

## A comparative aggressiveness and assertiveness in coping style students

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Assertiveness behavior may lead to failure of passive behaviors such as shyness and withdrawal, and in some people, can lead to aggression. The purpose of the present research was to compare the coping styles with assertiveness and aggressiveness in students Imam Khomeini International University.

**Methods:** The number of samples in this research includes 200 university students (121 females and 79 males) from Imam Khomeini International University were selected using random cluster sampling and completed the coping styles (CISS) and interpersonal responsibility models (IRM). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics; one-way analysis of variance and T-test.

**Results:** The difference between the behavior aggression and the coping style was 55.31 and the difference between the behavior assertiveness and coping style was 7.03. Also, data indicated there was a relationship between assertiveness and aggressiveness students who have variety coping styles. On the other hand, students who have problem focused coping style, were more assertive and students who have emotion focused coping style, were more aggressive. Also, there was no relationship between females and males assertiveness. However, there was a significant relationship between female and male aggression. Male students were more aggressive than females.

**Conclusion:** Considering the positive relationship between assertiveness and aggressiveness with coping style students, and attention to problem focused coping style can reduce aggression and improve assertiveness in students.

**Declaration of Interest:** None

**Key words:** Stress, Coping styles, Assertiveness, Aggressiveness

### Introduction

Aggressive behavior can influence social life, job, family and personal practices and determines how people react to stressors and environmental pressure (1). Interpersonal conflicts caused by organic or neurological disorders and interpersonal relationships with increased *momentum* and mental illness and the lack of influence of chemical inhibitors besides reduction of internal control, the

balance disrupted and cause aggression provided (2). Hulce and Wright attempted to define the distinction between the terms anger, hostility and aggression as defined them as a mental state of emotional arousal, a feedback with a long-term evaluation of others and events, an overt behavior involving and harming to others, respectively; yet, they define and approve the terms which are related to each other (3). Aggression refers to hostile,

destructive and violent behavior, and includes the potential behavior for injury and damage to the target (4). Most of the early theories failed to study the role of cognition on aggression, and instead focused on the basic role of mechanisms, so that emotional discharge theory of Freud and Frustration-aggression theory Dollard can be seen. However, research and theories about aggression indicate that aggression is usually caused instinctively, but largely due to cognition. Individuals' cognitions operate as an intermediary between the instincts of aggression and its detection in behavior, and more important formation of individuals' cognitions from environments and behaviors can be the best response (5).

Salter (1991) addressed assertiveness training method. He has focused on expressing emotions, expressing the opposite view, adoption of opinion from others; use the pronouns "I and Smartass" (6). Assertiveness is a favorable behavioral feature, which relates totally to social competences, mentioned a skill and speech technique in social situations (7). Some know assertiveness and aggression the same, but there is a major difference between these two. Psychologists believe that the inability in assertiveness, leads to different behaviors and reactions in people. Assertiveness behavior may lead to failure of passive behaviors such as shyness and withdrawal, and in some people, can lead to aggression (8). Assertiveness in communication is distinct from aggression. Major differences in communication lie in the rights of the individual (7). Aggressive individuals in a behavioral situation express their rights, but they do not respect the rights of others (9). Aggressive behaviors, including getting the right of others, foreclose the right of choice from others, preventing others from realizing potential existence of other (10). Assertive individuals are satisfied with their jobs, relationships, family members and friends and the others are considered to be effective and worthwhile on their view (11).

The term "coping" has been originated from the Latin word, *Calpus*, which is changing, and generally is applied in the psychological pattern expressed as treating as well as making efforts to cope with problems (12). Coping

styles are the responses that are useful and effective and may reduce the stressful problems. The effectiveness of coping styles in their ability to reduce the immediate distress and also for long-term outcomes such as psychological well-being and chaotic situations has been reported (13). On the other hand, one of the most important theories about coping styles is the very theory of Endler and Parker (1990) that coping strategies were divided into three categories (14): 1- focuses oriented strategy, that requires for being acquired with information about the stressful situation and its possible consequences. People, who use this approach, try to prioritize their activities according to the importance of this approach and use the management time to engage in those activities. 2- Emotion oriented strategy: This strategy involves finding ways to control emotions and trying to be hopeful when confronted with stressful situations. People, who use this method, while they have control over their emotions, might express the feelings such as anger or frustration. 3- Avoidance oriented strategy: This strategy requires deny or minimize stressful situations. People who use this strategy, ignore thinking stressful thoughts and they replace it with another, so that people could classify stressful situations (15). Research carried out regarding the role of personality factors and coping strategies are mainly based on three models. This study is based on the final model, that is, interactive model. Extensive research in the biological, medical and psychological fields on both humans and animals support that there are various factors that influence the type of coping style including type of gene, ontogenesis, adult experiences and social support (16).

Research in Kalubrisy study including examination of sexual assertiveness-communication among female students came to the conclusion that high levels of sexual assertiveness leads to decreased sexual abuse. In a study entitled "comparison of mental well-being and coping styles in mothers of children with normal hearing and deaf children, concluded that there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of cognitive coping style so that mothers of deaf

children used the cognitive coping style less than the mothers of children with normal hearing (17).

In research investigated the relationship between assertiveness, self-esteem, social anxiety, and the results showed that training assertiveness in psychiatric patients has led to improvement of behavioral components (18). In other research by Aschabr (19) as the effectiveness of interventions at the level of social aggression in a few classes, the results suggest that the social aggression influenced of intervention in boys reduced, but there was no change in girls' behavior.

Since a large part of our nation's population consist of students, in addition, some young people have no control of their anger and do not differentiate between the assertiveness and aggression. Also, in times of stress, some young people do not have a strong coping style. Therefore, the present study is important because it is necessary to familiarize students with the skill of expressing an opinion and effective coping style with stressful situations. Considering the role of personality in the use of coping styles, this study was designed and conducted to answer these hypothesis to compare aggressiveness and assertiveness in coping styles people in students.

### **Method**

In this study, participants answer the questionnaires of coping inventory for stressful situation and interpersonal responsibility models. The study's population included all students of the Imam Khomeini International University (2012-2013) of whom, 60.5% and 39.5% consists of females and males. The sample consists of 200 individuals of whom 121 and 79 individuals were females and males. Also, the average age of students was between 19-34. Cluster random sampling style has been used in this study. To analyze the data using SPSS16 and also using descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance and t-test.

The coping inventory for stressful situation (CISS): Parker and Endler designed it in 1990. The hypothesis includes 48 hypotheses. The range of response to each hypothesis starts

from 1 to 5. 1 shows that the participant would not ever do such task and 5 show that participant applies it a lot. 2, 3 and 4 shows rarely, sometimes and most of the time. The validity coefficient includes problem-focused (89%), emotion oriented (91%) and avoidant oriented coping (87%) styles has been reported by Parker and Endler. Further, the reliability coefficient for these three coping styles has been reported 92%, 90% and 90%, respectively.

In Iran Qurishi Rad (2010) obtained the simultaneous validity of this scale with a correlation coefficient of 0.62 for problem-oriented and 0.40 for excitement and also the reliability of this questionnaire was calculated by Cronbach's discrepancies of 80% (43).

Interpersonal responsibility models (IRM): It is designed by Annie Townend. It developed from 80 hypothesis involving 4 sub-scales of 20 hypotheses. This hypothesis includes four styles including assertiveness, aggression, passive behavior and governing. Also, the responses represented as yes or no. For each response, score 1 is given to yes, and score 0 to no. This hypothesis includes the reliability coefficient (0.76). In Iran the reliability and validity of the hypothesis confirmed by Jalali and Ghasemzadeh in 1997. (21).

Inclusion criteria for selected samples were female and male students, aged 19 to 34 years. They were studying undergraduate and postgraduate studies. Exclusion criteria were included. It was imperfect to fill out questionnaires in some students. Also, It should be noted that all ethical considerations were considered such as confidentiality and student hypothesis and optionally being and satisfaction hypothesisnaires.

### **Result**

The findings from the present paper designed in the hypothesis, are evaluated.

Table 1. The descriptive statistics related to individuals' aggression and assertiveness with different coping styles

Coping styles	Response pattern	No	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard deviation error
problem-focused	aggression	66	8/00	2/180	0/277
emotion oriented	aggression	25	10/36	3/487	0/697
avoidant oriented	aggression	109	8/19	3/568	0/342
	Total	200	8/41	3/256	0/233
problem-focused	assertiveness	66	12/94	3/124	0/270
emotion oriented	assertiveness	25	8/52	2/371	0/534
avoidant oriented	assertiveness	109	8/06	2/583	0/274
	Total	200	29/52	8/078	1/078

As shown above, higher extent has been assigned to emotion oriented coping style with a mean of (10.36) compared to problem-focused and avoidant oriented coping styles respectively with a mean of 8.00 and 8.19, i.e. the individuals with emotion oriented coping style are more aggressive. Also, higher extent

has been assigned to problem-focused coping style with mean (12.94) compared to emotion oriented and avoidant oriented coping styles respectively with a mean of 8.52 and 8.06, i.e. the individuals with problem-focused coping style are more assertive.

Table 2. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) associated to difference on response pattern for assertiveness and aggression based on coping styles

Response pattern	Groups	Sum squares	of Freedom degree	F-value	Significant level
Assertiveness	Inter-groups	135/617	2	7/031	0/004
Assertiveness	Intra-groups	1438/1278	198		
	Total	1483/755	200		
Assertiveness	Inter-groups	110/633	2	55/316	0/005
Assertiveness	Intra-groups	1956/714	198	10/138	
	Total	2067/347	200		

As shown above, the difference between response pattern of assertiveness in terms of coping styles (problem-focused oriented, emotion oriented and avoidant oriented) is significant. It can say that a significant difference exists between individuals' response pattern with three coping styles. Also the difference between response patterns of

aggression in terms of coping styles (problem-focused oriented, emotion oriented and avoidant oriented) is significant. It can say that a significant difference exists between individuals' response pattern with three coping styles.

Table 3. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) associated to difference on response pattern for aggression based on coping styles

Response pattern	Groups	Sum of squares	Freedom degree	F-value	Significant level
Assertiveness	Inter-groups	110/633	2	55/316	0/005
Assertiveness	Intra-groups	1956/714	198	10/138	
	Total	2067/347	200		

As shown above, the difference between response patterns of aggression in terms of coping styles (problem-focused oriented, emotion oriented and avoidant oriented) is

significant. It can say that a significant difference exists between individuals' response pattern with three coping styles.

Table 4. Results of t-test for independent groups associated to two groups of male and female students in terms of inter-personal response patterns.

Response pattern	Gender	No	Freedom degree	t-test	Significant level	Difference of mean	F
Assertiveness	Females	121 79	194	0/604	0/547	0/23	3/178
	Males	121 79	194	3/805	0/001	1/73	
Aggression	Females	121 79	194	0/604	0/547	0/23	3/178
	Males	121 79	194	3/805	0/001	1/73	

As shown above, there is a significant difference between male and female groups in terms of aggression ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $t = 3.805$ ). According to this table, males (9.14) compared to females are more aggressive. Hence, according to the findings of present paper, it can conclude that males are more aggressive than females. As shown above, a significant difference does not exist between males and females in terms of assertiveness.

### Conclusion

The result from one-way variance analysis showed that the individuals with problem-focused coping style compared to the individuals with emotion oriented and avoidance oriented styles are more assertive. These results are in accordance with the findings of the research by Jalali, Ahmadi and Molavi (20). The results of their research showed that assertive individuals have the ability of decision making to deal with problems, problem solving ability (as PBL)

and adaptive behaviors. Further, these findings were totally in compliance with the findings of research by Boogar Rahimian (2007), miller (2008), putallaz (2004), (2003) (22,23,24). They came to the conclusion in this way that assertive individuals have the characteristics including self-awareness, empathy, responsibility and ability to cope with emotions (control emotions) and deal effectively with stressors. To define this finding, it can refer to the results of the research by Neisi and Paeizi (2007) (25). They came to the conclusion in this way that assertive individuals have the ability to cope with external conditions, the conditions that might bring about stress and tension for them. Applying the assertive skills in assertive individuals enable them to control complicated and stressful needs faced with in life. Ogden (2004) argues, assertiveness is a behavior that has cognitive and emotional aspects and reflects the individual's ability to deal effectively with the demands of the environment (26).

If assertive individuals taken as the ones qualified with the ability to solve the problem, this characteristic can affect problem-focused coping style in dealing with stressors. These results are in compliance with the results of research by Akbari (2007), Mubarak (2007) and *Hinkelman* (2004). Further, Anrayt and Powell (1990) believe that assertive behavior has a major role in controlling and reducing stress (27,28, 29). An individual who has shown assertive behavior properly and defined his thoughts, feelings and beliefs, might reach to his goals; yet not reached to his goal, would find a good feeling of his ability in choosing an adaptive behavior (30). If a problem-oriented coping style, as a way of focusing on techniques such as information gathering, problem solving, social skills, effective communication, direct action to change environmental demands or stressful situations to be considered, features of this coping style fit with to features of an assertive personality type (32). ANOVA results on the second hypothesis suggest that people with emotion-focused coping styles compared to those with problem-focused coping styles and avoidant copying style are more aggressive. To define this finding, it is stated that the families who use authoritarian parenting practice, generally limit their children's development. In the family with authoritarian parenting practice, the dictator is just the decision maker and planner (27). Aggressive individuals have poor parenting practice, lacked from appropriate behavioral patterns, low social support and grow in large families or single parent families (33). The results of this hypothesis are relevant with the findings of research by Shokri (2008), Rejeh and Faghih zadeh (2002) (33,34). Parker (1990) argues that emotion-focused coping styles include emotional discharge in an improper manner, or deny and fantasies (36). According to this strategy, all efforts would be made to reduce adverse feelings or express emotions and/or control them (37). According to the characteristics of the individuals who use this style, it seems logical compared with the individuals who use two other coping styles including avoidance oriented coping style and problem-focus coping style, they would be more aggressive while faced with

stressful events (32). According to the research findings and other associated findings, it seems logical that the individuals qualified with emotion oriented coping style behave more aggressive while faced with stressful situations and life events (38). The results of this hypothesis are in compliance with the results of research by Shirazi (2002). According to research by Ahmadi and Dehghi (2006) and other research ground on this topic, if aggression taken as a behavior that involves excessive arousal, screaming, emotional discharge and feeling to improper strategies, then it can deduce that the characteristics of this personality type line to the use of emotion oriented coping styles (36).

Assertiveness is a cultural concept, i.e. different cultures show different reactions to the concept of assertiveness. The results of this hypothesis found irrelevant with the findings of the research by Ismaeil zadeh (2004) and Peterson (2002), shown boys compared to girls due to the cultural differences are more assertive. In their view, the reason for assertiveness can be attributed to the cultural differences in boys. More sons of assertiveness can be attributed to cultural differences. Yet, the results of research by Dibaei (2003) and Seyed Fatemi (2008) showed that a significant difference does not exist between males and females in terms of assertiveness where there does not exist a significant difference on assertiveness skills.

To define this finding, it can say that today women in different social and education classes and in different sectors engaged in economic activities express positive feelings from themselves. They are in the position to claim their demands and tend to regain their personal rights trampled (36,37).

Yet, the results for this hypothesis compared to the results of the findings of research by Mehrabizadeh Honarmand (2009) showed that a significant difference and relationship does not exist between two groups of males and females in terms of assertiveness (38). Kan (1981), quoted by Aghaei and Malek poor (2003), to define males are more assertive than females, believe that males engage in social interactions more than females so that society calls assertiveness a masculine behavior

whereby social expectations from masculine role together with the behaviors with decision-making and authority cause males be more assertive rather than females. In general due to the results of different research grounded on this hypothesis, some authors state there is no obvious evidence about the difference on the assertiveness between two genders (38). About the trait of aggression, the results of this hypothesis are not relevant with the findings of research by Karahmadi and Ismaeili Dehghi (2007), which showed there is no significant difference in terms of aggression among males and females (39). Totally relevant with the results of this hypothesis, Vahedi and Fathi Azar (2008) concluded that males from the very childhood compared with females are more aggressive, even in older age males are more aggressive than females. It is assumed that when aggressive individuals, it is believed that when aggressive people are in negative situations, depending on the initial evaluation, they will compare their tolerance and patience so that frustration and distress over their tolerance would cause aggression and aggressive behavior. When an unpleasant situation, beyond a threshold, appears, in response to such a situation, to avoid the situation or eliminate it, the behaviors which are more likely to take reported defensive or invasive behaviors whereby severe aggressive reactions would be shown (40). Further, the results of this hypothesis considering the findings of research by Creek and Grout (1995), quoted by Masaebi (2008), show that "males show higher level of aggression rather than girls, where males apply aggressive responses such as assault and murder, while females react without aggression, i.e. crying and break up. To confirm this theory, Biological factors involved in aggression: first, not only males, but also male apes and monkeys more than females of their own kind, show aggressive behavior. Second, aggression in males starts from juvenile years (41). To sum up, according to the results of this study, it can conclude that coping with stress is more significant than stress, and type of personality and coping style relate to each other. Hence, strengthening non-emotional and problem-focused coping styles can greatly prevent

psycho-physical disorders and problems. Where also strengthening problem-focused coping style may lead to healthy kind of assertiveness so that this can lead to increasing trend in effective coping styles (42). Our study had some limitations, as there were a lot of questions on the, some students left the questioners incomplete. Therefore, we have to present new students. In the study, it was suggested to enhance students' mental health use the problem focused coping style and also psychological workshops will be held in order to increase the use of aggression control and use effective coping styles. Also, recommending the future studies to apply with a larger sample size.

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