Choice of Coping Strategies and Psycho-Social Adjustment of Pakistani Students: An Exploratory Study

ASMA BASHIR

Department of Applied Psychology, Women University Multan, Pakistan
Institute of Psychology, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan
Education and Learning Sciences, Wageningen University & Research, the Netherlands
Corresponding address: Beaconhouse National University, Institute of Psychology,
Main Campus,13 KM Off Thokar Niazbeg - Raiwind Road, Tarogil, Lahore - 53700, Pakistan.
Email: asma.bashir@wum.edu.pk

RUHI KHALID

Professor & Director, Institute of Psychology, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan
Corresponding address: Beaconhouse National University, Institute of Psychology, Main Campus,13 KM
Off Thokar Niazbeg - Raiwind Road, Tarogil, Lahore - 53700, Pakistan.

Abstract

The psychosocial adjustment of international students is central to their success while they venture out to study abroad. However, the challenges of the new place may hinder the adjustment process. Thus, in the current study, we observed whether the use of coping strategies plays a significant role in the adjustment process of Pakistani students. A cross-sectional research design was employed. A total of 305Pakistani graduate and postgraduate international students participated in the study. The Brief COPE (Carver, 1997) Questionnaire was employed to measure the choice of coping strategies. The Acculturative stress scale for Pakistani Muslim international students (Bashir & Khalid, 2020) and the Revised Sociocultural adjustment scale (SCAS-R) (Wilson, 2013)were used to collect data on Psychological and sociocultural adjustment. Correlation and regression analysis were used to test the hypothesized relationship. The results revealed that the use of acceptance and substance use as coping strategies helped to alleviate acculturative stress, whereas the choice of planning, self-distraction, and self-blame as coping strategies increased the level of stress among students. Similarly, instrumental support and Behavioural disengagement contributed positively to the sociocultural adjustment of students. In addition, having emotional support and self-blaming negatively affected sociocultural adjustment. The current findings hold implications for international students, educational policymakers, and psychologists to take measures to facilitate healthy psychosocial adjustment among international students.

Key Words: *Psychosocial Adjustment, Stress, Coping Strategies, International Students.*

Introduction

Globally, Pakistan is the sixth-largest country in terms of population. It is estimated that the population of Pakistan will reach 300 million by 2050. Educationally, enrollment rates for 18-24-year-old students in higher education institutes are not very encouraging at the national level (Zainab et al., 2019). However, there is still an increase in the demand for university degrees nationally and internationally. One of the main reasons for this is to get a good job with a reasonable salary (Hamrick, 2007; Zakaria et al., 2016). In

addition, the acquisition of educational opportunities abroad is possibly attained only after obtaining a degree from a higher education institution. According to a report by the British Council, by 2024, there will be further increment in the student mobility trends of Pakistani students. The report indicated a 6.4% increase in Pakistani student mobility trends over the next ten years, given the growing number of Pakistani students abroad (Council, 2014). The reasons for the increase in international student mobility in Pakistan included the provision of better education systems, the acquisition of academic and financial benefits affiliated with a foreign degree, and the attraction of employment opportunities to live and earn abroad (Zainab et al., 2019).

Pakistani international students although aspiring to obtain all the aforementioned benefits experience various challenges in their pursuit of education abroad. As with all international students, Pakistani international students face adjustment adversities such as language issues, financial difficulties, lack of resources to solve new space problems, and the unavailability of social support at all times in the new host country (Noreen et al., 2019; Su, 2017). However, some challenges set Pakistani students apart from other students. One such challenge is that Pakistani students experience greater adjustment quandaries due to the differences in the collectivistic values of their native culture and the individualistic traditions of western host countries (Ayyoub et al., 2019). For instance, family honor and integrity are of utmost importance to these students as they are the core values of collectivistic culture. This integrity puts students at risk to suffer from additional stress to meet the standards set by their families (Haider, 2013, 2018). Similarly, the maintenance of family integrity demands mastery and high grades in academia. Pakistani students along with regular challenges to perform their best are burdened by such indigenous demands to achieve high standards of excellence to make their families proud. Likewise, these students also struggle to maintain their attachment to their native culture in Western countries, learn to live in an individualistic society and adjust to the Western system of freedom and autonomy.

Moreover, Pakistan is an Islamic country. Belonging to Islam and the Islamic State, these students have their separate national and Islamic identities (Jibeen & Khalid, 2010a). Along with experiencing the regular challenges of being international students, Pakistani students also face religious extremism in the Western world and have a negative image in the international media. The limited literature on Pakistani Muslim students seeking education abroad indicated that they suffered from entry challenges, discrimination, biased attitudes of host nationals, and educational challenges. Female students particularly reported incidents of discrimination due to their appearance and encountered challenges practicing their regular religious rituals (Ayyoub et al., 2019; Haider, 2018). The scarcity in the literature about given variables needs to be researched to provide a clear guideline for students going abroad.

Similarly, a certain number of Pakistani students returned to their homeland without completing their educational journey. This may be attributed to educational stressors, social stressors, and personal adjustment issues (Haq, 2015). If educational and social challenges are not tackled timely by such students, increased social adjustment issues arise to the surface creating difficulty in surviving in a new environment. This results in a high level of acculturative stress (Bashir et al., 2019; Cao et al., 2016). A qualitative study revealed that Pakistani students experienced educational stressors in the host country. The initial period of their stay was reportedly tough and exhausting. They suffered because of differences in home and host institutional study patterns and examination systems. However, with persistent efforts along with other factors, they eventually managed to cope with differences. Such studies uphold the role of certain coping strategies in dealing with acculturative stress and improving socio-cultural adjustment (Bashir et al., 2019). Literature on the use of coping strategies among Pakistani students explored the challenges faced by Pakistani university students. However, there is a scarcity in the literature reporting the use of coping strategies among the Pakistani student population. The limited findings highlighted that

Pakistani students used the coping strategies of Planning, Acceptance, Religious as well as Active Coping, Mental Disengagement, and venting of Emotions to deal with educational, personal, and social stressors(Ayyoub et al., 2019; Bashir et al., 2019; Haider, 2013).

The available literature reports that the difficulties faced by students belonging to a particular cultural background and their techniques to solve them are influenced by their cultural and social background. To the best of researchers' knowledge, no study has explored the choice of particular coping strategies to facilitate the adjustment of Pakistani students. Hence, considering the unique ethnic, religious and cultural identity of Pakistani students, it is important to examine and assess whether the use of certain coping strategies in the host country would lessen their acculturative stress and enhance sociocultural adjustment or vice versa. It is also hypothesized that the choice and use of certain coping strategies in the new environment and encountered challenges would have an impact on their Psychosocial adjustment. This research provides imperative direction to students, educational institutions, and psychologists to take appropriate measures to improve resilience among students.

Theoretical Background of the Study

Acculturation refers to the assimilation into a different culture; typically the dominant culture. It occurs on a psychological and social level. At the cultural level, assimilation requires the individual to adopt the principles, norms, and culture of the guest country (Berry, 2006; Li & Lin, 2014). Two acculturation models namely the unidimensional and bi-dimensional models are used to probe this phenomenon (Bertram et al., 2014). Under the unidimensional model, adjustment to a new environment is rendered successful when an individual adapts themselves fully to the methods of the host country. This included learning a new language, adapting to cultural norms, and adapting to the attitudes and behaviors of the people of the host country (Berry, 1997; Berry, 1974). In the bi-dimensional model, acculturation is divided into two dimensions which include attitude towards one's guest country and attitude towards one's country of origin. These are further subdivided into four sections, which are called four types of strategies to adapt to life in the host country; assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (Berry et al., 2006). The assimilation strategy enables full integration into the culture of the host country and distancing from the native culture. The integration strategy produces the maintenance of an equally positive attitude towards the cultures of both native and host countries. The separation strategy requires maintaining distance from the host country norms and adoption of the norms of the native country while staying there. Marginalization strategy includes having a negative attitude towards both the guest country and the country of origin (Berry et al., 1989; Haider, 2013, 2018).

In the acculturation process, when international students enter the host country, quotidian problems and stressors make them suffer from acculturative stress. under the definition of acculturative stress, the sources or stressors that cause acculturative stress must have their source in the new environment (Akhtar, 2012). To cope with the encountered challenges, students use various coping tacts and seek support from their environment. Similarly, the less the students felt the severity of these encountered challenges, the lower their stress level scores remained. Consequently, the easier the adjustment, the better the well-being. As the acculturative stress of students increased, students became victims of psychological disorders. In addition, studies on Pakistani international students' adjustment tactics in eliminating acculturative stress and enhancing social adjustment are rare. Therefore, information on culturally relevant literature may play an active role in facilitating their adjustment abroad while they venture out to study abroad(Alegria, 2009; Bashir & Khalid, 2020; Demes & Geeraert, 2013).

Coping Strategies and Psychosocial Adjustment: Literature Review

There is limited research examining the relationship between coping strategies, acculturative stress, and sociocultural adjustment. Coping refers to the use of behavioral and cognitive resources to adapt to the demands of a new environment (Rhein, 2018). When the demands of a new environment create problems for individuals or exceed their tolerance, these coping tools can help reduce the stress and make the adjustment process easier (Kim et al., 2012). Recent literature purports that coping strategies may be classified into four different broad categories. These include active coping (working on a problem/drafting a plan to solve a problem, seeking support from available resources, seeking help from religion), problem-oriented coping (use of such coping strategies to reassess the problem, positively accept the problem, and reinterpreting its meaning to form new positive means), emotion centered coping (to seek emotional support, emotional venting) and avoidance coping (use of alcohol, drugs to suppress or ignore the encountered challenges, denial, mental and behavioral disengagement) (García et al., 2018). However, traditional research on coping uses Lazarus and Folkman's categorization of coping strategies. Lazarus and Folkman (1984), in their well-known stress-coping model, highlighted the importance of coping to reduce stress and defined it as efforts on the mental and behavioral level to deal with challenging situations considered as exhausting or surpassing individual capacities to deal with them(Ryan, 2013). According to Lazarus and Folkman, coping strategies are divided into problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused coping strategies refer to identifying problems, assessing available resources, and taking action at the behavioral and cognitive levels to solve the problem. These may include taking steps such as resetting goals, learning new skills to deal with problems, and continuing to work on solving problems (Khawaja & Stallman, 2016; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Conversely, in emotion-focused coping, efforts are put to reduce the stress and anxiety triggered at a cognitive level because of the problems encountered. Steps may include wishful thinking, blaming one for the situation, and trying to keep oneself calm. The only difference between the two strategies overall is that in problem-focused coping, the emphasis is placed on the environment and the encountered challenges, while emotion-focused coping relates to the sojourner and their individualistic efforts to emotionally regulate to reduce stress and anxiety (Alexander et al., 2015; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

A review of coping strategies for reducing the acculturative stress of international students proved that coping strategies played an important role in reducing the intensity of acculturative stress and acculturative stressors. However, coping strategies are not widely used in the international student population (Ra & Trusty, 2015). International students can be divided into two groups based on their nationalities. These include Asian and European groups. This grouping is critical as both groups were found to use different coping strategies under their traditions, values, and culture (Ra & Trusty, 2017). For example, European groups belong to an individualistic culture, while Asian groups generally belong to a collectivistic culture. The Asian group was found to use active coping predominantly, while avoidant coping was also reported. Students from European countries mostly reported giving preference to active coping (Li & Lin, 2014). However, the main reason for the different use of coping strategies across cultures lies in the differences in the personality that grows in individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Wei et al., 2012).

Research reported that Asians as international students had varied use of coping strategies. Asian students generally used problem-focused coping. Lack of problem-solving skills in new countries causes stress and depression in students (Park et al., 2017). Owing to collectivistic cultural roots, Asian international students did not report their difficulties or discuss their problems with people close to them as cultural restrictions forbade them from upsetting others by sharing their troubles; a save face policy (Rhein, 2018). As a result, they tried to solve problems at a personal level. In addition, Asian students did

not confront their problems, aggravating them in the new environment (Cao et al., 2018). Seeking psychological support is also stigmatized and shamed in the Asian community. As a result, these students faced more psychological and health-related challenges than students from other groups, such as those from other Western countries. Owing to these cultural restrictions, Asian international students have been shown to use drugs to reduce anxiety and stress (Lee et al., 2004; Wang et al., 2012). Hence, it may be postulated that coping occurs at a personal level and relates to the use of resources at the individual and personal level of the sojourner. In other words, coping helps to reduce stress on an individual and personal level (Lashari et al., 2018; Sam et al., 2015).

Justification and the Significance of the Current Study

Pakistani students have a distinct identity as Muslim students. With Pakistani and Muslim identities, when these students study abroad, the biased attitudes associated with these identities coupled with religious extremism difficulties cause them to experience greater challenges than other international students do. Students face discrimination from peer groups and nationals of the host nations. It is therefore critical to review the psychosocial adjustment of these students, explore the kind of strategies they use, and assess what coping strategies play an influential role in reducing stress and enhancing adjustment (Jibeen, 2011). In addition, Available literature has revealed that Pakistani national students belong to a collectivistic culture and possess unique traditions, values , and the religion of Islam. They have strong social ties, they try to accept the situations gladly, seek help from religion, and consult with parents and siblings in the face of troubles (Jibeen & Khalid, 2010b). The available literature has suggested researching Muslim students from different countries to explore whether acculturation differs across nationalities and different Muslim groups (Burkholder, 2014; Khawaja & Stallman, 2016). It is hence critical to study the impact of different acculturation variables to observe their impact to reduce stress and enhance adjustment in Pakistani students overseas. Hence, the current research is important as it assesses exclusively the adjustment of Pakistani students quantitatively to expose the buffering effects of coping strategies on acculturative stressors. Also, the use of specific coping strategies may contribute to the sociocultural adjustment of students. This research hence not contributed to the limited literature on acculturation experiences of Pakistani Muslim students but also focused both on the challenges and on the sources to alleviate the stress caused by encountered challenges.

Research Questions

Since there is a dearth of literature on the use of coping strategies in Pakistani students, the current study would explore the phenomena and formulate research questions based on the available literature related to the choice of coping strategies among Asian international students. The following research questions are formulated.

What are the certain coping strategies that would lessen the acculturative stress of Pakistani students? What are the specific coping strategies in the new environment and encountered challenges that would have an impact on their sociocultural adjustment?

Method

Procedure

The study was approved by the Advanced Board of Studies of the university. An email containing the purpose and significance of the study was sent to the students studying abroad and their informed

consent was obtained. Students who showed a willingness to participate in the study were sent an online link to participate in the study. During this process, students came up with different queries regarding the study. All the queries were entertained on an individual basis. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the study.

Sample

In this study (N = 305) Pakistan International students participated. Students reside in different guest countries for education purposes purely and express their intention to return home after completing their studies. The duration of their stay in the host country varies from six months to four years. The students ranged in age from 21 to 45 (M = 32.12, SD = 3.87).The number of male students was higher than that of female students (male = 260, female = 49). Students were enrolled in various educational programs, namely (Masters = 145, Ph.D. = 160).These students were enrolled in Masters (n = 145) and Ph.D. programs (n = 160) .They were enrolled in various study fields, i.e. Health and medicine (n = 22), Engineering (n = 196), Management sciences,(n = 21), Arts and Social Sciences (n = 21), Biological Sciences and other (n = 45). Their duration of stay in the host country was categorized into less than 1 year to approximately 5 years (M = 3.2, S.D = 1.3). All the students reported enough proficiency to proceed with their studies in the host country with ease.

Measures

In the current study a brief demographic form, Acculturative stress scale (Bashir & Khalid, 2020), revised Sociocultural adjustment scale (SCAS-R) (Wilson, 2013), and brief Cope scale (Carver et al., 1989) were used.

Demographic Form

The demographic form collected information about the age, gender, academic level, and language proficiency of the participants.

Brief COPE Scale

The Brief COPE scale is widely used to measure the coping strategies of individuals. The scale has been widely used among the Pakistani student population. The scale had 14 subscales measuring different coping strategies including active coping (putting efforts to find the solution to the encountered challenge), Planning (putting in effort or planning something to get out of the encountered situation), Positive reframing(to give positive meaning to the situation), Acceptance(to accept and confront the situation and behave accordingly), Humor(to make fun or indulge in fun related activities to escape from negative feelings), Religion (to seek help from God to get through the situation), Emotional Support (to get a help or advice from any source which may calm the shuttered feelings), Instrumental Support (to seek support, advice or having a conversation with close ones to get some solution about the problem), Self-Distraction (intentionally distracting from the encountered situation possibly because of inability to deal with the problem), Denial (to escape from the reality instead of confronting the circumstances), Behavioral Disengagement (to find an exit instead to deal with the problem), Self-Blame (considering oneself responsible or blaming oneself for the encountered problem), Venting (doing catharsis by sharing things to get rid of the unpleasant emotions), and Substance use (to use drugs to get through the situation). Each strategy was measured through 2 items. For the current study, the internal consistency of the scale was very good (α =.83).

Sociocultural Adjustment Scale –Revised (SCAS-R)

The Revised Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS-R) consisted of 20 items. These items measured the behaviors and competencies in daily life situations required to adjust to the new environment in the host society (e.g., interpersonal interaction, community involvement, language competency, academic adjustment, ecological adaptation). Participants were asked to rate their competence at each of the given behaviors (1 = Not competent; 5 = extremely competent). The final score was calculated. The higher scores indicated lesser problems and higher levels of sociocultural competence. For the current study, the internal consistency of this scale was excellent (α = .89).

Acculturative Stress Scale for Pakistani International Students

The acculturative stress scale for Pakistani students was used in the current study. The Acculturative stress scale for Pakistani Muslim international students (ASSPMS) is a 24 items scale. This scale measured the possible stressors and challenges among Muslim students. It consisted of six subscales including academic, environmental, religious, discrimination, financial, and language challenges. These subscales stated different stressors and the participants submitted their responses on 5 points Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The higher score on the scale indicated more suffering from acculturative stress. The scores ranged between 24 to 120. For the current study, the scale reported good reliability (α =.93).

Results

Correlation Matrix

According to the results, acculturative stress had a significant positive correlation with self-distraction (r =.13, p <.05) self-blaming (r =.17, p<.001) and Venting (r =.15, p<.05). Sociocultural adjustment had a significant negative correlation with denial (r =-.17, p<.001),and self blame (r =-.15, p<.05).

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Variables (N=305)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	A.ST.	1	-.23**	-.11	.38	-.02	-.11	.02	.00	.00	-.05	.13*	.07	.08	.17**	.15*	-.07
2	SC.		1	.05	.08	.05	.05	-.01	.03	-.07	.09	-.06	-.16**	-.02	-.12*	-.05	.01
3	ACT.C.			1	.47**	.36**	.33**	.09	.25**	.20**	.19**	.28**	-.02	-.05	-.02	.07	-.06
4	PLAN.				1	.45**	.45**	.09	.26**	.21**	.27**	.12*	-.07	-.02	.07	.07	-.01
5	PO.REF.					1	.56**	.08	.21**	.17**	.27**	.17**	-.02	-.04	.07	.06	-.05
6	ACC.						1	.20**	.28**	.29**	.27**	.23**	.02	.08	.11	.08	.03
7	HUMO.							1	.05	.18**	.15**	.21**	.32**	.24**	.23**	.25**	.25**
8	REL.								1	.27**	.35**	.10	.08	.09	.08	.09	-.20**
9	EMO.SUP									1	.55**	.32**	.19**	.26**	.21**	.35**	.09
10	INS.SUP										1	.19**	.11*	.18**	.18**	.23**	.05
11	SELF.DIS											1	.21**	.20**	.20**	.62**	.16**
12	DENIAL												1	.48**	.43**	.24**	.30**
13	BEH.DIS													1	.71**	.32**	.40**
14	SELF.B														1	.42**	.27**
15	VENTING															1	.30**
16	SUBS.																1

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Variables: 1. A.ST=> Acculturative Stress, 2. SC=>Sociocultural adjustment, 3 ACT.C=>Active coping, 4. PLAN.=>planning, 5 PO.REF=>positive reframing, 6 ACC.=>Acceptance, 7. HUMO=>Humour, 8.REL=>. Religion,9 EMO.SUP. =>Emotional support, 10.INS.SUP =>Instrumental support, 11.SELF.DIS =>.self-distraction, 12. DENIAL=> Denial, 13 BEH.DIS =>Behavioural disengagement, 14.SELF.B =>self –blame, 15. VENTING=>venting, 16 SUB =>substance use

Regression Analysis

Coping strategies were introduced in the model through the entering method. In this model, R^2 = .125 was found, which signified that the outcome variable was explained by a 12.5 % variation, in coping strategies. This model produced significant results. $F_{(14,294)}$ = 3.001, $p < .001$. The results revealed that the use of active coping (β=-.196, $p < .001$), acceptance (β=-.198, $p < .001$), and substance use (β=-.14, $p < .001$) negatively affected the acculturative stress. It implies that the use of these specific coping strategies helped to alleviate the acculturative stress of students. Moreover, the use of planning (β=.17, $p < .05$), self-distraction (β=.18, $p < .05$), and self-blame (β=.19, $p < .05$) as coping strategies increased the level of stress among students.

Table 2: Regression Analysis showing the Impact of Coping Strategies on Acculturative Stress (N=305)

Acculturative stress							
		B	β	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	F
1	(Constant)	-0.103		0.983	-9.458	9.252	3.232***
	1. ACT.C.	-1.826	-0.196**	0.003	-3.041	-0.610	
	2. PLAN.	1.554	0.178*	0.011	0.365	2.743	
	3. PO.REF.	0.433	0.046	0.513	-0.867	1.733	
	4. ACC.	-1.730	-0.198**	0.007	-2.972	-0.487	
	5. HUMO.	0.182	0.021	0.734	-0.871	1.235	
	6. REL.	0.151	0.020	0.753	-0.794	1.097	
	7. EMO.SUP	0.115	0.012	0.865	-1.216	1.447	
	8. INS.SUP	-0.941	-0.101	0.144	-2.206	0.323	
	9. SELF.DIS	1.808	0.184*	0.015	0.349	3.266	
	10. DENIAL	0.196	0.021	0.748	-1.003	1.395	
	11. BEH.DIS	-0.298	-0.033	0.709	-1.866	1.270	
	12. SELF.B	1.758	0.190*	0.026	0.215	3.301	
	13. VENTING	0.273	0.028	0.729	-1.276	1.823	
	14. SUBS.	-1.538	-0.145*	0.027	-2.898	-0.179	

Note: B = unstandardized coefficients; ˇ β = standardized coefficients.
*p≤0.05, ** p≤0.01, *** p≤0.001 or less

Variables: 1. ACT.C => Active coping, 2. PLAN. => Planning, 3. PO.REF => positive reframing, 4. ACC. =>Acceptance, 5. HUMO=> Humour, 6.REL=>. Religion, 7. EMO.SUP. =>Emotional support, 8.INS.SUP => Instrumental support, 9.SELF.DIS =>.self-distraction, 10. DENIAL=> Denial, 11. BEH.DIS =>Behavioural disengagement, 12.SELF.B =>self –blame, 13. VENTING=>venting, 14. SUB =>substance use

Coping strategies were introduced in the model. The enter method was used. In this model, R^2 = .089 was found, which implied that the 8.9 % variation was explained in the outcome variable. This model produced

significant results. F (14,294) = 2.045, p <.05. The results further showed the use of instrumental support (β=.17, p <.05) and Behavioural disengagement (β=.20, p <.05) contributed to the sociocultural adjustment of students. In addition, having emotional support (β=-.17, p <.05) and self-blaming (β=-.21, p <.05) negatively affected sociocultural adjustment.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Showing the Impact of Coping Strategies on Sociocultural Adjustment (N=305)

Sociocultural adjustment						
	B	β	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	F
(Constant)	-0.633		0.880	-8.902	7.636	2.045*
1. ACT.C.	0.316	0.039	0.564	-0.759	1.390	
2. PLAN.	0.327	0.043	0.541	-0.724	1.378	
3. PO.REF.	0.041	0.005	0.944	-1.108	1.190	
4. ACC.	0.292	0.039	0.601	-0.806	1.391	
5. HUMO.	0.222	0.029	0.639	-0.709	1.153	
6. REL.	-0.007	-0.001	0.988	-0.842	0.829	
7. EMO.SUP	-1.455	-0.174*	0.016	-2.632	-0.278	
8. INS.SUP	1.432	0.177*	0.012	0.314	2.549	
9. SELF.DIS	-0.607	-0.071	0.355	-1.895	0.682	
10. DENIAL	-1.385	-0.174	0.011	-2.445	-0.326	
11. BEH.DIS	1.625	0.206*	0.022	0.240	3.011	
12.SELF.B	-1.739	-0.217*	0.013	-3.103	-0.375	
13. VENTING	0.417	0.049	0.549	-0.952	1.787	
14. SUBS.	0.340	0.037	0.578	-0.861	1.542	

Note: B = unstandardized coefficients; ˇ β = standardized coefficients.
*p≤0.05, ** p≤0.01, *** p≤0.001 or less

Variables: 1. ACT.C => Active coping, 2. PLAN. => Planning, 3. PO.REF => positive reframing, 4. ACC. =>Acceptance, 5. HUMO=> Humour, 6.REL=>. Religion, 7. EMO.SUP. =>Emotional support, 8.INS.SUP => Instrumental support, 9.SELF.DIS =>.self-distraction, 10. DENIAL=> Denial, 11. BEH.DIS =>Behavioural disengagement, 12.SELF.B =>self –blame, 13. VENTING=>venting, 14. SUB =>substance use

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to consider the impact of coping strategies on the Psychological and sociocultural adjustment of Pakistan International students. The finding of the current study established that active coping and positive reframing, proved to be negative predictors of acculturative stress. This signified that instead of surrendering to the difficulties and hardships faced by the students, these students preferred to accept the challenges and take effective steps to solve them. These findings support the content of previous literature (Alexander et al., 2015). For instance, per the results of a study conducted on Pakistani students, they expressed their determination to change the attitude of the people of the host country toward Muslims, especially to resolve discrimination. According to these students, they tried to remove the negative impression of Muslims with their good attitudes (Haider, 2018). It was also noted that students used active coping to deal with the challenges of discrimination. There is evidence in the literature regarding these findings that when Asian students face discrimination, they try to resolve their differences rather than widen the gap so that relationships can be improved (Noh &

Kaspar, 2003). In this way, the current study supported the notion that positive coping and resilient behaviours improve adjustment. However, the results of the current study did not support the notion that Asian students use maladaptive and avoidance coping strategies that play a role to enhance stress (Chataway & Berry, 1989; Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008).

Acceptance, a positive coping strategy, proved to be a negative predictor of acculturative stress in the current study. This means that students accept the problems they face in the environment as a fact and through positive reframing; they reduce the possibility of acculturative stress. This is in line with the literature, which states that Asian students use acceptance and positive reframing to reduce mental stress (Alexander et al., 2015). Moreover, acceptance as a problem-focused strategy helps to alleviate the negative effects of acculturative stress (Kuo, 2014).

Another interesting finding from the current study was that students were found to use substance use as a coping strategy. The literature in this regard justified that the symptoms of psychological and physical problems are somewhat similar to those of depression, cramps, pain, and feelings of anxiety. Students used substances and drugs to relieve pain because of these occurring symptoms. Students perceived the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and pain caused by psychological problems to be symptoms caused by physical disorders. Usage of pain relief medicines resulted in temporary relief for these students(Mori, 2000). However, it was dependent upon the nature of the substance use and the way it was interpreted by the student, which needs further inquiry in future studies.

The results also implied that instrumental support proved to be the positive predictor of sociocultural adjustment. It has been shown in earlier studies that support from college staff contributed to the psychosocial adjustment of the students (Lin, 2006). Furthermore, behavioral disengagement proved to be a positive predictor of sociocultural adjustment, whereas, self-blame and emotional support negatively predicted sociocultural adjustment. These results are in line with the literature that states that Asian international students prefer emotion-focused strategies when adjusting to a new environment (Alexander et al., 2015). However, behavioral disengagement as a positive predictor and emotional support as a negative predictor of sociocultural adjustment, need additional research on this issue.
Implications

These are the implication, which can be used based on the results of the current study. Given the results of the current study, it is important for the students that upon their arrival in the host country, if they experience any anxiety and worry they should consult a mental healthcare professional and then a physician. This may aid them in differentiating between the psychological or physical nature of the symptoms. If the symptom manifestation is owing to adjustment to a new environment, students should not feel ashamed to take psychological services. Equally, it is the responsibility of the host countries and campus counselors to work in collaboration to introduce the services to the coming, educate them about the ongoing challenges, and most importantly encourage them to ask for assistance as if it is normal.

Limitations and Recommendations

Although the current study provides important information regarding Pakistani students, some limitations need to be addressed. First, a study may be compiled using qualitative methods, and detailed data should be collected, keeping in view the culture of Pakistani Muslim students and the challenges experienced by Muslim students at host universities. This would help to get better information on the phenomena under study. The study also highlighted various aspects that were associated with Asian students but they were not supportive of the current population of Pakistani international students. These include the use of

maladaptive coping strategies in Asian students and resistance to seeking support from available support systems under the save the face policy (Rice et al., 2012). It is highly suggested to investigate them with bigger data set. This would help to devise better policies to facilitate the adjustment of Pakistani students.

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