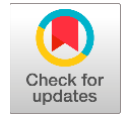


# Coping with stressful situations using coping strategies and their impact on mental health



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**Abstract** This exhaustive examination focuses on the nuanced coping mechanisms utilized by grown-ups in navigating stressful situations. It intricately dissects the multifaceted dimensions of how people perceive stress. In particular, it highlights how people evaluate stress factors as menacing challenges or manageable tasks, and consequentially, how they respond to them. To offer a comprehensive viewpoint, this review undertook a thorough exploration of pertinent research from the DOAJ and EBSCOhost databases, concentrating on literature published within the last decade. The examination encompasses diverse aspects of stress, encompassing its cognitive appraisal, adaptive coping mechanisms, and interventions aimed at alleviating its impact. Stress manifests diversely among individuals, being inherently subjective. Its ramifications can range from severe repercussions to perceived challenges with positive outcomes. Coping mechanisms are deeply rooted in learned behaviors, shaped by familial and past traumatic encounters. Recognizing prevalent stress reactions is crucial for crafting effective coping strategies. Problem-solving and seeking social support rank high among successful coping methods. Emotion regulation tactics also aid in managing stress responses. Conversely, nonadaptive coping mechanisms offer short-term relief but often neglect addressing underlying stressors. This review highlights the pivotal role of coping mechanisms in the realm of stress alleviation among adult populations. Approaches centered on finding solutions, such as active problem-solving and seeking social reinforcement, surface as invaluable assets for individuals navigating through stressful situations. It is imperative to acknowledge that adults possess the autonomy to opt for coping strategies that can efficiently counteract the negative impacts of stress. Through understanding and advocating for these strategies, individuals can refine their stress management prowess, thereby fostering better mental health outcomes and overall holistic well-being.

**Keywords:** stress, strategies for coping, coping behavior, coping resources, psychological well-being, loneliness

## 1. Introduction

Stress is our body's innate response to external triggers and is thought to be a key factor in the development of mental illnesses such as major depression (Hankin et al., 2015; Sgoifo et al., 2017; Gradus, 2017). It can stem from various sources, such as noise, conflicts at work or at home, personal crises such as the death of a loved one, divorce, imprisonment, or serious illness. Surprisingly, events typically viewed as positive, such as weddings, the birth of a child, or a promotion, can also induce stress. Financial worries, social challenges such as economic downturns or discrimination, and even minor occurrences such as unexpected raindrops can trigger stress (Gradus, 2017).

Stress is not merely about the events that occur but rather about how we interpret them. Even a single unkind remark can trigger stress. Each individual responds uniquely to stressful circumstances. What exactly do they feel like? Initially, there is overactivation of the nervous and endocrine systems. One may become aggressive, be easily irritated, and struggle to manage their emotions. As time passes, the body's resources become depleted. The initial excitement gives way to apathy, leading to a low mood and potentially depression. This decline in performance is accompanied by increased weakness, drowsiness, and a deterioration in health (Gradus, 2017). The interaction among an individual's behavior, personality characteristics, and surroundings explains why certain individuals might encounter greater stress than others facing similar circumstances (Feng, 2023). The way we analyze and assess life events significantly influences our emotional responses, coping mechanisms, and whether we adapt positively or negatively to challenges. Cognitive assessments play a crucial role in shaping mental health consequences (Padmanabhanunni and Pretorius, 2023). When minor stressors elicit repeated negative responses, they can contribute to both physical ailments and mental health issues (Zolkowska and McNeil, 2015). Stress perception involves an individual's cognitive evaluation of the level of threat posed by stressors (Liu et al., 2021). When



confronted with challenging situations, individuals may experience a range of adverse emotions, such as anxiety, frustration, and hopelessness (Huang et al., 2021). Choosing appropriate coping strategies is critical for preventing adverse outcomes such as posttraumatic stress disorder.

## 2. Literature review

Stress is often triggered by factors such as unpredictability, lack of control, and hopelessness. Stress is frequently elicited by factors such as uncertainty, feeling powerless, and despair. Scenarios such as exams, bossing, public speaking, traffic jams, and even media exposure can instigate stress (Gradus, 2017). It is widely recognized that stress precedes various health issues and can cause changes in cognitive, behavioral, and emotional functioning, hindering decision-making abilities (Dyess et al., 2018). In our fast-paced society, everyone seems to be rushing, striving to meet deadlines and fulfill obligations. Each individual forms his or her own perceptions of the world, establishes criteria, and shapes his or her needs and desires. The dissonance between reality and our aspirations often breeds dissatisfaction. However, this dissatisfaction can serve as a motivation for personal growth and development or, conversely, can lead to aggression when expectations are unmet. Severe stress can result in mental trauma and, at times, serious illness (Hankin et al., 2015; Sgoifo et al., 2017; Gradus, 2017). Interestingly, stress does not always require external triggers; a mere thought can suffice. The perception of a situation as stressful largely depends on our attitude toward it (Kim et al., 2017; Campo et al., 2017). Consequently, maintaining a positive outlook helps reduce stress levels, while a negative mindset serves as a recipe for stress (Carver and Scheier, 2014; Kim et al., 2017). Daily life is rife with negative emotions, from waking up to the dreaded sound of the alarm clock to enduring crowded commutes and unfavorable weather. Many individuals normalize feelings of irritation or stress and often overlook symptoms such as decreased focus, hostility, excessive worry, sleep disturbances, and despondency.

The human brain reacts to perceived threats in a similar manner to real threats without distinguishing between the two. Hence, when a situation seems risky, the body reacts as if it were genuinely in danger. The longer the environment is perceived as threatening, the more prolonged the body stays in a state of heightened vigilance. Chronic stress emerges from persistent exposure to an environment perceived as hazardous, a common feature of our unpredictable surroundings (Yaribeygi et al., 2017). Our bodies possess remarkable resilience and capacity for recovery, but only if the mind operates clearly and effectively (Mariotti, 2015). Our mental processes, including thoughts and imaginings, profoundly impact our well-being, often operating beyond our conscious awareness (Crielaard et al., 2021). Broadly speaking, various categories of stressors can affect an individual (Koffer et al., 2019).

The first category of stressors comprises factors that are largely beyond our control, such as prices, taxes, government policies, weather conditions, and the behaviors and personalities of others (Mulska et al., 2022). While we may feel agitated or frustrated by situations such as power outages or traffic jams caused by reckless drivers, beyond experiencing a rise in blood pressure and adrenaline levels, our reactions typically yield little benefit (Tsaras et al., 2018). In this case, using techniques such as muscle relaxation, meditation, breathing exercises, or active visualization can be more effective. The second category includes stressors that we can and should influence. These include our own counterproductive behaviors, difficulty setting life goals and priorities, poor time management, and relationship challenges. The third category includes events and situations that we often unnecessarily view as problems (Popovych et al., 2022; Popovych et al., 2022). This may include various fears about the future or regrets about past events that are beyond our control or ability to change.

The concept of coping strategies, though perhaps not universally recognized, has been extensively developed and validated. Psychologist Richard Lazarus introduced this concept and provided insights into how individuals navigate challenging and stressful situations (Obbarius et al., 2021). Coping behavior theory pertains to an individual's capacity to endure and manage stressful circumstances, often manifesting unconsciously. Coping encompasses the actions we undertake, often subconsciously, to address stress. While coping mechanisms vary among individuals, they can generally be categorized into two broad classes: problem-focused (aiming to alter the situation) and emotion-focused (aiming to manage emotions). In the former, individuals seek to understand the problem, strategize solutions, and prepare for action when faced with a stressful situation. In the latter, individuals endeavor to restore emotional equilibrium (through humor, denial, positive reframing, etc.). Key coping strategies include the following (Abouammoh et al., 2020):

**Confrontation** – addressing the current situation head-on. This approach is characterized by aggression. The individual perceives the problem in a hostile manner and immediately engages in intense combat against it. This is akin to the behavior of Don Quixote, who charges into battle against perceived “giants” without much forethought. This strategy holds advantages: when stress presents itself as a clear threat, it allows for rapid alteration of the circumstances for improvement. Like Don Quixote, individuals are prepared to defend their position at any cost. However, confrontation also has significant drawbacks: if the threat is not substantial, it may only serve to exacerbate issues or further harm oneself. Aggression is challenging to rein, leading to difficulties in planning one's actions and behaviors.

**Self-control** and the inclination to suppress emotions embody what is often referred to as the “Agent 007 technique”: to refrain from displaying emotions outwardly, to quell any negative feelings, to avoid confrontation, and to not oppose others. However, self-control also has its drawbacks: in situations where expressing anger and emotions is necessary to effectively handle an opponent, this strategy may fail to yield the desired outcome.



Seeking social support and finding like-minded individuals can be likened to the "cat-in-boots" approach. In times of stress, we often crave someone to offer comfort, assistance, empathy, admiration, and rescue. Employing coping mechanisms to address personal challenges can help prevent isolation and expedite the process of overcoming grief. However, there is a significant drawback to this method: relying too heavily on others for support may lead to being perceived as weakly skilled or dependent.

Avoiding the issue is a common strategy, illustrated vividly by Scarlett from "Gone with the Wind", who famously said, "I will think about it tomorrow". This approach involves denying or ignoring the problem, shirking responsibility, being passive, displaying impatience, experiencing bursts of irritation, indulging in fantasies, overeating, consuming alcohol, etc. On the positive side, it reduces emotional stress. However, the negative side includes a failure to address problems, which leads to accumulating difficulties, and its effectiveness is often short-lived.

Planning to address this issue. In a stressful scenario, the immediate awakening of Robinson Crusoe, who then systematically began to settle on his island, proved to be an effective coping strategy, especially in impending dangerous situations.

Positive reappraisal, or the inclination to find positivity in every situation, can be a powerful coping mechanism. Embracing positive emotions, even amidst crises, can invigorate us and ignite an inner drive. This approach, exemplified by Carlson's philosophy of finding contentment in all circumstances and soothing others with the reassurance to "stay calm", is particularly effective when facing situations where individual agency is limited, such as illness or accidents. Although seeking silver linings in challenging circumstances can reduce stress, it may not be conducive to immediate action when urgent decisions are needed.

Accepting responsibility is akin to a superhero strategy. It embodies an individual's willingness to acknowledge their errors, rectify them, and glean lessons for the future. This approach is frequently adopted by resilient and determined individuals who typically navigate challenging situations effectively.

Distancing. The urge to resolve a conflict from afar is justified when the adversary is in a state of fury, and it is advisable to avoid direct contact. However, employing distancing tactics in other scenarios not only fails to address the issue but could also exacerbate it for both oneself and others.

The same individual, depending on various situational, emotional, and external factors, may employ different coping mechanisms for defense (Zhao et al., 2022). In one scenario, they might act as a brave superhero, while in another, they could resemble Carlson, advocating for calmness—all within the same person but under different circumstances (Zayed et al., 2022). Numerous psychological questionnaires exist to determine an individual's preferred coping strategies, such as the Lazarus Coping Questionnaire, developed in 1985, or more recent tools such as the Stress Coping Behavior Test. While these assessments offer insights into coping behaviors, their results should be handled carefully since the results tend to be generalizable and might not fully reflect reality (McMordie, 2021).

This study aimed to analyze different strategies for stress relief to reduce the harmful effects of stress on adults and to improve their quality of life.

### 3. Methods and materials

For a thorough search, we utilized the DOAJ and EBSCOhost databases to identify relevant studies published over the past decade. To streamline the manual search process and minimize the influx of irrelevant articles, we devised a set of search terms: "stress/coping strategies" OR "stress/coping behaviors" OR "stress/cognitive appraisals" OR "stress/coping methods" OR "stress/coping resources" OR "stress/protective factors". We then applied these terms in the EBSCOhost database search. The current literature review encompasses research on stress perception mechanisms, coping strategies, and intervention methods.

### 4. Results

People perceive stress in different ways (Gradus, 2017). You can take it as a threat or a demand. Stress can have serious consequences (including emotional burnout) only when people perceive the event as a threat. Conversely, viewing an event as a need can lead to a surge of emotions. Some salespeople admitted in questionnaires that they even become bored when things are going well at work. Automatic responses to stress can be influenced by familial predispositions or past traumas. It is crucial to acknowledge which reactions predominate, requiring awareness during moments of stress. Reflecting on past stressful encounters enables the recognition of unhelpful reactions, allowing for better management in future stressful scenarios. For instance, an individual may tend to avoid issues during stress, despite being a typically responsible and rational person (Feng and Lei, 2023).

Modern psychologists have proven that emotional burnout is directly dependent on poorly chosen coping strategies (McMordie, 2021). The following are some interesting facts worth noting:

1. Burned out specialists more frequently than nonburned out specialists use coping strategies such as coping, taking responsibility, and avoidance.

2. Burned out specialists seek social support more often than nonburned out specialists do.

3. Elevated levels of emotional exhaustion align with diminished levels of positive reappraisal. In essence, individuals experiencing burnout lack the motivation to reinterpret challenging situations positively, hindering their personal growth and development.

4. High levels of emotional exhaustion are correlated with reduced levels of positive reappraisal. That is, "burned out" experts are unable to make the effort to give positive meaning to problem situations and direct them toward their personality development.

At present, there are more than 400 coping strategies, which can be categorized into several groups (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004). We can identify three main categories of stress relief strategies: proactive methods of solving problems that involve the use of personal resources, strategies aimed at searching for social support, and strategies based on avoidance and nonadaptive behavior when people choose self-harm, as well as drug and alcohol abuse, to escape from their problems.

**Solution-oriented strategy.** This classification comprises coping strategies aimed at modifying the situation itself:

1) Active coping – specific actions to overcome the stressor or reduce its impact;

2) Plan – Think specifically about how to react to any stressors and consider steps to overcome problems;

Suppressing competing activities and focusing on the challenge – relinquishing other engagements to deal with stressful situations:

Rest – wait for the appropriate opportunity to act;

I am looking for social support, which could include seeking advice, financial assistance, or helpful information. I am focused on coping strategies centered around regulating my emotions.

These coping techniques can aid in controlling emotional responses to challenges:

1) Seek emotional social support - seek moral support from relatives;

2) Positive reappraisal – the skill of reframing situations so that stressful events are seen as beneficial. For instance, seeing divorce as a chance to gain insight into your capacity for love;

3) Radical acceptance – the ability to recognize the reality of stressful situations without shutting down or lying to oneself;

4) Withdrawal and avoidance – refusing to believe that the stressful event has occurred and attempting to live as if nothing happened;

5) Self-control – trying to monitor and control one's emotions as a reaction to stress;

6) Turning to religion – trying to find solace in religious activities;

7) Humor – Try to deal with negative emotions by laughing.

**Nonadaptive strategies.** There are also some popular coping strategies that might not work well in a person's life:

1) Letting out negative emotions – trying to focus on the experience and express negative emotions;

2) Lack of commitment – lack of readiness to handle stressors, even if it means giving up on goals;

3) Lack of focus on thoughts – any behavior that distracts from the stressor. The most common of these are watching videos, daydreaming, and sleeping;

4) Chemical use—taking alcohol or illegal drugs to improve emotional well-being;

5) Social withdrawal – keeping a distance from others.

Functional and nonfunctional coping styles, as outlined by Chao and Wang (2013), encompass approaches to managing stress. Functional coping entails direct problem solving, with or without external support, while dysfunctional coping, also known as "avoidant coping," involves ineffective strategies. The selection of coping styles is influenced by situational factors, perceived control, and individual traits. Effective stress management is characterized by a reduction in the negative impact of situations; decreased levels of depression, anxiety, and irritability; fewer psychosomatic symptoms; and the strengthening of adaptive resources (Bendezú, Sarah and Martha, 2016).

According to the theory of coping behavior, the mechanisms individuals employ to handle stress play a crucial role in determining whether they adapt effectively or struggle with maladaptation. Both theoretical frameworks and experimental evidence show that people utilize adaptation techniques based on their personal experiences and psychological resources. Consequently, coping behaviors are seen as the outcome of the interplay between such ways of coping and personal resources (Taylor and Stanton, 2007). Coping strategies can be broadly categorized into active and passive strategies, as well as into adaptive and nonadaptive methods (Wadsworth, 2015; Holton et al., 2015). Active coping strategies involve problem-solving techniques. They include multiple actions to address stressful situations and social support-seeking behaviors. The latter involves turning to others for help and empathy. On the other hand, passive coping strategies include escapism. This includes multiple actions to avoid or minimize the impact of stressors (Wadsworth, 2015; Holton et al, 2015). While avoidance is typically considered passive, some of its forms may involve active elements.

Personality-mediated adaptive resources (coping resources) include cognitive development level, the presence and availability of social support networks, and personality-related psychological characteristics that ensure resilience to stress (Taylor and Stanton, 2007). Research on psychological stress reflects the issue of psychological protection mechanisms closely

related to coping behavior. This refers to the action strategies an individual takes to consciously and proactively overcome stressful conditions and negative experiences. According to Taylor and Stanton (2007), the ability of a person to effectively cope with stress depends on the cultivation of coping behavior. It is shaped by both personal experience and access to external resources. Strategies for coping refer to the practical responses that people use to handle the threats and challenges that they perceive. These strategies are nurtured by coping resources, which encompass stable personal and social attributes that create a psychological framework for handling emotional distress, as suggested by Holton, Barry, and Chaney (2015). Coping behaviors are widely regarded as a subset of human social behavior characterized by adaptation and avoidance of crisis situations, with an emphasis on recognizing and addressing potential dangers or insurmountable challenges in a timely manner (Taylor and Stanton, 2007; Holton et al., 2015).

Lazarus and Folkman, along with others, initiated the exploration of the notion of psychological stress within the realm of psychology, contrasting it with the physiological, largely predictable (algorithmic) stress response triggered by harmful or threatening stimuli. They emphasized that stress is not solely a result of external factors but also arises from internal psychological processes, including threat assessment (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Obbarius et al., 2021). In this context, R. Lazarus points out that not all environmental demands, only those that are assessed as threatening, create stress. There has been a trend among psychologists, which can be defined as a rejection of the nonspecificity of stressful situations. According to Lazarus's theory of stress and coping, much attention has been given to the mechanism of stress overcoming. It defines the formation of different behavioral patterns that lead to personality adaptation or maladaptation. R. Lazarus stressed the significance of one's capacity to effectively manage stress in various scenarios, asserting that this ability outweighs considerations of the specific nature, severity, or frequency of stress exposure. Consequently, actions aimed at mitigating the impact of stressors on an individual or decreasing their intensity are referred to as "coping behaviors" or stress coping behaviors, as elucidated (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

To date, there are three main ways to define "coping". The ego-oriented approach has its origins in the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud and is rooted in Sigmund Freud's analysis of defense mechanisms. Such analysis considers the coping process to be a specific ego mechanism aimed at effectively adapting to the behavior of the target personality. A person steps to relieve inner tension in a difficult situation (Haan, 1993). The functioning of the coping process requires the engagement of the cognitive, moral, social, and motivational structures of the personality to manage the issue and all the stress it causes. If a person is unable to cope adequately with a problem, defense mechanisms are activated, contributing to passive adaptation. Therefore, the abovementioned authors define defense mechanisms as rigid, maladaptive forms of problem solving that prevent individuals from fully positioning themselves in reality. In addition, according to Haan, coping and defense function in the same ego processes but are different (Haan, 1993). According to the second concept, coping styles are determined by relatively stable personal conditions that determine a person's response to specific stressors. According to this theory, stable personality traits are a major factor in whether a person chooses this or that behavior in stressful situations. Billings and Moos (1984) identified three ways of dealing with stressful situations: assessing the situation, intervening in the situation, and avoiding and distinguishing between active and passive ways of coping with stress, the former being seen as an expression of constructive behavior and the latter being unconstructive (Billings and Moos, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman developed the cognitive phenomenological theory of stress management, which belongs to the third direction and is currently the most widely used theory. According to the third concept, coping is a dynamic process determined by the subjectivity of the experienced situation and many other factors.

Stress management theory posits that coping is a dynamic process influenced by the specific circumstances, the phase at which the stressor is encountered, and the individual's cognitive appraisal of the stressor. Lazarus and Folkman define psychological coping as an individual's cognitive and behavioral efforts aimed at reducing the impact of stress (Obbarius et al., 2021). Active coping behavior or active overcoming is the targeted elimination or modification of the impact effects of a stressful situation, thereby weakening the individual's stress connection with the environment. Passive coping behavior, also known as passive resilience, is an inherent approach to managing stress by employing various psychological defense mechanisms aimed at alleviating emotional strain rather than altering stressful circumstances. Both theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence indicate that individuals employ coping strategies, drawing from personal experiences or coping resources, to manage stress. Coping behaviors, which encompass stress management tactics, are thus understood as the interplay between coping strategies and coping resources. Coping strategies represent responses to perceived threats, while coping resources are stable attributes within individuals and societies that facilitate the improvement of stress relief mechanisms. The success of coping hinges on the cultivation of coping resources. Insufficient coping resources may precipitate reactive maladaptive coping behaviors, social withdrawal, and individual breakdown in challenging or extreme scenarios. Folkman delineated coping resources into physical (e.g., health, stamina), psychological (e.g., beliefs, self-esteem, the control locus), and social (for example, personal networks, familial and peer support) spheres, categorizing them as personal and environmental resources. Presently, an individual's coping resources encompass cognitive capacities enabling the assessment of stressors and social environment, self-concept, inner locus of control, communication skills, empathy, existential beliefs, personal will, and value systems. Social environmental factors also significantly shape human behavior.

These include social support processes, which are essential resources for coping with stress and encompass the presence of supportive social networks, the ability to recognize and utilize these networks, and the capacity to provide support to others. According to the cognitive stress theory developed by Lazarus and his followers, human behavior is understood not only as a response to social influences but also as the result of individual interpretations and adaptations to the social environment. This perspective suggests that individuals develop specific behavioral strategies in response to social contexts, meeting environmental demands through personal experiences (Obbarius et al., 2021). Currently, understanding people's responses to stress and effective stress management techniques has become a focal point for researchers and a crucial area in preventing various physical and psychosomatic ailments. The concept of coping has emerged as central in modern stress theory, with coping mechanisms increasingly recognized as stabilizing factors aiding individuals in maintaining psychosocial equilibrium amidst stressors. The seminal work of Lazarus and Folkman highlights two primary processes mediating the interaction between individuals and their environment: cognitive appraisal and coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Obbarius et al., 2021). Throughout human evolution, cognitive evaluations of situations have played a pivotal role. Individuals navigate challenges by assessing their personal significance, which in turn influences the intensity and nature of their emotional responses. Emotions, known to regulate various human activities, particularly impact information processing and cognitive functions, shaping our understanding of the world and how we interact with it. The second is an evaluative cognitive activity that involves identifying a piece of information that needs to be retrieved and is important to a particular individual's well-being—"What does this mean to me? Furthermore, there are two types of cognitive activities – primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Primary assessment refers to information about what happened and affects the well-being of an individual. Lazarus and Folkman described three types of stress – harm, reflecting ties to previous experiences; threat, reflecting anticipated harm; and challenge, directed against one's potential resources (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Obbarius et al., 2021).

The perception of an event often hinges on an individual's available coping resources. When individuals perceive their resources as insufficient to handle a situation, they are more inclined to view it as a threat. Individuals who often experience stress tend to accurately evaluate their resources and view stressful events as changeable. Through an initial assessment, individuals can determine whether a situation poses a threat to their well-being or presents an opportunity for positive change. This allows for the evaluation of the severity of stress effects and comparison of the likelihood of damage to an individual's resilience. As noted by Haan, secondary assessment complements primary assessment, guiding the selection of coping mechanisms and resources to influence negative events and their consequences (Haan, 1993). This process aids individuals in deciding their course of action in a given situation. Following a thorough evaluation of the situation, individuals initiate coping strategies to manage stress. While animals typically respond to stress with avoidance, withdrawal, or aggression, humans engage in cognitive processes for adaptive decision-making during stressful situations. R. Lazarus identified three primary coping strategies: self-defense mechanisms, direct action such as fighting or fleeing accompanied by emotions such as anger or fear, and ineffective coping when perceiving but not facing an actual threat.

Lazarus and S. Folkman further elaborate that coping serves two essential functions: regulating emotions (emotion-focused coping) and addressing the underlying problems causing stress (problem-focused coping). Both functions are commonly employed by individuals in highly stressful situations. According to the theory of cognitive appraisal proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Obbarius et al. (2021), the quantity of coping strategies used depends on how people evaluate stressful situations. Billings and Moos (1984) identified three primary coping styles: evaluative coping, problem-focused coping, and emotion-focused coping. Evaluative coping involves appraising the situation's meaning and implementing strategies such as logical analysis and cognitive reappraisal. Problem-focused coping aims to alter, reduce, or eliminate stressors, while emotion-focused coping entails cognitive and behavioral efforts to alleviate emotional distress and maintain emotional equilibrium. According to Lazarus, coping is the process through which individuals manage the balance between environmental demands and available resources. Initially, defined by Lazarus as a cognitive process encompassing the assessment of perceived threat or harm (primary appraisal) and the determination of specific actions to address the threat (secondary appraisal). The coping process, which involves managing stress, utilizes different behavioral strategies depending on personal and environmental coping resources. These strategies are typically categorized as active or passive by many authors (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Obbarius et al., 2021). Active coping strategies encompass problem-solving approaches aimed at resolving or addressing stressful situations, while social support-seeking strategies involve seeking assistance from others to obtain emotional or practical support.

Passive coping behaviors involve avoidance as a fundamental strategy for dealing with stress, although some forms of avoidance can also be considered active. Thus, the primary coping strategies for managing stress include problem solving, seeking social support, and avoidance. Additionally, in the foreign psychological and psychotherapeutic literature, psychological defense is closely related to coping behavior, stemming from the English term "cope". Coping mechanisms aim to address challenges, mitigate their adverse effects, avoid them, or simply disregard their existence, contrasting with unconscious, passive psychological defense mechanisms. Unlike defense mechanisms, coping mechanisms are consciously recognized and employed by individuals.

They are strategies that are constructive, flexible, need sensitive, and designed to actively solve problem situations and seek social help from others. Despite the growing scientific interest in the problems of people's defensive coping behavior in

recent years, as many Russian psychologists have repeatedly emphasized, these problems have not been fully studied in domestic science, either at the theoretical or empirical level.

As already mentioned, Lazarus and Folkman believe that coping has two main functions: regulating emotions (emotion-focused coping) and coping with stress-causing problems (problem-focused coping). These functions are used in most stress situations, and the scaled representation of each function changes depending on how the stress situation is evaluated. Emotion-focused coping is defined as the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral effort through which a person attempts to regulate or alleviate emotional tension (the emotional component of stress). Початок форми In the field of problem-oriented coping, individuals engage in efforts to address and mitigate the influence of a stressor or threat. Within this framework, Lazarus views coping or stress management as the active process undertaken by individuals under pressure to effectively balance the demands posed by their environment with the resources available to meet these demands (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Obbarius et al., 2021).

## 5. Discussion

The problem of stress was initially considered by scientists based on the study of the intensity of various stress factors. In particular, several researchers (Huang, 2021; Mariotti, 2015; Yildirim, 2019) have observed that people exposed to the same level of stress or adverse conditions may react differently. Scholars (Abouammoh et al., 2020; Campo et al., 2017) have proposed the concept of "differentiated vulnerability," which sheds light on how people respond differently to challenging circumstances through the combination of personal coping resources and environmental resources. The authors emphasize the multifactorial nature of factors, such as the presence of social support and the tendency to seek and use it, locus of control, problem-solving skills, security assessment, and career choice. The cited results of scientific research explain the conclusions of the current work on the individualization of strategies for overcoming stressful situations, which play a significant role in determining a person's vulnerability to adverse circumstances.

Psychologists have tried to reconcile the differences between Selye's concept of stress as a generalized response to any stimulus and Lazarus's idea that the stress response depends on the individual's psychological assessment of the threat. Scholars (Yaribeygi, 2017; Zayed, 2022), for the most part, supported the point of view of Lazarus, who emphasizes the subjective assessment of the threat. This led to a significant clarification of the concept of "stress", with an emphasis on extreme situations and individual experiences. To reconcile the physiological nonspecificity and psychological selectivity of stress reactions, Lazarus introduced the concept of "coping", which refers to the ability to effectively manage stress. The outlined concept justifies the results of the current study.

From a theoretical point of view, as Crielaard (2021), Bendezú (2016), and Feng (2023) argue, understanding stress coping mechanisms is crucial because they determine whether a person adapts to difficult circumstances or maladapts. Research shows that people use different coping strategies based on personal experience, called coping resources. These coping strategies are used to overcome stressors that are perceived as threats. On the other hand, as emphasized by Wadsworth (2015) and Wu (2019), coping resources are stable personality traits that affect individuals' ability to effectively cope with stress. Hence, coping behavior is viewed as a product of the interaction between coping strategies and coping resources, which synergizes with the findings of the current study.

Scientists (De Clercq, 2019; Tsaras et al., 2018) have managed to identify different coping resources that people use to solve life problems. Researchers divide these resources into physical, psychological and social factors, as well as personal and environmental factors. In the physical realm, coping resources encompass aspects such as health and endurance. Psychological coping resources include beliefs, self-esteem, locus of control, morality, and other elements that shape a person's mental resilience. Social coping resources include both personal social networks and broader social support systems. The approach proposed by the scientists explains the differentiated approach proposed in the current work regarding the individualization of strategies for coping with stressful situations.

According to scientists (Pedron, 2021), modern understanding also includes cognitive development that allows people to evaluate the influence of their social environment. These include concepts such as self-concept (perception of self), internal locus of control (belief in one's ability to influence outcomes), social competence, empathy, and personal beliefs about fundamental aspects of life. In addition, the resources available in a person's social environment significantly influence his or her behavior. This includes support networks, including family and wider societal structures. In today's fast-paced world, people often face numerous stressors that can lead to irritation and even overwhelming stress. As Taylor & Stanton (2007) argue, when people face such challenges, they use different coping strategies to solve them. Psychologists define coping strategies as actions that people take to alleviate unpleasant conditions and situations that reflect their unique ways of coping with life's difficulties. These strategies encompass three key dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive, manifested in actions, feelings, and thoughts, respectively. Each strategy has advantages and disadvantages, offering people different options for coping with stress. Although these methods are readily available, they are not universal solutions, as evidenced by the findings of research by scientists. Therefore, each person can choose those stress coping mechanisms that most resonate with him or her, correspond to his or her preferences, or are the most effective in helping him or her navigate difficult circumstances.

Stainton (2019) and Szkody (2021) believe that stress can be effectively dealt with by diverting attention from the situation that caused it. Focusing on negative events can increase stress levels and potentially lead to psychological trauma. Taking a humorous perspective can help relieve stress by inducing laughter, which in turn relaxes muscles and normalizes heart rate and blood pressure. Because stress generates intense energy in the body, it requires action. Exercising, such as hitting the gym, cleaning your living space, venting your frustrations by hitting a pillow or a dish, or even hitting the mattress hard with a tennis racket, can help channel this energy into a productive channel. In addition, according to Dyess (2018) and Sgoifo (2017), relaxation techniques offer another way to relieve stress, aimed at reducing both physical and mental tension. Although these techniques are relatively easy to master, motivation plays a crucial role in their effectiveness. After all, the goal of these exercises is to achieve complete relaxation, which will benefit both you and your loved ones.

Individual scientists (Lee et al., 2021; Obbarius, 2021; Padmanabhanunni, 2017) note that in some people experiencing stress, appetite may decrease, which leads to weight loss because the body's increased biological responses to stress use a significant amount of energy. However, for most, stress tends to cause the opposite effect: an increase in appetite, especially for foods high in sugar and fat, such as chocolate, cakes and candies.

Obviously, choosing the most effective strategy for coping with stress involves taking into account various factors since there is no universal method that is suitable for everyone and every situation. As Prayag (2020) and Santilli (2020) emphasize, it is important to understand that all stress coping strategies can potentially hinder problem solving, lower self-esteem, and cause distress. Therefore, determining the optimal approach requires careful consideration. Moreover, people with strong conscientiousness traits, known for their competence and discipline, tend to actively solve problems and use positive reappraisal techniques. In contrast, people high in neuroticism, anxiety, shyness, and negativism are more likely to use emotionally oriented strategies and seek support from others. When choosing stress management methods, it is important to evaluate their suitability for a particular person. For example, one person may find value in using self-regulatory techniques to achieve calmness and take action, while another may experience increased anxiety and potential breakdown.

As Gradus (2017) and Kim (2017) argue, adapting strategies to unique circumstances is crucial. What works well in one situation may not be as effective in another. Therefore, it is vital not only to choose adaptive methods but also to be flexible in their application. In scenarios where people cannot control stressors, such as during an epidemic, reliance on adaptive emotional coping appears to be more beneficial than relying on problem-solving approaches. The importance of choosing appropriate strategies has also been confirmed by numerous scientific studies (Liu et al., 2021, Mulska et al., 2022).

Eun & Jin (2018) and Koffer (2019) noted that to initiate a change in coping strategies, it is important to first identify the current coping mechanisms being used. Because the stress response is often automatic, people should try to be as attentive as possible to recognize their habitual patterns. As scientists are convinced, to begin with, it is worth analyzing various stressful scenarios and identifying ineffective actions. For example, avoidance tactics such as overeating, excessive drinking, and indulging in fantasies can be counterproductive. Similarly, hypercompensatory coping mechanisms, such as relentless perfectionism or provocative behavior, may not produce the desired results. Each person has innate resources to effectively cope with stress. Moreover, developing mindfulness appears to be a very powerful tool for changing stress coping strategies. Mindfulness involves the ability to observe one's mental and emotional states, as well as bodily sensations. For example, practicing mindfulness meditation for two weeks helped students develop adaptability in their approaches to coping with stress. The outlined approach proposed by scientists explains the conclusions of the current study because, due to such practices, people can choose optimal strategies for overcoming stress in specific stressful situations.

Scientists (Heppner et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019; McMordie, 2021) have proposed coping strategies for proactively solving problem situations:

- proactive steps to eliminate sources of stress;
- plan your own actions based on the problem situation;
- get help or advice from those around you;
- evaluate the situation in a positive light and perceive it as an episode from one's own life experience;
- to realize reality;
- inactive coping, which helps individuals adapt to stressful situations;
- seek sympathy and understanding from others;
- reduce the focus of attention on other matters and problems and fully focus on the cause of stress;
- waiting more favorable conditions to solve the problem;
- react emotionally to problematic situations;
- denial of stressful events;
- diversion of attention from stressful factors with the help of entertainment, place, sleep, etc.
- refusal to solve problems.

There are many strategies for coping with stress, but active and effective stress management techniques are essential for problem solving and adapting to difficult situations. The ability to independently cope with stressful events is a key indicator of self-sufficiency and significantly affects people's quality of life and well-being. The choice of solution-oriented stress coping strategies is most useful for mature people, as such strategies contribute to problem solving and improve general well-being—Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius (2023) and Popovych (2022) are convinced. One must agree with scientists because feeling alone is usually a sign of immaturity, and overcoming it often requires professional help, for example, psychotherapeutic techniques such as Hibuki therapy or body-oriented practices. These approaches aim to increase happiness levels by increasing oxytocin and endorphin levels and decreasing cortisol levels. Ultimately, happiness reduces feelings of loneliness and improves well-being (Vittner et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2022; Maksimov (Sharon), 2022). A contented person rarely feels lonely.

## 6. Conclusion

After analyzing various coping strategies, we concluded that solution-oriented approaches offer several advantages over emotion regulation-oriented coping strategies and nonadaptive strategies, which are more characteristic of immature individuals. However, the choice of coping strategy depends on numerous factors, such as past experiences, personal character traits, and examples set by family members. A truly mature individual can effectively manage stress by selecting strategies that address the root cause. Unlike emotion regulation-oriented coping strategies and nonadaptive approaches, solution-oriented strategies actively address the problem rather than merely masking it or downplaying its significance.

## Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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