



COVID-19 Pandemic: Romantic Relationship Breakup Of Emerging Adults

Akinwale, Gbenusola, A.

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS¹
gakinwale@unilag.edu.ng

&

Bada, Bukola, V.

bvbada@unilag.edu.ng
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

Corresponding Author: gakinwale@unilag.edu.ng

Abstract

COVID-19 is a global pandemic that ravaged different aspect of human existence. The pandemic affected all ages differently and the young person's relationships were also affected especially during the school closure. The objective of this study was to explore the coping mechanism of emerging adults who are university students that experienced romantic relationship breakups during the pandemic due to the lockdown. It was hypothesized that males would have a better coping strategy than females. The role of self esteem and parenting styles were also hypothesized in to see if they would correlate with the coping strategy. 200 (46%, males 54% Females) emerging adults who had experienced at least one romantic breakups between year 2020/2021 filled the survey online. The questionnaire used are Parent acceptance scale, Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES) and Emotional Approach Coping Scale (EACS). The result showed no significant difference in the coping strategy used by both genders $t(198) = -.189, p > 0.05$. Only authoritative parenting style was found to be negatively related to coping strategy ($r = .158, p < 0.05$) out of the three dimensions of parenting styles. Lastly, self-esteem was not significantly related to breakup coping strategy ($r = .036, p > 0.05$). The results were discussed with extant literature and recommendations were made. The study concluded that humans have to develop context-contingent strategies to solve life challenges.

Keywords: Coping Strategy, COVID-19, Parenting Styles, Romantic relationship, Self-esteem

Introduction

The world pandemic known as COVID 19 shook the whole universe and took its toll on all and sundry including the emerging adults in the society who are not left out. One of the things said to be the major impact of the pandemic among this group of young individuals is the romantic relationship breakup they experience as a result of the lock down. Inevitably, persons in a romantic relationship share a variety of personal and emotional connections that ultimately enrich their lives. Romantic relationships are described as the existence of a shared emotional, psychological, physical, financial, and sexual relationship shared between the two (Arikewuyo, et al 2020). The prevalence of romantic relationship breakup is common in higher institution especially among emerging adults. An increasing body of evidence demonstrates that an individual's degree of self-esteem influences their well-being and achievement in various life areas as well as their physical and mental health. (Orth, et al 2012) and better physical and mental health (Sowislo & Orth, 2013).

An individual's subjective judgment of his or her value as a person is referred to as having self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Feelings of self-respect and self-worth are included in self-esteem. An individual with high self-esteem "considers himself (or herself) worthy, he (or she) does not necessarily consider oneself (or herself) superior than others," according to the Harvard Health Letter (Rosenberg, 1965). According to research, self-esteem peak at adolescence and young adulthood, rises again around middle adulthood, peaks at about age 50 to 60 years, and then gradually declines as the person age (Orth et al, 2012).

Self-esteem is one of the most researched individual difference variables considered to affect the success of effective communications and relationships ([Cameron & Granger, 2019](#); [Harris & Orth, 2020](#)) and social acceptance and loss are fundamental to key theoretical background of self-esteem ([Leary & Baumeister, 2000](#)). However, as with many other self-esteem effects, there is little consistent evidence for this theoretical assumption ([Harris & Orth, 2020](#)), with few studies examining whether self-esteem predicts wellbeing following breakup using small, non-representative samples with methods that do not assess real-life rejection or suffer from retrospective and forecasting biases, and failing to account for a range of confounding variables, including self-esteem and wellbeing.

Although romantic breakups are a risk to one's wellbeing, how people perceive and manage with breakups differs ([Sbarra et al., 2015](#)). Self-esteem is one crucial feature that is likely to influence how people feel and cope with relationship breakups. According to the sociometer hypothesis, measure how are accepted and valued by others well self-esteem indexes the degree to which individuals are accepted and valued by others ([Leary & Baumeister, 2000](#)). People with poor self-esteem have been rejected and socially despised ([Harter, 2003](#)). People with poor self-esteem react more negatively to rejection and the loss of social acceptance as a result of unpleasant interpersonal encounters and subsequent perceptions that the self is not respected and will not in the future ([Leary & Baumeister, 2000](#)).

A stable romantic relationship predicts improved psychological and physical wellbeing because of high-quality intimacy, support, belonging ([Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017](#)). Relationship dissolution is common although it is important to well-being ([Rhoades et al., 2011](#); [Rosenfeld, 2015](#)). Given the importance of relationships in meeting relatedness dissolution is linked to relatedness needs, experiencing a relationship dissolution is connected to increased psychological distress and depressive symptoms ([Kim & McKenry, 2002](#); [Sbarra et al., 2014](#)), lower happiness

and life satisfaction ([Braithwaite et al., 2010](#); [Gustavson et al., 2016](#)), and a greater risk of psychological and physical health problems ([Braithwaite et al., 2010](#); [Gustavson et al., 2016](#)), ([Rhoades et al., 2011](#)).

The interaction between parents and their children as well as how these children were raised, has long been linked to the development of love partnership. Despite the fact that most people create close love relationships in their early adulthood, the development of romantic intimacy features and qualities begins in childhood. The quality and kind of attachment they will have with their parents has been found to predict the quality of attachment they will have in romantic relationships as an adult (Collins & Read, 1990; Mikulincer, Shaver & Dolev 2004).

According to Herman & McHale (1993) their study correlated coping strategies and parental relationship perspective, warmth, intimacy, and communication with children suggest that action tactics would be used more when dealing with obstacles like a breakup. Furthermore, people who see their parents as indulgent and negligent use a more cognitive coping strategy, whereas people who see their parents as warm and a supportive employ a problem-focused coping strategy.

Finally, parent's perceived firmness and vigilance are linked to a cognitive and emotion-focused coping style (Dusek & Danko, 1994). While some parents experience authoritarian and permissive parenting style from both father and mother, parental warmth is positively correlated with the active coping; Other studies from (Wolfradta, Hempelb & Miles, 2003; de-Minzi, 2006), shows that how children perceive their parents' connections influences their coping behavior, regardless of age and gender.

To create the authoritative parenting style Baumrind combine the best elements of permissive parenting (high warmth) with the best elements of authoritarian parenting (high control). The attributes of the authoritative parenting style are responsiveness,

support, demand and direction (Baumrind, 1966, 1971). When it comes to children, authoritative parents are aware of their children's emotions and educate them how to regulate it. Studies by (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Suldo & Huebner, 2004) revealed that authoritative parents are warm, responsive, and emotionally supportive of their children and they foster communication, so that both parties feel happy. Authoritative parents their children be independent and create their own identities while simultaneously establishing norms and boundaries (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009; Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2008).

The present study investigated whether individuals with a recent romantic relationship breakup would have a better coping strategy. Further, to explore the correlation between self-esteem, parenting styles, and coping strategy of the participants, and also to examine the gender differences in coping strategy of the participants.

The nature of past findings has created an avenue to further investigate relationships breakup and individual coping strategy in relationship to individuals' self-esteem and parenting style. To this end, young men and women who are emerging adults 18-29years (Arnett, 2016) and whom just recently had romantic relationship breakup especially during and immediately after covid-19 lockdown participated.

Methods

Population/Sample & Sampling Procedure

The populations for the survey was emerging adults who are undergraduates' students of University of Lagos. 113 participants met the study selection criteria which is defined as emerging adults who experience romantic relationship breakup during COVID-19 school closure. The study adopted purposive sampling; a sampling

technique where the sample selected was based on characteristic of the study and the objective of the study.

Participants

The sample comprised of 113 participants who were unmarried, and they were from different socioeconomic, ethnic and family backgrounds. The participants were 113 (56.5%) ages 17-20 years and 87 (43.5%) ages 21 and above years with 92 (46%) Male respondents and 108 (54%) Female respondents. The study took place between year 2020 and 2021 among emerging that are also undergraduates' student of the University of Lagos. The survey utilized a cross-sectional design and an online goggle form battery of self-report questionnaires to gather the data on the participants' coping strategy, self-esteem and parenting styles for the study. Before the start of the study, written informed consent was obtained from every participant because of the sensitivity of the topic.

Instrument

The Parenting Style Questionnaire

The parenting style scale is a 20 items scales measuring parenting style as reported by the respondents. The scale has the three categories as described by the Baumrind typology and the three subscales are permissive with 5 items, 6 items measuring authoritarian and 9 items measuring the authoritative parenting styles respectively. The items were drawn from Baumrind Parental care scale and (Rohners, 1995: cited in Akinsola, 1999). Akinsola (1999) obtained correlation coefficient of 0.67, 0.35 and 0.80 for permissive, authoritarian and authoritative parenting style respectively.

The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES)

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale is the standard measure of self-esteem in psychological research that was developed by Morris Rosenberg in (1965). It is a ten-item Likert scale type that with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Five of the items were worded positively and five were worded negatively. The scale assesses overall self-worth/esteem by assessing both positive and negative self-evaluation. It employs a scale of 0-30 with a score less than 15 indicating an issue with low self-esteem.

The Emotional Approach Coping Scale (EACS)

This coping scale was developed by Stanton, Kirk, Cameron & Danoff- Burg, 2000. It is a 16-item measures with a four Likert response format ranging from A (I usually don't do this at all) to D (I usually do this a lot). The scale comprises of two subscales namely Emotional processing and Emotional expression with which each is made up of 8-items. The Emotional processing describes the attempts by a respondent to understand his/her emotions, for example "I work on understanding my feelings and situations" while Emotional expression describes the attempts by a respondent to freely allow the expression his/her emotions, for example "I let my feelings come out freely". Higher summed scores on each of the two subscales are indicative of more frequent approval of emotional processing and emotional expression coping strategy. Correlation between both subscales ranges from .55 - .62 (Stanton et al.,2000) provides evidence of reliability and validity of EACS items which are highly internally consistent $t(\alpha=.92 \text{ to } .97)$ and retest reliability over four weeks was $r=.79$ for expression and $r=.81$ for processing.

Results

Table 1: showing Correlation coefficient of the relationship between Parenting styles and coping strategy.

		Permissive	Authoritaria n	Authoritativ e	Coping strategy
Permissive	Pearson Correlation	1	.112	-.066	.106
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.114	.354	.134
	N		200	200	200
Authoritarian	Pearson Correlation		1	.008	.063
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.907	.377
	N			200	200
Authoritative	Pearson Correlation			1	-.158*
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.026
	N				200
Coping strategy	Pearson Correlation				1
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N				

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

The table above shows the correlations between parenting style and coping strategy. Authoritative parenting style was found to be negatively related to coping strategy ($r = -.158, p < 0.05$). Permissive parenting style and Authoritarian parenting style was not found to be significantly related to coping strategy.

Table 2: Showing the correlation coefficient between self-esteem and coping strategy

		Self-esteem	Coping strategy
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	1	.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.611
	N	200	200
Coping strategy	Pearson Correlation	.036	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.611	
	N	200	200

The table above shows that self-esteem is not significantly related to breakup coping strategy ($r=.036, p>0.05$). Thus, the hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3: Showing the results of the independent T test comparing Males and Females on coping strategy.

Variables	Sex	N	Mean	S.D.	T	Df	P
Coping strategy	Male	92	40.25	4.75	-.189	198	.850
	Female	108	40.37	4.89			

The table above shows the results of the independent t test statistic comparing Males and Females on coping strategy. The results showed no significant difference between male, (Mean=40.25, SD=4.75) and female students (Mean= 40.37, SD=4.89) in coping strategy $t(198) = -.189, p>0.05$. This implies that there is no significant gender difference in coping among the students' sampled.

Discussion

In the present study, the first hypothesis examined the relationship between parenting styles coping strategy, the result revealed a negative relationship for Authoritative parenting style but no significant relationship between permissive and authoritarian which made the hypothesis slightly accepted. This indicates that if an individual experienced an authoritative parenting style, such individual would have less emotional strength to cope after a romantic relationship breakup. From the result, obtained in this study it shows that Authoritative parenting Style predict poor Breakup coping strategy. And these findings contradict some of the existing facts about authoritative parenting Style. This kind of parenting style has been proven to be one that encourages Independence. It teaches an individual that they are capable of Accomplishing things on their own. And also that they are capable of handling and managing frustration and hurtful experiences. The authoritative parenting style when compared to Other parenting styles Is Prescribed to be the best form of parenting Because it is characterized by high level of responsiveness, Assertiveness, Self-regulation and adaptation to different circumstances. The results above indicate a negative relationship between The Break-Up coping strategy and authoritative parenting Style ($r=-.158$) Meaning that a n individual who grew up under an authoritative style of parenting will have a lesser coping strategy after breakup, Although, the predictive strength of the result is not a strong relationship. the result above Shows a weak relationship between the two variables.

The second hypothesis in this study reveals that self-esteem is not significantly related to breakup coping strategy. As against research that supported that there's a connection between coping strategy and self-esteem for instance, Frydenberg (1997) also explains that individuals with good self-esteem will employ active coping skills. Previous findings has found that low self-esteem predicts increased suffering after social

rejection. Undergraduate students with low self-esteem for example reacts more negatively to experimentally induced rejection ([Nezlek et al., 1997](#)), evaluate themselves more negatively after being primed with rejection-related words ([Sommer & Baumeister, 2002](#)), and experience more distress after imagining romantic rejection ([Waller & MacDonald, 2010](#)). In the case of breakups, students lower in self-esteem who had a recent breakup (within the last six months) retrospectively assessed the breakup as more stressful and had more present adjustment problems ([Frazier & Cook, 1993](#)). In samples of divorced/divorcing women and undergraduate students who just suffered a break-up, lower self-esteem was linked to greater emotional pain ([Waller & MacDonald, 2010](#)).

The third hypothesis investigated if males would have a better coping strategy than females. Contrary to expectation, the findings in the study revealed that there is no significant difference in coping strategy across both genders. Males do not cope better than females after a romantic relationship breakup, neither does females do better with coping strategy after a romantic relationship breakup. Comparing this study with other research, studies have reported mixed results with respect to gender. For instance, Brody & Hall (1993) revealed that gender plays an incontestable role in post-breakup coping strategies indicating that men and women may focus on different aspects of the same situation, and that females are superior to males in identifying and expressing a wide range of emotions verbally and facially.

Conclusion

The study also adds to the long debate on authoritative parenting's effectiveness in the lives of every growing child since it helps as a mediating mechanism that accounts for the link between coping strategy and relationship stability. Human strength and

positive psychological attributes such as self-esteem and coping strategy has become increasingly important as positive psychology has evolved.

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