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Personality and Coping Strategies Associated with Job Stress among Zimbabwean Teachers' College Lecturers

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Abstract

The study sought to determine the relationship between personality as mapped by the Big Five traits and coping strategies among teachers' college lecturers in Zimbabwe. A non-experimental quantitative research design was used. 211 lecturers from three teachers' colleges were surveyed using convenience sampling. A fifty-item IPIP scale was used to map the personality traits of lecturers, while lecturer coping strategies were determined using a sixty-item Coping Orientations to Problems Experienced – Dispositional Version measure. Quantitative data were analysed using multiple linear regression and correlation analysis. Inferential statistics were presented in the form of tables. Findings of this study reveal that the predictive variables, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience explained a significant per cent of the variation in coping. Conscientiousness explained a significant variation in three coping strategies namely, planning, restraint coping and the use of instrumental social support. Neuroticism had a negative correlation with four potentially maladaptive emotion-focused coping strategies; denial, substance use, venting emotions, and behavioural disengagement. Openness to experience had a weak positive correlation with three emotion-focused coping strategies; positive reinterpretation and growth, religious coping, and humor.

Introduction and background

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between personality and stress. In particular, scholars in organisational and occupational psychology continue to be preoccupied by how personality influences individuals in work settings (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2012), the relationship between personality and turnover (Zimmerman, 2008), and how personality affects work-family balance (Wickramaaratchi & Perera, 2016). While personality research is important, it is noteworthy that the bulk of this research has been contextualized to western cultures, which are largely individualistic. Very little research has examined this relationship in collectivistic cultures, more so, with a sample of Zimbabwean teachers' college lecturers.

Stress scholars generally agree that many academic institutions, the world over, are in a state of flux and that academics, who in the past enjoyed lighter workloads and other benefits, no longer do so in the present (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2008), and are susceptible to higher levels of job stress (Steyn & Kamper 2006). Studies have revealed that some of the high levels of stress emanate from an overload of demands (Mxenge, Dywill & Basaza, 2014), and increased student numbers (Kinman, 2014) which is a result of massification of students. Massification is a worldwide phenomenon that has also affected Zimbabwe's higher education sector, particularly teachers" colleges. It is therefore evident that teacher education has not escaped the challenges which have characterised the global demand for higher education. These include inadequate government funding, inability of institutions to recruit staff resulting in high staff/student ratios, increased administrative responsibilities for lecturers, poorly resourced libraries, and physical infrastructure which has not matched the high student enrolment (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Mohamedbhai, 2014; Teferra & Altbachl, 2004). How lecturers cope with these varied stressors becomes an important area of focus in an environment where there is a scarcity of such research. Numerous studies have examined the relationship between personality and dependent variables such as stress, burnout and coping (Bakker, Van Der Zee, Lewig & Dollard, 2006; Cleare, 2013; Foley 2013; Johnson, 2013; Fink, 2015; Penney, David & Witt, 2011). The specific objective of the current study was therefore to determine the relationship between personality as mapped by the Big Five traits and coping among teachers' college lecturers in Zimbabwe.

Conceptualising personality

The five-factor model (FFM), which has given rise to the NEO-Personality Inventory, is currently viewed as the gold standard in western psychology. It is amongst the most widely used and researched operationalisation of the FFM which is deemed cross-culturally applicable (Laher, 2008). In this model, traits are commonly referred to as The Big Five factors (Srivastava, 2013). The validity of the FFM has been supported in the literature (Digman, 1990; Mount, Barrick & Stewart, 1998). Some scholars (e.g. Barbaranelli et al., 2007; Weinschenk & Panagopoulos, 2014) argue that this hierarchical model offers a comprehensive understanding of personality and individual differences. They have therefore argued for the universality of traits. A study by Piedmont, Bain, McCrae and Costa (2002) demonstrated that the Big Five traits shared some universal elements with the Zimbabwean Shona culture.

Personality was operationalised using five broad traits. Each trait has six components that are bipolar in nature, indicating that each component has both low and high levels that describe an individual personality. *Openness to experience* is a quality described by a proclivity towards creative ability, tolerance and stylish affectability (Kokkinos, 2007; Lee, Johnston & Dougherty, 2000). The six components of openness to experience include; creative energy, imaginative interests, emotionality, boldness, astuteness, and liberalism (Costa & McCrae, 1995). *Conscientiousness* characterizes the degree to which an individual is composed, solid and dedicated, accomplishment oriented, and reliable (Digman, 1990; Mondak et al., 2010; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998). The six components of conscientiousness include an individual's self-efficacy, precision, devotion, accomplishment endeavoring, self-restraint, and mindfulness (Costa & McCrae, 1995). *Extraversion* depicts an individual's activity level, degree of amiability and emphaticness (Lee at al., 2000), and is related with an air towards constructive feelings (Kokkinos, 2007). The six facets of extraversion are an individual's benevolence, gregariousness, emphaticness, activity level, excitement seeking, and gladness (Costa & McCrae, 1995). *Agreeableness* characterizes an individual's relational connections and epitomizes charitableness, benevolence and adaptability (Lee et al., 2000; Barrick, Mount & Gupta, 2003). The six components of agreeableness incorporate an individual's capacity to confide in others, ethical quality, selflessness, teamwork, unobtrusiveness, and compassion (Costa & McCrae, 1995). *Neuroticism* characterizes the degree to which an individual will demonstrate the nearness or nonappearance of nervousness, despondency or related negative feelings (Gallego & Oberski, 2012), and is frequently connected with a failure to control urges, inclination to unlikely thoughts and powerlessness to adapt to pressure (Kokkinos, 2007). The six components of neuroticism are uneasiness, outrage, dejection, self-consciousness, hastiness, and helplessness (Costa & McCrae, 1995).

The current study investigates the relationship between personality and coping using measures which have been developed within a Western individualistic worldview. The relationship is explained using a sample of lecturers in a Zimbabwean setting that is largely collectivistic, and has an Afrocentric worldview. The study is therefore conducted against a backdrop of ongoing debate, which has led some scholars to argue that personality traits are more applicable to western cultures (Cross & Markus, 1999; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993). However, some scholars (e.g. Piedmont, Bain, McCrae & Costa, 2002) aptly warn that the acceptance of such a narrow standpoint would imply that personality trait models, and related

measures, developed in western cultures are inapplicable in collectivistic cultures. In the current debate, Mkhize (2003) proffers a balanced view by pointing out that the emergent challenge is therefore to advance a psychologically relevant and dynamic interpretation of the African and other worldviews, because in the modern world people are exposed to multiple worldviews and social realities. The current study therefore can only add, and not subtract to this debate and extant literature on the universality of personality traits. This study adds to current studies in South Africa (e.g. Govender, 2008; Naidoo, 2016; Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003) which used the Big Five Personality Inventory with samples drawn from different service industries.

Personality and coping

Coping is a very broad concept, and in view of this, it involves the subjective appraisal and response to stressful events (Folkman & Moscowitz, 2004). It is therefore an effort to avoid or minimise what an individual appraises to be a stressor (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Extant literature shows that several coping distinctions exist. However, this study is based on a tripod typology which categorizes coping into three groups namely; problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and potentially maladaptive emotion-focused coping. Each group has five dimensions (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). The use of these three groups does not in any way preclude the existence of other distinctions because there is no single categorization which can sufficiently explain coping (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart 2007).

Problem-focused coping

Individual differences impact the way people cope with job stress. George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory holds that individual differences imply that people have subjective interpretations of similar events, and therefore form different constructs of the same reality (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). Individuals who employ problem-focused coping will target the stressor and engage in action designed to circumvent or eliminate the effect of the stressor (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). The five dimensions of problem-focused coping are; active coping, seeking social support for instrumental reasons, suppressing competing activities and restraint coping (Carver et al., 1989). Evidence shows that each of the Big Five traits influences the choice of the five problem-focused coping strategies to varying degrees (Foley, 2013).

Active coping has shown a positive relationship with work engagement. Individuals who used active coping were capable of sustaining high work engagement levels, while those who did not use this strategy were characterized by low levels of work engagement (Schiffrin & Nelson, 2010). Agreeableness and openness to experience both had a positive relationship with active coping and seeking instrumental social support (Leandro & Castillo, 2010; Penley & Tomaka, 2002). This implies that individuals high in both these traits tend to use more active coping and instrumental social support than those who are low in these traits. On the other hand, individuals high in conscientiousness opted more for active coping and planning, and infrequently used potentially maladaptive emotion-focused coping (Jelinek & Morf, 1995; Vollrath, et al., 1994; Vollrath et al., 1995; Watson & Hubbard, 1996). Paradoxically, active coping had no significant relationship with teacher stress (Griffith, Steptoe & Cropley, 1999). A cogent conclusion is that this form of coping would be naturally embedded in the usual work routines of proficient and capable teachers. With regard to extraversion, some studies (e.g. Costa, Somerfield & McCrae, 1996; Watson & Hubbard, 1996) confirm that individuals high in this trait engage in active coping strategies (Vollrath & Torgersen, 2000).

Emotion-focused coping

An individual employing emotion-focused coping solicits compassion or pity or moral backup in order to reduce stress. Five dimensions of emotion-focused coping are; positive reinterpretation and growth, use of emotional social support, religious coping, acceptance and humour is (Carver et al., 1989). Studies which examined humour have produced varied and inconclusive outcomes (Samson & Gross, 2012). In some studies, humour is seen as positive with individuals who have high levels of humour perceived as being able to resist the harmful effects of life stressors better than those who low levels (Abel, 2002; Kuiper, 2012. Humorous individuals were also able to positively evaluate their under-performance on self-threatening tasks (Geisler & Weber, 2010) which strongly suggests that the conscious use of humour encompasses a stress-mediating impact. However, it cannot be ignored that humour has also been associated with cynical intentions (Kosenko & Rintamaki, 2010; Rowe & Regehr, 2010).

The use of religion was a prevalent coping strategy in non-Western cultures (Bardi & Guerra, 2011; Radman et al., 2011). In Eastern cultures which are largely collectivistic, religion and deferral to hierarchy define the social order, because individuals generally place responsibility outside the self, in either religion or God (Bardi & Guerra, 2011). In contrast,

religion was one of the least used strategies among Spaniards who opted more for acceptance, positive reinterpretation and growth, and seeking emotional support when dealing with stressful situations (Leandro & Castillo, 2010). Other studies have shown that religious coping is unrelated to extraversion and neuroticism, but shows a small positive correlation with agreeableness and a negative correlation with openness to experience (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007).

Potentially maladaptive emotion-focused coping

The five dimensions of potentially maladaptive emotion-focused coping are; ventilating emotions, denial, mental disengagement, behavioural disengagement, and the use of alcohol and drugs (Carver et al., 1989). Among the Spaniards, behavioural disengagement and denial were less frequently used coping strategies, with more men resorting to the use of denial than women (Leandro & Castillo, 2010). Other studies have found a relationship between neuroticism and maladaptive coping (Costa, Somerfield & McCrae, 1996; Vollrath, Torgersen & Alnñs, 1995; Watson & Hubbard, 1996). On the other hand, neuroticism has been shown to have a positive relationship with venting of emotions and the use of intoxicants (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Leandro & Castillo, 2010). These studies provide ample evidence to prove that neuroticism is particularly important for stress experience and affectivity, and therefore determines stress vulnerability (Vollrath & Torgersen, 2000). Consequently, there is potential that lecturers who are high in neuroticism may resort to maladaptive behaviours when confronted with work-related stress. Some studies have shown that agreeableness and conscientiousness were negatively associated with the use of alcohol and drugs (Chalfont & Bennett, 1999; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). This implies that individuals who are high in agreeableness and conscientiousness will use this coping strategy less, while those who are low on these traits will opt more for the use of alcohol and drug use.

Method

Participants and procedure

The study relied on a non-experimental quantitative research design in which 224 lecturers were surveyed from three teachers' colleges. A non-probability convenience sampling strategy was adopted. Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007, p. 286) define convenience sampling as "Choosing settings, groups, and/or individuals that are conveniently available and willing to participate in the study." The use of a convenience sampling approach was informed mainly by two factors; the accessibility of participants, and their willingness to participate (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The decision to use a convenience sampling strategy was therefore based on feasibility and efficiency, as the colleges provided a setting where only those lecturers who demonstrated eagerness to contribute to the study could be accessed.

A total of 270 questionnaires were distributed at three research sites with ninety questionnaires being administered at each teachers‟ college. A valid sample of 211 was derived after questionnaire data were assessed for missing values. This indicated a 78.1% return rate. The age profile demonstrated a close typical dissemination with 113 members in the 41-50 age class, which mirrored that the lecturers in the example were generally middle-aged and relatively mature. The majority of lecturers was married and did not hold any posts of special responsibility. Lecturers without any posts of responsibility accounted for 81% of the sample. Heads of Subject made 11.4 per cent, Lecturers‟ in Charge, 4.3 per cent, and Heads of Department 3.3 per cent. Furthermore, the majority of lecturers were in the senior to principal lecturer grades, implying that they had six or more years of teaching experience. 52.6% of the lecturers had first degrees and a teaching qualification, while 47.4 per cent of the sample had senior degrees at master's level. Participation, which was both voluntary and anonymous, was based on the ethical principle of informed consent.

Instruments

Two instruments where concurrently administered as a research battery at the research sites.

a) Personality: Goldberg's Lexical Factor Markers – The Big Five Personality Test

A fifty-item IPIP scale with ten items per dimension was used to map the personality traits of lecturers. The participants were asked to indicate their preferences on Likert scale items which had a range from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree). On each trait, the final calculated score ranges between zero and forty. A South African study (Vogt, 2007) using the BTI (a South African adaptation of the NEO-PI-R) established Cronbach's alpha coefficients as follows: Extraversion =.89, Neuroticism =.94, Conscientiousness, =.94, Openness to Experience, =.90

and Agreeableness = 0.88. The alphas calculated for the five scales in the current study were as follows: extraversion =.79, neuroticism =.76, conscientiousness, = .74, openness to experience, = .73 and agreeableness = .72. Based on the
Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel (2007) matrix, a sample of 211 lecturers, and that the Big Five Personality Test had ten items per subscale, the alpha coefficients reported in this study were in the range "Fair" to "Moderate".

b) Coping Orientations to Problems Experienced – Dispositional Version (COPE-DV)

A sixty-item COPE-DV which determines how people cope with various stressful situations was administered. In this measure, participants complete a Likert-type scale by rating each item from 1 to 4. The lower score of 1 indicates what a person does not usually do, and the highest score of 4 is indicative of a behaviour which is done frequently. The sixty items are arranged into three broad groups, each with five coping dimensions (Villada, Hidalgo, Almela & Salvador, 2016). The COPE-DV was seen as appropriate for the current study because it offers a broad spectrum of coping behaviours, which makes it useful in assessing the coping behaviours of the lecturers. To arrive at a score for each dimension, an average is calculated by totaling the responses indicated and dividing it by four. A total coping score is then derived by summing up the averages for all the fifteen dimensions. Donoghue (2004) reported alpha reliabilities which ranged from =.45 to =.92 for the Coping Orientations to Problems Experienced – Dispositional Version, while Villada et al. (2016) also reported satisfactory Cronbach's alpha ranging from α =.66 to =.81. In the current study, the reported alpha ranged from =.71 to =.74 for the five sub-scales, each with $\leq$ 6 items. Using the matrix proposed by Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel (2007), the computed alpha were rated "Moderate".

Data analyses

Inferential statistics were the preferred method of data analyses which suited the quantitative study. Version 23.0 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse data. Both multiple linear regression (MLR) and correlation analysis (CA) were used. The primary purpose of MLR was to identify dominant personality traits that predicted each of the dependent coping variables. MLR analysis is used to investigate a relationship between a dependent variable and at least two predictor variables. It is a statistical technique which "… enables us to predict future [outcomes] based on values of predictor variables" (Field, 2009 in Plotts, 2011, p. 56). Because personality had five predictive variables, which constituted a small number, the simultaneous enter method was used. CA was then used to determine the relationship between personality and the identified coping

dimensions. This technique is used to evaluate the degree of relationship between two quantitative variables (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002). A model was developed for the dependent variable, coping. Predictive variables were simultaneously entered into the model to determine the relationship between personality and coping. The statistical significance of the predictive variables which contributed to coping was determined using an F statistic. A p-value of ≤ .05 demonstrates relationship between the predictive and dependent variables (Hussien, 2010; Shaffer, 2007). Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient or r coefficient was used. It is a measure of the strength of the linear relationship between two such variables (Hauke & Kossowski, 2011).

The r coefficient has a magnitude and direction of either positive or negative on a range of values from -1 to 0 to + 1, where the values are absolute and non-dimensional (Taylor, 1990). Therefore, a correlation of zero indicates that there is no relationship between the measured variables, while the closer the r coefficient approaches ±1, regardless of direction; the stronger is the existing association between the two variables (Taylor, 1990). If a relationship between two variables is positive, an increase in one variable will result in an increase in the other variable. Conversely, if there is a negative relationship, it implies that higher levels of one variable are associated with lower levels of the other. In correlation analysis, a p-value <.05 identifies the predictor variables significantly related to the dependent variables‟ dimensions correlations (Taylor, 1990). CA was an expedient way of gaining a general impression of the dimensions that contributed to coping.

Correlation coefficients that were ≤ .35 represented low or weak correlations, .36 to .67 were modest or moderate correlations, and, 68 to 1.0 were high or strong correlations(Taylor, 1990). Data were interpreted using the determination coefficient (r2). It is the percentage of variance in the dependent variable that can be predicted from the independent variable (Weber & Lamb, 1970; Congelosi, Taylor & Rice, 1983; Mason, Lind & Marchal, 1983). The interpretation of the results is easier by determining a per cent value. Taylor (1990) argues that it is a more conservative measure of the relationship between two variables that many statisticians prefer.

Results

As shown in Table 1, three predictive variables showed significance at the .05 level. These are conscientiousness (B = .143, Beta = .178, p-value = .027<.05), neuroticism (B = -.140, Beta = -.168, p-value = .022<.05), and openness to experience (B =.142, Beta =.172, p-value

= .027<.05). Coping is positively related to conscientiousness and openness to experience, but is negatively related to neuroticism.

Table 1: Multiple linear regression model for coping

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients			Collinearity statistics	
	B	Std. error	Beta	T	p-value	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	33.902	2.200		15.408	.000		
Extraversion	.055	.061	.065	.901	.369	.882	1.134
Agreeableness	-.037	.059	-.050	-.622	.535	.704	1.421
Conscientiousness	.143	.064	.178	2.225	.027	.703	1.422
Neuroticism	-.140	.061	-.168	-2.304	.022	.850	1.177
Openness to experience	.142	.063	.172	2.233	.027	.764	1.309
		Regression Equation Statistics					
F		3.179					
P-value of the F-Statistic		.009					
R Square		.072					
a .Dependent Variable: Coping							

Based on the relative strength of the Beta coefficients as seen in table 1, the rank order of the significant predictive variables relative to the dependent variable, coping is: (1) conscientiousness (.178), (2) openness to experience (.172), (3), neuroticism (-.168). Extraversion (B = .055, Beta = .065, p-value = .369>.05) and agreeableness (B = -.037, Beta =-.050, p-value = .535>.05), do not have a statistically significant impact on coping. Since the summary of the regression model, as seen in table 1, shows an R Square of 0.072, the conclusion drawn is that the predictive variables, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience explain 7.2% of the variation in coping. This suggests that the dominant personality traits of the Zimbabwean teachers' college lecturer sample were restricted to these three traits. These three traits were thus extracted for CA analysis.

Table 2 reveals that conscientiousness has no correlation with focusing on and venting emotions, using social emotional support, humor, and substance use. This implies that lecturers in this sample who exhibit this trait do not opt for the four coping strategies in the job stress environment of the teachers' colleges.

Table 2: Coping dimensions correlation analysis

Coping Dimensions	Conscientiousness			Neuroticism			Openness to Experience		
	r	r^2	p-value	r	r^2	p-value	r	r^2	p-value
Positive reinterpretation and growth	.321	.103	.000	.205	.042	.003	.241	.058	.000
Mental disengagement	-.159	.025	.021	.162	..000	.019	.120	.014	.091
Focus on and venting of emotions	-.126	.016	.067	-.380	.004	.000	.033	.001	.636
Use of instrumental social support	.223	.050	.001	.148	.002	.031	.997	.994	.158
Active coping	.377	.142	.000	.331	.110	.000	.333	.110	.000
Denial	-.204	.042	.003	-.256	.066	.000	-.076	.006	.272
Religious coping	.152	.023	.027	.027	.001	.693	.145	.021	.035
Humour	.073	.005	.290	.065	.084	.347	.210	.044	.002
Behavioural disengagement	-.198	.039	.004	-.395	.156	.000	-.021	.000	.003
Restraint	.263	.069	.000	-.035	.001	.610	.093	.001	.177
Use of social emotional support	-.020	.000	.771	-.083	.007	.229	-.035	.001	.612
Substance use	-.097	..009	.162	-.232	.026	.001	-.016	.000	.815
Acceptance	.136	.018	.049	.009	.000	.896	.049	.002	.490
Suppression of competing activities	.091	.008	.005	.021	.000	.760	.137	.019	.047
Planning	.344	.118	.000	.275	.076	.000	.288	.083	.000

Conscientiousness reveals a weak positive correlation with four problem-focused coping strategies; use of instrumental social support (r = .223, p = -.001), restraint ((r = .263, p = -.000), suppression of competing activities (r = .091, p = -.005), and planning (r = .344, p = -.000) at alpha .05. In rank order, the coefficient of determination indicates that conscientiousness explains a significant 11.8, 6.9, and 5 per cent variation in the dependent variables planning, restraint, and use of instrumental social support respectively. Conscientiousness furthermore shows a weak positive correlation with three emotion-focused coping strategies; positive reinterpretation and growth (r = .321, p = -.000), religious coping (r = .152, p = -.027) and acceptance (r = .136, p = -.049). In rank order, the percentage of variation explained in the three dependent variables is 10.3, 2.3 and 1.8 respectively.

Conscientiousness has a weak negative correlation with three potentially maladaptive emotion-focused coping strategies; mental disengagement (r = -.159, p = -.021), denial (r = -.204, p = .000), and behavioural disengagement (r = -.198, p = -.039). In rank order, the coefficient of determination indicates that conscientiousness explains a significant 4.2 per cent variation in the dependent variable denial, and an insignificant 3.9 and 2.1 per cent variation in the dependent variables behavioural disengagement and mental disengagement.

Neuroticism has no correlation with six coping dimensions; religious coping, humour, restraint, use of social emotional support, acceptance, and suppression of competing activities. Neuroticism, however, has a low or weak positive correlation with three strategies: use of instrumental social support ($r = .148$, $p = .031$), active coping ($r = .331$, $p = .000$), and planning ($r = .275$, $p = .000$), relative to the standard alpha level of .05. In rank order, neuroticism explains a significant 11 per cent variation in the dependent variable active coping and 7.6 per cent variation in planning, while use of instrumental social support explains an insignificant .2 per cent variation. Neuroticism also has a low or weak positive correlation with positive reinterpretation and growth ($r = .205$, $p = .003$) which is an emotion focused coping strategy, and mental disengagement ($r = .162$, $p = .019$), which is a potentially maladaptive emotion-focused coping strategy.

On the other hand, neuroticism has a negative correlation with four potentially maladaptive emotion-focused coping strategies; denial, substance use, venting emotions, and behavioural disengagement. First, neuroticism shows a low or weak negative correlation with denial ($r = -.256$, $p = .000$), and substance use ($r = -.232$, $p = .001$) at alpha .05. Of these two coping strategies, neuroticism explains a moderate per cent variation in the dependent variable denial (6.6%) than in substance use (2.6%). Second, neuroticism has a moderate negative correlation with focus on and venting of emotions ($r = -.380$, $p = .000$), and behavioural disengagement ($r = -.395$, $p = .000$) at alpha .05. Neuroticism accounts for a 15.6 per cent variation in behavioural disengagement, but a virtually insignificant .4 per cent variation in venting of emotions.

Openness to experience has no correlation with ten of the fifteen coping dimensions; mental disengagement, focus on and venting of emotions, use of instrumental social support, denial, religious coping, humour, restraint, use of social emotional support, substance use, and acceptance. It however, has a weak positive correlation with three emotion-focused coping strategies; positive reinterpretation and growth ($r = .241$, $p = .000$), religious coping ($r = .145$, $p = .035$), and humor ($r = .210$, $p = .002$) at alpha.05. In rank order, openness to experience accounts for 5.8, 4.4 and 2.1 per cent variation in the dependent variables positive reinterpretation and growth, humour, and religious coping respectively. Openness to experience also has a weak positive correlation with three problem-focused coping strategies; active coping ($r = .333$, $p = .000$), suppression of competing activities ($r = .137$, $p = .000$), and planning ($r = .288$, $p = .000$) relative to the standard alpha level of .05. In rank order,

openness to experience explains a significant 11 and 8.3 per cent variation in the dependent variables active coping, and planning respectively. However, it explains an insignificant 1.9 per cent variation in suppression of competing activities. Openness to experience has a weak correlation with behavioural disengagement ($r = -.021$, $p = .003$), which is a potentially maladaptive emotion-focused coping strategy. However, it accounts for zero per cent variation in the dependent variable behavioural disengagement.

Discussion

The present study investigated the relationship between Big Five traits and coping strategies used by lecturers from a collectivistic culture. Findings of this study reveal that conscientiousness explains a significant variation in three coping strategies namely, planning, restraint coping and the use of instrumental social support. Three explanations emerge for this pattern.

First, individuals who use planning deliberately map a strategy of engaging a problem (Carver, et al., 1989). On account of not being impulsive, conscientious individuals will generally reduce interpersonal problems (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Planning was used as a coping strategy by lecturers in the current study, thereby affirming some research studies which proved that conscientious individuals experience less stress (e.g. Lee-Baggley, Preece & DeLongis, 2005). Second, restraint coping was another predominantly used strategy. Restraint is the exercise of self-control and maturity which prevents impulsivity when in a stressful situation (Carver, et al., 1989). It would appear that restraint coping is concordant with collectivistic cultures. According to the Cultural Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (Chun, Moos & Cronkite, 2006), coping is evaluated in terms of social and relational consequences, such as the need to maintain the group together and enhance interdependence. Therefore, a cogent explanation is that the lecturer sample derives from a collectivistic culture. They will thus exercise restraint to create group harmony rather than focus only on the reduction of stress which is the main focus in of persons in individualistic cultures. Third, lecturers used instrumental social support as one of the dominant strategies of coping. Lecturers who plan their work, such as lecturing, marking and project supervision, are less likely to be embroiled with supervisors or colleagues over unmet deadlines. Biographical data support that the majority of lecturers have matured in their jobs through prolonged experience, and were therefore most likely to avoid volatile and confrontational work

situations. The maturity of the lecturers also implies that they preferred to acquire information before making decisions. This consequently minimizes the risk of interpersonal conflict among the lecturers in the workplace.

Conscientiousness also explains a significant per cent variation in positive reinterpretation and growth. This coping strategy aims at circumventing the stressor by focusing more on controlling feelings of anxiety resulting from the stressor (Carver, et al., 1989). Because people who are conscientious are organised, meticulous, thorough, and operate with planned intentionality (Srivastava, 2013), lecturers who use positive reinterpretation and growth have more control of their distress emotions. And, by using planning, restraint coping together with instrumental social support, they avoid potential stress in the job environment. The conclusion drawn is that lecturers with higher conscientiousness scores use more problem-focused coping strategies such as active coping, planning, restraint, and instrumental social support, to deal with stressful situations. These findings converge with the extant literature, which has demonstrated that conscientiousness is associated with three interrelated characteristics: success seeking, reliability, and organisation (e.g. McCrae & John, 1992; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen & Barrick, 1999). These characteristics impel conscientious people to perform well in their jobs because they are unemotional, calm, and not difficult to interact with (Barrick, Mount & Judge, 2001). Lecturers who are high in conscientiousness are likely to accomplish more in the time available, which may reduce unwanted time pressures, thereby reducing conflict. These characteristics seem to indicate the use of primary coping by the lecturer sample. It is important to note that primary coping is associated with individualistic cultures, where the emphasis is on individuality and personal control of life, generally linked with problem-focused coping (Chun, Moos & Cronkite, 2006). The lecturer sample showed these same characteristics, despite their culture being described as collectivistic.

The results of the current study furthermore reveal that highly neurotic lecturers opt more for active coping and planning combined with positive reinterpretation and growth. This explanation apparently contradicts the commonly held standpoint by personality researchers (e.g. Costa, & McCrae, 1992; Endler, & Parker, 1990) that neurotic individuals perceive threats rather than challenges when confronted by stressful situations, and because of this, they tend to seek emotional support. Again, the results suggest that highly neurotic lecturers are more likely to opt to use behavioural disengagement when confronted by stressful job

situations and conflict. Behavioural disengagement is characterized by a sense of resignation when an individual is confronted by stress (Carver, et al., 1989), and predisposes neurotic individuals to experience higher levels of stress. This study therefore confirms other studies which have shown that neuroticism predicts job stress (Piedmont, 1993), and predisposes individuals to increased conflict (Stoeva, Chiu & Greenhaus, 2002). Other studies (e.g. Shimizutani, et al, 2008) have supported the positive association between neuroticism and workload. Faced with an increased workload, neurotic lecturers are unlikely to identify avoidable work factors, such as the failure to adhere to marking and project supervision schedules.

In conclusion, it can be seen that conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience have weak correlations with various coping dimensions. Nonetheless, their utility in explaining the coping strategies used by this lecturer sample is important. Two plausible conclusions emerged. First, the current study seems to suggest that individual differences, based on personality traits, offer a logical explanation of coping behaviour at an individual, rather than at a cultural level. There is a possibility that some of the lecturers have adopted western values. Acculturation theory suggests that individuals who undergo transition transform their personalities, and consequently their stress and coping experiences (Berry, 1997, in Kuo, 2011). The influence of globalization may well account for the apparent contradictions, which are explained in this study by what appear to be individualistic tendencies in a predominantly collectivistic culture. Second, this study indicates that college lecturers employ a variety of strategies to mitigate the negative impact of job stress and burnout. This supporting evidence therefore shows the usefulness of personality traits, especially in collectivistic cultures.

Strengths, limitations and future research

This study adds to other studies which have examined personality traits and coping. It was further buoyed by a study (i.e. Piedmont et al., 2002) which tested a Shona Zimbabwean sample to examine whether traits were cross-cultural. Despite problems associated with translation owing to language differences, this study recommended that an extension of research on the five-factor model in agrarian cultures was imperative, and would help illuminate how culture determines personality traits. However, as there is no evidence of prior studies with a Zimbabwean teachers' college lecturer sample, the current study provides useful information for future research in collectivistic cultures. What emerges is that future

research should develop measures with local language-appropriate translations of the five-factor model, in order to test its universality.

This study therefore challenges African psychologists to expand the realm of their research in this direction. A limitation of this study is that the two self-report measures used do not preclude response style and prejudices by the participants (Van de Vijver & Leung, 2001; Piedmont et al., 2002). While the lecturers generally use English in the course of their teaching, notable lingual and cultural differences between the developers of the measures and the lecturer sample exist, and these could have influenced the lecturers' interpretations of the question items. Consequently, some concepts measured by the personality and coping measures may not have had meaning in their local languages. It is therefore recommended that future studies design, and use culture-relevant measures to fully understand participants from collectivistic cultures.

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