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Jingle S. Navarez¹ & Kirt Anthony R. Diaz²

¹ Guidance Counselor, Basic Education Department, Cor Jesu College

jsnavarez@cjcd.edu.ph

² Principal, Basic Education Department, Cor Jesu College

kardiaz@cjcd.edu.ph



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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Guidance and counseling, academic performance, descriptive-correlational design, Multiple Regression Analysis, Philippines

Many students nowadays are experiencing school life without the presence of their parents. While many children have shown a decline in classroom performance while parents are away, many were also found to have performed excellently through various mechanisms. This study employed descriptive-correlational research design to investigate the influence of coping mechanisms towards the academic performance of students with OFW parents. A survey was conducted to students who were performing academically high for the school year 2013–2014 and 2014–2015. Survey questionnaires were given to 142 students from Catholic schools in Davao del Sur while Key Informant Interviews were done to another ten students. Using Multiple Regression Analysis, it was determined that out of the eight coping mechanisms tested only three were found to be significant, namely: active coping, planning and using instrumental support. Based on the findings, it is recommended that schools must define policies that would support the creation of a separate program for students with OFW parents with an emphasis on the significant predictors.

Introduction

In the world today, the increasing number of students that are experiencing school life without the presence of their parents is now a global phenomenon. Some parents leave the comforts of their home to find greener pasture. It is always said that migration is the solution to the rising financial instability of the families but the persistent concerns are on the issues on students being left behind by such migration that have attracted growing attention and grow into a global concern. Despite the fact that many children have experienced a decline in classroom performance while parents are away, many were also found to have performed excellently through various mechanisms. This reality is what encourages many politicians, educators, and scholars to give due attention on this matter and examine the conditions that re-shaped this left behind children.

Today's children need tangible support as they face a range of challenges that extend beyond the cognitive domain (Roberts and Crawford, 2008). Fassler (2005) explain that children who are away from their parents have chances of experiencing descending classroom performance. Students may have difficulty studying due to worry regarding their concerns, as well as the status of parental health and well-being. However, these students have to face the reality of their parents leaving them for a noble reason. Due to lesser chances of getting employed in most developing countries coupled with higher demands for low-wage workers in developed countries, many parents sought employment abroad to support themselves and their families back home. As reported by the United Nations Human Rights (UNHR, 2013), there are currently more than 215 million migrants around the world, many of which are Filipinos. With this number of migrants, one can already assume of the difficulties experienced by children left behind.

The migration of parents affects not only migrant's own lives, but also their family especially to their children left behind putting them at risk and jeopardizing their safety and well-being. Bakker, Elings-Pelsand Reis (2009) pointed out that the reality is that children are significantly affected by

migration. They suffer from depressions and low self-esteem which can lead to behavior problems and risk of losing the right to education as well as poor academic performance and an interruption of schooling.

The data from the POEA (2012) indicate that most of the migrant workers working in over 190 countries around the world are Filipinos and as a consequence, a more pressing concern focuses on children being left-behind. In fact, Tan (2008) discovered that around nine million Filipino children under the age of 18 were left behind by one or both parents due to employment abroad. According to Philippine Institute for Development Studies (2008), one of the main reasons why many decided to work abroad is the children's need for better education. In fact, education is among the top 3 recurring expenses of OFWs' remittances thus, indicating investments in human capital (Custodio & Ang, 2011).

The separation during migration changes the nature of the parent-child relationship. This condition of children left behind can become a source of stress in their daily life. However, people see stressful events as either challenging or threatening (Lazarus, 2000). To deal with these stressful events, there are many coping skills that people can use, and some may prove more effective than others. Therefore, how individual deals with stress and his/her ways of responding to a situation that he/she encountered will depend on his/her coping skills.

Despite the difficulty children face in the absence of their parents, there are some of them who manage to excel in academics. In looking at the impact of migration, findings of researches done in the Philippines, Brazil, Mexico, and other countries show that when parents are away housework burdens of children decreases while learning time at school increases resulting to better academic performance (Acosta, 2006; Hanson & Woodruff, 2003; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Asis, 2006). This scenario manifests an affirmative influence for those students who are academically high performing in school even if their parents are away. The positive influence is due to successful coping skills that create an idea as to how one can make changes in his/her life to make stress more manageable (Jarrey, 2002 as cited in Smith, 2004). Thus, the effectiveness of coping efforts depends on the type of stress, type of individual, and the circumstances surrounding it (Lee et al., 2009). Moreover, the person's ability to manage and face stressful events in his/her life and make that individual on top of or in control of things will eventually result in achieving lives of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) which states that stress and coping is an effort to explain people's method in dealing with stress that was an environmental and internal demand that exceeds a person's resources and endangers his or her well-being. Moreover, coping aims to assess and identifies thoughts and actions that individuals use to respond to stressful situations of daily living (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Thus, the person's ability to manage and face the stressful events in his or her life will make that individual feel on top of or in control of things that will eventually result in achieving lives of satisfaction and fulfillment.

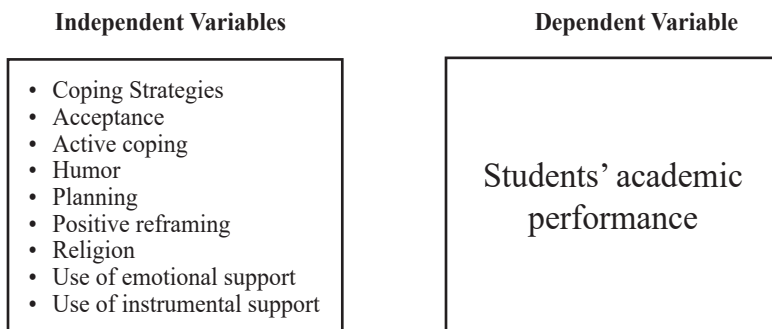


Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm Showing the Relationship of the Variables of the Study

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted to determine the level of academic performance and coping mechanisms of students in the private Catholic schools in Davao del Sur school year 2014–2015. It also identified which of the coping mechanisms could significantly predict or influence academic performance of Philippine students' left behind by OFW parents.

Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis advanced in this study was that:

None of the coping mechanisms can predict academic performance of the Philippine students' left behind by OFW parents.

Method

This study employed descriptive-correlational research design and was conducted in Davao del Sur during the school year 2014–2015. The target respondents were chosen using Purposive Sampling Technique. The researchers personally went to the different schools to ask permission from the school heads. Selected respondents were asked to fill out the authorization form stating that their grades and personal views would be used for the study. A total of 142 high performing students from various Catholic high schools in Davao del Sur was the subject of the study. They were sons and daughters of OFW parents. The study used an adopted instrument "Cope Inventory" designed by Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) which measures the coping mechanisms in eight subscales, namely: acceptance, active coping, humor, planning, positive reframing, religion, use of emotional support and use of instrumental support. The students' final general average grade for the school year 2013–2014 and their first grading GPA for the school year 2014–2015 were used to determine their academic performance. Likewise, ten students coming from different schools who got the highest general average grade during the final grading period for the SY 2013–2014 were interviewed and findings were used to deepen the analysis of the quantitative results of the study. In analyzing the data, Descriptive Statistics using mean score was used to establish the level of coping mechanisms and level of students' academic performance. In addition, Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was applied to determine which of the coping mechanisms can significantly predict academic performance of Philippine students left behind by OFW parents.

Results and Discussion

Level of Coping Mechanisms of Philippine Students' Left Behind by OFW Parents

Table 1 shows the level of coping mechanisms of Philippine students left behind by OFW parents. Among the eight (8) subscales, religion got the highest mean (4.47). This result indicates that in the absence of either father, mother, or both parents, students with OFW parents have often put their trust in God, seek God's help, find comfort in religion and pray more than usual to cope and overcome challenges in life. This analysis is supported by Pargament (1997 cited in Pargament & Raiya, 2007) when he explained that it is the ability of left behind children to respond to those times when they are faced with limits of one's own power, and that religion gives them the capacity to go beyond personal limitations for solutions. Students who experience challenges without their parents seek spiritual support and increase spiritual connection as a way of coping with challenges (Wachholtz & Sambamoorthi, 2011).

When positive reframing (4.19) used as a coping mechanism, students with OFW parents try to see their difficulties in a different light or see it more in a positive way as well as look for

something good in what is happening. Golin (2011) pointed out that it is always good for OFW children to find positive aspects in the outcomes they regard as failures, and reframe them more positively. Adolescents who employ positive reframing, have more positive reactions and outcomes after experiencing intense victimization (Dempsey, 2010).

Table 1. *Computed level of coping mechanisms of Philippine students' left behind by OFW parents.*

Coping Mechanisms	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Interpretation
Acceptance	3.98	Agree	Oftentimes done
Active coping	3.67	Agree	Oftentimes done
Humor	2.91	Undecided	Sometimes done
Planning	3.88	Agree	Oftentimes done
Positive reframing	4.19	Agree	Oftentimes done
Religion	4.47	Agree	Oftentimes done
Use of emotional support	3.65	Agree	Oftentimes done
Use of instrumental support	3.73	Agree	Oftentimes done

Regarding acceptance as a coping mechanism which has mean score of 3.98, the students are used to the idea that their situation happened and that they learn to live with it. This result is supported by Carver et al. (1989 cited in Aldebot & Weisman de Mamani, 2009) when they argued that acceptance as a coping mechanism is found to be more beneficial than others for children may learn to accept reality for the meantime while their parents are away. It is also the most effective coping mechanisms in dealing with disappointments and hindrances for this can help people to keep up their spirits and feel satisfied because it has a positive effect (Stoeber & Janssen, 2011).

When it comes to planning as a coping mechanism with a mean score of 3.88, it means that students try to come up with a strategy about what to do. They also think how problems can be best handled as well as think deeply about what steps to take when difficult times are present. In fact, Parrenas (2000) said that there is a need for OFW children to prepare and arrange on what to do with the current condition for them to be more productive.

The use of instrumental support (3.73) also helps the students with OFW parents cope with challenges in life. They do it by trying to get advice from someone about what to do, learn more about the situation, and ask people who have had similar experiences with them. Many experts claim that social support can assist a person cope with the demands of stress (Schwarzer & Leppin, 1989, 1991; Veiel & Baumann, 1992) as well as concentrate on deriving meaning from the stressful experience (Brannon & Feist, 2009). The use of instrumental support is available to anybody through linkages and social ties to other individuals, organizations, groups, and the community as a whole (Ozbay *et al.*, 2007).

When active coping is being used (3.67), students with OFW parents try to concentrate their efforts on doing something about their situation and to take direct action to get around the problem. It is also avenue for these students to function well and move forward. Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) explained that students left behind need to take active steps to remove or avoid the pain or to enhance its effects which include initiating direct action, increasing one's efforts, and trying to execute a coping attempt in a stepwise fashion.

When students use emotional support (3.65) as a coping mechanism, they get emotional support from friends or relatives, talk to someone about how he or she feels, and discuss his or her feelings with someone. Burleson (2003) pointed out that when feeling hurt, disappointed, or upset, virtually everyone would like to receive sensitive support from caring others. Goldsmith (2011) added that emotional support is helping to lift someone to higher ground so an individual can see their way through the difficulty. Having someone to rely on is one of the best parts of being in a relationship.

In the final analysis, it can be said that all of the above cited seven subscales or coping mechanisms were being exhibited, applied and were seen as clearly evident, though in varying degrees, in the day

to day lives of students with OFW parents as measures to overcome challenges in life.

Interestingly, humor as coping mechanism got the lowest mean of 2.91. It is described as undecided and interpreted as sometimes done with statements such as make fun of the situation, make jokes about it, and laugh about the situation. The result implies that students rarely apply this mechanism to cope with challenges. In contrast, however, Scott (2014) stressed that applying sense of humor during difficult times can help normalize one's experience, and keep things from appearing too overwhelming or scary. He further assumed that proper and timely application and usage of sense humor can keep people and relationships strong. However, when the respondents were asked during the interview why they seldom use this coping mechanism, all of them explained that when they experience life's challenges, especially that their parents are away, they cannot just laugh at it because of the sacrifices of their parents. That is why they are more serious in facing life's difficulties.

Level of Academic Performance of Philippine Students' Left Behind by OFW Parents

Table 2 shows the distribution of the respondents according to each level. The table further shows that among the 142 respondents, there are only 32 or 22.54% that belong to advanced level and the remaining 110 (77.46%) respondents occupy the proficient level.

Table 2. Distribution of students according to academic performance.

Numerical Value	Rating	Population	Percentage
90% and above	Advanced	32	22.54
85–89%	Proficient	110	77.46
Total		142	100

Table 3 presents the level of academic performance of Philippine students' left behind by OFW parents. Results reveal that the average academic performance of the respondents is at 88.00 percent and described as being at the proficient level. This result means that the students at this level have developed the fundamental knowledge and skills and core understandings, and can transfer them independently through authentic performance tasks.

Table 3. Computed level of academic performance of Philippine students' left behind by OFW parents.

Academic Performance	Mean	Descriptive Rating	Interpretation
Grades	88.00	Proficient	The student at this level has developed the fundamental knowledge and skills and core understandings, and can transfer them independently through authentic performance tasks.

The result presented in Table 3 is expected because the participants of the study are students who are known to have high performance in their academic tasks. In the study of Edillon (2008), he discovered that there were higher chances that children whose parents are working abroad will join academic organizations and participate in extracurricular activities; they are more likely to receive school awards compared with the children of non-OFWs. However, this result deviates from what Fassler (2005) said that children might experience a decline in classroom performance while parents are away. In fact, Asis and Ruiz-Marave (2013) explained that honors and awards received by children of overseas Filipinos during graduation exercises or convocation activities tend to be viewed as the exception rather than the norm. During the KII, participants stressed that they need to focus and aim for high grades because they feel

the sacrifices of their parents and they need to show high grades for their parents to be happy. Another student also said that high grades were the rewards they can give to their parents while making sacrifices abroad.

Coping Mechanisms that predict academic performance of Philippine students' left behind by OFW parents

Table 4 shows that when regression equation $AP = \beta_o + \beta_1Ac + \beta_2AC + \beta_3Hu + \beta_4Pln + \beta_5PR + \beta_6Rel + \beta_7UE + \beta_8UI + \epsilon_i$ was tested using multiple regression analysis, results from the ANOVA table show that the sig-value is .000 which is found to be below the .05 level of significance. This implies that overall, the model is considered to be significant and that the model fits the data.

However, when looking at the regression coefficient of each of the independent variables, only three (3) of the eight coping mechanisms tested were found to be significant, namely: (1) Active Coping (p-value = .041); (2) Planning (p-value = .001); and (3) Use of Instrumental Support (p-value = .001). These results imply that of all the factors included in the model, only three can be able to explain the variations in the dependent variable which is academic performance of high performing students with OFW parents. Thus, the estimated regression model can be mathematically presented as:

$AP = 77.257 \text{ (constant)} + (-) 1.763 \text{ (Active Coping)} + 1.667 \text{ (Planning)} + 3.367 \text{ (Use of Instrumental Support)} + \epsilon_i$

The value of the beta coefficient for Active Coping implies that holding all other variables in the regression constant, its coefficient indicates that for every 1 unit change in the participant's level of active coping would give a corresponding -1.763 decrease in his or her academic performance. This implies that when students are using active coping, the lower it would be for his or her academic performance. The high negative beta coefficient with p-value of .041 for active coping confirms the empirical findings which claimed that there is a significant negative correlation between active coping and academic performance. This finding is supported by Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) when they claimed that active coping can be a process of taking active steps to try to remove or avoid the stressor or to enhance its effects which include initiating direct action, increasing one's efforts, and trying to execute a coping attempt in a stepwise fashion. Thus, students left behind can perform their tasks and responsibilities even if they are depressed or in a painful situation. The participants of the KII also revealed that they used active coping that helped them continue to study even if they are depressed. They try to suppress the negative emotions but reveal that sometimes it will not take too long. Thus, making them confess that they are not sure if they can be consistent of getting high grades.

Table 4. Regression coefficients of the independent variables.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	77.257	2.899		26.646	.000
Acceptance	.074	.376	.017	.198	.844
Active coping	-1.763	.854	-.309	-2.065	.041
Humor	-.174	.213	-.062	-.815	.416
Planning	1.667	.486	.296	3.430	.001
Positive Reframing	.197	.478	.037	.413	.680
Religion	-.373	.456	-.066	-.817	.415
Use of Emotional support	-.218	.273	-.067	-.798	.426
Use of instrumental support	3.367	.957	.549	3.517	.001

Constant	=	77.257
R ²	=	.268
R Adjusted	=	.224
F Value	=	6.090
Sig Value	=	.000
DF	=	141

With regards to planning as a coping mechanism, holding all other variables in the regression constant, its beta coefficient indicates that for every 1 unit change in the participant's level of financial demand would give a corresponding 1.667 increase in his or her academic performance. The p-value of 0.001 with positive beta coefficient confirms the empirical findings which claim that there is a significant positive relationship between planning and academic performance. These results imply that if the respondent's level of planning increases, it would also increase his or her level of academic performance.

There is a need for these children left behind to have a planning skill which refers to the actions, strategies and thinking of the steps and how best they can handle their problems (Schmalzbauer, 2004 cited in Graham & Jordan, 2011). Epstien (2003) also pointed out that planning is more than making choices. It is a choice with intention and that an individual begins with a specific goal or purpose in mind that results in the choice. She further explained that planning involves deciding an action and predicting interactions, recognizing problems and proposing solutions, and anticipating consequences and reactions. Respondents also reveal during the KII that in a situation whereby parents are not around because of being an OFW, they need to plan how to manage their time for studying, playing and hanging out with their friends.

Regarding the Use of Instrumental support as a coping mechanism, holding all other variables in the regression constant, its beta coefficient indicates that for every 1 unit change in the participant's Use of Instrumental Support would give a corresponding 3.361 increase in his or her academic performance. The p-value of 0.001 with positive beta coefficient confirms the empirical findings which claimed that there is a significant positive relationship between the Use of Instrumental Support and academic performance. These results imply that if the respondent's level of Use of Instrumental Support increases, it would also increase his or her level of academic performance.

In the situation of students left behind by OFW parents, Lavine, and Munsch (2011) pointed out that disclosure is the first essential step for getting social support. In addition, adolescent should be involved in at least one protective factor (e.g., family, school, and church) which facilitates the development of strong personal relationships, which provide encouragement and advice, which in turn facilitate the development of a positive value system or world view and healthy coping strategies (Grant, 2005). Participants of the KII reveal that the presence of family, friends and other significant persons in their life played a crucial role especially when they have difficulties and worries. The time when they can listen to the negative and positive emotions of the OFW children are enough chances to be inspired and continue to focus on to their studies. In fact, another KII participant said that the time when their parents have time in the net for chatting and calling, it gave them so much satisfaction and reminded them to exert more effort in their studies.

All other factors like Acceptance, Humor, Positive Reframing, Religion, and the Use of Emotional Support were found to be not good predictors of academic performance as manifested by sig values which were all greater than 0.05 level of significance set for this study.

In its entirety, however, the combined explanatory and predictive power of the three significant independent variables is considered to be low because it could not account for 73.2 percent of the variation in the academic performance. This is manifested in the model summary table which shows that the value of the R² is .268 which implies that only 26.8 percent of the variations in academic performance can be explained by the three significant variables. The remaining 73.2 percent unexplained variation could be accounted for by other variables not included in the model.

The limitations of the study revolved only on the following: First, respondents were only the high school students who were studying in the various Catholic schools in Davao del Sur for the school year 2014-2015. Second, academic performance of the students' covered only their final general average grade for the school year 2013-2014 and their general average grade for the first grading period for the school year 2014-2015. The students were only those who belong to the proficient and advanced levels for the school year 2013-2014. Finally, respondents were the students' left behind by OFW parents from Davao del Sur.

Conclusion

In analyzing the findings of the study, some significant conclusions were derived. First, the level of academic performance of students' with OFW parents was at the proficient level. This result was also expected because the respondents of the study were the academically high performing students in school. It is concluded that despite the situation where mother, father, or both parents are not around during challenging times, students' left behind are capable of achieving high academic performance given the right coping mechanisms. With parents' absence, technological mechanisms like cellular phones and computers have become the default substitute for personal parenting especially in the motivation of parents in the academic performance of their children. That these children also aim for high grades because they want their parents to be happy and it is only the reward they can give to their parents who sacrifice a lot.

Finally, among the eight subscales of coping mechanisms, only three (active coping, planning, and use of instrumental support) can predict academic performance of students left behind especially for those who are high performing in school. It is concluded that students with OFW parents must not rely too much on oneself (active coping) to overcome challenges in life because it may result to burn out and frustrations and possibly lower academic performances. In contrast, proper planning is a skill that students with OFW parents must possess because it is through this mechanism that they will be able to manage well their time and think about the correct steps on how they can best handle the situation and able to move and become more productive. It is also concluded that students with OFW parents must increase usage of instrumental support because the need to include efforts of the family for those who care for the children is a positive side of putting them in a strong social relationship. The use of instrumental support as a coping mechanism can facilitate the development of strong interpersonal relationship which they can provide encouragement and advice to children left behind. The need for caregivers to look into the general satisfaction of children under their care can make them feel better and make life manageable even in their current situations and conditions.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusion drawn from the study, the following recommendations are offered: 1. That teachers and guidance counselors will be aware of the personal, family profile and the effect of migration on the students with OFW parents so that coping-up activities will be provided; 2. That school authorities will provide more religious undertakings to nurture and increase spiritual connection of the students; 3. That school authorities will ensure that the guardians of students with OFW parents will be given sessions and assistance to maintain a significant relationship and ensure that students are in good hands to preserve family culture; 4. That the result of this study will be the guide in creating a proposed support program in coping activities and on the enhancement of academic performance of students left behind by OFW parents; 5. That a case analysis should be conducted to ask and gather more data on other variables that came out to be not good predictors of academic performance. The findings will help schools, especially the guidance office, in crafting a more comprehensive plan for students with OFW parents; and 6. That a future research should be conducted using the same model and would involve more students with OFW parents regardless of their academic performance in school.

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