

When the Spotlight Fades: The Inner World of Actors

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to study the flow, coping with stress and overall well-being among the actors. For this purpose, a sample of 104 actors consisting of 52 males and 52 females was selected through purposive sampling. The FLOW measured by FLOW SHORT SCALE - Rheinberg, Vollmeyer & Engeser, 2003. Coping with stress measured by Coping Scale Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, 2013. Well-being measured by The Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI 5th edition: International Well-being Group 2013). Findings revealed a significant Positive Correlation between Flow and Well-Being ($r = 0.439$, $p < 0.01$), no significant correlation between Coping with Stress and Well-Being ($r = 0.166$, $p < 0.01$) no significant correlation between Coping with Stress and Flow ($r = 0.098$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis revealed that the flow predicts 20.9% of variance in correlation with well-being and coping with stress. This study highlights the struggles of actors which will help in designing intervention plans for them to cope with stress and to enhance overall well-being.

Keywords: *The Flow, Well-being, Actors, Stress, Coping*

Actors are the artists working in different sectors of the entertainment industry, which includes theatres, advertisement, commercials, movies, web series, and different mediums, which promote dramatics. While performing, actors require unique psychological needs, due to the creative and emotional nature of their work; factors like creativity, public scrutiny, and career instability, places these individuals at a higher risk of stress, burnout and compromised well-being. As they deal with these challenges, it is very crucial to understand the psychological construct that influences the abilities to cope with such situations.

One such concept conceptualised by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is *FLOW*. According to him, flow is closely linked to optimal performance and intrinsic satisfaction, which are particularly relevant for performing artists who often derive fulfillment from their craft. The extent to which flow impacts their ability to cope with stress and its relationship to overall well-being remains underexplored. Coping Strategies are the conscious efforts one puts to deal with challenging situations of life. For actors, these strategies can range from preparing themselves and rehearsing the act, which is a problem focused approach, to seeking

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emotional support and performing relaxation techniques, which is an emotional focused approach. Well-being is another factor that shapes mental health outcomes of performing artists. The high-pressure environment of the entertainment industry often requires them to maintain a delicate balance between professional and personal fulfillment. This study aims to understand the relation and interplay between flow, coping with stress and wellbeing. This research will provide valuable insights into how actors can optimise their psychological needs and sustain their wellbeing to fulfill the demands of their profession.

Objectives

- a) To study the level of Flow, Coping with stress and Well-Being in Actors.
- b) To study the Correlation Between Flow and Coping with Stress in Actors.
- c) To study the Correlation between Coping with stress and Well-being in Actors
- d) To study the Correlation between Flow and Well-being in Actors.

Hypotheses

- **H01:** There will be a Positive Correlation between Flow and Well-Being among Actors.
- **H02:** There will be a Positive Correlation between Coping with Stress and Well-Being among Actors.
- **H03:** There will be a Positive Correlation between Coping with Stress and Flow among Actors.

METHODOLOGY

Research design:

The present study follows a within-group quantitative research design. It is a correlational study.

Sample:

104 actors consisting of 52 females and 52 males, (aged 25-45 years), were selected using a purposive sampling method. Participants were having working experience of 3 to more years in the acting industry.

- **Inclusion criteria:** Age: 25 - 45 Gender (Male/Female)
Working Status: 3+Yrs
- **Exclusion criteria:** Actors with ill Mental Health Condition

Tools:

1. **Flow Short Scale:** The flow short scale given by Rheinberg, Vollmeyer and Engeser in 2003. It is a 13-item self-report inventory used to measure the Fluency (smooth pursuit of action) and Absorption, which together represent the flow experience. The third factor is the Worry component. Items 14-16 are designed to measure the demands-skill balance. It uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) to assess the respondent's level of absorption and enjoyment. Higher scores indicate a greater experience of flow. The scale has internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from 0.83 to 0.90. The FSS also shows strong test-retest reliability. Convergent validity is supported by significant positive correlations with related constructs such as intrinsic motivation, task enjoyment, and engagement, with correlation values reaching up to 0.70–0.80.

2. **The Coping Scale:** The coping scale (Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, 2013) is a 13-item self-report scale used to assess coping with stress. It uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Higher scores reflect more frequent use of adaptive coping strategies. The scale reports acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values around 0.79. Test-retest reliability studies show moderate stability over a 2-week period. Convergent validity is supported by positive correlations with measures of resilience and positive emotional regulation, while divergent validity is demonstrated by weak correlations with unrelated psychological constructs.
3. **The Personal Wellbeing Index – Adult (PWI-A):** The scale was developed by the International Wellbeing Group (IWbG, 2006) as a comprehensive tool for measuring personal well-being at the individual level. It has 8-items which reports the PWI-A consists of seven core items, each assessing satisfaction with different life domains on a 0-10 Likert scale (0 = "No satisfaction at all," 10 = "Completely satisfied"). The seven standard domains are: Standard of Living, Health, Achieving in Life (Personal Achievement/Goals), Personal Relationships, Personal Safety, Community-Connectedness, Future Security. An optional 8th item measures satisfaction with spirituality/religion (used in some cultural adaptations). The Personal Wellbeing Index Score (PWI Score) is calculated by averaging the seven domain scores, then transforming it into a percentage scale (0-100%). Interpretation of Scores are Below 50%: Indication of low well-being (potential mental distress). 50%-70%: Represents moderate well-being (typical for general populations). Above 70%: Suggests high well-being (strong personal satisfaction)

Procedure

The researcher approached various actors or institutes of acting in pune. Willing people who fulfilled the inclusion criteria were selected as the sample. Participants were informed about the confidentiality of their responses and an informed consent was taken from them. They were asked to fill a form which consisted of demographic details followed by the questionnaires.

RESULTS

Statistical Analysis:

The data was analysed using SPSS version 30.0.0.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated and normality tests were conducted. The Shapiro-Wilk test of normality indicated that the data did not follow normality. As a result, the Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to measure the correlation between the variables. Regression analyses were performed to predict the variances between the variables.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptives	FLOW	COPING WITH STRESS	WELL BEING
Number (N)	104	104	104
Mean	58.91	37.51	54.62
Median	60	38	57
Mode	62	38	47
Sum	6127	3902	5681

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Descriptives	FLOW	COPING WITH STRESS	WELL BEING
Standard Deviation (SD)	12.12	6.15	17.49
Range	75	35	85
Minimum	13	16	00
Maximum	88	51	85
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.979	0.972	0.964
Shapiro-Wilk p	0.099	0.027	0.006

Table no. 1 shows the descriptive statistics including the central tendencies for Flow, Coping with Stress, and Psychological Well-Being among professional actors. The mean score for Flow ($M = 58.91$) and median ($Mdn = 60.00$) indicate that the participants' experiences of flow are fairly centered, with a slight negative skewness (-0.550) and a leptokurtic distribution ($kurtosis = 1.454$). This suggests a generally consistent experience of flow with few extreme values. The mean score for Coping with Stress ($M = 37.52$) and median ($Mdn = 38.00$) imply symmetrical distribution with slight negative skewness (-0.609) and moderate consistency ($kurtosis = 0.602$), reflecting moderate coping styles among participants. The mean score for Psychological Well-Being ($M = 54.63$) and median ($Mdn = 57.00$) show that well-being is moderately high among actors, with mild negative skewness (-0.711) and a near-normal distribution ($kurtosis = 0.476$), indicating that while most participants reported good well-being, a few showed lower well-being levels.

Table 2 Correlation between Flow, Coping with Stress, and Psychological Well-Being among Actors ($N = 104$)

Correlation Matrix		FSS	COPE	PWI
FSS	Spearman's rho	1.000	0.098	-
	p-value	0.00	0.324	-
	N	104	104	-
COPE	Spearman's rho	-	1.000	0.166
	p-value	-	0.00	0.092
	N	-	104	104
PWI	Spearman's rho	0.439**	-	1.000
	p-value	<.001	-	0.00
	N	104	-	104

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). ** $p < 0.001$

Table no. 2 shows the correlation between Flow, Coping with Stress, and Psychological Well-Being among actors. The correlation between Flow and Well-Being is moderate and highly significant ($r = 0.439$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that a higher experience of flow is associated with greater psychological well-being. The relationships between Coping with Stress and Well-Being ($r = 0.166$) and Flow and Coping with Stress ($r = 0.098$) are weak and statistically non-significant.

Table 3 Regression between Flow, Coping with Stress, and Psychological Well-Being among Actors (N = 104)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standardised coefficients Beta	t	Sig
1	.466a	.217	.209	.466	5.317	<.001\

Table no. 3 shows the regression analysis between Flow, Coping with Stress, and Psychological Well-Being among actors. The regression value indicates that Flow predicts 19.3% of the variance in Psychological Well-Being and this result is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This means that the experience of flow at work significantly contributes to higher levels of well-being among actors. On the other hand, Coping with Stress predicts only 2.7% of the variance in Psychological Well-Being, and this finding is not statistically significant ($p = 0.092$). This suggests that coping strategies, while important, do not strongly predict the well-being outcomes for the actors in this study. Overall, the findings highlight the crucial role of flow experiences in enhancing mental health and life satisfaction among performing artists.

FINDINGS

There is a Positive Correlation between Flow and Well-Being among Actors. The strongest relationship identified in this analysis is between Flow and Well-Being, with a correlation coefficient of ($r = 0.439$) and a highly significant p-value (< 0.001). Acting is in itself, a creative process to achieve the potential to portray multiple fictional and non-fictional characters around the world. The process of acting allows actors to express their suppressed emotions as well as it becomes a medium to access inner self through insights. Most of the time, the actor relates himself or herself with the character and establishes a fascinating relationship, leading to an intense experience of flow. Experiencing flow in the working environment gives a sense of appreciation and fulfillment of their needs, which also leads to a sense of having optimal well-being in their lives. As the flow is experienced on the sets, i.e., respective working environment, the need for financial requirements is also fulfilled leading to satisfaction of different dimensions of well-being. Hence as the experience of flow of an actor increases, the rise in well-being is also experienced. One of the research, 'Flow at Work and Basic Psychological Needs: Effects on Well-Being.' Ilies, R., Wagner, & et.al (2017)., discussed how flow experiences at work influence employees well-being through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. The study's emphasis on the workplace setting parallels the performance environment of actors. The study demonstrates that flow experiences at work significantly enhance well-being by fulfilling basic psychological needs for competence and autonomy. These findings suggest that fostering environments that facilitate flow can lead to improved mental health and job satisfaction.

There is no significant correlation between Coping with stress and wellbeing among the actors. The Spearman's rho between Coping with Stress and Psychological Well-Being is ($r = 0.166$) with a p-value of 0.092. Medium level of coping has been found among the actors working in the entertainment industry, indicating that they face medium levels of difficulty while dealing with stress as there is no fixed income or employment. In this working sector, it creates this profession, more complex and challenging, leading to stress like family pressure and financial pressure. The actors also find it difficult to deal with the stress due to being unable to find alternative solutions and have a positive aspect towards the situation, leading towards an avoiding approach. Due to unstable income and employment as well as low level

of family support, actors often experience compromised well-being, most of the actors stated “there is a lot of struggle to get opportunities in this profession that leads us to make compromises in our daily lives to fulfil the needs of our family.” no fixed working hours hampers the sleep and over health of the actors. The working shifts sometimes reach 24 hours, leading to over exhaustion of the physical and mental state of the actor.

There is no significant correlation between Coping with stress and Flow among the Actors. The Spearman's rho correlation coefficient between Flow and Coping with Stress is ($r = 0.098$) with a p-value of 0.324. The flow is experienced when there is no disturbance or distraction while working or performing. It has been formed that actors often faces higher audience and performance expectations while performing as well as there is an expectation of creative liberty from the (Actress)'s point of view, while performing as the process of acting is creative in itself, but due to inappropriate behaviour of the Director of the project and superior, i.e., senior actors and producers, the actors feel inferior and lack of self-confidence. This impacts their coping abilities while working, creating it more difficult to focus on the performance. This leads to increasing levels of stress. The working hours are not fixed sometimes leading to 18 to 24 hours of ships, camping their health and sleep which leads to moderate levels of coping impacting on the potential of the performance.

The present study was conducted in order to understand the correlation between the flow, coping with stress and wellbeing of actors. The study has certain limitations. Firstly, it was conducted on a small sample size of only 104 actors. It provides guidelines for future researchers to replicate the study on a larger sample size. Secondly, random sampling could have been used instead of the purposive sampling method for better results. Future research can highlight between actors of a particular gender.

CONCLUSION

In this analysis, the relationships between the flow, coping with stress and Well-Being were assessed using Spearman's rank-order correlation.

1. The hypothesis stated “There is a Positive Correlation between Flow and Well-Being among Actors.”
2. The hypothesis stated “There is no significant correlation between Coping with Stress and Well-Being among Actors.”
3. The hypothesis stated “There is no significant correlation between Coping with Stress and Flow among Actors.”

Implications

1. Helping actors experience flow during performance can significantly enhance their emotional well-being and satisfaction.
2. Acting schools and theatre groups should include mindfulness, improvisation, and meditation in training to promote flow states.
3. Therapists working with actors should focus on reconnecting them with joy and mastery in their craft, not just reducing stress.
4. Stress management strategies must be meaningful and personally tailored to be truly effective for actors' mental health.
5. Actor training programs should also include mental health education, emotional resilience, and self-care as core components.

Limitations and Future Directions

1. The use of self-report tools may have affected accuracy due to social desirability or personal bias in how actors viewed their experiences.
2. The study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to understand cause-and-effect relationships between flow, coping, and well-being.
3. The sample, focused mainly on urban actors in Mumbai, may not reflect the experiences of performers in other regions or cultural settings.
4. Not distinguishing between types of coping strategies limited deeper understanding of how different approaches impact well-being.
5. Future research should use longitudinal, qualitative, and physiological methods to explore how flow and coping unfold over time and across acting genres.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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