
Demographic Group Differences in Stress Coping Mechanism: The Case of Public-School Administrators in the Division of Romblon

Jonathan P. Wong, Christine M. Tome and Amaranth M. Wong

Corresponding author email id: jo_wong3@yahoo.com

Date of publication (dd/mm/yyyy): 15/03/2019

Abstract – Managing schools under challenging conditions brings untold occupational stress to school principals as in the case of school administrators in the Division of Romblon who are also facing similar pressure brought about by many work-related stressors ranging from administrative tasks and the pressure of improving students’ academic performance. The pressure, therefore, requires an effective stress coping mechanism from both the administrators and the organization that would lead to better work performance. This study, therefore, is an attempt to help build better stress management program for school administrators by providing baseline information on the way they cope up stress based on demographic groupings. A Coping Stress Indicators (CSI) questionnaire was administered to public-school administrators using survey method. Parametric tests using the t-test for independent sample and the Pearson’s correlation revealed the existence of statistically significant interactions between the coping strategies to stressful situations and the demographic and job characteristics (age, sex, job position, and length of service). The results allow us to compare the stress coping mechanism of school administrators between different demographic groupings which provide valuable input to any stress management program to be developed by the Department of Education. Further study is likewise encouraged of similar nature using a qualitative method to understand more fully those stress coping mechanisms not covered in this study.

Keywords – Stress, Coping Mechanism, Demographics and School Administrators.

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress has been viewed variously from several perspectives. However, it has been viewed mostly from what happens to an individual that causes him unhappiness and lack of calm. The term is defined as the inability of an individual to cope with his/her environment (Dobson & Smith, 2000). Chitty (2005) saw stress as the responses the body makes while striving to maintain equilibrium and deal with the demands of life. Khan, Shah, Khan, and Gul (2012) saw stress as the body’s response to the negative demands of the environment. These negative demands undoubtedly cause unpleasantness, restlessness and rising levels of discomfort. From a psychological point of view, stress refers to “an adaptive response, mediated by individual characteristics and psychological processes that is a consequence of any external action, situation, or event that places special physical and/or psychological demands upon a person” (Ivancevich & Matteson in Adams, 1999). It is a psychophysiological process which results from the interaction of the individual with the environment and results in disturbances caused to the physiological, psychological and social systems, depending on the individual’s characteristics (Akhlaq, Amad, Mehmood, Husaan & Malik, 2010). Stress can simply be defined as the challenge the body experiences in its bid to maintain the equilibrium of existence. It is the degree to which an individual can adjust to the demands of the environment. In doing so, the individual makes effort, sometimes in pain to make ends meet or to satisfy the needs considered very necessary. It can also be accepted that stress refers to the exposure of the body to much work in which the body has trouble to cope.

Since stress has been the challenge the body experiences in its effort to meet the demands of the environment, every occupation carries with it what is generally referred to as job stress or occupational stress. Job or

occupational stress refers to a mental and physical condition which affects an individual's productivity at the workplace, as well as his effectiveness, personal health, and quality of work (Comish & Swindle, 1994). In another view, Kyriacou (2001), saw job stress as the experience of negative emotional states such as frustration, worry, anxiety, and depression. But stressing this point, Reddy and Anuradha (2013), saw job stress as an employee's mental state aroused by a job situation or a combination of situations perceived as presenting excessive and divergent demands.

In recent years, the body of literature about educators' stress has been continually growing. It is a topic, which has been subjected to considerable scrutiny. Although research studies available on the matter are a handful, the role of stress among those holding positions of school administrators has received less attention. Nevertheless, the available research at hand is enough to indicate that occupational stress among those in the position of principalship, administrators in schools is, in fact, quite common (Elwyn, 2000).

Since stress or emotional problems are difficult to diagnose, coping or managing stress or emotional problem becomes inevitable. The administrative job of school administrator increases every day, from implementing the curriculum, integrating morals, addressing grievances, attending training and seminars to monitoring all other activities in schools (Gay, 2000). This cut across school both in private and government-owned schools. One of the biggest concerns expressed by principals is the increased amount of mandatory administrative and compliance work including classroom teaching. Due to workload pressures, principals in turn, express frustration that adversely impacts on educational outcome hence leading work-related stress (Mutinda, 2008). The escalating role multiplicity makes the principals see their main role as instructional leaders. Some principals, especially in some schools, do not have deputy principals hence the lack of administrative support in their undertakings increases external demands. This lack of support leads to job dissatisfaction against too much expectation and responsibility put on the principals (Mutai, 2009). Most of the schools lack physical structures, good and adequate buildings, library facilities, playing grounds, furniture, classrooms and staff rooms. These factors have contributed greatly towards principals' work-related stress. The conditions under which students learn militates against their holistic contributions to the achievement of set academic goals which results in students' unrest (Small, 2009). The demands of academic excellence and a decade rich with increased accountability have placed additional pressures on principals hence must prepare to experience pressure from parents, political leaders, educationists, students, and community. They must also encourage teachers to acquire new skills, support them during inevitability, frustrations, and recognize their efforts (Mwangi, 2003). The world of work of principals has expanded in both complexity and quantity. The changing nature of the principals' work requires more time, transparency and accountability in dealing with management issues hence the administrative occupational stress for principals being on the rise. From this perspective, exploring the work characteristics of principals in the context of how they manage time, develop and maintain relationships and handle a variety of administrative duties is valuable to the profession (Lame, 2011).

Managing schools under challenging conditions brings untold occupational stress to school principals as in the case of school administrators in the Division of Romblon who are also facing similar pressure brought about by many work-related stressors ranging from administrative tasks and the pressure of improving students' academic performance. Initial interview with some school heads of local schools within the Division of Romblon reveals their growing occupation-related anxiety. This growing anxiety leads the researcher to look into the way these school administrators manage their stress.

Stress management or coping strategy is vital if an employee wants to avoid the negative effect of stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggested that coping effectiveness plays an important role in the impact of perceived stress on psychological outcomes. They further stated that the effectiveness of a coping strategy depends on the extent to which it is appropriate to internal and external demands of the situation. Carver et al. (1989) elaborated that certain responses to stress may tend to be maladaptive. Specifically, the tendency to focus only on venting frustration may be less useful to meet the demands of the situation. In the case of some school heads in the Division of Romblon, initial interview regarding the way they cope up to stress reveals that somehow, they differ in the way they manage stress and that they have limited knowledge as to the better way of managing stress. With the absence of any imperative study concerning the way they manage stress, authorities may find it hard to develop any policy framework regarding stress management, that would help school administrators better cope or manage work stresses. As Brown and Uehara (1999) had found out that stress management intervention programs have a variety of outcomes, such as improved peer support, reduced levels of somatic complaints, decreased work pressure and role ambiguity, enhanced feelings of personal accomplishment, and improved job satisfaction, hence this study was undertaken to provide baseline information to DepEd authorities for the development of any stress management policy framework in the Division of Romblon.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to

1. Determine the coping mechanism of public-school administrators in work-related stress.
2. Determine whether they differ in their coping mechanism or not when grouped according to their demographic profile.
3. Determine whether their demographic profile significantly influence their coping stress management.

III. METHODOLOGY

Since this study is descriptive-correlation in nature, it made use of a one-shot survey design employing the survey method in gathering the needed data.

Respondents of the Study

The participants of the study are the 220 school administrators within the Division of Romblon mainly coming from the public schools in the basic education institutions. Most of them (58%) are females, and 42% are males. Majority of them are married (87%), and in their older age category (45 above). Only 4% have Ph.D. units, 4% are a master degree holder, and the rest have units in Master program. About 62% occupy head teacher position with only 38% having a principalship position. A greater percentage of them (64.5%) have served less than ten years being an administrator. Many receive a monthly salary below 30,000 (43.2%). Almost all (99%) have undergone stress-related training.

Research Instrument

The study adapted the Coping Strategy Indicators (CSI) questionnaire developed by Amirkhan (1990). It is composed of three factors with each factor consisting of 11 items measured in 4-point Likert scale. It has a reliability test score of 0.82 which met the acceptable value set at .70. Thus the researchers did not subject it anymore to reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha.

Data Analysis

To examine the differences in the stress coping mechanism of school heads grouped according to their demographics, the t-test for independent sample and ANOVA were used. These statistical tools showed who among the groups tends to use the above-mentioned coping mechanisms. The relationship between demographics and coping mechanism was explored through the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

IV. RESULTS

Stress Coping Mechanism of Public-School Administrators

The stress coping mechanism of public-school administrators in table 1 clearly shows that the most preferred way of coping to the stress of the respondents is through problem-solving garnering a mean score of 3.42 indicating that this type of coping mechanism is always practiced. It received the highest mean rating compared to the other mechanisms such as seeking social support with a mean score of 3.02 and 2.32 for avoidance. The least coping mechanism appears to be avoidance which is practiced rarely, an indication that the school heads are more likely not inclined with this type of stress coping mechanism.

Table 1. Stress coping mechanism of public-school administrators

Coping Mechanism	Mean	Interpretation
Problem Solving	3.42	Practiced Always
Seeking Social Support	3.02	Practiced Always
Avoidance	2.32	Practiced Rarely

Demographic Group differences in Stress Coping Mechanism as to Problem

Solving, Seeking Social Support, and Avoidance

We explored the differences in the way the school administrators cope with stress using the t-test for independent sample and ANOVA set at .05 alpha level. Regarding problem-solving (table 2.1), the result generated probability values greater than .05 which means that when they are grouped according to sex, civil status, position, length of service, monthly salary, and attendance to training related to stress, no significant difference was noted. However, grouping them by age did register a significant difference with those older ones preferring to use problem-solving more often than the younger ones.

Regarding seeking social support (table 2.2), the respondents share similarities in the use of this type of coping mechanism even if they were grouped according to various demographics and that no significant differences were observed in reference to P-values which are higher than .05 level of significance.

As to avoidance, two demographic groupings register Probability values less than .05 which includes position and length of service. It can be seen from Table 2.3 that those occupying head teacher positions tend to use avoidance more often than those with principalship position. They also vary in the use of this mechanism when grouped according to the length of service. Those whose service rendered are still short tend to utilize avoidance more often than those who have served longer ($P < .05$).

Table 2.1. School heads' stress coping mechanism regarding problem solving according to the demographic profile.

Profile	Group	Mean	Mean Difference	Df	t/f	Sig. (2 tailed)
Age	Younger	3.3972	-.02007	218	-.418	.049
	Older	3.4172				
Sex	Male	3.3978	-.01733	218	-.357	.712
	Female	3.4152				
Civil Status	Single	3.4351	-.03118	218	-.434	.665
	Married	3.4039				
Position	Head Teacher	3.3705	-.09332	218	-1.925	.56
	Principal	3.4638				
Length of Service	Short Term	3.4181	.02878	218	.575	.566
	Long Term	3.3873				
Monthly Salary	₱30,000.00 and below	3.3493	.02878	2	2.757	.066
	₱30,001.00-₱40,000.00	3.4318				
	₱40,001.00 and above	3.4945				
Trainings Attended	With Training	3.2727	-.13636	218	-.541	.589
	Without Training	3.4091				

Table 2.2. School heads' stress coping mechanism regarding seeking social support according to demographic profile

Profile	Group	Mean	Mean Difference	Df	t/f	Sig. (2 tailed)
Age	Younger	3.0591	.10265	218	1.605	.110
	Older	2.9565				
Sex	Male	2.9091	-.16535	218	-2.584	.10
	Female	3.0744				
Civil Status	Single	2.9221	-.09449	218	-.984	.326
	Married	3.0166				
Position	Head Teacher	2.9952	-.02342	218	-.358	.721
	Principal	3.0186				
Length of Service	Short Term	2.9942	-.02907	218	-.434	.665
	Long Term	3.0233				
Monthly Salary	₱30,000.00 and below	2.9589	.02907	2	.929	.397
	₱30,001.00-₱40,000.00	3.0227				
	₱40,001.00 and above	3.0732				
Trainings Attended	With Training	3.4545	.45413	218	1.349	.179
	Without Training	3.0005				

Table 2.3. School heads' stress coping mechanism regarding avoidance according to the demographic profile

Profile	Group	Mean	Mean Difference	Df	t/f	Sig. (2 tailed)
Age	Younger	2.3583	.08624	218	1.359	.176
	Older	2.2721				
Sex	Male	2.3697	.09912	218	1.548	.123
	Female	2.2706				
Civil Status	Single	2.2078	-.11995	218	-1.262	.208
	Married	2.3277				
Position	Head Teacher	2.3789	.16612	218	2.598	.010
	Principal	2.2128				
Length of Service	Short Term	2.3318	.05436	218	.819	.033
	Long Term	2.2774				
Monthly Salary	₱30,000.00 and below	2.3705			1.742	.178
	₱30,001.00-₱40,000.00	2.2965				
	₱40,001.00 and above	2.2106				
Trainings Attended	With Training	2.1818	-.13186	218	-.394	.694
	Without Training	2.3137				

Correlation between Demographics and Stress Coping Mechanism

Table 4 presents the correlation test done between the respondents' demographic characteristics and their stress coping mechanism. It can be inferred from the table that problem-solving is associated only with monthly salary ($r = .157, p = .020$). Sex was found to have a relationship with seeking social support ($r = .172, p = .010$) while avoidance as a stress coping mechanism was found to be linked with the respondents' job position ($r = .173, p = .010$).

Table 4. Relationship between demographic profile and stress coping mechanism of public school administrators

Independent Variable Demographic Profile	Dependent Variable Stress Coping Mechanism					
	Problem Solving		Seeking Social Support		Avoidance	
	Pearson's r	Sig (2-tailed)	Pearson's r	Sig (2-tailed)	Pearson's r	Sig (2-tailed)
Age	-.028 ^{NS}	.676	-.108 ^{NS}	.110	-.092 ^{NS}	.176
Sex	-.024 ^{NS}	.721	-.172 ^{**}	.010	-.104 ^{NS}	.123
Civil status	-.029 ^{NS}	.665	-.066 ^{NS}	.326	-.085 ^{NS}	.208
Educational attainment	-.091 ^{NS}	.180	-.021 ^{NS}	.752	-.003 ^{NS}	.967
Position	-.129 ^{NS}	.056	-.024 ^{NS}	.721	-.173 ^{**}	.010
Length of service as administrator	-.039 ^{NS}	.566	-.029 ^{NS}	.665	-.055 ^{NS}	.414
Monthly salary	-.157 ^{**}	.020	-.092 ^{NS}	.174	-.126 ^{NS}	.063
No. of training attended related to stress management	-.037 ^{NS}	.589	-.091 ^{NS}	.179	-.026 ^{NS}	.694

NS = Not Significant

** = Significant at .01

* = Significant at .05

V. DISCUSSION

This study delved into the coping mechanism of public-school administrators in the Division of Romblon and sought an answer to the question of how their coping mechanism differ when they are grouped according to their demographic characteristics. Coping helps a person detect and attend to stressors and identify resources for and ways of mitigating job strains. Often, coping strategies are learned skills that have a cognitive foundation and serve important functions in improving people's management of stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1991). Viewed as a whole, this study found out that school administrators tend to practice often the *problem-solving* way of coping followed by seeking social support with avoidance considered to be the least practiced. Based on the results, preference of school administrators to face the problem or tasks appears to be a positive finding. Problem-focused or direct coping helps employees *remove* or *reduce stressors* to reduce their strain experiences (Bhagat et al., 2012). Bhagat further explained that problem-focused coping is featured as an extension of control because engaging in problem-focused coping strategies requires a series of acts to keep job stressors under control. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) likewise stressed that problem-focused coping would buffer the impact of stress by influencing individuals' accurate appraisals of available coping resources and using specific coping efforts that mitigate stress. It was also found out in the study that school administrators prefer social support as a way of coping stress aside from problem-solving. Dealing with the stress problems with social support as a factor makes negative effects of stress less intense, reduces our helplessness and increases our trust in the the ability to deal with the work-load situations. Avoidance as a way of coping tend to be practiced rarely by the respondents and is viewed to be good because literature suggests that this type of coping has little or no effectiveness at all (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Nevertheless, others use this coping because it is convenient, easy, and quick to use (Lopez et al., 2001).

As to whether the school administrators differ in the way they use the three stress coping mechanisms, the study only come up with the findings that when it comes to problem-solving, the older ones most likely will prefer the said coping mechanism than the younger ones. Studies on the effect of age to stress coping are still poorly understood and may sometimes lead to further debate (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987) Nevertheless, this study has generally confirmed McCrae's (1982) findings that older adults used fewer escapist and hostile strategies when coping with problems. Several researchers have shown that older adults use less escapism or avoidant coping but a similar or higher level of problem-focused coping as do younger adults (Blanchard-Fields, Sulsky, & Robinson-Whelen, 1991; Felton & Revenson, 1987; Irion & Blanchard-Fields, 1987).

In term of social support, no significant differences were observed suggesting that regardless of groupings by age, sex, civil status, position, length of service, monthly salary and training attended related to stress, school administrators show similarities in the way social support is used. As far as avoidance is concerned, we found out that position and length of service matter as those with head teacher position commonly tend to yield to this type of mechanism compared to those with principalship position. Further, those who have served already in longer terms tend to prefer this mechanism less often compared to those who served in the shorter term. These variations perhaps can be attributed to the assumption that those with higher positions and had served for a longer period tend to master already the problems they have encountered giving them the advantage of facing these problems instead of avoiding them.

It was also found out in the study that the coping mechanism tends to be affected by the respondents' sex especially for seeking social support. Although no significant difference was found out between the males and females, women show a higher inclination to seeking support compared to men based on their mean scores. This finding is consistent with the study of J.T. Ptacek, Ronald E. Smith, Kenneth L. Dodge (1994) that women reported seeking social support and using emotion-focused coping to a greater extent than men, whereas men reported using relatively more problem-focused coping than women. Meanwhile, job position emerged to have been significantly associated with avoidance. Those with lower position tend to prefer avoidance than those with a higher position. Although higher position carries greater task resulting to higher degree of stress, the experience brought about by the position can also serve as an advantage to cope up with stress. This is supported by the study of Mark (2013) who reported that older workers or those with more experience tended to cope better with stress.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study was aimed at exploring the demographic differences in the stress coping mechanism among public school administrators in the Division of Romblon Philippines. The evaluation of the findings of this research study showed the existence of statistically significant interactions between the coping strategies to stressful situations and the demographic and job characteristics (age, sex, job position, and length of service). The results allow us to compare the stress coping mechanism of school administrators between different demographic groupings which provide valuable input to any stress management program to be developed by the Department of Education. Further study is likewise encouraged of similar nature using the qualitative method to fully understand other coping mechanisms not covered in this study.

REFERENCES

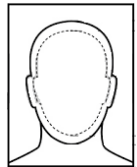
- [1] Akhlaq, M., Amjid, K., Mehmood, K. Hasan, S., & Malik, S. (2010). An evaluation of the effects of stress on the job performance of secondary school teachers. *Journal of Law and Psychology*, 1(1), 43-54.
- [2] Amirkhan, J.H. (1990). A factor analytically derived measure of coping: The coping strategy indicator. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 1066-1075.
- [3] Blanchard-Fields, F., Sulsky, L., & Robinson-Whelen, S. (1991). Moderating effects of age and context on the relationship between gender, sex role differences, and coping. *Sex Roles*, 25, 645-660.
- [4] Brown, Z.A., & Uehara, D.L. (1999). *Coping with teacher stress: A research synthesis of Pacific educators*. (#RS9901). Honolulu, HI: Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
- [5] Carver, C.S., Scheier, M.F., & Weintraub, J.K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, 267-283. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.56.2.267
- [6] Chitty, K.K. (2005). *Professional nursing: Concepts and challenges*. Missouri; Elsevier Saunders.
- [7] Comish, R. & Swindle, B. (1999). Managing stress in the workplace. *National Public Accountant*, 39(2), 24-28.
- [8] Dobson, F. & Smith, A. (2000). What is stress and how does it affect reproduction? *Animal Reproduction Science*, 60, 743-752.
- [9] Elywn, T. (2000). *Teacher education: dilemmas and prospects*. New York press.
- [10] Felton, B.J., & Revenson, T.A. (1987). Age differences in coping with chronic illness. *Psychology and Aging*, 2, 164-170.
- [11] Folkman, S., Lazarus, R.S., Pimley, S., & Novacek, J. (1987). Age differences in stress and coping processes. *Psychology and Aging*, 2, 171-184.
- [12] Gay, L.R., & Airasian, P. (2000). *Education research competencies for analysis and application* (6th ed). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- [13] Irion, J.C., & Blanchard-Fields, F. (1987). A cross-sectional comparison of adaptive coping in adulthood. *Journal of Gerontology*, 42, 502-504.
- [14] J.T. Ptacek, Ronald E. Smith, Kenneth L. Dodge (1994). Gender Differences in Coping with Stress: When Stressor and Appraisals Do Not Differ. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Volume: 20 issue: 4, page(s): 421-430. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0146167294204009>.
- [15] Khan, A., Shah, I.M., Khan, S. & Gul, S. (2012). Teachers' stress, performance and resources: The moderating effects of resources on stress and performance. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2(2), 1-9.
- [16] Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: Directions for future research. *Educational Review*, 53 (1), 27-35.
- [17] Lame, O. P. (2011), *Coping with Stress in Life and at Workplace*. Starlin-Hordon Publishers (Nig), Ltd.
- [18] Lazarus, R.S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.
- [20] Mark, G.M. (2013). The relationship between workplace stress, and Job characteristics, individual differences, and mental health. *ProQuest LLC*. Retrieved from <https://orca.cf.ac.uk/54730/1/U585119.pdf>
- [21] McCrae, R.R. (1982). Age differences in the use of coping mechanisms. *Journal of Gerontology*, 37, 454-460
- [22] Mwangi, R.W. (2003). *Principals as a significant tool in the provision of Quality Education in Africa*. Unpublished paper presented during Africa convention of principals (ACP) conference in Mombasa, Kenya.
- [23] Mutai, S.G. (2009). *A Study of Occupational Stress and Quality of Work Life among Professional and Non-Professional*. PhD Thesis, Moi University, Eldoret.

- [24] Mutinda, B. K. (2008). *A Study on Motivation and Stress Coping Strategies of Technical Personnel at a Railway Workshop*. Unpublished M A Thesis, University of Nairobi.
- [25] Reddy, G.L. & Anuradha, R.V. (2013). Occupational stress of higher secondary teachers working in Vellore District. *International Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, 3(1), 9-24.
- [26] Small, M.O. (2009). *Teacher Development and Social Educational*. News London: Kenya Paper.

AUTHORS PROFILE⁹



Jonathan P. Wong, Ph.D., the lead author is an associate professor of Romblon State University (RSU) – Romblon Campus – Philippines. He served as a campus director of RSU – Romblon campus. His line of interest in research includes Teacher Education, Management and Leadership.



2nd Author

Christine M. Tome is an instructor of Romblon State University – Romblon Campus - Philippines. She holds a master's degree in educational management.



3rd Author

Amaranth M. Wong, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of Romblon State University – Romblon Campus - Philippines. She holds an BS in Early Childhood degree and a Ph.D in Educational Management. She is currently the Extension Services Coordinator of RSU – Romblon Campus.