



# The Effects of Coping Style On Illicit Substance Use In A Hispanic Young Adult Population

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## Abstract

The current study sought to identify how different coping styles impact illicit substance use in students on the U.S. / Mexico border. We addressed this issue using the Collectivist Coping Style Measure (CCSM; Moore & Constantine, 2005). The CCSM is a new coping style measure created to address the lack of information on coping styles within more collectivistic cultures, such as those of Latin American descent. The measure assesses two constructs: social support seeking (e.g., reaching out to friends) and forbearance (e.g., the tendency to conceal problems from others). We examined these two coping strategies and their relationship to illicit substance use in a young adult Hispanic, predominantly Mexican American sample (n=445). Participants completed the CCSM as well as a self-report measure of use of illicit substances in the past month. Results were analyzed using a Multiple Indicators-Multiple Causes model in Mplus. Results indicate that social support seeking is influential in decreasing the probability of illicit substance use. Forbearance appears to not influence illicit substance use for Hispanics, though males appear more likely to use forbearance as a coping skill than females. These results suggest that bolstering social support seeking skills in prevention and treatment programs targeting Hispanics may be an expedient means of intervention.

## Objective

The current study investigated the relationship between coping styles (either a social support seeking or forbearance coping style) and illicit substance use. In addition, we sought to determine the impact that age, gender, and acculturation level would have on coping style preference.

## Introduction

### Illicit Substance use

Approximately 23 million Americans struggle with a drug or alcohol problem (National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 2004).

By 2020, it is predicted that 30,962,000 lives will be affected by diseases attributable to alcohol and illicit drug use compared to the 884,000 lives affected in 1990 (Murray & Lopez, 1996).

The majority of substance users (rates up to 85%) do not feel that they need to receive treatment (NSDUH, 2005). Out of the remaining 15% who perceived a need for help, only 7% actually sought some type of healthcare, and only 3% sought this help from a mental health professional (NSDUH, 2005).

### Coping Styles and Illicit Substance Use

Individuals can adopt avoidant or active coping strategies to manage stress. For example, some people turn to drugs or alcohol as an avoidance strategy to try to reduce distress or depression. Alternatively, others may rely on active/approach methods, such as seeking social support, to cope with stress. (Forsy, McKellar, & Moos, 2007).

Many individuals turn to illegal drugs as a way to cope with stressors, depression or psychological dysfunction. Specifically there is a high rate of adolescents and young adults who turn to substance use as a coping mechanism (Green & Ritter, 2000).

Reliance on approach rather than on avoidance coping strategies is associated with better substance use outcomes (Chung, Langenbucher, Labouvie, Pandina, & Moos, 2001). High social support protects a person from engaging in substance use (Wills & Cleary, 1995). For example, approach coping (i.e. social support seeking) at a 1-year follow-up was associated with less substance use at a 5-year follow-up (Lemke & Moos, 2003). Additionally, a study by Galif, Sussman, Chou and Wills (2003) found that adolescents who seek social support for depression are less likely to turn to drug use as a means of coping.

A gender difference has been identified with regard to coping style. Studies have consistently demonstrated that women cope with stress by expressing their emotions and seeking social support, while men tend to employ distractive means to cope with stress, such as alcohol and drug use (Alumran & Punamäki, 2008; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

### Coping Styles Pertinent to Hispanics

Seeking social support – (active / approach coping style) the tendency to seek out friends and family members when facing a stressful event or problem. This is common in collectivist cultures likely due to the importance of family and community (Moore & Constantine, 2005).

Forbearance – (avoidant coping style) the tendency to minimize or conceal problems and negative emotions in an attempt to solve problems alone and not burden others (Moore & Constantine, 2005).

Western cultures, such as the U.S., tend to employ independent, avoidant coping styles when addressing life stressors (Lucas, 2002), while Latin cultures tend to prefer collectivist and social support seeking problem solving strategies (Mori, 2000).

## Hypotheses

- Individuals who report being less acculturated will be more likely to report a social support seeking coping style.
- Women will be more likely than men to adopt a social support seeking coping strategy.
- Individuals who employ a forbearance coping style will report significantly more illicit substance use.

## Method

### Participants

Hispanic undergraduate students attending the University of Texas at El Paso (n = 445).

Students received course credit for participation via Experimatrix or equivalent credit source.

### Procedure

The confidentiality of the experiment was explained to participants before they began through the use of a consent form which was explained to them.

Participants anonymously completed questionnaires assessing their illicit substance use and their coping style.

Following the completion of the experimental questionnaire, participants were debriefed about the experiment.

### Measures

The Collectivist Coping Styles Measure (CCSM; Moore & Constantine, 2005) is a 9 item measure designed to assess Social Support Seeking and Forbearance in coping with problems and concerns within Latin American, African American, and Asian individuals. Each of the 9 items is Likert-scaled with 5 response options ranging from 1 (“not used”) to 5 (“used often”). Items from the two respective scales are summed to provide continuous measures of Social Support Seeking and Forbearance in Coping; higher scores indicate higher levels of use of each coping style. The CCSM shows adequate test-retest reliability with an observed Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .71 for the Seeking Social Support subscale and an observed Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .80 for the Forbearance subscale (Moore & Constantine, 2005). Furthermore, the creators of this scale also note adequate convergent, discriminant, and concurrent validity to a variety of other measures assessing coping styles.

An Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Use Frequency questionnaire, used in recent and current studies both at UTEP and in the community, asks participants to report past and present patterns of substance use.

The Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (SASH; Marín, Sabogal, VanOss, Otero-Sabogal, & Pérez-Stable, 1987) assesses how acculturated Hispanics are to American culture. Twelve items on a 5-point Likert-type scale are used to assess the degree to which individuals of Hispanic descent have adopted American culture. This instrument has been found to have high internal reliability ( $\alpha = .92$ ; Marín et al., 1987), and internal reliability was also found to be high for this study ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Mean item scores are used for purposes of analyses and can range from one (indicating less acculturation) to five (indicating greater acculturation).

## Approach to Analyses

Because the main outcome of interest was dichotomous, Mplus 5.1 with the WLSMV estimator and  $\Theta$  parameterization was used.

Age, gender, and SASH acculturation level were exogenous predictors of three endogenous variables: past month illicit substance use (dichotomous), forbearance coping (CCSM factor 1), and social support seeking coping (CCSM factor 2). The paths between the two latent continuous factors of the CCSM and past month use of illicit substances were also estimated. To improve model fit in the measurement model,  $\theta$  covariances with derivatives above .08 were freed.

		Estimate	Std. Error	Z	P
Forbearance $\gamma$ s	Age	0.01	0.01	0.75	0.46
	Gender (female)	-0.23	0.12	-1.87	0.06
	SASH Acculturation	0.12	0.08	1.52	0.13
Social Support Seeking $\gamma$ s	Age	-0.03	0.01	-2.73	0.01
	Gender (female)	0.47	0.11	4.08	0.00
	SASH Acculturation	-0.06	0.07	-0.89	0.38
Past Month Use of Illicit Substances $\gamma$ s	Age	-0.02	0.03	-0.64	0.52
	Gender (female)	-0.33	0.17	-1.99	0.05
	SASH Acculturation	0.14	0.10	1.39	0.17
Past Month Use of Illicit Substances $\beta$	Forbearance	-0.03	0.08	-0.35	0.73
	Social Support Seeking	-0.13	0.07	-1.78	0.07

## Results

### Demographics

Because participants (n = 445) were college students, the sample was comprised predominantly of young adults (M Age = 20.06, SD = 3.98), the majority of whom were females (59%). Participants were also slightly more acculturated rather than less acculturated (M SASH Acculturation = 3.27, SD = .77). A total of 12% of the sample reported use of at least 1 type of illicit substance in the past month (e.g., marijuana, cocaine, crack, heroin and related opiates, methamphetamine, psilocybin, LSD, and Ecstasy).

### Measurement and Structural Models

Figure 1 presents both the measurement and structural model predicting illicit substance use in the past month as a function of exogenous demographics and the two endogenous latent factors that comprised the collectivistic coping styles measure.

Allowing item 3 of the CCSM (“I told myself I could overcome the problem or concern”) to load on both Forbearance and Social Support Seeking improved model fit significantly. Table 2 presents the unstandardized structural estimates, and significant standardized coefficients are presented in Figure 1. Females were less likely to employ forbearance coping styles,  $\gamma = -.20, p = .06$ , and more likely to employ social support seeking as a coping mechanism,  $\gamma = .43, p < .01$ .

Females were also less likely to report use of illicit substances in the past month,  $\gamma = -.33, p < .05$ . Finally, of the exogenous predictors, younger age was associated with increased social support seeking by participants,  $\gamma = -.03, p < .01$ .

Past month use of illicit substances was marginally related to lesser coping by means of seeking out social support,  $\beta = -.14, p = .07$ . No moderator effects of the two coping styles were present for any of the exogenous variables (all  $p$ 's > .11).

Categorical Variables	n	%
Past Month Use of Illicit Substances		
No	392	88
Yes	53	12
Gender		
Male	183	41
Female	262	59
Continuous Variables		
Age	M	SD
Acculturation Level	20.06	3.98
Forbearance (CCSM Factor 1)	3.27	0.77
Social Support Seeking (CCSM Factor 2)	3.28	0.98
	3.69	0.84

Note: Range is 17 to 57 for Age; 1 to 5 for Acculturation; Ranges not provided for CCSM factors given resulting factor structure

## Results

Model Fit Indices (n = 439 Hispanics):  
 $\chi^2(30) = 43.16, p = .06; CFI = .95;$   
TLI = .95; RMSEA = .032; WRMR = .63

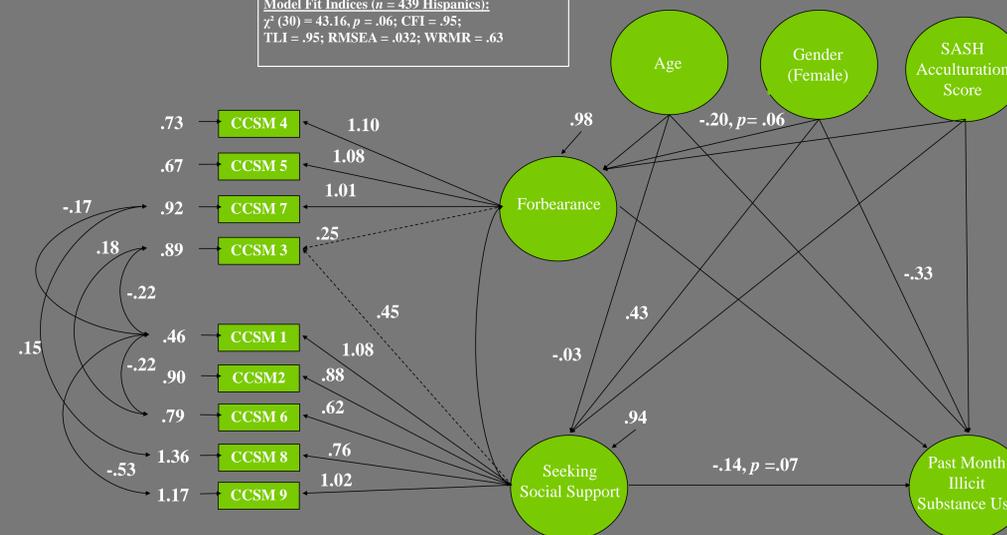


Figure 1: Influence of Forbearance and Social Support Seeking on Past Month Use of Illicit Substances

## Discussion

- The Social Support Seeking coping style is marginally associated with a decrease in past month illicit substance use in our sample of Hispanics.
- This finding is consistent with the research of Chung, Langenbucher, Labouvie, Pandina, and Moos (2001) who found that individuals engaging in social support seeking are less likely to seek drug use as a way to cope with a problem.
- Our findings are also consistent with the research of Mori (2000) who reported that collectivist cultures, such as Hispanic and eastern societies, engage in more active, social methods of problem solving.
- Acculturation in our sample on the border was not significantly related to study outcomes; however, future research should be conducted to determine if Hispanics in border towns (such as our sample) differ in their responses as opposed to Hispanics living in interior areas of the U.S. (where more acculturation may have taken place).

- Seeking social support may prevent individuals from turning to drug use as an alternative means of coping with stressors.
- Our results could aid in designing treatment and prevention programs for substance use that include a heavy social support component to the program, especially for individuals from collectivist cultures (i.e. Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans).
- Also that item 3 of the CCSM (“I told myself I could overcome the problem or concern”) loaded positively on both Forbearance and Social Support Seeking may indicate an implicit social support based interpretation in this sample. As such, treatment and prevention programs should consider the potential implications of latent social support perspectives.

- The Forbearance coping style was unrelated to past month illicit substance use.
- A possible reason for this result may be that the majority of our sample was Hispanic, which is a culture known for its collectivistic coping strategies (Moore & Constantine, 2005).
- Future studies should look at a predominantly Western society sample of participants to see if cultural differences elicit different results.

- Females and younger members of our sample were more prone to use the Social Support Seeking coping style.
- These results may be due to the cultural role given to women; women are encouraged to express emotions, including negative emotions (Fivush & Buckner, 2000).
- Additionally, when looking at the findings through a developmental approach, females are raised to engage in more social play (Wilansky-Traynor & Lobel, 2008).

- Males were more likely than females to employ a Forbearance coping style.
- This finding could be due to the traditional stereotypical role that men are often conditioned not to express negative emotions but rather remain stoic when dealing with a problem (Casey, 1993).

## Conclusions

- Social Support Seeking appears to reduce Hispanic students use of illicit substances.
- Females appear to seek social support when they have a problem or concern, while males tend to try to solve the problem on their own.
- Younger individuals tend to employ social support seeking coping styles more than older individuals.

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