LEX
LOCALIS

COPING STRATEGIES OF FIRST-GENERATION FEMALE LEARNERS FROM NORTH EAST INDIA AND NORTH INDIAN STUDYING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DELHI: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Elangbam Reebika Devi[1], D. Chao[2]

[1]*Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Delhi
[2]** Professor, Zakir Husain Delhi College, Department of Psychology, University of Delhi

Abstract: *The study investigates the coping strategies employed by first-generation female learners(FFGL) from North East Indian (NE) and North Indian (NI) studying at the University of Delhi, using   Sreenivasan Coping Scale (1999) such as appraisal-focused, emotion-focused, and problem-focused coping across different academic streams (Arts, Science, Law, Technical and Commerce). Using a quantitative comparative design, data were collected from 400 female students (159 from North east India, 241 from North Indian) through stratified random sampling. Findings indicate significant regional differences exists where North east students predominantly use emotion-focused coping due to cultural alienation and social isolation, while North Indian students favour problem-focused strategies, influenced by urban familiarity and social hierarchies. Stream-wise analysis reveals Science students employ more appraisal-focused coping, possibly due to academic rigor. Implications highlight the need for tailored support systems to address regional and stream-specific stressors.*

Key words: First generation learners, North east students, North Indian students, coping scale, college students

Introduction

The behavioural and cognitive strategies people employ to deal with particular internal or external stressors are referred to as coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies have a significant role in psychological adjustment, particularly for students making the move to college. This shift is frequently more difficult for first-generation students because of cultural expectations, financial strain, and a lack of parental support (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

First-generation students, who typically originate from low- to middle-income segments of society, are those whose parents did not complete formal education beyond the 12th grade and who, even if enrolled in college, would not be able to finish their degree. In order to deal with a lack of information, mentors, and guidance regarding skills and knowledge related to education, careers, social interaction, financial resources, etc., first-generation students are facing numerous challenges related to fear, anxiety, frustration, and related mental health issues.

At the University of Delhi,apremier institution attracting diverse students, regional backgrounds shape coping strategies. North East India (NEI), with its tribal diversity and geographical isolation, contrasts with North India (NI), marked by caste hierarchies and urban-rural divides. First-generation learners face socio-economic, cultural, and academic challenges. Studies highlight cultural alienation and language barriers for tribal students in urban universities (Boro&Kakati, 2023). Emotion-focused coping, such as seeking social support, is common due to community-oriented values. Conversely, students whose background are influenced by caste and gender norms, often face familial pressure and resource constraints, leaning toward problem-focused coping (Sharma, 2025).

Due to a lack of direction, financial limitations, and an unfamiliar academic atmosphere, first-generation students frequently endure psychological distress (Pascarella et al., 2004). In the Indian context, North East Indian students usually face extra obstacles like prejudice in urban universities, linguistic hurdles, and migration (Das, 2018). Coping mechanisms may be influenced by other external factors.Significant regional disparities exist in India, particularly between the Northeast (e.g., Manipur, Meghalaya) and urban centres like Delhi or Chennai, influencing coping strategies among college students.

The study addresses the gap in comparative research on first-generation female learners from North East Indian and North Indian students , examining how regional and academic stream differences influence coping strategies. The research questions are:

1. How do coping strategies (appraisal-, emotion-, and problem-focused) differ between NE and NI students first-generation female learners?
2. How do coping strategies vary across academic streams (Arts, Science, Law, technical and Commerce?

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the level of coping strategies employed by first generation female learners (FGFL) from North east (NE) and North Indian (NI) students
2. To identify the coping strategies employed by first-generation female learners (FGFL) from Northeast (NE) and North India (NI) students enrolled University of Delhi.

Hypothesis

1. There is a significant difference in coping strategies among the respondents based on their state NE & NI students.
2. There is a significant relationship between coping strategies – appraisal focus coping, emotion focus coping and problem focused coping.

Research Design

A quantitative, comparative cross-sectional study was designed to assess coping strategies among first-generation female learners from NEI and NI at the University of Delhi across different disciplines.

Participants

Sampling: Stratified random sampling ensured representation across streams (Arts, Science, Commerce) and regions (NE-Assam, Manipur, etc.; NI: Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, etc.) included

Sample Size: 400 female students from different steam of subjects identified as first-generation learners (parents with no higher education).

Inclusion Criteria: Full-time undergraduate students, aged 18–22, currently enrolled in University of Delhi.

Exclusion Criteria: Non-first-generation students, students who are not studying in the University of Delhi

Instrument

The subjects' coping strategies were assessed using the coping style scale developed by Sreenivas and Kumar (1999). It consists of 40 statements, divided into three components.

- Appraisal-focused coping (12 items)
- Emotion-focused coping (13 items) and
- Problem-focused coping (15 items)

The extent to which the students react to psychosocial challenges is indicated on a five-point scale ranging from "never to "always. A response of 'Always' is given a score of 4, a score of 3 is given to a response of 'Very Often', a score of 2 is given to 'Sometimes', a score of 1 is given to 'Very Rarely', and a response of 'Never' is given a score of 0. The maximum possible score is 200 (5x40). The higher the score, the more the student has used that particular coping style. The Cronbach's alpha obtained from the sample in the present study was 0.80. Hence, the coping strategies scale was considered reliable.

Statistical Tools Used: Descriptive and Inferential statistics were computed using the Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS 21.0)

Result table

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of each of the 3 items of the Coping Scale among the respondents of North East students and North Indian students

Coping Strategies	North East students (Mean)	Standard Deviation	North Indian students (Mean)	Standard Deviation
Appraisal Focused Coping	3.15	0.45	3.22	0.43
EmotionFocused Coping	2.97	0.37	3.03	0.37
Problem Focused Coping	2.53	0.40	2.47	0.41

Table no.1 compares the coping strategies between North East students and North Indian students, presenting their mean scores and standard deviations for three types of coping strategies: Appraisal Focused Coping, Emotion Focused Coping, and Problem Focused Coping. Across both groups, students generally exhibit higher mean scores in Appraisal Focused Coping, followed by Emotion Focused Coping, and then Problem Focused Coping. Although there are slight variations in mean scores between North East students and North Indian students across the different coping strategies, these differences are relatively minor. Additionally, the standard deviations suggest that there is a similar degree of variability in responses within each group for all three coping strategies. Overall, both North east (NE)and North Indian (NI) students tend to rely more on appraisal and emotion-focused coping strategies, with less emphasis on problem-focused coping, and the coping patterns are quite comparable between the two groups.

Table 2: Level of Appraisal Focused Coping among the Respondents Region

Appraisal-Focused Coping Level	Respondent Region		Total
	NE Students	NI Student	
Low Level	73	89	162
	45.1%	54.9%	100.0%
Medium Level	68	116	184
	37.0%	63.0%	100.0%
High Level	18	36	54
	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
Total	159	241	400
	39.8%	60.3%	100.0%

The table 2 illustrates the level of appraisal-focused coping among respondents from NE and NI students, delineating the distribution across low, medium, and high levels within each state. In terms of low-level coping, a greater proportion of NI students (54.9%) exhibit this behaviour compared to NE students (45.1%). Conversely, NE students demonstrate a slightly higher prevalence of high-level coping (33.3%) compared to NI students (66.7%). However, the medium level of coping shows a stark difference, with Delhi students (63.0%) significantly outnumbering Manipur students (37.0%). Overall, while both groups exhibit a similar total proportion of low, medium, and high levels of appraisal-focused coping, there

are noticeable disparities in the distribution within each level between students from NE and NI.

Table 3: Level of Emotional-Focused Coping among the Respondents Region

Emotion-Focused Coping Level	Respondent Region		Total
	NE Students	NI Students	
Low Level	81	109	190
	42.6%	57.4%	100.0%
Medium Level	17	36	53
	32.1%	67.9%	100.0%
High Level	61	96	157
	38.9%	61.1%	100.0%
Total	159	241	400
	39.8%	60.3%	100.0%

The table 3 compares the level of Emotional-Focused Coping among respondents from NE and NI, providing frequencies and percentages within each regions. In terms of low-level coping, a higher proportion of NI students (57.4%) exhibit this behaviour compared to NE students (42.6%). Conversely, NE students demonstrate a slightly higher prevalence of high-level coping (38.9%) compared to NI students (61.1%). Additionally, the medium level of coping is more pronounced among NI students (67.9%) compared to NE students (32.1%). Overall, while both groups exhibit a similar total proportion of low, medium, and high levels of Emotional-Focused Coping, there are noticeable differences in the distribution within each level between students from NE and NI , with NI students showing a higher propensity for high and medium-level coping strategies, and NE students displaying a higher tendency for low-level coping strategies.

Table 4: Level of Problem-Focused Coping among the Respondents region

Problem-Focused Coping	Respondent Region		Total
	NE Students	NI Students	
Low Level	80	137	217
	36.9%	63.1%	100.0%
Medium Level	47	63	110
	42.7%	57.3%	100.0%
High Level	32	41	73
	43.8%	56.2%	100.0%
Total	159	241	400
	39.8%	60.3%	100.0%

The table compares the level of Problem-Focused Coping among respondents from NE and NI students , presenting frequencies and percentages within each state. In terms of low-level coping, a higher proportion of NI students (63.1%) exhibit this behaviour compared to NE students (36.9%). Conversely, NE students demonstrate a slightly higher prevalence of high-level coping (43.8%) compared to NI students (56.2%). Additionally, the medium level

of coping is slightly more pronounced among NI students (57.3%) compared to NE students (42.7%). Overall, while both groups exhibit a similar total proportion of low, medium, and high levels of Problem-Focused Coping, there are noticeable differences in the distribution within each level between students from NE and NI students with NI students showing a higher propensity for low and high-level coping strategies, and NE students displaying a slightly higher tendency for medium-level coping strategies.

Table 5: Mean and standard deviation and t-value of coping strategies among respondents from North East and North Indian students

Variables	Respondent Region	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Coping Strategies	North East students	159	2.8635	0.30397	-.698	0.485
	North Indian students	241	2.8853	0.30538		

Based on the analysis, the mean coping strategy score for first-generation female learners from North East at Delhi University is 2.8635 with a standard deviation of 0.30397, while for Delhi students, the mean coping strategy score is 2.8853 with a standard deviation of 0.30538. The t-value of -0.698 reveals the difference in means between the two groups, although it does not appear to be statistically significant. Additionally, the p-value associated with the t-test is 0.485, which is greater than the significant level of 0.05. The means that we fail to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that there is no significant difference in coping mechanisms between first-generation female learners from NE and NI at Delhi University based on the variables employed in this study.

Table 6: Mean and standard deviation and f-value coping strategies with the nature of the course of the respondents

Variables	Nature of the course	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	p-value
Coping Strategies	Arts	71	2.8915	0.31789	3.450	0.009
	Science	110	2.9400	0.26626		
	Commerce	73	2.8815	0.28635		
	Law	38	2.8967	0.32300		
	Technical	108	2.7919	0.32367		
Total		400	2.8766	0.30462		

The table provides the findings of a one-way ANOVA conducted to assess the differences in coping techniques among respondents grouped by the type of their course. The mean coping strategy scores vary across different course categories, with the highest mean coping strategy score found among respondents in the Science stream (mean = 2.9400) and the lowest mean coping strategy score observed among respondents in the Technical stream (mean = 2.7919). The ANOVA revealed an F-value of 3.450 and a corresponding p-value of 0.009. These results demonstrate that there is a statistically significant difference in coping

mechanisms among respondents dependent on the nature of their course. Therefore, the analysis provides evidence to support the hypothesis that there is a substantial variation in coping mechanisms concerning the nature of the course of the respondents.

Table 7: The Pearson correlation coefficient of Appraisal Focused Coping, Emotion Focused Coping, and Problem Focused Coping among the Respondents.

		Appraisal-focused coping	Emotion-focused coping	Problem-focused coping
Appraisal-focused coping	Pearson Correlation	1	.601**	.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.164
Emotion-focused coping	Pearson Correlation	.601**	1	.401**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
Problem-focused coping	Pearson Correlation	.070	.401**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.164	.000	

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

The Pearson correlation coefficientis analysed to assess the relationship between Appraisal Focused Coping, Emotion Focused Coping, and Problem Focused Coping – the table reveals significant relationships between certain pairs of coping strategies.

Firstly, there is a strong positive correlation between Appraisal Focused Coping and Emotion Focused Coping (r = 0.601, p < 0.01), suggesting that individuals who engage more in one type of coping tend to also utilize the other type. This indicates a complementary relationship between these two coping strategies, where individuals who actively appraise and evaluate stressors also tend to use emotional regulation strategies to cope with them.

Secondly, Emotion Focused Coping shows a significant positive correlation with Problem Focused Coping (r = 0.401, p < 0.01), indicating that individuals who employ more emotion-focused coping strategies also tend to utilize more problem-focused coping strategies. This suggests that individuals who regulate their emotions in response to stressors may also concurrently take action to address the underlying problems causing distress.

However, the correlation between Appraisal Focused Coping and Problem Focused Coping is weak and not significant (r = 0.070, p > 0.05), suggesting a lack of a strong relationship between these two coping strategies. It implies that individuals who engage in one type of coping strategy are not necessarily more likely to engage in the other type.

Thus, these correlations interplay between different coping dimensions, highlighting how individuals may employ multiple coping strategies simultaneously to deal with various stressors they encounter.

Discussion

The aim of the paper is to assess and compare coping strategies used by college students from North east and North Indian students as measured by the three subscales of the Coping Scale: Appraisal-Focused Coping, Emotion-Focused Coping, and Problem-

Focused Coping across different disciplines.The above results provide a comparative analysis of the ways in which students from North east and North Indian, adjust to stresses. These differences may be due to socio-psychological, cultural, and environmental factors. Overall, both groups mean scores show a moderate to high reliance on these methods, with minor variances that should be interpreted in light of ideas of adaptation and psychological resilience.

NI students exhibited slightly higher means in Appraisal-Focused Coping (M = 3.22, SD = 0.43) and Emotion-Focused Coping (M = 3.03, SD = 0.37) compared to NE students (M = 3.15, SD = 0.45; M = 2.97, SD = 0.37), suggesting a marginal preference for cognitive reappraisal and emotional regulation among NI students, possibly due to urban exposure and resource availability. Conversely, NE students showed a higher mean in Problem-Focused Coping (M = 2.53, SD = 0.40 vs. M = 2.47, SD = 0.41), which may reflect adaptive responses to regional challenges like socio-political instability. The low SDs indicate consistent strategy use within groups.

For Appraisal-Focused Coping, NI students dominated higher levels (66.7% High, 63.0% Medium), while NE had a higher proportion in Low (45.1%). Similarly, in Emotion-Focused Coping (Table 3), NI led in Medium (67.9%) but NE in Low (42.6%). Problem-Focused Coping (Table 4) showed NE with higher shares in Medium (42.7%) and High (43.8%), suggesting NE students' inclination toward action-oriented coping amid adversity. These distributions highlight that while overall sample sizes favour NI (60.3% total), proportional differences may indicate cultural influences, with NI favouring internal strategies

Thus, coping strategies shows no significant difference between NE (M = 2.8635, SD = 0.30397) and NI (M = 2.8853, SD = 0.30538) students (t = -0.698, p = 0.485), implying regional homogeneity in aggregate coping, despite subscale variations. The non-significance could result from migration effects homogenizing behaviours or sample imbalances. In contrast, there is significant differences by course nature (F = 3.450, p = 0.009), with Science students highest (M = 2.9400) and Technical lowest (M = 2.7919). This suggests discipline-specific stressors—e.g., empirical demands in Science fostering adaptive coping, vs. practical pressures in Technical fields leading to lower means.

In contrast, there is significant differences by course nature (F = 3.450, p = 0.009), with Science students highest (M = 2.9400) and Technical lowest (M = 2.7919). This suggests discipline-specific stressors—e.g., empirical demands in Science fostering adaptive coping, vs. practical pressures in Technical fields leading to lower means.

Correlations indicate strong positive associations between Appraisal- and Emotion-Focused Coping (r = 0.601, p < 0.01) and Emotion- and Problem-Focused (r = 0.401, p < 0.01), but non-significant between Appraisal- and Problem-Focused (r = 0.070, p = 0.164). This implies complementary use of emotion- and appraisal-based strategies, with problem-focused somewhat independent, consistent with literature on integrated coping repertoires. These results align with prior findings on regional stress but highlight non-significant overall differences, possibly due to shared university contexts.

Conclusion

Although there are no overall significant differences, this study shows interesting patterns by subscale and course in the coping techniques of NE and NI university students. While NE students prefer problem-focused coping that reflects environmental adjustments, NI students tend toward appraisal- and emotion-focused coping. The interdependence of tactics is shown by significant connections, which explain holistic approaches to mental health. Larger, longitudinal samples should be used in future studies to investigate mediators

such as acculturation. In the end, these observations support inclusive university policies that increase resilience among various student populations.

Implication

1. University Support: NEI students need culturally sensitive counselling to address isolation. NI students may benefit from workshops on stress management to complement problem-focused approaches.
2. Stream-Specific Interventions :Science students could receive mentorship to enhance problem-focused skills, while Arts students need structured emotional support programs
3. Promoting appraisal-focused strategies universally could build resilience, particularly for first-generation or underrepresented groups. On a broader scale, the results underscore the need for culturally sensitive mental health frameworks in India, addressing how regional stressors.

Limitation

- The Sreenivasan Coping Scale (1999) may not capture culturally specific coping mechanisms (e.g., tribal rituals in NEI).
- A key limitation is the descriptive nature of the table, lacking effect sizes or significance testing, which tempers conclusions about group differences. The sample's representativeness (e.g., unspecified sample size per group) and potential self-report biases in the Coping Scale could also influence results.
- Data collected from single University of Delhi so its limited for generalization.

References

Alkahtani, A. H., et al. (2025). A Systematic Literature Review on Anxiety Among Undergraduate Students During COVID-19. PMC. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12420638/

Alshammari, T., et al. (2023). Stress Factors, Stress Levels, and Coping Mechanisms Among University Students. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, 2023, 2026971. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1155/2023/2026971

Augustine, L. F., et al. (2020). Psychological Stress in Northeast Indian Students Pursuing Higher Education in Mainland Indian Cities. *Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 36(3), 229-235.https://journals.lww.com/ijsp/fulltext/2020/36030/psychological_stress_in_northeast_indian_students.9.aspx

Bansal, P., et al. (2023). Stress and Coping Strategy Among Coaching and Non-Coaching Students Studying in Kota. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 65(11), 1120-1125. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10871398/

Das, P., et al. (2025).A Comparative Study on Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among Medical and Engineering College Students in North-East India. *ResearchGate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352513090_A_comparative_study_on_depression_anxiety_and_stress_among_medical_and_engineering_college_students_in_North-East_India

Ganesan, Y. (2023). A Study on Understanding Academic Stress and Coping Strategy Amongst College Students in Shillong, Meghalaya. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(4), 1-10. https://ijip.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/18.01.001.20231104.pdf

Ganesan, Y. (2025). A Study on Understanding Academic Stress and Coping Strategy Amongst College Students in Shillong, Meghalaya. *ResearchGate*.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394980558_A_Study_on_Understanding_Academic_Stress_and_Coping_Strategy_Amongst_College_Students_in_Shillong_Meghalaya

Grover, S., et al. (2013). Coping Styles and its Association with Sources of Stress in Undergraduate Medical Students. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 35(4), 389-397. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3868092/

Ibragimova, N., et al. (2023). Cross-Cultural Study of Resilience, Stress, and Coping Behavior as Prerequisites for Foreign Students' Successful Learning. *The Open Psychology Journal*, 16, e187435012306160. https://openpsychologyjournal.com/VOLUME/16/ELOCATOR/e187435012306160/FULLTEXT/

McKay, A. J., et al. (2020). "We've Got Through Hard Times Before": Acute Mental Distress and Coping Among Disadvantaged Groups During COVID-19 Lockdown in North India. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 19(1), 1-12. https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-020-01345-7

Rani, S., et al. (2022). Coping Styles to Vitiate the Risk of Psychological Morbidities Among Undergraduate Medical Students. *Middle East Current Psychiatry*, 29(1), 1-10. https://mecp.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s43045-022-00196-y

Sinha, U. K., et al. (2000). Stress and Coping Among Students in India and Canada. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 32(4), 218-225. https://psycnet.apa.org/getdoi.cfm?doi=10.1037/h0087118

Sharma, V., et al. (2023). Coping Strategies Used by Indian International Students to Overcome Acculturative Challenges. *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education*, 15(3), 1-15.

Sharma, B., & Prasad, S. (2021). Academic Stress and Coping Mechanism Among Students: An Indian Perspective. *Research Gate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353446078_Academic_stress_and_coping_mechanism_among_students_An_Indian_perspective

Sinha, U. K., et al. (2000). Stress and Coping Among Students in India and Canada. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*. https://psycnet.apa.org/getdoi.cfm?doi=10.1037/h0087118

Sharma, V. (2025). Exploring Stress Management and Coping Mechanisms of Indian International Students: A Pilot Study. *Research Gate*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391044886_Exploring_Stress_Management_and_Coping_Mechanisms_of_Indian_International_Students_A_Pilot_Study

Sharma, A. (2024). The Influence of Social Support and Resilience with Coping Strategies Among College Students. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(2), 1-15. https://ijip.in/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/18.01.135.20241202.pdf

Watson, K. (2022). Ethnic Differences in the Way College Students Cope with Stress. *Eastern Illinois University Theses*. https://thekeep.eiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5965&context=theses