

# Cross-Cultural Analysis of Men's and Women's Coping Behavior

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**Abstract** – The modern pace of life and requirements for personality that are presented in this regard require quick and effective coping with stress factors using coping behavior. The article describes and analyzes an empirical study of the ethno-psychological characteristics of coping behavior among the representatives of Russian and Ossetian ethnic groups. A comparative analysis of the socio-psychological differences in coping behavior among men and women was also carried out. A comparative analysis of the socio-psychological differences in coping behavior was carried out. The sample of the study was 160 people from the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania at the age of 25 to 55, and the average age was 33.5. It has been established that more often the representatives of the Russian ethnos use problem-oriented coping, and the Ossetians use emotionally-oriented coping. Significant differences between men and women in the preferred coping strategies are described. In a stressful situation men are more prudent and inquisitive than women. On the other hand, women more often deny what happened refusing to believe it or trying to reject its reality. Avoidance coping is more common among men regardless their ethnicity. The obtained results contribute to the enrichment of scientific ideas on the problem of the influence of cross-cultural and gender factors as well as age ones on the process of coping behavior formation. The study outcomes can also be applied in developing recommendations on implementing national policies in the republics of the North Caucasus. The identified data may be used as starting points in organizing social and psychological services in multicultural regions as well as in developing training programs in stress psychology, personality psychology, ethnic psychology and developmental psychology.

**Key words** – *ethnicity, culture, coping behavior, problem-oriented coping, emotionally oriented coping.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The modern science is characterized by a lot of works devoted to studying various psychological, ethnopsychological, physiological, social and medical aspects of coping behavior [3–7, 9, 10, 14–16, 18, 21, 22, 26 et al]. The ways which a person uses to cope with stressful situations is called coping strategies (or coping behavior) [3, 4, 12, 19].

Currently, psychological science includes a variety of approaches to coping research. Thus, the dispositional approach (S.M. Millei, N. Endler, J. Parker) studies the relationship of stable individual and personal characteristics with resources and coping strategies. According to the ideas of the integrative approach (C.S. Carver, R.N. Moss, M.F. Scheier, J.K. Wemtraub), the choice of coping methods

is determined by both personality characteristics and a particular situation. The neops psychoanalytic approach (G. Vaillant, N. Haan) considers coping as an ego-process aimed at the productive adaptation to difficult life situations. From the perspective of a personality-oriented approach (R. Moos, E. Frydenberg, E. Skinner), coping is defined as a changing personality trait that affects behavior in a wide range of stressful situations [6, 7].

According to the definition of T.L. Kryukova, coping is a purposeful behavior that allows a person to cope with stress (a difficult life situation) in the ways that are adequate to personal characteristics and a particular situation [2]. According to S.A. Khazova, coping is an adaptive behavior used in stressful situations to reduce the effects of stress with the objective to regulate emotional states for stopping, avoiding or enduring the effects of a stressor.

In the works of V.M. Yaltonskiy and N.I. Sirota, coping is understood as a strategy of actions taken by a person in a situation of psychological threat, specifically, in conditions of adaptation to a disease as a threat to physical, personal and social well-being [8]. From the point of view of E.I. Chekhatiy and N.V. Veselova, the concept of coping should be considered as an active personal effort aimed to master a situation or problem [3].

Psychologically coping behavior is aimed to adapt a person to the requirements of an unfavorable life situation in the best possible manner, allowing him to master it, weaken or mitigate negative factors and unconstructive effect of the situation [10].

Literature review suggests that nowadays more than 20 types of coping strategies have been identified. These strategies are considered to be defined as the use of various methods and techniques aimed to overcome stressful situations [2, 18, 22, 23]. However, the most classifications of coping behavior are based on two major styles identified by foreign researchers R. Lazarusom and S. Folkmanom:

1) In a problem-oriented style of coping behavior the subject of coping with a stressful situation analyzes what has happened, seeks help from the others and seeks additional information [6]. This style involves the following: a preliminary analysis of the problem focusing on the search for possible ways to solve it, an individual's awareness of their abilities and features of the situation, the choice of possible alternatives to the most acceptable model of behavior, turning

to personal experience in solving similar problems, practical plans implementation [11].

2) An emotionally oriented style of coping behavior involves immersion in personal experiences, self-blaming, involving others in personal experiences [6]. This style implies the following: internal aggression (anger at oneself, guilt); external aggression (anger at others, unmotivated disruptions to loved ones); fixation on the experience of helplessness, inability to cope with the situation; focusing on personal shortcomings; apathy or irritation at everything that happens; experiencing nervous tension, breakdowns; search for opportunities to get emotional relaxation [12, 13].

It is considered that both styles of coping behavior are necessary for an individual and the ability to apply each of them depending on the complexity of the situation is constructive because they both contribute to the physical and mental health of the individual.

The problem of coping personality behavior in the context of cultural diversity is of particular interest to most researchers. The study of the ethnopsychological features of coping behavior is particularly relevant due to the fact that it contributes to a better understanding of how a person functions as a subject of activity in a multicultural environment [6, 7, 21]. In psychology, there are still no clear criteria revealing the cross-cultural characteristics of coping behavior among the representatives of different ethnic groups living in Russia [19, 20]. Therefore, additional comprehensive studies are essential for studying the role of ethnopsychological, personal and social factors that contribute to the formation of constructive coping behavior among representatives of different nationalities of our country [21–23].

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

The main objective of the study is to compare the cross-cultural characteristics of coping behavior among the representatives of Russian and Ossetian ethnic groups. The purpose of the study stipulates the following tasks: to carry out a comparative analysis of the ethnopsychological characteristics of coping behavior among representatives of the Russian and Ossetian ethnic groups, and to identify the differences in the preferred coping strategies among men and women. The study was carried out using the following set of empirical methods: the author's survey form with the questions aimed to establish the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, "Coping behavior in stressful situations" (developed by N. Endler and D. Parker, adapted by T. L. Kryukova) [11, 12], "COPE stress coping questionnaire" (developed by K. Carver, M. Scheyer and J. Weintraub, adapted by T.O. Gordeeva, E.N. Osin, E.A. Rasskazova, O.A. Sychev, V.Yu. Shevyakhova) [19]. The research results were processed and analyzed using mathematical and statistical methods, as well as computer programs Excel and SPSS.13.0, namely, Student t-test.

## III. SURVEY SAMPLE

The study was conducted in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, the city of Vladikavkaz, whose indigenous population

is Ossetians. Russians are an ethnic minority in the territory of this region and they make up a single ethnic community, preserving their ethnic identity, specific national features of a culture that is aware of its differences. Representatives of the Russian ethnic group living in the republic and taking part in the study are Cossacks who have been living here for almost 500 years (41 people), as well as Russians, who came mainly during the Soviet period (38 people).

The total sample size was 160 people (92 women and 68 men) aged 25 to 55 years. 81 representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group (32 men, 49 women) and, 79 representatives of the Russian ethnic group (36 men, 43 women) were interviewed. 55 not married people, 78 married people, 20 divorced people and 7 widows or widowers were surveyed. 130 respondents had a university degree, 6 people had an incomplete higher education and 24 people had a specialized secondary (college or vocational school).

## IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

According to the data obtained, the representatives of the Russian ethnic group often use problem-oriented coping ( $t = 3.18$ , at  $p \leq 0.01$ ), which includes a high degree of self-control and faith in personal resources to overcome difficult life situations. The captured data indicate that Russians tend to control emotions and be reserved, plan actions carefully and analyse problems. Thus, in a stressful situation Russians are aimed to change the existing problematic circumstances by searching for useful information and taking active actions to eliminate them.

It was determined that Russians more often than Ossetians use the strategy of active coping ( $t = 2.50$ , at  $p \leq 0.01$ ) in cases of difficult life situations. This strategy implies suggesting phased actions aimed to overcome a stressful situation. It was found that the respondents from the Russian sample more often opt for social distraction as a form of coping behavior ( $t = 2.84$ , with  $p \leq 0.01$ ), in which an individual tries to be in the public eye more often and socialize with the objective to deal with problem situations.

In turn, the use of emotionally oriented coping was more often observed among the representatives of the Ossetian sample ( $t = -1.98$ , at  $p \leq 0.05$ ). This strategy is distinguished by the excessive manifestation of people's feelings and emotions caused by an unpleasant situation as well as active indignation and protest with regards to difficulties, a state of hopelessness, an experience of anger and blaming themselves and the others.

Representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group tend to concentrate on their own emotions more often ( $t = -3.28$ , at  $p \leq 0.01$ ), focus on negative emotions in trouble and in situations which demand expressing subjective experiences and demonstrating their feelings. It was determined that the respondents of the Ossetian sample are distinguished by the frequent use of denial as the behavior aimed to cope with stress in a critical situation ( $t = -3.70$ , at  $p \leq 0.01$ ). This suggests that in comparison to Russians, the Ossetians more often do not want to believe the reality thus trying to deny it. Also, in the case of a difficult life situation the representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group apply the strategy of behavioral avoidance of the problem ( $t = -3.42$ , with  $p \leq 0.01$ ), which is

distinguished by the refusal to achieve the desired goal and the inability to regulate efforts aimed at interaction with stress.

The outcomes of studying the individual psychological characteristics of the represented ethnic groups imply that Russians showed more respect for others ( $t = 2.50$ , with  $p \leq 0.01$ ). Perhaps this suggests that Russians tend to have a positive attitude towards others, feel the need to be close to people, are responsive, understand others clearly, feel personal responsibility for their well-being and tolerate vices. They are able to empathize, eagerly participate in social activities and feel responsible for a common goal, carry out their assignments conscientiously and responsibly. While interacting with others they try to avoid disagreements, prefer to cooperate with people than to compete.

Representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group are more characterized by self-esteem ( $t = 2.53$ , with  $p \leq 0.01$ ), which is distinguished by the desire to be independent. They are always ready to defend their interests in the competition and, as a rule, strive for excellence.

The obtained data suggest that in stressful situations men use problem-oriented coping ( $t = -2.33$  at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) more often than women. This indicates that men tend to control emotions and be reserved, plan actions carefully and analyse a problem. Thus, men are more focused on changing the prevailing problematic circumstances by searching for useful information and taking active actions than women.

It was determined that in a stressful situation men are more prudent ( $t = -2.42$  at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) and inquisitive ( $t = -2.08$  at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) than women. This once again suggests that men are characterized by a high level of volatile regulation of behavior and self-control.

However, it should be noted that avoidance-oriented coping ( $t = -2.21$  at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) is more common among men as well. Men are more prone to distract from stressful situations with the help of funny and noisy get-togethers, alcohol, tobacco and/or psychoactive drugs. Thereby, they try to avoid contact with the reality and get away from solving existing problems.

However, it was also revealed that Russian men are more likely to have a distraction from the problem situation ( $t = 2.30$ , at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) than Ossetian men. It is reflected in the desire for a shift away from solving problems with the help of alcohol, medicines, immersion into a favorite pastime, travels, realizing burning ambitions. As the findings show, Russian men use the coping strategy of problem avoidance ( $t = 3.61$ , at  $p \leq 0.01$ ) more often than Ossetian men. The strategy implies ignoring the thoughts about troubles, pliability, passivity and a desire to keep calm.

Conversely, the dominance of emotionally oriented coping was found among women ( $t = -2.78$  at  $p \leq 0.01$ ), which manifests itself in focusing on unpleasant emotions and feelings. The study revealed that women deny the reality ( $t = -2.27$  at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) more often than men by refusing to believe in what is happening or trying to reject it. According to the study outcomes, in a stressful situation women turn to God, faith and religion more often than men.

It was revealed that in a problem situation women have a higher level of tension ( $t = -2.29$  at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) than men. Perhaps this suggests that women can easily fall into despair or depression in case of failure.

According to the study, such behavioral strategies as: solution planning ( $t = 2.44$  at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) and active coping with stress ( $t = 3.22$  at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) prevail among Russian women, which indicates the desire of Russian women to cope with a difficult stressful situation through a focused analysis of the situation and possible behaviors, developing a strategy for problem resolution, planning their own actions based on objective conditions, past experience and available resources.

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In a study carried out by Kim E. Sun aimed to analyse the ethnopsychological features of the coping behavior of Russians and Japanese, it was noted that Russians are often asked for help from outsiders and organizations, they are given a heavier burden of responsibility and there are elements of infantilism in their behavior. As well, they show more spontaneity in the process of problem solving; they do not always make up a clear plan. However, non-standard and even original ways of solving problems are more characteristic for Russians [11].

Similar results were obtained in our study of the cross-cultural characteristics of the coping behavior of Russians and Ossetians. The research showed that reasoning of the representatives of the Russian ethnic group is characterized by imagery and focusing on large-scale problems. Russians are keenly aware of new trends and impending changes but are experiencing significant difficulties if it is necessary to turn the result of foreboding into a rational form and concrete decisions. Their activities are characterized by a tendency to think, which does not always result in actions, hesitation when choosing a specific alternative, impulsiveness. This ethnopsychological peculiarity is reflected in the indicator of intensity of the coping strategy of planning a solution to a problem.

The study of cross-cultural characteristics of the representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group in the works of Gurieva S.D., Zuraeva A.D., Ilchenko V.V., Khudalova M.Z., were confirmed by our study as well. The ethnopsychological features of the representatives of the Ossetian ethnic group were formed by climatic conditions, special features of social and spiritual life, peculiar forms and methods of the national education system (prevalence of prohibitive measures in controlling child behavior, negative sanctions over positive ones, regressive nature of control, which leads to excessive emotionality rather than to the ability to control their behavior independently and flexibly). For the most Ossetians the dominant values are communitarian ones (nation, family) [7]. Ethnic features of coping strategies are based on values, traditions, norms of behavior, attitudes. Thus, the coping behavior of Russian culture as a whole is the same for both men and women. In Ossetian culture, values and the traditionally established gender division of social roles in the family limit the strategies of women's coping behavior [22].

Thus, the data obtained indicate cross-cultural differences in coping behavior among representatives of the Russian ethnic group, who are more tolerant, friendly and loyal to others due to a multicultural environment, and the Ossetian ethnic group adheres to the customs and traditions of their own nationality.

## VI. FINDINGS

It was determined that coping behavior has different contents depending on ethnicity and gender. Socially acceptable coping strategies for representatives of the Russian ethnic group are as follows: positive reevaluation, problem solving planning, self-control. Moreover, the leading coping strategy is a problem-oriented one. It can be assumed that the Russians are characterized by the suppression and restraint of their emotions, overcoming negative experiences due to a positive reinterpretation.

On the other hand, Ossetians are characterized by a dominance of expressiveness, i.e. a light attitude to life, more confidence in their feelings and intuition than common sense. Orientation toward negative feelings and emotions associated with the problematic situation is more common. It is worth noting that the Ossetians are more conservative, which indicates their commitment to traditional values and orders. Preserving the traditions of their ethnic group is perceived as the main human value.

It should be noted that in stressful situations men often choose constructive coping strategies such as planning and search for social support of an instrumental nature. This may indicate that men tend to think about how to act in relation to a difficult life situation and the development of tactics of behavior. They more often seek advice, help or information from the social environment. However, there are ethnic differences in men's coping behavior. Thus, avoidance and social distraction are distinctive features of Russian men while denial and deterrence of coping is specific for Ossetian men.

Women are characterized by a predominance of emotionally-oriented coping behavior, namely, focusing on unpleasant emotions and feelings. Women more often deny what happened and refuse to believe in the situation, try to reject the reality, tend to seek help from God, faith and religion. Additionally, women are more likely to respond to a problem situation with humor, laughter or a joke.

Ethnic differences of coping behavior were revealed among women as well. The behavior of Russian women is characterized by self-control, in which overcoming of negative feelings in connection with a difficult life situation occurs through targeted suppression and restraint of emotions, as well as minimizing their influence on assessing the situation and choosing a behavior strategy, tight control of behavior, the desire for self-control [25, 26]. On the other hand, concentration on emotions and their expression as well as on behavioral avoidance of the problem prevails among women of the Ossetian ethnic group.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The results of a studying ethnopsychological and gender characteristics of coping behavior can be used to develop recommendations for implementing national policies in the republics of the North Caucasus [13]. Empirical results can become the foundation for the theoretical base of new studies devoted to coping strategies among the representatives of different ethnic groups while this assists in enriching scientific ideas on the problem of the impact of cross-cultural factors on the process of coping behavior formation [8, 21]. The results of the study can be used in developing recommendations on the organization of socio-psychological services in multicultural regions as well as in developing training programs in the fields of stress psychology, personality psychology, ethnic psychology and developmental psychology. It is also possible to use the described data in counseling men and women experiencing difficult life situations.

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