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Exploring the relationship between humor styles, perceived stress and emotional resilience: A correlational study

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Abstract

Humor serves as an adaptive psychological mechanism that influences how individuals perceive stress and build resilience. The present correlational study explored the relationship between various humor styles: Affiliative, Self-Enhancing, Aggressive, and Self-Defeating with Perceived Stress and Emotional Resilience among young adults aged 18 to 26 years. The study aimed to understand whether the use of adaptive or maladaptive humor contributes to better stress management and resilience levels within this age group.

Data were collected through Google Forms and standardized questionnaires, including the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ; Martin et al., 2003), the Brief Inventory of Perceived Stress (BIPS; Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2012), and the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith et al., 2008). A total of 203 participants were selected using random and convenient sampling techniques. The data were analyzed using both IBM SPSS (v21.0) and Jamovi (v2.6.44) software, employing descriptive statistics, tests of normality, and Spearman's rank correlation due to non-normal data distribution.

The findings revealed that self-enhancing and affiliative humor were the most commonly used styles among participants, indicating a tendency toward positive and socially adaptive humor. However, these adaptive humor styles did not show a significant relationship with perceived stress or emotional resilience, suggesting that humor may function more as a social tool than a direct stress buffer in this context. Self-defeating humor showed a weak negative correlation with emotional resilience, implying that individuals who often use self-deprecating humor might have lower resilience levels. No significant associations were found between aggressive humor and either stress or resilience.

Overall, the study highlights that while humor contributes to social harmony and emotional expression, its effectiveness in reducing stress or enhancing resilience may depend on broader psychological and cultural factors. The findings emphasize the need for developing adaptive humor training and resilience-building programs to promote mental well-being among young adults.

Keywords: Humor Styles; Perceived Stress; Emotional Resilience; Young Adults; Adaptive and Maladaptive Humor

1. Introduction

As an ancient resource for human, the term Humor has been at hand with mythology, history, social interactions, everyday rituals and speech. Nevertheless, only in the recent decades it has been on light that humor, is not only simply seen as an amusement, but also as a multi-faceted mechanism for coping, emotion regulation, social bonding, mental health, etc. Positive Psychology, increasingly states humor as more than just laughter, but as a style, strategy, habitual

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pattern of thinking and interaction which can moderate and safeguard the stress, enhance well-being, and help individuals resolve and navigate adversity (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003).

Humor Styles, one central aspect in this discipline, that differentiates the habitual ways in which individuals can use humor in social and intrapersonal life as a coping. Proposed by Martin et al. (2003), the four humor styles that integrates are affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating. Affiliative and Self-enhancing as adaptive styles are linked to social connectedness, positive affect, good emotion regulation, whereas, Aggressive and Self-defeating as maladaptive styles are linked to conflict, poorer adjustment, negative outcomes (Martin et al., 2003).

Perceived stress refers to the subjective opinion on how an individual's capability to cope surpasses due to the demanding pressures of life. Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein (1983) developed The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) which effects this particular dimension as it not only focuses on the stressors, rather how an individual interprets and perceives them. Thus, higher level of perceived stress has been associated with anxiety, depression, physical health problems, burnout, lowered life satisfaction.

Emotional resilience can be understood as the capacity to sustain and bounce back from the face of adversity, trauma or stress and to regain emotional well-being. Resilience includes traits or processes that help individuals to adapt recovery, maintain positive functioning, regulate emotions, and in many models also to grow and derive meaning from adversity. The scales that can be used in effecting this dimension are such as the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), the Resilience Scale (RS-14), etc.

However, there is limited understanding regarding how these three constructs: perceived stress, humor styles and resilience are related in non- Western contexts and among Indian young adults specifically. Culture dictates norms around humor, perception of stress, the definition of what it means to be resilient. India, with a mix of different languages, social norms, traditional family life, educational pressure and fast changing economic and social environment can provide an example where these relations could be different than that from the Western world.

Recent empirical research from India has begun to scratch the surface of pertinent fragments: for instance, researchers have extended and validated the Brief Resilience Scale in Indian college students. (PMC) The factor structure of the Resilience Scale-14 (RS-14) was investigated among a sample of working adults in India. CD-RISC has been translated into Hindi and it has been tested in certain sections of population such as Indian military, etc. There is also a recent Indian study that involves humor styles and other positive psychology constructs of interest: Humor Styles, Subjective Happiness, and Self-Esteem among Indian Adolescents (Jolly & Lokesh, 2022) examined how adaptive humor styles mediated self-esteem/happiness, so they found that affiliative and self-enhancing humor were associated with subjective happiness. Another recent Indian study looked at humor styles, coping strategies and resilience in "high-stress scenarios" among young adults. (IJIP)

2. Theoretical Framework

The Humor Styles Framework (HSF) provides a foundational lens for understanding the role of humor in psychological functioning. According to Martin et al. (2003), humor can be categorized into four distinct styles: affiliative and self-enhancing, which are considered adaptive, and aggressive and self-defeating, which are considered maladaptive. Adaptive humor styles have consistently been linked to higher well-being, greater social connectedness, and more effective coping strategies (Cann & Collette, 2014; Kuiper, 2012). Conversely, maladaptive humor styles are often associated with interpersonal conflict, higher stress levels, and poorer mental health outcomes (Saroglou & Scariot, 2002).

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping emphasize the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environment in the stress process. Stress occurs when individuals appraise a situation as exceeding their coping resources, which involves two stages: primary appraisal (evaluating whether an event is a threat, harm, or challenge) and secondary appraisal (assessing one's coping capacity). Coping strategies are then enacted based on these appraisals.

Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory provides further insight into the mechanisms by which humor supports resilience. Positive emotions, such as joy and amusement, expand cognitive and behavioral repertoires, encouraging creativity, flexibility, and adaptive problem-solving. Over time, these broadened repertoires accumulate into enduring resources such as social support and psychological resilience (Fredrickson, 2004). Humor, particularly affiliative and self-enhancing forms, generates positive affect that facilitates reappraisal of stressors and supports adaptive coping (Kuiper & Martin, 1998)

Resilience has been conceptualized both as a trait and as a dynamic process that emerges through interaction with adversity. Trait-based perspectives, such as the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Connor & Davidson, 2003), view resilience as relatively stable, encompassing optimism, tenacity, and adaptability.

Stress Appraisal Theory reinforces the centrality of subjective perceptions in determining stress outcomes. It emphasizes that stress is less about the objective qualities of an event and more about how individuals evaluate its controllability, threat level, and personal significance (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

3. Review of Literature

Research based on the Humor Styles Framework (Martin et al., 2003) shows that adaptive humor styles, like affiliative and self-enhancing, are linked to better well-being and lower stress. In contrast, maladaptive styles, such as aggressive and self-defeating humor, relate to poorer outcomes. International studies indicate that adaptive humor reduces stress, protects against depression, and improves resilience by changing how people view stressors and encouraging positive coping.

In India, recent studies show similar patterns. Adaptive humor styles are associated with higher self-esteem, happiness, and emotional intelligence (Graphyonline; ResearchGate; IJIP). On the other hand, maladaptive humor is related to lower resilience and more defensive coping (OUCI). However, research in India is still limited. Most studies are cross-sectional and rarely look at humor, stress, and resilience together. Cultural factors like collectivism and family support may also influence how humor works as a coping strategy.

The Humor Styles Framework (HSF) developed by Martin et al. (2003) remains the foundation for research in this area. Their seminal study linked affiliative and self-enhancing humor with greater psychological well-being, social support, and self-esteem, while aggressive and self-defeating humor were found to predict higher depression and interpersonal conflict. These findings have been replicated in various international contexts, establishing humor as a significant predictor of mental health and coping outcomes. In India, empirical work has begun to explore these associations.

Stress research in India has primarily focused on student and healthcare populations, where academic and professional demands are especially pronounced. For instance, a cross-sectional study conducted in Madurai on nursing students reported high levels of moderate to severe stress, with significant correlations found between perceived stress, resilience, and coping strategies (Lippincott Journals, 2021). These findings align with global literature where perceived stress has been shown to predict poorer mental health outcomes in student populations. Broader Indian studies using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983) have revealed variation in stress levels across gender, socioeconomic status, and academic discipline.

Cultural context is crucial when interpreting the role of humor, stress, and resilience. Humor norms are not universal; what is classified as aggressive humor in Western contexts may be more socially acceptable in collectivistic cultures such as India (Saroglou & Scariot, 2002). Similarly, self-defeating humor—which in Western samples is often associated with poorer mental health—may function differently in collectivistic settings where humility and self-deprecation are valued traits. Affiliative humor, which emphasizes group cohesion and maintaining harmony, may have stronger positive associations in Indian contexts given the emphasis on family bonds, respect for elders, and collectivistic coping. Moreover, family support structures and social expectations in India may shape how young adults experience stress and how they use humor as a coping mechanism. These cultural considerations underscore the importance of examining humor styles, perceived stress, and resilience together in Indian young adults rather than assuming Western findings generalize directly.

Although global research highlights humor as an important psychological force that promotes resilience and reduces stress, empirical evidence from India is scarce and fragmented. Existing Indian studies have not comprehensively examined all four humor styles in relation to both perceived stress and emotional flexibility within a single framework. Furthermore, cultural factors – such as collectivism, family orientation, and social expectations – may determine how humor is expressed and used as a coping mechanism, yet these influences are rarely considered. Therefore, the present study aims to bridge this gap by examining the relationships between humor styles, perceived stress, and resilience among Indian young adults, thereby extending the international evidence into a culturally relevant context and contributing to a better understanding of positive mental health behaviors in this population.

4. Methodology

4.1. Statement of the Problem

Although research globally shows the relation between humor styles, stress and resilience. But there are limited studies in India have examined these variables together. Most existing findings focus on individual aspects of humor or stress without integrating all four humor styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating and in relation to perceived stress and emotional resilience among young adults. Understanding these relationships is crucial for promoting adaptive coping and positive mental health in this population.

4.2. Aim of the Study

The present study aims to explore the relationship between humor styles, perceived stress, and emotional resilience among young adults, with particular focus on how different humor styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating has a relation to the levels of stress and emotional resilience capacities.

4.3. Objectives of the Study

- To determine the Humor Styles among young adults.
- To determine the levels of Perceived Stress and Emotional Resilience.
- To explore the relation between Humor Styles, Perceived Stress and Emotional Resilience.

4.4. Hypotheses

- H1: There is a negative correlation between Self-enhancing and Affiliative humor styles with Perceived stress.
- H2: There is a positive correlation between Self-defeating and Aggressive humor styles with Perceived stress.
- H3: There is a positive correlation between Self-enhancing and Affiliative humor styles with Emotional resilience.
- H4: There is a negative correlation between Self-defeating and Aggressive humour styles with Emotional resilience.

4.5. Research Design

This study employs Correlational research design using Quantitative method.

4.6. Operational Definitions of the Variables

4.6.1. Humor Styles

The term humor styles describe the regular ways that people express and use humor in daily life. In this study, they are measured by using the Humor Styles Questionnaire developed by Martin et al. (2003). The HSQ assesses four domains-

- Affiliative humor: Using humor to establish and maintain social bonds.
- Self-enhancing humor: using humor to keep a positive attitude and manage or cope with stress through comedy or laughter.
- Aggressive humor: Using humor that involves sarcasm, teasing often at the cost of others.
- Self-defeating humor: Using humor by often putting oneself down to win favor or avoid conflicts.

4.6.2. Perceived Stress

Perceived stress is the extent to which people feel or perceive how their life situations or circumstances are uncertain, overpowering or unmanageable. In this study, the Perceived Stress Scale by Cohen et al. (1983) to determine how often individual felt stressed or anxious during the previous month.

4.6.3. Emotional Resilience

Emotional resilience is the ability to recover or bounce back from stress, hardship or emotional failures. In this study, the Brief Resilience Scale developed by Smith et al. (2008) to measure an individual's ability to recover from challenging situations.

4.7. Participants

This study employs Indian young adult participants from the age group of 18-25, currently studying and working.

4.8. Sample Size

The sample size for the aimed data is 205 to analyze with the statistical techniques.

4.9. Sampling Technique

The Random and Convenient Sampling technique will be applied for the selection of the participants.

4.10. Inclusion Criteria

- Young adults between the age group of 18-26.
- Study will mainly focus Indian population.
- Participants should be able to read, write and understand English.

4.11. Exclusion Criteria

Individuals with diagnosed psychiatric, neurological, or cognitive disorders that could affect responses or comprehension.

Responses that are incomplete, inconsistent, or show patterned answering (e.g., same response for all items).

The inclusion and exclusion criteria are designed to create a sample that is relating to the focus research questions and to control for confounding factors.

4.12. Measurements/Instrumentations

The tools use for research for the is mentioned below.

4.12.1. Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ)

The Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) was developed by Martin et al. (2003) to assess individual differences in how people use humor in their daily lives. It measures both adaptive and maladaptive uses of humor across four distinct dimensions.

Structure of the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ)

Items:

The HSQ consists of 32 items, divided into four subscales, each containing 8 items:

- **Affiliative Humor:** Reflects the use of humor to enhance relationships, reduce tension, and facilitate social interactions.
- **Self-Enhancing Humor:** Involves maintaining a humorous outlook on life, even in stressful situations, to cope positively.
- **Aggressive Humor:** Characterized by sarcasm, teasing, and ridicule at the expense of others.
- **Self-Defeating Humor:** Entails putting oneself down or using humor as self-disparagement to gain others' approval.

Response Format: Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Higher scores indicate a greater tendency to use that particular humor style.

4.12.2. Reliability of the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ)

- **Internal Consistency:** The HSQ demonstrates satisfactory internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values typically range between 0.77 and 0.81 across the four subscales (Martin et al., 2003), indicating good internal reliability.
- **Test-Retest Reliability:** Test-retest correlations over 2–3 months range from 0.80 to 0.85, showing high temporal stability for each humor style dimension.

4.12.3. Validity of the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ)

- **Construct Validity:** Factor analyses support a four-factor model corresponding to the four humor styles. The HSQ has demonstrated clear differentiation between adaptive and maladaptive humor styles.
- **Concurrent Validity:** HSQ subscales correlate in expected directions with measures of well-being, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction, supporting concurrent validity.
- **Predictive Validity:** humor styles (affiliative and self-enhancing) have been shown to predict higher psychological well-being and stress resilience, while maladaptive styles (aggressive and self-defeating) relate to poorer mental health outcomes.

4.12.4. Standardization of the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ)

- **Population Norms:** The HSQ has been standardized across various populations, including college students, working adults, and clinical groups.
- **Cultural Adaptation:** It has been adapted and validated in multiple languages, such as Hindi, Chinese, and Spanish, with consistent factor structures.
- **Use in Research:** The HSQ is widely used in research exploring personality, coping, mental health, and interpersonal relationships, especially in the context of stress and emotional resilience.

4.12.5. Brief Inventory of Perceived Stress (BIPS)

The Brief Inventory of Perceived Stress (BIPS) was developed by Ribeiro et al. (2012) as a concise and psychometrically sound tool derived from the Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). It measures the individual's perceived stress levels over the past month.

Structure of the Brief Inventory of Perceived Stress (BIPS)

- **Items:**
The BIPS contains 9 items, assessing overall perceived stress as a unidimensional construct.
Response Format:
- Responses are provided on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = never to 5 = very often, indicating how frequently participants experienced certain stress-related feelings and thoughts.
- **Scoring:**
Items are summed, with some items reverse scored. The total score reflects the individual's perceived stress level, with higher scores denoting greater stress.

4.12.6. Reliability of the Brief Inventory of Perceived Stress (BIPS)

- **Internal Consistency:** The BIPS has demonstrated good internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.78 to 0.86 across different populations (Ribeiro et al., 2012).
- **Test-Retest Reliability:** Test-retest correlations over short intervals (2–4 weeks) range between 0.75 and 0.83, indicating satisfactory temporal stability.

4.12.7. Validity of the Brief Inventory of Perceived Stress (BIPS)

- **Construct Validity:** Factor analyses confirm a single-factor structure, representing general perceived stress.
- **Concurrent Validity:** The BIPS correlates strongly with the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and measures of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress, confirming concurrent validity.
- **Predictive Validity:** Higher BIPS scores are predictive of poorer emotional well-being and higher physiological stress indicators such as fatigue and irritability.

4.12.8. Standardization of the Brief Inventory of Perceived Stress (BIPS)

- **Population Norms:** The BIPS has been standardized among college students, working professionals, and clinical samples in different countries.
- **Cultural Adaptation:** It has been adapted in multiple languages, ensuring cross-cultural validity while maintaining psychometric strength.
- **Use in Research:** The BIPS is increasingly used in stress-related research and clinical screenings due to its brevity and reliability in assessing perceived stress levels among different populations.

4.12.9. Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), developed by Smith et al. (2008), measures an individual's ability to recover from stress or adversity—focusing specifically on resilience as the ability to “bounce back.”

Structure of the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

Items:

The BRS includes 6 items, designed to capture one's capacity to recover from setbacks.

- **Response Format:** Participants rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.
- **Scoring:** Three items are reverse scored, and the mean of all six items represents the individual's resilience score. Higher scores indicate greater resilience.

4.12.10. Reliability of the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

Internal Consistency: The BRS shows good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values between 0.80 and 0.91 across different studies (Smith et al., 2008).

Test-Retest Reliability: Test-retest reliability ranges from 0.69 to 0.84, demonstrating stability of resilience scores over time.

Validity of the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

- **Construct Validity:** Factor analyses support a unidimensional model representing overall resilience.
- **Concurrent Validity:** The BRS correlates positively with optimism, life satisfaction, and well-being, and negatively with perceived stress, anxiety, and depression, demonstrating strong concurrent validity.
- **Predictive Validity:** High BRS scores predict better coping outcomes, emotional regulation, and recovery from stressful life events.

4.12.11. Standardization of the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

- **Population Norms:** The BRS has been standardized in diverse populations, including students, adults, patients with chronic illness, and trauma survivors.
- **Cultural Adaptation:** It has been translated and validated in various cultural contexts, including Asian and Western populations, showing consistent psychometric properties.
- **Use in Research:** The BRS is extensively used in studies examining psychological resilience, coping mechanisms, and recovery from stress, particularly among young adults and health-related populations.

4.12.12. Procedure

The participants were first provided with a comprehensive explanation of the research, including its aims, objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement, ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Participants were also informed about the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The researcher's email address was shared for clarification or queries, and participants were assured that professional assistance would be available if any psychological discomfort arose. A consent form and a demographic information sheet were administered before the main questionnaires. The following instruments were then circulated via Google Forms: The Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ), the Brief Inventory of Perceived Stress (BIPS), and the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). Clear instructions were provided for each section to ensure accurate responses. Upon completion, the data were collected and statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to examine the relationships among the variables.

4.13. Data Analysis

This section consists of Statistical Analysis that has been used for the evaluation of the gathered data.

4.14. Statistical Analysis

The data gathered will be measured using descriptive statistics, to summarize the basic features, to measure mean, median, mode, standard deviation. Correlation Analysis is to analyze the associations between Humor Styles, Perceived Stress and Emotional Resilience among Young Adults.

- **Measures:** Pearson correlation coefficients.
- **Variables:**
 - Humor Styles and Perceived Stress
 - Humor Styles and Emotional Resilience

5. Results and discussion

These standardized instruments were administered to a total of 205 participants ($n = 205$), after excluding responses that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The collected data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 26 and Jamovi 2.6.44. The parametric statistical techniques were applied to examine the relationships between the variables of the study. Preliminary analyses indicated partial non-normality in the data distributions; therefore, the non-parametric Spearman's correlation (ρ) was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between humor styles, perceived stress, and emotional resilience among young adults aged 18–26 years.

5.1. Presentation of the Results:

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for all the variables

Variable	Affiliative Humor Style	Self-enhancing Humor Style	Aggressive Humor Style	Self-defeating Humor Style	Perceived stress	Emotional resilience
Mean	32.00	36.40	31.90	30.60	22.00	3.11
SD	5.45	7.41	5.89	7.04	5.72	0.60

Note. $N = 205$. SD = standard deviation.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for affiliative humor style, self-enhancing humor style, aggressive humor style, self-defeating humor style, perceived stress and emotional resilience. The mean scores indicate that participants reported the highest use of self-enhancing humor ($M = 36.40$, $SD = 7.41$), followed by affiliative humor ($M = 32.00$, $SD = 5.45$), and aggressive humor ($M = 31.90$, $SD = 5.89$). Self-defeating humor had the lowest mean score ($M = 30.60$, $SD = 7.04$). The mean perceived stress score was 22.00 ($SD = 5.72$), while emotional resilience showed a mean of 3.11 ($SD = 0.60$).

Table 2 Test of Normality (Shapiro–Wilk)

Variable	Affiliative Humor Style	Self-enhancing Humor Style	Aggressive Humor Style	Self-defeating Humor Style	Perceived stress	Emotional resilience
Shapiro-Wilk	W	0.976	0.993	0.974	0.992	0.984
	p	0.001**	0.501	0.001***	0.296	0.018*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Shapiro–Wilk tests were conducted to examine the normality of all continuous variables. The results indicated that the distributions of Affiliative Humor Style ($W = .976$, $p = .001$), Aggressive Humor Style ($W = .974$, $p = .001$), Perceived Stress ($W = .984$, $p = .018$), and Emotional Resilience ($W = .984$, $p = .022$) significantly deviated from normality. In contrast, Self-enhancing ($W = .993$, $p = .501$) and Self-defeating Humor Style ($W = .992$, $p = .296$) did not significantly differ from a normal distribution.

The results suggest that while some humor style variables approximate normality, others show significant deviation, indicating that the data are partially non-normal. Consequently, non-parametric correlation methods such as Spearman's rho were used for subsequent analyses involving these variables.

For of hypothesis testing, Emotional Resilience scores were classified into three categories based on the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) guidelines. Participants scoring between 1.00 and 2.99 were categorized as having low resilience, those scoring between 3.00 and 4.30 were categorized as having normal resilience, and those scoring between 4.31 and 5.00 were categorized as having high resilience. This categorization allowed the emotional resilience scores to be treated as ordinal data, supporting the use of Spearman’s rank-order correlation in subsequent analyses. This approach facilitated interpretation of how variations in resilience relate to humor styles and perceived stress within the sample.

Table 3 Correlation Coefficients for Self-Enhancing and Affiliative Humor Styles in relation in relation to Perceived Stress (H₁: Negative Correlation)

Variable	1	2	3
Self-enhancing Humor Style	—		
Affiliative Humor Style	0.19	—	
Perceived stress	0.01	0.06	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001, one-tailed

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between self-enhancing and affiliative humor styles and perceived stress. The analysis showed that self-enhancing humor ($\rho = .01, p > .05$) and affiliative humor ($\rho = .06, p > .05$) had small, non-significant positive correlations with perceived stress. Since these relationships were not statistically significant and were in the opposite direction of what was predicted, Hypothesis 1 which stated that there is a negative correlation between self-enhancing and affiliative humor styles with perceived stress was rejected.

Table 4 Correlation Coefficients for Self-defeating and Aggressive humor styles in relation to Perceived stress (H₂: Positive Correlation)

Variable	1	2	3
Self-defeating Humor Style	—		
Aggressive Humor Style	0.33***	—	
Perceived stress	0.10	0.02	—

Note. p < .001***, one-tailed

Table 4 presents the correlation coefficients for Self-defeating and Aggressive Humor Styles in relation to Perceived Stress. The results show a significant positive correlation between Self-defeating and Aggressive Humor Styles ($r = .33, p < .001$). However, neither Self-defeating Humor Style ($r = .10, p > .05$) nor Aggressive Humor Style ($r = .02, p > .05$) showed a significant relationship with Perceived Stress. The hypothesis (H₂), which proposed a positive correlation between Self-defeating and Aggressive Humor Styles with Perceived Stress, was not supported and therefore rejected.

Table 5 Correlation Coefficients for Self-Enhancing and Affiliative Humor Styles in relation to Emotional Resilience (H₃: Positive Correlation)

Variable	1	2	3
Self-enhancing Humor Style	—		
Affiliative Humor Style	0.194**	—	
Emotional Resilience	0.068	0.011	—

Note. ** p < .01, one-tailed

Table 5 presents the correlation coefficients between Self-enhancing and Affiliative Humor Styles in relation to Emotional Resilience. The results showed a significant positive correlation between Self-enhancing and Affiliative Humor Styles ($r = .194, p < .01$), indicating that individuals who use humor to maintain a positive self-view also tend to engage in humor that strengthens social bonds. However, neither Self-enhancing Humor Style ($r = .068, p > .05$) nor Affiliative Humor Style ($r = .011, p > .05$) demonstrated a significant association with Emotional Resilience. Therefore,

Hypothesis 3 (H₃), which proposed a positive correlation between Self-enhancing and Affiliative Humor Styles with Emotional Resilience, was not supported and is rejected.

Table 6 Correlation Coefficients for Self-defeating and Aggressive humor styles in relation to Emotional Resilience (H₄: Negative Correlation)

Variable	1	2	3
Self-defeating Humor Style	—		
Aggressive Humor Style	.334	—	
Emotional Resilience	-.185**	.002	—

Note. ** $p < .01$, one-tailed

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between Self-defeating and Aggressive humor styles with Emotional Resilience. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between Self-defeating humor and Emotional Resilience ($r = -.185$, $p < .01$), suggesting that higher use of Self-defeating humor was associated with lower levels of Emotional Resilience. In contrast, Aggressive humor showed no significant relationship with Emotional Resilience ($r = .002$, $p > .05$). Accordingly, Hypothesis 4, which proposed a negative correlation between Self-defeating and Aggressive humor styles with Emotional Resilience, was partially supported. The hypothesis was retained only for the Self-defeating humor dimension.

5.2. Statistical Findings

Descriptive analyses (Table 1) revealed that participants most frequently used self-enhancing humor ($M = 36.40$, $SD = 7.41$), followed by affiliative humor ($M = 32.00$, $SD = 5.45$), while aggressive ($M = 31.90$, $SD = 5.89$) and self-defeating humor ($M = 30.60$, $SD = 7.04$) were less common. Average perceived stress ($M = 22.00$, $SD = 5.72$) and emotional resilience ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.60$) suggested moderate and balanced levels within the sample.

The Shapiro–Wilk normality tests (Table 2) showed that several variables deviated from normality, leading to the use of Spearman’s rho correlations. Correlation results indicated that none of the adaptive humor styles (self-enhancing and affiliative) were significantly associated with perceived stress, and none of the maladaptive styles (self-defeating and aggressive) were significantly related to stress either. However, self-defeating humor was significantly and negatively correlated with emotional resilience ($\rho = -.185$, $p < .01$). No significant relationship was found between aggressive humor and resilience.

Thus, Hypotheses 1–3 were rejected, while Hypothesis 4 was partially supported. Overall, the findings suggest that while participants primarily employ adaptive humor, such humor does not necessarily predict lower stress or higher resilience.

5.3. Interpretation

The preference for self-enhancing and affiliative humor indicates that participants generally use humor to maintain positivity and foster social connection. This aligns with findings by Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, and Weir (2003), who reported that adaptive humor styles are linked with greater psychological well-being and social integration. In collectivistic contexts such as India, humor often reflects the importance placed on maintaining social harmony and positive interpersonal relationships (Ghosh & Khatun, 2019).

The lower endorsement of aggressive and self-defeating humor mirrors findings by Kuiper, Grimshaw, Leite, and Kirsh (2004), who observed that maladaptive humor styles are less common among individuals with higher empathy and social adjustment. Participants’ moderate levels of perceived stress and average emotional resilience further indicate a balanced emotional profile, wherein humor may act as a facilitator of adaptive coping (Lefcourt, 2001). Hence, participants appear to rely on constructive humor that strengthens both interpersonal bonds and emotional stability.

5.3.1. Interpretation of Hypothesis 1: Self-Enhancing and Affiliative Humor with Perceived Stress

Contrary to expectations, self-enhancing and affiliative humor did not show a significant negative relationship with perceived stress. This finding diverges from previous research by Abel (2002) and Cann and Etzel (2008), who found that adaptive humor mitigates stress through positive reappraisal and emotional distancing.

5.3.2. Interpretation of Hypothesis 2: Self-Defeating and Aggressive Humor with Perceived Stress

Although self-defeating and aggressive humor were moderately correlated ($\rho = .33, p < .001$), neither demonstrated a significant relationship with perceived stress. This suggests that maladaptive humor might be used to conceal or deflect stress rather than directly express it. Frewen, Brinker, Martin, and Dozois (2008) proposed that individuals who employ maladaptive humor often experience emotional vulnerability but use humor defensively to maintain social approval.

5.3.3. Interpretation of Hypothesis 3: Self-Enhancing and Affiliative Humor with Emotional Resilience

While self-enhancing and affiliative humor were positively correlated with each other, they were not significantly related to emotional resilience. This contrasts with prior studies showing that adaptive humor contributes to greater resilience and psychological well-being (Kuiper, 2012; Cann & Collette, 2014).

5.3.4. Interpretation of Hypothesis 4: Self-Defeating and Aggressive Humor with Emotional Resilience

A significant negative correlation was found between self-defeating humor and emotional resilience ($\rho = -.185, p < .01$), supporting part of Hypothesis 4. This indicates that individuals who frequently use self-deprecating humor—often to gain approval or avoid rejection—may exhibit lower emotional resilience. Martin et al. (2003) and Tucker, Wingate, Slish, O'Keefe, and Rasmussen (2013) similarly found that self-defeating humor is associated with poorer psychological health and diminished coping capacity.

Overall, the findings suggest that humor styles directed toward self-devaluation can erode self-worth and impede adaptive coping, whereas humor aimed at others may not directly affect emotional strength. Encouraging young adults to cultivate adaptive humor may therefore enhance emotional health and resilience.

6. Summary and conclusion

The study titled “Exploring the Relationship between Humor Styles, Perceived Stress, and Emotional Resilience among Young Adults” aimed to examine how different humor styles—namely affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating—relate to perceived stress and emotional resilience. The research sought to understand whether adaptive humor styles contribute to lower stress levels and higher resilience, and whether maladaptive humor styles are linked to poorer coping mechanisms among young adults.

A correlational research design was adopted, and data were collected using standardized questionnaires: the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ; Martin et al., 2003), the Brief Inventory of Perceived Stress (BIPS; Gonzalez-Ramirez et al., 2012), and the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith et al., 2008). Data were gathered through both offline (questionnaire-based) and online (Google Form) formats. A total of 203 responses were obtained using random and convenient sampling techniques. The collected data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) and Jamovi (Version 2.6.44) software. Due to non-normal data distribution, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient (ρ) was applied to examine the relationships between variables.

6.1. Summary of Findings

6.1.1. Descriptive Findings

The descriptive results indicated that participants reported higher use of affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles, reflecting tendencies toward positive social interaction and self-regulation. Aggressive and self-defeating humor were comparatively lower, suggesting less reliance on maladaptive humor styles. Participants displayed moderate levels of perceived stress and average levels of emotional resilience, indicating a balanced emotional profile.

6.1.2. Humor Styles and Perceived Stress

The findings revealed no significant negative relationship between affiliative or self-enhancing humor and perceived stress. This suggests that while young adults may use adaptive humor for social bonding, it may not directly buffer against stress. Similarly, self-defeating and aggressive humor styles showed no significant positive relationship with stress, implying that maladaptive humor may serve defensive or masking functions rather than directly reflecting stress levels.

6.1.3. Humor Styles and Emotional Resilience

Analysis showed a significant negative correlation between self-defeating humor and emotional resilience ($\rho = -.185, p < .01$), suggesting that individuals who frequently use self-disparaging humor may struggle more with adaptive coping

and emotional recovery. However, affiliative and self-enhancing humor showed no significant positive correlation with resilience, indicating that humor may enhance social well-being but does not independently predict resilience without other coping resources.

6.2. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights that humor plays a nuanced role in emotional functioning among young adults. While adaptive humor styles (affiliative and self-enhancing) are socially beneficial, they do not necessarily reduce perceived stress or enhance emotional resilience on their own. Conversely, self-defeating humor demonstrated a small but significant negative association with resilience, indicating that self-deprecating humor might undermine emotional strength over time.

The use of Spearman's correlation provided a reliable means to assess monotonic relationships among non-normally distributed variables. Employing both SPSS and Jamovi ensured accuracy and cross-validation of findings. Overall, the study successfully achieved its objective of exploring the complex relationships between humor, stress, and resilience within the young adult population, particularly within the Indian sociocultural context.

6.2.1. Implications

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the growing literature on positive psychology and coping theory by elucidating how humor functions as a social and emotional regulation mechanism. The findings partially support Martin et al.'s (2003) humor model, indicating that adaptive humor supports psychological well-being indirectly, whereas maladaptive humor may impair resilience. This aligns with resilience theory, suggesting that humor's protective effect depends on internal emotional regulation and environmental factors.

Practical Implications

From an applied perspective, the findings underscore the importance of promoting adaptive humor styles among young adults to foster healthier coping strategies. Counsellors, educators, and mental health professionals can incorporate humor-based interventions or workshops that encourage positive reframing and stress reduction. Reducing reliance on self-defeating humor can enhance self-worth and emotional resilience, contributing to improved mental health outcomes.

6.3. Limitations

6.3.1. Sampling Characteristics

The study utilized a combination of random and convenient sampling, which may limit the generalizability of results. Participants were predominantly young adults from an Indian population, and future research could include more diverse demographics or cross-cultural comparisons.

6.3.2. Data Collection Method

Data were collected through self-report questionnaires and Google Forms, which may be subject to response biases, such as social desirability or misunderstanding of items. Additionally, the cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretation.

6.4. Recommendations for Future Research

6.4.1. Longitudinal and Experimental Studies

Future research could adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to assess how humor styles influence stress and resilience over time. Intervention-based studies could test the effectiveness of humor training in reducing stress and enhancing coping resources.

6.4.2. Cultural and Contextual Factors

Given that humor expression varies across cultures, future studies should explore how collectivistic values, gender norms, and social expectations influence the relationship between humor, stress, and resilience among Indian and international populations.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgement

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Statement of Ethical Approval

Necessary ethical consideration was followed while conducting this study. The study was conducted in accordance with standard ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was taken from the participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time.

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