

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.

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.

THE STUDY

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.

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)

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.

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.

FINDINGS

Results disclose that the mean scores on living arrangement problems along academic and family are 2.66 and 2.71 respectively. Problems along academic include 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. On the other hand, problems along this area consist of missing the comforts of home and care of parents. The students experience difficulty being separated from their parents. First year college students fail to achieve the maximum of happiness and efficacy in college because they are homesick. 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. 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.

Furthermore, results show that academic performance is significantly related with birth order and college. 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. 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#ixzz3QGuEklIW>)

As regards the relationship between living arrangement problems and coping strategies, academic is significantly related to active coping, planning, positive reinterpretation and growth, and acceptance. When 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, come up with a strategy about what to do and think about how they might handle the situation as well learn something from experience and look for something good in what is happening and learn to live with it, and accept the reality of the fact that it happened.

Moreover, 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

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.

Hence, 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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