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Level of Coping Skills among Psychology and Non-Psychology Students in Colleges of Kathmandu Metropolitan City

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ABSTRACT

Background: Coping skills play a vital role in managing stress and adversity, influencing psychological well-being, particularly among university students. Students of psychology are expected to possess better coping mechanisms due to their academic training. This study aimed to assess the level of coping skills among psychology and non-psychology students and to examine the association of coping skills with selected demographic variables.

Methods: A comparative cross-sectional study was conducted among 271 undergraduate and graduate students (126 psychology and 145 non-psychology) from selected colleges in Kathmandu. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation from both groups. Data were collected using the Coping Scale developed by Hamby, Grych, and Banyard. Data analysis was performed using SPSS software, applying descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests to compare coping skills between groups.

Results: Among participants, 51.3% had medium-level coping skills, followed by high (25.8%) and low (22.9%). Psychology students scored significantly higher in coping skills than non-psychology students (mean = 37.33 vs. 34.74, $p < .001$). Males reported higher coping levels than females ($p = .018$). Residence, mobility preference, and employment status were not significantly associated with coping skills.

Conclusions: Psychology students exhibited significantly better coping skills compared to their non-psychology counterparts. Gender differences were also observed, with males demonstrating stronger coping mechanisms. The findings underscore the need for targeted coping interventions, especially for non-psychology students.

Keywords: Coping skills; Kathmandu; non-psychology students; psychology students.

INTRODUCTION

Coping strategies are essential psychological tools that help individuals manage stress and life challenges.[1,2] University students face various stressors, including academic pressure, career uncertainty, and personal issues.[3-15] The ability to cope with such stressors significantly influences students' psychological well-being and academic success.[4-6] Coping mechanisms can be problem-focused, emotion-focused, or maladaptive, and their effectiveness varies depending on individual traits, context, and educational exposure.[2,7,8]

Psychology students, due to their training in stress management and psychological health, are presumed to possess more effective coping mechanisms compared to non-psychology students.[1,4] Understanding these differences can help institutions develop supportive interventions tailored to students' educational backgrounds.[10,11]

This study investigates the overall coping levels among undergraduate and graduate students from psychology and non-psychology backgrounds in Kathmandu, examining the influence of variables such as sex, economic status, mobility, and living arrangements on coping capacity.

METHODS

A comparative cross-sectional study was conducted to assess the level of coping skills among psychology and non-psychology students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs within Kathmandu Metropolitan City.

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The study was carried out in three selected colleges: K&K International College, Padma Kanya Multiple Campus, and Tri-Chandra Multiple Campus. Data collection took place from February to April 2025. Students aged 18–29 years who were enrolled in either psychology or non-psychology programs and present during the data collection period were included. Students who were absent, declined participation, did not provide written consent, or submitted incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the study.

A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure proportional representation of psychology and non-psychology students. First, permission was obtained from each college to access their student records. The student lists were then divided into two strata based on faculty (psychology and non-psychology). The number of required participants from each stratum was determined proportionately to the population size in each group to maintain adequate representation. Eligible students within each stratum were approached during classroom visits with the coordination of faculty members. The researcher explained the purpose of the study, and students who provided written informed consent were enrolled consecutively until the required sample size from each stratum was fulfilled. This approach-maintained randomness within strata while ensuring feasibility in the classroom setting. The sample size was estimated using Cochran's formula with a 95% confidence interval, a 5% margin of error, and an estimated proportion of 0.5, resulting in an initial sample of 461. After applying the finite population correction for an estimated target population of 1,000 students, the adjusted sample size was 278. During data cleaning, seven questionnaires were found incomplete and were excluded. The final sample consisted of 271 students, including 126 psychology students and 145 non-psychology students.

A structured, self-administered questionnaire consisting of two parts: (1) demographic information and (2) the standardized Coping Scale were used for data collection. The standardized tools such as the Coping Scale developed by Hamby, Grych, and Banyard are widely used to assess coping patterns and behavioral responses among youth and adults.[13] The demographic section included variables such as sex, faculty, residence, mobility preference, and employment status. The Coping Scale comprises 13 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Not true about me") to 3 ("Mostly true about me"), Each answer category is assigned a value from 4 to 1. The total score can be a sum or mean of all the items. Z-scores of the scale is used as score in analyses. Higher scores indicate higher levels of coping. The scores as Low, Medium, or High coping skills level was categorized based on established norms and percentiles. Z score < -1: was considered as Low level of coping, Z score = 0: was considered as average level of coping and z score > 1: was considered High level of coping [13]. Approval to use the Coping Scale was obtained from its original author, Sherry Hamby. To ensure clarity and cultural relevance, the instrument was translated into Nepali with the support and expert suggestions of bilingual psychology professionals. Since colleges in Kathmandu Metropolitan City commonly use both English and Nepali as mediums of instruction, providing a bilingual version of the questionnaire helped minimize language barriers and reduce potential response bias. For ease of administration, the English and Nepali items were presented in the same rows. During pretesting, students reported no difficulty understanding the combined bilingual version, indicating that the translated items were clear and appropriately adapted for the study population. Pretesting was done at one college in the Metropolitan area among 10% of the estimated sample size. Minor modifications were made to demographic items to improve clarity, while the standardized Coping Scale remained unchanged due to its validated structure. Reliability testing revealed strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.88 for the pilot study and 0.91 for the main study sample.

Data collection was conducted inside classroom settings. Before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher explained the study's objectives, procedures, and rights of participants. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Students completed the questionnaire within approximately 15 minutes, after which the forms were collected immediately. Confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly maintained throughout the data collection process. After data collection, all questionnaires were checked for completeness, coded, and entered into IBM SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were used to summarize the data. Independent samples t-tests were performed to examine differences in coping levels by faculty, sex, residence, mobility preference, and employment status. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethical Review Board of the Nepal Health Research Council, and official permission was secured from all participating institutions.

RESULTS

Table 1. Coping Skills Levels by Faculty.

Faculty	Low	Medium	High	Total
Psychology	19	63	44	126
Non-Psychology	43	76	26	145
Total	62	139	70	271

This table presents the distribution of coping skill levels by faculty. Overall, the majority of students across both groups exhibited a medium level of coping skills, followed by high and low levels. Psychology students demonstrated a higher proportion of high coping skills, whereas non-psychology students showed a greater proportion of low coping skills. This indicates that coping skill levels differed between the two faculties, with psychology students generally displaying stronger coping abilities than their non-psychology counterparts (table 1).

Table 2. Independent Samples t-Test of Coping Skills Across Demographic Variables.

Variable	Groups	N	Mean (SD)	t (df)	p-value	Mean Difference [95% CI]
Faculty	Psychology	126	37.33 (5.74)	3.84 (269)	< .001	2.58 [1.26, 3.90]
	Non-Psychology	145	34.74 (5.31)			
Sex	Male	86	37.14 (5.43)	2.37 (268)	.018	1.74 [0.29, 3.18]
	Female	184	35.40 (5.70)			
Residence	Own House	91	35.41 (5.69)	-1.04 (265)	.297	-0.76 [-2.20, 0.68]
	Rent	176	36.17 (5.65)			
Mobility	City	119	36.20 (5.67)	0.66 (269)	.509	0.46 [-0.91, 1.82]
	Village	152	35.74 (5.65)			
Economic Status	Employed	43	35.44 (6.16)	-0.64 (269)	.526	-0.60 [-2.45, 1.25]
	Unemployed	228	36.04 (5.56)			

***** *N*: Number of participants in each group.

† *Mean (SD)*: Mean value with standard deviation.

‡ *t (df)*: t-value with degrees of freedom from the Independent Samples t-test.

§ *p-value*: Probability value indicating statistical significance.

|| *95% CI*: 95% confidence interval of the mean difference.

¶ *Mean Difference*: Difference between the two group means (Group 1 – Group 2).

The findings from the independent samples t-tests indicate that psychology students had significantly higher coping skill scores than non-psychology students, with a mean difference of 2.58 ($p < .001$). This suggests that students in psychology faculty demonstrate stronger coping abilities compared to those from non-psychology backgrounds. Similarly, male students scored significantly higher than female students ($p = .018$), indicating a gender difference in coping patterns. However, no significant differences in coping skills were found across other demographic variables, including residential status (own house vs. rent), mobility background (city vs. village), or economic status (employed vs. unemployed), as all corresponding p-values were above .05. These results suggest that while academic discipline and sex are important predictors of coping skills, factors such as residence, mobility, and employment do not meaningfully influence coping levels among students in this study (table 2).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that psychology students possess better coping skills than non-psychology students. This can be attributed to their academic exposure to psychological theories, mental health education, and training in emotional self-awareness, [9] which are integral parts of psychology curriculum in Nepal. Such education likely enhances their ability to understand and manage stress, contributing to more adaptive coping behaviors unlike patterns reported in other student groups.[12] These results are consistent with earlier studies that emphasize the role of formal psychological education in fostering effective stress management.[16]

The gender differences observed in coping skills may be influenced by Nepalese cultural and social norms, where males are often expected to demonstrate independence and problem-solving capabilities. This may contribute to male students reporting more active or problem-focused coping strategies. However, other socio-economic variables such as residence, mobility, and employment status did not show significant effects on coping skills. This suggests that, within the context of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, academic discipline and gender are more influential than socio-economic status in shaping students' coping abilities.

These findings underscore the importance of promoting mental health awareness and coping skill development beyond psychology programs. Colleges and universities across Nepal should consider integrating structured coping skills training and psychological literacy workshops into the curriculum of non-psychology disciplines. Doing so may help build emotional resilience and better mental well-being among a broader student population.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to recall and social desirability biases. Additionally, as the research was conducted solely within the Kathmandu Metropolitan City, the findings may not be generalizable to students in rural or other urban regions of Nepal with different educational and cultural contexts. Future studies could adopt longitudinal designs and include more diverse geographic areas to gain deeper insights into coping mechanisms among Nepalese students.

CONCLUSIONS

This study briefly confirms that psychology students in Kathmandu Metropolitan City exhibit stronger coping skills compared to non-psychology students. These outcomes highlight the positive influence of psychological education and exposure to mental-health concepts on students' ability to manage stress effectively. Introducing basic coping-skills training within non-psychology programs becomes necessary to help reduce stress and enhance emotional resilience among this group because non-psychology students demonstrated comparatively lower coping levels. The findings further indicate that gender played a significant role in coping skills, whereas socio-economic factors such as residence, mobility, and employment status did not show notable differences. These results suggest that academic discipline and gender are more influential determinants of coping capacity among undergraduate and graduate students in Kathmandu Metropolitan City.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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