Abstract

The present empirical investigation entitled "a study of parental expectations, attributional styles and coping strategies of students experiencing psychological distress" sought to identify a set of predictors that contributed to the experience of psychological distress among students population. India which is the largest democracy and is increasingly viewed as a strong global player due to its exploring economic growth, is facing problems of increasing insecurity and uncertainty among its youth. A great majority of students population is suffering from symptoms of distress. The problem has acquired a new gravitas with newspapers and T.V. channels reporting student suicides nearly every day (Lal, 2008). There is ample evidence that factors like unrealistic parental expectations and other psychological variables have serious impact on students experiencing psychological distress, but no systematic efforts have been made to explore the role of such factors in Indian students. The present research work was an humble effort in this direction.

The criterion variable in our study was psychological distress. Parental expectations, attributional styles and coping strategies together with academic achievement and other demographic variables constituted the predictor variables.
The following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Parental expectations will positively predict psychological distress.

2. Attributional style will emerge as an important predictor of psychological distress. (2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4).
   
2.1 Composite attributional style for positive events will be negative predictor of psychological distress.

2.2 Internal, stable and global dimensions of attribution for positive events will negatively predict psychological distress.

2.3 Composite attributional style for negative events will positively predict psychological distress.

2.4 Internal, stable and global dimensions of attribution for negative events will positively predict psychological distress.

3. Coping strategies will also be the important predictor of psychological distress.

3.1 (a) Problem focused coping style will negatively predict psychological distress.

3.1 (b) All the dimensions of problem focused coping (i.e. active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping and seeking social support for instrumental...
reasons,) will not be equally useful predictors of psychological distress.

3.2 (a). Emotion focused coping will positively predict psychological distress.

3.2 (b). Different dimensions of emotion focused coping (i.e. seeking social support for emotional reasons, positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance, turning to religion and focus on & venting of emotions) will not be equally useful predictors of psychological distress.

3.3 (a). Avoidant coping will positively predict psychological distress.

3.3 (b). Different dimensions of avoidant coping (i.e. denial, behavioral disengagement and mental disengagement) will not be equally significant in predicting psychological distress.

4. Academic achievement will negatively predict psychological distress.

5. Predictors of psychological distress for boys and girls will be different.

6. Predictors of psychological distress for Science and Arts students will be different.
7. Predictors of psychological distress for students of nuclear and joint family will be different.

The sample of the present investigation comprised of 300 senior secondary school students studying at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India. Average age of the students was 17.6 years.

The following self report measures were used by the investigator:

1. Perceived Parental Expectations Scale (developed by the investigator).
2. Attributional Style Questionnaire.
3. COPE Scale for measuring coping strategies.
4. PGI Health Questionnaire for measuring psychological distress.

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify the set of variables predicting psychological distress in the sample as a whole, amongst boys and girls and in two stream groups. Regression analyses for nuclear and joint family groups were not carried out because the two groups did not significantly differ on psychological distress. Before conducting regression analyses, descriptive statistics like mean, SD, t-test analyses for group comparisons, and simple correlations were also calculated.
The following results were obtained:

1. For the total sample, stepwise multiple regression analysis yielded nine predictors which accounted for as much as 62.4% of the total variance in psychological distress. These variables were avoidant coping, perceived parental expectations, composite attribution for positive events, active coping, mental disengagement, restraint coping, academic achievement, global versus specific negative and focus on & venting of emotions.

2. Seven variables emerged as useful predictors of psychological distress for male students. These were composite attribution for negative events, avoidant coping, perceived parental expectations, behavioral disengagement, internal versus external positive, academic achievement and restraint coping.

3. For female students six predictors were identified. These were avoidant coping, perceived parental expectations, active coping, denial, focus on & venting of emotions and academic achievement.

4. Avoidant coping, perceived parental expectations, and academic achievement were the common predictors of psychological distress among boys and girls.

5. Attributional style (composite attribution for negative events and internal versus external dimension of attribution for positive events) predicted psychological distress only for boys.
6. For boys group behavioral disengagement and restraint coping had negative predictive relationship with psychological distress.

7. For girls group denial had negative predictive relationship with psychological distress. While focus on & venting of emotions emerged as a positive predictor only for girls.

8. Regression analysis for the Science students led us to four predictors viz mental disengagement, perceived parental expectations, composite attribution for negative events, and focus on & venting of emotions.

9. For the Arts group a set of six predictors was obtained i.e. avoidant coping, perceived parental expectations, composite positive, restraint coping, academic achievement and mental disengagement.

10. A comparison of predictors in Science and Arts groups revealed two variables to be common. These were perceived parental expectations and mental disengagement. Mental disengagement was the most important predictor for the Science group while its contribution was least in the Arts group.

11. For the Science students composite attribution for negative events predicted psychological distress whereas for the Arts students composite attribution for positive events was an important predictor of psychological distress.
12. Focus on venting of emotions was a significant predictor only for the Science students.

13. Restraint coping and academic achievement predicted psychological distress only in Arts students.

14. Girls experienced more psychological distress as compared to boys.

15. Science students reported less symptoms of psychological distress as compared to Arts students.

16. No significant difference in psychological distress could be obtained between the students belonging to nuclear and joint families.

In conclusion, this study was an humble but first attempt to examine the predictive relationship between parental expectations, attributional styles, coping strategies and psychological distress systematically among students. The results of the study indicated significant relationship between predictor variables and criterion variable. The study has also provided valuable direction for future researches in this area. Further researches may be required to study the problem of psychological distress in students more intensively to know the relationship among the variables and the direct and indirect impact of these variables on psychological distress.