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COPING WITH STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE
AN INVESTIGATION OF BLUE COLLAR WORKERS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University

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1994
ABSTRACT

In recent years research on coping with job stress has begun to move away from investigation of the relationships between theoretical constructs and towards investigation of the constructs themselves. Such research includes the study by Dewe and Guest in which they presented an inductive approach to the development of a valid classification of the major methods of coping with work related stress built on a carefully articulated methodology. The present study replicated this methodology using a blue collar population. Comparisons were made between the present study and the results obtained by Dewe and Guest. Sex and ethnic differences were also investigated. Finally, the problem-focused, emotion-focused dichotomy was explored. Which was the most prevalent approach in the present population? One hundred and fifty three cleaners were given a self-report questionnaire consisting of both a coping measure and demographic information. Results indicated that five main coping strategies were used (Rational task oriented and preparation for dealing with the problem, Expression of emotion and avoidance, Attempts to tolerate or mitigate the effect, Distraction by pleasurable activities, and Emotional release). Despite the different work context, the present study showed consistencies with the previous studies. It appeared that four of the components were consistent across studies. These were direct action, emotional release, distraction, and passive rationalization. No sex differences in coping were found except in the use of prayer where it appeared that women used this strategy more frequently than males. No ethnic differences appeared to exist, that is, all ethnic groups used similar coping strategies. In contrast to previous findings, problem-focused coping was found to be the most prevalent form of coping among the present subjects. It is acknowledged that the cross sectional design, reliance on self report, and the characteristics of the questionnaire itself limit the conclusions to be drawn from the study. Future research should be undertaken on other populations, especially other blue collar workers with more restricted autonomy, thus counteracting some of the present study's limitations.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr Judy Brook, for the encouragement, understanding, and guidance that she has provided over the duration of this thesis.

My thanks to Ross Flett without whose help the statistical analysis would have been virtually impossible. Thanks for the use of your computer, your SPSS-x knowledge, and your patience.

I would also like to thank Philip Dewe. His help and guidance at the various stages was invaluable. Thanks especially for your help with the Principal Components Analysis. It was much appreciated.

My thanks also to Paula Boult. Without her encouragement and support this thesis would not have been possible. Due to her organization and unswerving enthusiasm my data collection ran smoothly. This was much appreciated.

Thank you to all the cleaners who filled in the questionnaire. Thanks also to those cleaners who participated in the pilot study. Your constructive feedback was much appreciated.

Thanks to all my friends who showed interest through their encouragement and support. Thanks also to the ladies in the office who spent many an hour helping me with the intricacies of Wordperfect. Thank you for your patience.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, especially my parents. Their patience, support and reassurances over the years have been wonderful.
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