

## **Perceived Risk for Depression and Coping Skills of Adolescents in a Private Higher Education Institution: Basis for Mental Health Education Program**

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### **Abstract**

*Adolescent mental health is a pressing global concern, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Philippines, mental illness is the third most frequent disability, yet only 3–5% of the health budget is allocated to mental health services. This study perceived risk for depression and coping skills among senior high school students in Cavite, Philippines, to inform school-based interventions. Anchored in Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, a quantitative descriptive design was employed, with 365 participants (61.4% female; 84.1% aged 18) selected via Raosoft sampling. Validated tools—the Kutcher Adolescent Depression Scale-6 (KADS-6,  $\alpha=0.80$ ) and Brief-COPE inventory ( $\alpha=0.60$ )—were administered online.*

*Results revealed 67.67% ( $n=247$ ) scored  $\geq 6$  on KADS-6, indicating possible depression, with symptoms like low energy (mean=2.50) and diminished enjoyment (mean=2.45). Coping strategies were predominantly problem-focused (mean=2.89), with active coping (mean=3.08) most utilized, while avoidant strategies were least employed (mean=2.10). No significant correlation was found between depression severity and coping styles (avoidant:  $p=0.474$ ; problem-focused:  $p=0.128$ ), suggesting external factors (e.g., family dynamics) may influence perceived risk for depression.*

*These findings highlight high post-pandemic depression risks but also resilience through adaptive coping. Schools are pivotal for early intervention, and this study recommends: (1) institutionalizing routine mental health screenings using KADS-6 and Brief-COPE; (2) training school staff to facilitate peer support groups and self-reflection programs; and (3) advocating for increased mental health funding and stigma reduction. By leveraging schools as hubs for mental health support, this research contributes to global efforts to address adolescent mental health in low-resource settings.*

**Keywords:** *Perceived Risk for Depression, Coping Skills, Adolescent Students, KADS-6, Brief-COPE, Adolescent mental health, Adolescent mental health Philippines, Student mental health assessment, Coping skills students, KADS-6 assessment tool, Brief-COPE questionnaire, School mental health programs Philippines, Coping mechanisms high school students*

### **Introduction**

Mental health is a necessary and fundamental component of health. "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity," the WHO constitution declares. This term has an important implication: mental health is more than the absence of mental diseases or disabilities. Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual recognizes their potential, is capable of coping with typical

life challenges, is productive at work, and can contribute to their community.

Mental and behavioral problems account for around 14% of the worldwide disease burden, affecting up to 450 million people. In the Philippines, mental illness has become the third most frequent disability, with six million Filipinos suffering from depression and anxiety. As a result, the country has the Western Pacific's third-highest rate of mental disorders. (World Health Organization, 2021)

The Philippines has enacted the country's first mental health law (Republic Act No. 11036). The Act aims to increase access to comprehensive and integrated mental health treatments while protecting the rights of individuals with mental illnesses and their family members. However, mental health continues to get insufficient funding: just 3–5% of the entire health budget is spent on mental health, with 70% spent on inpatient care. (Department of Health, 2020)

Since mental illnesses typically develop throughout adolescence, special attention must be paid to the mental health of individuals in this age group. Suicide intervention, prevention, and response measures should be implemented, with a particular emphasis on youth concerns.

Adolescence is a time of profound psychological and physiological change, including changes in stress. The specific methods by which adolescents respond to stress are less well understood. Stress is unavoidable in life, but the stressors we face and our reactions to them change over time.

This study is anchored in Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, which proposes that adolescence (Stage 5: Identity vs. Role Confusion) is a critical period for forming self-identity and navigating social relationships. Erikson's framework underscores how unresolved crises during this stage—such as feelings of inadequacy or social alienation—can heighten vulnerability to depression (Gabriel & Lindsay, 2022).

It is only through the process of "coping" that people can overcome the stress and prevent it from becoming worse. Adolescents must use positive coping skills to preserve positive mental health when faced with situational problems occurring simultaneously as developmental changes; when coping skills are inadequate, adolescents are at an increased risk of depression.

The World Health Organization has urged for a "coordinated response from several sectors" to enhance adolescent mental health and well-

being, emphasizing that "among all the sectors that play crucial roles in adolescent health, education is critical." This is for a variety of reasons. To begin, the developmental processes connected with various mental health problems and the high proportion of lifetime mental health problems that manifest during adolescence highlight the critical need for early prevention, intervention, and care. Second, parts of young people's social settings, such as their schools, can be actively controlled and modified to affect health-related outcomes even to offset the effects of other risk factors such as poverty or hardship. Finally, because children spend so much time in school, schools provide an ideal setting for reaching out to young people for prevention, intervention, and care. Given this background, a school's climate can improve adolescent mental health and well-being. (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018)

The Researcher is a nurse working in a school-based health center. Due to her regular access to students, she is in a unique position to play an active role in mental wellness promotion, mental health screening, and early intervention programs and to assist in managing the ongoing treatment of mental health and substance use disorders in the school setting. The results of this research will provide a basis for mental health education programs.

This study assessed the perceived risk for depression (via KADS-6) and coping strategies (via Brief-COPE) among Filipino adolescents. Its findings will inform a tailored mental health education program, addressing gaps in institutional support and leveraging adolescents' existing resilience.

The study aimed to determine adolescent students' perceived risk for depression and coping skills at a private Senior High School in Cavite. Specifically, the Researcher sought answers to the following questions: (1) What are the perceived risk for depression scores of adolescent students using 6-Item KADS-6? (2) What are the coping skills scores of adolescent students using Brief-COPE?; (3) Is there a significant relationship between the perceived risk for depression scores and the coping skill scores of students? (4) What Mental Health

Education Program can be offered to adolescent students in Private schools to prevent and manage mental health issues or problems among them?

## Methods

The quantitative descriptive design was chosen for this study to systematically assess the perceived risk for depression and coping skills among adolescent students in a private senior high school in Cavite. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to describe the current state of these variables without manipulating them, providing a clear picture of the students' perceived risk for depression and coping mechanisms. By employing this method, the study could quantify the prevalence of depression risk and identify the most commonly used coping strategies, which is essential for developing targeted interventions.

This study focused on the assessment of the perceived risk for depression and coping skills of adolescent students from a private Senior High school in Cavite through the use of a standardized tool. Furthermore, this study is limited only to the enrolled Senior high school students 18 years old and above. The participants were selected using Raosoft software to ensure a representative sample of 365 senior high school students, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The sample included 84.1% 18-year-olds and 61.4% females, reflecting the demographic composition of the school. The instruments chosen were the KADS-6 and the Brief-COPE questionnaire. The KADS-6, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.80, was selected for its reliability in screening depression among adolescents, while the Brief-COPE, with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.60, was used to measure 14 distinct coping strategies. These tools were validated and administered online via Google Forms to comply with pandemic-related restrictions, ensuring ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were upheld.

The procedure involved online administration of the questionnaires, with the researcher providing clear instructions and support to participants during data collection. The analysis included frequencies and weighted means to summarize the data, and Spearman's correlation to examine relationships between variables. This approach helped answer the research questions by revealing that 67.67% of participants were at risk for depression, with problem-focused coping being the most utilized strategy (mean=2.89) and avoidant coping the least (mean=2.10). The lack of a significant correlation between depression risk and coping skills ( $p=0.474$  for avoidant;  $p=0.128$  for problem-focused) suggested that other factors, such as biological or environmental influences, might play a more critical role in depression risk. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive mental health programs that address both depression screening and coping skill development in schools.

## Discussion

The study on the Perceived Risk for Depression and Coping Skills of Adolescents in a Private Higher Education Institution provides critical insights into the mental health challenges faced by adolescent students, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In view of the results mentioned above, the following key findings are drawn:

**Profile of the Respondent:** Respondents' age, 307 or 84.1% are 18 years old, 44 or 12.1% are 19 years old, 10 or 2.7% are 20 years old, and less than 1% are 21 – 22 years old. Regarding gender, most respondents are female (224, 61.54%), with 141 (38.46%) male. Regarding the Grade level, the vast majority of respondents (304 or 83.3%) are in grade 12, while only 61 or 16.7% are in grade 11.

**Assessment of the Behavior of Adolescents.** Most teenagers (247 or 67.67 %) scored at or above 6 (possible depression), whereas 118 or 32.33 % scored below 6 (probably not depressed). Indicating a "possible depression" and the need for further clinical assessment. This highlights a significant mental health concern among adolescents, exacerbated by

stressors such as academic pressure, social isolation, and pandemic-related disruptions. Symptoms like persistent low mood, fatigue, lack of motivation, and reduced enjoyment of life were frequently reported, aligning with global trends of rising adolescent depression during the pandemic (WHO, 2021). The Philippine context is particularly concerning, given the country's high mental health stigma and limited access to care (DOH, 2020).

Implications of this result include: Early Intervention Needed: (1) Schools must prioritize mental health screening to identify at-risk students before symptoms escalate, (2) Policy Action: The results support the urgency of fully implementing the Philippine Mental Health Act (RA 11036), which mandates mental health services in schools, (3) Parental/Teacher Awareness: Educators and families should be trained to recognize warning signs (e.g., fatigue, hopelessness) and refer students to professionals.

**Assessment of the Coping of Adolescents.** Adolescents primarily employed problem-focused coping (e.g., active problem-solving, planning) and emotion-focused coping (e.g., seeking emotional support, acceptance), which are adaptive and associated with resilience. Avoidant coping (e.g., denial, substance use) was least utilized, with substance use scoring the lowest ( $1.21 \pm 0.56$ ). This suggests awareness of maladaptive strategies but underscores the need to reinforce healthy coping mechanisms. This reflects resilience and aligns with research linking adaptive coping to better mental health outcomes (Stanisławski, 2019). Avoidant coping (e.g., substance use, denial) was rarely reported—a positive finding given its association with worsened depression.

Implications of this result include: (1) Strengths-Based Programs: Schools should reinforce existing adaptive strategies (e.g., peer support groups, stress-management workshops), (2) Gaps in Emotional Support: While students sought support, the low utilization of professional help suggests barriers (e.g., stigma, lack of access), (3) Integrate school-based counselors and telehealth options.

## Test of Correlation Between the Perceived Risk for Depression Scores and Coping Skills Scores of Adolescents

The study found no significant relationship between perceived depression risk and coping skills, implying that depression risk is influenced by factors beyond coping strategies (e.g., biological, environmental, or social determinants). This aligns with Erikson's psychosocial theory, which emphasizes identity struggles and external stressors during adolescence.

### Implications for Mental Health Programs.

The results of the study led to the following Mental health Programs: (1) Early Screening: Regular use of tools like KADS-6 and Brief-COPE can help identify at-risk students and tailor interventions. (2) Small Support Groups: To address isolation and provide peer/emotional support. (3) Self-Reflection Programs: Journaling, mood tracking, and gratitude exercises to enhance emotional awareness and resilience. (4) School-Based Initiatives: Collaboration between nurses, counselors, and teachers to promote mental health literacy and reduce stigma.

**In Sociocultural Context:** The Philippines' mental health landscape, marked by stigma and limited resources (as noted in RA 11036), calls for culturally sensitive programs. The study's findings advocate for integrating mental health education into school curricula and expanding access to counseling services. Challenges may include the following: (1) Many Filipino adolescents avoid seeking help due to hiya (shame) or fear of judgment (Brillantes & Rodenas, 2022). (2) Resource Limitations: Mental health services are concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural schools underserved. With these challenges, proposed solutions are: (1) Anti-Stigma Campaigns: Normalize mental health discussions through student-led initiatives. (2) Community Partnerships: Collaborate with local health centers to expand access to care.

The study was limited to one private institution; broader samples (e.g., public schools, rural areas) could generalize findings. Longitudinal research could explore how coping strategies

evolve and their long-term impact on mental health.

## Conclusions

This study highlights the significant mental health challenges faced by adolescents in a private senior high school in Cavite, with 67.67% of students (n=247) scoring at or above 6 on the KADS-6 scale, indicating a possible risk for depression. While students primarily used problem-focused coping strategies (mean=2.89), such as active problem-solving, and rarely relied on avoidant coping (mean=2.10), particularly substance use (mean=1.21), no significant correlation was found between depression risk and coping styles, suggesting other factors may contribute to mental health struggles. These findings underscore the urgent need for school-based mental health interventions, including routine screenings, support groups, and coping skills training, to address the rising prevalence of depression among adolescents. The study also supports the goals of the Philippine Mental Health Act (RA 11036), advocating for better mental health policies, funding, and anti-stigma initiatives in schools. By prioritizing early intervention and holistic support systems, educational institutions can foster resilience and well-being among students, ultimately shaping healthier futures. Further research should explore additional factors influencing adolescent depression to refine targeted interventions.

## Recommendations

To address the mental health needs of adolescents identified in this study, it is recommended that the private university adopt KADS-6 and Brief-COPE as standard screening tools to routinely assess students' depression risk and coping skills. School administrators should organize Training of Trainers (TOT) programs to equip faculty, counselors, and peer mentors with the skills to facilitate mental health interventions effectively. A dedicated training team should also be established to oversee program implementation, monitor student progress, and evaluate outcomes. Collaboration with the Guidance and Counseling Department is

essential to integrate evidence-based programs such as Small Support Groups and Self-Reflection Workshops, which can provide emotional support and enhance coping strategies. Additionally, the development of tailored mental health activities, such as mindfulness sessions, resilience-building workshops, and stress management seminars, can further strengthen students' adaptive coping skills. Ultimately, this study underscores the urgent need to institutionalize mental health education programs in schools, combining regular screenings, peer support networks, and skill-building initiatives. By prioritizing early intervention and fostering a supportive school environment, educators can help mitigate the rising prevalence of adolescent depression and promote holistic well-being. Building on the findings of this study, future researchers should expand the scope of investigation by including a more diverse sample, such as students from public schools and different socioeconomic backgrounds, to enhance the generalizability of results.

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