

Chapter 15

Emotion Approach Coping and Adjustment Challenges Among Students in Higher Education Institutions

Scolastica Kariuki Githinji

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9885-0438>

Daystar University, Kenya

ABSTRACT

The majority of university first-year students are young adults. They experience salient developmental changes as they transition from adolescence to young adulthood. The changes are less dramatic relative to the adolescence stage; hence, the stage is underestimated by the researchers. In young adulthood, the brain is not fully matured despite adult-like social function expectations. Their cognitive and social-emotional immaturity states are linked to poor decision-making, social-emotional problems, sensational behaviours, and risk-taking behaviours, which aggravate adjustment challenges in higher education. Young adults are experiencing academic, cultural, emotional, financial, intellectual, and social challenges. It is observed that the mental health of university students is a rising concern and is associated with their social functioning demands. This chapter explores young adults' biopsychosocial development, their challenges at higher education, and appropriate emotion coping approaches deemed appropriate for the stage and in yielding adaptive coping.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of first-year students in the university are young adults. Higley (2019) describes young adulthood as a developmental period that occurs between 18-25 years. Development refers to changes in growth and the acquisition of abilities as a maturation process. The young adult population is biologically and psychologically in a state of maturation though the change is largely less dramatic than in their earlier stages of adolescence. Young adults are at a significant and pivotal time of life when they may seek

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higher education, develop personal relationships, and health habits as well as pursue other productive pathways. The transition stage to adulthood exposes the young adult to vulnerabilities and risks at a time when this population is also transitioning to higher education, therefore, the individuals are experiencing double transitions. Young adults in higher education are moving out of services and systems that supported them in their childhood and adolescence (NRC, 2013) to systems that by design are not well suited to supporting personalized needs. The students by their very developmental stage nature and the exposure to new environments that are highly demanding to young minds pose a high-level challenge.

In their first year, students have to worry about their academics which for most universities means 6-7 courses (Villanova & Bownas, 1983) on average 18 credit hours per semester, the students were not exposed to such workloads before. They get to know the high-performance expectation in higher education (Heiman, 2006). Students also experience environmental stressors related to living away from home and navigating adult-like life that includes housing among other issues that are never obvious for a fresh student. To comprehend why emotional approach coping (EAC) are important to first-year university students, the stressors and associated stress need an exposition. This chapter provides an examination of first-year students as young adults and their biopsychosocial development as it influences their adjustment to higher education. The section is followed by an exposition of the students' challenges in their transition and finally, the use of emotion-approach coping strategies are examined.

BACKGROUND

Young adults' key developmental tasks include self-exploration, and identity formation, their distinction from earlier stages is important because their concerns related to healthcare and service delivery, as well as research, are different from those of adolescents (Higley, 2019). As young adults move from adolescence into adulthood, physical changes continue to occur but more gradually, they steady weight gain into what will characterize adulthood, however, the changes are less dramatic compared to adolescence (Cole, 2003; Zagorsky & Smith, 2011). For the reasons that the stage is less dramatic in change and the social expectation that they are adults, the young adult is underestimated in terms of research yet it is a critical developmental period. During this period, they are expected to have individualized from their parents, while maintaining family connectedness to enable the identity development that characterizes the stage (Galván et al., 2006; Steinberg et al., 2008).

Higley (2019) also describes young adults' experiences as characterized by relatively high rates of injuries, mental health issues, substance use, and sexual and reproductive health conditions. The nature of young adults implicates them to intensified rates of risky behaviours (National Research Council, 2013), however, most of the social, emotional, and cognitive maturation has occurred in adolescence to enable them to take on adult responsibilities, which lenders decline of antisocial behaviours (Cauffman et al., 2010). While the change from childhood to adolescence is a surge that of adolescence to young adults is gradual, risk-taking tendencies transition to young adulthood in a linear, less apparent pattern. Notably young adults take longer to consider difficult problems before deciding on a course of action, are less lured by a reward systems in their behaviour, in equal measure are sensitive to potential costs associated with behaviour and have improved impulse control (Cauffman et al., 2010).

The young adult stage is characterized by psychological development marked by opportunities, responsibilities, new roles, as well as changes in social contexts with the functional maturation of the brain reaching its peak (Bonnie, et al., 2015). However, qualitative maturation is ongoing, and special-

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