

# Stress and Coping Mechanisms of Single Parents: Their Relationship

JUN REY VILLOSILLO-BALBUENA

Teacher III

Jose Rizal Memorial State University Dipolog Campus  
Jrbalbuena84@gmail.com

*Abstract* — This study aimed to look into the stress and coping mechanisms employed by single parents in the City of Dipolog during the calendar year 2016. Moreover, the study determined the extent of stress experienced by single parents and its relationship to coping mechanisms employed. The coping mechanisms for stress were categorized into problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping was further classified into confrontive or interpersonal and planful problem solving while emotion-focused coping into distancing, escape avoidance, accepting responsibility, self-control, seeking social support and positive reappraisal. The profile of the respondents was also considered to determine its influence on stress and their coping mechanisms. This study utilized the descriptive-correlational research method with the aid of a standardized questionnaire. The study revealed that almost 50 percent of the respondents belonged to 26 years old and below bracket. Eighty six percent of the respondents were living in the urban area. Most of them attained a low level educational attainment having completed high school down to elementary education only. About 49 percent of the respondents are earning monthly income of Php 6000 and below. Stress was sometimes experience by the respondents. As regard to coping mechanisms the confrontive coping and escape avoidance were employed quite a bit by the respondents while the rest of the other coping mechanisms were used by the respondents extensively. Coping mechanisms employed were influenced by how often stress was experienced. On the other, coping mechanisms were influenced by stress, thus the way respondents handle stress leads towards a more favourable coping mechanisms among them. On the personal level, respondents should guard their emotions on stressful situations. It is recommended that single parents may attend trainings and seminars on stress management as this would help them handle the demands of their situations. Workshops on coping mechanisms may be conducted by the government so that single parents will further learn the value of coping with stress.

*Keywords* — *Stress, Coping, Single, Mechanisms*

---

## I. Introduction

The increasing pace of life and its demands stress people. But not to all people especially those with social support network (krutner,2005). Others tend to experience stress, as they look at the situation threatening. The reason why it's important to know ones limits when it comes to stress to avoid more serious health effects. Stress can be defined as the brain's response to any demand. Many things can trigger this response, including change. Changes can be positive or negative, as well as real or perceived. They may be recurring, short-term, or long-term and may include things like commuting to and from school or work every day, travelling for a yearly vacation, or moving to another home. Some changes are major, such as marriage or divorce, serious illness, or a car

accident. Other changes are extreme, such as exposure to violence, and can lead to traumatic stress reactions.

Not all stress is bad. However, chronic stress, those same nerve chemicals that are life-saving in short bursts can suppress functions that not needed for immediate survival. Problems occur if the stress response goes on too long, such as when the source of stress is constant, or if the response continues after the danger has subsided. As the nation continues to face high-levels of stress, families are susceptible to mounting pressures from finances and work. Raising a family can be rewarding and demanding even in healthy social and economic climates, so stressful times can make things much more challenging. An online survey by the American Psychological Association (APA), conducted by Harris Interactive in August 2010, reported that family responsibilities are significant sources of stress.

Indeed single mothers who often are associated with great demands and many challenges. Single mothers are more likely affected by chronic stress and episodes of depression compared to married mothers (Cairney, et. al. 2003). There are various sources of stress for single mothers. First and foremost, single mothers with children represent the most impoverished families in many countries compared to those with two parents. These single bread winners are more likely to have jobs with poor pay and yet they are responsible for more people including themselves and their children. Financial problem represents one of the major source of stress for single mothers (Hashim, I.H.L. et al., 2015). Other sources of daily stress among single mothers with young children are the interactions with children and parental stress. Stress even get worst when single mothers experienced misbehaviours among their children. In addition, social interactions with other adults also represent another source of stress for these women.

Single or solo parents are those who are left alone with the responsibility of rearing their children regardless of marital status, based on the National Statistics Office (NSO) data, there are about 14 million solo parents in the Philippines. The increasing number of solo parents has led the national government to pass Republic Act 8972, or the Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2010. It was enacted to provide a comprehensive program of services for solo parents and their children. This law covers fathers or mothers who raise their children by themselves, either because of the death of a spouse, abandonment, separation, or even those who have children as a result of rape. This law also considers as a solo parent those who are left to care for children not their own, such as nephews, nieces, or godchildren.

In Dipolog City many families are increasingly settled as it offers jobs opportunity among working families. Changes in the family structure are also as cases of parents left alone to rear their children become apparent. These single parents work day and night to support the needs of their children. Thus, stress becomes part of their lives. Unmanaged stress is really detrimental to the well-being of both parents and children. Proper stress management coupled with effective coping mechanisms always matter on the relationship parents develop with their children.

Indeed determining the level of stress experienced by single parents and how they managed it through coping mechanisms can truly help children develop a positive outlook in life despite the absence of one of the parents. For this reason, this study is conducted.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of coping exists in many studies involving individuals with minor and major events. Experiences it began along the interest in stress. Lazarus's (1993) views of coping theory had begun to change in the late 1970s. Lazarus no longer viewed coping as a major standing. Instead, Lazarus treated coping in a different approach, which in turn, people were treated based on their behaviour and action. From a coping perspective, Lazarus found that coping reflected every aspect of a situation based on the occurrences of condition and circumstance that will change over a period of time. Lazarus conducted a study using ways of coping and adopted the ideas of using other scales demonstrating related viewpoint and methods. In the research, Lazarus found that some coping strategies were somewhat consistent, and others were very consistent across stressful encounters. For an example, "seeking social support was very inconsistent, whereas positive reappraisal was modestly—but insignificant statistically—consistent"(Lazarus,p.238).

Duque (2007) cited common effects of stress. These are insomnia, headaches, backaches, constipation, diarrhea, high blood pressure, heart disease, depression and alcohol, tobacco or drug use. He suggested doing the following: 1) After seeing the doctor, share the treatment plan to the people. Talk with friends and relatives and explain the experience; 2) If the doctor prescribes medication take it exactly the way it is prescribed. Do not stop taking the medication until one doctor tells them to stop doing so; 3) Keep all follow-up appointments with the doctor; 4) Remember that it may take some time to start feeling better; 5) If one experience side effects from any medication, tell the doctor; and 6) Seek professional counselling. If the methods of coping with stress are not contributing to your greater emotional and physical health, it is time to find healthier ones. There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. One can either change the situation or change ones reaction. When deciding which option to choose, it is helpful to think of the four A's: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept. Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no "one size fits all" solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so try with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes ones feel calm and in control.

In the study of Salvation (2004) on the stress profile of students in the College of Dentistry of the University of the Philippines, Manila, he revealed that academic stressors like examinations and grades, fully loaded days, difficulty in completing clinical requirements, and fear of getting delayed topped the identified stressors. Academic factors were stressful in the first three year levels. Academic stress peaked during the sophomore year. No significant differences in rankings were observed between genders. There was undeniable similarity in the general stress profile of the different year levels. Common methods of coping with stress were employed by students

included crying, praying, talking, watching movies, and listening to music. Stress makes or breaks a person. It is like a two-edged sword which can either motivate and stimulate a student to peak performance or reduce the student to ineffectiveness.

Further, it was Grandea (2006) who used the descriptive research approach in studying the stress and coping mechanisms of college freshmen of Southville International School and Colleges. It involved 201 student-respondents. The student-respondents experienced high perceived stress. The identified main stressors were academics. The student-respondents used positive stress coping mechanisms. The perceived stress and coping mechanisms of the student-respondents were independent of their profile. While Blona (2005) claimed that students experienced stress since some are trying to cope up with the demands of adapting to a new living environment, new peers, academic pressure, and sexual concerns. Being in college can also put financial stress on the students and their families. These situations can leave them with trembling hands, tense muscles, migraine, headache, and multiple other symptoms of stress. These can contribute to a host of chronic diseases ranging from hypertension to peptic ulcers that can predispose them to premature disability and even death.

On the other hand according to Berardo, et al (2005) among single mother the sources of stress were the roles and responsibilities held. Roles and responsibilities in themselves are not necessarily stressful. However, overwhelming roles and responsibilities across many different areas can be a source of stress. For example, a single mother who is responsible for the health and well-being of herself, children and other family members are likely to be overwhelmed and they experience a higher level of stress as compared to women with lesser roles and responsibilities. In a study comparing the housework between working married women and their husbands, women who work outside the home spend as much as three hours more on doing housework as compared to their husbands.

A stress response called the “fight or flight” response was first developed to explain the bodily reaction to stress. The “fight or flight” response is the body’s sympathetic nervous system reacting to a stressful event by producing endocrine hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol to heighten response towards a perceived threat or challenge (Gazzaniga et al., 2010). The body’s responses include increased heart rate and blood pressure, increased skeletal muscle tension, and alertness (Gazzaniga et al., 2010). The arousal enables the body to prepare for the right course of action-to fight or to flee. Also,

While Dr. Hans Selye, a major researcher on stress response proposed the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) to explain stress reactivity (Gazzaniga et al., 2010). There are three phases in the GAS namely; the alarm stage, resistance stage and exhaustion stage. The alarm stage is similar to the “fight or flight” response such that the endocrine system is activated when the body confronts a stressor. When the stress is on-going, the body goes into the resistance stage whereby the body attempts to maintain equilibrium whilst adapting to the stress. If the stress persists and turns chronic, the adaptive mechanisms will start to deplete and the body enters the

exhaustion stage. At the exhaustion stage, the bodily reactions to stress are experienced at a greater intensity leading to increased susceptibility to fatigue related illnesses and disorders (Gazzaniga et al., 2010). Nonetheless, the above theories have been criticized for not taking into account non-major events and self-perception that might also impact

Different types of coping strategies were (2006) also identified by Magalit et al ( 2006) different types of coping strategies. One is Problem – oriented coping refers to efforts to deal with the sources of stress by changing the behavior of the individual or by changing the environmental conditions or both. Emotional regulation coping referred to coping efforts aimed at reducing emotional distress and maintaining a satisfactory internal state. In a published study fifty-eight percent the coping strategies used by parents were problem – oriented while fifty-two percent of the possible coping strategies were emotion – oriented.

The literature and the studies cited are very closely related to the on-going study. The present study look into the stress and coping mechanisms of single parents which are the foci of the cited literature and studies. On the other hand , the current study used different indicators in the profile of the respondents and considered single parents as respondents. In addition, they differ too in terms of locals and time the studies were conducted.

## **II. Methodology**

This study utilized the descriptive-co relational research method with the aid of standardized questionnaire. It aimed at acquiring and analyzing information pertaining stress experienced and coping mechanisms employed by single parents in Dipolog City. The researcher utilized the standardized questionnaires on the extent stress experienced by the respondents taken from Schwarzer (2014) and coping mechanisms by Lazarus et al.. The first part of the questionnaire was the profile of the respondents. The second part of the questionnaire was on the extent of stress experienced by the respondents. The questionnaire on stress was composed of 40 items describing manifestation of stress as experienced by single parents. These items were rated from 0-3 scaling from “never” to “always”. On the other hand, the third part of the questionnaire was intended for the coping mechanisms employed by single parents. This part of the questionnaire was composed of 66 items categorized generally into problem-focused and emotion-focused coping mechanisms.

## **III. Results and Discussion**

It could be seen on the table that stress was sometimes experiences in general. This was proven by the mean of 1.58. This shows that the respondents usually are under stress in their lives are single parents. Among the predictors of stress, they rated item no.15 with the highest mean of 41.88. This means the fact that faintness or fatigue is the common description of being in stress.

The raw data in the table revealed that there were respondents who sometimes were under stress while others rarely experienced it.

Looking at the overall result would tell that a lot of people do not usually care about stress. This implies that they have this proper way of handling or managing stress at their level. Those who rated the items with 0 signified that stress does not matter to them at all. It is noted that all the coping mechanisms either belonging to problem-focused or emotion-focused coping were used in a great deal. It implies that whatever coping mechanism proves to be effective in stressful situations as long as it reduces the stress felt even in a short period of time. Respondents are willing to do and even applying many mechanisms just to avoid and keep away from stress. This means that devising a plan in order to face and manage stressful situations effectively is similarly used by the respondents across ages, home locations, and educational attainment and even in terms of income. Single parents despite of their educational attainment where majority of them have not reached college level of education, do not deliberately and hastily decide on matters just to avoid stress but they have this mechanism of intelligently and objectively solving the problems. With this coping mechanism, they are quite confident that things will turn out to be right because there is a concrete plan of action to address a stressful situation. By so doing, problems or situations that are too difficult to address may be carefully analysed, root causes identified and possible solutions are suggested in order to favourably come up with the most appropriate way to address stressful situations.

Pravhan (2010) averred that stress in the organization has to be carefully managed because it would generally affect the overall ambiance of the people working. Stress leads to different exit points. There are those that manage stress carefully and make a positive exit however, there are also people who cannot manage stress very well and end up with a very devastating exit to a point that it would affect both their personal and their work life. Similarly, this finding is also related to the situation of single parents. Single parents create their own structure like on organization in a family system, thus being always or rarely experience stress has a significant effect on how they function in the system.

Kinicki A. (2005) In his study of 90 married couples, it showed that men and women experienced level of stress and found out that women have higher stress than men, similarity the case is applicable to the single women understanding

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher hereby concludes that coping mechanisms do not rely on age, home location, educational attainment and income. The use of either problem-focused coping or emotion-focused coping mechanisms does not matter for as long as stress is being coped up with. It comes in a time when needed however, when respondents were exposed to stressful situations, they think first before they act so that stressful situations would not lead to negative reactions. On the other hand, coping mechanisms were influenced by how often



they experienced stress. Thus, the way respondents handle stress leads towards more favourable coping mechanisms among them.

## REFERENCES

### Books

- [1] Blona, R. (2005). Coping with Stress in a Changing World. The McGraw Hills Companies. Inc. 2005.
- [2] Choy and Moneta (2002) Single motherhood is closely connected with stigmatization, poverty, and welfare dependence.
- [3] Duque, F.T., M.D., M.Sc(2007) Health Guide 13th Ed., 2007-2008. Philippines Medical Marketing, Inc.
- [4] Fisher, R. (2009). Rural - Urban Migration. A necessity to survive,
- [5] International Spatial Development, India.
- [6] Gazzinga, et al. (2010), The Cognitive Neurosciences. MIT Press, Cambridge, (4th Ed.)
- [7] Grandea (2006) Used the descriptive research approach in studying the stress and coping mechanisms of college freshmen of Southville.
- [8] Kirby, Jacqueline, M.S. (2003).Single-parent Families in Poverty. The Gale Group Inc., The Ohio State University (Lazarus, 1991,1993a, 1993b; Lazarus & Folkman, 1987) . As an introduction, the cognitive-relational theory of stress, coping and... and coping processes.
- [9] Lyons\*, A.M., Leon S. C., Roecker Phelps, C.E., & Dunleavy, A. (2010). The impact of child symptom severity on stress among parents of children with an ASD.
- [10] Murali Raj, (2009), Depression is usually related to work and stress the people undergo because of the pressure to perform better.
- [11] Margalit and Klietman (2006) Parenting stress is a possible risk factor that may influence the emergence or exacerbation of behavior problems.
- [12] R Schwarzer,; (2014), Modeling health behavior change: How to predict and modify the adoption and maintenance of health behaviors. Applied Psychology.
- [13] Sevilla, C.G., et al. (1988) General Psychology with Values Development Lessons, Rex Publishing Co., Inc, Rex Bookstore, Quezon City.
- [14] Shane Schick, (2007), Stressed IT professionals who use a balance of problem – focused coping.
- [15] Journals/Periodicals/Magazines A. Thoits, (2010) Department of Sociology, 744 Ballantine Hall, 1020 E. Kirkwood Avenue,. Journal of Health and Social Behavior. November 2010 vol. 51.

### Studies

- [16] Baluyot, R.C. (1999). Adolescent Experiences of Stress and Coping Strategies of Students in the University of San Carlos Girls High School: Basis for a Proposed Stress Management Program. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of San Carlos, Cebu City.
- [17] Basibas, T.A. (2000). Stress, Job Satisfaction and Performance of the Faculty in the UEP System. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of Eastern Philippines, Catarman, Northern Samar.
- [18] Erlan D. Pasana BS Developmental Communication 2011 Thesis Visayas State University as one of the media of communication, social.

- [19] Granda, S. J. (2006). Stress and Coping Mechanism of College Freshmen of Southville International School and Colleges as a Basis of a Focus Area in Wellness Program. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Pamantasan Lungsod ng Maynila, Intramuros, Manila
- [20] Salvacion, M.L.D. S. (2004). Stress Profile of Students of the University of the Philippines College of Dentistry. Unpublished Thesis. University of the Philippines, Manila.

**Internet Source**

- [21] National Statistics Office (2010). Census of Population and Housing. Retrieved on May 16, 2017 from <https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/attachments/hsd/article/Explanatory%20Text.pdf>