

Creativity as a respite during COVID-19: A Study on selected Psychological Factors

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ABSTRACT

Creativity is not only encompassed by the artists and scientists, as it is not limited to art and creation but it goes deeper. As everybody encompasses creativity as we use it now and then in the form of critical thinking, problem-solving, and meeting up a deadline or dealing with everyday challenges. With people being cooped up in their homes, level of one's creativity impacted happiness, coping, meaning-making, and stress during the challenging phase of COVID-19. This paper aimed to study the role of creativity in impacting happiness, coping, meaning-making, and stress during the pandemic among college students. The data was collected online from 371 college students of various universities and colleges in the city of Jaipur, India. The findings suggest that creativity tend to enhance happiness and meaning-making among the population, by enhancing the coping strategies of an individual. It was also found that stress tend to decrease when one engages in creativity and creative tasks even in the situation of challenge and panic.

You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have- Maya Agleou

Introduction

Creativity not only defines the artists, yet it is something that almost all of us hold within ourselves. Creativity is not just defined by how one engages with art or science, but it's more than that. It is something that all of us use in our day-to-day existence either for critical thinking, helping others or resolving an issue, deciding what to wear, how to decorate a room, or more.

Sometimes it is noted that the creativity of the individual gets on a new high when exposed to the seemingly larger world i.e. the college environment. This environment has found to have a lot of new experiences with the fluctuating level of stressors and to resolve those issues a new set of skills, abilities, responsibilities, and ideas are required every time. These actions tend to affect our happiness, coping strategy, stress, and meaning of life to a great extent, as this is the path to our journey to a better future at every level whether career, personal life, or social life. How to deal with these situations depends on one's ability to innovatively deal with the situations. This innovation or creativity tended to make the individual's life easier and more exciting at the same time. This has also been seen during the time of pandemic when people who used creative ways in overcoming their stressors and finding meaning in life were found to be happier at times, with a good coping strategy, a lesser level of stress, and also had some goal to accomplish in that challenging phase of life for the better future. For some people creativity has worked as a cathartic way of dealing with the stress and problems they were going through in that phase.

Creativity

Creativity is a social and psychological phenomenon that is shaped by societal norms and can be either fostered or hindered by social influences. A key environmental situation where creativity plays a crucial role is the workplace or academic setting, where interaction between an individual and their surroundings impacts the innovation process. On a personal level, creativity encompasses cognitive processes, personality traits, and the dynamic interplay of thought, inspiration, emotions, and personal characteristics within a given environment (Cropley, A., 2011). Another important view that defines creativity as an ability to generate or develop original ideas, theories, methods, or works. As per research highly creative individuals often exhibit originality, imagination, and

expressiveness, making creativity a resilient and enduring trait (American Psychological Association). This tends to make people confident about themselves and make them stress-free after any stressful events. It is considered as one of the most complex patterns of human behavior, influenced by a diverse range social, formative, developmental, and educational experiences. These influences contribute to creativity in various ways across different fields. Perspectives on the origins of creativity vary, with no single theory fully explaining the creative process. Creativity in its totality is often seen as a divine quality, serendipity, strategic thinking, perseverance, and strategy. These things tend to enhance creativity to a great extent (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

Happiness

There are two psychological references to happiness. First, the term "happiness" is an umbrella for a number of ideas of well-being. These theories also include positive attitudes about oneself and the outside world. Second, most theorists in the psychology of emotions have regarded happiness as a fundamental emotion. This chapter emphasized happiness as a measure of well-being (Kaczmarek, 2017). Most authors like Czapiński, Peeters, Diener, and Kahneman use happiness as a substantial psychological term within prosperity writing while Seligman considers happiness excessively clumsy for a psychological term (Synder & Lopez, 2002). Happiness is a pluralistic term because it is defined in various ways depending on the setting where it is used and the sort of professional gathering that introduces it into their terminology (Kaczmarek, 2017). Additionally, research has found statistically significant associations between happiness and creativity. The findings also reveal that level of happiness vary between individuals who are subjectively creative and those who are not, suggesting that creativity may play a role in overall wellbeing (Dirzyte, 2021).

Coping

Cope is a term used in the psychological worldview, derived from the Latin word "colpus," which means "to adjust". It denotes to the process of dealing with and attempting to overcome challenges and difficulties (Merriam-Webster). The coping, has been used or explored across various domains including as a perspective, personality trait, and in a social setting. Lazarus and his colleagues conceptualized coping as the use of cognitive and social efforts to battle demands that surpass an

individual's resources. Their approach emphasizes coping as a process rather than a fixed personality trait, it also highlights the importance of situational specificity inducing that coping responses depend on the nature of the stressor rather than being an overall physiological response. Additionally, this perspective does not specify or explain coping based on its outcome (be it positive or negative), distinguishing it from the concept of mastery that focuses only on successful adaptation (Sharma. M., 2003). Decades of research in the social and clinical sciences have investigated coping in many domains across the lifetime, Coping is a fundamental process essential to transformation and survival and illustrates how people recognise, appraise, manage, and benefit from stressful experiences (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2016). According to mainstream research that measures individual differences and correlates of coping, coping can directly influence the development of psychopathology and resilience as well as support or exacerbate the impacts of stress on mental and physical health and functioning (Blum, 2012).

Meaning-making

"Meaning-making" designates the process through which individuals interpret situations, events, objects, or conversations, based on their prior information and experiences. The concept of "learning as meaning-making" highlights how individuals actively engage in understanding new situations by drawing from their past experiences and available social resources. This perspective also underscores the role of personal identity and emotions in the learning process, as individuals make sense of their surroundings and integrate new knowledge into their existing understanding (Zittoun & Brinkmann, n.d.). Research suggests that having a strong sense of purpose in life, along with intrinsic goals and religiosity or spirituality, puts individuals in a better position to grow from negative life experiences. Additionally, engaging in volunteerism encourages one to have an outward-looking perspective, helping individuals develop and reinforce personal values. This in turn enhances their resilience and ability to navigate life's challenges more effectively throughout everyday life (Meng & Dillon, 2014). By applying the Four C model of creativity on such responses, researchers have acknowledged that this time has been and continues to be filled with distress and uncertainty. They have suggested that creative thinking across different domains can help make sense of recent events. Furthermore, they propose that engaging in creative activities can act as a buffer or resistance against the negative effects of experiencing the pandemic, offering a means of coping and resilience (Kapoor & Kaufman, 2020).

Stress during COVID

Stress holds different meanings for individuals depending on their circumstances. Hans Selye, has provided one of the earliest and most widely accepted definitions, explaining stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand or request (Tan & Yip, 2018). Traditionally the idea of homeostasis, refers to maintaining stability through constancy was considered the main mechanism through which the body overcomes the stress. However, this perspective has evolved into the concept of allostasis which means achieving stability through change. Instead of simple keeping things constant, the brain and body continuously adjust to challenges, helping one adapt to stressful situations more effectively (Fink, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic is a worldwide global public health crisis with significant human, social, and economic repercussions. In addition to its direct impact of pandemic, the preventive 'lockdown' measures have contributed to a parallel mental health crisis, leading to heightened emotional turmoil, with increased levels of prolonged stress across populations. Developing effective strategies to help individuals cope during and beyond the pandemic is essential. Research highlights stress reappraisal interventions as a potentially effective and cost-efficient approach to managing pandemic related stress and mitigating its adverse effects on one's wellbeing (Hagger et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has brought exceptional uncertainty and challenges to both the global economy and individuals' regular day-to-day existence. Recounted scientific evidence has suggested the existence of a positive relationship between the experience of crisis and heightened creativity. Creative innovation has been linked to higher levels of overall wellbeing and flourishing. Furthermore, individualism has been identified as a key variable effecting this relationship, as it moderates the positive coping impact of creativity on both personal growth and flourishings (Tang, M., 2021).

Methodology

Objective:

In the present research, we aimed to study the following objectives:

1. To study the relation between creativity on the level of happiness among college students.
2. To study the relation between creativity on Coping among college students.
3. To study the relation between creativity on Meaning-making among college students.

4. To study the relation between creativity on COVID-19 stress among college students during COVID-19.

Hypothesis:

Based on the review literature, here are the following hypothesis:

1. Creativity is significantly related to happiness among college students.
2. Creativity is significantly related to coping among college students.
3. Creativity is significantly related to meaning-making among college students.
4. Creativity is significantly related to COVID-19 stress among college students.

Research Methods:

Primary data for this research was collected through online questionnaires which were distributed via social media platforms among college students studying online during the COVID-19 pandemic using Google Forms. College students were chosen as the sample because they faced significant challenges in adjusting to their studies, personal life, and social interactions during this period. A sample of 415 were gathered from students across various cities of Assam, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, UP, Rajasthan, MP, Bihar, Punjab, Delhi, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Tripura, and West Bengal. After validating the responses, 371 were considered suitable for analysis. The selected participants were within the age range of 18-25 years. According to Sekaranand & Bougie (2016), a sample size range from 30 to 500 is considered sufficient and acceptable for social science research. This study aims to examine the effect of creativity on the level of happiness, coping, meaning-making, and stress levels among college students at the time of COVID-19.

Research design

The research employed a correlational study. It's non-experimental research that tends to study the relationship between two variables with the help of correlation (Anastasi, 1988). In this research, the relationship of creativity was found with happiness, coping, meaning-making, and COVID stress. Hence, the correlation among them was assessed.

Research instruments

In the current research, the following instruments were used:

1. **Kaufman Domains of Creativity Scale (K-Docs)** was developed by J.C. Kaufman in 2012. The scale consists of 50 items and has a 5-point scale; the scale is used to measure creativity in the 5 domains like self/every day, scholarly, performance, science, and arts among the individuals. The reliability of the scale was found to be ranging from 0.81 to 0.92 of Cronbach's alpha reliability and validity were found to be ranging from 0.37 to 0.75.
2. **The Subjective Happiness Scale (GHS)** was developed by psychologists Lyubomirsky & Lepper in 1999. The questionnaire consists of 4-items and has a 7-point scale. The scale is used to measure the general happiness among individuals. The test-retest reliability of the questionnaire was found to be ranging from 0.55 to 0.90 and convergent validity was found to be ranging from 0.52 to 0.72.
3. **Brief Resilient Coping Scale (BRCS)** was developed by Sinclair & Wallson in 2004. The scale consists of 4 items and has a 5-point scale. The scale is used to measure the tendency to effectively use coping strategies inflexible, committed ways to actively solve problems despite stressful circumstances. The reliability of the scale was found to be 0.71 and the validity of the same was found to be 0.59.
4. **The flourishing Scale** was developed by Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener in 2009. The scale consists of 8 statements and has a 7-point scale. The scale is used to measure self-perceived success in important areas of life. The reliability of the scale was found to be 0.95 and the validity of the scale was found to be 0.79.
5. **Covid-19 Student Stress Questionnaire** was developed by MC Zurlo in 2020. The scale consists of 7 items and has a 5-point scale. The scale is used to measure the stress accompanied by the COVID-19 virus. The reliability of the scale was found to be 0.95 and the validity of the scale was found to be 0.75.

Sampling technique

The purposive sampling technique is a sampling approach, which is frequently employed in implementation research, involves identifying and selecting cases that are particularly rich in

information about the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, Horwitz, et.al., 2015). This method was employed to collect the data from the college students using Google Forms. The sample of only those college students was incorporated in the research who were actively studying during COVID- 19 pandemic through different virtual platforms.

Sample

The study sample comprised college students from various private and government colleges and universities aged between the of 18-25 years. The sample was collected using the Google form link that has been shared on social media platforms (WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram). The link was shared among the 700 students engaged in virtual learning during the pandemic, yielding 415 responses. After assessing the responses authenticity from the gathered data 371 participants were selected for the final analysis.

Ethical Statement

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the test constructor for research uses, and informed consent was secured from all the participants.

Statistical Technique- To examine the effect of creativity on the level of happiness, coping, meaning-making, and stress among college students, a correlation technique was used using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 21.0.

Table 1: Results

	Coping	Happiness	COVID stress	Flourishing	Creativity
Coping	1	.433**	-.282**	.538**	.420**
Happiness	.433**	1	-.216**	.648**	.469**
COVID stress	-.282**	-.216**	1	-.367**	-.129*
Flourishing	.538**	.648**	-.367**	1	.491**
Creativity	.420**	.469**	-.129*	.491**	1

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

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

Discussion

COVID-19 pandemic was a testing time for everyone locked in their homes, working from home and having less access to the outside world and their regular lives pre-pandemic. In these trying times people found respite in creatively engaging which helps in adapting to changing times (Kapoor & Kaufman, 2020).

This study aims to explore the impact of creativity on happiness, coping, meaning-making, and stress among college students during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 371 students who were engaged in online learning during pandemic, participated in this study through online survey collected using Google Forms. The data was analyzed using correlational techniques to derive inferences of the outcome. According to the findings, happiness, coping, and flourishing are all positively correlated with creativity, however, COVID stress is inversely connected with it at the significance level of 0.01. Happiness and creativity are positively correlated, with a correlation coefficient of 0.469** and a significance level of 0.01, meaning that as creativity increases, so does happiness. Students who studied using a conventional style had lower levels of happiness and creativity than those who worked with positive emotions tend to indulge in the newer and trending contents of the subjects they were studying. (Caballero-García et al., 2018). During pandemics, students who participated in daily dairy creative were found to be happier than their peers (Karwowski et al., 2021). This has also been said by Maili, 2023 in the blog that self-efficacy, which is similarly strongly correlated with well-being and happiness, was found to be less accurate at predicting subjective well-being than creativity. It has also highlighted that self-rated creativity establishes a positive relationship with happiness among young adults and working adults.

Additionally, at the acceptable level of 0.01 (0.402), it was demonstrated that there is a positive and substantial correlation between creativity and coping. Children will therefore, as their creativity expands, develop more efficient and healthy coping techniques. Creativity is used as a coping mechanism to lessen stress and the symptoms of mental illness through catharsis and the instillation of innovative ideas for solving difficulties. Additionally, it helps people cope more effectively. It was also revealed that it had a lot of positive effects on people and helped them modify their ideas to practice positive psychology. Additionally, it was found that being creative

is a good habit (East, 2016). Researchers have also shown a strong connection between creativity and efficient coping strategies (Benedek, Bruckdorfer, & Jauk, 2019; Wu & Wu, 2020). McConatha, 2021 in her blog has emphasised on the role of creativity in coping with the challenging situations. She has mentioned that getting creative is one method to deal with stressful situations. As it help one develop resiliency during trying times. Individual's life can revolve around creativity, which is linked to engagement, originality, experimentation, and problem-solving. Everyone can be creative, and it can do so in a variety of ways.

As a result, a positive correlation between creativity and flourishing was found, with a value of 0.491**, at the significance level of 0.05. Because it tends to provide us with a unique perspective on life, creativity, therefore, aids in helping us make sense of it. It also tends to generate concepts and solutions successfully and swiftly. Additionally, it encourages people's healthy psychological and social growth. According to some researchers, it seems to support the increased emphasis on ordinary creativity as a tactic for fostering optimal psychological functioning (Conner et al., 2016). According to Smith, Pickering, and Bhattacharya (2022), daily creative activity is associated with more flourishing.

It was found that there was a negative correlation between students' levels of creativity and COVID stress in this study, with a value of -0.129* at a significance level of 0.05. This suggests that stress tends to decrease as creativity increases. Consequently, taking part in creative pursuits can help one lower life's stress. Students who participate in creative pursuits have reduced stress, and the associated positive outlook improves students manage their stress (Rastogi, 2018). According to research by Fiori, Fischer, and Barabasch (2002), creative individuals appear to experience less stress even in pandemic and challenging situations. In the course of the research, it should be noted that all variables correlate positively with one another, except for COVID stress, which correlates negatively. At the 0.01 level, each of these associations is significant. Therefore, when people's levels of creativity, happiness, coping, and flourishing tend to enhance together, their levels of stress will decline. Creativity provided as a respite in facing the COVID-19 stressors and brought about a positive engagement by egaging in creative acts thereby experience of happiness, flourishing and acting as a means of coping with the changes circumstances. It was reported by the sample and review of literature corroborates that people engaged in everyday creativity like cooking, gardening, dancing (Berman, 2022). Kiernan, et al. (2021) have reported listening to

music, playing music, dancing and singing as a means of emotional regulation and methods of dealing with stress and spending the free time that pandemic induced lockdown provided them with.

According to a recent study out of New Zealand, “engaging in creative activities contributes to a "upward spiral" of positive emotions, psychological well-being, and feelings of "flourishing" in life” (Gregoire, 2016). Jacobs, 2014 highlighted the importance of creativity by conducting a research on college students done at the University of North Carolina - Greensboro, "those who reported feeling happy and active were more likely to be doing something creative at the time." Various other organizations and dignified people have focused on its importance as according to Pacific Standard Journal, People can explore their identities, build new relationships, develop their skills, and think critically about the world by engaging in creative activities. In turn, the new information, self-awareness, and connections act as sources of fortitude and resilience. Adding on to this a by CNN's Amanda Enayati has clearly shown a connection between creativity and improved mental and physical wellness. People who create are happier, less worried, more resilient, and better able to solve problems when faced with difficulty (Gorman, 2018).

Conclusion

The goal of the current research was to determine how creativity affected college students' levels of happiness, coping skills, sense-making, and stress. In this regard, data was gathered utilizing the Google form link, and after that, SPSS was used for scoring and analysis. A correlation between coping, meaning-making, and stress was conducted to ascertain the impact of creativity on happiness. With a significance level of 0.01, it was discovered that there was a positive correlation between creativity, happiness, coping, and flourishing, and these all have a negative correlation with stress. This means that while all four of these traits tend to improve when present, stress tends to decrease as they do. This can be expressed as follows: The happiness of the individual rises with increased creativity, which also promotes positive and healthy coping mechanisms used to give one significance in life and improve psychological and social functioning. Additionally, engaging in creative activities and thought processes reduces stress. Therefore, in addition, creativity may be improved by fostering a caring environment, promoting autonomy, praising oneself for coming

up with an original and creative solution, finding a novel way to go around a difficulty, shattering established mental frames, rethinking issues, and practicing meditation. All of these things can be very beneficial in helping people find their purpose in life, be happy, develop healthy coping mechanisms, and experience less stress. This will increase work productivity, and personal accountability, and will help people become more independent and self-assured.

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