



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCE RESEARCH, IDEAS AND INNOVATIONS IN TECHNOLOGY

ISSN: 2454-132X

Impact factor: 6.078

(Volume 6, Issue 3)

Available online at: www.ijariit.com

Study of the relationship between humour, stress and psychological well-being in young adults

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ABSTRACT

This study is titled as “Relationship between humour, stress and psychological well-being in young adults.” The objective is to study the relationship between humour and stress, humour and psychological well-being and stress and psychological well-being among young adults in Pune city. The total sample of 139 consisted of college students who are currently enrolled in a professional or a traditional course. Methodology consisted of purposive sampling. Standardized tools of Multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale, Perceived Stress Scale and Scales of Psychological Well-being were used for data collection in order to assess humour, stress and psychological well-being respectively. The Parametric measure of Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyse the data, followed by regression. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between Humour and Psychological Well-being (significant at 0.01 level), and a significant negative correlation between Stress and Psychological Well-being (significant at 0.01 level). The implications could be that adaptation of humour in teaching methods will create a relaxing environment. This can facilitate student participation, concentration, attention, as well as can strengthen and increase social interaction.

Keywords— Humour, Stress, Psychological well-being, Students

1. INTRODUCTION

"A sense of humour is a needed armour. Joy in one's heart and some laughter on one's lips is a sign that the person deep down has a pretty good grasp of life."

- Hugh Sidey

The above quote shines light on the construct that is humour and how it is an instrument that helps individuals in everyday life. A sense of humour is something that is possessed by few, but envied by all. This research undertakes the study of the role that sense of humour plays in terms of how one perceives stress and the effect it has on an individual's psychological well-being. The main aim is to see the relationship between sense of humour, stress and psychological well-being. Since humour is something that can easily lighten up a stressful, tense or awkward situation, it will be interesting to see the young adults' take on the same. Humour today is considered to be a broad term that encompasses all forms of laughter including jokes, satire, sarcasm, wit, dark humour, stand-up comedy and ridicule. Possession of a sense of humour is considered to be both- an attractive as well as a highly desirable characteristic of personality.

In his book titled 'Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious' (1905), Freud declares humour to be a defensive process, going as far as to consider it to be the healthiest forms of defence mechanisms. A sense of humour is a construct consisting of multiple dimensions, whose importance can be seen in everyday life, more particularly in the adaptation of everyday situations. During the most difficult phases of life, the Researcher found respite when she used humour to deal with mentally and emotionally draining situations. It also majorly helped in easing academic pressure. Seeing how effective humour was at easing particularly stressful situations, the Researcher was more intrigued to find out how much humour was used by individuals all around, especially by those students who are under a lot of academic duress. The World Health Organisation has dubbed stress as the "Health Epidemic of the 21st century." Individuals today are facing a lot of problems both socially and academically. It is therefore imperative to understand humour's role in adaptation, adjustment, stress management and the overall psychological well-being. The current study aims at determining the relationship between humour, perceived stress and psychological well-being.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

To study the correlation between humour, stress and psychological well-being in young adults.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- (a) To study the relationship between humour and stress.
- (b) To study the relationship between humour and psychological well-being.
- (c) To study the relationship between stress and psychological well-being.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Millicent H. Abel (2002) conducted a research titled "Humour, Stress and Coping Strategies". The sample size consisted of 258 undergraduate students of Psychology. The tools that were used were Perceived Stress Scale, Everyday Problems Scale, State Anxiety Inventory, Preferred Coping Strategies Scale and Sense of Humour Scale. It was seen that the high humour group used more coping strategies than the low humour group. Individuals in the low humour group also reported higher perceived stress in everyday problems. The results supported the role of humour in restructuring a situation so it is less stressful.

5. HYPOTHESES

1. There will be a negative correlation between Humour and Stress.
2. There will be a positive correlation between Humour and Psychological Well-being.
 - (i) There will be a positive correlation between Humour and Self -acceptance
 - (ii) There will be a positive correlation between Humour and Positive Relations with Others
 - (iii) There will be a positive correlation between Humour and Autonomy
 - (iv) There will be a positive correlation between Humour and Environmental Mastery
 - (v) There will be a positive correlation between Humour and Purpose in Life
 - (vi) There will be a positive correlation between Humour and Personal Growth
3. There is a negative correlation between Stress and Psychological Well-Being
 - (i) There will be a negative correlation between Stress and Self-acceptance
 - (ii) There will be a negative correlation between Stress and Positive Relations with Others
 - (iii) There will be a negative correlation between Stress and Autonomy
 - (iv) There will be a negative correlation between Stress and Environmental Mastery
 - (v) There will be a negative correlation between Stress and Purpose in Life
 - (vi) There will be a negative correlation between Stress and Personal Growth

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Operational Definitions

Humour- Humour is an individual's ability to look at and consider a situation in such a way that it is amusing and funny.

Stress- Stress is the perception of threat, which results in anxiety, tension and difficulty in adjustment.

Psychological well-being- Psychological well-being encompasses a person's welfare, happiness and quality of life.

6.2 Sample

The total sample consists of 139 individuals. The sampling technique used is snowball and purposive sampling. The age group included in the research is from 18-25 years (male and female), consisting of young adult students enrolled in either a professional or traditional course. Inclusion Criteria- The inclusion sample consisted of unmarried individuals who are currently enrolled in a course as a student. Exclusion Criteria- The exclusion sample consisted of individuals who are currently working and those belonging to lower income households (family annual income below 10,000 INR).

6.3 Tools

6.3.1 Personal Data Sheet: A personal data sheet was designed to obtain the basic demographic information of the respondents. In the personal data sheet, the name, age, gender, education qualification, course they are currently enrolled under, number of siblings, and family's annual income were asked.

TOOL 1- HUMOUR: Multidimensional Sense of Humour Scale (MSHS) (J. A. Thorson and F. C. Powell, 1993). It is a 24 item scale, used for measuring an individual's sense of humour and consists of four subscales, namely humour production, coping humour, humour appreciation and humour attitude. The respondents are asked to state the degree to which they agree or disagree with each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The scoring is reversed to 4 (strongly disagree) to 0 (strongly agree) for item numbers 4,8,11,13,17 and 20. The reliability Cronbach's Alpha was 0.92. Construct and Discriminating Validity are present.

TOOL 2- STRESS: Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, S, 1994) The Perceived Stress Scale is a widely used psychological instrument for measuring an individual's perception of stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. The items on the test were designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives. The scale also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of experienced stress. It is a 10 item instrument which has a 5 point scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 5 (Very Often). PSS scores are obtained by reversing responses to four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, & 8) and then summing across all scale items. The reliability Cronbach's Alpha was 0.82. Validity was Construct Validity.

TOOL 3- PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: Scales of Psychological well-being (Ryff, C.D & Singer,B. 1998).The Scale of Psychological Well-Being provides a framework for investigating the positive functioning in individuals. It is an 18 item scale, consisting of 6 dimensions. These are- Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Personal growth, Positive relations with others, Purpose in life and Self-acceptance. Scoring is done on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree). Scoring is

reversed for item numbers 4,5,6,7,10,14,15 and 16. Internal- consistency Reliability is seen to be from 0.86 -0.93. Validity is Construct validity.

6.4 Research Design

A descriptive correlational research design was used for the purpose of this research.

6.5 Procedure

- (a) 1.The data of 139 students was collected, with their ages ranging from ages 18-25 years. In order to collect data, the permission letter was taken from college. Collection of data was done from students who are currently enrolled in a course.
- (b) 2.The research instruments used in the present study were standardized tools. The questionnaire had 4 sections.
- (c) 3.The first section consists of personal data sheet and other section of 3 standardized scales i.e. multidimensional sense of humour scale, perceived stress scale and scales of psychological well-being.
- (d) 4.For data collection, the participants were informed that all details which they fill will be kept strictly confidential and used for research purposes only. Their signatures were taken on the consent form and they willingly filled the questionnaire. All the research ethics were maintained.

6.6 Statistical Analysis

Quantitative analysis was followed. The current research focuses on studying the correlation between humour, stress and psychological well-being. The data that was collected was scored according to the scoring procedures. SPSS version 17 was conducted. In descriptive statistics mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis were computed. In inferential statistics, Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation was used to study the correlations among the stated variables. Thereafter regression was calculated.

7. RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	Humour	Stress	Psychological Well-being
Mean	69.31	20.38	91.61
Median	70.00	20.00	92.00
Mode	64 ^a	19 ^a	92 ^a
Std. Deviation	9.618	6.733	12.954
Skewness	-.314	.177	-.152
Std. Error of Skewness	.206	.206	.206
Kurtosis	.711	-.386	-.025
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.408	.408	.408

In the above table of descriptive statistics, the ratio of skewness to standard error of skewness as well as that of kurtosis to the standard error of kurtosis was seen to be below 2, proving the normal distribution of the sample. Hence, the parametric method of Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used in order to determine the correlation between the three variables. The mean for the variable of humour is 69.31 which is interpreted as high, mean for the variable of stress is 20.38 which is interpreted as average and the mean for the variable of psychological well-being is 91.61 which is interpreted as high.

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation between humour with stress and psychological well-being

		Stress	Psychological Well-being
Pearson Correlation	Humour	-0.158	.330**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 shows a significantly positive correlation at 0.01 level between humour and psychological well-being.

Table 3: Pearson product moment correlation between stress with domains of humour

		Humour production	Coping humour	Attitude towards humour	Humour appreciation
Pearson Correlation	Stress	-.125	-.183*	.044	-.195*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 shows a negatively significant correlation at 0.05 level between domains of humour of coping humour and humour appreciation with stress.

Table 4: Pearson product moment correlation between humour with domains of psychological well-being

		Positive relation with others	Self-acceptance	Autonomy	Personal growth	Environmental mastery	Purpose in life
Pearson Correlation	Humour	.329**	.174*	.290**	0.134	0.101	.199**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 shows a significant correlation at 0.01 level between domains of psychological well-being of positive relation with others, autonomy and purpose in life and stress. And, significant correlation at 0.05 level between self-acceptance and stress.

Table 5: Pearson product moment correlation between psychological well-being with domains of humour

		Humour production	Coping humour	Attitude towards humour	Humour appreciation
Pearson Correlation	Psychological well-being	.097	.316**	.205**	.267**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5 shows a significant correlation at 0.01 level between domains of humour of coping humour, attitude towards humour and humour appreciation with psychological well-being.

Table 6: Pearson product moment correlation between stress with domains of psychological well-being.

		Positive relation with others	Self-acceptance	Autonomy	Personal growth	Environmental mastery	Purpose in life
Pearson Correlation	Stress	-.367**	-.497**	-.223**	-.291**	-.503**	0.028

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6 shows a negatively significant correlation at 0.01 level between domains of psychological well-being of positive relation with others, self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth and environmental mastery with stress.

Table 7: R square, Adjusted R square and Std. error of estimate of humour and psychological well-being.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Significance
.325 ^a	0.106	0.099	12.294	.000 ^a

- a. Predictors: (Constant): humour
- b. Dependant Variable: psychological well-being

Table 7 shows that 10.6% variance is created by humour on psychological well-being.

Table 8: R square, Adjusted R square and Std. error of estimate of stress and psychological well-being.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Significance
.484 ^a	.234	.228	11.380	.000 ^a

- a. Predictors: (Constant): stress
- b. Dependant Variable: psychological well-being

Table 8 shows that 23.4% variance is created by stress on psychological well-being.

8. DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: There will be a negative correlation between humour and stress.

The first hypothesis which stated that there will be a negative correlation between humour and stress was rejected, as there was seen to be no significantly negative correlation between these two variables. A number of factors can be attributed to this finding. The most important factor being that in the present study, stress was tested by using the “Perceived stress scale” by Cohen. In this test, test takers are supposed to specify the stress that they have experienced in the *last 30 days*. The stress that is perceived in one single month is in no way indicative of the overall stress that a person has in their life. Data collection was done during July end, and the sample that was tested comprised of college going students. Incidentally, since that period is when colleges are just starting, it means that there is no added academic or exam-related pressure that is felt by the students during this time. Another factor is that since the sample in the study comprised of individuals belonging to middle- and higher-income households, these individuals do not face financial stress. Also, all unmarried individuals who are studying are still figuring out their path and are not bagged down by the pressures and challenges of shouldering an entire family or household, and therefore there is no significant stress in their lives.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a positive correlation between humour and psychological well-being.

According to the tables 2,4 and 5, it is seen that the hypothesis stating that there will be a positive correlation between humour and psychological well-being has been proved, since there is a significant correlation at the 0.01 level. There is seen to be an intricate role that humour plays in the psychological well-being of individuals.

- i. There will be a positive correlation between humour and self-acceptance.

This hypothesis has been proved since there is a significant correlation at the 0.05 level. Since self-acceptance refers to having a realistic perception of oneself which includes the good as well as the bad, it fosters a positive attitude that individuals have towards themselves, in a way in which they can accept all their traits. This attitude enables one to make use of the self-enhancing and affiliative humour, which are considered to be the positive humour types, furthering an individual’s well-being.

- ii. There will be a positive correlation between humour and positive relations with others.

This hypothesis has been proved since there is a significant correlation at 0.01 level.

Positive relation with others means being able to form warm, caring and trusting relationships with others as well as having the capability of developing intimacy and showcasing empathy. Humour is a construct that lowers social constraints and aids in

forging newer relationships as well as strengthening inter-personal connections. This has an impact in forming positive relation with others.

iii. There will be a positive correlation between humour and autonomy.

This hypothesis has been proved since there is a significant correlation at the 0.01 level.

Autonomy means regulating behaviours from within as well as evaluating oneself by their own personal standards. These behaviours are congruent with those individuals who engage in the self-enhancing humour style. Being able to resist social pressures by finding humour in it strengthens psychological well-being.

iv. There will be a positive correlation between humour and environmental mastery.

This hypothesis is rejected since there was no significant correlation.

v. There will be a positive correlation between humour and purpose in life.

This hypothesis has been accepted since there is a significant correlation at 0.01 level.

Purpose in life is having the sense that one's life has a particular meaning and being driven by that purpose. A sense of humour is linked with the constructs of happiness as well as optimism. An optimistic attitude leads to a stronger purpose in life.

vi. There will be a positive correlation between humour and personal growth.

This hypothesis is rejected since there is no significant correlation. The self-defeating style of humour is characterised by the use of potentially harmful behaviour towards oneself in order to gain approval from others. Because of this self-directed harm, there is not much scope for growth in those individuals engaging in this humour type. This leads to there being no relation in this domain of psychological well-being.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a negative correlation between stress and psychological well-being.

According to tables 2 and 6, it is seen that the hypothesis stating that there will be a negative correlation between stress and psychological well-being has been proved. Stress has a negative impact on individual's physical as well as mental health, which in turn impacts the psychological well-being.

i. There will be a negative correlation between stress and positive relation with others.

This hypothesis has been accepted since there is a significant correlation at 0.01 level.

Man is a social animal who thrives on social and interpersonal relationships. These connections are fostered only when there is a give and take in relationships, which comes with the deeper understanding of one another. However, when there is a lack of this, it gives rise to conflicts and friction between relations which hampers the psychological well-being of the person.

ii. There will be a negative correlation between stress and self-acceptance.

This hypothesis has been accepted since there is significant correlation at 0.01 level.

Self-contentment leads to the complete acceptance of one's positive as well as negative attributes. Self-acceptance is the acceptance of oneself despite the negatives, by having the faith to overcome those. This contentment and acceptance means that there are no unnecessary pressures and stressors faced by the individual, nor will there be any disappointment or dissatisfaction, ultimately lowering the levels of stress. There is an improved sense of satisfaction because of the lack of worrying regarding personal shortcomings.

iii. There will be a negative correlation between stress and autonomy.

This hypothesis has been accepted since there is significant correlation at 0.01 level.

Autonomy implies the ability of making your own decisions. This quality makes it possible for a person to measure themselves according to their own beliefs of their strengths and weaknesses. When there is no pressure of conforming to any external factors, it harbours independence, lowering the stress in individuals.

iv. There will be a negative correlation between stress and personal growth.

This hypothesis has been accepted since there is significant correlation at 0.01 level.

Personal growth means the ability to grow and develop as a person which makes it easier to have a clearer vision of the future without dwelling on the past negative experiences. This positive outlook reduces stress and aids the psychological well-being

v. There will be a negative correlation between stress and environmental mastery.

This hypothesis has been accepted since there is significant correlation at 0.01 level.

Environmental mastery is manipulating and mastering one's own environment by choosing only those situations that align with one's needs and values. When one can easily remove themselves from a stressful situation to a place of serenity and calm, there will be a low effect of stress on their well-being.

vi. There will be a negative correlation between stress and purpose in life.

This hypothesis has been rejected since there is no significant correlation. Since the sample in the study consisted of students aged just 18-25 years, it is possible that there is no fixed goal or direction in their lives since they are still exploring all options. Because of there being no strong need or demands to have everything figured out, there is no cause for this sort of stress, explaining the lack of correlation between stress and purpose in life.

After the inferential statistics was done, regression analysis was carried out. Table 7 shows the regression between humour and psychological well-being. It was found that 10.6% variance was created by humour on psychological well-being. Table 8 shows the regression between stress and psychological well-being. It was found that 23.4% variance was created by stress on psychological well-being.

9. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study reported the following conclusions

- There is a positive correlation between humour and psychological well-being.
- Humour and stress are not significantly correlated.
- There is a negative correlation between stress and psychological well-being.
- Psychological well-being is positively correlated with domains of humour such as coping humour, attitude towards humour and humour appreciation.

- Humour is positively correlated with domains of psychological well-being such as positive relation with others, self-acceptance, autonomy and purpose in life.
- Stress is negatively correlated with domains of humour such as coping humour and humour appreciation.
- There is a negative correlation between stress and domains of psychological well-being such as positive relation with others, self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth and environmental mastery.

10. IMPLICATIONS

- Incorporating humour in academics like teaching about humour may bring humour itself into the classroom, which in turn will enhance other aspects of learning.
- Use of humour in teaching methods will create a relaxing environment which will facilitate student participation as well as concentration and attention to the course material.
- Activities and games that promote humour can be used in team building and team strengthening as well as to increase interaction.
- Use of humour in workplaces can be used in breaking communication barriers which generally exist between employer and employees.
- Humour may also be used as a form of therapy, especially for people who may be suffering from depression.
- Humour analysis can also be used to understand inter- gender interaction.

11. DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Future researches could compare groups which are ethnically or culturally different from one another, so as to better understand the perception, adaptation and use of humour by individuals belonging to different cultural groups.
- Humour analysis can be used to understand how individuals and groups view the world. This will give an insight into cross-cultural studies in order to understand how societies use humour differently and how their approach towards humour differs.
- Researching various humour styles possessed by individuals can be undertaken to better understand the way humour is perceived.
- Extensive research can be carried out involving individuals who are not confined to just one city or a specific geographical location.
- Use of a completely randomised sample will yield better results which in turn will have more widespread applications.
- Additional research should be undertaken in order to determine the situations other than academic settings, in which humour can be more effective when dealing with stress or pressure.

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