



University Students' Viewpoints: A Coping Mechanism amid the Covid-19 Pandemic

Jirby M. Laniton, Jenefer B. Vallar and Kennet G. Cuarteros

Abstract

The crisis we encounter in the global community is paramount to all species of social interaction. COVID-19, previously known as 2019 nCoV has devastated our day-to-day lives from our financial capability to our emotional condition. According to Rubin and Wessely (2020), the widespread contagion will inevitably have a psychological effect. This study aims to explore the different coping mechanisms among university students with the current global crisis, determine the significant difference of coping among gender preferences, and identify to what extent university students have been able to cope. Data was collected through a researcher-made survey questionnaire and an instrument adapted from Carver (1997). The survey was administered to university students. Students who responded and gave their consent were included in the study. Based on the results, the top five coping strategies that the students use as per experience are “listening to music”, “sleeping”, “social media”, “movie/Netflix”, and “online games”. However, it is also notable that none of the students believed that using “prohibited drugs” or “substance use” is an option in coping with this pandemic. Moreover, there is no significant difference in coping among gender preferences which implies that regardless of your gender preference, orientation, and identity, all want to deal with their problems, hardships, or stresses in life. Hence, diverting one’s attention to other things somehow is the students’ best way of coping, armoured with positivity and faith.

Keywords: pandemic, stress, students, viewpoint, coping mechanisms

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Introduction

Background of the Study

As the global pandemic continues to invade every individual physically, financially, and emotionally and from all walks of life, we remain resolute towards our plight, especially with regard to our mental health. Mental health is a necessary component of overall health and wellbeing and is crucial to healthy adolescent development. Good mental health in adolescence provides the necessary foundation for “having a positive sense of identity, the ability to manage thoughts, emotions, as well as to build social relationships, and the aptitude to learn and to acquire an education, ultimately enabling full active participation in society” (World Health Organization, 2013).

Global health measures should be employed to address psychosocial stressors, particularly those related to the use of isolation/quarantine, fear, and vulnerability among the general population (Torales et al., 2020). Emerging research shows that Covid-19 is one of the major stressors in today's global society. According to Brown, et al., (2020), families around the world are experiencing a new range of stressors that threaten their health, safety, and economic well-being. In this study, the researchers would like to focus on the mental health of youth since youth's well-being also involves economic well-being, health, and safety as a student. Youth is vital to future generations hence, honing them to acquire a stable and healthy mindset is pivotal in preparation for becoming who they want to be in the future. One study shows that the confluence of the experiences of youth helps contextualize the mental-health needs of young people while Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, and McGorry (2007) stated that experience and exposure helps to develop the mental capacity of every individual. However, according to Deater-Deckard (2004), exposure to stressors can lead to cognitive, emotional, and physical fatigue and place undue strain on the parent-child relationship.

The global pandemic offers an opportunity to better understand how stressors external to the family increase the risk of maltreatment (Brown, et al, 2020). This leads to the question as to what coping mechanisms are used by youth when dealing with the stressors brought about by the global outbreak. Once we understand the existence of the global outbreak, we can also choose to understand what type of coping mechanism is required in order to develop into a holistic being, according to Efuribe, Barre-Hemingway, Vaghefi, Suleiman, and Ballonoff (2020). We recognize that there is no easy solution to cope with the current global pandemic. These extraordinary times require a coordinated, holistic public health approach that carefully balances costs and benefits to ensure the health and well-being of the population. As a result, there are several ways to cope with the stressors we encounter both external and internal. One of the most common coping mechanisms are the various social platforms. Several studies agree to the fact that due to the advent of technologies there are a lot of ways to cope. In addition, many youth spend more time with media than any single activity other than sleeping—the average American aged 8–18, for example, uses media for over 6 hours per day (Roberts and Foehr, 2008). The study signifies that the rampant use of social media may have influenced the mind-set of every individual, most especially the vulnerable ones - the youth. Life satisfaction during Covid-19 has been negatively influenced by reduced social interactions resulting from restrictions (Ammar et al., 2020). Frequent use of social

media platforms and necessary technology has increasingly been used due to government restrictions in preventing the spread of Covid-19. It is equally important to determine who among the current generation of youth, regardless of gender preferences, are more likely to cope especially in times of crisis brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. The accumulation of stresses associated with placement in a youth home heightens the risk of suicide (Silverman, 2007). Different coping mechanisms are prevalent due to the advent of technology, one of them being the social media platform. Also, spirituality as a coping mechanism can be observed to be a powerful resource in the provision of comfort, peace, and resolution for patients confronted with a critical illness (Kelly, 2004).

This study intends to explore University students' viewpoints on coping mechanisms amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study aims to identify the different coping mechanisms experienced by university students, determine the significant difference of coping among gender preferences, and identify to what extent university students have been coping.

Theoretical Considerations

The Lazarus Stress Theory - Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is a framework for evaluating the processes of coping with stressful events. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 19), "psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being". This relationship goes through two important phases: (1) cognitive appraisals; and (2) coping.

The researchers signify its relevance to the study in understanding youth's emotional stress brought about by the global outbreak, its significance to university student's viewpoints, and their coping mechanisms amid the Covid-19 pandemic. How do young people approach the global scenario and what are their coping mechanisms? The use of transactional models of stress represents real progress, as it permits us to better explain and predict the variety of responses that people show when encountering discrimination and prejudice, as well as the effect of discrimination and prejudice on self-esteem and other adjustment related variables (Major et al., 2003). The researchers will identify the coping strategies which students use as well as cognitive appraisal. Cognitive appraisal is the "process of categorizing an encounter, and its various facets, concerning its significance for well-being" (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, p. 31). Indeed, before actually coping with a situation, it has to be cognitively evaluated as being potentially stressful. Moreover, these theoretical explanations can be categorized according to their primary conceptualization of the stress experience: stress as an external stimulus, stress as a response, stress as an individual/environmental interaction, and stress as an individual/environmental transaction (Brough, O'Driscoll, Kalliath, Cooper, and Poelmans, 2009; Cox and Griffiths, 2010).

Methodology

This study intends to explore University students' viewpoints on coping mechanisms amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, the project aims to identify the different coping mechanisms experienced by university students, determine the significant difference of coping among gender preferences, and identify to what extent university students have been coping with the pandemic.

This study used a quantitative research design. Data was collected through a survey questionnaire created by the researchers and an instrument adapted from Carver (1997). Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine the significant difference of coping among gender preferences.

This study was conducted at one of the universities in Cagayan de Oro City, Mindanao, Philippines. The survey questionnaire was sent via a Google link. Only students who responded to the survey questionnaire were considered in the study. Under Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act, consent was requested from the participants. Participants were informed about this research in order for them to decide whether they would participate or not. Also, participants were assured of the confidentiality of the data and that it would only be used for this study.

Highlights of the Findings and Discussion

The main reason for conducting this study was to hear the voice of the university students and to find out how they cope with these trying times. The Covid-19 pandemic introduced people to different situations. For some, this pandemic put an end to their life's journey. Dealing with the situation or problem with the right attitude will help to bring us to victory over this illness.

261 students responded to the online survey and out of 261, 258 gave their consent and 3 didn't want to participate. Hence, only 258 participants were considered in the analysis of the data.

Table 1 presents the age distribution of the respondents. As shown, most of the respondents are teenagers with ages ranging from 17 years to 19 years old. Moreover, there are respondents in their early 20s who basically have the same mindset as the teenagers. In this stage, teenagers want to explore everything including how will they face the challenge brought about by this pandemic. How will they cope with limited interactions and limited mobility? According to Ungar and Theron (2020), families, peers, schools, and communities, all have a role in nurturing the growth, stability, and recovery of these systems. Hence, individual environment and upbringing also plays a crucial role on the part of coping.

Table 1: Age Distribution of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
17 years old	7	2.7
18 years old	105	40.7
19 years old	92	35.7

20 years old	44	17.1
21 years old	10	3.8
Total	258	100

Table 2 below shows the distribution of the respondents according to their gender preferences. The researchers included “other preference” for gender sensitivity and to let the respondents express their true selves in terms of their sexual preference, orientation, and identity. 62.4% of the respondents are female, 36.5% are male, and 1.2% chose “other preference”.

Table 2: Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	160	62
Male	95	36.8
Other preference	3	1.2
Total	258	100

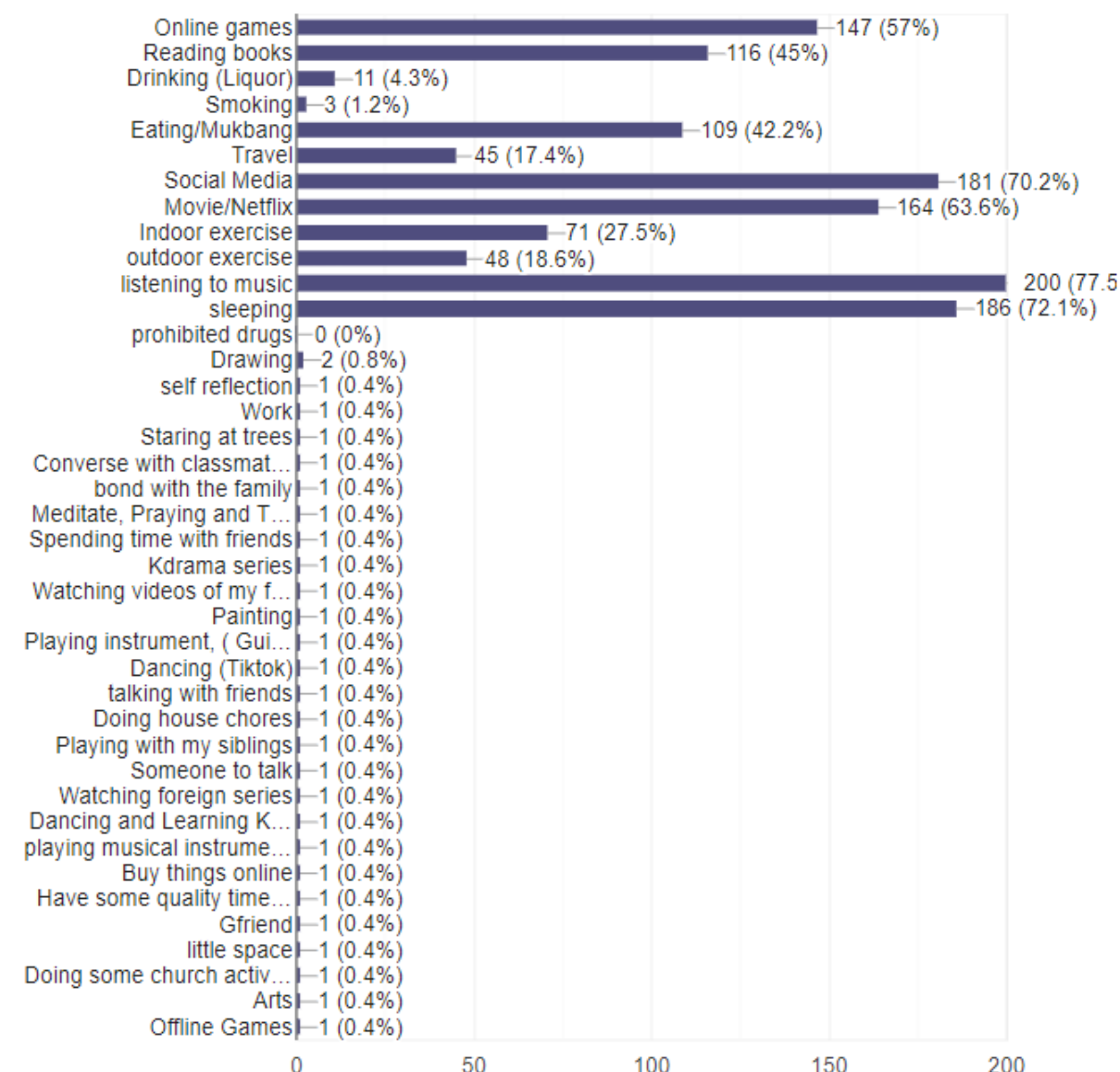


Figure 1: Different Coping Mechanisms

Figure 1 shows the different coping mechanisms which the respondents used based on their experience during the pandemic. From this Figure, it is evident that “listening to music” is the top coping mechanism of the students with 77.5% of the respondents. Followed by “sleeping” with 72.1%, “social media” use with 70.2%, watching “movie/Netflix” with 63.6%, playing “online games” with 57% and so on. However, it is commendable to note that none of the respondents believed that taking “prohibited drugs” was a way to cope with this difficult situation. On the other hand, according to Stuckey and Nobel (2010), stay-at-home orders may afford youth more time to discover new passions, hobbies, or talents, such as experiences with art, music, or nature, which can provide a greater sense of control and meaning in their lives. Without a doubt, having time for yourself during a lockdown or even a quarantine period could be a good avenue of coping.

Table 3: ANOVA Test on Coping Among Gender Preferences

Gender	Mean	SD	F-value	P-value	Remark
Female	2.41	0.38	0.97	0.382	Not Significant
Male	2.35	0.34			
Other preference	2.25	0.23			

*Significant at 0.05 level of significance

Using the 28-item instrument adapted from Carver (1997) on how an individual is coping with stress especially during this time of the pandemic, respondents were measured on how they tried to deal with it. Based on the results stated in Table 3, there is no significant difference in coping among gender preferences. This implies that regardless of your gender preference, orientation, and identity, all want to deal with their problems, hardships, or stresses in life. We may have different ways of coping but what is important is we want to deal with it. Moreover, this is no longer an issue of who can cope better, but rather the ability to cope.

Table 4: Scales of Coping

Scales	Mean	Remarks
Self-distraction	2.97	I've been doing this a medium amount.
Active coping	3.00	I've been doing this a medium amount.
Denial	1.85	I've been doing this a little bit.
Substance use	1.19	I haven't been doing this at all.
Use of emotional support	2.44	I've been doing this a little bit.
Use of instrumental support	1.87	I've been doing this a little bit.
Behavioral disengagement	2.35	I've been doing this a little bit.
Venting	2.42	I've been doing this a little bit.
Positive reframing	2.97	I've been doing this a medium amount.

Planning	2.96	I've been doing this a medium amount.
Humor	2.28	I've been doing this a little bit.
Acceptance	3.00	I've been doing this a medium amount.
Religion	2.81	I've been doing this a medium amount.
Self-blame	2.42	I've been doing this a little bit.

The 28 items were categorized according to the different scales as shown in Table 4. Each item will answer to what extent a student has been doing in coping with the different scales. Respondents answered each item that they think they're doing, not because it is the right thing to do. From the results, it is notable that the scale "Substance Use" has an extent of "I haven't been doing this at all.". This supports the different coping mechanisms presented in Figure 1 that none of the respondents opted to use prohibited drugs just to cope with the pandemic. Moreover, positive approaches like "Self-distraction", "Active coping", "Positive reframing", "Planning", "Acceptance", and "Religion" were among the scales which respondents believed that they've been doing it a medium amount. These are also supported by the results shown in Figure 1. Diverting one's attention to other things somehow is their best way of coping, armored with positivity and faith.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study presented evidence that despite the Global Crisis brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, university students could adapt and cope with the situation we are currently experiencing. Though students have different types of coping mechanisms, most of them adapt to the current situation through listening to music, sleeping, social media, movies/Netflix, and online games.

It may be interesting to consider and identify more coping mechanisms since this may not be true for all student universities. Different coping efforts were influenced by various social forces including race, upbringing and social stratification, stress, and socioeconomic status.

However, despite apparent differences in the use of coping styles, individual coping efforts were not influenced by gender. Thus future work in the area of gender and coping consistently includes contextual considerations when assessing such differences.

And lastly, most university students focus more on healthy coping strategies in adjusting to the stress brought by the pandemic. Thus, society should create more activities that would strengthen the holistic whole being of the student to better adapt to stressful situations.

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