

## Research Article

# A Study on Coping Strategies of Emergency Workers in Lockdown of COVID-19

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**Abstract:** A stress is a situation of emotional and physical tension and people take proper coping strategies, i.e. actions to master, tolerate, reduce or minimise the effects of stressors. This can include problem focused (behavioural) and emotion focused (emotional) strategies. But it is not that people use either problem-focused strategies of emotion focused strategies; most people use both the forms of coping strategies to deal with the controllable stressful events (Eschenbeck et al;2008; Folkman & Lazarus;1980; Lazarus;1993; Stowell et al;2001). For example: gaining social support at the time of stresses. The lockdown situation of 2020 due to corona virus has led to excessive demand on emergency workers which have contributed to rising level of stress. The purpose of this study is to find the coping strategy used by the emergency workers to deal with stress in lockdown situation due to covid-19. Previous researches have focused on the coping strategies of emergency worker in everyday situation. But now Covid-19 has led to a novel situation. Where emergency workers are more vulnerable. The methodology used was semi-structured interview. It is a qualitative study as administration of these interviews was done on phone. Due to lockdown, following social distancing we cannot meet the subjects in person. Most common coping strategies found out was problem focused coping along with emotion focused coping. Within emotion focused coping acceptance and distraction positive was prominently used. Considerable amount of social support was observed. This study definitely answers the questions regarding the pattern of coping strategies used by emergency workers in lockdown. As we took the interview over phone calls, rapport establishment and the flow of the interview was not as smooth as it would have been if it was a face-to-face interview. Also, as the study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, so it has the disadvantages of semi-structured interview as its limitations. Further studies are needed to observe the changes in pattern of coping strategies after lockdown ends. This study can further provide material for any longitudinal study in this case.

**Keywords:** stress, COVID-19, Coping Strategies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Stress is a negative emotional experience accompanied by predictable biochemical, physiological, cognitive and behavioural changes that are directed either towards altering the stressful event or accommodating to its effects (A Baum, 1990).

**Stress can be classified into 4 types: -**

### 1. Acute Stress:

The most common form of stress that normally comes from demands and pressures of the past or future. For example; when a student is stuck in a traffic and is getting late for school, he suffers from a certain amount of acute stress. Once the traffic gets clear there is no stress associated with it.

### 2. Episodic acute stress:

A more serious form of acute stress in which one feels stress on a daily basis and rarely gets relief. A person suffering from acute stress constantly feels stressed out with little relief, he keeps on complaining about his workloads or may constantly be late. Such a person is anxious and irritable on a regular basis and may have taken on too much and created self-imposed demands.

### 3. Chronic stress:

The type of stress that happens months after months, years after years. This is a long-term stress where people are very little way out of a situation. For example; war situation or a pandemic.

#### 4. Eustress:

Not all stresses are distressing to us. Eustress is a form of stress that produce positive feelings in a person and he is motivated to deal with the stressful situation. He perceives the stress within his coping abilities. For example; when exams are coming, students get motivated to study more in order to secure good marks.

Whether it is Eustress or distress, we always try to cope with it and find the way out of it. In order to deal properly with stressful situations, we need appropriate coping strategies. Coping consists of efforts, both action oriented and intrapsychic to manage (master, tolerate, reduce minimise) environmental and internal demands and conflicts around them. Stress related problems can be treated through medications or through non-medical treatments like yoga or meditation or hypnosis. Among non- medical treatments there are basically 2 ways of coping with stress: -

##### 1. Problem-focused coping:

Coping strategy that works on eliminating or changing the stressors itself. When people try to eliminate a source of stress or reduce its impact through their actions it is called problem focused coping. For example; a student is not being able to follow what the professor is teaching in his college. He is very much stressed out as his exams are approaching. So, in order to cope with this stress, he may take private tuitions for joint coaching classes or ask his fellow friends to clarify the concepts taught in college.

##### 2. Emotion-focused coping:

Emotion- focused coping is a strategy that involves changing the way a person feels or emotionally reacts to a stressor. This reduces the emotional impact of the stressors and makes it possible to deal with the problem more effectively. For example; the student who cannot follow classes in his college in order to get emotional support might share his concerns with his friend and talking his heart out until calm enough to deal with the problem directly. Emotion focused-coping also works with stressors that are uncontrollable and for which problem focused coping is not possible. For example; when one is waiting outside the OT and his or her beloved son is going through a critical operation then he or she has nothing to do but only get some emotional support from his surroundings. Or in case of that college student who is not being able to follow his college classes if he is using emotion focused coping may decide to view the stress as a challenge rather than as a threat, decide that the problem is a minor one, write down concerns in a journal or even ignore the problem altogether.

##### Domains under emotion focused coping:

1. Distraction positive
2. Distraction negative
3. Acceptance and redefinition

#### 4. Religion and faith

#### 5. Denial and blame

It is not that people use either problem focused or emotion focused coping strategies to deal with stressors. Most people use both the forms of coping strategies to deal with controllable stressful events. (Eschenbeck *et al.*, 2008, Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, Lazarus, 1993, Stowell *et al.*, 2001). For example: gaining social support at the time of stresses.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the recent studies done was on The Coping Strategies of nurses in emergency hospital services by Renato Mendonca Ribeiro, Daniele Alcala Pompeo, Maria Helena Pinto and Cassia Helu Mendonca Ribeiro (2015).

The study was to identify the coping strategies of nurses in hospital emergency services and report to the socio demographic and professional variables.

A cross sectional study with 89 nurses was done. Research instrument included a form to characterize the research subjects and the ways of coping Questionnaire by Folkman and Lazarus.

Results found out those most commonly used coping strategies were problem solving and positive reappraisal, whereas the least was used confrontation. The strategies of confrontation, positive reappraisal and escape-avoidance were associated with the male sex, not having a partner and working night shifts, respectively.

It was concluded in the study that coping strategies can be aided by listening, monitoring, educational programs and creation of a space for discussion of work-related difficulties.

Another study under this topic was Coping strategies and stressful situations of professional in the hospital environment by Maturana, Ana Paula Pacheco Moraes e VALLE, Tania Gracy Martins do (2014).

This research aimed to identifying and describing stressful situations as well as coping strategies related to the professional practice of sixty professionals working in the health area; specifically, psychologists, nurses and social workers. The instruments used for data collection were: Lipp's Stress Symptoms Inventory for Adults and the Coping Strategies Inventory FOLKMAN and LAZARUS. The result showed the presence of stress in 51.6% of the sample's professionals. The three professionals analyzed showed similar results in choosing the most and least used coping strategies. The category "Communication and Relationship between the team" was identified as the most stressful situation at work.

Therefore, in addition to the need for stress management training, it is noted the importance of programs aimed at developing social skills related to communication and interpersonal relationships skills.

Coping adequately with stressful situation may prevent them from interfering during the rest of one's work career.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample

The population of emergency service workers is chosen and from there a sample was drawn.

**Sample size:** 6

**Sample selection:** Random Selection

### Description of the sample: Demographic features of the sample: -

Demographic details	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5	Subject 6
Age	43	23	52	44	34	25
Education Qualification	Class 5	Paramedical complete +GNM nursing running	Class 4	M. Com	MBA in finance	M.Sc. in Mathematics
Marital Status	Married	Unmarried	Married	Married	Married	Unmarried
Total Family Members	5	4	3	7	8	4
Occupation	Health worker and Tailor	Health care service	Home delivery	Police officer	Banker	Public Servant under PSU
Socio-Economic Status	Lower Middle Class	Middle Class	Lower Middle Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Middle Class

## TOOLS

The research was carried on through semi structured interviews. This type of interview is widely used in qualitative social science researches.

While a structured interview has a rigorous set of questions which do not allow one to divert. And an unstructured is just the opposite, more informal and free-flowing more like and everyday conversation. The semi structured is the one in between; the loosely structured questions give the interviewee more opportunities to fully express themselves.

Being the combination of both structured and unstructured interviews, it has both their advantages. The structured part of the interview gives a general overview of the interviewees. It helps to draw objective comparison from the interviews which are helpful for qualitative researchers. And the unstructured part gives more space for clarifications on answers and to express free flow of thoughts. The interviewers normally do not feel stress during these interviews. This helps in building personal bond between the interviewer and interviewee under the relatively warm and friendly atmosphere.

### Procedure

To carry out this research work the population of emergency department workers was selected and random sampling was done. Sample size was 6.

The research was carried out in the lockdown period so it was not possible to meet the samples in person. The whole work was done through phone calls.

At first interviewers introduced himself or herself to the subjects and then asked the interviewee to be comfortable. Rapport was established and then a semi structured interview was taken.

For the interview few primary questions were prepared based on the research topic. It was kept in mind that none of the questions were leading in nature (non-leading questions). From the responses of the subject's new derivative questions based on the same topic were asked which were made on spot by the interviewer.

As all the subjects work in the emergency department, they couldn't gather much time to answer all the questions in a single conversation. So, the interviews were completed over two to three phone calls.

From the responses of the subjects we tried to understand the coping strategies they followed to cope up with this Covid-19 pandemic. Interpretations were derived and we reached to a necessary conclusion.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Subject 1:**

She is a trained home healthcare provider. She cares elderly or infirm patients covering the distance for them on bicycle. She works more than 12 hours in the night, from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 a.m. During this pandemic she is taking extra precautions. Before providing care, she washes her hand with soap and change the dress. Then she keeps all the stuffs including her phone in a bag. She uses mask and maintains physical distance from others but she is bit scared about her family members. So now she is thinking about total self-quarantine. She has accepted the situation fully and gets relief thinking that at least her condition is much better than the thousands of insecure people in the lockdown. She plays Ludo with her children and watch old series like Mahabharata to be relaxed. Her family supports her though they are also scared about her health. She blames government for some policies and believes that only human beings can help themselves, not any kind of supernatural power.

### **Subject 2:**

He is a GNM student. Besides his study he practices in a private hospital and stays there. This pandemic situation has changed his life a lot. Even there is a Covid-19 hospital nearby. So, as per the instructions he is taking extra precautions. Before providing care, he wears mask and covers his full body with PPE kit. When his duty gets over, he gets sanitized fully. He tries to maintain physical distance from others as far as possible. Like this he works for 7 days and then quarantined for 14 days in a room away from his hospital. Now his normal routine has got disrupted. Even sometimes he works in empty stomach but he is not worried. He has accepted the situation completely and is very happy to be able to give service during this emergency situation. In the night he goes for a walk with co-workers just to be relaxed. His family initially was scared about his condition but his father encouraged him and they are really proud of their son.

### **Subject 3:**

She runs a home delivery service with her husband. She goes to deliver food by herself in the nearby localities; avoids public transports and walks to each house and doesn't spend more than 15 to 20 minutes outside. After returning home she washes her hands and feet well with soap but do not change her clothes because she doesn't cover many distances. While on road she always avoids body contacts with people and avoids those who cough or sneeze. She also uses a mask. She is trying to accept the situation and is abiding by all the health rules and maintains hygiene. Her husband supports her but her daughter is working

outside and other relatives are asking her to stop the service for the time being and not to go out of the house. She is also afraid but is still working as many aged people avails her service. They cannot cook themselves and are totally dependent on her for food. She cannot say "no" to them - but she has said that if the situation worsens, she may stop the service. She always prays to God to save people from this pandemic. Due to this lockdown her daily routine has got disrupted and she is busier these days. But she feels lonely and misses her daughter and nephew (who use to stay with her) and talk to them on phone. She fears for them.

### **Subject 4:**

A police officer who has taken mental preparations to face any kind of emergency situation and serve the common people from the very beginning of his professional life. He is an active member of the police force who regularly comes in contact with many people. When people come to the police station, they are asked to use masks (the police provide masks if needed), maintain social distancing and to wash their hands and feet before entering the police station. Taps have been made outside the police station for this purpose. The subject also goes out in the road campaigning and urging people to abide by the hygiene rules and to maintain social distancing and lockdown. He also goes for relief distributions and visits the resting camps prepared for the migrant workers; prepares for the medical test for those workers in the Bengal Orissa border of Danton and arranges for them to return to their homes. Due to this emergency situation his daily routine has got disrupted to a great extent. Almost 24 x 7 hours he is working. It's not that he is not at all worried about himself - but the smile on the faces of the migrant workers after they board the buses to return home motivate him to work and give him a different kind of satisfaction which he got for the first time in his profession. As precautions to protect him in this pandemic he is maintaining hygiene using masks and maintains social distancing even outside the police station - maintaining some 3-4feets of distance from people on road. His family members are also worried for him though they are not expressing. They know they have to accept it.

### **Subject 5:**

He is a banker and has a joint family. Although there are other earning members in his family. During the lockdown he has to work. 7-8 hours a day and 5 days a week. He takes extra precautions whole going out. Wears mask and travels to work though his own two-wheeler. On asking him about the situations of pandemic he reports to be fearful of situation and a bit anxious. Given that he has a new born baby on 8 months old. In these stressful times he plays with his infant to relieve stress and spend time with other family members. And at times listen to the music. He hopes the situation to be normal and the believes there will be changes in his lifestyle even after lockdown end.

### **Subject 6:**

He is a public servant and unmarried, has a small family of four. Where his father is already a military officer and working in lockdown. Leaving only his mother and elder sister home. With he being working too. His work is extensive as he works in airport. Working 6 days in a week that too 12 to 14 hours. They are given kits to wear. And properly sanitised. Being in those kits are somewhat difficult. It's takes 40 minutes to reach the destination on a two-wheeler from his home. He is thankful to his family for the constant support he received. Along with that he spends his spare time in writing poems, listen music, playing games and chatting with friends on video call. His friends too time again kept in touch during lockdown. Knowing that he works. He believes that even in crises we have been given time to think about ourselves and work on self. He believes that we should take these experiences in a positive way. And credits his family and friends for positive beliefs in lockdown.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Subject 1**

The subject mostly used as problem solving coping strategy; she always maintains hygiene rules, social distancing and has even plant for self-quarantine. She has completely accepted the situation and has redefined it--- saying that she is there to protect her children unlike some migrant workers. She positively districts herself by spending quality time with her family and watches TV series. She gets social support from her family and relatives. And also, she uses blame as a coping strategy as she has problems with certain policies of the government.

### **Subject 2**

This subject is also mostly problem focused---- abiding by all the necessary hygiene rules and maintaining social distancing and staying in quarantine (mostly because he is working in a government hospital). He has completely accepted the situation and is redefining it by saying that he is being able to serve people during their crises. He is feeling good for that. Sometimes he positively distracts himself by going out for night walks. He also gets social support from his father.

### **Subject 3**

This subject focuses on problem solving by maintaining social distancing but she also uses denial as a strategy saying---- because she doesn't cover much distance, she doesn't change her clothes after returning home. She redefines the situation thinking that many aged people are getting relief because of her service. She also uses religion as a coping strategy.

### **Subject 4**

The subject is mostly taking problem solving strategies like maintaining hygiene rules and social distancing. He also gets adequate social support from his family. He completely accepts the situation and is

redefining it by saying; he never ever had satisfaction like this before which we got after serving people, especially the migrant workers during this crisis.

### **Subject 5**

This is subject is mainly problem focused i.e. abides by all hygiene rules social distancing and other necessary steps. He totally accepts the situation and positively distracts himself by playing with his less than a year-old child, listening to music and watching web series. His family adequately supports him to carry on his work during this period.

### **Subject 6**

Alike the others this subject is also problem focused; takes all prescribed measures to avoid falling ill. He has also accepted the situation and positively distracts himself by reading writing and playing games. We can also see denial in him as he blames that section of the society which is discriminating against the emergency workers in the present situation. And he receives full support from his family to continue working during this Covid-19 crisis.

So, from the above-mentioned cases it can be assumed that to cope up with this Covid-19 crisis the emergency workers are generally undertaking problem focused coping strategies. That is, maintaining hygiene rules, using masks, social distancing etc. But besides being problem-focused, they are also using emotion focused coping and social support from their friends, relatives and families. We find that social support is there for nearly all the subjects. They have also accepted the situation and are trying to redefine it in their own ways. They are also positively distracting themselves - spending time with family or writing poetries, listening to music, watching web series or thinking how people are being helped to do to their services. sometimes denial and blame strategies or believing in some supernatural power i.e. religion/ faith is also found in some cases.

### **Limitations of the study**

Due to lockdown we took the interview over phone calls; therefore, rapport establishment and the flow of the interview were not as smooth as it would have been if it was a face to face interview.

Also, the study was conducted through semi structured interviews and when compared with structured interviews, semi structured interviews are less objective and legally harder to defend. And also, semi structured interviews somewhat restrict the interviewees free flow of thoughts and limit the potential possibility of the interview as a whole.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the study conducted it has been found that the emergency workers are using problem focused coping strategy as well as emotion focused coping

strategies like acceptance and redefinition, positive distraction, denial and blame, social support or religion/faith. And interventions can be adopted for the above-mentioned emergency workers.

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