

Coping With Concerns: An Exploratory Comparison of Australian, Colombian, German, and Palestinian Adolescents

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Consistent with an emphasis on positive psychology, and on ability rather than deficit, this study of adolescents in 4 communities sought to examine how young people cope with their concerns. Samples of Australian, Colombian, German, and Palestinian students completed the general form of the Adolescent Coping Scale, an 80-item instrument used to measure coping. A comparison of young people's usage of 3 coping styles and 18 coping strategies within these communities indicated that Palestinian youth report greater usage of all but three strategies (namely, physical recreation, relaxation, and tension reduction), and German youth report the least usage of 2/3 of the strategies assessed. Both Palestinian and Colombian youth were noted to utilize more seek to belong, focus on the positive, social action, solving the problem, seeking spiritual support, and worry than were German or Australian adolescents. When the relative usage of coping strategies within national settings was considered, some noticeable differences were apparent. For example it was found that regardless of the national setting young people reported most frequent use of working hard and use of problem solving strategies. When it comes to more culturally determined activities such as physical recreation, the Australian and German students ranked this strategy more highly in their coping repertoires than do the Colombians, and more noticeably, the Palestinian students. For example, although physical recreation is ranked as the second most commonly used strategy for the German sample, it is ranked 16th by the Palestinians. The study demonstrates the importance of identifying coping strategies that are reflective of each community under investigation. Similarity in coping cannot be assumed across different student populations. Consequently caution needs to be exercised when importing coping programs from one community to another.

KEY WORDS: coping; cross-cultural; adolescents.

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In recent years it has become accepted that youth, in the main, traverse adolescence with relative ease and resilience (Ebata and Moos, 1991; Petersen, 1993). There is also an increasingly held view that, rather than highlighting young people's distress, it is more productive to consider how young people deal with their circumstances. This is in keeping with calls for a positive psychology that moves away from a model of human behaviour which identifies inadequacies, to one which helps us to focus on a "good life" in which actions lead to 'well-being, positive individuals and thriving communities' (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). These sentiments have also been echoed by others (Fredrikson, 2001; Sheldon and King, 2001).

Whilst the reality is that young people experience stress, it is how they deal with stress that is important, that is, their ability to cope. Coping represents intentional efforts to manage the affective arousal in threatening situations, or to change the situation. This may be done by directly solving the problem (problem-focused coping), or accommodating to the concern without bringing about a solution (emotion-focused coping).

For the purposes of this paper coping is defined within a cognitive-transactional framework. The coping process is dependent on the type of situation being confronted and how the individual perceives or appraises the situation. The interactions between other individual and environmental variables also influence the coping process. People are assumed to rely on one form of coping at certain times and others at different times, depending on the status of the person-environment relationship. Therefore a stressful event may provoke varied and conflicting behavioral and emotional reactions in different and the same individuals (Brotman-Band and Weisz, 1988). Some of the coping behaviours adopted are more effective than others (Bailey and Dua, 1999). In general terms, there are three ways in which young people cope when dealing with their concerns. Some actions attempt to remove or to remedy the source of the demand (e.g., problem solving), others help individuals to accommodate to it (e.g., wishful thinking) and there are those which indicate some evidence of an inability to deal with the demand (e.g., despair and get sick).

The categorisation of approaches to coping ranges from the dichotomous grouping of strategies by Folkman (1982) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) which identifies problem- and emotion-focused coping (the latter of which can be further categorised into an additional 5 scales), to the specification of 18 strategies which make up the Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS) (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993a).

Relatively few studies have compared young people's coping across different communities. Studies such as that

of Schönflug and Jansen (1995), comparing German and Polish adolescents, Jose *et al.* (1998), comparing Russian and American adolescents, Seiffge-Krenke (1992), comparing German, Finnish, and Israeli adolescents and a 13-nation study of Gibson-Kline (1996), found more similarities than differences.

The carefully executed 13-nation study spanning 6 years and drawing on the responses of over 5,000 young people 13-15 years of age (Gibson-Kline, 1996) highlights the importance of young people across the globe, making references to adolescents as the 'builders' of the future, and those upon whom the future is built. The contribution of these young people in each of their communities are expected to contribute to, if not determine, the world's future. The Gibson-Kline study provides an important backdrop for the investigation reported in this paper in that it identified the problems and coping strategies used by young people. When it came to coping, the open-ended response format used in the Gibson-Kline study yielded more similarities than differences. They found that across the communities, problem-solving strategies, the will to assist, and interpersonal strategies were the most frequently used. That study found that individual problem solving was by far the most commonly reported coping strategy. However, the range of coping responses reported, and comparisons that could be subsequently made, were limited by the fact that young people were asked to nominate how they cope. This approach generally yields only a few coping responses from each participant (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1996) and may, in part, account for the reported similarities Gibson-Kline found across cultures. It may be argued that instruments more sensitive to assessing the range of coping strategies employed by young people may find differences as well as similarities.

This concern is reinforced by the study of German, Finnish, and Israeli adolescents (Seiffge-Krenke, 1992). Using a 20-item questionnaire to record adolescents' responses to 8 problem areas, Seiffge-Krenke identified a 3-dimensional structure of coping, namely active coping, internal coping, and withdrawal. Within these broad areas a comparison was made between the 3 urban communities. It was concluded that there was a universal capacity for young people to use the two functional styles of coping, namely active and internal coping and to a lesser extent the dysfunctional style of withdrawal.

A study that did identify differences between cultural groups, namely, German and Turkish adolescents was that of Jerusalem and Schwarzer (1988), who reported differences in the broad categories of instrumental and emotional coping, with the Turkish adolescents using more emotional coping than did the German group.

National differences were also reported in a recent study of 319 students from 3 communities, namely, Colombia, Northern Ireland, and Australia (Frydenberg *et al.*, 2001) which determined how young people cope with social issues of Pollution, Discrimination, Fear of Global War, and Community Violence. In that study it was found that when it comes to coping, the Northern Irish students were significantly more likely to use non-productive coping strategies such as self-blame, tension reduction, and "not cope." They were also highest in the use of friends and in seeking social support. Colombian students were most likely to use solving the problem, spiritual support, social action, seek professional help, and worry. The only strategy that the Australian students were more likely to use than the other two groups was relaxation. Regardless of nationality, focus on the positive, friends, and physical recreation were strategies used more in response to community violence than in response to the other 3 concerns. In all communities, females were more likely than males to resort to using tension reduction strategies and less likely to turn to relaxing diversions, physical recreation, ignore the problem, and keep to self.

In interpreting the results of such studies Alsaker and Flammer (1999), in their report of the Euronet study of 14–16 year olds in 13 communities, point out that it is the underlying context that is all-important. For example they cite factors such as daily activities including time spent in school, eating, sleeping, and leisure, and future orientation which refers to values and beliefs characterising the community in which the adolescents are located as being important.

It can be argued that cultural differences in coping can be detected even when the adolescents reside in the same community. In one study of 673 Australian students, which categorised the students backgrounds into 3 broad categories, Anglo-Australian, Australian-European and Australian-Asian, Anglo-Australian students as a group were distinguished by the fact that they used more tension reduction and less work and worry than did the other students. In contrast, the Australian Asians appeared to use more social action, work, and seeking professional help. Australian Europeans, however, reported using seeking spiritual support to a greater extent than did the other two groups of students (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993b).

While young people in different communities have different issues to contend with it is of interest to determine how they cope with concerns in general. In this study students in 4 communities, namely Australia, Colombia, Germany, and Palestine completed the ACS, to assess whether there were cultural differences in general coping patterns in the 4 communities.

The experience of adolescents in the 4 communities investigated is expected to differ. Colombia is situated in the upper northwestern part of South America and has a current population of 35 million people. Of the total, 66% of the population live in cities. Social values in Colombia are related to social patterns of organisation that influence the family unit, and go beyond the patterns of economic, religious, and political organisational grouping. Previous research has found that family, education, religion, and politics are very relevant in Colombia (Ardila, 1996a). The family is a highly respected institution and as a result is often the center of activity. Education is given great relevance, and more than 100 universities exist in the country. Almost 95% of the population claims to be Roman Catholic, and the influence of religion in social life is very strong. Finally politics is a very important part of society, as is also the case with other Latin American countries (Ardila, 1996b).

The German data were collected in Thuringia, a federal state of Germany located in the middle of the country. Until the unification of Germany, Thuringia was a part of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany). This history and the social, political, and economical change after the unification of East and West Germany in 1989/1990 are the most important conditions influencing the social values and attitudes of the people in Thuringia. The political situation is characterized by the differences between left and right orientated concepts, by a conservative government and by social-democratic and socialistic orientated opposition groups, by remarkable extent of xenophobia (Frindte *et al.*, 1996a,b, 2001) and by high levels of unemployment. Although Thuringia is a very industrialised region, the rate of unemployment exceeds more than 20%. Religious orientations have no specific influence on everyday and political life.

The Palestinian sample were drawn from the West Bank. The Palestinian National Authority administers 2 areas: the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The West Bank had by the end of 1999 a projected population of 1,589,067, divided into 7 municipal districts. The 7 districts of the West Bank each consisted of a major city, rural villages, and the surrounding refugee camps. The total Palestinian population was 3,019,704 by the end of 1999. (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2000). Islam is the main religion of the Palestinian population and 97% of the Palestinians are Muslims. The remaining 3% of the population is Christian. Palestinian Christians are assimilated into the society and have many of the same cultural values, beliefs, and traditions as the Muslims. Christian relations with Muslims have been traditionally good with no documented fractions or social problems. Of the total Palestinian population, 50% are registered refugees

with the UNRWA (the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). This agency was established by the United Nations especially to look after affairs of the Palestinian Refugees. There are 19 camps scattered over the West Bank, and there are 8 in the Gaza Strip. Camps are located very close to urban centres and are overcrowded with cramped housing, unpaved streets, and open sewers. Palestinians are reputed to be among the most highly educated of the Middle Eastern peoples, with Palestine boasting 10 universities.

Australia is a Western democratic industrialised country with a population of 20 million inhabitants which is made up of the indigenous inhabitants, dating back at least 50,000 years, followed by British colonists in the Eighteenth Century. The latter half of the 20th Century has been dominated by immigration that reflects a multicultural mix representing the globe. Whilst the dominant culture is Anglo-Celtic, and Christianity is the most widely reported religion, the country cannot be described as a religious one. A keen interest and pursuit of sports is evident in the leisure activities of the community and in the sporting representations in international meetings such as the Olympics. Politically, Australia is a stable parliamentary democracy.

METHOD

Participants

Adolescents from 4 communities (Australia, Colombia, Germany, and Palestine) were sampled from populations of urban high school students.⁷

The Australian sample was recruited from schools in Metropolitan Melbourne. The sample consisted of 88 males (44%) and 112 females (56%). The subjects' mean age was 16.17 years. The Colombian sample was recruited from Bogota, Colombia. It consisted of 39 males (39%) and 61 females (61%) and the mean age of respondents was 15.71 years. The German sample from Thuringia consisted of 64 males (50%) and 64 females (50%) with a mean age of 14.23 years, and the Palestinian sample from the West Bank consisted of 68 males (47%) and 76 females (53%) with a mean age of 15.38 years. Statistical analysis (Chi-square for gender and ANOVA for age) indicated no significant differences between the three samples in terms of the age and gender distributions. Further preliminary statistical examination using MANOVA showed similar patterns of difference between males and females

in each of the 4 samples with no interaction between nationality and gender for either coping styles or strategies. This demonstrated that there was no danger of introducing confounding of nationality and gender by combining the data for both boys and girls. Consequently it was decided to proceed to examine differences in coping related solely to nationality in subsequent analyses using all the data available for each national group.

Measures

Data were collected in each of the communities by means of a pencil and paper instrument. The Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS), is an 80-item instrument which comprises 18 coping scales (see Table I), each reflecting a different coping strategy, and each containing between 3 and 5 items. Apart from the last item, which asks students to write down any things they do to cope, other than those things described in the preceding 79 items, each item describes a specific response to a concern. Using a rating scale, respondents indicate the extent to which they use the activity described (1 "doesn't apply or don't do it", 2 "used very little", 3 "used sometimes", 4 "used often" and 5 "used a great deal"). The 18 identified coping strategies can be grouped into 3 coping styles. Productive coping includes those strategies that promote a solution focus, keeping fit, and maintaining social connections (focusing thoughts and actions on solving a problem, working hard to achieve goals, seeking to belong to a peer network, focusing on the positive aspects of a situation, seeking relaxing diversions, and physical recreation). Nonproductive coping includes "avoidance strategies generally associated with an inability to cope," (worry, investing in close friends, wishful thinking, ignoring the problem, tension reduction strategies, not coping, self-blame, and keeping to self) (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1996, p. 233). Reference to others includes strategies that utilize or engage others when dealing with concerns (seeking social support, social action, seeking spiritual support, and seeking professional help).

The stages of the ACS' development, including evidence of its validity and reliability, have been reported elsewhere (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993a, 1996). In short, the internal consistency of the ACS scales is acceptable, with Cronbach alpha coefficients ranging from 0.54 to 0.85 with a median of 0.70. The stability of responses to scales as measured by test retest reliability coefficients range from 0.44 to 0.81 and is in general moderate, but nevertheless considered satisfactory given the dynamic nature of coping (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993a). In sum, students from 4 communities, namely Australia, Colombia, Germany, and Palestine completed the adolescent coping

⁷This convenience sample provided an opportunity to examine how coping varies in different communities.

Table I. The 18 Coping Strategies of the Adolescent Coping Scale

1. *Seeking social support* is represented by items which indicate an inclination to share the problem with others and enlist support in its management, e.g., Talk to other people to help me sort it out
2. *Focus on solving the problem* is a problem-focused strategy which tackles the problem systematically by learning about it and takes into account different points of view or options, e.g., Work at solving the problem to the best of my ability
3. *Work hard and achieve* is a factor describing commitment, ambition, and industry, e.g., Work hard
4. *Worry* is characterised by items which indicate a concern about the future in general terms or more specifically concern with happiness in the future, e.g., Worry about what is happening
5. *Investing in close friends* is about engaging in a particular intimate relationship, e.g., Spend more time with boy/girl friend
6. *Seek to belong* indicates a caring and concern for one's relationship with others in general and more specifically concern with what others think, e.g., Improve my relationship with others
7. *Wishful thinking* is characterised by items which are based on hope and anticipation of a positive outcome, e.g., Hope for the best
8. *Social action* is about letting others know what is of concern and enlisting support by writing petitions or organizing an activity such as a meeting or a rally, e.g., Join with people who have the same concern
9. *Tension reduction* is characterised by items which reflect an attempt to make oneself feel better by releasing tension, e.g., Make myself feel better by taking alcohol, cigarettes, or other drugs
10. *Not coping* consists of items which reflect the individual's inability to deal with the problem and the development of psychosomatic symptoms, e.g., I have no way of dealing with the situation
11. *Ignore the problem* is characterised by items which reflect a conscious blocking out of the problem, e.g., Ignore the problem
12. *Self-blame* indicates that individuals see themselves as responsible for the concern or worry, e.g., Accept that I am responsible for the problem
13. *Keep to self* is characterised by items which reflect the individual's withdrawal from others and wish to keep others from knowing about concerns, e.g., Keep my feelings to myself
14. *Seek spiritual support* is characterised by items which reflect prayer and belief in the assistance of a spiritual leader or Lord, e.g., Pray for help and guidance so that everything will be all right
15. *Focus on the positive* is represented by items which indicate a positive and cheerful outlook on the current situation. This includes seeing the 'bright side' of circumstances and seeing oneself as fortunate, e.g., Look on the bright side of things and think of all that is good
16. *Seek professional help* denotes the use of a professional adviser, such as a teacher or counsellor, e.g., Discuss the problem with qualified people
17. *Seek relaxing diversions* is about relaxation in general rather than about sport. It is characterised by items which describe leisure activities such as reading and painting, e.g., Find a way to relax, for example, listen to music, read a book, play a musical instrument, watch TV
18. *Physical recreation* is characterised by items which relate to playing sport and keeping fit, e.g., Keep fit and healthy

scale, to assess whether there were cultural differences that reflected how they coped.

Styles

To consider the influence of Nationality on coping style, a MANOVA was completed using the 3 coping styles as dependent variables and Nationality as the independent variable. In this analysis, sex was statistically controlled by including it as an independent variable, despite the insignificant interaction effect of Nationality and sex on coping patterns ($F(9, 1692) = 0.78; p = 0.631$). The results show a significant multivariate main effect for Nationality ($F(9, 1692) = 47.99; p < 0.001$). All univariate tests were significant. The relevant means are noted in Table II, together with the F -statistics for the univariate ANOVAS. Also included is an indication of which means differed significantly ($p < 0.01$) based on Sheffé tests.

Productive coping was the style used most by all samples. When one looks at only statistically significant differences it can be shown that the Palestinians used this style more than did other students. Australian and Colombian subjects, while not differing in their mean use of this style, used it more than German subjects. The Non-productive coping style was the 2nd most used style for Australians, Colombians, and Germans and the 3rd most used style for Palestinians. Despite this, Palestinians used this style more regularly than did all students in the other samples. Colombians used it more than Australians and Germans, while Australians used it more than Germans. Reference to Others was again used more by Palestinians than other samples. Colombians used this style more than both Australians and Germans (who did not differ in their use of this style).

Considering recent research by Frydenberg *et al.* (2001), which indicates that level of stress is associated with the frequency of usage of coping responses, it may be argued that the Palestinian and Colombian students lead more stress-filled lives than do Australian or German students. These results may also indicate that level of stress is a stronger influence on coping than is nationality. To further investigate this possibility, analysis was conducted which allowed the comparisons of the different samples' usage of each of the 18 coping strategies assessed by the ACS.

Consequently a MANOVA was completed which used the 18 coping strategies as dependent variables and in which Nationality was the independent variable of interest. The results showed there was a statistically significant main effect for Nationality ($F(54, 1527) = 22.60; p < 0.001$). Once again sex was controlled despite the insignificant interaction effect of Nationality and sex on

Table II. Means for Coping Styles and Significance Tests

	Nationality				<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Significant differences
	Palestine	Australia	Colombia	Germany			
Nonproductive	3.00	2.71	2.85	2.56	26.83	<0.001	P > C > A > G
Productive	3.54	3.28	3.33	3.10	21.97	<0.001	P > CA > G
Reference to others	3.35	1.96	2.40	2.09	192.43	<0.001	P > C > AG

coping patterns ($F(54, 1527) = 1.22; p < 0.132$). The relevant strategy means are reported in Table III, followed in parenthesis by the strategy's within-country rank (of usage). Also included is the *F*-statistic for the respective one way ANOVA and an indication of which means differ significantly derived from the Sheffé tests.

Strategies

The most noticeable difference in the usage by nationality for the 18 coping strategies seems to be between the Palestinian sample and the other 3 groups of students (Australian, Colombian, and German). This is evidenced by relatively few nonsignificant results when this sample is compared to the others. When compared to the Australian sample only 2 of the strategies, keep to self and self-blame, do not display statistically significant differences. Similarly, when the Palestinians are compared to the German sample they differ significantly on all but 3 of the coping strategies, namely relaxing diversions, self-blame, and tension reduction. Finally, when the Palestinians are compared to the Colombians the only strategies for which there

were no differences were focus on the positive, self-blame, wishful thinking, and worry.

There were 10 strategies that the Palestinians used significantly more frequently than did all other samples: seek to belong, invest in close friends, ignore the problem, not cope, professional help, social action, social support, solve the problem, spiritual support, and work hard. There was only 1 strategy for which the Palestinian subjects reported significantly less use than did the subjects from other samples and this was physical recreation.

For strategies where there were differences between Palestinians and others, the Palestinian sample was using each strategy significantly more frequently. In terms of significant differences ($p < 0.01$) Palestinians were using the strategies work hard, focus on the positive, and worry more than both Australians and Germans and were using keep to oneself more than Colombians and Germans. This pattern reversed for tension reduction which is used less often, in comparison to Australians and Germans. The only other strategy used less frequently by Palestinians than by Australians is relaxing diversions. It is nevertheless used more by Palestinians than by Colombians.

Table III. Means for Nationality and Significance Tests

	Nationality								<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Significant differences
	Palestine		Australia		Colombia		Germany				
Belong	(6)	3.60	(8)	2.97	(4)	3.44	(11)	2.76	51.39	<0.001	PC > AG
Focpos	(10)	3.41	(7)	2.98	(6)	3.37	(5)	3.08	14.33	<0.001	PC > AG
Friends	(7)	3.56	(10)	3.04	(8)	3.00	(7)	3.05	15.12	<0.001	P > ACG
Ignore	(15)	2.88	(14)	2.38	(13)	2.30	(13)	2.23	22.70	<0.001	P > ACG
keepself	(12)	3.03	(11)	2.89	(12)	2.78	(12)	2.61	5.74	=0.001	PAC > G
Notcope	(17)	2.32	(15)	2.15	(15)	2.05	(16)	1.97	5.76	=0.001	P > ACG
Physrec	(16)	2.88	(4)	3.19	(7)	3.28	(2)	3.37	5.94	=0.001	ACG > P
Profhelp	(11)	3.11	(17)	1.64	(14)	2.09	(14)	2.05	85.00	<0.001	P > CG > A
Relax	(5)	3.63	(1)	3.98	(5)	3.43	(1)	3.56	14.30	<0.001	A > CGP
Selfbl	(14)	2.95	(12)	2.82	(10)	2.80	(19)	2.71	0.87	=0.445	All the same
Socact	(13)	2.97	(18)	1.54	(16)	1.88	(18)	1.59	141.04	<0.001	P > C > AG
Socsup	(8)	3.49	(6)	2.99	(11)	2.77	(6)	3.07	17.67	<0.001	P > AG > C
Solvprob	(2)	3.84	(3)	3.41	(3)	3.61	(4)	3.24	19.75	<0.001	P > CAG,C > G
Spirit	(3)	3.81	(16)	1.66	(9)	2.86	(17)	1.70	166.64	<0.001	P > C > AG
Tensred	(18)	1.97	(13)	2.43	(17)	2.17	(15)	1.99	14.38	<0.001	A > PCG
Wish	(9)	3.42	(5)	3.10	(7)	3.26	(7)	2.94	6.79	<0.001	P > C > AG
Work	(11)	3.92	(2)	3.67	(2)	3.74	(9)	2.79	56.52	<0.001	P > A,PCA > G
Worry	(4)	3.82	(9)	2.92	(1)	3.95	(3)	3.39	70.48	<0.001	PC > G > A

Note. Values in parentheses indicate relevant strategy's within-country rank (of usage).

For the strategies of seek to belong, focus on the positive, social action, solve the problem, seek spiritual support and worry, the mean usage for Colombian students is significantly greater than for both the Australian and German samples. For the strategy of social support the Colombians are lower in usage than the Australian and German samples. Australian subjects reported greater usage than the Colombians on the strategies of relaxing diversions and tension reduction while they reported less usage of the strategy of seek professional help. German subjects scored lower than Colombians for the strategies of wishful thinking and work hard.

Overall the Australian and German samples seem to be the most similar in their responses, with only 7 of the 18 strategies showing significant differences between them. Germans reported more frequent usage of the strategies of seek professional help and worry and less use of seek to belong, keep to self, relaxing diversions, tension reduction, and work hard.

A productive coping style was utilised in the main by each group. In general, Palestinian students recorded greater use of a range of strategies compared to the other groups. For example, although reference to social action ranked relatively low in all groups, in the Palestinian group it was more prevalent. When it came to the use of seeking spiritual support, although it was low in Australian and German samples it was used moderately by Colombian students and frequently by the Palestinian group. Relaxing diversions were used to a moderate extent by the Palestinian, Colombian, and German students. However, the Australians exhibit a significantly greater use of this strategy.

Overall Colombian students indicated that they used 6 coping strategies more frequently than did their Australian and German counterparts, however they reported that they use social support significantly less than both the Australian and German adolescents. Australian subjects scored higher than all other samples on the strategies of seeking relaxing diversions and tension reduction. It is interesting to note that the only strategy to show no differences between samples was self-blame with all samples using it to a similar extent.

DISCUSSION

As noted earlier, National differences in coping responses of adolescents are to be expected as we have already reported differences in Australian samples of young people broadly grouped according to languages spoken at home (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993b). Moreover the National differences noted in the current investigation are to be expected given our earlier work on young people's

coping in Australia, Colombia, and Ireland (Frydenberg *et al.*, 2001). In that study, the level of concern with social issues was associated with variations in coping. Given then that level of stress is a concomitant of coping it could be postulated that both the Palestinians and the Colombians are likely to be experiencing greater levels of concern. Hence their greater usage of coping strategies. Although scant data is available on the level of young people's stress in these communities, it is known that 6–12 year old Palestinian boys and girls who experienced neurotic anxiety-related symptoms often told stories about curfews, a feature of their lives (Qouta and El-Sarraj, 1994). Furthermore it has been reported that 596,000 adolescents (less than 18 years) displayed outbursts of crying, fear of loneliness (788,000), fear of darkness (839,000) and involuntary urination (172,000) (Palestinian Central Bureau of statistics, 2000). Clearly more research is needed to assess adolescent concerns and stresses in each of the communities.

Nevertheless, despite the Palestinians' more 'active' coping pattern when compared to Australian and German adolescents there is a striking difference in the level of usage of physical recreation and relaxation between the Australian students and the other 3 groups. This would appear to indicate that these strategies may be more alien to Palestinian culture than they are to adolescents in the other national settings. Nevertheless there appears to be a possibility that for strategies such as self-blame, adolescent culture overrides National differences.

Findings such as the Palestinians' relative neglect of physical recreation and relaxation as effective coping responses may be a result of the type of concerns with which they have to contend and or the intensity of stress they may be experiencing. There may be little value (or opportunity) to relax when you are part of a 'dispossessed' people living in compromised physical circumstances. In contrast, relaxation may be very beneficial to the sorts of concerns held by German and Australian adolescents. More needs to be understood about the way in which National setting and inherent stress may mediate the effectiveness of alternate coping strategies.

In general, the variation in both the absolute and relative level of usage of different strategies in different communities highlights the need to take account of community setting when attempting to interpret coping styles of youth. The importance of such findings is related to the growing interest in the development of programs to prevent or alleviate depression with children and adolescents by focussing on coping skills. Generally researchers have focused mainly on programs aimed at children who are at risk rather than general prevention programs for all children (Roberts, 1999). The benefit from programs that develop coping skills is increasingly being recognized.

One example of a psychoeducational depression prevention program with Year 7 students in Australia resulted in significant increases in coping skills, control over interpersonal and school relationships, and problems (Rice *et al.*, 1993). Similarly, the Resourceful Adolescent Project (RAP) is aimed at preventing the development of depression disorders. The RAP uses a cognitive behavioural approach and aims to build resources and skills in adolescents and includes topics such as stress management, problem-solving, and cognitive restructuring (Shochet and Osgarby, 1999). Another Australian program, The Bright Ideas, a cognitive-behavioural program, effected positive changes in 11–12 year old children's explanatory style (Brandon *et al.*, 1999). These changes were maintained at 3-month follow-up. Another Australian program, the Best of Coping (Frydenberg and Brandon, 2002) was found to be most effective with adolescents at risk in the 16-year-old age group (Bugalski and Frydenberg, 2000) and with a regular population of adolescents (Cotta *et al.*, 2001). These programs highlight the value of teaching adolescents cognitive-based skills in coping and the use of their own interpersonal resources.

Nevertheless, given the National differences in coping patterns apparent in the findings reported in this study, it may be argued that care must be taken in judging the relevance and effectiveness of coping programs developed in one National setting when attempting to utilize them in another.

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