations in orientation, the ANOVA computed on the helplessness scores indicates the difference between the INL and NIL subjects, $F(1, 288) = 30.31, p < .01$. It is also found that NIL individuals are more helpless ($M = 40.87, SD = 12.75$) than the INL participants ($M = 35.75, SD = 13.93$). In industrial settings, it is likely that the individuals' work life consumes greater portion of their time. As a result, they encounter less bad events in their private life. On the other hand, the nonindustrial subjects may come across more uncontrollable situations leading to their higher degree of helplessness. Secondly, the interaction among the domains of activities would have been contributing to their increased helplessness. By the process when the individuals experience helplessness in a particular domain of their activities, it would spill over to other areas due to its pervasiveness. Because of this pervasiveness the NIL individuals may feel helpless. Besides, the INL employees experience an urban setting, whereas the NIL workers have rural background. It is very clear that the country folk very often miss the amenity available to townfolk. Moreover, when the people in townships face negative events or difficulties, they are likely to perceive controllability as there are widened facilities to overcome several difficulties. On the contrary, people in rural areas perceive uncontrollability due to lack of such facilities. Additionally, their socioeconomic status might be contributing to their helplessness. Though it has not been investigated, as observed, the INL employees in townships maintain a higher socioeconomic status than the nonindustrial employees. Thus, any of these factors, or these factors together, or the interaction among these factors, would have been constituting helplessness-inducing conditions.

Further, the degree of helplessness also varies across the three career phases, $F(2, 228) = 3.20, p < .05$. The individuals in ECP show maximum helplessness ($M = 39.62, SD = 12.21$) and the helplessness level is minimum at MCP ($M = 36.79, SD = 13.08$). However, the individuals in LCP are more helpless ($M = 38.58, SD = 15.17$) than the

individuals in MCP. Helplessness at ECP, pertaining to perceived uncontrollability in work life, may be ascribed to less experience and several transitions. The reduction in helplessness towards MCP may be attributed to social maturity and increased experience. Moreover, as we have already indicated earlier, the increase in helplessness during LCP would be caused by the feeling of uncontrollability due to several negative effects encountered in old age. Lack of autonomy and past experiences of negative events would have caused this feeling of uncontrollability in late career phase.

The findings of the study put forward a number of valuable features and clues for further research in the field of human helplessness. An organized and systematic exploration, vis a vis other related fields, would extend its broader applicability. However, future research programs in this field are to be undertaken to attenuate the problems pertaining to methodological and empirical complexity. A pragmatic approach to the study of helplessness would not only contribute to empirical research but also to the solution of several problems of mankind.

Implications

In consideration with the present findings, a number of implications may be highlighted.

First of all, the adequacy of socialization is very much implicated in the development of competence. By the process of socialization the modality is to be taken into consideration. The individual learns several noncontingencies in the face of repeated or continuous failures. The induction of new associations of contingencies would reduce helplessness and depression.

Secondly, the attribution training would be very useful to cope with several negative events. People develop helplessness in the situations of failure. Since interpretation of these situations influence the magnitude of helplessness, it is possible to train individuals to adopt explanatory style that reduces helplessness. As pointed out

earlier, explanatory style invoking external, unstable, and specific factor is adaptive, whereas attributional style employing internal, stable, and global factor is maladaptive. So, an external attributional style should be substituted for individuals' internal style. Similarly, training to replace stable and global attributional style by unstable and specific explanatory style would be helpful in combating helplessness.

Besides, effective leadership training programs can be devised by means of artificial induction of contingencies. The contingency training program can help to form new associations. In work settings, more emphasis should be given to learning goals rather than performance goals. People are given training with respect to setting goals, substituting goals, and new strategies for goal achievement. The emphasis on learning goals, as opposed to performance goals, would help the individuals to overcome the negative effects of failure.

It is also suggested by the study that the rural folks experience more helplessness; specific enriched programs are to be carried on in rural areas. Further, the individuals have shown uncontrollability mostly during late career phases; this manifestation is linked to loss or lack of control. Thus, control inducing programs are suggested for older people. Additionally, counseling and behaviour modification programs may be undertaken to reduce helplessness and depression among individuals. Fittingly, then, multifarious training and rehabilitation programmes may be undertaken to improve the conditions of the victims.

Directions for Future Research

First of all, the modality of the measures is to be considered while investigating helplessness. As the self-report method has several limitations, future improvement should be made in form of multi-method for an effective investigation of helplessness. A specific use of multi-method would involve multi-rater technique, where a number of sources would be used to assess an individual's helplessness. For example, the ratings

of the individuals, their peers, family members, and supervisors may be considered in combination, to scale the individuals' helplessness. In addition, some other indirect methods like projective techniques may be employed for better assessment of helplessness.

Secondly, manipulative studies may be carried on to find out the causal factors of helplessness. As discussed, several psychosocial factors cause for the development of helplessness. Hence, the effects of induced personality pattern for the development of helplessness may be examined. It is possible to contrive situations where manipulations could be effected to study the causal effects of psychosocial factors. For example, false feedback method could be adopted to give persons a sense of reduced helplessness. In such cases, the effects of positive factors (competent inducing) could be studied. Such studies are likely to provide more information than the correlational investigation.

Thirdly, specific measures are to be identified to predict specific helplessness, such as, personal helplessness and universal helplessness. Similarly, some studies could be undertaken to identify the predictors of domain specific helplessness, such as, employee helplessness, student helplessness, child helplessness, and so on and so forth.

Since we have some evidence that the level of helplessness shows a marked change in life span of an individual; different cluster of psychological factors may be regarded as effective predictors of helplessness during different phases of life span. Future investigations should be directed to identify such clusters in relation to specific phase (i.e., childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age) separately.

Moreover, future research could be undertaken to identify several behaviour modification techniques with respect to attenuating helplessness. The relative effectiveness of the techniques should also be assessed.