

**LEVEL OF STRESS, ACADEMIC PROGRAM ENROLMENT AND AGE PROFILE OF
SELECTED STUDENTS IN THE BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN SOCIAL WORK AND
BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS:
A COMPARATIVE AND CORRELATIONAL STUDY**

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Abstract -Stress represents a significant challenge for university students, often stemming from demanding academic workloads, financial constraints, and personal responsibilities. This study examined the perceived stress levels of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) and the Bachelor of Science in Disaster Risk Management (BSDRM) programs at the University of Makati. Using a quantitative framework with descriptive-comparative and descriptive-correlational designs, the researchers surveyed 69 students selected through purposive sampling. Perceived stress was measured using the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), with data analyzed through non-parametric tests, including Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis, and Spearman's rank-order correlation.

Findings revealed a serious concern for student well-being, as 93% of participants reported high stress levels, while the remaining 7% reported moderate stress. BSDRM students exhibited significantly higher stress levels than their BSSW counterparts ($U = 316.500$, $p = .023$), a difference likely attributed to the emotionally taxing nature of disaster management training and the fact that many enrollees did not originally prefer this specialization. Conversely, while variations were observed across age groups, age was not found to be a statistically significant predictor of stress ($p = .355$), showing only a very weak positive relationship ($r = .105$, $p = .391$). The study concludes that academic program demands and college adjustment are more influential than age in determining stress. Recommendations include implementing targeted counseling, resilience-building programs, and integrating stress management into the curricula to better support student mental health.

Keywords: perceived stress, university students, Disaster Risk Management, Social Work, age differences

INTRODUCTION

Stress is defined as a natural physiological and psychological response to internal or external pressures that challenge an individual's ability to cope. While moderate stress can serve as a motivator to enhance performance, chronic

or excessive stress poses significant risks to mental and physical health, often leading to increased vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and burnout.

University students are particularly susceptible to high stress levels due to a

combination of academic workloads, financial difficulties, part-time employment, and familial responsibilities. This pressure is often magnified for students in specialized disciplines such as Social Work (BSSW) and Disaster Risk Management (BSDRM). These programs involve emotionally taxing coursework and exposure to trauma-related content, which can elevate stress levels beyond those experienced by the general student population.

Recent literature suggests that multiple risk factors, including academic pressure, social isolation, and poor time management, contribute to psychological distress in higher education. Furthermore, contextual factors such as the specific academic discipline and the level of perceived social support are crucial; students with lower social support are more likely to experience elevated stress.

Given that BSSW and BSDRM are relatively new programs at the University of Makati, this study seeks to identify the prevalence of stress among these students. By understanding these stressors, the university can develop adaptive coping strategies and prevent long-term psychological consequences. Specifically, this research aims to determine if significant differences in stress exist between these two programs and explore

the relationship between student age and reported stress levels

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study was to examine the perceived stress levels of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Social Work (BSSW) and Bachelor of Science in Disaster Risk Management (BSDRM) programs, while also exploring how these stress levels relate to the students' age profile.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the students in terms of their academic program enrollment (BSSW vs. BSDRM), reported level of stress, and age?
2. Is there a significant difference in the level of stress between students enrolled in the BSSW program and those in the BSDRM program?
3. Is there a significant difference in the reported level of stress when categorized by the students' age profile?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the reported level of stress and the students' age profile?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative method, specifically employing descriptive-comparative and descriptive-correlational research designs. The descriptive-

comparative design was used to identify significant differences in reported stress levels between BSSW and BSDRM students, as well as across their age profiles. The descriptive-correlational design was implemented to determine if a significant relationship existed between the students' reported stress levels and their age.

The study involved 69 selected students from the University of Makati who were chosen through purposive sampling. The participants included 14 students (20%) from the B.S. in Social Work (BSSW) program and 55 students (80%) from the B.S. in Disaster Risk Management (BSDRM) program. Although the sample size was relatively small and unevenly distributed, it was considered sufficient for the non-parametric tests used in the analysis

RESULT & DISCUSSION

1. Distribution of demographic profile of students in terms of academic program enrolment, stress level, and age

Table 1: Students Academic Program Enrolment Profile

Academic Program	Frequency	Percentage
BSSW Students	14	20
BSDRM Students	55	80
Total	69	100

Most of the participants (80%) were enrolled in the B.S. in Disaster Risk Management (BSDRM) program, while only 20% participated from the B.S. in Social Work (BSSW) program as shown from the Table 1. This reflects the greater availability and willingness of students from the BSDRM. These findings may also mean students' heightened interest in understanding their stress levels, possibly due to greater exposure to their academic and personal contexts and making their involvement in stress-related research as a form of self-assessment and coping strategy.

Table 2: Stress Level Profile

Stress Level	BSSW		BSDRM	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Moderate	3	21.40	2	3.60
High	11	78.60	53	94.40
Total	14	100	55	100

Table 2 reveals that students from BSSW have 78.60 percent of high stress level while BSDRM students have 94.40 percent stress level. This explains that most students have high stress level which should be considered as a potential area of concern. BSDRM students have obviously shown a high level of stress. This may be due to the reason that most of them do not prefer disaster risk management as their course in college. They have to enroll in this

program because they were not accepted to their preferred courses during admission. This might also a result of combined apprehensions towards their academic requirements, emotional challenges and personal situation. According to Alkhawalde and Al Omar (2023) academic pressure and personal factors such as financial hardship, family problems, and other academic demands contribute to perceived stress.

Table 3: Age Profile

Age	Frequency	Percent
18	12	18
19	38	55
20	7	10
21	2	3.0
22	4	6.0
23	3	4.0
24	2	3.0
25	1	1.0
Total	69	100

Based on the data presented in Table 3, 55 percent of the participants are 19 years old, and 18 percent are 18 years old. The rest has lower percentage ranging from one to seven percent between the ages of 20-25. These findings are highly expected since the students who participated are all freshmen during the data collection. These age periods (18 and 19) are the common age of students who currently finished their senior high school degree.

Likewise, this phase in college is a critical adjustment period, as students

transition from adolescence to adulthood. They experience academic pressures while becoming more independent from their families and sometimes has to live away from them for prolonged period of time. Mofatteh (2021) found many students experience academic pressures and having uncertainties in dealing with their future careers. Mofatteh (2021) further noted that without well-developed coping strategies, students are more susceptible to increased stress level and academic burnt out.

2. Comparison on the reported level of stress between students enrolled in the B.S. in Social Work program and those in the B.S. in Disaster Risk Management program of the University in Makati

Table 4: Comparison on the Stress Levels Between BSSW BSDRM Students

Course	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
BSSW	14	30.11	421.50
BSDRM	55	36.35	1993.50
Total	69		

Table 5: Results of Comparison on the Reported Stress Level Between BSSW and BSDRM Students Based on Mann Whitney U Test

Test	Value
Mann Whitney U	316.500
Wilcoxon W	421.500
Z	-2.276
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.023

Tables 4 and 5 show that BSDRM students reported higher stress levels compared to BSSW students. The average rank for BSDRM students was 36.35, while BSSW students had a lower average rank of 30.11. This means that BSDRM students generally felt more stressed. Moreover, when the mean ranks of the two groups of students were compared significantly using the Mann-Whitney U test, result confirms that there is a significant difference. This implies that the difference is meaningful and not just due to random chance ($U = 316.500$, $Z = -2.276$, $p = .023$). In other words, BSDRM students really do experience higher stress than BSSW students. Beside the reason cited in the previous findings, another possible reason is the BSDRM students' early introduction on how disasters affect people's well-being and are made aware of the many responsibilities they have to deal with as future disaster responders. While this exposure helps them recognize the seriousness of their chosen career, it may also create fears of making mistakes in the future. These concerns may account for the higher stress level observed among BSDRM students in this study. This result is consistent with Brooks and Dun (2019), who showed that people engaged in emergency response and disaster management often experience greater stress

due to training that involves crisis situations and high-pressure intervention. By contrast, social work students also face considerable stress, largely due to financial strain, health concerns, and the challenge of balancing school, work, and family responsibilities, particularly during extended field placement (Beddoe, Baker, and Ballantyne, 2023). However, in this study, BSDRM students reported even greater stress, likely due to the added pressures of preparing for disaster and emergency response roles.

3. Comparison on Students' Reported Stress Level and their Age Profile

Table 6: Stress Level Mean Rank of Students by Age Group

Age	Mean Rank (Stress Level)
18	30.50
19	34.26
20	36.00
21	36.00
22	36.00
23	25.00

Table 7: Comparison on Students' Stress Level and their Age Based on Kruskal-Wallis H Test

Kruskal-Wallis H	5.530
Df	5
Asymp. Sig (p-value)	0.355

Table 6 and 7 describe the age profile of students and highlighted that the age levels of 20, 21 and 22 have the high level of

stress among them, as shown having the same mean rank of 36.00 respectively. On the other hand, students who are 23 years old belong to the lowest rank of 25.00. However, the Kruskal-Wallis test result ($p=0.355$) indicates this difference is not statistically significant. In simple terms, stress level across age groups are not clearly different, and the small variations in Table 6 may simply be due to chance rather than a real difference. This suggests that stress level of students from both BSSW and BSDRM is associated to their age and the way they handle stress is based on their age.

In the Philippines, college freshmen experience significant stress due to academic pressure, financial constraints, and adjusting to a new environment, with studies finding moderate stress levels are common. While specific data on stress varying by age among Filipino freshmen isn't always prominent, a study found stress levels in some Filipino university students were not significantly different across ages, though other research indicates age can be a factor in stress prevalence and risk for depression and anxiety in the broader college student population (De Guia, 2022).

Table 8: Correlation on Students' Stress Level and their Age Based on Spearman Rho Test

Table 8 shows result of correlation on the level of stress of students according to their age profile based on Spearman Rho's measure. The correlation coefficient of 0.105 indicates a very weak positive relationship. This means that as students get older, their stress levels appear to increase slightly, but the influence is so small that it is almost unnoticeable. In addition, the p-value is 0.391, which is much higher than the usual cut-off point of 0.05 tells that the result is not statistically significant. In other words, the varied results shown in stress levels across ages are not sufficient enough to prove that age is directly associated to the stress level of students. Since there is a weak correlation, the findings suggest older students might have moderate to high level of stress due to some other affecting factors such as financial concerns, relationship issues, while adjusting to college life. It is understandable that the older people get, the higher the expectations from their families and the society

4. Correlation on students' reported stress level and their age profile

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			Stress	Age
Spearman's Rho	Stress	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.105
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.391
		N	69	69
	Age	Correlation Coefficient	.105	1.000
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.391	
		N	69	69

Barbayannis, et. al. (2022) explain why age might not be a strong predictor of stress in college students: a) **Diverse Student Populations:** The "college student" demographic is diverse, with a wide range of ages. While traditional-aged students (18-22) are common, many students are older, taking a few years off, or attending part-time; b) **Varied Life Experiences:** Older students may have different life experiences and support systems that could buffer stress, while younger students might face unique challenges related to independence; and c) **Other Factors More Influential:** Stress in college is often linked more strongly to factors like academic workload, financial pressures, social adjustments, and future uncertainty rather than age itself.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concludes that a staggering 93% of student respondents experience high stress levels, highlighting a critical concern for student well-being within the BSSW and BSDRM programs. BSDRM students report significantly higher stress than their BSSW counterparts, which is attributed to the demanding nature of disaster management training and the fact that many students did not originally prefer this specialization. Furthermore, while stress levels fluctuated slightly across age groups, age was not found to be a statistically significant predictor of stress. Instead, the intensity of stress is more closely linked to academic program demands and the psychological challenges of adjusting to university life as a freshman.

RECOMMENDATION

To address these findings, the following actions are recommended:

Mental Health Support: The university should provide non-academic activities and ensure that counseling services are easily accessible through the Center for Guidance and Counseling Services or professionals within the institute.

Curriculum Integration: Stress management and resilience-building

programs should be integrated directly into the BSSW and BSDRM curricula to provide students with practical coping strategies.

Targeted Interventions: Additional support should be prioritized for first-year students due to their vulnerability during the college transition.

Monitoring and Research: The university should implement regular monitoring of student well-being. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples and explore other contributing factors such as financial strain, social support, and family responsibilities

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