



Filipino Senior High School Students' Perceived Stress and Coping Strategies in the Post-Pandemic Context

Celosteo A. Villaceran^{1,2}

¹Graduate School, Cebu Technological University, Cebu City, Philippines

²Division of Lapu-Lapu City, Department of Education, Lapu-Lapu City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aimed to determine the levels of perceived stress and coping strategies among Filipino senior high school students in the post-pandemic context and to examine the relationships between their stress and coping strategies.

Methodology: The study employed a descriptive-correlational design using validated survey instruments, namely the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) and the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale (FCS). Data were collected through an online self-administered questionnaire among senior high school students in Central Visayas, Philippines, following ethical and consent procedures. The data were analyzed using SPSS, applying descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Pearson product-moment correlation to examine the relationship between perceived stress and coping strategies.

Main Findings: Students reported high levels of perceived stress and generally high coping strategies, with religiosity being very high. Moderate coping strategies included overactivity and emotional release, while substance use was low. Correlations showed negligible but significant positive relationships between stress and most coping strategies, except religiosity, which was not significant.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study integrates the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping with the Grounded Theory of Filipino Well-Being (*Kaginhawaan*), providing culturally contextualized insights into student stress and coping in the post-pandemic era. It advances knowledge by highlighting Filipino-specific coping mechanisms and their relevance in educational and guidance practices, offering practical implications for supporting student resilience.

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Corresponding Author:

Celosteo A. Villaceran

Graduate School, Cebu Technological University, R. Palma Street, corner M. J. Cuenco Avenue, Cebu City, Philippines

Email: celosteo.villaceran@deped.gov.ph

1. INTRODUCTION

The resumption of in-person classes in the Philippines, following a decrease in COVID-19 cases, marks a significant phase in post-pandemic education. Educational institutions shifted from online and blended formats back to conventional classroom environments, to reinstate pre-pandemic learning dynamics [1], [2]. The return occurred without a gradual transition plan, resulting in a challenging academic environment for students. As students adapted to new routines, heightened academic expectations, and the re-establishment of physical classroom dynamics, they experienced increased stress, which adversely affected their academic performance and overall well-being [3].

Although schools have made strides in reopening, the effects of the pandemic continue to shape post-pandemic education in the Philippines. The abrupt and frequent changes in learning modalities during the pandemic have had enduring impacts on students' study habits, time management, and motivation [4], [5]. Students accustomed to flexible online platforms often struggle to adapt to strict in-person schedules, leading to absenteeism, delayed assignment submissions, and reduced concentration [6]. The challenges indicate that the pandemic's effects transcend health, affecting educational frameworks and student adaptation during the recovery phase.

In Central Visayas, numerous senior high school students face challenges in adapting to the post-pandemic educational requirements. Stress is a widespread issue, evident in diminished communication skills, excessive reliance on digital resources, reduced cognitive engagement, and impaired self-regulation [7]. The career choices and self-efficacy of students interact with their academic and personal stressors, as evidenced by research on Filipino senior high school learners' career preferences and goals [8], [9]. Stress is a fundamental aspect of the learning process; however, the additional pressures resulting from post-pandemic adjustments have led to increased mental health issues among adolescents. This situation highlights the need to explore coping strategies within the contemporary educational context [10].

However, much of the existing literature on student stress has focused primarily on the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing emergency remote learning, lockdown-related anxiety, and health-related fears [10]-[12]. There is a relative scarcity of research focused on students' stress and coping mechanisms during the transition to full in-person schooling post-pandemic, especially among senior high school students in developing contexts. International studies frequently conceptualize coping as a broad psychological construct, neglecting culturally specific coping mechanisms, such as spirituality and family-centered support systems, which are prominent in collectivist societies [13]-[15].

Revisiting theoretical frameworks that elucidate stress and coping is essential for addressing these issues, particularly as international research continues to document sustained psychological distress among adolescents even after the easing of pandemic restrictions [14], [16], [17]. The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping [18] posits that stress arises from a disparity between demands and available resources, emphasizing the appraisal and coping processes. Evaluating this theory in the post-pandemic context can help determine the continued relevance of its constructs for understanding learners' stress experiences today. The Grounded Theory of Filipino Well-being (*Kaginhawaan*) [19] presents a culturally situated perspective that highlights family, economic conditions, occupation, psychosocial well-being, and spirituality as fundamental components of Filipino resilience. Analyzing both frameworks provides an understanding of stress and coping from both universal and culturally specific perspectives.

This study examined perceived stress and coping strategies among senior high school students in Central Visayas, Philippines, specifically during the post-pandemic return to in-person schooling. Unlike prior studies conducted during the height of the pandemic that focused on emergency remote learning and crisis-related stressors [10]-[12], this research addresses adjustment-related stress and coping responses during the recovery phase, where academic demands, social reintegration, and routine re-establishment intersect [16]. By integrating established stress theory with a culturally grounded framework of Filipino well-being, the study provides context-specific evidence that complements recent international findings on adolescent stress and coping in post-crisis educational settings [13], [14], [17], while extending localized Philippine evidence relevant to educational and guidance interventions [2], [20].

This study's findings have important implications for school guidance and counseling. Understanding students' stress levels and coping mechanisms could inform the creation of effective counseling programs, mental health support services, and school-based interventions in the post-pandemic context. The study emphasizes educators' and counselors' obligation to address mental health issues, as mandated by the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004 (RA 9258), and highlights its significance for student success. Ultimately, this study could enhance student well-being and resilience within the ongoing post-pandemic education context in the Philippines.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study utilized the descriptive-correlational design to elucidate the relationship between perceived stress and coping strategies among senior high school students, rather than to infer causal relationships [21]. This design enabled the researcher to investigate the relationship between variables in a context where control over independent variables was not possible, thereby facilitating the study of naturally occurring stress and coping behaviors among learners. Moreover, the study employed an Input-Process-Output (IPO) framework for data organization and collection, facilitating a systematic analysis and interpretation of the findings [22].

Figure 1 shows the flowchart of the study's research procedures.

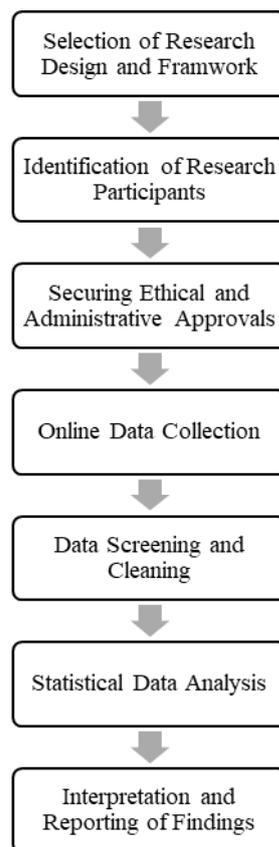


Figure 1. Flowchart of the research procedures of the study

2.2. Research Subjects and Sampling Procedure

The research was carried out with senior high school students in Central Visayas, Philippines. Two hundred eighty (280) respondents participated in the study. Participants were selected through simple random sampling to ensure that all eligible students had an equal opportunity to be included in the study, thereby reducing selection bias [23]. The sample size was calculated using Slovin's formula, based on the population of senior high school learners in the selected districts and a 5% margin of error, in accordance with established practices in social science research [24], [25]. The study included only students who were legal and provided informed consent, and specific schools were not identified to ensure confidentiality.

2.3. Research Instruments

Two main instruments were employed to assess the variables of interest: the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) and the Filipino Coping Scale (FCS). The PSS-10, comprising ten items on a Likert scale, assessed students' perceived stress levels during the post-pandemic period, with response options ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Often) [26], [27]. The scale exhibits adequate internal consistency, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients between 0.67 and 0.91. The FCS, created by Rilveria [28], comprises 38 items using a 4-point Likert scale to assess coping mechanisms specific to Filipino culture across 8 domains: cognitive reappraisal, social support, problem-solving, religiosity, tolerance, emotional release, overactivity, relaxation, and substance use. The instrument exhibited satisfactory reliability, evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.716 overall and ranging from 0.60 to 0.90 across its domains. Both instruments incorporated demographic variables, including age, gender, and socioeconomic status, to delineate the respondents' profiles.

2.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection began with obtaining permission from the Schools Division Superintendent and securing approval from the school principals. Participation in the study was limited to students who provided informed consent. The survey was conducted online via a secure platform, with instructions provided for completing each section of the questionnaire. The orientation highlighted the study's objectives, the voluntary aspect of participation, and the confidentiality of responses. Upon completion of the survey, all quantitative data were extracted into a spreadsheet, verified for completeness, and cleansed of duplicate or inconsistent entries. The data were then encrypted with a password to ensure secure storage [29].

2.5. Data Analysis Techniques

Each instrument was evaluated according to its designated scoring procedures for data analysis. The PSS-10 employed a five-point scale, with numerical scores categorized as Very Low (1.00–1.80), Low (1.81–2.60), Moderate (2.61–3.40), High (3.41–4.20), and Very High (4.21–5.00) perceived stress levels. The FCS used a five-point scale with verbal descriptors ranging from Very Low to Very High coping strategies, employing consistent intervals to quantify students' reported coping behaviors (Reddy et al., 2023). Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were calculated to summarize students' perceived levels of stress and coping. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was utilized to analyze the relationship between perceived stress and coping strategies. Inferential statistics were performed at a 95% confidence level, with p -values below .05 deemed statistically significant, enabling the identification of meaningful associations between the variables [30], [31].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Demographic Profile of the Senior High School Students

The demographic profile of the senior high school students includes their age, gender, parents' educational attainment, number of siblings in the family, and combined monthly family income. Table 1 presents this demographic profile.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents (N=280)

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	17 years old and below	43	15.26
	18-19 years old	135	48.21
	20 years old and above	102	36.43
Gender	Male	141	50.36
	Female	139	49.64
Fathers' Education	No formal schooling	4	1.43
	Elementary level/graduate	53	18.92
	High school level/graduate	144	51.43
	College level/graduate	78	27.86
	Master's level/graduate	1	0.36
Mother's Education	Elementary level/graduate	55	19.64
	High school level/graduate	157	56.07
	College level/graduate	68	24.28
Sibling Number	1-2 siblings in the family	66	23.57
	3-4 siblings in the family	110	39.29
	5 siblings and above in the family	104	37.14
Combined Family Monthly Income	P10,000 and below	122	43.57
	P10,001-P15,000	54	19.29
	P15,001-P20,000	31	11.07
	P20,001-P25,000	30	10.71
	P25,001-P30,000	19	6.79
	P30,001 and above	24	8.57

According to Table 1, the participants were predominantly late adolescents, within the typical age range for senior high school, and exhibited nearly equal representation of males and females. The observed gender balance aligns with global population trends, suggesting that the participants are representative of a typical senior high school demographic. The age and gender distribution suggest a typical progression through educational stages, which may influence peer relationships, learning experiences, and exposure to stressors within the academic environment. Beyond representativeness, the predominance of late adolescents suggests heightened vulnerability to stress during the post-pandemic transition, as this developmental stage coincides with identity formation, academic decision-making, and increased social demands. International studies have reported that adolescents returning to in-person schooling after prolonged disruption experience elevated stress related to peer reintegration and academic performance expectations, even when gender differences are minimal [10]-[12]. The absence of pronounced gender disparity in this study contrasts with some international findings that report higher stress among female adolescents, suggesting that contextual and cultural factors may mediate gendered stress experiences in the Philippine setting [12], [32].

Moreover, the majority of SHS students' parents had completed at least secondary education, although a smaller proportion had earned college or graduate degrees. Studies have consistently demonstrated that parental education positively affects children's academic performance and school engagement [33], [34]. Parents with

higher levels of education often provide both academic and personal support [35], which, in turn, influences students' coping strategies and learning outcomes. The prevalence of numerous siblings suggests that many respondents were raised in environments characterized by peer support, motivation, and intermittent sibling conflict, which contributed to their resilience and adaptability [36]-[38]. From a practical standpoint, these findings imply that school-based interventions should not assume uniform parental support capacities. While higher parental education may facilitate academic and emotional assistance, students from households with limited educational resources may require stronger school-led guidance, mentoring, and counseling services. International research emphasizes that post-pandemic stress mitigation is more effective when schools compensate for unequal family resources through structured psychosocial programs and academic scaffolding [13], [39]. Thus, the role of schools becomes particularly critical in contexts where family-based academic support is uneven.

Furthermore, the predominant demographic of SHS students originated from low-income households, indicating that economic constraints may affect educational decisions and experiences. Low-income families often choose public education due to its affordability, whereas middle-income families enroll based on perceived quality and accessibility [40], [41]. Public schools are recognized for offering diverse learning environments that foster inclusivity and social understanding across different income levels [43]. These demographic factors provide critical context for analyzing the respondents' academic experiences, stress levels, and coping mechanisms in the region. While economic disadvantage is commonly associated with increased academic stress, the present findings should be interpreted cautiously. The predominance of low-income respondents may amplify perceived stress levels, potentially limiting direct comparisons with studies conducted in higher-income or private-school contexts [40], [41]. International research indicates that socioeconomic stressors intensified during the post-pandemic period, particularly in public education systems where students face compounded academic and financial pressures [11], [12].

From an educational policy perspective, these findings underscore the importance of strengthening school-based mental health programs, particularly in public senior high schools serving economically disadvantaged communities. Post-pandemic recovery initiatives may include enhanced guidance counseling services, peer-support programs, stress-management workshops, and family engagement strategies aligned with existing education and mental health policies [10], [42]. By situating stress and coping within structural and socioeconomic conditions, this study contributes to the growing international literature that frames post-pandemic student well-being as both a psychological and systemic concern rather than an individual issue alone [13], [16].

3.2. Perceived Stress of the Senior High School Students

The perceived stress of SHS students was assessed using the PSS-10, which measures the frequency with which students experience stress in their daily lives. Table 2 shows the overall level of stress among them.

Table 2. Level of students' perceived stress

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
I felt nervous or stressed.	3.78	High
I felt confident in handling personal problems.	3.58	High
I felt unable to control important things in my life.	3.56	High
I felt difficulties piling up beyond what I could handle.	3.50	High
I was upset by unexpected events.	3.46	High
I was able to control irritations in my life.	3.38	Moderate
I was angered by things outside my control.	3.38	Moderate
I felt that things were going well for me.	3.25	Moderate
I felt unable to cope with everything I had to do.	3.25	Moderate
I felt control or on top of things.	3.00	Moderate

Legend: 1.00-1.80 (Very low), 1.81-2.60 (Low), 2.61-3.40 (Moderate), 3.41-4.20 (High), 4.21-5.00 (Very high)

Based on Table 2, SHS students reported high levels of stress related to unforeseen events, a sense of helplessness regarding critical life aspects, heightened nervousness or tension, diminished confidence in addressing personal issues, and an overwhelming perception of cumulative challenges. These findings indicate that post-pandemic students experienced considerable psychological pressure, likely stemming from the uncertainties and challenges that arose after the COVID-19 pandemic. Analogous trends were reported [11], indicating that perceived stress levels remained globally elevated during the pandemic, attributed to uncertainties surrounding health, vaccinations, and social restrictions. Ongoing anxiety and the expectation of adverse outcomes can exacerbate stress [12], even following the resolution of immediate threats. Importantly, these elevated stress indicators reflect not only residual pandemic-related anxiety but also the psychological demands associated with rapid academic normalization. Unlike studies conducted during lockdown periods that emphasized health-related fear and social isolation [11], [12], the present findings suggest that post-pandemic

stress among senior high school students is increasingly driven by academic pressure, performance expectations, and perceived loss of control during reintegration into structured schooling. This shift highlights an emerging phase of stress qualitatively distinct from crisis-related stress documented earlier in the pandemic literature [10], [16].

Additionally, moderate stress levels were noted in domains including positive progress perception, task management, irritability control, personal agency handling, and anger regulation in response to uncontrollable circumstances. The results suggest that although students experienced significant stress in specific areas, they maintained some ability to handle daily demands and emotions. The moderate ratings indicate that post-pandemic students were not entirely overwhelmed and could manage routine challenges, though these coping mechanisms may be tested under sustained pressure. Studies suggest that moderate perceived stress can impact concentration, emotional regulation, and overall well-being [16], [43], underscoring the need for supportive interventions even in the absence of high stress levels. However, the presence of moderate stress across several domains should be interpreted with caution. International research suggests that moderate perceived stress, particularly when sustained over time, may function as a hidden risk factor, gradually impairing academic engagement and emotional well-being despite the absence of acute distress [16], [43]. In contrast to some international studies reporting declining stress levels after school reopening [11], the persistence of moderate stress in this cohort indicates that recovery trajectories may differ across educational systems and socioeconomic contexts.

From a practical standpoint, these findings underscore the need for preventive and responsive school-based mental health interventions rather than crisis-only support. Even in the absence of very high stress levels, sustained moderate stress warrants structured programs such as stress-management workshops, academic advising support, and emotional regulation training integrated into senior high school curricula [10], [42]. International evidence suggests that early identification and intervention during post-crisis adjustment periods are more effective than delayed responses once stress escalates into clinical concerns [13], [16].

In general, the findings reveal that SHS students in the region consistently experience heightened stress during the post-pandemic period, particularly due to concerns about unpredictability, a lack of control, and cumulative challenges. The interplay of elevated and moderate stress levels indicates the enduring psychological effects of pandemic-related disruptions on their academic, social, and personal domains. The findings align with global research indicating that post-pandemic stress remains a significant issue for adolescents [11], [12], underscoring the importance of monitoring stress levels to understand students' mental health and well-being. From a practical standpoint, these findings underscore the need for preventive and responsive school-based mental health interventions rather than crisis-only support. Even in the absence of very high stress levels, sustained moderate stress warrants structured programs such as stress-management workshops, academic advising support, and emotional regulation training integrated into senior high school curricula [10], [42]. International evidence suggests that early identification and intervention during post-crisis adjustment periods are more effective than delayed responses once stress escalates into clinical concerns [13], [16].

At the policy level, the results support the strengthening of school guidance and counseling programs, particularly in public senior high schools navigating post-pandemic recovery. The findings underscore the need to align educational policies with mental health mandates, emphasizing continuous stress monitoring, enhanced counselor capacity, and robust student support systems within post-pandemic education reforms [10], [42]. This study documents stress patterns during the reintegration phase, contributing to the international literature that reinterprets post-pandemic student stress as a long-term adjustment challenge rather than merely a transient consequence of the health crisis.

3.3. Coping Strategies of the Senior High School Students

The coping strategies of senior high school students were assessed using the FCS, focusing on how students manage stress in daily life. Table 3 showcases the levels and types of coping strategies employed.

Table 3. Level of students' coping strategies

Strategies	Weighted Mean	Description
Religiosity	4.42	Very high
Relaxation	4.17	High
Problem-solving	4.07	High
Tolerance	3.80	High
Social support	3.78	High
Cognitive reappraisal	3.67	High
Overactivity	3.39	Moderate
Emotional release	3.38	Moderate
Substance use	2.14	Low

Legend: 1.00-1.80 (Very low), 1.81-2.60 (Low), 2.61-3.40 (Moderate), 3.41-4.20 (High), 4.21-5.00 (Very high)

As showcased in Table 3, religiosity was the predominant coping strategy among students, exhibiting a significantly high level of utilization. This suggests that faith, prayer, and spiritual beliefs are crucial in shaping students' approaches to addressing and managing stress. The reliance on religiosity underscores the profound cultural and historical significance of religion in the Philippines, where spirituality often provides meaning, strength, and comfort during challenging times. Prior research has demonstrated that religiosity contributes to well-being by providing individuals with a sense of purpose and resilience in the face of adversity [44], [45]. This finding highlights the role of religious practices as a significant buffer against stress, particularly in the post-pandemic context marked by ongoing uncertainties. While religiosity emerged as the most prominent coping strategy, this finding warrants critical reflection. International studies conducted in more secular contexts often report lower reliance on religious coping, with greater emphasis on individualistic strategies such as cognitive reappraisal and self-regulation [14], [17]. The markedly high reliance on religiosity in this study suggests that cultural context plays a decisive role in shaping post-pandemic coping behaviors, highlighting a divergence from dominant Western coping models. However, excessive reliance on spiritual coping alone may also limit engagement with problem-focused or professional support mechanisms, suggesting a need for balance rather than substitution in coping approaches [44], [46].

Alongside religiosity, relaxation and problem-solving emerged as frequently employed strategies. Students often engaged in activities that foster rest, tranquility, and cognitive clarity, suggesting that breaks and leisure pursuits contributed to the regulation of emotional distress. The prominence of problem-solving indicates that many students preferred addressing challenges directly through logical reasoning and constructive actions. These approaches demonstrate proactive stress management, which is linked to favorable psychological outcomes and effective coping strategies in both academic and life challenges [47], [48]. These strategies suggest that, in addition to spiritual reliance, students employ a balance of coping mechanisms, including both practical and restorative approaches. From an applied perspective, the strong presence of relaxation and problem-solving strategies underscores the potential for schools to institutionalize these practices through structured academic support systems. Programs such as time-management workshops, problem-solving clinics, and guided relaxation or mindfulness sessions can help formalize adaptive coping skills that students already employ informally [16], [49]. International post-pandemic interventions suggest that embedding such strategies within regular school routines enhances sustainability and prevents escalation of stress-related difficulties [14], [15].

Additionally, tolerance, social support, and cognitive reappraisal were commonly used, all at high levels. Tolerance denotes the ability to withstand challenges with composure, whereas social support signifies students' inclination to seek assistance, empathy, and affirmation from their peers and family. Cognitive reappraisal involves students reinterpreting stressful events in more positive or manageable terms. These strategies illustrate adaptive coping based on acceptance, interpersonal connection, and reframing, consistent with prior research indicating that these approaches enhance emotional resilience and improve stress adjustment [13], [17], [32]. The findings suggest that students exhibit self-reliance while also seeking support from others and adjusting their perspectives. Nonetheless, the uniformly high ratings across multiple adaptive coping strategies may partly reflect self-report bias or socially desirable responding, particularly in collectivist cultures where resilience and emotional control are socially valued [32], [50]. This limitation suggests that reported coping strengths should be interpreted cautiously and complemented by qualitative or longitudinal data in future studies to capture coping effectiveness over time.

Moreover, moderate levels were noted in both overactivity and emotional release. This indicates that although some students alleviated their stress by engaging in excessive activity or expressing emotions through crying, venting, or similar methods, these were not the predominant strategies used. While emotional release may offer temporary relief and overactivity can serve as a distraction, these approaches do not necessarily address the root causes of stress. They may lead to exhaustion if employed excessively. Prior studies indicate that overactivity and emotional discharge can serve as temporary coping mechanisms; however, they are less sustainable than adaptive strategies, such as problem-solving or seeking social support [51], [52]. This moderate reliance suggests that students utilized them sporadically rather than depending on them extensively. Importantly, the moderate reliance on overactivity and emotional release may signal latent challenges in stress regulation that are not immediately apparent in aggregate stress scores. International research indicates that such coping strategies often intensify during prolonged adjustment periods, potentially leading to burnout or emotional exhaustion if not addressed early [51], [52]. Thus, these findings highlight the importance of monitoring not only dominant coping strategies but also secondary behaviors that may emerge under sustained post-pandemic pressure.

Substance use was observed at a minimal level, indicating that students infrequently utilized smoking, alcohol, or drugs as coping mechanisms for stress. This outcome is favorable, given that substance-based coping has been linked to maladaptive results and an exacerbation of stress over time [46]. The limited reliance on these methods indicates that students predominantly eschewed maladaptive behaviors in favor of more constructive strategies, such as religiosity, relaxation, and problem-solving, to address their challenges.

From an educational policy standpoint, the findings support the integration of culturally responsive mental health programs within senior high school curricula. School guidance services may leverage students' strong inclination toward religiosity and social support by collaborating with families, community leaders, and counselors, while simultaneously strengthening evidence-based coping skills such as cognitive reappraisal and problem-solving [10], [42]. Post-pandemic recovery policies that emphasize holistic well-being, rather than academic remediation alone, are more likely to sustain student resilience and engagement [12], [16].

Overall, the findings demonstrate that senior high school students predominantly use adaptive coping strategies in the post-pandemic context, but these strategies are deeply shaped by cultural, social, and structural factors rather than by individual preferences alone. Moderately utilized strategies offered occasional outlets but were not predominant, whereas maladaptive methods such as substance use were infrequently employed. The findings align with the existing literature, which highlights the protective role of cultural and social values in Filipino students' coping mechanisms [49], [50], [53]. The results indicate that, in the post-pandemic context, students continue to rely on faith, interpersonal connections, and constructive problem-solving as their primary strategies for managing stress, highlighting the adaptive strengths inherent in their cultural and personal resources.

3.4. Relationship between Students' Perceived Stress and Their Coping Strategies

The relationship between SHS students' perceived stress and their coping strategies was examined using the Pearson product-moment correlation to determine the strength and direction of the association. Table 4 highlights the results of this analysis.

Table 4. Relationships between students' perceived stress and their coping strategies

Variables	r-value	Strength	p-value	Interpretation
Stress and Cognitive reappraisal	0.29	Negligible positive	.000	Significant
Stress and Overactivity	0.26	Negligible positive	.000	Significant
Stress and Tolerance	0.20	Negligible positive	.001	Significant
Stress and Emotional release	0.17	Negligible positive	.004	Significant
Stress and Substance use	0.17	Negligible positive	.004	Significant
Stress and Relaxation	0.16	Negligible positive	.008	Significant
Stress and Social support	0.14	Negligible positive	.022	Significant
Stress and Problem-solving	0.12	Negligible positive	.044	Significant
Stress and Religiosity	0.10	Negligible positive	.094	Not significant

*Significant at $\alpha=.05$

As highlighted in Table 4, a positive and significant relationship exists between cognitive reappraisal and perceived stress among SHS students. This coping strategy, which involves reframing stressful situations constructively, can help students manage stress more effectively. This finding is consistent with earlier research suggesting that cognitive reappraisal enhances resilience and adaptive coping by enabling individuals to confront challenges through a problem-focused perspective and rational assessment [17], [54]. However, the weak correlation suggests that cognitive reappraisal, while adaptive, may primarily serve as a response to perceived stress rather than a mechanism that directly reduces stress levels. International post-pandemic studies similarly report weak associations between stress and adaptive coping, indicating that coping strategies often emerge in response to stress rather than serving as immediate stress buffers [16], [17]. This pattern reflects the complexity of stress-coping dynamics in post-crisis contexts, where multiple contextual and structural factors shape students' psychological experiences.

Overactivity and tolerance were positively associated with perceived stress, suggesting that students may increase their activity levels or exercise patience and acceptance as strategies for stress management. While overactivity can be advantageous for redirecting attention and maintaining productivity, it requires careful management to prevent exhaustion or burnout [52], [55]. Tolerance fosters the acceptance of difficult situations and enhances emotional stability, which is associated with better psychological well-being [32], [56]. The weak correlation further implies that overactivity and tolerance may reflect coping effort rather than coping effectiveness. International research suggests that these strategies are often used when individuals perceive limited control over stressors, particularly during prolonged adjustment periods such as post-pandemic school reintegration [32], [52]. While such strategies may prevent emotional collapse, they may not substantially alleviate stress unless paired with problem-focused or institutional support mechanisms.

Moreover, emotional release, substance use, and relaxation exhibit positive, though minimal, correlations with perceived stress. Emotional release, including the expression of feelings through crying or verbal communication, serves as an outlet for repressed emotions, thereby enhancing mental health in stressful circumstances [51], [57]. Substance use, recognized as a coping strategy, presents potential risks to both physical and mental health, underscoring the necessity of advocating for safer coping mechanisms [58]. Relaxation techniques, such as mindfulness, meditation, and personal downtime, effectively mitigate psychological and

physiological stress responses, underscoring the advantages of intentional stress-relief practices [14]. The minimal correlations observed for these strategies indicate that their use may be situational and short-term, offering temporary relief rather than sustained stress reduction. International evidence suggests that relaxation and emotional expression are most effective when embedded within structured intervention programs, whereas unstructured or sporadic use shows limited long-term impact on perceived stress levels [14], [51]. This finding reinforces the need to distinguish between the availability of coping strategies and their systematic effectiveness.

The findings also indicate a positive association between social support and problem-solving in the context of stress, underscoring their role in effective coping. Social support provides students with emotional and practical assistance from peers, family, or mentors, thereby enhancing their resilience and mitigating the effects of stressors [13], [59], [60]. Problem-solving enables students to identify practical solutions, make informed decisions, and respond constructively to challenges, aligning with the function of creative and reflective thinking in adaptive coping strategies [61], [62].

Conversely, religiosity exhibits a minimal positive correlation with perceived stress that lacks statistical significance, indicating that for this cohort of students, religious coping may not have a direct impact on stress levels. Previous research suggests that religiosity can offer meaning, purpose, and social support [44], [62]; however, its effects may vary depending on individual beliefs, cultural context, or level of engagement. One possible explanation for this non-significant relationship is that religiosity may function as a meaning-making or emotional anchoring mechanism rather than a stress-regulating strategy that directly alters perceived stress intensity. International studies conducted in collectivist and highly religious contexts report similar findings, where religious coping enhances psychological endurance and acceptance but does not necessarily reduce stress appraisals [44], [46], [62]. This suggests that religiosity may buffer the impact of stress on well-being rather than influence stress perception itself, a distinction that warrants further empirical investigation.

The predominance of weak correlations across coping strategies may also be influenced by methodological factors, including the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported measures, which limit the ability to capture coping effectiveness over time [21], [63], [64]. International longitudinal studies demonstrate that the strength of stress-coping relationships often increases when coping is assessed dynamically across multiple time points, particularly during extended recovery phases [16], [65]. Thus, the present findings should be interpreted as indicative of coping presence, not causal impact.

Overall, the findings indicate that while students actively employ a range of coping strategies in response to perceived stress, the predominantly weak associations suggest that individual coping alone is insufficient to substantially reduce post-pandemic stress. The weak correlations suggest that while these strategies may help students manage stress, they are not reliable indicators of stress reduction. The findings underscore the need to establish comprehensive mental health programs in educational settings that incorporate diverse coping strategies, promote adaptive methods, and provide support systems tailored to students' cultural and social contexts [46], [49], [53]. From an educational policy perspective, these results highlight the importance of shifting from an individual-responsibility model of coping toward school-supported mental health systems, including counseling services, structured coping-skills training, and academic stress management programs [10], [42]. By demonstrating that coping strategies are present but weakly linked to stress reduction, this study contributes to the post-pandemic literature by emphasizing the need for institutional and systemic interventions alongside individual coping efforts [13], [16].

3.5. Implications and Limitations

This study's findings have significant theoretical implications, particularly in reinforcing and expanding established models of stress and coping within the post-pandemic educational context. Based on the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping [18], [66], the findings highlight the interconnection between students' perceptions of stress and their chosen coping strategies, which collectively impact both psychological and academic outcomes. Coping techniques, including cognitive reappraisal, utilization of social support, and emotional release, exemplify the dynamic interaction between individual appraisal and environmental demands, thereby reinforcing the theory's focus on person-environment transactions [47], [65]. This study employs the Grounded Theory of Filipino Well-being (*Kaginhawaan*) [28], [53] to elucidate the cultural factors influencing coping mechanisms, specifically family cohesion, spirituality, and community support. It provides a contextually relevant perspective on the stress responses of Filipino students in a post-COVID learning environment [67], [68]. The insights are further supported by the literature regarding pre-service teachers' acceptance of technology and their experiences with online learning, suggesting that stress and coping mechanisms are influenced by digital and instructional contexts [2], [69], [70].

The study offers valuable insights for guidance and counseling practices in schools as they address post-pandemic challenges. Students employ diverse coping strategies; however, structured programs can improve their efficacy in addressing academic and personal stress [47], [71]. Guidance counselors may employ interventions that foster cognitive reappraisal, problem-solving, and social support, while also incorporating relaxation exercises and reflective practices to support their clients. Incorporating culturally responsive methods grounded in the *Kaginhawaan* framework facilitates the integration of familial and spiritual support, thereby

improving holistic well-being [28], [46], [72]. Furthermore, findings from regional research on students' academic performance and career decisions emphasize the importance of guidance in linking stress management with career development and educational outcomes [7], [8], [73]. Counseling interventions targeting stress and career orientation are likely to enhance resilience, well-being, and informed decision-making in students facing post-pandemic academic and life challenges.

However, it is important to recognize several limitations. The research employed self-reported measures, which may lead to bias or inaccuracies [63], [64]. Additionally, its cross-sectional design limits causal inferences regarding the relationship between stress and coping strategies [10], [21]. The sample consisted exclusively of SHS students from a particular locality, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other regions or age groups [4], [7]. Future research may employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to investigate coping processes over time and across diverse populations, while also examining the integration of culturally grounded well-being frameworks with academic and career outcomes [13], [65], [74], [75]. Future research could explore the impact of digital and collaborative learning platforms, technology acceptance, and online instructional environments as contextual factors affecting students' stress, coping mechanisms, and career readiness, thereby extending recent findings in Philippine education and teacher training [5], [70], [76], [77]. Expanding in these areas can enhance the understanding of stress, coping, and well-being, while also contributing to theoretical development and practical guidance strategies in the post-pandemic context.

4. CONCLUSION

The study provides a nuanced understanding of how Filipino senior high school students experience stress and employ coping strategies in the post-pandemic educational landscape. Findings suggest that students' stress levels and coping mechanisms are influenced by both individual factors, such as cognitive appraisal and emotional regulation, and cultural factors, including family support and spiritual practices, consistent with the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping and the Grounded Theory of Filipino Well-Being (*Kaginhawaan*). While the results highlight patterns and associations rather than definitive causal relationships, they offer valuable insights for educators, guidance counselors, and researchers seeking to support student well-being and resilience in post-COVID learning environments. The study underscores the importance of context-sensitive, culturally aligned approaches to addressing stress and fostering coping skills, particularly as students navigate the ongoing challenges and transitions following the pandemic.

Future research may extend these findings by employing longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to examine how students' stress and coping strategies evolve across different stages of post-pandemic adjustment, thereby addressing the limitations of cross-sectional analysis. Further studies may also explore mediating and moderating variables, such as academic workload, school climate, access to guidance services, and digital learning environments, to better explain the weak but significant relationships observed between stress and coping strategies. Additionally, comparative research across regions, school types, or cultural contexts may help clarify how culturally grounded coping mechanisms, including religiosity and family support, function in relation to stress perception and well-being in diverse post-pandemic educational settings.

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