



Are Women Hardier? A Study on Indian Corporate Professionals

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ABSTRACT

Hardiness is theorized by Suzanne C. Kobasa (1979) as a personality construct which combines its three important facets like Commitment, Control and Challenge to overcome stressful situations. Hardiness as a personality pattern, acts as a moderator between stress and its consequences which can be detrimental to one's physiological and psychological well-being. Except for a few studies, hardiness, since its inception has been mostly studied on male subjects, neglecting the females' mediating effects on stress-illness-hardiness relationships. Moreover, there has hardly been any study of the Indian professionals. Often results obtained from male studies have been generalized as outcomes for females. This has raised a questionable concern on the differential effects of gender on hardiness. This paper is an attempt to find out whether females are hardier than males when they encounter a stressful situation.

KEYWORDS

Stress, hardiness, gender

1. Introduction:

Hardiness is often described as a stress-resilient factor which enables a person to stay strong and healthy in stressful situations. The inception of this model was first developed by Suzanne C. Kobasa in 1979 who theorized that "persons who experience high degrees of stress without falling ill have a personality structure differentiating them from persons who become sick under stress". It is characterized as a single construct of three mutually related dispositions – Commitment, Control and Challenge. These three components of hardiness interact with each other to increase transformational coping and decrease regressive coping when the person is confronted with adverse life events. Thus, a hardy person is one who has a strong sense of commitment to life and work activities, a strong belief in one's own ability to control events and influence outcomes and greater openness to change and challenges in life (Maddi & Kobasa, 1985).

Considering stability in an individual's physical and mental health, hardiness as a personality pattern combines the cognitive, physiological, and behavioural processes for buffering the harmful effects of stress. As a result, it acts as a moderator between stress and its ill effects and keeps the individual healthy. This moderating effect of hardiness has been confirmed from both retrospective studies (Kobasa, 1979) and prospective studies (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982) comparing self-report measures of life stress and illness scores in high and low hardy subjects. Hardiness has also acted as a buffer, moderating the effects of stress for drug use and was directly influential in the prediction of aberrant behaviour and affective reactions (Collins, 1991). In another study, personality hardiness served to moderate the effects of pre-deployment stress on later general psychiatric symptoms, lending further support to a stress-buffering role for hardiness (Bartone, 1998).

2. Hardiness and Gender:

Surprisingly though, much of the research on stress-illness-resistance literature has examined the buffering effect that mediate the relationship between stress and its negative outcomes. But, one major moderating variable, gender, has been quite overlooked, even though it has been suggested as having differential effects in the stress-illness-resistance studies (Aneshensel & Pearlin, 1987; Braiker, 1986; Cleary, 1987; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Miller, 2012). The concept of gender is important in that it is part of physiological, psychological, and sociocultural categorizations of human behaviour (Lang, 1984).

Till the last two decades, it was assumed that men and women have different societal roles to play. Work was considered the central life interest and identity-defining role for men, and family

for women. A shift in the thought process and gender-role changes in the last two decades has made more women work and simultaneously take care of their family. As a result, women strive to strike a balance between multiple roles, especially, work and family life. In such a situation women have higher chances of being stressed.

This is evident from a study done by M. P. Matud (2004), which indicated that women scored significantly higher than men in chronic stress and minor daily stressors and rated their life events as more negative and less controllable than men. Whereas men listed relationship, finance and work-related events, women listed family and health-related events more frequently than the men. In such a situation, women may either succumb to the adverse effects of stress or try to cope well in a hardy way.

Since Kobasa's initial study was on male executives, hardiness has been explored mainly on adult male subjects, except for few studies where the percentage of adult female subjects compared to their male counterparts was very low. Such studies have neglected the differential effects of gender in coping the hardy way. Often the results obtained from studies based on male subjects were generalized for females too. This is the reason why the proposed moderating effect of hardiness have not consistently emerged, particularly for females. Moreover, a good number of such studies are not based on gender-sensitive understanding of female personality: they are either based on standard models of stress and resistance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Meichenbaum & Jaremko, 2013), or on male models of functioning such as the Type A personality (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974), or personality hardiness (Kobasa, 1979; Kobasa, Maddi and Puccetti, 1982; Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982). An exception was a study done by Judith D. Fair (1993) which intended to have an exploratory investigation of women and stress from a gender-sensitive perspective within the meta-construct of personality hardiness, an approach which had not been previously undertaken.

Several researchers like Holahan & Moos (1985) and Lawler & Schmieid (1986) have suggested that hardiness exerts weaker effects among females than among males. Another study done by Wiebe (1991) indicates that high hardy males responded more adaptively to a laboratory stressor than did low hardy males and that hardiness exerted either weaker or no effects among females. In the same year, a similar study was done by Barbara Tiller Sanford (1991) to assess the effects of gender to the moderating effects of hardiness on physiological reactivity to two types of laboratory stressors but results indicated limited support for the moderating effects of hardiness, particularly for female individuals.

In contrast to the above findings, a moderate life stress illness relationship which was stronger for females than males was studied by K. H. J. Claypoole (1987). However, there were no main effects indicating that hardiness functioned in a health-buffering fashion. Another research -- intended to explore the role of personality hardiness as a stress resistance resource for male and female freshmen cadets at West Point -- supports the finding that females have a significantly higher hardiness when compared to males (Bartone & Robert F. Priest, 2001).

The study of a few other scholars (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Schmeid & Lawler, 1986; Rich & Rich, 1987; Fair, Judith D., 1993; Foster and Dion, 2003) has yielded mixed results when they integrated the female gender as a specific variable, used diverse definitions of stress, included various methodologies, and different outcome measures.

From the above findings, it is evident that gender differences in hardiness have resulted in a major issue as far as the conceptualization of hardiness is concerned. My present paper is a study about hardiness and its variance across gender administered on 50 corporate professionals. An attempt would be made to establish the hypothesis that women are harder than males in coping with stressful life situations.

3. Research Methodology:

The data for this pilot study was collected through purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of 50 corporate professionals (22 males and 28 females, i.e. 44% males and 56% females as shown in Table-1) working in different IT, Banking and Media companies in a few randomly selected Indian cities. To measure hardiness, this study used a modified version (suitable to the Indian context) of a 15-item scale called the Dispositional Resilience Scale (DRS-15) developed by Bartone (1995). This scale measures the three conceptually important facets of hardiness – Commitment, Control and Challenge as well as the overall hardiness of an individual.

The respondents were mailed the questionnaires and results were obtained. The first step was to derive an overall score of hardiness for each respondent. A median split of the scores revealed 12 subjects having low hardiness and 14 subjects having high level of hardiness. Out of the 14 high hardy individuals, there were 10 females and only 4 males (Table-2). The overall hardiness score for female employees was also higher than their male counterparts. The chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 0.007$ in Table-3) shows a significant association between hardiness and gender, at 0.05 level of significance and also helps in confirming the hypothesis that females are harder than males.

Table-1: Frequency of Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	22	44.0	44.0	44.0
Female	28	56.0	56.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table-2: Level of Hardiness across Gender

			Level_hardiness			Total
			Low	Moderate	High	
Gender	Male	Count	10	8	4	22
	Female	Count	2	16	10	28
Total		Count	12	24	14	50

Table-3: Chi-Square Test

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.995 ^a	2	.007
Likelihood Ratio	10.475	2	.005

4. Conclusion:

The above findings are based on a sample study done as a pilot project which cannot be deemed as conclusive. Further research has to be undertaken by me by obtaining a larger sample. I intend to study the effect of hardiness on Indian professionals, focussing

on women, considering its well-defined societal multiple role-play as well as a well-established cultural background they are normally brought up with. This study will fulfil the need of assessing the hardiness of women professionals of India and their ability in coping with stress.

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