

Exploring the coping strategies of emerging adult millennials at a higher education institution delivery site

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Mini-dissertation accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Commerce in [Industrial Psychology](#) at the North-West University

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Graduation: July 2020

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COMMENTS

This mini-dissertation follows the following guidelines:

- The editorial guidelines specified by the *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* were followed in the mini-dissertation. Where the former guidelines may deviate, the editorial style follows the format prescribed by the publication manual (6th ed.) of the American Psychological Association (APA). The latter was also followed in the referencing of sources that are cited. This practice is in line with the policy of the programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus.
- This mini-dissertation is further divided into three chapters; the Introductory chapter (Chapter 1); Research article (Chapter 2); and the Conclusion chapter (Chapter 3).
- The recommendations of Levitt et al. (2018) were followed throughout this mini-dissertation. Which states, according to the American Psychological Association Publications and Communications Board Working Group on Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Research, qualitative manuscripts, compared to quantitative studies, tend to be longer and require more pages. Since the methods sections outlines the detailed procedure followed and the findings are described with rich descriptions. Therefore, the current research study's research article exceed the standard length of quantitative articles.

DECLARATION

I, Liesel Engelbrecht, hereby declare that this mini dissertation titled “**Exploring the coping strategies of emerging adult millennials at a higher education institution delivery site**” is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this research study are my own. This includes all relevant literature references, as seen in the reference lists.

Furthermore, all content of this research study will only be submitted for this qualification and not any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Engelbrecht', with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the name.

Liesel Engelbrecht

March 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- I would firstly like to thank my almighty Lord for giving me the opportunity to study towards a master's degree and providing me with the capability, strength, and determination to complete my mini-dissertation.
- To my supervisor, Professor Karina Mostert, thank you very much for your guidance, support, and push when I needed it. Thank you for inspiring me to keep going when times got tough and encouraging me when I wanted to give up. Your passion towards research inspires me to enjoy each second of the process. Lastly, a BIG thank you for helping me get done this dissertation completed in time, even though time was short. Having you apart of the process was an absolute privilege, and I would love to work with you again.
- My co-supervisor, Professor Jaco Pienaar: thank you for your guidance and assistance in each phase of the process, despite the distance. Your insights inspire me to learn more and gain other perspectives. Your inputs and feedback were greatly appreciated. Thank you for being part of my journey.
- Dr. Carlien Kahl, I cannot even mention how grateful I am to have met you. All your assistance, feedback, insights, and "PACE" was a key factor in getting through this process. Thank you for taking the time to mentor me and advising on not only research but on the way to broaden my view of life. I wish you all the best in life and hope that our paths might cross more in the future.
- To my boyfriend, Eddie Landsberg. Thank you for not giving up on me and staying by my side throughout this process. Thank you for providing me with love, support, and plenty of encouragement. May I be such a light for you, too, throughout your master dissertation process.
- Thank you to my loving family, especially my father, mother, and sisters. Thank you for being there when I needed and supporting me when possible, even if it was through a cup of coffee, a laptop when mine broke or lending me the generator when load shedding started. I will always remember the role each of you played through this process.
- To my friends, especially the once created through this process, Cherie, Megan, and Bianca. Each of you has formed such a special place in my heart, and I would not have enjoyed the road to here without your assistance, advice, support, and all the late nights in the library. I love you all and wish only good things for each of your futures.
- I would like to also thank the North-West University, the StudyWell research project, and the WorkWell research unit, for creating the opportunity for me to work as part of a group of research assistants, providing me with the learning experience. In addition, thank you to

Lelanie Malan and Anneke Stols for being a part of this research project and providing me with as much knowledge on qualitative research as possible.

- A very *big* thank you to Sarah Louise Cornelius, a member of Professional Editors' Guild, from Regcor Enterprises Pty LTD, for assisting me in such short notice and taking care of the language editing, reference checking, and formatting of my mini-dissertation. Your assistance made this possible.
- Thank you to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning, North-West University, for making available funds to this research study. The material described in this dissertation is based on work supported by the office of this Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The views and opinions expressed in this research are those of the researcher and do not reflect the opinion or views of the funder.
- Lastly, I would like to thank both companies where I have worked over the last two years. Gijima Holdings, and LabourNet Rustenburg. Thank you for all the support, days of leave, and just checking up on me to see my progress. Your curiosity in my progress assisted in keeping me on track and helped get this thing done.

SUMMARY

Title:

Exploring the coping strategies of emerging adult millennials at a higher education institution delivery site

Keywords:

Coping process, coping resources, coping strategies, emerging adulthood, millennials, first-year students, higher education institution

South Africa is faced with economic difficulties, and the Higher Education Institution (HEI) is recognised as a key factor in modernising and developing the future of South Africa (Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019), through the formation of human capital, the building of knowledge, the dissemination of knowledge, and the maintenance of knowledge (Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014). This can be achieved by improving educational productivity, which could lead to the improvement of global competitiveness, meeting economic growth, and reducing unemployment rates. As a result, higher education institutions started focusing on student attrition or dropouts, as students who start university might not complete their degrees in the required time (Kuh, 2005, Barefoot, 2005, Turner & Thompson 2014). Some of these reasons could include challenges and stressors they are faced with at the HEI. For this reason, the aim of this research study is to explore the coping process of emerging adults at an HEI delivery site, from a first-year students' perspective. This could assist in knowledge creation for the HEI and support systems to create awareness and introduce interventions that would assist students in coping with these challenges at the HEI, which would assist in the reduction of drop-outs and increase in the completion rates of degrees. This, in turn, could impact the unemployment rate and add to South Africa's economic growth.

The study followed a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2014) through a descriptive, interpretive strategy (Sandelowski, 2000) to understand the experiences of first-year students from their perspective and their meaning thereof (Churchill & Wertz, 2001). The sample ($N = 13$) followed a purposive voluntary method, and later a snowball sampling method was used. The inclusion criteria for participants were: participants had to be a registered full-time first-year student at the applicable delivery site, studying towards an undergraduate degree, and had to have basic proficiency in English. Data were collected through two methods: the Mmogo method® ($n = 9$), and semi-structured individual follow-up interviews with three participants involved in the Mmogo method® session and one additional voluntary participant ($n = 4$).

From the literature review and research findings of the present study, it was evident that four main themes emerged: (1) The nature and domains of stressors first-year students experience, (2) The coping resources, availability and access thereof for students, (3) Coping strategies students rely on to manage their stressors at university, and (4) The effectiveness of coping strategies chosen by students at university.

The significant contribution of the findings is to provide the individual, HEI, and future research with the knowledge to create awareness, identify resources and implement strategies to assist first-year emerging adults to manage their stressors at an HEI. Recommendations were made for future research and practice.

OPSOMMING

Titel:

'n Ondersoek na die hanteringstrategieë van opkomende volwasse millenniërs aan 'n hoër onderriginstelling afleweringspunt

Sleutelbegrippe:

Hanteringsmeganismes, hanteringshulpbronne, hanteringstrategieë, opkomende volwassenheid, millennials, hoër onderriginstelling

Te midde van ekonomiese uitdagings word Hoër Onderriginstellings (HOI) as sleutelfaktor in die modernisering en ontwikkeling van 'n toekomstige Suid-Afrika geag (Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019). Die funksie van 'n HOI word beskryf as die ontwikkeling van menslike kapitaal, asook die uitbreiding, verspreiding en instandhouding van kennis (Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014). Hierdie funksie kan gerealiseer word deur die verhoging van akademiese produktiwiteit, wat tot verbetering in globale mededinging kan lei, ekonomiese groei kan stimuleer, en werkloosheid kan teëwerk. Om in hierdie doel te slaag, het hoër onderwysinstellings aan die afslyting van studente, wat daartoe kan lei dat hulle nie hul grade suksesvol binne die voorgeskrewe tydsraamwerk voltooi nie, aandag begin skenk (Kuh, 2005, Barefoot, 2005, Turner & Thompson, 2014). Stressore en uitdagings waarmee studente aan 'n HOI gekonfronteer word kan as moontlike oorsake van sodanige afslyting aangedui word. Hierdie studie fokus derhalwe daarop om vanuit die perspektief van eerstejaarstudente aan 'n spesifieke HOI insig te ontwikkel in die wyse waarop opkomende volwassenes hierdie uitdagings en stressors hanteer. Die kennis wat vanuit hierdie studie na vore kom kan bewustheid by die HOI en ondersteuningsisteme skep en die inwerkingstelling van intervensies stimuleer waardeur studente ondersteun kan word om hulle uitdagings die hoof te bied. Hierdie proses kan daartoe lei dat die uitval van studente beperk word met 'n gevolglike toename in suksesvolle voltooiing van voorgraadse studies. 'n Verhoging in suksesvolle afhandeling van voorgraadse studie kan werkloosheid verminder en 'n positiewe bydrae maak tot ekonomiese groei in Suid-Afrika.

Die studie volg 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering (Creswell, 2014), gerugsteun deur 'n interpretatief-beskrywende strategie (Sandelowski, 2000) om eerstejaarstudente se ervarings en die betekenis wat hulle daaraan heg vanuit hulle perspektief te verstaan (Churchill & Wertz, 2015). Die navorsingsmonster ($N = 13$) is doelmatig uit vrywilligers saamgestel. Hierdie metode is met 'n sneeubal metode opgevolg ten einde die navorsingsmonster kwantitatief uit te brei. Deelnemers aan die studie moes aan die volgende kriteria voldoen: geregistreerde, voltydse eerstejaarstudente aan

die betrokke HOI; besig met voorgraadse studie; basiese vaardighede in Engels. Die volgende twee metodes is aangewend om data te bekom: die Mmogo metode® ($N = 9$); semigestruktureerde opvolgonderhoude met drie deelnemers wat by die Mmogo metode® betrokke was en 'n addisionele vrywillige deelnemer ($N = 4$).

Vier hooftemas het vanuit die literatuuroorsig en die navorsingsbevindings na vore gekom, naamlik: (1) Die aard van stressore wat deur eerstejaarstudente ervaar word, asook die lewensareas waarbinne hulle dit ervaar, (2) Die bestaan, beskikbaarheid en toeganklikheid van hulpbronne vir studente, (3) Strategieë wat studente aanwend om stressore te hanteer, en (4) Die effektiwiteit van studente se hanterinstrategieë.

Die bydrae van hierdie studie is daarin geleë dat dit kennis aan individue, die HOI, en toekomstige navorsing bied met die doel om bewustheid te skep, hulpbronne te identifiseer en strategieë te implementeer waardeur opkomende volwassenes in hulle eerste jaar aan 'n HOI bemagtig kan word om stressore te bestuur. Aanbevelings is gemaak vir toekomstige navorsing en praktyk.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this mini dissertation is on exploring the coping strategies of emerging adult millennials at a higher education institution delivery site.

Chapter 1 will discuss the problem statement, followed by a discussion of the research objectives, referring to both the general objective and the specific objectives of this study. Thereafter the method will be discussed in detail and concluded with the chapter divisions.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

South Africa's economy has taken several turns over the past several years. This is no surprise considering that a new political system is yet to settle at a steady pace (Bawa, 2012). Some of the concerns South Africa's economy displays include low-growth and the middle-income trap, where people neither fall in the high- or low earning percentage of the population. These concerns are characterised by a lack of competition, unemployment, and unskilled workers in the current economy (National Planning Commission, 2012). In the National Development Plan, it is indicated that South Africa's population is mostly young and low-skilled, thus upgrading their skills and knowledge can create a better future economy. The National Development Plan for 2030 (NPC, 2012) states explicitly that one of the main objectives is to educate and train unskilled workers to reduce unemployment and promote fair and equal work opportunities. This objective includes expanding skill bases through education and vocational training, to provide better education and to meet the demands for higher skills levels, which will make entry into the labour market easier and make labour mobility possible (NPC, 2012). It is, therefore, evident that South Africa is in need of improved tertiary educational outcomes. Economists are in agreement that skills shortage poses a significant limitation for South Africa's long-term economic growth potential (Bawa, 2012). This is primarily the obligation of post-school systems, like universities, which are not well designed to meet the skills development needed by the youth or the economy (Council for Higher education, 2007).

South African higher education institutions (HEIs) are in the process of restructuring to overcome past inequalities, serving new demand orders, meeting national needs, and responding to local and international trends (CHE, 2004). Consequently, there is an increase in pressure on HEIs to move into a more development area (Bawa, 2012). Universities are seen as a place where knowledge workers are produced by teaching undergraduate students and producing professionals, which is necessary for the economy to be more productive, competitive, and strive to become a knowledge-based economy in the 21st century (Habib, 2016). Habib (2016) states, however, that universities

have become more corporatized and are treated as business entities where the focus has shifted from academics to finances. This is an increasing concern that universities have to face. Habib (2016) reports that almost 55% of students who entered university did not complete their tertiary education, and less than 25 % of these students completed their degrees within the minimum allocated time. According to Murray (2014), this is directly influenced by finances due to tuition rates that increase every year, students' intention to switch courses or add different courses or subjects, and some students that takes advantage of internship programmes or study-abroad programmes. This can have a considerable impact on the rate at which universities try to acquire an increasing number of new applicants for both the financial aspect, as well as trying to keep a competitive advantage in the knowledge market (Rochford, 2008).

HEIs need to connect their goals with the National Development Plan's strategic objectives. These objectives aim to produce graduates with the skills and competencies to meet the human resource needs of the university and additionally of South Africa (NPC, 2012). This includes increasing participation rates to meet demands of high-level skills, to increase the number of graduates through improving the efficiency of the systems and to balance the production of graduates in different fields, as well as to have the cognitive skills and competencies required to participate in the modern world of work (CHE, 2004). The universities' management system can achieve these objectives by planning, developing, and analysing constructs to optimise the workplace and to understand their clients, the students, as well as enhance the university effectively (CHE, 2004; Health Profession Council of South Africa, 2011). It is, therefore, essential to facilitate individual processes for effective organisational functioning by developing adequate strategies to understand consumer behaviour (Snizek, 2016), to further address student drop-out rates, non-completion of degrees, and develop strategies for student retention (Strage & Sorkhabi, 2016).

There are various areas the university can start focusing on to optimise their environment. One emerging field in literature is the new generation entering the university and the organisation (Bland, Melton, Welle, & Bigham, 2012; HPCSA, 2011). Most students attending university are born between 1982 and 1999. These students form part of the millennial generation. Millennials are individuals born between 1982 and 2002, therefore making them a model group of the current traditional-aged university students and form part of the current rising generation (Turner, & Thompson, 2014). In previous research, it has been noted that millennial young adults possess fundamentally different characteristics and traits from the past research generations (Turner & Thompson, 2014). This generation requires the integration of technology and communication strategies in their daily lives (Kuron, Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015). This can be further important for universities to adapt their structure, familiarise themselves on what this new generation acquires

to thrive and that the university is able to adjust with the changes this generation brings to further attract and retain new students (Bland, Melton, Welle, & Bigham, 2012). It has been noted that this generation consists of a larger and more diverse population. Also, although they experience the same type of development and transitioning challenges as the past generations, their learning styles, educational expectations, and socialisation characteristics challenge the traditionally set institutional programs, services, and instructional strategies offered by universities (Much, Wagener, Breitzkreutz, & Hellenbrand, 2014). The population therefore only consisted of undergraduates' who are part of the millennial generation, which is described as possessing fundamentally different characteristics and traits from the previous generations (Turner & Thompson, 2014).

Information on millennials can help university management to implement additional learning strategies, e-learning technology, and adequate training and development to optimise the university structure (Richardson, & Long, 2003). However, other factors may also contribute to dropout rates and low retention levels for universities and are also important to be investigated. This may include the transition from high school to university, since coming to university can be a stressful experience for anyone, even for students from the millennial generation (Much, Wagener, Breitzkreutz, & Hellenbrand, 2014). Moving from high school to university can place a significant demand on young adults in their first year (Tinto, 1982, 1993). These stressors include changing of environment, moving away from parents, making new friends and relationships, dealing with more academic demands, and making a future career choice (Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007). This is seen as a critical phase in a student's or adults' life, as noted in Developmental Psychology (Erikson, 1980). People do not become mature adults overnight, but it is seen as a process of cognitive and moral development that includes a crucial transitional phase that conventionally commences with undergraduate education (Black & Allen, 2017). This phase forms part of the theory of psychosocial development as an adolescent or in early adulthood, which specifically focuses on identity and intimacy by creating mature interpersonal relationships (Erikson, 1980). This phase was further coined as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004).

Emerging adulthood is a recent term used for young adults outgrowing the adolescence phase and moving onto being young adults, but not yet reaching adulthood (Arnett, 2014). An emerging adult can be seen as the period from the age of 18-25, located in more industrialised countries during which young people become more independent from their parents and can explore various life and work possibilities before they have to make enduring life commitments (Arnett, 2004; 2006; 2007; 2011; Tanner, 2011). This life phase is usually distinguished from other ages due to five characteristics that emerging adults possess, including exploring their identity, age of instability and indecisiveness, being more self-focused, feeling-in between all of life's phases, and the time for

possibilities (Arnett, 2014). In this life phase, emerging adults tend to develop their own identity, capabilities, limitations, beliefs, and values and find their place in society to eventually make more real and enduring choices in terms of life, love, and work (Arnett, 2004). However, this time of their lives can be associated with a lot of instability and indecisiveness on what they want to be (Braziler, Gati, & Tatar, 2015). This can clearly be seen in the tremendous dropout rate of universities and why students tend to take longer to complete their traditional four-year degree, as seen in the last two to three decades (Strage & Sorkhabi, 2016). Therefore, it is of utmost concern to research this phase of early adulthood since universities need to develop and maintain strategic objectives to manage current student experiences and equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the workplace (NPC, 2012). University management also needs to develop its business strategy to ensure that the challenges students face during this transition are appropriately addressed to guarantee student retention, and developing students to their full potential (Habib, 2016; HPCSA, 2011).

The study of emerging adulthood is relatively new and is only just now becoming a distinct area of study. Though a remarkable amount of information has been learned, most research has focused on young people in American majority cultures, and more focus has been given to student experiences (Malina, Bouchard, & Bar-Or, 2004). Previous research has not focussed on students in the larger cohort of millennials, and very little research has focused on students in a South African context. Therefore, further research is needed on the student experience during emerging adulthood and in the context of the new generation entering an HEI and the workforce (Skinner, & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2009). This research is especially important for universities to gain an understanding of student experiences during this critical life phase to ensure that adequate services and education are provided for students when transitioning into university (Duerden, Witt, Garst, Bialeschki, Schwarzlose, & Norton, 2014). Since this phase can be challenging and it can be difficult for students to adjust to university life, it can have an impact on academic performance, intention to stay at university, and the duration of obtaining a degree (Murray, 2014). Consequently, it is the university's responsibility to understand what these challenges are and how students tend to cope with these challenges. This can further inform university management strategies on how to assist students to adequately adjust to the university during this life phase and to implement the necessary coping strategies for a satisfactory adjustment (Zambianchi, & Ricci Bitti, 2014).

Coping can be defined as the efforts we make to manage situations we have appraised as potentially harmful or stressful (Kleinke, 1991). Some several different approaches and models evaluate different coping mechanisms or strategies of various students; however, the most noted study originated in the Social Cognitive theory of stress, which was elaborated in 1966 by Lazarus.

According to Folkman and Lazarus (1984), coping strategies consist of the particular thoughts and behaviours a person is using to manage, reduce, minimise, master, or tolerate the demands of a specific person-environment transaction that has relevance for their well-being. These strategies can be further categorised into two groups based on their function to encounter stressful or harmful situations. This is labelled differently by various researchers, such as problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984), engagement coping and disengagement coping (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003), active and avoidance coping (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989), and adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies (Wichianson, Bughi, Unger, Spruijt-Metz, & Nguyen-Rodriguez, 2009). However, these coping strategies can be differentiated based on their function – the first coping strategy is used when dealing with the problem at hand that is causing the distress (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987), the patterns which are aimed at dealing with the stressor and are emotionally positive (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003). This is also a more adaptive approach in dealing with situations. The second coping strategy regulates emotions (Folkman et al., 1987) or action patterns, which are aimed at escaping or avoiding the stressor and are perceived as emotionally negative (Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003) – this is seen as a more maladaptive approach to deal with stressors. Since transitioning to university can be a very stressful experience, it is, therefore, significant to explore the different coping strategies that students use to manage in the processes of emerging adulthood.

Different coping strategies students use to cope with various demands in their first year have been explored, and multiple measurements to examine these strategies have been developed. According to Skinner, Edge, Altman, and Sherwood (2003), there are five basic types of coping strategies: problem-solving (instrumental action, planning, and motivation as perseverance), support seeking (reaching out to others for behavioural, cognitive and emotional support), avoidance (behavioural and cognitive strategies, such as denial, distancing, or withdrawal), distraction (includes positive behaviours and cognition to minimise stress), and positive reconstruction (a reinterpretation of a problematic situation, hope, looking for potential positive outcomes). Recently, another positive coping strategy has emerged, namely religious coping, such as prayer and meaning-making (Pargament, 2011). All these different strategies have been explored and developed into various measurements of coping, most notably instruments such as the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WAYS) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced scale (COPE) (Carver, 1997) and CODE, a test battery based out of the Utrecht Coping List (UCL) and part of the Defence Mechanisms Inventory (DMI) (Eriksen, Olff, & Ursin, 1997).

From a methodological viewpoint, extensive research on coping has been done using a quantitative approach, where students need to complete a self-report inventory or questionnaire that claims to measure stress, well-being, and/or coping strategies. However, individuals tend to react negatively to being measured and tend to respond in a manner that is not reflecting their actual views (Folkman, & Lazarus, 1984). Very little qualitative research has been done on coping. This gap in the research foundation calls for research that is capable of providing a more subjective explanation of students coping with challenges through in-depth interviews with different individuals (Robotham, 2008). This can be very important since qualitative data can explore the diverse experiences and opinions that first-year students may have on coping with university transition and emerging adulthood (Camic, Rhodes, & Yardley, 2003). There has also been a lack of empirical work examining the strategies used by individuals to reduce stress once they have arrived at university (Robotham, 2008).

Additionally, the literature is fragmented on coping strategies of first-year students (Robotham, 2008). Research mostly focuses on emotion regulation, racial discrimination, and racial-trauma, dissociative symptoms, substance abuse, and culture competencies, while little research focuses on the coping strategies used by students when emerging as adults (Allem, Sussman, Soto, Baezconde-Garbanati, & Unger, 2016; Brewer, Zahniser, & Conley, 2016; Polanco-Roman, Danies, & Anglin, 2016; Slaymaker, & Fisher, 2015; Zambianchi, & Ricci Bitti, 2014). This type of research is exceptionally scarce in a South African context (Schreuder, & Coetzee, 2010).

Research on student coping is especially crucial for universities to understand how students deal with the transition in order to include student behaviour in university management strategies. Any information on student behaviour, precisely information on how students in the millennials experience this phase of emerging adulthood and how they cope with it, can inform universities on how students obtain and process information to make decisions on dealing with challenging situations, or not (Snizek, 2016). Through this information, university structures can inform services on how to assist students as clients in adjustment and equip students for future careers through not only obtaining knowledge but also developing soft skills to function optimally in the work environment. This process relates closely to the role of the Industrial Psychologist in understanding the workforce with all its stakeholders (staff and students), to plan, develop, and apply programs and strategies to optimise the workplace, and in turn to ensure its' promotion to attract, engage and retain students for a competitive advantage in the knowledge market (HPCSA, 2011).

The fundamental goal of tertiary education is to establish a direct career link with the modern world of work (Habib, 2016). This can be done through the gaining of knowledge on the field of study as well as obtaining soft skills to meet the present and future needs of the economy and society (NPC, 2012). However, the quality of university education is disturbing in terms of knowledge production, with low participation, high attrition or dropout rates, and insufficient capacity to produce the required levels of skills needed (CHE, 2007). Currently, the concern is that many graduates are products that do not meet the needs of industry and society and cannot adapt to this modern changing environment (NPC, 2012). Therefore, universities can benefit from a study that explores the factors that students find challenging and how they cope with these challenges during the emerging adulthood phase to develop students to their full potential to function optimally in the workplace (Duerden, Witt, Garst, Bialeschki, Schwarzlose, & Norton, 2014). This will promote the attraction, engagement, and retention of this generation of students, but also possibly contribute to the knowledge on revamping of human resource systems at an organisational level in order to effectively attract, engage and retain the next generation of workers or clients for the labour market (Habib, 2011).

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the mini dissertation are divided into general objectives and specific objectives, which will be explored below.

1.3.1 General Objectives

This research study focuses on exploring the coping process of emerging adults at a HEI delivery site, from a first-year students' perspective

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The following specific objectives can be formulated:

- To conceptualise emerging adulthood and coping strategies according to literature.
- To exploring the coping process/strategies of emerging adults millennials at a HEI delivery site, from a first-year students' perspective.
- To make recommendations for the field of research and practice.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Good research design involves a comparison between research questions and methods in order to generate valid and reliable data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Terre Blanche, Durrheim, and Painter

(2006) state that a research design strategy framework acts as a link between research questions and the execution or implementation of research questions. Next, the research approach, research strategy, and research method will be discussed.

1.4.1 Research Approach

A qualitative study was utilised and applied in this study. This approach explores the opinions, beliefs, personal reactions, and approaches that the students have on the coping strategies they use to cope with the demanding HEI environment. Qualitative research is a study that helps researchers better understand the meanings and perspectives of the research participants (i.e., seeing it from their point of view – how their perspectives are shaped by the physical, social and cultural contexts, and the process of maintaining or altering these phenomena and relationships) (Maxwell, 2012). The focus of this research study is on the current generation entering university as emerging adults and being first-year students, and to explore their subjective experiences of how they cope with challenging situations at an HEI. As Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, and Richardson (2005) states, qualitative research is used to produce evidence-based research on the investigation of a certain context and specific people and not for the end goal of generalisation, which is in line with the objectives of this study.

1.4.2 Research Strategy

An interpretive descriptive qualitative research design was applied in this research study. This approach, therefore, seeks to understand the given research problem from the perspective of the local population involved and consequently this approach aims to describe the participants' subjective experience of the phenomena in this study and determine the perception and meaning the phenomena may have for them (Churchill & Wertz, 2001). Furthermore, the epistemological stance of this research involves the social-constructivism paradigm, which explains the presence of a participant's subjective reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this reality, each participant develops their own meaning of their reality through social construction (Doucet, Letourneau, & Stoppard, 2010). According to Doucet et al., (2010), social constructivism uses relativism as the ontological approach, which can be explained as the assumption that reality is not static, and that each person can create their own reality, as reality is unique to each person. Whereas Creswell and Poth (2018) explain it as the individual's understanding of the world that they live and work in, and therefore they develop a subjective meaning to their experiences. All of these experiences are different and therefore lead to a complex view on a specific experience. Thus, the researcher needs to rely on the participant's views and opinions of their experiences to understand the phenomenon in more depth. However, there are different stances a researcher can take to provide their research with direction,

and therefore the researcher's view and how they know their reality is essential. Furthermore, an interpretive framework is used by the researcher to ensure their fundamental beliefs guide their actions (Guba, 1990). This framework supports research to be done in a consistent and logical manner through various data collection methods and analytical strategies (Thorne, 2016). This strategy gives special attention to using structure, practice-relevant findings, and paying particular attention to biases and commitments from the researcher (Hunt, 2009). Thus, the researcher, as a student who has been through similar experiences, has a set background in the research setting and would be able to utilise their reality to understand the participant's reality as a first-year experience emerging as an adult in university. First-year students' explanations are constructed through their engagements with the research process as well.

Therefore, this study strived to explore and describe the experiences and opinions of the participant's in-detail and to understand what coping strategies the first-year students used during the emerging adulthood phase in as millennials at a higher education institution.

1.5 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method consisted of a literature review, a research setting, entrée and establishing researcher roles, sampling, data collection methods, recording of data, data analysis, and strategies employed to ensure quality data, reporting style, and ethical considerations.

1.5.1 Literature review

First, a comprehensive literature search regarding coping, emerging adults, and millennials were conducted. These sources included internet databases such as Ebscohost, Academic Search Premier, Google Scholar, SAe Publications, Science Direct, and the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology as well as any other relevant journal articles. The literature search terms included 'coping,' 'coping strategies,' 'emerging adulthood,' 'first-year student,' 'higher education institution,' and associated synonyms and Boolean phrases. Published journals, peer-reviewed articles, and published books were used to ensure adequate literature was gathered and was from 2006 to the present day. Older sources were only to be used as an exception, this ensured that all relevant information was utilised during the literature review of this topic (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012).

1.5.2 Research setting

This mini-dissertation forms part of a larger project titled "StudyWell: Student Well-Being and Success of Students" that form part of the HEIs Framework for Student Access, Retention,

Attainment, and Success (SARAS) (ethical certificate number: NWU-HS-2014-0165). The motivation for the StudyWell project is to address issues on low levels of student success, and poor retention rates associated with the struggles South African universities report and thus develop a tool to proactively identify areas in need of intervention. Therefore, one of the main objectives of this project is to explore the coping process/strategies of emerging adults millennials at a HEI delivery site, from a first-year students' perspective.

Data for the larger StudyWell project was collected on three delivery sites of the participating university; however, for this study project, only one delivery site's data was utilised. Although these themes emerged in the more extensive data set, it was especially prevalent in one of the delivery sites where first-year students participated. As a result, it was decided to focus on and further explore these topics in the sample of this particular delivery site. The research setting for this study took place within a South African higher education institution among first-year students. These first-year students form part of the emerging adulthood development phase and will form part of the current generation entering university as millennials (Turner, & Thompson, 2014). These students experience various demands and challenges while transitioning through this development phase and adjusting to university, specifically into a South African higher education institution (Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Tinto, 1993).

1.5.3 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Access to the research setting within the HEI was negotiated with the necessary stakeholders, and permission was obtained before identifying a gatekeeper (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011). The roles were established during this meeting with the various stakeholders and the purpose of the study discussed. After obtaining permission, a gatekeeper was identified, an individual who assisted the researcher to acquire participants and a venue. Details and information pertaining to the research study were explained and made available to the gatekeeper to ensure that the gatekeeper involved was able to communicate to the various structures involved in the research and to make the necessary arrangements for data collection. A relationship with the gatekeeper is very important since this is the central person in communicating the necessary arrangements with participants (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). The invitations to the participants included a short summary of what the research study is about and what was expected of them to clarify their role.

On the day of data collection, a consent form was distributed to participants to ensure they are informed on the purpose of the research study, as well as the importance of the study, what is expected of them, and to clarify that the research study is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time, without repercussions. The leading researcher played the role of a facilitator, who

conducted the Mmogo-method® group session and asked the research question, investigated the participant's models, asked probing questions, while the other researchers on the team observed the session and made field notes. Following the Mmogo-method® session, the researcher was responsible for organising and establishing appropriate times for follow-up interviews with the participants identified. The researcher was also responsible for the transcriptions and analyses of the data collected. During these stages, the researchers forged a working set of rules to follow through the analysis in attempts to portray the data collected in a holistic manner, by incorporating the views of the participant (emic) and the opinions of the researcher (etic). As a result, the researchers learned from the participants sharing and includes their own assumptions in the interpretation of the participant's views. This was discussed in the group debriefings session, where all researchers shared their biases, values, experiences, and interpretations subjectively with the group and might add to the qualitative research study.

1.5.4 Sampling

A purposive voluntary sampling method was used to include first-year students at a South African HEI delivery site. The participants for the interviews were identified during and after the Mmogo-method®, which the researcher identified or wished to further question in more detail. According to Merriam (2009), purposive sampling can be used when a researcher wants to explore, discover, understand and increase insights into the topic at hand and thus must select a sample from which the most can be learned from. Additionally, a snowball-sampling method was used to acquire more participants for the research project, and these additional participants were contacted by the gatekeeper. According to De Vos et al. (2011), snowball sampling is used when there is limited access to participants for the intended research study, and it involves the approach of contacting a single case/participant that is involved in the study to refer other possible participants for the research study. This process can be repeated until a sufficient number of participants for the intended study is obtained, or until nobody else with the specific characteristics can be found, or data saturation has taken place (De Vos et al., 2011). Participants were selected using sampling criteria that meant they had to be registered as a first-year student at an HEI, at our appropriate delivery site in South Africa and the following was taken into account to ensure a representative sample of the population was obtained; language, gender, race, faculties, disciplines, schools within these faculties, on- and off-campus students (Boehnke, Lietz, Schreier, & Wilhelm, 2011). Participants were full-time students at the HEI delivery site and studying towards an undergraduate degree at the particular HEI delivery site in order to reflect on their first-year experience, and had a basic proficiency in English.

The sample size was dependent on the willingness and accessibility of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The sample consisted of thirteen participants, nine of the thirteen participants participated in the Mmogo-method®, three of whom agreed to conduct follow-up interviews. One additional participant agreed to participate in the follow-up interview. The group demographics are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant demographics participating in Mmogo-method® and follow-up interviews (N = 13)

Item	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	4
	Female	9
Ethnicity	African	7
	White	6
Home language	Setswana	3
	English	1
	isiXhosa	2
	Afrikaans	7
Living conditions	I stay off-campus, and I am part of a town residence	5
	I stay off-campus, but I am not part of a town residence	7
	I stay on campus and live in a hostel	1
Year of birth	1995 (22 years old)	1
	1997 (20 years old)	7
	1998 (19 years old)	5
Relationship status	Single	9
	In a relationship	4

1.5.5 Data collection methods

The author of this mini-dissertation was part of a team of research assistants and involved in the arrangements for the first phase of data collection in the broader StudyWell project. The data collection method used during this phase was the Mmogo-method®. The main focus was to collect data through the Mmogo-method® and was followed up with individual interviews with the identified participants from the Mmogo-session at the specific HEI. Based on this method, the

researcher first obtained permission from the HEI, where the research was conducted to ensure none of the participants are disrupted by the research study (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). This method of data collection was performed by a registered clinical and research psychologist trained in the Mmogo-method®, while the author of this mini-dissertation formed part of the administration, observation, and interpretation of the research team. Two strategies for data collection were used; this was to ensure the trustworthiness of the method through triangulation (Brink, 1993).

The data collection took place on the HEI delivery site, in a room where the environment is relaxed, and special attention was placed on proper ventilation and lighting, comfortable chairs and a workstation, free from noise and disturbances, and refreshments were provided to participants during frequent breaks to ensure convenience for participants (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). Since the Mmogo-method® is conducted in a group format, it is essential to make participants feel comfortable and relaxed. This aids the participants to speak freely and comfortably, which resulted in meaningful and rich data collection (Roos, 2012).

The Mmogo-method® can be described as a visual data-collection method in which to explore personal and group experiences. Participants in the research setting were invited to take part in a group session of 10 participants to comment on their experiences and opinions related to a specific research question.

The Mmogo-method® as the primary data collection method was conducted in four distinct phases, as discussed below (Roos, 2016):

- Phase 1: Entering the Research Context

This phase consisted of meeting and introducing the participants and researcher while creating transparency around the research context. The researcher established the group norms and obtained informed consent for the research study. In addition, a biographical questionnaire was completed. The method was clearly explained to the group and how a photo of the visual representations and recordings of the session will be kept afterward for analysis purposes. In the informed consent obtained, the researcher gave all the needed information on the current study and that participation is voluntary, asked permission for follow-up interviews, and lastly conveyed the importance and primary objective of the research study.

- Phase 2: Construction Phase

The Mmogo-method® was conducted in a group setting, and the optimum size is between 6 and 10 participants. Each participant received a container with a set of materials such as clay, beads, sticks, and cloth. No specific instruction on the usage of these materials were given, allowing the

participants to make their own interpretations. The researcher then stated the research question “Tell us something about your experiences of being a student at the applicable HEI?” and the participant had between 35-45 minutes to create any visual interpretation based on the research questions asked, with the materials provided. It is said that the visual presentation of the Mmogo-method® is expressions of something that is not yet consciously recognised or conceptually formulated; therefore, it is seen as a projective method and can obtain social, cultural, and contextual factors underlying student behaviour (Roos, 2008).

- Phase 3: Discussion

After the second phase, the researcher then invited the group of participants to voluntarily explain what they have made and how it links to the research question. This method allows the participant to be active in the data collection process, which ensures rich data is obtained, as it is seen as more rewarding than a focus group session. According to Roos (2016), being part of a group ensures additional perspectives, which may lead to detailed data collection on participant’s perspectives and views. The leading researcher formed part of the discussion with one participant at a time, following onto the next. The researcher took a stance behind the participant to have the same view of the visual representation as to the participant and therefore observe the model from a similar perspective. In the discussion, it is imperative to get a good audio recording of all the participants’ descriptions and explanations on their visual representations, and therefore the researcher had to move to each participant to ensure the quality of the recording while ensuring to not invade a participant's personal space.

- Phase 4: Debriefing

The last phase, and the most important, is to debrief both the participants and the researcher before they leave the research setting. The group was asked how they experienced the day and was invited to talk with a debriefer about their experiences or any thoughts or emotion it may have left with them. The debriefer consulted and helped the participants to work through any emotions or thoughts that arouse and where necessary referred to either additional sessions or an appointment with a counsellor. The participants were also informed that they are allowed to take their representations with them if they wanted to.

After the research session, the researchers involved met and discussed specific observations made from the data collection. This session was recorded and can be referred to once data analysis has started, thereby constituting another source of data collection (Roos, 2016). After data collection from the Mmogo-method® additional interviews were held with participants specified in the Mmogo-method® for follow up data-collection.

The second data collection method was semi-structured interviews. The individual interviews were conducted face-to-face with open-ended questions to further explore the subjective experiences of participants in more depth (Patton, 2002). De Vos et al. (2011) stated that an interview is a social relationship between the participant and researcher, during which information regarding a central focus is exchanged between the two parties. Consequently, allowing the researcher to elicit a comprehensive collection of the participant's beliefs and perceptions regarding a specific topic. The researcher encouraged the participants to discuss their subjective experience and opinions in response to open-ended questions and furthermore probed for detailed explanations to ensure rich data was obtained. This method of data collection was also to give the researcher more flexibility in terms of questions, follow up questions, clarification, and probing questions (De Vos et al., 2011). Due to the Mmogo-method® being conducted in groups, there is not enough time to have in-depth conversations with each of the participants (Roos, 2012); therefore, these participants were interviewed individually and when they had more time to reflect. Interviews were conducted until enough data was collected to represent the phenomenon under the study (Thorne, 2016).

The interview schedule included a brief prelude on what the researcher knows of student experiences and the changes that occur in general, as well as that some students may be helped in adjusting to the university by some individuals or things. This will be followed up with the question: *Tell me about your experience when starting university*. Furthermore, this open question was followed up or probing questions in the following three concepts:

- The participants' experiences as emerging adults
- Coping strategies used during these experience
- Advice to the HEI on the above topics

1.5.6 Recording of data

Data management and recording is of utmost importance in a qualitative study and is regarded as the act of ensuring high-quality data that is regularly accessible by only the researcher (De Vos et al., 2011). Therefore, for the recording of the data, multiple digital recorders were used to record the Mmogo-session® and follow-up interviews. In addition, detailed field notes were made by the researcher. This contributed to the research due to important observations or additional information being captured. The field notes included observed participant's body language, reactions, description of models, and any additional information that may be of use to the researcher (Mulhall, 2003). This ensured better credibility of the data collected. The participants were clearly informed of the use of the recorder, and they gave full consent prior to the sessions' commencement. The data is kept in a safe and secure place with a defined file management system, which will ensure that

coding, labelling, linking, and documents are kept safe, anonymous, and confidential (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Dates, number, participant's personal information, and transcripts were given code names and are kept safe in a secure place provided by the WorkWell Research Unit, where only the researchers involved in the project has access. The latter measure ensures the quality and objectivity of the analysed data. This process was repeated for individual follow-up interviews as well.

1.5.7 Data analysis

The Mmogo-method® data were analysed as a team of research assistants under the supervision of an independent, registered research psychologist. The author of this study formed part of the data analysis process as a co-coder using thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the analysis of the total dataset, several prominent themes emerged, amongst others, the theme of emerging adulthood and coping strategies of first-year students. Although these themes emerged in the broader data set, it was especially prevalent in one of the delivery sites where first-year students participated. As a result, it was decided to focus on and further explore these topics in the sample of this particular delivery site, as this specific delivery site would best inform the research objectives of this study. The data transcribing and analysis is an ongoing process and was done while data were collected (Creswell, 2014).

The data was transcribed verbatim and imported into ATLAS.ti version 8, where the transcripts and a first-order analysis were conducted for the larger project that this study falls under. The researcher used computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, called ATLAS.ti version 8, which computerises the process of analysing qualitative data. The software is a creative way of analysing qualitative data systematically and efficiently by allowing the user to code words, link codes, make schematic representations, cluster data, and colour-code various codes and themes in the dataset (Evers & Silver, 2014). According to Barry (1998), ATLAS.ti is visually attractive and creative, and all the results are digital, user-friendly, well designed, imposes no limitations on coding, creates hypertext links between data, codes, and documents, presents data in a visual manner, links multiple memos; and processes visual and audio data, therefore making this an attractive method of analysing data. It has been proved to be a highly useful tool in the study of social sciences (Evers & Silver, 2014). To ensure the researcher is competent to use this software tool, comprehensive training was undergone as well as under the supervision of a registered research psychologist.

Thematic analysis was then applied, and this consists out of six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Additional authors and strategies are noted and where applicable. The first phase involves the familiarisation with the data and includes the reading and re-reading of the data and noting key ideas. The second phase consists of the generation of initial codes, in which features of

the data can be identified through the codes, open coding was used to examine, compare and conceptualise the themes thereafter, and selective coding was used to select the core category. The third phase involves the search for themes, which is driven more by the data than by theory. According to Henning (2004), the researchers should try not to just summarise the content, but to organise the principles of the underlying themes. The researcher should analyse the different codes and categorise the codes or combine codes to create an overarching theme. The fourth phase is the reviewing and refining of the designed themes. The themes should be linked meaningfully to the research question; however, they still need to be distinguishable from each other.

Following the creation of preliminary themes for the larger StudyWell project, the research question for the current study was formulated, and literature was explored to identify and define the gap for the research question. Thereafter, secondary data analysis focused on the specific topic of this study by accessing data from the primary dataset (the larger project) on the sections pertaining to this study. As soon as the data was coded, patterns and connections were made between the various categories on the Mmogo-method® data as well as the in-depth, individual interviews, which lead to meaningful interpretations (Powell-Taylor, & Renner, 2003). Therefore, two stages of coding were implemented to inform the thematic analysis from both methodologies used. Relying on Powell-Taylor, and Renner, (2003) strategies of data analysis stages, the current study relied on a combination of primary and secondary analysis to identify themes of the coping strategies of first-year emerging adult student's experiences in the cohort of millennials specifically. During this stage, the second-level coding was used to focus the analysis and to interpret the categories to finalise the themes. The fifth phase involves defining and naming of the themes as well as identifying the essence of each theme and which aspect of the data each theme captured. In the last or sixth phase, the data were coded and grouped into theoretical terms provided by the insight of the literature and produced in a report.

It is of importance that the researcher is familiar with the data, to be able to identify relevant sub-themes and themes in the data set (Silverman, 2011). This whole process of analysis was conducted in a group format where the researchers were seen as co-coders. It is highly beneficial to analyse data as a group since this will ensure the quality of the data codes and minimise researcher bias (Rabiee, 2004). An inter-coder reliability method was used, where there are multiple coders as part of the coding phase to ensure quality and reliable codes and themes. After analysis, the data is placed in a table format, in order to distinguish the categories and the themes that are revealed, according to the background influences (Kotze, 2007). The analyses were externally reviewed by an independent registered research psychologist.

1.5.8 Strategies employed to ensure quality data

When conducting qualitative data, the researcher must ensure that the necessary guidelines are followed to ensure that quality data is collected. In qualitative data, there is a variety of measures and techniques that can aid the researcher to ensure the trustworthiness and quality of data collected. Guba (1981) proposed four criteria to ensure trustworthiness in a qualitative study; these criteria directly correspond to the positivist research paradigm. Later Tracy (2010) integrated Guba's criteria into eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. These criteria were used for the Mmogo-method®, as well as when conducting individual interviews. These criteria follow;

Worthy topic: The qualitative research should be relevant, timely, and significant, as well as interesting for the reader (Tracy, 2010). The topic of the research study is worthy as it is researching an emerging cause in providence significant data to inform HEI to assist in supporting the new emerging generations.

Rich Rigour: Sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex constructs should be utilised in the research study to explain the data in more depth (Tracy, 2010). This also refers to the face validity of the finding to be transferred to other populations and situations (Merriam, 2009). Since the findings of qualitative studies might be small or specific to a particular environment or individuals, it is possible to demonstrate the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations or populations as well (Shenton, 2004). By evaluating the organisation taking part in the research study, the restrictions of the individuals participating, the quantity of participants, the data collection methods, the number and length of these data collection sessions, and the time period over which data was collected, summarised the boundaries of the study and the level of transferability of the study (Cole & Gardner, 1979; Marchionini & Teague, 1987).

Sincerity: The research should be characterised by self-reflexivity about the researchers' values and biases, while still retaining the transparency of the methods and challenges of the research (Tracy, 2010). This is the comparability of the researcher as subjective and to ensure that the study's findings are the result of the experiences of the participants and not the characteristics of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). This is why multiple data collection methods were used to reduce the effect of researcher bias, as well as to predetermine the dispositions of the researcher before the study is conducted (Huberman & Miles, 2002). It is important that the researcher remain objective and impartial throughout the whole process to ensure that their own views, expectations, or opinions do not influence the data.

Credibility: This refers to the research being marked by thick descriptions, concrete details, and credible knowledge, which can be obtained through triangulation (Tracy, 2010). Triangulation is the use of different methods to collect data. In the present study, this was included by using the Mmogo-method®, visual interpretations, observations, and individual interviews. According to Guba (1981), using different methods of data collection compensates for individual limitations and increases the benefits of these data-collection methods. This also links to member checks, to check the accuracy of the data collected with the informant at the end of the data collection dialogue to see if the informant considers their words as an accurate representation of what they meant (Shenton, 2004).

Also, to consider the competency of the researcher and their ability to collect the data or training in the research method (Patton, 2002). To also collect thick descriptions of the phenomenon being studied or to have detailed descriptions to ensure the actual situation being investigated and the context around the phenomenon is conveyed throughout the research study (Shenton, 2004). Lastly, to see the extent to which these research project results are congruent with those of similar previous research findings.

Resonance: Includes the influences, affects, or, more particularly, the reader or audience with an aesthetic representation and transferable finding of the study (Tracy, 2010). This is explained as if the research study were to be repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and the same participants, it will not obtain similar results, as each experience is subjective to the participant, and meaning for them is socially constructed. This can mostly be achieved through the use of overlapping methods, such as focus groups and individual interviews. Also, through ensuring a detailed description of the process, the research study followed is established, thereby enabling future researchers to learn from the process to obtain the same methods and process, perhaps with similar results and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1999).

Significant Contribution: Ensuring that the study has a conceptual, theoretical, practical, moral, and methodological significance (Tracy, 2010). Thus, this study would firstly contribute to theoretical knowledge about the new generation entering the HEI while broadening our perspective of subjectively looking at coping strategies in a qualitative manner in a South African context. Thus, assisting the HEI to support the students with adjusting to their newly changed environment.

Ethical: To consider the procedural, situational, and cultural ethics of this research study by taking the necessary ethical considerations, ethical clearance, consent, and researcher experience to ensure the research is conducted in an ethical manner. Therefore the larger project the research study falls part of has received ethical clearance, and certain ethical considerations have been implemented

such as voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality, and lastly, the researcher has undergone extensive ethical workshops to ensure they consist of the necessary skills the research study requires.

Meaningful coherence: The research achieves what it said it would through using the required methods to fit the set objectives while connecting meaningfully with the literature, research questions, findings, and interpretations (Tracy, 2010).

1.5.9 Reporting

A qualitative report was written on the results of the data collected from the Mmogo-method®, as well as the semi-structured interviews. This report was written with integrity (Chenail, 2011), to ensure the credibility of the report by implementing the abovementioned strategies in order to ensure quality data and applying the necessary ethical sets in order to report credible results. In this report, the definitions, sub-themes, themes, and concepts were descriptive in nature and in line with the data collected on the coping strategies students use while transitioning as emerging adults, during their first-year experience at a South African higher education institution.

The descriptive nature of the report emphasises the experiences of the participants in a non-biased way, and the researcher only reported on the views that the participants provided (Shenton, 2004). However, the researchers' field notes and reflections were consulted and included when the report was written up, to ensure a holistic approach to all the data collected (Henning, 2004). This report includes themes, which consisted out of the structuring of the coping strategies emerging adult first-years students' use, as well as the context which provided a clear setting for the reader to understand the background of emerging adult first-year students and how their coping strategies inform this transition. This was reported through the use of example quotations to support the findings. Through this process, the researcher demonstrated the extraction and interpretation of the data set in an ethical and confidential manner.

1.5.10 Ethical considerations

Prior to data collection, the researchers involved in the study gained the necessary permission to enter this setting and collect meaningful data (De Vos, et al., 2011). Based on this method, the researcher first obtained consent from the HEI, where the research was conducted to ensure none of the participants are disrupted by the research study (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). The data collection took place on the HEI delivery site, in a room where the environment is relaxed, and special attention was placed on proper ventilation and lighting, comfortable chairs and a workstation, free

from noise and disturbances, and refreshments were provided to participants during frequent breaks to ensure convenience for participants (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). Since the Mmogo-method® is conducted in a group format, it is important to make participants feel comfortable and relaxed. This aids the participants to speak freely and comfortably, which resulted in meaningful and rich data collection (Roos, 2012). After data collection from the Mmogo-method®, additional interviews were held with participants specified in the Mmogo-method® for follow up data-collection. It is important to acquire participants from a diverse group specific to the HEI setting to ensure a rich group of participants (De Vos, et al., 2011). Further consent forms were used to provide permission to use electronic recorders to access this data and recordings at any time. Participants were informed that the study is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time without any repercussions (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). The session was conducted in complete confidentiality to ensure participants that any personal information is kept confidential and in a safe place, which only the researchers involved in the study will be able to access. During the data collection, a debriefer was available to speak to any participant who felt the need and had a debriefing session with the group before they exited the research setting. During the interviews, there was also an opportunity to talk to a professional if the need arose.

In qualitative research, it has become increasingly important to identify distinct considerations and criteria pertaining to the viewing of ethical dimensions when collecting data. The direct involvement and participation with people impose the acknowledgement of the subjective nature that qualitative data is collected in (Munhall, 1988). Therefore, the researcher was responsible for ensuring the study adhered to the strict ethical guidelines, and these concepts typically includes; avoidance of harm, voluntary participation, informed consent, misleading of participants, confidentiality, respect for persons, denial of services, compensation, debriefing of participants, the competency and accountability of the researcher, and the publication of research results (De Vos et al., 2011) These concepts are summarised according to the work of De Vos et al., (2011):

Avoidance of harm: This is seen as the fundamental rule for social research, bringing no harm to any participant. This includes both physical and emotional harm; therefore, it was the researchers' responsibility to identify any risks pertaining to the study and to protect the participant from any physical or emotional discomfort the project may elicit.

Voluntary Participation: Participation at all times was voluntary, and the participants were allowed to withdraw at any moment if they feel uncomfortable, and there were no negative consequences.

Informed consent: Informed consent must be obtained from the participants before data is collected. This implies that all possible information of the research study, including the purpose of the study, expected duration, expected contribution from the participants, procedures which will be followed, possible advantages and disadvantages, recording of the data collection session, the credibility of researcher and who have access to the data collected. This was obtained in written format and was thoroughly explained to the participants. However, the participant should have the psychological and mental competency to give informed consent. This consent informed the participant that all information collected will be kept confidential and in a safe and secure place and is treated with the utmost discretion. Informed consent ensures the full knowledge and cooperation of participants while resolving or relieving tensions, aggressions, resistance, or insecurities of participants.

Misleading of participants: It is unethical to mislead participants, deliberately misrepresented facts, or withholding information from participants. Therefore, when conducting a research project, there may be no form of deception of participants. In this project, it was clearly stated that the research study forms part of a larger project. However, the researcher has obtained a goodwill permission letter and has signed a code of conduct to conduct the research for both the larger project and this research study.

Confidentiality: This ensures the privacy and anonymity of the participants are kept confidential and be handled in a confidential manner, and limits the access to private information to only those participants of the research project. This allows only the researcher to identify the participants afterward and that the safety of the participants is ensured. Additionally, ensuring the participants' information is stored in a safe and secure place to protect their privacy.

Respect for persons: To respect the participant and trusting them to convey their experience to the best of their knowledge, to make certain all participants receive the same treatment, avoid misleading participants by providing all of the information, respecting and diminishing the power imbalance to not exploit participants, avoid eliciting sensitive information and be non-judgemental at all times (Creswell, 2014).

Denial of services: This entailed that the participants were entitled to receive beneficial services. Therefore, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that participants had access to some sort of services after data is collected.

Compensation: The researcher may not compensate the participants for participating in the research project by any means. However, the researcher may reimburse participants for the costs acquired to attend the research project.

Debriefing of participants: It is a researcher's ethical obligation to debrief the participants after the data is collected. This is a session at the end of the data collection dialogue, where the participants have the opportunity to work through their experiences to minimise any possible harm which might have been done. This also includes the identification of any misunderstanding and further referral to therapy if necessary.

Competency and accountability of the researcher: Intense interview training was undergone to ensure the researcher has the competency to collect the data. The researcher must be competent in the data collection methods, research topic, and the specific context. Therefore, strict training in the data collection method was undergone to ensure researcher competence. This ensured that the researcher is honest about the adequacy of their skills to undergo the proposed study. The researcher also takes accountability for their responsibilities and ensure all ethical guidelines are followed. Ethical consultation (Research psychologist) was employed to ensure that the researcher conducts the research in an ethical manner. Additionally, the TRREE online ethical course was completed (TRREE, 2009). This course included an introduction to research ethics, research ethics evaluation, informed consent, and the National Supplement for South Africa. Thereafter, ethical workshops and informed consent training were attended to ensure the researcher is competent to conduct the research study. Additionally, the researcher has been supervised by their mentor to conduct ethical and accountable research. Throughout the data analysis process, the research project included a Setswana-speaking co-researcher who picked up on cultural nuances and ensured understandings of the data in context (cultural nuances).

Publication of research results: During informed consent, the publication of research findings were discussed and ensured that the results, to the public, are anonymous and written in an understandable format. Additional ethical workshops were attended to ensure the researcher follows the correct procedure in relation to the publication of the research results.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The findings of the research study are further discussed and displayed in the research article, as seen in chapter 2. Furthermore, the conclusion, limitations, and recommendations are discussed in Chapter 3.

1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Firstly, in this chapter, the problem statement and research objectives were explained in detail. Secondly, the data collection and research method were described, and lastly, an overview of the chapters was presented.

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CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the coping strategies of emerging adult millennials at a higher education institution delivery site

Orientation: South Africa is faced with economic difficulties, and the Higher Education Institution (HEI) is recognised as a key factor in modernising and developing the future of South Africa, through the formation of human capital, the building of knowledge, the dissemination of knowledge, and the maintenance of knowledge. This can be achieved by improving educational productivity, which could lead to the improvement of global competitiveness, meeting economic growth, and reducing unemployment rates.

Research purpose: Exploring the coping strategies of emerging adult millennials at a higher education institution delivery site

Motivation for the study: Higher education institutions started focusing on student attrition or dropout, as students who start university might not complete their degrees in the required time. Some of these reasons could include challenges and stressors they are faced with at the HEI. For this reason, the aim of this research study is to explore the coping process of emerging adults at an HEI delivery site, from a first-year students' perspective.

Research design, approach, and method: The study followed a qualitative research approach, through a descriptive, interpretive strategy to understand the experiences of first-year students from their perspective and their meaning thereof. The sample ($N = 13$), participants had to be a registered full-time first-year student at the applicable delivery site, studying towards an undergraduate degree, and had to have basic proficiency in English. Data were collected through two methods: the Mmogo method® ($n = 9$), and semi-structured individual follow-up interviews with three participants involved in the Mmogo method® session and one additional voluntary participant ($n = 4$).

Main findings: From the literature review and research findings of the present study, it was evident that four main themes emerged: (1) The nature and domains of stressors first-year students experience, (2) The coping resources, availability and access thereof for students, (3) Coping strategies students rely on to manage their stressors at university, and (4) The effectiveness of coping strategies chosen by students at university.

Practical/managerial implications: This could assist in knowledge creation for the HEI and support systems to create awareness and introduce interventions that would assist students in coping with these challenges at the HEI, which would assist in the reduction of drop-outs and increase in

the completion rates of degrees. This, in turn, could impact the unemployment rate and add to South Africa's economic growth.

Contribution/value-add: The significant contribution of the findings is to provide the individual, HEI, and future research with the knowledge to create awareness, identify resources and implement strategies to assist first-year emerging adults to manage their stressors at an HEI. Recommendations were made for future research and practice.

Keywords: Coping process, coping resources, coping strategies, emerging adulthood, millennials, first-year students, higher education institution

INTRODUCTION

Even though in the last 20 years, South African higher education has gone through major state interventions, South Africa's post-apartheid higher education institutions still lag slightly behind its counterparts in other developing countries (Habib, 2016). In the face of South Africa's difficult economic circumstances, higher education is recognised as a key force for modernisation and development for the future of South Africa (Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019). Higher Education contributes to both social and economic development through four major missions: the formation of human capital, the building of knowledge, the dissemination of knowledge, and the maintenance of knowledge (Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014). These four strategies are moved to the center stage to promote economic prosperity, fuller employment, and the social cohesion South Africa has been lacking (Pouris & Inglesi-Lotz, 2014). It could, therefore, be expected that if the country improves its educational productivity, then it may lead to the improvement of global competitiveness and meeting economic growth and reducing unemployment rates.

This precisely reflects the levels of graduation and retention rates of higher education institutions as indicators of efficiency and effectiveness in the functioning of the changing environment (Fowler, n.d.). Therefore, great significance has been placed on increased competition between universities, student diversity, attrition/dropout, and retention at a higher education institution seeking to survive and, in chance, promote social and economic growth (Willcoxson, Cotter, & Joy, 2011). As a result, higher education institutions started focusing on student attrition or dropouts (Barefoot, 2005; Kuh, 2005, Turner & Thompson, 2014; Beer, & Lawson, 2017). According to the Council of Education (2004), almost 55% of students who enter university will not complete their degrees at all, and fewer than 25% will complete their degrees within the minimum time allocated. Therefore, it can be assumed that students are at high risk of attrition .

Through a students' university span, they face various personal, family, academic, social, transition, and adjustment challenges (Turner & Thompson, 2014). Especially vulnerable are first years as they form the model group of transitioning into a new phase with different adjustments and is facing the greatest challenge of adaptation to university. Bernardo et al., (2016) mention that universities face a high rate of drop-out between a student's first and second years of study, and therefore most research focusses on this initial or early phase of student dropout. Research also indicated that first year's account for more than half of all attrition or dropouts on record (Barefoot, 2005; Kuh, 2005, Turner & Thompson, 2014). The focus of this study is, therefore, on first-year students. According to Bean and Eaton (2001), attrition/dropouts could be a consequence of background variables such

as previous academic performance, socioeconomic status, place of residence, moving away from parents, and geographically moving away. Nevertheless, there are also some institutional or organisational determinants that can also have an effect (Willcoxson, Cotter, & Joy, 2011).

Since the transformation and acceleration of workplaces in the 21st century, an increased emphasis has been placed on graduate employment, and it expresses the imperative that educational institutions need to provide students with soft skills to operate in the changing, diverse culture settings of South African workplaces (Habib, 2016; Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019). Although an organisation such as a higher education institution cannot be held liable for all factors that can cause attrition of students, it may be in their best interest to assist in reducing first-year attrition/dropouts (Beer, & Lawson, 2017). Specifically, this can be done by implementing on-going programs, services, and support to help retain students and ensuring completion of their degrees, which in turn can promote social and economic wellbeing. Higher education institutions, thus, need to understand these challenges students are faced with.

Moving from high school to university can be a stressful experience and place significant demand of a first year student (Tinto, 1982; 1993). Since the model group of first year student are born between 1982 and 2002, it forms part of the current rising generation, millennials (Turner, & Thompson, 2014). According to a study done in 2009, millennials makes up 30% of the university population in the United States and accounted for approximately 100 million individuals (Rickes, 2009). In previous research, it has been noted that millennials of fundamentally different characteristics and traits from the past research generations (Turner, & Thompson, 2014) and requires the integration of technology and communication strategies in their daily lives (Kuron, Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015). These researchers further states, due to this over-exposure and dependence on such mechanisms, millennials struggle to resolve conflict, think critically and develop face-to-face communication techniques, although they can also experience similar development and transitioning challenges as the past generations, their learning styles, educational expectations and socialisation characteristic challenges the traditionally set institutional programs, services and instructional strategies offered by universities (Much, Wagener, Breitreutz, & Hellenbrand, 2014). Other challenges first year students face to their wellbeing and academic performance, including adaptation to campus life, having to function more independently in a more autonomous and less supportive environment, dealing with financial concerns, managing time effectively, handling administrative problems and managing the loss and formation of old and new friendships and/or romantic relationships (Kotze, & Niemann, 2013). In addition, perceptions of excessive academic demands and workload from student schedules and examinations, assignments, and practical work of an academic year can often lead students to feel emotional ups and downs,

stress, and even burnout, preventing them from performing to their fullest (Bojuwoye, 2002; Kotze, & Niemann, 2013).

While all these changing factors are overwhelming, these first years are additionally also going through an essential developmental stage by establishing themselves as autonomous adults. This is a transitional period between adolescence and young adulthood, which presents students with various other possibilities, challenges, and decisions that may also lead to stress and confusion (Bojuwoye, 2002). Arnett (2014) coined the transitional period as ‘emerging adulthood.’ The term captures the sense of where these students are and describing the exploratory, unstable, and fluid period of an individual’s life (Arnett, 2015). Emerging adulthood lasts roughly from age 18, when most young people finish secondary school, to age 25, when most people move towards making the commitment that usually structures an adult life, marriage, parenthood, and a stable long-term job. This phase might even last until the age of 29, depending on different variables in their lives and cultures (Arnett, 2004).

In research, this phase is still entirely new and has only been researched in the last decade or so. It has been noticed that this phase is likely to vary considerably across national, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics, however, with similar views on the experiences of education, work, beliefs, self-development, and relationships (Arnett, 2015). Even though this phase provides different paths to explore, individuals might experience the same features, which is distinguishable from other development phases. According to Arnett (2004), these main five features of emerging adulthood includes; identity exploration through trying out different life, love and work options to develop their identity, enduring instability in their lives, being self-focused to develop their knowledge, skills, and self-understanding, experiencing the feeling of being in transition, and gaining more possibilities and optimism than previous generations.

Accumulating research on emerging adulthood has been completed historically (Arnett, 2004; Arnett, 2014; Arnett, 2015; Malina, Bouchard, & Bar-Or, 2004; Nelson, & Chen, 2007), and with growing industrialisation and economic integration this phase is likely to become an increasingly common field in the 21st century, also in South Africa, as stated by Habib, (2016) whose research paved the way for further investigation into this phenomenon. Therefore, it is essential to investigate at these changing factors, especially when addressing the dropouts and retention of students, as first-year students are going through both transitional and emerging adulthood changes. It can consequently become a challenge for the higher education institution to assist in managing, coping, and addressing these stressful encounters, to develop them as global graduate citizens. Nevertheless, through soft-skills training and retainment of students, it could influence the social and economic

environment to produce a more qualified and skilled workforce (Habib, 2016). Since universities are focusing more on retaining students and preparing them for adulthood, and as it is well documented that students at university are exposed to and at risk for high levels of stress (Kotze & Niemann, 2013), especially first year students (Tinto, 1993), a typical intervention could propose assisting students in understanding stressful encounters and help in coping thereof.

Nevertheless, coping is seen as very situational and contextualised in nature (Folkman, 2011; Lazarus & Folkman 1984) and in order to understand what coping strategies these students utilise, and the effectiveness thereof, it is vital to understand the stressful encounters, hence the need for further research on this topic. This stressful encounter can be appraised differently by each individual and is impacted by the frequency and intensity thereof. As each individual assigns their own value (appraisal) to an object or event (Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 2001). This encounter is appraised then as either a harm/loss, benefit, or a challenge, and then a coping strategy can be chosen to either address the situation, manage the impact or avoid the stressor altogether (Goh, Sawang, & Oei, 2010; Lazarus 1994; Perrewé, & Zellars 1999). While coping has been researched extensively in the past with different focuses on the conceptualisation, differentiation, typical stressors of individuals in psychological distress, emotion in coping, personality and coping and different coping strategies, there seems to be a lack in adopting a more holistic process in terms of research in coping (Goh, Sawang, & Oei, 2010). Coping further has mostly been focused on the quantitative nature of how individuals cope without concentrating on the nature of the stressful encounter as well, especially throughout the phase of transitioning into emerging adults at a higher education institution in South Africa (Folkman, 2011; Robotham, 2008). Although some research has been focused on coping at a higher education institution, it focused more on the linkage between coping and the stressful encounter with individual well-being (Zambianchi & Ricci Bitti, 2014), academic risks students face in college (Strage & Sorkhabi, 2016), racial inequalities (Slaymaker & Fisher, 2015), negative psychological trauma (Polanco-Roman, Danies, & Anglin, 2016), coping with cyberbullying (Orel, Campbell, Wozencroft, Leong, & Kimpton, 2017), and stress tolerance (Bland, Melton, Welle, & Bigham, 2012), thus limiting it to a more negative approach of an individualistic perspective.

The aim of this study is, therefore, to explore the coping process of emerging adults at an HEI delivery site, from a first-year students' perspective. This knowledge could assist the higher education institution to intervene and help where possible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A definition of coping

Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, De-Longis, and Gruen, (1986) defined coping as a person's cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage, reduce, minimise, master, and tolerate the internal and external demands of a person-environment transaction, that is appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources. Schwarzer and Schwarzer (1996) stated that coping is an umbrella term used to describe strategies, tactics, responses, cognitions, or behaviours that can be noticed either by introspection or by observation of others and it could include internal events or overt actions, that is appraised as taxing or exceeding a person's resources. To summarise, these authors note that coping takes place in a person-environment transaction which entails that the situation is specific to the individual, and might differ in intensity, type of stressor, and frequency thereof. This event could occur either internally (inside the individual) or externally (from the environment or situation). This transaction makes a demand on the individual's resources and forces the individual to spend resources to balance the demand-resource transaction and could lead to either a positive or a negative outcome.

In a combination of these definitions, focusing on emerging adults in an educational context, the researcher defined coping as a continually changing, cyclical and iterative, interactional processes of emotional, cognitive and behavioural efforts a person makes, the strategies and tactics they employ, and responses to manage specific internal or external demands that arise in response to the stressors, that are in turn appraised as threatening, posing harm or loss, beneficial, or challenging a person's resources. This definition gives important emphasis on coping occurring in the presence of a stressor and that the process is cyclical in nature, thus if the chosen course of action doesn't achieve the desired result, the process restarts through re-appraisal. These strategies can be either emotional, cognitive, and behavioural efforts, strategies of tactics a person employs. Stressors can then further be divided into internal/personal, through introspection inside the individual sphere of functioning of a person, or external/situational stressors from the environment. Furthermore, each individual can appraise the stressor differently and can be either seen as threatening, posing harm or loss, beneficial, or challenging the resources (past, present, or future) of the person to cope with the perceived situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, by understanding how a situation is appraised, it becomes clear that different strategies exist to manage, avoid, and cope thereof and to understand coping in a more contextualised way.

Stress and appraisal

Coping has been researched extensively by various different researchers over the years (Coetzee, & Esterhuizen, 2010; Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001; Dewe, Cooper, & Cooper, 2017; Folkman, 1982; Folkman, 2011; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 2000; Schwarzer, & Schwarzer, 1996) and it is evident that coping can only happen in the presence of a stressor. An individual then appraises this stressor in order to choose a coping strategy applicable to manage this stressful event. (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987). Therefore, understanding stress is the start of this process, in the Oxford dictionary, (2019) stress is defined as: "A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances," which suggest stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension that may elicit a range of actions; behavioural, emotional, and cognitively, to find a solution. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1984), a stressful event is a person-environment transaction that is appraised by the individual in relation to their well-being and could possibly tax or exceed their coping resources.

People function differently according to the area of their lives and can experience different stressors in each domain, as an individual would cope differently with work stress than with illness-related stress (Lazarus, 2000), thus coping is more contextualised (Folkman, 1982). These stressors can be further divided into being a chronic stressor or acute stressor. An acute stressor could happen over shorter frequency yet with a significant impact, whereas a chronic stressor might happen over a longer spectrum with a smaller effect, but over the long-run effects a person more severely, due to its continuing nature (Folkman, & Moskowitz, 2000). A stressor is further differentiated in terms of severity as an individual might experience a stressor to be either near or far to them (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A stressor that is observed to be near would lie close to a person's value-system and affects them severely, whereas a stressor far from an individual might be a problem for others yet seem to affect them less. According to Folkman (2011), there is a phenomenological tradition in psychology that states that a meaning of an event for a specific person could shape their emotional and behavioural response or avoid or cope with the stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Appraisal refers to the evaluation of a cognitive process that intervenes in between the encounter and the individual's specific reaction and can be either consciously or unconsciously. Or as Scherer, Schorr, and Johnstone, (2001) would state, appraisal is the function value a person assigns a object or event, yet without state how this function value is determined. Three kinds of appraisals can be identified: Primary-, secondary-, and re-appraisal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A primary appraisal can be either encountered as irrelevant and has no personal significance, benign-positive could have a potential positive impact, or stressful, which could entail either harm

or loss to an individual, the threat of loss or challenge which might result in mastery or gain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Perrewe & Zellars, 1999). A secondary appraisal is a judgement of what can be done and the consequences of selecting a specific coping strategy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Perrewe & Zellars, 1999). Re-appraisal then refers to an altered appraisal after the primary appraisal has taken place, based on new information gathered from the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The transactional model of coping

Folkman and Lazarus (1984) and thereafter Lazarus (1991) explains the transactional model of coping as an interaction between the person and environment and is very dynamic and highly fluid in nature (Goh, Sawang, & Oei, 2010). As seen in figure 2 in Appendix A, which presents a chronological approach to coping.

The central tenet of this model is that a potentially stressful event needs to occur to trigger primary appraisal, an individual then assesses the stressor to be either a benefit, harm or loss, a potential threat, or challenge to their well-being. In the case of the later, the individual will flow over to the secondary appraisal process, which takes the individual through a global assessment of their coping resources and their ability to react to the situation, the coping responses are then initiated.

This model represents coping as a choice (consciously or not) affected by the primary and secondary appraisal of the best perceived coping mechanism. Thereafter, the outcome provides essential feedback, and if further actions are required (Goh, Sawang, & Oei, 2010). This is the goodness-of-fit between the appraisal and the coping mechanism to result in a favourable outcome. The feedback loop closes by a third cognitive appraisal (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Lazarus, 1994), re-appraisal, in which both primary and secondary appraisals are changed via the individuals coping mechanism and the environmental relationship.

This model is widely accepted and supported by researchers and practitioners (Cooper, Dewe & O'Driscoll, 2001; Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen, 1986; Yu, Chiu, Lin, Wang & Chen, 2007). However, some research lacks a holistic approach to researching stress and coping. Goh, Sawang, and Oei (2010) proposed a revised transactional model of coping, as they introduced two additional variables, namely stress outcome one and a stress outcome two, with is a direct link between primary appraisal and the stress outcome one, as well as a link between stress outcome one and stress outcome two. If a person perceives an event as threatening or stressful (primary appraisal), the psycho-physiological arousal (stress outcome one) will follow, in addition, this stress outcome is continuous and is expected to sustain a strong

and direct link after coping (stress outcome two), and has been explicitly found valid in an Australian sample. Therefore, figure 2 forms the theoretical framework of the present study.

This framework, therefore, states that the experience of stress is a consequence of the interaction between the stressor and the individual's perception of control over the stressor, which impacts the psycho-physiological behaviours an individual and their effectivity thereof. This effect (positive or negative) will, in turn, determine the choice of coping strategy utilised (Boekaerts, 2002). Nonetheless, not only is the nature of the stressor and the appraisal thereof critical to evaluating the types of coping strategies employed, but the impact of coping resources also needs to be understood.

Coping resources

Before an individual can decide if an encounter is taxing or exceeding their resources, a person-environment measure is implemented sub-consciously, subtracting the demands from the available resources of the individual (Folkman, 1982). If the resources are less than the demands, the situation is perceived as stressful, in other words, harmful, challenging, or threatening, and a coping strategy is chosen to be employed. These resources are called coping resources. Hammer, Grigsby, and Woods (1988) describe coping resources as a psychological capacity inherent to a person, which enables them to manage stressors more effectively and experience fewer symptoms for the stressor. These coping resources could include; cognitive resources (capabilities to maintain a positive sense of self-worth, a positive outlook, and optimism), social resources (social networks and support in times of stress), emotional resources (individuals' acceptance and expression of emotional responses to alleviate long-term negative consequences of stress), spiritual resources (guided by values derived from religious, family or cultural tradition which defines their meaning of the stressful event, or physical resources (interacting with health-promoting behaviours to increase physical well-being and decreases negative responses to stress) (Hammer, Grigsby, & Woods, 1988). The availability of these coping resources impacts the choice of coping strategy employed (Lazarus, 1984; Van den Brande, Baillien, De Witte, Vander Elst, & Godderis, 2016).

Coping resources differ from other resources described in the literature, such as job resources, as this refers to physical, psychological, social, and organisational aspects of a job which impacts success in work goals, reducing job demands and stimulating growth and development (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). It can also include personal resources, as an individual's ability to control and impact an environment successfully through resilience, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and optimism, these are generally more static in nature (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007).

These concepts differ from recovery strategies, as coping can only happen in a stressful, threatening or challenging situation, whereas recovery strategies is the process during which an individual's functional systems that have been called upon during a stressful encounter is returned to their pre-stressor levels and restores impaired mood and actions, also reflects a decrease of physiological strain (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). In conclusion, recovery happens after a stressful encounter, which replenishes the resources lost, whereas coping is the actions, tactics, mechanisms or strategies employed to avoid, manage, cope or deal with the stressful encounter through the utilisation of coping resources available.

Coping strategies

Coping strategies are defined as different strategies individuals use to manage a stressful encounter and the accompanying distress associated therewith (Folkman, 2011). When an encounter is appraised as stressful, they initiate their available coping resources and choose an applicable coping strategy in the hopes of alleviating the discomfort, addressing the issue, or challenging themselves. Additionally, the intensity and frequency of the encounter might affect the choice of the coping strategy they employ (Goh, Sawang, & Oei, 2010). According to Folkman, (1982); Folkman, (2011); and Lazarus and Folkman, (1984) coping strategies can be categorised into two main categories: 1) Problem-focused coping refers to the attempt to alter the stressor itself, such as finding a solution to a problem and developing a plan-of-action; and 2) emotion-focused coping, which refers to the ways an individual accommodates themselves to alleviate the feeling of stress, which range from distraction, avoidance, denial, venting, acceptance, focusing on the positive side and finding a deeper meaning from the situation. Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) introduce avoidance coping as well, which refers to person-and/or task-orientated strategies that attempt to avoid the problem, encounter, or emotion elicited altogether.

Coping strategies are expanding, and the sensitivity and complexities of measuring and classifying these coping strategies are evolving (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Emerging strategies include:

- Religious coping as the tendency to turn to spiritual and religious aspects while searching for meaning and forgiveness (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011),
- Resignation coping by accepting the stressful situation without any significant efforts to alter it (Dewe, Cooper & Cooper, 2017),
- Pro-active coping by acting in advance to prevent a stressor or to mute the impact (Greenglass, Schwarzer, Jakubiec, Fiksenbaum, & Taubert, 1999),
- Reflective coping as the reflection and anticipating of the stressor and possible ways of managing the stressor (Greenglass, et al., 1999),

- Collective coping as the constellation of behaviours of multifaceted stress responses shaped and enhanced by collectivistic norms, values, and tendencies, to work together to cope with a stressor (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004),
- Leisure coping the construction of meaning and direction through leisure activities (Patry, Blanchard, & Mask, 2007), and
- Emotion-Approach coping, is processing and expressing emotions through coping (Austenfeld & Stanton, 2004).

Effectiveness of coping

The effectiveness of coping remains one of the most difficult concepts in coping research, as the effectiveness thereof is entirely contextual in nature. Since no coping strategy can be viewed as good or bad, some might just be more effective in some situations than others (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). It can be generalised under two headings; the coping outcome, which views effectiveness in the sense of goals that are achieved through the applied coping strategy. Zeidner and Saklofshe (1996) describes eight possible goals that can be achieved;

- the resolution of a stressful situation,
- reduction of physiological and biochemical reactions,
- reduction of psychological distress, normative social functioning, return to pre-stress activities,
- the wellbeing of self and others affected by the situation,
- maintaining positive self-esteem, and perceived effectiveness, although some might be difficult to evaluate due to short- or long-term goals,
- the impact other outcomes could have on the specific objectives,
- the nature of the resolution,
- and the individual evaluation of the effectiveness of the outcome (Dewe, Cooper & Cooper, 2017).

Dewe, Cooper, and Cooper, (2017) further states the effectiveness of coping can be measured by the goodness-of-fit approach, which looks at the process rather than the outcome. This suggest the suitability of a coping strategy is in relation to the appraisal the individual made on the encounter and the goodness-of-fit of the coping strategy chosen. Presumably, choosing a coping strategy that fits their appraisal and gains control over the tasks will have a more effective outcome (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). This just reinforces the argument to give special attention to the nature of the stressor and the appraisals thereof to understand the assessment for the goodness-of-fit of coping

effectiveness (Dewe, Cooper, & Cooper, 2017). Still, people are able to modify their coping according to different demands, coping flexibility, which involves the systematic use of a variety of strategies (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach

For this study, a qualitative approach was followed, which focuses on the opinions, beliefs, personal reactions and approaches of research participants, to assist the researcher to better understand their meanings and perspectives, through seeing it from their own point of view and how their perspectives are shaped by their physical, social, and cultural contexts (Maxwell, 2012). The approach is applied in order to generate evidence-based research through the investigation of a specific context with specific participants, which would not result in the generalisation of evidence (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). By utilising a qualitative approach, the researcher is able to understand the emerging generation entering university, through their opinions, beliefs, personal reactions, experience and challenges they are faced with at an HEI and explore the way they cope therewith.

Research strategy

In an attempt to further understand the research problem, from the perspective of the participants through their subjective experiences of phenomena, the researcher chose to apply an interpretive descriptive research strategy throughout this study. This enables the researcher to determine the perception and meaning that the phenomena might have on the participants (Churchill & Wertz, 2001).

The epistemological stance followed a social-constructivism paradigm approach, which explains the participants' subjective reality, through the development of their own meanings of their reality through social construction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, relativism is utilised as the ontological approach, through the assumption that reality is not static, and each person can create their own unique reality (Doucet, Letourneau, & Stoppard, 2010), or in other words the participants subjective understanding of the world they live and work in (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This results in different and complex experiences from participants, which enables the researcher to access their experiences to inform the research study. Within the interpretive framework, the researcher can follow different stances to gain direction and ensure their basic beliefs guide their actions, supports consistency, and research is done in a logical manner through the collection of data from different methods and analytical strategies (Guba, 1990; Thorne, 2016).

Research method

The research method is further presented as the research setting, entrée and establishing of the researchers' role, sampling, data collection methods, recording of data, data analysis, strategies employed to ensure quality data, and reporting style.

Research setting

The study formed part of a larger project titled "StudyWell: Student Well-Being and Success of Students," which formed part of the HEIs Framework for Student Access, Retention, Attainment, and Success (ethical certificate number: NWU-HS-2014-0165). This project aims to address issues on low levels of student success and poor retention rates associated with the challenges of an HEI in South Africa, which in turn will lead to the development of a tool to identify areas in need of intervention in student lives proactively. Data from this project enlighten the research question of the present study, which were further explored at a specific South African HEI delivery site, amongst first-year students. These students experienced various demands and challenges, as they are transitioning and emerging as young adults (Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2007; Tinto, 1993).

Entrée and establishing of the researchers' role

Access and permission were negotiated with applicable stakeholders, and when granted a gatekeeper, was identified (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011). The roles were further established, and the aim and purpose of the study were also discussed with the gatekeeper. This gatekeeper was fully informed on all information pertaining to the research study in the attempt to acquire participants as well as a venue. This individual was a vital part as they were the central person in communicating all the necessary arrangements with the participants (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). In these communications, a short summary of the research study was included as well as clarification on their expected role in the research process.

On the day on data collection, informed consent was attained, and important information shared with the participants. In the Mmogo-method® group session, a trained researcher facilitated the session while a group of co-researchers made comprehensive field notes. Afterward, follow-up interviews were scheduled individually, conducted by the first author of this dissertation. Data were transcribed, and a working set of rules were established in the data analysis phase to portray a holistic way of incorporating the participant (emic) and the researcher (etic) views, which added to the qualitative research study.

Sampling

A purposive voluntary sampling method was followed as first-year students from a specific South African HEI delivery site were contacted to participate. In addition, a snowball sampling method was also introduced in an attempt to acquire more participants for the research project. Participants complied with the following inclusion criteria: (i) they had to be a registered full-time first-year student at the applicable delivery site, (ii) studying towards an undergraduate degree, and (iii) had to have basic proficiency in English. The following was considered to ensure a representative sample of the population; language, gender, ethnicity, living conditions, year of birth, and relationship status (Boehnke, Lietz, Schreier, & Wilhelm, 2011).

The sample consisted of thirteen participants, nine of which participated in the Mmogo-method®, and three of whom agreed to conduct follow-up interviews after the Mmogo-method® session, with one additional individual participant, that was recruited for an interview. The sample size was dependent on the willingness and accessibility of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The group demographics are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1:

Participant demographics participating in Mmogo-method® and follow-up interviews (n=13)

Item	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	4
	Female	9
Ethnicity	African	7
	White	6
Home language	Setswana	3
	English	1
	isiXhosa	2
	Afrikaans	7
Living conditions	I stay off-campus, and I am part of a town residence	5
	I stay off-campus, but I am not part of a town residence	7
	I stay on campus and live in a hostel	1
Year of birth	1995 (22 years old)	1
	1997 (20 years old)	7
	1998 (19 years old)	5
Relationship status	Single	9
	In a relationship	4

Data collection methods

Data-collection took part in two phases. Phase one as part of the larger StudyWell projects, and secondly, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted. The multiple data collection methods ensured the trustworthiness of data through triangulation (Brink, 1993). The Mmogo-method® was facilitated by a registered clinical and research psychologist who has been thoroughly trained in this method and was further assisted by a team of co-researchers with the administration, observation, and interpretation thereof. This primary data collection method is a visual method that explores personal and group experiences by commenting on their experiences and opinions related to a specified research question and is further divided into four stages (Roos, 2016). The stages start with a group session that the facilitator opens with a meet and greet with the participants who volunteered, and a transparent process is further created through obtaining informed consent, the participants' biographical information, and clarifying the purpose and method of the research project. This is followed up with the construction phase, as each participant receives a container with material such as clay, beads, sticks, and a cloth, and with no create instruction. A broad research question is asked, and the construction of a visual representation thereof begins. This is a visual representation of what is not yet conscious of conceptualised through a projective method to obtain social, cultural, and contextual ways from the students (Roos, 2008). The central research question states: "Tell us something about your experiences of being a student at the applicable HEI?" Participants answer the question by building a model with the materials provided, which represents their interpretation of the research question followed by an open and voluntary discussion of each participants' model, and further prompting questions are asked by the facilitator. This active process of obtaining data ensures that rich data is collected and recorded, as well as additional perspectives are gained from the rest of the group. After which a debriefing session is held for the participants and separately the researchers, they are invited to speak to a debriefer about any emotions that might have been evoked. The researchers further discuss certain observations which could inform the analysis of the process. This was furthermore followed by additional individual semi-structured interviews.

Face-to-face semi-structured follow-up interviews were held with the participants of the Mmogo-method® to explore in more detail the experiences of each participant by eliciting detailed beliefs and perceptions of the topic through flexibility in questioning, probing and clarifying questions (De Vos et al., 2011; Patton, 2002). This was done until the phenomenon was represented (Thorne, 2016). A brief prelude on student experiences and the general adjustments students are faced with opened the interview schedule and was followed by an open-ended question "Tell me about your experience when starting university." Probing questions were focused on three main concepts the

participants' experiences as an emerging adult, coping strategies they used during these experiences, and any advice participants had for the HEI on the above topics.

Recording of data

Multiple digital recorders were used in the recording of data, as well as comprehensive field notes were taken of participants observed body language, reactions, and description of models by the researchers (Mulhall, 2003). The consent thereof was obtained prior to data collection, and participants were ensured that the data would be kept safe and confidential. A file management system was introduced to code, label, and link documents to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, through the removal of dates, numbers, and participant information who were provided with code names which only the researchers involved had access to, in attempt to ensures quality and objectivity when analysing the data (Struwig & Stead, 2001).

Data analysis

A team of researchers, supervised by an independent research psychologist analysed the data by using thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through analysis, several prominent themes emerged, amongst others, the theme of emerging adulthood and coping strategies of first-year students, which were especially prevalent in one of the delivery sites. This resulted in the objectives of the current study as the data was transcribed and analysed as an ongoing process while data was collected (Creswell, 2014). The transcription was transcribed verbatim and later imported into ATLAS.ti version 8, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software, to computerise the process in a creative way through systematically and efficiently allowing the user to code words, link codes, make schematic representations, cluster data, and colour-code various codes and themes in the dataset (Evers & Silver, 2014). Comprehensive training was undergone to ensure competency in this tool, as well as supervised by a registered research psychologist. Thematic analysis was then applied, through six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006), familiarising the data by reading and re-reading thereof and noting key ideas, generation of initial codes through open coding and later selective coding, then searching for themes, which is driven more by the data then by theory, and lastly reviewing and refining of the created themes in order to link meaningfully to the research question.

As preliminary themes informed the present study's research question, literature was explored to identify and define the gap in the research question, where after the second phase of data analysis was done, the focus was on the specific topic through accessing data from the primary dataset (the larger project) on the sections pertaining this study. Data were coded, patterns and connections were

made between the various categories of data and themes identified (Powell-Taylor, & Renner, 2003). Themes were finalised, defined, and named to capture and group into theoretical terms. This was all done in a group format to ensure the quality and rigour of the data analysis and minimise researcher bias through multiple coders in the coding process (Rabiee, 2004). After analysis, the data were grouped according to different code patterns and placed in a table format, in order to distinguish the themes, sub-themes, and boundaries thereof by providing clear definitions of each.

Strategies employed to ensure quality data

Obtaining quality data is extremely important, and some guidelines need to be followed to ensure the trustworthiness of data collected. Guba (1981) proposed four criteria to ensure trustworthiness in a qualitative study, which Tracy (2010) later integrated into eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. She states that excellent research must have a worthy topic that is relevant, timely, significant, but still interesting. The current research topic is worthy, as it researches an emerging cause that will inform HEI on how to assist and support students. Further, by obtaining rich rigour, through having sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex structures to ensure not only rich data as well as face validity (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the researcher, a fellow student, has gone through similar experiences in the research setting, which enables them to understand the research participants' realities in more detail, as data is collected through student experiences, explanations, and engagement. In the present study the restrictions of the individuals participating, the quantity of participants, the data collection methods, the number and length of these data collection sessions, and the time period over which data was collected, summarised the boundaries of the study and the level of transferability of the study (Cole & Gardner, 1979; Marchionini & Teague, 1987).

The sincerity of the research study is characterised by the researchers' subjective views and the experiences of the participants and not the characteristics of the researcher (Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010). Thus, this is the reason for multiple data collection methods to reduce the effect of researcher bias, as well as predetermining the dispositions of the researcher before the study is conducted (Huberman & Miles, 2002). The credibility of the research is ensured through thick descriptions, concrete details, and credible knowledge, which was obtained through the triangulation of multiple data collection methods as this compensates for the researcher's limitations (Guba, 1981; Tracy, 2010). Further, resonance includes the influences, affects, or, more particularly, the reader or audience aesthetic representation and the transferability of the finding (Tracy, 2010). This is explained as, if the research study were to be repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and the same participants, it will not obtain similar results, as each experience is subjective to the

participant and the meaning thereof socially constructed. This can, therefore, only be achieved by ensuring a detailed description of the process followed is recorded, which could enable future researchers to learn from the process to obtain the same methods and process, perhaps with similar results and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1999).

It is essential to ensure a significant contribution to conceptual, theoretical, practical, moral, or methodological significance (Tracy, 2010). Thus, this study would firstly contribute to theoretical knowledge through broadening our perspective of coping strategies in a qualitative manner in a South African HEI context. Through considering the procedural, situational, and cultural ethics of this research study and following the necessary ethical considerations, ethical clearance, consent, and researcher experience, quality data can be obtained. Therefore, the larger project received ethical clearance, and specific ethical considerations have been implemented, and extensive ethical workshops were undergone to ensure competency to conduct the research. Lastly, quality data can be ensured through a meaningful coherence with the literature, research questions, findings, and interpretations (Tracy, 2010). All criteria were utilised throughout the Mmogo-method®, as well as the individual interviews.

Reporting

A qualitative report was compiled of all results from the Mmogo-method® and the semi-structured interviews. This report was written with integrity to ensure the credibility thereof through the implementation of the abovementioned strategies, collection of quality data, and ethical guidelines followed (Chenail, 2011). This report categorises descriptive themes, sub-themes, definitions, and example quotations in line with the data collected from this research study.

FINDINGS

The main objective of the study is to explore the coping process/strategies of emerging adults millennials at an HEI delivery site, from a first-year students' perspective, through identifying different categories and linking this to literature to enhance the meaning thereof. Four main themes were identified. In an attempt to understand their coping strategies, the researcher aimed first to understand the stressful encounter students are faced with. Thereafter, the researcher was able to identify different coping resources.

Each main theme is divided into subthemes, which provides deeper insight and provides a more detailed description of the theme. Each theme is presented in a separate table, with the descriptive subthemes and a formulating meaning thereof. Table 2 below explores the first main theme that was explored.

Table 2

Summary of the nature and domain of stressor

Sub-themes	Associated topics	Formulated Meanings
The nature of stressors	Category of stressor: Main or sub-problem/stressor	Stressors were considered as main or sub-problems where the participant may express a stressor that was seemingly unrelated to a university stressor, yet still formed part of a challenge they are faced with or considered as the embedded reason to their stress.
	Proximity: Near vs. far	How far or near the stressor is perceived to be from the participant and how deeply it affects the participant on different levels (e.g., physical or emotional).
	Intensity	How intensely a stressor is perceived by the participant.
	Chronic/Acute	The frequency of the stressor.
	Internal/External	Participants' differentiation of a stressor in relation to the domains within which these stressors occurred.
Domains of stressors	Academic	Adjusting to the workload, volume, pace, and group work in academics at an HEI level and perceiving studies as challenging.
	University systems and processes	The systems, processes, procedures, financial constraints, expectations, and the way things are done at the university can enhance or elevate stress.
	Emerging adulthood and university transition	The phase and transition into university life, this includes becoming more independent, finding your own way, dealing with unfamiliarity and taking ownership of choices.
	Interpersonal	Stressors that can be interpersonal, social, or relationships that can occur from family, friends, relationships, or feeling alone.
	Intrapersonal	Strains that occur within a person which can amplify a stressor, such as trying to prove self to others and dealing with failure.

As can be seen in Table 2, stressful encounters are experienced in different ways by students, yet it appears in this study that students are faced with more chronic related stressors, which can endure

for a longer period, such as their student career. These stressors could be perceived as either internal to the student or external. Reportedly, more students seem to face stressors that come from inside themselves as from the external environment. Furthermore, these stressors and challenges experienced are reported to be very close or near to them with a higher intensity level. Since the data was generated from a student's experience reflecting on their challenges throughout their first year, more students focused on main problems as stressors and slightly less mentioned sub-problems they experienced. Therefore, the assumption can be made that more students in the current emerging adulthood development phase are exposed to multiple enduring stressors, which affects them deeply within and is experienced as highly demanding. This is clearly seen in the interview with the following participants.

"But the transition for me from school to university is really the volume of work that makes it really difficult, so having to adjust to the little hours of sleep you have and things like that. Yes, just doing engineering and doing nothing else, that's pretty tough as well." This participant is faced with a stressor or challenging situation, and it can be viewed as a chronic stressor, with high intensity that is lying close to them and affects the participant deeply. It can be noted in a different response as well.

"... I also think it's just an adjustment in regards to the tempo to which lectures work in comparison to what it was in school, but you can see the tempo growing from grade nine to grade ten and from grade ten to grade twelve, and so I think one tends to get used to it."

Whereas another response was, *"I don't think changing from school to university was such a large adjustment; I do think you obviously miss the familiarity when you are in high school. Everybody says that, but that's just something you have to get used to when you get here."* This indicates a sub-problem the participant is faced with and is not seen as a major theme in the participant story, with a lower intensity level and affected the participant less frequent than other stressors.

The stressors can also occur within different domains or areas of a student's life. The main themes that submerged that students seem to be highly challenged with are with academics and the emerging adulthood and transition to university.

With regard to academic stressors, the volume of work, group work, and not studying something you are interested in or want to study are major stressors for participants. The students specifically reported that the volume of work at university is far more than what they have previously experienced in high school, and it has been a major challenge to adjust to the volume and tempo thereof, as the following quotes demonstrate.

“University has a lot of work, always.”

“It is different because a high school student, I think, is someone who some teacher’s spoon feed, there are certain things that will appear on the question paper, here in varsity you have to study on your own.”

“Joh, dis baie meer werk, baie moeilik. Soos die werk is nie eintlik moeilik nie, dis lekker werk, maar dis moeiliker op `n manier en dus baie werk en die klasse.” [Yes, it is alot more work, very difficult. So the work is not really difficult, it is enjoyable work but in a way it is more difficut and more work in class].

Furthermore, emerging adulthood and transition has also been a domain that students reported to find stressful. This includes not having enough time, the unfamiliarity and uncertainty they are faced with at university, adjusting to this changing environment, and finding themselves.

“Um ja, I don’t see how you can adjust gradually from staying at your parent home for twelve years and under their care and come to university, and you have to do everything yourself.”

“I think the adaption to, as I said earlier, the unfamiliarity with what is going on at university, so you do tend to miss school and how little work you did at school, I miss that a lot.”

“But then what I experienced is that because my dad never let me do, allowed me to do what I wanted to do at school, this year it was really difficult because now I am on my own and now I have to make my own decisions, and I did do wrong stuff... this year made me realise who I really am, and who I was at school was really who my dad wanted me to be.”

“So, for me, when I began, um, it was kind of hard figuring out who I want to be, where I want to go.”

“There is not always a lot of time. I mean, when you are at school, school is until two, for instance, and then you have time for yourself. Then here, you are at university you have class from the morning until the night, and you don’t have time and then afterward supper, it is like a routine.”

When this stressful situation has been encountered, it is appraised according to the nature and domain thereof, and then only the student can assess their coping resources available in order to find a way forward. The coping resources, availability, and access thereof for students are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

The coping resources, availability, and access thereof for students

Sub-themes	Associated topics	Formulated Meanings
Availability and access to coping resources	Available/static/not used	A resource is identified to be available yet is not utilised in order to manage the stressor.
	Accessed/processed/used	A resource is available and accessed in order to cope with a stressor, which leads to a coping process/strategy.
Coping resources	Internal (inside a person)	Resources that are found within a person which could elevate stress, such as personal resources.
	External (outside of a person)	Resources that are found outside of a person, such as social support in terms of informational, instrumental, and emotional support.

Table 3 indicates that coping resources are available, but students choose to either access such resources or not utilise them. This can be either an internal or external resource that could assist in alleviating or managing the stressor. As for internal, it can be personal resources, which was reported as a major resource that students utilise in order to cope with challenges. Some examples include:

“Let me help myself so that I can do better.”

“Also, drawing energy that is positive.”

“I think it starts with yourself. Accepting that ... ok, I am this way, and I don't gel with...”

Other resources utilised are external resources, which include social support in order to manage challenges. Social support is reported as one of the largest themes from the data and can include emotional-, informational- or instrumental support, whereas support for emotional reasons is mentioned to alleviate more stress than others.

“I think what made it a lot easier for me coming to university is the fact that I live in an apartment with my brother so that feeling of homesickness was kind of avoided in a sense by the fact that he was there and that I was not in a hostel or something like that.”

“So, I think that made it that much easier, technology, it does wonders. Just being able to call my grandma or my mom also helps.”

“Ja, and then my boyfriend, he is very supportive.”

“Meestal my een vriendin, ons het nogal baie mekaar gehelp deur die jaar en goeters en baie lesse uit ons vriendskap uir geleer.” [Mostly my one friend, we helped each other alot through the year and we learned many lessons through our friendship.]

Although most students mention using social support for emotional reasons, some also reported utilising such support for instrumental reasons, in order to find assistance to manage the stressor they are faced with:

“Another thing that helped me is the fact that my brother did electrical engineering...he phoned me telling me, make sure you have a multi-meter with a... because that helps or make sure you have a diagram and highlight the wires as you connect them, so it really helps to have somebody that has already been through that and especially if it is my brother and to tell me to do this, and this, and this.”

“Let me ask my lecturer, let me go to facilitation, let me help myself so that I can do better.”

“Having a friend when I don't understand, I will ask them, can you please explain this to me, and then he will just explain it to me, so definitely that is nice to have a friend.”

When a coping resource is available to be used, a student either consciously or unconsciously starts choosing a coping strategy, which is supported by their available resources in the attempt to assist them in coping. Coping strategies students rely on to manage stressors are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Coping strategies students rely on to manage their stressors at university

Sub-themes	Associated topics	Formulated Meanings
Experiences and exposure of past stressors to find solutions	Utilising university and hostel resources	Utilising functions and systems of the university and hostels to manage a stressor such as R & O to help the adjustment to university.
	Learning from past experiences	Learning from previous experiences in a similar situation and using tried and tested methods to cope with the stressor
	Eliminating other activities	Cutting out on activities that are taking up most of your time to focus on the stressor.
	Time orientated	Managing time in order to relieve stress by making diary entries, lists, and plan-of-actions.
	Work harder	Just jumping in and working harder and not giving up when times get tough.

Table 4 Continued

Coping strategies students rely on to manage their stressors at university

	Solution-focused	Finding a proactive way of solving the problem.
	Revision/facilitation/group studying	Revising of work, going to facilitation, and group study, to elevate academic strain.
	Seeking informational support	Seeking and gaining more information in order to understand the stressor or situation.
	Seeking instrumental support	Seeking support for academic reasons, from lecturers, friends, and family in order to help with academics.
Supportive practices to balance emotions	Journaling	Journaling emotions in order to re-evaluate the situation and consider different perspectives.
	Motivation	Motivating self through keeping the goal in mind and staying positive in tough times.
	Surrounding yourself with positivity	Ensuring you surround yourself with positivity from friends and family.
	Living a balanced life	Maintaining a balanced lifestyle by eating healthy and sleeping enough in order to cope with stressors and challenges of life/academics.
	Religious practices and prayer	Practicing religious or spiritual believes in order to cope with the stressor/challenge.
	Seeking emotional support	Seeking emotional support from lecturers, friends, and family in order to help with a stressor.
Distancing, perspective, and understanding	Distractions	Distracting self and not dealing with the stressor such as smoking, watching series, or partying.
	Accepting fate	Acceptance of fate of the challenges or ignoring the stressor.

In Table 4, three main coping strategies are mentioned by students, which include the experiences and exposure to past stressors to find solutions, supportive practices to balance emotions, and distancing, perspective and understanding. Each participant manages their situation differently, and this is done through their appraisal of the situation or the nature of the stressor and the resources they have available. Some students had experience similar stressors before and were able to find a solution that assisted them in coping, in being more time-orientated and just simply working harder. Especially being more time-orientated through planning, scheduling, and diarising events, assignments, and timelines. The following are examples that participants mentioned:

“Sometimes, it is best if you have a list of things you need to do and start from the top and start doing it.”

“I’m a, have to write everything down in my diary kind of person.”

“I have to read and give myself a break, refresh my mind, and then I will go to another book and then another module, and then prepare myself again.”

While working harder is explained through facing challenges head-on and putting your head down and working even harder, to ensure that you push through and get the job done:

“It’s just, in general, it gave me a good scare, and then I started working harder, in that specific subjects that I struggled with, and it just paid off. And in the end, those subjects tend to be your best ones because of that scare.”

“Like I know that if you want to get something in life, it is not easy, you can’t take short ways... if you want to get out from that hole or whatever you are facing, you need to manage to go and follow your dreams as I did.”

“Well, it, uh, you just work harder to make sure that you get there, that’s what I think.”

“... that mentality of when things get tough you drop your head, and you start swinging, and now talking about it, it sounds like the mentality I had when things got tough I just started swinging and hoped it would be fine in the end, I just did it.”

Other students preferred to find a more supportive way to balance their emotions in an attempt to alleviate the stressful situation and being able to manage their stress. This specifically refers to finding the motivation to carry on and participating in religious practices and prayer.

“Then if the motivation is your thing, then get it, anything that is going to help you, your mindset to help you get up in the mornings help you, those are also my things, let’s put those motivations on the wall.”

“Secondly, you always need to keep on motivating yourself, knowing who you are, once you get here and people tell you other stuff about who you are and how you should be; otherwise you are going to lose yourself, and that is a disaster.”

“So self-motivation, I think that takes the negative things in your life and makes it positive.”

Whereas these statements were made about practicing religious and spiritual beliefs: *“Um I feel, if it wasn’t for getting down on your knees and being like okay I need help and I need God to be in my life right now, I don’t know how to explain it to you, I know it really helps me whenever I feel down or whenever I feel okay all my energy is gone then I know where to get it from.”*

“I like to go to church because it is where I find myself, I find peace for my mind, and I get to rest.”

“So far, the university has been great, especially the church...”

While other students prefer to rather avoid their stressors and challenges and would rather distance themselves. In the dataset, students reported to distract themselves when faced with a stressor in order to avoid the situation, as well as avoid coping therewith altogether.

“Soos my vriende het nogals baie gehelp, soos dit was nogals lekker gewees ek het baie uit gekom en my kop van alles afgehaal.” [Like my friends helped alot , like it was very fun , I went out alot and cleared my head from everything.]

“Ok, mainly at the moment now is me listening to music and like drawing more.”

This coping strategy should, therefore, not be mistaken with recovery strategies students implement in order to recover after the stressful situations or challenging tasks.

“I think it really helps is you have something you can do that doesn’t require brainpower....so, in general, a lot of people tend to watch series when they get to university, and I guess it’s the same as well, so it’s nice to have something like that, especially if you’ve been studying for three hours to just have something to take your mind off things, so that helps.”

“Okay, what I do is I like to journal; I’ve been through four books in one year.”

In some instances, re-appraisal also takes place after a coping strategy was chosen, where a student can re-evaluate their perceived stressor and choose a different strategy altogether. However, only when a strategy has been implemented, the effects thereof can be evaluated in relation to the encountered stressor, as the outcome can be either positive or negative. This is reported in Table 5.

Table 5

Effectiveness of coping strategies chosen by students at university

Sub-themes	Associated topics	Formulated Meanings
Sense of accomplishment and growth	Learning more about self and others	Learning more about self and how you interact with others through self-insight.
	Good thing at the end	A feeling, in hindsight, that the stressor was a good challenge and looking at the positive side thereof.
	Sense of accomplishments	A sense of accomplishment when a stressor has been managed and having peace of mind thereafter.
	Matured/grown-up	Growing up and maturing in order to take care of myself and becoming more independent.
	Better relationships	Forming a better relationship with friends and family, in the aftermath of the stressor.
	Proving them wrong	A sense of proving the people that doubted you wrong when you faced and persevered the challenge.
Learn from experiences & applying change	Helping others to not go through a similar situation	Learning from stressors to advise others how to cope in a similar situation.
	Managing a similar situation better in the future	Learning from experience to gain skills to handle a similar situation better in the future.
	Start saying, "No."	Learning when to say no to distractions, bad choices, and people.
	Negative emotions	The aftermath of a coping strategy results in a feeling of anger, irritability, grumpiness, and annoyance.
Supported transition	Making university adjustment easier	The challenge or stressor undergone made adjustments and transition to university easier.
	Increase academic knowledge	Gaining more academic knowledge through managing challenges.

Table 5 shows the outcomes mentioned after the implementation of a coping strategy and key topics are that it turned out to be a good thing at the end, growing up and becoming more mature, learning more about self and others, and having a sense of accomplishment in the aftermath, although experiencing negative emotions was also mentioned. Nevertheless, it seems that most students reported positive outcomes from their coping processes and mention they have learned more about themselves and others.

“One thing I came to realise from my first year to my second year...I’m a very serious person, and things need to be very formal, getting to know myself in terms of how much of an introvert I am and also learning patience.”

“I’m a very organised person, and she is not an organised person... don’t know ja, we are just very different from each other.”

“The University for me is very involved and multi-cultural and multi-racial and different languages and different people which is really nice because you get to know a lot of people who are different and you get to see how they work and how they are and like you try and incorporate that into who you are and try to blend with them.”

Becoming grown up and maturing was also mentioned repeatedly.

“Ek het baie meer volwasse geword kan ek sê. En soos ek het baie lesse geleër oor hoe om mense te hanteer en hoe om oor die weg te kom met mense en hoe om konflik op `n manier te hanteer en ek het ook geleër dat dit wat ek gedoen het, om goeters in te hou, nie meer werk nie, want soos dit alles hoop-op en toe het ek soos `n breakdown gehad.” [I became alot more mature I can say. And like I learned alot of lessons about how to handle people and how to handle conflict in a way and I also learned that what I have done, to keep stuff inside, does not work anymore, because everything builds up and then I had like a breakdown.]

“I’ve grown a lot. In my first year, I had to deal with a lot of responsibilities, more than you would have in school. And, uh, I’ve also learned, things are not always as it seems, and you have to make it for yourself.”

Whereas, a sense of accomplishment gave a clear achievement perspective to students when overcoming the challenges they were faced with and, in turn, helped them to identify strategies that could work in the future.

“So, I knew that this subject I have to work hard in, and in the end, it paid off.”

“Ja, because I have been through a lot when I was little, my parents were divorced at a young age, and I got a step-mom and step-dad, and everything and they also pressured me... I have come a long way, and I am happy with who I am now.”

Although all outcomes are not positive, some negative emotion was also reported to emerge from less effective coping strategies.

“When you sleep less, you are tired. Ja, I think the worst thing you tend to get very grumpy, and that eventually has an impact on how you treat people as well, and that leads to people thinking that you are just a miserable person in general, which is not great.”

“Uhm, the impact of it, I have to say. I don’t have the thrive to pass any tests or assignments even though I do.”

The findings clearly report on first-year students’ experiences and challenges at an HEI and the resources available to them in order to choose an appropriate coping strategy to, in turn, lead to an effective coping process. Therefore, it is very important for the university to understand where the process starts in order to assist by providing the necessary support to help a student choose the most effective strategies to manage their stressors.

DISCUSSION

The objective of this research study aimed to explore the coping process of emerging adults at an HEI delivery site, from first-year students’ perspectives. This is seen as an important contribution to the HEI system to adjust their’ perspectives of the current generation entering university and assist by adopting new techniques to manage the stressors associated with the university, which, in turn, could assist turnover retention of first-year students.

The discussion will focus on comparing the present findings to current literature. The findings made it clear that in order to understand the coping process, one first needs to understand the context wherein the participants function. This process is laid out in Figure 1.

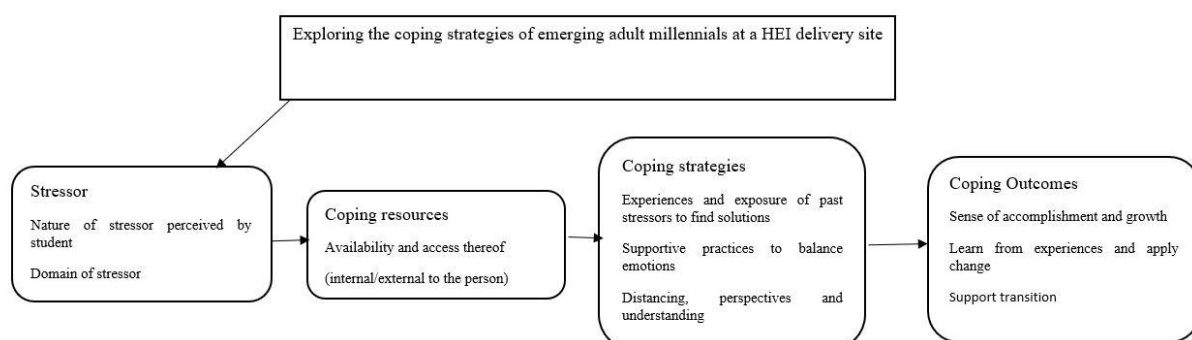


Figure 1

Graphical representation of the coping process of first-year emerging adults at an HEI delivery site.

Through a comprehensive exploration of the literature on the coping of emerging adults at an HEI, it is evident that some themes in literature correspond to those of the findings.

Stressors

The first level in Figure 1 illustrates that a stressor needs to be present for coping to take place, yet the nature of the perceived stressor might differ between individuals. Two sub-themes were identified from the data: the nature of the stressor and the domain of the stressor. The nature of the stressor was explained in five categories: main of sub-problem, acute or chronic, intensity, proximity, and internal/external. The data represents five main domains students experience challenges in, namely academic, university systems and processes, emerging adulthood and university transition; the interpersonal domain; and the intrapersonal domain.

This corresponds to previous findings and models (e.g., Folkman, 2011; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Goh, Sawang, & Cei, 2010). Additional stressors were identified by other studies, including examination stress (Robotham & Julian, 2006); time demands; financial pressures (Aherne, 2001); changes in sleeping and eating habits; new responsibilities; increased workload (Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999); meeting new people; career decisions, fear of failure; parental pressures (Schafer, 1996); and transition to university (Baglin, 2003; Hudd, Dumlao, Erdmann-Sager, Murray, Phan, Soukas, & Yokozuka, 2000; Radcliffe & Lester, 2003).

Contributions

Exploring each participant's reality and experiences at university show that they come from different backgrounds, have different expectations, aspirations, and challenges. The data identify some specific findings in the following domains: Academic as experiencing stress by not being able to study what they want and influenced their overall wellbeing and academic performance, mainly due to family pressure and expectations. In addition, the lack of information when starting university, such as not having all the necessary information on courses and created an alternative expectation thereof, might indicate a possible cause for student dropout. Another domain mentioned is university systems and processes on offer; students perceive the university to not pay attention to their needs by not addressing the concerns they raise through appropriate processes and complaint systems, leaving them feeling worthless. In addition, students' expectations when entering university is not in line with the reality due to the lack of information provided to students on entering. Some stressors associated with the interpersonal domain include feeling alone, experiencing family drama, which affects their studies, making new friends who make bad choices, and struggling to approach people at university. The intrapersonal was quite evident to cause some

challenges for students, struggling to adjust to their new reality and creates instability and uncertainty in their lives.

Coping Resources

Coping resources can be cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical resources available (Coetzee & Estherhuizen, 2010). Hammer, Grigsby, and Woods (1988) further describe coping resources as a psychological capacity inherent in a person when stressors are managed more effectively. Therefore, resources could either be internal, personal, or external to a person. Personal resources, as mentioned by Xanthopoulou et al. (2007), is optimism, mastery, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-determination, locus of control, and self-insight. External resources could be the skills, abilities, and talents students acquired to assist in adjustment and social support through instrumental-, informational- and emotional reasons to cope with a stressor. Social support, as a resource, can be utilised by students to seek assistance and support from others to manage a situation more effectively (Bouteyre, Maurel, & Bernaud, 2006).

Coping Strategies

Extensive research on coping strategies has been done throughout history, and many different researchers has commented, described and tabularised different coping strategies (Folkman, 1982; Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989; Lazarus, 2000; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Patry, Blanchard & Mask, 2007, Dewe, Cooper & Cooper, 2017). Some findings from the dataset correlate to previous research. Three main categories were described in the findings; experiences and exposure of past stressors to find solutions, supportive practices to balance emotions, and distancing, perspective, and understanding thereof, which could reflect problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and dysfunctional coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Carver et al., 1989; Endler & Parker, 1990).

Key identified strategies utilised by students and mentioned previously in the literature include eliminating other activities in order to focus on the stressor; being more time-orientated through planning and scheduling; being solution-oriented and task-driven; seeking more information to understand the stressor better; seeking instrumental support for academic reasons from lecturers, friends, family, and the university systems; getting the motivation to alleviate stress; surrounding yourself with positivity energy; seeking emotional support from friends and family; distractions from the stressor; accepting the fate of inability to change the situation; mentally disengaging from the stressor; and religious practices and prayer (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Folkman, 1982; Folkman, 2011; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989, Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Pargament,

Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011). Some coping strategies mentioned in the literature were not mentioned by participants, including resignation coping (Dewe, Cooper & Cooper, 2017); pro-active coping; reflective coping (Greenglass et al., 1999); collective coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004); and leisure coping (Patry, Blanchard, & Mask, 2007).

Contributions

Some coping strategies that emerged from the data is the experiences and exposure of past stressors to find solutions by learning from past experiences, as students who have been faced with similar situations or challenges could reuse the solutions previously identified as effective, such as being hard-working in school as well as in a university or previously staying in a hostel at school which made the adjustment to campus hostel easier. Another strategy from this category emerged, just work harder and do it. This refers to the characteristic to just push through by working even harder. Other student reports rather utilise the university or hostel system to manage stressors through facilitation, study groups, or hostel programmes which assisted in their adjustment to a university.

From the category supportive practices to balance emotions, strategies that emerged were journaling their emotions in order to re-evaluate their situation and gaining perspective over how to manage the challenges in a calm state, whereas other students' approach is to live a balanced lifestyle through eating healthy, exercising and getting enough sleep which assists coping with the challenges of life.

Coping Outcomes

The effectiveness of an implemented coping strategy is subjective in nature. Zeidner and Saklofshe (1996) describes eight goals that can be achieved, and any of them could be taken as a success in the coping process (including resolution of a stressful situation, reduction of physiological and biochemical reactions, reduction of psychological distress, normative social functioning, return to pre-stress activities, the wellbeing of self and others, maintaining positive self-esteem, and perceived effectiveness). Dewe, Cooper, and Cooper, (2017) explains the effectiveness of coping is the goodness-of-fit of the coping strategy, by looking at the process rather than the outcome and suggests the suitability of a coping strategy in relation to the stressor is perceived effective by the individual. Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) argue that the effectiveness of a coping outcome is the opportunity for personal control, and to gain control over their tasks will result in a more effective outcome.

The findings reported in this study showed different coping outcomes: the sense of accomplishment and growth; learning more about self and others, the challenge turning out to be a good thing at the

end, experiencing and expressing negative emotions resulting from managing stress, becoming grown-up and mature, maintaining better relationships, and sense of accomplishments by proving people who doubted them wrong. Students also report to learn from their experiences and applying such change; by helping others to not go through a similar situation, being able to manage such situations better in the future, and start saying no to bad choices. Another outcome is supporting transition by increasing your academic knowledge and making the adjustment too university easier. All outcomes are specific and subjective to the student; therefore, for each situation, challenge, or context, the effectiveness of the chosen coping strategy might differ in perceived effectiveness.

In conclusion, the overall aim of the research study was to explore the coping process of emerging adults at an HEI delivery site, from a first-year students' perspective as many HEI's can utilise this information to incorporate systems and measure to reduce student drop-out and enhance overall student well-being (Strage & Sorkhabi, 2016). Not only does this study provided literature on the student experiences and coping processes of emerging adults at an HEI delivery site, but in turn also contribute to the implementation of more effective management and resource structures within the HEI.

Limitations of the research study

This study has certain limitations. The sample impacts the representative nature of the study; focusing on only one delivery site of the HEI makes it challenging to generalise such findings across different HEIs. The sample could be more representative, since the present study sample population was predominately female, Afrikaans speaking individuals. Another limitation was that the quality of data recordings from the Mmogo method® was sometimes difficult soft, and it was difficult to hear what some respondents said. However, field notes were used to try and accommodate this limitation. Future research endeavours should ensure a representative sample is recruited, and special attention should be given to data recording and the quality thereof.

Recommendations

The recommendations this study contributes can be identified into three areas: for the individual, the HEI in South Africa, and for future research. The present study findings could inform first-year students of the current experiences and challenges students are faced with when going through emerging adulthood and transitioning to university. In addition, these findings could assist in creating an awareness of the coping process and being more pro-active in choosing and implementing certain coping strategies to yield a more effective outcome. For the HEI, the findings contribute to the knowledge of challenges emerging adults are faced with when adjusting to

university and possible resources and strategies students could implement to manage and cope with their stressors. This information can be utilised to create a support resource structure that would create awareness amongst students, provide possible resources, and assist in utilising these resources to manage their stressors. This could develop students with the necessary skills to adapt to the changing environment, which in turn could reduce student dropout and increase the completion rate of students. These learned skills could further assist students when moving over to the world of work and the adjustment to a new environment, thus reducing the unemployment rate and adding to South African's economic growth. Lastly, for future research, this study contributes to the literature of emerging adulthood, and coping in a qualitative context was specially conducted in a South African HEI context. Further recommendations could be to extend this study to various other delivery sites to be able to generalise the data across HEI's in South Africa or include senior pre-graduate or post-graduate students, from different backgrounds and cultures to enrich literature even further.

Author's note

This article findings are supported by the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Teaching and Learning at the North-West University; however, this work does not reflect any of the views and opinions of this funder and are those of the researcher.

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CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 CONCLUSION

The current research project focused on exploring the subjective experiences of first-year students as emerging adults by utilising different coping strategies to adjust to the changes they go through at an HEI delivery site. It further aimed to explore these experiences through identifying the nature of the stressors and the domain it functions in, the coping resources available, coping strategies employed, and the effectiveness of the coping outcome as perceived by the individual. This research study followed a qualitative approach (Maxwell, 2012) by applying an interpretive descriptive research strategy to enable the researcher to determine the perception and meaning the phenomena might have on the participants (Churchill & Wertz, 2001).

The sample consisted out of registered full-time first-year students ($N = 13$), at the applicable delivery site, studying towards an undergraduate degree, and had to have basic proficiency in English. In addition, these students were born between 1995-1998, which ensured they formed part of the current generation entering university. Data were collected through two methods, firstly the Mmogo-method® ($n = 9$) and followed up by semi-structured interviews with three participants from the Mmogo-method® and one additional voluntary participant was acquired for an interview ($n = 4$). The data was analysed by utilising thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and supported through the operating of ATLAS.ti version 8, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (Evers & Silver, 2014).

The first specific objective of this study was to conceptualise emerging adulthood and coping strategies according to literature.

Emerging adulthood

Extensive research by Arnett (2004; 2014; 2015) and Polanco-Roman, Danies, and Anglin (2016) states that emerging adulthood forms part of the development stages, between adolescence and becoming a young adult. This phase is described as explorative, unstable, and fluid, which ranges from the age of 18-25 yet could even extend further to the age of 29, depending on different environmental factors and cultural traditions (Arnett, 2004). Although individual experiences on education, work, beliefs, self-development, and relationships differ across national, cultural, or socioeconomic characteristics, it has been noted that emerging adulthood consists of similar features, and can be differentiated from other development phases into five key features (Arnett, 2004; 2015):

- *Identity exploration*: exploring different opportunities in life, love, and work before making enduring life choices and develop their identity, capabilities and limitations, while finding how they fit in society.
- *Instability*: enduring instability in love, work, and place of residence, while exploring their identity.
- *Self-focused*: more focused on self than obligations towards others until they reach a life-span low and change to another phase, this includes a more independent lifestyle focusing on themselves as they develop their knowledge, skills, and self-understanding until they need to make independent decisions in adulthood;
- *Feeling-in-between* in transition neither an adolescent nor adult, this is a subjective feeling of being in a transitional phase of life and not reaching it yet; and
- *Possibilities and optimism*: Hope flourishes, and individuals take on different opportunities to transform their lives to not be just merely made in the image of their parents but contribute independently towards who they are and their own futures.

Even though this term has been researched before, this concept is still entirely new and has only been investigated in the last decade or so, although it is becoming more prevalent (Arnett, 2004; Arnett, 2014; Arnett, 2015; Nelson, & Chen, 2007; Malina, Bouchard, & Bar-Or, 2004). The emerging adults of today would typically also be first-year students entering university and going through several adjustments. They are also faced with the general transitional pressures when moving again, exploring new things, and becoming more independent. They can, therefore, experience the transition to the educational system as quite stressful and this could, in turn, affect their integration and ultimately success in their education (Barefoot, 2005; Bojuwoye, 2002; Kuh, 2005; Turner & Thompson 2014; Willcoxson, Cotter, & Joy, 2011).

Coping

Extensive research on coping has been done through the years by various researchers (Coetzee, & Esterhuizen, 2010; Cooper, Dewe, & O'Driscoll, 2001; Dewe, Cooper, & Cooper, 2017; Folkman, 1982; Folkman, 2011; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 2000; Lazarus, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Schwarzer, & Schwarzer, 1996). Although it seems that most of these research lacks in the ability to conceptualise coping as subjectively situational of context (Folkman, 1982; Folkman, 2011; Lazarus & Folkman 1984), researchers define coping as a term to describe strategies, tactics, responses, cognitions, or behaviours that can be noticed either by introspection or by observation of others and it could include internal events or overt actions, that is appraised as taxing or exceeding a person's resources (Schwarzer & Schwarzer, 1996). However,

throughout this research study, coping has been instead conceptualised in a more contextual or situational manner to include an individuals' subjective circumstances in order to understand the coping process they have implemented. This resulted in the researcher looking at the stressor or situation first before the process could be explored since coping can only occur in the presence of a stressor

A stressful encounter could be evaluated by examining the nature of the stressor and the domain in which it functions. The nature of the stressor is the individual perceived appraisal of the situation to choose a coping strategy applicable to manage this stressful event. (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987). This stressor can be differentiated by means of intensity, proximity from the person, a chronic or acute stressor, a leading or sub-problem, and being perceived as internal, through introspection, or external from the person or situation (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In addition, the stressor can occur in a specific domain or area of life, such as academic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, financial, social, etc. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 2000). Therefore, by appraising the situation at hand and defining in which domain it falls, as well as the nature thereof, the individual can then calculate which course of action to take. This appraisal can be perceived as either irrelevant with no personal significance to them and that it could be ignored, benign-positive which could have a possible beneficial and/or desirable impact, or as stressful which could create a sense of harm/loss, threat or challenge (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Perrewe & Zellars, 1999). When appraisal has taken place, the individual evaluates their current coping resources and is able to choose an appropriate coping strategy to follow. Coping resources need to be available and accessed in order to utilise specific coping resources, and these resources are defined as psychological capacity inherent to a person, which enables them to manage stressors more effectively and experience fewer symptoms of the stressor (Hammer, Grigsby, & Woods, 1998) and can include cognitive resources, social resources, emotional resources, spiritual resources, or physical resources. When a resource is available, an appropriate strategy can be chosen. Coping strategies are different strategies individuals use to manage a stressful encounter and the accompanying distress associated therewith (Folkman, 2011). Extensive research has been done, and various coping strategies have been defined in the literature and are described in Table 1.

Table 1

Coping sub-categories: Problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance coping (Carver, Scheier & Wintraub, 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Category	Item	Description
Problem-focused coping	Planning	Thinking about how to cope with the stressor, coming up with action plans, a systematic way of addressing the problem.
	Suppression of competing activities	Putting other projects or activities to the side to avoid becoming distracted and focusing on the problem.
	Restraint	Waiting until an appropriate opportunity to act and not acting prematurely.
	Seeking social support for instrumental reasons	Seeking advice, assistance, and more information in order to solve the problem.
	Active coping	Actively finding solutions to address issues.
Emotion-focused coping	Seeking social support for emotional reasons	Getting moral support, sympathy, or understanding from others.
	Positive reinterpretation and growth	Managing distressed emotions rather than dealing with the stressor includes intrapsychic cognitive processes of meaning-making, searching for meaning that leads to the ideas or benefit-finding, and drawing attention to the concept of personal growth or change (Dewe, Cooper & Cooper, 2017).
	Humour	Finding humour in a stressful encounter to alleviate the negative impact.
	Acceptance	Accepting the situation and the individuals' inability to change the encounter, acceptance creates a sense of understanding of the situation and consequences thereof (Carver, 1997).
Avoidance coping	Behavioural disengagement	Reducing an individual's effort to deal with the stressor by giving up the attempt to attain goals, a sense of helplessness.
	Mental disengagement	Alternative activities to take the individual's mind off the problem, daydreaming, escaping through sleep, or immersion of TV.
	Denial	Denying the reality of the stressor and the refusal to believe the stressor exists.
	Tension-reduction	Usage of alcohol, drugs, or food abuse to relieve tension.

Table 1 continued

Coping sub-categories: Problem-focused, Emotion-focused, and Avoidance coping (Carver, Scheier & Wintraub, 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

	Focusing on the venting of emotions	Venting of emotional distress to others.
	Distractions	Engaging in substitute tasks as a distraction from the stressor.
	Self-isolation and social diversion	Isolating self from others, blaming self for the problem, or alternatively seeking out people to distract from the issue.

The second objective of the research study aimed to explore the coping process/strategies of emerging adults millennials at an HEI delivery site, from a first-year students' perspective. The findings were categorised according to four themes created from the data presented in Figure 1.

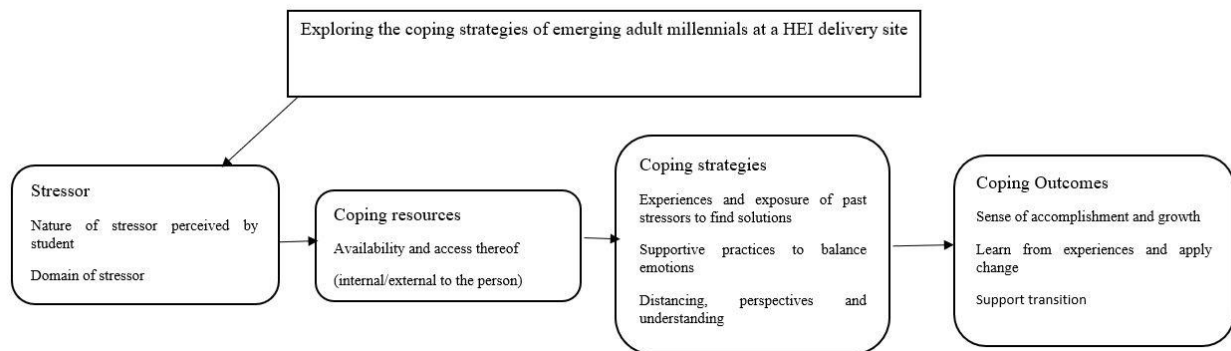


Figure 1

Graphical representation of the coping process of first-year emerging adults at an HEI delivery site.

Through a comprehensive literature search on coping of emerging adults in an HEI environment, it is evident that some themes from the current study findings correspond to those of literature, done across counties, in South Africa, and in some cases specifically at an HEI.

The first level representation in Figure 1 states that a stressor needs to be observed for coping with existing; however, the way it is perceived will differ from individual to individual. The findings suggest students understand the nature of stressors according to five categories. A stressor can be classified in the relation of being internal or external; is it the main problem or a sub-problem, proximity of the stressor; intensity of the stressor; and if the stressor is acute or chronic. Even though perspectives are personal and subjective in nature, similar explanations have emerged in

previous research by researchers such as Folkman and Moskowitz, (2000); Folkman, (2011); and Goh, Sawang and Cei, (2010). Therefore, it can be assumed that the way students appraise their stressors would influence their choice of coping strategy, but the domain in which the stressor function can also influence their decision. In the research from Robotham and Julian (2006), they further broaden the list to include; examination stress; time demands; financial pressures (Aherne, 2001); changes in sleeping and eating habits; new responsibilities; increased workload (Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999); meeting new people; career decisions, fear of failure; parental pressures (Schafer, 1996); and transition to university (Baglin, 2003; Hudd, Dumlao, Erdmann-Sager, Murray, Phan, Soukas, & Yokozuka, 2000; Radcliffe & Lester, 2003).

The findings of this study also showed five domains first-year students experience as challenging at an HEI delivery site, namely academic stressors, university systems, and processes on offer, emerging adulthood and university transition, interpersonal relationships, and intrapersonal strains. Some findings clearly support these findings, yet some unique results also submerged (Aherne, 2001; Baglin, 2003; Hudd et al., 2000; Radcliffe & Lester, 2003; Robotham & Julian, 2006; Ross et al., 1999; Schafer, 1996). By understanding the perceived stressor in more depth, assessing the coping resources naturally follows in the coping process.

Coping resources are described such as a psychological capacity inherent in a person, and thus when it is employed manage stressors more effectively (Hammer, Grigsby, & Woods, 1998), this can be cognitive (capabilities to maintain a positive sense of self-worth, a positive outlook, and optimism about life), social (individuals involved in social networks for support), emotional (individuals' acceptance and expression of emotions to alleviate stress), spiritual (guided by values derived from religious, family or cultural tradition), and physical resources (interacting with health-promoting behaviours to increase physical well-being) (Coetzee & Estherhuizen, 2010). These resources could be internal, personal resources (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007), or external, situational resources such as skills, abilities and talents students acquired and social support for informational-, instrumental-, or emotional reasons to manage stress (Bouteyre, Maurel, & Bernaud, 2006).

Through the availability of coping resources, a coping strategy can be chosen. Since coping has been researched extensively (Carver, Scheier & Wintraub, 1989; Dewe, Cooper & Cooper, 2017; Folkman, 1982; Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Lazarus, 2000; Patry, Blanchard & Mask, 2007) the findings of this research study discussed three main categories of coping: experiences and exposure of past stressors to find solutions, supportive practices to balancing emotions, and distancing, perspective, and understanding, which correlates to those discussed in Table 1 above. Key strategies identified in the literature and

correlates with the current findings are eliminating competing activities; being more time-orientated through planning and scheduling; being solution-oriented and task-driven; seeking more information to understand stressors; seeking instrumental support for academic reasons from lecturers, friends, family, and university systems; getting the motivation to alleviate stress; surrounding yourself with positivity; seeking emotional support from friends and family; distractions, avoidance and isolating oneself from the stressor; accepting the fate of the inability to change the stressor; mentally disengaging from the stressor; and religious practices and prayer to broaden perspective and balance emotions (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011).

Coping effectiveness is hard to evaluate as the process is subjective in nature, although some guidelines have been established by Dewe, Cooper, and Cooper, (2017); and Zeidner and Saklofshe (1996). Firstly, the effectiveness can be determined by the achievement on any of the following eight goals: the resolution of conflict or stressful situation; reduction of physiological and biochemical reactions; reduction of psychological distress; normative social functioning; return to pre-stress activities; the well-being of self and others; maintaining positive self-esteem; and perceived effectiveness (Zeidner & Saklofshe, 1996). Alternatively, the goodness-of-fit can also be implemented as the context is taken into consideration. This suggests that the most suitable strategy will be in relation to the context and the individual perceived effectiveness thereof (Dewe, Cooper & Cooper, 2017). Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) rather state that the effectiveness of coping is through the opportunity of personal control over their tasks. Therefore, the assumption could be made that the more control the student has over their situation, the more effective the outcome of the coping strategy will be. Findings mention some outcomes as a sense of accomplishment and growth through learning more about self and others. Stressors turned out to be a good thing at the end, experiencing and expressing negative emotions after coping, feeling more grown-up and mature, maintaining better relationships, feeling a sense of accomplishments, learning from experiences and applying such change by helping others to not go through a similar situation, being able to manage stressor better in the future, start saying no to bad choices, supporting transition by increasing academic knowledge, and making university adjustment easier.

The unique findings

Previous research mostly focused on an international context, specifically looking at the findings from a South African HEI, it became evident that these first-year students experience some unique challenges as emerging as adults transitioning into university. An interpretive descriptive qualitative research design was followed to understand their perspectives in a subjective way and develop their own meaning (Churchill & Wertz, 2001; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Doucet, Letourneau, & Stoppard,

2010). These findings suggest that, even though each student comes from a different background with different expectations, realities, and aspirations, some challenges they experience might be similar. Unique findings were experiences of stress from not studying what they want to; the lack of information they have of their studies which in turn does not meet up with their expectations; feeling the current university systems and process are not working and thus creating the feeling of being unheard by the university; moving away from home where their family and friends are; feeling alone at university, taking on new leadership roles; family drama interfering with academics, struggling to approach new people; making bad choices; as well as intrapersonal challenges through not adjusting to their new reality. These are clear stressors that fall part of the emerging adulthood phase and need to be addressed to ensure students do not become overwhelmed, pressured, or unstable, which could result in first years dropping out of university.

The second theme that gained more unique findings is the coping strategies first-year students use in emerging as adults and transitioning into university. Some interesting strategies, according to the findings were learning from previous experiences to reuse effective strategies; just working harder; utilising the university or hostel activities to manage their stressors through study groups, doing revision, facilitation, or orientation programmes; journaling emotions to gain more perspective; and living a balanced lifestyle through eating healthy, exercising and sleeping enough to cope with their challenges.

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to explore the coping process of emerging adults at an HEI delivery site, from a first-year students' perspective. As many HEI's can utilise this information to incorporate systems and measures to reduce student drop-out and enhance overall student well-being (Strage & Sorkhabi, 2016). Therefore, this study presented literature on coping and emerging adults at an HEI delivery site as well as some unique findings that can be utilised to implement more effective management and resource structures within the HEI.

3.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The first limitation of the research study was focusing on one HEI delivery site. This impacted the representative nature of the study and made it challenging to generalise such findings across different HEI's. Although the HEI delivery site is diverse, it lacks the dynamics and diversity of a sample from different delivery sites or universities. This could have resulted in more diverse data and findings. Therefore, expanding the study to other HEI delivery sites or even other HEI's will broaden this topic and result in a more generalised set of findings.

Secondly, the current sample population was predominately female, Afrikaans speaking individuals from similar faculties. The assumptions could, therefore, be made that a more representative sample would diversify the findings and contribute to the quality of data collected.

The third limitation for this study was the quality of data recordings from the Mmogo method®, since these recordings were sometimes too soft, and it was difficult to hear what some respondents said. However, field notes were used to try and accommodate this limitation. For future research, it should be addressed in using a quality recording device and moving closer to each participant when speaking.

The last limitation was the time-lapse between the stressful situation, the Mmogo-method® group session, and then to the follow-up interviews. This lapse in time gave the participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and re-appraise their encounters, which could have impacted their responses in the data-collection phase. Thus, for further research projects, the data collection methods should be conducted as close to each other as possible to avoid this phenomenon or re-appraisal of their encounters should be included and measured over time.

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.3.1 Recommendations for the individual

This study contributes certain recommendations towards first-year students by creating the awareness of challenges faced while emerging and adjusting to university while exploring different coping resources available to assist in managing these stressful encounters and recommending different interventions or strategies to solve the problem, reduce the stressor or manage the challenges experienced. By gaining this knowledge, it might assist students in adjusting to the changing environment and supporting the completion of their degrees.

In turn, this awareness could assist in reducing the occurrence of certain challenges due to the creation of awareness and prevention. Furthermore, the new skills and understanding of how they cope will develop them into more successful employees when entering the workforce.

3.3.2 Recommendations for the Higher Education Institution

The present study provides the HEI with the knowledge of challenges emerging adults are faced with when adjusting to university and possible resources and strategies students could implement to manage and cope with their stressors. Furthermore, the knowledge gained plays a vital part in student support systems. These support systems can be established to create awareness amongst

students of possible challenges the year, and their student careers could hold, assist them in identifying coping resources, utilising these resources through a coping strategy to manage these challenges, and evaluate which coping strategies are more effective in different situations.

The HEI forms a significant part of the country's economic, competitive stance. Therefore, assisting these students to gain the necessary knowledge and skills could affect the managing of the first-year drop out statistics and increase the number of students completing their degrees. These learned skills could further assist students when moving over to the world of work and the adjustment to a new environment, thus reducing the unemployment rate and adding to South African's economic growth.

3.3.3 Recommendations for future research

The findings of this research study can be incorporated into South African literature on the experiences for first-year students emerging as adults and their coping process, at an HEI delivery site. The literature could further inform the field of Industrial Psychology and other support practitioners and contribute to what students are experiencing as challenging, what resources they have available, how they manage these situations, and the effectiveness thereof.

This study could form the basis of further extensions on this study to various other delivery sites to be able to generalise the data across HEI's in South Africa or include senior pre-graduate or post-graduate students, from different backgrounds and cultures to enrich literature even further. These findings might create further insights that were not found in this research study and expand the future of research in South Africa.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Figure 2 Model of transactional coping

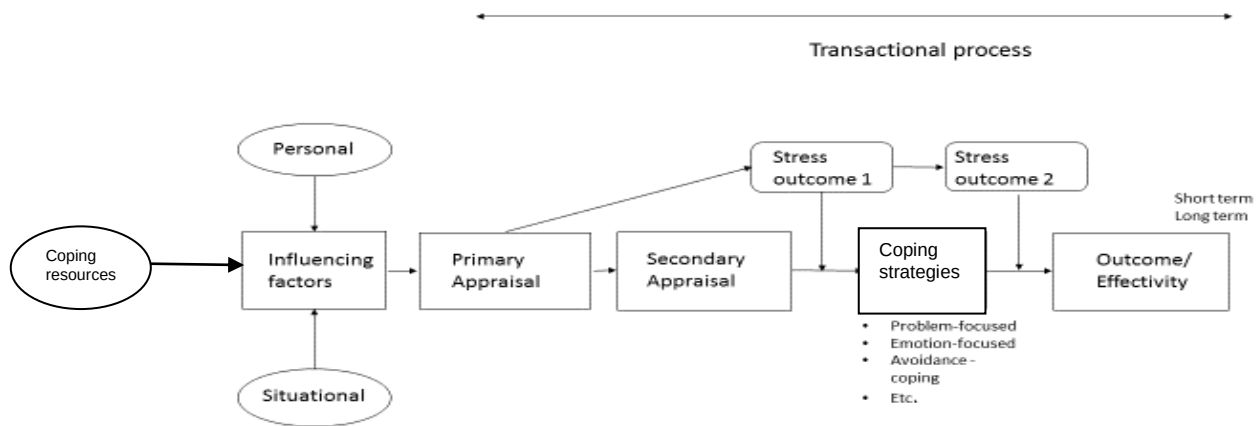


Figure 2

Model of transactional coping

Appendix B

Informed consent form



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear participant

You are hereby invited to partake in this study conducted by the StudyWell research programme at the North-West University.

Please take some time to read the following information on the research project, and ask the researcher any questions you may have concerning the project that might be unclear to you. Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. At no point will you be mistreated or negatively affected if you do not wish to participate. If you however choose to participate, it is very important that you do so voluntarily. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without reprisal or prejudice, even after you have agreed to partake. Below, you will find important information on the research project, the researchers involved in the project and information for participants who want to participate in this project.

1. PROJECT INFORMATION

Title of the project: Experiences and well-being of students at the North-West University: Developing and testing an integrated framework

Ethical approval number: NWU-HS-2014-0165

Principal researcher: Prof Karina Mostert

Address: North-West University, Faculty of Economic and Management Science, WorkWell Research Unit, Potchefstroom, 2531

Contact details: info@studywell.co.za

2. RESEARCHER QUALIFICATIONS

Karina Mostert is a Professor in Industrial Psychology. She obtained her PhD in Industrial Psychology in 2003 on the topic of employee burnout and work engagement in the South African Police Service and is a rated researcher (level C2) at the South African National Research Foundation. She primarily studies the psychological well-being of university students and focuses on student demands and resources, student burnout and engagement, student well-being and psychological resources that can assist students in coping with their university experience.

Vera Roos has been a senior research professor in the Africa Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Research (AUTHeR) at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus since 2013. Vera is a social gerontologist, trained as a clinical psychologist, and has a background in community psychology. She focuses on relational and collective well-being of older people and communities in

relation to contextual realities by eliciting strengths and competencies. Vera's theoretical approach, that the broader environment informs the continuous interactions between people, provided the background for the development of the Mmogo-method, a visual data-collection method. To date, she has published widely in peer-reviewed papers in national and international journals and contributed to chapters in textbooks. Vera is an NRF-rated scientist at level C1.

Lelanie Malan is an independent research psychologist that has worked on several projects, as well as consulting students with regard to their research needs. She completed her internship in research psychology at the Psychology department of the North-West University Potchefstroom campus in 2012 and registered as an independent research psychologist in 2014. She is also trained as a clinical psychologist and registered independently in January 2016. Her previous research experience includes publications of research papers, attending and presenting at international conferences, completing an internship at the Oxford University, assisting students with data analysis and managing projects. Lelanie is currently a senior lecturer at the Psychology department of the North-West University Potchefstroom campus and collaborates in research within the psychology department, as well as social work with a special interest in the well-being of older people and children.

Liesel Engelbrecht is a Master student in Industrial Psychologist at the North-West University. She is currently busy with her Mcom in Industrial Psychology, focusing on the coping strategies first year emerging adult millennials use at a higher educational delivery site.

1. PROJECT SUMMARY

The long-term aim of the StudyWell project is to develop a valid, reliable and cultural sensitive online analytical processing (OLAP) tool to empower the NWU to proactively monitor student adjustment, wellbeing and success. The project focuses on the validation of a theoretical framework in order to explore first-year student's experiences in terms of demands and resources, the validation and development of several cultural sensitive instruments within the framework in order to profile the entering status and adjustment processes of new first-year students and to determine important predictors of student well-being and success at the NWU. The project forms part of the broader framework of the Student Access, Retention, and Success framework of Prof Martin Oosthuizen's office. Information gained from this study will be presented to the University and relevant stakeholders in order for them to implement changes and ultimately to provide current and future students at the University with a rewarding first-year experience.

2. INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Who may participate? (Inclusion criteria)

You fit the inclusion criteria if you are a student of the NWU.

Who may not participate? (Exclusion criteria)

Anyone who recently experienced a traumatic incident.

Study approval

Ethical permission from the ethics committee of the North-West University was obtained (name of project: StudyWell: Student Well-Being and Success; Ethics number: NWU-HS-2014-0165).

What are the responsibilities of participants?

You will be expected to partake in a small group, where you will be presented with a basic question on your experiences as a university student, where after you will be expected to make a visual representation using the material provided (e.g. clay, sticks, and beads). You will be encouraged to participate in the discussions. Two sources of data will be obtained; visual data are obtained by means of photographs of the visual presentations, and textual data of the transcriptions of the discussions concerning the visual representations.

If you agree, you will be expected to attend a single semi-structured interview arranged at a time that is suitable and convenient for you. Interviews will approximately be an hour long (this may vary). You may ask about questions about uncertainties and concerns, and report any feelings of discomfort for which you will receive free counselling at the psychological services of the University.

Interview location

Your group session/interview will be conducted on the campus at which you are situated (exact locations will be provided in a timely manner).

Interpretation services

Interviews will be conducted in English, Afrikaans or Setswana. If you prefer any other language or you need to communicate with sign language, such interpretation services may be provided.

Please indicate your preference

☐

English

☐

Afrikaans

☐

Setswana

☐

Other, please specify: _____

What are the benefits of taking part in the research?

The direct benefits for you as a participant will be the opportunity to share your personal experiences of studying at a Higher Education Institution (HEI). You will also learn about other people's experiences which may confirm your experiences. You may also request counselling if necessary, which will be provided to you by the University.

An indirect benefit is that your involvement may aid the NWU to better understand the nature of its students' experiences in order to provide the necessary resources and assistance for you and students in the future.

What are the possible risks of taking part in the research?

You may experience some discomfort by sharing your experiences with the researchers and in a group context. If the need arise, a reflective or therapeutic session will be arranged by a trained professional. You will also be referred to student counselling services to assist you in any way you

How will risks be minimised or prevented?

The risks in participating in this study are minimal. In addition, safety measures will be in place to prevent any predetermined possible psychological or physical harm to study participants. Registered clinical psychologists will be on standby if you are in need of counselling services. These services are freely available to you. To protect your privacy, confidentiality and anonymity a selected interview room will be soundproof and secured. However, please take note that only partial confidentiality can be ensured since the data will be collected in a group setting. Group norms of respect will be introduced to treat the information shared in the group as confidential. Tape recorder data will immediately be encrypted and transferred to password protected clouds. Hereafter data on recorders will safely be erased.

Who will have access to the research data?

The researchers and interpreters (if needed) will be present during the group sessions/interviews. Members of the research team, including a co-coder and a peer researcher, will also have access to interview information. Please note that they will not have access to your identifying characteristics. All identifying data/information related to race, demographic details, age and ethnicity will be substituted with nicknames unrelated to your identifying characteristics when recorded data is transcribed by the researcher. Any identifiable information will be coded by a coding system. Nevertheless, all above mentioned individuals are obligated by law and their professional ethical guidelines not to disclose any information you share during an interview. Apart from these individuals, no information will be shared with anybody without explicit consent from the participant. Additionally, if you make use of counselling services, information shared within these sessions will not be disclosed to the researcher or any other relevant party of the NWU. Information will be safely stored for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Note: Research records might be inspected by the research ethics committee members if necessary. If you feel that your private research details have been exploited in any way, you are encouraged to report to the researcher who will then take legal action.

Will you be paid to participate in the study and are there costs involved?

You will not be paid to partake in this study. Refreshments will be available before the onset of the group sessions. There will be no personal costs involved if you choose to partake.

How will the study findings be communicated?

Study findings will be published as articles in scientific journals which you are allowed access to. Results will be reported in general with no identifying characteristics. The researcher will provide you with relevant information if you wish to access it.

If you have any other queries, you are welcome to contact the StudyWell research team (details provided above). Concerns and/or complaints may be reported to the Health Research Ethics Committees at the North-West University. A copy of the informed consent will be provided to you for personal record keeping purposes.

1. DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT

In signing this form I declare that I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to explore my experience as a registered student of the NWU. My participation will involve that I will assist in a data gathering process where I will visually represent my experience as a student at a HEI, using sticks, clay and beads and further participating in a group discussion and a semi-structured interview.

I understand that there are no anticipated risks associated with my participation in the study. I recognize that the results of the study may be published and that my personal particulars (identifying information) will not be revealed. The NWU will maintain confidentiality of all records, material and recordings. I have been informed that I will not be compensated for my participation.

I have been informed that any questions I may have concerning this research or my participation before or after my consent, will be answered by the researchers of this study. I am aware of the fact that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time of the research process, without penalty or loss of benefit to myself. I take note that discontinuing my participation will have to be indicated in written format. By signing this consent form, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights and remedies.

By signing below, I _____ agree to take part in a research study entitled: Experiences and well-being of students at the North-West University: Developing and testing an integrated framework.

I declare that I have read this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable. I have been provided with an opportunity to discuss any queries/uncertainties. I voluntarily take part in this study. I am aware that I may decline or withdraw at any time, without being penalised. I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if I or the researcher is of opinion that this will not be in my best interest. In such a case, my recorded data will be destroyed (not included in the study).

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 2016.

Signature of participant

Signature of witness

2. DECLARATION BY RESEARCHER

I (name) _____ declare that I thoroughly explained the information in this document to _____. I encouraged him/her to ask questions with regards to any uncertainties and took time to appropriately answer them. I am confident that he/she understands all aspects of the research as discussed above.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 2016.

Signature of researcher

Signature of witness



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Exploring the coping strategies of emerging adult millennials in a higher education institution delivery unit

The focus of this mini dissertation is on exploring the coping strategies of emerging adult millennials in a higher education institution delivery unit.

Chapter 1 will discuss the problem statement, followed by a discussion of the research objectives, relating to both the general objective and the specific objectives of this study. Thereafter the method will be discussed in detail and concluded with the chapter discussion.

South Africa's economy has taken several turns over the past several years. This is no surprise considering that a new political system is yet to settle at a steady pace (Doria, 2012). Some of the concerns South Africa's economy displays include low-growth and the middle-income trap, where people neither fall in the high- or low-income percentage of the population. These concerns are characterised by a lack of competition, unemployment, and unskilled workers in the current economy (National Planning Commission, 2012). In the National Development Plan it is indicated that South Africa's population is mostly young and less skilled, thus signalling their skills and knowledge can create a better future economy. The National Development Plan for 2030 (NRP, 2012) states explicitly that one of the main objectives is to educate and train unskilled workers to reduce unemployment and promote fair and equal work opportunities. This objective includes expanding skills through education and vocational training, to provide better education and to meet the demand for higher skills levels, which will make entry into the labour market easier and make labour mobility possible (NRP, 2012). It is, therefore, evident that South Africa is in need of improved tertiary educational outcomes. Education is in agreement that skills shortage poses a significant hindrance for South Africa's long-term economic growth potential (Roux, 2017). This is primarily the obligation of post-school systems, like universities, which are not well designed to meet the skills development needed by the youth or the economy (Cotterill for Higher Education, 2007).

South African higher education institutions (HEIs) are in the process of responding to economic and social inequalities, serving new demand orders, meeting national needs, and responding to local and international trends (CIBS, 2002). Consequently, there is an increase in pressure on HEIs to move into a more development-orientated focus (Doria, 2012). Universities are seen as a place where knowledge workers are produced by teaching undergraduate students and producing professionals, which is necessary for the economy to be more productive, competitive, and strive to become a knowledge-based economy in the 21st century (Hahs, 2006). Hahs (2006) states, however, that universities



(2015/375453/07)

Date: 14/03/2020

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter is to certify that I, Sarah Louise Cornelius, of Regcor Enterprises Pty Ltd, have completed the initial editing of the mini dissertation titled *Exploring the coping strategies of emerging adult millennials at a higher education institution delivery site* by Liesel Engelbrecht.

I have ten years of experience in the field, having worked on multiple doctorates. Currently, I am a member of the Professional Editor's Guild (PEG).

This has been an initial (first-time) edit and all recommendations and errors have been noted in the comments. Any changes or lack of corrections done to the document after editing is not a reflection of the editing services provided. Students are welcome to send the document for a further proofread before the final submission.

Kind Regards

Sarah Louise Cornelius

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Associate Member

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