

Relationship of Defensive Pessimism with Perceived Stress, Coping and Psychological Functioning in Youth

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Defensive pessimism is considered as a cognitive coping strategy found to be useful in performance related stressful situations. In the background of scanty literature in the Indian context the study aims to examine defensive pessimism, coping and psychological functioning among youth and also to examine the relationship between defensive pessimism, perceived stress, coping and psychological functioning. The study was exploratory in nature, conducted with 200 undergraduate students. They were assessed on Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire, Cohen's' Perceived Stress Scale, Proactive Coping Inventory, Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale and Adult Self Report. Descriptive statistics, correlation and t test were used to analyze data. Results indicate that the participants have high defensive pessimism and perceived stress. With respect to coping strategies used, strategic planning was used more. Defensive pessimism has high correlation with perceived stress and proactive, preventive, reflective, and strategic coping. There was average self esteem among the participants. On Adult Self Report, anxiety depression was found more in females, so was perceived stress and instrumental coping. Defensive pessimism is associated with thought problems. Anxiety/depression, withdrawal and attention problems had negative correlation with proactive, preventive and emotional coping. The findings have implications in planning interventions keeping the coping patterns and the nature of stress in mind..

Keywords: Defensive pessimism, Youth, Perceived Stress, Self Esteem, Coping.

Defensive pessimism is a cognitive strategy in which people set low expectations and reflect extensively on possible outcomes prior to an event, situation or performance (Norem & Canter, 1986). This strategy can help anxious people harness their anxiety so that it works for rather than against them (Showers & Ruben, 1990). Defensive Pessimists, even if they have done well in the past, feel anxious and out of control as they anticipate future situations. Their pessimism is said to be strategic because it appears to serve two goals: 1. preparing the individual for the possibility of failure, 2. Increasing effort to enhance the likelihood of doing well (Showers & Ruben, 1990). Their mental rehearsal of possible bad outcomes helps to visualize how they might prevent those outcomes, and then they put their plans into action. As their strategy unfolds, the defensive pessimist's anxiety typically subsides, and subsequently does not interfere with their performance (Norem & Illingworth, 1993). Setting low expectations is said to prevent a

loss of self-esteem should failure occur. They also generally have moderately positive self views and self esteem which itself will help in maintaining the self esteem (Norem, 2001). With respect to the domains of defensive pessimism research shows that in Chinese college students' reflectivity subscale correlated with Chinese cultural values and contributed to hope and positive growth initiative (Lie & Duan, 2016). In a two year follow-up study on university students it was found that four types of achievement strategy were identified: optimistic, defensive-pessimistic, impulsive and self-handicapping. An optimistic strategy was associated with academic satisfaction and well-being, defensive pessimism was related to academic achievement (Eronen, Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 1998).

Stress occurs when one is confronted with a situation which is perceived to be overwhelming and one cannot cope with (Agolla & Ongori, 2009). Perceived stress is found to be high in