FACTORS INFLUENCITNG THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF STREET VENODRS IN HPA-AN TOWNSHIP, KAREN STATE, MYANMAR: A PATH ANALYTIC STUDY

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Abstract: The present study examined the factors that influence the psychological well-being among street vendors in and around the public markets of Hpa-an township, Karen State, Myanmar. A total of 190 female participants who make a living as street vendors in the local markets were obtained by convenience sampling method. The findings of this study revealed that the vendors reported having average levels family functioning, social support, stress, and psychological well-being, used average levels of coping styles. The results showed that the vendors' social support has direct and positive influence on their psychological well-being. Moreover, the findings yielded direct and positive influences of family functioning, problem-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping on their level of stress. Regardless of having healthy relationships in the family and employing two types of coping strategies, these vendors still reported experiencing certain levels of stress. It is evident that these vendors certainly need professional advice and guidance in order to deal with various stressors in their daily lives.

Keywords: Family Functioning, Social Support, Coping Styles, Stress, Psychological Well-Being, Street Vendors.

Introduction

Street vendors serve an important component of urban economics around the world by the distribution of suitable materials and services with convenience and acceptable prices. Making a living as a street vendor has existed for many years and is recognized as a cornerstone of many cities with historical and cultural heritage (Bromley, 2000). According to the National Commission of Labor, street vendors are identified as self-employed workers in the informal sector who offer their labor for selling goods and services on the street without having any permanent built-up structure (Bhowmik, 2010). Street vendors may be classified into two types: mobile/dynamic (who visit different places during working hours), and immobile/static (who stay at one place and have regular working periods).

There is substantial increase in the number of street vendors in major cities around the world, especially in the developing or underdeveloped countries of Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The lack of gainful employment in these countries

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combined with poverty and unstable jobs with insufficient salaries have forced people to a better place and more stable job as street vendor (Bhowmik & Saha, 2012). Nowadays, many housewives and young women make a living as shopkeepers or street vendors to help alleviate their family's financial problems, pay for their children's school fees, and save for unexpected health problems or emergency situations.

Street vendors face many problems in dealing with their work setting, social protection, credit accessibility, and public space utilization (Bhowmik, 2001; Machhi, 2013). Female vendors, especially, are also responsible for household chores and caring for the children; hence, they constantly try to strike a balance between work and family. Sanlier and Arpaci (2007) demonstrated that working women have higher levels of stress than non-working women, leading to negative effects on their physical health and emotional status. There is no denying that street vendors struggle hard to cope with daily hassles or stress from different sources. Due to their daily struggles as well as insufficient knowledge of coping skills and mechanisms, street vendors are likely to become overwhelmed and, as a result, become less satisfied with life.

Family Functioning

Family functioning is defined as the way in which family members interact with and react to each other, and includes variables within the family such as communication styles, traditions, clear roles and boundaries, and degrees of flexibility and adaptation (Winek, 2010). Healthy family functioning represents all family members united together as a family unit, effectively coping with cultural, environmental, psychosocial, and socioeconomic stresses throughout the family life cycle. All family members enter a period of adjustment and cooperation to adapt and change situations when a family member experiences stressful conditions, traumatic events, and positive or negative life changes (Olson & Gorall, 2003). Furthermore, each family member plays an important role and adopts one's own style to form a healthy and standard family, with the aim to reach the whole family's ultimate goal of physical and emotional well-being.

Social Support

Social support refers to the experience of being valued, respected, cared about, and loved by others within or outside the family (Gurung, 2006). Social support does not focus on an individual's general appearance and external factors; it only focuses on the person as a human being. Regardless of whether a person is good or bad, people accept, care about, and help him or her unconditionally.

Social support is considered as a variety of social relationships that have consequences on the performance of an individual (Glanz, Rimer, & Lewis, 2002). Family members and significant others play an important role in improving the individual's psychological well-being and healthy life development; thus, the healthier the relationship a person has with significant others, the better the support he or she gets from them. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, social needs serve as the third important level among five levels, indicating that a person needs belongingness, affection, and love from family, friends, and significant others as well as healthy relationship with them (Kenrick, Neuberg, Griskevicius, Becker,

& Schaller, 2010). If a person cannot accomplish this level or if the need is not satisfied, he or she can rarely reach the two top higher-order needs of esteem and self-actualization.

Coping Styles

Coping mechanisms are crucial processes in the daily lives of human beings because they help people in many ways, including managing stress caused by various factors, solving problems effectively, and dealing with intrapersonal or interpersonal conflicts. Coping is any action taken or behavior performed to reduce an individual's physical, emotional, or psychological burden relative to stressful events (Snyder & Dinoff, 1999). As stress may come from different sources and in different levels that affect an individual's well-being, the individual needs to implement effective coping skills and systematic problem-solving methods in order to maintain a healthy life and improve one's physical or emotional well-being. Useful and constructive coping strategies are needed for an individual to free him/herself from stress ranging from overwhelming to low level.
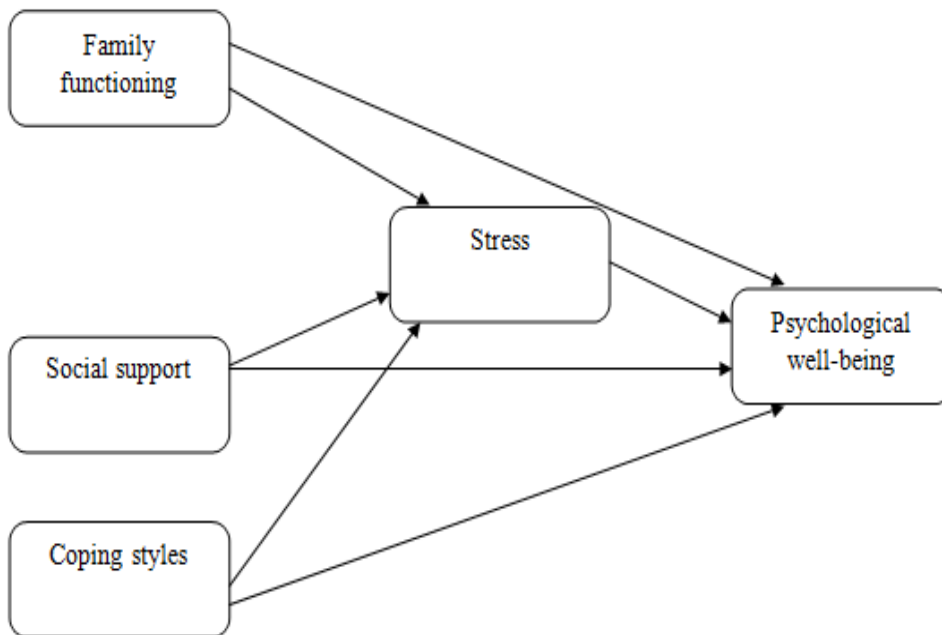
Stress

Grant et al. (2004, as cited in Moksnes, 2011) defined stress as a person's physical or emotional reactions to a situation that threatens, challenges, or harms his or her well-being. Alternatively, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) asserted that stress is a specific relationship between a person and his or her environment that is accepted by that person as a challenging or stressful condition. Based on the condition they face, some people may have more physical reactions while some have more emotional responses. The way people cope with stress is crucial for their physical, social, and psychological well-being. A basic premise about stress and coping is that they are reciprocals of each other. This means that when coping is effective, stress is usually controlled; when coping is ineffective, stress mounts and can get out of control, leading to physiological disturbance, subjective distress, and impaired social functioning (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Psychological well-being

Well-being generally includes the presence of positive emotions and attitudes, the absence of negative emotional status, lack of physical illness, and satisfaction with life. Hird (2003) noted that well-being can be distinguished into two essential types: objective and subjective well-being, with the former proposed as the improvement of objective living standards, and the latter suggesting the enhancement of people's happiness and life satisfaction. Diener and colleagues (1991, as cited in Bheeradhev, 2006) explained that psychological well-being is a multifaceted concept that includes people's emotional responses, life satisfaction, and global judgment of one's whole life. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) described psychological well-being as the cornerstone of mental health; it is a state in which a person is aware of his/her own capabilities or coping skills and can effectively deal with stressful life events. It suggested that individuals can unexpectedly experience some kind of difficulty at any point in their lives; nonetheless, they are able to manage the unfortunate event and still promote their own self-awareness and well-being.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Path Model of The Hypothesized Influence of Family Functioning, Social Support, and Coping Styles on The Psychological Well-Being of Hpa-An Female Street Vendors, Being Mediated by Their Level of Stress

Research Questions

From the conceptual framework, the following research question was drawn:

Are there any direct and indirect influences of family functioning, social support, and coping styles on the psychological well-being of street vendors in Hpa-an township, Karen State, Myanmar, being mediated by stress?

Research Hypotheses

H1:   Family functioning, social support, and coping styles (problem-focused and emotion-focused) have direct influences on the psychological well-being of street vendors such that the greater levels of family functioning, social support, and coping styles, the higher is the level of their psychological well-being.

H2:   Family functioning, social support, and coping styles (problem-focused and emotion-focused) have indirect influences on the psychological well-being of street vendors, being mediated by their level of stress such that the higher the levels of family functioning, social support, and coping styles and the lower the level of stress, the higher is the level of their psychological well-being.

Method

The participants of the study (*N=190*) were female street vendors selling mainly vegetables and fruits in and around the public markets in Hpa-an township, Karen State, Myanmar.

Instruments

Apart from demographic information such as the number of years of working as a vendor, income per month, and total number of family members, the other instruments used consisted of Family Assessment Device (FAD) - a five point Likert scale which was based on the McMaster Model of Family Functioning (MMFF) by Epstein et al. (1962, as cited in Epstein et al., 1983). The researcher utilized only 12 items from the original version which was deemed sufficient to measure the respondent's perceived overall family functioning. For general functioning scale only, the coefficient alpha was at 0.83 to 0.86 and test-retest reliability was 0.71 (Epstein et al., 1983).

The other scale used was Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), designed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley in 1988, a seven point scale which higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived social support. According to the report of Zimet et al. (1988), the alpha coefficient of internal reliability was 0.91 for the total scales and 0.90 to 0.95 for the subscales.

The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) developed by Endler and Parket in 1990. The 48-item CISS has three of the 16 item scale assessing the task-oriented, emotion-oriented and avoidance-oriented coping. For the purpose of the present study, only task-oriented (problem-focused) and emotion-oriented (emotion-focused) coping factors were measured. This is a five point Likert scale with higher scores showing higher frequency of using that coping style.

The Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ), developed by Levenstein and colleagues in 1993(as cited in Fliege et al., 2005). The 30-item PSQ is a self-assessment type of questionnaire designed to measure the respondent's experience with stressful situations, in general. Respondents are asked to rate how often each item applies to them on a four-point Likert scale. The overall Cronbach's alpha is 0.85 and test-retest reliability is 0.80.

Lastly, the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin in 1985. The instrument's internal consistency is very good with an alpha of 0.87. Diener and colleagues (1985) also stated that this instrument appears to have excellent test-retest reliability, with a correlation of 0.82 for a two-month period; 0.84 for a two-week interval and 0.84 for a one-month interval.

Procedure

A pretest was conducted on the Burmese version of the survey questionnaire on 20 street vendors in a small market who were recruited through convenience sampling. Only those who consented to participate in the study and who identified themselves as being street vendors and able to read and write in Burmese were given the full survey questionnaire to complete.

Results

Initial reliability analysis indicated that the computed Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all six scales (family functioning, social support, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, stress, and psychological well-being) ranged from .68 to .81.

Path Analysis: Test of Hypotheses
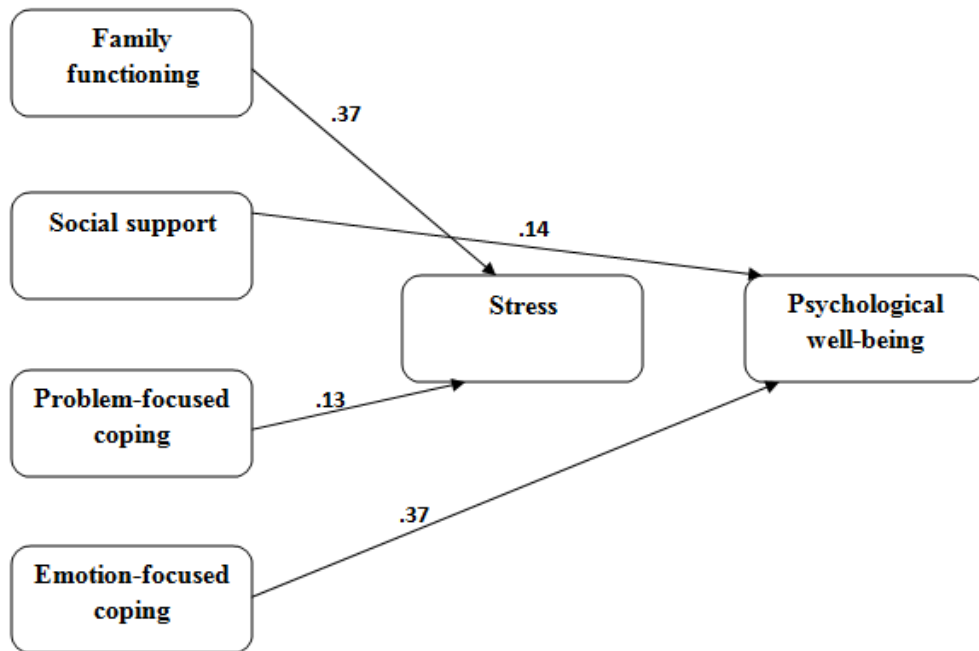
Figure 2: Path Model of Psychological Well-Being as A Function of The Direct and Indirect Influences of Family Functioning, Social Support, Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused Coping Styles, Being Mediated by Stress

The findings yielded no significant direct or indirect influences (being mediated by stress) for the predictor variables of family functioning, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping styles on the respondents' psychological well-being. Nevertheless, the results showed that there is a direct influence of social support on psychological well-being (Beta= .14), such that the higher the respondents' level of perceived social support, the higher is their level of psychological well-being. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that family functioning has an influence on stress (Beta= .37), such that the higher the respondents' level of family functioning, the higher is their reported level of stress. Additionally, the results showed that the respondents' use of problem-focused coping (Beta= .13) and emotion-focused coping styles (Beta= .37) have positive influences on their level of stress. This means that the more the respondents reported employing problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping styles, the higher is their reported level of stress.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Results obtained from the path analysis showed that the street vendors' family functioning, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping styles have direct positive influences on stress, while social support has a direct positive influence on psychological well-being. The direct positive influence of street vendors' family functioning on the level of stress suggests that the higher their level of stress, the stronger their family functioning. Generally, healthy relationships and interpersonal support within the family greatly affect a person's stress reduction and coping skills when facing stressful situations. A study by Victoria et al., (2006) demonstrated that caregivers who reported having a high level of family functioning reported having great capability of reducing their daily stresses. Healthy interaction and a helpful hand between families members are definitely important for each member in order to cope with stressful or challenging situations, solve minor or major problems, and maintain respect and satisfaction in both family and work. On the other hand, a person's level of stress can be increased or decreased, depending on the type of family interactions and coping skills. Edgar and Glezer (1992) stated that stress level is associated with many other factors including work-family balance. Daily stressful situations at the workplace (e.g., working long hour, irregular income, low job status and satisfaction, and unhealthy working environment, etc.) are encountered by street vendors while they try to fulfill the family's needs. Thus, it is not unusual for street vendors to report experiencing some stress in the workplace even they have good relationships with family members.

Another finding from the path analysis indicated that the street vendors' problem-focused coping style has a direct positive influence on their stress level. More specifically, the more the vendors employed problem-focused coping, the higher their level of self-reported stress. Actually, different types of coping styles are useful and effective in dealing with various situations, based on the person's coping skills and capabilities. Problem-focused coping, especially, is a 'solution-oriented' approach in dealing with various stressors (Farkas, 2012); thus, it is deemed useful in approaching manageable and changeable situations. Previous studies proved that problem-focused coping style is beneficial in reducing daily stresses at the workplace (Maja et al, 2013; Wang, Kong, & Chair, 2011; Charanjeev, Sunita, & Ravider, 2011). Unexpectedly, the current result deviated from previous assumptions and findings. Street vendors struggle hard to cope with daily stressors by using various methods as advised by others. Carver (2011) stated that problem-focused coping style tends to be ineffective if the person is unable to control the situation or change the circumstances as well as adjust to the stressors. In the street vendors' situation, their stress level did not seem to subside because they opted to utilize ineffective coping mechanisms on unchangeable situations.

Similarly, the current results also showed that the vendors' emotion-focused coping has a direct positive influence on stress, suggesting that the more they employed emotion-focused coping, the higher their reported level of stress. While problem-focused coping is deemed effective in dealing with manageable stressful situations; it had been demonstrated that emotion-focused coping is more suitable for unchangeable conditions like terminal illness and death of a loved one. Carver (2011) stated that emotion-focused coping mechanism involves a cognitive reappraisal

process that includes self-reflection and taking control over a person's emotions. Instead of changing the circumstances, emotion-focused coping typically focuses on the person's emotional responses to the stressor. In other words, emotion-focused strategies only depend on a person's emotions, not on the problem itself; hence, they are often less effective than using the problem-focused style. A study by Epping-Jordan et al. (1994) proved that cancer patients who avoided facing their current condition reportedly deteriorated more quickly than those who face and accept the reality of their illness. In the current study, it may be the case that the street vendors' preferences for using emotion-focused coping style is not the most effective way to deal with daily stress; perhaps, it would serve them well if they tried to use alternative ways of coping with stress such as problem-focused coping style.

Lastly, the results of path analysis indicated that the street vendors' level of perceived social support positively and directly influenced their psychological well-being. More specifically, the higher their level of perceived social support, the higher their level of psychological well-being and overall satisfaction with life. Social interactions with family members, colleagues, and significant others are definitely important, and equally so are various kinds of support from them. Social support tends to be more distinctive and significant especially when a person experiences stress and tries to cope with this stress. Previous studies showed that social support plays a vital role in maintaining and promoting physical health (Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt, 1996; Salovey, Detweiler, Steward, & Rothman, 2000). By the same token, a person can experience psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and other negative consequences if he or she fails to receive a sufficient amount of social support in order to deal with stressful situations (Eskin, 2003). Sharing life experience, expressing personal feelings, sharing information, and giving a helpful hand may be effective types of social support for vendors while having healthy and open interactions with other street vendors. These forms of social support greatly impact on their daily lives in basically the same way as coping with stressors. Thus, adequate amount and appropriate forms of social support combined with effective coping skills are bound to promote and ensure physical health and psychological well-being among street vendors and also help maintain good self-image and optimal satisfaction with life.

Conclusion

The vendors clearly understand the importance of their multi roles and how much their life is valuable while sharing feelings and life experience with others. Even they are facing many sources of stress, social support from friends and significant others are still helpful and effective for them to be satisfied with their occupation and understandable of the meaning of life. On the other hand, they certainly need professional guidance and advice such that special trainings for effective coping skills, stress-reduction method, and so on in order to handle daily stressful situations effectively.

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