

Does Stress Coping Strategies Predict the Quality of Life and Life Satisfaction among University Employees?

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the current research was to examine how stress coping strategies predict quality of life and life satisfaction among staff at Sistan and Baluchestan University. A total of 94 employees from the University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Iran were chosen using a simple sampling method. To gather data, the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) by Endler & Parker (1990a), Huebner's Life Satisfaction Scale (1994), and the WHOQOL BREF Quality of Life Questionnaire were utilized. The data was analyzed using Pearson and multiple stepwise regression. The findings indicated a significant negative correlation between the avoidant approach to stress management and quality of life ($r = -.243$, $p < .01$), whereas the problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies did not show a significant link with quality of life and satisfaction with life. The avoidant coping style accounted for 5.9% of the variance in quality of life. The other coping styles were excluded from the regression and did not make it into the regression equation. Avoidant style ($Beta = .525$, $p = .0001$) exhibited a negative and significant relationship with quality of life. It is determined that avoidant-oriented coping was a negative unique predictor of the employees' quality of life.

Introduction

Stress is defined as any physical or mental strain caused by external or internal influences, whereas job stress, or occupational stress, arises when a nursing professional struggles to manage job demands, resulting in adverse effects on themselves and/or the work environment (Souza, Silva, & Alves de Sousa Costa, 2020). At low intensities, stress is advantageous and helpful, as it boosts the motivation, engagement, enthusiasm, and focus of employees, which in turn enhances their productivity. Nonetheless, at elevated levels, stress can be detrimental, as it leads to exhaustion, irritability, depression, and difficulty concentrating. As a result, it adversely affects the workplace atmosphere and diminishes efficiency (Carvalho, 2008). Job – related stress can manifest in three different types: acute, episodic, and chronic work-related stress (Robert, 2018). Acute stress, the most prevalent type, occurs when an individual struggles to manage situations that a typical person would find manageable; episodic stress arises when acute stress occurs repeatedly, while chronic stress is characterized by the prolonged duration of the phenomenon. Job stress is a common result of workplace bullying, leading to various negative impacts, including physical and mental health issues, reduced job satisfaction, diminished productivity, and poorer



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quality of health care, which ultimately results in a lower quality of professional life (Babapour, Gahassab-Mozaffari, and Fathnezhad-Kazemi, 2022). Although stress is increasingly recognized as a significant topic in research literature, coping strategies, a crucial concept, have not been thoroughly examined. Coping styles denote the methods that people employ to handle stress and adverse feelings (Crego et al., 2016; Hamaideh, 2011). There are three approaches to cope with stress; the first approach is to seek assistance, the second is to attempt to resolve the issue, and the third is to evade confronting the problem. Research has been conducted to investigate the heuristic usefulness of these coping methods among various student populations globally (Ager, and Maclachlan, 1998; Bijttebier, and Vertommen, 1997).

Quality of life refers to a wider context and subjective evaluation that captures a person's personal, social, physical, and psychological experiences throughout life. It showcases how individuals view their life circumstances, how they evaluate their skills, interactions with others, and their surroundings, alongside their perceptions of everyday occurrences (Iždonaitė-Medžiūnienė, & Preikšaitienė, 2024). According to WHO (2012) quality of life can be described as how a person views their existence in connection to their culture, values, aspirations, and worries. Quality of life evaluation is a multifaceted concept that explores various facets of functioning. The WHO, in evaluating quality of life, connects it to an individual's physical health, mental condition, social connections, and environmental factors, along with their overall health and overall quality of life (WHO, 2012). The quality of life (QOL) is a multifaceted idea that encompasses personal assessments of both favorable and unfavorable elements of life in relation to individuals' aspirations, anticipations, criteria, and issues (WHO, 2014). Studies have shown that stress coping strategies have a meaningful association with quality of life, for instance, Qobadpoor et al. (2022), in a study revealed that stress coping strategies significantly mediate the relationship between organizational climate and the positive quality of work life in employees of the social security organization. Moreover, a positive problem-focused coping strategy significantly mediates while a negative emotion-focused coping strategy also significantly mediates the connection between organizational climate and work quality of life. There is a strong relationship between work stress, the use of coping strategies, and the quality of life related to health among oncology nurses (Al-Ruzzieh, & Ayaad, 2021). The quality of the workplace demonstrated a notable relationship with job stress, as well as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Lower effective coping indicated a connection with job stress, yet did not relate to the quality of working life. Job stress and various coping strategies are strongly linked to the quality of working life (Sittironnarit, 2018). Shahbazi et al. (2018) conducted a study that revealed a significant link between task-oriented coping style, stress, mental health, social relationships, and environment among nurses in intensive care units, emergency departments, and various other hospital areas; however, no notable difference was found between emotion-oriented coping style, avoidance-oriented coping style, and physical health among nurses in these same settings. Studies have demonstrated that control strategies and symptom management greatly affect the perception of quality of life, while avoidance strategies suggest a reduction in this perception. Managers in positions categorized as high strain often experience a lower quality of life, even when social support is taken into account (Barcaui and Cristina Limongi-França, 2014). In another study Crişan et al. (2024) showed that problem-focused coping has a positive correlation with the various quality of life domains: physical, psychological, relationship, and environmental. Emotion-focused coping showed a significant and positive correlation with all QOL domains: physical, psychological, relationship, and environment. Emotion-focused coping continued to show a significant association with the physical domain, psychological domain, and relationship domain, but not with the environment domain. Dysfunctional coping showed a notable correlation with the physical, psychological, and relationship domains. Maladaptive coping continued to show a significant negative relationship with the psychological domain, but not with the physical or relational domains. Life satisfaction signifies a cognitive and overall assessment of the quality of an individual's life in its entirety (Meule, & Voderholzer, 2020). Life satisfaction involves the comprehensive evaluation of emotions and perspectives regarding one's life at a specific moment, spanning from unfavorable to favorable assessments. It includes multiple facets of well-being, such as emotional, psychological, and social dimensions (Diener et al., 1999; Ryff, & Keyes, 1995). Life

contentment is an essential element of subjective well-being. Numerous elements affect personal well-being and overall life contentment. Socio-demographic elements encompass gender, age, marital status, income, and education level. Psychosocial elements encompass health and disease, functional capacity, activity intensity, and social connections (Fernandez-Ballesteros, Zamarron, & Ruiz, 2001). Seligman (2002) suggests that happier individuals tend to pay less attention to the negative elements of their lives. Happier individuals tend to be more fond of others, fostering a more joyful atmosphere. This relates to an increased sense of life satisfaction for the individual, stemming from the belief that being constructive with others can enhance overall life satisfaction. Previous studies have shown that stress coping strategies have a significant impact life satisfaction, for instance, Tamini and Ansari (2014) demonstrated that life satisfaction had a significant correlation with task focus and avoidance coping, while emotion focus did not significantly correlate with life satisfaction. The findings from the step-wise regression indicated that avoidance coping was associated with student life satisfaction and explained 9.4% of the variance in students' life satisfaction. Researches show that a positive coping style was identified as having a partial mediating role between life events and life satisfaction, with the mediating effect constituting 33.2% of the overall effect (Ding et al., 2022). It seems that the task-oriented and emotion-oriented coping styles may serve as a mediating factor in the bidirectional link between life satisfaction and perceived stress (Rogowska, Kuśnierz, & Ochnik, 2021). Milas et al. (2021) found out that stress was directly connected to life satisfaction, but it also influenced it indirectly by impacting young people's tendency to adopt withdrawal behaviors like problem avoidance, distraction, or resorting to anger, alcohol, or drugs. The share of the overall effect facilitated by withdrawal was 19.4%. Conversely, both active and internal coping were not significant mediators. In a study, Gustems-Carnicer and Calderón (2012) found out that approach-oriented coping correlates with favorable outcomes for psychological well-being, while avoidant emotion-focused coping especially behavioral avoidant coping can be a significant indicator of psychological distress. Wu et al. (2024) demonstrated that active coping may reduce the effects of mental fatigue on overall life satisfaction. Valentine, Kuzu, and Kratz (2023) indicated that protective elements (moderating elements) encompassed adaptive caregiving evaluations (personal responses to challenges), personality traits, coping strategies, social connections, and social assistance. Personal adjustment or resilience may affect how negative life circumstances, like fatigue, influence overall satisfaction in personal life.

Research findings reveal the intricate impact of stress management techniques on individuals' quality of life and overall satisfaction, with this complexity potentially varying in developing societies and native cultures. Given that university staff operate in educational settings and experience significant job stress, and that the coping strategies they employ can influence their overall quality of life and satisfaction, this study aims to explore if the methods of stress coping can serve as predictors for the quality of life and life satisfaction among employees at the University of Sistan and Baluchestan.

Method

Sample and Sampling Method

The statistical population for this research includes all staff members of the University of Sistan and Baluchestan. The study sample comprises 94 employees chosen via simple random sampling who took part in the research.

Tools Used

Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS)

This inventory was created by Endler & Parker (1990a). This inventory (48 items, utilizing 5-point Likert scales) assesses three primary coping strategies: task-focused, which involves addressing the issue directly; emotion-focused, which centers on the emotions that arise (e.g., feeling angry or upset); and avoidance coping, which seeks to evade the problem. There are 16 items associated with each coping strategy. Avoidance coping can be subdivided into two categories: an 8-item Distraction sub-scale and a 5-item Social Diversion sub-scale. This inventory demonstrates excellent Cronbach's alpha values of .91, .89, and .85 for Task, Emotional, and Avoidance-oriented styles, respectively. The total Cronbach's alpha was .91 (Tamini and Ansari, 2014).

Life Satisfaction Scale

This scale was created by Huebner (1994) to assess student life satisfaction. Internal consistency (alpha) coefficients have been documented in several studies (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1997; Huebner, 1994; Huebner, Laughlin, Ash, and Gilman, 1998). The results indicate that the reliabilities vary from the .70s to low .90s; therefore, they are suitable for research objectives. Test-retest coefficients for both two- and four-week intervals have also been documented (Huebner, 1997), predominantly falling within the .70 to .90 range, which further enhances the scale's reliability. Tamini and Mohammadyfar (2009) demonstrated that the total Cronbach's Alpha was .7577 (Tamini and Ansari, 2014).

Quality of Life Questionnaire – WHOQOL BREF

The World Health Organization Quality of Life Questionnaire (WHOQOL-BREF) is a 26 – item questionnaire that measures a person's overall and general quality of life. This scale was developed in 1996 by a group of World Health Organization experts by modifying the items of the 100 – item form of this questionnaire. This questionnaire has 4 subscales and an overall score. These subscales are: physical health, mental health, social relationships, environmental health and an overall score. Initially, a raw score is obtained for each subscale, which must be converted into a standard score between 0 and 100 through a formula. A higher score indicates a higher quality of life. This scale has been translated into 19 different languages and is used in different countries to measure the quality of life of individuals. The World Health Organization study group considers this scale to be a cross-cultural scale and therefore it is used in different cultures (WHO, 1994). In Iran, Nejat et al. (2006) translated this scale into Persian and reported its validity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84 indicates its desirable internal consistency. On the other hand, factor analysis of the 26 items of this scale revealed that there are four subscales in this scale (i.e., physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and living environment, which were present in the original scale), which indicates its structural validity. Also, to examine the validity and reliability of this questionnaire, a study was conducted on 1167 people from Tehran. The participants were divided into two groups with chronic and non-chronic diseases. The test – retest reliability for the subscales was obtained as follows: physical health was 0.77, mental health was 0.77, social relationships was 0.75, and environmental health was 0.84 (Nejat et al., 2006).

Results

For the analysis of the data, Pearson correlation and stepwise regression were employed, with results presented in the tables below.

Table – 1: Results of Pearson correlation coefficient between stress coping methods, quality of life and life satisfaction (n=94)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Life satisfaction	1				
2. Quality of life	.645**	1			
3. Problem – focused	-.028	.038	1		
4. Emotion – focused	-.116	-.027	.559**	1	
4. Avoidant – focused	-.011	-.243**	.563**	.708**	1

The results of the above table show that a negative and significant relationship was observed between the avoidant style of coping with stress and quality of life ($r = -.243$, $p < .01$), while the problem-oriented and emotion-oriented styles did not have a significant relationship with quality of life and life satisfaction.

Table – 2: Results of stepwise regression of stress coping methods on quality of life

Model	B	Std.E	Beta	T	R	R ²	Sig.
Avoidant – focused	.772	.202	-.243**	-3.815	.243	.059	.0001

The above results indicate that only the avoidant coping style entered the regression equation and explained 5.9% of the variance for quality of life. While the other coping styles did not enter the regression and were removed from the regression equation. Avoidant style ($\text{Beta}=.525$, $p=.0001$) had a negative and significant relationship with quality of life.

Discussion

The aim of the current research was to determine the influence of coping strategies on the quality of life and life satisfaction among staff at Sistan and Baluchestan University, Iran. The outcomes indicated that there was a negative and significant association between the avoidant coping style for stress and quality of life, whereas the problem-focused and emotion-focused styles showed no significant relationship with quality of life. Additionally, findings showed that solely the avoidant coping style had a negative impact on quality of life. Other coping styles did not significantly predict quality of life among the employees of Sistan and Baluchestan University. The results of this research align with a part outcomes of earlier studies (Sittironnarit, 2018; Qobadpoor et al., 2022; Al-Ruzzieh, & Ayaad, 2021; Crişan et al., 2024). Crişan et al. (2024) demonstrated that dysfunctional coping demonstrated a significant relationship with the physical, psychological, and interpersonal areas. Maladaptive coping persistently demonstrated a considerable negative association with the psychological realm, but not with the physical or relational realms. It appears that, among stress coping strategies, only avoidant coping styles may have a negative association with and predict the quality of life for employees in Sistan and Baluchestan. Shahbazi et al. (2018) performed a study that uncovered a significant connection between task-oriented coping style, stress, mental well-being, social relationships, and environment among nurses in intensive care units, emergency departments, and different hospital areas; however, no significant difference was observed between emotion-oriented coping style, avoidance-oriented coping style, and physical health among nurses working in these identical environments.

The results of this research demonstrated that life satisfaction did not have a notable relationship with stress coping styles, and moreover, these coping styles were unable to predict life satisfaction among employees of Sistan and Baluchestan University. The findings of this study are not align with the prior studies (Tamini and Ansari, 2014; Ding et al., 2022; Rogowska, Kuśnierz, & Ochnik, 2021; Milas et al., 2021; Gustems-Carnicer and Calderón, 2012; Wu et al., 2024; Valentine, Kuzu, and Kratz, 2023). To explain the findings of the study, which differ from earlier research, it can be noted that the sample comprises the unique indigenous culture of Sistan and Baluchestan, and cultural factors may influence the outcomes. Consequently, further investigation is essential regarding the impact of stress coping mechanisms on life satisfaction and quality of life in employees, utilizing larger statistical samples to obtain more precise outcomes. By comparing the findings of this study with those of future research, we will be able to distinctly recognize the similarities and differences, allowing us to identify which stress coping style enhances employee satisfaction and quality of life, as well as serves a crucial role in forecasting quality of life and life satisfaction.

Conflict of Interest

The authors do not have any conflicts of interest.

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