

## Helplessness and Stress Management among Adolescent Girls

Qudsiya Jan

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4681-7713>

Research Scholar, Department of Education, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, India

**Dr. Mohammad Iqbal Mattoo**

Professor, Department of Education, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, India

### Abstract

Stress management skills are essentially required for improving adolescents' behaviour and academic adjustment. Studies have consistently shown that adolescents with better stress management skills experience less stress. This study attempts to assess Kashmiri adolescent girls' helplessness and stress management. The study also aims to examine the relationship between helplessness and stress management. A total of 256 senior secondary school girls from Kashmir of the age group of 16 and 17 were included in the sample. The data was collected using two measures, the helplessness scale developed by Mathur and Bhatnagar (2012) and the Adolescents' Stress Management Scale (2021) developed by the researcher herself. The statistical techniques used in this study were frequency distribution, percentage analysis and Pearson product moment correlation. The results revealed that majority of senior secondary school girls were at high and at very high levels of helplessness. However, only a few senior secondary school girls demonstrated high levels of stress management. The results also indicated a significant negative relationship between helplessness and stress management. Interventions targeting stress management and life skills may help in reducing the high level of helplessness and psychiatric morbidity among adolescent girls of Kashmir. Therefore, it is important to cultivate effective stress management skills among adolescent girls.

**Keywords:** Adolescents; coping; helplessness; passivity; stressors; stress management

### Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional stage and the most rapid phase of human development. The beginning of adolescence is characterized by a huge leap in physical, neurobiological, cognitive,

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social, and affective changes (Krapic et al., 2015). The period of adolescence is also accompanied by excessive advancements such as high parental expectations, academic pressure, conflicts with peers and family members, identity and role confusion, and financial pressures. These changes can undermine adolescents' mental health. During adolescence, academic achievements and failures determine future academic careers and employment opportunities (Rana & Mahmood, 2010). Therefore, young people are generally at a perceived risk of experiencing anxiety, frustration, and helplessness, which in turn affects their academic performance. Peterson et al. (1993) posited that helplessness is shown by a student's inactivity, which is caused by changes in how they think and feel, loss of motivation, and lack of confidence in one's own abilities. Helplessness is when an individual's actions and efforts do not have a positive effect on the results. In the academic world, helplessness is mainly described as passivity especially in those academic and non-academic activities that require persistence. Signs and symptoms of helplessness are loss of a sense of personal power, inability to initiate plans and set goals, lack of self-confidence and trust, negative outlook of life, and passive behavior in the face of challenges (Devda, 2015). Learned helplessness is defined as motivational, cognitive and emotional deficits that occur when a person is exposed to stressful situation (Isaacovitz & Seligman, 2007). Students with learned helplessness may be characterized by the belief that they are unable to see the connection between effort and results. After repeated failures, they become victims of this conviction and belief that negative events are uncontrollable and overwhelming and that failures are due to their poor abilities. These characteristics not only reduce their persistence and effort (Elliott & Dweck, 1988) but also worsen their academic performance (Filippello, et al., 2018; Filippello et al., 2017; Filippello, et al., 2015; Sorrenti et al., 2016). Helpless students engage themselves in various work avoidance strategies, or simply give up trying and leave it altogether. They develop a negative attitude towards tasks and become overwhelmed by anxiety and frustration (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Ruthig, et al., 2008). They tend to believe that they will never succeed in school for a variety of reasons, including their perceived inability and the difficulty of the tasks. They attribute their failures to personal

inadequacy, low intelligence, poor memory or reduced problem-solving ability. Such students also believe that the events they are exposed to are always inevitable and beyond their control. They feel stressed due to increased workload, unclear tasks, and time pressure. Learned helplessness theorists Abramson et al. (1978) proposed that the key cognitive factors associated with depression are the attributional style with which an individual tends to explain the causes of positive and negative events. The reformulated learned helplessness theory of depression posits that individuals who explain negative events with a pessimistic approach are prone to depression after a negative event. Learned helplessness hinders academic success, as the students experiencing learned helplessness believe that they are unable to deal with the situation effectively (Filippello, et al., 2020; Mcacatca, et al., 2007; Sorrenti, et al., 2016; Valas, 2001). A student who constantly fails in school eventually stops trying because of the belief that he cannot succeed. Gernigon et al. (2000) conducted a study on failure under controlled and uncontrolled conditions and revealed that learned helplessness can hinder education. Students' high levels of helplessness and stress can undermine educational efforts and affect students' mental and physical well-being. Therefore, effective stress management skills help young people reduce their stress levels. Adler and Park (2003) stated that appropriate and effective stress management can buffer the negative impact of stressful situation on individual's physical and mental health. Stress management is defined as the individual's efforts to deal with challenging circumstances. The stress management process does not appear to be unidimensional, but rather multidimensional. There have been different stress management styles. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) presented the well-known distinction between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. More direct forms of stress management include strategies like problem-focused coping, or primary management, and strategies aimed at modifying the stressful situation. However, indirect forms of stress management include strategies like emotion-focused coping, secondary management, or avoidance. These strategies are aimed at regulating negative emotions associated with stress. Problem-focused stress management emphasizes managing the situation that produces stress. It includes taking systematic measures to avoid the stressor and its harmful

effects. It is considered an adaptive way to deal with stress, especially when individuals perceive the stressful situation as manageable (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Compas et al., 2001). Emotion-focused stress management emphasizes the regulation of affective responses. Ignoring, distancing from the stressor, excessive worry or anger are all included in emotion-focused stress management (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Enhancing adolescents' stress management skills is very important in order to facilitate their capacity to overcome helplessness and successfully deal with challenging circumstances in academic life. The present study will evaluate and address these intricate constructs. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to assess helplessness and stress management of Kashmiri adolescent girls and also to investigate the relationship between helplessness and stress management.

### **Objectives of the study**

- ✓ To assess the levels of helplessness among senior-secondary school girls of Kashmir.
- ✓ To assess the levels of stress management among senior-secondary school girls of Kashmir.
- ✓ To find the relation between helplessness and stress management of senior-secondary school girls of Kashmir.

### **Hypothesis**

H<sub>01</sub> There is no significant relationship between helplessness and stress management of senior secondary school girls of Kashmir.

### **Method and Procedure**

#### **❖ Sample**

The sample of the present study consisted of 256 senior-secondary school girls of Kashmir division. Simple Random Sampling Technique was used to obtain the data for the study.

#### **❖ Tools Used**

- Helplessness scale developed by Mathur and Bhatnagar (2012) was used. The scale was administered on adolescents of the age group 14+. The scale consists 22 items in eight

dimensions which include Susceptibility, coping difficulties, Inadequacy, Failure to invariants and negative events or uncontrollable factors, Anxious over concern and fruitless tendency to worry, Syndrome of cognitive motivational disturbance, Problem avoidance and low cognition and Lack of self evaluation and self esteem.

- Adolescents' Stress Management Scale constructed by Jan and Mattoo (2021). A five point Likert type scale having 34 items which measure four dimensions (Understanding Stress, Stress Tolerance, Effectual Communication and Regular Physical Activities) of stress management.

#### ❖ Statistical Treatment

This study employed a cross-sectional design by using standardized tools. The data was processed with the help of MS Excel 2019 and IBM SPSS 23. Considering the objectives of the study, the gathered data was subjected to frequency distribution, percentage analysis and Pearson product moment correlation.

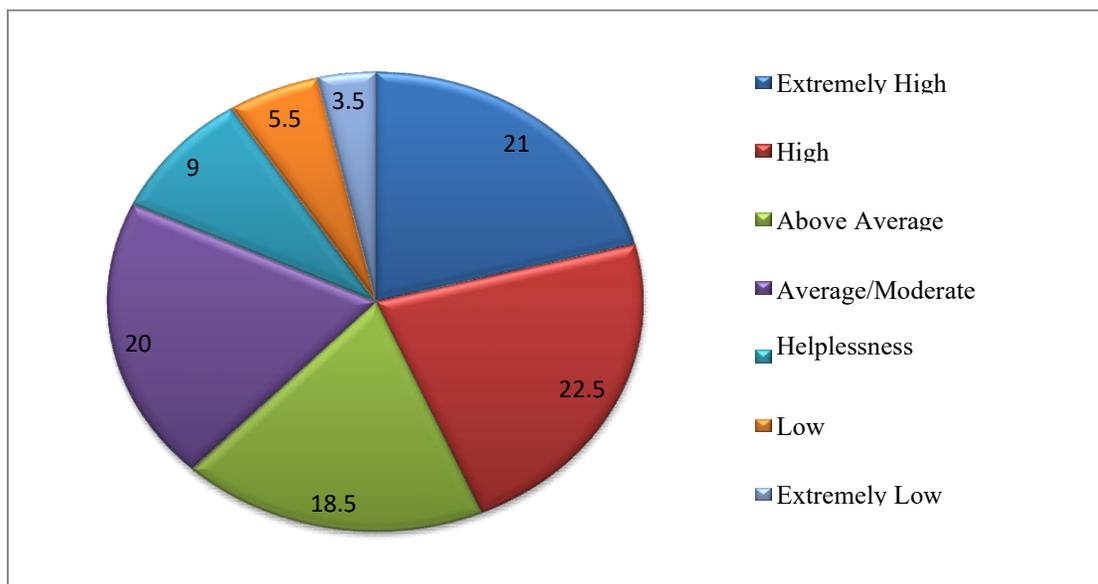
## Results

**Table 1.1: Overall Frequency distribution levels of Helplessness among Adolescent Girls**

Level	Rang	N	%age
Extremely High Helplessness	89 & above	52	21.0
High Helplessness	82-89	55	22.5
Above Average Helplessness	76-82	47	18.5
Average/Moderate Helplessness	66-76	46	20.0
Below Average Helplessness	60-66	28	9.0
Low Helplessness	53-60	11	5.5
Extremely Low Helplessness	53&below	17	3.5
<b>Total</b>		<b>256</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table depicts the overall frequency levels of helplessness among adolescent girls. The results of the table indicates that 21.0% adolescent girls have extremely high level of helplessness, 22.5% adolescent girls have high level of helplessness, 18.5% adolescent girls have above average level of helplessness, 20.0% adolescent girls have average/ moderate level of helplessness, 9.0% adolescent girls have below average level of helplessness, 5.5% adolescent girls have low level of helplessness and 3.5% adolescent girls have extremely low level of helplessness.

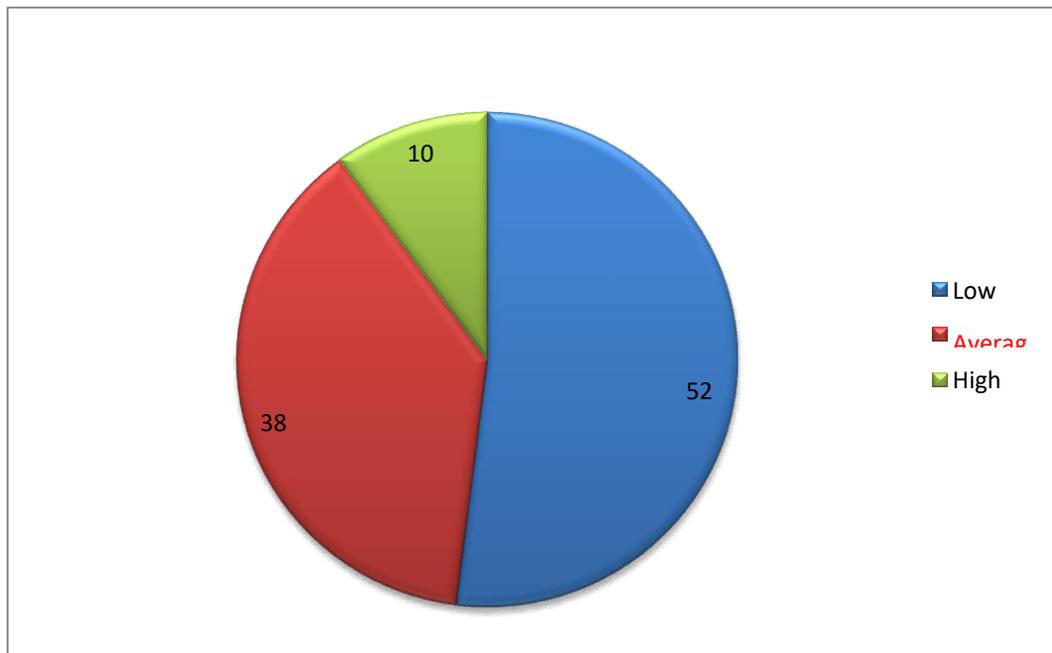
**Fig1.1: Overall Frequency distribution level of Helplessness among Adolescent Girls**



**Table 1.2: Overall Frequency distribution level of Stress Management among Adolescent Girls**

Levels of Stress Management	Rang	N	Percentage
Low	97&above	130	52.0
Average	50-96	86	38.0
High	49&below	40	10.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>256</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The above table shows the overall frequency levels of stress management among adolescent girls. The result shows that 52.0% adolescent girls have low level of stress management, 38.0% adolescent girls have average level of stress management and only 1.0% adolescent girls have high level of stress management.



**Fig. 1.2: Overall Frequency distribution of level of Stress Management among Adolescent Girls**

**Table1.3: Correlation coefficient between Helplessness and Stress Management among Adolescent Girls**

	Stress Management	P
Helplessness	-.288	.019**

\*\*Significant at .01 level

The above table shows the correlation coefficient between helplessness and stress management among adolescent girls is (-.288). The results reveal that there is significant negative relationship between helplessness and stress management among adolescent girls.

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Thus higher level of helplessness among adolescent girls will create lower level of stress management among them and vice versa.

### **Discussion:**

According to the results of the current study, a large proportion of the sample of Kashmiri adolescent girls is extremely helpless. The possible explanation may be Adolescence is a rigorous and stressful stage of life, and at this time of transition, adolescent girls typically experience greater pressures from their studies, society, and employment. The study's findings indicated that adolescent girls are more likely to adopt inadequate stress management techniques. These results were different from those of the previous study, which showed that female students utilize more constructive coping mechanisms Ni and co. (2012). The findings of the present study, however, are consistent with Folkman's (1980) findings which reveal that female students preferred emotional or negative coping mechanisms over positive ones. Adolescence is thought to be accompanied by significant factors including high parental expectations, academic pressure, interpersonal issues, disagreements with family members and sometimes with friends, identity and role confusion, and financial demands that can make adolescent girls anxious. The circumstance overwhelms the adolescents and causes them to feel nervous and distressed when multiple stressors occur at once. Overreaction, perplexity, and difficulty focusing are all symptoms of anxiety. These elements may have a negative impact on the adolescent girls' coping competence. This study revealed a substantial inverse association between helplessness and stress management in Kashmiri adolescent girls. This demonstrates that higher the level of helplessness among adolescent girls poor will be there level of stress management. A possible explanation may be that helpless students are characterized by the belief that they are not in control of their academic activities and are unable to see the connection between effort and outcomes. They fall victim to the notion that unfavorable circumstances are beyond of their control and that their failures are the result of their limited abilities after experiencing repeated failures. These characteristics affect not only their tenacity and effort but also their ability to regulate stress (Elliott & Dweck, 1988).

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## Conclusion:

The aim of this study was to assess helplessness and stress management among adolescent girls of Kashmir. The results showed that senior secondary school girls are helpless to a high level. It was also found that senior secondary school girls in Kashmir manage their stress less effectively. They lack effective strategies and skills to cope with challenging life circumstances. Furthermore, a significant negative correlation was found between helplessness and stress management among senior secondary school girls in Kashmir. There is an urgent need to develop stress management interventions and life skills to reduce the high levels of helplessness and psychiatric morbidity among adolescent girls in Kashmir. Adolescent girls of Kashmir are required to improve their quality of life and to engage in effective relaxation techniques. This study had some limitations. The coping strategies of senior secondary school girls in Kashmir may be influenced by regional and cultural factors, thus the ability to generalize the results of this study to the larger population needs to be considered. Second, the study was cross-sectional in nature and reported the association between helplessness and stress management strategies. However, the association can only give a hint about the causal connection. In the future, prospective and longitudinal studies are needed, such as experimental study in order to test whether training in coping strategies can have an influence on health of adolescents. Despite the limitation, our study has several strengths. Unlike most previous reports that focus primarily on adolescent stress and coping strategies, this study examines helplessness and the use of stress management strategies among adolescent girls in Kashmir. It provides important information about helplessness and stress management competence that is essentially required during adolescence.

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