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Identity Instability and Psychological Distress Among Emerging Adulthood: Moderating Role of Approach-Avoidance Coping Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Emerging adults are more vulnerable to experiencing high levels of psychological distress arising from identity instability. Limited studies have explored the buffering role of coping in this association. The study adopted cross-sectional research to examine the moderating role of approach-avoidance coping strategy in the association of identity instability and psychological distress among emerging adults. With the convenience sampling technique, 500 undergraduates consisting of 121(24.2%) males and 379(75.8%) females between the ages of 18 - 30 years ($M=23.86$ years; $SD=2.76$) from the University of Nigeria Nsukka participated. Participants responded to The Identity Instability Scale, Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, and the Brief Approach-Avoidance Coping Questionnaire. Results of the Hayes PROCESS macro showed that the dimensions of identity instability (self-disconnection and others-reliance) were significantly and negatively associated with psychological distress. Approach coping style did not predict psychological distress. Avoidance coping style was significantly and positively associated with psychological distress. However, the approach coping style moderated the separate associations of self-disconnection and reliance on psychological distress. Avoidance coping style did not moderate the separate associations of self-disconnection and others-reliance on psychological distress. Findings suggested the need for practical coping skills among emerging adults emphasizing approach coping means of managing distress for an efficient transition to adulthood with improved mental health and well-being.

Keywords: Approach-avoidance coping strategy; emerging adulthood; identity instability; psychological distress