

# Subjective Well-Being and Coping Skills: A Study of Counselors Working During COVID-19 Pandemic

Priyanka Tyagi

Ph.D. Research Scholar, University School of Education GGS Indraprastha University

## Abstract

This research paper studies the effect of COVID-19 causing health crisis. A systematic review of healthcare professionals' mental health during pandemic showed aggravated psychological pressure and some mental illness. there are two broader categories of the affective element, which indicates the experiences of the individual as positive and negative. One is the Positive affect, which represents one's natural tendency to deal with life challenges in a positive way and interact with others open-heartedly. Whereas, negative affect includes negative feelings one develops in relationships and surroundings and has a negative perception for the entire world. The Subjective well-being measure is the combination of the PANAS scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale for evaluating Subjective Well-being. The study found that the highest number of Counselors scored average on the Life satisfaction scale and is generally satisfied with life. But at the same time, they are motivated towards improvement. Also, they are more inclined towards positive affect and are more positive to deal with situations in a more positive manner.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Mental well-being, Counselors, PANAS, Psychological distress

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected several nations not only as a health crisis but also with psychological distress. These psychological disturbances are associated with many mental health-related consequences. Xiong, J. et al.(2020) studied COVID-19's impact on the mental health of general public of Iran, China, Spain,, US, Turkey, Nepal, , Italy and Denmark and found that there was a high percentage of symptoms of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, psychological stress and distress. Sripad, M.N. et al. (2021) gathered suicide reports in pandemic in India, whether suspected/positive, from online news resources. The analysis showed suicidal higher risk for male gender, and positive/suspected COVID infectious people. An increased suicidal incidence brings an urgent need to focus on mental health as essential protocols of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Roy, D., Kar, S. K. et al.,(2020) studied psychological factors and importance of mental health in Indian population during COVID-19 pandemic. They highlighted the urgent need of awareness program and requirement of addressing various mental health issues people face during problematic situations. Keeping this in mind, the importance of Counselors also increases to promote psychological wellness and preventing psychological problems

in society. Amla et al. (2006) explained that counselors with good psychological health and can cope successfully with their problems can provide more effective services for the society. McLeod & McLeod (2014) cited some essential qualities that counselors should master to provide effective counseling services like demographic differences, types of disabilities, ethics in counseling, confidentiality, subjective well-being, and more. Importance of understanding the well-being of counselor's part and clients' to ensure successful counseling sessions.

However, Counselors are also humans and could experience burnout, stress, variable life satisfaction, positive and negative emotion, and more. Since, counselors are aware of various techniques to promote positive mental health, but at the same time, subjective well-being matters. Moreover, the professional practice of counselors in itself can be a source of challenges that may have psychological costs. According to Gray-Toft et al. (1981) people associated with health care are more intended to develop work discontent. Professional satisfaction and well-being of people working in health care services could be influenced by stress and burnout. A systematic review of healthcare professionals mental health during pandemic showed aggravated psychological pressure and some mental illness (Vizheh, M., Qorbani, M. et al., 2020). Coral, M.(2012) conducted a research focusing on the issues related to burnout and job satisfaction of HIV/AIDS Counselors. The study analyzed the levels of burnout, job satisfaction and personality and inter-relationship between all of these three variables. Also, they focused the impact of different types of personality on burnout and job satisfaction. Findings showed that more than 50 per cent of the respondents scored average on all the five factors of personality. 34 percent respondents demonstrated moderate level of burnout whereas job satisfaction was reported from low to moderate.

Huat(2018) found that the Counselors were highly exposed to stress and burnout. Gutierrez and Mullen (2016) conducted a study on counselors in school and found the higher burnout level of counselors decline their performance while providing counseling services at school level. Similarly, Friedman and Mullen et al.(2017) concluded that the school counselors with a high level of stress and burnout have a low level of job satisfaction.

Affective and cognitive reactions at work place affect the mental health as well as work efficiency of the individual. According to Amti(2010); Illies et al.(2010); Mathews et al.(1987) various indicators psychological functioning are linked with job affect and satisfaction. Diener (2000) explained subjective well-being in relation with people's cognitive and affective experiences of their lives. The cognitive element refers to one's life satisfaction, i.e., experiencing the life as a superset and as a subset, i.e., family, friends, relationships, etc. The affective element indicates the emotions, feelings, and moods. Based on experiences faced by individuals, this domain could be negative as well as positive or as pleasant or unpleasant. Basically, there are two broader categories of the affective element, which indicates the experiences of the individual as positive and negative. One is the Positive affect, which represents one's natural tendency to deal with life challenges in a positive way and interact with others with open-heartedly. Whereas, negative affect includes negative feelings one develops in relationships and surroundings and have a negative perception for the entire world.

Irrespective of psychological challenges, people with better-coping styles can adapt themselves in any situation. Coping is a process in which an individual uses cognitive and behavioral skills to manage demands

externally or stressful conditions effectively (De Ridder, 1997). According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) transactional theory, the transaction between an individual and the immediate environment can affect the well-being of the individual. For this, one's coping skills need to put efforts to bring equilibrium between self and situation by involving cognitive and behavioral aspects of one. Also, prior experiences dealing with stressful situations could be helpful to prevent the individual from stress. Along with this, people's health get affected with the strategies they use for coping (Kraag et al., 2006) with their pertinence for subjective well-being (e.g. Parsons et al., 1996, Lyubomirsky and Sheldon, 2006). According to Endler et al. (1994), coping strategies are generally contextual in nature which can be effective in one context and not in others.

A study conducted by Jordaan et al. (2007), showed that the counselors who were actively using their coping skills to prevent stress showed a low burnout level resulting in better well-being. Jones et al. (2016), found the importance of coping skills to prevent stress and burnout in health workers including counselors. Many studies have shown that counselors are much more psychologically strong when it comes to their daily life hassles. A study conducted by Ismail M. et al. (2017) on The Counselors' Psychological Well-being revealed that the level of psychological well-being is high. The study's findings showed that four dimensions named personal growth, positive relation with others, environmental mastery, and purpose in life scored high level.

Chen, Lin, Wang, & Hou, (2009) did a cross-sectional study on 121 operating nurses of Southern Taiwan. The study revealed that constructive stress coping strategies were more favorable to the right work environment than destructive stress coping strategies. A similar study by Lee, T. S. et al. (2019) conducted on 500 nurses to examine the impact of nurses' coping strategies on their psychological well-being. The data was collected with the help of the self-report questionnaire Brief COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced) for coping skills and Ryff's psychological well-being scale. Results showed that Nurses are more inclined to approach-oriented and avoidant coping strategies and are in better psychological well-being than others. These studies show that an individual's psychological well-being is directly proportional to the working style and a healthy mindset.

Kackin, O. et al (2020) conducted a qualitative study of psychological problems of nurses working with COVID-9 patients in Turkey. Findings showed that nurses were affected adversely in psychological as well as sociological aspect. Although they used short-term coping strategies to cope up with stressful environment but needed psychosocial support too. Similarly Sun, N. et al (2020) studied that negative and positive affects develops gradually in mental health Nurses, but they deal with psychological challenges with self-coping styles.

### **Objectives**

1. To assess the subjective well-being of Counselors working during COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To assess coping skills of Counselors working during COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To find the correlation between subjective well-being and coping skills of Counselors.

### **Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant relationship between subjective well-being and coping skills of counselors.

## Instruments

The methodology of the study consists of three short questionnaire surveyed constructs:

1. The Subjective wellbeing measure is the combination of **PANAS** scale and Satisfaction with Life Scale for evaluating Subjective Wellbeing developed by Ed Diener and colleagues (Pavot & Diener, 1993; Diener et al, 1985).
  - I. The SWLS signifies a short 5- item instrument designed to evaluate global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction. The range of the agreement is from 1, "Strongly Disagree" to 7, "Strongly Agree". The higher the value of agreement shows higher sense of life satisfaction. The Satisfaction with Life Scale scores are positively correlated the mental health and can predict the future.
  - II. The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) was developed in 1988 by psychologists David Watson, Auke Tellegen & Lee Anna Clark (Mulder, P., 2018).It is a self-report questionnaire that consists of two 10-item scales that has two types of moods to measure both positive and negative affect: Afraid, Ashamed, Alert, Attentive, Determined, Distressed, Jittery, Irritable, Enthusiastic, Hostile, Excited ,Guilty, Inspired, Interested, Nervous, Upset, Strong and Proud. It is a psychometric scale useful to show relationship between positive and negative affect with personality stats and traits. A 5-point scale is used for each item ranging from 1 to 5, i.e. ,"Not at all" to " Extremely". The range is to indicate the extent to which particular person have felt over the past week.
2. To assess coping skills by Counselors, Proactive Coping Inventory by Greenglass, E. & Schwarzer, R. (1998) was used which has emerged with positive psychology research. The Proactive Coping Inventory is an inventory to assess skills in coping with distress, as well as those that promote greater well-being and greater satisfaction with life. Originally this inventory consist of seven scales, namely Proactive coping, Reflective coping, Strategic coping, Preventive coping, Instrumental Support seeking, Emotional Support Seeking and Avoidance coping. For the present study we have used only 2 related scales were used namely
  - Proactive coping
  - Strategic Planning

In scoring responses, the range is from 1, "not at all true" to 4, "completely true". The Proactive scale consist of 14 items including 3 negative statements for which scoring will be reversed, whereas, Strategic Planning consists of only 4 items with no reverse items.

## Procedure

The data collection procedure was administered on Counselors with the help the self-reporting questionnaires for Subjective well-being and coping strategies. The counselors' informed consent was taken before the data collection

as essential ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the administration of questionnaires was through Google forms and data sheets were generated.

## Result and Discussion

To understand the varying nature of life satisfaction levels, it is essential to realize that one's happiness is related to social relationships. People with a high score have a supportive environment and good relationships with family and friends. Sometimes loss of a dear one could affect the satisfaction level, but over time, the person will bounce back from the loss. Another factor is affecting life satisfaction in the workplace. When the person works full-heartedly and is satisfied with the job profile, then the level of satisfaction automatically gets raised. In contrast, people facing unhealthy relationships with other employees or having a hostile atmosphere at the workplace scores lower in life satisfaction.

Based on data collected from counselors' responses, 9.30% of counselors were substantially dissatisfied with their lives. According to the theory of Satisfaction with Life, people falling in this range may have certain things not going well in their lives. Low levels indicate that some alterations are needed both in attitudes and patterns of thinking as well as in life activities. 11.63% of counselors fall in slightly below average range. People falling in this range may have little but significant problems related to their lives or could have all well except one big question affecting the others.

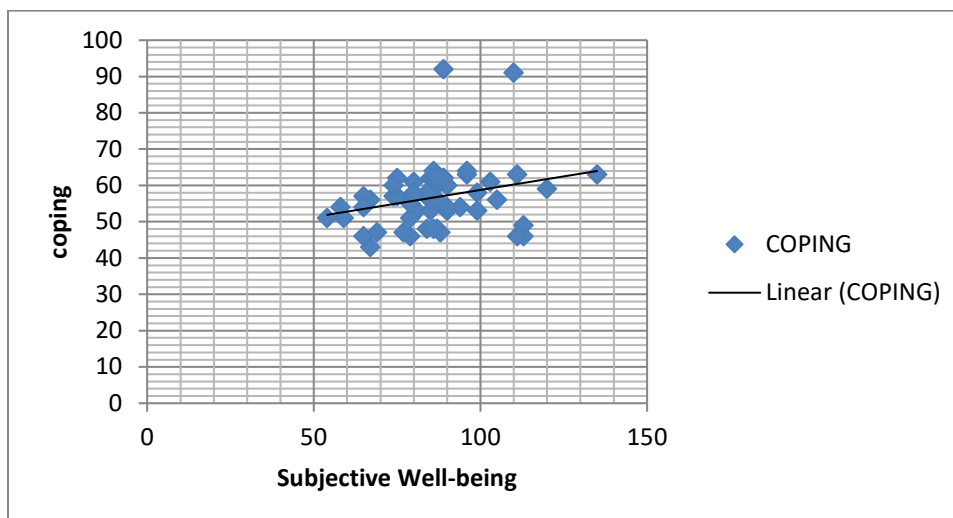
Further, 34.88% of the sample responded with an average score, highlighting that they are generally satisfied, but still want improvement in some areas. People with this range are motivated to move towards a higher level. 30.23% of counselors scored high, making a point that even if their lives are not perfect, but they are still happy with most of it. Whereas 13.95% scored very high, indicating that they are highly satisfied with their lives. Amla et al. (2006) also supported that good psychological conditions help the individuals. For them, life is delightful and significant areas of life are prospering, including family, friends, and work.

Responses collected against the **PANAS(Positive Affects and Negative Affects Scale)** scale showed that Counselors are more inclined towards Positive affect with 83.72% as compared to Negative affect with 46.51% with a higher score. In contrast, the lower score is more inclined towards Negative affect with 53.48 as compared with 18.60% of Positive affect. Also, the standard deviation of the responses of Counselors for negative affect is 7.81 and for positive affect is 9.86. This indicates that Counselors are experiencing more Positive affect rather than negative affect, which ultimately helps them to develop a more positive perspective while dealing with different situations of life, whether it is providing counseling services or any other. Consistent with these findings, Bozdogan, F. and Ergun, N. (2020) that HealthCare Professionals can only work effectively if they can build up positive emotions and debilitate negative emotions. Their quality of work can be affected by basic psychological needs such as sleep and satisfaction with life.

Proactive Coping Inventory was used to measure coping skills for distress, as well as for those that foster better well-being and substantial satisfaction with life. Originally this inventory has 7 subscales, but for the study we have used two of them which are Proactive Coping and Strategic Planning. They both have high internal consistency of range from .71 to .85 and skewness is acceptable for symmetry around the mean. The data showed that majority of Counselors scored high in both the scales i.e. the mean score of proactive coping subscale is 42.13 and of strategic planning is 13.58, which represent that they are active and motivated towards their services.

Further, the study focused on the correlation between the subjective well-being and coping strategies of Counselors. Therefore, coefficient of correlation was calculated between subjective well-being (Satisfaction with life scale and Positive and Negative affects) towards coping strategies used by Counselors. The calculated correlation value i.e. 0.26, technically shows that there is a positive correlation, but the relationship between the variables is weak because the nearer the value is to zero, makes the relationship weaker (fig.1.0). The coefficient of determination value ( $R^2$ ) is 0.07. A measure of the probability i.e. p-value is 0.03 and significant at  $p < .05$ . This means that the test hypothesis is false or should be rejected.

Fig. 1.0 Relationship between Subjective well-being and Coping skills of counselors



Therefore, there is a positive correlation between subjective well-being and coping skills of counselors. These results are consistent with the finding of Jordaan et al. (2007) and Jones et al.(2016), which explained that individuals' coping strategies are directly linked to their psychological well-being and empower them to perform their duties effectively..

## Conclusion

The Counselors working during COVID-19 pandemic have experienced psychological challenges for themselves while providing counselling services and have learnt to cope up. The study found that the highest number of Counselors scored average on the Life satisfaction scale and is generally satisfied with life. But at the same time, they are motivated towards improvement. Also, they are more inclined towards positive affect and are more positive to deal with situations in a more positive manner. Thus Counselors scored high on coping skills equipping them to adapt themselves in problematic situations. The study concluded that although the requirement of the profession demands the counselor to be motivated and resilient to provide effective counseling services to the clients, at the same time, they too have different emotions which can be affected by different situations. These results are in line with previous study conducted by Babore, A., Lombardi, L., Viceconti, M. L. et al.(2020) on psychological effects mainly stress and coping among healthcare professionals during COVID-19 pandemic. They found that coping styles, including positive attitude, were the strongest defensive factors for stress and concluded that distress levels fall down when one approaches the problem with a positive outlook.

The findings are consistent with other studies which concluded that positive attitude at workplace helps the individuals to cope up with stress (Cai et al.,2020 ; Khalid et al., 2016). Functional coping strategy (Flesia et al., 2020) allows individuals to modify negative situations into positive alternatives, to provide better psychological wellbeing and quality of life. Thomson (2009) found that Counselors with high level of psychological well-being are more creative and productive to provide effective counseling services as compared with counselors with low level of psychological well-being. Also, counselors are more or less aware of various skills for developing better life satisfaction and coping strategies which they can use for counseling purposes and for themselves too. So we could conclude that even in the period of COVID-19 pandemic, they are more positive towards life challenges and can equip themselves with better-coping strategies according to the demand of time.

### **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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