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EFFECT OF GENDER ON DIMENSIONS OF SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING, PROBLEM-FOCUSED COPING STRATEGY AND INEFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES

***Mohammad Nabi Zadeh¹, Koroush Namdari¹ and Iman Alah Nabi²**

¹Department of Psychology, Isfahan University

²Department of Education, Isfahan University

*Author for Correspondence

ABSTRACT

The present research aims to investigate whether the results from this fact that the men use problem-focused coping strategy and the women use ineffective coping strategy against stress are universal or not, and whether such results will be obtained in our country or just influenced of the culture and education of western communities as the related works have been almost conducted in western countries. Conducting a comparative study on dimensions of spiritual well-being as a coping mechanism in stressful situations in both genders including male and female has been regarded as another aim of this research. In the present research, comparative-casual method has been used. The statistical population consists of the students studying in Isfahan University, and the sample group consists of 160 students (80 boys and 80 girls) selected via single-stage cluster sampling. Frydenberg & Lewis coping and Pulutzyn and Ellison spiritual well-being questionnaires were used as the research instruments. Results of Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test indicated that men more likely use problem-focused coping strategy against stressful situations and women more likely use ineffective coping strategy regarding previous studies. The results of studies indicate that the coping strategies are universal among men and women. Further, results of this study indicated that the extent of religious and existential well-being significantly is greater among men rather than women. Higher extent of existential health in men will probably result in more use of men from problem-focused coping strategy than women. This clarifies the importance and role of existential well-being in coping with stressful situations; this also indicates that it can increase the extent of using problem-focused coping strategy and the power for resistance against stress and resolving crises by training existential dimensions of purpose and philosophy of life.

Keywords: Coping with Stress, Problem-Focused Coping Strategy, Ineffective Coping Strategy, Spiritual Health, Religious Well-Being, Existential Well-Being

INTRODUCTION

Overview of gender differences has been regarded as one of the interesting issues for several researchers who strive to understand and investigate the psychological well-being (Croese *et al.*, 1992; Eberst, 1984; Ryff and Singer, 1996; Wissing and van Eeden, 1997; quoted from Roothman *et al.*, 2003). A variety of studies have reported role of gender differences in some certain scales of mental well-being including depression, anxiety and physical diseases (Thornton, 2010; Myers, 2010; Gomez and McLaren, 2006; quoted from Vakili *et al.*, 2011). On the other hand, there is an increasing desire for investigating the individuals' responses to conduct the life difficulties and problems. The relationship between stressful life events and physical and psychological well-being has been thoroughly confirmed, and a large number of studies have reported that stressful life events accelerate illness and psychological distress (Theorell and Rahe, 1971; quoted from Beasley *et al.*, 2003). Stress has been drawn into attention as an inevitable phenomenon in modern communities (Hung, 2011, quoted from Odaci and Cikrikci, 2012), described as a psychological state that emerges when the individuals face physical or psychological problems (Atkinson *et al.*, 2002; quoted from Odaci and Cikrikci, 2012). Stress is a complicated reaction which affects our body, behavior, thought and emotions, and raises in exposure to the situations under which the individual' go beyond their ability to conduct them (Hiebert, 2000; quoted from Miller and Spriddle,

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2004). Causes of stress almost cannot be predicted, yet it can resolve consequences of stress using proper coping strategies against stress (Mesko *et al.*, 2013). According to Piko, coping encompasses cognitive and behavioral strategies that enable the person to resist the stressful events and negative emotional reactions under such situations (Dakhli *et al.*, 2013). According to Lazarus, Folkman (1984), coping responses can be classified into two dimensions including problem-focused coping and emotional-focused coping, that is, problem-focused coping encompasses the efforts to change the situation, under which the person obtains the information on what he must deal with it and then applies the activities for the purpose of changing the person-environment relations (Lazarus, 1999).

Examples of problem-focused coping include problem resolving, planning, increasing effort, time management, goal setting and searching information. Emotional-focused coping encompasses the efforts to regulate emotional distress associated to the situation (Lazarus, 1999). Examples of emotional-focused coping include relaxation, acceptance, seeking social support and wishful thinking (Kaiseler, 2010). Coping strategies include applying adaptive and maladaptive strategies by the person to be adjusted with a threat to make mental balance (Halliday and his colleague, 2004; quoted from Hayati and Mahmoudi, 2008). According to Roger & Najarian (1993), problem-focused coping is accounted as an effective strategy and emotional-focused coping is accounted as an ineffective strategy, such that Johnson *et al.*, (2007) in a research indicated that problem-focused coping is followed by higher mental well-being and emotional-focused coping is followed by lower mental well-being. Evidences in the studies associated to coping with stress indicate that the men use problem-focused coping strategy and the women use ineffective coping strategy against stress (Brems and Johnson, 1989; Stone and Neale, 1984; Ellen *et al.*, 2006).

Wide range of studies have confirmed that the men use problem-focused coping strategy and the women use ineffective coping strategy against stress, which include: the studies by Peterson *et al.*, (2006), Matsumoto *et al.*, (2009), Dyson and Renk (2006), Dwyer and Cummings (2001), Shapiro *et al.*, (2010), Bayley *et al.*, (2009), Hampel and Petermann (2005), Smith *et al.*, (2003), Kausar (2004), Dadsetan *et al.*, (2007), Shokri *et al.*, (2008), Vakili *et al.*, (2011). Concerning problem-focused coping, it must say that spirituality is the potential source in the relationship between mental well-being and a coping mechanism under stressful situations (Yang, 2008). Importance of spirituality and divine growth in human in recent decades has been drawn into attention by psychologists and specialists at the field of mental health.

Increase of desire for spiritual psychology has been almost derived from empirical findings and theoretical background, suggesting the critical role of spiritual and religious variables in mental and physical well-being (Emmons, 2000; quoted from Dehshiri *et al.*, 2008). Spirituality implies awareness from the universe or a force beyond the material aspects of life, emerging a deep sense of unity or tie with universe. Positive thoughts and hardiness represent two components of spirituality, linking to well-being and resistance to stress. Spiritual support serves as shock absorbing effect against stress (Eckstein and Kern, 2000; quoted from Bahrami *et al.*, 2006). Spiritual coping might result in physical and mental well-being, e.g. meditation can result in relaxation that might raise more well-being with decreasing stress (Krause, 2011; Peltzer and Koenig, 2005; quoted from, 2013). Hence, meditation can directly decrease anxiety by decreasing stress (John, 2013). Advocates of the role of spirituality in improving mental well-being and interpersonal adjustment have made huge efforts to make relationship between two concepts of well-being and spirituality entitled spiritual well-being (Jafari *et al.*, 2009). Spiritual well-being is considered as one of the important aspects of human well-being, developing integration between the man's internal forces and resulting in stability in life, consistency, and convenience, close relationship with relatives, God, community and environment (Agha *et al.*, 2012). Further, spiritual well-being divided the man's spiritual experience to two different aspects. Religious well-being puts an emphasis on individuals' spiritual well-being in relation with a superior power (Boivin *et al.*, 1999; Vollman *et al.*, 2009).

In contrast, existential well-being represents individuals' psychological social affairs and how they adjust with one selves, community or environment, including the existential dimensions of life goal, relation with others and satisfaction with positive or negative experiences at life (Boivin *et al.*, 1999; Vollman *et*

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al., 2009). Overview of the relationship between gender and spirituality has been regarded as one of the most interesting issues. Numerous researchers have sought understanding this relationship, and numerous researchers have agreed that the women are more religious rather than men (Hammermeister *et al.*, 2005; Volk *et al.*, 2012). Yet, inconsistent results about comparison of two genders including male and female have been reported concerning spiritual well-being and its two aspects including religious well-being and existential well-being. For instance, the studies by Bryant (2007), Buchko (2004), Smith and Denton (2005), Gomez and Fischer (2005), Dehshiri *et al.*, (2008) indicated that women enjoy higher spiritual well-being and religious well-being rather than men. Further, the findings of research by Kellums (1995) indicated high spiritual well-being in women rather than men, and findings of research by Roothman *et al.*, (2003), Rahgozar *et al.*, (2013) indicated higher religious well-being in women rather than men. The study by Dehshiri *et al.*, (2008) indicated that existential well-being is higher in women rather than men. Yet, in contrast the studies by Volk *et al.*, (2012), Simpson *et al.*, (2008) indicated that there is no significant difference between spiritual well-being and religious well-being among men and women. The studies by Aly (2010) and Hafeez and Rafique (2013) did not indicate the significant difference on religious well-being among men and women. Findings of research by Aly (2010) indicated that there is higher spiritual well-being and existential well-being in men rather women. Further, results of research by Rahgozar *et al.*, (2013) and Roothman *et al.*, (2003) indicated that there is no difference on existential well-being among men and women. As overview on gender differences on coping strategies against stress has been conducted in western countries, this question is asked whether the results concerning the more use of problem-focused coping strategy by men and the more use of Spiritual Well-being by women will be obtained in our country or just influenced of the culture and education of western communities as the related works have been almost conducted in western countries. Hence, concerning a survey on effect of gender on dimensions of spiritual well-being including existential and religious well-being as a coping mechanism in stressful situations, as said the results of research have been inconsistent. To sum up, few studies have been conducted on the survey on effect of gender on existential health. Hence, another aim of this study is to investigate the dimensions of spiritual health among men and women.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Method

The casual-comparative research method has been used in this study.

Statistical Population, Sample Group and Sampling Method

In this study, the statistical population (160) consists of all the students studying in Isfahan University, including male and female students, that the sample group was selected among the students via one-stage cluster sampling.

Measurement Instruments

Young people coping style scale: young people coping style scale has been formulated for the first time in 1993 by Frydenberg & Lewis in Australia. This scale consists of 90 questions which are used to measure 18 coping strategies against stress in adolescents and youth at the age groups 12-18 and 18-25 years old. To design this scale which has been formulated during four years in eight separate studies, the coping behaviors against stress were described affiliated to situation (Khodayari and Parand, 2007).

In present research, two fundamental coping strategies have been used:

1-problem-focused coping strategy, that such a strategy encompasses six coping strategies including focus on solving the problem, physical recreation, pursue relaxing diversions, work hard and achieve, focus on the positive.

2-Ineffective coping strategies including worry, engage in wishful thinking, decide not to cope, ignore the problem, suppress tension, keep to oneself and blame oneself (Khodayari and Parand, 2007).

To use this questionnaire in Iran, content of the questions after being translated and edited has been adapted with the culture prevailing in the country. Further, to fill the questionnaire, the contents which exist in the Young people coping style but not in the questionnaire, have been added to the questionnaire. To give a response to the questions in the questionnaire, five-point Likert scale is used. To measure the

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reliability of questionnaire, retest and cronbach's alpha were used. Results of re-test and cronbach's alpha indicate that the questionnaire enjoys a proper reliability (Khodayari and Parand, 2007). In the preliminary study, factor analysis was used to measure the validity of questionnaire; with regard to the obtained results, the saturation extent for each item on 18 considered factors has been greater than 30%, i.e. 18 factors or coping styles against stress in the questionnaire were confirmed (Khodayari and Parand, 2007).

Pulutzyn and Ellison Spiritual Well-being Questionnaire

Pulutzyn and Ellison spiritual well-being questionnaire consists of 20 questions that 10 questions measure the religious well-being and rest of 10 questions measure the existential well-being. The score for religious and existential well-being ranges from 10 to 60. It can judge on the sub-groups of religious and existential well-being based on the obtained score. The more score is greater it will indicate higher religious and existential well-being. The score for spiritual well-being represents the sum of both sub-groups for which the range of 20-120 has been considered. Six-item Likert scale including totally disagrees to totally agree has been considered to give a response to the questions. Inverse scores have been given to negative questions, and ultimately the spiritual well-being has been divided to three levels including low level (20-40), average level (41-99) and high level (100-120). In the study by Seid *et al.*, validity of the spiritual well-being questionnaire was specified and confirmed via content validity, and the reliability was determined via Cronbach's alpha coefficient equal to 82%, indicating a good reliability of these instruments (Seid *et al.*, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Mean and standard deviation of the scores for the respondents in the variables affiliated to the research concerning their gender have been represented in table 1.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the scores for the respondents in the variables affiliated to the research

| Indicator | Mean | Standard deviation | |
|------------------------------|-------|--------------------|--------|
| | | Male | Female |
| Religious Well-being | 38.30 | 34.93 | 3.56 |
| Existential Well-being | 37.31 | 34.62 | 3.92 |
| focus on solving the problem | 29.83 | 28.92 | 4.99 |
| pursue relaxing diversions | 13 | 12.31 | 2.07 |
| seeking belonging | 14.77 | 14.63 | 2.47 |
| work hard and achieve | 14.07 | 12.86 | 1.90 |
| focus on the positive | 13.45 | 11.76 | 1.93 |
| physical recreation | 8.78 | 7.15 | 2.28 |
| worry | 15.97 | 17.78 | 4.33 |
| friendly ties | 14.66 | 15.32 | 3.67 |
| engage in wishful thinking | 15.06 | 15.78 | 2.63 |
| keep to oneself | 12.05 | 10.78 | 2.19 |
| suppress tension | 15.92 | 18.03 | 4.00 |
| decide not to cope | 11.26 | 13.65 | 2.30 |
| ignore the problem | 10.73 | 10.23 | 2.34 |
| blame oneself | 12.05 | 12.61 | 2.16 |

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Table 2: Results of Wilks' lambda criterion to compare the affiliated variables in two groups including male and female

| Indicators/ source of effects | Eigenvalue | F | Freedom degree of hypothesis | Freedom degree of error | Significance | Eta square | Statistical Power |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Gender | 0.62 | 5.41 | 16 | 143 | 0.00 | 0.37 | 1 |

Table 3: Results of Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) for all the variables

| Indicators | | Sum of squares | Freedom degree | Mean of squares | F | Significance | Eta square | Statistical Power |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------|--------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Gender | Religious Well- being | 452.25 | 1 | 452.25 | 29.14 | 0.00 | 0.15 | 1 |
| | Existential Well- being | 288.90 | 1 | 288.90 | 18.67 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.99 |
| | focus on solving the problem | 33.30 | 1 | 33.30 | 1.30 | 0.25 | 0.00 | 0.20 |
| | pursue relaxing diversions | 18.90 | 1 | 18.90 | 3.30 | 0.07 | 0.02 | 0.43 |
| | seeking belonging | 0.75 | 1 | 0.75 | 0.11 | 0.73 | 0.00 | 0.06 |
| | work hard and achieve | 58.80 | 1 | 58.80 | 15.25 | 0.00 | 0.08 | 0.097 |
| | focus on the positive | 113.90 | 1 | 113.90 | 4.44 | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.55 |
| | physical recreation | 107.25 | 1 | 107.25 | 13.10 | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.94 |
| | worry friendly | 131.40 | 1 | 131.40 | 8.26 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 0.81 |
| | ties | 17.55 | 1 | 17.55 | 1.44 | 0.23 | 0.00 | 0.22 |
| | engage in wishful thinking | 21.02 | 1 | 21.02 | 2.44 | 0.12 | 0.01 | 0.34 |
| | keep to oneself | 63.75 | 1 | 63.75 | 9.47 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 0.86 |
| | suppress tension | 178.50 | 1 | 178.50 | 10.33 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.89 |
| | decide not to cope | 228.00 | 1 | 228.00 | 26.30 | 0.00 | 0.14 | 0.99 |
| ignore the problem | 10 | 1 | 10 | 2.21 | 0.13 | 0.01 | 0.31 | |
| blame oneself | 12.65 | 1 | 12.65 | 2.02 | 0.15 | 0.01 | 0.29 | |

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As shown in table 1, mean of scores for men is higher than that of for women in the dimensions of spiritual well-being including religious and existential well-being. Mean of scores for men than women is greater in all the dimensions of problem-focused coping strategy except for the dimension of seeking belonging that the mean for the scores of women and men is almost equal. There is no significant difference on the mean of scores for men and women concerning the dimensions associated to ineffective coping strategies in three dimensions of blame oneself, ignore the problem and engage in wishful thinking. Yet, the mean of scores for men is greater than that of for women in the dimension of keep to oneself. To examine significance of the differences seen at descriptive level and to examine effect of gender on the research variables, Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was used. Results of Box test ($P=0.00$, $M=367.87$) indicated that presumption of equality of co-variances did not come true, and the results of Levin test for the variables including religious well-being($P=0.45$, $F=0.57$), existential Well-being($P=0.29$, $F=0.58$), focus on solving the problem($P=0.02$, $F=0.88$), pursue relaxing diversions($P=0.12$, $F=2.34$), seeking belonging ($P=0.06$, $F=0.80$), work hard and achieve ($P=0.16$, $F=0.68$), focus on the positive($P=0.14$, $F=2.15$), focus on the positive($P=0.28$, $F=0.59$), engage in wishful thinking($P=0.13$, $F=2.56$), suppress tension($P=0.61$, $F=0.25$) and ignore the problem($P=0.07$, $F=3.14$) indicated that presumption of equality of variances did not come true, and also the results of Levin test for the variables including worry($P=0.02$, $F=5.07$), keep to oneself ($P=0.02$, $F=4.83$), physical recreation($P=0.00$, $F=13.41$), decide not to cope($P=0.00$, $F=9.47$), and blame oneself($P=0.01$, $F=6.46$) indicated that presumption of equality of variances did not come true. Under such circumstances, due to equality of the number of respondents in each group and due to large sample size, it can use the parametric test, yet it is also a good idea to use non-parametric test to confirm the results, whereby the consistency of the results in two tests indicates this fact that lack of observance of the presumptions has not had any significant effect on the results of analyses (Glass and Stanley, 1989; Molavi, 2007). Results of Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) in tables 2 and 3 and results of non-parametric Mann-whitney test have been represented in table 4.

Table 4: Results of Mann-whitney test to compare the affiliated variables in two groups including male and female

| Indicators | U | Significance |
|------------------------------|---------|--------------|
| Religious Well-being | 1600 | 0.00 |
| Existential Well-being | 1910.50 | 0.00 |
| focus on solving the problem | 2851 | 0.23 |
| pursue relaxing diversions | 2716.50 | 0.09 |
| seeking belonging | 2992.50 | 0.47 |
| work hard and achieve | 2024.50 | 0.00 |
| focus on the positive | 2397.50 | 0.00 |
| physical recreation | 2247.50 | 0.00 |
| worry | 2391 | 0.00 |
| friendly ties | 2928.50 | 0.35 |
| engage in wishful thinking | 2725 | 0.10 |
| keep to oneself | 2343.50 | 0.00 |
| suppress tension | 2402.50 | 0.00 |
| decide not to cope | 1669 | 0.00 |
| ignore the problem | 2675 | 0.07 |
| blame onself | 2844.50 | 0.22 |

With regard to table 2, it can perceive that there is a significant difference between two groups of men and women concerning all the affiliated variables. With regard to table 3, the difference between two groups concerning all the variables has been examined, under which it can assume a significant difference

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between men and women in two dimensions of religious well-being and existential well-being as the dimensions for the spiritual well-being. Hence, with regard to the results of table 1, it can say that extent of religious well-being and existential well-being in men has been greater than that of in women. Results of Mann-whitney test in table 4 confirm these results. Concerning dimensions of problem-focused coping strategy, difference between men and women is significant in the variables of work hard and achieve, focus on the positive and physical recreation. Hence, with regard to table 1, it can say that the extent of these three variables for men has been greater than that of for women. Results of Mann-whitney in table 4 are consistent with these results. Concerning dimensions of ineffective coping strategy, difference between men and women is significant in the variables of worry, keep to one, suppress tension, and decide not to cope. Hence, with regard to table 1, it can say that the extent of the variable ‘keep to oneself’ for men has been greater than that of for women, and extent of three variables of worry, suppress tension and decide not to cope is greater in women rather than men. Results of Mann-whitney in table 4 are consistent with these results.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present research aims to represent a comparative study on the coping strategies in both genders including male and female and to investigate whether the men use more likely problem-focused coping strategy than women and the women use more likely ineffective coping strategy than men, and whether the obtained results have been influenced of the culture and education prevailing in western communities. To examine this, two genders including male and female were compared with each other concerning various dimensions of problem-focused coping strategy and ineffective coping strategy. In this study, problem-focused coping strategy encompasses six coping strategies including focus on solving the problem, physical recreation, pursue relaxing diversions, work hard and achieve, focus on the positive and ineffective coping strategies encompass worry, engage in wishful thinking, decide not to cope, ignore the problem, suppress tension, keep to oneself and blame oneself (Khodayari and Parand, 2007).

Results of this study indicated that the men compared to the women obtained higher scores in the dimensions problem-focused coping strategy including work hard and achieve, focus on the positive and physical recreation. Yet, women compared to men did not obtain higher scores in any of the problem-focused strategies. These results are consistent with the findings of studies by Roothman *et al.*, (2003) concerning this fact that the men obtained higher scores in positive thoughts, constructive thinking and cognitive flexibility. Further, these results are consistent with the results of the research by Nolen-Hoeksema (1994) and Frydenberg and Lewis (1996) concerning this fact that the men more likely use physical recreation to cope with stress. More use of work hard and achieve and increase of effort and focus on positive against stress which refer to more constructive thinking and cognitive flexibility in men to face stressful problems will lead to changing the position, planning, time management and problem resolving. Further, concerning more use of physical recreation by men rather than women, it must state that physical activity implies suppress tension, release hidden emotions and obtain opportunity to find a solution for the problem. To sum up, with regard to what aforementioned, it can perceive that men more likely use the problem-focused coping strategy than women and the results of research indicate that the more use of problem-focused coping strategy is universal.

Results of the present research indicated that the women acquired higher scores in the dimensions of ineffective coping strategy including worry, suppress tension and decide not to cope; yet, the men acquired higher scores in the dimension of keep to oneself. These results are consistent with the findings of research by Zeman and Garber (1996) and Haji (2007) concerning this fact that the women compared to the men express more worry in exposure to stressful life events; further, the results of this study are consistent with the findings of the research by Kirchner *et al.*, (2010), Renk and Creasey (2003), Recklities *et al.*, (1999) and Shokri *et al.*, (2008) concerning this fact that the women invoked not to decide to cope in exposure with stressful life events.

High worry, suppress tension and decide not to cope in women than men in exposure with stressful life events indicate lower focus by women for changing stressful life events, lack of resolving problem, and more focus on the emotions associated to the stressful events, regulating distress, accepting situation, and

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engaging in wishful thinking. To sum up, with regard to what mentioned above, the results of the present research indicate that women compared to men more likely use the ineffective coping strategy to cope with stressful life events concerning the findings of previous research, and the results of research indicate that such coping style against stress among women is universal. Yet, another aim of the present research is to compare the dimensions of spiritual well-being including religious well-being and existential well-being as a coping mechanism in stressful life events among men and women. In this regard, the results of the present research indicated that the extent of religious well-being and existential well-being is more likely common in men than women. These results are consistent with the findings of research by Ally (2010) concerning this fact that the existential well-being of men goes beyond that of for women. Further, the results of this research are inconsistent with the findings of research by Roothman *et al.*, (2003) and Bryant (2007) concerning this fact that the religious well-being of women goes beyond that of for men, and also inconsistent with the results of research by Dehshiri *et al.*, (2008) concerning this fact that existential well-being of women goes beyond the men. The reason for this inconsistency as Volk *et al.*, (2012) referred to it lies on the definition represented for religion in various measurement scales for it. In general, the results of research indicate that religious well-being in women goes beyond in men. Yet, this does not go true for existential well-being, and it seems that existential well-being in men goes beyond in women. Higher existential well-being in men which conveys the person's better consistency with oneself, community and life environment and satisfaction with positive or negative experiences at life and causes the person considers the existential aspects of life, will lead to more use of problem-focused coping strategy to cope with stressful events by men rather than women. This indicates importance and role of existential well-being to cope with stress and stressful events, that it can increase the use of problem-focused strategy by individuals and their power of resistance with stress and stressful life events and resolving crises and mental pressures by referring to psychological clinics.

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