

The Relationship between Cultural Stress, Coping Strategies, and Externalizing Behaviors among Latinx Youth in the U.S.

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Abstract

Latinx youth and their families in the U.S. face systemic stressors such as acculturative strain, discrimination, and economic hardship, which can negatively impact family dynamics. The relevant literature indicates that disruptions in parenting can lead to increased externalizing behaviors in adolescents, which are often heightened by family-related stressors, despite being common during this developmental stage. Latinx families have cultural resources, such as heritage-language retention, that can help protect against these stresses. However, socioeconomic strain can weaken family cohesion and exacerbate externalizing behaviors. Chronic stress can impair emotional regulation and increase the likelihood of these behaviors, even in those without a biological predisposition. This study explored the relationship between coping strategies, family stress, and externalizing behaviors, focusing on the influence of socioeconomic strain and Spanish-language retention. Findings showed that female adolescents reported higher family stress, which was linked to reduced engagement in coping. After excluding outliers, increased secondary control coping correlated with fewer rule-breaking behaviors. In summary, the study highlights how stress impacts externalizing behaviors through less effective coping strategies among Latinx adolescents from immigrant families.

Keywords: *Latinx Youth, Family Stress, Cultural Resources, Mental Health, and Externalizing Behaviors*

1.0. Introduction

Latinx youth represent one of the fastest-growing demographic groups in the United States (Flores, 2017). Although many Latinx immigrants arrive in the US in search of opportunities, prevailing social rhetoric and the political climate often foster discriminatory attitudes and policies that can adversely impact their levels of stress and overall well-being (Graves et al., 2021). Nonetheless, when Latinx families migrate, they bring valuable cultural resources that can provide insulation and protection against the various stressors inherent in immigration and acculturation (Nair et al., 2018). These factors distinctly influence the development of Latinx youth, particularly during adolescence, when they are developing new competencies.

A crucial competency that adolescents must develop is the ability to regulate their emotions in the face of stressors (Compas et al., 2017). The effective utilization of adaptive coping skills is associated with enhanced psychosocial functioning. For Latinx adolescents, achieving this developmental competency is influenced by the broader socio-political context in which they live (Compas et al., 2017; Flores, 2017).

As adolescents strive for maturity, they often test boundaries, which can manifest in externalizing behaviors characterized by rule-breaking and aggression. Some degree of externalizing behavior is not only developmentally appropriate but also expected across various cultures and countries during adolescence (Givens & Reid, 2019). While most adolescents cease engaging in significant externalizing behaviors before reaching adulthood, a small subset that continues to exhibit such behaviors faces negative long-term outcomes (Martinez & Polo, 2018). Research on the etiology of externalizing behaviors has evolved to reflect the complex interplay between biological vulnerabilities—such as impulsivity and heightened physiological reactivity—and environmental risk factors, including family stress, parenting practices, and adverse experiences (Vargas & Mittal, 2021). Meta-analyses suggest that interventions targeting school-aged children that address underlying causes of aggression and conduct problems—such as deficits in social skills and emotion regulation—are effective in reducing problem behaviors (LaMontagne et al., 2023). While coping skill usage is sometimes regarded as a separate construct, it is often considered an integral component of emotion regulation (Compas et al., 2017). Consequently, maladaptive coping behaviors may contribute to the emergence of externalizing behaviors in adolescents (LaMontagne et al., 2023; Martinez & Polo, 2018).

Latinx adolescents experience a unique combination of stressors and protective cultural factors that significantly influence their development, particularly regarding their emotional regulation and coping abilities (Ramos et al., 2022). The interplay of risk and resilience within their environments presents intriguing implications for the potential emergence of externalizing behaviors during adolescence. As such, a greater understanding of the associations between coping skill usage and externalizing behaviors in Latinx adolescents is needed to better support the unique needs of this community (Martinez & Polo, 2018). The present study builds upon existing research on the effects of systemic and familial stressors, protective cultural processes, and coping skill usage in the development of externalizing symptoms in Latinx adolescents (Wasserman et al., 2024). Specifically, this study will evaluate whether coping skill use mediates the relationship between family-related stress and externalizing symptoms among Latinx youth, in the context of broader systemic stressors and protective cultural processes (Ramos et al., 2022; Wasserman et al., 2024).

2.0. Literature Review

The Latinx population in the United States has significantly grown, rising from 16.3% in 2010 to 18.7% in 2020 (Jones et al., 2021). As of July 1, 2024, the Census Bureau estimates the Hispanic and Latino population in the United States at approximately 68 million. This demographic accounts for approximately 20% of the U.S. population, making it the nation's second-largest racial or ethnic group and a crucial contributor to national population growth (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). From 2000 to 2024, the Latino population nearly doubled, increasing from 35.3 million to 68 million (Newman et al., 2018). The population has a relatively young median age compared to the non-Hispanic white population, with 25.7% of individuals under 18. As of 2020, individuals of Mexican origin constitute the largest subgroup, accounting for 61.6% of the total Hispanic population, followed by Puerto Ricans at 9.6%, Central Americans at 9.3%, and South Americans at 6.4% (Jones et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2018).

More than half of the total population growth in the United States from 2010 to 2024 can be attributed to the growth of the Latinx population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). While the growth of the Latinx population from the 1970s to the 1990s was predominantly driven by immigration, US-born Latinx individuals have since become the primary contributors to population growth (Flores, 2017). Specifically, from 2010 to 2015, the Latinx population grew by 1.9 million due to immigration, while 5 million of this growth was due to US births during the same period (Flores, 2017). Additionally, the Latinx population under 18 in the United States grew by 22% from 2006 to 2016, reaching an estimated total of 18.3 million youths (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Conversely, the populations of White and Black individuals under the age of 18 declined during this period. According to Jones et al. (2021), Latinx individuals accounted for 25.7% of all individuals under 18 years of age, compared with 16.8% of the adult population. This demographic trend indicates that Latinx youth represent a growing segment of the population whose cultural contributions, strengths, and needs warrant significant consideration (Flores, 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

The Latinx population is inherently diverse, encompassing individuals with ancestry spanning North, Central, and South America—regions characterized by distinct cultures and historical contexts (Lovato & Abrams, 2020). The history of many of these areas includes the destabilizing effects of colonization and exploitation by external entities, which often compel individuals to seek refuge through emigration. The process of emigration to a new country can induce considerable stress, potentially impacting familial dynamics (Torres et al., 2018). Immigration-related stressors experienced by Latinx parents may adversely affect their US-born children due to the influence of parental stress on family functioning (Masarik & Conger, 2017). Nonetheless, Latinx youth often inherit valuable cultural resources from their families that may serve as protective factors against the negative mental health effects associated with stress (Masarik & Conger, 2017; Torres et al., 2018).

Notably, Latinx adolescents in the United States possess a distinct profile of risk and resilience that significantly influences their accomplishment of developmental milestones, including the development of emotional regulation and coping strategies (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018). This same profile equally affects the propensity to exhibit externalizing behaviors (Park et al., 2018). However, there exists a gap in understanding the pathways linking the utilization of coping skills to externalizing behaviors within the framework of broader systemic stressors and cultural protective factors pertinent to Latinx youth. Systemic stressors, such as experiences of discrimination, have been shown to heighten family conflict and stress (Masarik & Conger, 2017), thereby increasing the likelihood of externalizing behaviors (Ponting et al., 2018). Additionally, these stressors impair the body's capacity to engage in automatic biological processes essential to effective emotional regulation (Park et al., 2018; Vargas & Mittal, 2021).

Consistently stressful environments may condition hyperactivity of the sympathetic nervous system, a trait associated with biological impulsivity and an elevated risk of engaging in externalizing behaviors (Ponting et al., 2018). While certain individuals may possess a genetic predisposition towards externalizing behaviors, environmental stressors can also modify neural architecture, thereby amplifying these risks, notably by increasing impulsivity (Bennett et al., 2020). Moreover, research indicates that deficits in sympathetic nervous system reactivity can adversely affect both the automatic and effortful selection of emotion regulation techniques under stress (Masarik & Conger, 2017). Over time, the avoidance of stressors may evolve into conditioned, stable behavior, leading to adverse mental health outcomes, such as the manifestation of externalizing behaviors (Compas et al., 2017), which may result in a subjective experience of heightened stress. Consequently, this conditioning of a disengagement stress response may further exacerbate the risk for externalizing behaviors by increasing biological vulnerability (Bennett et al., 2020; Roubinov & Luecken, 2013).

In conclusion, while stress is not a singular causal factor in the engagement of externalizing behaviors, a complex interplay of environmental influences and genetic predispositions contributes to such risk (Bennett et al., 2020). In particular, family conflict has been identified as a predictor of externalizing behaviors among Latinx adolescents (Martinez & Polo, 2018). Thus, it is imperative to consider the potential for maladaptive coping skill usage to longitudinally reinforce externalizing behaviors among a population that may experience family stress as a consequence of systemic stressors (Masarik & Conger, 2017). Subsequently, the present study aims to improve understanding of the factors influencing externalizing behaviors in Latinx youth (Bennett et al., 2020). It will examine how cultural and socioeconomic contexts affect family stress and coping strategies. Specifically, this research will investigate whether family stress predicts subsequent externalizing behaviors in Latinx adolescents from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. Additionally, the study will consider systemic stressors, such as low SES, alongside protective factors, such as higher proficiency in Spanish (Masarik & Conger, 2017; Ramos et al., 2022).

3.0. Latinx Cultural Protective Processes

Cultural contexts that encompass diverse populations are recognized as a significant factor in the pertinent literature (Martinez & Polo, 2018). The resilience exhibited by the Latinx population in the United States has been the subject of extensive study, particularly in light of the Latino Health Paradox (Arora et al., 2021). This paradox holds that Latinx immigrants frequently exhibit better health outcomes than their socioeconomically comparable peers from other ethnic groups in the United States (Held et al., 2018). A significant body of research has sought to identify and elucidate the cultural values that contribute to the success of Latinx families in diverse environments (Arora et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2022).

Several critical cultural values have been identified by researchers, including *Espiritu*, *Respeto*, and *Familismo* (Martinez & Polo, 2018). These values have shown a capacity to mitigate the risk of negative psychological and academic repercussions among Latinx youth who encounter discrimination (Ponting et al., 2018). *Espiritu* underscores the importance of spiritual values, *Familismo* accentuates the centrality of family ties (Stein et al., 2024), and *Respeto* relates to the concept of showing reverence and deference to elders (Salcido & Stein, 2024).

3.1. *Espiritu*

Espiritu, defined as the belief and confidence in a higher power, has been recognized as a significant cultural value within the Latinx community that offers protective benefits against psychopathology (Borelli et al., 2021a). Research indicates that *Espiritu* is not correlated with coping mechanisms characterized by wishful thinking; rather, it serves as a safeguard against depressive symptoms for individuals under high stress (Roubinov & Luecken, 2013). It has been demonstrated that *Espiritu* effectively mitigates depressive symptoms among Latinx individuals, particularly in contexts characterized by elevated stress levels (Marín-Chollom & Revenson, 2021). Importantly, findings suggest that the efficacy of various stress-reduction techniques in alleviating depressive symptoms is contingent upon the presence of high levels of *Espiritu*. Collectively, these cultural values play a crucial role in protecting Latinx families from life's stressors (Borelli et al., 2021a; Marín-Chollom & Revenson, 2021).

3.2. *Familismo*

The relevant research literature indicated that Latinx cultural values, particularly *Familismo*—which emphasizes the prioritization of family and fulfillment of familial obligations—are associated with a decrease in externalizing symptoms among Latinx youth (Gonzales et al., 2022). *Familismo* promotes family support, sacrifices for family members' well-being, and collaborative decision-making; it exemplifies a collectivist cultural perspective (Marín-Chollom & Revenson, 2021). Numerous studies have demonstrated that elevated levels of *Familismo* correlate with a reduction in problematic behaviors and lower aggression in Latinx adolescents, irrespective of whether they were born in Mexico or the United States (Givens & Reid, 2019). Additionally, *Familismo* serves as a protective factor against aggression in contexts of acculturative stress and helps to alleviate conflicts between parents and children (Martinez & Polo, 2018; Ponting et al., 2018).

Furthermore, *Familismo* offers protective benefits against depression in Latinx youth, particularly among those whose parents are terminally ill (Wang et al., 2022). Adolescents who exhibit strong *Familismo* values tend to employ more effective coping strategies, as avoidance of stressors is linked to increased depressive symptoms, while a reframed perspective yields positive outcomes (Marín-Chollom & Revenson, 2021). In summary, *Familismo* appears to play a critical protective role in the mental health of youth and enhances coping strategies among Latinx adolescents (LaMontagne et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022).

3.3. *Respeto*

The concept of *Respeto* is intricately connected to *Familismo*, emphasizing the importance of demonstrating respect towards elders, particularly within the family unit (Stein et al., 2024). Research has indicated that *Familismo* may serve as a protective factor against externalizing symptoms in Latinx adolescents by fostering a commitment to uphold the family's reputation, closely linked to the principle of *Respeto* (Marín-Chollom & Revenson, 2021). Another pertinent concept is *Affiliative Obedience* (LaMontagne et al., 2023), which underscores the importance of showing respect and yielding to family elders. This principle is associated with lower rates of externalizing behaviors among Latinx youth, especially in stable neighborhoods with higher concentrations of Latinx residents (Martinez & Polo, 2018; Stein et al., 2024).

Familismo and other family-centric values within the Latinx community are believed to mitigate externalizing behaviors by disrupting potential pathways between systemic stressors and behavioral issues within the family context (Weisskirch, 2025). Specifically, these values may serve as a safeguard against the emergence of family conflict and stress, which could otherwise disrupt effective parenting and lead to subsequent adjustment challenges for children and adolescents within the family (Masarik & Conger, 2017). Therefore, the values upheld by Latinx families play a pivotal role in reducing the risk of externalizing behaviors by protecting the family system from the adverse effects of systemic stressors (Lovato, 2020; Weisskirch, 2025).

4.0. Preservation of Latinx Cultural Heritage

Martinez & Polo (2018) examined how families successfully preserve protective cultural resources intrinsic to various facets of Latinx culture. Individuals inherit their family's cultural values through a process known as cultural transmission, which occurs via mechanisms such as linguistic socialization (Rocha, 2021). Thus, cultural practices and values are frequently passed down through generations, predominantly through language, particularly the heritage language (Colón-Quintana, et al., 2022). In addition to elucidating how cultural values are articulated in Spanish, the retention of Spanish among Latinx youth may offer substantial opportunities to reinforce their heritage language and culture through various community members (Perreira et al., 2019). More specifically, the retention of complex aspects of heritage language is crucial for cultural transmission across generations, as it necessitates consistent input and feedback from elders concerning diverse linguistic and cultural norms (Colón-Quintana, et al., 2022). Consequently, youth who exhibit proficiency in their heritage language typically experience greater benefits from Latinx cultural values, as evidenced by reduced levels of externalizing behaviors, including substance use and criminal behaviors. This protective influence is often associated with a dynamic heritage community where Spanish is predominantly spoken (Rocha, 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

The retention of the heritage language is essential for enculturation and serves as a buffer against the challenges of acculturation for youth from immigrant backgrounds (Wang et al., 2022). Engaging in complex linguistic tasks, such as narrative production, necessitates adherence to family norms and serves as a critical indicator of cultural preservation (Schofield et al., 2017). Children's proficiency in their heritage language is augmented through adult guidance, particularly in complex narrative tasks that require advanced linguistic capabilities. Feedback from Spanish-speaking adults is crucial for enhancing narrative accuracy in bilingual children, as the interplay of linguistic and cultural differences influences the reinforcement of these complex features (Weisskirch, 2025). Therefore, the retention of more complex characteristics of one's heritage language may serve as a significant indicator of the extent to which future generations maintain their cultural heritage (Schofield et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2022).

5.0. Systemic Stressors

Many Latinx families have a rich cultural heritage that enhances their identity and strengthens their communities. However, they also face significant stressors as they navigate life in the United States (Sanchez et al., 2017). Extensive research, including over 50 studies across various populations, shows that these chronic stressors can greatly increase the likelihood of individuals developing externalizing symptoms, such as aggression and behavioral problems, as well as internalizing symptoms, such as depression and anxiety (Suárez-Orozco & López-Hernández, 2020). Particularly concerning is the experience of numerous Latinx adolescents who grapple with the dual challenges of discrimination and the pressures associated with the acculturation process (Vargas & Mittal, 2021). These experiences often lead to heightened levels of stress within families, which can manifest in a range of behavioral issues among children and adolescents. The compounded effect of these stressors underscores the complex interplay between cultural identity, social challenges, and mental health within the Latinx community (Arora et al., 2021; Suárez-Orozco & López-Hernández, 2020).

5.1. Discrimination

Discrimination represents a substantial systemic stressor encountered by Latinx individuals in the United States (Bekteshi & Kang, 2020). For many minority youth, discrimination functions as a considerable stressor that may heighten the prevalence of both internalizing behaviors (Bennett et al., 2020) and externalizing behaviors (Bennett et al., 2020). Beyond its negative implications for mental health, discrimination has been consistently linked to adverse physical health outcomes (Park et al., 2018). Additionally, perceived discrimination has been directly associated with increased aggression and hazardous drinking behaviors among Latinx adolescents (Park et al., 2018; Ponting et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, Latinx youth encounter discrimination in various environments and from multiple sources throughout their lives (Ponting et al., 2018). In educational settings, Latinx youth commonly face discrimination from both peers and educators, with discriminatory actions by educators significantly predicting future internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Bennett et al., 2020). A study involving 455 rural Latinx adolescents revealed a significant correlation between perceived discrimination and externalizing behaviors in male participants; however, this correlation was not evident among female participants (Ponting et al., 2018).

Additionally, another study that included 302 Latinx adolescents in the Southeastern and Southwestern United States found that stress associated with discrimination significantly predicted an increased likelihood of smoking, binge drinking, depression, physical aggression, and rule-breaking behaviors, regardless of gender (Cano et al., 2015; Givens, E. M., & Reid, 2019).

Moreover, research conducted with 246 Latinx adolescents indicated that the strength of the relationship between discrimination and externalizing symptoms could be alleviated if participants possessed a robust ethnic identity, social support, and the ability to regulate or suppress their anger (Park et al., 2018). For teens who openly show anger, discrimination is more strongly linked to externalizing behaviors (Martinez & Polo, 2019). In summary, discrimination emerges as a pervasive source of stress in the lives of Latinx youth, wherein their cultural and psychological resources significantly influence their management, experience, and expression of this stress (Park et al., 2018; Ramos et al., 2022).

5.2. Acculturation and Acculturative Stress

Acculturation is a complex process involving changes in beliefs, behaviors, and language as individuals adapt to a new culture, often influenced by John W. Berry's framework. This adaptation is particularly relevant for immigrants, whose well-being may depend on their ability to assimilate into the host culture (Bekteshi & Kang, 2020). While some individuals choose to emigrate, others may have no choice due to challenging circumstances. For many immigrant families, adopting characteristics of the host culture can have negative implications. Latinx individuals, for instance, have historically shown better health outcomes than peers from other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Gonzalez et al., 2022); however, these benefits seem to decline among their descendants as they integrate more fully into U.S. culture (Held et al., 2018). This decline may be influenced by systemic stressors, such as discrimination and evolving immigration policies (Bacong & Menjívar, 2021; Bekteshi & Kang, 2020).

The stress of conforming to the host culture can clash with ties to one's ancestral culture. Research shows that Latinx youth with limited English proficiency in first grade face higher rates of behavioral issues later (Colón-Quintana et al., 2022). Language acquisition is key to understanding and integrating into a host society, while retaining a heritage language helps maintain cultural identity (Schofield et al., 2017). Maintaining dual-language skills doesn't necessarily hinder host-language acquisition (Wang et al., 2022). However, negative attitudes toward heritage languages complicate retention (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010). Maintaining Spanish is critical for enculturation and the preservation of heritage values (Colón-Quintana et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022).

Research highlights that staying connected to one's culture can have protective effects (Mogro-Wilson & Cifuentes Jr., 2021). Adolescents aligning with their culture of origin are less likely to develop aggressive behaviors, and parental involvement in cultural practices can reduce adolescent aggression through familial bonds (Givens & Reid, 2019). Strong ethnic identity also helps mitigate risky behaviors among Latinx youth facing discrimination (Acosta et al., 2015). Acculturation can become a source of stress, especially when parents and children differ in their levels of adaptation (Bekteshi & Kang, 2020). This disparity may force youth into roles as cultural and language brokers. Studies indicate that greater parent-child acculturation gaps correlate with increased externalizing behaviors, particularly when mothers are more acculturated than their children (Colón-Quintana et al., 2022; Givens & Reid, 2019).

5.3. Family Stress and Conflict: Implications for Child and Adolescent Behavior

Family conflict is a significant area of research, especially concerning its impact on children's and adolescents' behavioral issues. The Family Stress Model (FSM), outlined by Conger et al. (2010) and further developed by Masarik and Conger (2017), examines how systemic stressors affect child behavior by placing stress on parents and the family unit. Family stress can arise from various relationship dynamics, including those among spouses, siblings, and parent-child interactions (Held, et al., 2018). The FSM posits that stressors, such as economic strain, heighten parental stress, disrupt effective parenting, and lead to family conflict (Masarik & Conger, 2017). This conflict further exacerbates parenting disruptions, fostering behavioral challenges in children and adolescents. The model also recognizes both risk and protective factors that may influence these dynamics (Held et al., 2018; Nystrand et al., 2017).

Research has shown the FSM's relevance in Latinx families. A study of 749 Latinx families revealed that higher perceived economic pressure led to harsher parenting practices, correlating with increased externalizing behaviors in adolescents (White et al., 2015).

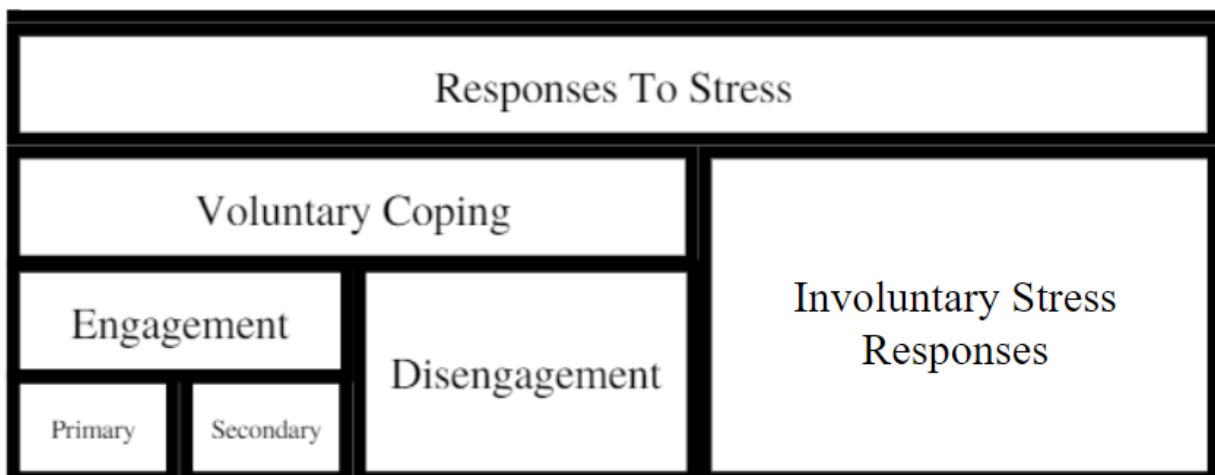
Family conflict was found to be a strong predictor of these behaviors, even more so than acculturative strain (Wasserman et al., 2024). The FSM suggests that stress from acculturation indirectly affects adolescent behavior by increasing family conflict and parenting disruptions. Conversely, cultural values like familismo can act as protective factors against externalizing behaviors. Familismo fosters warm and supportive parenting, which can mitigate the negative effects of systemic stressors on adolescents (White et al., 2015). Other studies further support familismo's protective role in various Latinx contexts (Bekteshi & Kang, 2020). In summary, the study of Masarik and Conger (2017) provides critical insights into how systemic stressors influence adolescent behavior in Latinx families and highlights the protective role of cultural values, such as familismo, in promoting positive parenting. Understanding these dynamics is vital for developing effective interventions to support families (Bekteshi & Kang, 2020; White et al., 2015).

6.0. Coping Mechanisms

Stress exerts a profound influence on individuals, prompting extensive investigation into effective management strategies (Nair et al., 2018). Coping has been conceptualized from both the animal stress literature, which portrays it as a learned behavioral response to stressors, and from psychoanalytic literature, which considers it a mechanism for resolving stress-related concerns (Perreira et al., 2019). The coping model proposed by Lazarus and Folkman distinguishes between emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. The comprehensive, still-relevant study by Skinner et al. (2003) has delineated approximately 400 distinct coping strategies, categorized in diverse ways to facilitate the identification of coping behavior patterns. Although the definitions of coping may vary, it is predominantly regarded as a conscious process aimed at addressing stress (Compas et al., 2017). Early definitions emphasized the reduction of physiological responses and the resolution of problems, while more recent theories have broadened this focus to also encompass the regulation of cognition and emotions (Compas et al., 2017; Perreira et al., 2019).

The evolution of coping theory is significantly shaped by the methodologies employed to assess coping behaviors. Some researchers use exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to categorize strategies, a method that has been criticized for potentially oversimplifying the complexities of coping (Compas et al., 2017). In contrast, others prefer confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure that theoretical frameworks align with the classifications of coping strategies. In a meta-analysis, Modecki et al. (2017) synthesized the existing coping literature into overarching domains and factors, such as adaptive versus maladaptive coping and emotion regulation. They identified twelve thematic categories of coping strategies, including emotion expression, cognitive reappraisal, and problem-solving. Additionally, the findings of Compas et al. (2017) indicated that numerous assessment tools inadequately capture the nuanced nature of coping behaviors. Certain broad coping categories may be conflicted with mental health symptoms, while others may correspond to comprehensive multi-factor models, thereby offering enhanced insights into the interplay between coping strategies and outcomes. A thorough understanding of these models can significantly advance research on coping behaviors and their associated effects (Compas et al., 2017; Modecki et al., 2017).

Figure 1: Three-Factor Model of Coping



Note: The above model is reproduced from Connor-Smith et al. (2000).

Voluntary stress responses can be classified into two main types: engagement coping and disengagement coping (Roubinov & Luecken, 2013). Disengagement coping involves avoidance strategies to manage stress, such as suppressing thoughts about the stressor or denying its existence (Waugh et al., 2020). In contrast, engagement coping includes active efforts to control the stressor or one's reactions to it. It aligns with the concepts of approach and active coping (Compas et al., 2017).

Engagement coping can be divided into two subcategories: primary control coping and secondary control coping (Sarah et al., 2017). Primary control coping aims to change the stressor or one's reaction, like breaking a complex task into manageable parts or using emotional regulation strategies. Secondary control coping focuses on changing perceptions of the stressor or managing emotional distress, such as accepting the stressor as part of life or using distraction techniques (Rossi, 2020). Research shows that using primary and secondary engagement coping strategies is linked to better health outcomes, while disengagement coping is associated with higher levels of mental health symptoms (Compas et al., 2017; Rossi, 2020).

6.1. Engagement Coping

Engagement Coping refers to a broader category of coping strategies studied in both primary and secondary contexts (Roubinov & Luecken, 2013). A meta-analysis of 212 studies with 80,850 participants revealed that Engagement coping skills in children and adolescents are linked to lower levels of internalizing symptoms (Compas et al., 2017). For Latinx adolescents, it helps reduce the impact of poverty-related stressors on mood (Santiago et al., 2020) and is associated with fewer behavior problems reported by parents and children (Valiente et al., 2009). Furthermore, Engagement coping shows a significant negative correlation with externalizing symptoms in both parent and child reports (Roubinov & Luecken, 2013; Santiago et al., 2020).

6.2. Primary Control Coping Associations

A greater use of primary control coping than disengagement coping is associated with lower stress levels among American and Spanish college students (Waugh et al., 2020). However, in Latinx populations, the relationship between primary control coping and mental health symptoms is complex. Research on Latinx adolescents and young adults with parents suffering from cancer found no significant link between primary control coping and depressive symptoms (Marín-Chollom & Revenson, 2022). In contrast, Active coping is associated with reduced internalizing symptoms in Latinx youth exposed to violence (Gudiño et al., 2018), though it did not correlate with externalizing symptoms and intensified the link between violence exposure and PTSD symptoms. Furthermore, in a study of urban adolescents, primarily Latinx, Active coping was negatively correlated with conduct problems and depressive symptoms (Gudiño et al., 2018; Salcido & Stein, 2024).

6.3. Secondary Control Coping Associations

A meta-analysis shows that secondary control coping skills are significantly associated with lower internalizing and externalizing symptomatology across various populations (Compas et al., 2017). This coping style also correlates with reduced perceived stress, helping individuals manage stress effectively (Salcido & Stein, 2024). Among Latinx individuals, lower adherence to family-oriented values may increase depression associated with secondary control coping strategies (Marín-Chollom & Revenson, 2022). Similar patterns have been noted with disengagement coping, leading researchers to question the adequacy of current coping measures for cultural variations within Latinx populations (Marín-Chollom & Revenson, 2022; Salcido & Stein, 2024).

6.4. Disengagement Coping Associations.

Disengagement coping is significantly associated with an increase in both internalizing and externalizing symptoms across various populations, including Latinx youth (Valiente et al., 2009). Research by Marín-Chollom and Revenson (2022) suggested a significant correlation between coping strategies and depressive symptoms among Latinx adolescents and young adults with terminally ill parents. Additionally, disengagement coping exacerbates the effects of peer-related stress on their mood, with females employing these strategies more frequently than males (Compas et al., 2017; Santiago et al., 2020).

In a predominantly Mexican American adolescent sample, disengagement coping correlated with poor mental health outcomes under low stress but seemed more adaptive under high stress (Waugh et al., 2020). Additionally, it showed a positive correlation with parent-reported externalizing behaviors but a negative correlation with child-reported externalizing behaviors (Valiente et al., 2009). The related avoidant coping construct linked to increased internalizing and post-traumatic stress symptoms among Latinx youth exposed to violence was found not to correlate with externalizing symptoms (Gudiño et al., 2018; Waugh et al., 2020).

6.5. Using Coping Models for Latinx Youth Across Cultures

Research shows that coping profiles validated within Caucasian populations may not reflect the coping behaviors of Latinx individuals (Compas et al., 2017). A study comparing American and Spanish college students found significant differences in preferred coping strategies, suggesting that current coping models may be biased towards individualistic cultural frameworks and overlook the collectivist values prevalent in Latinx culture (Compas et al., 2017; Marin-Chollom & Revenson, 2021).

For marginalized populations facing systemic stressors, disengagement coping may not correlate with negative mental health outcomes as it does in less stressed groups (Perzow et al., 2021). Latinx youth exposed to significant stress may employ avoidant coping strategies more frequently, which can sometimes improve functioning under high-stress conditions, contrasting with the negative perceptions of disengagement coping in low-stress environments (Gudiño et al., 2018; Perzow et al., 2021).

Research has indicated that avoidant coping can act as a protective factor in high-violence environments (Gudiño et al., 2018). A study of 302 Mexican American college students revealed that problem-solving was the only engagement coping strategy linked to better well-being, whereas disengagement strategies were associated with lower well-being (Villegas-Gold & Yoo, 2014). While chronic stressor frameworks differ from conditions like chronic illnesses, disengagement coping is generally seen as harmful to mental health in the long run, emphasizing the need for effective stress management skills among Latinx adolescents (Rossi, 2020; Villegas-Gold & Yoo, 2014).

7.0. Externalizing Behaviors

Externalizing behaviors are identifiable problem behaviors, such as physical aggression, whereas internalizing behaviors pertain to less visible issues, including depressive rumination (Salcido & Stein, 2024). Research pertaining to externalizing symptoms predominantly emphasizes aggression, oppositionality, and rule-breaking (Givens & Reid, 2019). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), classifies externalizing disorders into three main categories: Disruptive, Impulse-Control, and Conduct Disorders. These categories encompass Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Intermittent Explosive Disorder (IED), Conduct Disorder (CD), Pyromania, Kleptomania, and antisocial personality disorder (APD) (Bennett et al., 2020). It is important to note that Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is classified as a Neurodevelopmental Disorder, distinguishing it from the aforementioned disorders (Bennett et al., 2020; Givens & Reid, 2019).

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) is characterized by a persistent angry mood, argumentative behavior towards authority figures, and the intentional annoyance of others (Demmer et al., 2017). In contrast, Conduct Disorder (CD) is marked by physical aggression, threats, theft, property destruction, and violations of laws (Moore et al., 2017). The International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10), defines Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) as a condition characterized by a consistent and prolonged pattern of disobedience, defiance, and hostility directed towards adults or authority figures (Demmer et al., 2017). This disorder is marked by frequent instances of argumentation, anger, and vindictiveness. In contrast, Conduct Disorder (CD) is characterized by persistent physical aggression, destruction of property, and violations of rules, laws, and the rights of others, as outlined in the ICD-10 (Demmer et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017).

7.1. Etiology of Externalizing Behaviors

The etiology of externalizing behaviors involves a complex interplay of genetic and environmental factors. Biological vulnerabilities, particularly those related to trait impulsivity, are often heritable and can be exacerbated by environmental influences such as trauma and substance use (Bennett et al., 2020). Research has identified structural brain differences and genetic variations in oxytocin receptors associated with externalizing behaviors, which may also affect the effectiveness of interventions (Cano et al., 2015). Dysfunctions in dopamine pathways are acknowledged as genetic predispositions that emerge during early development (Givens & Reid, 2019). It is noteworthy that variations in brain structure can manifest even in individuals exhibiting subclinical externalizing behaviors (Andre et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2020).

In addition to genetic considerations, environmental factors, particularly maternal depression, play a significant role in the manifestation of externalizing behaviors in youth (Ponting et al., 2017). This association is influenced by both heritable vulnerabilities and coercive parenting practices (Andre et al., 2020). Studies indicate that as levels of maternal depression increase, genetic factors contribute more significantly to the variance observed in child behaviors (Clark et al., 2018).

Parents of reactive children may engage in coercive parenting techniques as a response to their children's behaviors, compounded by their own vulnerabilities (Valiente et al., 2009). While coercive parenting is known to elicit oppositional behaviors in children, evidence does not support a reciprocal relationship (Andre et al., 2020; Ponting et al., 2017).

7.2. Prevalence of Externalizing Behaviors and Disorders

The examination of the prevalence of externalizing behaviors from adolescence to adulthood is a multifaceted issue, owing to the diverse range of behaviors encompassed and the considerable overlap with attentional symptoms (Clark et al., 2018). Longitudinal studies indicate that physical aggression and rule-breaking behaviors during adolescence are more closely associated with future delinquent behavior than oppositional behavior or hyperactivity (Gudiño et al., 2018). Despite the comorbidity observed among Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Conduct Disorder (CD), and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), it is essential to treat these as distinct constructs (Clark et al., 2018; Waugh et al., 2020).

Approximately 7.5% of adolescents in the United States are diagnosed with a behavioral disorder (Ghandour et al., 2019), with 5.5% of Latinx children affected, alongside varying prevalence rates among other racial groups. Gender disparities in the diagnosis of CD yield mixed results; however, diagnostic rates are higher for adolescent males ($M = 5.1\%$) than for females ($M = 4.6\%$; Moore et al., 2017). Similar patterns emerge for ODD, with males exhibiting a greater risk of diagnosis, particularly in Western cultures ($RR = 1.80$, 95% CI [1.55, 2.10], $p < 0.001$; Demmer et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017).

While binary diagnostic rates for Conduct Disorder (CD) and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) provide valuable insight into the prevalence of clinically significant externalizing symptoms, empirical research advocates for a dimensional approach to studying externalizing symptoms comprehensively (Modecki et al., 2017). This approach should include an exploration of specific subsets of externalizing behaviors, such as physical aggression and rule-breaking (Achenbach, 2019; Demmer et al., 2017).

In summary, while understanding the prevalence of externalizing symptoms at different developmental stages provides valuable context, it does not explain how these symptoms change over time (Andre et al., 2020). On the other hand, research on the developmental trajectories of externalizing symptoms offers crucial insights into the specific patterns of symptom progression over time and the demographic characteristics associated with these trajectories (Givens & Reid, 2019; Martinez & Polo, 2018).

8.0. Implications for Clinicians

Latinx youth are a rapidly growing demographic in the U.S., facing various stressors that increase the likelihood of externalizing behaviors exacerbated by over-policing and systemic racism (Jones et al., 2021). However, Latinx families possess cultural assets that can mitigate these effects (Bennett et al., 2020). Understanding the risk and protective factors affecting Latinx youth is essential for clinicians aiming to provide effective support (Bennett et al., 2020; Ramos et al., 2022).

Clinicians should recognize that male and female adolescents may have different support needs related to family stress. Evaluating Latinx females regarding *Respeto* values can reveal both mental health concerns and protective aspects of this cultural framework (Kosmicki, 2017). Furthermore, heightened family stress often reduces the use of engagement coping skills, leading to poorer outcomes. Clinicians can guide interventions to enhance these skills. Higher proficiency in complex expressive Spanish is associated with better coping skills and reflects family cohesion, underscoring the importance of culturally relevant interventions (Rodriguez, 2022). The study suggests that externalizing behaviors should not be seen solely as traits but rather as influenced by systemic and family stressors. Clinicians are encouraged to assess these factors when addressing externalizing behaviors in Latinx adolescents and to implement family-based interventions (Rodriguez, 2022; Rossi, 2020).

Policymakers also need to recognize the role of systemic stress in externalizing behaviors and consider reforms such as raising the minimum wage and creating pathways to citizenship for undocumented individuals to alleviate family stress (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2021). Addressing these broader issues could significantly reduce societal costs associated with externalizing behaviors, which often lead to difficulties in employment and repeated law enforcement interactions (Andre et al., 2020; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2021).

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