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# The Influence of Dark Humor on Emotional Resilience and Stress Coping in Emerging Adults

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***Abstract*:** Dark humor, a unique and often controversial form of humor, has been linked to psychological resilience and stress management. This study investigates the influence of dark humor on emotional resilience, stress levels, and coping mechanisms among emerging adults. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through a Google Form questionnaire from 101 participants aged 18-25. Statistical analysis, including descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and Pearson correlation, were conducted to examine the relationships between variables. Findings indicate a significant positive impact of dark humor on emotional resilience and coping mechanisms, suggesting that individuals who engage in dark humor tend to have stronger psychological resilience and employ effective coping strategies. However, no significant relationship was found between dark humor and stress reduction, indicating that while dark humor may enhance coping mechanisms, it does not necessarily lower stress levels. These results align with previous research suggesting that humor, particularly adaptive humor styles, contributes to overall psychological well-being by acting as a protective factor against negative emotions. This study provides important implications for psychological interventions, suggesting that humor-based coping strategies can be integrated into mental health programs to enhance emotional resilience among young adults. However, limitations such as self-report bias, small sample size, and lack of longitudinal analysis highlight the need for future research with larger and more diverse populations to further validate these findings.

**Keywords:** *Dark humor, emotional resilience, stress, coping mechanisms, emerging adults, psychological well-being, humor styles, mental health.*

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## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 The Role of Dark Humor in Emotional Resilience and Stress Management Among Emerging Adults*

In today's fast-paced and often stressful society, humor functions as a crucial psychological mechanism to cope with adversity. Among various forms of humor, dark humor—also referred to as black or gallows humor—stands out for its ability to elicit amusement from topics traditionally seen as taboo, morbid, or emotionally difficult. While historically viewed as inappropriate, black humor has gained traction among younger generations, particularly emerging adults aged 18–25. This demographic faces a critical life phase marked by increased responsibilities, academic pressures, career uncertainty, and evolving social roles (Arnett, 2000). This research investigates whether black humor supports or hinders emotional resilience and stress management among emerging adults, exploring its psychological, social, and ethical implications.

### *1.2 Background of the Study*

Historically, humor has been linked to stress relief and emotional regulation, grounded in theories such as Freud's relief theory and the incongruity theory of humor. These models suggest that humor enables individuals to process distressing experiences more constructively. Black humor, which thrives on sensitive subjects such as death or existential suffering, may help individuals reframe negative events and cope with adversity. For emerging adults, who are in a transitional developmental stage, emotional regulation strategies are especially important (Luthar et al., 2000). Emotional resilience, the ability to adapt constructively to adversity—is essential for mental health and overall well-being. Coping strategies, including humor, play a significant role in determining how individuals handle life's challenges.

Despite the potential of humor in stress management, most existing studies focus on general humor styles (e.g., affiliative, self-enhancing) rather than black humor specifically (Martin, 2007). Recent research indicates that individuals who appreciate black humor often show greater cognitive flexibility and reduced emotional reactivity to distressing stimuli, possibly enhancing stress resilience (Ruch & Proyer, 2009). However, frequent use of black humor may also reflect emotional detachment or suppression rather than healthy coping. Given the growing popularity of dark humor in digital settings such as memes and social media, it is vital to assess whether this humor style contributes positively to mental health or acts as a maladaptive escape mechanism.

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### *1.3 Psychological Theories and Mechanisms*

Three major psychological theories underpin the use of dark humor in stress coping. Freud's (1905) Relief Theory posits that "humor allows the release of repressed emotions, enabling individuals to confront difficult topics in a less threatening manner". For emerging adults, black humor might serve as an outlet to deal with stress without overt emotional expression.

The Incongruity Theory, proposed by Kant (1790) and further developed by Suls (1972), suggests that humor emerges from the clash between expectations and reality. Dark humor leverages this incongruity by presenting disturbing issues through an unexpected or absurd lens, allowing people to reinterpret negative experiences more lightly (McGraw & Warren, 2010).

Finally, Hobbes's (1651) and Gruner's (1997) Superiority Theory frames humor as a demonstration of one's perceived dominance over others or over fearful situations. Through dark humor, individuals may gain psychological distance from their anxieties, fostering a sense of control and strength. However, this can also risk reinforcing negative worldviews or promoting desensitization (Ruch & Heintz, 2016).

### *1.4 Social and Digital Influence*

The internet and social media have transformed the way humor, particularly black humor—is shared and consumed. Platforms like Reddit, Twitter, and Instagram have popularized dark humor, creating online communities where individuals use sarcasm and satire to discuss trauma, mental health, and existential dread (Shifman, 2014). These environments offer a form of peer support and shared coping by validating distress through humor.

Black humor online often manifests in memes that combine absurdity with emotional pain, offering a digital outlet for reinterpreting suffering (Phillips & Milner, 2017). Research by Dynel (2021) suggests that these memes foster connection, reduce feelings of isolation, and enhance collective resilience. Similarly, Moran et al. (2013) found that engagement with comedic material on serious topics is associated with higher emotional resilience.

However, this digital exposure can have adverse effects. Excessive engagement with dark humor may normalize insensitivity, reinforce negative thought patterns, or trivialize serious issues (Ruch & Heintz, 2016; Samson & Gross, 2012). The anonymity and rapid sharing of online content may further promote emotionally detached humor that lacks empathy and reinforces stereotypes (Ferguson & Ford, 2008). Thus, while digital black humor can facilitate social support and stress relief, it must be used mindfully to avoid psychological harm.

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### *1.5 Black Humor and Emotional Resilience*

Emotional resilience is the "capacity to positively adapt to adversity, and dark humor may support this process by encouraging cognitive reappraisal of negative events". Studies have shown that black humor users tend to be more emotionally stable and less neurotic (Ruch & Proyer, 2009). By injecting irony or absurdity into painful experiences, dark humor enables individuals to mentally distance themselves from distress, which may enhance psychological flexibility (Strick et al., 2009).

In social contexts, black humor can foster a sense of community among like-minded peers, offering validation and shared emotional experiences. This collective resilience is particularly important during emerging adulthood, when peer support plays a crucial role in emotional well-being (Ferguson & Ford, 2008). However, individual and cultural differences must be considered. What may be empowering to one person can be offensive or harmful to another. Thus, while black humor can serve as a positive coping mechanism, its effectiveness depends on context, intent, and individual psychological profiles.

### *1.6 Risks and Ethical Considerations*

Despite its potential benefits, black humor also presents ethical and psychological risks. Regular exposure may result in emotional desensitization, reduced empathy, or reinforcement of harmful ideologies (Samson & Gross, 2012). In digital spaces, where humor is often shared without nuance, there is a risk of trivializing trauma or perpetuating prejudice. For example, some individuals may use black humor to mask discriminatory attitudes under the guise of comedy (Ford et al., 2014).

Additionally, black humor may serve as an emotional avoidance strategy. While it can reframe distressing experiences, overreliance on this coping style may hinder personal growth or delay seeking support (Martin & Ford, 2018). Understanding the audience and intent behind humor is crucial, especially when dealing with sensitive topics. According to McGraw and Warren's (2010) benign violation theory, humor succeeds when it violates norms in a socially acceptable way. When this balance is lost, black humor risks alienating individuals or causing psychological harm.

Dark humor offers both opportunities and challenges as a coping strategy for emerging adults. Rooted in established psychological theories, it has the potential to enhance emotional resilience, foster social bonds, and help individuals reframe negative experiences. However, its efficacy depends heavily on individual differences, cultural context, and the way it is employed—

particularly in online spaces. While black humor may serve as a tool for emotional regulation, caution must be taken to ensure it does not obscure deeper emotional needs or perpetuate harmful ideologies. A nuanced understanding of black humor's role in stress management is essential for developing informed mental health interventions for emerging adults.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 *Aim*

The aim of this is to analyze the impact of dark humor on stress, emotional resilience and coping mechanisms among young adults.

### 2.2 *Variables*

*Independent Variable*: Dark Humor

*Dependent Variable*: Emotional Resilience, Stress, Coping Mechanisms

### 2.3 *Research Objectives*

**a)** To explore the impact of dark humor on emotional resilience among adults.

**b)** To explore the impact of dark humor on stress among adults.

**c)** To explore the impact of dark humor on coping among adults.

**d)** To explore the relationship between dark humor on emotional resilience, stress and Coping among Emerging adults.

### 2.4 *Hypothesis*

**1)** There is significant impact of dark humor on emotional resilience among adults.

**2)** There is significant impact of dark humor on stress among adults.

**3)** There is significant the impact of dark humor on coping among adults.

**4)** There is significant relationship between dark humor on emotional resilience, stress and Coping among Emerging adults.

### 2.5 *Sample & Sample Selection*

A total of 101 persons were selected for the study, with a majority falling between the 18–25 age bracket. The selecting method used was purposive sampling, which ensures that both males and females are represented.

### 2.6 *Procedure*

Four questionnaires, the "*Humor Styles Questionnaire, Brief Resilience Scale, Perceived Stress Scale, Brief-COPE*"—were used to collect the data. After receiving an explanation of the

study's objectives, participants were asked to participate and provided with a questionnaire package that covers many topics such as the study, privacy concerns, the researcher's contact information, and more. The instruments needed to be described, which took ten minutes.

**2.7 *Measures***

**2.7.1 *Humor Styles Questionnaire*:** The Humour Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) assesses four humour types: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating (Martin et al., 2003). Self-enhancing and affiliative humour are linked to well-being, while aggressive and self-defeating styles are associated with poor mental health. The HSQ uses a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), with several items reverse-scored (e.g., items 1, 7, 9, 15). Each subscale contains eight items. Reliability is measured using Cronbach's alpha (≥ .70 acceptable), and validity through Pearson's correlation (≥ .70; Carvajal et al., 2011).

**2.7.2 *Brief Resilience Scale*:** It is possible to gauge an individual's resilience by administering the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). Smith et al. developed it in 2008, and it has six parts. There are negative claims in things 2, 4, and 6, but positive ones in items 3, 4, and 5. The BRS is scored using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 signifies "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree." After tallying up all of the scores, divide the total by the total number of components to get your unique BRS score. A higher score indicates that the individual is more resilient. The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) has adequate internal consistency, as shown by the coefficient alpha of 0.71.

**2.7.3 *Perceived Stress Scale*:** The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a widely used tool developed by Cohen et al. (1983) to assess how individuals perceive stress over the past 30 days. It includes 10 items rated on a 5-point scale, with items 4, 5, 7, and 8 reverse-scored. Scores range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater stress. Stress levels are typically categorized as mild (14–26) and severe (27–40). The PSS demonstrates strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values between .71 and .91. Convergent and divergent validity have been supported using Kendall's τ and related psychological measures (Cohen et al., 1983).

***2.7.4 Brief Cope Scale:*** A person's ability to deal with difficult situations in life can be assessed using the 28-item Brief COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory). The medical field frequently use it as a means of evaluating patients' reactions to life-threatening circumstances. A higher score indicates that the coping approach is being used more consistently. To assess the Brief COPE, a 4-point Likert scale was utilised. Strong internal consistency is shown

in the Brief COPE scale. The Cronbach's alpha range for dementia carers was 0.72-0.84, but the range for traumatic brain injury carers was 0.55-0.75.

**2.8 *Statistical Analysis***

Data analysis in the research has been done using SPSS program. The results of descriptive statistical tests will be validated by means of regression analysis, thereby supporting the investigations of the hypothesis.

**2.9 *Data Analysis***

The results of a Google Form survey were analyzed in this part in order to investigate among emerging adults the effects of black humor on emotional resilience, stress levels, and coping techniques. Using statistical techniques, the data has been processed and analyzed to find trends and correlations between the dependent variables—emotional resilience, stress, and coping mechanisms and the independent variable dark humor. The results seek to shed light on whether black humor is a useful adaptive coping mechanism or has possible negative effects on emotional control and stress management.

## 3. Results

**Table 1:** *Descriptive statistics of all variables*

| | ***Dark Humour*** | ***Emotional Resilience*** | ***Stress*** | ***Coping mechanism*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Mean** | 129.9604 | 3.123762 | 22.19802 | 71.0297 |
| **Standard Deviation** | 16.08037 | 0.380536 | 4.287236 | 7.645202 |
| **N** | 101 | 101 | 101 | 101 |

**Table 1** shows the descriptive statistics for the main research variables—dark humor, emotional resilience, stress, and coping strategies. With a standard deviation of 16.08 and a mean score of 129.96, dark humor indicates a modest degree of involvement among participants with some variance in replies. With a mean score of 3.12 (SD = 0.38), emotional resilience suggests that individuals show somewhat modest levels overall. Reflecting variances in participant experience of stress, the mean stress level is 22.20 with a standard deviation of 4.29. Finally, coping techniques have a mean score of 71.03 (SD = 7.65), indicating that individuals use a variety

of coping mechanisms with some degree of fluctuation. These statistics give a basic knowledge of the dataset prior to doing additional inferential investigations using a sample size (N) of 101 for all variables.

**Table 2:** *Regression analysis of impact of dark humour on emotional resilience among young adults*

| ***Regression Statistics*** | |
|---|---|
| **Multiple R** | 0.337457 |
| **R Square** | 0.113877 |
| **Adjusted R Square** | 0.104926 |
| **Standard Error** | 0.360019 |
| **Observations** | 101 |

| **ANOVA** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***df*** | ***SS*** | ***MS*** | ***F*** | ***Significance F*** |
| **Regression** | 1 | 1.649024 | 1.649024 | 12.72264 | 0.000559 |
| **Residual** | 99 | 12.83172 | 0.129613 | | |
| **Total** | 100 | 14.48075 | | | |

**H1:** *There is significant impact of dark humour on emotional resilience among adults.*

The study of dark humor's effect on emotional resilience among young people uses regression analysis. With a R Square value of 0.1139, dark humor suggests a small link between emotional resilience and explains 11.39% of the variance in the value. With a significance level (p-value) of 0.00056—much below the accepted threshold of 0.05—the ANOVA findings indicate. This suggests that the regression model is statistically significant, so dark humor clearly affects emotional resilience.

Given the p-value is substantial, we accept the hypothesis (H1) that dark humor significantly influences emotional resilience among young people. The relatively small impact size, however, indicates that if dark humor affects emotional resilience, other elements might possibly be quite important.

**Table 3:** *Regression analysis of impact of dark humour on stress among young adults.*

| ***Regression Statistics*** | |
|---|---|
| **Multiple R** | 0.183462 |
| **R Square** | 0.033658 |
| **Adjusted R Square** | 0.023897 |
| **Standard Error** | 4.2357 |
| **Observations** | 101 |

| **ANOVA** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***df*** | ***SS*** | ***MS*** | ***F*** | ***Significance F*** |
| **Regression** | 1 | 61.86514 | 61.86514 | 3.448225 | 0.066293 |
| **Residual** | 99 | 1776.174 | 17.94116 | | |
| **Total** | 100 | 1838.04 | | | |

***H2:*** *There is significant impact of dark humour on stress among adults.*

The study of the influence of dark humor upon stress among young adults uses regression analysis. With a R Square score of 0.0337, dark humor suggests a poor link between the two variables as it explains just 3.37% of the variance in stress levels. With a significance level (p-value) of 0.0663—above the traditional 0.05 threshold—the ANOVA findings indicate. This suggests that the regression model is not statistically significant, hence dark humor has no appreciable effect on stress levels.

Given the p-value is not statistically significant, we reject the hypothesis (H2) that dark humor significantly influences adult stress levels. This implies that although dark humor could have additional psychological consequences, its direct impact on stress levels is either negligible or impacted by other elements not taken into consideration in this paradigm.

**Table 4:** *Regression analysis of impact of dark humour on coping mechanisms among young adults.*

| ***Regression Statistics*** | |
|---|---|
| **Multiple R** | 0.307482 |
| **R Square** | 0.094545 |

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| | |
|---|---|
| **Adjusted R Square** | 0.085399 |
| **Standard Error** | 7.311469 |
| **Observations** | 101 |

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***df*** | ***SS*** | ***MS*** | ***F*** | ***Significance F*** |
| **Regression** | 1 | 552.6099 | 552.6099 | 10.33735 | 0.001761 |
| **Residual** | 99 | 5292.301 | 53.45759 | | |
| **Total** | 100 | 5844.911 | | | |

***H2:*** *There is significant impact of dark humour on coping mechanisms among adults.*

The influence of dark humor on coping strategies among young people is assessed using the regression analysis. Dark humor suggests a modest association between the two variables since the R Square value (0.0945) shows that it explains 9.45% of the variation in coping techniques. With a significance level (p-value) of 0.00176—much below the accepted threshold of 0.05—the ANOVA findings reveal. This suggests that the regression model is statistically significant, so dark humor clearly influences coping strategies.

Given the statistically substantial p-value, we support the hypothesis (H3) that dark humor significantly influences adult coping strategies. The little impact size, however, indicates that although dark humor shapes coping mechanisms, other elements also help people control emotional difficulties and stress.

**Table 4:** *Pearson Correlation Analysis of relationship between dark humor, emotional resilience, stress and coping strategies among young adults.*

| | ***Dark Humour*** | ***Emotional Resilience*** | ***Stress*** | ***Coping mechanism*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dark Humour** | 1 | | | |
| **Emotional Resilience** | 0.337457 | 1 | | |
| **Stress** | 0.183462 | 0.158498 | 1 | |
| **Coping mechanism** | 0.307482 | 0.247354 | 0.308879 | 1 |

***H4:*** *There is significant relationship between dark humor on emotional resilience, stress and Coping among Emerging adults.*

**Table 4** shows young people' Pearson correlation coefficients between dark humor, emotional resilience, stress, and coping strategies. dark humor and emotional resilience show a modest but favorable link (r = 0.3375), meaning those who participate more in dark humor typically have better emotional resilience. With a weak yet positive connection (r = 0.1835), dark humor and stress have a modest link. Likewise, the modest and favorable connection between dark humor and coping processes (r = 0.3075) suggests that those who employ dark humor might possibly depend on different coping techniques.

We accept the hypothesis (H4) that dark humor, emotional resilience, stress, and coping among emerging adults have a significant relationship since there are statistically significant relationships between dark humor and emotional resilience as well as dark humor and coping mechanisms. Though the correlation exists, the small relationship between black humor and stress indicates that it is not as strong as with the other factors.

## 4. Discussion of Results

This study explored the relationship between dark humor, emotional resilience, stress, and coping strategies among emerging adults. The findings revealed that while dark humor significantly correlated with improved coping mechanisms and emotional resilience, its direct impact on stress was not statistically significant. These results suggest that dark humor functions more as a psychological buffer, enhancing individuals' ability to manage adversity rather than reducing stress levels outright. The study aligns with Dasti (2022), who found that adaptive humor styles positively influenced emotional well-being. Although no mediation effects were examined in this study, the positive link between dark humor and coping supports the idea that humor aids emotional regulation and cognitive reappraisal. The weak correlation with stress highlights that stress levels may be more strongly influenced by external factors and individual differences. Overall, the research suggests dark humor is a potentially adaptive coping tool that supports emotional resilience in young adults.

## 5. Conclusion

This study explored the effects of dark humor on emotional resilience, stress, and coping strategies among emerging adults. Results showed that dark humor was significantly linked to increased emotional resilience and improved coping mechanisms, although it had no statistically

significant impact on stress levels. This suggests that while dark humor may help individuals manage adversity, it does not directly reduce stress, which is likely influenced by other psychological and environmental factors. The findings align with Dasti (2022), who emphasized the positive role of adaptive humor styles in emotional regulation and well-being. Unlike Dasti's work, this study did not examine emotional control as a mediator, indicating a direction for future research. The results highlight the potential for incorporating humor-based approaches into psychological interventions. Encouraging the use of adaptive humor, particularly dark humor, may enhance resilience and coping in young adults, especially those facing academic, personal, or professional challenges. Future research should explore individual differences in humor perception.

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