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Causes, Effects of Stress, and the Coping Mechanism of the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology Students in A Philippine University

Generoso N. Mazo^{*}
Leyte Normal University

Abstract

The causes, levels of stress, and coping mechanisms vary. The study of Information Technology is basically a rigorous one as it is designed to prepare students for the actual demands in the world of work, the IT industry. This study sought to determine the causes of stress, the effects of stress, and the stress coping mechanisms of Bachelor of Science in Information Technology students in the Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City. It tested some assumptions using the descriptive survey method with 51 respondents. Thesis writing/research and school requirements/projects were the most common causes of stress. Sleepless nights and irritable/moody feeling were the common effects of stress. There was disparity on the causes and effects of stress between the male and female respondents. The use of computer and praying to God were the common stress coping mechanisms. There was an observed disparity between the male and female responses.

Keywords: Stress, Causes of stress, Effects of Stress, Coping mechanism.

* Generoso N. Mazo, Social Science Unit, Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Philippines 6500,
E-mail:roskymazo@yahoo.com

Introduction

Stress affects people from all walks of life regardless of age, gender, civil status, political affiliation, religious belief, economic status and profession. It affects decision-makers such as the politician, the manager, the priest or pastor, the employee, the housewife, the student, the out-of-school-youths, the driver, and even the jobless.

Stress is found everywhere, that is, at home, with friends, in the office, in school, in the classroom. It is just around the corner. It simply cannot be avoided because it is part of being human. In fact, a lot of people experience stress every day. It could be brought about by many factors. The causes and levels of stress vary from one person to the other. No person is free from stress, regardless of how privileged, reasonable, clever, and intelligent he may be. Every person will be challenged at times by frustrations, losses, changes and conflicts.

To understand one's stress, Blona (2005) pointed out that one needs to know what it is and its causes, in order to cope with it well. He defined stress as any event or circumstance that strains or exceeds an individual ability to cope. Ellison (1990) considered stress as a biochemical response by the body to a threatening situation.

The school is one place where a lot of people converge on a regular basis. It is a fact that when people come together, stress is bound to happen one way or the other. The Administration may be stressed with the low turn-out of enrollment or the need to generate more funds to finance important capital outlays. The causes of stress for teachers vary, such as lack of preparation, family and financial problems, absentee and, sub-par students, among others. Students also experience their own stressors. The common causes of their stress include their academic subjects, requirements and projects, oral and written examinations, announced or unannounced quizzes and graded recitations, finances, issues with parents or guardians, love life, their professors and instructors, and many more.

Blona (2005) claims that students experience stress since some are trying to cope up with the demands of adapting to a new living environment, new peers, academic pressure, and sexual concerns. Being in college can also put financial stress on the students and their families. These situations can leave them with trembling hands, tense muscles, migraine, headache, and multiple other symptoms of stress. These can contribute to a host of chronic diseases ranging from hypertension to peptic ulcers that can predispose them to premature disability and even death.

Stressors are demands made by the internal or external environment that upset the balance of a person, thus affecting the physical and psychological well-being of the person and thus would require appropriate action if one is to restore that balance. At one point stress was considered to be a transactional phenomenon dependent on the meaning of the stimulus to the perceiver.

Thus, stress is not an ordinary thing that may be set aside and ignored. Giving utmost attention to it from the very start of the symptoms is necessary and taking proper action is a must to avoid its worst effects.

The Leyte Normal University (LNU) is a state university in the Philippines. The university has twenty (20) of its academic programs accredited by the AACCUP. It was proclaimed by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) as Center of Excellence for Teacher Education. As a leading state university, it was identified as the CHED Program Cluster Implementer for Social Science and Graduate School Research. It has also been tapped as the Department of Education Center of Training.

To maintain its academic standing, LNU aims to attain its mission and vision by upgrading and maintaining its standards as Center of Excellence (COE), and provide an environment conducive to serious study and research as well as tolerance, openness, and respect for ideas and opinion of others (Student Handbook, 2001).

To achieve these, LNU would time and again review and upgrade its curriculum and require dedication, focus, and the adaption of new teaching strategies from its professors. The students are likewise expected to exert their best effort and perform above their own expectations to survive university life as the academic requirements, projects and other assignments are so numerous and at times almost impossible to accomplish. All these can cause stress on a student.

This study attempted to determine the causes of stress, the effects of stress, and the stress coping mechanisms of students in the Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, particularly those taking-up Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT). This sought to answer the profile of the student respondents in terms of gender, age, skills/talents, civil status, weekly allowance, and location of house where they reside. It also tested assumptions that there is disparity in the causes of stress, the effects of stress, and the stress coping mechanisms between the male and female Information Technology students.

Data gathered from this study will form part of the data base of the university. These will provide guidance counselors, teachers, and class advisers a better understanding of students and guide them to respond accordingly when problems with students occur.

This study used Cooley's "Symbolic Interaction Theory" as adapted by Basibas (2000), and Sevilla's (1988) "General Adaptation Syndrome."

The Symbolic Interaction Theory claims that individuals are capable of creating solutions to their own problems. It adheres that the "self" is influenced and shaped by social processes, in this instance "stress," and the capacity to symbolize. Human action is caused by complex interaction between and within individuals. Dynamic social activities take place among persons and they act according to how they define this situation. Applied to this study, it means that as everyone has the ability to find ways and means to handle stress, thus, students can cope up with the stress they encounter.

Sevilla developed a concept of general adaptation syndrome which pertains to the physiological process that develops when an organism is exposed to stress. He assumes that the body reacts to stress in three successive stages, namely: an alarm reaction stage; the stage of resistance, and finally; the stage of exhaustion.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is a basis for evaluating the processes of coping with stressful events. Stressful experiences are interpreted as person-environment transactions. These transactions depend on the impact of the external stressors. The dual approach in appreciating the stressor involves firstly, through the person's appraisal of the stressor, and secondly, on the social and cultural resources at his/her disposal.

In this study, when faced with a stressor, a student evaluates the potential threat (primary appraisal). Primary appraisal is a student's judgment about the significance of an event as stressful, positive, controllable, challenging or irrelevant. Facing a stressor, the second appraisal follows, which is an assessment of student's coping resources and options. Secondary appraisals address what one can do about the situation. Actual coping efforts aimed at regulation of the problem give rise to outcomes of the coping process.

To establish focus for the study, it was delimited to causes of stress, effects of stress, and the stress coping mechanisms as experienced by students of the Leyte Normal University (LNU). The student-respondents were limited to the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT) students enrolled during the 2nd Semester of School Year 2012-2013.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

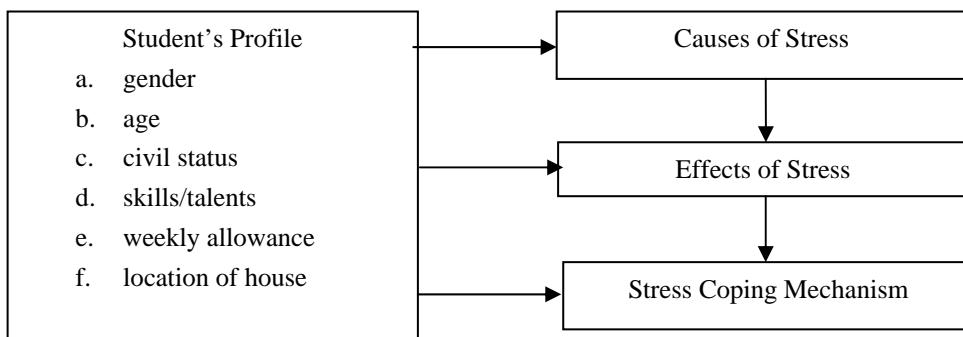


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Causes of stress are called stressors. It is an agent or condition capable of producing stress or something that initiates a stress response; it can be people, objects, places or events. These are outside forces that place unusual demands on a person's body or mind.

Modern life exposes people to many stressors. Some physical stressors remain, including natural disasters, illness, and noise. Certain life experiences, such as the death of a loved one, are major stressors. Day-to-day problems, such as burning toast, taking rest, or feeling rushed, may also be stressful.

People need not experience events directly to feel stress. Television, newspapers, and other means of mass communication flood people with information about upsetting occurrences throughout the world. People can also imagine future misfortunes and regret past failures.

Experts consider modern life particularly stressful for children and families. Not all stressors affect everyone in the same manner. In a particular situation, one person may remain quite calm while

another person displays many signs of stress. The difference between the two people may be that the first person feels in control of the situation and views it as a challenge and is committed to overcome it. The second person does not feel in control of the situation, is threatened by it, and only wants to avoid coping with it.

The immediate effects of stress include an increase in heart rate blood pressure, dilation of the pupils, and an increase flow of blood to the muscles. Long term effects can be heart diseases, depressions, and migraine headache. People who are aggressive and who easily get angry are most likely to develop these problems.

Duque (2007) cited common effects of stress. These are insomnia, headaches, backaches, constipation, diarrhea, high blood pressure, heart disease, depression and alcohol, tobacco or drug use. He suggested doing the following: 1) After seeing the doctor, share your treatment plan with people close to you. Talk with friends and relatives and explain what you are going through; 2) If your doctor prescribed medication take it exactly the way it is prescribed. Do not stop taking your medication until you doctor tells you to stop doing so; 3) Keep all follow-up appointments with your doctor; 4) Remember that it may take some time to start feeling better; 5) If you experience side effects from any medication, tell your doctor; and 6) Seek professional counseling. If your methods of coping stress are not contributing to your greater emotional and physical health, it is time to find healthier ones. There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. You can either change the situation or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose, it is helpful to think of the four A's: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept. Since everyone has unique response to stress, there is no "one size fits all" solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

Salvacion (2004) studied the stress profile of students in the College of Dentistry of the University of the Philippines, Manila. The study involved 149 dentistry student-respondents. Academic stressors like examinations and grades, fully loaded days, difficulty in completing clinical requirements, and fear of getting delayed topped the identified stressors. Academic factors were stressful in the first 3 year levels. Academic stress peaked during the sophomore year. No significant differences in rankings were observed between genders. There was undeniable similarity in the general stress profile of the different year levels. Common methods of coping employed by students include crying, praying, talking, watching movies, and listening to music. Stress makes or breaks a person. It is like a two-edged sword which can either motivate and stimulate a student to peak performance or reduce the student to ineffectiveness.

Grande (2006) used a descriptive research approach in studying the stress and coping mechanism of college freshmen of Southville International School and Colleges. It involved 201 student-respondents. The student-respondents experienced high perceived stress. The identified main stressors were academics. The student-respondents used positive stress coping mechanism. The perceived stress and coping mechanisms of the student-respondents were independent of their profile.

In this study, the researcher used the descriptive survey method aimed at coming-up with a base line data on the causes of stress among students taking Information Technology, the effects of stress on them, and the coping mechanism that they employ to overcome their stress.

This study was conducted in the College of Arts and Sciences, Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City. The college exercises direct supervision over the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (BSIT) course.

The BSIT course had a total of 282 students for School Year 2012-2013. One hundred five (105) were in first year, eighty six (86) in the second year, fifty-seven (57) in the third year, and thirty four (34) fourth year students. Fifty one (51) students prorated from all year levels were identified respondents of this study.

The research instrument is divided into four (4) parts. Part I required the student-respondents to give their profile in terms of gender, age, skills/talents, civil status, weekly allowance, and location of house where they reside. Part II was a 20-item checklist of pre-identified causes of stress commonly met by students. Each item had five (5) options, to wit: Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, and Never. Part III was a 20-item checklist of pre-identified effects of stress commonly experienced by students. Each item had five (5) options, to wit: Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, and Never. Part IV was a 20-item checklist of pre-identified mechanisms that students usually resort to in trying to cope with their stress. Each item had five (5) options, to wit: Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, and Never.

The researcher downloaded the list of Information Technology students from the on-line module of the university. Using the simple random sampling method, the researcher identified the students who would be made respondents in this study. The questionnaire was fielded to each student-respondent with the help of the Chair of the BSIT Unit. The researcher personally fielded, retrieved the questionnaires, tabulated the results and subjected the data to statistical treatment.

Results and Discussion

Out of fifty-one (51) student respondents, 25 or 49.02% were male while 26 or 50.98% were female. The data manifest that there is almost an equal number of male and female students enrolled in the BSIT course.

Of the fifty-one (51) student-respondents 24 or 47.06% were aged 17-18 years old. Some 22 or 43.14% were 19-20 years old. Another 3 or 5.88% were 21-22 years old. Only 2 or 3.92% were 23-24 years old. The data imply that the students taking BSIT are within the age bracket for college students and are presumed to be mature enough to handle the responsibilities of a college student.

Twenty three (23) or 45.10% of the student-respondents had skills/talents in singing while 20 or 39.22% were into dancing. Fifteen (15) or 29.41 play sports while 11 or 21.57% play musical instruments. It can be deduced that most of the student-respondents are musically inclined. All the student-respondents were single.

Twelve (12) or 23.53% of the student-respondents had P501.00 - above weekly allowance. Six (6) or 11.76% enjoyed P301.00 – P350.00 weekly allowance, another 6 or 11.76% received P151.00-200.00 weekly. On the extreme another 6 or 11.76% only had a measly P50.00-below allowance every week. It can be inferred that though a good number of the student-respondents enjoy a reasonable weekly allowance there are those who are financially hard-pressed considering the urban location of the school.

Eighteen (18) or 35.29% of the student-respondents are residing in the city proper and town proper and another 21 or 41.18% are residing in barangays along the National Road. Only 9 or 17.65% come from remote barangays, while 1 or 1.96% is residing along the river, 1 or 1.96% from a barangay along the seashore, and still another 1 or 1.96% along the hillside. It implies that many of the student-respondents have access to transportation and can easily attend classes and other school activities without much difficulty.

The common causes of stress among students taking BSIT are presented in Table 1. The data show that the male student-respondents consider Thesis writing/research as their most common cause of stress with a mean of 4.1 interpreted as Often while the female student-respondents consider school requirements/projects as their most common cause of stress with a mean of 4.3 interpreted as Often. The male student-respondents identified strict parents as their least cause of stress with a mean of 2.0 interpreted as Seldom while the female student-respondents identified lovelife/love affair as the least cause of their stress with a mean of 1.8 interpreted as Seldom.

Table 1. Causes of Stress

CAUSES OF STRESS	Male Respondents				Female Respondents			
	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation
1 Quizzes/Examinations	25	3.5	3	OFTEN	26	4.0	3.5	OFTEN
2 Assignments/homework	25	3.2	4.5	SOMETIMES	26	3.5	6	OFTEN
3 School requirements/projects	24	3.8	2	OFTEN	26	4.3	1	OFTEN
4 Recitations	24	3.1	6.5	SOMETIMES	26	4.0	3.5	OFTEN
5 Practicum/demonstration	24	3.2	4.5	SOMETIMES	24	4.0	3.5	OFTEN
6 Presentation of dances, songs, speech, etc...	25	2.8	11.5	SOMETIMES	26	3.0	11.5	SOMETIMES
7 Family Problems	25	3.1	6.5	SOMETIMES	26	3.1	10	SOMETIMES
8 Conflict with someone	25	2.2	17.5	SELDOM	26	2.6	15	SOMETIMES
9 Lovelife/love affair	24	2.3	16	SELDOM	26	1.8	20	SELDOM
10 Arguments	25	2.5	13.5	SOMETIMES	26	2.7	14	SOMETIMES
11 Home Responsibilities	25	2.8	11.5	SOMETIMES	25	2.4	17	SELDOM
12 Far Location of home	25	2.4	15	SELDOM	26	3.0	11.5	SOMETIMES
13 Strict/inconsiderate teacher	24	3.0	8.5	SOMETIMES	26	3.3	8	SOMETIMES
14 Finances/allowances	25	3.0	8.5	SOMETIMES	26	3.3	8	SOMETIMES
15 Poor Health	25	2.1	19	SELDOM	26	2.2	18.5	SELDOM
16 Thesis writing/research	24	4.1	1	OFTEN	26	4.0	3.5	OFTEN
17 Strict Parents	24	2.0	20	SELDOM	26	2.5	16	SOMETIMES
18 Flacg Ceremony	25	2.5	13.5	SOMETIMES	26	2.9	13	SOMETIMES
19 Demanding parents/guardians	25	2.2	17.5	SELDOM	26	2.2	18.5	SELDOM
20 School policies	25	2.9	10	SOMETIMES	26	3.3	8	SOMETIMES

It connotes that the student-respondents find school requirements/projects burdensome and give them stress. The male students may have supportive parents as their being strict is not a cause of

stress for them. The female students appear to be more focused on their studies as love life/love affair is not a cause of their stress.

Thus, the assumption that there is disparity on the causes of stress of the male and female student-respondents is accepted.

The common effects of stress among BSIT students are presented in Table 2. The data shows that the most common effect of stress among the male student-respondents was sleepless nights with a mean of 3.8 interpreted as Often while the female students identified two (2) effects namely: sleepless nights with a mean of 3.2 and irritability/moody feelings with a mean of 3.2 where both means are interpreted as Sometimes as the most common effect of stress on them. The second most common effect of stress differed between the male and the female student-respondents. The males indicated that they experience low performance in the class with a mean of 3.4 interpreted as Sometimes while the females indicated that they become absent-minded/forgetful with a mean of 3.1 interpreted as Sometimes. Both male and female student-respondents identified injury as having the least effect on them due to stress with a mean of 1.9 for the males and 1.6 for the females and both interpreted as Seldom.

It implies that when the student-respondents experience stress they are unable to get good night rest which results in low performance in class for the males and irritability/moody feelings among the females. Being in their youth would help explain why the student-respondents are less prone to injury even when they are stressed.

Table 2. Effects of Stress

EFFECTS OF STRESS	Male Respondents				Female Respondents			
	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation
1 Sleepless nights	25	3.8	1	OFTEN	25	3.2	1.5	SOMETIMES
2 Low Performance in the class	24	3.4	2	SOMETIMES	25	3.0	4.5	SOMETIMES
3 Irritable/moody	24	3.2	3.5	SOMETIMES	25	3.2	1.5	SOMETIMES
4 Headache	24	3.2	3.5	SOMETIMES	25	2.9	6	SOMETIMES
5 Body pains/fatigue	25	2.8	9.5	SOMETIMES	24	2.5	10.5	SOMETIMES
6 Sad feeling/lonely	25	2.8	9.5	SOMETIMES	24	2.6	8.5	SOMETIMES
7 Hypertension/high blood	25	2.0	18.5	SELDOM	24	1.7	19	SELDOM
8 Nervousness/tense feelings	25	3.1	6	SOMETIMES	25	3.0	4.5	SOMETIMES
9 Lack of appetite	25	2.5	13	SOMETIMES	25	2.6	8.5	SOMETIMES
10 Overeating	25	2.4	15	SELDOM	24	2.4	12	SELDOM
11 Failing grades	25	2.9	8	SOMETIMES	25	2.8	7	SOMETIMES
12 Absenteeism	24	2.4	15	SELDOM	24	1.9	17.5	SELDOM
13 Late submission of requirements/projects	25	3.1	6	SOMETIMES	25	2.5	10.5	SOMETIMES
14 Feeling of insecurity	25	2.6	11.5	SOMETIMES	25	2.2	14	SELDOM
15 Rebellious attitude	25	2.0	18.5	SELDOM	25	1.9	17.5	SELDOM
16 Quarrelsome attitude	24	2.6	11.5	SOMETIMES	25	2.0	16	SELDOM
17 Too much sleeping	25	2.3	17	SELDOM	25	2.2	14	SELDOM
18 Absent-minded/forgetful	25	3.1	6	SOMETIMES	25	3.1	3	SOMETIMES
19 Injury	25	1.9	20	SELDOM	25	1.6	20	SELDOM
20 Becomes physically weak	25	2.4	15	SELDOM	25	2.2	14	SELDOM

The assumption which states that there is disparity on the effects of stress of the male and female student-respondents is therefore accepted.

The data in Table 3 indicates that the male students would use the computer with a mean of 4.3 interpreted as Often while the female student-respondents would foremost pray to God with a mean of 4.5 interpreted as Always in order to cope with their stress. The student-respondents agreed on their second (2) ranked stress coping mechanism and identified listening to music with a mean of 4.2 for the males and 4.4 for the females, both interpreted as Often. They also indicated that they are less likely to drink alcohol and smoke as the males ranked it at number 19 with a mean of 1.7 interpreted as Seldom while the females ranked it last with a mean of 1.3 interpreted as Never. Taking drugs as a way to cope with stress is not in their vocabulary as the males ranked it last with a mean of 1.2 interpreted as Never and the females ranked it at 19 with a mean 1.4 interpreted also as Never.

Table 3. Stress Coping Mechanism

STRESS COPING MECHANISM	Male Respondents				Female Respondents			
	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation	N	Mean	Rank	Interpretation
1 Go out with friends	25	3.5	8	OFTEN	25	3.5	8	OFTEN
2 Drink alcohol and smoke	25	1.7	19	SELDOM	24	1.3	20	NEVER
3 Ask advice of friends/classmates	25	2.8	13.5	SOMETIMES	25	3.3	10.5	SOMETIMES
4 Watch television/movies	25	3.7	4	OFTEN	25	3.7	7	OFTEN
5 Talk to my special someone	25	2.5	16	SOMETIMES	25	2.7	15.5	SOMETIMES
6 Use the computer	25	4.3	1	OFTEN	24	4.0	4.5	SOMETIMES
7 Take drugs (illegal drugs)	25	1.2	20	NEVER	25	1.4	19	NEVER
8 Keep self busy	25	3.4	10.5	SOMETIMES	25	2.9	13	SOMETIMES
9 Control my emotions	25	3.6	5.5	OFTEN	25	2.8	14	SOMETIMES
10 Ignore the problem/issue	24	3.0	12	SOMETIMES	25	3.3	10.5	SOMETIMES
11 Ask the help of parents/relatives	25	2.6	15	SOMETIMES	25	2.4	17.5	SELDOM
12 Listen to music	25	4.2	2	OFTEN	25	4.4	2	OFTEN
13 Spend sometime being alone	25	3.4	10.5	SOMETIMES	25	3.4	9	SOMETIMES
14 Pray to God	24	3.8	3	OFTEN	25	4.5	1	ALWAYS
15 Complain/argue	25	2.8	13.5	SOMETIMES	25	2.4	17.5	SELDOM
16 Sleep early	25	2.4	17.5	SELDOM	25	3.0	12	SOMETIMES
17 Accept the situation	25	3.6	5.5	SOMETIMES	25	4.0	4.5	SOMETIMES
18 Face and solve the problem at once	25	3.5	8	SOMETIMES	25	4.0	4.5	SOMETIMES
19 Hide my reaction/emotion	25	3.5	8	SOMETIMES	25	4.0	4.5	SOMETIMES
20 Seek the help of a guidance/peer counselor and/or teacher	25	2.4	17.5	SELDOM	25	2.7	15.5	SELDOM

The data imply that generally, while the male student-respondents use their computers to cope with their stress the females find solace in praying to God to cope with stress. All student-respondents would resort to listening to music as the second alternative to cope with stress. A positive indicator is the fact that the student-respondents would never turn to drinking alcohol and smoking nor take drugs (illegal drugs) to cope with their stress.

The assumption which states that there is disparity on the stress coping mechanisms of the male and female student-respondents is therefore accepted.

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are formulated:

1. There is an almost equal number of male and female students taking the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, 17-20 years old, single, skilled/talented in singing and dancing, receive a weekly allowance from P501.00 and more, and mostly live in barangays along the National Road in the city and of the adjacent municipalities of the city. This attests to the fact that the students of the course are mostly teenagers who are musically inclined, who enjoy enough weekly allowance and have easy access to the university.
2. The common causes of stress among students taking BSIT were school related. They identified thesis writing/research for the males and school requirements/projects for the females as the causes of their stress. These reflect that they are apprehensive about the expectations placed on their shoulders as college students.
3. There was disparity between the causes of stress among the male and female student-respondents.
4. The common effect of stress among male BSIT students was sleepless nights while the female students experienced sleepless nights and being irritable/moody. This adheres to the psychological explanation that stress causes sleepless nights or insomnia and triggers biological responses causing irritability. This effect is a common psychological reaction among normal individuals.
5. There was a noted disparity of the effects of stress among the male and female student-respondents.
6. Male BSIT students turn to the use of computer to cope with their stress while the females found succor in praying to God to cope with their stress. This indicates that the males found comfort in their computers while the females experience consolation in communicating with God through prayer when they are under stress. Noteworthy is the fact that they would never turn to the use of illegal drugs, or take alcoholic drinks, or smoking even when they experience stress.
7. A disparity on the coping mechanisms of the male and female student-respondents was observed.

Stress is a factor that affects the performance and behavior of students in the university. Rationally, schools as the “loco parentis” must try to determine the causes of stress and its effects among its students. Knowing the coping mechanisms that they employ in trying to overcome the stressors is equally important. These data are necessary if the schools are to understand the pressures

experienced by their students and be able to offer responsive, proactive and viable activities to better equip students to handle the rigors of university life.

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