Culture, Stress and Coping: Socio-Cultural Context Influence on Coping Types among Russians

Tatiana Kryukova
(tat.kryukova44@gmail.com)

Tatiana Gushchina, Olga Ekimchik
Kostroma Technological University, Russia

Abstract

The paper presents a new psychometric adaptation of the cross-cultural coping scale for the Russian-speaking sample (Cross-Cultural Coping Scale by B. Kuo et al., 2006, Canada: Kuo, Roysircar, Newby-Clark, 2006) and a research made with its help, answering the questions: Do Russians cope with stress? What are socio-cultural contexts of coping in the time of cultural transition? The tool explores the influence of the socio-cultural context on the respondents’ choice between three types of coping. The influence of cultural context on coping and its intensity has been confirmed in this study. The situational context has the greatest impact on the choice of collective coping among Russian respondents. In general Russians evaluate more acute and important stress in the situations Health/Illness than in Job/Career context. There are obvious relations between the choice of avoid- ance coping and the respondents’ age in the career scenario. In both contexts people use engagement coping (self activity) more actively and are less inclined to avoid difficulties. The choice of coping type is affected by a group of factors: self-concept traits (independent or interdependent selves), stress level, type of values, life satisfaction.

Introduction

Social processes and changes in subject’s life style affect the level of his/her efficiency, constructive or destructive coping types significantly. It is important to study coping behavior, its determination and consequences in the fundamental context that connects the individual and his environment – that is culture (see R. Moos, 2006 / ed. Wong and Wong; Kuo, 2011).

Russians as well as any other cultures, have some specific culturally determined stress perception and coping strategies. They correspond to personal dispositions, gender, age, stress-coping dynamics, and ways of eliminating stress by training and self-learning. It means that the complex and ever-changing system of meanings - ideas, norms, beliefs, values, shared and transferred by culture representatives to each other - prescribes subject’s behavior, influences him diversely, depending on race, ethnus or minority/majority affiliation (Kuo, 2012; Triandis, 2007).

Method

Research Design

The purpose of this study has been to test the model of socio-cultural coping contextualization, created by the authors, according to which the contextualization is a cultural indicator, the extent which shows how culture promotes behavioral diversity in corres-
**Individualistic and collectivistic values** have been measured with the help of the Shalom Schwartz and Wolfgang Bilsky scale (Schwartz & Bilsky’s, 1990).

**Interdependent Self and Independent Self** is a variant of a Self-concept/Self-esteem research technique, created to fix dependability on the nearest environment (others) by Singelis (*The Self-Construal Scale, SCS*, Singelis, 1994).

**Religiosity.** The statement of the religiosity level was preceded by the questions about whether the respondent professed any religion and which one. Then the participant was asked to determine his religiosity with a 10 points scale, regardless of whether he was a believer or not.

**Level of confidence, feeling of happiness, life satisfaction.** To measure each of these parameters, respondents were asked to answer a related question and to rate their level of confidence, happiness and life satisfaction from 1 to 10 points.

**Self-esteem level.** For measuring self-esteem we used the question: “to what extent do you agree with the following statement: “I have high self-esteem”». The respondents rated their replies from 1 (absolutely disagree) to 5 (absolutely agree).

**Socially demographic control variables.** Respondents were also asked to indicate their age, gender and education.

**Statistical analysis**

The data analysis was performed by SPSS Statistics 19.0. The following methods were used: descriptive statistics, reliability analysis (Cronbach’s α coefficient, Pearson’s correlation coefficient, Guttman’s coefficient), comparative analysis (Student’s t-test), regression analysis, ANOVA - repeated measures analysis of variance (Pillai trace, Fisher’s F-test). Reliability analysis allowed us to determine the internal consistency of the statements by Cronbach’s α coefficient; the statements homogeneity was determined with the help of Guttman half-split coefficient. To identify gender differences, we used Student’s t-test. We applied correlation analysis with Pearson coefficient for determining the external validity of CCCS and *Way of Coping Questionaire* (WCQ). The prediction of coping types by dispositional characteristics in different contexts was determined by the regression analysis. ANOVA was used to determine the impact of the situation on the choice of a particular type of coping.

**Results**

1. **Primary Russian validation of B. Kuo’s CCCS (Cross-Cultural Coping Scale)**

Psychometric test data submitted the following results - the high level of questionnaire items consistency for the entire scale taking into account the situational context (α = 0.846) has been derived. Half-splitting (Guttman coefficient) determined a good level of test homogeneity in general (H = 0.752). But inter-items correlation occurred within the interval (0.06 < r < 0.48), reflecting rather a weak relation of a few questions with the overall scale. Therefore, we have made the assessment of the scale reliability and homogeneity separately for different contextual situations. (cf. Tables 1 and 2).
We have obtained the following results. Russian participants may be characterized by average levels of religiosity ($m = 4.88$), confidence in others ($m = 5.34$), self-esteem ($m = 2.93$) and happiness, and life satisfaction levels are slightly above the average ($m_1 = 7.22$; $m_2 = 6.81$). The stress levels of the offered scenarios are rated by the respondents as moderate, but the Illness scenarios evoke higher stress. The respondents have more intensively expressed Interdependent Self along with the prevailing individualistic values. Coping intensity in the offered scenarios is presented in Table 5.

### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WCQ: coping-strategies</th>
<th>Collective Coping</th>
<th>Avoidance coping</th>
<th>Engagement coping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confrontive Coping</td>
<td>0.199*</td>
<td>0.298**</td>
<td>0.184*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
<td>0.370**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.320**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Controlling</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.377**</td>
<td>0.200*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Social Support</td>
<td>0.380**</td>
<td>0.196*</td>
<td>0.430**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting Responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.187*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escape / avoidance</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.434**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planful Problem Solving</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.568**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Reappraisal</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.368**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Relevant correlations between both questionnaires have been identified, which is confirming the external validity of B. Kuo’s measure - CCCS. According to the results of the psychometric validating, Kuo’s measure could be used to determine the intensity of collective, avoidance and engagement coping in specific projectively given contexts or situations. At the same time, we fairly admit, that the results obtained with the help of Lazarus and Folkman’s WCQ, which we adapted into the Russian language earlier (2003), give sometimes neither less diverse nor less accurate ties of individual coping strategies with a context.

### 3. Predicting probability of coping types in certain contexts with the help of dispositional variables

A group of factors are influencing the respondents’ collective coping choice in the Career context such as: Interdependent Self ($\beta = 0.242; p = 0.000$), religiosity ($\beta = 0.178; p = 0.000$), stress level ($\beta = 0.137; p = 0.002$), collectivistic values ($\beta = 0.120; p = 0.017$), happiness ($\beta = 0.094; p = 0.038$). Two major factors – Independent Self ($\beta$
= 0.141; \ p = 0.004) and respondents’ age (\ \beta = 0.140; \ \ p = 0.005) are predicting avoidance coping in the Career context. Engagement coping in the job problems scenario has been chosen when the following factors have major influence: individualistic values (\ \beta = 0.183; \ \ p = 0.000), life satisfaction (\ \beta = 0.151; \ \ p = 0.001), Independent Self (\ \beta = 0.140; \ \ p = 0.006), Interdependent Self (\ \beta = 0.125; \ \ p = 0.009). The stress level has negative influence in this case (\ \beta = - 0.133; \ \ p = 0.004). It could be seen that the engagement coping choice in the Career context is caused by low stress, which is typical for 14% of the sample: stress level has stimulated or restrained subject’s activities. Individualistic values and life satisfaction promote activity, while dependence or independence of Self is probably insufficiently significant in this situation, not being a coping factor (this result demands more data and clarification).

Analyzing regression analysis results in the Illness context we could see that the collective coping choice is affected by a group of factors: Interdependent Self (\ \beta = 0.210; \ \ p = 0.000), stress level (\ \beta = 0.185; \ \ p = 0.000), religiosity (\ \beta = 0.161; \ \ p = 0.001), life satisfaction (\ \beta = 0.133; \ \ p = 0.004). Notably Interdependent Self has the greatest influence on the collective coping choice in the Illness context scenario as well as in the Career issues context.

Avoidance coping use in the Illness scenario is distinctively influenced by life satisfaction (\ \beta = 0.017). Life satisfaction and being healthy in particular, is very peculiar for the young people; it is what determines their avoiding health/illness problems. Our previous study showed that young respondents (university students) mentioned that headaches were the only health problem in the given context (Gushchina, 2013).

Engagement coping in the Illness context is chosen under the influence of variables: life satisfaction (\ \beta = 0.236; \ \ p = 0.000), individualistic values (\ \beta = 0.143; \ \ p = 0.005), stress level (\ \beta = - 0.128; \ \ p = 0.006), and Independent Self (\ \beta = 0.122; \ \ p = 0.017). We have observed that life satisfaction, especially combined with absence of serious health problems, lead to independent problem solving, sometimes without medical intervention, both contributing to active coping strategies. But a high stress level in the given context, reduces the probable choice of this coping type, actualizing collectivistic coping. In general, we could admit that life satisfaction influences coping in the Illness context, expanding the variety of coping strategies. To determine the effect of the situational context on coping types we used ANOVA. We considered the Career and Illness scenarios as an intra-group factor for collective, avoidance and engagement coping. We obtained statistically significant results, confirming the impact of the situation on a coping type and its intensity (Pillai trace = 0.15, F = 24.29, p = 0.000). Thereafter using a one-dimensional criterion, we have found out that the situational context factor (cf. Figure 1) has a fairly significant impact only on the collective coping (F = 54.09, p = 0.00). It has been more intense in the Illness scenario (\ \bar{m} = 29.61, \ \bar{SD} = 0.37), than in the Career scenario (\ \bar{m} = 27.52, \ \bar{SD} = 0.34). The ANOVA results suggest that the scenario or specified context, influence or predict choosing not all coping types.

**Figure 1**
The situational context predicting collective coping

**Discussion**

In the situation of lack of adequate measures to study the stress-coping socio-cultural context, we have made a contribution due to the adaptation and development of a new instrument – the cross-cultural coping scale by Ben Kuo and a group of Canadian authors. The measure is useful for investigating the influence of the socio-cultural context on the respondents’ coping choice for a wide range of users.

A similar adaptation had already been successfully carried out by Anna Kwiatkowska in Poland (Kwiatkowska, 2013). The scale has been successfully approved in several countries, including Canada, the USA, Norway, Germany, Poland, and Belarus.

**Conclusion**

The main results obtained in the study are the following: the situational context has the greatest impact on the Russian respondents’ choice of collective coping. Further questions have emerged during the study requiring more research and comprehensive interpretations: whether or not the other coping types (avoidance and engagement) are as sensitive to the context as the collective one or whether the socio-cultural context is not the major leading factor of the coping type choice in the Russian sample.

**Author note**

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References


