

Proactive Coping Skills and State-Trait Anxiety of Women Teacher Students

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The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between proactive coping skills and state-trait anxiety among teacher students of Bentolhoda Teacher Education Center of Boushehr, Iran. The sample (N=120) was randomly selected from the teacher students and stratified on the basis of their training fields in to five groups: Mathematics Teaching, Primary School Teaching, Experimental Sciences, Religion and Arabic Teaching, and Social Studies Teaching. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 21 years. Two validated instruments (Proactive Coping Inventory & State-Trait Anxiety) were used in collecting data. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and multiple regression were utilized to analyze data. Correlation analyses showed a significant reverse relationship between most of the proactive coping skills and state-trait anxiety. Also, the regression analysis revealed that reflective coping, instrumental support seeking, emotional support seeking, and proactive coping were the most important factors which predicted state-trait anxiety. The results are discussed in the light of available theoretical and empirical evidence and the implications for intervention are suggested.

Keywords: coping skills, state-trait anxiety, teacher students.

From organizational perspective, higher education aims to help students to develop their talents and potentials and succeed in educational endeavors throughout their lives (Akhavan & Dehghan, 2006). A strong and effective education can help to boost the development of the country. However, mental health problems are highly disruptive to the educational and emotional development of the student but also to the progress of universities, educational institutions and other society segments (Khodarahimi, Rasti, Khajehie, & Sattar, 2009). Therefore, the university is a critical context for studying youth mental health (Weitzman, 2004).

As if now, huge evidence suggests that mental health problems are numerous and increasing among students in higher education (Khodarahimi et al, 2009). Teacher students often are subjected to different kinds of stressors, such as moving away from the family for the first time, residing with other

students, experiencing reduced adult supervision (Murray & Lopez, 1997), tolerating a new social life and necessity of complying with stresses resulting from the existing problems. In addition to the pressures of academics with an obligation to succeed and difficulties of integrating into the system, students also face social, emotional, physical, and family problems which may affect their learning ability and academic performance (Sreeramareddy, et al ,2007; Chew-Graham, Rogers, & Yassin, 2003). These changes may increase the risk of depression and anxiety and affects the general health states of teacher student (Read, Wood, Davidoff, McLacken, & Campbell, 2002).

Evidence that suggests that teacher students are vulnerable to mental health problems has generated increased public concern in societies (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008). Previous studies suggest high rates of psychological morbidity, especially

depression and anxiety, among teacher students all over the world (Nerdrum, Rustoen, & Ronnestad, 2006; Ovuga, Boardman, & Wasserman, 2006; Voelker, 2003; Wong, Cheung, Chan, Ma, & Tang, 2006).

One area identified as influencing students mental health is the coping process. Coping is a process that individuals employ every day. We engage in coping when we feel under stress or want to manage a taxing situation. The process of coping involves two components, appraisal and coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Appraisal is the act of perceiving a stressor and analysing one's own ability to deal with the stressor. Appraisal can be made in three different conditions: when we have experienced a stressor, when we anticipate a stressor and when we experience a chance for mastery or gain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Once we appraise a stressful situation we must decide how we will respond or 'cope' with the stressor, either choosing to master it, reduce it or tolerate it. The coping style we engage in is ultimately determined by whether we believe we have the resources to resolve the stressor. There appear to be three main coping styles that people employ when attempting to resolve or remove a stressor: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and avoidant coping. Problem-focused coping involves altering or managing the problem that is causing the stress and is highly action focused. Individuals engaging in problem-focused coping focus their attention on gathering the required resources (i.e. skills, tools and knowledge) necessary to deal with the stressor. This involves a number of strategies such as gathering information, resolving conflict, planning and making decisions (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Emotion-focused coping can take a range of forms such as seeking social support, acceptance and venting of emotions etc (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

Although emotion-focused coping styles are quite varied they all seek to lessen the negative emotions associated with the stressor, thus emotion-focused coping is action-orientated (Admiraal, Korthagen & Wubbels, 2000; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Also the third main coping style is avoidant coping. Avoidant coping can be described as cognitive and behavioral efforts directed towards minimising, denying or ignoring dealing with a stressful situation (Holahan, Holahan, Moos, Brennan, & Schutte, 2005). Avoidant coping is focused on ignoring a stressor and is therefore passive, whereas emotion-focused coping is active (Admiraal et al., 2000, Holahan et al., 2005).

A more effective method of stress coping has been identified as the proactive coping method. Proactive coping strategy is multidimensional and forward looking as it integrates processes of personal quality of life management with those of self-regulatory goal attainment (Greenglass, 2001). Proactive coping skills include planning, goal setting, organizing and mental stimulation (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). Also, proactive coping involves goal management whereby individuals see risks, demands and opportunities in the future but they do not appraise them as threat, harm or loss. The motivation for proactive coping is positive since it derives from perceiving situations as challenging and stimulating (Greenglass, 2001).

Although many factors are involved in the development of psychological distress, coping styles have been shown to be a significant contributor. Problem-focused coping appears to be the most adaptive coping style as it is associated with reduced psychological distress (Wijndaele et al., 2007; Billings & Moos, 1984; Cronkite, Moos, Twohey, Cohen, & Swindle, 1998). Alternatively, avoidant coping appears the most maladaptive style as it is associated with increased distress. (Ben-Zur, 1999; Bouteyre, Maurel, & Bernaud, 2007; Carver et al., 1989;

Crockett et al., 2007; Folkman, 1997; Knibb & Horton, 2008; Penland, Masten, Zelhart, Fournet, & Callahan, 2000; Sherbourne, Hays, & Wells, 1995; Wijndaele et al., 2007). The results regarding emotion-focused coping are more complex as this coping style has been associated with both increased and decreased levels of psychological distress (Ben-Zur, 1999; Billings & Moos, 1984; Bouteyre, Maurel, & Bernaud, 2007; Brown & Harris, 1978; Brown, Svrakic, Przybeck, & Cloninger, 1992; Carver et al., 1989; Crockett et al., 2007; Knibb & Horton, 2008; Penland et al., 2000; Wijndaele et al., 2007). Hence the present study examines the relationship between proactive coping skills and state-trait anxiety among teacher students. Therefore, the main question is: Are proactive coping skills and state-trait anxiety related and if so, which proactive coping skill is most important in predicting the state-trait anxiety of teacher students?

Method

Participants:

120 participants were randomly selected through a stratified random sampling technique from the 5 training fields: Mathematics Teaching, Primary School Teaching, Experimental Sciences, Religion and Arabic Teaching and Social Studies Teaching from Bentolhoda Teacher Education Center, Boushehr, Iran. The age range of participants was between 19 and 21 years.

Measures:

Proactive coping skills inventory (PCSI): It was developed by Greenglass et al., 1999. The inventory consists of 55 items with 7 scales viz., 1. *Proactive Coping*- refers to the combination of autonomous goal setting with self-regulatory goal attainment, cognition and behavior; 2. *Reflective Coping*- refers to simulation and contemplation about a variety of possible behavioral alternatives by comparing their imagined effectiveness. This process includes brainstorming, analyzing

problems and resources and generating hypothetical plans of action; 3. *Strategic Planning*- refers to the process of generating a goal-oriented schedule of action in which extensive tasks are broken down into manageable components; 4. *Preventive Coping*- deals with anticipation of potential stressors and making preparation before these stressors develop fully; 5. *Instrumental Support Seeking*- refers to the process of obtaining advice, information and feedback from one's social network when dealing with stressors; 6. *Emotional Support Seeking*- refers to the process of regulating temporary emotional distress by disclosing to others one's feelings, evoking empathy and seeking companionship from one's social network, and 7. *Avoidance Coping*- the process of eluding action in a demanding situation. Participants responded by indicating the extent of their agreement with each of the 55 statements using a four-point Likert scale, the choices typically being 'not at all true', 'barely true', 'somewhat true', and 'completely true', scoring from 1 to 4, respectively. The subscales only allow the means and deviations to be calculated. Reliability of the proactive coping skills inventory estimated using two methods viz., the Spear-Brown split-half ranged from .55 to .80 and the coefficient of Cronbach alpha ranged from .74 to .81 (N=100). To find the validity of the inventory, it was correlated with one external criteria, General Self-efficacy scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995). The Pearson product moment correlation ranged from .21 to .64 (N=100) which was significant at 0.01 level. This shows the test has concurrent validity.

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI): It is a self-report assessment device which includes separate measures of state and trait anxiety. The original STAI form was constructed by Spielberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene in 1964 (Spielberger, 1983). The STAI is a validated 40 item self-report assessment device which includes separate

measures of state and trait anxiety. The state anxiety consists of 20 statements; for a positive statement in section, a score of 4 was given for Not at all; 3 for A little; 2 for somewhat and 1 for Very Much So. For a negative statement, the scoring was reversed, i.e., a score of 1, 2, 3, & 4 was given for Not at all, A little, somewhat, and Very Much so respectively. The trait anxiety consists of a similar set of items used to evaluate the trait anxiety. For a positive item, a score of 4 was given for almost never; 3 for sometimes; 2 for often and 1 for almost always. For a negative item, the scoring was reversed, i.e., a score of 1, 2, 3, & 4 was given for almost never, sometimes, often, and almost always respectively. High scores on their respective scales mean more trait or state anxiety and low scores mean less. The total possible score on the STAI ranges from 40 to 160, with higher scores indicating poor mental health. The inventory also allows the means and deviations to be calculated, both for the global total, as well as for the two sub-scales. The split-half reliability of the inventory for state anxiety was found to be 0.70(N=100) and for trait anxiety was 0.91(N=100). The test-retest reliability for state anxiety was 0.81(N=100) and for trait anxiety was 0.70(N=100). The correlation using the Pearson product moment formula for state anxiety inventory was found to be 0.82 (N=100) with Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck& Steer,

1987) and 0.72 (N=100) with Goldberg General Health Questionnaire (GHQ₂₈) (1981), and for trait anxiety it was found to be 0.85 (N=100) with BDI and 0.65 (N=100) with GHQ₂₈, and for STAI (global total) it was found to be 0.87 (N=100) with BDI and 0.71 (N=100) with GHQ₂₈, which are significant at 0.00 level. This shows the test has concurrent validity.

Results

Table 1. Mean Scores and SD.

Variables	Mean	SD
Proactive Coping	43.04	5.05
Reflective Coping	34.45	5.46
Strategic Coping	11.79	2.61
Preventive Coping	31.29	5.25
Instrumental Support Seeking	26.76	3.81
Emotional Support Seeking	14.80	2.77
Avoidance Coping	8.03	1.83
State Anxiety	44.47	12.46
Trait Anxiety	43.88	10.50
State-Trait Anxiety	88.30	21.69

Table 1 displays the mean and standard deviation obtained by the subjects in the variables under study.

Correlation among Study Variables

Beliefs may many aspects of thinking. Hence it was deemed important to evaluate correlation between proactive coping skills and state-trait anxiety (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlation matrix of the relationship between Proactive Coping Skills and State-Trait Anxiety

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.Proactive Coping	1	.62**	.58**	.64**	.49**	.34**	.23**	-.29**	-.49**	-.41**
2.Reflective Coping		1	.72**	.66**	.46**	.47**	.08	-.39**	-.53**	-.48**
3.Strategic Coping			1	.68**	.46**	.46**	-.04	-.30**	-.42**	-.38**
4.Preventive Coping				1	.55**	.47**	.21*	-.29**	-.37**	-.35**
5.Instrumental Support Seeking					1	.50**	.21*	-.04	-.16	-.08
6.Emotional Support Seeking						1	.20*	-.30**	-.36**	-.35**
7.Avoidance Coping							1	-.006	-.09	-.08
8. State Anxiety								1	.78**	.95**
9. Trait Anxiety									1	.93**
10. State-Trait Anxiety										1

** p<0.01(2-tailed) * p<0.05 (2-tailed).

In order to determine the linkages between proactive coping skills and state-trait anxiety and its sub-scales, coefficient of correlations were computed (vide Table 2). As correlations results (table-2) indicate, all the proactive coping scales had significant reverse relationship with state-trait anxiety, barring instrumental support seeking and avoidance coping. Proactive coping was found to be significantly negatively correlated with state anxiety ($r = -.29, p < .01$), trait anxiety ($r = -.49, p < .01$), and state-trait anxiety ($r = -.41, p < .01$). Similarly, reflective coping was also found to be significantly negatively correlated with state anxiety ($r = -.39, p < .01$), trait anxiety ($r = -.53, p < .01$), and state-trait anxiety ($r = -.48, p < .01$). Strategic coping was also found to be significantly inversely correlated with state anxiety ($r = -.30, p < .01$), trait anxiety ($r = -.42, p < .01$), and state-trait anxiety ($r = -.38, p < .01$). Similarly, preventive coping was also found to be significantly negatively correlated with state anxiety ($r = -.29, p < .01$), trait anxiety ($r = -.37, p < .01$), and state-trait anxiety ($r = -.35, p < .01$). Emotional support seeking was found to be significantly negatively correlated with state anxiety ($r = -.30, p < .01$), trait anxiety ($r = -.36, p < .01$) and state-trait anxiety ($r = -.35, p < .01$).

seeking, and emotional support seeking significantly predict state anxiety of women teacher students. When reflective coping was entered into the model as the first predictor variable based on the strength of its relationship with state anxiety, a significant prediction was revealed ($F_{1,118} = 21.489; R = .392, R^2 = .154; p < .05$). This indicates that reflective coping alone predicted 15.4% of the variation in state anxiety of women teacher students. When instrumental support seeking entered into the model as the second predictor variable, a significant prediction was also re-vealed ($F_{2,117} = 14.176; R = .442, R^2 = .195; p < .05$). This revealed that the two-predictor va-riables together predicted 19.5% of the variation in state anxiety of women teacher students. Instrumental support seeking was able to add only 4.1 % into the prediction. When emotional support seeking entered into the model as the third predictor variable, a significant prediction was re-vealed ($F_{3,116} = 12.662; R = .497, R^2 = .247; p < .05$). This revealed that the three-predictor va-riables together predicted 24.7 % of the variation in state anxiety of women teacher students. Emotional support seeking was able to add only 5.2 % into the prediction. Rest of independent variables could not meet the criteria for it to enter the regression model.

Results presented in Table 3 revealed that reflective coping, instrumental support

Table3. Cumulative Multiple Regression Analysis for State-Trait Anxiety and it’s sub-scales by Proactive Coping Skills

No Predictor Variables	Criterion Variables	R	R ²	Beta	t value
1 Reflective coping	State anxiety	0.392	0.154	-0.41	-4.31**
2 Instrumental support seeking		0.442	0.195	0.32	3.36**
3 Emotional support seeking		0.497	0.247	-0.27	-2.82**
1 Reflective coping	Trait anxiety	0.538	0.289	-0.35	-3.49**
2 Proactive coping		0.576	0.332	-0.33	-3.48**
3 Instrumental support seeking		0.6	0.36	0.27	3.03**
4 Emotional support seeking	State-Trait anxiety	0.626	0.392	-0.22	-2.48**
1 Reflective coping		0.486	0.236	-0.35	-3.41**
2 instrumental support seeking		0.513	0.263	0.35	3.69**
3 Emotional support seeking		0.556	0.309	-0.26	-2.93**
4 Proactive coping		0.59	0.348	-0.26	-2.64**

**p<0.01

Regression results shows that reflective coping, instrumental support seeking, and emotional support seeking are good pre-dictors of state anxiety of women teacher students. They were found to be significant at .01 levels. Reflective coping ($B = -.414$; $t = -4.315$; $p < .01$) was found to be a better pre-dictor of state anxiety of women teacher students than instrumental support seeking ($B = .329$; $t = 3.364$; $p < .01$) and emotional support seeking ($B = -.277$; $t = -2.820$; $p < .01$).

Results (table 3) further denoted that reflective coping, proactive coping, instrumental support seeking, and emotional support seeking significantly predicts trait anxiety of women teacher students. When reflective coping was entered into the model as the first predictor variable based on the strength of its relationship with trait anxiety, a significant prediction was revealed ($F_{1,118} = 48.026$; $R = .538$, $R^2 = .289$; $P < .01$). This indicates that reflective coping alone predicted 28.9% of the variation in trait anxiety of women teacher students. When proactive coping entered into the model as the second predictor variable, a significant prediction was also re-vealed ($F_{2,117} = 29.091$; $R = .576$, $R^2 = .332$; $p < .01$). This revealed that the two-predictor va-riables together predicted 33.2 % of the variation in trait anxiety of women teacher students. Proactive Coping was able to add only 4.3 % into the prediction. When instrumental support seeking entered into the model as the third predictor variable, a significant prediction was also re-vealed ($F_{3,116} = 21.746$; $R = .600$, $R^2 = .36$; $p < .01$). This revealed that the three-predictor va-riables together predicted 36% of the variation in trait anxiety of women teacher students. Instrumental support seeking was able to add only 2.8 % into the prediction. When emotional support seeking entered into the model as the fourth predictor variable, a significant prediction was also re-vealed ($F_{4,115} = 18.572$; $R = .626$, $R^2 = .392$; $p < .01$). This revealed that the four-predictor va-riables together predicted 39.2 % of the

variation in trait anxiety of women teacher students. Emotional support seeking was able to add only 3.2 % into the prediction. Rest of independent variables could not meet the criteria for it to enter in the regression model.

Results presented in the table shows that reflective coping; proactive coping, instrumental support seeking, and emotional support seeking are good pre-dictors of trait anxiety of women teacher students. They were found to be significant at .05 levels. Reflective coping ($B = -.351$; $t = -3.497$; $p < .01$) was found to be a better pre-dictor of trait anxiety than proactive coping ($B = -.339$; $t = -3.481$; $p < .01$), instrumental support seeking ($B = .279$; $t = 3.031$; $p < .01$), and emotional support seeking ($B = -.220$; $t = -2.480$; $p < .01$).

Table 3 further reveals that reflective coping, instrumental support seeking, emotional support seeking, and proactive coping significantly predicts state-trait anxiety of women teacher students. When reflective coping was entered into the model as the first predictor variable based on the strength of its relationship with state-trait anxiety, a significant prediction was revealed ($F_{1,118} = 36.466$; $R = .486$, $R^2 = .236$; $p < .01$). This indicates that reflective coping alone predicted 23.6% of the variation in state-trait anxiety of women teacher students. When instrumental support seeking entered into the model as the second predictor variable, a significant prediction was also re-vealed ($F_{2,117} = 20.897$; $R = .513$, $R^2 = .263$; $p < .01$). This revealed that the two-predictor va-riables together predicted 26.3% of the variation in state-trait anxiety of women teacher students. Instrumental support seeking was able to add only 2.7 % into the prediction. When emotional support seeking entered into the model as the third predictor variable, a significant prediction was also re-vealed ($F_{3,116} = 17.264$; $R = .556$, $R^2 = .309$; $p < .01$). This revealed that the three-predictor va-riables together predicted 30.9 % of the variation in state-trait anxiety of women teacher students. Emotional

support seeking was able to add only 4.6 % into the prediction. When proactive coping entered into the model as the fourth predictor variable, a significant prediction was also re-vealed ($F_{4, 115} = 15.3704$; $R = .590$, $R^2 = .348$; $p < .01$). This revealed that the four-predictor va-riables together predicted 34.8 % of the variation in state-trait anxiety of women teacher students. Proactive coping was able to add only 3.9 % into the prediction. Rest of independent variables could not meet the criteria for it to enter in the regression model.

Results presented in the table shows that reflective coping; instrumental support seeking, emotional support seeking, and proactive coping are good pre-dictors of state-trait anxiety of women teacher students. They were found to be significant at .01 levels. Reflective coping ($B = -.354$; $t = -3.413$; $p < .01$) was found to be a better pre-dictor of state-trait anxiety than instrumental support seeking ($B = -.351$; $t = -3.690$; $p < .01$), emotional support seeking ($B = -.269$; $t = -2.931$; $p < .05$) and proactive coping ($B = -.267$; $t = -2.647$; $p < .01$).

Discussion

Results from this study showed that a moderate negative but significant association exists between proactive coping skills (proactive, reflective, strategic, preventive, and emotional coping) and state-trait anxiety ranging from ($r = -0.29$ to -0.53 , $p < 0.01$) (vide T.2). This finding parallels the results of past researches (Wijndaele et al., 2007; Billings & Moos, 1984; Cronkite, Moos, Twohey, Cohen, & Swindle, 1998; Crockett et al., 2007; Knibb & Horton, 2008). The data suggest that proactive coping skills are self-regulatory coping strategy that is associated with higher levels of well-being, lower levels of anxiety, and better psychological functioning.

The results on Tables 3 revealed that reflective coping was the most potent of all predictors accounting for 15.4% of the variation in state anxiety of women teachers'

students followed by instrumental support seeking which contributed additional 4.1 % and emotional support seeking, 5.2 % into the prediction. Rest of independent variables could not meet the criteria for it to enter the regression model; by implication rest of independent is not a good predictor of state anxiety of women teacher students. This is however, surprising, as one would have expected proactive coping skills predict state anxiety, Furthermore, the t-ratio values of table 3 -4.315, 3.364 and -2.820 for reflective coping, instrumental support seeking and emotional support seeking respectively showed that reflective coping is the most potent predictor of state anxiety. Reflective stress management strategies like brainstorming, analyzing problems and resources and generating hypothetical plans of action can help students reduce the negative effect of stressful events and cope proactively.

The results on tables 3 reveal that as in the case of trait anxiety; reflective coping emerged as the most potent predictor, accounting for 28.9% of the variation in trait anxiety of women teacher students. Proactive coping contributed 3.2 %, instrumental support seeking 3.9 %, emotional support seeking 3.2 % respectively of the total variation. Furthermore, the t-ratio values on this table , -3.497, -3.481, 3.031, and -2.480 for reflective coping, proactive coping, instrumental support seeking, and emotional support seeking in respectively showed that reflective coping is the most potent predictor of trait anxiety.

This result is similar to previously reported results of a negative association between proactive coping skills and state anxiety. Results on table 3 show that reflective coping alone predicted 23.9% of the variation in state-trait anxiety, of women teacher students, instrumental support seeking contributed additional 2.4 %, emotional support seeking 4.6, and proactive coping 3.9

% into the prediction. By implication rest of independent is not a good predictor of state-trait anxiety. Furthermore, the t-ratio values on tables 3, -3.413, 3.690, -2.931, and -2.647 for reflective coping, instrumental support seeking, emotional support seeking and proactive coping, respectively showed that reflective coping is the most potent predictor of state-trait anxiety. This finding is consistent with past research (Ben-Zur, 1999; Carver et al., 1989; Knibb & Horton, 2008; Penland et al., 2000; Wijndaele et al., 2007). Findings reveal that when women teacher student encounter stress, a greater the number of them employ reflective coping because reflective coping is psychological resource that is associated with lower anxiety scores and better mental health. A reflective individual is more likely to regard performance of daily activities as a challenge rather than a stressor. Thus, a reflective women teacher is more likely to perceive daily activities as a challenge to be undertaken in order to achieve independence. Emotional coping styles such as seeking social support and acceptance have also been found to be adaptive as they help alleviate emotional distress (Knibb & Horton, 2008).

Conclusion

The sample of this study included teacher students who are being trained to become school teachers. The current study asserted the use of proactive coping skills and their function in promoting well-being. Proactive coping skills were all shown to be associated with state-trait anxiety. Alternatively, proactive coping, reflective coping, strategic coping, preventive coping, and emotional support seeking were significantly associated with reduced psychological distress. These findings suggest that coping styles (barring Avoidance coping and Preventive coping) are significant predictors of psychological distress and should be taken into account when treating and preventing symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression. Proactive coping

skills are more problem orientated and consist of efforts to build up general resources that facilitate promotion of challenging goals and personal growth. Avoidance coping and preventive coping are passive coping style that appear the most maladaptive as it is associated with increased psychological distress. More importantly reflective coping, instrumental support seeking, emotional support seeking and proactive coping, assumed respective importance as the predictor variables in accounting for the variations in state-trait anxiety of women teacher students. The generalizability of the results is however limited, as the sample was restricted to women teacher students. The study could be replicated among male students also. The findings suggest that university students should be made aware of reflective coping and also should be encouraged make optimum use of them when coping with stress.

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Received: February 06, 2011

Revised: October 09, 2011

Accepted: November 03, 2011

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