



STRESS, PERSONALITY AND COPING STYLES

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Abstract

Stress and personality have been shown to be correlated in a number of studies. It is a proven fact that how an individual perceives a stressful situation and the coping mechanisms he adopts. Thus, a better understanding of these variable is very important in preparing officers in training programs to deliver their best without compromising their physical and mental health. This is all the more important where the officers are constantly facing hard working conditions like in police, disaster management and paramilitary forces. This study was done with this view. A sample of direct & promoted IPS officers and direct & promoted RPS officers was taken. Results revealed differences and found that personality mediates between stress and coping styles.

Key words:- Stress, personality type, coping style, police officers.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is an inevitable part of people's lives (Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams, & Malcolm, 2003). While a certain amount of stress can actually be healthy, acute stress also causes many physiological reactions that could lead to complications with health (Stress, 2014). Whether that stress comes from external pressures, internal frustrations, daily nuances, or any other of the many possible sources, it's something that heavily influences people worldwide. Beiter et al. (2015) reported that "seven out of ten United States adults claim to experience stress or anxiety at least at a moderate level on a daily basis".

The way people manage stress is referred to as coping (Folkman, 2013). Markovic, Rose-Krasnor, and Coplan (2013) explained that coping is any response to internal or external stressors. There are various ways individuals deal with perceived threats that may be stressful. However, people have a tendency to respond to threats with a predominant coping



style, in which they dismiss feelings, or manipulate the stressful situation. Most coping strategies can be divided into two categories: “Approach-focused, which reflects efforts to deal with stressors directly (e.g., seeking social support, problem-solving); and avoidance-focused, or efforts to avoid stressors or control their emotional impact (e.g., self-blame)” (Roberts & Mroczek, 2013, p.4; Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997).

Perceptual style of an individual determines the impact it has on the individual. A stressor that may be acute to one person but may not be so powerful in another. It is believed that personality plays an intricate role in how stress is perceived from one person to the next (Ebstrup, Eplöv, Pisinger & Jorensen, 2011). Personality has been equally debated by philosophers and psychologists alike (Uher, 2016). Connor-Smith (2007) defined personality as “patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors over time and across situations”. Carver (2010) defined it as “the dynamic organization [...] that underlie [a] person's patterns of actions, thoughts, and feelings”. Roberts (2008) defined it as “the relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that distinguish individuals from one another”. Although the definitions may vary slightly, each is comprised of the necessary elements of thought, feeling, and behavior. Friedman and Rosenman (both cardiologists) actually discovered the Type A behavior by accident. Type A individuals happen to be very competitive and self-critical, always striving to achieve their goals without feeling the joy of accomplishment. Their life is imbalanced heavily tilted toward workaholics with tendency to overreact due to heightened sensitivity. Such people show an urgency of time as if the world will go topsy turvy if things do not happen on time. When this behavior is expressed overtly (i.e., physical behavior), it generally involves aggression and possible bullying (Forshaw, 2012). Contrary to Type A, Type B people are relaxed, patient, and easy-going nature. They work steadily and enjoy their accomplishments; they don't lose their sense of balance even if things don't happen or workout as planned. Analyzing and comprehending personality is fundamental in understanding and predicting coping strategies. Personality has been shown to be a foundational factor in determining whether a person will use coping strategies that lead to empathy, problem-solving, and cognitive reframing, or to self-blame, avoidance, and withdrawal (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005). Understanding and predicting such reactions could aid in creating an accurate awareness of a person's coping strategies, which could then assist them in developing healthier and more effective coping strategies in the future.



This topic is important to study for many different reasons as it might be beneficial to understand their personality traits so as to equip officers with effective stress-coping skills prior to their posting in the field.

OBJECTIVES

- The main purpose of the study was to study coping style differences among direct and promoted police officers.
- To examine the moderating effect of personality in relation to stress and coping styles.

HYPOTHESES

- IPS and (direct and promoted) RPS officers (direct and promoted) will differ in coping styles.
- Personality moderates the relationship between role stress and coping style.

SAMPLE

The data was collected from 80 IPS and 80 RPS officers both direct and promoted from district headquarters all over Rajasthan. Rajasthan police academy and other officers in Jaipur.

IPS (80) Direct (40), Promoted (40)

RPS (80) Direct (40), Promoted (40)

TOOLS

- To measure stress 'Organizational role stress' scale developed by Udai Pareek (1982) was used. It is a five-point scale consisting of 50 items on ten dimensions of role stress.
- Short rating scale as a potential measure of pattern A by A Bortner.
- Coping Scale developed by Latack (1986)



PROCEDURE

The questionnaires were given to the police officers individually. They were asked to read the instructions carefully and answer frankly. The filled in questionnaires were collected and scoring was done according to the manual.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Mean, SD, t-test and correlation were computed.

Table no.1 Mean and SD of Role Stress Dimensions for Police Personnel (N=160)

Sr. No.	Stress Dimensions	Mean	SD
1	IRD	8.70	4.05
2	RS	5.59	3.23
3	REC	6.14	2.56
4	RE	8.25	4.18
5	RO	5.09	3.45
6	RI	6.24	2.71
7	Pin	4.37	2.72
8	SRD	6.25	3.44
9	RA	3.93	2.66
10	Rin	6.51	3.40
11	TOTAL RS	61.5	23.64

Table 1 depicts the mean and standard deviation of different role stress dimensions, age and years in service of respondent police personnel. The major stressors experienced by police officers are inter role distance (M=8.70; SD-4.05) and role erosion (M=8.25, SD-4.18) whereas role ambiguity (M=3.93; SD-2.66) causes minimum stress. Thus, it is the conflict between the police role and other roles for e.g., Family demands which cause maximum stress for police personnel.



Mittal (1993) also found inter role distance and role erosion to be dominant stressors among doctors. This indicates that jobs like that of doctor and police officer which involve maximum public dealing and are highly demanding cause maximum stress due to conflict between the organizational role and other roles. The table also indicates the total stress mean 61.51 and SD 28.64. The total mean of age is 43.54 and SD is 6.95; whereas mean of years in service is 18.34 and SD is 7.69.

Table No.2 showing Mean & SD of Coping Styles for Police Personnel (N=160)

S.No.	Variable	Mean	SD
1. Control	56.59	10.33	
2. Escape	27.10	7.44	
3. Symptom Management	43.42	8.88	

Table above depicts the mean and SD of different coping strategies employed by police personnel. Police personnel make maximum use of control strategy (Mean=56.69; SD=10.33) followed by symptom management (Mean=43.42; SD=8.88). Minimum use is made of escape strategy by police officers to cope with stress. This shows that on being confronted with stressful situations police officers take charge and actively approach the situation because they know that they themselves have to face the situation instead of avoiding it. This is also because police officers have been trained to face stress in all situations as it is not feasible for a police officer to escape or avoid a stressful situation. Control or approach strategy is also effective in dealing with long term stresses and a feeling of control over the environment can help the police officers to maintain their self-confidence.

Table No.3 showing Mean, SD, t ratio and significance level of different coping styles for direct and promoted IPS Officers.

Direct		promoted				
S. No.	Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t
1.	Control	55.42	8.57	56.97	11.34	-.58
2.	Escape	24.97	5.85	31.37	9.25	4.39**
3.	Symptom Management	44.30	8.47	44.87	10.47	.26

Table depict the mean, SD t ratio and significance of difference between direct and promoted



police officers with in IPS officers on different coping styles. The two group differ significantly on escape mode ($t=4.39, p \leq .01$). Where as promoted officers use escape mode more frequently ($M=31.37, SD=9.25$) as compared to direct officers ($M=24.97; SD=5.85$). Direct and promoted officers of IPS do not differ significantly on control and symptom management.

Table no.4 showing Mean, SD, t ratio and significance level of different coping styles for direct and promoted RPS Officers.

S. No.	Variable	Direct		promoted		t
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1.	Control	56.42	10.85	54.52	10.34	--.80
2.	Escape	25.07	5.8126.97	6.6991.39**		
3.	Symptom Management	42.077.54	41.958.82	--.37		

The two subgroups of RPS (Rajasthan Police Services) do not differ significantly on control ($t=-.80, NS$), escape ($t=1.39, NS$) and Symptom management ($t=-.37$) style of coping. It is clear from the table that these police officers make maximum use of control and minimum use of escape mode of coping. They also show that different groups of police officers under study do not differ on coping style used to relive stress

From the results above the hypothesis that partially proved as IPS officers direct officers' resort to escape mode of coping less as compared to promoted officers.



Table no. 5 showing inter correlations between stress role dimensions and coping style modes

Variable	Coping		
	Control	Escape	Symptom Management
IRD	--.1283	--.2335	.0291
RS	--.2239*	--.1947*	--.1542*
REC	--.2349**	.1350	.0380
RE	--.1647	--.0459	--.0317
RO	--.1554	.0080	.0902
RI	.0511	.0902	--.0345
PI	--.2486**	.1518*	--.1945
SRD	--.1398	--.0643	--.0387
RA	--.2056**	--.0615	.0991
Rin	--.2620**	--.0717	--.2099
TRS	--.2914	.0763	--.1297

Table above records the correlation and the significance level between various dimensions of stress and coping. Control style correlates significantly negatively with total stress ($r = -.2914, \leq .01$) and most of its dimensions role stagnation ($r = -.2239, p \leq .05$), role expectation conflict ($r = -.2349, \leq .01$), role erosion ($r = -.1647, \leq .01$), role overload ($r = -.1554, \leq .01$), personal inadequacy ($r = -.2486, \leq .01$), role ambiguity ($r = -.2056, \leq .01$) and role inadequacy ($r = -.2620, \leq .01$). This indicates that higher the use of control style of coping lower is the experienced stress. Escape style correlates only with inter role distance ($r = -.2335, \leq .01$), role stagnation ($r = -.1947, \leq .01$) and personal inadequacy ($r = .1518, \leq .05$). Whereas symptoms management correlates significantly negatively with role stagnation ($r = -.1542, \leq .05$), personal inadequacy ($r = -.1945, \leq .01$) and role inadequacy ($r = .21, \leq .01$).

The negative correlation shows that successful use of all coping styles in different circumstances reduce stress.



Thus, the impact of stressful life events might be either buffered or exacerbated by one's habitual coping strategies. Police officers who possess an effective repertoire of coping response would be able to endure severe stress with minimal consequences for their mental health.

Table no. 6 showing inter correlations between stress role dimensions, personality type and coping style modes

Variable	Stress	Coping		
		Personality Control	Escape	Symptom Management
IRD	A	--.1814	--.1920*	--.0065
	B	--.0829	--.3017**	.0644
RS	A	--.2391*	--.1740	--.2489*
	B	--.1271	--.2041*	--.0208
REC	A	--.2752**	.2127*	--.1390
	B	--.1302	.1013	.2181
RE	A	--.3693**	--.0724	--.2460*
	B	.1180	.0236*	--.2337*
RO	A	--.1637	.0430	.0847
	B	--.0798	--.0144	.0416
RI	A	.0413	.0265	.0882
	B	--.1638	.1953	.0249
PI	A	--.1678	.1626	--.2235*
	B	--.3002**	.1629	--.1473
SRD	A	--.2085*	--.0571	--.3414**
	B	--.0025	--.0509	.3357**
RA	A	--.3303	.0322	--.1894
	B	--.0329	--.0787	--.4032**
Rln	A	--.2247	.0631	--.2031*
	B	--.2531	--.2475	--.2012
TRS	A	--.3694**	--.0099	--.3048**
	B	--.1549	--.1403	.0622

* $p \leq .05$

** $p \leq .01$



Table above reveals the correlation between stress and coping styles in two groups type A personality and type B personality.

Owing to type A acting as moderator, control mode of coping correlates significantly negatively with stress ($r = -.36, p \leq .01$) and most of its dimensions namely role stagnation ($r = -.23, p \leq .05$), role expectation conflict ($r = -.27, p \leq .01$), role erosion ($r = -.27, p \leq .01$), self-role distance ($r = .20, p \leq .05$), role ambiguity ($r = -.33, p \leq .01$) and role inadequacy ($r = -.1920, p \leq .05$), whereas escape style correlates only with inter role distance ($r = -.1920, p \leq .05$) and role expectation conflict ($r = .21, p \leq .05$)

Symptom management coping correlates significantly negatively with total stress ($r = -.30, p \leq .01$), role stagnation ($r = -.25, p \leq .05$), role erosion ($r = -.25, p \leq .05$), personal inadequacy ($r = -.22, p \leq .05$), self-role distance ($r = -.34, p \leq .01$), and role inadequacy ($r = -.20, p \leq .05$).

Table clearly indicates that due to type B acting as moderator, significant correlations between stress and coping styles are very few. Control style correlates significantly only with personality inadequacy ($r = -.25, p \leq .05$), whereas escape mode correlates significantly with inter role distance ($r = -.30, p \leq .01$), and role inadequacy ($r = -.25, p \leq .05$), and symptom management correlates with role erosion ($r = -.23, p \leq .05$), self-role distance ($r = -.34, p \leq .01$), and role ambiguity ($r = -.20, p \leq .05$).

This shows that stress correlates significantly negatively with coping in type A police officers whereas significant correlations in type B are very few. It means that higher the successful use of different coping strategies, lower is the experienced stress. On the other hand, in type B personality relationship between stress and coping is not so strong as in type A. Thus, the hypothesis that personality moderates the relationship between stress and coping is partially proved.

Margarete Vollrath, and Sverre Torgersen (2000). In recent years, it has been well established that the basic personality factors of Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness are associated with stress experience and coping. However, little is known about their combined effects. To address this question, we studied eight personality types — unique combinations of Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness — in a sample of 683 university students. Participants reported daily hassles, positive and negative emotions, and coping strategies. The eight types related differentially to these measures. Types combining low



Neuroticism with high Conscientiousness featured the most favourable profile of stress and coping, whereas types combining high Neuroticism with low Conscientiousness showed high vulnerability to stress and poor coping. The effects of Extraversion were more ambiguous and appeared to depend on the specific combinations of Neuroticism and Conscientiousness. The findings suggest that this typology represents a useful approach to addressing the question of how individuals with different combinations of personality traits experience and manage stress.

The relationship of personality traits and coping processes has been considered in many studies (Carver, C. S., & Connor-Smith, J., 2010). Some studies show that adaptive personality traits are significantly positively associated with active coping styles (DeLongis, A., & Holtzman, S., 2005). While maladaptive personality traits (neuroticism) are positively associated with avoidance coping. The association between personality and coping styles suggest that individuals with maladaptive personalities are at a greater risk for experiencing psychological distress as they probably use a maladaptive coping style such as avoidant coping. [Van Berkel H. Canterbury, 2009; Ebstrup, J. F., Eplov, L. F., Pisinger, C., & Jorgensen, T. 2011]. Accordingly, the main goal of this study is more comprehensive examining the association of personality traits and coping styles according to the stress level in a large sample.

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