



Age and gender differences in coping style across various problems: Omani adolescents' perspective



Muna Al-Bahrani*, Said Aldhafri, Hussain Alkharusi, Ali Kazem, Abdulqawi Alzubiadi

Department of Psychology, College of Education, P.O. Box: 32, Al-Khod, P.C.: 123, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman

ABSTRACT

Keywords:
Adolescents
Coping styles
Problems
Gender
Arab
Omani

This study examines adolescents' coping styles, with relation to their gender and age and level, of six types of problems. The participants were 1843 adolescents (51.7% female and 48.3% male) from the Sultanate of Oman with a mean age of 15.75. Two scales examining general adaptive and maladaptive coping styles and levels of school, economic, personal, health, family, and emotional problems were administered. The findings showed that adolescents' high levels of perceived problems were associated with higher levels of maladaptive coping styles than those with low levels of problems. Furthermore, female adolescents seem to use maladaptive coping styles (across all levels of the six types of problems) more than males. The use of adaptive and maladaptive coping styles increase with age.

© 2012 The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Reviewing research on adolescents showed that adolescence is universally viewed as challenging with youth having to deal with a range of different concerns relating to the demands of the transition from childhood to young adulthood (Marja-Lena et al., 2010; Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2010). A range of problems become evident within different cultural contexts, for example, adolescents reported conflict with parents, mood disruption, and risk behavior (Cicognani, 2011; Dwairy, 1997; Ebata & Moos, 1994; Plunkett, Radmacher, & Moll-Phanara, 2000; Saleh, 1995). Issues such as academic, family, financial hardship, self-image, puberty, peer and romantic relationships, health, career and educational transition are also shown by adolescents (Abumostapha, 2006; Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Ge, Conger, & Elder, 2001; Magaya, Asner-Self, & Schreiber, 2005; Stredny & Ball, 2005).

Cultures offer different ways of helping individuals who encounter challenges associated with psychological distress and behavior, to cope with these issues (Sue & Sue, 1999). Thus, understanding how one deals with stress is important especially since research has documented that some coping strategies such as problem solving and support seeking predict fewer adjustment problems (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009; Piko, 2001; Wadsworth & Compas, 2002). The use of withdrawal coping and avoidance was correlated positively with anxiety and depression (Cicoganani, 2011; Comez & McLaren, 2006). Moreover, self blame and aggressive behavior was associated with emotional problems and an increased risk of externalizing problems (Thuen & Bru, 2004).

It is clear that adolescence is a crucial developmental stage and its challenges have been documented in various cultures. Although there is growing literature on adolescents coping in different cultural contexts (Gelhaar et al., 2007; Marj-Lena et al., 2010), research examining adolescents' coping style is very limited in Arab countries, and almost nothing was found on Omanis' adolescents. Hence, it is of interest to learn about Omani adolescents' coping styles in relation to different types of problems. Also, in reviewing literature in general, little was found on research into coping in different

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +968 99821171; fax: +968 24413522.
E-mail address: munabh@squ.edu.om (M. Al-Bahrani).

situations; the novel contribution of this study is to examine coping within a comprehensive framework and it is expected that this will provide insight into various structural factors influencing the ways adolescents' deal with everyday problems.

Theoretical framework

The problem type and personal related factor in coping styles

We explored literature that link the impact of different coping strategies employed in a specific situation with factors such as gender. Research findings were not always consistent, for example, in responding to stressful situations related to school and peer contexts, active coping was more employed (Al-Sarraf, 1992; Seiffge-Krenke, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2009). Looking for the support of others, particularly from family and peers, to school related problems was reported by adolescents (Cicognani, 2011). Aggressive coping was also found as a main predictor of externalizing problems focusing on academic issues (Thuen & Bru, 2004). The combination of the frequent use of productive and nonproductive including focusing on their fear, anticipating anxiety, and positive self-talk were documented (Brown, O'keef, Sanders, & Baker, 1986).

Coping research with school children has also suggested that compared to boys, girls accepted greater responsibility for academic failure, more often used social support, and had fewer inadequate reactions (Rijavec & Brdar, 1997). While research does show that young people may call upon effective problem-solving and seeking of help for academic concerns, they are less likely to do so for interpersonal and emotional problems (Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2009). For instance, self blame and aggressive coping emerged as the main predictor of emotional problems (Thuen & Bru, 2004). Gender differences in coping with interpersonal and emotional problems are inconsistent. In some studies the sex differences was found only in seeking support, with females using this coping strategy to a greater extent (Amirkhan & Auyeung, 2007; Gelhaar et al., 2007). Other studies found that females reported higher amount of perceived impersonal stress and used more social support comparing with boys (Hampel & Peterman, 2006). With peer stress, females engaged in disengagement strategies more often compared to other strategies (Sontag, Graber, Brooks, & Warren, 2008). Females employed more use of isolation, self blame, wishful thinking, rumination, and crying while males relied on physical activity and higher use of aggression (Alumran, 2006; Alumran & Punamaki, 2008; Jose & Kilburg, 2007; Matud, 2004; Piko, 2001).

These differences may to some extent be due to different roles and expectations that adolescents have learned; for example, parents may perceive the use of aggressive and confrontational coping strategies as negative to long term adaptive competence for females but not for males (Fournet, Wilson, & Wallander, 1998). In addition, perceived interpersonal stress may have a negative impact on emotional and behavioral problems in girls but a singular negative influence on emotional problems in boys (Sigfusdottir & Silver, 2009).

Coping was found to mediate the relationship between family conflicts and adjustment especially if they have a positive perception of their family environment. Participants involved in conflict with their parents described using external strategies such as blaming others and acting out (Vashchenko, Lambidoni, & Brody, 2007). Females relied more on social support, whereas males tended to avoid the problem or engage in blaming (Hamid, Yue, & Leung, 2003). Another factor that has been examined in relation to adolescent adjustment problems is family economic strain. Wadsworth and Compas (2002) found that perceived economic strain and conflict among family members was related to aggression and anxiety. Adolescents who were experiencing a higher amount of stress tended to use less of those potentially helpful coping strategies and used more disengagement coping. No differences were found according to gender. Santiago and Wadsworth (2009) reported that family conflict is strongly associated with internalizing symptoms for adolescents under high levels of poverty-related stress. In addition, analyses reveal that more use of primary control coping buffered the effects of family conflict for girls, but not for boys.

The role of age and related coping styles

We refer to research that investigates the role of socio-demographic such as age in predicting individual differences in coping styles (Fournet et al., 1998; Seiffge-Krenke et al., 2009). Age effect reflects development change in cognitive abilities to use more complex cognitive strategies in dealing with stress (Hampel, 2007). Older adolescents use coping strategies such as problem solving, accepting responsibility, self-controlling, and social support in dealing with problems more frequently than younger adolescents. They are more likely to try alternative strategies in their repertoire of coping skills when the initial coping strategy is not effective (Williams & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 1999). Ebata and Moos (1994) and Gelhaar et al. (2007) found that active coping was prominent among early adolescents and internal coping which is used on cognitive-reflective processes emphasizing appraisal of the situation and possible solution was highest among late adolescents. Zimmer-Gembeck and Locke (2007) and Kavsek and Seiffge-Krenke (1996) reported a positive association between coping such as active, avoidance, and wishful thinking and age. Other studies reported that coping remain somewhat stable over time and no age differences was found (Alumran & Punamaki, 2008; Amirkhan & Auyeung, 2007; De Boo & Wicherts, 2009; Kirchner, Forns, Amador, & damaris, 2010; Mullis and Chapman, 2000).

This study addressed the following questions: Does adolescents' coping styles vary according to the type of problem, and do gender and age predict the kinds of coping style employ?

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/881123>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/881123>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)