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## **Burnout Risks of Filipino College Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Basis for Institutional Mental Health Program**

**Belinda A. Ramos<sup>1</sup>, Gemlee O. Baptista<sup>2</sup>, Lorna V. Fulong<sup>3</sup>, Jose S. Sabaulan<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1 2 3</sup>Research & Development, University of La Salette, Inc., <sup>4</sup>Educational Management Information System, University of La Salette, Inc.

belindaalmueteramos@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, gemlee\_baptista@yahoo.com<sup>2</sup>,  
fulonglorna@gmail.com<sup>3</sup>, jssabaulan@uls.edu.ph<sup>4</sup>

**Abstract.** Student burnout is a concept born out of the occupational syndrome of working adults. In the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and shift of learning from face-to-face to online, people have experienced mental health issues in terms of burnout, especially among college students. With no mental health program in place in many higher education institutions, there is a need to find out students' burnout risks and status. This study used a modified survey questionnaire from the American Public Welfare Association to determine the burnout risks of the 245 student participants of a university in the northern Philippines. Results showed that the participants have moderate to high risks for burnout, especially the female students. These students already need interventional measures to combat their present mental health problems. It is thus recommended that future researchers be done on burnout that studies the different student constructs of burnout to formulate a more comprehensive mental health program specifically designed for students.

**Keywords.** burnout, mental health, occupational syndrome, working adults

### **Introduction**

COVID-19 has affected people's lives all over the world, bringing changes in all aspects of life. Education has been adversely altered as caused by lockdown and shift of modalities to non-face-to-face to limit the transmission of the disease. Stresses became overwhelming for most of the population, including students. Isolation and reduced interaction with peers and other people in the neighborhood/school contributed to mental health problems such as burnout.

Burnout is considered a psychiatric disorder that results from the continuous exposure to stress commonly in the workplace that is characterized by a persistent feeling of fatigue and tiredness or lack of energy, increasing feelings of detachment from work/activities, or reduced enthusiasm and enjoyment of previously gratifying endeavors and inefficiency in terms of performance and competence (World Health Organization, 2019). Although most commonly seen among adults in their workplace, the signs and symptoms were observed among students as young as those in high school (Bilge et al., 2014; Portoghese et al., 2018). There is a growing concern about the occurrence of the disorder among younger people because of the consequences: reduction in academic performance, social inadequacy, and increase in drop-out rates (Maroco & Campos, 2012).

Many factors were pointed out in the occurrence of academic burnout among students. Three important factors were identified: socio-economic status (SES), life satisfaction, and social support. These three factors could either mitigate or contribute to students' burnout (Ye et al., 2021). Across these factors is the student personality which determines how the student is affected by the factors. There are personalities that are more prone to burnout which must be identified so that early mediation can be instituted to prevent the occurrence of burnout (Montanez, 2019). Programs of mitigating burnout among students regardless of the level of learning they are in are imperative to help these students who have the potential to get burned out of their studies and end up as out-of-school youths or, worse, end up in psychiatric wards (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003).

In the Philippines, a survey done in October 2020 done by Radio Veritas, known as the Veritas Truth Survey, showed that 34% of the respondents said they feel exhausted and 30% said they felt anxious about their online classes. Feelings of frustration were given by 10% of the participants and only 8% showed determination in their online classes. The main reason given by the participants were increased academic work and unstable internet that affected their achieving the goals of their online classes. The survey showed that exhaustion is more apparent among high school and college students but not among elementary grade students (Bernardo, 2020). This is in conjunction with the findings of Aranas et al. (2020) in their study that the burnout status of college students predicts the occurrence of symptoms of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

A study was done by Velasco (2019) before the COVID-19 pandemic showed that Filipino college students seem to be not experiencing burnout. The survey participants were the millennials, as they call the students of today's generation and are enrolled in a large prestigious University in Metro Manila.

Given the surveys and articles, it seems that the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed much to the incidence of burnout among students. The two studies (Velasco in 2019, a pre-pandemic survey, and Aranas et al. in 2020, a post-pandemic study) showed contrasting results. Both of the studies were done in 2 prestigious large universities in Metro Manila. In this regard, the authors of the present study would like to explore the burnout risks of college students in the provinces where the factors of urbanization are less apparent and experienced but with the COVID-19 changes. There are even higher and maybe better family and social supports for these students in the province because most live with their family and see their family more often than those in Metro Manila. The COVID-19 pandemic may counteract the effects of family and peer support in limiting burnout among college students in a province in northern Luzon.

Students' mental health caught great concern during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the observed increase in psychological problems. In schools, before the pandemic, health programs were focused on the immediate health problems of students. Interventions and mental health prevention became a concern when many students seemed to be not coping with the mandated online learning platform due to the pandemic. It is of great concern that the risk and status burnout of students must be determined and identified for the school to create health and counseling program for both interventional and preventive measures be instituted before the mental health problem become worse and appears to cause permanent disability among students that educational institutions are responsible for.

### *Theoretical Background*

Burnout is defined by the 11<sup>th</sup> Revision of the International Classification of Disease as a condition resulting from the persistent exposure to stress that has not been successfully

reduced or eliminated by coping mechanisms/strategies of the individual (WHO, 2019). The burnout concept was thought to be an occupational condition unique to the workplace and adults (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Still, with the focus on students' mental health, research was directed to the students because observations of the signs and symptoms of burnout were seen among high school and college students (Aranas et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2021). The signs and symptoms of fatigue and decreased energy, feelings of negativity and cynicism and inadequacy, inefficiency, and poor performance were the same among the professional workforce and students (Portoghese, 2018). These symptoms do not appear simultaneously but come in succession with fatigue and lack of energy resulting in negative thoughts and pessimistic tendencies manifested in poor performance and low academic achievement (Kim et al., 2015; Romano et al., 2021).

The most commonly used instrument to study burnout among students is the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey, with many studies testing for its validity. It has tried to measure the three dimensions of burnout: fatigue and lack of energy, negativity, cynicism, and efficacy. However, many authors question the instrument and have tried to make modifications to test other concerns about student burnout (Maroco & Campos, 2012). Authors agree on burnout among students and looked deeper on factors that influenced the condition labeled as 'academic burnout.' Other burnout inventory for students were tested for validity and reliability and are found to be comparable with the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey for students (Maroco & Campos, 2012; Fiorilli et al., 2015; Platania et al., 2020).

*Context of Burnout.* The definition of burnout involves experiences surrounding the concept of work, performance, and adaptation. This meaning consists of the personality and attitudes of a person towards the source of persistent stress. Mostly defined along the lines of work and occupation because of the pressures that involve performance. According to Forbes Careers, personality types are prone to burnout: workaholics, people-pleaser, and perfectionists (Chang, 2016; Montanez, 2019). Among students, it is translated as the over-achiever, the conformist, and the obsessive. In these types of student personality, the common construct that appeared in studies is the sources of stress. In the over-achiever, there is personal stressor and factor, in the conformist, the teacher and the peer group, and the social environment. While in the obsessive, the three factors caused the stress (Maroco & Campos, 2012; Romano et al., 2021). During the pandemic, the idea of conformity and interactions with peer groups seemed to have decreased, so where does the burnout come from? According to Labraque and Ballard (2020), the lockdown to reduce coronavirus transmission has caused the devastating interruption of daily lives and routines and created the idea of decreased normality and increased inadequacy in all aspects of life. The pandemic's prolongation has caused the current situation's exhaustion and fatigue, as manifested in the increasing incidence of mental health problems (Husky et al., 2020).

*Social Support, Resilience and Burnout Mediation.* Adaptation to college life is the product of personality, social support system, and life satisfaction (Ye et al., 2021). Social support and life satisfaction influence the student's resilience over stresses, which may mitigate or contribute to burnout (Romano et al., 2021). Social support may come in terms of motivation, financial support, or resources to overcome adversities imposed by the change in the learning modalities and demands of online activities (Jacob & Dodd, 2003; Labraque & Ballard, 2020). Social support and life satisfaction are a function of students' socio-demographic characteristics, especially the economic aspects, because it determines the ability to cope with academic requirements needed to perform in school (Wang et al., 2019). The ability to cope with stresses (termed 'resilience') is a factor of adaptation which in turn is influenced by the self-efficacy

beliefs of the individual, and how tireless one will be in pursuing solutions when faced with obstacles and adversaries (Capri et al., 2012; De la Fuente et al., 2015).

Mediating burnout among students needs assessment of the intervening factors that may contribute or lessen burnout. The relationships of life satisfaction and socio-economic factor strengthen the various sources of motivation, a sense of purpose, and resilience to the negative effects of the stresses experienced by the student (Preacher et al., 2007). Mediating or preventing burnout among students needs building strength because it is a learned behavior (Romano et al., 2021). Many types of resilience are constructed mainly by social support from the immediate family and friends and teachers (Hurley, 2020). Among college students, strength is built on other sources such as classmates and peer groups other than the teachers. However, a good relationship with teachers is found to have protective effects from burnout because this kind of relationship means better self-efficacy for the student (Romano et al., 2020; Tang, 2020).

### Research Questions

The study aims to determine Filipino college students' burnout risks in a university in northern Luzon during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, would like to answer the following questions:

1. What are the burnout risks of the student participants during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Is there a relationship between burnout risks and students' profile of age, gender, and course?
3. Is there a difference in the burnout risks of the students when grouped according to their age, gender, and course?

### Methodology

*Research Design.* The descriptive, evaluative design to find out the burnout risks of the college students. Evaluation is through the use of a self-assessment instrument. The self-assessment instrument is a descriptive type of evaluation regarding the signs and symptoms of burnout that the participants feel, the frequency it happens, and experienced.

*Site and Participants.* The study was done in a private Catholic university in the northern Philippines. There were 245 students from different year levels and programs. The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown below:

**Table 1.**  
*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

Characteristics	Classification	f	%
Age	17	13	5.31
	18	65	26.53
	19	522	21.22
	20	82	33.47
	21	27	11.02
	22	4	1.63
	24	1	0.41
	35	1	0.41
Gender	Male	67	27.35
	Female	178	72.65
Course	BMLS	53	21.63
	BSN	61	24.90

	MM	59	24.08
	POLSCI	9	3.67
	BSA	49	20.00
	BSCompE	14	5.71
Year level	1 <sup>st</sup> year	63	25.71
	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	40	16.33
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	114	46.53
	4 <sup>th</sup> year	28	11.43

*Sampling Method.* The sample size was computed using Slovin's formula at a 5% margin of error. The targeted number of participants based on the computation was 362 students. Counterchecking the sample size using the formula devised by Almeda et al. (2010), the sample size at 5% error is 350. The students were chosen based on the instructor's cooperation and willingness to participate in the study.

*Instruments and Research Techniques.* The survey questionnaire of the present study was adopted from the American Public Welfare Association from the survey of Micelle Post from Public Welfare vol 39 no. 1 done in 1981 among working women. The questionnaire was modified after review of the following burnout questionnaires for students: Student School Burnout Scale (SSBS) by Aypay (2012), Academic Burnout Questionnaire designed by Bresó et al. (2007), Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Fiorilli et al., 2015), the Italian version of School Burnout Inventory (Platania et al., 2020), Oldenburg Burnout Inventory –student version (Campo et al., 2012), Academic Burnout Scale developed by Rong et al. (2005) and the School Burnout Inventory developed by Salmera-Aro and Naatanen (2005) that measured burnout in the three dimensions of lack of energy/fatigue, negativism and cynicism, and reduction in performance and self-efficacy. The survey questionnaire is made up of 4 parts: part 1- demographical characteristics, part 2- feelings of fatigue and lack of energy (10 questions), part 3- feelings of reduced enthusiasm and negative thoughts (10 questions), and part 4 – feelings of decrease efficiency and self-efficacy. The modified questionnaire has a 0.890 reliability score using Cronbach's alpha which is good and acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) for a 28-item questionnaire.

*Data Gathering Procedure.* After approval of the request to conduct the study in the University, the deans and teachers were informed of the purpose and objectives of the research. Their cooperation to have their students participate was sought. The survey was posted through the use of the Google form and answered online by the students. Three (3) weeks after the survey was posted, the link given was closed, and tallying and analyzed the data gathered. There were only 245 students who participated before the survey was completed.

*Data Analysis.* The burnout risks were analyzed based on the students' frequency of the signs and symptoms of burnout using a five-point scale: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4=often, 5 = always. The numerical score is computed from the given answers of the participants of the frequency of experiencing the given scenario in the questionnaire.

**Table 2.**  
*Burnout Risks and Numerical Scores*

Numerical Scores/Range	Description	Burnout Risks
28 - 38	Almost no stress experienced and appears resilient to burnout	No risk
39 - 50	Low stress experienced and unlikely to burnout, high coping	Low risk
51 - 70	Under the moderate amount of stress and have a fair chance of burnout, coping mechanisms seem not effective, needs preventive measures	Moderate risk
71 - 90	Have high levels of stress, and starts to burnout, needs preventive and interventional measures	High Risk
91 and above	Experienced very high levels of stress, already in burnout status, needs interventions	Very High Risk

Relationships between the categorical variables were computed using the Chi-square Test of Association.

*Ethical Considerations.* Informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of information were strictly observed during the conduct of the study.

## Results

The study's findings are presented in descriptive statistics in terms of age, gender, course, and year level to show the burnout risks.

**Table 3.**  
*Frequencies of Burnout Risks of Respondents according to Demographic Profile*

Profile/Risks	No risk (28-38)	Low risk (39-50)	Moderate risk (51-70)	High Risk (71-90)	Very High Risk (91 & above)
<b>Age</b>					
17	0	0	5	8	0
18	0	2	26	29	8
19	1	1	25	20	5
20	0	2	30	36	14
21	0	5	7	11	4
22	0	0	2	2	0
24	0	0	0	1	0
35	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	1	7	25	27	7
Female	0	3	70	81	24
<b>Course</b>					
BMLS	0	5	18	23	7
BSN	0	2	20	29	10

	MM	1	0	27	21	10
	BSA	0	2	20	23	4
	BSCo	0	1	5	8	0
	mpE					
	POLSC	0	0	5	4	0
	I					
<hr/>						
Year level						
	1 <sup>st</sup> year	0	3	25	31	4
	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	1	0	23	10	6
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	0	7	38	52	17
	4 <sup>th</sup> year	0	0	9	15	4

Looking into the table above, the highest risks for burnout are among the 20-year-old students, female, among 3<sup>rd</sup>-year level and those taking up nursing and marketing. Most students were at moderate to high risks for burnout regardless of the profile.

**Table 4.**  
*Overall Burnout Risks of the Participants*

Burnout Risks	Frequency (n=245)	Percent
28-38 (no risk)	1	0.41
39-50 (low risk)	10	4.08
51-70 (moderate risk)	95	38.78
71-90 (high risk)	108	44.08
91 and above (very high risk)	31	12.65

The majority of the participants were at high risks for burnout, followed by moderate risks. This means that prevention and interventional measures are needed to help students cope with online learning and burnout. It is noteworthy to note that 31 students (12.65%) have very high risks for burnout, even higher than those who have low risks.

**Table 5.**  
*Relationships and Differences of Burnout Risks*

Variables	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p-value
Age	29.86	28	0.370
Gender	12.52	4	0.014
Course	19.44	20	0.494
Year Level	20.96	12	0.151

The relationships and association of burnout risks and the demographic profile were computed using the Chi-square test of association. Results showed no significant relationships between burnout in terms of age, course, and year level. Gender showed significant relationships and differences in the burnout risks, with the females more prone to burnout than their male counterparts. The female burnout risks are higher than that of males.

### **Discussions**

The main aim of the study the burnout risks of college students in a university in northern Luzon. The measurement of burnout risks is made through the frequency of signs and symptoms they experience in terms of fatigue and lack of energy, negativism and reduced enthusiasm for common enjoyable activities, and reduced performance and self-efficacy. The relationships and differences of the burnout risks are also taken into consideration.

A greater number of students aged 19 and 20 years showed a high risk for burnout. While in the year level, first-year and 3<sup>rd</sup> year showed a high risk for burnout. According to many students and professionals, the ages coincide with the third-year level, which is the most stressful in their educational journey. Many new concepts and professional subjects are introduced during the 3<sup>rd</sup> year (Breitkopf, 2017). During the pandemic, professional internships and face-to-face job training were suspended (CHED, 2020) during the COVID-19 that anxiety about how to go about skills development be undertaken as stricter protocols are put into place. The first year is considered an adjustment period, so stress is more related to adaptation and coping with college life, so it is not surprising for freshmen to be at risk for burnout (Brooker et al., 2017). The ability and how fast they develop resilience as they adapt to their new learning environment is then translated into their achievement and satisfaction. (May et al., 2015).

The burnout risks among the participants of the study are greater among the female students than males. These findings are similar to the study of Labraque & Ballad (2020) that females were affected more by the lockdown, causing exhaustion and fatigue, reduced interest in previously enjoyable activities, and reduced self-efficacy. As with the current study, the differences in the proportion of male and female participants could limit the findings. Although the results agree with the Filipino cultural gender role expectations and labelling with women, they customarily have more problems dealing with their stress than men (Elmer et al., 2020).

The overall burnout risks of the student respondents were moderate to high across all demographic characteristics of age, course, and year level. This means that there is a need for a mental health program especially addressing the issue of burnout before it becomes too late for the student concerned. According to Aranas et al. (2020), interventional activities must be instituted if there is still no program or strengthened to prevent burnout among the students.

Filipinos are known for their resilience to any adversities that confront them because of their inherent and ethnic traits (Dela Peña, 2020). However, the study of Camitan IV & Bajin (2021) showed that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly lowered the resiliency of the general population. Academic resilience is necessary to counteract burnout in terms of the student relationships with their teachers and classmates and satisfaction with their capacity to perform academically (Romano et al., 2021). Therefore, it is common among researchers that academic burnout is becoming prevalent in this COVID-19 pandemic (Aranas et al., 2020; Nebrida & Dullas, 2018; Son et al., 2020). The present study's findings are a testimony of the increasing prevalence of burnout through the risks students are exposed to during the current health situation that necessitates lockdowns to prevent the transmission of the disease (Labraque & Ballad, 2020).

The study aimed only to find out the burnout risks of the student participants to come up with programs to promote mental health among the students of the University. The construct of mediation and factors that may mitigate or contribute to the occurrence of burnout is beyond the study. This is an area for future researchers to look into how Filipino students deal with the "new normal."

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