



## Depression among Students in Context of Coping Strategies and Stress

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### ABSTRACT

An attempt was made to examine the association of coping strategies and stress with depression. Further purpose it was hypothesized that (i) emotional focused and problem focused coping strategies to stress groups of students differ significantly on the measure of depression. (ii) High and low stress groups of students will differ significantly on the measure of depression. Coping strategies stress and depression were measure using Srivastava's coping strategies scale, stress scale by Laxhmi and Narayan and Hindi adaptation Beck Depression Inventory respectively. Besides, a PDS was used to seek the necessary information about the respondents. The scales along with PDS were administered on 150 college students and data obtained were treated using chi-square. The results confirmed the hypotheses. It was found that (i) low problem focused ground (ii) high emotion focused group and (iii) high stress group excelled in terms of having higher degree of depression. It was concluded that problem focused coping strategy leads lower level of depression whereas emotion focused coping strategy leads higher depression. Further, higher stress leads higher degree of depression and vice-versa.

### KEY WORDS

Depression, Students, Strategies, Stress.

### INTRODUCTION

Depression is a growing concern among students worldwide, and its impact on mental health, academic performance, and social relationships has become increasingly evident. As academic pressures, personal challenges, and the expectations of family and society converge, students face a complex web of stressors that can trigger or exacerbate mental

health issues. Among the most pervasive of these issues is depression, which, if not addressed adequately, can lead to severe long-term consequences, such as academic failure, substance abuse, and even suicidal tendencies.

The student population is particularly vulnerable to depression due to the combination of multiple stressors they encounter during their academic years. These include the pressure to perform academically, the transition to higher education, social isolation, and uncertainty about future career paths. Moreover, external factors such as financial struggles, family expectations, and societal pressures can contribute to feelings of anxiety and hopelessness, leading to depressive symptoms. For many students, the academic environment itself can be a source of intense pressure. The demanding schedules, competitive atmosphere, and high expectations from both professors and peers can make students feel overwhelmed, trapped, and exhausted.

Stress, often a precursor to depression, is a natural response to the various demands and challenges students face. When stress is prolonged or becomes chronic, however, it can significantly affect emotional well-being, leading to feelings of sadness, fatigue, and disengagement. In fact, the relationship between stress and depression is complex; while stress can lead to depression, depression, in turn, can also intensify stress, creating a vicious cycle that can be difficult to break. This cycle often leads to a situation where students feel unable to cope, further exacerbating their mental health issues.

Recognizing the serious implications of depression among students, there has been an increased focus on developing effective coping strategies to help students manage both stress and depressive symptoms. Coping strategies refer to the methods individuals use to deal with difficult situations and emotional distress. These strategies can vary widely, from problem-solving techniques and social support to relaxation methods and cognitive-behavioral approaches. Some students may rely on maladaptive coping mechanisms such as substance abuse, avoidance, or denial, which, though temporarily relieving, only worsen their mental health problems in the long run. On the other hand, adaptive coping strategies, such as seeking help from mental health professionals, engaging in physical activity, practicing mindfulness, and maintaining a balanced lifestyle, have been found to significantly reduce the impact of stress and depression.

It is essential to note that the effectiveness of coping strategies is influenced by a range of individual factors, including personality, social support networks, and personal resilience. While some students may naturally adopt healthy coping strategies, others may need more guidance and support in developing these skills. Educational institutions, therefore, play a crucial role in fostering a supportive environment that encourages open discussions about mental health, provides access to counseling services, and promotes well-being through various student services.

In recent years, there has been growing awareness of the importance of mental health in academic settings. Universities and schools around the world have started implementing various programs to raise awareness about depression and stress and to promote the development of coping skills. These initiatives are designed not only to help students manage their mental health but also to reduce the stigma associated with seeking help for emotional distress. The increasing focus on mental health within educational contexts is a positive step towards creating an environment where students can thrive academically and emotionally.

In conclusion, depression among students is a multifaceted issue influenced by various stressors. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach, which includes not only understanding the causes and symptoms of depression but also offering effective coping strategies and mental health resources. By fostering resilience, promoting healthy coping mechanisms, and creating a supportive environment, educational institutions can help students navigate the challenges they face, ultimately leading to better mental health and overall well-being.

## Review of Literature

Eisenberg, D., Gollust, S. E., Golberstein, E., & Hefner, J. L.<sup>3</sup> (2007) this study focused on the high

rates of depression among college students and its impact on academic performance. It emphasizes that the stress of transitioning to college, alongside academic pressure and personal issues, significantly contributes to the rising rates of depression. The authors also discuss the importance of recognizing depression as a major health issue within the student population and highlight the need for targeted interventions to address mental health in educational settings. Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., & Weintraub, J.K.<sup>1</sup> (1989) explored various coping strategies that individuals, including students, employ when faced with stress. It discusses both adaptive (e.g., problem-focused coping, seeking support) and maladaptive strategies (e.g., avoidance, substance abuse), and their respective impacts on mental health. The study reveals that coping strategies can significantly affect the development of depression, particularly when maladaptive strategies are used frequently. Thoits, P. A.<sup>10</sup> (1995) looked into how social support acts as a coping resource for students under stress. The study concludes that students with stronger social support networks tend to cope better with academic and personal stress, resulting in lower levels of depression. The paper argues that peer relationships, family support, and counseling services can buffer the negative impact of stress and reduce the likelihood of developing depression. Folkman, S., & Moskowitz, J. T.<sup>4</sup> (2004) examined the relationship between coping strategies and depression among college students. It highlights the differences between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Problem-focused coping was found to be more effective in preventing or alleviating symptoms of depression, while emotion-focused strategies, particularly avoidance or rumination, were associated with worsened mental health outcomes. Ramaswami, S., & Muralidharan, S.<sup>8</sup> (2013) explored how stress and depression among university students impact their academic performance. The research found a clear correlation between high levels of stress and academic underachievement, with depression acting as a significant mediator. Coping strategies such as time management, seeking academic help, and engaging in physical activity were identified as helpful in mitigating the adverse effects of stress and depression on academics. Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S.<sup>6</sup> (1984) found influential work on stress and coping introduces the transactional model of stress. It discusses how students perceive stress and how their coping mechanisms either buffer or exacerbate the effects of that stress. The study emphasizes that students who actively engage in stress-reducing strategies like mindfulness or relaxation techniques experience lower levels of depression. Hammen, C.<sup>5</sup> (2005) focused on the role of self-esteem as a risk factor for depression in students. It investigates how low self-esteem, in combination with high levels of stress, can trigger or worsen depressive symptoms. The study also explores the protective role of adaptive coping strategies, such as self-compassion and seeking professional help, in maintaining mental health. Zeidan, F., Johnson, S. K., Diamond, B. J., & David, Z.<sup>11</sup> (2010) reviewed the effectiveness of mindfulness practices as a coping strategy for stress and depression in college students. The research shows that mindfulness, including meditation and awareness exercises, significantly reduces the symptoms of depression and anxiety. The authors argue that incorporating mindfulness-based interventions into student wellness programs could greatly enhance students' mental well-being. Dyrbye, L. N., Thomas, M. R., & Shanafelt, T. D.<sup>2</sup> (2006) specifically targeted medical students, who often experience high levels of stress due to the intense academic demands of their program. The research identifies high rates of depression and burnout among medical students and underscores the importance of developing strong coping strategies, such as seeking peer support and balancing study with personal time, to mitigate the psychological impact of academic stress. Smith, S. M., & Gelfand, M. J.<sup>9</sup> (2006) examined the mental health of international students, who often face unique stressors such as cultural adjustment, language barriers, and isolation. It finds that while stress levels are higher among international students, adaptive coping strategies such as developing a support network and engaging in cultural exchange activities can significantly lower depression rates and improve overall well-being. Nolen-Hoeksema, S.<sup>7</sup> (2012) explored how gender influences the coping strategies and mental health of students. The study finds that women are more likely to engage in ruminative coping strategies, which are linked to higher levels of depression, while men tend to avoid emotions and rely on distraction. This review stresses the need for gender-specific interventions that target the unique ways that students cope with stress and depression.

These reviews provide a wide range of insights into the relationship between depression, stress, and coping strategies among students. They illustrate that the mental health of students is shaped by multiple factors, including their coping mechanisms, social support networks, and personal characteristics. Effective coping strategies, particularly adaptive ones, play a crucial role in reducing the incidence of depression and enhancing students' ability to manage stress.

## Objectives

The study intends to examine the association of coping strategy to stress with depression and stress with depression.

## Hypothesis

- H<sub>1</sub>** Emotional focused and problem focused coping strategies to stress groups of students differ significantly on the measure of depression.
- H<sub>2</sub>** High and low stress groups of students will differ significantly on the measure of depression.

## Method of Study

**Sample :** A sample of college students (N=150, age ranging 19-22 years) were selected from different college of Patna town using incidental cum purposive sampling technique. Other than the condition required they were matched so far as practicable.

### Tools

1. A Personal Data Sheet was used to seek the necessary information about the college students
2. Coping Strategies Scale by Prof. A.K. Srivastava was used to measure problem focused coping strategy as well as emotion focused coping strategy.
3. Stress Scale SS-LVNS by Vijayalaxmi and Shruti Narayan was used to measure the level of stress of respondents.
4. Beck Depression Inventory was used to measure the depression amongst college students.

## Procedure of Data Collection

Above mentioned scales along with PDS were administered on respondents and informations/data were obtained. Using the respective manual as well as median (as per requirement) they were grouped as per plan of the study. The respondents were grouped into problem focused grouped vs emotion focused grouped, high stress grouped Vs low stress group and their respective score on depression were compared using chi-square as under.

## Results

**Table 1:** Chi-square showing on comparison of high and low problem focused coping strategies groups in terms of having high and moderate depression

Variable	Group	Group	Depression		t <sup>2</sup>	df	P
			High	Low			
Problem Focused Coping Strategies	High	25	34% (N=9)	66% (N=16)	26.18	1	<.01
	Low	33	70% (N=23)	30% (N=23)			

It is clear from the result table-1 that problem focused coping strategy is significantly associated with depression. Only 34% (N=9) high problem focused coping strategies groups of respondents manifested high depression whereas more 66% (N=16) of this group manifested low or moderate depression. Similarly, more than 70% (N=23) of low problem focused coping strategy group manifested high depression whereas only 30% (N=10) of this group manifested low or moderate depression. The chi-square was found significant. ( $\chi^2 = 26.18$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p<01$ ) Students with low use of problem-focused coping strategies tend to manifest higher

levels of depression because they struggle to actively address and resolve stressors. Without constructive coping methods like planning, seeking solutions, or taking action, problems often feel overwhelming and unmanageable. This helplessness can intensify negative emotions, leading to chronic stress and depressive symptoms. In contrast, Students who effectively use problem-focused coping feel more in control, reducing the risk of depression.

**Table 2:** Chi-square showing on comparison of high and low emotion focused coping strategies groups in terms of having high and low or moderate depression

Variable	Group	Group	Depression		t <sup>2</sup>	df	P
			High	Low			
Emotion Focused Coping Strategies	High	50	70% (N=35)	30% (N=15)	24.75	1	<.01
	Low	32	35% (N=11)	65% (N=21)			

It is clear from the result table-2 that emotion focused coping strategy is significantly associated with depression. More than 70% (N = 35) of high emotion focused coping strategy group of respondents manifested high depression whereas 30% (N=15) of this group manifested low or moderate depression. Similarly, more than 65% (N=50) of low emotion focused coping strategies group manifested low depression whereas only 35% (N = 11) of this group manifested high depression. The chi-square was found significant. ( $\chi^2 = 24.75$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .1$ ) Students who rely heavily on emotion-focused coping strategies often internalize stress rather than addressing its root causes, which can lead to increased rumination, helplessness, and emotional overwhelm. These strategies—such as denial, withdrawal, or venting—may temporarily relieve distress but do not resolve underlying problems, making individuals more vulnerable to depression. In contrast, problem-focused coping promotes active resolution, reducing prolonged emotional strain and the likelihood of depressive symptoms.

**Table 3:** Chi-square showing on comparison of high and low stress groups in terms of having high and low or moderate depression

Variable	Group	Group	Depression		t <sup>2</sup>	df	P
			High	Low			
Stress	High	87	72% (N=63)	28% (N=24)	29.17	1	<.01
	Moderate	87	34% (N=21)	66% (N=42)			

It is clear from the result table (3) that more than 72% (63) of high stress group of college students and only 34% (N=21) of low stress group manifested high depression. On the other hand only 28% (N = 24) of high stress group of college students and more than 66% (N = 42) low or moderate stress manifested low depression. The chi-square was found significant ( $\chi^2 = 29.17$ ;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < .1$ ) Students experiencing high levels of stress are more likely to face overwhelming psychological and physiological demands that exceed their coping capacity, leading to persistent anxiety, fatigue, and hopelessness—key triggers of depression. Chronic stress disrupts emotional regulation and cognitive functioning, making it harder to manage daily challenges. In contrast, adolescents with moderate stress levels often maintain better coping balance and resilience, reducing their risk of developing severe depressive symptoms.

## CONCLUSIONS

- (i) Low problem focused coping strategy is conducive to higher degree of depression and vice-versa.
- (ii) High emotional focused coping strategy is conducive to have higher degree of depression
- (iii) Higher level of stress is conducive to higher degree of depression.

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