Humour and Resilience amongst hostellers and day scholars: A comparative study

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ABSTRACT

The lifestyle of hostellers and day scholars vary widely, with respect to numerous factors. While day scholars are exposed to sitcoms which have most of us rolling with laughter, the hostellers remain confined without the source of technology. The study aims to analyse characteristics like humour, and the ability to deal with difficult situations amongst school students. The objective was to study the difference between resilience and use of coping humour amongst hostellers and day scholars and study the association strength between coping humour and resilience amongst the school students. The study was carried out on 104 participants, females, age group of 16-18 years old (11th & 12th class) consisting of 52 hostellers and day scholars each. Assessment tools used were The Coping Humour Scale (Martin, 1983), and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 25, 2003). The difference between the use of coping humour and resilience amongst the hostellers and the day-scholars was studied by using Independent t-test. Pearson correlation was computed to evaluate the relation in variables mentioned above. The t-test showed that there was no significant difference in the coping humour level between the hostellers and the day scholars.

However, there was a difference in the resilience of both groups at 0.01 level of significance. A significant difference in two subscales of resilience (t= 0.07) was found. Hardiness was found significant at $p<0.01$, and Resourcefulness was also found significant at $p<0.05$. Correlation between coping humour and resilience is also significant at $p<0.01$. The result found could be impacted by confounding variables like socialization, positive coping mechanism, social support, exposure to media which telecasts sitcom, and positive impact of fictional characters like Harvey Specter and Chandler Bing.

KEY WORDS: *humour, resilience, hostellers, day scholars*

Introduction: Developmental and Educational Realities

Modern day life is witness to the need to travel away from home for better educational avenues. Contemporary Indian society has been witness to the staying *'away from home trend'* for furthering educational venues much akin to the mythical Hogwarts. Ancient historical

treatises also mention the presence of the *'gurukul'* system where a child (mostly young men) were sent away to study under the tutelage of a *guru* with children of various ages as compatriots. Whether it be the exploits of a Sudama and Krishna at Sandwipani's Ashram or the achievements of a Ram and his brothers in Guru Vashistha's ashram, history as well contemporary society is replete with tales of the 'fun and education to be garnered in these mythic places of a St Clare's or Malory Towers of Enid Blyton or the Hogwarts of JK Rowling. Dedicated bastions of education which provided the best of facilities and overall development have been the forte' of most of the Boardings Schools of yore some of which still exist like Scindia School, Mayo, Woodstock, Sanawar etc. and have long traditions of historicity most of which have had generations of a family attending them. These were necessitated by need and lack of particular avenues, if in smaller towns or by a meditated design to further a certain mode of education.

The developmental years of children are marked by various factors which influence their growth, personality, attitude, etc. Among other primary factors, the school contributes immensely to the students' life, shaping their thought process as well as the kind of education they receive, and the lifestyle they later adopt. Parents' have to take numerous decisions throughout their child's life, right from deciding the child's name to settling on whether the child should be exposed to a life of a day-scholar or a hosteller. While these are decisions which emerge out of economic, geographic and social realities, these decisions have a marked impact on the eventual evolution of the adult. Being sent to a hostel for whatever reason, namely personal, economic, aspirational or arising out

of geographic paucity is an interesting interstice to witness differential behaviours for a social psychologist. A *space between two cries*, the hostel- day schooling provides a unique space where, the child cries on leaving the security of home and embarking on a life in a hostel as well as cries on leaving the hostel once the period is successfully over on leaving its bonds of friendship.

The lifestyle of the two varies in numerous ways. While the day-scholars have the freedom and exposure to an independent life, regulated by parents after scheduled hours of school, hostellers spend their days confined by the rules and regulations of the teachers, and later of the warden. The former are also exposed to various technologies, while the latter have limited access to them, often only when they return home. This might also influence the bonds they share with their peers, as the peer group for the hostellers becomes the actual family with who they spend hours living, while the same is untrue for day-scholars. Various lifestyle development also involves the kind of sleep pattern and food habits adopted by the students.

The kind of stressors differ among the day-scholars and the hostellers, however various stressors for school students have been identified in both Indian as well as International contexts. A study conducted among Indian High Schools identified that nearly two-thirds, i.e. 63.5% participants underwent stress because of scholastic burden, another two-thirds, i.e. 66% participants indicated experiencing the emotion of weight from their parents for better academic execution. Also, about one-third, i.e. 32.6% participants were symptomatic of psychiatric cases and examination anxiety was reported by 81.6%. (Deb, Sibnath, Strodl, Esben, Sun,

Jiandong, 2015) The parent's burden to have better academic performance prevails in both the hostellers and day-scholars, although the conditions are more defined and restricted in the former case, which might lead to higher expectations. The stress for the hostellers might also generate from living away from family. This then is a unique cross sectional comparison area to view different social systems through the prism of positive psychological realities without manipulation.

Positive Psychology in *'The Home'* away from Home: A Review

A hostel is considered to be a home away from home. Hostels encourage more social interaction between students than any day-scholar can have as students residing in hostel are always in close proximity with each other which allows them to meet in their dormitories, common rooms, mess etc. There are many reasons as to why parents send their children to live in the hostel, they want the optimum education for their children even if when it means sending them away from home. They want their children to be *independent* as they start making decisions of their own, manage their life and because of hostel rules it makes it possible for the students to work on their own and have a sense of responsibility. As students in a hostel stay with multicultural social groups, they learn how to live with different kinds of people and hence it increases the level of patience of students. Most tales of boarding schools be they by Enid Blyton or Rowling, or even Indian hostel tales as portrayed in mythological or TV characters show the protagonist emerging a stronger more vibrant and 'happy' person having gone through the experiences.

Human emotions such as happiness, joy, anger, fear, anxiety, affect both psychological and physiological processes. Such feelings are common to all human beings. Humour and resilience are the two corner stones which begin a boarding school sojourn where a child leaving all familial connections behind, starts life anew in the Boarding School. Here acceptance, understanding and emotional bonds need to be forged afresh with people his /her own age and teachers and wardens.

Laughter is a basic function recognised by every human, most of the boarding school tales (both contemporary and past) portray laughter as an imperative. This is an important consideration as teaching is also about forming relationships and strengthening human bonds, as much as it's about the content. Humour helps in enhancing student's performance by grabbing the student's attention, decreasing anxiety, improving involvement and increasing motivation. Humour helps to build relationships and enhance performance. Moreover, humour activates various physiological systems that reduce the amount of stress hormones like epinephrine and cortisol and activates the mesolimbic dopaminergic reward system. Humour and laughter cannot be directly related to learning but it has been seen that humour creates an environment for learning. It also helps in reducing anxiety. (Savage, Lujan, Thipparthi and DiCarlo, 2017)

Humour in classrooms is seen to build positive relationships amongst peers in the classroom and it creates a positive climate which helps in learning. Teachers are not professional entertainers in schools but an optimum level of humour helps in increasing information retention provided in the class by the teacher

and the students enjoy learning new concepts in class. But most of all it creates a positive environment in the classroom amongst students as well as the teacher. (Elias, 2015)

Resilience is commonly defined as the potential of an individual to "bounce back." This phenomenon is inspired by the physical sciences, which say that resilience is a factor that permits objects to take their natural shape again after being stretched or bent (Dyer and McGuinness, 1996; Southwick and Charney, 2012). It involves having a set of personal characteristics which stimulates a person to bounce back when coming to terms with hardships. (Connor and Davidson, 2003) Resilient people manage stress more efficiently and bounce back speedily from adverse situations. (Windle, 2011)

An optimum sense of humour is a skill which contributes to the psychological well-being of a person. Humour helps to reappraise threats, increase personality strength and facilitate happiness and also helps in maintaining a positive effect. And this positive effect has shown to impact efficient skills of problem solving and to produce resilience. Good humour shows better resilience and greater mental well-being. (Cann and Collette, 2014)

Research suggests that the use of humour decreased the influence of the stressful situation in people's lives, on giving a negative life-event checklist to the subjects to predict the scores on a measure of mood disturbance. The results showed that humour impacted significantly on negative life situations and on mood disturbances. (Martin and Lefcourt, 1983)

A study was conducted to measure whether there exists a difference amongst hostellers and day-scholars with respect to the degree of social competence. The study hypothesised that there exists no significant difference however, the results indicated that day scholars and hostellers differ significantly with respect to social competence. (Singh, 2014)

Focussing on Indian school realities, a study conducted in VIT– Chennai, compared day-scholars and hostellers. It was found that there was a significant level of difference in the state-trait anxiety of the two groups. The second hypothesis was rejected as significant results were found on the fear of negative evaluation of the two groups, whereas the hypothesis stated otherwise. (Kumar, Athilakshmi, Maharishi and Maya, 2015)

Self-concept and resilience were measured between the undergraduate hostellers and day-scholars. There was a significant difference found between self-concept of both the groups, and resilience was found to be higher in the girls as compared to the boys. (Anthony and Mol, 2017). This research studied the difference between resilience and coping humour taken up by the pupil who found home away from their family in order to achieve higher studies and the pupils who stay with families so as to understand how these two aspects are different or associated with one another.

A lack of clear emergence of the facets of resilience and humour as a coping mechanism is what is witnessed in these studies. To look at whether these differences are because of individual differences or the modality of schooling is what is fascinating to a researcher of posiive psychology. If larger generalisations could be drawn lessons for positive psychology would be enviable. The unique cross sectional interstice of day boarder vs hosteller allows us

to formulate a hypothesis about there being a difference between the two modalities and look more closely at the realities which shape these differences.

METHOD

Sample

104 school students were taken for the study. All participants were females in the age group of 16- 18 years. The participants were chosen for the exploratory research through the method of purposive sampling of 52 day scholars and 52 hostellers. The research was focussed on school students; hence the participants chosen were from 11th and 12thgrades. The reason that this research concentrated on school students was because this is the first time in the lifespan when the pressure on students is at peak and every student tries to excel in these exams to get admission in the colleges of their choice and to create a good future for themselves. This comparative research was done to see how coping humour and resilience is different in hostellers and day- scholars and do coping humour and resilience actually do have something in common.

Measures

The Coping Humour Scale (Martin, 1983) comprises of 7 items on a 4-point scale (1-4) with a greater score reflecting higher coping humour. The responses range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This included statements like – *"I often lose my sense of humour when i am having problems"*.

To measure resilience, the Connor–Davidson Resilience scale (CD–RISC 25, 2003) was used which includes 25 items, on a 5–point scale (0–4), with higher scores indicating greater resilience. Hardiness, Optimism, Resourcefulness and Purpose are four subscales of this measure.

Hardiness is to have strength and tolerance during stressful situations. It includes 7 items, i.e, item number 4,7,11,16,17,18. Example– "I am not easily discouraged by failure." Optimism assists people to indulge in constructive behaviour. It also includes 7 items, i.e, item number 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 20. Example – *"Under pressure, I am able to focus and think clearly."*

Resourcefulness refers to the ability to look for speedy methods which might be unique and different for conquering difficult situations. It includes 6 items, i.e, item number 1,2,3,5,9,13. Example – *"I have close and secure relationships."* Purpose is consistent and generalized intention to achieve something which holds meaning to self as well as beyond it. It includes 5 items, i.e, item number 21, 22, 23, 24, 25. Example – *"I work to attain my goals."*

Procedure

The current exploratory study was conducted on 104 participants who were school students of 11th and 12thgrade. 52 participants were day scholars and the other 52 participants were hostellers. Their level of coping humour was measured through The Coping Humour Scale by R.A. Martin (1983). It consisted of 7 items. The greater score indicates more coping humour. The participant's resilience skill was also measured through Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 25, 2003). It consists of 25 items which includes seven items for hardiness and optimism respectively, six items for resourcefulness and five items for purpose. In the results, a greater score shows more resilience between 0-100.

Results

In the present study, independent sample t-test was calculated to find the mean difference between day-scholars and hostellers on coping humour, t (102) = -0.273, p>0.05, N.S, with mean (SD) of 19.44 (3.102) and 19.60 (2.6222) respectively. (Table 1) The hypothesis formulated was that there will be a difference in the resilience level of day-scholars and hostellers. The independent sample t-test was calculated to find the mean difference between day scholars and hostellers on resilience, t (102) = 2.761, p<0.05, having mean (SD) of 71.35 (8.733) and 65.31 (13.132) respectively. (Table 2) The mean difference between the two groups, was measured by independent sample t-test on the subscale of hardiness, t(102) = 2.195, p<0.05., having mean(SD) of 19.69 (3.223) and 18.27 (4.529); optimism, t(102) = 1.773, p>0.05, N.S, having mean(SD) of 18.08 (3.519) and 16.62 (4.790); resourcefulness t(102) = 4.918, p<0.01 having mean(SD) of 18.48 (2.419) and 15.31 (3.627); and purpose t(102) = -0.475, p>0.05, N.S., having mean(SD) of 14.83 (2.625) and 15.12 (3.507) respectively (Table 3). Results also convey that there is a significant positive correlation between resilience and coping humour (r=0.435, p<0.01) (Table 4).

Discussion

The present research work was an attempt to find the differences between the coping humour and resilience of the school students who either study in a hostel or are day scholars and to find if coping humour and resilience correlate to each other. The review of literature was taken as a basis for formulating the hypothesis that the students who live in hostel would have more coping humour as compared to the day scholars. However, the results show that there is no significant difference found in the coping humour amongst day scholars and hostellers. The independent t- test value was found to be -0.273 (p>0.05), with mean difference of –0.16, with mean (SD) of 19.44 (3.102) and 19.60 (2.622).

No significant difference was found amongst both the groups as coping humour depends upon various factors like self-efficacy, social support and spirituality in determining the quality of life of people. (Marzialli, McDonald and Donahue, 2008) Humour can contribute to the overall wellness of a person, it also depends upon the happiness of the person. Happiness contributes to having healthier relationships, better immune responses and higher level of creativity. (Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, 2005)

Resilience is usually defined as the ability to bounce back; within the hostellers and the day scholars, it was hypothesised that the hostellers will possess more resilience than the day-scholars. The differences between these two groups were found by calculating independent t-test, and it was found that there is a significant difference, with the t-value as 2.761 (p<0.05), and mean (SD) of 71.35 (8.733) and 65.31 (13.132) with the mean difference of 6.04. The two groups were also evaluated in regard with the four subscales of the Connor Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC 25, 2003). The measure has four subscales, including hardiness, optimism, resourcefulness and purpose. Hardiness can be understood as the potential to withstand emotional and physical stressors without it overwhelming the individual. A significant difference was found between the two groups in hardiness at 0.05 level of significance with t-value of 2.195 (p<0.05). Optimism can be understood as a trait

which encourages an individual to engage in constructive behaviour towards a situation. The two groups had no significant difference in this subscale of resilience as the t-value was 1.773 (p>0.05). However, among the two groups, at 0.01 level of significance, resourcefulness found t-value of 4.918 (p<0.01). The subscale of resilience, purpose, yielded no significant difference between both the groups as the t-value was -0.475 (p>0.05).

A significant difference was found in both the groups indicating more resilience in the hostellers as compared to the day scholars. There were two subscales on which resilience is found significant which are hardiness and resourcefulness. Research also shows that resilience is influenced by the individual qualities, family bonds which are learned, cultural elements, and community aid (Cardoso, 2012). The level of resiliency can also be influenced by the individual characteristics which ameliorate positive outcomes including optimism, perseverance and motivation. (Rojas, 2015)

Strength of association between the groups, (Day scholars and Hostellers) on coping humour and resilience was compared using Pearson correlation. A significant difference was found between the two groups at 0.01 level of significance with Pearson correlation being 0.435 (r=0.435, p<0.01). Humour is correlated with resilience and it has an impact on the resilience of people while being in a traumatic event and how humour helps in coping with various kinds of traumatic events. When sense of humour becomes a quality of a person, it can ameliorate psychological resilience. (Kuiper, 2012) One of the coping strategies used by schools students is humour while facing

stressful situation like during college preparation, it helps build resilience amongst students to face this kind of situations. (Shaunessy and Suldo, 2010)

While the results of the present study cannot yield generalisations but they are indicative of how a microcosm like a Boarding school can affect the inherent coping ability of a student and in turn shape it.

Conclusion: The '*Education of the Heart*'
While the study shows no significant difference between use of coping humour in the school pupils who live with their families and pursue education from home, i.e, day scholars and the school pupils who found homes away from families to pursue higher education, i.e, hostellers. The study shows that there is a significant difference between day scholars and the hostellers on the levels of resilience particularly in the two subscales out of four i.e. hardiness and resourcefulness, showing that hostellers perhaps tend to make better use of their available networks and find solutions faster, perhaps through 'old boys networks' as they exist in most of the old schools. However, a significant correlation was found between coping humour and resilience showing that the two concepts are closely linked.

While the sampling and statistical analysis in this research sample is small but it is representative of the population, yet it is not possible to generalise the findings on the population. These findings however shed light and reiterate how resilience during stressful situations is connected to how individuals perceive the humorous side of that stressful situation. The findings have implications for larger changing social realities where more and more children are leaving homes at a younger

age for education in hostels. Such findings would help pave way and make parents more aware of the repercussions of hostel versus day scholar life. As urban centres become more cosmopolitan, the reach and aspiration to study abroad and explore further avenues drives the mobility and migration of students across the world. Having an exposure to boarding schools would enable these skills to be imbibed and honed while in the nascent developmental periods.

If the role of education be to harness human potential to its utmost, our systems of education ought to reflect the ability to build resilience and the ability to cope. Which ever the modality of education, this is an intrinsic reality which the schooling systems need to harness. Perhaps the lessons and differentials as found here can be best encapsulated in the words of Ms Grayling of Malory Towers who says:

"…. I do not count as our successes those who have good scholarships and passed exams, though these are good things to do. I count as our successes those who learn to be good-hearted and kind, sensible and trustable, good, sound women the world can lean on. Our failures are those who do not learn these things in the years they are here…"

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APPENDIX:

Table 1: Difference between coping humour level of Day scholars and hostellers					
Coping Humour	n	Mean	SD	t-test	df
Day scholars	52	19.44	3.102	-0.273(0.785)	102
Hostellers	52	19.60	2.622		

Table 2: Difference between resilience level of Day scholars and hostellers

Resilience	n	Mean	SD	t-test	df
Day Scholars	52	71.35	8.733	2.761(0.007) *	102
Hostellers	52	65.31	13.132		

*Significant at 0.05 level of significance (2-tailed)

Table 3: Difference between Day scholars and hostellers according to the subscales of Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale

Subscales	Resilience	N	Mean	SD	t-test	df
Hardiness	Day scholars	52	19.96	3.223	2.195(0.030)*	102
	Hostellers	52	18.27	4.529		
Optimism	Day scholars	52	18.08	3.519	1.733(0.079)	102
	Hostellers	52	16.62	4.790		
Resourcefulness	Day scholars	52	18.48	2.914	4.918(0.000)**	102
	Hostellers	52	15.31	3.627		
Purpose	Day Scholars	52	14.83	2.625	-0.475(0.636)	102
	Hostellers	52	15.12	3.507		

* Significant at 0.05 level of significance (2-tailed)
**Significant at 0.01 level of significance (2-tailed)

Table 4: Correlation between Coping humour and Resilience.

	Resilience	Coping Humour
Resilience	1	0.435**
Coping Humour	0.435**	1

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