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## LIVING ARRANGEMENT PROBLEMS, ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND COPING STRATEGIES OF FIRST YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** *The ability of the first year college students to cope with problems during their first year in college is crucial for their adjustment. Thus, this study essentially investigated the living arrangement problems, academic performance and coping strategies of first year college students. It made use of the descriptive correlational method of research with 975 respondents. The instruments used in the study are self made questionnaire, documentary analysis and Coping Strategies Inventory. Results show that most of them have Satisfactory Academic Performance and always use emotion focused coping strategy specifically positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance and turning to religion. First year college students are in a time of transition from living with their parents to living on their own. Their coping strategies are important to help them deal with living arrangement problems they encounter.*

**Key words:** *living arrangement problems, coping strategies, academic performance, descriptive correlational method, emotion-focused coping strategies, first year college students*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

It has been established that a major developmental task of late adolescence is the formation of a unique adult identity. One manifestation of this process is leaving the family home and establishing a residence of one's own most especially when he enters college. Similarly, the change from the secondary life to college represents a specific life transition that is acknowledged as challenging and potentially stressful life event.

Significantly, first year college students face a difficult decision in determining where they will live during the commencement of their college years. One potential outcome that can result from living arrangements during the college years, especially the first year students is its effect on academic performance. (Sanchez 2012)

Generally, commencing university is accompanied by major lifestyle changes for students who move into new forms of accommodation. Students who live in college dormitories during their first year are more socially prepared for life. One reason for this is that students learn what it is like to live away from home and their parents. They begin to learn self responsibility as well as fiscal responsibility. Students also meet many new people who may be taking similar classes and other students who have the same interests. These are all important social connections to make as a young adult.

Although attending college can be a rewarding experience, it also can be a time of considerable anxiety and stress for students. The combination of many specific demands of college life such as planning for the future, struggling with exams and assignments, meeting the demands of challenging professors, deciding on a major and transitioning into financial and emotional independence, can be an overwhelming experience for many college students. Further, students may wonder whether they will be able to meet their own expectations as well as those of their parents and friends (Dyson and Renk, 2012).

First year college students face academic demands which include grade competition, lack of time and issues relating to time on task management, the need to adapt to new learning environment in terms of increased complexity of the material to be learned and the greater time and effort required to do so, the need to constant self-regulation and to develop better thinking skills. This level in an individual's academic life is considered stage of inside and outside pressures by the world to succeed, goal direction, financial worries, social pressure, concerns about uncertain futures, social problems and opportunities, thus requiring



preparation and focused with often conflicting priorities. Thus, much of the success of the adjustment of the freshman depends on their coping patterns. And as the freshman goes into college level, one carries one's own unique coping skills as he gradually makes way to become adept with the variety of problems one will meet in adjusting with the challenges of the life in college. One's ability to overcome difficulties in adjustment during the freshman year will more likely depend on the coping patterns employed as one journeys to the first year of college life.

This is because the first year students are plunged in a new environment and adjustment to academic life is one of their concerns. It is on this context that the researcher embarked on the study.

## **FRAMEWORK**

College is an experience that some students find the most difficult experience of their lives; therefore it is not hard to see why some students drop out or have significantly low grades. During college, adjustment is a huge factor towards accomplishment. One study (Lapsley, Rice and Fitzgerald, 1990) found that for many adolescents, departure from home is a major transition; it takes its toll on the level of adaptation achieved by the students.

The social challenges of a move to a new school are also important to consider. Adolescents may experience disruptions in friendships as they move to a new environment. School-related changes may lead to significant changes in social support. (Berndt, 1989). Relationships with parents may also change as adolescents begin to search for support in others, such as in peer group. In a discussion of stress and development, Hess and Copeland (1997) reported that as adolescents progress toward adulthood their reliance on family continues to decrease and the influence of peers becomes increasingly important.

It is important to examine factors that influence successful adjustment to college (Carver, 2011), and the ability to cope with this new experience may be an important variable. The ability to successfully cope in the college environment is a critical skill to acquire. The effects of perceived social support are mixed. Support from the university and outside contributors like family, friends and mentors can make a huge impact on a student's success. Support such as emotional, academic, financial are tremendous factors in the success of a college student.



Stress and academic performance are omnipresent issues in college students' lives. Endler and Parker (1990) argue that people develop distinct styles of coping when responding to stressful situations. Coping style is the typical manner in which an individual will confront a stressful situation. Adjusting to college can be a very challenging time for some students. It is very pertinent that one adjust properly because if they do not, it can lead to changing of schools, or even to failure to pass their classes. (Boulter, 2002)

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study essentially investigated the living arrangement problems, academic performance and coping strategies of first year college students of Cagayan State University Andrews campus. Specifically, it determined the profile of the participants, their living arrangement problems, academic performance, coping strategies, the difference in academic performance and coping strategies when grouped according to profile variables, and the relationship between the living arrangement problems and coping strategies.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study made use of the descriptive correlational method of research. This research design gathers data through the questionnaire technique to elicit information on the living arrangement problems, academic performance and coping strategies of first year students of Cagayan State University Andrews Campus. It looked into the relationship of living arrangement problems and coping strategies of students. There were 975 students who participated in the study. The instruments used in the study are self made questionnaire, documentary analysis and Coping Strategies Inventory. Frequency count, percentage, chi square test of independence, Kruskal Wallis Test and Mann Whitney U test were used in the analysis of the data.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Results disclose that the mean scores on living arrangement problems along academic is 2.66, which means that the first year students often experience problems along this area particularly on the difficulty of the subjects, the bulk of school work and the inability to concentrate. This is because the freshmen students are plunged in a new academic environment where they find the subjects in college more difficult compared to high school. Academic demands include grade competition, lack of time and issues relating to time on task management, the need to adapt to new learning environment in terms of increased



complexity of the material to be learned and the greater time and effort required to do so, the need to constant self-regulation and to develop better thinking skills. This level in an individual's academic life is considered stage of inside and outside pressures by the world to succeed, goal direction, financial worries, social pressure, concerns about uncertain futures, social problems and opportunities, thus requiring preparation and focused with often conflicting priorities.

This is related with a study conducted by Hong Ji and Lei Zhang (2011) where college students are at a special stage in life and their mental development is in the process of maturity but still immature. In college, along with changes of environment and fierce competitions, the fast - paced in the teaching learning process generate significant impact on academic stress of college students.

Similarly, the over-all mean is 2.71 on living arrangement problems along family. This means that the first year students often experience problems along this area particularly on missing the comforts of home and care of parents. This means that the students experience difficulty being separated from their parents. This is because adolescents are used to be protected by their parents; parents decide what should be and what must be done. Adolescents depend on their parents to make decisions. First year college students fail to achieve the maximum of happiness and efficacy in college because they are homesick. Family area is one of the greatest concerns among college freshmen because the family is the source of sustenance and protection, center of affection and emotional security. Even when there are groups such as clubs, organizations and associations which can provide companionship and psychological support, the emotional security provided by the family can hardly be equaled by any other institution. There is no better for the love and care that parents can give their children which make these students feel homesick.

Along coping strategies, Positive Reinterpretation and Growth, acceptance and turning to religion are always used by the respondents. This means that the students take a positive outlook on the stressful situation that they are in and become a better person after overcoming difficulties. They have the capacity to turn a negative situation into a positive one and display an optimistic perspective. As a result, they learn something from experience and look for something good in what is happening.



Likewise, acceptance is used when people believe that there is little that they can do or should do to change a situation. Many things in life are out of our control; it is simply not within our power to change them. Worrying and fretting about them will just create chronic stress and undermine our physical and mental health. Acceptance of a situation is experiencing it for what it really is, without defense or distortion, and letting it be. This result is related with positive reinterpretation and growth. When the students have difficulties, they accept the situation and find meaning from the situation which makes them better persons.

On the other hand, the first year college students always use turning to religion when dealing with difficulties or under stress. This manifests that the students become more prayerful when confronted with stressors. Students always utilize this coping strategy regardless of what religious belief they have hence, they always become closer to God when confronted with problems.

This result is confirmed by Refuerzo (2001) who pointed out the contribution of religious belief in adjusting to life stresses. First, religious belief influences the one way evaluates the meaning of the event depending on one's religious view. Second, it also influences the perceived availability of coping options and how effective the coping is. These functions of religious views may also explain the use of positive reintegration and acceptance. Through the religious beliefs, one is more likely to reframe the situation so that it becomes acceptable, that is, one tends to look for the positive side of the situation and be more accepting about it.

Furthermore, results show that there is a significant difference on the academic performance and college of the participants. This implies that the academic performance of the participants is at variation depending on the college where they belong. This could be attributed to the fact that each college in Andrews campus has its admission and retention policies unique of its own. In this regard, the participants are made aware of these college policies which they have to adhere in order to maintain their stay in the college. Hence, through this, their performances along their academics differ according to the college where they are enrolled in.

Similarly, there is a significant difference on the academic performance of the participants when grouped according to birth order. This means that their academic performance varies



depending on the order of their birth in the family. This can be attributed to the fact that most of the respondents are first born children in the family. According to Alfred Adler, in general, firstborn children have been found to be responsible, assertive, task-oriented, perfectionist, and supporters of authority. Because they often look after their younger siblings, they get experience leading and mentoring others, often rising to leadership positions as adults. Studies have also linked firstborn children with higher academic achievement and possibly higher intelligence scores when compared to later-born children. This may be due to more exposure to adult language and greater interactions with parents. (<http://www.healthofchildren.com/B/Birth-Order.html#ixzz3QGuEkIIW>)

Results also show that there is a significant difference in the coping strategies and the college where the participants are enrolled in. This implies that the coping strategies of the participants differ depending on the college where they are enrolled in. This points out to the differences among the learners in each college as well as the culture that each college adopts. Culture and surroundings also affect what coping strategies are practically available and socially acceptable. Similarly, each of the colleges in Andrews campus promotes their own college culture. College culture provides comforting environments for managing stressful situations and encourages independence and self-sufficiency when it comes to coping with stress. Each college has an exceptional way of facilitating the process of adjustment among the new entrants hence, their coping strategies differ according to the college where they are enrolled.

Also, there is a significant difference on the coping strategies of the participants when grouped according to birth order. This means that their coping strategies differ depending on the order of their birth in the family. Firstborns often feel pressure to succeed or perform well, either by parents or through their own inner drives. They often are called on to take care of younger siblings or do chores because they are responsible. Firstborns also feel pressure to be good examples for their siblings. (<http://www.healthofchildren.com/B/Birth-Order.html#ixzz3QGuEkIIW>)

As regards the relationship between living arrangement problems and coping strategies, academic is significantly related to active coping. This means that when the students experience academic problems, they concentrate their efforts on doing something about it and take additional action to try to get rid of the problems as well as do what has to be



done, one step at a time. Likewise, academic problem has significant relationship with planning. This means that when the students could hardly cope with their academics, they try to come up with a strategy about what to do and think about how they might handle the situation.

Moreover, academic problem is significantly related with positive reinterpretation and growth. This means that when they experience hardships in their academics, they learn to grow as a person. As a result, they learn something from experience and look for something good in what is happening. Lastly, academic problem has a significant relationship with acceptance. This implies that when they experience difficulty in their academic life, they learn to live with it, and accept the reality of the fact that it happened.

Also, family problem is significantly related with turning to religion. This means that if the students encounter problems with their family, they put their trust in God, seek God's help, pray more than usual. The result of the study is confirmed by (Kark et al. 2010) that one of the socially constructed ways to cope with adversity is through religious beliefs. The impact of faith, and of religious observance and that religious observance appears to have mitigated stress and enhances host resistance.

Significantly, financial problem is related with planning. This implies that when financial problem arises, they make a plan of action as well as think about how they might best handle the problem. Likewise, personal problem is related with active coping. This means that when they experience difficulties in their personal life, they do something about it and take actions to solve the problem. On the other hand, personal problem is related with suppression of completing activities. This implies that when they encounter personal problems, they put aside other activities in order to deal with their problem and they prevent other things from interfering with their efforts to deal with their personal problem. Social problem is also related with active coping. This means that when the students experience social problem, they focus their efforts on doing something as well take additional steps to solve the problem.

Also, social problem is related with planning and positive reinterpretation and growth. This means that when they encounter difficulties in their social life, they make a plan of action when it arises as well as think of how they can best handle the problem as well as grow as a person and learn from experience.



## **CONCLUSIONS**

On the basis of the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the first year college students face stressful situation but it is a necessary part of the learning process. Students living in boarding houses experience difficulty along academic and family areas. This can be attributed to the fact that living away from home requires a lot of adjustments on the part of the students as well as coping with the novelty of subjects learned in college. Also, comforts are given up and one has to face the rigors of living independently. On the other hand, social area is considered as never a problem because students living in a boarding house gain friends along the way as they interact and relate with their board mates.

College students employ both problem- focused and emotion-focused coping strategies since this is ultimately aimed at reducing or managing the distress that is associated with the stressful situation. However, they always utilize emotion-focused coping strategies. This is attributable to the characteristics of adolescents where they are on the process of developing their emotional maturity and tend to do activities that gain approval and acceptance from peers. As a result, adolescents have the greater tendency to expect positive outcomes; optimism is associated with better adjustment.

Moreover, college students are in a time of transition from living with their parents to living on their own. A set of novel responsibilities and roles comes into their lives as the students make a move to a new stage.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

CSU administration through the Office of Students Services and Welfare should strengthen linkages with owners of boarding houses since most of the first college students are living in a boarding house. This is to ensure that the students are safe while away from home. Also, guidance counselors should intensify programs such as formation of affiliation groups composed of first year students to help the college freshmen cope with whatever problems they encounter during the transition period from high school to college. Lastly, other psychological changes in students brought by college education are probable topics for further research.

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