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# The Effectiveness of Multiple Stress Management Intervention on the Level of Stress, and Coping Responses Among Iranian Students

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## Abstract

This study examined the effects of multiple stress management intervention (MSMI) on coping responses, and stress symptoms among Iranian students. Sixty students with high scores for avoidance responses, stress and low scores for approach responses were randomly assigned to one of two groups: the experimental group or the control group. During the 8-week period, sixteen 2-hour session interventions were conducted for the experimental group. Both groups responded to a set of questionnaires before and after intervention. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) mixed design (group  $\times$  measures) was conducted to determine the effect of the MSMI on the dependent variables. Significant differences were found between the two groups regarding the dependent measures. The multivariate  $\eta^2$  based on Wilks'  $\Lambda$  was quite strong. To examine the durability (stability) of MSMI effectiveness, repeated measure analyses of variance were performed on the stress, and coping response variables. The results showed that the effects of MSMI are stable over time. These findings indicate that multiple stress management intervention has a positive effect on coping responses, and stress.

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*Keywords:* Stress management; stress; coping responses

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## 1. Introduction

During the past two decades, the construct of “stress” has received significant investigative attention as a correlate or predictor of psychological and health outcomes (Cohen, Kessler, Gordon, 1995; Dougall & Baum, 2001). Psychological stress has been found to be associated with a variety of ailments and health outcomes in adolescents, including poor general physical health (Baldwin, Harris, & Chambliss, 1997), depressive symptoms (Unger et al., 2001), and smoking initiation, continued smoking, or relapse into smoking following smoking cessation treatment (Byrne & Mazanov, 2001; Wills, Sandy, & Yaeger, 2002). Associations have been found between stress, coping variables and aspects of health in a variety of populations (e.g., Kolen, Hartly & Murdock, 1990; Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Henderson, 2003; Hicks, & Miller, 2006; Dolbier, Smit & Steinhardt, 2007). Many studies have indicated that large percentages of college students are feeling overwhelmed, sad, hopeless, and so depressed that they are unable to function (e.g., Veaser, Blakemore, 2006; the National Alliance for mental Health, 2005; Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Hicks & Miller, 2006). Iranian students are, of course, among those suffering from such concerns (Gholamzadeh, Passyar & Haghshenas, 2008; Moeini, Birashk, & Allahverdipour, 2008). According to Rostami and Bahrainian, (2001) 16.3% of freshman students have been diagnosed with mental

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disorders. Additionally, 37.6% of college students reported emotional disorders, and 27.5% of them reported experiencing anxiety disorders during 2003-2004 (Ferdusi, 2004). Successfully handling these events can help students acquire new tools for everyday life. However, continued struggles can result in more persistent signs of anxiety, depression, and isolation that need treatment. The ability to manage and control stress is a useful skill for student life but also for life beyond the university.

## **2. Theoretical Framework of Study**

The Multiple Stress Management Intervention (MSMI) framework is underpinned by a transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), a model of the interaction between context, coping and adaptation (Moos & Hallahan, 2003), and the multimodal transactional model of stress (Palmer & Dryden, 1995). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that whether or not stimuli are stressful depends on a person's "cognitive appraisal," a process that translates objective events into perceptual experiences. When a person appraises an objective event as harmful, he or she may still attempt to cope with it; that is, he or she may make behavioral efforts to reduce and master related internal and/or external demands. A person who fails to cope with harmful stimuli might suffer from mental or physical exhaustion or disease. The model by Moos and Hallahan, (2003) stipulates that (a) ongoing environmental and personal factors foreshadow transitory conditions, such as new life events and participation in intervention and treatment programs; and (b) these three sets of factors shape cognitive appraisal and coping skills. In turn, appraisal coping skills influence individual health and well-being. The framework emphasizes the key role of cognitive appraisal and coping skills in the stress and coping process. The working model of stress used by Palmer and Dryden, (1995) that has been adapted for stress counseling is known as "transactional." This model provides a simple but realistic explanation of the complicated nature of stress as it addresses the interrelationship between the internal and external worlds of individuals. Palmer and Dryden (1995) modified the transactional models of stress proposed by Cox (1978) and Cox and Mackay (1981) to incorporate Lazarus's seven modalities. Lazarus believes that the entire range of personality can be covered within seven specific modalities (Lazarus 1981, 1989): Behavior, Affect, Sensation, Imagery, Cognition, Interpersonal, and Drugs/Biology. This helps the therapist to achieve a holistic understanding of an individual.

The MSMI based on these three models attempts to change and correct cognitive appraisal and responses to stress. The goals of the intervention are: (a) to help students understand the components of stress and how stress operates in their lives; (b) to provide a structured opportunity for students to learn, practice, and apply management techniques and strategies for change to their lives; and (c) to promote healthy methods of managing stress.

## **3. Method**

### *3.1. Design*

This study employed an experimental design of experimental and control groups with pre- and post-tests. The subjects of this study were sixty students selected from four academic majors: Human Science, Natural Science, Medical Science and Engineering. Participants were assigned to the experimental and control groups by random assignment and were given University stress student (USSI), Coping responses (CRI) and Type-A behavior (TABI) inventories as a pretest on dependent variables, Y1. Multiple stress management was only conducted for the experimental subjects over an eight-week period of time from May until June of 2008. The dependent variables for the two groups were measured by the three inventories mentioned above, after they finished the treatment. The average difference between the pre-test and post-test ( $Y_2 - Y_1$ ) was found for each group, and then these average difference scores were compared in order to ascertain whether the experimental treatment produced a greater change than the control situation.

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