Chapter-V

DISCUSSION

The complex mechanisms underlying resilience to stress have garnered greater attention over the past few years. There are many different definitions of resilience in the literature, but most definitions refer to the capacity of an individual to adapt successfully in the face of trauma, or significant acute or chronic stressors. Resilience research first began in the 1970s with studies of children who adapted well despite significant adversity. This work identified the importance of relationships with a caring adult, social competence, and the capacity for self-regulation, among several other factors. After that, a number of researchers (Roth, 1997 & others) have identified specific factors such as trusting relationships, emotional support outside the family, self-esteem, encouragement of autonomy, hope, responsible risk taking, a sense of being lovable, school achievement, belief in God and morality, unconditional love for someone. But there is insufficient understanding on the dynamic interaction of these factors, their roles in different contexts, their expression and their sources. A child's own genetic make-up and temperament are fundamental to whether he or she will be resilient. That is, a child's vulnerability to anxiety, challenges, stress or unfamiliarity determines his or her self-perception, how he or she interacts with others, and how he or she addresses adversities.

Later research turned to identify factors associated with resilience in adulthood. But, resilience is not just the opposite of vulnerability. In order to understand the unique mechanisms associated with resilience, more studies are needed in people who have survived trauma and have adapted well. There is much to discover about the underlying psychological traits characteristic of resilient individuals, with potential applications to prevention and treatment of stress-related psychiatric disorders. Present study is a humble endeavour to extract some important psychological correlates the potential applications of which may help young students surrounded with academic stress to prevent stress related psychiatric disorders.
Not surprisingly, the work load of college is significantly more involved than the high school work load and it comes with less hand holding from parents and teachers. With challenging classes, scheduling issues to coordinate, difficult tests and other academic obstacles, coupled with more independent nature of the college learning structure, many new and returning students find themselves studying long hard hours.

But, it is also true that better academic performance was positively related to effective coping, personal independence and global personal resilience.

Though there are no dearth of psychological well structured scale on perceived stress (e.g.) but most of them are dealing with perceived life events the major domains of which are lie on natural calamity, accidents, bereavements, death, break of relationships etc. There is very little literature which addresses the academic stress directly and even a few scales constructed on academic stress are not very suitable in the present day situation. For example Life Stress Scale for University Students by Agrawal & Naidu (1997), Youth Problem Inventory by Verma (1997) Student Alienation Scale by Sharma (1997). So, according to the first objective, considering the nature of stress in modern era, a scale was constructed which address academic stress including other stresses in students’ life.

Following all the scientific steps of test construction, the scale entitled ‘Perceived Stressful Life Events Scale for College Students’ (SLESCS) has been constructed and administered on 1000 college students and Reliability, Validity and Norm are established scientifically.

With this scale, to meet the second objective, the study have identified 185 (both male and female) college freshmen who perceived their life stress including academic one in a magnified manner, designated here as ‘High Stressed’ (HS) group and 164 are just in an opposite degree as ‘Low Stressed’ (LS) group. The remaining 215 out of 600 college freshmen can perceive their life stress in an average degree.
It is seen that though the area covered by medium stress perceived group is maximum but no way is the population of high stress perceived group ignorable. So, a large percentage of freshmen suffering from high stress in Indian system is again corroborate with the research finding of both sides of Atlantic (Britton & Tesser, 1991; Frazer & Kohn, 1986). Findings from studies conducted with Asian adolescents (e.g. Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore) indicate that while academic achievement is high in these countries, negative consequences such as excessive stress and mental health problems are also clearly evident (Frazer & Kohn, 1986). Research with adolescents in Korea showed that they devoted large amounts of time to study and many attended private cram schools after school and on weekends just to do well in the entrance examination in order to be placed in a high ranking university (Chung et al., 1993). Twelfth-grade Koreans were also found to spend twice the time completing homework when compared with their twelfth-grade American counterparts while the latter was found to spend twice as much time socializing and taking part in leisure activities (Lee et al., 2000). In Hong Kong for example, the adolescent is socialized to understand that academic excellence enables a young person to enter a well-paid profession (e.g. business or medical professions), which in turn provides the opportunity for upward social mobility (Ho & Kang 1984; Shek & Chan 1999). Students in Hong Kong were found to be highly competitive with strong drives to achieve academic excellence. These students also face strong pressures from their parents and themselves to excel academically (Gow & Kember 1990; Smith 2001). Thus, it is not surprising to find

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that students in Asian countries rated academic school demands as one of their main sources of stress (Hui, 2001).

The purpose of the present research study is manifold. First, it wants to identify the stress, its magnitude and correlates as well as to find out whether there is any effect of perceived life stress on aforesaid correlates, viz., coping strategy, personality factors, adjustment patterns and impulsivity of the subjects.

The result clearly showed that HS group of people apply more problem focused coping and social support coping strategies for reducing their stress in comparison to other two counterparts (MS and LS). Moreover the findings also shows that, in spite of their high stress these people are significantly more agreeable and conscientious in nature, which may help them for better adjustment with their home, health, social, emotional and educational environment. As a result these groups are well adjusted with their mental health as showed by their low score of neuroticism. It can be said that due to the effective coping strategies the people even with high stress are better adjusted than their low or medium stress perceived counterpart. This is supported by the experimental findings of Botwin (1997) who found that agreeableness, consciousness leads to emotional stability which brings ultimate life satisfaction. Another study by Lawton (1995) found that problem focused coping was linked to better adherence. Jacobi (1991) conducted a research study on college students. Research report revealed that supportive relationship prevents and reduce the harmful effect of stress and enhance individual ability to cope effectively with stress in specific social settings. Mac Millian (1969) was also found that two years community collegepersisters examined significantly greater encouragement from parents than dropouts. Evidences also suggest that personality traits explain significant amounts of variation in coping behaviour (e.g., Parkes, 1986; Terry, 1991). For example, Parkes (1986) found that personality trait predicted a wide range of cognitive and behavioural strategies that has direct attempts to change stressful circumstances or avoid maladaptive cognitive distortions.

At first, the general recommendation to reduce stress is to implement methods include effective time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and engagement in leisure pursuits is accepted by a good number of research workers (Blake, 1988;
Leisure satisfaction is defined as the positive feeling of contentment one perceives as a result of meeting personal needs through leisure activities (Seigenthaler, 1997).

The concept of time management is generally defined in terms of clusters of behaviour that are deemed to facilitate productivity and alleviate stress (Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993). Effective time management strategies increase academic performance (Svenson, 1992) and are frequently suggested by academic assistance personnel as aids to enhance achievement for college students. Productive study methods are characterized by "time management" and "strategic studying" (Perri, 1982). Although programs emphasize starting large tasks well before due dates, breaking down large tasks into small ones, and doing small tasks on a regular schedule, students regularly ignore these techniques and find themselves in great distress before exams (Brown, 1991).

Research has reported evidence for the multidimensional nature of the time management construct (Macan et al., 1990). In one study, time management was conceptualized in terms of setting goals and priorities, the use of mechanics (like listing priorities), preference of an organized workplace, and the perceived control of time (Mishra & McKean, 2000; Mishra et al., 2000).

Next, very hopeful result extracted from the study is a good number (233 out of 600) of freshmen showed an effective practice with problem solving coping strategy to deal with their perceived stress events as revealed by the score of 'Coping Check List' designated here as high effective group (HE). But no dearth of the number of freshmen belonging to opposite camp, viz., 'low effective group' (LE) (193 out of 600) who
demand special attention of Psychologists.

Most adolescents show a flexible and dynamic approach to coping with stress, changing their coping style to fit the situation. In general, those who consistently use a problem-focused or approach coping style reported fewer symptoms of depression while those who used a more avoidant or emotion-focused style reported more symptoms. Young people who are less adept at generating and using problem-focused coping experienced more adjustment problems. This low effective coping strategy can be interpreted through the famous classical postulates of Karen Horney — 'moving with' ‘moving toward’, ‘moving against’ and ‘moving away’. The strategy ‘moving with’ involves compromise by which healthy people develop relationships. In order to move with, there must be communication, agreement, disagreement, compromise, and decisions. Karen Horney describes the other strategies as a neurotic. This means that they are unhealthy strategies people utilize in order to protect themselves. The individual moves towards those perceived as a threat to avoid retribution and getting hurt. The argument is, “If I give in, I won't get hurt.” This means that: if I give everyone I see as a potential threat whatever they want, I won’t be injured (physically or emotionally). In other way, the individual threatens those perceived as a threat (moving against) to avoid getting hurt. And the most worst strategy, according to Horney is when individual distances themselves from anyone perceived as a threat to avoid (moving away) getting hurt. The argument is, “If I do not let anyone close to me, I won’t get hurt.” A neurotic, according to Horney desires to be distant because of being abused. If they can be the extreme introvert, no one will ever develop a relationship with them. If there is no one around, nobody can hurt them. These Moving Away people fight personality, so they often come across as cold or shallow. This is their strategy. They emotionally remove themselves from society.

Another interesting result of the present research study showed that though the subjects of HE (both male and female) group (who using greater problem focused coping strategy) are perceived more stress than their other two counter part but they are well adjusted in home and emotional adjustment area. They apply emotion focused and social support coping strategies where needed for reducing their stress along with problem focused coping. It is said that though HE group are well adjusted but they as a
group perceived high stress because resilient individuals are already included within this group and it is well accepted that resilient individual are better adjusted inspite of having high stress. For this reason HE group on an average perceived high stress irrespective of their good adjustment with the situation.

They are also agreeable in nature but they are less adjusted in other adjustment areas (health, social, educational) which affect their mental health (showed by their high score of neuroticism). On the other hand subjects of ME group (both male and female) are more open and conscientious in nature; make them better adjustable in health, social and educational area. Violato (1994) presented evidence that people vary in their coping consistency and that persons high in Neuroticism are significantly less consistent in their choice of coping strategies.

Their results are compatible with the notion that consistency is, at least in part, a function of individual difference.

Pairing the above two, viz., stress and coping, the study demanded the construct of resilience, i.e., the person with combination of perceived high stress and effective coping strategy. Thus the study has identified 98 college freshmen as resilient (R) and 85 as non-resilient (NR) (low perceived stress but non-effective coping strategy). This demand was again validated by administering a commonly used scientifically accepted resilient scale (Annalaxmi, 2008) where 98 freshmen identified as resilient in the present study scored high and 85 scored low. So, both the constructed scale of perceived academic stress of students and the construct ‘resilience’ of the present study achieved criterion validity.

The result suggests that resilient group use both emotion focused and social support alongwith their problem solving coping strategy when necessary for reducing their stress in comparison to Non Resilient group. Resilient group are more agreeable and conscientious in nature, and they are well adjusted in home, health, social, emotional, and educational environment in comparison to their Non Resilient counterpart. The finding also supported by the work of Willson et al. (2001) who conducted a research on adolescents to examine the association between resilience and personality traits.
This study based on college students, revealed that resilience had a highly significant relationship with agreeableness.

An interesting study by Treichel (2007), have identified some of the personality traits that resilient individuals seem to possess. Result indicates that Resilient had a highly significant, positive relationship with both extraversion and conscientiousness and a highly significant negative one with neuroticism. Another study by Cooper (2008) revealed that when personality traits were grouped according to the big five factors, positive affect was predicted equally well by Extraversion and Agreeableness. In the present study the resilient groups possess Agreeableness and Conscientiousness as personality traits.

In this research study resilient group uses both Emotions focused and Social support coping strategies for dealing with their stressful situations. It is supported by previous studies. One research study by Lazarus (1975) revealed that social and emotional supports available to the person help him/her to effectively cope with stress.

Another study by Mehta (1989) found that both Problem focused and Emotion focused forms of coping were used by students in dealing with the two stressors (academic stressors and personal stressors), and the students who perceived the situation as controllable reported the use of self blame coping strategies, while the appraisal of stress as uncontrollable was related to emotion focused forms of coping. Challenge appraisals in both situation (academic and personal) were related to the use of problem solving methods of coping.

Another research findings by Joyce et al. (2006) were studied in a sample of 404 young women high school athletes in this case resilient (no illness time loss) and non resilient (upper third of time loss distribution) groups were compared. Result revealed that resilient athletes favouring Problem-focused Coping and Seeking Social Support, and non resilient athletes reporting greater use of Avoidance and Blaming Others. Correlations among Problem-focused Coping, Seeking Social Support, and minimize threat were higher in the resilient group.
Correlation values also are in line with above discussed statistical result. Resilient Scale (Annalaxmi, 2008) was administered to a group of 182 persons identified as Resilient (N=98) (High Perceived Stress and High Exercise of Problem Solving Coping Strategy) and Non-Resilient (N=84) (Low Perceived Stress and Low Exercise of Problem Solving Coping Strategy) by the present author. Result shows that Perceived stress, Coping strategies, Agreeableness and all types of Adjustment, viz., Home, Health, Social, Emotional and Educational have significant relation with resilience. Obviously, all adjustment scores show negative correlation with Resilience as in Adjustment Inventory ‘higher the score, lesser the adjustment’. Though all the abovesaid variables are accepted as CORRELATES of resilience, only Perceived Stress, Problem-Solving Coping Strategy and Agreeableness are found to be highly contributory (89% - 91%) variables to be resilient as shown by Stepwise Regression Analysis.

Out of the above discussion it is clear that resilience is closely related to some important components of personality, adjustment pattern and coping strategies. Problem Solving Coping Strategy, Perception of Stress and Agreeableness can make the construct ‘RESILIENCE” which ultimately fulfils the objective of the present research study.

The present research study revealed that to become a resilient people, persons use Problem focused coping, emotion focused coping for some cases and also social support coping strategies when necessary and they are agreeable and conscientious by nature to make good adjustment in home, health, social, emotional and educational adjustment areas.

But some parts of the result demand special justification. There is no statistically significant difference between Resilient and Non-Resilient persons in terms of their neuroticism, extraversion, openness and impulse control. All these faculties are qualities of a person the higher or lower scores of which signify healthy personality, in turn the word ‘Resilience’. Costa (1990) suggests that neuroticism may not only enhance poor or maladaptive coping strategies but also promote fewer adaptive responses.
Cohen & Lazarus (1979), citing several studies from the 1960s and 1970s, asserted that coping is more inconsistent than consistent from one situation to another, and to the extent that situational conditions affect the coping process and traits have little predictive value. Further, they contended that within a single stressful encounter (e.g., bereavement), different coping strategies may be used. Such variability was thought to support the notion that situations rather than dispositions determine coping behaviour that is one of the important predictive factors for resiliency.

The last part of the result addresses the organismic variable, viz., Gender. When the population (N=600) was divided by gender (male = 300 & female = 300) showed that female groups are less extrovert, apply more emotion focused coping strategy for reducing their stress which leads to better agreeableness and emotional adjustment in comparison to their male counterpart. Females tend to report having been affected by negative events more often and more markedly than males (Allen & Hiebert, 1991). In the society it may be said that female can use more self imposed stress than male which indicated that females liked to compete, be noticed, loved, and worry for others, sometimes seeking perfect solutions that lead to higher anxiety and stress within themselves. Possibly, female students attempt to do several activities such as achieve academic excellence, take care of families, and work at one time. To manage all of these activities may lead them to be fewer extroverts, which in turn influence their coping behaviour.

But more emotion focused coping may creates unsatisfactory result and ultimately leads to sadness, fear, anger that are the signs of neuroticism which may affect their health, home and social adjustment. It is supported by a study of Butt (2003), who revealed that spouse caregiver’s negative affectivity or neuroticism is associated with the use of Emotion focused coping strategies. Another study by Zuckerman (1995), also said that neuroticism is positively associated with distancing or avoidance for both men and women. Kardum (2001) suggested that emotion oriented coping was closely associated with neuroticism and isolation tendency. It had already been established that neuroticism was linked to certain forms of coping thought of as passive and ineffective, such as wishful thinking or self-blame, that will lead temporary solution to the problem but could not give them permanent resolution. A research study by McCrae & Costa...
(1985) suggested that neuroticism involves instability and coping efforts directed at emotionality. Similar findings of Endler & Parker (1990) revealed that neuroticism correlated with increased emotion focused coping, in both men and women and with lower task focused coping in women. Though female groups are using fewer problems focused coping but are better adjusted in emotional adjustment areas. So in this case it can be said that in spite of having high neuroticism score and using more emotion focused coping, agreeableness as a personality trait help them to developed little bit of better adjustment skill within themselves. It is supported by a study of Pascarella (2006) revealed that agreeableness was also expected to have a direct positive effect of social integration. In the present case female group are more agreeable in nature which help them to adjust in a better way with their emotional field in spite of having high perceived stress.

On the other hand, male group are more extroverts, more open and conscientious in nature and they are well adjusted in home, health and social environment in comparison to their female counterpart. Another research study by Barkman (2000) found that high extravert personality avail more social support which is important for coping. Moreover, he opined that consciousness predicts good health habits, health outcomes and longevity. So, the good adjustment in home, health and social environment having the qualities like extraversion, openness and conscientious of the male adolescent students in comparison to that of their female counterpart in the present study is well justified and established. Another study by Wentzel et al. (1998), through their study, brought out a consistent relationship between resiliency and positive psychology. They have reported that resilience is positively correlated with adaptive personality such as conscientiousness. So on the backdrop of above findings, it can be said that in spite of high stress, personality traits such as conscientiousness that help the male group to make good adjustment in their life.

Moreover present study shows that male group take less emotional focused coping strategies, Snyder (2001) revealed that Men prefer less emotion focused coping strategy, where as women can often tend towards an emotion focused responses. Nicholls et al. (2005) conducted a study on the effect of gender differences and coping strategy on adolescents. This study revealed that men prefer less emotion-focused
coping, whereas women can often tend towards an emotion-focused response. It is also found that Problem-focused coping mechanisms may allow an individual greater perceived control over their problem, while emotion-focused coping may more often lead to a reduction in perceived control. Paul Dent (2006) revealed significant differences between males and females in terms of engagement in coping strategies and academic attainment. Specifically, males exhibited greater ability to detach themselves from the emotions of a situation, it may result from the socialization of males, which teaches them that emotional expression is an admission of weakness and not masculine (Davidson, 2000) as a result they were more inclined to demonstrate emotional inhibition or ‘bottling up’ of emotions and reported higher self-esteem whereas academic attainment of female is significantly higher than their male counterpart though lower in self esteem. Basically, to consider gender differences in reactions to stress, it is evident from the present research work that male students seemed to be less stressed and have less reaction to stressors than female counterpart. In Indian culture till date our society is dominated by male figure, this basic nature lead them to become a more strong, confident and reality oriented person whereas submissiveness, obedience, caring, sharing, soft spoken and politeness are tagging by our society as female characteristics. So, it can be assumed that, till today, when we demand our modernization and equal rights, gender wise characteristics and role difference are imposed in persons by authority from very childhood – the time of core personality development that will ultimately determine future behaviour in any situation. So, on the basis of present research findings it can be said that whatever the apparent picture is, in general, male group are still in a better position in acceptance by the society irrespective of quality which helps them to develop some positive (brave, conscientious, effective coping) as well as some negative components (less agreeableness, more extrovert) of personality. Richard (2007) opined that people who are high on masculinity tend to be aggressive and overbearing but assertive and low on neuroticism. Contrarily, high on femininity tend to be over involved and agreeable in nature. So, it can be said that whatever the gender biasness exist in society, extremity of any type may pay a toll to positive health.