CHAPTER 3

Method of Study
The primary purpose of the study was to compare adolescents on several indicators of coping. A design appropriate for the purpose was selected.

An Overview of the Design

The study adopted a 2 X 2 X 2 factorial design where boys and girls of upper year and lower year college adolescents were categorised into mastery oriented and helpless subjects on the basis of their performance on a standardised test of learned helplessness. The participants were individually administered a standardised questionnaire on coping mechanisms. The comparison of responses of participants of these eight groups was undertaken on each of the coping strategies to examine the relationship between the socio-demographic status, helplessness and coping styles.

Participants

Thirty nine three hundred and nine adolescents participated in this study. All participants were randomly sampled from a larger pool of adolescent boys and girls of the lower and upper years of the colleges. All of them have similar geographical habitation. The adjoining areas, though rural, are exposed to urban influences.

Of all these participants, one hundred and seventy six students (30 boys and 146 girls) were from the higher secondary classes of colleges (lower year). One hundred and sixty three students (93 boys and 70 girls) were from the pre-degree classes (upper year)
of the colleges. The age range of lower year participants was between 14 years to 17 years and that of upper year was between 13 years to 21 years. With exception of few cases, almost all participants were from the families with middle socio-economic status.

Measures

The data collection tools included two sets of measures: The Students Helplessness Questionnaire and Ways of Coping Scale.

**Students Helplessness Questionnaire (SHQ).** The SHQ is a multipart questionnaire designed to scale students helplessness dimensions (see Appendix A). It consists of four part measures. The scale has been developed by Kanungo and Sahoo (1989) to measure various deficits associated with students learned helplessness. The dimensions include personal helplessness, universal helplessness, non-contingency, dissatisfaction, motivational deficits and attribution.

The first part of the SHQ deals with personal and universal helplessness. It consists of twelve items and each item has two components (i.e., component 'a' and component 'b'). Component 'a' indicates personal helplessness and component 'b' indicates universal helplessness. Each item in component 'a' presents a personal situation likely to be encountered by the participants. Each participant is asked to indicate whether she/he feels
confident or helpless in the situation. In order to indicate his or her response, a five point scale is provided where 0 (zero) represents complete control and 4 (four) represents total helplessness. Intermediate positions are accordingly indicated. For example, a personal helplessness item reads: while dealing with teachers to solve my problems, I feel.... Another personal helplessness item reads: while solving my problems in my institution, I feel.... The sum of scores across twelve items of component 'a' indicate personal helpless score of the participant.

In a similar manner, each item in component 'b' presents an universal situation likely to be encountered by the students and each student is asked to indicate whether all other fellow students experience complete confidence or total helplessness. For example, an universal helplessness item reads: while dealing with the teachers for solving their problems, other fellow students experience that they.... Another universal helplessness item reads: I think that to eradicate their difficulties other fellow students experience that they feel.... The sum of scores across twelve items of component 'b' denotes universal helplessness score of a student.

The second part of the SHQ consists of 21 items in the form of 21 statements dealing with situations from students' day-to-day life experiences in the colleges. Eleven of these items represent non-contingency, seven items represent satisfaction and the rest three items denote motivational deficit. The items of these three
dimensions are randomised in this part of the questionnaire.

The items dealing with non-contingency represent the cognitive expectancy that there is no contingency between behaviours and outcomes. In other words, behaviours and outcomes are independent. All such items are presented in the direction of non-contingency. Participants are to express their feeling or experiences along a four-point scale by indicating the degree of their agreement or disagreement with an item where 1 (one) stands for complete disagreement and 4 (four) represents complete agreement. Intermediate positions are accordingly indicated. For example, an item reads: I often feel that my work in the institution is not properly rewarded. Similarly another item reads: in spite of my best efforts, I doubt whether I can fulfil the demands of my institution. The sum of scores across these eleven items denotes non-contingency scores.

Similarly items dealing with satisfaction are positively worded. The greater agreement with the situation is indicative of higher satisfaction. For example, an item reads: I feel pleasure and satisfaction with regard to my life in the college. Similarly another item reads: I feel pleasure and satisfaction with regard to my association with the teachers of the institution. The sum of scores across these seven items denotes satisfaction scores.

The rest three items of this part present events dealing with motivational strength. However, the key is reversed while
scoring the individual's motivational deficit. Specifically here, in the four point scale, 1 (one) stands for complete agreement and 4 (four) stands for total disagreement. Intermediate positions are accordingly spread out. For example, an item reads: If I face any problem in the institution, usually I fight to the last to bring a solution. The sum of scores across three items indicates motivational deficit. With regard to a few items of non-contingency in this part, participants are asked to state briefly from their experiences as to why do they agree or disagree with regard to a particular statement. Such qualitative responses are considered useful in interpreting quantitative scores obtained from an item.

The third part of the questionnaire represents attributional style of the participants. It consists of twenty four items, out of which twelve items indicate good events and the rest twelve items indicate bad events. In each of good or bad events, four items indicate internality (to the extent the individual considers himself responsible for the occurrence), four items indicate stability (to the extent the individual feels that the event will persist over time), and four items indicate globality (to the extent the individual feels that the outcome applies to all possible spheres of life). Against each item, a standard line is shown to indicate the degree of agreement with a particular event. Participants are informed that the starting point of the line indicates complete agreement whereas the end point represents complete disagreement. They are further instructed to put a
cross mark (X) on the line depending on the extent of agreement of the situation to their personal lives. Similar response format was used for all other items of this part. For example, in good events, an internal item reads: If I am rewarded for any good work, it will be considered for the fruit of my labour. One stable item reads: The cause of my getting a reward will remain for a few days. Thirdly, a global item reads: The cause of my getting a reward will enlighten one or two aspects of my life.

In bad events, for example, one internal item reads: If any of my friends misbehave me, there is a role of other persons and external events in it. A stable item reads: The reason for which my friend misbehaved me will stay forever. Finally, a global item reads: If any of my friends misbehaves me, I have to deal every situation cautiously.

The final part of the SHQ seeks some personal information from the participants. Among the items, few items seek information about the name of institution, age and sex of the participants. Some other items ask questions regarding social and extra-curricular activities in the institution. A few items are also designed to receive information about the organization itself.

The robustness of SHQ as a valid measure of helplessness among adolescents has been reported elsewhere (Sahoo, 1989). The scale has also been used in a number of investigations (Sahoo & Rath, 1990). Prior to its use in the present study, its
reliability and validity has been shown to be satisfactory. It was also field-tested on a small sample of college students in rural areas with a view to examining its appropriateness in specific socio-cultural context. The previous data suggested its appropriateness for the present sample of participants.

Ways of Coping Scale. The ways of coping is devised by Folkman and Lazarus (1986) and adapted for use in Indian socio-cultural system (see Appendix 'B'). Originally, the scale is a 66-item questionnaire containing a wide range of thoughts and acts that people use to deal with the internal and/or external demands of specific stressful encounters. Although Folkman and Lazarus (1986) scale provided a base for constructing a scale of coping, a number of items were added to the original pool of 66 items scale of Lazarus. These items were added with the consideration that indigenous items would be more suitable to measure coping styles meaningful in Indian socio-cultural system. For instance, coping based on religious support is considered a model form in India and its inclusion is justified. With this rational, eighteen additional items were included in the scale.

The empirical use of the scale on a large sample of equivalent nature yielded nine factors. These include confrontative coping, Distancing, Self controlling, Seeking social Support, Avoiding Responsibility, Escape avoidance, Planful problem solving, Positive approval and Religion. It is important to recognize that some of the dimensions of coping
suggested by Lazarus were re-grouped and re-named. Besides, certain distinct dimensions such as religion emerged from this new measure.

The adopted scale contains 84 items in to-to. Participants were asked to keep in mind the stressful encounter occurring within the past one year and frequency of using that coping pattern presented by an item. To indicate the frequency of use of a particular coping way, a four point scale is shown against each item where 1 (one) is indicative of total non-use and 4 (four) indicates that it has been used a great deal.

The dimension of confrontative coping is represented in item Nos. 6, 7, 17, 89, 35, 47 and 70. Item No.6, for example, reads: I knew that in that stressful encounter whatever I can do, will be ineffective. Still I was thinking that I shall be doing something. In another example, item No.70 reads: Keeping the stressful situation away from me, I began to analyse it. The sum of scores across items indicate the students' 'confrontative coping'.

The 'Distancing' factor is represented in items 12, 13, 15, 21, 42, 45 and 72. For example, item No.45 reads: I took the situation lightly and decided not to think about it deeply. In another example, item No.72 reads: I recollected the unpleasant experiences of the past. The sum of scores across items is indicative of the students 'Distancing' coping style.
The factor 'self-controlling' corresponds to the items 10, 14, 36, 44, 56, 65, 66 and 71. Item No.14, for example, reads: I suppressed my sorrow and emotion within me. In another example, item No.71 reads: I prepared myself to encounter a more stressful situation. The sum of scores across the items indicates, the participant's 'self-controlling' factor in coping.

'Seeking Social Support' is represented in the items 8, 18, 22, 32, 43, 46, 73, 79 and 82. Item No.8, for example, reads: I consulted with people having more potentiality of supplying information about the stressful situation. In another example, item No.73 reads: I began to seek help from people who have encountered similar stressful situation and have similar experience. The sum of scores across items is indicative of the coping dimension of 'seeking social support'.

The factor 'Avoiding Responsibility' as a coping style is represented in the item numbers 9, 25, 30 and 53. Item No.30, for example, reads: I thought that I myself have invited the danger. In another example, item No.53 reads: Within me, I took a vow to take care so that the stressful situation will never occur again. The sum of scores across various items of the factor indicates the participants' coping style of 'Avoiding Responsibility'.

'Escape Avoidance' corresponds to the items 11, 16, 34, 41, 49, 52, 60, 62, 74 and 78. Item No.11, for example, reads:
I thought that some accidental things will occur to improve the stressful situation. In another example, item No. 78 reads: I devoted more time to watch T.V. programmes. The sum of scores across different items under this factor represent the students' 'Escape Avoidance' coping.

The next factor that emerged in 'Planful Problem Solving' is represented by the item numbers 1, 27, 40, 50, 51 and 54. Item No. 27, for example, reads: To counter the situation, I prepared my action pattern in a planned manner and followed it. Item No. 51 reads: I knew the solution to the situation; but I doubled my vigour to solve it. The sum of scores across items shows the students coping style of 'Planful Problem Solving'.

'Positive Approval' corresponds to the item Nos. 20, 23, 31, 39, 58, 63, 83 and 84. Item No. 23, for example, reads: I tried to build myself to be a good man. Further, item No. 83 reads: I started consoling me that the situation could have become more stressful. The sum of scores across the said items indicates the participants' 'Positive Approval'.

The last factor of the ways of coping came out to be 'Religion'. This factor is represented in the items 26, 37, 49, 61, 75, 77 and 80. Item No. 26, for example, reads: I started visiting more and more the temples/mosques. In another example, item No. 61, reads: I started reading scripts and books on religions. The sum of scores across such items indicate the participants' coping dimension of 'Religion'.
Although Folkman and Lazarus's (1985) original 66-item scale has been extensively used in studies carried out in the western context, Lazarus has reported its robustness in a number of investigations. However, the present scale consisting of 84 items is considered more appropriate in Indian socio-cultural system. A few modifications are incorporated into the Folkman and Lazarus's items with a view to making them usable in India. More specifically, the inclusion of additional 18 indigenous items render the scale more suitable for Indian participants. Prior to the present use of the scale, it was pre-tested and was found suitable.

**Procedure**

Each part of the SHQ and the 'ways of coping' was individually administered in the natural habitat of the participants. First, the SHQ was administered. Two weeks later, the ways of coping scale was administered. However, the subjects were not informed about the purpose of the study during the course of administration.

With respect to the SHQ, scores were obtained on the dimensions of personal helplessness, universal helplessness, non-contingency, motivational deficit and satisfaction. Scores were also obtained on attributional measures such as internality, stability, and globality. Two sets of such scores were obtained separately for bad events and good events. In addition, the total scores for negative events and positive events were computed. The coding with respect to personal information provided data points for age, sex, social involvement and educational level.
The scoring with regard to ways of coping scale yielded data points for coping patterns such as confrontative, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, avoiding responsibility, escape avoidance, planful problem-solving, positive approval and religion. Statistical analyses were carried out to examine the strength of relationship amongst quantified variables. Appropriate parametric tests were also used to examine several hypotheses formulated in Chapter 2. All the subjects were debriefed regarding the purpose of the study after the completion of the project.

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