



RESEARCH PAPER

Stress, anxiety and coping strategies of single earner couples- an explorative study after COVID-19

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Abstract : Being the primary financial provider, and the breadwinner at that, is not a choice, especially in these challenging times. Being a single-income household has several benefits, including the practicality of having one parent stay at home and take care of the kids, an unpredictable employment market and during and after COVID-19 phase, it was noticed that there is increase in stress and anxiety among individuals. The present study is to find out the prevalence of stress and anxiety among the single earners and the methods they used to cope up with the situation which was conducted among 60 couples who were resident of Udaipur, Rajasthan. Snowball sampling method was used to and the tool was designed by the researcher which was Stress and Anxiety Inventory and a modified version of Coping Strategies Scale by (Badgular and Gir, 2014) The couples were found to have a moderate amount of stress followed by a reduced level of anxiety, and they were able to cope with the COVID-19 condition effectively.

Key Words : Anxiety, Coping strategies, COVID-19, Single earner, Stress

View Point Article : Chanda, Puja and Audichya, Suman (2024). Stress, anxiety and coping strategies of single earner couples- an explorative study after COVID-19. *Internat. J. agric. Sci.*, 20 (1) : 78-83, DOI:10.15740/HAS/IJAS/20.1/78-83. Copyright@2024: Hind Agri-Horticultural Society.

Article History : Received : 08.07.2023; Revised : 10.08.2023; Accepted : 13.09.2023

INTRODUCTION

Stress is characterized as a condition of anxiety or mental tension brought on by a challenging circumstance. Stress is a normal human reaction that motivates us to deal with problems and dangers in our lives. Everyone goes through periods of stress. However, how we handle stress has a significant impact on how we feel overall (WHO, 2023).

Stress is a bodily reaction linked to an outside event. There must be a stressor for the cycle of stress to start.

Anxiety is a result of stress and worry, if they are the symptoms. Worrying and stress are two cognitive and physiological aspects of anxiety, so we feel it in both our minds and our bodies (Emma Pattee, 2020). The fight-or-flight reaction is the body's natural response and it includes both stress and anxiety. Stress hormones are released by the body when a person feels threatened (Barrell *et al.*, 2020). Anxiety affects everyone in different ways. Sometimes, the feelings of fear and dread don't go away or get worse over time (Holland, 2023). Effective coping techniques typically contribute to

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improving mental and emotional well-being. Those who are able to handle challenging life situations through efficient coping mechanisms may experience reduced anxiety, stress, and other psychological issues.

In addition to the physical effects of the unanticipated outbreak COVID-19, many impacted have experienced substantial psychological stress (Song, 2020). Anxiety, as one of the responses of COVID-19, was defined as a feeling of apprehension or dread accompanied with varied autonomic symptoms (Zhou *et al.*, 2016).

Objectives :

- To find out stress and anxiety among single earner couples and various coping strategies used by them.
- To compare between husband and wives.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A total of 60 middle-aged couples with one earner were chosen from Udaipur City, Rajasthan, to take part in the research study using the explorative approach. The sample was obtained by using the snowball sampling technique. The researcher developed a questionnaire to measure stress and anxiety. It has 68 items and were separated into three categories: socio-emotional stress, financial stress and physical stress. Five point scoring scale was used for scoring which were 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree and 5 for strongly agree. Similar to this, the anxiety questionnaire has 25 items and were separated into two categories: socio-emotional anxiety and health anxiety. A four-point scoring system was utilized, with 1 representing never, 2 representing frequently, 3 representing occasionally, and 4 representing always. By

Badgajar and Gir (2014), a modified version of the Coping Strategies Scale was utilized. The frequency and percentage were calculated to determine the degree of stress and anxiety experienced by the couples, and the t-test was employed to compare husbands and wives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the data in Table 1 and Fig. 1, which demonstrated that the single earner couples experienced moderate level of physical stress this may be due to majority of the husbands are at age 51-55 years and wives are at 45-55 years, because most of the men were in middle adulthood period as they age, a lot of bodily changes occurs which cause stress, while in case of women after the age of 45 there are bodily changes, hormone levels alter, bone density begins to decline gradually; this process speeds up after menopause. Due to the impact COVID-19 on the majority of bread winners, who had to deal with business losses and some job losses during the pandemic, 20 per cent of husband's experienced high financial stress and 86.7 per cent moderate financial stress. In contrast, due to their lack of financial stability, 13.3 per cent of wives reported high levels of financial stress, 80 per cent of wives had moderate level of financial stress and they believed that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on their financial situation. Husbands and wives had moderate level of socio-emotional stress this may be attributed to the social isolation that occurred during the pandemic phase and sadness at losing loved ones.

According to Table 2 and Fig. 2, more than half per cent of husbands and wives reported low levels of health anxiety, which suggests they had fewer worries and anxieties about their health. A low level of socio-emotional

Table 1 : Distribution of single earner respondents for stress and its dimensions

Dimensions	Category		Level of stress <i>f</i> (%)				
	Single earners		Low		Moderate		High
	Husbands = 30 Wives= 30	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Physical stress	Husbands	4	13.3	26	86.7	-	-
	Wives	4	13.3	26	86.7	-	-
Financial stress	Husbands	4	13.3	20	66.6	6	20
	Wives	2	6.7	24	80	4	13.3
Socio-emotional stress	Husbands	8	26.7	22	73.3	-	-
	Wives	6	20	24	80	-	-
Overall stress	Husbands	5	16.7	25	83.3	-	-
	Wives	3	10	27	90	-	-

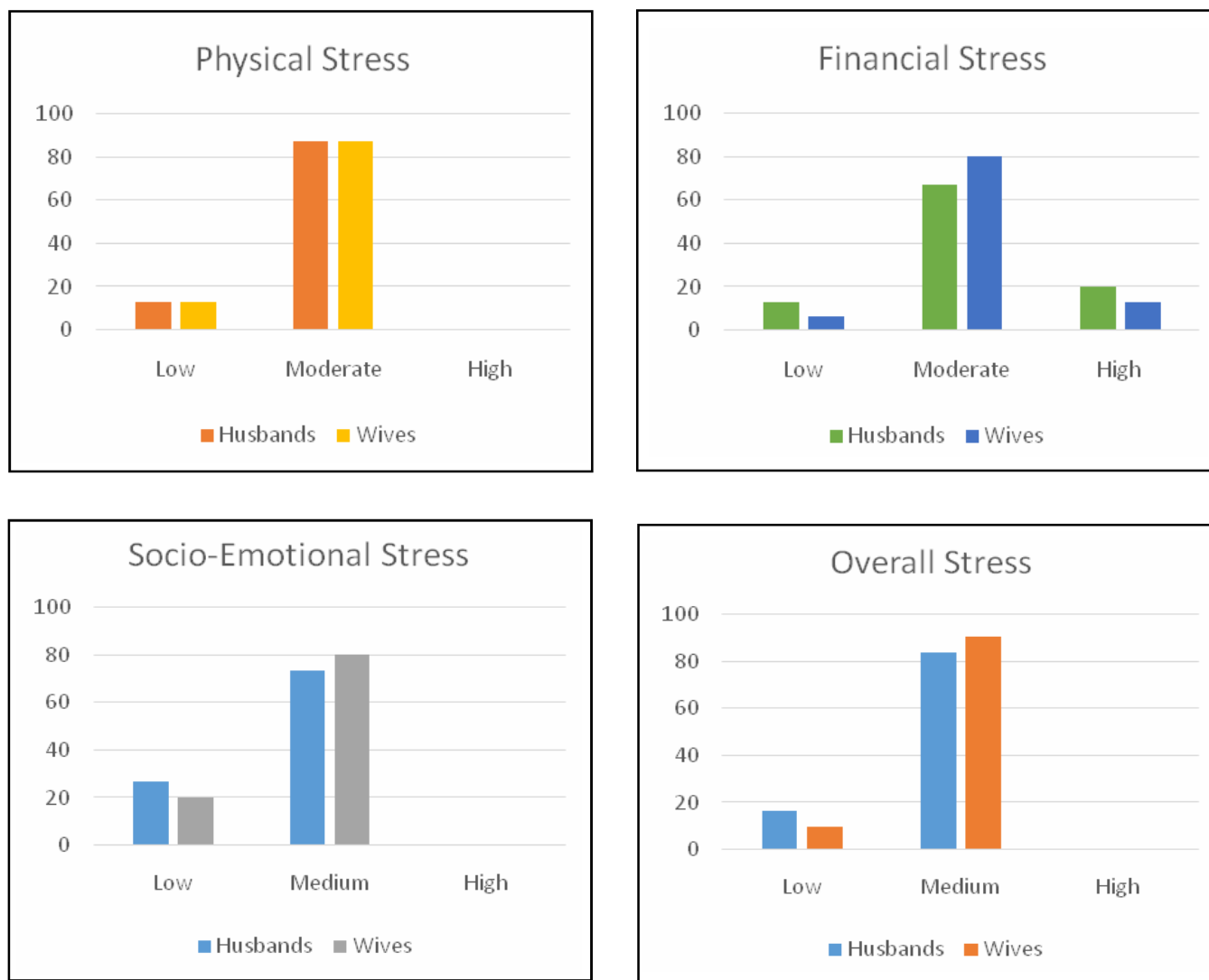


Fig. 1: Percentage distribution of various dimension of stress among husbands and wives

anxiety was reported in 70 per cent of husbands and 56.7 per cent of wives, which may be a result of close relationships with others. The majority of the men (76.7%) and wives (83.3%) showed low levels of anxiety,

indicating that they had successfully dealt with the challenging circumstances following the difficult COVID-19 phase and had acclimated to the new circumstances.

The mean values for overall stress and its many

Table 2 : Distribution of single earner respondents for anxiety and its dimensions

Dimensions	Category	Level of Anxiety (%)						
		Single earners		Low		Moderate		High
		Husbands = 30	Wives= 30	f	%	f	%	f
Health anxiety	Husbands		24	80	5	16.7	1	3.3
	Wives		25	83.3	5	16.7	-	-
Socio-emotional anxiety	Husbands		21	70	9	30	-	-
	Wives		17	56.7	12	40	1	3.3
Overall anxiety	Husbands		23	76.7	6	20	1	3.3
	Wives		25	83.3	5	16.7	-	-



Fig. 2 : Percentage distribution of various dimension of anxiety among husbands and wives

dimensions that the husbands and wives from both categories obtained are shown in Table 3. The table clearly demonstrates that respondents in both groups received nearly identical mean scores, which were at moderate levels. A small and homogenous sample may be to blame for the lack of substantial variations between husbands and wives in the overall comparative analysis of stress and its aspects.

Table 3 indicates that there is significant difference between husbands and wives in socio-emotional anxiety from both the category, wives had moderate level of socio-emotional anxiety and slight higher mean scores than husbands. The table further reveals husbands and wives did not differ significantly in health anxiety and overall anxiety, the reason may be small size sample, uniformity and majority of the husbands and wives had lower level

of health and overall anxiety. The educational background, annual income of respondents determine a non-significant relationship among husbands and wives.

The findings regarding the ways of coping used showed that more than half of the respondents used constructive coping mechanisms moderately to deal with stress. In the present study, the respondents used constructive coping mechanisms like problem-solving, confronting, problem appraisal, acceptance, hired help, tension reduction, confiding, and religious coping. The respondents reported that the majority of them have the capacity to deal with problems and they also seek help from others during their stress. Respondents used high to moderate level of positive coping to deal with health and socio-emotional anxiety. Regarding adverse coping strategies, the majority of respondents utilized them

Table 3 : Comparison of stress and anxiety between husbands and wives for overall and its dimensions

Dimensions	Category	Total	Single earners	
			Mean ± SD	t value
Stress				
Physical stress	Husbands	30	60.57±11.40	0.78 ^{NS}
	Wives	30	62.63±8.83	
Financial stress	Husbands	30	54.83±12.37	0.34 ^{NS}
	Wives	30	55.87±10.71	
Socio-emotional stress	Husbands	30	71.83±12.51	0.14 ^{NS}
	Wives	30	72.23±9.30	
Overall stress	Husbands	30	187.23±30.94	0.50 ^{NS}
	Wives	30	190.73±22.62	
Anxiety				
Health anxiety	Husbands	30	22 ± 7.36	0.48 ^{NS}
	Wives	30	21.23±4.50	
Socio-bmotional anxiety	Husbands	30	20.17±4.11	2.02 [*]
	Wives	30	22.60±5.12	
Overall anxiety	Husbands	30	42.17±10.65	0.66 ^{NS}
	Wives	30	43.83±8.70	

somewhat, a small number heavily, and a very small percentage never did so in order to cope with stress. Similar results were reported by Labrague *et al.* (2017) it was found that well known coping strategies utilized by individuals included problem solving techniques such as resolving problems, adopting various strategies to solve the problems, and finding the meaning of stressful events.

A dilemmatic situation where respondents denied the situation, distanced themselves from it, and attempted to flee from it may have led to respondents using moderately negative coping strategies when dealing with health and socio-emotional anxiety. As a result, rather than making a concerted effort to escape the challenging circumstance, they may have chosen to use negative coping mechanisms. The results of the study can be supported by similar study that adults who were using healthy coping mechanisms like exercise, altered routines and social strategies to enhance their physical and mental health, foster social support and promote meaningful daily activities during stressful or traumatic times (Finlay *et al.*, 2021). Another study conducted by Ogueji *et al.* 2021, found that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on people and as a result, people were using both positive and negative coping mechanisms to deal with the adverse situation.

Conclusion :

The majority of middle-aged couples with one

earner experienced anxiety and stress to some degree both during and after the COVID-19 phase, according to the results of the current survey. Due to job loss, low income, and poor business, they had financial hardships because they were sole earners. Overall, it had a bad effect on 50% of the world's population. The results also showed no statistically significant difference between both spouses.

Acknowledgement :

I would want to acknowledge and thank my advisor, Dr. Suman Audichya, for helping me finish this project. Thanks to her guidance and opinions, I was able to finish all the writing stages. I also like to express my gratitude to the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Community and Applied Sciences at MPUAT in Udaipur, Rajasthan, for providing the research facilities for this study.

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