ABSTRACT:
Coping means to invest one’s own conscious effort, to solve personal and interpersonal problems, in order to try to master, minimize or tolerate stress and conflict. The psychological coping mechanisms are commonly termed coping strategies or coping skills. The term coping generally refers to adaptive (constructive) coping strategies, that is, strategies which reduce stress. In contrast, other coping strategies may be coined as maladaptive, if they increase stress. Maladaptive coping is therefore also described, based on its outcome, as non-coping. Furthermore, the term coping generally refers to reactive coping, i.e. the coping response which follows the stressor. This differs from proactive coping, in which a coping response aims to neutralize a future stressor. Subconscious or unconscious strategies (e.g. defense mechanisms) are generally excluded from the area of coping. The effectiveness of the coping effort depends on the type of stress, the individual, and the circumstances. Coping responses are partly controlled by personality (habitual traits), but also partly by the social environment, particularly the nature of the stressful environment. Coping strategies refer to the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events. Two general coping strategies have been distinguished: problem-solving strategies are efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful circumstances, whereas emotion-focused coping strategies involve efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful events. Research indicates that people use both types of strategies to combat most stressful events (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). An additional distinction that is often made in the coping literature is between active and avoidant coping strategies. Active coping strategies are either behavioral or psychological responses designed to change the nature of the stressor itself or how one thinks about it, whereas avoidant coping strategies lead people into activities (such as alcohol use) or mental states (such as withdrawal) that keep them from directly addressing stressful events. Generally speaking, active coping strategies, whether behavioral or emotional, are thought to be better ways to deal with stressful events, and avoidant coping strategies appear to be a psychological risk factor or marker for adverse responses to stressful life events (Holahan & Moos, 1987). Broad distinctions, such as problem-solving versus emotion-focused, or active versus avoidant, have only limited utility for understanding coping, and so research on coping and its measurement has evolved to address a variety of more specific coping strategies, noted below in the measurement section.

Keys Words: Coping, strategies, stress, measurement.

About Authors
Author Ms. Kammu Verma is Ph. D. Scholar in Himalayan University, Arunachal Pradesh, India. She is working as Lecturer in Rattan Professional Education College, Sohana, Mohali, Punjab, India.

Author Dr. Krishna Chauhan is Principal in Shimla Nursing College, Annadale, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India.
DEFINITION:

COPING STRATEGIES:
An action, a series of actions, or a thought process used in meeting a stressful or unpleasant situation or in modifying one’s reaction to such a situation. Coping strategies typically involve a conscious and direct approach to problems, in contrast to defence mechanisms.¹

Coping mechanisms are the strategies people often use in the face of stress and/or trauma to help manage painful or difficult emotions. Coping mechanisms can help people adjust to stressful events while helping them maintain their emotional well-being.²

Types of Coping Strategies:
Hundreds of coping strategies have been identified. Classification of these strategies into a broader architecture has not been agreed upon. Researchers try to group coping responses rationally, empirically by factor analysis, or through a blend of both techniques. In the early days, Folkman and Lazarus split the coping strategies into four groups, namely problem-focused, emotion-focused, support-seeking, and meaning-making coping. Weiten has identified four types of coping strategies: appraisal-focused (adaptive cognitive), problem-focused (adaptive behavioral), emotion-focused, and occupation-focused coping. Billings and Moos added avoidance coping as one of the emotion-focused coping. Some scholars have questioned the psychometric validity of forced categorisation as those strategies are not independent to each other. Besides, in reality, people can adopt multiple coping strategies simultaneously.

Typically, people use a mixture of several coping strategies, which may change over time. All these strategies can prove useful, but some claim that those using problem-focused coping strategies will adjust better to life. Problem-focused coping mechanisms may allow an individual greater perceived control over their problem, whereas emotion-focused coping may sometimes lead to a reduction in perceived control (maladaptive coping).

Lazarus "notes the connection between his idea of 'defensive reappraisals' or cognitive coping and Freud's concept of 'ego-defenses', coping strategies thus overlapping with a person's defense mechanisms."³

Appraisal-focused coping strategies:
Appraisal-focused (adaptive cognitive) strategies occur when the person modifies the way they think, for example: employing denial, or distancing oneself from the problem. People may alter the way they think about a problem by altering their goals and values, such as by seeing the humor in a situation: "some have suggested that humor may play a greater role as a stress moderator among women than men".

Adaptive behavioural coping strategies:
People using problem-focused strategies try to deal with the cause of their problem. They do this by finding out information on the problem and learning new skills to manage the problem. Problem-focused coping is aimed at changing or eliminating the source of the stress. The three problem-focused coping strategies identified by Folkman and Lazarus are: taking control, information seeking, and evaluating the pros and cons. However, problem-focused coping may not be necessarily adaptive, especially in the uncontrollable case that one cannot make the problem go away.

Emotion-focused coping strategies:
Emotion-focused strategies involve:
- releasing pent-up emotions
- distracting oneself
- managing hostile feelings
- meditating
- Using systematic relaxation procedures.

Emotion-focused coping "is oriented toward managing the emotions that accompany the perception of stress". The five emotion-focused coping strategies identified by Folkman and Lazarus are:
- disclaiming
- escape-avoidance
- accepting responsibility or blame
- exercising self-control
- and positive reappraisal.

Emotion-focused coping is a mechanism to alleviate distress by minimizing, reducing, or preventing, the emotional components of a stressor. This mechanism can be applied through a variety of ways, such as:
- seeking social support
• reappraising the stressor in a positive light
• accepting responsibility
• using avoidance
• exercising self-control
• and distancing.

The focus of this coping mechanism is to change the meaning of the stressor or transfer attention away from it.1 For example, reappraising tries to find a more positive meaning of the cause of the stress in order to reduce the emotional component of the stressor. Avoidance of the emotional distress will distract from the negative feelings associated with the stressor. Emotion-focused coping is well suited for stressors that seem uncontrollable (ex. a terminal illness diagnosis, or the loss of a loved one). Some mechanisms of emotion focused coping, such as distancing or avoidance, can have alleviating outcomes for a short period of time, however they can be detrimental when used over an extended period. Positive emotion-focused mechanisms, such as seeking social support, and positive re-appraisal, are associated with beneficial outcomes. Emotional approach coping is one form of emotion-focused coping in which emotional expression and processing is used to adaptively manage a response to a stressor.

Reactive and proactive coping:
Most coping is reactive in that the coping is in response to stressors. Anticipating and reacting to a future stressor is known as proactive coping or future-oriented coping. Anticipation is when one reduces the stress of some difficult challenge by anticipating what it will be like and preparing for how one is going to cope with it.

Social coping:
Social coping recognizes that individuals are bedded within a social environment, which can be stressful, but also is the source of coping resources, such as seeking social support from others.

Humor:
Humor used as a positive coping strategy may have useful benefits in relation to mental health and well-being. By having a humorous outlook on life, stressful experiences can be and are often minimized. This coping method corresponds with positive emotional states and is known to be an indicator of mental health. Physiological processes are also influenced within the exercise of humor. For example, laughing may reduce muscle tension, increase the flow of oxygen to the blood, exercise the cardiovascular region, and produce endorphins in the body. Using humor in coping while processing through feelings can vary depending on life circumstance and individual humor styles. In regards to grief and loss in life occurrences, it has been found that genuine laughs/smiles when speaking about the loss predicted later adjustment and evoked more positive responses from other people.

Negative techniques (maladaptive coping or non-coping):
Whereas adaptive coping strategies improve functioning, a maladaptive coping technique (also termed non-coping) will just reduce symptoms while maintaining or strengthening the stressor. Maladaptive techniques are only effective as a short-term rather than long-term coping process.

Examples of maladaptive behavior strategies include dissociation, sensitization, safety behaviors, anxious avoidance, rationalisation and escape (including self-medication). These coping strategies interfere with the person’s ability to unlearn, or break apart, the paired association between the situation and the associated anxiety symptoms. These are maladaptive strategies as they serve to maintain the disorder. Dissociation is the ability of the mind to separate and compartmentalize thoughts, memories, and emotions. This is often associated with post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Sensitization is when a person seeks to learn about, rehearse, and/or anticipate fearful events in a protective effort to prevent these events from occurring in the first place. Safety behaviors are demonstrated when individuals with anxiety disorders come to rely on something, or someone, as a means of coping with their excessive anxiety. Rationalisation is the practice of attempting to use reasoning to minimise the severity of an incident, or avoid approaching it in ways that could cause psychological trauma or stress. It most commonly manifests in the form of making excuses for the behaviour of the person engaging in the rationalisation, or others involved in the situation the person is attempting to rationalise.

Anxious avoidance is when a person avoids anxiety provoking situations by all means. This is the most common method. Escape is closely related to avoidance. This technique is often demonstrated by people who experience panic attacks or have phobias. These people want to flee the situation at the first sign of anxiety.1

TWO DIFFERENT COPING STRATEGIES:

❖ Problem-Focused Strategy

This strategy relies on using active ways to directly tackle the situation that caused the stress: you must concentrate on the problem. Here are some examples:
1. **Analyze the situation**  
   e.g. Pay attention, avoid taking on more responsibility than you can manage

2. **Work harder**  
   e.g. Stay up all night to study for an exam

3. **Apply what you have already learned to your daily life.**  
   e.g. You lose your job for the second time — you now know the steps to apply for a new job

4. **Talk to a person** that has a direct impact on the situation  
   e.g. Talk directly to your boss to ask for an extension to the project that is due in one week.

**Emotion-Focused Strategy**

Emotion-focused coping strategies are used to handle feelings of distress, rather than the actual problem situation. You focus on your emotions:

1. **Brood**  
   e.g. you accept new tasks instead of saying “no”, but you keep complaining and saying it is unfair.

2. **Imagine/Magic thinking**  
   e.g. You dream about a better financial situation.

3. **Avoid/Deny**  
   e.g. You avoid everything that is related to this situation or you take drugs and/or alcohol to escape from this situation.

4. **Blame**  
   e.g. You blame yourself or others for the situation.

5. **Social support**  
   e.g. You talk to your best friend about your concerns.⁵

**Why Coping Skills Are Important:**

"Coping patterns are important because they facilitate a person's handling of a stressful experience," Burns-Nader said. "If someone is going through a tough time, positive coping patterns provide extra resources that can help that person deal with the demand of a stressor."⁶

**Efficient coping strategies:**

Coping strategies are different depending on the situation and the person; here are some good coping strategies.

1. **Be positive!**  
   Look at each obstacle you encounter as learning experiences.  
   e.g. you may not have done well on your mid-term exam, but that has motivated you to study harder and ace your final exam.

2. **Make the choice not to over-react to stressors and deal with them one at a time**  
   e.g. take a few deep breaths and carry on.

3. **Take an objective view of your stressor**  
   e.g. is preparing dinner for 12 people really that horrible?

4. **Communicate!**  
   Don’t ruminate or bottle up your emotions, as this will lead to an explosion later on.

5. **Accept yourself (and others).**  
   No one is perfect and there is always room for mistakes.

6. **Make connections with people**  
   Social support is key!

7. **Deal effectively with mistakes**  
   i.e. Learn from your mistakes and apply them to future decision making.

8. **Deal effectively with successes also!**  
   This will build on your competence.

9. **Develop self-discipline and control**  
   e.g. train yourself to study harder in preparation for your final exam, or train yourself to work out four times a week to lose those pounds you gained since last Thanksgiving dinner!

10. **Maintenance!**  
    Practice, practice, practice for a long life of resilient living.⁵

**Alternative Methods:**

Alternative methods of stress management have traditionally been popular in regions of the world outside of the United States, but they continue to gain influence in the Western world. As with alternative medicine, alternative stress therapies are not rooted in the scientific method, but rather have non-evidence-based healing effects. These methods tend to focus on the person experiencing stress, providing methods for mental...
reframing or management. Alternative methods such as yoga, meditation, and visualization embrace the transactional model of stress by empowering the stressed person to either view the situation differently or believe in their capability to cope. The transactional model of stress is a framework that emphasizes one’s ability to evaluate harm, threats, and challenges, and results in an enhanced ability to cope with stressful events. Individuals focus on the nature of thought and stress, and are encouraged to develop heightened security and positive thinking when it comes to stressful situations. Alternative methods are gaining prevalence as personal anecdotes and research continue to reinforce their effectiveness. Other alternative methods to stress management include meditation, deep breathing, and relaxation techniques, spending time in nature, humor, spas, and social activity, among many others.

1. The Crown Chakra
2. The Third Eye Chakra
3. The Throat Chakra
4. The Heart Chakra
5. The Solar Plexus Chakra
6. The Sacral Chakra
7. The Base/Root Chakra

Alternative stress management: Yoga is a popular alternative stress-management resource. In yoga teaching, the seven chakras are believed to be the source and manifestation of all stress and disease in the body.

CONCLUSION:
Coping usually involves adjusting to or tolerating negative events or realities while attempting to maintain your positive self-image and emotional equilibrium. Coping occurs in the context of life changes that are perceived to be stressful. Psychological stress is usually associated with negative life changes, such as losing a job or loved one. However, because all changes require some sort of adaptation, even positive changes, such as getting married or having a child, can be stressful.

Changes are stressful because changes require us to adjust and to adapt. Experiencing too many changes within a brief time period often creates a perception that we are not in control of important events. This perception contributes to low self-esteem low and may even contribute to the development of anxiety or depression. In some cases, physical illnesses may develop or be exacerbated when a person’s capacity to adapt to change is overwhelmed by too much change.

Coping involves adjusting to unusual demands, or stressors, and thus requires the mobilization of greater effort and the use of greater energy than is required by the daily routines of life. Prolonged mobilization of effort can contribute to elevated levels of stress-related hormones and to eventual physical breakdown and illness. Stressors that require coping may be acute, such as a change in residence or onset of marital problems. Stressors also occur that are of longer duration, such as chronic pain, chronic illness, or enduring financial problems. The effect of many acute stressors that occur within a relatively brief period of time may be cumulative and profound. Thus, the individual who experiences a marital separation, the death of an aging parent, and a change in his or her job within a brief period of time may find himself or herself struggling to adjust to maintain his or her physical and emotional health.
REFERENCES:


