

# Into the Unknown: Exploring the Psychosocial Functioning of College Students at a Central Luzon, Philippines Institution

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## ABSTRACT

Psychosocial functioning refers to a person's capacity to cope with tough situations in life. Many psychological and social elements of Filipino life have been influenced by the current outbreak of Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19), including adolescents' capacity to handle everyday functions. Due to the mandated community lockdowns, educational institutions have turned to various types of remote learning in order to maintain educational continuity. This sudden transition to the new normal of schooling has disrupted students' regular school habits, isolating them socially and negatively affecting their psychosocial functioning. This quantitative study looked into the psychosocial functioning of 374 Aurora State College of Technology students. The questionnaire was utilized by the researcher to collect demographic information from the students, measure their psychosocial functioning, and establish the significance of the difference between the two. Frequency count, percentage, and weighted mean were among the statistical techniques employed. Among their demographic information, course revealed a significant relationship with general psychosocial dysfunctions. Meanwhile, gender identity/preference showed a significant relationship with general psychosocial dysfunctions, behavior and relationship problems, and optimism and coping strategies. In addition, parenting style of the respondents' parents also showed a significant relationship with optimism and coping strategies. The results of this research is vital in designing guidance and counseling programs and activities tailored to student's needs

**Keywords:** Psychosocial functioning, Covid-19

## INTRODUCTION

According to World Health Organization (2017), mental illness is the third most frequent disability in the Philippines. Around 6 million Filipinos are said to suffer from depression and/or anxiety, making the Philippines the third-highest rate of mental disease in the Western Pacific region. Despite high rates of psychological distress, Filipinos all over the world have a strong resistance to obtaining official care. This is due to the self- and social stigma associated with mental illness, as well as concerns about losing face, embarrassment, and adhering to Asian values of conformance to standards in which mental illness is regarded unacceptable. (Martinez, 2020)

The outbreak of Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) has impacted many psychological and sociological aspects of Filipino life, including adolescents' ability to manage daily functions. Researchers from John Hopkins University (2020) said that although children and teenagers appear to be less susceptible to COVID-19 symptoms, the epidemic has wreaked havoc on their lives in other ways. Social

isolation and disruption of normal school routines might be particularly difficult for them.

When community lock downs were enacted, universities and college campuses across the Philippines were closed, including Aurora State College of Technology, and instruction was immediately converted to distance learning via online platforms. As a result of this situation, a variety of challenges arose that jeopardized the college students' ability to manage day-to-day tasks.

Literature shows that there are growing numbers of college students encountering psychosocial crises. According to Akpa et al. (2015), it is extremely important to assess the psychosocial functioning of this subgroup of the population for early detection of disorders and appropriate interventions. The timely interventions for these crises, according to the authors, can make essential mitigating contributions to some mood disorders such as depression and anxiety as well as behavior problems.

It is necessary for a college student to perform well not only his/her academics but also in his/her psychological and sociological aspects of development to enable to achieve success and life satisfaction. His/her ability to resolve psychological and social concerns and issues is a manifestation of an optimal and healthy psychosocial functioning, and a contributory factor in life.

The present study attempts to explore the psychosocial functioning of the college students of Aurora State College of Technology (ASCOT). Assessing and understanding their psychosocial conditions will be vital in designing guidance and counseling programs and activities tailored to their needs.

### **Framework**

The study draws heavily on Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development. Erikson's stages of psychosocial development is a theory introduced in the 1950s by psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson. It built on Freud's theory of psychosexual development by drawing parallels in childhood stages and expanding them to include the influence of social dynamics and the extension of psychosocial development. In adulthood, eight successive stages of individual human development are postulated, which throughout life of biological, psychological and social factors are influenced. This bio-psychosocial approach has influenced various areas of study including gerontology, personality development, identity formation, developmental life cycle and more.

Stages arise as individuals grow and face new choices and turning points in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Each phase is defined by two opposing psychological tendencies: a positive / syntactic and a negative / dystonic, starting from a virtue / strength or a bad development of the self is developed in each case. Accepting virtue can help resolve the current decision or conflict. It will also support later stages of development and contribute to a stable foundation for central belief systems in relation to the self and the outside world. It is true with the assumption of poorly developed quality. One has to navigate through the two opposing values at each stage in order to find a balance, rather than just striving for the positive quality. Deviating too far from the positive trend can be poorly adjusted, while too much tendency towards the negative trend can be malicious.

Erikson's theory proposes that people progress through the stages of development based on how they respond to social crises throughout their lives. These social crises teach people how to react to their surroundings. Erikson's psychosocial development theory's eight stages provide a stepping stone for proper growth that social workers, i.e. guidance counselors, can use to identify individual difficulties and, in turn, provide the appropriate support and services for addressing these challenges.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study generally aims to assess to explore the psychosocial functioning of the students at Aurora State College of Technology. Specifically, it intends to (1) determine the demographic profile of the students in

terms of age, year level, course, gender identity/preference, parents' or primary caregiver's parenting style, (2) measure the psychosocial functioning of the students using their scores in Behavior and Relationship Problems (BRP); General Psychosocial Dysfunctions (GPD); and Optimism and Coping Strategy (OCS), and (3) determine if there is significant difference in the Behavior and Relationship Problems (BRP), General Psychosocial Dysfunctions (GPD), and Optimism and Coping Strategy (OCS) with respect to age, year level, course, gender identity/preference, and parents' or primary caregiver's parenting style.

## METHODOLOGY

**Research Design.** The research design that used in this study is the descriptive survey to effectively facilitate the data collection. Descriptive survey design of research generates data that would best describe the attributes of the target population or field of interest, and that could be used for further data analysis. The main purpose of this research is to study the psychosocial functioning of college students in Aurora State College of Technology. The key data collection instruments are the questionnaire and the checklist. The study looked at the correlation between demographic information and psychosocial functioning. The data was analyzed and interpreted using statistical approaches that were appropriate for the research's nature and scope. The findings of this study may be used as a starting point for building a framework and implementing actions, projects, and programs that will assist students succeed in the classroom and in society.

**Participants of the Study.** This research involves the three hundred seventy-four (374) college students of Aurora State College of Technology. The participants answered the checklist and the questionnaire via Google form.

**Data Collection and Instrument.** The researcher secured permission from the college president of Aurora State College of Technology for the administration of the questionnaire to the college students who served as the respondents of this study. To facilitate the collection of information, the researcher personally sought the support and cooperation of the concerned school and teachers. Questionnaire was posted online via Google form. Accomplished questionnaires were immediately checked to avoid response error. Initially, a total of 377 respondents filled the survey questionnaire. However, it was observed that there are respondents with missing values/no-response. Responses from these respondents were excluded completely from the data set. This resulted in a final sample size of 374 respondents. In addition, it was made clear from the beginning that participating in the study was made voluntary and participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence. Prior to data coding and entry, data was stripped of every possible identifier, coded, and collated only by the researcher. The researcher tabulated, analysed, and interpreted the results to answer the objectives of the study.

The data gathering instrument that was used by the researcher is a checklist and the Adolescents' Psychosocial Functioning Inventory (APFI) developed by Akpa et.al. (2015). In the initial validation conducted by the authors, it shows that the instrument is a reliable measure for assessing psychological functioning among adolescents in the lower-middle-income families (LMIC). As stated by the authors, the APFI can be adapted and be modified in other settings. The APFI is a 23-item instrument covering three (3) subscales known as (1) Optimism and Coping Strategy (OCS); (2) General Psychosocial Dysfunctions (GPD) and (3) Behavior and Relationship Problems (BRP). The APFI has a 3-point Likert-type response scale where 0 = Not at All, 1 = Sometimes, and 2 = Very Often.

## Data Analysis

Data in this research were tabulated and analyzed to determine their statistical meanings and significance.

All analyses were performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) at a 5% level of significance. For problems 1 and 2, frequency counts, percentages, and measures of central tendency (mean) were used to summarize and describe the data, providing a clear overview of the distribution and central values. For problem 3, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Following a significant ANOVA result, post hoc analysis was performed to identify specific group differences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data obtained through the questionnaire were analyzed. The testing of the hypothesis was set at .05 level of significance.

**Table 1. The demographic profile of the students**

<b>Demographic Profile of Students</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 19 (Adolescents)	196	52.4%
20 – 25 (Young Adults)	165	44.1%
26 – Above (Adults)	13	3.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Year Level</b>		
First Year	138	36.9%
Second Year	134	35.8%
Third Year	95	25.4%
Fourth Year	7	1.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Course</b>		
Agriculture	47	12.6%
Education	61	16.3%
Engineering	91	24.3%
Forestry	39	10.4%
Hospitality Management	53	14.2%
Industrial Technology	33	8.8%
Information Technology	23	6.1%
Tourism Management	27	7.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Gender Identity/Preference</b>		
Female	229	61.2%
Male	130	34.8%
LGBTQ+	15	4.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Parenting Style</b>		
Permissive (Indulgent)	<b>90</b>	<b>24.1 %</b>
(Authoritative)	<b>257</b>	<b>68.7</b>

Set boundaries and limits		
Too strict (Authoritarian)	<b>27</b>	<b>7.2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>100%</b>

Findings of the study show that most of the respondents are adolescents (52.4%) aged 18 -19 years old. Most of them are squeezed into first years (36.9%) and second years (35.8%). Majority of respondents are Engineering students (24.3%), female-dominated (61.2%) and most of the respondents' parents' parenting style is authoritative in nature (68.7%).

Findings of the study shows that the age of the respondents displays that more than half (196 or 52.4%) are 18 to 19 year-olds, and more than forty percent (165 or 44.1%) are 20-25 year-olds, with a few students aged 26 and above (13 or 3.5%). This implies that most respondents are in the stage of adolescence and young adulthood, critical periods for personal identity and relationship development according to Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory.

The results reveal that over 70 percent of respondents are first-year (138 or 36.9%) and second-year (134 or 35.8%) students, with only a few fourth-year students (7 or 2.9%), likely due to the transition from the Basic Education curriculum to the K to 12 curriculum. The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted first-year students' sense of community and psychosocial functioning as they were forced to forego face-to-face class delivery modes.

The data shows that most respondents are Engineering students (91 or 24.3%), followed by Education (61 or 16.3%) and Hospitality Management students (53 or 14.2%). Mental health issues are common among college students, regardless of their course, due to academic pressure and the challenges of college life.

The gender identity of the respondents indicates that more than sixty percent (229 or 61.2%) are female, with a significant portion identifying as male (130 or 34.8%) and a small percentage as LGBTQ+ (15 or 4.0%). Gender differences in psychosocial functioning are noted, with LGBTQ+ youth at greater risk for mental health issues. The parenting style of the respondents' parents highlights that almost 70 percent use an authoritative parenting style, which is associated with better psychosocial health and success in life.

## 2. Psychosocial functioning of the students

<b>Behavior and Relationship Problems</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>
I break rules.	0.89	Sometimes
I shout at people; even adults.	0.54	Not at all
People of my age hate me.	0.5	Not at all
I feel people of my age will take me for granted.	0.85	Sometimes
<b>OVER-ALL MEAN</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>
<b>General Psychosocial Dysfunctions</b>		
I cannot see any light of hope in my future life.	0.54	Not at all
I feel I am a disgrace to my family.	0.53	Not at all
I have too many problems; I cannot be free from them.	0.88	Sometimes
I think of killing myself.	0.39	Not at all

Everywhere I turn, I see that my life is hopeless.	0.47	Not at all
I feel my presence causes distraction to other people.	0.76	Sometimes
I feel like years from now, I will be a total failure.	0.42	Not at all
I feel like running from everything around me.	0.74	Sometimes
I find it difficult to sleep.	1.06	Sometimes
Judging from the situations in my family, I am hopeless.	0.57	Not at all
It is as if I am a burden to my family/community.	0.53	Not at all
I feel my family is a shame to the community.	0.23	Not at all
I feel like everything around me is falling apart.	0.56	Not at all
I feel guilty for all the difficulties in my family.	1.05	Sometimes
I feel like things just wouldn't work for me.	0.80	Sometimes
<b>OVER-ALL MEAN</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
<b>Optimism and Coping Strategy</b>		
I feel though my parents/guardians are poor, I will be rich.	1.19	Sometimes
I feel life will not continue to be difficult for me.	0.90	Sometimes
I hope a miracle will happen.	1.24	Sometimes
I feel I may be nobody now but I will be a great person someday.	1.46	Always
<b>OVER-ALL MEAN</b>	<b>1.18</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>

## Behavior and Relationship Problems

Results shows that respondents “sometimes” break rules (0.89) and feel that people of their age will take them for granted (0.85). However, they do “not at all” believe that people of their age hate them (0.5) or shout at people, even adults (0.54). The majority of the respondents (57.8%) answered “Sometimes,” 39.8% answered “Not at all,” and 2.4% answered “Very often.”

The mean score of all items under BRP is 0.71, verbally interpreted as “Sometimes.” This data implies that students at Aurora State College of Technology are moderately engaged in behavior and relational problems that are inconsistent with normal human function. It is critical for the school guidance counselor to take reparative actions or plans to address these issues. According to Tayebi and Akbarzadeh (2020), young adulthood is marked by significant physical, psychological, and social changes that impact behavior. Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa report that young individuals are more prone to behavioral problems (Akpa & Bamgboye, 2015). Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of development suggests that young adulthood is a stage of intimacy versus isolation, where disrupted relationships and behavior can occur if success in this stage is not realized.

## General Psychosocial Dysfunctions

Results show that statements like “I cannot see any light of hope in my future life” (0.54) and “I feel I am



a disgrace to my family” (0.53) are verbally interpreted as “Not at all.” Respondents “sometimes” feel they have too many problems and cannot be free from them (0.88), but do “not at all” think of killing themselves (0.39) or see their life as hopeless (0.47). They “sometimes” feel their presence causes distraction to others (0.76) but do “not at all” feel they will be a total failure (0.42). Respondents also “sometimes” feel like running from everything (0.74) and find it difficult to sleep (1.06). However, they do “not at all” feel hopeless due to family situations (0.57) or feel like a burden to their family/community (0.53). They do “not at all” feel their family is a shame to the community (0.23) or that everything around them is falling apart (0.56). Even so, respondents “sometimes” feel guilty for family difficulties (1.05) and feel like things just wouldn’t work for them (0.80).

The mean score of all items under GPD is 0.63, verbally interpreted as “Not at all.” The majority of respondents (54%) answered “Not at all,” 44.1% answered “Sometimes,” and 1.9% answered “Very often.” High scores of “Not at all” indicate that ASCOT students’ general psychosocial issues, such as depressive symptoms, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation, are within normal human function. This implies that most respondents can manage their daily activities despite some dysfunctions. According to Bista et al. (2016), young adulthood involves various biological and emotional changes, leading to conflicts that impede proper psychosocial development, though conflict at this stage is normal.

### Optimism and Coping Strategy

Results shows that respondents “sometimes” feel they will be rich despite their parents/guardians being poor (1.19), feel life will not continue to be difficult (0.90), and hope a miracle will happen (1.24). They “always” believe they will be a great person someday, even if they feel like nobody now (1.46).

The mean score of all items under OCS is 1.18, verbally interpreted as “Sometimes.” The majority of respondents (64.4%) answered “Sometimes,” and 29.1% answered “Very often.” This data reveals that students at Aurora State College of Technology are generally positive about their future and can cope fairly well despite obstacles. Findings indicate that respondents' optimism and coping strategies for future events are independent of their current status. Past studies suggest that positive psychological characteristics like optimism and future orientation are crucial to human functioning (Lyubomirsky, 2001, as cited by Akpa et al., 2018). However, it is critical to identify the 24 respondents who answered, “Not at all” and provide them with appropriate support through the guidance counseling office, including assessments and seminars on coping strategies.

### 3. Significant difference in the Behavior and Relationship Problems (BRP), General Psychosocial Dysfunctions (GPD), and Optimism and Coping Strategy (OCS) with respect to age, year level, course, gender identity/preference, and parents’ or primary caregiver’s parenting style

**Table 3. Index of Relationship between demographic profile and psychosocial functioning of students**

Demographic Information	Behavior and Relationship Problems		General Psychosocial Dysfunctions		Optimism and Coping Strategies	
	r	p-value	r	p-value	r	p-value
Age	-0.083	0.109	-0.064	0.216	-0.097	0.061
Year	-0.064	0.214	-0.074	0.151	-0.074	0.152
Parenting Style	-	-	-	-	-	-

Indulgent vs. Authoritative	0.056	0.296	0.105	0.051	0.101	0.06
Indulgent vs. Authoritarian	0.037	0.691	.182*	0.049	-0.108	0.247
Authoritative vs. Authoritarian	-0.014	0.815	0.063	0.292	-.139*	0.019
<b>Gender Identity</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
Female vs. Male	-0.068	0.198	-.143**	0.007	-.187**	0.000
Female vs. LGBTQ+	.168**	0.008	0.016	0.807	0.026	0.689
Male vs. LGBTQ+	.216**	0.009	0.108	0.196	0.139	0.096

\*- Test result is significant at 5% level of significance.

\*\* - Test result is highly significant at 1% level of significance.

Among their demographic information, course revealed a significant relationship with general psychosocial dysfunctions. Meanwhile, gender identity/preference showed a significant relationship with general psychosocial dysfunctions, behavior and relationship problems, and optimism and coping strategies. In addition, parenting style of the respondents' parents also showed a significant relationship with optimism and coping strategies.

Post hoc analysis showed no significant difference between the courses that is offered in Aurora State College of Technology and the general psychosocial dysfunctions suggesting that college life overall influences students' psychosocial functioning. College can be challenging due to academic pressure and personal responsibilities.

Gender identity/preference significantly impacted all subscales of psychosocial functioning, with female respondents at higher risk for general psychosocial dysfunctions compared to males. This aligns with studies indicating that women are more prone to depression due to hormonal changes.

However, females showed better optimism and coping strategies than males, possibly due to receiving more appropriate support. LGBTQIA+ respondents had significant behavior and relationship problems compared to their heterosexual peers, highlighting the need for gender-inclusive programs. Parenting style also significantly affected optimism and coping strategies, with authoritative parenting being more beneficial than authoritarian. This underscores the importance of setting boundaries and limits to foster psychosocial health and success in children.

## CONCLUSIONS

Most of the respondents are under the age of 21, are first year Engineering students, are female-dominated, and have a parent that is generally authoritative in nature. Respondents "sometimes" experience behavior and relationship problems and "sometimes" learn how to project optimism and coping techniques, which aids them in managing their everyday tasks or functions that reduces their risk of developing general psychosocial dysfunctions. There is no significant difference that exists between courses and general psychosocial dysfunctions. However, there exists a significant difference between female and respondents with respect to their general psychosocial dysfunctions and optimism and coping strategies. In addition, significant difference also exists between LGBTQ+ and both male and female respondents with respect to their behavior and relationship problems. Also, it was revealed that significant difference also exist between authoritative parenting style and authoritarian parenting style with respect to with respect to optimism and coping strategy.

The study's findings highlight several important implications: the majority of respondents are in the critical



stages of adolescence and young adulthood, emphasizing the need for targeted support during these pivotal periods for identity formation and relationship building. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted first-year students' sense of community and psychosocial functioning, necessitating additional support systems to address isolation and depression.

Mental health issues are prevalent among college students across all courses, underscoring the importance of comprehensive mental health services. Gender differences in psychosocial functioning and the increased risk of mental health issues among LGBTQ+ youth suggest a need for more inclusive and supportive environments.

Additionally, the finding that most respondents' parents use an authoritative parenting style, associated with better psychosocial health, indicates that promoting effective parenting practices could positively impact students' well-being and success.

Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of providing holistic support to students, considering their developmental stages, mental health needs, and the impact of external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and parenting styles.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Guidance counselors should use the findings of this study as a starting point for assessing and analysing students' psychosocial problems, which will be critical in developing programs to assist students with psychosocial dysfunctions and constructing guidance and counselling programs suited to their specific requirements. It is vital for them to gain a thorough understanding of the prevalence and spectrum of mental health issues that affect college students. It is necessary to create strategies to increase treatment seeking and involvement among college students. The result of this research may be used as a baseline in developing a framework and in making corresponding actions, projects and programs that may help the students to ensure that they function well in the academe and the society.

## **ETHICAL STATEMENT**

The study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical standards. Participant confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through stripping any possible identifier. Participants' involvement is entirely on a voluntary basis, with participants fully informed of their rights and the study's purpose. Data was handled responsibly and securely, in compliance with Philippines' Data Privacy Act.

The study posed no risks to participants involved, and all potential inconveniences were identified and minimized. The researcher declares no conflicts of interest. The findings will be reported accurately and transparently.

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