

Exploring defence style in management students: A DS-40 based study with special reference to BITM MBA students

Dikshita Soni¹

¹ MBA Student, Ballari Institute of Technology and Management, Ballari, dikshitasoni67@gmail.com.

Dr. Shaheeda Banu S²

²Professor, Department of Management Studies, Ballari Institute of Technology and Management, Ballari, drsvedshaheeda@gmail.com

Abstract - This study explores the defense styles of MBA students at BITM using the Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ-40) developed by Andrews, Singh, and Bond (1993). Defense mechanisms are unconscious psychological processes that help individuals manage stress, anxiety, and emotional conflicts. The study examines the prevalence of mature, neurotic, and immature defense styles and analyses differences based on demographic factors such as gender and year of study. Understanding these defense styles provides insights into students' emotional adjustment, resilience, and readiness for managerial roles. The findings are expected to support the development of effective counselling, mentoring, and student well-being programs in management education.

Keywords:

Defense Mechanisms, Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ-40), Management Students, MBA Students, Mature Defense Style, Neurotic Defense Style, Immature Defense Style, Emotional Adjustment, Resilience, Psychological Well-being.

INTRODUCTION:

Andrews, Singh and Bond have developed a self-report psychological questionnaire called Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ-40) which measures an individual's defense

mechanisms. Psychological defense mechanisms are like reflexes; they help us cope with stress & anxiety (like job) more effectively by reacting fast without much thought. DSQ-40 is a popular tool to assess defense style among patients and non-patients. The following are the four levels of defense mechanisms: Level I – Pathological (Psychotic) Defenses, Level II – Immature Defenses, Level III – Neurotic Defenses, Level IV – Mature Defenses. The DSQ-40 measures 20 defense mechanisms with the three major defense styles being mature, neurotic and immature defenses. Both humor; sublimation can be considered an adult defense mechanism; it's a coping strategy that is both effective psychologically. Neurotic defense mechanisms are reaction formation and idealization; these are temporary and may also be somewhat distorted.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Students of management studies have numerous pressures like exam preparation presentation writing report assignment. It arises distress and mental conflict which require appropriate

psychiatric treatment, therapy. Understanding how well you defend yourself will tell whether it's a good time to lead them on behalf of others. This course helps to develop an excellent manager who will be able to take correct decision making; cooperation among

members of a group work on solving issues pertaining directly related with business affairs efficiently enough. Student behaviour, interpersonal relations and leadership skills might be influenced by individuality like emotion regulation & unconscious psychological processes. Protective strategies influence individuals' responses on criticism; however, these do not succeed when it comes working out of jobs because stress from employers.

OBJECTIVES:

- Aims at evaluating the most frequently used defense strategies among MBA students of BITM through Defense Style Questionnaire 40 (DSQ-40).
- To find out whether the neurotic, mature or immature styles of defence were more prevalent in MBA students, when faced with academic, personal and professional stress.
- Compare defense styles between 1st and 2nd year MBA students.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

1. Askari, Afshan, and Manickam (2015) compared shyness and personality traits among 200 college students from India, Iran, Africa, Maldives, and Tibetan refugee communities using standardized psychological questionnaires. A positive correlation was observed for neuroticism & shyness, while there is an inverse association of extraversion and shyness. Students from Maldives had a high degree to be shy. Cultural factors are found to have an impact on personalities, shyness of young adults at university level.

2. Louis De Page and Gina Rossi (2023) investigated the factor structure of the DSQ-60 among 509 psychotherapy outpatients in Belgium. With Exploratory Structural Equation modelling (ESEM), they found out a three-factor model for defense styles. Nevertheless, there were no measures of equality between genders and languages. The study found that DSQ-60 is a useful screening tool but demographic comparisons should be interpreted cautiously.

3. Anita, Deepika C. Khakha, and Rachna Bhargava (2024) studied personality, psychological distress, and adjustment problems of 292 nursing students with standardized

psychological scales. There were a lot of psychotic symptoms, anxiety disorders among young people. Some people had problems adjusting to it. This research highlighted that it is important for creating a positive learning environment so as to enhance student's psychological health significantly.

4. Turmanova, Ryskulova, and Güven (2025) studied psychological predictors of coping behaviour among 340 adolescents with a quantitative research design. Emotional resilience, adaptability to stress management skills and problem-solving ability are linked with adaptation strategies for coping mechanisms. Self-blame avoidance is associated with poor coping strategies. Adaptive defenses improve survival rate, mental health status according to this research finding.

5. Rajak, Singh, and Sahu (2025) the effects of a 12week yoga program on neuroticism among 50 college students. There was an increase of neuroticism among participants who took part as controls did not have this level. Asanas, pranayama, relaxation and counseling were part of this program. This research found out how yoga helps to enhance moods, stress levels significantly.

6. Bhattacharjee and Ramkumar (2025) the influence of Big Five personality traits on academic performance among 384 college students. Neuroticism is a strong indicator for good grades (GPA), while conscientiousness has an adverse effect on it. Joint family students were more disciplined, adaptable to change. Personality characteristics have an impact on student's performance at school studies were found out by this research work.

7. Kashyap and Srivastava (2025) studied the relationship between optimism, stress, and life satisfaction among 204 Indian college students. The standardized tools such as lots r, swls and student stress inventory has been utilized here. Positive optimism was associated with good lives while negative stressors had a bad impact on them. Researchers found out how to promote positive thinking, reduce anxiety for better student health and happiness.

8. Kaethe Schneider (2025) examined the influence of defense mechanisms on learning using psychoanalytic theory and Zimmerman's self-regulated learning model. The study reported that immature defense mechanisms reduce self-efficacy, goal setting, and metacognitive abilities. These factors negatively affect self-regulated learning. The author emphasized the need for further empirical research on mature defenses and learning outcomes.

9. Ferguson and Nelson (2025) studied the relationship between parental emotion socialization and depressive symptoms among 792 college students. The father's repressive emotion strategy was a predictor of depressive symptoms whereas mother's affective belief system had an indirect effect upon it. Emotional maladaptation was found to be a mediator of this relationship. Intervention to address maladaptive emotion patterns was suggested by this research project.

10. Kesharwani et al. (2025) defense mechanisms across different levels of depression using the DSQ-40 and HDRS. Depressive maladaptation was higher for more severe cases whereas coping mechanisms like humor and sublimation are lower among people suffering from depression. A correlation was found among military strategies to combat mental health

issues like depression. This research recommends employing defenses for improving evaluations and treatments plans.

11. Bindu Gupta, Aastha Dhoopar, and Shalini Srivastava (2025) found that poor management styles affect employees' safety practices, based on data from 275 employees analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). A threat analysis is a means to poor administration; this technique can be employed by anxious workers who do not want their participation on an organization's behalf. This research revealed just how important it's for reducing occupational hazards so as not much more than a few thousand cases of illness per year among workers due solely because they had jobs at all.

12. Villet et al. (2025) a study of emotional control among adolescents with bipolar disorder (BIP) comparing two groups by means of inter-group comparison design. Child abuse decreased a child's ability to recognize emotions whereas bpd patients are better at it as they are not as mature emotionally as adults with this illness. There is no difference between any party at this place. This research deals with how defenses affect emotions during traumatic events for children's mental health.

13. Nina N. Vishnyakova and Natalya I. Diakova (2026) emotional intelligence and defense mechanisms among 392 medical students. Higher EIS students were more likely to have better coping mechanisms like laughing excessively, joking on themselves when they are stressed out. Low levels for EIS are associated to bad coping mechanisms for stress and low mental health statistics. Emotional intelligence helps to reduce psychological stress according to this research finding.

14. Rajya guru and Patel (2026) study of academic stress, students' mental health and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in India. The study shows that much of this information leads to mental disorders such as anxiety disorder and stress disorder. The SEL program helped to improve psychological health and social skills through its implementation among individuals. The Indian school must have self (SEL) according to that of my friend's proposal.

15. Priyanka Pandey, K. G. Sahadevan, and Paul D. Hastings (2026) stress level of teachers, participation by them to a rural Indian schools (qualitative) and quantitative study respectively. Student's performance is better because of teachers' involvement but there was some amount of pressure on them too. Stressors such as work-related stress has been recognized to be a cause for worker exhaustion. It is designed to reduce student's health care burden.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Sample Design:

204 responses from MBA students obtained via a Google Form with the standard DSQ-40 instrument. The 'Name' field was not included for privacy reasons and data from teenage respondents was analysed separately from other age groups to identify distinct coping 3 patterns, demographic variables (Age, Gender, MBA Year, Specialization, Residence, Living arrangement) and the 40 DSQ items.

Handling of Missing Data:

Of the $204 \times 40 = 8,160$ total item responses, 201 individual cells (about 2.5%) were missing, affecting 32 of the 204

respondents (mostly one or two items each). Since it is going to take forever if we remove every single non-answer then there would be lots more correct answers coming out so our imputations are made based on the number of questions each respondent attempted individually per session for themselves alone as asked above now. Two respondents who left an entire block of items blank could not be scored and were excluded from the style-level analysis, leaving an effective analytic sample of N = 202.

Scoring:

Each of the three style scores (Mature, Neurotic, Immature) was computed as the mean of its constituent items (each on the 1-9 scale), following the original Andrews et al. (1993) item-to-style key. An Overall Defensive Functioning (ODF) score was also computed as the mean of all 40 items, where higher scores indicate greater immature/less adaptive defensive 1 functioning overall (since immature items dominate the item pool).

1. Reliability of the Scale

Internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was computed for each style subscale on this sample:

Style / Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's α
Mature	8	0.919
Neurotic	8	0.923
Immature	24	0.971
Overall scale (40 items)	40	0.982

Table 1: Internal consistency of the DSQ-40 subscales in the present sample

2. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the three defense styles and the overall score across the analytic sample (N = 202).

Style	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Mature	5.83	1.81	1.00	9.00
Neurotic	5.81	1.83	1.00	9.00

Immature	5.78	1.77	1.00	9.00
Overall (ODF)	5.80	1.76	1.00	9.00

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of defense style scores (1–9 scale)

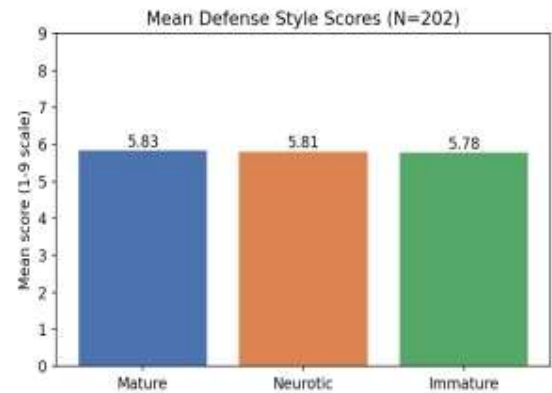


Figure 1: Mean scores across the three defense styles

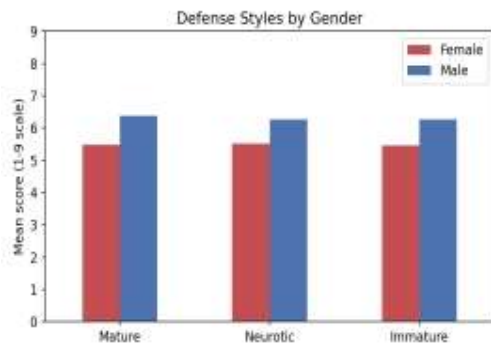
3. Comparison Across Demographic Groups

3.1 Gender

The sample comprised 120 female and 81 male respondents (3 unspecified/other). Independent-samples t-tests were used to compare mean style scores by gender.

Style	Female Mean	Male Mean	t	p-value	Significant?
Mature	5.48	6.38	-3.51	0.001	Yes
Neurotic	5.52	6.26	-2.81	0.006	Yes
Immature	5.46	6.27	-3.21	0.002	Yes
Overall (ODF)	5.47	6.29	-3.24	0.001	Yes

Table 3: Defense styles by gender (independent t-test, unequal variances)



2: Mean defense style scores by gender

3.2 MBA Year

The sample included 96 first-year and 105 second-year students (3 unspecified). One-way ANOVA (equivalent to a t-test for two groups) was used to compare means.

Style	1 st Year Mean	2 nd Year Mean	F	p-value	Significant?
Mature	5.49	6.15	6.96	0.009	Yes
Neurotic	5.41	6.17	9.16	0.003	Yes
Immature	5.47	6.07	6.00	0.015	Yes
Overall (ODF)	5.46	6.11	7.04	0.009	Yes

Table 4: Defense styles by MBA year

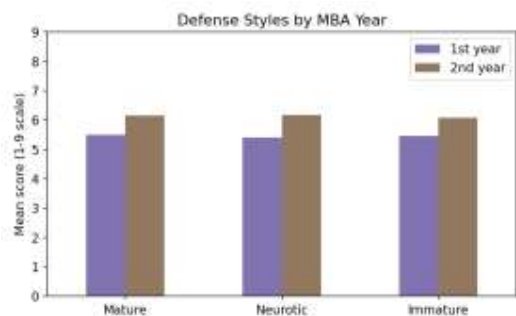


Figure 3: Mean defense style scores by MBA year

3.3 Residence, Living Arrangement, Specialization, and Age:

No significant differences in defense style scores were found based on residence, living arrangement, specialization, or age (all $p > 0.05$). This suggests that defense styles were generally

consistent across these demographic characteristics. Only gender and year of study showed statistically significant differences.

4. Relationship Between Defense Styles

Pearson correlations among the three style scores and the overall score were computed:

	Mature	Neurotic	Immature	Overall
Mature	1.000	0.922	0.939	0.965
Neurotic		1.000	0.940	0.966
Immature			1.000	0.993
Overall				1.000

Table 5: Inter-correlations among defense style scores

5. Individual Defense Mechanism Scores

Defense Mechanism	Mean	SD
Rationalization (Immature)	5.97	2.14
Humour (Mature)	5.96	1.97
Undoing (Neurotic)	5.96	1.99
Autistic Fantasy (Immature)	5.90	2.08
Anticipation (Mature)	5.87	1.95
Acting Out (Immature)	5.84	2.09
Splitting (Immature)	5.82	2.06
Idealization (Neurotic)	5.81	2.15

Devaluation (Immature)	5.80	2.00
Suppression (Mature)	5.80	2.02
Displacement (Immature)	5.79	2.01
Pseudo-altruism (Neurotic)	5.76	2.02
Passive Aggression (Immature)	5.75	1.95
Dissociation (Immature)	5.75	1.99
Denial (Immature)	5.74	2.06
Sublimation (Mature)	5.70	2.01
Reaction Formation (Neurotic)	5.70	1.97
Projection (Immature)	5.67	2.02
Somatization (Immature)	5.66	2.00
Isolation of Affect (Immature)	5.64	1.95

Table 6: Mean scores for the 20 individual defense mechanisms (highest to lowest)

Discussion and Interpretation:

Overall, data security appears moderate somewhere between weak and strong, based on the company's current needs. Interestingly, roughly equal numbers of individuals across the mature, neurotic, and immature styles were rated as highly effective. Gender and year of MBA enrolment appear to significantly influence scores. Male students generally scored higher than female students across all measures. However, the strong cross-style correlations raise concerns about data integrity some respondents may have "straight-lined" their responses on the DSQ-40 (choosing similar scores throughout), which can artificially inflate both reliability (alpha) and inter-style correlations. This is worth noting as a limitation, and future replications should check for respondents with unusually low standard deviation across all 40 items. Location and occupation don't appear to be meaningfully related to residence type.

Findings:

- This paper analyses coping (defense) styles among MBA students using the DSQ-40.
- 204 responses were collected; 202 remained valid after removing incomplete data.
- Mature ($M = 5.83$), Neurotic ($M = 5.81$), and Immature ($M = 5.78$) styles were nearly equally represented, with mature scoring marginally highest.
- Male students outperformed those leaning toward neurotic or immature styles.
- Second-year MBA graduates scored significantly better than graduates from a college of technology.
- At the individual level, Rationalization was more effective than Humor, Undoing, Isolation of Affect, Somatization, and Projection.

Suggestions:

- Management colleges should hold regular workshops and lectures on stress management, helping students understand and strengthen their coping strategies for the future.
- Stress management and emotional regulation training should be built into the MBA curriculum, helping students handle workplace pressure especially when working overseas.
- Students in their second year of the MBA appear to experience considerable stress, largely driven by workload and job-related pressures.
- Teachers and counsellors should be regularly accessible to students for mental health support, since some may need help only occasionally, based on individual needs.
- Future studies should include participants from other management institutions, using larger sample sizes to improve the generalizability of results.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this analysis of 204 MBA student responses (202 of which were analysable) to the DSQ-40 shows a generally balanced defensive profile across mature, neurotic, and immature styles. Also, much better than males (and teenagers) as scoring high on tests related to writing ability was not the only benefit for them. Since there were lots of levels within every scale then they're not just about being stronger compared to others across all scale types combined but also strong individually inside that particular scope. Improve your poor data set first of all find out what goes wrong there. This research contributing to a broader 19 understanding of how managers cope with workplace pressure, thereby informing stress management practices relevant to MBA education. It's bad news here - we need more support for psychiatry centers (stress reduction workshops). for building up his/ her mental strength, it's a must right now.

References:

- The Ego and the Id
Freud, S. (1961). The ego and the id (J. Strachey, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1923)
- Anna Freud: A Biography
Young-Bruehl, E. (1988). Anna Freud: A biography. Yale University Press.
- Theories of Personality
Feist, J., Feist, G. J., & Roberts, T.-A. (2021). Theories of personality (10th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Andrews, G., Singh, M., & Bond, M. (1993). The Defense Style Questionnaire. The Journal of Nervous and Mental disease

<https://www.ovid.com/jnls/jonmd/abstract/00005053-199304000-00006~the-defense-style-questionnaire?redirectionsource=fulltextview>

Bibliography:

- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2158244015587559>
- <https://researchportal.vub.be/en/publications/factor-structure-invariance-of-the-defense-style-questionnaire-60/>
- <https://bulletin-psychology.kaznpu.kz/index.php/ped/article/view/2169>
- <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1490427/full>
- <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/jclp.70113>
- <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1755407/full>
- <https://nijms.com/index.php/nijms/article/view/30>
- <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2026-34439-001>