



CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF COPING BEHAVIOR PATTERNS IN THE UNIVERSITY YOUTH

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Abstract

The purpose of this cross-cultural study was to examine characteristics of coping strategies in the samples of Egyptian Muslims (N=147); Egyptian Christians (N=68), and Ukrainian Christians (N=109). The study determined a weighted impact of ethnic and religious components of subject's identity on the coping behavior displayed in a stressful academic environment. Specific differences in coping strategies were identified in Egyptian Muslims, Egyptian Christians, and Ukrainian Christians. The empirical data were obtained using the 'SACS' and 'COPE' questionnaires. It was found out that the ethnic identity factor played a more significant role in predicting coping behavior of individuals of different ethnic-religious identities. In a particular stressful situation, a specific hierarchical coping pattern developed correlating with a person's ethnic identity and relying on a set of certain coping adaptive processes and coping families. Ambiguity of categorization of Ukrainian Christians and Egyptian Christians into an individualistic culture was emphasized.

Keywords: *coping pattern, ethnic-religious identity, coping strategies, coping families.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The impressive number of studies on stress and coping in the last two and a half decades has not resulted in either a unitary theoretical approach to coping or framework of categorizing coping. In particular, there is no consensus among researchers on conceptualizing and measuring the central constructs of coping behaviour, namely, coping strategies. As Vasylenko (2017) noted, almost every new researcher of coping suggests his or her own classification of coping strategies. Besides, a conventional division of coping strategies into the three dichotomies – problem-focused versus emotion-focused coping, problem-solving versus avoidance, and cognitive versus behavioural coping - is rather insufficient,

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mainly because it is difficult to organize such coping strategies against adaptive processes (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Frydenberg, 2003; Haslam & Reicher, 2006; Shirazi, Khan & Khan, 2011; Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016). The above inevitably affects consistency of existing cross-cultural research hindering understanding of coping behaviour in general, and factors that influence it in particular.

In an attempt to contribute to unifying the research on coping, including cross-cultural research, this study employed the hierarchical model of coping substantiated by Skinner, Edge, Altman, and Sherwood (2003). The hierarchical model specified is built around 3 adaptive processes and consists of 12 families of coping as response to stress. Each coping family includes coping instances and coping strategies. In the model above, instances are placed at the lowest level of the hierarchy and include numerous on-the fly acts that people do in a specific stressful event; while basic adaptive processes that mediate responses to stress and its physiological, psychological and interpersonal effects are at the highest level (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003; Skinner, Pitzer & Steele, 2013). The main idea behind such a coping structure is to conceptually combine coping instances and adaptation processes to fill the gap between numerous personalized and conceptually related coping instances, strategies and functions of the latter in response to a stressful situation (Skinner, Edge, Altman & Sherwood, 2003). Analysis of some most common questionnaires measuring coping strategies; namely: the Strategic Approach to Coping Scale ('SACS') (Hobfoll, Dunahoo & Monnier, 1994) / 'SPSS' (Vodopianova & Starchenkova, 2001) and Coping Orientations to the Problems Experienced ('COPE') (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989), allowed classifying the coping strategies designated around the higher order adaptive processes in the hierarchical model proposed (Table 1).

Table 1 – Classification of coping strategies measured with 'SACS' / 'SPSS' and 'COPE'

Adaptive process	Family of coping	Coping strategy measured by COPE/SACS
Coordinating actions and contingencies to enhance effectiveness in achieving certain results and preventing undesired consequences.	Problem-solving	'Active Approach' (COPE), 'Suppression of concurrent activities' (COPE); 'Assertive Action' (SACS), 'Cautious Action' (SACS)
	Information Seeking	'Planning' (COPE), 'Use of Social-instrumental Support' (COPE), 'Social Joining' (SACS).
	Helplessness	'Behavioural Disengagement' (COPE).
	Escape	'Denial' (COPE), 'Avoidance'

		(SACS).
Coordinating reliance and social resources available to evaluate available social resources	Support Seeking	‘Use of Social-emotional Support’ (COPE), ‘Religious Coping’ (COPE) ‘Seeking Social Support’ (SACS).
	Self-reliance	-
	Delegation	‘Indirect Action’ (SACS)
	Isolation	-
Coordinating preferences and available options to allow flexible and autonomous adjustment to a stressful situation.	Accommodation	‘Positive Interpretation and Growth’ (COPE), ‘Mental Disengagement’ (COPE),
	Negotiation	‘Restraint’ (COPE).
	Submission	‘Acceptance’ (COPE).
	Opposition	‘Antisocial Action’ (SACS), ‘Aggressive Action’ (SACS), ‘Instinctive Action’ (SACS)

This cross-cultural study used the above classification for describing coping behaviour of subjects with different ethnic-religious identities.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The aim of the present paper was to examine specific differences in coping strategies in the samples of Egyptian Muslims, Egyptian Christians, and Ukrainian Christians. Another objective was to study a weighted impact of ethnic and religious components of subject’s identity on the coping behaviour displayed in a stressful academic environment.

2.2. HYPOTHESES

It was assumed that there is relationship between an individual’s ethnic-religious identity and his or her coping behavior. It was also expected that the ethnic and religious components of the identity would have an unequal impact on the strategies a person chooses to cope with a stressful situation.

3. METHOD

3.1. INSTRUMENTS

The following instruments were used: the Strategic Approach to Coping Scale ('SACS') questionnaire (Hobfoll, Dunahoo & Monnier, 1994) on the Egyptian subjects /'SPSS' (Vodopianova & Starchenkova, 2001) on the Ukrainian subjects; Coping Orientations to Problems Experienced ('COPE') questionnaire (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989). Methods of statistical analysis were performed using IBM SPSS-23.

3.2. SUBJECTS

Students and young educators of two ethnic groups – Ukrainian and Egyptian - were selected for this cross-cultural study. The subjects were characterized with similar social status, age, gender and occupation. The Ukrainian sample consisted of youth aged 19-25 (N = 109), including 63 girls and 46 boys, who were students of 2 universities in the city of Lviv and Kyiv. The Egyptian sample included students and young educators of a private university in Cairo. The Egyptian sample (N = 216) had two subgroups: Muslims and Christians, including 139 women and 76 men, 147 Sunni Muslims and 68 Coptic Christians. The subjects' age varied from 18 to 30 years old.

An important consideration influencing the choice of both the Ukrainian and Egyptian samples was their strong sense of national identity, as well as a self-reported affiliation with a certain religion.

It should be noted that while Egyptian Muslims can traditionally be referred to a group with a collectivist pattern of behaviour, categorization of both the Ukrainian Christians and the Egyptian Christians is not straightforward. Although Ukrainians belong to the European cultural space, their cultural and ethnic identity predetermines a somewhat different pattern of behaviour, compared to Western Europeans. Hence, it is unclear if the attribution of the Ukrainian sample to the individualistic culture traditionally associated with Western Europeans is justified (Meizhys & Pochebut, 2008). Similarly, Egyptian Christians belong to the Eastern collectivist culture, but Christianity is usually associated with the individualism. The considerations above were also tested in the study under discussion.

4. RESULTS

4.1. COPING STRATEGIES MEASURED WITH 'SACS'/'SPSS'

Initially, data obtained with 'SACS'/'SPSS' questionnaire measuring coping strategies were statistically analysed. Independent Samples T-test revealed no statistically significant differences in coping strategies measured with 'SACS' between (1) Muslims and (2) Christians in the Egyptian sample. Therefore, an

analysis of coping strategies for the ethnic group of (1) Egyptians as a whole and (2) Ukrainians was carried out.

In the Egyptian sample, the highest scores were obtained for the 'Assertive Actions' coping strategy ($M = 30.913$). In addition, Egyptians often sought 'Social Support', which was a manifestation of a prosocial coping strategy ($M = 24.046$). This coping strategy was the second most commonly used by the Egyptians of both religious identities. In addition, Egyptians often displayed a direct coping strategy of 'Instinctive Action' ($M = 20.579$). The least employed strategy among Egyptians was the coping strategy of 'Indirect Action' ($M = 12.454$) and 'Antisocial Action' ($M = 12.439$).

Ukrainians showed a tendency to resort to coping in the person-to-person system in the direction of the prosocial coping strategy with the highest score on the scale of "Seeking Social Support" ($M = 22.595$) and 'Social Joining' ($M = 21.404$). The result above was somewhat unexpected for the researcher, since it had been assumed that in the dichotomy of collectivism-individualism, Ukrainians were closer to individualism. Ukrainians also often resorted to passive coping behaviour on the 'Cautious Action' scale ($M = 19.238$). On the other hand, they were least likely to exhibit 'Instinctive Action' coping strategy ($M = 10.857$). It is noticeable that, as opposed to the Egyptians of both religious identities who obtained high scores on the scale of 'Assertive Action' ($M = 29.956$ for Muslims and $M = 29.764$ for Christians), Ukrainians resorted to the 'Assertive Action' coping strategy less ($M = 18.571$).

Another unforeseen result was relatively low scores in prosocial coping behaviour on the 'Social Joining' scale in Egyptians ($M = 16.879$ in Muslims and $M = 18.411$ in Christians), as opposed to the Ukrainian sample, whose values on this scale were within $M = 21.404$. In addition, Ukrainians showed a significantly higher score in the 'Aggressive Action' scale compared to a low value obtained for Egyptians of both identities ($M = 13.810$ for Muslims and $M = 14.147$ for Christians). Ukrainians were less likely to use direct impulsive coping strategies of 'Instinctive Action' ($M = 10.857$), in contrast to Egyptians, for whom this coping strategy was one of the three most commonly used ($M = 20.818$ in Muslims and $M = 19.764$ in Christians).

Thus, Egyptians resorted to the coping strategies of (1) 'Assertive Action', (2) 'Seeking Social Support', and (3) 'Instinctive Action'; while Ukrainians preferred the coping strategies of (1) 'Seeking Social Support', (2) 'Social Joining', and (3) 'Cautious Action'.

4.2. COPING STRATEGIES MEASURED WITH 'COPE'

Subsequently, Independent Samples T-test was performed to assess inter-group differences in coping strategies measured with the 'COPE' questionnaire

between the ethnic groups of (1) Ukrainians and (2) Egyptians. As a result, (1) Egyptians and (2) Ukrainians showed statistically significant differences in the four coping strategies; namely, ‘Mental Disengagement’, ‘Religious Coping’, ‘Restraint-coping’, and ‘Substance Use’ (Table 2).

Table 2 - Differences in coping behaviour in (1) Ukrainians and (2) Egyptians

Coping Strategies	F	Sig.	t	df.	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mental Disengagement	3.316	.040	2.012	191	.046
			1.800	59.016	.077
Religious Coping	16.538	.000	11.450	191	.000
			9.273	53.472	.000
Restraint-coping	4.985	.027	2.172	191	.031
			2.489	85.557	.015
Substance Use	5.694	.018	-2.070	191	.040
			-1.814	57.713	.075

Afterwards, the coping strategies measured with ‘COPE’ were analysed. First, intergroup differences for subjects of different ethnic and religious groups – (1) Ukrainians versus (2) Egyptians and (3) Egyptian Christians versus (4) Egyptian Muslims - were visually identified using regression plot graphs. Second, univariate ANOVA regression analysis was performed for each ‘COPE’ scale. A correlation was found between the ethnic identity and the coping strategy of ‘Active Coping’ ($r = .144$; $F = 4.019$; $p \leq .05$), which revealed a trend-level statistical significance.

Relationship between the religious identity and ‘Religious Coping’ was identified ($r = .396$; $F = 35.456$; $p \leq .01$), indicating a moderate correlation. In the boxplot of the mean ‘Religious Coping’ values for the samples with different religious identities, it was visually evident that (2) Christians of both ethnic identities showed a wider scatter of values on the ‘Religious Coping’ scale, compared to the group of (1) Muslims. However, it was suggested that an unusually wide range of “Religious Coping” values in the group of (2) Christians might be an indication that the more significant factor associated with ‘Religious Coping’ was not, in fact, religion, but the ethnic identity. As predicted, Independent Samples T-test for the groups of Egyptian Christians and Egyptian Muslims revealed lack of statistically significant differences on the ‘Religious Coping’ scale.

A univariate regression analysis identified a trend-level correlation between the ethnic identity and the following coping strategies:

- ‘Restraint-coping’ ($r = .155$; $F = 4.716$; $p \leq .05$);
- ‘Use of Social-emotional Support’ addressing an appeal to emotional social support ($r = .184$; $F = 6.681$; $p \leq 0.01$);
- ‘Substance Use’ ($r = 0.148$; $F = 4.287$; $p \leq .05$);

- 'Planning' ($r=.149$; $F = 4,318$; $p \leq .01$).

Analysis of relationship between the religious identity and the coping strategy of 'Substance Use' in the Egyptian sample showed a correlation between the religious identity and variables obtained for the 'Substance Use' scale ($r= .148$; $F = 10.299$; $p \leq .01$). This may be logically explained by the religious prohibition on alcohol consumption for Muslims.

Finally, the mean values of coping strategies determined with 'COPE' were compared between the groups of (1) Muslims and (2) Christians for both Ukrainian and Egyptian samples using Independent Samples T-test. It revealed no statistically significant differences in coping strategies between the groups selected, which suggests that Egyptian Muslims and Egyptian Christians exhibit similar coping behaviour. In the sample of Ukrainians, the most employed coping strategies included 'Planning' ($M = 12.930$), followed by the 'Positive Interpretation and Growth' ($M = 12.767$) with almost the same value as in the sample of Egyptians ($M = 12.780$). The third most used coping strategy was 'Active Coping' ($M = 12.372$). The least preferred among Ukrainians was the 'Substance Use' coping strategy ($M = 6.326$). It is also worth noting that 'Religious Coping' in the sample of Ukrainians was among the least used coping strategies. It allows assuming that religious coping is not a dominant behaviour in societies where a religious identity is formed spontaneously, which needs further investigation. In the Egyptian sample, the most commonly used coping strategies were 'Religious Coping' ($M = 13.587$), 'Positive Interpretation and Growth' ($M = 12.780$), 'Planning' ($M = 12.093$), and "Use of Social-instrumental Support" ($M = 11.980$). The least preferred coping strategies among Egyptians of both religious identities was 'Substance Use' ($M = 5.313$). The dominant 'Religious Coping' behaviour in the Egyptian sample can be explained by the fact that in the Egyptian society, religious practices are formally taught, where they become a lifestyle, habitual and natural.

Therefore, it can be argued that the hypothesis of differences in the coping behaviour in people with different ethno-religious identities has been confirmed. In this case, the sample has shown differences, depending on the ethnic factor.

4.3. DISCUSSION

It is possible to conclude that there is relationship between coping behaviour and an individual's ethnic identity. Correlating the coping strategies with the hierarchical model of coping in (1) Egyptians and (2) Ukrainians in a stressful learning situation made it possible to provide a generalized assessment of the patterns of coping behaviour of subjects. Table 4 shows that (1) Egyptians underwent three adaptive processes in situations of academic-related stress: 'Coordinating actions and contingencies', 'Coordinating reliance and social

resources available’ and ‘Coordinating preferences and available options’ with most coping strategies related to the coping families of ‘Problem-solving’, ‘Support seeking’, ‘Accommodation’, and ‘Opposition’. (2) Ukrainians focus more on the adaptive process of ‘Coordinating actions and Contingency’ involving two coping families; namely: ‘Problem-solving’ (coping strategies of ‘Active Approach’ and ‘Cautious Action’) and ‘Information Seeking’ (coping strategies of ‘Planning’ and ‘Social Joining’). In the (1) Egyptians and (2) Ukrainians, the adaptive process of ‘Coordinating reliance and social resources available’ is presented by only one family; namely, ‘Support Seeking’ (‘Seeking Social Support’ and ‘Religious Coping’ in Egyptians; ‘Seeking Social Support’ and ‘Use of Social-emotional Support’ in Ukrainians). Besides, (1) Egyptians and (2) Ukrainians underwent the adaptive process of ‘Coordinating preferences and available options’, which was presented in the Ukrainian sample by the ‘Accommodation’ coping family (coping strategy of ‘Positive Interpretation and Growth’); and in the Egyptian sample – by the ‘Accommodation’ coping family (‘Positive Interpretation and Growth’ coping strategy) and the ‘Opposition’ coping family (‘Instinctive Action’ coping strategy).

Table 4 – Coping behaviour patterns in (1) Egyptians and (2) Ukrainians

Coping behaviour hierarchical pattern		Coping strategies (COPE / SCAS)	
Adaptive process	Family of coping	in Egyptians	in Ukrainians
Coordinating actions and contingencies	Problem-solving	‘Assertive Action’	‘Active Approach’; ‘Cautious Action’
	Information seeking	‘Planning’	‘Planning’; ‘Social Joining’
Coordinating reliance and social resources available	Support seeking	‘Seeking Social Support’; ‘Religious Coping’	Seeking Social Support; ‘Use of Social-emotional Support’
Coordinating preferences and available options	Accommodation	‘Positive Interpretation and Growth’;	‘Positive Interpretation and Growth’
	Opposition	‘Instinctive Action’	

An interesting conclusion can be derived from the above: (1) Egyptians and (2) Ukrainians revealed coping behaviour that was subject to all the three adaptive processes. In addition, the Egyptians and Ukrainians unexpectedly used almost the same coping families, namely ‘Problem-solving’, ‘Information Seeking’, ‘Support Seeking’, and ‘Accommodation’ (with the additional coping family of ‘Opposition’

employed by Egyptians). On the other hand, Egyptians and Ukrainians preferred slightly different coping strategies within the coping families designated. Thus, the Egyptian sample demonstrated the following hierarchical pattern of coping (from the most used to the least): ‘Support Seeking’ – ‘Problem-solving’ – ‘Opposition’ – ‘Accommodation’ – ‘Information Seeking’. The Ukrainian sample resorted to (from the most used to the least) ‘Information Seeking’ – ‘Accommodation’ – ‘Support Seeking’ – ‘Problem-solving’. Thus, on the one hand, it can be assumed that in similar stressful situations, individuals with the same ethnic identity would employ the set of similar coping families. However, it is possible to claim that in a particular stressful situation, a specific hierarchical pattern of adaptive processes and coping families develops depending on the person’s ethnic identity, which, in its turn, shapes a pattern of coping behaviour.

Also, in line with the idea of Bailey and Dua (1999) and Fischer et al. (2010), who theoretically proposed to divide all coping families into the individualistic (intra-personal) and collectivist (interpersonal) adaptive strategies, a tendency was evident in the group of (1) Egyptians to engage more collectivist adaptive strategies, compared to (2) Ukrainians who demonstrated more individualistic adaptive strategies. At the same time, it was obvious that (2) Ukrainians should not be unequivocally attributed to the individualistic identity, since one of the dominant coping strategies in the sample of Ukrainians were ‘Seeking Social Support’ and ‘Social Joining, as well as ‘Use of social-emotional Support’. Besides, it was inappropriate to unambiguously refer Christians to the individualistic religious identity, since the Egyptian Christians and Egyptian Muslims exhibited no differences in their coping behaviour (except for the ‘Substance Use’ coping strategy, which was more used by the Egyptian Christians). This can be explained with the interference and interplay between the two religious identities in one cultural space.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It has been found out that youth with different ethnic-religious identities develop different patterns of coping behaviour. At the same time, the component of ethnicity in the ethno-religious identity plays a more significant predictive role as to what kind of coping behaviour pattern a person will choose in similar stressful situations. Specific differences in coping strategies have been identified in the samples of Egyptian Muslims, Egyptian Christians, and Ukrainian Christians.

In addition, a more formal character of religious identity development in the Egyptian sample of both religious identities (Muslims and Christians), in which formal religious education and upbringing begins from childhood and continues throughout adulthood, suggests that Egyptians are formally trained to resort to religious coping. This implies that coping strategies can- and should be learnt in order to develop more effective models of stress response. This finding can be used

in further studies of coping behaviour and psychotherapeutic interventions to correct coping behaviour in educational settings.

While the findings of this study suggest the evident role of ethnic identity in predicting coping behaviour of individuals, a number of limitations should be considered when interpreting these results. First, the choice of the instruments measuring coping strategies in this study, although substantiated, is rather random. It means that use of other questionnaires and methods may lead to different pattern of coping strategies. Second, the ethnic identity predictive role determined in this study does not allow establishing any causality, yet. Further cross-cultural studies may consider a broader design to study coping behaviour patterns of individuals of a certain ethnic-religious identity in various stressful situations to investigate if the pattern changes depending on a stressful situation or remains similar in various contexts of moderate stress.

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