

Assessment and Intervention on Coping Strategies of School Dropouts: A Case Study of Distt. U.S. Nagar, Uttarakhand India

ABSTRACT: Stress is an inevitable part of human life. Every individual encounters different level of stress and has a tendency to develop unique style to respond and cope with it. Dropping out of school is one such stressful event. Despite universalisation of elementary education in India, there are still a significant number of school dropouts in the country. Hence, the research team of Child Development Unit of All India Coordinated Research Project, Pantnagar conducted a study to study the coping strategies used by school dropouts. It also implemented group interventions for the promotion of effective coping strategies. The study included a sample of 52 school dropout adolescents from four purposively selected villages of Distt. Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand. Standardized scales were used for identifying their coping strategies. School dropouts were seen to usually avoid the stressor to reduce its impact. Rarely did they go for understanding the problem and working for more converting it into a challenge to accept and win over. Post intervention there was significant shift in their coping strategies. It led to significant increase in practice of coping styles like logical analysis, positive appraisal, seek guidance & support, problem solving and significant decline in the use of coping strategies like cognitive avoidance, acceptance, seek alternative rewards, emotional discharge post intervention.

Keywords: Adolescents, Approach coping mechanism, Personality, Social environment, Stress

INTRODUCTION

Education broadens an individual's cognitive outlook and thus, it is presumed that it enables an individual to manage stress constructively. In India, government has implemented schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan, a program aimed at the universalization of elementary education "in a time bound manner" by making free and compulsory education to children between the ages of 6 to 14 a fundamental right. Yet the dropout rate continues to grow. According to a report by the Montreal-based UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Global Education Monitoring (2016), India has around 47 million youth dropped out of school in secondary and higher secondary.

There can be varied reasons why a child drop outs from a school. Firstly, if the family is not financially secure, then a child's education is certainly not a prime concern as the focus shifts towards meeting the basic needs of survival. Also at times, a lack of interest in studies, poor quality of education and unsuccessful attempts in examinations has been frequently cited as reasons for dropping out of school. The State Governments are spending a substantial portion of resources to check dropout rate all over the country. Programs like Mid Day Meal (MOM) have been launched in schools which include a provision of free lunch to students in school yet the dropout rate continues to haunt. In Uttarakhand, the school dropout rate in rural areas continues to be high at 8.6 percent (Grocchetti and Moloney, 2016).

Dropping out of school is a global occurrence which can lead to serious repercussion for children, families and society (Kishore and Shaji, 2012). A number of negative consequences follow as a result of dropping out like feeling of not being relevant, constant comparisons with age mates who are doing well academically, unemployment, lower standards of living etc (Belfield & Levin, 2007). In order to deal with such stressors one tends to use different coping strategies.

Coping strategies are basically skills and activities that people use to deal with a stressful event. It is something related to mental and physical health outcomes, but cultural and societal differences may influence its nature and structure. The style of coping is often controlled by personality and the social environment of the individual. The efficacy of the coping style largely depends on the type of stress, the individual and the circumstances. On encountering a stressor, an individual firstly appraises the challenge as either threatening or non-threatening, and secondly in terms of whether he or she has the resources to deal with it. The way of dealing with the stressor eventually determines whether one will be able to successfully adapt to the situation or not. People who make use of constructive strategies are not only good at handling challenges but they also tend to have better resiliency. Hence, coping strategies plays a significant role in shaping the personality of the individual.

Not many studies in India and in particular in Uttarakhand have studied the coping strategies used by the school drop outs, therefore the research team of AICRP-CD, Pantnagar has taken up the present study to fill this gap.

The objectives of the study were as under:

1. To assess the coping strategies used by school dropout adolescents of Distt. U. S. Nagar
2. To implement a group intervention to enhance use of effective coping strategies.

3. To examine the effectiveness of group intervention on coping skills of respondents

METHODOLOGY

Locale:

The present study was a part of All India Coordinated Research Project on 'Sensitizing Rural Families for Management of Socio-Emotional Problems of Youth' of G.B. Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, Pantnagar, and Uttarakhand. The four adopted villages of University viz. Buksora, Netanagar, Dopahariya and Pantpura village of Distt. Udham Singh Nagar was taken as a research base for the study.

Sample:

A list of vocationally untrained school dropouts of selected villages was prepared. A total of 52 vocationally untrained school dropouts adolescents from four purposively selected villages were taken as participants for the study.

Tools:

The tools employed for the present study were as follows:

1. **Structured socio-demographic and socio-economic questionnaire:** A questionnaire was developed to assess the socio-demographic and socio-economic profile of participants.
2. **Coping Response Inventory (CRI):** A Coping Response Inventory (CRI) developed by Moos (1993) was used to find out coping responses of school dropout adolescents. The first four of these subscales determine approach coping (Logical Analysis, Positive Reappraisal, Seeking Guidance and Support and Problem Solving) and the second set of four subscales measures avoidance coping (Cognitive Avoidance, Acceptance or Resignation, Seeking Alternative Rewards and Emotional Discharge). CRI can be administered as a self-report inventory or a structured interview.

Approach Coping Style:

- **Logical Analysis** refers to the intellectual efforts directed at understanding and preparing for the stressor and its consequences.
- **Positive Reappraisal** involves cognitive attempts to accept, interpret and analyze the problem in a positive light.
- **Seeking Guidance and Support** denotes behavioral efforts to seek information, guidance, or support from friends, family, relatives etc.

- **Problem Solving** represents behavioral attempts to take action to deal directly with the problem

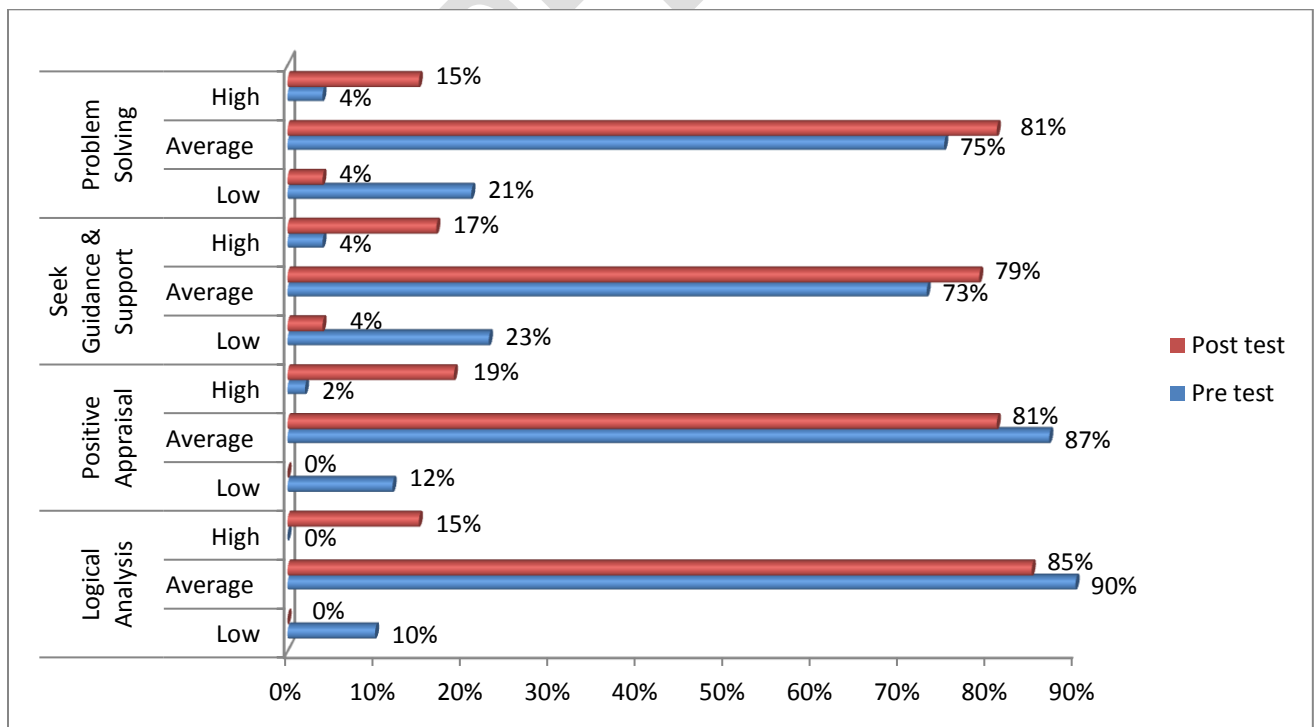
Avoidance Coping Style:

- **Cognitive Avoidance** as the name implies, tends to overlook the problem and avoid thinking realistically about the problem acting as if it does not exist.
 - **Acceptance or Resignation** represents cognitive attempts to react to the problem by accepting it.
 - **Seeking Alternative Rewards** represents behavioral efforts to get involved in alternative activities and look for other sources of gratification
 - **Emotional Discharge** is the behavioral attempts to reduce stress by venting out negative emotions.
3. **Intervention Module:** Self structured intervention module was developed which included games and activities promoting cognitive and social strategies of handling life stress. The activities are discussed as under
- a) **Interaction with the expert:** This exercise was used to organize open sessions on stress, factors affecting it, its implication, strategies for coping with the help of experts in the concerned field through use of drama, video clips and discussion etc.
 - b) **Self Analysis:** This exercise was planned as a self analysis to be performed by all participants individually. The steps of doing this exercise were as under:
 - Ask all participants to identify a stressful situation (current or past) and write it down.
 - Ask them to describe why they thought of it as stressful, what resources they used to counteract it and what extra ones they might need to give a try.
 - Come to consensus for the most efficient approach through discussion.
 - c) **Life style skills:** Life style skills are one that helps to increase our understanding of the world around us and prepare us with competence needed to attain a life which is more productive and fulfilling. A number of sessions were taken by the team to foster positive life style skills like:
 - **Relaxation techniques:** It includes exercising regularly, practicing relaxation techniques. For example, in tense situations, slowly breathe in and out for several minutes.

- **Positive self-talk:** Using positive and encouraging statements for self. These are sometimes referred to as positive assurance which is useful for putting up faith in self and challenging negative thoughts. For example, “Yes I can do this, I have the ability to deal with this” or “I’ll try my best”.
- **Time management:** Planning things in advance and avoiding procrastination is helpful to reducing stress.
- **Support system:** It basically means having one or more friends with whom you can share personal matter.

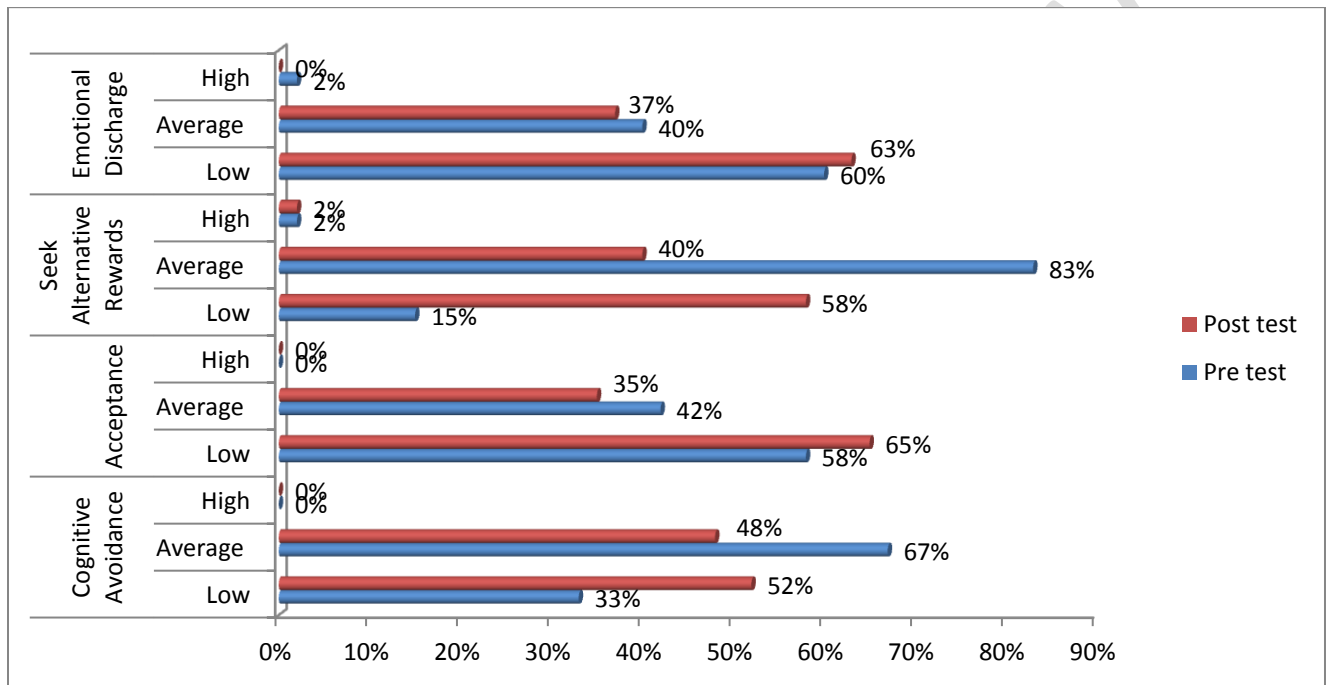
RESULTS

It is apparent from Graph 1 that in the Pre- Intervention phase, majority of the respondents i.e., 90 per cent, 87 per cent, 73 per cent and 75 per cent practiced approach coping like logical analysis; positive appraisal; guidance and support and problem solving respectively on an average basis. Not even a single respondent used logical analysis on a high level and only meagre number of respondents used strategies like positive appraisal, Seek Guidance & Support Problem Solving on a high level. On throwing light on the data of the post Intervention phase, it was observed that the majority (87%) of the respondents used logical analysis on an average level followed by 15 percent of respondents who used it on a high level.



Graph 1. Percentage distribution of vocationally untrained school dropouts on approach coping style

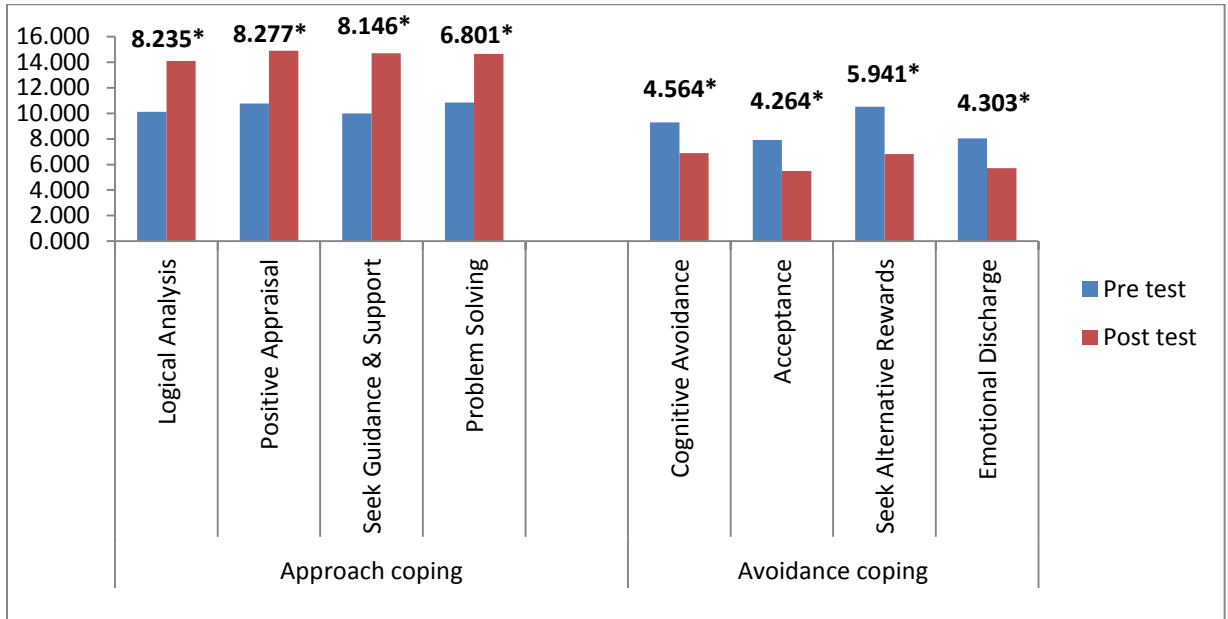
A similar trend was witnessed in the use of positive appraisal, Seek Guidance & Support, Problem Solving where majority of the respondents i.e. 81 percent, 79 percent & 81 percent respectively used it on an average level. It was interesting to notice that after the intervention, some respondents reported high level use of logical analysis (15%), positive appraisal (19%), Seek Guidance & Support (17%) Problem solving (15%) which was very less in the pre intervention phase.



Graph 2. Percentage distribution of vocationally untrained school dropouts on avoidance coping style

Graph 2 throws light on the trend of the use of avoidance coping strategies. It is evident that majority of the respondents used cognitive avoidance (67 %) and Seek Alternative Rewards (83%) on an average level. Use of strategies like acceptance was found to be low in nearly half of the respondents (58%). Similarly emotional discharge as a strategy was used by the majority (67%) of the respondents on low level. On scanning the data of the post intervention phase, it was found that majority of the respondents i.e. 52%, 65% , 58% & 63% used cognitive avoidance, acceptance seek alternative rewards and emotional discharge respectively on a low level . There was a clear shift in the use of avoidance coping strategies from majorly being used on average level to low levels after the intervention.

The mean difference in pre and post intervention phase is explained through Graph 3 which clearly depicts that there was a significant difference in the mean values of dimensions of approach coping strategies and avoidance coping strategies.



Graph 3: Mean differences in pretest and post test scores on various domains of coping strategies of school dropout adolescent

- Note:
1. Higher the mean score, higher the Approach coping and higher the Avoidance coping
 2. Means with different superscripts show significant differences
 - 3.*Significant at 0.05 level **Significant at 0.01 level

DISCUSSION

Results of the study revealed that the use of strategies like logical analysis, positive appraisal, seek guidance and support and problem solving improved significantly after the intervention. With regard to avoidance coping strategies, the findings revealed that use of strategies like Cognitive avoidance, Seek alternative rewards, and Acceptance and Emotional discharge coping style of respondents decreased significantly post intervention. This was congruent with the study done by Chinaveh (2013) who reported that after the execution of the intervention, the score of approach response significantly improved. There was a significant decline in avoidance responses from pre-test to post- test. Respondents who used logical analysis, positive appraisal, seeking guidance & support and problem-solving coping skills were reported to have less anxiety,

depression and substance use than those who utilize "Avoidance Coping Responses", which are characterized as attempts to avoid thinking about stressors and avoid emotional responses associated with the stressor. The results are also concurrent with the study by Lutgendorf *et al* (1998) who revealed that through psychosocial interventions factors like cognitive coping and social support can be modified and may act as prime determinants of the changes in the psychological well-being and quality of life. The results are also supported by a study by Steinhardt & Dolbier (2008) which concluded that the experimental group had significantly higher scores on resilience, effective coping strategies (i.e., higher problem solving, lower avoidant), protective factors (i.e., positive affect, self-esteem, self-leadership), and lower scores on symptomatology (i.e., depressive symptoms, negative affect, perceived stress) than the control group post intervention. These findings clearly points to the fact that intervention in form of a resilience program acted as a useful stress-management and stress-prevention strategy.

The significant shift in different approaches of coping styles was also apparent in the observations of the subsequent sessions that took place during and after the intervention. At the start of intervention, respondents were hesitant to share their experiences but through engaging sessions, they learned to understand, acknowledge and identify coping styles which helped them to talk about their personal experiences more precisely. When they were given a hypothetical problem, they tried to use techniques like brainstorming for understanding and seeking solutions. They also came up with ways like eyeing the problem from a positive side, sharing it with someone close. During the sessions relating to self analysis and lifestyle skills the respondents were quick to absorb the possible repercussions of hanging on to negative emotions for long. Post intervention, in one semi-structured interview respondents shared their views:

For instance, one of the respondent shared: "*Pehle main pareshan hoti toh kisi ko kuch nahi batati thi...chup rehti thi poora din bechaini si lagti... ab main aisa nahi karti..mann mei kuch pareshani ho toh behen ya dost ko batati hun... mann halka rehta hai*" (Earlier when I used to have some problem, I used to keep it to myself... never really shared it with anyone...The entire day I used to be anxious... but now I no longer do this, if there is some tension I share it either with my sister or my friend... this makes me feel very light.) Another respondent shared: "*Main padhne mei kamzor thi, accha nahi lagta tha toh padhai chhood di.. sathwale aage badh gaye...pehle accha nahi lagta tha kahin jaana jaha sab log aaye ho..sab poochte the toh maine jaana band kar diya...ab lagta hai ki kab tak nahi jaungi...isliye ab jaane lagi hun... mujhe silayi aati hai.. main*

usme accha karungi..(I was weak in studies and never liked it, so I dropped. Classmates continued schooling. Then I stopped going to social gatherings as everyone used to ask about it. But now I think I should go as I cannot avoid these things for lifelong... so now I go..I am good at stitching. I will do something good with it.)

The results and observations have led to the conclusion that intervention had a significant impact on the respondents. The results and observations are supported by a study conducted by Anson & Ponsford (2006) on outcome following a coping skills group intervention for traumatically brain injured individuals. It was reported that intervention led to better outcomes associated with greater self-awareness of injury-related deficits. The results also resonates with Chen *et al* (2017) who conducted a study to develop an intervention targeted towards improving coping strategies and to examine its effectiveness on reducing caregiver burden. The results of the study revealed that psychosocial intervention can help caregivers to adopt more problem- focused and social support coping strategies, which are beneficial in terms of reducing the caregiver burden.

CONCLUSION

Dropping out from school leads to negative consequences for the individual and society. Depression and other mental health issues can sometimes fall through the cracks. Therefore an understanding of the reasons leading to dropout is crucial in developing effective intervention programs. Interventions promoting effective coping patterns can be an important life resource for enhancing mental health as it can help individuals to appraise the situation and implement coping behaviors that can help to reduce distress, manage the problem and come up as a competent person.

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