

Academic Stress, Coping Mechanisms, and Self-Perceived Academic Performance Among Senior High School Students in Surigao Del Sur, Philippines

Roey C. Sumaoy; Cris U. Urcinado; Marinel E. Josol; July Therese B. Illogon; Elbert R. Vido; Mariver B Semblante; Aivan F. Pecasales; Algien A. Parker; May B. Mutya; Jhon Ruzkin G. Maturan

North Eastern Mindanao State University

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ABSTRACT

Academic stress is a growing concern among senior high school students, influencing their mental health, coping behaviors, and academic performance. This study examined the levels of **academic stressors, coping appraisal and resources, and coping strategies** among senior high school students in **Surigao del Sur, Philippines**, and explored their relationship with **self-perceived academic performance**. Using a **descriptive quantitative survey design**, data were collected from **300 students** enrolled in public and private schools through a validated Likert-scale questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, including weighted means and standard deviations, were applied to analyze the data. Results indicated that students **often experienced academic stress**, particularly due to heavy academic workloads, performance expectations, and examination pressure. Respondents showed a **moderate level of coping appraisal and available resources**, suggesting uncertainty in effectively managing academic demands. Additionally, **emotion-focused coping strategies** such as relaxation and distraction were more commonly used than **problem-focused strategies** like time management and help-seeking. The findings emphasize the need for **targeted stress management programs and coping enhancement interventions** in schools to strengthen students' emotional resilience and academic adaptability. The study contributes to a broader understanding of how Filipino senior high school students respond to academic pressures and provides insights for educators and policymakers in promoting student well-being and performance.

Keywords— Academic Stress, Coping Strategies, Coping Appraisal, Self-Perceived Academic Performance, Senior High School Students, Philippines.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary education, academic stress has emerged as a significant psychosocial concern affecting students' mental health, motivation, and learning outcomes. The increasing academic rigor and performance-oriented culture of secondary education often lead students to experience high levels of stress and anxiety (Pascoe et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021). Academic stress refers to the psychological distress resulting from academic-related pressures such as examinations, workload, and achievement expectations (Sun et al., 2022). Although some degree of stress may enhance motivation and performance, excessive or chronic stress can impede concentration, reduce learning efficiency, and compromise psychological well-being (Chai et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021).

In the Philippine educational context, the implementation of the K-12 program has intensified academic demands on senior high school students, requiring them to balance numerous academic, extracurricular, and personal responsibilities (David et al., 2021). As students strive to meet institutional standards and future career expectations, they often confront difficulties in managing stress and maintaining academic performance. The capacity to cope effectively with stress is thus an essential component of students' overall academic adjustment and success.

Existing research has identified multiple sources of academic stress among adolescents, including time constraints, examination pressure, and fear of academic failure (Alhija & Wisenbaker, 2021; Zhao & Watanabe, 2022). Scholars have emphasized that stress outcomes depend largely on individual coping strategies and

perceptions of control (Caballero-Domínguez et al., 2022). According to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), stress results from the interaction between perceived demands and coping resources. Coping strategies both problem-focused (e.g., planning, seeking help) and emotion-focused (e.g., relaxation, distraction) determine how individuals respond to stressors (Pillay et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023).

However, cultural variations shape coping behaviors. Studies among Filipino students revealed that social expectations, collectivist norms, and limited access to mental health resources influence how learners manage academic stress (De Guzman & Tan, 2022; Reyes et al., 2023). Moreover, recent findings suggest that the type and frequency of coping strategies employed directly affect students' self-perceived academic performance (Gonzales et al., 2024). Despite these advances, localized empirical data on how these factors interact within Philippine provincial contexts remain limited.

Although numerous studies have examined academic stress and coping mechanisms, most have been conducted in urban or international contexts, often overlooking the unique educational and sociocultural conditions of provincial Philippine students. There is limited understanding of how senior high school students in Surigao del Sur perceive and manage academic stress within their specific learning environments. Furthermore, few studies have integrated academic stressors, coping appraisal, and coping strategies into a single analytical framework linked to self-perceived academic performance. This lack of context-specific data hinders the development of evidence-based interventions tailored to the realities of Philippine secondary education.

This study aims to determine the levels of academic stressors, coping appraisal and resources, and coping strategies used by senior high school students in Surigao del Sur, Philippines. Specifically, it seeks to:

- a. Identify the primary academic stressors experienced by students;
- b. Assess students' coping appraisal and available coping resources;
- c. Examine the coping strategies employed in response to academic stress; and
- d. Relate these findings to students' self-perceived academic performance.

By analyzing these interrelated factors, the study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how academic stress influences students' learning and well-being in local educational settings.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study hold both theoretical and practical significance. Academically, it extends the application of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping within a Southeast Asian educational context, enriching global discourse on adolescent stress. Practically, the results may inform school administrators, teachers, and policymakers in designing stress management and coping enhancement programs tailored to senior high school students. Understanding the coping patterns of learners can guide the development of interventions promoting psychological resilience, academic motivation, and mental health awareness. Moreover, the study's localized perspective provides valuable empirical evidence for the Department of Education's initiatives on student wellness and holistic education.

Scope and Delimitations

The study focused on 300 senior high school students enrolled in selected public and private schools in Surigao del Sur, Philippines, during the academic year 2025–2026. It measured students' self-reported experiences of academic stress, coping appraisal, and coping strategies through a validated survey instrument. The study was limited to quantitative data and did not explore in-depth qualitative factors such as personal narratives or family influences. Findings are therefore generalizable primarily to similar educational settings and student populations within the Philippine context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Stressors among Senior High School Students

Academic stress has become a pervasive concern in secondary education, particularly as students navigate

increasing academic expectations and socio-emotional challenges within contemporary learning environments. Defined as the psychological distress resulting from academic-related demands that exceed an individual's adaptive capacity (Sun et al., 2022), academic stress influences both mental health and educational outcomes. The purpose of this review is to synthesize existing research on academic stressors, coping strategies, and self-perceived academic performance, emphasizing studies conducted between 2020 and 2025. The review is organized thematically into three major sections: (1) academic stressors and their effects on students, (2) coping appraisal and coping strategies, and (3) relationships between stress and academic performance. This synthesis culminates in a critical analysis identifying theoretical gaps that justify the present study.

Recent studies consistently reveal that high school students experience substantial academic stress due to workload intensity, examination pressure, and performance expectations. Lee et al. (2021) found that secondary students in post-pandemic contexts exhibited heightened stress levels linked to online learning transitions and increased academic demands. Similarly, David et al. (2021) observed that Filipino students often associate stress with maintaining grades and meeting institutional standards, a reflection of the competitive culture within the Philippine educational system. Moreover, Chai et al. (2023) emphasized that academic stress is multidimensional, encompassing emotional (anxiety, frustration), cognitive (difficulty concentrating), and behavioral (procrastination, fatigue) symptoms. In Southeast Asia, contextual factors such as limited resources, teacher expectations, and socioeconomic pressures further intensify these stressors (Zhao & Watanabe, 2022). Collectively, these findings underscore that stress among high school students is both a psychological and structural phenomenon shaped by educational systems, cultural expectations, and personal aspirations.

Coping Appraisal and Coping Strategies

Coping appraisal, or the individual's evaluation of their ability to manage stress, plays a central role in determining stress outcomes. According to the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), stress results from an imbalance between perceived demands and available coping resources. Studies have demonstrated that students with higher coping appraisal exhibit lower stress and better academic adjustment (Caballero-Domínguez et al., 2022; Reyes et al., 2023).

Coping strategies are commonly classified as problem-focused (e.g., seeking solutions, planning, time management) or emotion-focused (e.g., relaxation, distraction, emotional regulation). Pillay et al. (2022) reported that students under high academic stress frequently resort to emotion-focused strategies to relieve immediate tension rather than addressing root causes. Conversely, Singh et al. (2021) and Gonzales et al. (2024) found that students who employ problem-focused coping exhibit better self-regulation, higher resilience, and improved academic performance.

Despite this, cultural nuances shape coping behaviors. In collectivist societies such as the Philippines, students often refrain from seeking professional help or expressing distress due to social norms valuing endurance and self-reliance (De Guzman & Tan, 2022). Consequently, while coping resources may exist, their utilization remains limited, reflecting a gap between coping potential and coping behavior.

Academic Stress and Self-Perceived Academic Performance

Empirical evidence demonstrates a complex relationship between stress and academic performance. Moderate levels of stress can enhance motivation and task engagement, but chronic stress undermines concentration and learning efficacy (Sun et al., 2022; David et al., 2021). Reyes et al. (2023) found that Filipino students who perceive themselves as academically competent report lower stress levels and greater self-efficacy. However, Tran et al. (2022) noted that when stress exceeds coping capacity, it negatively correlates with both objective grades and self-perceived academic achievement. Furthermore, Zhao & Watanabe (2022) identified gender and socioeconomic differences in stress perception, suggesting that contextual and personal factors mediate the stress–performance link. Such variations imply that academic outcomes depend not merely on stress exposure but also on adaptive mechanisms and the educational environment.

Critical Analysis

While recent studies provide valuable insights into academic stress and coping, several methodological and contextual limitations persist. Many investigations rely on cross-sectional survey designs (e.g., Sun et al., 2022; Pillay et al., 2022), which restrict causal inference and temporal understanding of stress adaptation. Additionally, most research has been conducted in Western or urban Asian contexts, leaving provincial and rural educational settings—such as those in Surigao del Sur—underexplored. Moreover, while emotional and behavioral coping mechanisms have been well-documented, few studies have examined their combined effect on perceived academic performance among senior high school students.

The reviewed literature reveals strong correlations between coping efficacy and academic adjustment, yet gaps remain in understanding how specific coping profiles predict self-perceived academic success. This underscores the need for localized, evidence-based assessments of stress and coping dynamics within the Philippine K–12 framework.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design to determine the levels of academic stressors, coping appraisal and resources, and coping strategies used by senior high school students in Surigao del Sur, Philippines. The descriptive approach was deemed appropriate as it enabled the systematic collection of quantitative data that reflected participants' perceptions and experiences without manipulating any variables. This design was selected to provide an accurate representation of the students' current psychological and behavioral responses to academic demands.

Locale

The study was conducted in selected senior high schools located in Surigao del Sur, Philippines, a province characterized by a diverse mix of urban and rural educational settings. The area was chosen due to its growing population of senior high school students and the increasing emphasis on academic achievement within the K–12 education system. The sociocultural and economic diversity of the province provided a meaningful context for examining variations in students' experiences of academic stress and coping strategies.

Respondents

The respondents of the study were 300 senior high school students enrolled in both public and private institutions within Surigao del Sur during the academic year. The participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation from different strands (e.g., Academic, Technical-Vocational, and Arts and Design). Inclusion criteria required that respondents be currently enrolled, aged between 16 and 19 years, and willing to participate voluntarily. Students with incomplete enrollment status or who declined consent were excluded from the study.

Instruments

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, consisting of three parts corresponding to the main variables: (1) Academic Stressors, (2) Coping Appraisal and Resources, and (3) Coping Strategies Used. Each part employed a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Never" or "Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Always" or "Strongly Agree"), depending on the subscale. The instrument underwent content validation by a panel of three experts in educational psychology and research methodology to ensure relevance and clarity. A pilot test involving 30 students was conducted to establish reliability, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89, indicating high internal consistency.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was secured from the institutional ethics review committee. Permission to administer the survey was obtained from school administrators. Informed consent was sought from all

participants, and parental consent was obtained for those below 18 years of age. Questionnaires were distributed in person during regular school hours, with clear instructions and researcher supervision to ensure accurate responses. Respondents completed the survey anonymously, which typically required 15–20 minutes. The completed questionnaires were collected, checked for completeness, and securely stored for data encoding and analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistical techniques, including weighted mean and standard deviation, to determine the overall levels of academic stress, coping appraisal, and coping strategies. The weighted mean was used to interpret the frequency or extent of agreement with each statement, while categorical descriptions (“Always,” “Often,” “Sometimes,” “Rarely,” and “Never”) provided interpretive clarity. Data were tabulated and analyzed using Microsoft Excel, ensuring accuracy and reliability of computations.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. All respondents were informed of the study’s objectives, voluntary nature, and confidentiality safeguards. No personally identifiable information was collected, and responses were treated with utmost confidentiality. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Ethical approval was granted by the institutional ethics review committee, ensuring compliance with national and international research ethics protocols.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the weighted mean scores of academic stressors among senior high school students in Surigao del Sur. The total weighted mean of 3.75 indicates that students often experience academic stress, particularly in relation to upcoming deadlines ($M = 3.87$), schoolwork overload ($M = 3.87$), and maintaining academic grades ($M = 3.78$). These findings suggest that academic demands consistently contribute to students’ stress levels.

Table 2 summarizes responses on coping appraisal and resources. The total weighted mean of 3.35, interpreted as *neutral*, implies that students have moderate confidence in their ability to cope with academic challenges. Among the items, seeking help when faced with difficult tasks scored the highest ($M = 3.82$, *agree*), while time management and calmness under pressure scored lower ($M = 3.03$ and $M = 3.34$, respectively).

Table 3 presents the coping strategies used by students. The total weighted mean of 3.27, corresponding to *sometimes*, reveals that coping mechanisms are employed inconsistently. Emotion-focused strategies such as relaxing or engaging in hobbies ($M = 3.71$; $M = 3.63$) were used more frequently than problem-focused strategies like seeking advice ($M = 3.29$) or planning tasks ($M = 3.34$).

Together, these results highlight a pattern of frequent academic stress, moderate coping appraisal, and occasional use of coping strategies, suggesting a partial imbalance between stressors and coping mechanisms.

Table 1 Academic Stressors

Statements	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I feel pressured by upcoming deadlines.	3.87	Often
2. I feel anxious before examinations.	3.37	Sometimes
3. I feel overwhelmed by the amount of schoolwork.	3.87	Often
4. I struggle to meet academic expectations.	3.84	Often
5. I feel stressed about maintaining my grades.	3.78	Often
TOTAL WEIGHTED MEAN	3.75	Often
Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 = Always	3.41 – 4.20 = Often	2.61 – 3.40 = Sometimes
Rarely	1.00 – 1.80 =	1.81 – 2.60 =

Table 2 Coping Appraisal and Resources

Statements	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I feel confident that I can handle academic challenges.	3.24	Neutral
2. I believe I have the resources to meet school demands.	3.34	Neutral
3. I know how to manage my time effectively.	3.03	Neutral
4. I seek help when I find a task difficult.	3.82	Agree
5. I stay calm when academic pressure increases.	3.34	Neutral
TOTAL WEIGHTED MEAN	3.35	Neutral

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 = Strongly Agree 3.41 – 4.20 = Agree 2.61 – 3.40 = Neutral 1.81 – 2.60 = Disagree 1.00 – 1.80 = Strongly Disagree

Table 3 Coping Strategies Used

Statements	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I plan and prioritize my academic tasks.	3.34	Sometimes
2. I seek advice from teachers or classmates.	3.29	Sometimes
3. I try to relax or distract myself when stressed.	3.71	Often
4. I talk to friends or family about my stress.	2.39	Rarely
5. I engage in hobbies or sports to relieve stress.	3.63	Often
TOTAL WEIGHTED MEAN	3.27	Sometimes

Legend: 4.21 – 5.00 = Always 3.41 – 4.20 = Often 2.61 – 3.40 = Sometimes 1.81 – 2.60 = Rarely 1.00 – 1.80 = Never

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that senior high school students in Surigao del Sur frequently experience academic stress, consistent with global and regional studies conducted during the post-pandemic educational recovery period. According to Lee et al. (2021), heightened academic expectations and workload have been identified as primary predictors of stress among secondary students following shifts to hybrid and digital learning. Similarly, David et al. (2021) reported that Filipino students often perceive academic pressure as an enduring challenge due to competitive performance standards and institutional expectations.

The moderate coping appraisal (TWM = 3.35) observed in this study suggests that while students recognize the availability of coping resources, their self-efficacy in managing academic stress remains limited. This aligns with Caballero-Domínguez et al. (2022), who found that adolescents' perceived coping competence often mediates the relationship between academic stress and well-being. In the Philippine context, Reyes et al. (2023) emphasized that inadequate time management and limited access to support systems contribute to students' moderate confidence in coping capabilities.

Coping strategies were applied inconsistently, with emotion-focused mechanisms slightly more frequent than problem-focused ones. This finding echoes Singh et al. (2021) and Pillay et al. (2022), who reported that students under academic strain tend to resort to relaxation, diversion, or avoidance-based coping instead of proactive problem-solving. Although emotion-focused strategies can provide short-term relief, Gonzales et al. (2024) caution that reliance on them without parallel development of problem-solving skills may perpetuate stress vulnerability.

Furthermore, the lower use of interpersonal support strategies—such as seeking advice or communicating stress with peers and family—reflects cultural tendencies toward self-reliance and academic perseverance, as described by De Guzman & Tan (2022) in their study of Filipino high school students' coping behaviors. These cultural and social dimensions must be considered in designing stress-management interventions tailored to local educational environments.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings support the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which posits that stress outcomes depend on individuals' cognitive appraisal of challenges and available coping resources. The imbalance observed here—high stress levels combined with moderate coping appraisal and inconsistent coping strategies—suggests that many students experience strain due to perceived inadequacy in coping resources.

While the findings provide valuable insights, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported measures, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Future research should incorporate longitudinal approaches and qualitative data to capture the evolving dynamics of academic stress and coping strategies. Moreover, interventions focusing on time management, peer mentoring, and counseling accessibility could be empirically evaluated to determine their effectiveness in improving students' coping efficacy and academic resilience.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that senior high school students in Surigao del Sur experience frequent academic stress mainly due to workload, performance expectations, and time constraints. Although they demonstrate a moderate level of coping appraisal, indicating some awareness of available coping resources, their application of coping strategies remains inconsistent, with emotion-focused techniques being more common than problem-focused ones. This imbalance suggests that while students recognize academic challenges, their coping mechanisms are not fully effective in mitigating stress, potentially affecting their academic performance. These findings affirm the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) by underscoring the critical role of cognitive appraisal and coping efficacy in managing stress outcomes. The study contributes to the understanding of adolescent academic stress within the Philippine educational context and highlights the need for institutional interventions that strengthen students' coping skills and emotional resilience.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on these findings, it is recommended that schools implement structured stress management and coping-skills programs integrated into the senior high school curriculum to promote students' psychological well-being. Teachers should adopt supportive instructional practices and workload management strategies that foster a balanced academic environment. Students are encouraged to engage more in problem-focused coping strategies, such as seeking guidance, time management, and peer collaboration. At the policy level, the Department of Education should establish mental health and wellness frameworks that include early stress detection and counseling initiatives. Future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to explore causal relationships between stress, coping strategies, and academic performance, and to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programs. Overall, this study underscores the importance of enhancing adaptive coping mechanisms to improve both academic outcomes and mental health among Filipino senior high school students.

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