

COPING STRATEGIES AMONG NON-WESTERN ADOLESCENTS

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Adolescents from a non-western background who are living in a western culture must commute between intellectual fellowships sharing different religions, values, rules and regulations as well as a varying measure of social control. The young meet one fellowship in the educational system; they meet another in the family and a third fellowship when they are with other young people. Some of the young ethnics meet a fourth fellowship when visiting their parents' country of origin. This commute between fellowships, which takes place in the very years when the adolescent is performing a difficult piece of work with his identity, emphasizes the significance of the ability to cope with a view to create coherence and meaning thus preventing thoughts and acts of self-harm.

A total of 1040 adolescents in Denmark, 526 from a western background (49.4%) and 514 from a non-western background (50.6%), completed a questionnaire bearing on self-harm and coping strategies. The largest non-western group of adolescents have a Turkish or Pakistani background.

Non-western adolescents make more use of religion, prayer, reading a sacred book, or meditation as coping strategies than do western ones. The role of their family is crucial to the ethnic way of life in Denmark. Adolescents from Muslim or Buddhist countries contribute to the conservation of the way of life their parents grew up with by choosing the fellowship as opposed to individualism.

Prevention of self-harm must involve knowledge of the coping strategies that are employed in the culture from which the individual adolescent originates.