

## Chapter 8

# Risk Factors for the Adjustment of First-Year Students: Literature Review

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter analyzes the key arguments as explored by previous researchers on coping strategies applied by first-year students transitioning to institutions of higher education. The majority of first-year students face various challenges in adjusting to college life. New students use their peer group as a source of their company, sympathy, affection, and experimentation, which can be either productive or wasteful. Quite a good number of students use negative coping strategies to eliminate the psychological pressures evoked by the situations they find themselves. Being aware of one's strengths and weaknesses can aid one in choosing the best coping strategies. Having self-control, acceptance of individual differences, and positive thinking would contribute to an individual's coping strategies. The recommendation is that the universities assign new students to individual peer guides and advise students on how to go about the university dynamics by getting involved in positive leisure activities such as sports, getting into serious peer study groups, and social networking.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The university environment introduces students to a new academic and social environment, in which they have to manage familial relationships and deal with physical challenges (Funston, et al., 2014). The success of students' transition to higher education has perhaps been most aptly described as being due to "the capability to navigate change" (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 737), with such capabilities more specifically operationalized by the authors as the resources available to help students adapt to change during this time. First-year students in particular are vulnerable to psychological challenges due to the transition to university exacerbating existing causes of stress with high levels of stress paired with maladaptive coping strategies linked to depression in first-year students (Dyson & Renk, 2006). Attending university is now a common expectation for people from diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Most Spanish students who access Higher Education (HE) are aged 18 to 25 years old, financially dependent on their parents and free of adult life obligations such as full-time employment, mortgages, marriage and children. According to Arnett (2000), under these conditions students are neither adolescents nor adults, but somewhere in between, at a stage called emerging adulthood. The university experience requires emerging adults to face a particularly important challenge: to combine the exploration and lack of definition that are characteristic of adolescence with characteristics demanded of independent adults in an unknown and highly competitive environment. However, not all emerging adults are able to master these developmental tasks and enjoy a satisfactory experience in university. As a result, many students experience problems in the transition to university, including depression, loneliness, academic difficulties and substance abuse, which can lead to dissatisfaction, disengagement, lower achievement and attrition (Friedlander, et al., 2007). Adjustment to university is a complex, multifaceted construct that involves an array of demands that vary in type and degree and require a variety of coping strategies involving many factors other than academic performance (Baker & Siryk, 1984). This chapter analyzed risk factors for adjustment among first year students at universities.

## **BACKGROUND**

According to Mullen (2008), the college environment is a direct contrast to the experiences the students had in high school, thus it can be overwhelming to irresponsible students and those who like procrastinations. College students are expected to take personal responsibility to their learning without close follow up that takes place in high school. In college, the students are expected to attend classes regularly, complete their course assignments within given time, and do proper time management. Thus students who had never been given the opportunity to take responsibility for their actions find difficulties in adjusting to college life. These findings concurs with Joyce (2014) who records that students who have been raised by parents who watched their every move and advocated for them endlessly failed to be independent and responsible individuals which places them at risk of failure in adapting to college life. According to Ayele (2014), there are four aspects of student's adjustment which are; social, academic, institutional attachment and personal emotional adjustment. During this period of time the new students experience a lot of social difficulties such as separation from their immediate family members, financial constraints and management, and more challenging academic work. It is a period that their lives can be filled with emotional stressors such as homesickness, loneliness and confusion making them very anxious as they adjust to college life. Research done by Tinto (1996), showed that 40% of all students in America who

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