

Dynamics of Stress in Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to determine the causes of stress, the effects of stress, and the stress coping mechanisms of Political Science students in the Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City. It tested some assumptions using the descriptive survey method with 51 respondents. School requirements/projects were the most common cause of stress. Sleepless nights were the common effect of stress. It was observed that the causes and effects of stress between the male and female respondents were not different. Listening to music was the common stress coping mechanism. There was an observed difference between the male and female responses.

Keywords: Stress, Causes of stress, Effects of stress, Coping mechanisms.

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 may 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's 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, 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 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. Presently, the university has twenty (20) of its academic programs accredited by the AACCUP. In 1996, 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 mechanism of students in the Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City. 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 likewise sought to gather the causes of stress and the effects of stress among the students, and the stress coping mechanism of Political Science students. 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 Political Science students. 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 their 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 stressor. 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 the 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.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

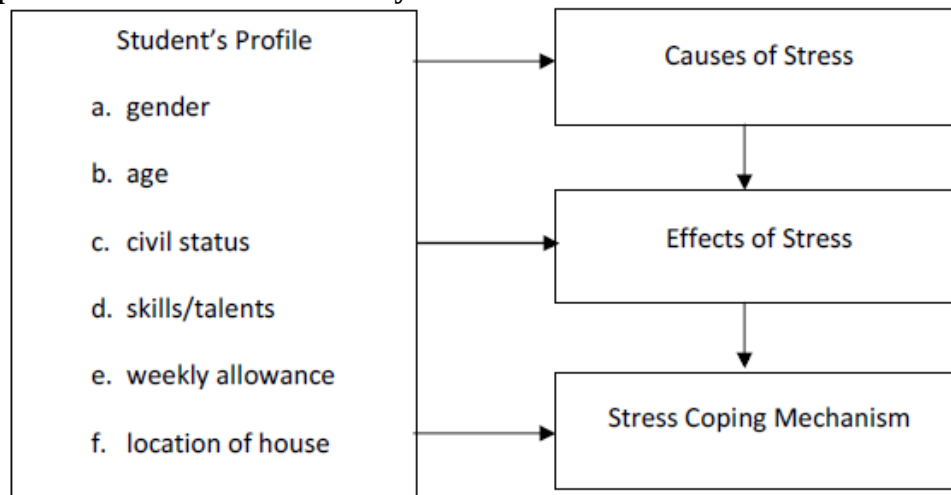


Figure 1

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 AB Political Science students enrolled during the 2nd Semester of School Year 2012-2013.

Literature Review

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. 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 may display 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 therefore committed to overcome it. The second person does not feel in control of the situation, 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 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 prescribes 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 with 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 a unique response to stress, there is no "one size fits 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 with stress were employed by students which 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. Grandea (2006) used the descriptive research approach in studying the stress and coping mechanisms 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 mechanisms. The perceived stress and coping mechanisms of the student-respondents were independent of their profile.

Methodology

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 Political Science, the effects of stress on them, and the coping mechanisms that they employ to overcome their stress. This study was conducted in the Social Science Unit, College of Arts and Sciences, Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City. The Social Science Unit exercises direct supervision over the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science (AB Pol Sci) course. The Political Science course had a total of 187 students for School Year 2012-2013. Eighty-seven (87) were first year, forty-nine (49) in the second year, forty-four (44) in the third year, and seventeen (17) fourth year students. Fifty one (51) students taking-up Political Science 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 Political Science 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 giving them the instructions to answer the same truthfully. The researcher personally fielded and retrieved the questionnaires, tabulated the results and subjected the data to statistical treatment.

Results and Discussion

Out of fifty-one (51) student respondents, 20 or 39.22% were male while 31 or 60.78% were female. The data manifest that there are more females enrolled in the AB Political Science course. Of the fifty-one (51) student-respondents 4 or 7.84% were aged 16-below. Some 22 or 43.14% were 17-18 years old. Another 18 or 35.29% were 19-20 years old. Around 6 or 11.76% were 21-22 years old while only 1 or 1.96% belong to the 23-24 years old bracket. The data imply that the students taking AB Political Science was within the age bracket for college students and are presumed to be mature enough to handle the responsibilities of college students. Thirty (30) or 58.82% and 23 or 45.10% of the student-respondents had skills/talents in dancing and singing respectively while only 3 or 5.88% had skills in gymnastics. It can be deduced that most of the student-respondents are musically inclined. All the student-respondents were single. Only 17.65% of the student-respondents had P501.00 - above weekly allowance, another 15.69% received P451.00 – P500.00 weekly allowance. On the extreme, 13.73% had a P101.00 – P150.00 weekly allowance; 9.80% had P51.00 – P100.00, while; 11.76% had the lowest weekly allowance of P50.00 – below.

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. The data shows that 58.82% of the student-respondents are residing in the city proper and town proper, and another 27.45% are residing in barangays along the National Road. Only 9.80% come from remote barangays, while 1.96% is residing in a hillside and another 1.96% 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 Political Science are presented in Table 1. The data shows that both the male and female student-respondents consider school requirements/projects as their most common cause of stress with a mean of 4.1 interpreted as Often for the males and 4.2 interpreted as Often for the females. The male student-respondents identified poor health as their least cause of stress while the female student-respondents identified three (3) items that are the least causes of their stress, namely: flag ceremony, demanding parents/guardians, and poor health.

Table 1: Causes of Stress

CAUSES OF STRESS		Male Respondents				Female Respondents			
		N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation
1	Quizzes/Examinations	20	4.0	2	OFTEN	31	3.9	2.5	OFTEN
2	Assignments/homework	20	3.5	5.5	OFTEN	31	3.4	10.5	OFTEN
3	School requirements/projects	20	4.1	1	OFTEN	31	4.2	1	OFTEN
4	Recitations	20	3.6	3	OFTEN	31	3.8	4.5	OFTEN
5	Practicum/demonstration	20	2.9	15.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.5	8	OFTEN
6	Presentation of dances, songs, speech, etc...	20	3.0	13	SOMETIMES	31	3.4	10.5	SOMETIMES
7	Family Problems	20	3.1	12	SOMETIMES	31	3.2	12	SOMETIMES
8	Conflict with someone	20	2.9	15.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.0	16	SOMETIMES
9	Lovelife/love affair	20	3.3	8.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.1	14	SOMETIMES
10	Arguments	20	3.2	10.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.1	14	SOMETIMES
11	Home Responsibilities	20	3.5	5.5	OFTEN	31	3.5	8	OFTEN
12	Far Location of home	20	2.9	15.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.1	14	SOMETIMES
13	Strict/inconsiderate teacher	20	3.3	8.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.9	2.5	OFTEN
14	Finances/allowances	20	3.2	10.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.6	6	OFTEN
15	Poor Health	20	2.1	20	SELDOM	31	2.7	19	SOMETIMES
16	Thesis writing/research	20	3.4	7	SOMETIMES	31	3.8	4.5	OFTEN
17	Strict Parents	20	2.9	15.5	SOMETIMES	31	2.9	17	SOMETIMES
18	Flag Ceremony	20	2.5	19	SOMETIMES	31	2.7	19	SOMETIMES
19	Demanding parents/guardians	20	2.8	18	SOMETIMES	31	2.7	19	SOMETIMES
20	School policies	19	3.9	3	OFTEN	31	3.5	8	OFTEN

It connotes that the student-respondents find school requirements/projects burdensome and gives them stress. Considering that all respondents are young it is understandable that poor health is not a cause of their stress. The assumption that there is disparity on the causes of stress between the male and female student-respondents was rejected. The common effects of stress among Political Science students are presented in Table 2. The data show that the most common effect of stress among the male and female student-respondents was sleepless nights where both means are interpreted as Often. The second most common effect of stress differed between the male and the female student-respondents. The males indicated that they experience body pains/fatigue while the females indicated that they become irritable/moody. The identified effect of stress which had the least effect among the male student-respondent was hypertension/high blood.

Table 2: Effects of Stress

EFFECTS OF STRESS		Male Respondents				Female Respondents			
		N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation
1	Sleepless nights	20	4.1	1	OFTEN	31	3.6	1	OFTEN
2	Low Performance in the class	20	3.2	5.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.0	8	SOMETIMES
3	Irritable/moody	20	3.2	5.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.4	2	SOMETIMES
4	Headache	20	3.3	3.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.3	3.5	SOMETIMES
5	Body pains/fatigue	20	3.4	2	SOMETIMES	31	3.2	5	SOMETIMES
6	Sad feeling/lonely	20	2.7	10	SOMETIMES	31	3.1	6.5	SOMETIMES
7	Hypertension/high blood	20	2.0	20	SELDOM	31	2.1	19.5	SELDOM
8	Nervousness/tense feelings	20	2.7	10	SOMETIMES	31	3.3	3.5	SOMETIMES
9	Lack of appetite	20	2.7	10	SOMETIMES	31	2.5	14.5	SOMETIMES
10	Overeating	20	2.3	17.5	SELDOM	31	2.7	9	SOMETIMES
11	Failing grades	20	2.6	12.5	SOMETIMES	31	2.5	14.5	SOMETIMES
12	Absenteeism	20	2.3	17.5	SELDOM	31	2.6	11.5	SOMETIMES
13	Late submission of requirements/projects	20	3.3	3.5	SOMETIMES	31	2.6	11.5	SOMETIMES
14	Feeling of insecurity	20	2.4	15.5	SELDOM	31	2.3	17.5	SELDOM
15	Rebellious attitude	20	2.4	15.5	SELDOM	31	2.4	16	SELDOM
16	Quarrelsome attitude	20	2.2	19	SELDOM	31	2.3	17.5	SELDOM
17	Too much sleeping	20	3.0	7.5	SOMETIMES	31	2.6	11.5	SOMETIMES
18	Absent-minded/forgetful	20	3.0	7.5	SOMETIMES	31	3.1	6.5	SOMETIMES
19	Injury	20	2.6	12.5	SOMETIMES	31	2.1	19.5	SELDOM
20	Becomes physically weak	20	2.5	13	SOMETIMES	31	2.6	11.5	SOMETIMES

The female student-respondents identified two (2) items which had the least effect on them, namely: hypertension/high blood and injury. It implies that when the student-respondents experience stress they are unable to get a good night rest which results in body pains/fatigue among the men and irritability/moody feeling among the women. Being in their youth would help explain why the student-respondents are less prone to hypertension even when they are stressed. The assumption that there is disparity on the effects of stress between the male and female student-respondents was rejected. Table 3 shows the coping mechanisms of students. The data indicate that both male and female student-respondents ranked listening to music as their number one (1) stress coping mechanism with a mean of 4.4 for the males interpreted as Often and with a mean of 4.6 for the females interpreted as Always. The student-respondents differed in their second (2) ranked stress coping mechanism as the males would rather face and solve the problem at once while the females would rather pray to God. They also indicated that they are less likely to drink alcohol and smoke. A coping mechanism that they will not do is take drugs (illegal drugs) as they ranked it last with a mean of 1.1 for the males interpreted as Never and a mean of 1.5 for the females likewise interpreted as Never.

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	20	4.1	4.5	OFTEN	31	3.7	5.5	OFTEN
2	Drink alcohol and smoke	20	1.8	19	SELDOM	31	2.2	19	SELDOM
3	Ask advice of friends/classmates	20	3.5	15	OFTEN	31	3.6	8	OFTEN
4	Watch television/movies	20	4.0	7	OFTEN	31	3.8	3	OFTEN
5	Talk to my special someone	20	3.7	12	OFTEN	31	3.0	16	SOMETIMES
6	Use the computer	20	4.1	4.5	OFTEN	31	3.7	5.5	OFTEN
7	Take drugs (illegal drugs)	20	1.1	20	NEVER	31	1.5	20	NEVER
8	Keep self busy	20	3.9	9.5	OFTEN	31	3.3	14	SOMETIMES
9	Control my emotions	20	4.0	7	OFTEN	31	3.5	10	OFTEN
10	Ignore the problem/issue	20	3.7	12	OFTEN	31	3.4	12.5	SOMETIMES
11	Ask the help of parents/relatives	20	3.7	12	OFTEN	31	3.1	15	SOMETIMES
12	Listen to music	20	4.4	1	OFTEN	31	4.6	1	ALWAYS
13	Spend sometime being alone	20	3.6	14	OFTEN	31	3.5	10	OFTEN
14	Pray to God	20	4.2	3	OFTEN	31	4.3	2	OFTEN
15	Complain/argue	20	2.8	18	SOMETIMES	31	3.4	12.5	SOMETIMES
16	Sleep early	20	3.1	16.5	SOMETIMES	31	2.9	17.5	SOMETIMES
17	Accept the situation	20	4.0	7	OFTEN	31	3.5	10	OFTEN
18	Face and solve the problem at once	20	4.3	2	OFTEN	31	3.7	5.5	OFTEN
19	Hide my reaction/emotion	20	3.9	9.5	OFTEN	31	3.7	5.5	OFTEN
20	Seek the help of a guidance/peer counselor and/or teacher	20	3.1	16.5	SOMETIMES	31	2.9	17.5	SOMETIMES

The data imply that generally, the student-respondents find solace in music in trying to cope with stress. Another approach to cope with stress, the males would face the problem head-on while the females would prefer praying to God. A positive indicator is the fact that the student respondents would never turn to drugs to cope with their stress. The assumption that there is disparity on the stress coping mechanisms between the male and female student-respondents was accepted.

Conclusions

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

1. Students taking the Political Science course are mostly females, 17-18 years old, single, skilled/talented in dancing and singing, receive a weekly allowance from P451.00-more than P500.00, 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 Political Science were school related. They identified school requirements/projects, quizzes/examinations, strict/inconsiderate teacher, recitations often cause stress among them. These show that they are apprehensive about the expectations placed on their shoulders as college students.
3. The common effect of stress among Political Science students was sleepless nights. This adheres to the psychological explanation that stress causes sleepless nights or insomnia. This effect is a common psychological reaction among normal individuals.
4. The stress coping mechanism of Political Science students was listening to music. This indicates that they find comfort and consolation in music when they are under stress. Noteworthy is the fact that they would never turn to the use of illegal drugs even when they experience stress. 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 to be able to offer responsive, pro active and viable activities to better equip students to handle the rigors of university life.

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