Structural Relations Between Personality Traits, Coping Strategy, Social Support and Well-Being Among Adolescents

Wan Shahrazad Wan Sulaiman*, Nor Ba’yah Abdul Kadir, Fatimah Wati Halim, Fatimah Omar, Rabiah Abdul Latiff and Wan Samhanin Wan Sulaiman
School of Psychology and Human Development, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The transition process from familiar surroundings to new places may overtax adolescents’ capacity to maintain their well-being. The goal of this study is to test the conceptual model of adolescents’ well-being. This model examines the predictors of well-being among adolescents comprise of individual factors of personality traits, coping strategy and social support. These variables will predict the criterion of well-being which is measured by three variables: positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction. This research employs survey method to 315 adolescents between the ages of 18 to 21 years old. Five standard psychological tests are administered to the respondents. The tests include the adapted NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), Brief Cope, Social Support Behaviors Scale (SSB), Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Data are analyzed using descriptive analyses, correlation and structural equation modeling (SEM). The results of structural equation modeling show that the data have goodness-of-fit with the model. Thus, validating the model of adolescents’ well-being. The results also show that there are significant relationships between personality traits and coping strategy, personality traits and social support, coping strategy and well-being, and social support with well-being. In addition, both coping strategy and social support significantly mediate the relationship between personality traits and well-being.

Keywords: Personality, coping, social support, well-being

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is an important developmental stage for every individual as it is a transition period from childhood to adulthood. It is
the one stage most marked by rapid and tumultuous transition (Cook & Furstenberg, 2002). Furthermore, adolescence is described as a time of “storm and stress” due to the rapid changes in physical and emotional development which can lead to conflicts between adolescents and authority figures. While the transition is inevitable, the speed and magnitude of these changes overtax the capacity for many young people to cope (Davis, 2003; Jessors, 1993). In the course of these physical, cognitive and emotional developmental processes, these individual differences may influence the psychological well-being of adolescents.

The period of transition from familiar surroundings of home and school to the new environment of college may influence the adjustment process such as homesickness, social anxiety (Urani et al., 2003), increased use of alcohol (Economos et al., 2008), symptoms of depression (Schroevers et al., 2007), anxiety and absent-mindedness (Fisher & Hood, 1987). The role of family and parents must still be fostered although the process of transition to college lead adolescents to form relationships and rely more on their peer groups. As such, adolescents still need the social support from family and peers even when they move towards achieving independence in adulthood. Most likely, young people talk to friends or family members as the first step of seeking support (Rickwood et al., 2005). Having strong social support from family and peers is a major component in effective coping strategy. Therefore, securely attached individuals who possess strong social support indirectly will also have good coping strategy. Sarason et al. (1987) discovers that individuals that are accepted, loved and involved in open-communication relationships are found to be less depressed or lonely and more satisfied with current relationships as compared to those who are less fortunate in acceptance, love and communication. The research further states that people with high levels of social support have low anxiety levels, high positive self-concepts, and possess beliefs in their own ability to control aspects of their environment (Sarason et al., 1983).

Seiffge-Krenke (1990) and Wrzesniewski and Chylinska (2007) studies find that adolescents aged between 15-19 years consistently use various coping strategies. Many studies have confirmed the importance of personality traits in stress and coping processes (Bolger, 1990; Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; Ferguson, 2001; Leandro & Castillo, 2010). Personality traits and coping strategies have been found as two significant factors affecting subjective well-being (Malkoc, 2011). These findings support McCrae and Costa (1996) proposition that connect the five factor personality model with coping responses. Lazarus (1999) also proposes that a certain personality trait may affect coping thoughts and behaviours in situations which are salient and relevant to the trait.

Effective coping strategy is found to be related to psychological distress such as depression, anxiety, hopelessness, anger, and interpersonal distress (Heppner & Lee, 2002). In other words, when individuals...
think that they are unable to cope with problems effectively, they tend to become depressed, anxious, hopeless, and angry. These emotions indicate that individuals using ineffective coping strategy may experience more negative emotions as compared to individuals using effective coping strategy. In addition, it also indicates the relationship between ineffective coping strategy with personality characteristics of individuals. Wei et al. (2003) states that persons who perceive themselves as ineffective problem solvers report themselves to be more interpersonally sensitive, less trusting of other people, more socially anxious, and less interpersonally assertive and engage in less social support.

One of the most robust findings in the literature on affect and personality is the strong correlation between dispositional global positive affect and the Big Five factor Extraversion (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1980; Gross et al., 1998; John, 1990; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989; McCrae & John, 1992; Watson & Clark, 1997). Extraversion scores predict frequency and intensity of felt positive emotion, as well as reactivity to positive feedback (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989; Meyer & Shack, 1989; Watson & Clark, 1997).

A relationship between affect and personality has been predicted from a number of theoretical perspectives, including emotion and temperament theories (e.g., Goldsmith & Campos, 1982) and personality disposition theories (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1980; Watson & Clark, 1984). In Western studies, two of the Big Five dimensions of personality, Extraversion and Neuroticism, have been linked consistently to the experience of PA and NA, respectively (Costa & McCrae, 1980; McCrae & Costa, 1991; Watson & Clark, 1992). The few researchers who have related the remaining Big Five dimensions to affect have tended to find that Agreeableness and Conscientiousness are correlated positively with PA and negatively with NA and that Openness to Experience is positively associated with PA but associated in a less consistent manner, if at all, with NA (McCrae & Costa, 1991; Watson & Clark, 1992).

As evidenced from the relationship among the variables of personality, social support, coping strategy and well-being, the study is detrimental in assessing these relationship patterns in order to ascertain that a fully adjusted adolescent can develop into a healthy adult. It is due to the longitudinal impact of mental health problems in adolescence that may be pervasive including disrupted and problematic relationships (Boden et al., 2008), future negative mental health outcomes, higher welfare dependence (Fergusson et al., 2007), reduced workforce participation, lower income and lower economic living standards (Gibb et al., 2010).

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

This research aims at testing the conceptual model of adolescents’ well-being that examines the interrelationships between four variables. Thus, the main objectives of this research are:
1. examining the direct relationship between personality traits with social support and coping strategy;
2. examining the direct relationship between social support and coping strategy with well-being that includes positive and negative affect and life satisfaction); and
3. testing the model of adolescents’ well-being based on the interrelationships among all the variables.

METHOD

Respondents
The respondents include 315 participants aged between 18 to 21 years old (Mean=19.11, SD=1.48). These respondents have been recruited from three community colleges in Klang valley, Malaysia. They are segregated in their respective classes and informed about the research. The participation is voluntary. In fact, most of the students have agreed to participate. The researchers distribute the questionnaires to the students. The students are informed that all responses shall be anonymous and treated confidential. Subsequently, they are requested to answer the questionnaires. They are given 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete the questionnaires. A total of 348 questionnaires have been distributed. Only 33 questionnaires are eliminated due to incomplete answers. The sample comprises of 95 students from Selayang Community College, 82 students from Hulu Selangor Community College and 138 students from Hulu Langat Community College.

Participants include 185 male and 130 female participants. The data collection takes 3 months to complete, that is from June to August 2012. Ethical approval is obtained by approval of grant from Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. The data collection process adheres to ethics of research as recommended by APA such as assuring confidentiality, maintaining anonymity and securing consent from respondents.

Research Instruments
This study contains four variables such as personality traits, coping strategy, social support, and well-being. They were measured by the adapted NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), Brief COPE, the Social Support Behavior Scale (SSB), the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). In addition, participants are asked to fill out some demographic information.

i. The NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI).

The adapted NEO Five Factor Inventory is used to measure personality traits. There are five dimensions measured which are neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. The inventory is a self-report questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale. It consists of 60 items.

ii. The Brief COPE is used to measure various dimensions of coping strategy. This research employs the brief
version consisting of 28 items and 14 dimensions.

iii. The Social Support Behaviors Scale (SSB)

The Social Support Behaviors Scale (SSB) is used to measure social support. The original SSB is a 45-item instrument designed to measure social support. However, in this study we use the short form of SSB which consists of 23 items. The five dimensions measured in this scale are emotional, socializing, financial assistance, practical assistance, and advice/guidance. The SSB is rated separately for family and friends. The scale uses a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = no one would do this, 2 = someone might do this, 3 = some family members/friends would probably do this, 4 = some family members/friends would certainly do this and 5 = most family members/friends would certainly do this. The SSB has a very good internal consistency with Cronbach Alphas exceeding .85 for several college samples (Vaux & Riedel, 1987). In a study conducted in Malaysia, Md. Aris Safree and Mariam Adawiah (2010) report that coefficient alpha values of .89 for social support from family, and .79 for social support from friends.

iv. The Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS).

This scale contains of 10 items measuring positive affect and 10 items measuring negative affect. Although high correlation is found with components of subjective well-being scales (such as positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction), this inventory is able to discriminate life satisfaction from affect through moderate correlation with positive affect (r= .43) and negative affect (r= -0.27) (PANAS).

v. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was developed by Diener (1984) and consisted five statements measuring general life satisfaction. Respondents were asked to rate the items using a 7-point scale with 1 =strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 =slightly agree, 6 =agree, 7 =strongly agree. Reliability as reported by Diener et al. (1985) showed that the two-month test-retest correlation coefficient was .82, and coefficient alpha was .87 indicating that the SWLS has desirable psychometric properties.

RESULTS

SPSS version 19 is used to analyze data. Respondents’ demographic profile is presented in Table 1. Based on illustration from Table 1 , a total of 185 respondents (58.7%) are male and another 130 respondents (41.3%) are female. A total of 110 respondents (34.9%) are 18 years old, 66 respondents (21.0%) are 19 years old, 113 respondents (35.9%) are 20 years old, and 26 respondents (8.3%) are 21 years
old. Majority of the respondents are Malays (86.7%), 2.9% respondents are Chinese, 10.2% are Indian, and 0.3% are of other ethnicity.

Relationship between Personality Traits with Social Support and Coping Strategy

Table 2 presents the results of correlation among the variables. The findings show that problem focused coping strategy are significantly correlated with neuroticism, extraversion, openness and conscientiousness but not with agreeableness. Avoidance coping strategy is positively and significantly correlated with neuroticism, and negatively and significantly correlated with agreeableness. However, no significant correlation is found between avoidance coping strategy with extraversion, openness and conscientiousness. Family social support is only significantly correlated with extraversion and conscientiousness but not with neuroticism, openness and agreeableness. Peer social support is also significantly correlated with extraversion and conscientiousness but not with neuroticism, openness and agreeableness.

Relationship between Social Support and Coping Strategy with Well-being

Table 2 also shows the results between social support, coping strategy and well-being. The results indicate that there are significant correlations between family social support with positive affect and life satisfaction. However, there is no significant correlation observed between family social support and negative affect. The same pattern of results is obtained for peer social support with significant correlations between peer social support with positive affect and life satisfaction. While, no significant correlation is obtained with negative affect. Problem-focused

---

**TABLE 1**
Respondents’ Demographic Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolej Komuniti Hulu Langat</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolej Komuniti Hulu Selangor</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolej Komuniti Selayang</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 yrs</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 yrs</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 yrs</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 yrs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2
Correlations Among Personality Traits, Social Support, Coping Strategy And Well-Being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion (2)</td>
<td>-.093</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness (3)</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.300**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness (4)</td>
<td>-.247**</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>-.028</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness (5)</td>
<td>-.164**</td>
<td>.426**</td>
<td>.445**</td>
<td>.222**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem (6)</td>
<td>.150**</td>
<td>.171**</td>
<td>.251**</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.372**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance (7)</td>
<td>.331**</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>-.150**</td>
<td>-.095</td>
<td>.306**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (8)</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.119*</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.164**</td>
<td>.281**</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer (9)</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>.147**</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.136*</td>
<td>.230**</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>.436**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA (10)</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>.340”</td>
<td>.264”</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>.335”</td>
<td>.279**</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.255**</td>
<td>.168**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA (11)</td>
<td>.452**</td>
<td>-.068</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>-.088</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.166**</td>
<td>.382**</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.155**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life (12)</td>
<td>-.126”</td>
<td>.153”</td>
<td>.239”</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.265**</td>
<td>.148**</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.183**</td>
<td>.147**</td>
<td>.276**</td>
<td>-.138*</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<0.01, *p<0.05
coping strategy is significantly correlated with positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction. On the other hand, avoidance coping strategy is significantly correlated with negative affect. While, no significant correlations is recorded with positive affect and life satisfaction.

Testing the Model of Personality-Well-being Among Adolescents

Subsequently, we test the model of adolescents’ well-being using structural equation modeling. The predictors specified in this model are the five traits of personality, problem focused and avoidance coping strategies, family and peer social support. While, the criteria or outcome is well-being with the indicators of positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction. The results show that the model has good fit data with \( \chi^2=199.64, p<0.0001, \) CMIN/df=4.34, GFI=0.90 and RMSEA=0.10. The goodness of fit indices of CMIN/df, GFI and RMSEA fulfill the requirements of a good fit model as recommended by Hair et al. (2006).

Next, we analyse the results of standardized regression weights of each path to determine the direct and indirect effects of the predictors towards the outcome variable. The results show that the path coefficient between personality traits and coping strategy is significant with \( \beta=0.49, p<0.05. \) There is also significant path coefficient between personality traits and social support with \( \beta=0.36, p<0.05. \) In addition, there is significant path coefficient between coping strategy and well-being with \( \beta=0.36, p<0.05. \) Finally, the results also show significant path coefficient between social support and well-being with \( \beta=0.42, p<0.05. \)

Apart from that, we examine the role of coping strategy and social support as mediator variables in the relationship between personality traits and well-being. This index is calculated by using the Hair et al. (2006) recommendation; that is, by multiplying the path coefficient of personality traits and coping strategy and coping strategy and well-being \( (0.49 \times 0.36=0.18) \). The result of indirect effect of 0.18 is deemed important mediator effect as recommended by Hair et al. (2006). The role of social support is also important with indirect effect of 0.15 \( (0.36 \times 0.42=0.15) \). Therefore, both coping strategy and social support are significant variables that mediate between personality and well-being. In addition, all the predictors of personality traits, coping strategy and social support contribute 36% variance towards adolescents’ well-being.

DISCUSSION

Neuroticism trait is significantly correlated with problem-focused coping strategy and avoidance coping strategy. It means that individuals with emotional instability trait will become more anxious when they use problem focused coping strategy. In addition, these types of people become more emotionally unstable when they use avoidance coping strategy. This is consistent with Wei et al.’s (2003) statement that persons who perceive themselves as ineffective problem solvers report themselves to be more interpersonally sensitive, less trusting
Moodiness, anxiety, and depression reflect higher neuroticism. Neuroticism has also been linked to the avoidance temperament (Caspi & Shiner 2006; Caspi et al., 2005; Evans & Rothbart, 2007). It suggests that anxiety and sensitivity to threat is indeed its emotional core.

On the other hand, extroverts, open and conscientious individuals tend to use more problem-focused coping which is an effective coping strategy. This is supported by the notion that extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness are all relate to perceiving events as challenges rather than threats and to positive appraisals of coping resources (Penley & Tomaka, 2002; Vollrath, 2001). In addition, findings also show that agreeableness is negatively and significantly correlated with avoidance coping. It means that the higher scores on agreeableness, the lower scores that individuals acquire in avoidance coping. In other words, less agreeable people tend to use more avoidance coping. Agreeable people are friendly and helpful (John & Srivastava, 1999), empathic (Graziano et al., 2007), and able to inhibit their negative feelings (Graziano & Eisenberg 1999).

The findings also indicate that only extraversion and conscientiousness traits are significantly correlated with family social support.
social support and peer social support. This is consistent with the traits of extroverts which is often thought of as implying sociability (Ashton et al., 2002). It means that extroverts constantly seek relationship and support from others. In particular, extrovert adolescents constantly need support from family and their peers. In addition, conscientious adolescents, characterized by their qualities of planning, persistence, and purposeful striving toward goals (Digman & Inouye, 1986), always seek social support in achieving their goals.

Adolescents who perceive that they receive social support from their families and peers have positive affect and high life satisfaction. At the same time, they experience no negative affect. It means that maintaining strong social support can increase the well-being of adolescents in terms of their positive emotions and life satisfaction. This is consistent with Rickwood et al.'s (2005) study that states young people are most likely to talk to friends or family members as the first step in seeking support. The findings of the current study also support Sarason et al.'s (1987) findings that indicate individuals that are accepted, loved and involved in open-communication relationships are found to be less depressed or lonely, more satisfied with current relationships, possess low anxiety levels, positive self-concepts, and a belief in their own ability to control aspects of their environment (Sarason et al., 1983).

In addition, adolescents using effective coping strategy such as problem-focused coping have higher scores in positive affect and life satisfaction. In contrast, those using ineffective coping strategy such as avoidance coping experience more negative affect. This is consistent with Malkoc's (2011) findings that affirm personality traits and coping strategies have been discovered as two significant factors affecting subjective well-being.

The results show that all personality traits are significant predictors with conscientiousness showing the strongest loading. It is followed by openness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. They significantly predict effective coping strategy used by adolescents. Problem focused coping strategy is preferred to avoidance coping strategy. These effective coping strategies in turn, influence the positive well-being experienced by adolescents. They report that they have higher positive affect and life satisfaction.

In addition, the personality traits also significantly predict social support received from family and peer groups. Although were experiencing, Family social support is deemed to be more important as compared to peer social support even though adolescents experience separation as a result of adjusting to college life. The strong social support received from family and peer groups predict the well-being of adolescents with higher experiences of positive affect and life satisfaction. Both coping strategy and social support are significant mediators in the relationship between personality traits and well-being of adolescents. In other words, in order for adolescents to experience well-being, they need to get strong social
support and use appropriate coping strategy together with having strong personality traits of conscientiousness, openness and extraversion.

CONCLUSION
These findings give important implications in the understanding of adolescents’ well-being. Well-adjusted adolescents are those with personality traits of conscientiousness, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and emotional stability. They also employ more problem focused coping strategy when confronted with problems. Family and friends must also provide adolescents with strong social support to enable them to experience positive emotions and satisfaction in their lives. The results provide an important profile of well-adjusted adolescents. The knowledge of these characteristics shall enable us to monitor their well-being. It might assist us in helping less fortunate adolescents such as juvenile delinquents, young offenders and runaways. These groups of individuals may not know what the appropriate coping strategies to be used are and may not receive adequate social support. These groups of individuals may not even know about appropriate coping strategies and may not receive adequate social support. As such, psychologists, counsellors and social workers may use these findings in intervention programs to develop well-adjusted adolescents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The researchers have been supported generously by Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia and the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia on UKM-SK-05-FRGS0229-2010 grant. The researchers would like to express their sincere appreciation for all the support provided.

REFERENCES


Cook, T., & Furstenberg, F. (2002). Explaining aspects of the transition to adulthood in Italy, Sweden, Germany, and the United States: A cross-


