

Stress: Its Causes, Effects, And The Coping Mechanisms Among Bachelor Of Science In Social Work Students In A Philippine University

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Abstract

The causes, levels of stress, and coping mechanisms vary. The study of Social Work course is basically a rigorous one as it is designed to prepare students for the actual demands in the world of work, specifically on social issues and problems and on community organizing. This study sought to determine the causes of stress, the effects of stress, and the stress coping mechanisms of Bachelor of Science in Social Work students in the Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City. It tested some assumptions using the descriptive survey method with 54 respondents. Quizzes/examinations, school requirements/projects and recitations were the most common stressors. Sleepless nights was the common effects of stress. There was disparity on the causes and effects of stress between the male and female respondents. Praying to God was the common stress coping mechanism. No disparity was observed between the male and female coping mechanisms.

Keywords: *Stress, Causes of stress, Effects of Stress, Coping mechanism.*

Introduction

Stress affects people from all walks of life regardless of age, gender, civil status, political affiliation, religious belief, economic status and profession. It affects decision-makers such as the politician, the manager, the priest or pastor, the employee, the housewife, the student, the out-of-school-youths, the driver, and even the jobless. Stress is found everywhere, that is, at home, with friends, in the office, in school, in the classroom. It is just around the corner. It simply cannot be avoided because it is part of being human. In fact, a lot of people experience stress every day. It could be brought about by many factors. The causes and levels of stress vary from one person to the other. No person is free from stress, regardless of how privileged, reasonable, clever, and intelligent he may be. Every person will be challenged at times by frustrations, losses, changes and conflicts. To understand one's stress, Blona (2005) pointed out that one needs to know what it is and its causes, in order to cope with it well. He defined stress as any event or circumstance that strains or exceeds an individual ability to cope. Ellison (1990) considered stress as a biochemical response by the body to a threatening situation. The school is one place where a lot of people converge on a regular basis. It is a fact that when people come together, stress is bound to happen one way or the other. The Administration may be stressed with the low turn-out of enrollment or the need to generate more funds to finance important capital outlays. The causes of stress for teachers vary, such as lack of preparation, family and financial problems, absentee and, sub-par students, among others. Students also experience their own stressors. The common causes of their stress include their academic subjects, requirements and projects, oral and written examinations, announced or unannounced quizzes and graded recitations, finances, issues with parents or guardians, love life, their professors and instructors, and many more.

Blona (2005) claims that students experience stress since some are trying to cope up with the demands of adapting to a new living environment, new peers, academic pressure, and sexual concerns. Being in college can also put financial stress on the students and their families. These situations can leave them with trembling hands, tense muscles, migraine, headache, and multiple other symptoms of stress. These can contribute to a host of chronic diseases ranging from hypertension to peptic ulcers that can predispose them to premature disability and even death.

Stressors are demands made by the internal or external environment that upset the balance of a person, thus affecting the physical and psychological well-being of the person and thus would require appropriate action if one is to restore that balance. At one point stress was considered to be a transactional phenomenon dependent on the meaning of the stimulus to the perceiver.

Thus, stress is not an ordinary thing that may be set aside and ignored. Giving utmost attention to it from the very start of the symptoms is necessary and taking proper action is a must to avoid its worst effects.

The Leyte Normal University (LNU) is a state university in the Philippines. The university has twenty (20) of its academic programs accredited by the AACCUP. It was proclaimed by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) as Center of Excellence for Teacher Education. As a leading state university, it was identified as the CHED Program Cluster Implementer for Social Science and Graduate School Research. It has also been tapped as the Department of Education Center of Training.

To maintain its academic standing, LNU aims to attain its mission and vision by upgrading and maintaining its standards as Center of Excellence (COE), and provide an environment conducive to serious study and research as well as tolerance, openness, and respect for ideas and opinion of others (Student Handbook, 2001).

To achieve these, LNU would time and again review and upgrade its curriculum and require dedication, focus, and the adaption of new teaching strategies from its professors. The students are likewise expected to exert their best effort and perform above their own expectations to survive university life as the academic requirements, projects and other assignments are so numerous and at times almost impossible to accomplish. All these can cause stress on a student.

This study attempted to determine the causes of stress, the effects of stress, and the stress coping mechanisms of students in the Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, particularly those taking-up Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW). This sought to answer the profile of the student respondents in terms of gender, age, skills/talents, civil status, weekly allowance, and location of house where they reside. It also tested assumptions that there is disparity in the causes of stress, the effects of stress, and the stress coping mechanisms between the male and female Social Work students. The BSSW course is considered the toughest in the university as they implement a very strict policy on elimination. The rigid practice is not without bases as the Social Work unit strive to maintain its lofty standing in the national board examinations where the unit has successfully produced successive 100% passing rate. This achievement has brought pride to the university as the top school on Social Work in the country.

Data gathered from this study will form part of the data base of the university. These will provide guidance counselors, teachers, and class advisers a better understanding of students and guide them to respond accordingly when problems with students occur.

This study used Cooley's "Symbolic Interaction Theory" as adapted by Basibas (2000), and Sevilla's (1988) "General Adaptation Syndrome."

The Symbolic Interaction Theory claims that individuals are capable of creating solutions to their own problems. It adheres that the "self" is influenced and shaped by social processes, in this instance "stress," and the capacity to symbolize. Human action is caused by complex interaction between and within individuals. Dynamic social activities take place among persons and they act according to how they define this situation. Applied to this study, it means that as everyone has the ability to find ways and means to handle stress, thus, students can cope up with the stress they encounter.

Sevilla developed a concept of general adaptation syndrome which pertains to the physiological process that develops when an organism is exposed to stress. He assumes that the body reacts to stress in three successive stages, namely: an alarm reaction stage; the stage of resistance, and finally; the stage of exhaustion.

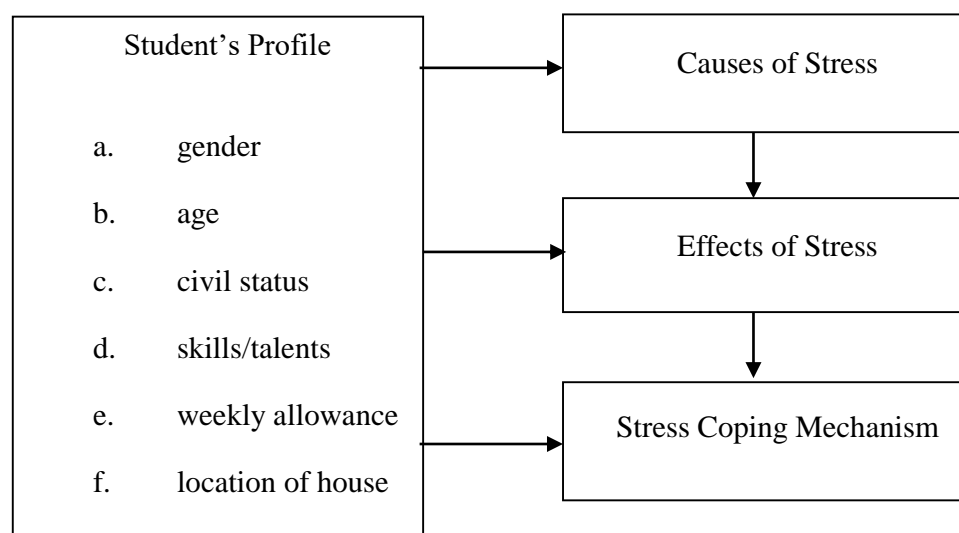
The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is a basis for evaluating the processes of coping with stressful events. Stressful experiences are interpreted as person-environment transactions. These transactions depend on the impact of the external stressors. The dual approach in appreciating the stressor involves firstly, through the person's appraisal of the stressor, and secondly, on the social and cultural resources at his/her disposal.

In this study, when faced with a stressor, a student evaluates the potential threat (primary appraisal). Primary appraisal is a student's judgment about the significance of an event as stressful, positive, controllable, challenging or irrelevant. Facing a stressor, the second appraisal follows, which is an assessment of student's coping resources and options. Secondary appraisals address what one can do about the situation. Actual coping efforts aimed at regulation of the problem give rise to outcomes of the coping process.

To establish focus for the study, it was delimited to causes of stress, effects of stress, and the stress coping mechanisms as experienced by students of the Leyte Normal University (LNU). The student-respondents were limited to the Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) students enrolled during the 2nd Semester of School Year 2012-2013.

Causes of stress are called stressors. It is an agent or condition capable of producing stress or something that initiates a stress response; it can be people, objects, places or events. These are outside forces that place unusual demands on a person's body or mind. Modern life exposes people to many stressors. Some physical stressors remain, including natural disasters, illness, and noise. Certain life experiences, such as the death of a loved one, are major stressors. Day-to-day problems, such as burning toast, taking rest, or feeling rushed, may also be stressful.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study



People need not experience events directly to feel stress. Television, newspapers, and other means of mass communication flood people with information about upsetting occurrences throughout the world. People can also imagine future misfortunes and regret past failures.

Experts consider modern life particularly stressful for children and families. Not all stressors affect everyone in the same manner. In a particular situation, one person may remain quite calm while another person displays many signs of stress. The difference between the two people may be that the first person feels in control of the

situation and views it as a challenge and is committed to overcome it. The second person does not feel in control of the situation, is threatened by it, and only wants to avoid coping with it.

The immediate effects of stress include an increase in heart rate blood pressure, dilation of the pupils, and an increase flow of blood to the muscles. Long term effects can be heart diseases, depressions, and migraine headache. People who are aggressive and who easily get angry are most likely to develop these problems.

Duque (2007) cited common effects of stress. These are insomnia, headaches, backaches, constipation, diarrhea, high blood pressure, heart disease, depression and alcohol, tobacco or drug use. He suggested doing the following: 1) After seeing the doctor, share your treatment plan with people close to you. Talk with friends and relatives and explain what you are going through; 2) If your doctor prescribed medication take it exactly the way it is prescribed. Do not stop taking your medication until you doctor tells you to stop doing so; 3) Keep all follow-up appointments with your doctor; 4) Remember that it may take some time to start feeling better; 5) If you experience side effects from any medication, tell your doctor; and 6) Seek professional counseling. If your methods of coping stress are not contributing to your greater emotional and physical health, it is time to find healthier ones. There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. You can either change the situation or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose, it is helpful to think of the four A's: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept. Since everyone has unique response to stress, there is no "one size fits all" solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

Salvacion (2004) studied the stress profile of students in the College of Dentistry of the University of the Philippines, Manila. The study involved 149 dentistry student-respondents. Academic stressors like examinations and grades, fully loaded days, difficulty in completing clinical requirements, and fear of getting delayed topped the identified stressors. Academic factors were stressful in the first 3 year levels. Academic stress peaked during the sophomore year. No significant differences in rankings were observed between genders. There was undeniable similarity in the general stress profile of the different year levels. Common methods of coping employed by students include crying, praying, talking, watching movies, and listening to music. Stress makes or breaks a person. It is like a two-edged sword which can either motivate and stimulate a student to peak performance or reduce the student to ineffectiveness.

Grande (2006) used a descriptive research approach in studying the stress and coping mechanism of college freshmen of Southville International School and Colleges. It involved 201 student-respondents. The student-respondents experienced high perceived stress. The identified main stressors were academics. The student-respondents used positive stress coping mechanism. The perceived stress and coping mechanisms of the student-respondents were independent of their profile.

In this study, the researcher used the descriptive survey method aimed at coming-up with a base line data on the causes of stress among students taking Information Technology, the effects of stress on them, and the coping mechanism that they employ to overcome their stress.

This study was conducted in the College of Arts and Sciences, Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City. The college exercises direct supervision over the Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) course.

The BSSW course had a total of 130 students for School Year 2012-2013. Sixty two (62) were in first year, twenty three (23) in the second year, twenty three (23) in the third year, and twenty two (22) fourth year students. Fifty four (54) students prorated from all year levels were identified respondents of this study.

The research instrument is divided into four (4) parts. Part I required the student-respondents to give their profile in terms of gender, age, skills/talents, civil status, weekly allowance, and location of house where they reside. Part II was a 20-item checklist of pre-identified causes of stress commonly met by students. Each item had five (5) options, to wit: Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, and Never. Part III was a 20-item checklist of pre-identified effects of stress commonly experienced by students. Each item had five (5) options, to wit: Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, and Never. Part IV was a 20-item checklist of pre-identified mechanisms that

students usually resort to in trying to cope with their stress. Each item had five (5) options, to wit: Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, and Never.

The researcher downloaded the list of Social Work students from the on-line module of the university. Using the simple random sampling method, the researcher identified the students who would be made respondents in this study. The questionnaire was fielded to each student-respondent with the help of the Chair of the BSSW Unit. The researcher personally fielded, retrieved the questionnaires, tabulated the results and subjected the data to statistical treatment.

Results and Discussion

Out of fifty-four (54) student respondents, 5 or 9.26% were male while 49 or 90.74% were female taken from a total population of 130 students where there are only 15 males to 115 females. The 5 male student-respondents is 33.33% of its total male population while the 49 female student-respondents is 42.6% from the total female population. The data manifest that the BSSW course is predominantly taken by female.

Of the fifty-four (54) student-respondents 35 or 64.81% were aged 17-18 years old. Some 14 or 25.93% were 19-20 years old. Another 4 or 7.44% were 16 years old and below. Only 1 or 1.85% was in the 21-22 years old age bracket. The data imply that the students taking BSSW are within the age bracket for college students and are presumed to be mature enough to handle the responsibilities of a college student.

Twenty eight (28) or 51.85% of the student-respondents had skills/talents in dancing while 25 or 46.30% were into singing. Twelve (12) or 22.22% play musical instruments while 9 or 16.67% play sports. Six (6) or 11.11% respondents were equally into acting and painting/drawing/sketching while 5 or 9.26% has skills/talent in literary arts. It can be deduced that most of the student-respondents are musically inclined. All the student-respondents were single.

Seventeen (17) or 31.48% of the student-respondents had P501.00 - above weekly allowance. Fifteen (15) or 27.78% enjoyed P451.00 – P500.00 weekly allowance, another 3 or 3.70% received P401.00-450.00 weekly. On the extreme 3 or 5.56% only received a measly P50.00-below allowance every week and 4 or 7.41% had P51.00-P100.00 weekly allowance. It can be inferred that though a good number of the student-respondents enjoy a reasonable weekly allowance there are those who are financially hard-pressed considering the urban location of the school.

Thirty-one (31) or 57.41% of the student-respondents are residing in the city proper and town proper and another 13 or 24.07% are residing in barangays along the National Road. Only 6 or 11.11% come from remote barangays, while 2 or 3.70% reside in a hillside and another 2 or 3.70% from a barangay along the seashore. It implies that many of the student-respondents have access to transportation and can easily attend classes and other school activities without much difficulty.

The common causes of stress among students taking BSSW are presented in Table 1. The data show that the male student-respondents considered 3 items, namely quizzes/examinations, school requirement/projects, and recitations as their most common causes of stress with a mean of 5.0 interpreted as Always while the female student-respondents identified quizzes/examinations as their most common cause of stress with a mean of 4.3 interpreted as Often. Both male and female student-respondents identified flag ceremony as their least cause of stress with a mean of 1.0 interpreted as Never for the male and with a mean of 1.9 interpreted as Seldom for the female student-respondents.

TABLE 1
CAUSES OF STRESS

CAUSES OF STRESS		Male Respondents				Female Respondents			
		N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation
1	Quizzes/Examinations	5	5.0	2	Always	49	4.3	1	Often
2	Assignments/homework	5	4.8	5	Always	49	3.4	8.5	Sometimes
3	School requirements/projects	5	5.0	2	Always	49	4.1	2	Often
4	Recitations	5	5.0	2	Always	49	4.0	3	Often
5	Practicum/demonstration	5	4.8	5	Always	49	3.6	5.5	Often
6	Presentation of dances, songs, speech, etc...	5	2.6	12	Sometimes	49	3.2	11	Sometimes
7	Family Problems	5	1.8	16	Seldom	49	3.5	7	Sometimes
8	Conflict with someone	5	3.4	10	Sometimes	49	2.6	17	Sometimes
9	Loveline/love affair	5	1.2	19	Never	49	2.0	19	Seldom
10	Arguments	5	2.2	13.5	Seldom	49	2.8	14.5	Sometimes
11	Home Responsibilities	5	2.2	13.5	Seldom	49	3.3	10	Sometimes
12	Far Location of home	5	1.8	16	Seldom	49	2.9	13	Sometimes
13	Strict/inconsiderate teacher	5	4.8	5	Always	49	3.8	4	Often
14	Finances/allowances	5	3.0	11	Sometimes	49	3.4	8.5	Sometimes
15	Poor Health	5	1.6	18	Seldom	49	2.3	18	Seldom
16	Thesis writing/research	5	3.6	8.5	Often	49	3.6	5.5	Often
17	Strict Parents	5	1.8	16	Seldom	49	2.7	16	Sometimes
18	Flag Ceremony	5	1.0	20	Never	49	1.9	20	Seldom
19	Demanding parents/guardians	5	3.6	8.5	Often	49	2.8	14.5	Sometimes
20	School policies	5	4.2	7	Often	49	3.0	12	Sometimes

It connotes that the student-respondents find quizzes/examinations burdensome and it always give stress to male students while female students classified it only as often. The male students identified 2 other items, specifically school requirements/projects and recitations as always the cause of their stress. The male students are never

stressed by flag ceremony with a mean of 1.0 interpreted as Never while the female students also identified flag ceremony as the least cause of their stress with a mean of 1.9 interpreted as Seldom.

Thus, the assumption that there is disparity on the causes of stress of the male and female student-respondents is accepted.

TABLE 2
EFFECTS OF STRESS

EFFECTS OF STRESS		Male Respondents				Female Respondents			
		N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation
1	Sleepless nights	5	4.4	1	Often	49	3.3	1	Sometimes
2	Low Performance in the class	5	4.2	2.5	Often	49	3.2	2.5	Sometimes
3	Irritable/moody	5	2.6	13	Sometimes	49	3.0	4	Sometimes
4	Headache	5	4.2	2.5	Often	49	2.9	6.5	Sometimes
5	Body pains/fatigue	5	1.8	18	Seldom	49	2.8	9	Sometimes
6	Sad feeling/lonely	5	4.0	4.5	Often	49	2.9	6.5	Sometimes
7	Hypertension/high blood	5	1.6	19	Seldom	49	1.7	18.5	Seldom
8	Nervousness/tense feelings	5	4.0	4.5	Often	49	3.2	2.5	Sometimes
9	Lack of appetite	5	2.8	10.5	Sometimes	49	2.2	13.5	Seldom
10	Overeating	5	3.0	8	Sometimes	49	2.2	13.5	Seldom
11	Failing grades	5	2.4	15.5	Seldom	49	2.9	6.5	Sometimes
12	Absenteeism	5	2.8	10.5	Sometimes	49	1.7	18.5	Seldom
13	Late submission of requirements/projects	5	2.4	15.5	Seldom	49	2.2	13.5	Seldom
14	Feeling of insecurity	5	3.0	8	Sometimes	49	2.3	10.5	Seldom
15	Rebellious attitude	5	2.2	17	Seldom	49	1.9	16	Seldom
16	Quarrelsome attitude	5	2.6	13	Sometimes	49	1.8	17	Seldom
17	Too much sleeping	5	3.2	6	Sometimes	49	2.2	13.5	Seldom
18	Absent-minded/forgetful	5	2.6	13	Sometimes	49	2.9	6.5	Sometimes
19	Injury	5	1.4	20	Never	49	1.5	20	Never
20	Becomes physically weak	5	3.0	8	Sometimes	49	2.3	10.5	Seldom

The common effects of stress among BSSW students are presented in Table 2. The data shows that the most common effect of stress among the male student-respondents was sleepless nights with a mean of 4.4 interpreted as Often while the female students also identified sleepless nights with a mean of 3.3 interpreted as Sometimes. The second most common effect of stress among the male students were low performance in the class and headache with a mean of 4.2 interpreted as Often while the female student-respondents identified low performance in the class and nervousness/tense feelings with a mean of 3.2 interpreted as Sometimes as the second most common effect of stress. Both male and female student-respondents identified injury as having the least effect on them due to stress with a mean of 1.4 for the males and 1.5 for the females and both interpreted as Never.

It implies that when the student-respondents experience stress they are unable to get good night rest which results in low performance in class and headache for the males and low performance in the class and nervousness/tense feelings among the females. Being in their youth would help explain why the student-respondents are less prone to injury even when they are under stress.

The assumption which states that there is disparity on the effects of stress of the male and female student-respondents is therefore accepted.

The data in Table 3 indicates that both male and female students would foremost Pray to God with a common mean of 4.8 interpreted as Always as their primary coping mechanism when they are under stress. The student-respondents differed on their second (2) ranked stress coping mechanism whereby the males would face and solve the problem with a mean of 4.6 interpreted as Always while the females would listen to music with a mean of 4.4 interpreted as Often. They also indicated that they are less likely to drink alcohol and smoke as both types of respondents ranked it at number 19 with a mean of 1.4 for the males and 1.2 for the females both interpreted as Never. None of the respondents would take illegal drugs as a way to cope with their stress as both ranked it at 20 with a mean of 1.2 for the males and 1.0 for the females, both interpreted as Never.

The data clearly shows that Social Work students, both male and female would find strength in Praying to God to cope with stress. Male students would tend to face and solve the problem as their second alternative while the female student-respondents would resort to listening to music as the second alternative to cope with stress. A positive indicator is the fact that the student-respondents would never turn to drinking alcohol and smoking nor take drugs (illegal drugs) to cope with their stress.

TABLE 3
STRESS COPING MECHANISM

STRESS COPING MECHANISM		Male Respondents				Female Respondents			
		N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation
1	Go out with friends	5	3.4	8	Sometimes	49	3.3	10	Sometimes
2	Drink alcohol and smoke	5	1.4	19	Never	49	1.2	19	Never
3	Ask advice of friends/classmates	5	3.6	5	Often	49	3.5	7.5	Sometimes
4	Watch television/movies	5	3.0	10.5	Sometimes	49	3.5	7.5	Sometimes
5	Talk to my special someone	5	2.8	12.5	Sometimes	49	2.4	16	Seldom
6	Use the computer	5	3.0	10.5	Sometimes	49	3.1	11.5	Sometimes
7	Take drugs (illegal drugs)	5	1.2	20	Never	49	1.0	20	Never
8	Keep self busy	5	2.8	12.5	Sometimes	49	3.4	9	Sometimes
9	Control my emotions	5	1.8	18	Seldom	49	3.6	5.5	Often
10	Ignore the problem/issue	5	2.4	14.5	Seldom	49	2.9	13.5	Sometimes
11	Ask the help of parents/relatives	5	3.6	5	Often	49	2.9	13.5	Sometimes
12	Listen to music	5	4.2	3	Often	49	4.4	2	Often
13	Spend sometime being alone	5	3.6	5	Often	49	3.6	5.5	Often
14	Pray to God	5	4.8	1	Always	49	4.8	1	Always
15	Complain/argue	5	2.4	14.5	Seldom	49	2.2	17	Seldom
16	Sleep early	5	2.0	17	Seldom	49	2.8	15	Sometimes
17	Accept the situation	5	2.2	16	Seldom	49	3.8	4	Often
18	Face and solve the problem at once	5	4.6	2	Always	49	3.9	3	Often
19	Hide my reaction/emotion	5	3.4	8	Sometimes	49	3.1	11.5	Sometimes
20	Seek the help of a guidance/peer counselor and/or teacher	5	3.4	8	Sometimes	49	1.8	18	Seldom

The assumption which states that there is disparity on the stress coping mechanisms of the male and female student-respondents is therefore not accepted.

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are formulated:

1. The students taking Bachelor of Science in Social Work are predominantly females, 17-20 years old, single, skilled/talented in dancing and singing, receive a weekly allowance from P451.00 and more, and mostly live in the city proper and town proper of the adjacent municipalities of the city. This attests to the fact that the students of the course are mostly teenagers who are musically inclined, who enjoy enough weekly allowance and have easy access to the university.
2. The common causes of stress among students taking BSSW were school related. The males identified quizzes/examinations, school requirements/projects and recitations as their common stressors while for the females they identified quizzes/examinations as their common cause of stress. These reflect that they are apprehensive about the expectations placed on their shoulders as college students.
3. There was disparity between the causes of stress among the male and female student-respondents.
4. The common effect of stress among male BSSW students was it often resulted in sleepless nights while the female students sometimes experienced sleepless nights. This adheres to the psychological explanation that stress causes sleepless nights or insomnia and triggers biological responses causing irritability. This effect is a common psychological reaction among normal individuals.
5. There was a noted disparity of the effects of stress among the male and female student-respondents.
6. Both male and female BSSW students found strength in praying to God to cope with their stress. This indicates that the respondents experience consolation in communicating with God through prayer when they are under stress. Noteworthy is the fact that they would never turn to the use of illegal drugs, or take alcoholic drinks, or smoking even when they experience stress.
7. No disparity on the coping mechanisms of the male and female student-respondents was observed.

Stress is a factor that affects the performance and behavior of students in the university. Rationally, schools as the “loco parentis” must try to determine the causes of stress and its effects among its students. Knowing the coping mechanisms that they employ in trying to overcome the stressors is equally important. These data are necessary if the schools are to understand the pressures experienced by their students and be able to offer responsive, proactive and viable activities to better equip students to handle the rigors of university life.

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