Filipino Adolescents’ Coping Strategies: A Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Jezamine De Leon and Edwin Balila

Abstract

This study used the descriptive research design to examine the coping strategies among selected Filipino adolescents. To achieve such the COPE Inventory was administered to a sample of 266 college students from one higher education institution in the Philippines from school year 2013 to 2014. The COPE Inventory was developed to assess a broad range of coping responses when they confront difficult or stressful events in their lives in general. Data gathered were validated through confirmatory factor analysis. The results suggested a four-model structure. Factor one showed that respondents utilized instrumental and emotional support as coping strategies. Factor two indicated the use of substances as another approach to cope. Furthermore, factor three revealed that respondents planned ways and took action as manners to deal with stress. Moreover, factor four showed that respondents used humor as a way to cope, respectively. Finally, overall findings of the study served as a basis for counselors, clinicians, educators, and researchers to further understand the underlying structures and nature of coping strategies among Filipino adolescents which may lead to improve practices in guiding the Filipino youth.

Keywords: Filipino adolescents, coping strategies, confirmatory factor analysis
I. INTRODUCTION

The national hero of the Philippines, Dr. Jose P. Rizal, once said that “the youth is the hope of every nation.” This statement implies that adolescents are crucial human commodities because future leaders, enterprisers, and professionals are coming from this group.

The adolescent stage is both challenging and critical. This is the time for having new responsibilities, experimenting on building identities, and a chance for both opportunities and risks (Papalia, Feldman, & Martorel, 2012). Associated problems and failures with adolescence are teenage drug, alcohol misuse, sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancy, satanic cults, and defiant behaviors (Blonna, 2007). During adolescence, bodies and minds change and grow of which can be a problematic and stressful situation; and stressful life experiences may threaten the well-being of adolescents (Blonna, 2007; Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2008). As cited by the Anxiety and Depression Association of America in 2008, most college and university students in United States frequently experience daily stress (Retrieved at http://www.adda.org/ on June 19, 2015). In support to this, Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2008) cited that approximately 25 percent of adolescents will experience at least one significant stressor such as the death of a loved one or witnessing a traumatic event. Daily hassles and stressors among adolescents are related to bullying by peers, academic difficulties, interpersonal relationships, and family conflicts. Moreover, levels of stress may increase as an adolescent age due to significant life changes such as leaving home, finding a satisfying career path, and developing intimate partner relationships.

On the other hand, adolescent stage can be a period of excitement and joy (Blonna, 2007). According to Carrera (1981), most teenagers go through this period without major problems and enter early adulthood as strong, competent, and whole beings (Blonna, 2007). A successful transition and readiness to adulthood can be possible when an adolescent is equipped with important life skills such as coping strategies. As it is true that stressors are everywhere, coping focuses on what can be done to manage stressful situations (Ciccarelli & Noland White, 2012). Coping is vital for survival and is related to a constructive quality and meaning of life (Snyder, 1999).

Helping adolescents learn to cope with stress is not always easy (Blonna, 2007). In this sense, one important way to help adolescents cope in facing their lives is to understand and explore how they cope (Gibson-Cline, 2000). Yet, one of the challenges in the study of coping is coping itself. Studies on coping strategies can be unlimited and despite the rapid increase in research on adolescent coping over the last twenty years, there is still controversy about the dimensions of coping (Gelhaar, Seiffge-Krenke, Borge, & Cicognani, et.al, 2007). Added to the fact that different developmental, national, environmental, social, and cultural contexts may influence coping (Gibson-Cline, 2000).

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies is one concept consisted of two powerful words. In general, coping is defined as how a person deals effectively with something difficult while strategies is defined as a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim. Different views, perspectives, and efforts have been made to understand coping strategies.

For Lazarus and Folkman, coping strategies refer to the constantly shifting cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage potential stressors that are appraised as threatening (Blonna, 2007). Further, coping strategies is composed of both cognitions and behaviors that are directed at managing problems and the negative emotions and distress it brings (Aldwin, 2007).
Lazarus, Folkman, and colleagues discussed two general types of coping (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The instrument they developed called Ways of Coping Scale identified two ways on how people cope. The first way is known as Problem-Focused Coping which is aimed at problem solving or doing something to change or eliminate the source of stress. The second way is called Emotion-Focused Coping which is aimed at reducing or managing the emotional distress that is associated or brought about by the source of stress (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

Another major development in the study of coping strategies was the one proposed by Charles Carver and colleagues. They developed the COPE Inventory an instrument used to measure a broad range of coping responses under stressful situations in general. The inventory has fifteen specific dimensions/scales such as planning, active coping, restraint, suppression of competing activities, use of instrumental social support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, focusing on and venting of emotions, use of emotional social support, religious coping, humor, denial, substance use, mental and behavioral disengagement. Inquiries have been made about the possibilities of combining the scales and categorizing them as problem-focused or emotion-focused by Lazarus, Folkman, and colleagues (Retrieved from http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/ccarver/sclCOPEF.html on July 19, 2015).

Considering these different respected views on coping strategies, interests and curiosity led the researchers to further examine how such perspectives on coping strategies be the same or distinct in terms of structures and applicability among Filipino adolescents. Indeed, more efforts must be done to understand how the Filipino adolescents cope. In the Philippines, the study of Clemente, Dicang, and Balila (2014) recommended that college students must be equipped with healthy coping strategies in order to have a successful college life. It is for these reasons that coping strategies among Filipino adolescents must be studied continually. In this way, understanding how the Filipino adolescents cope can be more specific, detailed, and guiding them has a more in-depth basis.

Objectives of the Study
The study had two primary objectives. First, was to describe how Filipino adolescents cope under stressful situations through knowing the underlying structures of coping strategies among selected Filipino college students using the COPE Inventory by Charles Carver and colleagues. And finally, the overall findings of the study may serve as a basis for counselors, clinicians, educators, and researchers to further understand the nature and improve practices in guiding adolescents find healthy ways in coping with stress specifically in dealing with the Filipino adolescents.

II. METHODS

Research Design
This study utilized the descriptive method of research using survey. This approach allowed the researcher to understand and describe the nature of coping strategies among selected Filipino adolescents.

Population and Sampling Technique
Respondents of this study were composed of 266 selected Filipino college students from one higher education institution in the Philippines from school year 2013 - 2014. To avoid biases and serve the purposes of the study the random sampling technique was used.
Respondents’ Demographic Profile

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>196</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>266</td>
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Table 2

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<tr>
<th>Home College</th>
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<tr>
<td>College of Arts and Humanities</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Business</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Dentistry</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Education</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Health</td>
<td>111</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Nursing</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Science and Technology</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>College of Theology</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>266</td>
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Table 3

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 years old and below</td>
<td>236</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 years old and above</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>266</td>
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Table 4

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<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adventists</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Adventists</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>266</td>
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Instrumentation

This study used two instruments. The first one, Respondent’s Demographic Profile. It seeks information about the respondent’s gender, home college, age group, and religious affiliation. The second instrument aimed in measuring the respondents’ coping strategies through the use of COPE Inventory by Charles Carver. This inventory was developed to understand the different responses of people during stressful situations in general. Some responses are considered as dysfunctional while others functional. It has 60 items categorized into 15 different scales. All of these items were rated using a 4 point scale (1 = I usually don’t do this at all, 2 = I usually do this a little bit, 3 = I usually do this a medium amount, and 4 = I usually do this a lot).
Data Gathering

The researcher sought necessary permission to conduct data gathering. After such, a call to join in the research was disseminated. Those who volunteered gave their consent to participate in the study. The purposes of the study were made known to all the respondents; confidentiality was ensured and roles of the respondents were discussed also. After which, respondents were asked to go to the assigned classrooms where they answered the research instruments given them. The researcher was assisted by a Master of Arts in Psychology student to administer the said instruments. Also, the said student-researcher assistant was oriented about the nature of the study and the protocols used.

Analysis of Data

After the data had been gathered, the results were encoded and then computed using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences. Frequencies and percentages were used to know the demographic profile of the respondents. Confirmatory factor analysis procedure specifically the principal component analysis was used to know the underlying structures of coping strategies and describe the nature of how Filipino adolescents cope under stressful situations. To establish fit, the following indexes were used for all tests: chi-square, degrees of freedom ratio, root mean square error of approximation, and comparative fit index.

III. RESULTS

Figure 1 showed the final model having four factor structures that indicated a good fit: \( \chi^2 = 357.465, \text{df} = 183, p = .000, \text{RMSEA} = .060, \text{and CFI} = .938 \). The COPE Inventory with 15 scales/dimensions was not confirmed in the final model. These results demonstrated that the new model is highly unique and distinct reflecting the underlying structures on how respondents cope. It can be said that the underlying structures of how they cope are seen in ways such as getting support, substance use, having plans and taking actions; and lastly the use of humor.
Filipino Adolescents' Coping Strategies: A Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Factor 1 had eight items from three scales of COPE Inventory. Scales on “use of emotional social support, use of instrumental social support, and focus on and venting of emotions” shared items for Factor 1. Scale on the “use of emotional social support, loaded three items: item 1 “I discuss my feelings with someone”, item 52 “I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives”.

Further, another scale about support, “use of instrumental social support” came out from the factor loadings that showed four items: item 4 “I try to get advice from someone about what to do”, item 30 “I talk to someone who could do something concrete about the problem”, item 45 “I ask people who have had similar experiences what they did”, and item 14 “I talk to someone to find out more about the situation”. Finally, scale on “focus on and venting of emotions” loaded item 28, “I let my feelings out”.

Furthermore, factor 2 had four items from the scale on “substance use” alone: item 26, “I try to lose myself for a while by drinking alcohol or taking drugs”, item 35 “I drink alcohol or take drugs in order to think about it less”, item 53 “I use alcohol or drugs to help me get through it”, and item 12 “I use alcohol or drugs to make myself feel better”.

Moreover, factor 3 had five items from two scales. Scale on “planning” loaded two items: item 32, “I try to come up with a strategy about what to do”, and item 39 “I think about how I might best handle the problem”. Scale on “active coping” loaded three items: item 47 “I take direct action to get around the problem”, item 19 “I make a plan of action”, and item 58 “I do what has to be done, one step at a time”.

Finally, factor 4 had four items from the scale on “humor”: item 50 “I make jokes about it”, item 20 “I make jokes about it”, and item 8 “I laugh about the situation”.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study on coping can be diverse and one significant factor affecting how people cope is culture. According to Aldwin (2007), “culture can affect the stress and coping process”. Further, cultural context shapes the types of stressors that individuals might experience. Culture affects the appraisal of events and the choice of coping strategies that an individual uses in given situations. Finally, culture provides different institutional mechanisms by which people can cope with stress. The outcome of coping is not only psychological and physical but also social and cultural (Aldwin, 2007). This study reflected how Filipino adolescents cope. A new model on how Filipino adolescents cope has been proposed and may be further studied and validated.

The Filipino adolescents when in difficult situations or stressful events cope through finding support. As described by Lazarus and Folkman, support can be seen in two different ways - emotional and instrumental (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Emotional support refers to wanting moral support, sympathy, and understanding. Based on the findings of the study, Filipino adolescents under difficult situations or stressful events want someone they can talk to and someone who understands how they feel. They seek support from people where they can ventilate the distress or upset they are experiencing. The use of emotional support makes a person “feel better” (Papalia, Feldman, & Martorell, 2012). (On the other hand, Filipino adolescents find supports from someone they can get advise. This as described by Lazarus and Folkman is considered as social instrumental support. This way of coping is through looking for advice, assistance, or information. Also it is important to point out from whom Filipino adolescents find support. Interestingly,
significant people in the life of Filipino adolescents from which they draw support are friends and relatives.

These findings reflect the collective nature of the Filipino culture. In difficult times, the Filipino finds strength with others. Filipinos are open to others which results in camaraderie and a feeling of closeness to one another (Ortigas, 1999). Moreover, the findings in Factor 1 opened some curiosity. It showed that one significant coping resource of the respondents were friends and relatives although the COPE Inventory did not directly mention family or with parents. Aldwin (2007) mentioned that good relations with parents helps adolescents cope with problems that they face. Adolescents may turn more to their friends and siblings for social support than to their parents. A strong social support system or network of family and friends who can offer help when a person is in need is still the best coping strategy (Ciccarelli & Noland White, 2012).

Considering Factor 2, results were highly significant. The COPE Inventory has a scale on substance use with four items. Interestingly, all items came out on one factor. This significant result showed that Filipino adolescents’ has tendencies to use substances when they are under difficult or stressful situations. Using substances may give them time to lose themselves for a while, and for them not to think or think less of the problem. Further, alcohol or drugs may help them get through the problem and may make them feel better. According to Aldwin (2007) substance use makes the adolescent reduce distress. At the same time, adolescents may have the capacity and easy access to have substances.

Yet, literatures mentioned that substance use as a coping mechanism can be considered dysfunctional and maladaptive due to the negative consequences it can bring (De Leon, 2013). When used in excess substances may create more problems (Aldwin, 2007). On the other hand, literatures mentioned ways on how to lessen the use of substances as coping strategies. Adolescents who had good family problem-solving skills were less likely to engage in the use of alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes to cope with stress. Added to these, adolescents from families who can express emotions in healthy manner and resolve conflicts uses better coping, less use of avoidance, and substance use (Aldwin, 2007).

Moreover, findings on Factor 3 showed that Filipino adolescents when experiencing difficult situations may look for the best strategies to manage difficult or stressful situations and act on these strategies one step at a time. These ways of coping illustrates a problem-focused approach in coping (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The cognitive abilities of adolescents support these findings. Problem-focused coping in adolescents can be more sophisticated and developed with the emergence of formal operations or the ability to think abstractly and apply these thoughts. Adolescents are on their way to adulthood. This means that adolescents have the capacity to find right ways in dealing with difficulties and stressful events in their lives (Aldwin, 2007). This illustrates that adolescents can learn healthy coping strategies. Thus it is important to teach and guide them important life skills such as healthy coping strategies.

Lastly, Factor 4 showed that Filipino adolescents may use humor when situations may be difficult or stressful for them. Humor is by making fun, kidding around, laughing, and making jokes about the situations. Humor is a highly significant coping strategy among the Filipino adolescents. Similarly on Factor 2, all items found in COPE Inventory reflecting humor came out on the final model also. Again, these findings reflected the Filipino culture. Joy and humor mean a cheerful approach to life. Laughing at oneself despite the mess one has is an important coping mechanism (Ortigas, 1999).
The findings of this study in one way showed the nature of how Filipino adolescents cope. With the aspect of understanding adolescents under stress, it is important to emphasize that the ways they cope are in finding support, substance use, planning on ways to solve the problem and act on it, and finally use of humor. These mentioned variables may need to be further studied and investigated.

Support as a way of coping may lead to inquiries such as where adolescents find support. Peers, siblings, parents, relatives, and the family in general could be coping resources for support. And who among these coping resources may be more influential and crucial in helping adolescents cope. Considering the use of substances as a way of coping looks alarming. Literatures mentioned the drastic effects and consequences of substance use. With these, it is important to know the access of adolescents to different substances. More efforts must be done to regulate the availability of substances among adolescents. Adolescents when under difficult or stressful situations cope by planning and acting on these plans. In doing so, an adolescent may feel competent thus helping build one’s identity and may remove learned helplessness. With these, coping strategies and other variables that may strengthened it can be studied such one’s perceived competence, self-efficiency and level of autonomy. Further, humor as way of adolescent coping is suggested to be further studied either as a functional or dysfunctional response.

The efforts of this study may help parents, agencies, and institutions guide adolescents cope. Open communication within the family especially between parents and the adolescent child is greatly encouraged. School curricula may include coping strategies as important life skills that adolescents need to learn. Other healthy coping strategies may be introduced and developed such as reframing, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, and turning to religion.

Finally, the results of this study may lead to further studies like exploring the final model of coping strategies across variance such as gender, age group, home college, religious affiliation, and other demographics. An in-depth study analyzing the model of coping strategies among the Filipino adolescents may further explain the factors revealed. It is also important to consider a wider scope of population representing the entire Philippines and compare results to a multicultural context. Other variables that may be associated to coping strategies and its outcomes may be conducted to fully understand coping strategies.

V. CONCLUSION

The difficulties and challenges that life brings are faced by Filipino adolescents in different coping strategies. Finding instrumental and emotional support from peers and relatives and at the same time the use of substances and finding humor are coping strategies that the Filipino youth may use when they experience stressful events. They do such acts with the goal to “feel better”. Also, it is important to remember that Filipino adolescents have the capacity to find right ways when in difficult situations. Understanding these mechanisms provides a strong foundation for dealing, helping, and guiding Filipino adolescents cope adaptively.

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