

Examining Depression and Coping Strategies among College Students in a Local Community College in Cebu

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ABSTRACT

This research determined the perceived depression and the coping strategies among 508 college students in a local community college in Cebu during the academic year 2025-2026. Specifically, it identified the respondents' demographic profile, level of depression, coping strategies employed and the significant relationship between depression and coping strategies. The respondents of the study were 508 college students selected through stratified random sampling technique. Data were gathered using adapted survey questionnaires on depression and coping strategies. Frequency count, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation were used as statistical treatments of the data. The study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design and gathered data using the Filipino Student Depression Inventory (FSDI) and the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale (FCSS). Findings revealed that the majority of respondents were 18-20 years old, predominantly male, first-year BSIT students from low-income households. Respondents exhibited an overall mild level of depression, though discomfort with self and others and familial finances were manifested at moderate levels. Regarding coping, adaptive strategies were highly practiced, with religiosity emerging as the most utilized mechanism. Substance abuse was minimally practiced and emerged as the least utilized coping strategy. Statistical analysis indicated no significant relationship between depression and coping strategies ($r=0.069$, $p=0.123$), suggesting that students utilize coping mechanisms as a baseline resilience measure regardless of symptom severity. A school-based mental health intervention program, Project THRIVE, is proposed to enhance emotional resilience and help-seeking behaviors.

Keywords: Education, Guidance and Counseling, Depression, Coping Strategies, Descriptive-Correlation Method, Cebu Province

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a vital aspect of overall well-being and has emerged as a major concern in higher education institutions both in the Philippines and around the world. College students encounter a wide range of challenges, including academic pressure, financial difficulties, family concerns, social adjustment, career uncertainty and personal issues. Studies have shown that these stressors significantly influence student's academic achievement, productivity and overall well-being (Aban et al. 2024). Student stress has likewise been associated with academic demands, personal concerns, negative life events, relationship problems, health issues and future uncertainties (Barbayannis et al., 2022). These findings emphasize the significance of effective coping strategies in promoting students' mental health and sustaining their academic engagement.

Depression among young individuals is often underestimated or misunderstood as mere laziness or lack of motivation rather than recognized as a legitimate mental health condition. College students are particularly vulnerable to depression and anxiety due to increased stress, limited social support and transitions in social roles (Auerbach et al., 2018). While school-based mental health promotion programs have been found to mitigate these risks (Alibudbud 2021), the persistent stigma associated with this continues to deter many students from reaching out for professional assistance.

If left unaddressed, depression may impair student's ability to function effectively in the academic environment characterized by reduced motivation, weakened cognitive functioning and limited academic engagement, which

may result in poor academic performance and dissatisfaction with university life (Liu et al., 2024). Persistent depression also negatively affects social relationships and emotional resilience. Prolonged exposure to academic stress further contributes to poor sleep quality, heightened anxiety and increased depressive symptoms (Benitez-Agudelo, 2025). In addition, ineffective coping strategies, limited social support and the absence of adaptive coping mechanisms increase students' vulnerability to chronic depression and burnout (Chong L.Z. et al., 2025). Studies likewise reveal that many college students experience moderate to severe levels of depression, anxiety and stress, indicating that without timely intervention, these mental health concerns may worsen into long-term psychological difficulties (Pedrelli P., et al., 2015). These conditions underscore the pressing need for effective coping interventions and enhanced institutional support systems to foster students' mental health and overall well-being.

Depression is widely acknowledged as one of the primary sources of disability globally (World Health Organization, 2017). In the Philippines, millions of Filipinos experience depressive symptoms and other mental health issues, with a growing number of cases reported among university students, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016). Studies revealed high prevalence rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidality among Filipino college students, especially among young adults aged 15 to 25 (Lee et al., 2013; Redaniel et al., 2011; Hedden et al., 2015). More than half of Filipino university students were found to experience symptoms related to anxiety and major depressive disorder (Genereux et al., 2021). These mental health concerns are often linked to academic pressure, financial difficulties, social relationships and future uncertainties.

Depression among Filipino students is shaped by interconnected factors, such as relationships with family members, self-perception, social belongingness, academic performance, and financial stress (Orr et al., 2022). Cultural values such as *kapwa* or shared identity further emphasize the importance of social connectedness in maintain emotional well-being.

However, despite extensive international research, localized studies examining depression and coping strategies among students in local community colleges, particularly in non-urban areas, remain limited. Most Philippine studies utilize Western-based assessment tools that may not fully capture the Filipino emotional experiences. Therefore, the adoption of culturally-appropriate tools such as the Filipino Student Depression Inventory (FSDI) by Orr et al., (2022) and the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale (FCSS) by Rilveria (2018), underscores the importance of conducting research that is tailored to the local context.

Cordova Public College provides a relevant setting for this study because many of its students come from low-income families and face challenges related to financial constraints, work-study responsibilities and inadequate access to mental health resources. Some students also work full-time, reside away from their families or pursue courses based on availability rather than personal preference, which may contribute to stress, fatigue and vulnerability to depressive symptoms. Despite increasing demand for mental health programs, many institutions continue to face inadequate resources and support systems while persistent mental health stigma continues to be a significant barrier to obtaining professional help.

Thus, this study sought to examine the relationship between depression and coping strategies among college students of Cordova Public College in Cordova, Cebu during the academic year 2025-2026. Specifically, it aimed to determine students' level of depression, identify dominant coping strategies and determine the relationship between depression and coping strategies. The findings of this research served as a valuable reference for developing a school-based mental health intervention program designed to enhance students' well-being and academic success.

Theoretical Background

This study is anchored on established psychological and counseling theories explaining the development of Depression and the impact of Coping Strategies in managing psychological distress. Specifically, this study is anchored on Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression, Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, and Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory. These theoretical perspectives are further reinforced by pertinent Philippine legal frameworks, including the Philippine Mental Health Act of 2018 (Republic Act

11036), the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004 (Republic Act 9258), and the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (Republic Act 10931).

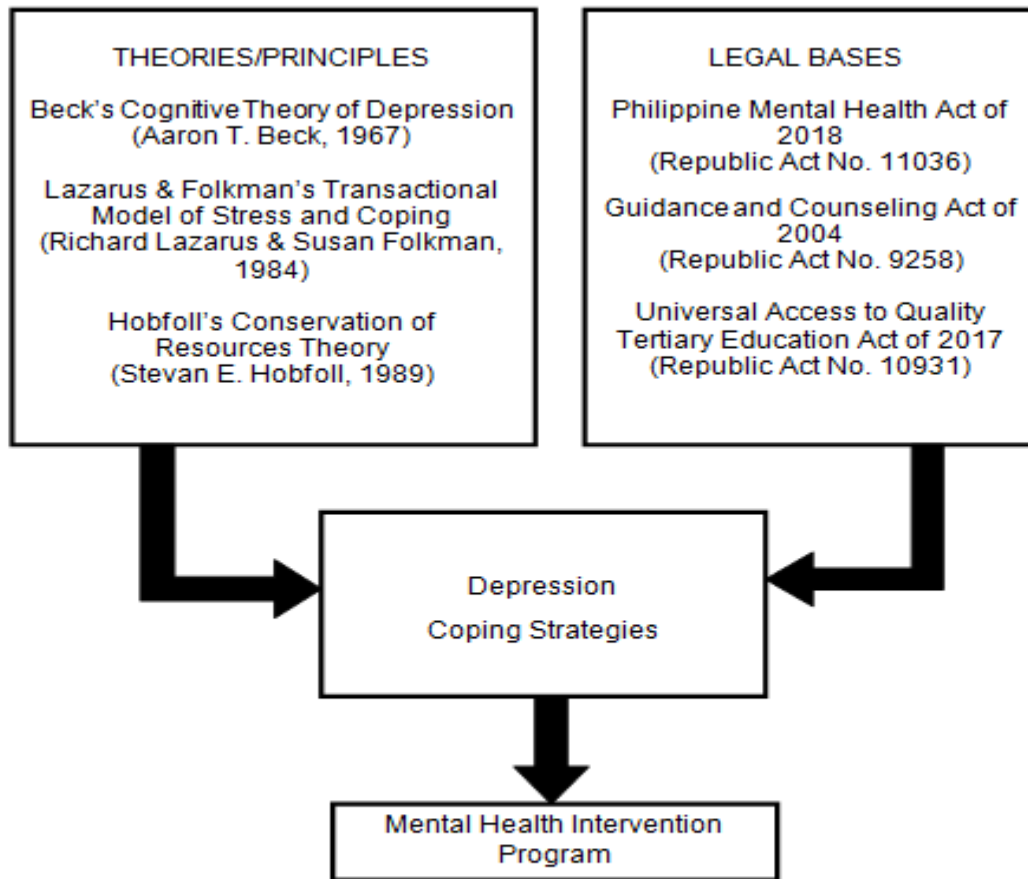


Figure 1
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Beck’s Cognitive Theory of Depression (1967), proposed by Aaron T. Beck, posits that depression is primarily rooted in maladaptive cognitive processes, particularly the presence of negative automatic thoughts and dysfunctional belief systems. Central to this theory is the cognitive triad, which consists of negative perceptions about the self, the world and the future. These distorted cognitions influence emotional responses and behavioral patterns, ultimately contributing to depressive symptomatology. The theory emphasizes maladaptive schemas and cognitive distortions as key contributors to depressive symptoms. Numerous studies have found a significant relationship between negative thinking patterns and higher levels of depression. This theory provides a strong foundation for understanding depression as the primary variable in this study. In the context of college students, this theory is highly relevant as academic pressures, social challenges, and personal expectations may trigger negative cognitive appraisals. Students who interpret academic failure, financial hardship, or interpersonal difficulties through a negative cognitive lens are more likely to experience depressive symptoms. Empirical studies support that cognitive distortions significantly predict depression levels among students, reinforcing the explanatory power of this theory.

In this study, Beck’s Cognitive Theory of Depression provides the psychological foundation for understanding depression as the dependent variable, particularly as measured through the Filipino Student Depression Inventory (FSDI). It also explains how maladaptive thinking patterns may influence the selection and effectiveness of coping strategies. This theory serves as a basis for examining how students' perceptions and interpretations of their experiences influence their psychological well-being. It also supports the expected relationship between depression and coping strategies, as maladaptive thinking may lead to ineffective coping behaviors. Within the conceptual framework, depression is viewed not only as an emotional condition but as an

outcome of cognitive processing shaped by individual experiences and environmental stressors. Thus, this theory is essential in explaining the psychological basis of depression in the study.

This study is also grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress results from a continuous transaction between the individual and the environment, with cognitive appraisal and coping resources playing central mediating roles. The model highlights two fundamental processes: primary appraisal, in which individuals determine whether a situation poses a threat or a source of stress, and secondary appraisal, in which they evaluate their capacity to manage or respond to the stressor. Coping strategies are generally classified into two categories: problem-focused coping, which aims to address or resolve the source of stress and emotion-focused coping, which seeks to manage the emotional reactions associated with the stressor. Numerous studies have validated this model in explaining how individuals manage stress and emotional challenges. This model is directly relevant to the present study as it explains how students respond to stressors such as academic demands, financial constraints and social pressures. This theory directly relates to coping strategies as the second variable in the study.

In this study, coping strategies serve as a primary independent variable and may also act as a mediating or moderating factor in the relationship between stress and depression. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping offers a theoretical framework for examining how various coping strategies influence depressive symptoms among college students. It suggests that individuals who appraise stressful situations positively and utilize adaptive coping strategies are more likely to manage stress effectively and are less likely to experience severe depressive symptoms. This theory provides a framework for understanding how variations in coping responses contribute to differences in depression levels among students, thereby supporting the study's investigation of the relationship between these variables.

This study is further supported by Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources Theory, which suggests that individuals seek to obtain, preserve and protect resources that they value, including emotional energy, social support, financial stability and psychological well-being. The theory proposes that stress and depression emerge when these resources are lost, endangered or inadequately restored over time. In the context of college students, limited financial resources, lack of social support, and academic demands may create conditions of resource depletion, increasing vulnerability to depression. Students from low-income backgrounds or those balancing academic and work responsibilities may experience greater resource strain, which can negatively affect their coping capacity and mental health.

This theory strengthens the study by providing a contextual and environmental perspective, explaining how socio-economic conditions and resource availability influence both depression and coping strategies. Research has indicated that individuals with limited resources are more susceptible to psychological distress. It highlights that coping is not solely an individual, psychological process but is also constrained by external realities. Hence, this theory contributes to explaining both variables in the study.

Taken together, the three theories present a comprehensive perspective for explaining the association between depression and coping strategies among individuals. Beck's Cognitive Theory explains the internal cognitive mechanisms underlying depression and highlights the role of internal thought processes in developing depression, the Transactional Model explains the process of coping in response to stress, and the Conservation of Resources Theory highlights the influence of environmental and socio-economic factors, as well as the crucial role of resource availability, in managing stress and maintaining mental health. Together, these theories illustrate that depression among college students is influenced by an interaction of cognitive, behavioral and contextual factors. These theoretical perspectives provide a holistic framework for understanding the interaction of cognitive, behavioral and environmental factors in influencing depression and coping strategies. They also support the assumption that improving coping strategies and strengthening resource availability can mitigate depressive symptoms. This integrated theoretical perspective underpins the conceptual framework of the study.

One of the primary legal frameworks supporting this study is the Philippine Mental Health Act of 2018 (RA 11036). This law institutionalizes a holistic strategy towards mental health by promoting awareness, accessibility of services, and protection of individuals with mental health concerns. It mandates the integration of mental

health programs in educational institutions and emphasizes the necessity of early detection, intervention and preventive strategies. Among its major provisions are the establishment of school-based mental health services and the integration of mental health education initiatives. This law directly supports the study by reinforcing the importance of understanding depression and coping strategies among students as a basis for developing evidence-based interventions.

The Philippine Mental Health Act justifies the need for research on student mental health by recognizing the contribution of educational institutions in addressing psychological concerns. Furthermore, the law highlights the need for evidence-based mental health initiatives that respond to the specific needs of students. In the context of tertiary education, it underscores the relevance of investigating depression and coping strategies to facilitate the formulation of relevant and effective support mechanisms. It also reinforces the responsibility of schools in promoting student well-being. Thus, this legal framework strengthens the relevance and urgency of the study.

The Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004 serves as the legal framework for the practice of guidance and counseling in the Philippines, ensuring that counseling services are rendered by appropriately trained and qualified professionals. It emphasizes the role of guidance counselors in promoting students' personal, social, educational and career development. In the context of this study, RA 9258 is highly relevant as it underscores the responsibility of educational institutions to provide professional counseling services that address students' mental health concerns. The findings of this study, particularly regarding depression and coping strategies, may serve as an empirical basis for guidance counselors in designing preventive and intervention programs tailored to students' needs. Furthermore, the law highlights the importance of evidence-based counseling practices, which aligns with the study's objective of developing a contextualized mental health intervention program for Cordova Public College.

Another pertinent legal framework is the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (RA 10931), which aims to expand access to higher education by offering free tuition and financial assistance to higher education by offering free tuition and financial assistance to eligible students in state universities and colleges. It also promotes student welfare and inclusive education. While primarily focused on access, the law also recognizes the importance of supporting students' overall development, including their mental health and well-being. This aligns with the study's objective of examining factors that influence student well-being. This legal framework supports the study by emphasizing that access to education must be accompanied by adequate support systems that address students' psychological and emotional needs.

These laws collectively serve as the legal and policy basis for this study by promoting mental health, counseling services and equitable access to education among college students. These laws emphasize the importance of student well-being, access to services and the role of institutions in supporting holistic development. By investigating depression and coping strategies, this study contributes to the implementation of these policies through evidence-based insights. It provides valuable data that can inform mental health programs and interventions in educational settings.

The integration of these theoretical and legal frameworks establishes a strong foundation for the study. The theories explain the mechanisms underlying depression and coping, while the legal frameworks justify the need for institutional support and intervention. Together, these laws reinforce the relevance of studying depression and coping strategies among college students and underscore the responsibility of educational institutions, particularly guidance and counseling units, in promoting student well-being. Thus, the study is both theoretically grounded and legally supported, ensuring its relevance, rigor, significance and practical applicability.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research design that incorporated both descriptive and correlational methods. The descriptive method was used to determine the respondents' profile, assess their level of depression in terms of familial connectedness, discomfort with self and others, academic pressure and familial finances, and identify the coping strategies employed by the students of Cordova Public College in Gabi, Cordova, Cebu. The

correlational method was applied to investigate the relationship between depression and coping strategies among the respondents.

Descriptive research facilitated the systematic observation, measurement and description of phenomena (Taguchi, 2018; Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019; Remler & Ryzin, 2021), whereas correlational focused on determining the nature and strength of relationships between variables without manipulating them (Ary et al., 2018; Seeram, 2019).

Further, this research used stratified random sampling wherein respondents from each academic program were adequately represented in the study according to its share in the total population. A sample of 508 students from the 3, 411 total population of Cordova Public College in the four (4) colleges namely: College of Elementary Education, College of Secondary Education, College of Computer Studies and College of Hospitality Management and 5 academic programs namely: Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in English, Bachelor of Secondary Education Major in Science, Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management and Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, were the study's respondents. The data were summarized, organized, and treated statistically per the study's objectives.

Research Locale

Cordova Public College is a public higher education institution located in Gabi, Cordova, Cebu. Established on June 1, 2005 through Municipal Ordinance No. 001-2005, the institution was created to broaden access to tertiary education for the residents of Cordova, particularly underprivileged high school graduates and students from neighboring communities. The institution initially operated in the old municipal building and opened with twelve pioneering students during its first enrolment period in June 2005. Over time, student enrolment steadily increased as learners from nearby cities and provinces chose to pursue their studies at the college. To accommodate this growth and support its academic programs, additional buildings and facilities were developed at its current campus in Barangay Gabi. At present, the institution offers several undergraduate degree programs, including Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English and Science, Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management and Bachelor of Science in Information Technology. These programs serve students from diverse academic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Figure 2 illustrates the location of the research environment. Cordova Public College was selected as the research locale because it serves a student population that may encounter a variety of academic, financial and personal challenges associated with college life. Many students face socio-economic difficulties and have insufficient availability of mental health services and resources support. These conditions make the institution an appropriate setting for examining depression and coping strategies among college students.

Research Participants

A total of 508 college students enrolled at Cordova Public College participated as respondents in this study. The respondents included 69 Bachelor of Elementary Education students, 26 Bachelor of Secondary Education students, 245 Bachelor of Science in Information Technology students and 168 Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management students. All four academic programs of the institution were represented in the study. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics and distribution of the respondents. The respondents of this study possessed diverse demographic characteristics including age, gender, course, year level, student status and socio-economic background. Such diversity provided a broader perspective on the experiences of college students in relation to depression and coping strategies

Table 1. Distribution of the Respondents

Academic Program	f	%
BEEd	69	13.58
BSEd	26	5.12

BSTM	168	33.07
BSIT	245	48.23
Total	508	100.00

The selection of college students as respondents was deemed appropriate because individuals in this developmental stage commonly encounter academic pressures, financial difficulties, social adjustment concerns and emotional challenges that may affect their mental health and well-being. As students in a local community college, they may also experience socio-economic constraints and insufficient availability of mental health resources, making them a relevant population for examining depression and coping mechanisms. Their lived experiences provided valuable data necessary for understanding the prevalence of depressive symptoms and the coping strategies utilized in managing stressors associated with college life.

Given the heterogeneity of the target population, the study adopted a stratified random sampling technique to obtain adequate representation from each academic program and year level. According to Creswell J.W. et al., (2018), stratified random sampling is appropriate when the population consists of distinct subgroups that must be proportionately represented in the study. Similarly, Saunders M., et al., (2019) emphasized that this sampling method reduces sampling bias and enhances the reliability and representativeness of research findings.

RESULTS

The majority of respondents were aged 18-20 (63.78%), male (53.15%), and enrolled in the BSIT program (48.23%). Freshmen comprised 53.15% of the sample, while 84.25% belonged to households with low family monthly income. The overall grand mean was 2.45, indicating a mild level of depression. However, Discomfort with Self and Others (WM=2.64) and Familial Finances (WM=2.61) were both interpreted as moderate. Academic Pressure (WM=2.44) and Familial Connectedness (WM=2.09) remained at mild levels. The respondents demonstrated a high level of coping strategies (Grand Mean=2.62). Religiosity was the most utilized mechanism (WM=3.52, Very High), followed by Problem-Solving (WM=3.13) and Relaxation/Recreation (WM=2.97). Substance Abuse was the least utilized strategy (WM=1.38, Minimal). The computed r-value was 0.069 with a p-value of 0.123. Since the p-value was greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected, indicating no statistically significant relationship between the level of depression and the coping strategies utilized by the respondents.

DISCUSSION

The study sought to examine the demographic profile of the respondents and assess their level of depression and utilization of coping strategies. It aimed to describe the respondents' age, gender, course, year level, student status and socio-economic background. The domains of depression included familial connectedness, discomfort with self and others, academic pressure and familial finances. Coping strategies include domains in cognitive reappraisal, social support, problem-solving, religiosity, tolerance, emotional release, overactivity, relaxation or recreation and substance abuse.

The analysis revealed a population of predominantly young college students aged 18-20 in their early stages of college life, with first year students comprising the majority. Most were full-time students from low-income households, highlighting a demographic prone to academic and financial stress.

The respondents generally experienced a mild level of depression. However, moderate levels of depression are observed in terms of discomfort with self and others and familial finances.

Table 12. Summary on the Respondents' Level of Depression

Components	WM	SD	Verbal Description
Familial Connectedness	2.09	0.77	Mild

Discomfort with Self and Others	2.64	0.78	Moderate
Academic Pressure	2.44	0.76	Mild
Familial Finances	2.61	0.76	Moderate
Grand Mean	2.45		Mild
Grand Standard Deviation		0.77	

Table 12 summarizes the respondents’ level of depression. The highest mean was observed in discomfort with self and others (2.64) and familial finances (2.61), both verbally interpreted as moderate. Familial connectedness (2.09) and academic pressure (2.44) were interpreted as mild. The overall grand mean of 2.45 indicates a mild level of depression among the respondents. The summary table identified a clear hierarchy of stressors with internal cognitive struggle and economic lack being the most prominent.

The results may imply that although the respondents generally experienced mild depression, interpersonal concerns and financial problems contributed more strongly to their emotional distress. Mental health concerns among college students are often multidimensional and influenced by social, academic and financial factors. Among the domains assessed, discomfort with self and others obtained the highest mean score and was interpreted as moderate. This finding is strongly supported by Porillo et al. (2021), who identified cognitive confusion, excessive rumination and difficulty concentrating as prominent features of depression among Filipino students. Likewise, Puyat, et al. (2021) reported that loneliness was the most commonly experienced symptom among young Filipinos with moderate to severe depression, underscoring the significant role of social isolation and interpersonal difficulties in depressive experiences. Although the overall grand mean was interpreted as mild, existing literature suggests that such findings should be interpreted with caution. Porillo et al. (2021) emphasized that many students remain outwardly functional while experiencing substantial emotional and cognitively distress, making it difficult for educators and administrators to identify those who may be at risk. Furthermore, Alayon et al. (2021) found that 65.21% of freshmen in a comparable state college population experienced depression ranging from moderate to extremely severe levels. This suggests that even seemingly mild depressive symptoms may intensify over time, particularly in demanding academic environments, highlighting the importance of early identification and intervention.

On the other hand, the respondents demonstrated an overall high level of coping strategies. Religiosity was the most utilized strategy, followed by problem-solving and relaxation/recreation. Conversely, substance abuse was minimally used, suggesting a preference for adaptive confrontation of stressors over chemical dependence.

Table 22. Summary on the Respondents’ Level of Coping Strategies

Components	WM	SD	Verbal Description
Cognitive Reappraisal	2.68	0.85	High
Social Support	2.35	0.90	Moderate
Problem-Solving	3.13	0.82	High
Religiosity	3.52	0.78	Very High
Tolerance	2.95	0.93	High
Emotional Release	2.15	0.92	Moderate
Overactivity	2.46	0.88	Moderate
Relaxation/Recreation	2.97	0.87	High

Substance Abuse	1.38	0.74	Minimal
Grand Mean	2.62		High
Grand Standard Deviation		0.85	

Table 22 summarizes the respondents' level of coping strategies. Religiosity obtained the highest aggregate mean of 3.52 interpreted as very high, followed by problem-solving 3.13, relaxation/recreation 2.97, tolerance 2.95 and cognitive reappraisal 2.68, all interpreted as high. Substance abuse obtained the lowest aggregate mean of 1.38 interpreted as minimal. The overall grand mean of 2.62 indicates a high level of coping strategies among the respondents. This indicates that Filipino college students possess a robust and diverse repertoire of coping mechanisms to manage psychological distress, predominantly favoring adaptive and culturally resonant strategies over maladaptive ones.

The findings suggest that respondents generally utilize adaptive and healthy coping strategies to manage stress and depressive symptoms. Reliance on religiosity, problem-solving and relaxation indicates the use of constructive coping mechanisms rather than harmful behaviors. Adaptive coping strategies are associated with better psychological adjustment and emotional resilience. Austria-Cruz (2019) emphasized that spirituality is a prominent characteristic of Filipino culture, with the belief that "God will help me" serving as a powerful psychological resource and protective factor during times of difficulty. Similarly, Serrano et al. (2022) noted that participation in spiritual practices, such as prayer and meditation, is a key feature of the developmental phase of student coping, providing calmness, comfort and stability in stressful situations. Tan et al. (2021) also found that restorative activities, including sleeping and watching movies, are among the most commonly used individual coping strategies among students. Furthermore, Patalinghug et al. (2024) identified problem-focused coping as an important mediating factor that significantly reduces the adverse effects of depression on well-being. Consistent with this finding, Helmbrecht et al. (2021) reported that psychological well-being influences students' capacity to employ practical, adaptive, solution-oriented coping strategies. Interestingly, seeking support from others was utilized less frequently than internally focused coping strategies. In addition, Tan et al (2021) reported that more than half of Filipino students tend to adopt a "coping solo" approach, often influenced by introverted tendencies or academic cultures that discourage the open expression of vulnerability. Moreover, the B.E.N.D. Model proposed by Serrano et al. (2022) suggested that frequent engagement in cognitive reappraisal and problem-solving strategies contributes to personal growth and the development of a more resilient and mature sense of self.

The study tested the relationship between depression and coping strategies using Pearson's r. The result showed a negligible positive correlation ($r=0.069$) with a p-value of 0.123, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level. Consequently, the study did not reject the null hypothesis, concluding that there is no statistically significant relationship between the level of depression and the coping strategies used. This implies that students utilize these coping mechanisms as a baseline resilience measure regardless of the severity of the depressive symptoms.

Table 23. Test of Significance of the Relationship between Depression and Coping Strategies

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Depression and Coping Strategies	0.069	Negligible Positive	0.123	Do not reject Ho	Not Significant
*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)					

Table 23 presents the test of significance of the relationship between depression and coping strategies. The computed r-value of 0.069 indicates a negligible positive correlation between the two variables. Moreover, the p-value of 0.1223 exceeds the 0.05 level of significance, leading to the non-rejection of the null hypothesis. This signifies that there is no statistically significant relationship between depression and coping strategies among the

respondents. This suggests that the utilization of coping strategies is independent of the severity of their depressive symptoms.

The findings imply that although respondents experienced varying levels of depression and coping strategies, these variables were not significantly associated in the study. This may suggest that other factors such as personality, social environment, resilience or support systems may influence coping behaviors more strongly than depression alone. Previous studies also noted that coping effectiveness varies depending on contextual and individual factors.

Findings in Table 23 however present a notable departure from several established studies which generally establish a significant link between mental health and coping. Patalinghug et al. (2024), reported that depression has a significant impact on well-being and coping strategies serve as important mediating factors in this relationship. Their findings further indicated that higher levels of depression may hinder an individual's ability to utilize problem-focused coping strategies, a result that contrasts with the present study's finding of no significant relationship between depression and coping strategies. Similarly, Parungao (2024) found that coping styles significantly mediated the relationship between anxiety and depression, demonstrating a strong statistical association among these variables. In addition, Terrell et al. (2022) reported that the risk of depression was 2.49 times higher among students who relied more heavily on negative coping strategies than positive ones, suggesting a substantial predictive relationship between coping behaviors and depressive symptoms. Furthermore, Orines et al (2023) found a positive link between psychological distress and avoidant coping strategies, indicating that heightened distress is associated with the increased use of specific coping behaviors. Their study showed that avoidant coping, particularly behavioral disengagement was positively correlated with elevated stress levels. In contrast, Lee et al. (2013) found that variables such as religion and academic program were not significantly associated to depressive symptoms, although certain lifestyle factors, including smoking and alcohol consumption, demonstrated significant relationships. Likewise, Estubo et al. (2024) reported no significant differences in students' perceptions of coping strategy effectiveness across grade level, age or sex, suggesting that students generally evaluate coping strategies similarly regardless of demographic characteristics. The finding is consistent with the present study's lack of significant correlation between depression and coping strategies. Similarly, Liu et al (2024) found that while depression significantly predicted life satisfaction, anxiety—which often co-occurs with depression—did not have a significantly predict satisfaction with university life. These findings suggest that psychological symptoms do not always demonstrate direct or statistically significant relationships with every behavioral, environmental or coping-related variable, highlighting the complexity of factors that influence mental health outcomes.

A primary reason for the lack of significance between depression and coping strategies may be the “mild” grand mean for depression. Previous studies that reported significant correlations, such as the research conducted by Alayon et al. (2021), often involved populations in which a substantial proportion of students (65.21%) experienced depression at moderate to severe levels. The differing levels of depressive symptoms among participants may provide an explanation for the lack of a statistically significant relationship found in this study. Nevertheless, despite the lack of a statistically significant correlation, the respondents' preferred coping strategies were consistent with findings from previous studies. Similar to the study of Austria-Cruz (2019), respondents identified religiosity and problem-solving as their most commonly utilized coping resources for managing stress and building resilience. Furthermore, the studies of Rilveria (2018) and Orines et al. (2023) emphasized that significant relationships often emerge when specific coping domains, such as substance use or overactivity, are examined individually. These findings suggest that associations between mental health outcomes and coping behaviors may be more apparent at the domain level than when coping strategies are considered collectively. Additionally, although the respondents' overall level of depression was interpreted as mild, the aggregate mean for coping strategies was high. This finding indicates that respondents actively engage in coping mechanisms regardless of the severity of their symptoms, suggesting that coping strategies may function not only as responses to psychological distress but also as proactive measures that promote resilience and help prevent the escalation of mental health concerns.

These findings necessitate a shift in how student support is provided. Guidance counselors, faculty and administration must be able to recognize that despite the “mild” aggregate mean in depression, there may be underlying “moderate” internal struggles particularly cognitive confusion and overthinking. Because students

often exhibit “disguised emotional expression”—smiling or appearing functional while struggling internally—school personnel should be alert in detecting and preventing emotional distress before they can escalate. There is a need to prioritize first year students and those from low-income backgrounds as these groups are at the highest risk for transition-related shocks and financial struggles.

The results of the study provided a data-driven foundation for institutional policy and program design. There is a critical need to adopt a school-based mental health intervention program that strengthens emotional regulation, self-awareness and help-seeking behaviors. School policy should institutionalize integration of socio-emotional learning (SEL) to address mental codes like cognitive confusion and to build on existing “high” coping strategies like problem-solving. Since financial struggle is a primary driver of moderate depression, higher education institutions including local community colleges should treat scholarships and financial aid as essential components of mental health support. Policies on the establishment of early alert systems to detect students at risk due to financial instability or personal distress should be in place. Support services and programs should be able to leverage the “very high” coping strategies such as religiosity, etc. while also working to increase the “moderate” coping strategies such as social support, etc.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that students at Cordova Public College predominantly experience mild depression, yet face moderate stressors related to self-perception and financial stability. They possess a robust and adaptive repertoire of coping strategies, heavily rooted in faith and practical action. Because students often exhibit “disguised emotional expression,” appearing functional while struggling internally, school personnel must be proactive in detecting distress.

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