Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Individual Differences in Adolescent Coping: Comparing a Community Sample and a Low-SES Sample to Understand Coping in Context

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Coping that is adaptive in low-stress environments can be ineffective or detrimental in the context of poverty. Identifying coping profiles among adolescents facing varying levels of stress can increase understanding of when and for whom coping may be most adaptive. The present study applied latent profile analysis (LPA) to identify coping profiles in two distinct samples of adolescents: a community sample of youth aged 11-16 years (N = 374, Mage = 13.14, 53% girls), and a low-SES sample of youth aged 12-18 years (N = 304, Mage = 14.56, 55% girls). The ten coping subscales of the Responses to Stress Questionnaire were included as indicators in the LPAs (problem solving, emotion regulation, emotion expression, acceptance, positive thinking, cognitive restructuring, distraction, denial, wishful thinking, and avoidance). Five profiles were identified in the community sample: Inactive, Low Engagement, Cognitive, Engaged, and Active Copers. All but the Low Engagement Copers profile were also identified in the low-SES sample, suggesting that adolescents employ similar coping strategies across contexts, but fewer low-SES adolescents engage in lower levels of coping. Profiles differed by gender and symptoms of internalizing psychopathology. Inactive copers in both samples were more likely to be male. Engaged Copers reported the lowest symptom levels whereas Active Copers reported higher symptoms. Cognitive Copers reported higher levels of anxious and depressive symptoms in the low-SES sample only, suggesting that this pattern of coping may be protective only in less stressful contexts. Elucidating within-person coping patterns is a promising avenue for targeting interventions to those most likely to benefit.

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