

# Assessing the Correlation between Demographics, Academic Stress and Coping Strategies of Filipino High School Students with Single-Parents

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**ABSTRACT.** Academic stress is a certain level of academic-related demands that exceed the students' adaptive capabilities. Related to this is coping strategies, which is a mindful effort to endure the stress. Thus, the descriptive-correlational research determined the associations among the demographic variables, the level of academic stress, and the extent of coping strategies. Academic Stress Scale and COPE Inventory standardized tests, were used among sixty seven Filipino high school students with single-parents of a Catholic school. The data were statistically analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson *r*, and Spearman rank correlation. As a whole, their academic stress is low with no significant relationship between academic level and single-parents' educational level. However, a moderate level of academic stress was found with significant relationship between sex and family monthly income. The overall coping strategies is great with significant relationship between family monthly income. However, there is no significant relationship between coping strategies and academic level,

sex, and single-parents' educational level. Finally, no significant relationship was found between academic stress and coping strategies. The study recommends designing an enhanced stress management program for the high school students.

## 1.0. Introduction

Single parenting has a major consequence on the child's mental, social, emotional, behavioral, financial, and psychological outcomes (Duke, 2000). It results from the separation in various ways, like the disease of one spouse who leaves the roles in a single parent or having children from wedlock (Salami & Alawode, 2000). In societies throughout the world, the family is considered important in supporting family members (Park, 2007). However, the lack of parent involvement in the lives of the children increases the possibility of being involved in problematic behaviors (Park, 2007).

On the other hand, stress is considered destructive in all aspects of life that transpires when trying to adjust to or deal with stress (Bernstein, 2008). According to Yumba (2008), stress is perceived differently and can be interpreted differently by individuals. Vermunt and Steensman (2005) have defined stress as the insight of mismatch between the external burden and a person's capability to satisfy these demands. Too much stress can increase psychological problems like despair, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide ideation (Bansal & Bhawe, 2006). Moreover, stress is considered part of students' life. It can affect the coping strategies of students by the requirements in academics. This is because academic tasks are always accomplished with stressful activities (Agolla & Ongori, 2009).

Relative to academic stress is coping strategies. Coping refers to the conscious effort to minimize, endure, or master the stress (Kronhe, 2002). Then, coping is a continually shifting mental and behavioral struggle to cope with demands that are assessed as burdening or beyond the person's capability (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Moreover, coping strategies have two main roles: handling the stress-causing problem and directing emotions linking to those stressors (Folkman & Lazarus, 1990).

Earlier research has shown that stress is growing day by day among higher education students (Robothan & Juian, 2006). According to Donaldson (2000), he stated that adolescents' most common stressors are related to school and social relationships. Concerning academic stress, there is much stress linked to studies, homework, tests, and other academic engagements (Porwal & Kumar, 2014). Relatively, it is a product of a broad range of concerns, including burden from tests and examinations burden, courses demanding submissions, and different educational systems, and thinking about plans upon education (Ramli, 2018).

One out of every ten students suffers significant distress related to studies. In India, 72% of students are unaware of how to deal with academic stress and its ill-effects (Kumar, 2013). Moreover, Usakli's (2013) study found that children with single parents have less assertion but more aggression in schools, which leads to poor academic performance than children with two parents. In the

Philippines, people keep on receiving compliments about how resilient they are because they can cope with very stressful situations (Tan, 2006). According to the Happy Planet Index, the country was ranked as the 20<sup>th</sup> happiest country in the world (Jeffrey, 2016). However, academic stress among students has long been a topic of research study in the previous years. Researchers have recognized various stressors like excessive assignments, unhealthy competition among class students, fear of failure in educational achievement, lack of pocket money, poor interpersonal relationships in class or lecturers, and family problems (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003). In the light of Catholic school in Antique, it has been observed that those students with single-parents are perceived as achievers academically and even have a strong sense of responsibility in their scholastic performance while others are less liked. On the other hand, many adolescents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have complexities coping and are demanding educational programs in schools to help prepare them to cope with such stressors (Freedenberg, 2004).

Researches have been conducted to examine the level and sources of stress among secondary school students (Akande, Olowonirejuaro, & Okwara- Kalu, 2014), academic stress among higher secondary students (Prabu, 2015), academic stress among higher secondary school students: a review (Ghatol, 2017), and stress level and coping strategies of college students (Kumar & Bhukar, 2013). However, there is a dearth of studies on stress levels and coping strategies among learners with single parents.

Hence, the study primarily assessed the level of academic stress and the extent of Filipino high school students' coping strategies in a Catholic school in Antique and their association with the demographics presented. Likewise, it determined whether academic stress and coping strategies are correlates.

## **2.0. Framework of the Study**

The paper theorized that academic stress is associated with coping strategies. This is anchored on the theory of Richard Lazarus's Transactional Theory, which asserts that stress is encountered when a person recognizes that the demands surpass the personal and social resources the individual can gather. This is termed the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. The individual perception of the psychological situation is a critical factor. According to Lazarus, stress can affect the person, specifically on the feeling of intimidation, vulnerability, and capacity to cope than on the stressful event itself. Folkman and Lazarus (1980) conceptualized coping in terms of a cognitive transaction between the individual and the environment in a distinct context. Hence, the transactional model looks at coping as process-oriented rather than trait-oriented.

The Theory of Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is a structure that highlights assessment to evaluate stressful events resulting in coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Moreover, the level of stress caused by internal factors, as a consequence of external stressors, depends on judgments of the circumstances, which includes a judgment about whether internal or external demands exceed resources and capacity to cope when demands exceed resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Central to the transactional model is the process of assessment. Individuals appraise the importance of an event for their well-being and assess the available resources to bring to the event (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping is thereby regarded as a progressive process that reveals the stressor, including appraisals and reappraisals. The transactional model highlights an attempt to manage stress, notwithstanding coping strategies' adaptability, providing a definite demarcation between coping strategies and the consequences of coping efforts.

Lazarus and Folkman suggested three coping strategies utilized by this study: emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, and avoidance-focused coping. Problem-focused coping tries to ascertain the stress-causing problem and then plan strategies to combat it. These strategies may include making a worklist to be accomplished. Emotion-focused coping deals with a variety of actions and movements to lower one's level of distress. This may be through talking to a confidant about the troubles experienced in a day, getting support and encouragement from a friend about a frustration, or going home and attempting to ignore something that is causing stress. Lastly, avoidance-focused coping deals with avoiding the situation and rejecting its existence. It also involves unplanned efforts to adapt to stressors by creating distance, escaping from the problem, or involving in different extensive activities to reduce stress.

### 3.0. Methods

The study employed a quantitative research design utilizing descriptive and correlational approaches. The descriptive approach described the level of academic stress and the extent of high school students' coping strategies. On the other hand, the correlational approach determined whether a relationship exists between the academic stress and coping strategies and students' demographics; and academic stress and their coping strategies.

The respondents of this study were 67 Filipino high school students with single-parents in a Catholic School in Antique for the school year 2019-2020 determined using stratified random sampling. The study employed two sets of standardized questionnaires. The Academic Stress Scale, developed by Rao (2012), was used to assess the level of academic stress. This is composed of 40 items. Another questionnaire is the COPE Inventory, with a 60-item self-report multi-dimensional inventory. It was developed by Carver (1989) to assess coping strategies. The data were treated and analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson  $r$ , and Spearman rank correlation.

On the other hand, the school administrator's permission was solicited to conduct the survey. Also, the participants were informed of the goal of the study. Their informed consent was obtained for their voluntary participation in the study. Furthermore, they were guaranteed full confidentiality. Also, it was assured of them that no traces of their identity would be revealed. The materials that contained the raw information derived from them were stored, protected, and disposed of by manual shredding after data processing within a given period.

### 4.0. Results and Discussion

#### Level of the academic stress of Filipino high school students

Generally, the findings in Tables 1A and 1B revealed that students exhibited a low level of academic stress ( $M=1.55$ ,  $SD=0.48$ ), which signifies that high school students of single-parents who responded to the study had a low level of academic stress and were more likely capable of performing academic tasks with a little amount of stress. This further means that students had less pressure in pursuing their education and were more willing to excel in difficult tasks knowing that they are capable of managing themselves under pressure.

When grouped according to demographics, high school students also showed low stress on academics regardless of academic level and single-parents educational level. Descriptively, senior high school ( $M=1.64$ ,  $SD=0.34$ ), female ( $M=1.67$ ,  $SD=0.47$ ), high income ( $M=1.73$ ,  $SD=0.44$ ), and elementary educational level ( $M=2.13$ ,  $SD= 0.04$ ) exhibited a higher means. Likewise, high school students who demonstrated a low level of academic stress in all areas except for fear of failure ( $M=1.75$ ,  $SD =0.60$ ) had a moderate level of stress. Moreover, in the areas of academic stress, it revealed that fear of failure is the highest source of stress. Fear of failure, high self-expectation, the fear of poor academic performance, the humiliation of inferiority, pressure from parents, and rivalry with peers were found to be the main sources of academic stress (Zhang, 2014).

**Table 1A.** Level of the academic stress of Filipino high school students

Variable	Academic Stress			Personal Inadequacy			Fear of Failure		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Academic Level									
JHS	1.54	0.51	LS	1.55	0.63	LS	1.76	0.62	MS
SHS	1.64	0.34	MS	1.66	0.51	MS	1.69	0.48	MS
Sex									
Male	1.43	0.47	LS	1.38	0.59	LS	1.53	0.56	LS
Female	1.67	0.47	MS	1.75	0.57	MS	1.95	0.56	MS
Family Monthly Income									
Low	1.47	0.49	LS	1.54	0.59	LS	1.64	0.61	MS
High	1.73	0.44	MS	1.64	0.66	MS	1.99	0.50	MS
Single Parent's Educational Attainment									
Elementary	2.13	0.04	MS	2.50	0.35	HS	1.79	0.51	MS
Secondary	1.49	0.43	LS	1.52	0.57	LS	1.69	0.61	MS
College	1.56	0.51	LS	1.55	0.61	LS	1.78	0.61	MS
<i>As a Whole</i>	<i>1.55</i>	<i>0.48</i>	<i>LS</i>	<i>1.57</i>	<i>0.61</i>	<i>LS</i>	<i>1.75</i>	<i>0.60</i>	<i>MS</i>

Note: HS=High stress, MS=Moderate Stress, LS=Low stress

**Table 1B.** Level of the academic stress of Filipino high school students

Variable	Interpersonal Difficulties w/ Teachers			Teaching Method			Inadequate Study Facilities		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Academic Level									
JHS	1.44	0.63	LS	1.53	0.59	LS	1.44	0.59	LS
SHS	1.41	0.55	LS	1.81	0.52	MS	1.62	0.26	MS
Sex									
Male	1.36	0.53	LS	1.52	0.60	LS	1.38	0.60	LS
Female	1.51	0.68	LS	1.62	0.58	MS	1.56	0.52	LS
Family Monthly Income									
Low	1.35	0.63	LS	1.49	0.57	LS	1.36	0.57	LS
High	1.64	0.52	MS	1.73	0.59	MS	1.70	0.48	MS
Single Parent's Educational Attainment									
Elementary	2.13	0.18	MS	2.19	0.62	MS	2.00	0.16	MS
Secondary	1.41	0.64	LS	1.51	0.45	LS	1.37	0.47	LS
College	1.42	0.60	LS	1.57	0.65	LS	1.50	0.61	LS
<i>As a Whole</i>	<i>1.44</i>	<i>0.61</i>	<i>LS</i>	<i>1.57</i>	<i>0.58</i>	<i>LS</i>	<i>1.47</i>	<i>0.56</i>	<i>LS</i>

Note: HS=High stress, MS=Moderate stress, LS=Low stress

Examining the academic level, senior students experienced a moderate level of stress. This is congruent with the findings of Akande, Olowonirejuaro, and Okwara- Kalu (2014) that in the modern world of secondary education, one would have anticipated a higher level of stress in terms of their academic performance. In terms of sex, both male and female students encountered academic stress. However, there was a difference in the mean values and mean percentage, and these were more in the female. It may be why female students aspire more about their future and want to become more professional, leading to academic stress. Possible explanations for female students experiencing higher stress levels could include women taking on the role of being the caretaker of the family (Stevenson & Harper, 2006)

Moreover, the high family income had a moderate level of academic stress. Meaning to say, they have a greater chance to expose themselves to varied activities and experiences inside and outside the school campus. Lastly, students of single-parents, whose educational level is elementary, demonstrated a moderate level of stress. This is congruence to Graetz's (2009) study that children from parents with low occupational status face many barriers in transiting from one stage of education to the next.

### **Extent of coping strategies Filipino high school students**

Generally, the findings in Table 2 revealed that students showed a high extent of coping strategies, which means that high school students with single-parents possessed a conscious effort to solve personal and interpersonal problems and see that the problems are minimized. Meaning to say, students with single-parents can manage their stress by looking for something good in the problem at hand and trying to set the stressful situation in a different light to make it more positive.

When grouped according to demographics, high school students also showed a high extent of coping strategies regardless of academic level, sex, family monthly income, and single-parents educational level. Descriptively, junior high school ( $M=2.72$ ,  $SD= 0.38$ ) had a higher ability to cope with the stressors. The result implied that parents' provision and support during junior years are apparent. Further, help students cope with stress. However, senior students perceive a lower ability to cope with the stressors. Apart from this, senior students, especially those away from home for the first time, experience much pressure to adapt to senior life. These implications are consonance to the study of Johnson, Batia, and Hauan (2008) that another category that evokes stress is a social adjustment, particularly adjusting to college life and separating from family and friends.

Moreover, females ( $M=2.70$ ,  $SD=0.37$ ) had a higher extent of coping than males. They employed the emotion-focused as their coping style. It is supported by the study of Matud (2004) that females undergo more emotional distress, and their coping style is more emotion-focused than that of males. However, male students used the avoidance-focused as their coping. It was observed that the female sought more social support, while the male sought more avoidance-focused strategies (Eschenbeck, Kohlmann, & Lohaus, 2007).

Furthermore, those with high family monthly income ( $M=2.89$ ,  $SD= 0.27$ ) had a great extent of coping. Meaning to say, if the family is gaining more, their coping towards the stressors is extensive. According to Yarcheski (2001), students who possess a rich repertoire of coping resources are likely to cope more successfully with stressors imposed by the school setting. This superior coping strategy is likely to be reflected in higher levels of satisfaction with life. Lastly, single-parents, whose educational level is secondary ( $M=2.72$ ,  $SD= 0.31$ ), had a great extent of coping. If the parents are employed, then the coping skills of a child will be at risk. It implies that a child's effective coping strategies must be coupled with an adequate support network that will lead to a better ability to manage stress.

As a whole, the emotion-focused strategy of coping with stress is predominantly used by students with than the problem-focused and avoidance-focused strategy. They attempt to reframe the problem to no longer evoke a negative emotional response and elicits less stress (Kausar, 2010).

**Table 2.** Extent of coping strategies of Filipino high school students

Variable	Coping Strategies			Problem			Emotion			Avoidance		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Academic Level												
Junior High School	2.72	0.38	GE	2.78	0.46	GE	2.95	0.46	GE	2.41	0.40	LE
Senior High School	2.59	0.31	GE	2.46	0.29	LE	2.88	0.36	GE	2.42	0.50	LE
Sex												
Male	2.69	0.37	GE	2.72	0.47	GE	2.86	0.43	GE	2.49	0.41	LE
Female	2.70	0.37	GE	2.76	0.43	GE	3.02	0.45	GE	2.34	0.40	LE
Family Monthly Income												
Low	2.61	0.37	GE	2.64	0.46	GE	2.85	0.46	GE	2.34	0.41	LE
High	2.89	0.27	GE	2.95	0.35	GE	3.15	0.33	GE	2.59	0.37	GE
Single Parent's Educational Level												
Elementary	2.54	0.25	GE	2.50	0.28	LE	2.80	0.35	GE	2.33	0.11	LE
Secondary	2.72	0.31	GE	2.78	0.44	GE	2.90	0.36	GE	2.46	0.36	LE
College	2.69	0.41	GE	2.72	0.46	GE	2.97	0.49	GE	2.39	0.44	LE
As a Whole	2.70	0.37	GE	2.74	0.45	GE	2.94	0.44	HE	2.41	0.41	LE

Note: LE=Low extent, GE=Great extent

**Relationship between demographics and academic stress**

Pearson r was used to determine the significant relationship between the academic level, sex, and family monthly income.

The findings in Table 3A shows that there was significant relationship between academic stress and sex [ $r(65)=0.252, p=0.040$ ], and family monthly income [ $r(65)=0.254, p=0.038$ ]. This showed that both males and females with high or low income could manage stress differently. However, levels of academic stress differed among male and female students, with female students being inclined to than their male counterparts (Misra & Mckean, 2000). Females are more predisposed to encounter a high level of stress due to their being sensitive than males. (Akande, Olowonirejuaro, & Okwara-Kalu, 2014). Meaning to say, family income plays an important role in the academic performance of students. Moreover, the support system of the Catholic school towards students' personal development, including managing stress, proved to be effective.

**Table 3A.** Relationship between the demographics and academic stress

Variable	r	df	p
Academic level	0.075	65	0.546
Sex	0.252*	65	0.040
Family monthly income	0.254*	65	0.038

Note: \*The correlation is significant when  $p \leq 0.05$ .

On the other hand, no significant relationship was found between academic stress and academic level [ $r(65)=0.075, p=0.546$ ]. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted, respectively. This finding is supported by Garrett's (2001) study that students have a unique cluster of stressful experiences or stressors. The experience of Catholic formation and guidance received in school was probably influential in communicating and translating the appropriate skills to effectively manage their academic stress

Spearman rank correlation was used to ascertain the significant relationship between academic stress and single-parents educational attainment.

Table 3B reveals no significant relationship between academic stress and the single parent's educational attainment [ $r(65)=0.04$ ,  $p=0.978$ ]. The result suggested that students could surpass academic demands, regardless of the literacy of parents. It also implies that Catholic education has communicated the value of equality and acceptance without a biased opinion. However, students would think their education very stressful if the parents would require high expectations. High expectations of parents for their children to obtain higher grades and achieve better is becoming a big burden that is unendurable for them to carry (Deb, 2015).

**Table 3B.** Relationship between the demographics and academic stress

Variable	$\rho$	df	p
Singe Parent's Educational Attainment	0.004	65	0.978

Note: \*The correlation is significant when  $p \leq 0.05$ .

**Relationship between demographics and coping strategies**

The data in Table 4A shows a significant relationship between coping and family monthly income [ $r(65)=0.360$ ,  $p=0.003$ ]. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This showed that both high and low family income could manage stress in diverse ways. The result of the study was supported by the findings that students have a varied cluster of stressful experiences resulting in different coping styles (Taylor, 2006; Park and Adler, 2003).

However, there was no significant relationship between coping and academic level [ $r(65)=-0.129$ ,  $p=0.298$ ] and sex [ $r(65)=0.019$ ,  $p=0.877$ ]. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted. Meaning to say, both junior and senior students can cope with the internal and external demands of stress.

**Table 4A.** Relationship between the demographics and coping strategies

Variable	r	df	p
Academic Level	-0.129	65	0.298
Sex	0.019	65	0.877
Family Monthly Income	0.360*	65	0.003

Note: \*The correlation is significant when  $p \leq 0.05$ .

On the other hand, the Spearman rank correlation was used to determine the significant relationship between academic stress and single-parents educational attainment.

Table 4B confirms no significant relationship between coping and single parent's educational attainment [ $\rho(65)=-0.056$ ,  $p=0.654$ ]. The result implied that either high or low status is not a determinant to gain a high level of stress. Also, whether or not the family income is enough will not hinder them from accomplishing their educational goals. Further, this affirms the study of Perino (2007), which revealed that senior high school students have a moderate academic stress level.

**Table 4B.** Relationship between the demographics and coping strategies

Variable	$\rho$	df	p
Singe Parent's Educational Attainment	0.056	65	0.654

Note: \*The correlation is significant when  $p \leq 0.05$ .

**Relationship between academic stress and coping strategies**

The data in Table 5 shows no significant relationship between academic stress and coping [ $r(65)=-0.209$ ,  $p=0.818$ ]; therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. If coping is ineffective, it is not an indicator that the level of stress is high; moreover, when coping is effective, it is not a determinant that the level of stress is low. The empirical evidence has emphasized that the experience of being a student provides a context of coping with a wide range of academic stress (Pierceall & Keim, 2007).

The theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) about the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping was accepted. However, the result revealed that academic stress showed no correlation with coping strategies. Besides, academic stress is just one of the stressors or sources of stress that threatens to disrupt students' daily functioning that caused them to make adjustments. Moreover, the support for the model comes from students experiencing stress, their interaction between stressors, and their emotional response to fulfill the demands already supported the framework of the study.

Overall, the theoretical assumption of the paper, which states that academic stress relates to coping strategies, was accepted. Besides, partial support for the model came from students reporting using various cognitive and behavioral coping strategies and experiencing stress subjectively. It is stated that when faced with demands or pressure to adapt or change, people cognitively appraise their resources, coping skills, and ability to respond to demands of the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

**Table 5.** Relationship between the academic stress and coping strategy

Variable	r	df	p
Academic Stress x Coping	-0.209	65	0.818

Note: \*The correlation is significant when  $p \leq 0.05$ .

### 5.0. Conclusion

Filipino high School students with single-parents generally had a low level of academic stress. Their extent of coping is great that it can influence the patterns of positive growth and development. The level of academic stress of high school students is not correlated to the extent of their coping strategies. Their low level of stress and a great extent of coping indicate their competencies and capabilities to accomplish and perform specific tasks set for them efficiently and successfully.

Having a low level of academic stress and a great extent of coping significantly are good indicators of school achievement. However, it may be better if added by external elements such as social support to offer a hand for accomplishing a specific task or outcome. It may result in a greater and stronger force that will direct behavior towards a goal.

Moreover, teachers' role as prime movers can help develop, build, and enrich students' academic-related tasks.

Lastly, parents' active participation in any school-related activities and monitoring students' status adds to the successes that the students may experience, especially in attaining holistic transformation.

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