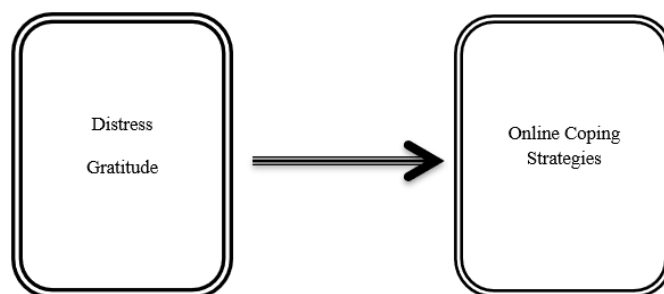# Distress, Gratitude, and Online Coping Strategies in the Academe during the Pandemic (COVID-19) Epoch

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Abstract: **COVID-19 is a global problem affecting Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This pandemic led to a strong reason among students who experience distress. This cross-sectional study aimed to examine students' distress, gratitude and coping strategies in the academic during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed that adequate information and high-risk perceptions were accessible to students. Non-medical prevention measures were perceived as highly effective. There were students satisfied with the government's actions to mitigate problems. Unwillingness to the online-blended learning approach, however, has been observed. Students used different approaches to deal with the problems of mental health challenges. During this COVID-19 pandemic among HEIs, it is important to address the mental health of learners.**

*Keywords***: Distress, Gratitude, Online Coping Strategies, Academic, COVID-19 Pandemic**

I. INTRODUCTION

Going back in world's history, globally, we have been attacked with different phenomenal pandemic that causes fatal disruption among living things and human being existing in this world particularly last year, 2019, the existence of novel coronavirus infection, or what is commonly known as COVID—19 was recorded in Wuhan, China which spreads rapidly around the world. Moreover, the first ever case in the Philippines was recorded last January 30, 2020 and on March 7, 2020, the first local transmission of COVID-19 was confirmed (WHO, 2020). With the outbreak of this fatal pandemic it brought numerous impacts to the lives of the people, even to the Academic Perspective.

People around the world were put into Quarantine to prevent the rapid spreading of the novel coronavirus (David, Rye & Agbulos, 2020).

As quoted by Margaret Visser, "where there is no gratitude, there is no meaningful movement; human affairs become rocky, painful, coldly indifferent, unpleasant, and finally break off altogether. The social machinery grinds along and soon seizes up".

1. Distress level.
2. Gratitude level
3. Online Coping Strategy
4. Cross-sectional study on the different perceptions on Distress Gratitude and Online Coping Strategy.

II. METHODS

This was a cross-sectional study on the different perceptions on distress gratitude and online coping strategy among the students in Davao del Norte, Philippines. This study was conducted by the researcher during the epoch of Covid-19 cases around the Philippines, particularly when Davao del Norte was placed under Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ). The questions were adapted from the study David, Rye, and Agbulos, 2020. Respondents were determined randomly through online survey developed through Google form. The survey link was sent to the respondents via social media. There is a total of 126 who responded the online survey, including students and teachers, with the age ranging from 18-64.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Distress Level

According to Ohayashi, H., & Yamada, S. (Eds.). (2012), psychological distress is a term used to describe the general psychopathology of an individual with a combination of depressive symptoms, anxiety and perceived stress. In this book, the authors have gathered and present topical research in the study of the symptoms, causes and coping mechanisms relating to psychological distress. Included in this compilation

are topics corresponding to mitigating adverse school experiences and psychological distress with parental support; psychological distress in an oncological context; screening for psychological distress in clinical practice; the Kessler 10 (K10) psychological distress scale and psychological distress in the military.

For more than 150 years, empowering practices have been used by social workers in their work with families, but the techniques of today differ significantly from those of the pioneers or even from those of a few years ago. Today's practitioners recognize that empowering others is impossible; social workers can, however, assist others as they empower themselves. Synthesizing several theoretical supports—the strengths perspective, system theory, theories of family well-being, and theories of coping distress (Wise, J.B., 2005).

This state-of-the-art volume synthesizes the growing body of knowledge on the role of distress tolerance--the ability to withstand aversive internal states such as negative emotions and uncomfortable bodily sensations--in psychopathology. Prominent contributors describe how the construct has been conceptualized and measured and examine its links to a range of specific psychological disorders. Exemplary treatment approaches that target distress tolerance are reviewed. Featuring compelling clinical illustrations, the book highlights implications of the research for better understanding how psychological problems develop and how to assess and treat them effectively as stated in the study of Zvolensky, M. J., Bernstein, A., & Vujanovic, A. A. (Eds.). (2010).

In addition, in Smail, D. (2015) research, it is the main argument of this book that emotional and psychological distress is often brought about through the operation of social-environmental powers which have their origin at a considerable distance from those ultimately subjected to them. On the whole, psychology has concerned itself very little with the field of power which stretches beyond our immediate relations with each other, and this has led to serious limitations on the explanatory power of the theories it has produced. To illustrate this, typical cases of patient distress in the 1980s are examined. The decade when the right-wing of politics proclaimed there was no such thing as society gave rise to psychological distress across social classes, as long-standing societal institutions were dismantled. This is as much a work of sociology, politics, and philosophy, as it is of psychology. Fundamentals of an environmental understanding of distress are outlined. A person is the interaction of a body with the environment.

Hoff, L. A. (2014) mentioned that crisis helps recognize common signs of endangerment across a range of life challenges by showing the interconnections between various harmful events. Through media coverage of school shootings, suicides, domestic abuse, workplace violence, and more, we've become accustomed to hearing about violence and trauma-almost invariably followed by reports that show all of the warning signs that were missed. While it is impossible to predict when, where, and with whom a crisis will occur, we do have the means to be better equipped to intervene in stressful situations before they tip over into a crisis. Important preventative information is readily available, and this book better prepares us to take appropriate responsive action. Often a crisis is the result of a critical life event; whether or not a life-changing event turns into a crisis depends on the type, timing, and interpretation of the event, the person's life cycle development phase, history of healthy coping, and available timely support. In sum, Lee Ann Hoff illustrates how to recognize crisis as both danger and opportunity. The more we know about how to spot a potential crisis and what to do, the more likely distressed persons will get the help they need.

Gratitude Level

We express gratitude toward others in different ways. Before COVID, we could offer a handshake, a pat on the back, or a hug when socially appropriate, in addition to more common direct verbal or written forms of communication. Now in the COVID social-distancing era, there are different means of expressing appreciation: a shout out at a Zoom work meeting, a thumbs up or heart emoji, a retweet, a daily or weekly email to your team inclusive of wins and achievements, or a monthly award for star colleague who went above and beyond in their duties and/or patient care. Research demonstrates that these small gestures can result in tremendous impact in well-being (Emmons, 2007a, Emmons, 2007b, Emmons, 2010). While we can impact others by expressing gratitude directly, we can greatly enhance our own well-being by articulating gratitude in written or spoken form, even to ourselves, which allows us to focus in the moment on what we appreciate and brings us joy, happiness, or satisfaction.

During moments of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a grateful perspective is critical to sustain our positive attitude—to energize, to heal, and to bring hope. Positive psychology research demonstrates that positive emotions, including gratitude, are symbiotic with health and wellness, such that positive emotions promote happiness and flourishing, creating an upward spiral (Fredrickson, 2009, Seligman, 2011). In contrast, negative emotions are an important reminder of dangers or unfulfilled needs (Gruber et al., 2011). Being grateful is a free mindfulness practice to help us cope with anxiety and uncertainty by focusing on what we value, what is in our control, and what we can give back (Emmons, 2013).

McCullough et al., (2001) describe gratitude as a moral emotion that helps us recognize when others intentionally support our wellbeing. In later work, McCullough and colleagues found support for gratitude as an evolutionary adaptation that not only acknowledges the value of when others benefit our welfare, but that it reinforces others' kindness toward us and spurs mutually cooperative relationships (Forster et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017). Gratitude is not only an important trait for reinforcing

altruistic behavior individually and communally, but it also accounts for reductions in depression, anxiety and substance abuse (Kendler et al., 2003).

Online Coping Strategies

Folkman & Moskowitz (2004) define online coping as thoughts and behaviors facilitated by the Internet that people use to manage stressful situations. Studies of support provided through online support groups have a relatively long history (Rains & Young, 2009; Wright & Bell, 2003). Moreover, there has recently been a rise in studies examining the role of social network sites (SNS, mostly Facebook) in providing support (Damian & Van Ingen, 2014; Frison & Eggermont, 2015; Oh, Ozkaya, & LaRose, 2014).

Websites and online support groups provide information on virtually any topic, from health to work and relational problems. Younger and highly educated people are especially likely to turn to the Internet first before taking additional action, for example, when faced with a health issue (Koch-Weser et al., 2010). After gathering information online, individuals are better able to understand their problem and take appropriate action (Barak, Boniel-Nissim, & Suler, 2008).

Coping strategies to reduce stress is a necessary condition for preventing the harmful effects of prolonged stress (William et al., 2010). Coping strategies refer to the specific efforts that people use to master, reduce or minimize stressful event. Coping is multi-dimensional and involves various strategies of which some are functional than others (Gnilka, Chang, & Dew, 2012). A study by Sideridis (2008) reveals five most frequently used coping strategies by students; browsing the internet, sleeping and resting, watching TV shows or movies, and instant messaging.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Using correlation analysis, it was found out that distress has low positive significant relationship (r-value=0.392;p-value<0.05) to coping strategies rand similarly, gratitude is also significantly related (p-value<0.05) in moderation level (r-value=0.516) to coping strategies. This means that as distress and gratitude increases (respectively decrease), coping strategies also increase (respective decrease).

With this, further analysis using multiple regressions can be conducted to identify which among the two variables can significantly influence coping strategies. It is found out that only gratitude can significantly influence (p-value<0.05) to coping strategies while distress is not significantly influential (p-value>0.05). The regression analysis tells that the prediction model based from R^2-value=0.21, F (2,123) = 22.882; and p-value<0.05 is CS = 0.132 *distress + 0.635*gratitude + 0.859.

Table 2. Distress Level

	Mean	SD	Description
1. Keeping my daily routine by setting up my personal goals to accomplished my task helps me reduce stress.	4.06	0.87	High
2. Listening to my favorite music as I do my task to distress myself.	4.29	0.94	Very High
3. Calling my friends, colleagues and family members to share my day to day experience through video call to work.	3.57	1.21	High
4. Preparing, baking and cooking healthy foods to boost my immune system distress me.	3.57	1.17	High
5. Reading the bible to uplift my spirit and always say a short prayer to relieve me with what I feel.	3.72	1.26	High
6. Reading facts about COVID-19, its prevention uplift me.	3.82	1.04	High
7. Motivating myself to fight stress by having 30-minute walking/dancing exercise" to boost my immune system.	3.84	1.13	High
8. keeping myself busy through backyard gardening motivate me to fight stress.	3.29	1.27	Moderate
9. Download relaxation music and use it in my meditation every morning to relieve anxiety before starting my routinary work.	3.73	1.29	High
10. Engaging self-care/hygiene care despite pandemic boosts immunity and can relive feeling of uncertainly.	4.51	0.72	Very High
11. watching movies to avoid boredom in the house helps me combat stress.	4.48	0.87	Very High
12. playing my favorite games in my computer or in my cell pitch in self-motivation.	3.82	1.18	High
Overall mean	3.89	0.54	High

Table 3. Gratitude Level

	Mean	SD	Description
1. praying for the front-liners to strengthen them to their sacrifices while I am staying at home.	4.50	0.84	Very High
2. Distributing meals to the frontliners of this pandemic is my expression of gratitude to help others.	2.82	1.42	Moderate
3. "staying at home " is the gratitude and opportunity to protect me and my family with this contagion.	4.80	0.51	Very High
4. Spending quality time with my family is celebrating gratitude.	4.66	0.77	Very High
5. having enough time to fix my clutter in our house makes me feel grateful after seeing they are neat and tidy.	4.34	0.94	Very High
6. having enough time to fix our family photos in an album gives me spirit of gratitude.	3.85	1.17	High
7. donating my points in my credit card/shopping card/debit card/cash back cards is a way of expending my expression.	3.60	1.23	High

	Mean	SD	Description
8. having enough time to arrange my books during lockdown in the shelves gives me happiness and accomplishments.	2.66	1.36	Moderate
9. Expressing gratitude to accept a new normal in terms of having virtual class(both) teacher and students be alike.	3.64	1.18	Moderate
10. motivating myself to be determined is an expression of gratitude which I consider powerful to resilience in the	4.42	0.76	Very High
Overall mean	3.93	0.69	High

Table 4. On-line Coping Strategies

	Mean	SD	Description
1. Prepare to ensure digital equity in the academe to adapt (online/distance learning/blended learning) as the new normal.	3.86	1.16	High
2. Practice the skills in the on line learning to be fully equipped and equally beneficial like in a regular classroom set up.	3.83	1.09	High
3. Provide clear expectations and communicate to parents if there are enquiries on the virtual set up to avoid	3.84	1.04	High
4. Prepare a module or step-by-step instructional guide for the access and use of the online learning modalities, tools	3.82	1.05	High
5. Taking time to smooth implementation in the online learning.	3.90	1.02	High
6. Making sure to have access to internet, computer, cellphone and materials during online.	3.98	1.17	High
7. Organize flexible time for classes the checking in and checking out (during online class implementation)	3.83	1.12	High
8. Virtual meetings, live chats or video tutorials maintain human connection to better understanding.	3.83	1.12	High
9. Setting daily and weekly goals in the activities for both the teacher and students helps smooth online class implementation.	3.87	1.07	High
10. Choosing tools, platforms, apps (right tools & stick to them concept) for teachers and students easy to adapt.	3.93	1.02	High
Overall mean	3.87	0.93	High

Table 5. The influence of Distress and Gratitude to Coping Strategies

Variable	Standard Error	Coefficient	Beta	P-Value
Constant	0.532	0.859		0.108
Distress	0.182	0.132	0.76	0.468
Gratitude	0.143	0.635	0.466	0.000
= 0.05				

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant concerns among students, especially among communities in the Southern Philippines. Based on the findings of this study, the students were aware of the COVID-19 pandemic and possessed sufficient knowledge about this global concern even though there were still gaps in various points. Now in the COVID social-distancing era, there are different means of expressing appreciation: a shout out at a Zoom work meeting, a thumbs up or heart emoji, a retweet, a daily or weekly email to your team inclusive of wins and achievements, or a monthly award for star colleague who went above and beyond in their duties and/or patient care. Students were responsive and satisfied with the government's initiatives to limit the spread of infection.

Though distress level is high, there is still enough evidence that students among two local colleges in Southern Philippines practice measures to deal with gratitude during this threat of global health security. In the future, HEIs should strengthen its plans on management strategies concerning outbreaks and pandemics, which may affect local communities. HEIs should also develop an innovative and helpful approach to promote and address the mental health issues of students during a pandemic. More importantly, though the Philippines is still at the stage of embracing the paradigm shift in pedagogical delivery, schools should start training students and teachers on the application of online-blended learning approach and improve Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources and capacities of both teachers and students. The government subsidy and educational support in the future should include capacitating Filipino learners in using online tools considering health challenges like this or other community emergencies during any future.

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