Information and everyday hassles—From teens' eyes

Ya-Ling Lu, PhD
Assistant Professor
Department of Library and Information Science
School of Communication and Information
Rutgers University

Introduction

Adolescents encounter a multitude of challenges emerging in the context of their ongoing developmental process and shifting relationships within the family and community. Some of these challenges and concerns leave no lingering negative effects, but others may develop into major disabling problems and disorders. Facing these challenges, young people eventually have to decide, based on the knowledge and information they have, how or if they are going to deal or cope with these challenges. Adolescents' decision-making, information interaction (or lack of interaction), and coping, therefore, are intertwined. Research studies in young people's coping have been paying heavy attention to examining the treatments of severe mental or behavioral disorder. While these studies contribute to the understanding of important aspects of youth's mental health, the multi-facets of youth growth are often simplified to one single dimension of their experiences pertaining to clinical treatment. The non-clinical, daily-life concerns of adolescents are rarely addressed. How adolescents perceive these life concerns and how they make decisions and process information to deal or cope with these concerns in order to proceed in their lives still remained unclear.

This study is the second phase of a study (Lu, 2010) that examined the information behaviors of young people in coping with their everyday hassles. The participants of the first phase of the study were 5th- and 6th- grade students in a public school in Taiwan. The results of the first phase of the study showed that 5th- and 6th-grade students exhibited five major information behaviors in dealing with their everyday hassles: information seeking to solve a problem, information seeking to escape, information seeking for a transition, information seeking to change mood, and information avoidance. In the second phase of the study, the researcher turned to another research site, a middle school, for another age range of participants, 8th grade students, to study their information behaviors in similar contexts. One hundred and twenty 8th grade students participated in the second phase of the study. The goal of phase two was to replicate phase one study with different populations and to assess if different information behaviors exist among different age groups of young people.

In order to address the aforementioned issues, the following research questions guided the investigation.
1. How do these teens interact (or not interact) with information in this everyday, coping context?

2. What information behaviors do these teens exhibit in coping with their everyday hassles? In what ways are these behaviors similar to, or different from, the findings from phase one?

Literature review

As there has been relatively little writing and effort devoted directly to understanding the information seeking and coping of young people, not to mention, specifically, eighth-grade students in a daily-life context, this literature review depends largely upon studies and theories that are implicitly relevant. These studies provide the background to link together young people's coping, daily-life problems, and information behaviors. Concepts discussed in this study include Wilson's theory (2000) of "human information behavior," Savolainen's (1995) "everyday life information seeking" (ELIS), coping, and everyday hassles.

Method

Subjects and survey instruments

The sample consisted of 120 teens, including 65 girls and 55 boys, in eighth grade classrooms in a public middle school in an urban community in Taiwan.
In order to elicit young people's reports of everyday hassles and their coping-related information behaviors, this study employed a semi-structured journal adopted from Sorensen's (1990) coping research. The journal contained eight questions. The first four questions were taken from Sorensen's journal items (1993, p. 83), which were to elicit the participant's daily-life worries and how he or she coped with them. The first four questions also helped set up the context for the current study by asking the participant to describe the thing that upset him that day and what he did about it. The investigator of the present study designed and added questions five to eight in order to examine how young people interact or do not interact with information.

Data analysis

In order to explore how teens interact with information in the coping contexts, the investigator identified key words and phrases from participants' written responses and manually coded them in order to analyze factors that impact teens' information behaviors to cope with their everyday hassles.

Preliminary findings

The preliminary findings show that in dealing with their everyday hassles, 8th grade students in phase two study exhibited similar information behaviors as their younger counterparts in phase one study. Phase two study was able to replicate the same major information behaviors found in phase one study: information seeking to solve a problem, information seeking to escape, information seeking for a transition, information seeking to change mood, and information avoidance. It indicated that these information

behaviors can be used as a platform to develop an explanatory and possibly predictive framework for future studies.

References

Lu, Y.-L. (2010). Children's information seeking in coping with daily-life problems: An investigation of fifth- and sixth-grade students. *Library & Information Science Research 32*, 77-88.

Savolainen, R. (1995). Everyday life information seeking: Approaching information seeking in the context of 'Way of life.' *Library and Information Science Research, 17,* 259-294.

Sorensen, E. S. (1993). *Children's stress and coping: A family perspective*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Wilson, T. (2000). Human Information Behaviour. Information Science, 3(2), 49-55.