

# Age Gender and Coping Strategies against Parental Gendered Behaviors

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## ABSTRACT

Inequality between strong and weak, male and female, rulers and ruled has a long history in human society. Scholars, in Nepal are paying more attention to types and degree of gender discrimination rather than the underpinnings and victims' efforts to eliminate or lessen such discriminatory practices. The objective of this study is to explore how teenage boys and girls cope against parental gendered behaviours. One hundred and twenty-six teenage boys and girls having cross sexed siblings at home were purposively chosen through networking. Data were collected through self-reporting techniques. Open ended questions were asked to the respondents which were categorized under three main themes for the purpose of data analysis. The present study was carried out in Kathmandu metropolitan city. It was found that though many teenage boys and girls resist parental gendered behaviour, significant numbers of them consider such behaviour as normal and easily accept, many others resist against it. Age and gender play influential roles while using coping strategies. It can be concluded that as teenagers grow up, they shift their emotion focused coping to problem solving strategy. Likewise, more girls than boys cope against discrimination emotionally.

**Key words:** Age, Gender, Emotion, Coping, Discrimination

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Family is the primary institution where each member enjoys fundamental needs of life, safety and intimacy. However, inequality between male and female, strong and weak, rulers and ruled has been a part of family structure. Substantial literature suggests that parental expectation toward son and daughter is gendered. They feel proud of their daughters for being obedient, beautiful and pressured to be involved with and connected to others whereas parents feel proud of their sons if their sons are tough, strong and brave (Hamieh & Usta, 2011). Gendered behaviour becomes more visible when children turn teenage which is one of the factors that produce conflict with parents and siblings. According to available literature, in general, people use almost each and every type of coping strategies to combat the stressful situation. However, the predominance of one over another is determined by cultural norms, personal attitude, individual's value and belief, and type of stress. Some youth react primarily with antisocial behaviour while others with internalizing distress out comes to same types of violence (Ng-Mak, Salzinger, Feldman, & Stueve, 2004).

Substantial literatures have indicated gender as one of aspects that influences the types of coping strategies used by teenagers. Stanescu and Romer (2013) in very small sample sized study confirm that emotional regulation and social support are associated particularly to girls than boys. Girls express and communicate their feelings of vulnerability, but boys either do not admit to it or succeed in converting them into resignation or assertiveness. Girls adjust their emotion by crying, sharing their feelings with others, while boys search for information to solve the problem and maintain 'nothing happened' attitude and behaviour. In comparison to men, women use more emotion regulation strategies (emotional deployment) than men (Vitulić & Prosen, 2016). Taylor *et.al* opine that there is some difference in behavioural response between male and female. Although 'Fight-or-Flight' is primary physiological response to stress of both males and females, females' responses to stress are more marked by a pattern of 'tend-and- befriend'. Women are more likely to turn to other females for support in order to protect each other from perceived threats. Males are more likely to use physical aggression in struggle for power in hierarchy or to defend territory against external enemies. Males more commonly adopt the "fight or flight" response, where they either move toward or away from danger based on their ability to manage the situation on their own (Taylor, 1998).

Coping is a multi-level adaptive process that starts from infancy and develops throughout the late adolescence. During middle adolescence coping is based on personal values whereas in late adolescence it is based on long term goals (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2009). Cocoradă and Mihalaşcu (2012) in their study found emotional discharge and mental disengagement coping strategies were more frequently used by younger students 13-15

years old than other groups 16 to 17 and 18 to 19 years old groups.

Nepal, as a traditional patriarchal society, showing gendered behaviour is very common to parents. Scholars, in Nepal are paying more attention to types and degree of gender discrimination rather than victims' efforts to eliminate or lessen such discriminatory practices. Studies about teenagers' efforts to cope against parental gendered behaviour is seriously lacking in sociological attention. This study explores how teen age boys and girls react against parental gendered behaviour.

## 2. METHOD

Different types of coping strategies tools have been used noticeably since 1980s. Most common amongst them are WOC (ways of coping scales) (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985); COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced) by Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) ; CISS (Coping Inventory for Stressful Situation) known as MCI (Multi-Dimensional Coping Inventory) (Endler & Parker, 1990) and CSI (Coping Strategy Indicators) developed by Amir Khan 1990. In Carver et al. (1989) pointed out some weaknesses of Coping Strategy Scales as lacking clear description such as: "Took a big chance and or did something risky"; "I did something which I did not think would work, but at least I was doing something" and argue that individual reaction to stress is unique (Carver et al., 1989). Other scholars also suggest that people adopt wide array of coping methods in managing discrimination (Joseph & Kuo, 2009). So, modification in coping models developed for adults is required (Compas et al., 2014). In Tobin's view (Tobin, 2001) coping strategies indicators also can be used as open-ended manner.

Pre-structured limited options might not cover the coping strategies used by teenagers against parental gendered behaviour, teenagers were requested to recall the stressful situation and describe the exact coping process they used in stressful situations. Information was collected through self-reporting technique followed by interview to maintain the reliability of self-reported coping strategy. For this study, three broader theoretical models of coping strategy suggested by (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985) have been used as a guideline: 1. Problem-focused coping; 2. Emotion-focused coping which consists of wishful thinking, distancing, emphasizing the positive, self-blame, tension reduction, self-isolation; and 3. Mixed problem-and emotion-focused coping.

A total of 126 teen agers including boys (61) and girls (65) having cross sex siblings (brother and sister from same parents) residing in Kathmandu metropolitan city were selected purposively through networking. Students studying child development and gender socialization in Master degree coming from different parts of Kathmandu metropolitan city were requested to identify the respondents and collect data. The author herself was also involved in data collection. Data were collected through self-reporting and interview during the year of 2011/2013. Data were also updated in 2015. First part of questionnaires consisted of general information and second part consisted of two simple open ended questions about coping strategies as based on Tobin (2001): 1. Mention the type of discrimination you feel at your home, 2 if you protest against discrimination, how?

Analysis of data regarding coping Strategy involves 2 steps:

1. Qualitative analysis of data by describing the stressor's action under different theme and
2. Categorization of each single action under three broad categories as suggested by (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

## 3. RESULT

### 3.1. Types of Coping Strategies Used by Teenagers

Present study found that majority of teenagers 87.3% (110 out of 126) experience parental gendered behaviour at home. When asked how they react against gendered behaviour, a significant number 28.2 % (31 out of 110) of respondents reported as they do nothing (Table 1).

Out of one hundred and ten respondents, 71.8% teenagers reported as they resist against gendered behaviour. To find out the types of coping strategies used according to age and sex of the respondents, those who accepted gendered behaviour were discarded.

**Table 1.** Experience of parental gendered behaviors and teenagers' reaction.

Gender	Experience of gendered behavior				Protest against gendered behavior			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr
Girls	53.6	59	37.5	6	56.9	45	45.2	14
Boys	46.4	51	62.5	10	43.0	34	54.8	17
Total	100	110	100	16	100	79	100	31

### 3.2. Age and Coping

Findings suggest that age of the boys and girls influence the types of coping strategies they select. During early teen age, boys and girls both cope with emotion focused strategies. Showing anger, crying, were most repeatedly reported strategies. Gradually they shift their emotion focused coping to mixed coping and then to problem solving coping strategies. Their self-report revealed the fact that with the increment of age, teen agers' mastery over problem solving coping increases (Figure 1). Following are some of the expressions expressed by teenage boys and girls.

If my parents refuse to fulfil my demand that I think is important for me, I stay quiet and do not talk to anyone. Then they understand that I am angry with them and fulfil my demand- A sixteen years old boy.

An eighteen years old boy expressed his response against his mother's control as:

My mom asks me to come home soon. Whenever I go outside she immediately starts calling me. Sometimes I do not receive her phone calls instead I disconnect. I do not care about her nags, so as my friends call me, I inform my mom that I am going outside, and immediately walk away from home".

A sixteen years old girls expressed her coping style against as:

My parents control my mobility whereas my brother gets freedom. For instance, I am not allowed to stay the night even at relatives' house. But, my brother is allowed to stay. When I protest I get scolded. My mood goes off for a while but I normalize myself again.

Whenever I come home late my mother inquire me a lot and scold me. But I talk to my mother, tell the reason why I was late and convince her- A Nineteen years old girl.

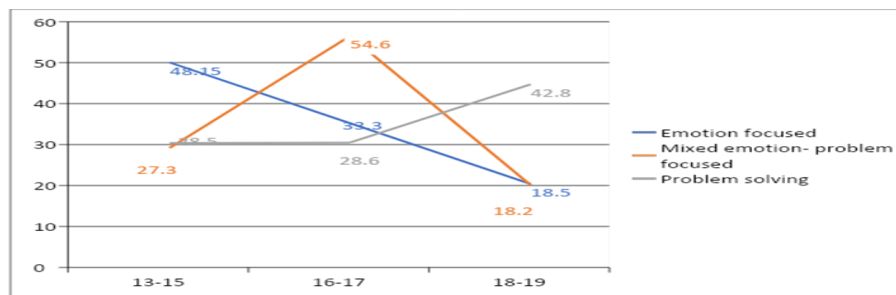


Figure 1. Age and coping strategies

### 3.3. Gender and Coping

This study is in line with previous studies (Stanescu & Romer, 2013; Vitulić & Prosen, 2016) and suggests there are some differences in gender. More boys (42.9%) in comparison to girls (28.9%) use problem solving method. On the contrary more girls (55.3%) in comparison to boys (33.3%) applied emotion focused coping strategies against parental discriminatory behaviours. Less than a quarter of teenagers *i.e.* 23.8% boys and 15.8% girls cope with mixed emotion focused and problem-solving strategy (Figure 2). Expression of emotion in more girls in comparison to boys might be associated with parental perception toward masculinity and femininity that encourage boys and girls to be assertive and emotional respectively. The reason is also supported by the study of Chaplin, Cole, and Zahn-Waxler (2005) who reveals father's attention to submissive emotion in preschooler girl's continuity of similar expression over time and discontinuity of such emotional expression in boys by the time they reach in early school age (Chaplin et al., 2005).

Finding also reveals the fact that expression of anger is one of the most repeatedly mentioned strategies used by both boys and girls to cope with parental gendered behaviours. However, intensity of aggressiveness is higher in boys than girls. Boys manifest their emotions instrumentally and through loud voice, throwing household stuffs around and disobeying parents etc. A fourteen years old boy reported his way of coping as

When I am angry I don't eat food, go to my friend's home, and break things that are around me. I am a boy and I get more freedom. I can stay at friend's home at night because it is accepted in the society.

Unlike to boys, girls express their emotions non-violently. Though they argue, they control their emotions calmly and keep their emotions to themselves. A fifteen years old girl expressed her way of coping against her stress as:

Whenever I talk to my friends a little bit longer, my mother sneaks at me and ask me to hang up the phone. Sometimes I fight with her and sometimes sleep without having dinner or lock myself inside the room.

The reason behind such differences might be the parental perception which encourages girls to tolerate and

suppress their emotion and linked with the Asian culture that view emotional self-control as the sign of maturity cited by Wei, Ku, Russell, Mallinckrodt, and Liao (2008).

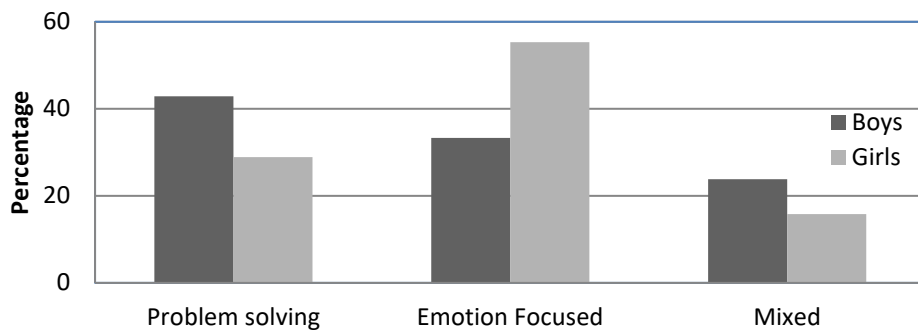


Figure 2. Gender and coping strategy.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

People react with the stressor differently. Basically age and gender of the individual influence the types of coping strategies chosen. This study finding is in line with previous studies (Cocoradă & Mihalăşcu, 2012; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2009). Nepal as a traditional society, where daughters are encouraged to tolerate, and a significant number of teenagers accept parental gendered behaviour and do nothing. Considering this significant number who experienced parental gendered behaviours but did nothing against such behaviour, it can be assumed that many teenagers consider such practice as granted in Nepalese society and accept it. Acceptance, distraction, and cognitive restructuring types of coping serve the function of “accommodation” or “going with the flow”. People adapting these strategies fit themselves and adjust to the environmental demands (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2008). Those who react with gendered behaviour, their ways of coping differ according to their age. Teenage boys and girls were categorized into three groups (13 to 15 years, 16 to 17 years and 18-19 years old) to analyse the types of coping strategies they use. Study showed that during 13 to 15 years, more boys and girls regardless sex cope with emotional expression as crying, showing anger but more boys and girls of 18 to 19 years cope with problem solving strategies. On the contrary, a huge number of 16 to 17 years old boys and girls cope with mixed problem solving and emotion focused coping strategies. The higher tendency of using mixed emotion-problem focused strategies suggests that with the increase in age boys and girls gradually start learning problem solving strategies but still are focused in emotional expression. They shift emotion focused to problem focused strategies very slowly.

Findings of this study revealed that gender is also an influential factor which affects in selecting types of coping strategies and consistent with (Taylor. et al., 2000) who concluded that Females’ responses toward stress are more marked by ‘Tend-and-Befriend’. They show less physical aggression than males. Instead, males’ responses toward stress are marked by ‘Fight-or-Flight’. In present study also boys tried to control the environment with instrumental anger, running away from the stressor. Instead, girls tried to cope by crying, suppressing their emotions. The probable reason of observed gender differences in coping strategies chosen by teenage boys and girls could be associated with their parent’s gender discriminatory perception toward son and daughter; and parental gendered behaviour reflected verbally in day to day life such as: daughters are other’s property, daughter should have more tolerance capacity etc. make daughters feel insecure and less valuable than sons (Pokharel, 2016).

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study it can be concluded that both teenage boys and girls in Kathmandu feel stress due to parental gendered behaviours. Age and gender play influential role while using coping strategies. Age and gender of the teenagers not only make differences in selecting types of coping strategies but also the way they use it. Boys vent their emotion actively and try to control the environment whereas girls suppress their emotion. Likewise, boys control the environment by running away from the home while girls keep themselves inside the home.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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