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SOME EXERCISES WITH THE LEARNED HELPESSNESS SCALE (LH/SCALE) IN HINDI

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SUMMARY

Learned Helplessness Scale - Hindi version (Dhar, Kohli & Dhar, 1987) was administered to 50 graduates. Scoring was done using the original method as given in the manual and by two of its variations. Correlations among the three forms of scoring were found to be very high (.85 and above). In another excercise, 30 of the subjects were administered P.G.I. Health Questionnaire N-2 and P.G.I. General Well Being Scales and in the third excercise 20 subjects were administered P.G.I. Health Questionnaire N-1 and P.G.I. Locus of Control Scale, in addition to the L-H scale. The obtained correlations between LH and other variables show that it is positively correlated with neuroticism and negatively with the sense of general wellbeing, both correlations showing relationship of moderate degree only (about 25% overlap with the neuroticism and even lower for general well being). This feeling of learned helplessness was not related to the internal or external locus of control and the scale showed little effect of social desirability response set.

Introduction

The modern age is the age of ever increasing anxiety and frustrations. With the increase in complexity and advancement in material fields, there is a corresponding increase in the number of situations that can cause these anxieties and frustrations. All these often result in a feeling of helplessness which goes on accummulating all the time. "Mastery over nature" that many advocate for these advancements in physical/material resources, is rather a misleading expression to describe the present situation. We are dependent upon many things and if left alone, on our own resources for anything, we feel just helpless, a feeling which may lead on to hopelessness and depression, if allowed to persist.

This feeling of helplessness is a learned one and we learn it quite at an early date. It has been seen that the development of this feeling of helplessness in the past, often leads on to a feeling of inability to control the present situation, even though one is potentially capable of it. This observation has led on to the concept of "learned helplessness". It is a term used by Seligman and others to describe the "results of learning to be unable to control events" (Seligman 1973, 1974, 1975; Seligman & Maier 1967; Hiroto & Seligman 1975) and has been reported both in animals and in human beings. Animals who learnt the "inevitability" of shock no matter what one does, later on failed to learn escape response, whereas animals who had never had such experiences, easily could learn to escape by jumping to the "safe" compartment (Seligman & Maier 1967). Similarly with human beings also, those who had first worked on "insoluble"

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problems did much more poorly than did those who had worked on soluble problems (Hiroto & Seligman 1975; Roth & Kubal 1975). Experiments have been done with regard to uncontrollable positive events, uncontrollable negative events (Krantz, Glass & Synder 1974; Roth & Kubal 1975; Benson & Kennelly 1976, Wortman & Brehm 1975), controllable events (Eisenberger, Park & Frank 1976; Schultz 1976; Langer & Rodin 1976), development of psychiatric disorders like depression & schizophrenia (Bateson et al 1965; Seligman 1974, 1975), ability to respond adaptively in stressful situations (Cofer & Appley 1964; Janis 1958; Janis & Leventhal 1968) and development of physical disease (Engel 1968; Schmale 1971).

A scale to measure learned helplessness, perhaps the first one in our country (Dhar, Kohli & Dhar, 1987; Verma, Mahajan & Verma, 1988) has recently been developed in our national language Hindi. The method of scoring given in the manual ("Original" method) seems faulted on logical ground. Here the scoring categories are 3, 2 and 1 for 'Yes' 'No' and 'Uncertain' categories. Choosing an "uncertain" response indicates indecisiveness, uncertainty and helplessness and should have been given greater weight than that of weight given to no response. Besides, it is the accepted pattern also in the tests that we have come across in our limited experience. This, we thought, called for some exercises with the scoring pattern of the L-H scale.

In the present study, some exercises with this scale have been reported.

Exercise I

Problem: Comparison of three scoring methods.

Sample: L-H (Hindi) was administered to 50 graduate and postgraduate students of Panjab University, Chandigarh. Forty six of them were females. Mean age was 22.88 years.

Tool: Learned Helplessness Scale (Dhar, Kohli & Dhar, 1987).

Scoring Method: Three scoring methods were used for Yes, No and Uncertain categories, viz. *"original"* method with 3, 2 & 1; *"modified"* method with 3, 1 & 2 and the "simplified" method with 1,0 & 0 respectively for the three response categories.

Results

The table shows that the range of scores is highest in the modified scoring method, the scores were more or less normally distributed, and all the three methods showed very high inter-correlations. Theoretically also, the modified scoring method is justified as the uncertain categories are usually given a middle

Table 1

Exercise I

A. Sample Characteristics:

(i) Number		= 50
(ii) Age	: Mean	= 22.88 years
	S.D.	= 6.60 years
	Range	= 20-45 years
(iii) Education		= Graduates and Postgraduates
(iv) Sex		= 46 Females 4 Males

B. Mean L.H. Scores By

	Mean	S.D.	Range
(a) Original Method	33.48	2.95	28–41
(b) Modified Method	24.08	4.84	15–37
(c) Simplified Method	4.24	2.51	0–11

C. Correlations between any two methods

$r_{a.b.}$ = .97**

$r_{a.c.}$ = .94**

$r_{b.c.}$ = .85**

** $p<.01$

value, between Yes and No in a three response category format, besides its being indicative of a state of helplessness (i.e. inability to choose/decide between Yes and No categories both being very definite responses). The next in order may be the simplified method but here the range of score becomes restricted.

Conclusion

Out of the three mothods of scoring, the most appropriate one appears to be the modified scoring method, followed by simplified scoring method. The original weights of 3, 2 & 1 for Yes, No, and Uncertain categories does not seem very satisfactory, particularly on logical ground.

Exercise II

Problem: To study the relationship of learned helplessness with neuroticism, general well being and social desirability response set.

Sample: Thirty graduate and postgraduate students of Panjab University, Chandigarh. Mean age was 23.3 years. Twenty eight of them were males.

Tools: Learned Helplessness Scale (Dhar, Kohli & Dhar, 1987), P.G.I. Health Questionnaire N-2 (Verma 1978); P.G.I. General Well Being Scale (Verma, Dubey & Gupta 1983).

Hypotheses: It is expected that (1) learned helplessness would be positively correlated with neuroticism and (2) negatively related to a sense of general well being.

With regard to social desirability response set, it would be desirable if no significant relationship is found. *Results:* Results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Exercise II

A. Sample Characteristics:

(i) Number		= 30
(ii) Age	: Mean	= 23.3 years
	S.D.	= 7.06 years
	Range	= 20-45 years
(iii) Education		= Graduates and Postgraduates
(iv) Sex		= 28 Females 2 Males

B. Mean L.H. Scores By

	Mean	S.D.	Range
(a) Original Method	33.17	2.94	28–41
(b) Modified Method	23.70	4.97	15–37
(c) Simplified Method	4.07	2.53	0–11

C.

L–H Scale scoring by	Correlations with PGI HQ N–2		PGI well Being
	Neuro-ticism	Lie	W.B.
(a) Original method	.51**	−.10	−.09
(b) Modified Method	.52**	−.08	−.37*
(c) Simplified method	.53**	−.12	−.27

*p<.05 **p<.01

desirability response set (insignificant negative correlation). It is positively related to the neuroticism (correlation highly significant) and negatively with the general well being of the individual (negative significant correlation). It suggests that learned helplessness is significantly greater in persons with high neuroticism but is low in those with higher sense of well being. All these results are in the expected direction. Absence of relationship with social desirability response set makes it a useful instrument with most subjects, but a note of caution is needed here, because the sets of correlation are also dependent upon the population studied. With a different set of population or, in a different setting the

results might be different e.g. in a selection interview situation. Here again, the "modified" scoring method gave relatively better sets of results amongst the three scoring methods.

Conclusions: Results are in the expected direction with regard to all the hypotheses stated above.

Exercise III

Problem: To study the relationship of learned helplessness with physical distress, psychological distress and with locus of control.

Sample: Twenty graduate and post-graduate students of Panjab University, Chandigarh. Mean age was 22.25 years and 18 of them were males.

Tools: Learned Helplessness Scale (Dhar, Kohli & Dhar 1987), P.G.I. Health Questionnaire N-1 (Verma, Wig & Pershad, 1983); P.G.I. Locus of Control Scale (Menon, Wig & Verma, 1988).

Hypotheses: It is expected that learned helplessness would be more related to psychological distress than to physical distress. It is expected to be relatively independent of locus of control i.e. both internals and externals would feel equally helpless.

Results

Results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that only the psychological distress (B part of P.G.I. Health Questionnaire N-1) shows any significant relationship with Learned Helplessness score. Physical distress (A Part of PGI Health Questionnaire N-1) shows insignificant correlations. Similarly locus of control also shows no significant relationship with learned helplessness.

Table 3

Exercise III

A. Sample Characteristics:

(i) Number		= 20
(ii) Age	: Mean	= 22.25 years
	S.D.	= 5.95 years
	Range	= 20-41 years
(iii) Education		= Graduates and Postgraduates
(iv) Sex		= 18 Females 2 Males

B. Mean L.H. Scores By

	Mean	S.D.	Range
(a) Original Method	33.95	2.98	29–39
(b) Modified Method	24.70	4.69	15–33
(c) Simplified Method	4.50	2.52	0–9

C.

LH Scale scored by	Correlations with PGI A	PGI B	HQ N-1 Total	Locus of Control
(a) Original Method	−.18	.49*	.39	−.19
(b) Modified Method	−.01	.52*	.42	−.14
(c) Simplified Method	−.11	.48*	.32	−.19

*p<.05

Here again, the "modified" scoring method gives the best results.

Conclusion: All the hypotheses stated above are retained.

Discussion and Conclusions

Learned helplessness is apparently a useful concept in explaining certain "abnormal" behaviour patterns even in the normal human beings. The L-H Scale developed by Dhar, Kohli and Dhar (1987) suffers from certain logical errors and from limitations of data. The logical errors are mainly two fold: (1) the scoring for "uncertain" category should have been 2 in place of 1 as it not only falls between Yes and No responses, it also shows a great deal of

helplessness or inability to choose either Yes or NO response category. (2) The low reported item total correlations for certain items may have been because of this wrong scoring method. The limitations of data are quite obvious, as very little evidence is reported in the manual of L-H scale, about its various correlates or, net work of relationship with other related/unrelated constructs. Another limitation is about the restricted range of sample, as only educated ones are taken.

The present study is only one such attempt to partly fill this lucuna. Many more such studies, with different groups and with different constructs, would be needed, before one is really convinced about the useability of the scale in the psychiatric population.

The results are encouraging, with regard to the:
(1) Modified scoring method seems a better substitute and may overcome the limitations of the scale to some extent.

(2) Modified scoring method shows some kind of relations with other constructspositive correlation where it is expected to be positive, negative, where it is expected to be negative, significant where it is expected to be significant and insignificant where it is expected to be insignificant. To that extent it establishes the construct validity of the scale.

More such works are needed for this promising instrument, which this young group of workers have brought out. Such works are justified also on the basis of relevant, empirical data. Similar works are in progress and would be reported from time to time.

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