

Problems and Difficulties Encountered and Training Needs of College Students: Basis for Improving Guidance and Counseling Services

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***Abstract** – Finishing college education nowadays is very challenging. These challenges come in the form of problems and difficulties that students need to overcome in order for them to finish college. Identifying these problems provides information on improving the student guidance and counseling services of the school. It helps students handle the challenges of academic life, thus giving them a better chance to survive and finish college.*

This study was conducted for the purpose of determining the problems and difficulties encountered by college students. This study was conducted at WPU-Quezon Campus, and a total of 300 students - enrolled during the first semester of SY 2015-2016 - were considered as respondents of the study. Descriptive statistics were employed in describing the data gathered, such as frequency counts, averages, rankings, and percentages.

The data revealed that most of the problems encountered were personal related problems such as: time management, unexplainable fear of failure in exams, lack of self-confidence, poor study habits, nervousness, and lack of self-control. It was also noted that the majority of students did not seek guidance and counselling from a school counselor, instead they tried to solve their own problems. This study recommends that the student guidance and counseling services of the school should provide intervention activities, such as seminars, training, workshops, retreat and symposia, which will empower students in handling their problems.

INTRODUCTION

The Meriam-Webster on-line dictionary defines a problem as something that is difficult to deal with, something that is a source of worry or trouble [1]. Normally when people face problems, they devise coping mechanisms or strategies that enable them to surpass or hurdle these challenges. Unfortunately, with the fast pace of development, and the many changes in our environment, sometimes it puts too much pressure and stress on people to go with these changes.

When a person is under stress or pressure it has psychological and physical effect on his or her wellbeing. His or her way of thinking, sleeping, eating and behaving can be affected.

According to the James-Lange Theory of Emotion, when an event stimulates a person (arousal), the autonomic nervous system (ANS) reacts by creating more perspiration, increased muscular tension, and more. Once these physical events occur, the brain will interpret these reactions, and the result of the interpretation is an emotion. In this sense, the theory is likened to the “fight-or-flight” reaction, in which bodily sensations prepare a person to react based on the brain’s interpretation of the event and the physiological reactions [2].

The Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping explains that people before coping with any problems usually carry out a primary and secondary appraisal of problems. Primary appraisal involves determining whether the stressor poses a threat. Secondary appraisal involves the individual's evaluation of the resources or coping strategies at his or her disposal for addressing any perceived threats. After secondary appraisal the person can now engage his coping mechanism with the problem. The process of reappraisal is on-going and involves continually reappraising both the nature of the stressor and the resources available for responding to the stressor [3].

Not all people can handle problems well, and some do not know how to solve them. If a person cannot handle stress or problems, there is a tendency that his or her behavior or reaction might have a negative effect on their life.

Bressert mentioned that when stress and anxiety escalate without a means to cope with the stress, they are often linked to many troublesome psychological and physiological conditions. Oftentimes, psychological distress accompanies and/or produces conditions such as amnesia, sleep walking, multiple-personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobias, generalized anxiety disorder, hypochondriasis and high blood pressure [4].

People under stress are prone to make wrong decisions in life, and some may even commit suicide. The incidence of suicide among the youth has increased dramatically and very alarmingly.

In a statement, Senator Joel Villanueva said that 46 percent of the total suicide cases recorded since 2010 are among the youth: 30% are young adults aged 20 to 35 while the remaining 16% are teens aged 10 to 19 [5]. In Addition to suicide, most students with problems also need to be guided to refocus their thoughts on attaining college degrees. Studying in College is difficult nowadays. Our dear students face many challenges and difficulties, such as changes in the curriculum, difficult subjects, many requirements and deadlines to beat, financial resources, family and personal problems.

It was posted in <http://www.bestcolleges.com> that depression among college students wears many faces, and, in a survey conducted by the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, 36.4% of college students reported they experienced some level of depression in 2013. Depression is the number one reason why students drop out of school, and is a gateway issue that, if left untreated, could lead to other symptoms or suicide. Depression is a common but serious illness that leaves someone feeling despondent and helpless, completely detached from the world. It interferes with one's life, making it difficult to work, study, sleep and eat [6].

National Health Ministries (2006) stated that in the USA the following were the most common stressors in college life: greater academic demands; being on one's own in a new environment and with new responsibilities; changes in family relations and one's social life; financial responsibilities; exposure to new people, ideas, and temptations; being away from home, often for the first time; making decisions on a higher level than one is used to; substance abuse; awareness of one's sexual identity and orientation; preparing for life after graduation; and psychological make-up can also play a role in one's vulnerability to depression. They also added that people who have low self-esteem, who consistently view themselves and the world with pessimism, or are readily overwhelmed by stress may be especially prone to depression [7].

Guimba et.al, in their study revealed that typical problems experienced by students in teacher education institutions in the Southern Philippines included problems in stress management, pressure, delayed allowances, enrolment, academic loading, library, time, grades, subjects, and teachers. Other personal problems, such as love life, physical condition, tribal affiliation, homesickness, dormitories, and relationship with others, were limited to some participants [8].

In the study conducted by Mazo of students taking Bachelor of Science in Information Technology at Leyte Normal University, it was revealed that the common causes of stress among the students were school

related. According to Mazo these revealed that the students were apprehensive about the expectations placed on their shoulders as college students [9].

Students with difficult problems sometimes behave and think differently. They make decisions and act in ways that are harmful to them in their desperate desire to overcome the situation they are experiencing. Having someone to talk to can help them realize the consequences of their actions and decisions.

It is the aim of every guidance and counseling unit of every educational institution to help students handle and overcome these problems thus giving them better chances of finishing college and become successful in life. However, the success of counselors in helping students deal with their problems can be influenced by how well the counselors understand what the students are going through.

Talking to counselors helps students to learn skills for solving problems, planning ahead and improving interactions with others. Counselors can help students see the positive side of themselves and others, and understand the circumstances they're into as well as helping them build relationship with others [10].

Knowing the problems and difficulties encountered by students will greatly help a counselor to plan her strategies and activities to reach out to his clients more effectively and help them.

The guidance and counselling unit of WPU-Quezon was officially established in 2013. Very few students seek the help of the counselor and visit the office for counseling. This study was conducted to provide baseline data for the purpose of determining the problems and difficulties encountered by college students. Knowing these problems will provide data that will serve as basis for the WPU-Quezon guidance and counseling office in planning the activities, and strategies to be implemented for the purpose of improving the services provided by the office to its clients - the students of WPU-Quezon.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to determine and categorize the problems encountered by students into personal, social, school, financial, emotional, and family related problems, and to enumerate the training needs of students.

METHODS

This study was conducted in Western Philippines University-Quezon Campus. Only the enrollees during the first semester of SY 2015-2016 served as the population of the study. A total of 409 students were enrolled in the first semester of SY 2015-2016. The questionnaires were administered to all the students but only 300 were returned by the students with a 73.00% turn out of the total population.

The instrument used was formulated by the researchers. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire pre-testing was done among college students enrolled in other universities in the area.

Before the commencement of the study, a letter of permission to conduct the research was first sent to the administrator. Upon approval the questionnaire was administered to the students.

Confidentiality of the data gathered was strictly observed and used only for this specific study. The students were informed regarding the confidentiality of the information they were going to give through letter and oral explanation by the researchers. The data were gathered from July to October 2015.

The problems given by the respondents were categorized into personal related, social related, school related, finance related, emotion related and family related.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the data gathered, such as frequency count, percentages and ranking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows the course distribution of the respondents. The respondents were distributed in the following five courses available in the campus: the Bachelor in Elementary Education (BEED, 40%), Bachelor in Secondary Education (BSED, 15%), Bachelor of Science in Criminology (BSCRIM, 15%), Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Business (BSAB, 22%), Bachelor of Science in Rural Development (BSRDM, 8%).

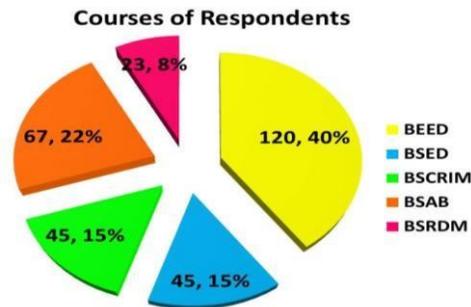


Fig. 1 BS Courses of the Respondents

Based on the responses of the students, the data showed that among the top ten problems and difficulties encountered by the respondents were (enumerated from top 1 to ten) the following: Time management, problems in completing assignments; lack of financial support; unexplainable fear of failure in exams; lack of self-confidence; family problems; very personal problems; poor study habits; frequent nervousness; and poor relationship with school authorities.

When the problems of these students were categorized into personal related, social related, school related, finance related, emotion related and family related, it was revealed that more than fifty percent (52%) or thirteen of the twenty-five problems they encountered were personal related. Some of these personal related problems were problems of attitude, such as time management, unexplainable fear of failure in examinations, lack of self-confidence, poor study habits, nervousness, and lack of self-control.

Most of the students of WPU-Quezon were from families with meager income and most of them were in college due to scholarship grants from various politician and NGOs. Most of these scholarships have maintaining grades so a failing grade means disqualification from the scholarship. Aside from that, the families had high hopes that when these students graduate they will contribute to a stable family income, thus uplifting their family from poverty. These findings are comparable to the findings of Mazo and Guimba, wherein school related problems and the expectations placed upon their shoulders were the most common stressors of college students.

On the other hand, six out of twenty-five problems were categorized as social related problems. These problems were related to the status of their relationships with school authorities, school mates and classmates. Three problems were identified as school related, such as problems with completing assignments and requirements, teacher related problems and dislike of the course they were taking (Table 1).

Table 1. Problems and Difficulties Encountered by Respondents

Problems and Difficulties Encountered	F	%	Rank
Time Management	218	78.14	1
Problems in completing Assignments and requirements	190	68.10	2
Lack of financial support	173	62.01	3
Unexplainable fear of failure in exam	163	58.42	4
Lack of self-confidence	137	49.10	5
Family Problems	129	46.24	6
Very personal problems	107	38.35	7
Poor study habits	100	35.84	8
Frequent nervousness	88	31.54	9
Poor relationship with school authorities	86	30.82	10
Lack of self-control	65	23.30	11
Nervous breakdown	64	22.94	12
Poor relationship with classmates	63	22.58	13
Acceptance of school mates	46	16.49	14
Poor relationship with friends	38	13.62	15
Teacher related problems	37	13.26	16
Spiritual and religious problems	36	12.90	17
Love related problems	35	12.54	18
School bullying	34	12.19	19
Do not like the course being taken	32	11.47	20
Gender preferences	27	9.68	21
Poor relationship with members of opposite sex	15	5.38	22
Alcoholism	12	4.30	23
Unwanted pregnancy	7	2.51	24
Addiction to drugs	6	2.15	25
Sexual problems	3	1.08	26

* Multiple Responses

The majority of the respondents (91%) did not visit the Guidance and Counseling Office for counseling because they did not encounter any difficult problems that they could not solve on their own (46.32%). Only twenty respondents visited the office to seek help from the counselor. The other reasons given by the respondents for not seeking counseling were the following: I can handle my own problems: I am shy to talk with the counselor; and I have no reason to visit the office. Please see Figure 2 and Table 2.

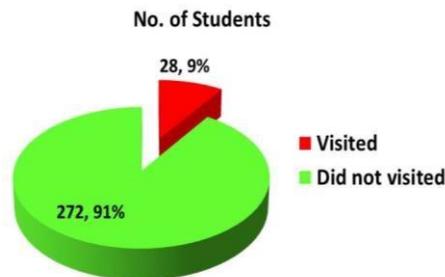


Figure 2. Number of Students Visited the Guidance Counseling Office for Counseling

Table 2. Reasons of Students for Not Visiting the Guidance and Counseling Office for Counseling

Reasons	F	%
I can handle my own problems	67	24.63
I did not encounter any difficult problems	126	46.32
I am shy to talk with the counselor	30	11.03
I have no reason to visit the office	49	18.01

The findings of the study may indicate that these students could handle most of their problems as explained in the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping. After their first and secondary appraisal of their problems they were able to develop coping mechanisms. It could be because most of the students were from not well to do families and so accustomed to facing difficulties in life and surviving them.

On the other hand, shame to share their personal problems could be a reason too, and must be remedied by the office so that help can be provided to these students.

According to the respondents their top 5 training needs were for the following topics: Personality Development (Rank 1), Time Management (Rank 2), Livelihood (Rank 3), Values Formation (Rank 4) and Spiritual Formation (Rank 5). On the other hand, their other training needs were the following: Love (rank 6), Pre-marital sex (rank 7), Teen-age pregnancy (rank 8), Violence (rank 9), and Drug addiction/alcoholism (rank 10) (shown in Table 3).

Table 3. Training Needs of the Respondents

Training Needs*	F	%	Rank
Personality Development	148	49.33	1
Time Management	135	45.00	2
Livelihood	113	37.67	3
Values Formation	89	29.67	4
Spiritual Formation	83	27.67	5
Love	69	23.00	6
Pre-Marital Sex	56	18.67	7
Teen Pregnancy	45	15.00	8
Violence	32	10.67	9
Drug Addiction/ Alcoholism	13	4.33	10

**Multiple Responses*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of the study are summed up by the following statements:

- a. Forty percent of the respondents were BEED students.
- b. Majority (91%) of the respondents did not visit the guidance and counseling office for counseling.
- c. More than forty six percent (46.32%) of the respondents who did not seek counseling said that they did not encounter any difficult problems.
- d. More than fifty percent of the problems encountered by respondents were personal related.
- e. The top 5 suggested topics/concepts by the respondents for their upcoming training were; personality development, time management, livelihood, values formation and spiritual formation.

The findings of the study led the researchers to conclude that the majority of the respondents did not seek counseling for the reasons that they did not encounter any difficult problems. The most common problems encountered by the respondents were personal related, thus requiring their full cooperation in overcoming these problems.

This implies that since most of the problems were personal related, the guidance and counselling unit of the school should focus on activities that will empower students to solve their own problems and build their self-confidence to overcome the trials that they may face in life.

There is also a great need for the counselor to gain the trust of students to encourage them to share even their most personal problems so help can be provided.

Based on the outcomes of the study, the following were the recommendation of the study.

WPU-Quezon Guidance and Counseling Office

- Conduct seminars, training and activities that empower students to solve their own problems
- Foster activities that build their self-confidence and self-esteem
- Intensify campaigns that encourage students to seek the help of the counselor whenever they need one
- The faculty in-charge of the guidance and counseling office should have a smaller academic load to allow more time for the counseling of students.
- One on one counseling should be done to encourage students to open up and share their challenges and hardships.

Future Researchers

- Conduct studies on how college students solve their life problems and how these problems affect their studies
- Conduct similar studies in different campuses of WPU
- Conduct studies on the levels of depression found among college students

Limitations of the Study

- Revisions must be made to the questionnaire, since most of the questions were open ended. The student responses were difficult to categorize, and there was a tendency for them to forget some of the difficult problems they had encountered. If the students had been provided with a checklist of the possible problems they may encounter, more detailed responses could have been gathered from the respondents.
- Questions regarding how these students solve their problems must also be included in the questionnaire. Knowing how these students solve their problems may enlighten a counselor as to what help and guidance should be provided to the students.
- More accurate data would have been gathered if the questionnaire had been administered individually and in the confinement of the guidance and counseling office.

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