

## Coping mechanisms curtailed to stress by the By-birth hermaphrodites

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**Objective:** To explore the healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms utilized by the by-birth hermaphrodites to cope with the stressful conditions.

**Methodology:** Subjects were selected based on four major domains of spiritual, avoidance, emotional and problem focused coping strategies. A total 14 participants sectioning into two groups of group leader and followers were included. Data were collected by semi structured interviews. Method of interpretative phenomenological analysis was used for data analysis.

**Results:** Positive and negative Spiritual Coping were main domains of spiritual coping, further sanctioned into eight and four subthemes, respectively. Avoidance coping subdivided into

avoidance at personal level and avoidance at behavioral level, seven and six subthemes were elicited from each sub domain. In Emotion focused strategy, themes were broadly subcategorized into positive and negative emotions, three and six subthemes were enlisted, respectively. Six sub themes were emerged in category of Problem focused strategies.

**Conclusion:** Overall, hermaphrodite community used the avoidance coping mechanisms at large to relieve the stress with following of Spiritual, Emotion and Problem-solving coping mechanisms. (Rawal Med J 202;45:7-12).

**Keywords:** Hermaphrodites, coping mechanisms, interpretative phenomenological analysis.

### INTRODUCTION

Each member of the community has their own specific gender identity that would be affected by biological, social and psychological features of that specific person. In society, most commonly gender is categorized as male or female gender,<sup>1</sup> but there is a gender which is not considered as male or female and is recognized as hermaphrodites. It is an umbrella term which is used for third gender, hijra, eunuch, transgender, transvestites, inter-sexed and bisexuals or homosexuals.<sup>2</sup> Word Hijra is commonly used in Pakistan for a hermaphrodite that is derived from the Persian word "Khawaja Sara". There are commonly three main types of hermaphrodites; By-birth hermaphrodites, By-choice hermaphrodites and By-force hermaphrodites.<sup>3</sup> In Pakistan, studies have revealed that hermaphrodites have to experience a lot of stress.<sup>3,4,6,7</sup> However, there is scarcity of work on how this community deals with stressors.

Coping ways/strategies are the individual's conscious effort to solve any kind of personal and

interpersonal problem and to find out the better ways to diminish threat, harm or to reduce associated distress.<sup>8</sup> Literature portrayed four major types including, Appraisal-focused, Problem-focused, Emotion-focused and Avoidance focused coping strategies.<sup>9</sup> A study explored that avoidance coping strategies are related to negative health outcomes.<sup>10</sup> Avoidant coping mechanism is in which person neither focus on the sources of the stress nor does he focus on his reactions towards stress, he just preferred to avoid the stress and stressors. A longitudinal study indicated a reciprocal relationship between stress and avoidance coping.<sup>11</sup> Old people who consider themselves as non-productive part of community deal with stressors with wide range of means which contradict to the young adults.<sup>12,13</sup> Efforts, hope, general health, pleasing oneself and social interaction have a relationship with recovery from age related changes.<sup>14</sup>

León and Marco reported the strong bivariatere-relationships between financial stress with prayer,

loneliness with book reading/watching television and listening music in elderly.<sup>15</sup> Although, there is rich contribution is available with particular to the poor living conditions and detailed work of stressors,<sup>2,3,5,7</sup> the scarcity of work in field of coping mechanisms of this population make it difficult to understand the strengths or weaknesses of this community. Current study will explore their personal potential or strength to find the appropriate ways to reduce the stress in birth hermaphrodites.

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research design was used to conduct the study and data were collected from 14 by-birth hermaphrodites from which 7 participants were group leaders and 7 were followers. Sample was selected via snow-ball sampling technique. In Pakistan, group leaders are known as "Guru or Master" while followers are known as "Chelas". Study data collected from different areas of Lahore and Sialkot city of Pakistan by using the Semi-structured interview protocol comprised of four

coping mechanisms domains including, emotion focused, avoidance focused, spiritual focused and problem focused.

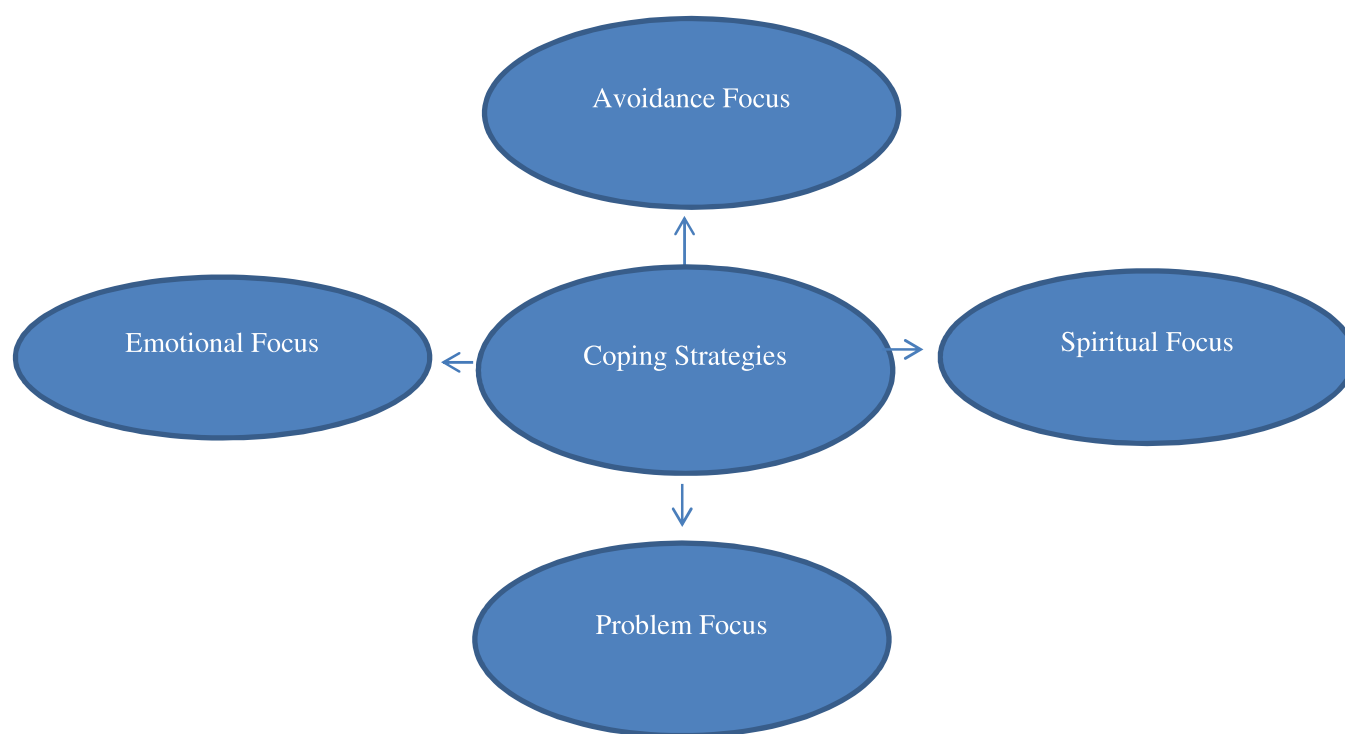
Ethical review board of Institute of Clinical Psychology, GCU Lahore approved the study and Informed Consent was given by all participants. Some of the participants, who experienced the emotional distress during the interview, were also provided with counseling strategies. Different skills, including relaxation exercise, deep breathing, and distraction strategies were taught to cope with emotional distress.

**Data Analysis:** Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the data to explore, describe and interpret the personal and social experiences of individuals.<sup>16</sup>

## RESULTS

Out of 14 participants, 7 were leaders and 7 were followers. Major coping strategies used are shown in the Figure. Major and subthemes of coping mechanisms used by subjects are detailed in the Table.

**Fig. Major Themes of Coping Strategies used by the Group Leaders and Followers.**



**Table. Major and Sub Themes of Coping Mechanisms Utilized by Hermaphrodites.**

Major Themes	Sub Themes	Group leaders	Followers
<b>Spiritual Coping</b>	<b>Positive Spiritual Coping</b>		
	-Praying	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
	-Recite the Holy Quran	1,2,4	1,2
	-Fasting	1,2,4	2
	-Secure relationship with God	1,3,4	2
	-Sense of being spiritual connectedness with others	1,4	1,4
	-Belief of meaningful life	2,6	2
	-Seeking spiritual support	1,3,4	2,3,5
	-Seeking religious forgiveness	5,6,7	4,7
	<b>Negative Spiritual Coping</b>		
	-Questioning the power of God	2,3,4,6,7	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
	-Expression of anger toward God	2,3,4,6,7	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
	-Interpersonal religious discontent	5	4,5,6,7
	-Spiritual discontent	4	1,6,3
	(Pargament et al, 1998)		
<b>Avoidance Coping</b>	<b>Avoidance at Behavioral Level</b>		
	-Dancing	3,4,5	1,2,3,4,5,7
	-Listening Music	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
	-Humorous talk with people	4,5,6	1,2,3,4,5,6
	-Sleeping	1,2,3,7	1,2
	-Withdrawal of task-oriented efforts	1,2,3,5,6,7	1,2,4,7
	-Drug consumption	5	1,3,4,5,6
	-Lying	1,4,5	1,2,3,5,7
	<b>Avoidance at Personal Level</b>		
	-Aloof	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	2
	-Quiet	2,3,7	2
	-Dependency	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	3,4
	-Waiting for miracle	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
	-Putting the problems out of mind	4	2
	-Denial	1,2,3,4,7	2,3,5
<b>Emotion Focused</b>	<b>Positive Emotion Coping Strategies</b>		
	-Humor	1,2,4,5,6,7	4,6,7
	-Self-appraisal	1,2,3,5	2,,3,4
	-Gratitude	2,4,6,7	4,6
	<b>Negative Emotion Coping Strategies</b>		

Major Themes	Sub Themes	Group leaders	Followers
	-Crying Spells	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	3,4,5,6
	-Aggression	5,7	1,2,3,4,5,7
	-Self-pity	1,2,3,4,5,6	3,5,7
	-Self-blame	4,5,6,7	3,4,5,6,7
	-Defensive	3,4,5,7	3,4,5,7
	-Suppression	1,2,3,4,5,6	2,4,6
<b>Problem Focused</b>	-Try to solve own problems	4	2,4
	- Guide others to solve their problems	2,4	2,5
	-leave the situation	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	1,2,4,5
	-Searching for work	2,4	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
	-Blame to others	2,3,4,5	2,3,5,6,7
	-Suicidal Attempt	1,3,4,5,6	1,3

## DISCUSSION

Through the IPA analysis, it was found that hermaphrodites use avoidance coping strategy at large than Spiritual, Emotion focused and Problem-solving coping strategies were highlighted.

In the domain of spiritual coping, group leaders illustrated positive spiritual coping mechanisms five times greater than followers, three themes were equally reported, while followers tend to fall in negative coping mechanisms more as compare to group leaders. As reported by the 3<sup>rd</sup> interviewee from followers. *We ever get instructions from our group leaders who are more religious and practice worship at large. They seemed to be contented as I never witnessed them by complaining to God due to the malfunctioning or disowned by their own family members, as compare to us. We get angry and showed the aggressive and complaining attitude towards our creation. However, in extreme form of stress we used to pray and ask help from God but that's not as much frequent."*

Above mentioned phenomenon of negative or unhealthy coping mechanism is explained by the Freud (1937) as defense mechanism of displacement. People tend to experience this condition in the form of extreme stress and in the condition of hopelessness. Might be followers showed the tendency of negative spiritual coping more due to extended practice of defense

mechanism.

From sub domains analysis, positive spiritual coping strategies were less likely reported by followers as compare to group leaders, the reason is reported by the follower as, *We spend the whole day and night in searching for the different work opportunities, where we did not find enough time for praying, and after returned the home we got enough tired that we could not fulfill the religious practice."*

With particular to the second domain of avoidance coping mechanisms it became evident that overall group leaders use the avoidance coping strategies at personal level more as compared to behavioral level, while followers use avoidance at behavioral level more as compared to group leaders. From six sub themes of avoidance at personal level, it was found that four domains were reported at large by group leaders and two themes were equally reported. Unhealthy coping mechanisms of 'Drug Consumption and Lying' were frequently reported by the followers. On the other side, group leaders reported the unhealthy coping mechanisms of 'dependency, aloof, denial and quiet' at large.

The most significant findings with respect to healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms were highlighted in the section of third particular domain of positive and negative emotion coping strategies. It was evident that in the form of extreme stress, whole community experienced the negative

emotion focused strategies more as compared to the positive one. Within the comparison of both groups, followers tend to use the negative emotion more as compared to positive one with contrast to the group leaders.

From the interviewee 5<sup>th</sup> follower reported, *We are disowned by our family members; society treated us like inhuman, received no care, love, affection and acceptance from caregivers. When we look injustice all around couldn't maintain control at our emotions and used to cry, became abusive and showed aggression towards the society and in our own peer group. It resulted in self-pity and used to blame ourselves due to our third-gender identity that leads toward much more negative consequences."*

On problem solving strategy, it was observed that followers used coping mechanism at large as compared to the group leaders, but when keenly observed the pattern of coping mechanisms, it revealed that most of coping mechanisms were the part of unhealthy ways used by the group leaders at large. Highlighted theme was the suicidal attempt, five out of seven interviewees reported the suicidal attempt as a solution to deal with the stressful situation. In the rest of themes most significant was to leave the situation.

With particular to this, 4<sup>th</sup> interviewee from the group leaders reported, *Sometimes we find very difficult to deal with the stressful situations particularly when we find disregard and disowned by our own hermaphrodite (hijra) community. Followers used to consider us as a burden and unproductive member of the community. Due to old age, we accept that we are unable to earn money through dance or any other mean, so due to this condition we have to face unjust in our own community too. Due to all this we tried to commit suicide and most of group leaders ended their lives through this way."* On the other side, followers showed the healthy coping tendency to solve their problems with their own effort and used to find different locations to extend their work or to get more money.

Government and few NGOs are currently working on the betterment of this marginalized society. Current study will provide a range of healthy/positive coping mechanisms that can be channelized

in their own hermaphrodite community and can guide others in much more appropriate way in their discomfort. It will be helpful for the health practitioners/psychiatrist/ psychologist to directly address these issues to turn the weakness into their strengths. Particular assessment tools can be developed by over considering the enlisted healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms. Sub themes and themes can be generated through triangulation of data.

Limitations of study include relying verbatim about their gender specification and no chromosomal or hormonal testing. In current study female ratio was relatively less than male in sample size, so it must be considered before generalizing the results.

## CONCLUSION

Group leaders and followers dealt with stressors differently and used healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms in different capacity. Overall, unhealthy coping mechanisms were in practice more as compared to the positive one. It is the need to highlight the strength of this marginalized population and to channelize their strengths to weaken the aspect of unhealthy coping mechanisms.

### Author contributions:

Conception and design: Tazvin , Razia  
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Analysis and interpretation of the data: Tazvin , Razia  
Drafting of the article: Razia  
Critical revision of the article for important intellectual content: Usman Ghani  
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**Conflict of Interest:** None declared. Current study is a part of MS. Clinical dissertation that was conducted at Unit of Clinical Psychology, GCU Lahore and at GC. Women University Sialkot in year of 2016-2018.  
Rec. Date: Jul 15, 2019 Revision Rec. Date: Sep 25, 2019 Accept Date: Nov 20, 2019

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