

Coping Strategies of Students in the United Arab Emirates University: A Research Application of the Arabic Version of the CISS

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Abstract

This paper investigated the manner by which students of the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) coped with stress and determined the influence of demographic factors on the coping strategies used by students in an academic setting. The sample consisted of 197 undergraduate Emirati students from the university who were differentiated according to sex, age, year level, and marital status. The study used the Arabic version of the CISS that was formulated and validated by Hamid and Musa (2012) which is a semantic and contextualization adaptation of the CISS. Data gathering was done by means of the survey and the collected data was quantitatively analyzed. The results showed that the students depended on a repertoire of coping mechanisms which were either used frequently or sparingly regardless of sex, age, year level, or marital status. The findings depict a culturally endemic outlook of student coping in the context of the universal phenomenon of university education which makes it differ from the picture of coping among students in other cultural circumstances. On the basis of the extent to which coping strategies were used, the students of the UAEU can be better seen as contingent or repertorial copers.

Keywords: Academic stress, coping, coping strategy, coping styles inventory

1. Introduction

Coping with stressful situations has attracted a tremendous interest of many researchers due to its importance in understanding human behavior. The increasing significance of coping comes corollary to the growing worldwide phenomenon of stress which has taken third place in the realm of human problems next to death and taxes (Bernstein et al., 2008). Stress does not spare anyone and among those who universally experience stress early in life are the students. Students experience a different degree of stress compared to their non-student counterparts (Keinan & Pelsberg, 1986) as they are subjected to different kinds of stressors during their educational journey (Bataneh, 2013). The kind of stress that students experience as the result of the effects of various stressors in the school environment has been collectively known as academic stress (Sarita, 2015).

Comparatively, it becomes more stressful for students when they are in college considering the process that they need go through in adapting to new educational and social environments (Misra & Castillo, 2004). A considerable portion of the literature on academic stress have focused on the various stressors that affect college and university students in different contexts and circumstances (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Madnani & Pradhan, 2014; Pourrajab, Rabbani, & Kasmainezhadfard, 2014; Bamuhair, Farhan, Alhubaiti, Agha, Rahman, & Ibrahim, 2015; Kashmoola, 2016; Thaker & Verma, 2014) and the outcomes showed mixed results. This might be the case because stress is a matter of personal perception (Bamuhair, et al., 2015) hence the perceived effects of stressors on college and university students can be as varied as well. Regardless of the stressors affecting students, it had been found that stress can take its toll on their physical as well as psychological well-being (Shah & Shah, 2015); academic performance (Duncan-Williams, 2015); academic success (Essel & Owusu, 2017); self-esteem (Berjot & Gillet, 2011); and health behaviours (Weidner, Kohlmann, Dotzauer, & Burns, 1996), among others.

Stress, therefore, does not have an equal effect on people but can definitely lead to negative consequences hence the need for its abatement. Abating the negative consequences of stress involves the process of coping. Coping is considered as a stabilizing factor that helps individuals adapt to stressful situations (Bamuhair, et al., 2015). The conceptualization of coping developed over time. Lazarus and Folkman (1984:141) defined coping as the “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.” Coping was also seen as “conscious and volitional efforts to regulate emotion, cognition, behavior, physiology, and the environment in response to stressful events or circumstances” (Compas, 2001: 89). It involves “how people mobilize, guide, manage, energize, and direct behavior, emotion, and orientation, or how they fail to do so” (Skinner & Wellborn, 1994: 113) under stressful conditions. Over the past decade the concept of coping converged on the idea of “regulation under stress” (Compas et al. 1997, Eisenberg et al. 1997, Rossman 1992, Skinner 1999), more specifically, as “action regulation under stress” (Skinner 1999, Skinner & Wellborn 1994).

Based on the differences in theoretical and conceptual approaches and dimensions of coping, Skinner and

Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) identified families of coping from empirical analyses in the literature. These include problem solving, information-seeking, helplessness, escape, self-reliance, support-seeking, delegation, social isolation, accommodation, negotiations, submission, and opposition (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007: 126). Other classify ways of coping into problem-focused, emotion-focused, and dysfunctional coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) recognized eight ways of coping with stress which reflect two techniques of coping, namely, emotion-oriented coping and task-oriented coping. The eight ways of coping include self-control, positive appraisal, confrontative coping, planful problem solving, escape-avoidance, seeking social support, distancing, and accepting responsibility (Cosway, Endler, Sadler, & Deary, 2000) McCrae and Costa (1986) suggested two types of coping; neurotic coping and mature coping. They defined mature (problem focused) coping as dealing with changing something in the situation and acting directly in order to remove the source of stress. Whereas, neurotic (emotion focused) coping aims at reducing or managing the emotional distress associated with the situation rather than dealing with the situation itself (Sica, Novara, Dorz, & Sanavio, 1997). There is a third type of coping, avoidance, which entails distancing self from the situation either through socializing with others or engaging in distracting activities (Rafnsson, Smari, Winde, Mears, & Endler, 2006; Wonderlich-Tierney & Vander Wal, 2010). The ways of coping can have infinite potential possibilities because every person can develop his/her own particular methods to cope with stress, although through social learning people acquire unique ways of overcoming it (Sica et al., 1997).

Coming hand in hand with the conceptual development of coping in the literature, are diverse models of coping with stressful situations such as the transactional model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), self-regulated learning model (Boekaert, 2006), and tripartite model (Clark & Watson, 1991), among others. The transactional model defines coping as gradually changing behavioral and cognitive attempts to deal with internal or external demands that are evaluated by the person as exceeding or taxing his/her resources (Lazarus, 1984 Cosway, et al., 2000). Hence the transactional model is an appraisal based coping which postulates that individual's cognitive appraisal and coping processes are influenced interactively by a combination of personality-based and situational factors (Duhachek & Kelting, 2009). The self-regulated model refers to the individual's capacity to understand one's emotions and their expressions (Boekaerts, 2006). The tripartite model defines coping as a temperamental approach of dealing with anxiety and depression (Fox, Halpern, Ryan, and Lowe, 2010). However, the current research focuses on the transactional model as it proves to be more reliable with more consistent factor structure (Rafnsson et al., 2006:1248).

Accordingly, different instruments to measure coping were developed over time. Among the most predominant in the literature are the CSQ or Coping Styles Questionnaire (Billings & Moos, 1981); COPE or Coping Orientation to the Problem Experience (Sica, et al., 1997); and CISS or Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (Parker & Endler, 1996). The Coping Styles Questionnaire (Billings & Moos, 1981) identified five modes of coping; active-cognitive, active behavioral, avoidance, problem focused and emotion focused coping. The Coping Orientation to the Problem Experience (COPE) describes 15 different coping modalities through the use of orthogonal Component factor analysis (Sica, et al., 1997). Endler and Parker's (1996) Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) suggests three dimensions of coping namely: avoidance-focused, emotion-focused, and problem-focused coping (Rafnsson, et al., 2005; Wonderlich-Tierney & Vander Wal, 2010). Later, researchers such as Cosway et al. (2000) and Rafnsson et al. (2006) identified four dimensions of coping that replicate Endler and Parker's findings, but the avoidance coping was split into two dimensions: distraction and social diversion. The three factors of CISS scale assessing task, emotion, and avoidance oriented coping have been found the most robust dimensions identified in the general coping literature (McWilliams, Cox and Enns, 2003).

Research conducted in different settings point out that the theories and models of coping generally share the following three features (Rafnsson, et al., 2006): theories mainly postulate two to three coping dimensions; tools developed to gauge these factors are overlapping in content; and, with exception to the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations, coping measures lack reliability and satisfactory factor structure. It had been noted that the shared feature among coping inventories is the limitation of unsatisfactory psychometric properties such as unstable factor structure and low reliability (Skinner, et al., 2003). This weakness may be caused by cultural differences hence Rafnson, et al. (2006) suggested that future studies should investigate the replication of CISS factor in different cultures. While coping with stress is an experience shared by all cultures, the manner and extent to which stress is appraised and evaluated as well as the consequent response to stress varies significantly from culture to culture (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Literature has shown that there are limited studies that focus on cultural differences in coping. Sica, et al. (1997) compared the coping strategies between Italian and American university students using Coping Orientations to Problems Experienced (COPE). Their findings indicated differences between the two groups and, thus, concluded that cultural differences may have played some role in determining the results of factor analysis as Europeans may probably use less rational coping than North Americans.

Stress and coping had been the subject of few studies in the UAE. Monsef, et al., (2015) investigated the

perceived depression, anxiety, and stress among Dubai Healthcare Authority residents and found that the perceived prevalence rates of depressive, anxiety and stress symptoms among residents were high. Kashmoola (2016) looked into the levels of stress among students studying in higher education institutions in Dubai in relation to academic, financial, and social support issues and found the overall stress levels to be low. These studies were focused mainly on stress and did not touch on coping strategies. A study by Barhem, Younies, Younis, & Smith (2011) focused on the opinions of healthcare employees about stress patterns in the UAE and found that the primary coping strategy used by healthcare workers are productiveness and activity. Assaf (2011) did a two-stage exploratory study of the coping patterns of Arab women with breast cancer residing in the UAE and found that faith and a belief in God were identified as the most important coping pattern regardless of their physical or emotional status. In a study by Hamid and Musa (2017), they found that coping partially mediated the relationship between burnout and secondary traumatic stress. Gomathi, Ahmed, and Sreedharan (2013) compared the causes of stress and coping strategies among a sample of undergraduate health-profession students at the Gulf Medical University, United Arab Emirates, and found that the majority of the students used positive ways of coping, with religion/praying found to be the most frequently used strategy.

The foregoing studies are among the fairly recent investigations done in the United Arab Emirates which indicates the dearth of empirical investigations in the local context. It can also be observed that healthcare professionals comprise most the subjects in these studies. Moreover, the response to the CISS in measuring coping strategies in the UAE has yet to be further explored. In consideration of these premises, this paper investigated the influence of selected demographic variables on the coping strategies employed by students of the United Arab Emirates University using the validated Arabic version (Hamid & Musa, 2012) of Endler and Parker's (1996) CISS with the end view of further understanding the dynamics of coping among individual students in an academic setting.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants were drawn from the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU). The sample was composed of 197 undergraduate students. There were 39.1% (n=77) male and 60.9% (n=120) female participants of whom 86.3% (n= 170) were single, 13.7% (n=27) married. The participants' age ranged between 17 and 26 years (Mean age = 20.56, SD = 1.58). About 23.9% (n=47) were in first year, 18.8% (n=37) second year, 29.9% (n=59) third year, and 27.4% (n=54) in their fourth year.

2.2 Instrument and procedure:

The instrument used in the study is the Arabic adaptation of Endler and Parker's (1990) Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) developed by Hamid and Musa (2012). The move to have an Arabic version of the CISS was motivated by the Tanzanian experience. Accordingly, the CISS was translated into Kiswahili, the Tanzanian national language and went through a translation-back-translation procedure to maintain the items' semantic equivalence (SE) of a translated measure. The procedures suggested by Mallinckrodt and Wang (2004) were applied in translating the scale. The CISS comprises 48 items that are distributed in three major factors namely; task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance coping. Each factor consists of 16 items. Individuals who score high on task-oriented coping use behavioral or cognitive problem-solving techniques when threatened with stress. Those who use emotion-oriented coping respond to stressful situations with emotional outbursts, self-preoccupation, or fantasy. Users of avoidance coping rely on social support or distract themselves with other activities (Rafnsson, et al., 2006). The Data from the Tanzanian sample showed an acceptable reliability, $r = .74$ ($M = 159.58$, $SD = 17.22$). Hamid and Musa (2012) did the procedure parallel to the development of the Tanzanian version and the Arabic version turned out to have a higher internal reliability, Chronbach's alpha $r = .85$ ($M = 156.08$, $SD = 18.12$), compared to the Tanzanian version.

A front page was attached to the questionnaire (CISS) that solicited the participants' consent after explaining the goal of the research. More specifically, demographic information such as sex, age, year of the college, and marital status was also elicited from the questionnaire. All of the students who participated in the survey are Emiratis to ensure the cultural homogeneity of the sample. The data obtained were using the corresponding descriptive and inferential statistical tools.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Extent of coping among the participants

In their analysis of the coping patterns among students, Frydenberg and Lewis (1994:1) suggested that regardless of the problems faced by students they tend to "have a stable hierarchy of preferred coping strategies which are in the repertoire of most, if not all, students." (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1994:1). Furthermore, it has also been suggested in a number of studies that coping strategies are not simply proxies for coping resources, but rather explain unique variance in adjustment that operates in tandem with other variables (Taylor & Stanton, 2007). In

consideration of these suggestions, simply coming up with a categorical classifying the students according to the coping strategies that they use is untenable. Hence, this paper found it prudent to focused on the extent to which students used the different coping strategies in dealing with their academic experiences to reflect the repertoire of coping. Accordingly, Table 1 shows the extent of how the study sample coped with stressful academic situations.

Table 1. Extent to which UAEU Students Cope with Academic Stress

Coping strategies	Mean	SD	Extent
Task-oriented	3.635	.5547	Often
Emotion-oriented	3.011	.5834	Sometimes
Distraction	2.917	.6692	Sometimes
Social-avoidance	3.343	.7028	Sometimes

The data shows that generally, the students of the UAEU indeed used a repertoire of coping strategies. It can be seen that the students often employ task-oriented coping (M=3.625, SD=.5547) but also sometimes resort to the use emotion-oriented (M=3.011, SD=.5834), avoidant-distraction (M=2.917, SD=.6692), and avoidant-social coping (M=3.343, SD=.7028). Students more often than not deal with stress by maintaining focus and keeping their emotions under control. They would rather deal with the problem cognitively. Students, however, sometimes dealt with stress through emotional outburst and release, keeping themselves pre-occupied, or indulging in fantasy. They sometimes distract themselves with activity to deal with stressors or seek recourse through the help of others. The study further determined whether the extent to which coping strategies were used varied among students when grouped according to sex, age, year level and marital status.

3.2. Difference in the extent of coping among the participants

Sex. Gender differences in coping strategies were also reported in the literature in which the factor structure remained stable. Nonetheless, women were reported to score higher in emotion and avoidance oriented coping styles (Rafnson, et al., 2006). Table 2 shows that the female students often resorted to task-oriented coping (M=3.645, SD=.5135) and social avoidance (M=3.509, SD=.6336) compared to distraction (M=3.014, SD=.6126) and emotion-oriented coping (M=2.958, SD=.6324) which they only sometimes used. Male students likewise employed task-oriented coping (M=.629, SD=.225) and social avoidance (M=3.333, SD=.7409) more often in dealing with stressful situations and only sometimes resorted to emotion-oriented coping (M=3.047, SD=.5832) and distraction (M=2.850, SD=.6998).

Table 2. Difference in the Coping Strategies of Male and Female Students

Coping Strategies	Female		Male		T	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Task-oriented	3.645	.5135	3.629	.5832	.225	.822
Emotion-oriented	2.958	.6324	3.047	.5465	-1.151	.251
Distraction	3.014	.6126	2.850	.6998	1.855	.065
Social Avoidance	3.505	.6336	3.333	.7409	1.842	.067

The t-test revealed that the male and female students did not significantly differ in the use of task-oriented, $t=.822$, $p>.001$; emotion-oriented $t=-1.151$, $p>.001$; distraction $t=1.855$, $p>.001$; and social avoidance $t=1.842$, $p>.001$ strategies in dealing with stress. This indicates that the extent to which males and females used these strategies to cope with the stressful situation was not dependent on their sex. Hence the use of the various coping strategies by male and female students did not differ significantly in extent.

Age. Studies have shown that there is a clear age difference in coping among individuals (Bamuhair et al., 2015; Beall et al., 2015) with older people showing a more stable response to stress and pressures in life (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987). For this study, the data shows that when confronted with stressful situations, task-oriented coping was the most often used strategy by the 19 years old and younger (M=3.519, SD=.5051); 20 years old (M=3.8234, SD=.5101); 21 years old (M=3.548, SD=.5394); and 22 years old and above (M=3.658, SD=.6231) students. Emotion-oriented and avoidance-distraction coping were sometimes sparingly used by the students in these age groups. Social avoidance was also sometimes used by students who were 19 years old and below (M= 3.364, SD=.6605) and also by those who were 21 years old students (M=3.218, SD=.7637) and above, however, was often used by 20 years old (M=3.504, SD=.6519) and 22 years old students (M=3.517; SD=.7183).

Table 3. Extent of Coping among Students According to Age

Coping Strategies	19 years old and below		20 years old		21 years old		22 years old		F	Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Task-oriented	3.519	.50516	3.8234	.5101	3.548	.5394	3.658	.6231	3.769	.011
Emotion-oriented	3.008	.5519	2.985	.6062	3.033	.6463	3.020	.5466	.069	.976
Distraction	2.870	.6542	2.906	.6320	2.927	.6193	2.971	.7731	.236	.871
Social Avoidance	3.364	.6605	3.504	.6519	3.218	.7637	3.517	.7183	2.215	.087

The F-test revealed that the different age groups of students did not significantly differ in the use of emotion-oriented, $F=.069, p>.001$; distraction $F=.236, p>.001$; and social avoidance $F=2.215, p>.001$ strategies in dealing with stress. The different age groups, however, differed significantly in the use of task-oriented strategies $F=.069, p<.001$ with the 20 years old students scoring higher than students of other ages. This indicates that the extent to which students of different ages used emotion-oriented, distraction, and social avoidance was independent of their age but age had a definite influence on the extent to which they used the task-oriented strategy.

Year level. Because college year levels generally are matched with age, studies have not fully explored this variable in relation to coping among college students (Pariat, Rynjah, Joplin, & Kharjana, 2014). Students in the same year levels, however, were found not to be necessarily homogeneous in age and cases of mixed ages in the same year levels generally occur (DeMann, 2011). On this note, this paper found it prudent to include year level as one of the variables. Accordingly, Table 4 shows that task-oriented coping was often used by first ($M=3.520, SD=.5408$), second ($M=3.740, SD=.5871$), third ($M=3.631, SD=.4975$), and fourth-year college ($M=3.704, SD=.5784$) students of the UAEU. Social avoidance was also found to be often resorted to by third ($M=3.428, SD=.6203$) and fourth-year college ($M=3.467, SD=.8346$) students as well. Emotional-oriented coping and distraction were sometimes used across all year levels and sometimes social avoidance was also resorted to by first ($M=3.326, SD=.7708$) and second year ($M=3.349, SD=.6460$) year students as well.

Table 4. Extent of Coping Among Students According to Year Level

Coping Strategies	First Year		Second Year		Third Year		Fourth Year		F	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Task-oriented	3.520	.5408	3.740	.5871	3.631	.4975	3.704	.5784	1.09	.354
Emotion-oriented	2.997	.5361	2.887	.5659	2.971	.5970	3.057	.5996	.579	.630
Distraction	2.847	.7633	2.804	.5242	2.942	.6276	3.052	.7149	1.13	.337
Social Avoidance	3.326	.7708	3.349	.6460	3.428	.6203	3.467	.8346	.343	.794

The F-test revealed that the students in the different year levels did not significantly differ in the use of task-oriented, $F=1.09, p>.001$; emotion-oriented, $F=.6309, p>.001$; distraction $F=2.23, p>.001$; and social avoidance, $F=.343, p>.001$ strategies in dealing with stress. This indicates that the extent to which students of different year levels used task-oriented, emotion-oriented, distraction, and social avoidance coping was independent of their year level in college. Hence the use of the various coping strategies by students across year levels did not vary significantly in extent.

Marital status. Another form of stress that can intervene with academic stressors is marital stress which can be experienced by married college students. Studies have shown that married college students experience more distress compared to their non-married cohorts and have called for marital counseling as a form of coping intervention (Price, 1969; Mehan.d. & Negy, 2003; (Lasode & Awote, 2014). Table 5 shows that single students often use task-oriented coping ($M=3.631, SD=.5347$) and social avoidance ($M=3.400, SD=.6892$) mechanisms to deal with stress but sometimes resort to emotion-oriented coping ($M=3.003, SD=.6009$) and distraction ($M=2.910, SD=.6505$). Similarly, married students scored higher than unmarried students on all coping strategies but nevertheless show that they often used task-oriented coping ($M=3.800, SD=.4844$) and social avoidance ($M=3.592, SD=.6407$) and sometimes resorted to to emotion-oriented coping ($M=3.003, SD=.6009$) and distraction ($M=2.910, SD=.6505$) just like their unmarried cohorts.

Table 5. Extent of Coping among Students According to Marital Status

Coping Strategies	Single		Married		t	Sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Task-oriented	3.631	.5347	3.800	.4844	-1.500	.135
Emotion-oriented	3.003	.6009	3.177	.5464	-1.372	.172
Distraction	2.910	.6505	3.161	.7959	-1.766	.079
Social Avoidance	3.400	.6892	3.592	.6407	-1.321	.188

The t-test revealed that married and single students did not significantly differ in the use of task-oriented, $t=-1.500, p>.001$; emotion-oriented $t=-1.372, p>.001$; distraction $t=-1.766, p>.001$; and social avoidance $t=-1.321, p>.001$ strategies in dealing with stress. This indicates that the extent to which married and single students used these strategies to cope with the stressful situation was not dependent on their marital status. Hence

the use of the various coping strategies by married and single students did not differ in extent.

4. Discussion

The Arabic version of the CISS is a semantic and contextual translation of the four-factor model of human coping with difficulty developed by Endler and Parker (1990). The instrument differentiates three strategies or styles of coping: emotion-oriented, task oriented, and avoidant. The avoidant style has two dimensions: distraction and social diversion. Task-oriented coping is considered a primary control style that is an adaptive response to situations that are appraised as changeable. The individual focuses on solving the problem cognitively and less depend on emotions. On the other hand, emotion -oriented coping is considered a secondary control style adaptive response resorted to when situations are appraised as unchangeable. It is an emotional response to a stressful situation. Distraction or avoidant-distracted coping is a short-term adaptive response for the perceived uncontrollable situation while avoidant-social coping is likewise a short-term adaptive mechanism where others are sought for assistance or diversion (Avero et al.,1990).

With the foregoing background, the focus on measuring the frequency of coping rather categorically differentiating individuals on the basis of their coping strategies provide a better insight on how students cope. In the context of the study participants, all of them employed various coping styles in addressing stressful situations which reflect a realistic picture of coping. The more frequent use of some styles over the rest affirms that students appraise and evaluate the source of stress differently and correspondingly adapt to these. It can be inferred from the response of the participants that the stressors can be appraised in terms of its perceived duration and controllability. Duration can be short-term or long-term and controllability can either be high (controllable) and low (uncontrollable). The possible permutations of duration and controllability lead individuals to match these with the appropriate responses at the disposal of the person in order to abate the stressful effect of the situation.

Situations that are short- term and highly controllable do not pose much of a problem. However, short-term events that are uncontrollable can lead students to cope either by using diversionary strategies (avoidant coping) or seeking assistance (social-avoidant). Situations that are appraised as long term and uncontrollable can lead students to cope emotionally either by emotional outburst or fantasy (emotional-oriented coping). Lastly, situations that are appraised as long term but are controllable lead students to face the problem and deal with these rationally (task-oriented coping). These hypothetical permutations can find its reality in the various factors operating in the college or university environment which can involve a gamut of soft (teachers, classmates, staff, administrators, instruction) and hard elements (university infrastructure, curriculum, policies, procedures, research, projects, exams, and other requirements).

Accordingly, there is a trend in the data reflecting the more frequent use of task-oriented coping and social avoidant in dealing with stressful situations. This is quite understandable as students experience a number of situations that they have to deal with cognitively or behaviorally. It would not lead to a meaningful outcome, for instance, if a student emotionally responds to a research requirement but may from time to time express emotional frustration over difficulties encountered in his university experiences. Since the very nature of the university experience equips students with the tools for problem-solving, their tendency is to use this skill to cognitively cope with stressful situations. The university is a social environment that encourages knowledge exchange through interactions. Such interactions form networks of dependencies whether formal or informal which students can leverage to cope with stressful situations. Hence the higher frequency of use of social avoidant coping. When a student is confronted with a difficult situation, one of his or her tendencies is to seek the assistance of friends or classmates.

The findings do not support the contentions that female student has a higher tendency to emotionally respond to stress; older students have more stable coping mechanisms; senior students can cope better than their junior counterparts; and that married students have to cope more compared to single students. On the whole, the findings of the study consistently support each other to give a picture of how students in the UAEU cope with stressful situations. It can, therefore, be claimed that when students in the UAEU are in stressful situations, they respond by often resorting to problem-solving and cognitively dealing with the situation or they seek the assistance of others. Depending on their appraisal of the situation, the students sometimes emotionally respond to it or divert the problem by focusing on something more interesting to do.

5. Conclusions

The coping strategies measured by the Arabic version of the CISS were deployed by the students during stressful situations in varying extent depending on their perception and appraisal of the circumstances encountered. The higher tendency of the students to cognitively and behaviorally cope with situations is reflective of their capacity to leverage learning as a result of their educational experience and to capitalize on their social networks for assistance. The sparing use of emotional coping and avoidant coping is more seen as a contingent adaptation depending on the problem situations encountered. Nevertheless, the strategies do not discriminate the extent of

use among students relative to their sex, age, year level, and marital status. This implies that the students of the UAEU have an arsenal of coping mechanisms that they often or sometimes draw upon in dealing with academic stress. The absence of a predominant strategy that is always resorted to by the students reflects on their flexibility in deploying the appropriate resources at their disposal to cope with stress. Since the cultural homogeneity of the sample was maintained, the findings portray a culturally endemic picture of student coping in the context of the universal phenomenon of university education which makes the findings differ from the outlook of coping among students in other cultural circumstances. On the basis of the extent to which coping strategies are used, there is evidence to claim that the students of the UAEU are better considered to be contingent or reportorial copers.

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