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Research Article

RELATIONSHIP OF ADAPTIVE AND MALADAPTIVE SENSE OF HUMOR WITH PERCEIVED STRESS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL STUDENTS: MODERATING ROLE OF GENDER

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Abstract:

Background- The shift of students to medical university or medical college is a major change in their lives. This change commonly causes number of stressful conditions in their lives. [1] Sometime the perception of stress and their buffering strategies may be depending on their gender due to traditional stereotypical involvement of men and women boundaries in Pakistani culture.

Objective- To find out moderating role of gender in relationship of adaptive and maladaptive sense of humor with perceived stress among undergraduate medical students:

Method- Co-relational research design was used to collect data. Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale and Perceived Stress Scale were used to operationalize the constructs of the present study.

Result- Significant gender difference were found in all the constructs, as boys were higher in adaptive sense of humor whereas girls were higher in maladaptive sense of humor and perceived stress. In multiple regression analysis, adaptive sense of humor negatively whereas maladaptive sense of humor positively predicted perceived stress after controlling for gender. Hierarchical regression analysis suggested that gender moderated the relationship of both adaptive and maladaptive sense of humor with perceived stress. Findings have been discussed in our indigenous cultural settings.

Conclusion- The overall results of the present study lead to the conclusion that enhancing students "sense of humor and especially germane to their gender buffer the effect on their stress level.

Keywords: perceived stress, adaptive sense of humor, maladaptive sense of humor, gender.

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INTRODUCTION:

Typically, some professions bag in more social acceptability, respect and status than the others. From the time of birth, based on gender, most parents in Pakistan decide on an occupation for their children. People are judged and treated according to the nature of their profession. Doctors and medical students get massive respect in our society. Many parents desire their children to become doctors. Each year we see a rat race to score high enough to get into a government or private medical college. More than fifty-two thousand students applied for the available seven thousand seats of Punjab public and private medical institutes combined [24]. Students face much pressure and stress during this process what to talk about the extensive load of studies thereafter. High parental expectations, frequency and vastness of curriculum, difficulties sleeping, and anxiety about performance in exams keep medical students at undergraduate level stressed [25]. To manage such stressors, people use different strategies. Some use sense of humor to ventilate excess emotion, release tension and deal with stress. However, men and women behave differently when it comes to stress. Their reaction, coping, and management all vary. The present study is focused on finding the moderating effect of gender on the use of adaptive and maladaptive sense of humor in relation to stress among undergrad students of medicine.

Sense of humor helps manage life stresses, solve problems, express and adjust better. Humor is a release of repressed energies. However, this expression doesn't always have to have positive feelings attached to it. Sometimes people use humor to mock and degrade others, express their negativity and make others feel worse. Other times humor simply lightens up a stressful situation. Therefore, sense of humor has two dimensions: Adaptive and maladaptive. Adaptive sense of humor reduces stress, enables coping and improves psychological wellbeing. Whereas, maladaptive humor induces stress among others and harms psychological wellbeing [6].

The Trans Theoretical Model of Stress [3] [4] advocates that stress is blown up when someone confronts an incident that pertains to his or her wellbeing. Generally, in our society, the women are taught to remain submissive and rely on their men for solving problems. The men are nurtured to act strong and take a leading role in almost all matters. Literature also supports gender differences in the perception of stress. Ng and Jeffrey [2003] ascertained a significant difference in the perception of stress attributed to gender where female

experienced more stress than males. [5]

To cope with everyday stress, some people use humor. Humor is disreputably a strenuous topic to study as what one person may find funny, the other may not. A lack of acquiescence remains among individuals over what is humorous. Previously humor was considered as an absolutely encouraging trait but recently it has been categorized into two dimensions: adaptive and maladaptive. [6] Adaptive humor is benign to psychological wellbeing and reduced the effects of stressors. Contrarily, maladaptive humor is to negatively evaluate or manipulate others which may rather induce stress. [2] Adaptive humor includes affiliative humor and self-enhancing humor [7] while maladaptive humor is conventionally injurious to wellbeing. [2]

On psychological level, adaptive humor is important in stimulating relationship strength, boosting self-esteem, and reducing apprehensiveness and stress [8]. Whereas, maladaptive sense of humor compromises on one's self-esteem [9] resulting in stress and anxiety [2].

It is therefore interesting to study which sex engenders better humor? There are hypothetical reasons to suppose that one's gender might manipulate the ability to create humor. Literature highlights that men and women are different in responding to both adaptive and maladaptive styles of humor [10]. Men have higher tendency of making jokes [11] while women are expected to use criticism humor. Women have more limitations and have partial exposure of external world than men. Due to these reasons, women show more psychological distress as measured by their perceived stress than men. [12]

Many previous studies have fortified the subjective view that people who are high on adaptive humor are less prone to being stressful owing to the mitigating nature of humor [13] while people who are high on maladaptive humor are prone to have lower self-esteem which makes them perceive circumstantial demands more stressful [2]. Furthermore, adaptive humor appears to be a defense mechanism alongside the deleterious effects of stress [14]. Kuiper, Sandra, and Kristine [1995] found that people with high adaptive sense of humor changed their perspective when coping with negative life events by viewing the events more positively than those with lower sense of humor or a maladaptive sense of humor [15].

Adaptive humor has been labeled as constructing a cognitive-affective change or reorganizing the

situation as less threatening with the release of emotions related with perceived stress. Contrarily, people adopting maladaptive humor restructure the situation as more belligerent, leading to incremented levels of perceived stress [2]. In consonance with literature and empirical support, the present study postulates:

Hypothesis 1: Women have higher scores on maladaptive sense of humor whereas men have high scores on adaptive sense of humor.

Hypothesis 2: Women have higher level of perceived stress as compared to men.

Hypothesis 3: Gender will likely moderate the relationship of adaptive sense of humor, maladaptive sense of humor and perceived stress.

METHOD:

Sample

The convenient sample of the present study [N = 220] comprised of undergraduate medico. The sample comprised female students [N = 104] and male students [N= 116]. Age ranged from 18 to 26 years [M = 20.58, SD= 1.88].

Instruments

Data was collected through psychometrically valid self-report measures of the focal constructs of the present study. Demographic information such as name [optional], age and gender was collected through demographic sheet. A brief description of the instruments is as follow:

Multidimensional Sense of Humor [MSHS]

Multi-Dimensional Sense of Humor [MSHS] was developed by Thorson and Powell in 1991. It is 5 point Likert scale [0=strongly disaccord, 4= vigorously concur] and contains 24 verbalizations with a score range of 0-96 [16]. The scale contains two major styles of humor, which are adaptive and maladaptive humor. Maladaptive sense of humor includes negation to utilize humor [15, 16, & 21] and posture towards humor [22, 23 & 24]. Adaptive sense of humor includes appreciation of humor [19 and 20], adaptive humor [12,13,14, and 17], and engenderment and gregarious utilization of humor [1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11, and18]. Coefficient alpha for the internal consistency of the scale was quite impressive [$\alpha = .92$]. [16]

Perceived Stress Scale [PSS]

Perceived Stress Scale [PSS] was developed by Cohen, Kamrack and Mermelstein [1983] and this scale was utilized for quantifying the perceived stress. [17] The scale comprises of 10 items about

present levels of experienced stress. Subjects' replications are quantified on a 5 point liker scale [0 = never, 4 = very often] and score of the scale ranged from 0-40. Item number 4, 5, 7, and 8 are positively verbally expressed items and they require to be coded reversely. Alpha coefficient of reliability of PSS was 0.85. [17]

Procedure

In order to gather the responses, students were individually and face to face contacted and then they were informed about the impartial of the study by signing informed consent. They were ascertained that their seclusion and secrecy will be preserved after amassment of data. Afterward, scales were given to take replications of students. They were appreciated for their participation after taking response and in the terminus, research participants were thanked for the valuable co-operation. All participants were treated in accordance with the APA code of ethics.

RESULTS:

The obtained data were subjected to statistical analyses through SPSS version 21. Descriptive statistics and alpha coefficients of reliability were computed for each of the scales. Correlations and multiple linear regression analyses were undertaken for testing the proposed hypotheses of the present study. The results are depicted in Table 1 to 3.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

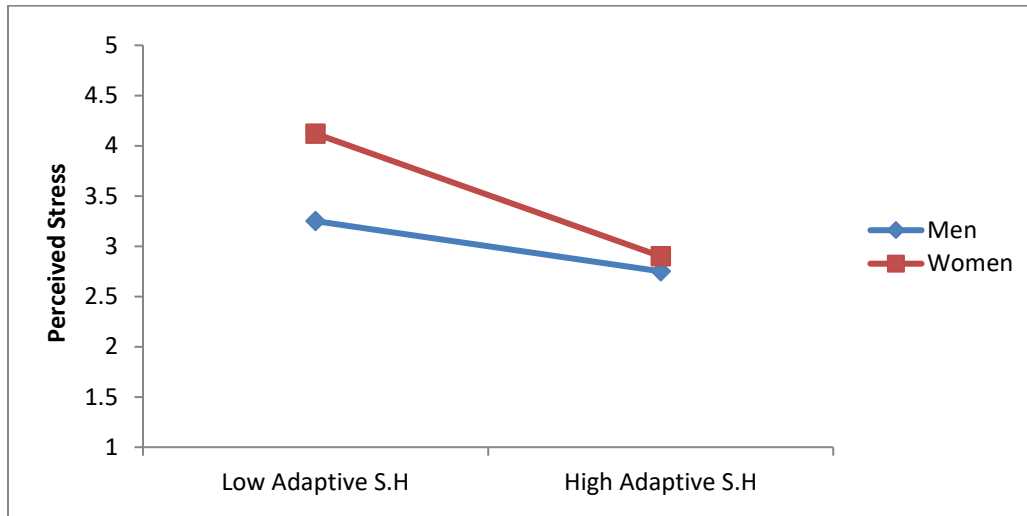
Table 1 shows psychometric properties of sense of humor and perceived stress. The reliability analysis betokens that the reliability coefficient of all scale and their subscale were up to the marks i.e., all of them were more preponderant than the benchmark of .70. Values of Kurtosis and skewness were also in the acceptable range designating normal distribution of variables of the present study which justify the cull of parametric tests for hypothesis testing.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Table 2 shows mean, standard deviation, and t-values of men and women on sundry variables of the present study. Results designate significant mean differences of men and women on Perceived stress, adaptive humor and mal adaptive humor.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

Table 3 depicts gender is as a significant moderating variable between adaptive, mal-adaptive sense of humor and perceived stress. Hierarchical regression analysis was used for determining its moderating role. Regression analysis was performed in three steps and all three models of this analysis are significant.

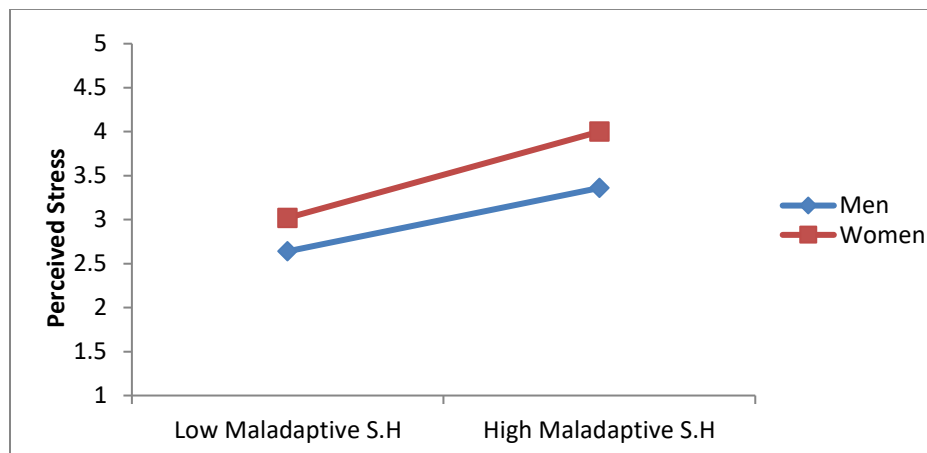


Note: S.H= Sense of humor

Figure 1 is showing the moderating role of gender in relation with adaptive sense of humor and perceived stress.

The figure 1 showed gender strengthens the negative relationship between adaptive sense of humor and

perceived stress. Men and women with high levels of adaptive sense of humor show minute difference towards vulnerable to the stress. Women students those are low on adaptive sense of humor are more vulnerable to the stress as compared to men students.



Note: S.H= Sense of humor

Figure 2 is showing the moderating role of gender in relation of maladaptive sense of humor and perceived stress.

The figure 2 showed genders strengthens the Positive relationship between mal-adaptive sense of humor and perceived stress. Women with high levels of mal-adaptive sense of humor make them more vulnerable to the stress as compared to men students.

DISCUSSION:

The present study is among the pioneering work on the moderating role of gender in relationship between adaptive, maladaptive sense of humor and perceived

stress. It was quite surprising to ascertain that studies fixating on the relationship between these variables were quite scarce albeit the theoretically plausible link between them. The study clearly supported the hypothesized i.e. gender moderates the relationship between adaptive and maladaptive sense of humor and perceived stress [see Table 3]. Our findings elucidated that male medical students were high on adaptive sense of humor and were less prone to stress. Whereas female students made higher use of maladaptive sense of humor and were more vulnerable to stress due to this destructive type of humor.

Humor as a coping strategy also allows one to distance oneself from the stressors [18] [19]. Humor acts as a truculent struggle to confront and deal with stress [18] and reduce the burden summing up to increasing stress. To support the results of the study, it is suggested that male students are high on adaptive sense of humor because men relish the jests. [11] Contrarily, female students are high on maladaptive sense of humor and perceived stress because they are more conscious to fixate on negative events compared to the male students [2]. Individuals with adaptive sense of humor more accurately and authentically appraise the stress in their lives than those with maladaptive sense of humor. [18] [20] It appears that females high on maladaptive sense of humor may either aggrandize the appraisal of stress in their lives or perhaps are more predisposed to experiencing greater stress as compared to male students who are high on adaptive sense of humor.

Conclusion, Implication and Suggestions

The overall results of the present study lead to the conclusion that enhancing students "sense of humor and especially germane to their gender buffer the effect on their stress levels". Studying medical course is an involute task that is associated with solicitousness and feeling of uneasiness, obstacles, self-doubt and apprehension. So, the current study's results suggest that teachers and students counseling associations services must deal with students who come to class not only with diverse capabilities and aptitudes but additionally with a range of gender boundaries relevant to their home town culture, where s/he grew up. Teachers and students counseling association services should be helped in pedagogical preparation programs to be aware of the concept of stress and their relationship with types of sense of humor relevant to their gender, so that they can help better address stressful events in medical universities and engenders better educational situation for their students.

Moreover, as advised by many psychologists, humor is a sense which can be adapted through practice and everyone has the potential for adaptive sense of humor and we are all born with the capacity to laugh. [22] As a result, students are advised to consciously adopt adaptive type of humor in their personal, colleges and university life. It can be hoped that students would than keep their quandaries in perspective, or at least have a different focus during some of the deterring or dejecting low points. Besides, those with student development responsibilities are suggested to encourage the students to be more humorous and provide them with

opportunity for acquiring such adeptness rather than considering the fun in sense of adaptive sense of humor as a sign of immaturity.

For example, the institute authorities should put emphasis on the connotations of humor and introduce certain skills of being humorous in orientation programs for incipient students. The edification department and teachers coalescence should organize the workshops or in service programs for students on how to keep their ever-present stresses in perspective, and there the roles and functions of humor should also be introduced.

A condition of no stress is infeasible in natural surroundings. We all have felt the strain of stress and experienced the startling emotional state that follows cachinnation. Humor is authentically a healthy practice to put events and peoples in felicitous perspective. [23] Thus, there are no whys and wherefores to be so reluctant to incorporate some adaptive humor in our life.

Results of the present study however must be treated with caution. To the researcher's best eruditions this is the first endeavor to study undergraduate medical student's sense of humor and stress relevant to their gender together in an institutional setting. Thus, this study should be replicated to optically discern whether kindred results can be obtained elsewhere. Since this study was conducted only one medical university, further researches need to be carried out at other private, government and semi-government medical colleges and universities to relate the findings. Though considered as overall terms in the present study, multidimensional sense of humor construct and gender; consequently, a promising area of research could focus on determining the specific dimension of these two variables which are furthestmost persuasive in the cognitive appraisal of stress. Conclusively, in the integration to self-report, structure and unstructured interviewed, mixed method approaches, previous histories, case study, and observational inspection are just few illustrations of some other tactics that could enhance significant description to the medical student's sense of humor and stress database.

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