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Assessment and comparison of coping strategies of aged widowed living with family and in old age home

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Abstract

The present study was conducted in Ajmer, Jaipur, Bikaner and Kota District of Rajasthan State. The purpose of the study was to assess and compare the coping strategies of aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age homes. A total of two hundred forty subjects were selected, out of which 60 widows and 60 widowers living in extended families and 60 widows and 60 widowers in old age homes were purposively selected. Coping scale was constructed and utilized for the research. The scale was subjected to content validation and test of split half reliability. Mean and Z test were utilized for analysis of data. It was found that active coping was used more by widows and widowers living with family as compared to widows and widowers living in old age homes.

Keywords: Old age. Coping, old age homes

1. Introduction

Series of challenges in life the ups and downs calls for adjustment across varying dimensions like physical, social, emotional etc. amongst which psychological adjustment seems to find a significant place. Coping with stress is an important dimension and strategies utilized decide whether an individual will remain in comfort or discomfort. During the entire life span an individual may select the coping styles most suitable to their stage of life cycle. The elderly people face series of challenges during the phase of ageing process and try to cope up and manage their stress via different mechanisms. Further situational demands for example widowhood may also have an impact on coping mechanisms. Miceli and Castelfranchi (2001)^[2] state that coping behaviours involve conscious modification of cognitive and emotional appraisal, which eventually modify the reactions to the stressful event rather than distort the perception of the event. Coping is basically a process of managing external or internal demands which are being faced but exceeds the resources of the person (Folkman, 1984). Thus coping is a process which involves appraisal and management of the situation resulting in relief from the pressure of stress. More broadly, coping encompasses cognitive and behavioural strategies used to manage stressful situations (problem focused coping) or/ and to attend negative emotions (emotion -focused coping). What is required is to understand various coping strategies used by widowed elderly in present context to cope up with situational stress specifically those who are living with their children. Separation from children and placement in old age home either voluntarily or non- voluntarily may require different sort of adaptation. Thus the present research was taken up to assess the coping strategies used by widows and widowers living in family and in old age home.

Objectives

To assess and compare coping strategies utilized by widows and widowers living in family and in old age home.

Materials and Method

A total of two hundred forty subjects were purposively selected from different cities Ajmer, Jaipur, Bikaner and Kota cities of Rajasthan State, comprising of aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age homes. Out of two forty subjects 60 widows and 60 widowers were selected who were residing in extended families and 60 widows and 60

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widowers in old age homes. The subjects belonged to middle socioeconomic strata. A self-constructed ‘‘Coping Strategies Scale’’ was utilized which was scrutinized and content validated by a team of experts. This scale was developed after in depth reference work to assess coping strategies used by the aged widows and widowers to cope up with stress. The coping scale were divided into active and avoidance coping strategies. Active coping strategies (i.e. Problem focused coping) included confronting, negotiating, positive thinking, adapting, confiding, accommodation and hired help. While Avoidance coping strategies (i.e. Emotion focused coping) were avoiding, spiritualizing, reaction formation, displacement/projecting/ denial/ rationalizing. The items for each specific strategy were worked out and thus the entire scale consisted of 26 items for active and 24 items for avoidance coping strategies. Split half method was used to establish the reliability of the tool. Frequency percentage, mean test and Z test were utilized for analysis of data.

Results and Discussion

People react to different stressors with their own cluster of defense mechanism or coping skills. With the increasing age the insight and outlook of an individual changes, thus is his/her protective mechanism of dealing with the strains and stress which he experiences. The finding reveals that on an overall basis widows and widowers living with family as also in old age homes moderately utilized active as well as

avoidance coping strategies.

Overall results depict that all active as well as avoidance coping strategies were occasionally utilized by all four categories of subjects. Amongst active coping strategies widows living with family mostly utilized confronting, adapting and positive thinking strategies whereas, negotiating, confiding, accommodating and hired help were occasionally utilized. Further as part of avoidance coping strategies subjects showed frequent use of reaction formation strategy whereas avoidance, spiritualization and displacement were rarely used. Active coping strategies were mostly utilized by widows living in old age home which included confiding, adapting and positive thinking. However confronting, negotiating, accommodating and hired help were occasionally utilized. Further moderately used avoidance coping strategies expressed by subjects were spiritualizing, reaction formation and displacement whereas avoiding strategies were rarely used.

Result depicted that widowers living with family utilized most of the active coping strategies occasionally and only confronting was frequently used. Further almost all avoidance coping strategies were occasionally used by subjects except reaction formation which was frequently utilized. Most of the active coping strategies were occasionally utilized by widowers living in old age home while confronting and adapting strategies were frequently utilized. Further all the avoidance coping strategies were utilized only at times.

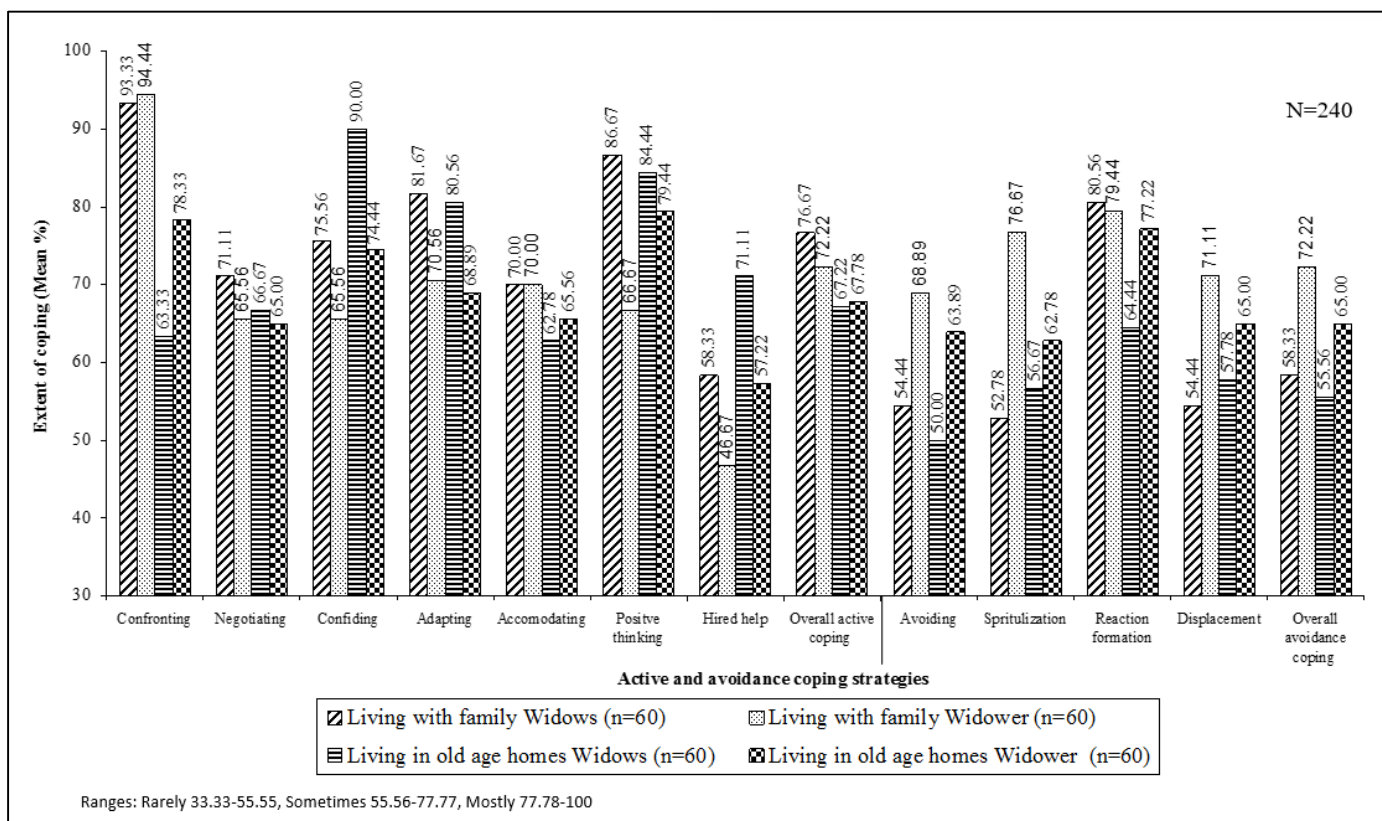


Fig 1: Coping strategies of aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age homes

Comparison of coping strategies of aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age homes

Table 1- clearly shows that significant difference was found between widows living with family and those living in old age homes with regard to the various coping strategies. A significant difference was observed for all active coping techniques except positive thinking. Non-significant result observed (positive thinking) in case of widows living with

family and in old age homes may be due to the fact that majority of widows living in different setting portrayed having a positive attitude towards the problem. This might be a result of their past bitter experiences through which they might have learnt to develop a positive outlook, as experiences are the best educators. Similarly a significant difference was observed for avoidance coping techniques for

almost all the strategies except avoiding and spiritualizing among widows living with family and in old age homes.

In case of widowers living with family and in old age homes, a non-significant difference was observed for almost all the coping techniques except confronting, positive thinking and external support (active coping) and avoiding and spiritualizing (avoidance coping). A non-significant difference ($Z = 1.28$) was observed between widowers living with family and in old age home on the overall basis.

The coping strategies on an overall basis were found with a significant difference in case of widows while a non-significant difference was observed in case of widowers. The findings of the research revealed that most of the widowers found it difficult to confide with others. This might be due to the fact that they found it hard to open up with others and their fellow companions because they realize confiding is not a solution to any problem. Instead, widowers adapted and accommodated to the situation to overcome their stress.

Table 1: 'z' value depicting comparison of coping strategies of aged widows and widowers living with family and in old age homes (N=120)

Coping strategies	Widows living with family (n ₁ =60) And Widows living in old age home (n ₂ =60)	Widowers living with family (n ₁ =60) And Widowers living in old age home (n ₂ =60)
Confronting	16.46**	6.94**
Negotiating	4.43**	1.37
Confiding	4.94**	-1.86
Adapting	2.49*	1.76
Accommodating	4.32**	1.61
Positive thinking	.21	3.26**
Hired help	2.21*	3.80**
Avoiding	1.39	3.15**
Spiritualizing	1.72	3.73**
Reaction formation	5.07**	-1.38
Displacement	3.22**	.03
Overall	6.08**	1.79

*Denotes significant at 5% level of significance

**Denotes significant at 1% level of significance

Interestingly, it was observed that widows and widowers in both the settings used coping strategies irrespective of the type or technique of coping. They used them (active and avoidance coping) as per the situation and the ability of the technique to help them (aged widows and widowers) overcome the stress. On an overall basis significant difference was observed in coping strategies utilized by widows living with family and in old age home. However, no significant difference was found in this area between widowers living with family and in old age homes. Significant difference was observed in the coping strategies viz. of confronting, negotiating, confiding, adapting, accommodating, hired help, reaction formation and displacement amongst widows living with family and in old age homes. Findings of the present study showed that significant difference was found in the coping strategies such as positive thinking, hired help, avoiding and spiritualizing between widowers living with family and in old age homes.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that widows and widowers in both the settings used coping strategies irrespective of the type or technique of coping. On an overall basis it was observed that widows and widowers in both the settings moderately utilized active as well as avoidance coping strategies to overcome their stress. The study reflected significant difference in the coping strategies viz. of confronting, negotiating, confiding, adapting, accommodating, hired help, reaction formation and displacement amongst widows living with family and in old age homes.

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