

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED STRESS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS PRE AND POST COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was, to find out the gender differences in perceived stress among young adults before and after counseling. The current article presents the mean differences among both genders perceived stress before and after counseling. To conduct the study a sample of 120 young adults belonging to the age group of 20-40 years were selected. To measure the stress levels among young adults Perceived stress scale developed by Cohen (1983) was used. Results revealed that there were no significant differences found between the genders before and after counseling. However, mean differences were observed between genders depicting women had higher levels of perceived stress compared to men before and after counseling. Therefore, it was evident that counseling techniques were effective in reducing stress and enhancing better coping strategies among young adults.

KEYWORDS: *Counseling, Perceived Stress, Gender, Financial Stress*

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INTRODUCTION

Young adults try to develop new skills, or to learn to cope with new experiences in their daily life. A successful transition will enhance the young adult's willingness to take up new challenges and accept changes in life. Inability or unsuccessful transition often leads to stress among young adults limiting their performance at work and also with family. Stress is dynamic which strains the physical and psychological adjustment of an individual to his surroundings, leading to a disturbed personality and physical and mental illness. Sources of stress are different for everyone it might be because of the competitive world where they are under constant scrutiny to accomplish with regard to higher education, unpredictable professional environment, heavy compensations with huge expectations for employees, etc. Moreover, young adults also encounter with new roles and responsibilities in personal life as being a partner, a parent and financial management will often lead to stress among young adults. Stress has direct effects on moods and increases sleep disturbances, irritability, and cognitive changes such as impaired concentration affecting both physical and mental health among young adults leading to anxiety, depression and dementia. A study conducted by ICICI Lombard, (2017) revealed that about 65% of respondents in the 22-25 age group exhibited signs of depression, compared to 60% in the 26-30 age group and 55% in 31

years and above. The study also found that lower income levels were a major source of stress as was sleep deprivation; as high as 64% of respondents were sleep deprived with less than 7-8 hours of sleep. About 55% respondents said it was income-related issues that caused them the maximum stress in their professional lives.

Men and women perceive stress differently where women perceive high stress due to long working hours and family related and whereas men perceive stress based on financial and work pressures. Women who work more than 60 hours a week had less perceived control and report higher levels of stress than women who worked fewer hours. However, men who worked more than 60 hours reported increased levels of control (Tytherliegh et al. 2007). In order to address the issues on perceived stress among young adults, it was identified that counselling would be an effective method in helping young adults manage their stress. Counselling is an intervention strategy that can facilitate young adults in reducing stress and anxiety, as well as improving their well-being. This is done through therapeutic skills fostered by the counselor, such as being present in the moment with clients, participation in active listening, fostering a strong therapeutic relationship, and reflecting empathy for the client feelings, all in a non-judgmental way (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014). Individual counselling has clear benefits for employee's psychological well-being.(Renolds,1997). Increase in employee participation and training events reduce stress of employees. Stress management and relaxation techniques help individuals to cope up with their life situations and enhance their well-being. Therefore, the current study aimed to understand the gender differences in perceived stress among young adults before and after counselling in order to see the effectiveness of counselling.

METHODOLOGY

Young adults belonging to the age group of 20-40 years from the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad were selected for the study. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study (young adults who had approached counselling center in order to seek help from professionals for their perceived stress were part of the study). An equal sample of 60 men and 60 women were selected for the study. To find out the perceived stress among young adults, the investigator used "perceived stress scale" developed by Sheldon Cohen (1983). The PSS internal consistency Cronbach's co-efficient (reliability) of the scale was 0.85. It assesses the degree to which participants evaluate their lives as being stressful during the past month. The data on the perceived stress scale was collected in two stages one before counselling sessions and the other after counselling. The collected data were coded and analyzed using frequency, percentages and paired t-test.

RESULTS

Table 1: Gender Differences in Perceived Stress before Counselling (Pre-Test)

Perceived Stress	Men		Women		t-value	Probability
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
	15.8	4.16	17.23	4.63	1.78 NS	0.07

Note:*Significance at (P<0.05), **Significance at (P<0.05), NS- Not Significant

The above table presents the gender differences between men and women based on their perceived stress before counselling. It clearly depicts that there were no significant differences between both genders with respect to perceived stress before counselling. The findings of this study are in congruence with the study conducted by Ghaderi et al. (2009) which concluded that there was no significant gender difference in stress. However, there were differences between the

mean scores of men and women. High mean score with reference to perceived stress was observed in women when compared to men.

High mean scores on perceived stress indicates that women were more emotional, vocal and get affected by stress associated with family, education, marital status, children, work and life situation. On the other hand men stress is associated with career, financial, work and family. This might also be because women are more sensitive to the world around them and react more emotionally rather than solution focussed. Both men and women reported substantial stress in response to the problems with life situation. This might be because of the societal expectations for both genders vary and resulted in their well-being. Men scored lower compared to women with perceived stress this might be because men are fearful of disclosing or quite unaware of their feelings (Hogan, 2002). This might also be because men put less emphasis on the need to manage their stress than women do. Another study supporting the results conducted Pathak, Mitali (2011) reveals that generally women perceive a situation more stressful in comparison to the men and uses the emotion -focused coping strategies. On the other side, men try to control the cause of the situation first rather than giving the reaction based on the emotions.

Table 2: Gender Differences in Perceived Stress after Counselling (Post-Test)

Perceived Stress	Men		Women		t-value	Probability
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
	10.85	4.22	12.20	4.71	-1.65 NS	0.10

Note: *Significance at (P<0.05), **Significance at (P<0.05), NS- Not Significant

The above table depicts gender differences with respect to perceived stress after counseling. It was evident from the table that there were no significant differences found between men and women with respect to perceived stress after counseling. This means that both men and women had reduced levels of stress after counseling compared to before counseling. The results are in congruence with a study conducted by Dyson and spirits, (2006) revealed that there were no gender differences in coping with stress. However, there were differences found in their mean scores. Men had low mean scores on perceived stress compared to women after counseling.

Low mean scores on perceived stress might be men were able to respond quickly to the counseling and used more problem solving focussed strategies to overcome, whereas women used emotion focussed strategies to overcome which takes considerate duration to cope. Women had comparatively higher mean scores than men after a counseling this might be due to the acute and chronic stressors that women had encountered. However, the difference between both genders persisted even before counseling. MoomuangNikom, 2005 research indicated that there is an inverse relationship between increases in the reported experience of stress and health-promoting behaviors, such that those young men who engage in positive health-promoting behavior, exercise, good nutrition expression of emotion and social collaboration are less likely to report a high incidence of impact on sources of stress.

CONCLUSIONS

The finding of the study reveals that stress management techniques, relaxation therapies and goal-oriented training had enhanced young adults from both genders to cope with stress. The mean differences clearly depicted that there were significant mean differences existed between the genders before and after counseling. It clearly stated that women perceived high levels of stress compared to men. Interventions for women may focus on increasing the use of adaptive

strategies such as praying and talking to friends and family, while interventions for men may introduce the use of adaptive coping strategies such as exercise and actively fighting causes of stress.

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