

Relationship Between Personality Traits and Coping Styles among Malaysian Young Adults

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Abstract

Given the increasing prevalence of stress and anxiety, which permeates all aspects of society and affects people of all ages and backgrounds, understanding how coping styles and personality traits are related is crucial to coping with everyday challenges and stressors. This study examined the relationship between personality traits and coping styles among Malaysian young adults. This study utilized a cross-sectional survey method. A total of 252 young adults participated in this study using purposive sampling, and the data were collected through a survey using a set of questionnaires, namely, the Big Five Inventory (BFI) and the Brief-COPE. The finding showed that personality traits and coping styles are positively correlated. Alongside this, there were intriguing gender differences in the use of avoidance coping among Malaysian young adults. However, this study found no differences in the coping styles used by different genders in emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. This study concluded that problem-focused coping was utilized the most by Malaysian young adults compared with emotion-focused and avoidant coping. The findings of this study highlighted that young Malaysian adults, with their proactive coping approach, are hopeful and optimistic about addressing challenges and stress. Implications and future recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: Coping Styles, Malaysia, Personality Traits, Young Adults

Introduction

The prevalence of stress and anxiety in Malaysia pervades all aspects of life and influences people of all ages and backgrounds. Therefore, developing healthy coping skills and strategies can be beneficial for individuals in managing stress (Afshar et al., 2015). For instance, enhancing coping strategies is crucial for nurses and healthcare professionals to maintain resilience during unexpected and prolonged pandemics and other life events (Sagaca et al.,

2023). Recognizing that positive coping strategies can also be adopted during this challenging time is crucial. Ding et al (2015) showed that an upbeat coping style entails actively engaging in productive actions, while individuals with negative coping styles seek to evade stress to reduce discomfort with pessimistic thinking. Therefore, how well individuals cope with challenging situations significantly influences their happiness and personal satisfaction (Allen & Leary, 2010).

A study found that 62.1% of participants experienced moderate to very high levels of psychological distress, while 27.1% reported high levels of fear of COVID-19. However, 65.1% of participants were identified as having medium to high resilient coping strategies (Moni et al., 2021). Besides, Rom et al (2023) found that students at the National Defense University Malaysia (NDUM) have high levels of depression, anxiety, and stress during the Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO). Religion was the most used coping style, while substance abuse was the least common.

Coping styles and personality traits are critical factors influencing how Malaysian young adults cope with everyday challenges and stressors. Essentially, studying personality traits and coping styles is an essential area of research in psychology. Carver and Connor-Smith (2010) present a more nuanced picture of the relationship between personality traits and specific coping responses and suggest ways to expand future research to deepen our understanding of how personality and coping shape adaptation to stress.

Afshar et al (2015) demonstrated a correlation between adaptive traits and active coping, as well as maladaptive traits and passive coping, suggesting that enhancing effective coping strategies in individuals with maladaptive traits is vital for stress prevention and control programs. Besides, Chen et al (2023) found that mature coping styles like problem-solving and seeking help had positive effects, while immature coping styles like self-blame, fantasy, repression, and rationalization negatively impacted anxiety and depression. These findings could provide insights into managing anxiety and depression in patients.

A variety of definitions of the term personality traits have been suggested. This study used the definition contributed by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae. They published a series of papers in the 1980s and 1990s that established the Big Five as a comprehensive model of personality. The "Big Five" personality traits, the Five Factor Model, are widely accepted frameworks for understanding human personality (McCrae & Costa, 1987). Personality traits are enduring thinking, feeling, and behavior patterns that shape an individual's responses to various situations.

According to Power and Pluess (2015), the study showed that the Big Five model of personality has become an established and accepted approach to describing and measuring individual personality differences, including openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness-antagonism, and neuroticism. Personality is an essential psychological concept that determines our lives. For example, the Big Five personality traits are conscientious people tend to be healthier and have more harmonious interpersonal relationships; extroverted people have a stronger sense of happiness; emotionally unstable people have a greater probability of mental health problems; people earn more; agreeable people are more popular and have more friends.

Coping styles are vital strategies for helping individuals manage stressful situations. Coping styles are cognitive and behavioral changes that result from an individual's management of specific external and internal stressors. Researchers have proposed three coping styles: problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Therefore,

this study focuses on three coping styles among Malaysian young adults: problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping.

Coping styles are an individual's cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage stress. For instance, Berkel and Kathryn (2009) show that high harm avoidance and low self-directedness reported increased stress, anxiety, and depression. High harm avoidance was associated with avoidant coping, leading to more significant distress than either predictor alone.

Afshar et al (2015) showed that neuroticism was a risk factor for stress levels, but other personality traits were protective. Active coping styles were protective, and positive reinterpretation and growth were the most effective. However, the influence of personality on coping and both outcomes is only partially understood.

The main objective of this research was to analyze the relationship between personality traits and coping styles among Malaysian young adults. Subsequently, the first sub-objective of this research was to determine the types of coping styles by gender among Malaysian young adults. The second sub-objective of the current study aimed to examine the types of coping styles utilized by young Malaysian adults.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between personality traits and coping styles among Malaysian young adults?
2. Are there any different coping styles by gender?
3. Which types of coping styles do Malaysian young adults frequently utilize?

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative research design approach to collect and analyze data, mainly cross-sectional survey methods, to obtain numerical results. It used correlation research to establish the presence and strength of a relationship between variables in a population or sample, quantified using a correlation coefficient.

Sample and Data Collection

The sampling method used in this study was purposive sampling. Kelly (2010) defined purposive sampling as choosing participants expected to provide relevant and valuable information for the study. Using purposive sampling, researchers can specifically target and include respondents who meet the criteria of being Malaysian young adults aged 18-40, ensuring that the sample represents the population of interest. This approach allows for a focused investigation of the research question and enhances the relevance and applicability of the findings to the target population.

This study targeted young adults in Malaysia. Based on Erik Erikson's (1950) theory, the stage age of young adults is between 18 and 40. The inclusion criteria of the sample were (a) Malaysian, (b) Young adults from age 18 to 40 years old, (c) No serious mental health issues, (d) Individuals who can understand and read clearly with a degree of fluency in the English language. The exclusion criteria of the sample include: (a) illiterate in information and technology, (b) illiterate in English.

In this study, quantitative methods were used to collect and analyze data. Before collecting data, obtaining ethical approval from the Institution's Ethical Review Board is crucial to ensure that the research was conducted to respect and protect the rights, safety, and well-being of the respondents involved.

For the quantitative approach, the data was collected using a survey form. The data was normalized using a questionnaire survey. Due to the fixed nature of the questions, this form of questioning is often more flexible than interviews. However, a significant advantage of questionnaires is that they help collect information on large groups of people. The average completion time for the questionnaires was approximately 15 to 20 minutes, indicating the approximate duration required for participants to respond to the survey. Participants answered the questions through an online survey form. The questionnaire used personality traits (The Big Five Inventory BFI) and coping styles (Brief COPE). These methods were chosen because they are one of the most feasible ways to analyze young adults' personality traits and coping styles.

To ensure the confidentiality of participants, the study utilized unique identification codes instead of personal information. All data was stored securely and limited to authorized researchers. Published or presented results were maintained anonymity by using aggregated data without disclosing individual responses or identifiable information. Respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary, and their information was kept confidential throughout the research process. The research data were retained for at least one year after the study concluded and was officially closed. However, the records may need to be preserved longer if some additional obligations or regulations need to be fulfilled.

Furthermore, the respondents were provided with informed consent forms and instructions on how to complete the questionnaires. Informed consent is a fundamental principle in research ethics that ensures participants have complete information and voluntarily choose to participate. It requires obtaining consent before the research begins without undue influence, and participants must understand the study and what they agree to.

Research Instruments

This study employed self-report measures to assess personality traits and coping styles. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is a questionnaire specifically created for individuals to evaluate and self-report their levels of five major personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness). This inventory serves as a tool to measure and evaluate these critical dimensions of personality. Besides, The Brief-COPE is a 28-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure effective and ineffective ways to cope with a stressful life event.

This study used questionnaires with three (3) sections to collect the appropriate data. The questions' three (3) sections include sections A, B, and C—the first section collected demographic information. Section A consists of the demographic data that was asked for in the respondents' profiles.

The social demographic data (Section A) cover gender, age, marital status, ethnicity, educational background, employment status, state, and religion. The second section contains questions to measure Malaysian young adults' personality traits. In Section B, the five personality trait types were measured using the Big Five Inventory (BFI). The Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI) was developed by John, Donahue, and Kentle (John et al., 2007). The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is a widely used personality assessment tool designed to measure five key dimensions of personality: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. It effectively measures traits without delving into details. BFI items use one or two trait adjectives accompanied by detailed information to enhance clarity and context. Participants rated items on a 5-point scale, and although the BFI is brief, it maintains content coverage and strong psychometric properties. Eight to ten items represent

each factor of personality, and participants indicate their agreement or disagreement on a Likert-type scale ranging from one point to five points (e.g., from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Among these 44 statements, 16 items are phrased negatively and require reverse scoring. According to Li et al (2015), the study's findings demonstrated that each dimension's Cronbach's coefficient alpha approached 0.8.

In Section C, the Brief-COPE was used to measure the coping styles among Malaysian young adults. According to Carver (1997), the Brief-COPE questionnaire helps assess how individuals cope with stressful events. It consists of 28 questions and aims to identify effective and ineffective coping strategies. Participants rate their frequency of using various coping strategies on a 4-point Likert scale. This scale is commonly used in healthcare settings to understand how patients deal with serious diagnoses. It can also be utilized to evaluate coping mechanisms in various challenging situations, such as cancer, heart failure, injuries, assaults, natural disasters, and financial stress. The scale can determine someone's primary coping styles with scores on the following three subscales: Problem-focused, Emotion-focused, and Avoidant Coping. The Brief-Cope scale was created as a short version of the COPE scale, which initially consisted of 60 items and was developed by Carver et al. (1989). The COPE scale was designed using different coping models as a theoretical foundation. To create a more concise measure, the Brief-COPE was introduced. Overall, the Brief COPE Scale is a suitable tool for assessing coping strategies within the Malaysian population.

Data Analysis

After gathering data, two levels of analysis were conducted to test the study's hypothesis. A descriptive analysis was used to show the research sample's descriptive data. Descriptive analytics involves analyzing past and present data to detect patterns and correlations. This study's descriptive analysis of the population (i.e., mean and standard deviation) was performed.

The independent variable in this study was personality traits, and the dependent variable was coping styles. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to evaluate the relationship between personality traits and styles, answering the main research objective. Pearson correlation can be applied to examine the association between personality traits and coping styles by quantifying the extent to which changes in one variable (e.g., personality traits) correspond to changes in another variable (e.g., coping styles) using a single numerical value. This study used the Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to evaluate the relationship between gender and the three types of coping styles. MANOVA is a powerful statistical tool that evaluates the statistical significance of the effect of gender as an independent variable on a set of dependent variables represented by various coping styles. By assessing multiple dependent variables simultaneously, MANOVA enhances the overall understanding of gender differences in coping mechanisms.

The entire analysis was conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics version 23.0, and a significance level of $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$ was used to ensure that the observed effects were statistically significant. These methodological choices facilitated a robust test of the relationships hypothesized in the study, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of personality traits, coping styles, and gender among Malaysian young adults.

Findings

Participants' Socio-Demographic Results

The total sample size of respondents in this study comprised 252 Malaysian young adults. The frequency analysis was first done on the demographic variables to determine the participants' demographic information. Demographic data, including gender, age, marital status, ethnicity, educational background, employment status, state, and religion (see Table 1.0).

Table 1.0

Participants' Demographic Data

Variables		Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	94	37.3
	Female	158	62.7
Age group	18 - 21 years old	47	18.7
	22 - 25 years old	104	41.3
	26 - 29 years old	36	14.3
	30 - 33 years old	35	13.9
	34 - 37 years old	23	9.1
	38 - 40 years old	7	2.8
Marital status	Single	222	88.1
	Engaged	5	2.0
	Partnered / Married	24	9.5
	Divorced	1	.4
Ethnicity	Malay	58	23.0
	Chinese	143	56.7
	Indian	26	10.3
	Bumiputera Sarawak	8	3.2
	Bumiputera Sabah	16	6.3
	Other	1	.4
Educational Background	Penilaian Menengah Rendah / Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PMR / PT3)	2	.8
	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)	3	1.2
	Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM)	12	4.8
	Diploma / Matriculation / Foundation	29	11.5
	Bachelor's Degree	179	71.0
	Master's Degree	20	7.9
	Doctorate Degree (PhD)	7	2.8
	Employment Status	Employed full-time	70
Unemployed	16	6.3	
Self-employed	7	2.8	
Student	157	62.3	
Employed part-time	1	.4	
Other	1	.4	
State	West Malaysia	182	72.2
	East Malaysia	70	27.8
Religion	Christianity	54	21.4
	Muslim	56	22.2
	Hinduism	22	8.7
	Buddhism	113	44.8
	Other	7	2.8

N = 252

Gender Differences in Big Five Personality Traits

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean scores between males and females for each Big Five Inventory domain (BFI) domain. The results show that males exhibited a mean of 3.0279 (SD = 0.58174), while females had a slightly lower mean of 2.8964 (SD = 0.58173) in Extraversion. However, the independent-sample t-test did not reveal a statistically significant difference between genders in Extraversion ($p = 0.084$). A similar pattern emerged in Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness. However, none of these personality traits showed significant gender differences (Agreeableness: $p = 0.513$, Conscientiousness: $p = 0.124$, Neuroticism: $p = 0.704$, Openness: $p = 0.429$).

An independent-sample t-test was also conducted to compare the personality traits of males and females. The results revealed no significant difference in scores between males (M = 3.278, SD = 0.238) and females (M = 3.279, SD = 0.247). The two-tailed p-value was 0.967, exceeding the conventional significance threshold of $p = 0.05$. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean personality traits between males and females.

Table 2.0

Group Statistic between Gender and Domains of Big Five Inventory (BFI)

	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Extraversion	Male	3.0279	.58174	.06000
	Female	2.8964	.58173	.04628
Agreeableness	Male	3.4693	.38633	.03985
	Female	3.5021	.38341	.03050
Conscientiousness	Male	3.1998	.58672	.06052
	Female	3.3136	.55357	.04404
Neuroticism	Male	3.1463	.70939	.07317
	Female	3.1788	.62354	.04961
Openness	Male	3.4819	.45341	.04677
	Female	3.4348	.45804	.03644

Note. N= 252

Table 3.0

Independent samples Test between Gender and Domains of Big Five Inventory (BFI)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
Extraversion	Equal variances assumed	.175	.676	1.736	250	.084	.13156	.07578	-.01768	.28081	
	Equal variances not assumed			1.736	195.569	.084	.13156	.07578	-.01788	.28101	
Agreeableness	Equal variances assumed	.000	.982	-.656	250	.513	-.03284	.05008	-.13148	.06580	
	Equal variances not assumed			-.654	194.387	.514	-.03284	.05018	-.13181	.06613	
Conscientiousness	Equal variances assumed	.033	.857	-1.544	250	.124	-.11388	.07374	-.25912	.03136	
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.522	186.592	.130	-.11388	.07484	-.26153	.03377	
Neuroticism	Equal variances assumed	.243	.623	-.380	250	.704	-.03252	.08555	-.20102	.13598	
	Equal variances not assumed			-.368	176.105	.713	-.03252	.08840	-.20698	.14194	
Openness	Equal variances assumed	.000	.991	.792	250	.429	.04710	.05944	-.06996	.16417	
	Equal variances not assumed			.795	197.159	.428	.04710	.05929	-.06981	.16402	

Note. N = 252

Table 4.0

Group Statistic between Gender and Big Five Inventory (BFI)

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BIG FIVE INVENTORY (BFI)	Male	94	3.2780	.23838	.02459
	Female	158	3.2793	.24748	.01969

Note. N = 252

Table 5.0

Independent Samples Test between Gender and Big Five Inventory (BFI)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
BIG FIVE INVENTORY (BFI)	Equal variances assumed	.000	.983	-.041	250	.967	-.00130	.03180	-.06393	.06133	
	Equal variances not assumed			-.041	201.449	.967	-.00130	.03150	-.06341	.06081	

Note. N = 252

Types of Coping Style

This study conducted a frequency analysis to determine which of the three coping styles most Malaysian young adults used. The distribution of coping styles and the mean and standard deviation were conducted to see the result. The mean is the average value, and the standard deviation (SD) tells the average scatter of values around the mean. The highest mean indicates that most respondents agree with the variable. A relatively small standard deviation

compared to the mean indicates that the data points are clustered closely around the mean and that the data has low variability or dispersion.

Analyzing the BRIEF-COPE variable showed that the mean value of problem-focused coping was 3.06, with a standard deviation of 0.5896. Most respondents selected the third point on the 4-point Likert scale, indicating a moderate degree to which the respondent adopts this coping style. Besides, the table also showed that the mean value of emotion-focused coping is higher than avoiding coping, respectively, 2.75 (SD = .5148) and 2.34 (SD =.5896). This can indicate the degree to which respondents adopt these coping styles. As a result, problem-focused coping was frequently utilized by young Malaysian adults compared to avoidant and emotion-focused coping.

Table 6.0
Descriptive analysis in three types of Coping Styles

	Avoidant Coping	Emotion-Focused Coping	Problem-Focused Coping
Mean	2.3387	2.7540	3.0630
Std. Deviation	.58960	.51482	.53681

Note. N= 252

Bar Chart in Three Types of Coping Styles

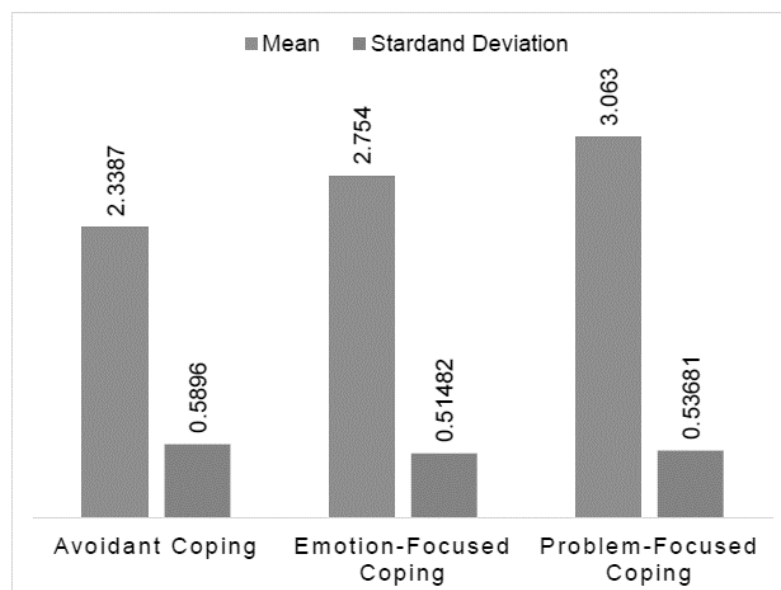


Figure 1.0
Bar Chart of Three Types of Coping Styles

Correlation between Personality Traits and Coping Traits

Pearson correlation was performed using SPSS to examine the association between personality traits and coping styles. This study chose a more conservative significance level, 0.01 (1%). This can reduce the risk of incorrectly rejecting the null hypothesis (Type I error). According to Cohen (1988), he suggests the following guidelines: small ($r = .10$ to $.29$), medium ($r = .30$ to $.49$), and large ($r = .50$ to 1.0). The results showed that problem-focused coping was associated with all personality traits except neuroticism. It was positively associated with

extraversion ($r = 0.185, p < 0.01$), agreeableness ($r = 0.164, p < 0.01$), conscientiousness ($r = 0.202, p < 0.01$), and openness ($r = 0.252, p < 0.01$).

The results showed that Emotion-focused coping was positively associated with extraversion ($r = 0.146, p < 0.01$), neuroticism ($r = 0.257, p < 0.01$), and openness ($r = 0.233, p < 0.01$). No significant associations were found in emotion-oriented coping with agreeableness and conscientiousness. Avoidance coping was positively associated with extraversion ($r = -0.151, p < 0.01$), neuroticism ($r = 0.193, p < 0.01$), and openness ($r = 0.198, p < 0.01$). These coping styles also show no significant association with agreeableness and conscientiousness. A positive correlation existed between the Big Five Inventory (BFI) and Brief-Cope, representing $r = 0.282, p < 0.01$. Besides, this study set the significance level α at 0.05 so that it has only a 5% chance of making a Type I error. The result showed that the P-value, 0.000, is less than $\alpha = 0.05$, so the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Table 7.0

Pearson Correlation between the domains of Big Five Personality (BFI) and the dimensions of Brief-COPE

		Problem-Focused Coping	Emotion-Focused Coping	Avoidant Coping
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	.185**	.146*	.151*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.021	.017
Agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	.164**	-.009	-.120
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.885	.058
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	.202**	-.113	-.123
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.074	.052
Neuroticism	Pearson Correlation	-.013	.257**	.193**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.842	.000	.002
Openness	Pearson Correlation	.252**	.233**	.198**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.002

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

$N = 252$

Table 8.0

Pearson Correlation between Brief-COPE and Big Five Personality (BFI)

		BIG FIVE INVENTORY (BFI)
Brief-COPE	Pearson Correlation	.282**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Note. N = 252

Difference Gender among Three Types of Coping Styles

This study used MANOVA to determine which coping styles significantly positively affected gender. The results of the multivariate analysis are summarized in the following table. First, Box's M test was evaluated to determine the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Box's M test is a parametric test that compares variation in multivariate samples. The results show that the Sig. value is .676, which is larger than .001. Therefore, the results have not violated this assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices.

Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) recommend that when conducting a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), Wilks Lambda should be used to compare two or more mean vectors between groups. The results showed the Wilks' Lambda value of .947, with a significance value of .004. This is less than .05 (see Table 4.9). Besides, the "Value" column, often associated with Pillai's Trace, indicates the effect size. In this case, a value of .053 suggests a small effect size. While statistically significant, the effect size is relatively small, meaning that although coping styles differ between genders, the practical significance may not be substantial.

In this study, three dependent variables were investigated. According to Tabachnick & Fidell (2007), the Bonferroni correction modifies probability (p) values because running multiple statistical tests increases the chance of a type I error. Therefore, the original alpha level 0.05 would be divided by three and give a new alpha level of 0.017. The results were considered significant when the probability value of significance was less than 0.017. The results showed that only one dependent variable (Avoiding Coping) recorded a significance value of less than .017 (with a Significance value of 0.002). Therefore, it can be concluded that only avoiding coping utilizes significant differences between males and females. According to this, the alternative hypothesis was rejected, and it was concluded that there is no difference in utilized coping styles by gender in emotion-focus coping.

However, although the results show that males and females differed in coping styles, the data did not show who utilized more. Therefore, the estimated marginal means among genders are required to find which gender is utilized more. Results showed that the mean score of Avoidant coping for the males was 2.737, and for females, it was 2.488. However, the results were statistically significant; the difference in the two mean scores was minimal, with fewer than 0.3 scale points, and the value was only different at 0.238. In avoidant coping, females have a lower mean than males, and the 95% confidence intervals do not overlap. This suggests a statistically significant difference, with males tending to use avoidant coping more than females.

Table 9.0

Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices^a

Box's M	4.060
F	.667
df1	6
df2	253438.419
Sig.	.676

Note. N = 252

Table 10.0

Multivariate Tests

		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.053	4.600b	3.000	248.000	.004
	Wilks' Lambda	.947	4.600b	3.000	248.000	.004
	Hotelling's Trace	.056	4.600b	3.000	248.000	.004
	Roy's Largest Root	.056	4.600b	3.000	248.000	.004

Note. N = 252

Table 11.0

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Gender	Problem-Focused Coping	.145	1	.145	.502	.479	.002
	Emotion-Focused Coping	.117	1	.117	.441	.507	.002
	Avoidant Coping	3.334	1	3.334	9.932	.002	.038

Note. N = 252

Table 12.0

Estimated Marginal Means: Gender

Dependent Variable	Gender	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Problem-Focused Coping	Male	3.032	.055	2.923	3.141
	Female	3.081	.043	2.997	3.166
Emotion-Focused Coping	Male	2.782	.053	2.677	2.887
	Female	2.737	.041	2.657	2.818
Avoidant Coping	Male	2.488	.060	2.370	2.606
	Female	2.250	.046	2.159	2.341

Note. N = 252

Discussions*Profiling of Personality Traits and Coping Styles*

In this study, a demographic analysis of 252 Malaysian young adults provides a rich exploration of the interplay of personality traits and coping styles in this group. Notably, the skewness towards female respondents introduces a gender dimension that may influence the performance of personality traits. Understanding how gender differences intersect with coping mechanisms is critical because of its implications for mental health interventions targeting specific demographic groups. Furthermore, the prevalence of the 22-25 age group points to the focus on studying coping styles during critical transition periods. Exploring the challenges and stressors unique to this age can provide a nuanced understanding of coping mechanisms in adulthood.

Moreover, the study's examination of marital status revealed a predominance of single respondents, opening avenues for investigating coping strategies in the context of personal and relationship dynamics. Additionally, the ethnic diversity of the sample, in which Chinese respondents comprised the majority, prompted exploration of how cultural context shapes coping mechanisms. Most have at least a bachelor's degree and educational attainment is essential. This suggests the need for in-depth research on the interaction between education and coping styles to reveal the role of intellectual resources in stress management. Furthermore, the dominance of students and the proportion of employed persons highlight potential changes in coping strategies related to occupational status.

The inferential analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in the personality traits for males and females based on the results of the independent-sample t-test. This finding was contrary to previous research by Costa et al (2001), who indicated that women generally score higher on neuroticism and agreeableness and are seen as open to feelings, while men score higher on assertiveness. Besides, the current findings contradict Weisberg et al (2011), which revealed gender differences in personality traits, with women scoring higher on extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism but more minor or undetectable scores on openness, conscientiousness, and extraversion.

These results indicated that gender does not appear to be a significant predictor of variation in personality traits measured by the assessment tools used, at least within the scope of the studies conducted. The fact that there is insufficient evidence to support the idea that gender plays a vital role in shaping these specific personality traits lacks statistical significance, meaning that any observed differences in mean scores between men and women are likely to be due to accidental factors. This highlights the importance of acknowledging personality's complex and diverse aspects, which a wide range of variables beyond gender may influence.

Relationship between Personality Traits and Coping Styles Among Malaysia Young Adults

In this study with Malaysian young adults, the results found that the personality traits of extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness positively predict problem-focused coping. In contrast, neuroticism positively predicts emotion-focused coping and avoidant coping. Agreeableness and conscientiousness also negatively predict some emotion-focused coping and avoidant coping. This result was aligned with those obtained in other populations' studies (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; McCrae & Costa, 1986). These findings were broadly consistent with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness as predictors of coping styles that focus more on problem-solving. While Neuroticism predicts more negative and avoidant coping associated with emotion-focused

strategies, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness are negative predictors of emotion-focused strategies.

Malaysian young adults who are high on neuroticism tend to use emotion-focused coping and avoidant coping to deal with problems. At the same time, they are less likely to adopt a problem-solving approach to deal with problems. This result aligns with Leszko et al. (2020), who discovered that neuroticism had a negative correlation with task-oriented coping but a good correlation with emotion-oriented coping. Criminals with high neuroticism tended to use coping mechanisms that focused on emotions. When under stress, these people are more sensitive to getting anxious and nervous than people with lower ratings.

The findings supported the alternative hypothesis, which means a significant relationship exists between personality traits and coping styles among Malaysian young adults. This result was in line with existing literature research—for instance, a higher correlation between coping strategies and personality traits in samples under more significant stress (Ścigała et al., 2020; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007).

Types of Coping Styles Utilized by Malaysian Young Adults

This study examined the types of coping styles utilized by Malaysian young adults. The main finding is that Malaysian young adults predominantly use problem-focused coping strategies when faced with challenges. The results aligned with Ismail et al (2021), who found that most interns utilized problem-focused strategies to cope with their challenges. The study on coping styles among Malaysian young adults reveals a predominant utilization of problem-focused coping strategies, indicating a proactive approach to addressing and resolving challenges. This finding aligns with established psychological literature. Notably, the work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984); Berkel and Kathryn (2009) emphasizes problem-focused coping as a proactive strategy for stress management.

Besides, the current findings suggested that the coping strategies observed among Malaysian young adults do not entirely align with what is typically expected in Asian culture. This introduces an interesting cultural dimension, implying that factors beyond regional cultural norms might influence coping behaviors. The study proposes an alternative explanation for the observed coping styles. Referring to a related study by Kamaludin et al (2020), it is suggested that the prevalence of maladaptive coping strategies among Malaysian students during the pandemic might explain the deviation from typical Asian coping styles. Besides, Berkel & Kathryn (2009); Holahan et al (2005) contribute to the understanding that certain psychological factors, such as harm avoidance and avoidant coping, are correlated with adverse mental health outcomes like stress and depressive symptoms. By referencing a similar study, the interpretation gains support and context. The mention of maladaptive coping strategies aligns the findings with broader research on how individuals cope with stress.

Types of Coping Styles by Gender among Malaysian Young Adults

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the subtle relationship between coping styles and gender, adding to the existing body of research in this area. Identifying significant differences in avoidant coping between men and women, although characterized by small effect sizes, contributes to the ongoing conversation around gender-specific coping mechanisms. This is consistent with research suggesting that gender shapes individuals' responses to stressors (Matud, 2004). The current study's rigorous methodology, including multivariate analysis of variance and Bonferroni correction, increases the reliability of the

results and highlights the importance of statistical robustness in drawing meaningful conclusions.

In this study, the findings suggest that there was no significant difference in gender when problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping were used among young Malaysian adults. This aligns with Leandro and Castillo (2010), who indicated that men and women use problem-solving strategies equally. However, Leandro & Castillo (2010); Gashi et al (2022); Ptacek et al (1994) indicated that females tend to use emotion-focused coping more than men. Besides, the finding shows that a closer look at the data broken down by gender reveals slight differences in how females and males utilize avoidant coping. These results showed that males seem to be more experiential avoidant than females. This is interesting, contrary to Panayiotou et al (2017), who suggest that greater reliance on avoidance (particularly behavioral avoidance) in women may be associated with higher anxiety susceptibility.

In contrast to earlier research, the current study builds on an understanding of coping styles by identifying gender-related differences and highlighting the practical implications of these differences. This study's contributions contribute to ongoing research as researchers delve into the intricate interactions between coping styles and gender, urging a comprehensive perspective encompassing statistical rigor and practical implications.

Implications of the Study

Coping styles and personality traits are key factors that influence how young adults in Malaysia cope with daily challenges and stress. In addition, studying personality traits and coping styles is an essential area of psychological research. Carver and Connor-Smith (2010) provide a more nuanced description of the relationship between personality traits and specific coping responses and suggest ways to extend future research to deepen our understanding of how personality and coping styles influence adaptation to stress. This study proposes a framework by which different personality traits may influence coping styles related to stressful life events. Therefore, the results of the current study highlight the importance of understanding the correlation between personality traits and coping styles so that individuals can identify strengths and weaknesses, thus enhancing the development of effective coping strategies among young adults in Malaysia.

The increasing mental health issues among Malaysian young adults are a growing concern, prompting a need for a comprehensive investigation into the factors contributing to this trend. The findings can guide the development of policies and practices promoting mental health among young adults, incorporating coping skills training and tailored support based on individual personality traits in educational curricula and mental health policies. This study's findings can be a framework for Malaysian young adults to understand their personality traits and coping styles to cope with their problems. A better understanding of the role of personality traits and their relationship with coping strategies may facilitate more targeted and effective psychological interventions to improve the ability of Malaysian young adults to cope with stress.

According to Ling et al (2017), there is limited research on the relationship between personality traits and coping styles in the context of young adults in Malaysia. Therefore, this study contributed significantly to psychology by examining how personality traits influence coping styles in Malaysian cultural contexts. It may enhance understanding of mental health, stress management, and well-being among young adults in Malaysia and contribute to the existing literature on Big Five personality traits and coping styles.

Golemis et al (2021) highlighted the psychological impact of COVID-19 on young people and the need for online programs to promote adaptive coping strategies for loneliness. Understanding the relationship between personality traits and coping styles can help individuals identify their strengths and weaknesses and develop coping strategies tailored to their unique personality traits. Therefore, the results of this current study have important implications for Malaysian youth in developing effective coping strategies.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study was the sampling bias. Sampling bias occurs when the selected sample does not accurately represent the target population, leading to results that may not be generalizable to the larger population. In this study, the respondents chosen are young adults in Malaysia, and the sample did not reflect the diversity of the entire population of Malaysia or other age groups. This bias was acknowledged and considered when interpreting and generalizing the findings.

Besides, self-report bias also happened because respondents did not always provide accurate or honest responses when completing the survey, which impacted the validity of the study's findings. In this study, social desirability bias was a big issue with self-report measures because respondents mostly admiringly described themselves. This is particularly important when examining coping styles, as respondents are more likely to report using socially desirable coping strategies, so the questions are not always straightforward, so it is not known whether the respondents understand the questions, and collecting valid information on the data would be difficult.

Furthermore, correlational analyses used in this study may be restricted due to the inability to establish causal relationships, the possibility of confounding variables, and the reliance on statistical relationships. In this study, the correlational analysis can identify associations between personality traits and coping styles but cannot predict their causation. Researchers should investigate alternatives to correlation coefficients, such as regression analysis for causal studies. Despite numerous studies, the impact of personality on coping and outcomes is only partially understood due to measurement issues, overreliance on cross-sectional studies, insufficient consideration of situational factors, and insufficient attention to the interaction between personality traits.

Moreover, the study results were not easily generalizable to the entire population due to the imbalanced data on gender representation. In this study, female data accounted for more than half of the total. The results did not accurately reflect the diversity of coping styles and personality traits across genders. Besides, this study did not adequately represent both genders, affecting practical implications, and intervention recommendations may be limited. Developing effective coping strategies and personality-focused interventions that are applicable and beneficial to individuals of all gender identities can be challenging.

Overall, while online questionnaires with closed questions can provide valuable data, they also have some limitations to consider when interpreting the results. Closed-ended survey questions have limitations as they prevent respondents from providing in-depth responses, limiting their ability to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings. In this study, respondents cannot ask for clarification, making it difficult to seek help if confused about a question. Therefore, it is essential to use various methods and approaches to understand the relationship between personality traits and coping styles among Malaysian young adults.

Future Recommendations

Based on the current study's findings, the following suggestions are made for relevant research in various fields such as psychology, counseling, human development, and others.

First, this study used a quantitative method to reveal the relationship between personality traits and coping styles. On this basis, future research should examine this relationship using qualitative methods. Qualitative research methods can offer visions for different problems and help develop concepts or theories for potential quantitative research, achieving excellent results. Qualitative research can help researchers understand the thoughts and feelings of research participants, thereby developing a deeper understanding of the meaning people attribute to their experiences. Some qualitative methods include observation, interviews, and focus groups.

Secondly, context plays a crucial role in influencing situational demands, resources, coping response choices, and the costs and benefits of coping responses (Prokopcakova, 2004). The nature of the stressor, including severity, controllability, and scope, must be considered, not just in conjunction with participants' responses to self-generated stressors. Personality also affects coping styles, with traits such as extraversion and agreeableness being more related to social stressors, while conscientiousness is more related to planning and persistence stressors. Personality also affects coping flexibility and matching coping strategies to problem demands.

Moreover, personality assessment has a long history, and the consensus is more about personality structure and optimal measures than coping. Assessing specific coping responses provides a more nuanced understanding of coping than broad engagement, disengagement, or emotion-focused coping. Therefore, assessing specific personality facets should provide a more complete picture of how personality relates to coping.

Lastly, the current understanding of personality traits and coping responses is inadequate, as personality is not a single trait at a time. Stress exposure and responses are influenced by all personality traits simultaneously. Future research should consider joint influences of traits on coping, examine personality profiles, control for one trait, and examine interactions among traits. Therefore, future research should also explore the joint and interactive impacts of multiple coping responses.

Conclusions

This study examined the relationship between the big five personality traits and coping styles among Malaysian young adults and provided three critical results. Based on the current study's findings, it can be concluded that there is a significant correlation between personality traits and coping styles among Malaysian young adults. The findings also showed no significant gender differences in problem-focused and emotion-focused coping but slight differences in avoidant coping usage between males and females, with males being more experientially avoidant.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted Malaysian society, causing financial constraints, remote online teaching, and academic concerns. Social distancing has led to increased symptoms of depression, anxiety disorder, intrusive thoughts, insomnia, and acute stress. As lockdowns and the virus's rapid spread cause significant changes, people adopt various coping strategies to manage the challenges and stresses. Past research shows that Malaysians used maladaptive coping strategies to handle the problem of Movement Control Order (MCO) (Kamaludin et al., 2020). However, the current study found that Malaysian young adults used problem-focused coping to solve problems and stress. This means that

Malaysian young adults are slowly emerging from the shadow of the pandemic. Therefore, this study has important research implications because it can enhance the reader's understanding and assessment of young adults' coping mechanisms, which is critical for future research and interventions to improve their well-being.

This study showed the relationships between personality traits and coping styles in Malaysian young adults. It not only provides knowledge reflected in personality traits and coping styles but also lays the foundation for future research in this area in Malaysia. The current study's findings can serve the literature regarding Malaysian perspectives. Data may provide an application and implications for individual or group treatment in psychological counseling.

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