

Resilience and Coping Strategies of Junior High School Students in Dumaguete City

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Abstract

At the beginning of distance learning, there was a notable surge in referrals to the guidance office due to behavioral changes among junior high school students. Consequently, this study aims to explore the crucial association between the level of resilience and coping strategies among Junior High School students in Holy Cross High School Dumaguete. Despite considerable research on resilience and coping methods, there is a limited body of knowledge concerning Filipino Junior High School students. The survey included 253 students who responded to two standardized questionnaires. Based on the findings, it was observed that the respondents exhibited a high level of resilience. This is a positive attribute on the part of the respondents since it brings to light that they believe they can achieve their goals despite obstacles. They can return quickly to normal condition after a difficult situation or event. This manifests their high adaptability to changes that are inevitable in human existence. Additionally, their coping strategies leaned more towards an approach-oriented approach rather than avoidant coping strategies. When confronted with an unpleasant situation, they devise and execute strategies to alleviate the existing condition. They also think of it as part of the reality in life. Lastly, the study revealed a significant relationship between the level of resilience and coping strategies among the respondents.

Keywords: Junior high school, Students, Resilience, Coping strategies

Introduction

Adolescence is a period marked by confusion and exploration, where questions of independence and identity arise. During this phase, adolescents confront challenging decisions about academics, friendships, sexuality, gender identity, substance use, and alcohol consumption (Psychology Today, 2022). This transitional journey may induce anxiety related to physical

development, evolving relationships, and one's role in the broader world. While mild anxiety and common challenges are expected, serious mental health conditions may emerge during adolescence, emphasizing the importance of early intervention for optimal outcomes (Psychology Today, 2022).

Similar to physical health, mental well-being extends beyond the absence of disorders. Positive mental health dimensions, such as resilience, play a crucial role in an individual's ability to function competently amidst adversity (Murphey et al., 2013). Resilience, defined as the capability to navigate challenges or stress successfully, is associated with better-coping outcomes in adulthood, even after experiencing difficult circumstances in youth (Murphey et al., 2013). Resilience, a dynamic and developmental trait, has garnered attention in research, particularly during adolescence, a vulnerable period marked by risky behavior (Ahern et al., 2008).

Transitioning from childhood to young adulthood introduces new cultural and societal opportunities and expectations, accompanied by stressors such as romantic relationships, peer dynamics, academic pressures, and concerns about the future (Seiffge-Krenke & Klessinger, 2000). Coping strategies, developed and utilized by adolescents, are pivotal for handling stress and navigating the challenges inherent in this developmental phase. Adolescents benefit from support from peers and adults and their ability to manage everyday stressors independently, influencing their overall well-being (Marcova & Nikitskaya, 2013).

Historically, evidence consistently indicates that the peak incidence of mental health difficulties occurs during the transition from childhood to young adulthood, affecting up to 20% of adolescents (Kessler et al., 2005). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, impacting students' well-being due to school closures, social distancing, and the shift to online or blended learning. Studies reveal increased anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep disturbances, academic difficulties, and externalizing problems among students during the pandemic (Cao et al., 2020; Gonzales et al., 2020; Son et al., 2020; Savitsky et al., 2020; Wang & Zhao, 2020; Salman et al., 2020; Labrague et al., 2020; Marelli, 2021; Kecojevic et al., 2020; Mahdy, 2020; Copeland et al., 2021). Social interactions declined due to restrictions, impacting students' connections with friends, classmates, and relatives.

De Guzman (2021) reports that amidst the initial COVID-19 surge in March 2020, the Philippines halted in-person classes for its 24.9 million public education students. President Rodrigo Duterte's "no vaccine, no classes" policy delayed the start of the new school year until October 2020. The education department implemented remote learning options, including

online platforms, educational TV and radio, and printed modules. However, social inequalities and inadequate resources at home have disproportionately affected many students and teachers, highlighting the challenges associated with the adopted learning approaches (De Guzman, 2021).

Over two years ago, everyone witnessed the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly changing our lives. Everyone has lived in the “new normal” setting for over two years. While some schools refused to open, Holy Cross High School (the research locale) continues to deliver education to its students. The school has two different learning modalities—offline (modular) and online. This is to ensure that “No Child Is Left Behind.” For Offline Learning, teachers prepare comprehensive modules so the learners can still understand the lesson even in their absence. It is given to those not fortunate enough to have strong internet access at home. Another form of learning modality that the school offers is online learning. In this mode, teachers use an effective integrated set of interactive online services that can bring out the best in their students.

Since beginning distance learning, the Guidance Office has significantly increased referrals, especially in the Junior High School Department. These referrals came from teachers and parents who have observed the change in behaviors among their students and children. Some common concerns include absenteeism and failure to submit classwork on time. There were also cases from the Guidance Office that have been referred to psychologists since the referred students manifested signs of depression. Most of the students' complaints during the interviews were about their anguish due to the lockdowns. Some students, even those who excelled in their coursework before the pandemic, have lost motivation to attend online classes.

Hence, this study aims to investigate the important association between the level of resilience and coping strategies of Junior High School students in Holy Cross High School. While much research on resilience and coping methods has been completed, few have been conducted with Filipino Junior High School students, particularly in Dumaguete City. The study's findings could form the basis for a particular Guidance and Counseling Program that is beneficial during challenging times.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This research employed a descriptive-correlational design, primarily

describing and establishing relationships among the investigated variables. As Lappe (2000) and Salkind (2010) advocate, a descriptive-correlational design is well-suited for portraying relationships between variables without implying cause-and-effect connections. This design is particularly valuable when elucidating how one phenomenon is interconnected with others, especially in cases where the researcher lacks control over independent variables presumed to impact the dependent or outcome variable.

The study began by describing the respondents' profiles, encompassing age, sex, and grade level. Following this, the level of resilience among the respondents was evaluated using the Connor–Davidson Scale (CD-RISC-10). Subsequently, the coping strategies employed by the respondents were delineated based on the Brief-COPE Inventory. Finally, correlational analysis was undertaken to ascertain whether a significant relationship exists between the level of resilience and coping strategies among the respondents.

Research Participants

The respondents for this study comprised officially enrolled Junior High School students for the School Year 2021-2022. The total number of students in Grades 7 to 10 was 281. Among them, 253 students participated in online classes, while the remaining 28 were in offline or modular classes. Only students taking online classes were considered participants in the study to eliminate the learning delivery modality as a source of variance. Due to the manageable number of participants, a complete enumeration approach was employed.

Research Instrument

This research employed two distinct research instruments. The first instrument was the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10). Comprising ten items selected from the original 25 of the CD-RISC-25 scale, this instrument measures an individual's resilience or ability to recover after encountering stressful events, tragedy, or trauma. The second instrument utilized was the Brief-COPE, a condensed version of the COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced) Inventory. COPE Inventory is a self-report questionnaire designed to evaluate a broad spectrum of coping responses and is well-regarded for its validation and widespread usage (Garcia et al., 2018).

Data Gathering Procedure

Throughout the distance learning period, the Guidance Office of Holy Cross High School has recorded increased referrals from teachers and parents. Most reported issues include students' absenteeism and failure to submit class works on time. There were also cases from the Guidance Office that have been referred to psychologists since the referred students manifested signs of depression. Most of the students' complaints during the interviews were about their anguish due to the lockdowns. Some students, even those who excelled in their coursework before the pandemic, are now unmotivated to attend online classes. The research process involved a series of formal communications to obtain necessary permissions and consents. Initially, formal letters of request were composed and sent to the School Director and School Principal of Holy Cross High School, seeking permission to conduct the study among their Junior High School students. Upon receiving approval from both authorities, subsequent formal letters were dispatched to the parents, seeking their consent for their children's participation in the study. The study was conducted online, and parents were provided with a Data Privacy Consent Form. After receiving parental approval, the respondents were sent a Research Informed Consent Form through their Microsoft Teams Account, requesting their approval to participate in the study. Following the approvals and consents, the two-part questionnaire, comprising the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale and the Brief COPE Inventory, was distributed to the respondents.

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Data Analysis Procedure

To assess the level of resilience, the scores for each item were added up, and then the column totals were aggregated to obtain the CD-RISC score. Interpretation of results followed the scale: 0 to 10 signifies not true at all; 11 to 20 indicates rarely true; 21 to 30 suggests sometimes true; 31 to 40 implies often true, while 41 to 50 signifies true nearly all the time. Regarding resilience level, not true at all was considered very low; rarely true as low; sometimes as moderate; often true as high; and true nearly all the time as very high.

For the coping strategies, the data were analyzed using a weighted mean. Groupings were established based on intervals for a four-point scale to facilitate interpretation: 1.00–1.74 for "I haven't been doing this at all"; 1.75–2.49 for "I've been doing this a little bit"; 2.50–3.24 for "I've been doing this a medium amount"; and 3.25–4.00 for "I've been doing this a lot." Lastly, Spearman's rho was employed to determine the extent of the relationship between the level of resilience and coping strategies. This statistical tool was chosen because the correlated data were both in the ordinal level of measurement. For a significant relationship to be considered, the p-value had to be equal to or lesser than the alpha, set at 0.05 in this study.

Ethical Considerations

For the advancement of this study, ethical approval was secured from and granted by the University Research Ethics Committee of Silliman University. This step was taken to guarantee that all tests, procedures, and information gathered in this study were conducted in the best interest of the participants. To ensure transparency and uphold ethical standards, parental consent and informed consent were obtained from all respondents before they participated in the study and data-gathering processes.

A commitment to confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, with students' responses treated with the utmost discretion. In

processing and interpreting the data, the participants' identities will remain anonymous, safeguarding their privacy and confidentiality. This ethical framework underscores the dedication to conducting research with integrity and ensuring the well-being and rights of the participants.

Results

Demographic Profile

In terms of gender, the results indicated a higher representation of female respondents, comprising 154 individuals (60.87%), surpassing their male counterparts. Regarding grade level, it is evident that most respondents were in Grade 10, constituting 81 individuals (32.03%) out of the total respondents. Following Grade 10, Grade 9 had 68 respondents (26.88%), Grade 7 had 57 respondents (22.53%), and Grade 8 had 47 respondents (18.58%).

Level of Resilience

The overall level of resilience among the respondents was high. This is evident in the aggregate weighted mean presented in Table 1. Also, most (70%) items were rated as high. Although the weighted means of items with such ratings varied, ranging from 2.42 to 2.98, all fell within the verbal description of high. This is a positive attribute on the part of the respondents since it brings to light that they believe they can achieve their goals despite obstacles. They can return quickly to normal conditions after a challenging situation or event. This manifests their high adaptability to changes that are inevitable in human existence.

Table 1
Level of Resilience

Statements	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I believe I can achieve my goals, even if there are obstacles.	2.98	1.19	High
2. I tend to bounce back after illness, injury, or other hardships.	2.82	1.30	High
3. I can adapt when changes occur.	2.75	0.88	High
4. Under pressure, I stay focused and think clearly.	2.67	0.99	High
5. I am not easily discouraged by failure.	2.58	1.14	High
6. Having to cope with stress can make me stronger.	2.42	1.17	High
7. I can handle unpleasant or painful feelings like sadness, fear, and anger.	2.42	1.29	High
8. I think of myself as a strong person when dealing with life's	2.38	1.22	Moderate
9. challenges and difficulties.			Moderate
10. I can deal with whatever comes my way.	2.27	0.76	
11. I try to see the humorous side of things when I am faced with problems.	2.24	1.06	Moderate
Aggregate	2.55	0.78	High

Coping Strategies

As indicated in Table 2, coping orientation to problems experienced is classified into avoidant and approach. In the avoidant category, the aggregate weighted mean is 2.15, indicating that respondents have used avoidant strategies to a moderate extent. In other words, they are using these strategies to a moderate degree. In terms of utilizing the approach as a mechanism in dealing with unpleasant situations, unlike avoidant, they use it to a medium level. This is reflected in the aggregate weighted mean of 2.76. Hence, it can be deduced that the respondents are more approach-oriented than avoidant. When confronted with an unpleasant situation, they will resort to coming up and executing strategies that could alleviate the existing condition. They also think of it as part of the reality in life.

Table 2
Coping Mechanism

Avoidant	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.	2.88	1.03	Medium
2. I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things.	2.80	0.89	Medium
3. I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.	2.63	1.09	Medium
4. I've been criticizing myself.	2.48	1.03	A bit
5. I've been expressing my negative feelings.	2.43	1.04	A bit
6. I've been blaming myself for things that happened.	2.25	0.93	A bit
7. I've been refusing to believe that it has happened.	2.23	1.00	A bit
8. I've been giving up the attempt to cope.	2.21	0.88	A bit
9. I've been saying to myself, "This isn't real".	1.82	0.95	A bit
10. I've been giving up trying to deal with it.	1.81	0.74	A bit
11. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better.	1.17	0.43	Not at all
12. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it.	1.12	0.39	Not at all
Aggregate	2.15	0.42	A bit
Approach			
13. I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do	3.13	0.89	Medium
14. I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.	3.02	0.75	Medium
15. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.	2.98	0.84	Medium
16. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.	2.92	1.02	Medium
17. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.	2.86	0.69	Medium
18. I've been getting help and advice from other people.	2.85	1.09	Medium
19. I've been looking for something good in what is happening.	2.69	0.93	Medium
20. I've been trying to see it in a different light to make it seem more positive.	2.66	1.05	Medium
21. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.	2.62	0.99	Medium
22. I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.	2.53	1.29	Medium
23. I've been learning to live with it.	2.47	0.89	A bit
24. I've been getting emotional support from others.	2.34	1.01	A bit
Aggregate	2.76	0.59	Medium

Neither Avoidant nor Approach			
25. I've been praying or meditating.	3.01	1.02	Medium
26. I've been making jokes about it.	2.44	1.12	A bit
27. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.	2.38	0.89	A bit
28. I've been making fun of the situation.	1.93	0.87	A bit
Aggregate	2.86	0.69	A bit

Relationship Between Level of Resilience and Coping Strategies

As shown in Table 3, a significant relationship exists between resilience and each of the coping orientations. This is manifested in the respective p values, which are lesser than the alpha at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is a need to do something to keep avoidant at its low level and, at the same time, keep the approach to a high level to enhance one's level of resilience.

Table 3

Relationship between Level of Resilience and Coping Strategies

Variables	Rs	p
Resilience & Avoidant	-0.26	0.00*
Resilience & Approach	0.53	0.00*
Resilience & Neither Avoidant nor Approach	0.34	0.00*

Discussion

High Resilience Among Participants

In general, students demonstrated a notably high level of resilience as assessed by the Connor–Davidson Scale. This positive characteristic among the respondents reflects their confidence in their capacity to achieve goals despite obstacles, swiftly return to normalcy following challenging situations or events, and their adeptness at adapting to the inevitable changes in human existence. This finding aligns with the research of Delvecchio et al. (2022), indicating that while most children tend to revert to normal behavior after stressful events, some are more susceptible to developing psychological issues (Orgilés et al., 2021). Understanding the coping

ability to overcome challenges sheds light on the variations in how children navigate adversity. Moreover, the data reveal their ability to maintain focus under pressure, signifying robust resistance to failure and negative emotions. Due to their elevated sense of positivity, they exhibit resilience, bouncing back stronger after being affected by adverse phenomena. This resonates with Rutter's Resilience Theory in 2006, which defines resilience as "An interactive concept concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite those experiences" (Rutter, 2006).

However, some responses indicated that respondents perceived themselves as in the middle range on the resiliency scale, viewing themselves as neither highly nor poorly resilient in confronting life's challenges. These aspects may warrant attention and improvement, as adverse phenomena are inherent to human existence, as illustrated in Rouse, Ingersoll, and Orr's (1998) study on the relationship between adolescent high-risk behavior and resilience. The researchers concluded that resilient youth were less likely to engage in new risky behaviors, although they were not exempt from experiencing troublesome behaviors and emotions. According to Seligman's (1990) 3Ps Theory, understanding how thoughts, mindset, and beliefs influence experiences can contribute to resilience and the ability to rebound from life's challenges.

Moderate Coping Strategies

Earlier, it was illustrated that respondents have been utilizing avoidant strategies to a moderate degree. This implies that they indulge in self-critique, self-blaming, denial of occurrences, abandonment of coping efforts, and the conviction that nothing unpleasant has transpired. Coping strategies vary based on the nature of stressors and the individual's developmental stage (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011). A recent study involving a substantial sample of UK adults revealed that all three types of coping strategies were significantly associated with heightened anxiety and depressive symptoms at the commencement of the lockdown (Fluharty, Bu, Steptoe, & Fancourt, 2021). Factors such as the abrupt closure of schools, uncertainty regarding reopening, the adoption of distance learning, and societal crises have negatively impacted the mental well-being of children and adolescents (Bozkurt et al., 2020; Ghosh et al., 2020; Guessoum et al., 2020; Lee, 2020). An examination of children's learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic underscored escalated feelings of anxiety and stress (Di Pietro et al., 2020).

Regarding utilizing the approach as a coping mechanism for unpleasant situations, respondents engage in it to a medium extent. This suggests that the respondents lean more towards approach than avoidance. This inclination is evident in the prevalence of statements/items with medium verbal descriptions. Faced with unpleasant situations, they tend to formulate and implement strategies to alleviate the existing condition, viewing it as part of life's reality. Moreover, they adopt an optimistic outlook by seeking positive aspects of what happened, believing that lessons from such experiences can strengthen them in the future. Additionally, respondents acknowledge the substantial support and advice from others in helping them cope with unpleasant situations.

Beyond the two distinct coping orientations, a set of items that fall neither into the avoidant nor approach categories were also explored. Among these, making jokes about the situation, finding comfort in one's religion, and making fun of the situation are used to a small extent. Praying and meditating are employed to a medium level. This aligns with Ang and Diaz's (2017) study at Bulacan State University, which explored Filipinos' perceptions, resilience, and coping strategies in the face of frequent disasters such as typhoons and floods. Resilience among respondents often relies on faith-based practices and traditional support systems like family and community. The respondents believe in having a way to deal with problems, reflecting the Filipino quality of "lakas ng loob" (inner strength) (Ignacio, 2010). Thus, the results indicate that Filipinos' manifestation of resilience and coping strategies is influenced by their perception of the aftermath or effects of a disaster.

Significant Relationship Between Resilience and Coping Strategies

The Spearman's rho correlation coefficients indicate a significant relationship between resilience and each of the coping orientations, as reflected in the respective p values being less than the alpha at the 0.05 level of significance. A similar study conducted by Nicomedes et al. (2020) at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines found that individuals maintaining tolerance despite negative influences on their coping tended to develop negative resilience. Enduring past adversities and new challenges with negative behavior, thoughts, and a pessimistic world perspective characterize negative resilience. Conversely, despite facing adversities, some individuals tend to develop healthier resilience. When encountering new challenges, they cope positively, often relying on family, religious spirituality, or community support. These individuals may initially go through a phase

of negative resilience, which eventually transforms into positivity.

This outcome is consistent with research by Valladolid (2021), which affirms the positive association between resilience and well-being. However, the link was not influenced by the type of coping strategy employed. The discovery of a positive correlation between resilience and well-being resonates with other relevant studies indicating that resilience contributes to positive mental health (Malkoc & Yalcin, 2015; Souri & Hasanirad, 2011; Chow et al., 2018; Yildirim & Arslan, 2020; Konaszewski et al., 2021; Chen, 2016). Furthermore, behavioral avoidance strategies were linked to negative psychological well-being. The study also uncovered a positive correlation between resilience and the approach to coping strategy, suggesting that resilient individuals utilize positive coping mechanisms. This finding aligns with other research demonstrating a positive association between resilience and positive coping strategies.

Moreover, individuals with higher levels of depression were found to have lower resilience and were more likely to engage in avoidant coping strategies. In contrast, those who employed more problem-focused coping strategies reported lower levels of depression. However, this study revealed that neither approach nor avoidant coping strategies moderated the relationships between resilience and well-being. Similarly, Bonner (2015) discovered that coping diversity did not align with measures of perceived stress, mental health, physical health, or the primary method of measuring coping diversity. Overall, elevated levels of perceived stress were linked to poorer mental and physical health outcomes. However, these relationships were not influenced by coping self-efficacy or coping diversity.

Conclusion

Regarding demographics, the dominant population was 14 years old. The youngest respondents were 11 years old, and the eldest were 17 years old. Second, The female respondents comprised the larger percentage of the respondents enrolled during the school year when the study was conducted. Out of the total population, there are more female respondents, 154 (60.87%) compared to male respondents, who are only 99 (39.13%). Lastly, the majority of the respondents were Grade 10 students.

Concerning the level of resilience, the respondents' overall level of resilience is high. This is a positive attribute on the part of the respondents since it brings to light that they believe they can achieve their goals despite obstacles. They can return quickly to normal condition after a difficult situation or event. This manifests their high adaptability to changes that are

inevitable in human existence.

Concerning the respondents' coping strategies, the results reveal that the respondents are more approach than avoidant coping strategy. This is reflected in the approach coping strategy's aggregate weighted mean of 2.76, which means medium. The preponderance of the statements/items with medium verbal descriptions exemplifies this phenomenon. When confronted with an unpleasant situation, they will devise and execute strategies to alleviate the existing condition. They also think of it as part of the reality in life.

As to the relationship between the level of resilience and coping strategies, a positive relationship exists between each pair of variables, indicating that the same movement of the other accompanies any movement in one variable. Hence, as one's score/rating in approach and neither avoidant nor approach go higher, so does resilience. This implies that there is a need to do something to keep avoidant at its low level and, at the same time, keep the approach to a high level to enhance one's level of resilience. Thus, there is a significant relationship between level of resilience and coping strategies among the respondents.

Recommendation

The overall level of resilience of the respondents is high. Nevertheless, it is highly recommended that the resilience level of respondents be raised from high to very high. One way to do this is to have a Registered Guidance Counselor in Holy Cross High School who will facilitate the conducting of profound programs to enhance the level of resilience of students.

A thoroughly planned and well-organized orientation program or workshop on the different types of coping strategies is also recommended. It can help them understand the consequences of involving themselves in avoidant coping and the advantages of approach coping.

This study has established a significant relationship between level of resilience and coping strategies. Thus, the researcher then recommends that the school hire a Registered Guidance Counselor who will design a training program wherein the junior high school students will undergo training on addressing issues such as resilience and coping.

The result of this study needs to be shared with administrators, teachers, and parents so that they can better understand their students' / children's challenges and better assist them properly. It is recommended that further studies be made on exploring other techniques to enhance one's level of resilience and coping strategies aside from the ones explored in this study.

Furthermore, this study could be used as a basis for studies on the transition from online classes to face-to-face classes.

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