

Coping with Crowding and Human Behaviour: A Study of South Delhi, India

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ABSTRACT

In this fast changing world, crowding has become a common phenomenon and a serious policy issue in urban centres, particularly in the developing and underdeveloped countries. A crowded locality is directly linked with the physical manifestation in terms of housing congestion, density or persons- area ratio within houses. In general, such conditions are the characteristics of slums or squatters of the city areas, where high density with greater possibility of more intense crowding is manifested. Crowding is implicitly or explicitly linked with abnormal human behaviour. The study area, South Delhi district, is predominantly urban with a high population density of 11,297 persons per km². Rapid economic growth and development in Delhi have been the chief reasons behind high population density. Apart from administrative work force and large markets, mostly the poor, unskilled and semi-skilled people of the adjoining areas and other distant places throng here in search of jobs, education and other opportunities. The study analyses the coping strategies adopted by the respondents in the study area. It concludes, inter alia, that crowding is very endemic in the South Delhi area. Among other coping strategies, people mostly adopt the means of avoidance, refuge, escapism, and pretence, which are not normal behaviours. The study emphasizes that the need for such mechanisms can be minimized by managing any or all of the causative factors of crowding nonetheless.

Key Words : Coping, Crowding, Population density, Coping strategies

INTRODUCTION

Crowding is an ambiguous concept. It is hard to define comprehensively. However, a rapid demarcation of crowded locality is carried out on its physical manifestation in terms of housing congestion, density or persons-area ratio within houses. As such, housing areas with high population density and housing congestion are generally considered crowded or overcrowded. Coping of crowding refers to managing stress generated by the physical and human environment (Campbell, 1983). Coping can be adaptive or maladaptive. Adaptive coping strategies generally involve confronting problems directly, making reasonably realistic appraisals of problems, recognizing and changing unhealthy emotional reactions, and trying

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to prevent adverse effects on the body. Maladaptive coping includes using avoidance, refuge and escapism and also alcohol or drugs to escape problems (Kassel *et al.*, 2000). The study area comes under one of the densely populated areas in Delhi. In the case of coping, some of the expressed strategies, some knowingly and some unknowingly to ward off stress or give vent to it are not definitely the result of crowding, though it cannot be denied some of the stress is generated by the crowding. It needs to be further investigated that these coping strategies are to deal with the stress generated by their living conditions, fatigue of hard work, anger against deprivation and manifest inequalities and culture of poverty in the area.

The term *coping* generally refers to adaptive (constructive) coping strategies that reduce stress. Callan (1993) defines *non-coping* as unsuccessful efforts to cope, accompanied by a range of physical and psycho-social disturbances, which result in higher stress. Coping is a widely acclaimed concept in psychology and is generally defined as “any behavior, whether deliberate or not that reduces stress and enables a person to deal with a situation without much stress” (Sutherland, 1996). In contrast, other coping strategies may be coined as maladaptive, which may increase stress. Maladaptive coping is, therefore, also described, in terms of outcome, as non-coping. Furthermore, the term ‘maladaptive coping’ generally refers to reactive coping, *i.e.* the coping response which follows the stressor. This differs from adaptive or proactive coping in which a coping response aims to neutralize a future stressor. Subconscious or un-conscious strategies (e.g. defence mechanisms) are generally excluded from the area of coping. Though hundreds of coping strategies have been identified, classification of these strategies into a broader contextual background has not been agreed upon. Common distinctions are often made between various contrasting strategies, such as problem-focused versus emotion-focused, engagement versus disengagement, and cognitive versus behavioral. However, in the nearest study, coping has been seen as adaptive and non-adaptive coping.

Literature Review :

Though most of the conceptual and empirical studies have focused attention on coping mechanisms in context with crowding, recent research has revealed that recreational visitors may also adopt coping strategies to deal with the problems of conflict (Schneider and Hammitt, 1995). Carver *et al.* (1989) mention that non-coping strategies lead to higher levels of depression and anxiety. The classic work of Milgram (1970) has illustrated the ways in which urban residents cope with excessive population density, abrupt conversations, unlisted telephones, and disregard of strangers, even when they may be in need. The literature on outdoor recreation has identified a number of coping mechanisms that might be used by recreationists to deal with crowding and conflict, including shifting use to other locations and/or times and redefining appropriate outdoor recreation experiences. Gabe and Williams (1986) conducted a study on the relationship between overcrowding, women and mental health. Assessment of overcrowding was made by grouping of persons per room, while measurement of mental health was made by psychological symptoms through the General Health Questionnaire. They found that low as well as high levels of overcrowding were harmful to the psychological health of women. Blackman *et al.* (1989) conducted a study on housing areas in northern Ireland and found that housing problems are significantly associated with

the symptoms of psychological distress among children, where overcrowding is one of the housing factors. Evans, Lepore and Allen (2000) caution against an uncritical use of terminology related to crowding issues. The term '*crowding tolerance*' is the 'enhanced ability to withstand the adverse effects of high-density living conditions' not the difference in people's personal space zones. Jarry (2002) states that successful coping is comprised of positive belief. The ability to cope is enhanced when an individual believes that he or she can successfully achieve the desired consequences. Francisco *et al.* (2016) studied of coping strategies and adjustment in children, based on four types of stressors, *i.e.* school, family, peer interaction and health, whence of changes coping, school, stress, and social and clinical maladjustment. The samples were 402 students aged between 9 to 12 years. The results of study were that the coping variable with ACS, also stress and clinical maladjustment predict, with different effect, and the coping strategies adopted by children. Avoidance can manifest as behavioural avoidance, such as staying in apartment or taking time off work (Hagemann, 1992). Generally, researchers agree that such approaches are a band-aid solution to the underlying trauma, but they may have an adaptive element by helping the person slowly build on small success experiences. In other words, initial avoidance may allow the victim to take time to "lick their wounds" and gather resources to rebuild their life and deal with other challenges e.g. the criminal justice system.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted in the study area to assess the stress of crowding. The purpose of the survey was to see how the severity of the stressors of crowding affected the respondents and what coping strategies were adopted by them. Each participant was individually contacted and the measures were administered in two sessions. These measures were largely used as interview schedules. The researchers read aloud each item and then clarified in the local dialect and recorded the responses. Thus, every possible care was taken to ensure that the participants were following the instructions. The respondents were contacted at their homes. The male researchers interviewed the male respondents and the female researchers interviewed the female respondents. The researchers introduced themselves and explained the purpose of study to the respondents. In each surveyed area, random sample was collected. In the instance of refusal or non availability, the next alternate household was chosen for interview. To cope with the stress generated by crowding, it was found that the respondents adopted the strategies of avoidance, refuge, escapism, and pretence.

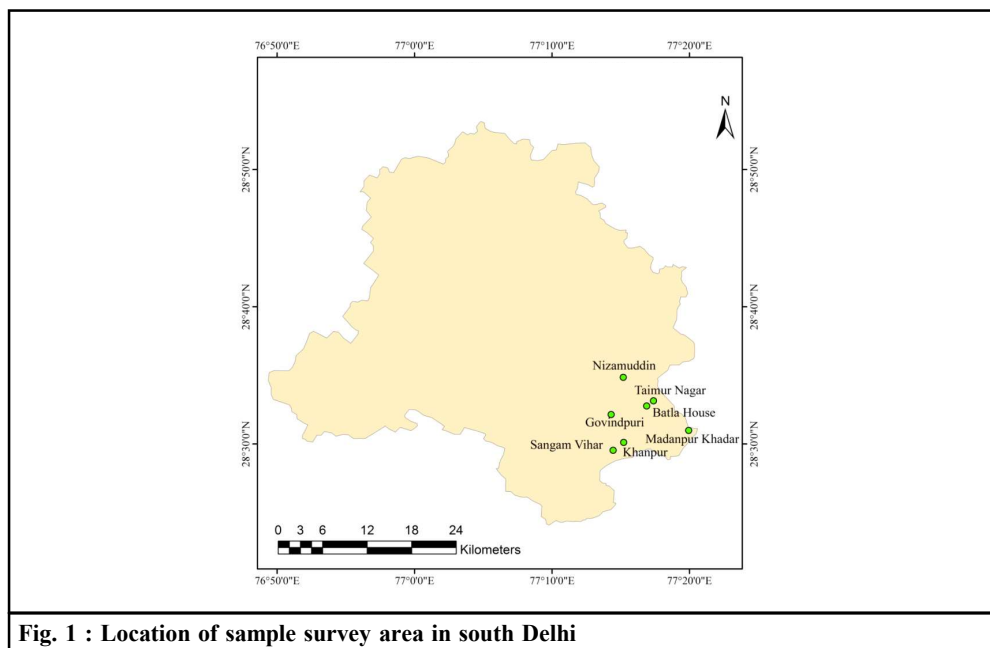
Data collection :

At the initial stage, a pilot survey was carried out in the study areas. A field survey was also done by a group of research assistants. Most of them were postgraduates in Sociology, Psychology, and Geography. The areas chosen for field survey were either notified slum like Govindpuri, or slum like condition like Batla House. Since the data is presented in the descriptive form, the experience of each person was written and conceptualized. Within this process, similarities and differences in responses were noted, irrelevant information was circumvented. The methodology involves reporting *interpretive structures* of experiences of individuals. The interpretive focus is from the outside - from the perspective of the 'objective'

researcher, or from the inside - with a focus on interaction between the interpreter and objects/conditions of interest narrated. Bracketing does not occur because researcher becomes one with the research question through self-awareness and self-knowledge involving and may use a reflective journal for reference to understand meaning. All the field survey was recorded by the electronic gadgets to explore the relevant information related to our research in the final study. Bearing in mind the broad definition of the slum, a pocket of slums was identified from South Delhi. They were Batla House, Govindpuri, Sangam Vihar, Khanpur, Nizamuddin, Madanpur Khadar, and Taimur Nagar. They were selected for the study to see how different socio-economic, cultural and physical environment generate feeling of crowding associated with these pockets and what repercussions this feeling has over residents' overall health. In these discussion areas, interviews with respondents were conducted between November 3, 2014 and June 25, 2015. During these months, 320 households of the study areas consisting of 1020 members including 480 females were interviewed. The respondents shared their life experiences in their respective areas.

Study area :

The slums of South Delhi District were selected as a case study. The district is one of nine districts of NCT (National Capital Territory) of Delhi. It has great historical, social, economic and cultural importance. It is surrounded by the states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Though South District is predominantly urban, it has also 25 urban villages. Area wise, South District is the third largest district of Delhi with an area of 250 sq. km and covers about 16.7 per cent of the total area of NCT Delhi. Urbanisation of South Delhi has been by reasons of being Delhi being as the National Capital. Administrative work force and original habitants have also attracted several services.



Lately on becoming a large market, it has also added several new industries in its ambit. Since migration stream flows from backward to developed areas, migrants from rural areas of different states by virtue of high pressure on land and from small towns and cities as a result of lack of opportunities started to converge for imagined or real opportunities. Currently, rapid growth and development has resulted in opportunities of livelihood for poor, unskilled and semi-skilled rural population in the secondary and tertiary sectors of economy, especially in construction, trade, commerce and transportation in South Delhi. A large number of them are engaged in arduous and low-paid jobs and several others are self-employed creating their demand with small earning as vendors, hawkers, scavengers etc. However, Delhi is a city of contrasts. The disparities of development over space are manifest. The rich and the poor exist side by side. Skyscrapers, bungalows and posh colonies coexist with slums and *jhuggis-jhopri* clusters of the urban poor.

Presently, more than half of Delhi's population live in such settlements like *jhuggis-jhopri* clusters, slums designated areas, resettlement colonies, unauthorised and recently authorised colonies, etc. which by no means represent wholesome environment. Many large slums, unauthorised, regularised colonies and *jhuggis-jhopri* clusters are found in South Delhi.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the study area :

Respondents of South Delhi in their narration also sometimes explicitly and mostly implicitly narrated as how they cope with the stress generated by crowding. However, except in cases wherein it is explicitly mentioned, the entire stress to crowding is unjustified. However, it also cannot be denied that crowding is a stressor. The binary codes on the ten key concepts/meanings or essences have been subjected to factor analysis to come out with the hidden dimensions of coping. As shown in Table 1, there have come out four (4) dimensions or factors which together explain as high variability as 81.73 per cent across the respondents in the locality.

Table 1 : Factor structure		
Sr. No.	Factors	Per cent of total variance explained
1.	Avoidance	42.52
2.	Refuge	18.80
3.	Escapism	10.55
4.	Pretence	09.84
Per cent of total variance explained by three factors		81.73

Analysis of coping strategy adopted by respondents :

The first factor designated as *Avoidance* explains the highest variability across the respondents. The variability explained by it is 42.53 per cent. The second factor called *Refuge* (Coping by Positive Approach) explains 18.80 per cent variability. The contribution of the third factors labelled as *Escapism* (Positive Behavioural Coping) to the variability across respondents is 10.55 per cent, while the fourth and the last factor named as *Pretence*

(Productive Avoidance) explains only 9.84 per cent of the total variability in South Delhi. As such, it is least important coping strategy from crowding in comparison to the three factors.

Factor 1: Avoidance :

Factor 1, which explains 42.53 per cent (Table 2), variance can be identified as the major dimension of coping from the stress of crowding. On this dimension or factor, out of ten, four variables loaded positively high and one loaded not so highly but it is important in its contribution to this dimension. The four out of these five variables were *productive avoidance* (0.898), *escapism using alcohol* (0.888), *outright avoidance* (0.864) and *refuge in reminiscences* (0.823). Only one variable out of five loaded not so highly, loading of *escapism in past* is only 0.594, but it is significant.

The people, who feel crowded in South Delhi, were not happy with their current conditions of living in homes and surroundings (Soen, 1974). A large number of them cope with the unsatisfactory conditions by avoidance including escapism adopted as a temporary measure. Mainly men of the sample households described use of alcohol, or getting involved too much in work to forget everything and become unaware of happenings around them (Allman *et al.*, 1972, Beary, and Carol, 1974). Even some get so intensely busy in work when guests or neighbours visit their houses to avoid impact of their presence and involvement in conversation. Some like to walk away from their homes and roam here and there without purpose or spend time with friends uselessly to avoid crowding.

Table 2 shows that *productive avoidance* has come as the most important variable of the dimension of avoidance. It refers to a productive behaviour in which individuals under stress of crowding including density at home, guests, noise or congestion in the locality engage themselves in some productive work to avoid the effects of crowding (Choe *et al.*, 2016). Since, in many households, members are generally engaged in some work as sewing, making small items, etc. for sale or on contractual basis in the condition of increased crowding, they engage in their work more devotedly than passing time in gossip or taking tea and snakes with visitors. It discourages visitors and they leave them alone. Alternatively, if they have no work, they engage themselves in repairing household appliances, cleaning and dusting or cleaning choked water pipes or arranging furniture or washing and pressing clothes, etc.

Sr. No.	Variables	Factor Loading
1.	Escapism in past	0.594
2.	Escapism by withdrawing	0.214
3.	Refuge in Pacifism	0.159
4.	Pretence	-0.058
5.	Outright avoidance	0.864
6.	Productive avoidance	0.898
7.	Refuge in reminiscences	0.823
8.	Refuge in productive/unproductive business	-0.012
9.	Escapism using alcohol	0.888
10.	Escapism	0.430
	Per cent of total variance explained	42.53

while womenfolk either entertain guests or engaged themselves in households, if guests are unwelcome. These individuals hardly come out except for purchasing grocery, etc. and have limited social circle. They mostly remain engaged in their work. In educated households, these people mostly devote their time in tutoring or teaching their young children.

Strangely enough, the coping strategy *escaping using alcohol* has loaded second highest on this dimension, while Muslim community who are dominant in the locality boast not to take wine (Allman *et al.*, 1972). However, a large number of men respondents have mentioned that they consume alcohol to forget or escape from their living condition such as crowding, density, congestion and noise etc. in their description of lived experience. However, it should be noted that majority of them belong to the poor class family or find it hard to make both ends meet. A large number of them are rickshaw pullers, construction labourers, vendors etc. To ease out their fatigue of hard work of the day and tension of abusive language of the supervisors, passengers or haggling, they consume alcohol so that their tension and mental stress is not further confounded by the shabby and crowded house in a congested and noisy locality. After taking alcohol they sleep peacefully unaware of events going on around them.

The third highest loading factor is *outright avoidance*. It refers generally behaviour of men who leave house when neighbour or some other person visits the house. It not only signifies the intensities of crowding stress but also the degenerating behavioural patterns which are not the tradition of India. However, it is their compulsion, otherwise they may lose their mental balance as is represented in the general descriptions, “*agar aisa nakaren to kuchh din mein pagal ho jaunga*” (If we don't do it, we would become mad in a few days).

The fourth highest loading factor is by escapism in reminiscences (0.823) followed by not so strong tendency of escapism in the past (0.594). The later strategy of coping with stress includes remembering parents, relatives and friends in the place of origin or place from where they have shifted. Though, as told by respondents, it makes them forget present for a while, this experience is not pleasant. On the other hand, escapism in reminiscences includes memories of past of their place of origin and homes there, which have not been so crowded with natural surroundings and in which they grew, friends with which they grew and parents and past events. Generally these memories are sweet as these relate to events which they relish and persons whom they love most. These make them happy and they forget present worries etc. for a while or for the period they are depressed. This dimension is, therefore, designated as avoidances as individual does not like to face the situation. It generally signifies the strategy of men respondents' avoidance. In their description of lived experience, women respondents do not appear except few to adopt avoidance from the reality.

Factor 2: Refuge :

This dimension refers to the coping strategy of those individuals who take refuge either by withdrawing (no involvement or interference or complaint) or in peaceful behaviour in an attempt to deflect the stress. Both variables refuge by withdrawing (0.907) and refuge in pacifism (0.908) load high and positive. Essences of experiences of elderly both men and women indicate that withdrawing is common among them. Some have described this situation

with a touch of conventional wisdom, “*buzargon ko ziada dakhil andazi nahin karni chahia. Jub hum kuch nahin kar sakte, to jaise hain, bhale hain.*” (Elderly should not interfere. If we can do nothing, we are well as we are). They do not involve either within house or outside, whether someone visits the household or some members of households visit other household, whether there is noise or peace, they neither bother nor interfere. Their life is limited to their daily routine. If specifically asked, they listen and respond properly. Refuge in pacifism is characteristics of youths and mature ladies. Though in some manner it is akin to withdrawing, however, when there is too much noise within houses or outside, they act peacefully. These people do not lose temper if there is an argument and many times they are successful in restoring peace inside and outside.

Sr. No.	Variables	Factor loading
1.	Escapism in past	0.388
2.	Refuge in productive work or withdrawing	0.907
3.	Refuge in Pacifism	0.908
4.	Pretence	0.072
5.	Outright avoidance	0.187
6.	Productive avoidance	0.075
7.	Refuge in reminiscences	0.189
8.	Refuge in productive/unproductive business	-0.044
9.	Escapism using alcohol	0.148
10.	Wasteful escapism (do not want face the situation)	-0.031
	Per cent of total variance explained	18.80

In case of visits of neighbours or friends or relatives, these ladies receive them calmly. Neither the guests feel they are not unwelcome nor the members of household are mentally stressed. After few minutes later, these ladies generally make the visitor to visit a common relative or friend or another neighbour accompanying them. In this way the effect of stress of crowding on the mind of other members is deflected and accompanying ladies have a chance of outing (Manning *et al.*, 2001). This dimension is the second most important and explains 18.80 per cent variability of variables of coping across the respondents. This strategy is largely adopted by ladies or in other way it is a way of women to deflect the stress which could probably build up, if not deflected. But their experience reveals remorse and guilt.

Factor 3: Escapism :

The third factor labelled as escapism is based on two main variables, refuge in unproductive activities and wasteful escapism. The two variables loaded positively high on this dimension with loadings as high as 0.931 and 0.701, respectively. The respondents, both men and women alike, who are dissatisfied with their crowded and shabby residences in a densely populated and congested locality, try to stay away from their residences and locality for long (Ochodo *et al.*, 2014). These respondents generally belong to middle-middle class in the community and generally work in some government or private service sector. After work or duty they return home late in the night only to take dinner and sleep. Rest of the

time, they waste in the gossip with friends or visiting places without enjoyment as they described it as a matter-of-factly.

Sr. No.	Variables	Factor loading
1.	Escapism in past	-0.021
2.	Refuge in productive work or withdrawing	0.022
3.	Refuge in pacifism	-0.089
4.	Pretence	-0.081
5.	Outright avoidance	0.157
6.	Productive avoidance	0.176
7.	Refuge in reminiscences	-0.010
8.	Refuge in productive/unproductive business	0.931
9.	Escapism using alcohol	0.094
10.	Wasteful escapism (do not want face the situation)	0.701
	Per cent of total variance explained	10.55

The respondents themselves described it as sheer wastage of time without any burden on mind as they do not want to face the reality of their living conditions (Caterina and Carly, 2010). They also do not want to involve in some social work after day's hard work. In their description such involvement would be morally binding- an extra burden after day's toil. Therefore, they adopt an aimless and economically and socially non-productive way from reality of life that is in a way nothing less than escapisms.

The variables refuge in non-productive activities loaded strongly (0.931) on this dimension. It is because individuals, who adopt it, belong to economically lower class. Women and youths adopt this strategy. Women when they find time, engage pick up themselves quarrel with women of neighbourhood on one or other pretext. This quarrel goes on for hours and becomes almost a daily routine. Wasting time on trivial issues is their well conceived coping strategy as in their description they put it this way, "*is se jee halka ho jata hai*" (It makes mind stress less). In fact, this practice not only relieves them of tensions, stress, tiredness, etc. but also those who are engaged in such quarrels. After a quarrel these people are refreshed (Oktay *et al.*, 2009).

The young adults go on roaming outside the locality. They sometimes make them busy in fights that end very often in the police station. In fact, expectations and aspirations of all young adults after liberalisation and globalisation of the economy have gone up. They also see the palatial and massive building coming up in and around their locality and a number of their fortunate peer driving trendy and costly cars and bikes. It makes them frustrated and they aspire to have similar lifestyle which they cannot afford. Therefore, they do not want to face the reality of their living. Sometimes they become so frustrated that they leave the work in which they are engaged and go on roaming without purpose.

Factor 4: Pretence :

There is a subtle difference between *escapism* of Factor 3 and *pretence* of Factor 4. It is because pretence is a single dominant essence of Factor 3 with a loading of 0.953; some

others variables of escapism also loaded positively, though with small loadings variance. This is why this dimension is labelled after its dominant variable, pretence. This factor explains 09.84 variability of all variables of coping across all respondents in the locality. In escapism, people are not concerned with impact of their behaviour on others but in pretence they are. Pretence appears a dominant mode of coping with stress of crowding. It is mainly the characteristics of middle class respondents. It also obtains across all socio-economic strata. Their approach to their living condition is positive or compromising.

Sr. No.	Variables	Factor loading
1.	Escapism in past	0.301
2.	Refuge in productive work or withdrawing	0.025
3.	Refuge in Pacifism	0.056
4.	Pretence	0.953
5.	Outright avoidance	0.205
6.	Productive avoidance	-0.059
7.	Refuge in reminiscences	0.259
8.	Refuge in productive/unproductive business	0.046
9.	Escapism using alcohol	-0.116
10.	Wasteful escapism (do not want face the situation)	-0.264
	Per cent of total variance explained	09.84

Knowing the fact that it is hard enough to change the economic status, they remain cheerful in the conditions in which they live. Basically, they are conformists. Several of them describe their attitude towards life in following words, “*Zindagi ke hain char din, hunsker guzar de ya rokar guzar de*” (Life is four days long, one may pass them happily or complaining) (Iphofen, 1990 and Oakley, 2010).

Therefore, these individuals appear cheerful and when one visits them, they receive the visitors with traditional courtesy and listen to him patiently and cut jokes and laugh with the guest even though joke or event narrated is of not their taste or is vulgar. Men and women generally can be observed taking with shopkeepers etc. They do not appear to have any burden on their mind, but as one put it subtly with guilt, “*Har din hamein marta hai*” (Everyday kills us).

Conclusion and discussion :

The present study suggests that crowding is very endemic in the study area. In order to deal with crowding, the respondents employ a variety of behavioral and cognitive coping mechanisms. To cope with the stress of the crowded situations, the respondents adopt avoidance, refuge, escapism and pretence as the means of coping. Avoidance finds the highest variability across the respondents as a temporary measure in comparison with rest of the three factors. Refuge takes priority as the second highest alternative to cope with the stress of crowding with no involvement or interference or complaint in others' private affairs.

In the similar vein, escapism is also one of the most alternative methods of the respondents. People generally try to stay away from their residences for quite long time in

order to relieve tension and stress. More often people waste their time by gossiping with their friends or simply by visiting places without much enjoyment.

Lastly, pretence also appears to be one of the dominant modes of coping with stress of crowding. Though mostly the middle class finds this alternative, it is also adopted by all socio-economic strata of society. It is a kind of making compromise where people, knowing all the facts that the socio-economic and political condition won't change for the better, tend to be conformists. But, to positive note, when warranted, the need for adoption of coping mechanisms can be minimized by managing any or all of these causative factors.

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