

Coping Mechanisms for Academic Pressures of the First Year Students of City College of San Fernando Pampanga, City of San Fernando, Pampanga

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Amidst the mental health concerns besetting students, this research sought to identify City College of San Fernando Pampanga's (CCSFP) freshmen's perceived pressures and coping mechanisms. The researchers used the descriptive design. The data gathering instruments used rating scale questions, Likert type scale, and pre-defined options. The result concluded that all freshmen experienced the same pressures and coping mechanisms regardless of their courses. To cope with pressures on maintaining the required grades, it is recommended that they consult their teachers, dean and guidance counselor more regularly and for the school to provide more learning resources. On their lack of self-confidence, seminars on personality development should be continued and exposures to social activities and cultural affairs must be instituted. To cope with difficult exams, more intensive reviews, peer teaching and co-curricular activities are recommended and for financial difficulties experienced, financial support system, "Studpreneurship and continuance of the P5,000 subsidy per student per semester must be sustained.

Keywords: coping mechanism, academic pressures

Introduction

Amidst the complexities of the modern times when millennials are confronted with a myriad of problems brought about by changes in recent developments, mental health has become an urgent global concern.

In connection with this, this research ventured into the timeliness of this issue. However, it is limited to the perceived pressures and coping mechanisms as experienced by CCSFP first year students. It is hoped that the result may bring about a better understanding of the reasons why the students are, at present and presumably, burdened by such pressures.

Their transition from high school to college and their awareness of strict adherence to grade requirements need to be looked into as contributors to their pressure. There is also the realization that this crucial stage in their tender years may make or break their tomorrows and equally this pressure is exacerbated by their desperate aspiration to be freed from the bondage of poverty. Being recipients of opportunities and scholarships which they would not wish to squander, these students are given a heavy load of responsibilities together with community and parental expectations and social concern.

Looking into these perceived pressures as experienced by the respondents, the researchers wish to delve deeper, and infer if these perceptions of pressure are real and, consequently, recommend, based on the findings, ways by which their pressures may be alleviated.

The study aimed to determine the coping mechanisms for academic pressures among the first-year students of City College of San Fernando Pampanga.

This study specifically aimed to:

- Identify the academic pressures as perceived and experienced by BA, AIS, IT, and Education first year students;
- Identify the coping mechanisms perceived and experienced by BA, AIS, IT, and Education first year students;
- Determine the differences in academic pressures as perceived and experienced by BA, AIS, IT, and Education first year students; and
- Recommend measures on how to alleviate academic pressures.

According to Shaikh (2004), the inability to cope, helplessness, increased psychological pressure, mental tension and too much workload are 'stress factors' for students. Low moods, inability to concentrate, loss of temper are most common symptoms. Academics and exams are the most powerful stressors. If needed, students prefer to talk to a peer. They demand more recreational activities on campus, revised schedule of academics and exams, better counselling facilities and improvement in student-teacher relationship. They concluded that the prevalence of perceived stress seems to be high among medical students and according to them the review of academics and exam schedules, more leisure time activities, better interaction with the faculty and proper guidance, advisory services and peer counselling at the campus could do a lot to reduce the stress.

Misra, Ranjita, McKean, Michelle, West, Sarah and Russo, Tony (2000) examined the perceptions of academic stress among male and female college students and compared faculty and student perceptions of students' academic stress. Results indicated a considerable mismatch between faculty and students in their perceptions of students' stressors and reactions to stressors. The faculty members perceived the students to experience a higher level of stress and to display reactions to stressors more frequently than the students perceived. These results are observed from the faculty observing the students only during their moments of stress in the classroom. Results also supported the hypotheses that stress varied across year in school and by gender.

Aspiras (2014) found out that among the perceived stress scales, the respondents "fairly often" feel that they cope with the changes that were occurring in their lives and feel confident about their ability to handle personal problems. Moreover, the respondents "sometimes" feel angry because of the things that happened outside their control and sometimes feel that they could not cope with all things that they had to do. On the other hand, it was found out that among the stressors identified, "finances" is the major stressor of the respondents. Their study also revealed that the perceived stress factors have a significant bearing on the course, gender, age, and ethnic affiliation of the respondents.

The hypotheses of the study include:

- There are no significant differences in academic pressures as perceived and experienced by BA, AIS, IT, and Education first year students.

Theoretical Framework

Anxiety and Defense Mechanisms

According to (Freud), when anxiety occurs, the mind's first response is to seek rational ways of escaping the situation by increasing problem solving efforts and a range of defense mechanisms may be triggered. Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud developed and elaborated these defense mechanisms such as denial (believing that what is true is actually false); displacement (taking out impulses on a less threatening target); intellectualization (avoiding unacceptable emotions by focusing on the intellectual aspects); projection (attributing uncomfortable feelings to others); rationalization (creating false but believable justifications); reaction – (taking the opposite belief because the true belief causes anxiety); regression (going back to a previous stage of development); repression (pushing uncomfortable thoughts out of conscious awareness); suppression (consciously forcing unwanted thoughts out of our awareness); and sublimation (redirecting 'wrong' urges into socially acceptable actions). These defenses are not under one's conscious control and one's unconscious will use one or more to protect one's self from stressful situations. This study would like to examine how the students cope up when confronted by stressful situations such as academic pressures.

Lazarus (1966) posited that how an individual appraises a stressor determines how he or she copes with or responds to the stressor. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) later elaborated their concept of stress appraisal, which includes primary, secondary, and reappraisal components, referred to as "The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping". The primary appraisal phase determines whether the stressor poses a threat. Secondary appraisal involves the individual's evaluation of the resources or coping strategies at his or her disposal for addressing any perceived threats. Finally, the process of reappraisal is ongoing and involves continually reappraising both the nature of the stressor and the resources available for responding to the stressor.

Some of the "stress management techniques," according to them, are: cognitive (e.g., time management, planning), physical (e.g., artistic expression, relaxation), environmental (e.g., nature), and others (e.g., prayer).

Method

The researchers used the descriptive research design. Descriptive research is a fact-finding with adequate interpretation. This method is something more and beyond just data gathering. The true meaning of data collected should be reported from the point of view of the objectives and the basic assumption of the project. This follows logically after careful classification of data (Aquino, 1971). The research used rating scales, Likert scales and closed ended questions.

Prior to crafting the survey questionnaire, the researchers interviewed students entering the library about the pressures they experienced and the manner of coping with them. From the preliminary list of questions, a survey tool was prepared using the rating scale and Likert scale. The final version of the tools was administered to first year CCSFP students.

The participants of the study were all the first-year college students enrolled in the different courses: Education, Business Administration (BA), Information Technology (IT), and Accounting Information System (AIS).

Results were tabulated and summarized. The computation of percentages, means and chi-square value was done. Percentages were used to determine the proportion of students in each course who experienced pressures while the means were computed to determine the degree of coping mechanism of the students for the pressures experienced. The hypothesis was tested at the .05 level of significance.

Interpretation Guide for Pressures		
Mean	Description	Level
3.5-4.00	Very extensive (VE)	SEVERE- giving up stage
2.5-3.49	Extensive (E)	MODERATE - average stability /can hardly manage
1.5-2.49	Somewhat extensive (SE)	MILD - easily manageable
1.4 and below	Not at all (NA)	CAN COPE - very manageable
Interpretation Guide for Coping Mechanisms		
Mean	Description	
3.5-4.00	Very helpful (VH)	
2.5-3.49	Helpful (H)	
1.5-2.49	Somewhat helpful (SH)	
1.4 and below	Not at all (NA)	

Results

Pressures Experienced by Students as Perceived by the Students

Student factors

The results reveal that approximately one (1) out of 4 BA students (26%) experienced pressure in having insufficient meal/transportation allowance while approximately 2 out of 5 (17%) Education students experienced the same. One (1) out of 10 Education students (10%) reported that they experienced pressure because they could not meet the costs of their projects in the subject. Approximately one half (51%) of the BA students experienced pressure in maintaining their grades to meet the requirements of the retention policy while approximately 2 out of 5 Education students identified the same as their source of pressure. About a third (32%) of IT students reported that they lack self-confidence and about one fifth (19%) of BA students identified the same as source of pressure.

Teacher factors

Some of the pressures identified by the students as source of their pressures are examination, submission of requirements, and unaddressed needs. One hundred per cent (100%) of IT students identified difficult examination as source of pressures while 64% of Education students reported the same. Twelve percent (12%) of AIS and BA students reported that one of the sources of their pressure is the time frame for submission of requirements and only 10% of Education students said so. One (1) out

of four (26%) Education students reported that teachers were not able to address their academic needs and only 15% of BA students experienced the same.

Table1. Pressures Experienced by Students as Perceived by Them

Pressures Experienced by Students	AIS	BA	EDUC	IT
1. Student factors				
a. insufficient meal/transportation allowance	0.2	0.26	0.17	0.18
b. cannot meet cost of projects	0.03	0.04	0.09	0
c. maintaining retention policies (grades)	0.5	0.51	0.44	0.5
d. lack of self confidence	0.28	0.19	0.3	0.32
2. Teacher factors				
a. difficult exams	0.72	0.73	0.64	1
b. unreasonable time frame for submission of requirements	0.12	0.12	0.1	0
c. failure to address students' needs	0.16	0.15	0.26	0
3. Technology factors				
a. lack of computers and books	0.71	0.38	0.31	0.25
b. lack of computer literacy	0.29	0.63	0.69	0.75

Technology factors

Another source of pressures among CCSFP students is the technology factors which include the lack of computers and inadequate computer literacy. Seventy-one percent (71%) of AIS students answered that they lack computers and books and 25% of IT students have the same experience. Three out of four (75%) IT students identified lack of computer literacy as source of pressure and 29% of AIS students felt the same.

Comparison of the Academic Pressures Experienced by Students According to their Courses

Table 2. Comparison of the Student Factor Pressures Experienced by Students According to Course

1. Student factor Pressure	AIS	BA	EDUC	IT	TOTAL
a. insufficient meal/transportation allowance	8	15	20	4	47
b. cannot meet cost of projects	1	2	11	0	14
c. maintaining retention policies (grades)	20	29	53	11	113
d. lack of self confidence	11	11	36	7	65
Total	40	57	120	22	239

p-value= 0.435 no significant difference

The comparison of the academic pressures emanating from the students themselves shows no significant difference as shown in Table 2. The computed chi-square value is 0.435 is not significant. Considering the pressures coming from the teachers, the comparison using the chi-square (0.625) shows no significant difference. Thus, students experienced the same academic pressures emanating from them.

Table 3. Comparison of the Teacher Factor Pressures Experienced by Students Considering their Courses

Teacher Factor Pressures					
2. Teacher factors	AIS	BA	EDUC	IT	TOTAL
a. difficult exams	18	30	44	4	96
b. unreasonable time frame for submission of requirements	3	5	7	0	15
c. failure to address students' needs	4	6	18	0	28
Total	25	41	69	4	139
p-value= 0.625 no significant difference					

Table 3 reveals that, considering the pressures coming from the teachers, there is no significant difference in the pressures experienced by students as shown by the p-value of chi-square which is 0.626. Regardless of the course where the students are enrolled, they experienced the same pressures originating from the teacher.

Table 4. Comparison of the Technology Factor Pressures Experienced by Students Considering their Courses

Course	AIS	BA	EDUC	IT	TOTAL
a. lack of computers and books	10	6	8	1	25
b. inadequate computer literacy	4	10	18	3	35
Total	14	16	26	4	60
p-value= 0.074 no significant difference					

The technology factors did not show either significant difference among students as shown by the chi-square p-value of 0.074. This shows that regardless of their course, students experienced the same pressures coming from the lack of technology hardware or inadequate computer literacy.

Degree of Pressures Experienced by Students

Among the sources of pressures identified by students, extensive pressure is experienced on the following stressors: maintaining grades to meet the retention policy, lack of self-confidence, difficult examination, insufficient meal or transportation allowance, and difficulty in understanding the lesson as shown by their means. Table 5 shows the details.

Table 5. Means of Extent of Pressures Experienced Students

PRESSURES	AIS	Level of Coping	BSBA	Level of Coping	EDUC	Level of Coping	IT	Level of Coping
1.Student factors								
a. insufficient meal/transportation allowance	2.5	E	2.37	SE	2.46	SE	2.36	SE
b. cannot meet cost of projects	1.73	SE	2.05	SE	2.14	SE	2.22	SE
c. maintaining of retention policies (grades)	3.27	E	3.21	E	3.16	E	3.33	E
d. lack of self confidence	2.5	E	2.78	E	2.77	E	3.14	E
2.Teacher factors								
a. difficult exams	3.32	E	3.03	E	2.87	E	2.78	E
b. cannot submit requirements on time	2.45	SE	2.17	SE	2.18	SE	2.44	E
c. difficulty in understanding the lesson	2.59	E	2.35	SE	2.4	SE	2.25	SE
3.Technology factors								
a. lack of computers and books	2.09	SE	1.8	SE	1.88	SE	1.44	NA
b. lack of computer literacy	2.14	SE	2.23	SE	1.88	SE	1.67	SE

Coping Mechanism of Students from Pressures Experienced

Students are able to cope up from the pressures they experienced. To cope with insufficient meal or transportation allowance, they asked help and subsidy from relatives or friends while in maintaining grades to meet the requirements of the retention policy, they found consulting brighter students personally, forming study groups, using the internet, social media and attending remedial classes as helpful.

Table 6. Coping Mechanisms of Students

Coping Mechanisms	AIS	Level of Coping	BSBA	Level of Coping	Educ	Level of Coping	IT	Level of Coping
1. For pressures like insufficient meal/transportation allowance & could not meet cost of projects								
• Use of savings or loans	2.36	SH	2.5	H	2.45	SH	2.43	SH
• Engage in part-time job	2.14	SH	3.06	H	2.6	H	2.43	SH
• Ask for help/subsidy from relatives/friends	3.43	H	3.17	H	3.22	H	3.09	H
2. For maintaining grades required by retention policy								
• Consult brighter students personally	3.23	H	2.91	H	3.21	H	2.56	H
• Request for remedial classes	3.32	H	3.11	H	3.22	H	3	H
• Group chat and other social media	3.14	H	2.89	H	2.84	H	2.13	SH
• Copying	1.9	SH	1.36	NA	1.17	NA	1.38	NA
3. For lack of self confidence								
• Focus on your positive characteristics	3.41	H	3.42	SH	3.41	H	3.09	H
• Connect with other students	3.4	H	3.08	H	3.29	H	2.67	H
4. For Difficult exams								
• Consult brighter students personally	3.32	H	3.18	H	3.04	H	2.6	H
• Form study groups	3.45	H	3.38	H	3.16	H	2.82	H
• Group chat and other social media	2.81	H	3	H	2.71	H	2.3	SH
• Copying	2	SH	1.83	SH	1.31	NA	1.33	NA
5. For difficulty in submitting requirements on time								
• Prioritize urgency of other requirements	3.1	H	3	H	2.75	H	2.25	SH
• Avoid cramming	3	H	2.39	SH	2.77	H	2.44	SH
6. For lack of technology paraphernalia								
• Borrow from friends	2.4	SH	2.9	H	2.73	H	2.67	H
• Go to internet cafe's	2.4	SH	2.76	H	2.81	H	2.67	H
7. Lack of computer literacy								
• Work with knowledgeable persons	3.48	H	3.15	H	3.13	H	3.1	H
• Use Google, YouTube, yahoo etc.	3.57	VH	3.2	H	4.86	VH	3	H

Discussion

Results of the study on academic pressures and coping mechanisms of tertiary students showed that there were three general sources of pressures – the pressures emanating from the students themselves, those coming from the functions of the teacher and of technology. The academic pressures such as

insufficient meal and transportation allowance are mostly experienced by 26% of BA students; meeting grade requirements by the retention policy was also experienced by 51% by BA students, 50% by IT and AIS students and 44% by Education students; lack of self-confidence was experienced by 32% of IT students; majority of all first year students experienced pressure on difficult examinations given by teacher; and lack of computer literacy is one of the sources of pressures of first year students.

The findings of this study confirm the findings of Shaik, et al. (n.d.). Results of studies undertaken in Pakistan, a Midwest University in US, and in the Philippines show that pressures affect all students. Academics and exams are the most powerful stressors and are most common in all except in the Philippines where “finances” ranked highest. Improvement of student-teacher relationship and better counselling, common among all the cited studies, suggest that students, presumably because of class sizes, are not personally attended to and need to be more inspired to love and enjoy their courses. In fact, in the Mid-Western University, the fact that the faculty’s perception of stressors was higher than what the students actually experienced calls for more academic exchanges between the faculty and students. In the local study, it is interesting to know that the students feel confident in handling their pressures.

According to Sigmund Freud, when anxiety occurs, the mind’s first response is to seek rational ways of escaping the situation by increasing problem solving efforts and a range of defense mechanisms may be triggered. Drawn from this premise, the students under this study cope with their pressures through intellectualization, avoiding unacceptable emotions by focusing on the intellectual aspects and sublimation, redirecting ‘wrong’ urges into socially acceptable actions. None resorted to suppression, consciously forcing unwanted thoughts out of their awareness.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Results showed that all first-year students extensively experienced pressure on: maintaining grades to meet the retention policy, lack of self-confidence and difficult exams while AIS students extensively experienced lack of sufficient meal and transportation and difficulty in understanding the lesson. IT students extensively experienced difficulty in submission of requirements on time. However, all of the first-year students think that asking for subsidy is helpful in coping with pressure to cope with meeting the cost of projects. Also, all students answered that attending remedial classes and consulting brighter students can be helpful in coping with pressures of maintaining grades to meet the retention policy. To overcome difficult examinations, students in all courses think that consulting brighter students personally is helpful. To cope with lack of self-confidence, all courses think that connecting with other students is helpful. All students answered that working with knowledgeable persons is helpful in coping with lack of computer literacy. AIS and Education students find the use of social media as very helpful in coping with lack of computer literacy. Lastly, all first-year students experienced the same pressures regardless of their courses.

Considering the results, it is recommended that, for the students to maintain their grades, they need to consult their teacher, dean and guidance counselor more regularly and they should be given more enhanced learning resources (e.g., study areas, availability of resources like books, e-journals) and interventions (e.g., remedial classes). As for their reported lack of self-confidence, it is proposed that continuing seminars on personality development and exposures to social and cultural activities be undertaken. As for the pressure on difficulty of examinations, more intensive reviews, formation of peer

teaching groups, study groups/co-curricular activities according to subjects and adaptation of teaching methods that will facilitate learning are recommended. As for their financial difficulties, the school must establish a financial support system through benefactors, “studpreneurship program”, and continue the Php 5,000 subsidy.

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