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Academic Stress and Coping Behaviors among Social Work Students in a Philippine State University

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ABSTRACT

Academic stress is a pervasive challenge that affects students' learning and well-being. This study examined the academic stress of Bachelor of Science in Social Work students at a state university in Claveria, Misamis Oriental, Philippines, focusing on its level, causes, differences across year levels, and coping strategies. Using an explanatory sequential mixed-method design, data were collected from 266 students through the Academic Stress Inventory and open-ended responses, and were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and thematic analysis. Results revealed that students experienced moderate academic stress, particularly related to teachers, test performance, time management, and self-inflicted pressures. Significant differences were found in test-related and self-inflicted stress across year levels, with first- and third-year students reporting higher levels. The main stressors were examinations, parental expectations, poor time management, and instructor-related demands. To cope, students engaged in spiritual practices, quality time with family and peers, music, self-motivation, and time management strategies. Based on these findings, a 10-week stress-reduction program was developed to support students' well-being and academic success. This study contributes to the growing literature on academic stress in Philippine higher education and provides a practical intervention model for social work students and similar academic programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic stress is a well-documented concern in higher education across the globe. University students often experience stress from academic workload, examinations, performance pressures, and the expectations of teachers and parents, all of which can adversely affect learning outcomes and well-being. International studies have consistently underscored the prevalence and consequences of academic stress. For instance, Bedewy and Gabriel (2015) found that both academic and non-academic factors contribute to stress in university students in the United Kingdom, while Leonard et al. (2015) highlighted the association between stress, coping, and risk behaviors among youth in private schools in the United States. In Asian settings, academic stress has been shown to be particularly pronounced due to sociocultural emphasis on achievement and high parental expectations (Alsulami et al., 2018). These findings affirm that while academic stress is a universal phenomenon, it is shaped by cultural, institutional, and disciplinary contexts.

In the Philippine setting, research has examined sources of academic stress such as examinations, time management, and instructor-related demands (Tuladhar, 2021; Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). However, the bulk of these studies focus on general college populations or students in established professional programs such as medicine, engineering, and teacher education (Baste & Gadkari, 2014; Sohail, 2013). What remains underexplored is the academic stress of students enrolled in emerging programs such as Social Work, which combines rigorous classroom instruction with field practice and carries added expectations of advocacy, service, and social responsibility. For students in new or pioneering cohorts, such as those at the University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines – Claveria (USTP Claveria), Mindanao, Philippines the pressure may be compounded by their perceived role in setting the standard for future batches. Yet, there is limited empirical research examining how such unique program contexts shape students' experiences of academic stress, its causes, and their coping strategies.

To frame the inquiry, this study is anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984)

stress and coping model, which views stress as a dynamic interaction between environmental demands and individual appraisals, mediated by coping mechanisms. This framework provides a structured lens to identify the stressors faced by students such as examinations, parental expectations, instructor-related demands, and to analyze the coping strategies they employ problem-focused or emotion-focused approaches. Applying this model not only enhances the scholarly rigor of the study but also facilitates interpretation of both quantitative results and qualitative insights.

The present study addresses a specific research gap: the lack of evidence on academic stress among Social Work students in an emerging program in the Philippines. It aims to examine the level of stress, compare stress experiences across year levels, and identify causes of stress and coping strategies. The study contributes new insights into how academic stress manifests in this context and how students respond to it. Furthermore, by proposing a tailored stress-reduction program, the study provides a practical contribution that may inform institutional interventions to support student well-being and success in Social Work education and similar emerging programs.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method design. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered in the study. The participants' academic stress was analyzed quantitatively by computing their answers' mean and standard deviation. These numerical data served as the foundation for later analyses and interpretation (Given, 2008). Qualitative data, on the other hand, involved describing, recording, analyzing, and interpreting the existing condition (Best & Kahn, 2006). From these analyses, the conclusion and recommendation were derived.

Research Setting

This study was conducted at USTP Claveria, a State University in Claveria, Misamis Oriental, Philippines. The University is one of the major campuses of the USTP System. The study was conducted during the first semester of school year 2022–2023, immediately after the midterm examinations. This timing was chosen to ensure that students had already been exposed to various academic requirements such as exams, assignments, and group activities, enabling them to provide more accurate reflections on the causes of their stress and the coping strategies they employed.

Respondents and Sampling Procedure

The respondents of the study were all students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) program at USTP Claveria during the first semester of school year 2022–2023. A total of 428 students were invited to participate (118 first-year, 148 second-year, and 162 third-year students). Of these, 266 students voluntarily responded: 97 first-year, 90 second-year, and 79 third-year students. No specific exclusion criteria were applied, as the survey was open to all enrolled BSSW students.

To determine adequacy of the sample, a sample size calculator with a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level recommended a minimum of 203 respondents for a population of 428. The 266 students who participated exceeded this requirement, ensuring sufficient statistical representation. Convenience sampling was employed, as responses were gathered based on availability and willingness to participate.

For the qualitative component, 20 students who voluntarily agreed to be interviewed after completing the survey were included. Selection was based on willingness and availability, with no exclusion criteria applied, to ensure that perspectives from different year levels were represented. Their narratives were used to supplement the survey data and were analyzed thematically.

In line with ethical considerations, participation was strictly voluntary. Students were informed of the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Informed consent was obtained prior

to data collection, and no student was coerced or disadvantaged for choosing not to participate. The study followed the ethical guidelines of the University, and approval for data collection was secured through the proper institutional channels.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument used in the study was the Academic Stress Inventory (ASI) developed by Lin and Chen (2009). This tool was selected because of its strong psychometric properties (reported reliability of α = 0.85–0.92) and prior use in Asian university contexts, which made it suitable for the Philippine setting. The ASI consists of 34 items distributed across seven factors: teacher stress, results stress, test stress, studying in groups stress, peer stress, time-management stress, and self-inflicted stress. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). The level of students' stress was interpreted based on Table 1.

Table 1
Rating and Interpretation

Numerical Rating	Interpretation
4.21–5.00	Extremely Stressful
3.41–4.20	Fairly Stressful
2.61–3.40	Sometimes Stressful
1.81–2.60	Rarely Stressful
1.0–1.80	Not at all Stressful

The questionnaire was administered in English, which is the medium of instruction at the University. As such, no translation was required, and only minor contextual adjustments were made to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness for the respondents. While no separate pilot testing was conducted, the tool's established reliability and validity in similar student populations support its appropriateness for this study.

For the qualitative component, a brief semi-structured interview guide was used to explore the students' perceived causes of stress and coping strategies. This guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit narrative responses and underwent content validation by three faculty experts in psychology and social work to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness in the Philippine academic context.

Data Analysis

The study utilized descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, to present the level of students' stress. To compare students' stress across year levels, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. When significant differences were identified, the post-hoc Tukey HSD test was applied.

For the qualitative component, the researchers used thematic analysis based on the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). Two researchers independently coded the responses, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. Representative quotations were then selected to illustrate and support each theme.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Stress Level by Factor

The stress level of the students is presented in Table 2 below. Each indicator was interpreted using the scoring scheme presented in Table 1.

Table 2 presents students' stress levels across seven factors: teachers, results, tests, studying in groups, peers, time management, and self-inflicted pressures. The mean scores indicated that students experienced these areas as "sometimes stressful. Among the factors, test stress (M = 3.40) and time-management stress (M = 3.00) stood out as relatively higher concerns, while teacher stress (M = 2.89), results stress (M = 2.99), group work stress (M = 3.25), peer stress (M = 2.94), and self-inflicted stress (M = 3.08) were also evident but moderate in level.

Table 2
Students' Stress Level by Factor

Factors	Mean	Level
Teachers' Stress	2.89	Sometimes
Results' Stress	2.99	Sometimes
Tests' Stress	3.40	Sometimes
Studying in Groups' Stress	3.25	Sometimes
Peer Stress	2.94	Sometimes
Time-management Stress	3.00	Sometimes
Self-inflicted Stress	3.08	Sometimes

Test-related stress emerged as the most salient, with students reporting that examinations often disrupted sleep and triggered anxiety about failing or repeating courses. This is consistent with international findings that excessive exam pressure negatively impacts learning and performance (James, 2015; Fitzgerald, 2019; Zauderer, 2023). Time management difficulties were also reported, reflecting the challenge of balancing heavy workloads and multiple responsibilities, similar to Alsulami et al. (2018), who emphasized time pressure as a major stressor among university students. Teacher-related stressors such as strictness, heavy assignments, and instructional methods were noted but remained moderate. Prior studies confirm that teacher practices significantly influence student well-being and academic success (Greenberg et al., 2016; Terada, 2022).

Although peer and group-related stress were less severe overall, students reported higher stress when required to perform publicly, such as in speeches and presentations. This aligns with Reynolds (2022), who found that performance demands contribute to stress across year levels. Finally, self-imposed expectations also played a role, indicating that students' internal standards compounded external stressors. This resonates with findings that academic stress is often a combination of environmental pressures and self-appraisal (Reddy et al., 2018).

While all the factors involved were rated as only "sometimes stressful," the literature highlights that even moderate stress can accumulate and lead to negative outcomes such as low self-esteem, depression, and reduced academic performance (Thakkar, 2018; Sohail, 2013). The present findings therefore underscore the need for proactive support systems to help students manage test anxiety, improve time management skills, and build resilience against both external and self-imposed pressures (Sparks, 2017; Tatter, 2019).

Comparison of Students' Stress by Year Level

To further explore stress levels, students' responses were compared across year levels. As shown in Table 3, most stress factors did not differ significantly by academic year. Teacher, results, peer, group work, and time-management stresses were all rated as "sometimes stressful" with no meaningful year-level differences. However, test stress ($p = 0.04$) and self-inflicted stress ($p = 0.03$) showed significant variation.

The findings suggest that exam-related anxiety and self-imposed expectations are the main factors distinguishing students in different year levels. In particular, third-year students reported higher levels of test stress and self-inflicted pressures compared to first-year students. This is understandable given that upper-year students are closer to professional practice, face more advanced coursework, and may feel the weight of being part of a pioneering cohort. These pressures are consistent with earlier research showing that examination-related stress tends to intensify as students progress through higher education (Fitzgerald, 2019). Likewise, the role of self-imposed expectations mirrors findings by Reddy et al. (2018), who emphasized that internal appraisals of performance are central to academic stress.

The absence of significant differences in other stress factors, such as teacher demands and time management, indicates that many stressors are experienced uniformly across year levels. This finding aligns with Banerjee and Chatterjee (2016), who noted that stress affects learners at all stages of study, not only in advanced years. Nonetheless, the prominence of test stress and self-driven pressure among third-year students resonates with literature showing

that academic transitions and impending professional responsibilities amplify perceived stress (Thakkar, 2018; Sohail, 2013).

The year-level comparison reinforces that while stress is a common experience across the program, examinations and self-expectations become more salient as students advance, highlighting the need for targeted interventions such as test anxiety management, self-regulation training, and counseling for upper-year cohorts.

To identify further which specific groups are significantly different from each other, a post-hoc analysis was conducted. Table 4 shows the Tukey HSD result for Factor 3: tests' stress.

As presented in Table 4, the post-hoc Tukey HSD test indicated that there were no significant pairwise differences in test stress between year levels. This suggests that although the overall ANOVA result showed significance, the variation may be attributed to the combined means rather than clear differences between individual groups. In other words, while test stress levels vary across the program, no single year group consistently stands apart. This pattern highlights the pervasive nature of exam-related anxiety, echoing James (2015) and Zauderer (2023), who emphasized that test-related stress is a common concern across student populations.

When it comes to self-inflicted stress, Table 5 displays the differences of each mean. When examining self-imposed pressures, Table 5 shows that significant differences were observed between first-year and third-year students ($p = 0.03$). This indicates that third-year students placed greater expectations on themselves compared to freshmen, likely due to heavier academic demands and the pressure of nearing program completion. These findings are consistent with Reddy et al. (2018), who noted that internal appraisals of performance amplify stress as students progress, and Sohail (2013) who observed that upper-year students often experience higher self-driven stress tied to academic achievement and career readiness.

Table 3

Students' Stress by Year Level

Factors	Year Level	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Statistic	p-value
Teachers' Stress	1st Year	97	24.89	6.04	2.63	0.07
	2nd Year	90	26.54	6.36		
	3rd Year	79	26.81	6.04		
Results' Stress	1st Year	97	14.93	3.79	0.49	0.61
	2nd Year	90	14.70	4.41		
	3rd Year	79	15.32	3.95		
Tests' Stress	1st Year	97	13.27	3.44	3.20	0.04*
	2nd Year	90	13.24	3.74		
	3rd Year	79	14.47	3.53		
Studying in Groups' Stress	1st Year	97	15.87	4.18	2.14	0.12
	2nd Year	90	15.92	4.20		
	3rd Year	79	17.04	3.90		
Peer Stress	1st Year	97	11.61	3.03	0.81	0.44
	2nd Year	90	11.6	3.28		
	3rd Year	79	12.14	3.09		
Time-management Stress	1st Year	97	8.87	2.64	2.32	0.10
	2nd Year	90	8.67	2.59		
	3rd Year	79	9.53	2.87		
Self-inflicted Stress	1st Year	97	11.85	3.03	3.39	0.03*
	2nd Year	90	12.14	3.21		
	3rd Year	79	13.06	3.23		

**Significant at 0.05 level of significance*

Table 4
Post-hoc Analysis for Tests' Stress

Difference of Levels	Difference of Means	SE of Difference	p-value
1st year – 2nd year	0.02	0.37	0.10
1st year – 3rd year	1.20	0.38	0.07*
2nd year – 3rd year	1.22	0.39	0.07*

**Significant at 0.05 level of significance*

Table 5
Post-hoc Analysis for Self-inflicted Stress

Difference of Levels	Difference of Means	SE of Difference	*p*-value
1st year – 2nd year	0.30	0.33	0.80
1st year – 3rd year	1.22	0.34	0.03*
2nd year – 3rd year	0.92	0.35	0.15

**Significant at 0.05 level of significance*

The broader literature underscores that stress exerts wide-ranging effects on students' performance and well-being. High stress levels among teachers have been shown to influence student outcomes (Sparks, 2017), while stress-related cognitive burdens can partly explain poorer test performance among disadvantaged learners (Tatter, 2019). Moreover, academic pressure has been identified as one of the most common sources of stress in both secondary and higher education (Reynolds, 2022), with potential long-term consequences for mental health and achievement (Wettstein, 2021). Taken together, these results highlight the pervasive nature of stress across student groups, with examinations and self-imposed expectations emerging as the most distinguishing stressors for upper-year students.

To triangulate these quantitative results, qualitative data were also gathered. Table 6 presents the themes derived from students' responses on the causes of academic stress and their coping strategies.

Causes of Academic Stress of the Students

As shown in Table 6, students identified examinations and parents' expectations, lack of time management, and instructor-related demands as the primary causes of their academic stress.

The theme "examinations and parents' expectations" was combined because many students explicitly connected their worries about exam performance with the pressure of meeting parental expectations. For example, one student noted, "*I feel stressed because of the expectations of my parents.*" This reflects findings by Reddy et al. (2018), who emphasized that both internal and external expectations are central stressors in student life. Similarly, Saha (2017) reported that high parental expectations can compound exam-related stress to the point of overwhelming students.

Instructor-related stress was also a recurring theme, with students citing excessive workloads, tight deadlines, and inconsistent schedules. As one respondent explained, "*Some of the instructors are not giving us ample time to comply with the activities, especially those in need of more efforts.*" These experiences align with Alsulami et al. (2018), who found that excessive academic demands often exceed students' adaptive capacities, and Freire et al. (2020), who linked such stressors to poorer academic outcomes.

Time-management difficulties further added to students' burdens. Struggles in balancing coursework, family responsibilities, and personal activities highlight how organizational challenges exacerbate stress. Portoghese et al. (2020) similarly described how balancing academic and private life remains a persistent challenge for students.

These findings confirm that academic stress among social work students is shaped by a combination of external pressures (exams, instructors, parental expectations) and internal challenges (time management, self-regulation). This pattern is consistent with prior studies showing that academic stress is a pervasive phenomenon with wide-ranging effects on mental health, academic engagement, and risk behaviors (Wettstein, 2021). Moreover, the

Table 6

Causes of Students' Academic Stress

Area	Themes	Sample Responses
Causes of Students' Stress	Examination and Parents' Expectations	*I am stressed by thinking of my examination results in my major subjects.* (S1) *I do experience stress like having a low grade/score in class. The cause of my stress is that I worry that my parents will blame me.* (S16) *I feel stressed because of the expectations of my parents as well as expecting too much about my activities and quizzes.* (S18)
	Lack of Time-management	*I feel bad lately about my grades because I didn't have much time to study.* (S10) *The cause is poor time management since I sometimes spend a lot of time relaxing myself, which is fine only if I don't take advantage of it.* (S11) *Pressure and time management because I have a lot of work. That's why I'm very stressed for now because I am the one who supports my study.* (S15)
	Instructor-related stresses	*When my instructor gives us many activities that are not that easy to answer.* (S5) *Yes, due to activities that must be passed at the same date.* (S9) *I am stressed with the schedule of the class that the instructor does not follow.* (S12) *I'm experiencing some stress at the moment because of loaded activities.* (S13) *Causes of stress are more on activities specially some instructors give us more PIT more reporting and we will at the head of time that's why we are under pressure.* (S17) *Some of the instructors are not giving us ample time to comply with the activities, especially those in need of more effort.* (S20)

interconnected nature of teacher and student stress, as noted by Sparks (2017), highlights how instructional practices can either mitigate or exacerbate stress. Finally, the prevalence of exam-related and parental stress in this study echoes broader trends reported in student stress statistics worldwide (Zauderer, 2023).

Coping Strategies of the Students

As presented in Table 7, students reported diverse coping strategies that helped them manage academic stress. These include going to church and praying, spending time with friends and family, listening to music, motivating themselves through positive self-talk, and managing their time.

Spiritual practices such as prayer and church attendance were commonly mentioned. These practices provided meaning, comfort, and a sense of belonging, functioning as culturally grounded emotion-focused strategies that buffered negative emotions. This finding is consistent with Kwaah and Essilfie (2017), who observed that faith-based coping is an important resource for students in collectivist and religious contexts. Similarly, Freire et al. (2020) found that students who engage in spiritual or reflective practices tend to report higher levels of resilience when facing academic demands.

Spending quality time with family and friends was another prevalent strategy. Social support gave students emotional ventilation, normalized academic struggles, and reduced the perceived threat of stressors. Leonard et al. (2015) likewise found that supportive relationships are critical in mitigating the psychological impacts of stress among youth. This echoes Greenberg et al. (2016), who highlighted that strong interpersonal support networks can protect students from the adverse effects of academic and institutional stressors.

Students also turned to music for immediate mood regulation and distraction from intrusive worries about grades, deadlines, and instructor demands. Research suggests that listening to music can reduce physiological stress responses and enhance emotional well-being among students (Baste & Gadkari, 2014). Alongside this, self-motivation and positive self-talk reflected cognitive reframing strategies that helped students appraise stressors as manageable. Both approaches align with Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress–coping model, which emphasizes appraisal-driven strategies as central to coping effectiveness.

Finally, time management strategies such as outlining activities, making schedules, and organizing tasks represented problem-focused coping. These efforts allowed students to regain a sense of control over their workload and complemented emotion-focused methods by directly addressing academic demands. Similar findings were reported by Alsulami et al. (2018), who observed that students with better time-management practices experienced lower academic stress.

To sum everything up, the results show that students relied primarily on emotion-focused coping strategies (e.g., prayer, music, social support, self-motivation) to regulate distress, while problem-focused strategies (time management) were used less frequently but targeted task demands directly. Framing these findings within Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model clarifies why students gravitate toward emotion regulation when stressors such as examinations and parental expectations cannot easily be changed. This supports prior work by Reddy et al. (2018), who argued that coping style depends largely on how controllable students perceive the stressor to be. Programmatically, these insights suggest that universities may consider pairing time-management training and study-skills workshops with psychoeducation on adaptive emotion regulation to strengthen both problem- and emotion-focused coping resources among students.

Table 7
Students' Coping Strategies

Area	Themes	Sample Responses
Coping Strategies of the Students	Going to Church and Praying	*At this moment, what I want to do is to think positive and pray that in times of these problems or challenges that I encountered today there is always a hope and solution.* (S3) *I go to church and forget all of it in the meantime.* (S13) *Prayers and going to church are my coping mechanism.* (S21)
	Spending Quality Time with Friends and Family	*By spending some quality time with my friends, relatives or family.* (S2) *I hung out with my family and friends, and I watched entertaining videos like k-dramas.* (S6)
	Listening to Music	*I just listen to music.* (S5) *One of the ways I can cope with this stress is just listening to motivational music.* (S8)
	Motivating Oneself and Thinking Positively	*I think positive thoughts. (S5)* *The thing I do to cope with stressors is to think positively and to motivate myself.* (S7) *The thing I do to cope with stressors is to think positively and to motivate myself.* (S7) *By thinking positively and telling myself that I can do it.* (S11) *By motivating myself, I need to do this so that I can get my "me time".* (S12)
	Managing Time	*By outlining my activities that need to be done.* (S15) *By making a schedule. Listing all the class schedules, activities, and also household chores.* (S14)

CONCLUSION

This study examined the academic stress of Bachelor of Science in Social Work students in a state university in Claveria, Philippines, focusing on their stress levels, causes, year-level differences, and coping strategies. Findings showed that students generally experienced moderate or "sometimes stressful" levels of academic stress, with examinations, parental expectations, and self-imposed pressures emerging as the most notable contributors. Differences across year levels were minimal, except for test stress and self-imposed pressures, which were more pronounced among upper-year students.

Rather than suggesting that students are heavily burdened, these results highlight that academic stress is a present but manageable challenge for most students, provided that effective supports are in place. This distinction is significant: it suggests opportunities for proactive intervention before stress escalates to levels that impair academic performance and well-being.

The practical significance of this study lies in its implications for Social Work education and similar emerging programs. Faculty and administrators can use these insights to design interventions that address test anxiety, strengthen time-management skills, and foster adaptive coping strategies. The proposed stress-reduction program offers a starting point for structured support, while the findings themselves provide an evidence base for guidance offices and policy-makers seeking to enhance student welfare.

Although the study is limited to one program and institution, the issues identified—exam pressure, parental expectations, and coping limitations—are common in higher education globally. Thus, the results may serve as a reference point for designing context-sensitive interventions in other programs and institutions facing similar challenges.

RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study suggest that while social work students generally experience only moderate levels of academic stress, certain stressors—particularly examinations, parental expectations, and self-imposed pressures—emerge as more critical. These results carry several implications. For faculty, the findings underscore the importance of teaching practices and workload management, as these can either aggravate or alleviate students' stress levels. For administrators, the study highlights the need to design support systems that build time-management and study skills, while also acknowledging students' reliance on emotion-focused coping. For guidance and student affairs offices, the results provide an evidence base for more targeted counseling and stress-reduction initiatives that are responsive to the needs of students in emerging academic programs such as Social Work.

In light of these implications, several recommendations are proposed. First, universities should develop and implement a structured stress-reduction program based on students' expressed coping strategies, integrating workshops on time management, study habits, and resilience-building. Second, faculty development sessions are recommended to encourage student-centered instructional practices that maintain academic rigor without imposing unnecessary stress. Third, guidance and counseling services should be strengthened by institutionalizing peer support systems and faith-based counseling options that align with students' cultural coping preferences. Finally, similar research may be extended to other programs and campuses to determine whether the patterns identified here are consistent across disciplines, thereby guiding institution-wide interventions for student well-being.

Proposed Stress-Reduction Program for BSSW Students

The proposed 10-week program is designed as a structured intervention to help Social Work students manage academic stress more effectively (Table 8). The program is anchored in Lazarus and Folkman's stress–coping model and draws from evidence-based practices used in similar student support programs (Freire et al., 2020; Kwaah & Essilfie, 2017).

This program aims to (1) increase students' awareness of stressors, (2) strengthen adaptive coping skills, (3) improve time-management and study habits, (4) enhance social and spiritual support, and (5) evaluate the program's effectiveness through pre- and post-intervention stress assessments using the Academic Stress Inventory.

The program can be institutionalized through collaboration between the Guidance Office, peer counselors, and faculty. Annual implementation will ensure continuity, and peer facilitators may be trained each year to maintain student involvement. Evaluation data will guide improvements and long-term integration into student support services.

This program is comparable to other stress-management interventions that used workshops, peer support, and spiritual resources to reduce stress among students (Freire et al., 2020; Kwaah & Essilfie, 2017; Leonard et al., 2015). Like those models, it combines both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping enhancement, but is tailored specifically for Social Work students in the Philippine context.

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Table 8

A 10-week Proposed Stress-Reduction Program

Weeks	Activity	Objective	Expected Outcome	Implementers	Evaluation Method
1	Getting Together	Orient students on program goals and group formation	Students articulate personal stressors	Peer facilitators & Guidance Office	Pre-program stress inventory
2	Sharing of Coping Strategies	Identify and reflect on current coping methods	Increased self-awareness of coping strengths and weaknesses	Peer facilitators	Reflection sheets
3	Time-Management Workshop	Teach scheduling and prioritization techniques	Students create individual study plans	Faculty & Guidance Office	Review of plans
4	Study Habits Workshop	Introduce evidence-based study strategies (e.g., Pomodoro, note-taking)	Improved study efficiency	Faculty resource speakers	Practice tasks
5	Confidence-Building Workshop	Develop public speaking and self-expression	Students show improved self-confidence in class tasks	Communication faculty	Observation checklist
6	Motivational Movie & Reflection	Reframe stress into eustress	Students articulate positive lessons from film	Peer facilitators	Reflection essays
7	Inner Child Activity	Enhance self-compassion and self-care	Students report reduced negative self-talk	Guidance counselors	Journaling activity
8	Spiritual Talk	Reinforce meaning-making through spirituality	Students recognize spiritual coping as a resource	Invited youth leaders	Group sharing
9	Student–Teacher Team-Building	Strengthen relationships with faculty	Improved trust and communication	Faculty & Peer facilitators	Feedback survey
10	Program Evaluation	Assess program effectiveness	Students demonstrate lower stress levels compared to baseline	Guidance Office	Post-program stress inventory, SWOT analysis

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