Filipino youth's concerns and worries and their ways of coping

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Using a social constructivist perspective, this qualitative research looked into selected Filipino youth's worries and concerns and how they coped with their problems. Seven focus group discussions were conducted with Filipino youth with ages ranging from 13 to 20 years. FGD data revealed that the problems confronting youth included lack of resources and conflict within themselves or with others. They recognized that some of their coping strategies were positive (seeking help, actively resolving, and talking about their problem). They also noted how other strategies they used such as engaging in negative and escapist behaviors, excessive drinking, taking drugs, acting out, or simply ignoring the problem, were not desirable. This research showed that even without intervention, Filipino youth were able to cope with their difficulties by relying on their inner resources.

Keywords: Filipino youth, mental health, positive youth development, coping resources, social constructivist

Many adults see adolescents as different, at times deviant and difficult to understand. People refer to youth's experiences as generally part of development. Experiences of Filipino youth are seen as developmentally similar to the experiences of their peers in other parts of the world; Filipino youth experience problems and concerns typical of other teenagers. Whereas many past studies try to understand how adolescents' problems generally affect them in ways which need intervention to help them cope and solve their problems, this research seeks to find out how Filipino youth give meaning to, describe, and understand their problems, and how they cope with these problems on their own using a social constructivist perspective. This study attempts to look at the current concerns and ways of coping of the Filipino youth based on their organization and narration of their

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experiences. A social constructivist perspective highlights more the importance of the processes in the construction of human knowledge than the external reality (Flick, 2009). Similarly, this research focuses on the positive traits of the Filipino youth, viewing them as resilient and strong. While it is true that many teens consult either peers (friends) or adults (parents, teachers, and at times professional counselors or psychologists), some Filipino youth try to cope with their personal and family difficulties on their own relying primarily on their inner strength.

Youth's Contemporary Worries and Concerns

Youth's concerns were expressed in a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted for the 2002 Young Adult Fertility Studies and reported by Ogena (2004). Among the youth's worries were poverty and lack of money, and the inability of their out-of-school siblings to find work. They also talked about problems in their families, citing breakdown of communication between and among family members, including their parents quarrelling about money yet gambling when they had some. Some of the youth expressed regret over having gotten married too early.

It was also found out that the Filipino youth value their intimate (boyfriend-girlfriend) relationships. However, when it came to their views on sexual experience in the context of their relationships, only 7% of the total population claimed that love was the sole motivation for sexual intercourse and intimacy. Majority said that they engaged in sex out of curiosity, out of fear of losing his or her partner, and because the situation was uncontrollable. It was also determined that females were more inclined to control and stop themselves from engaging in intercourse as compared to the males. Apart from their relationships, it was also ascertained that the Filipino youth valued their future goals in life.

For youth in other countries, different concerns were noted. From a survey on Brazilian undergraduates (Ramos, 1973), it was found out that Brazilians valued inner harmony and family security the most, whereas American adolescents valued freedom and happiness the most. Comparatively, Brazilians ranked world peace and equality high, while Americans ranked these much lower. There were other factors that Brazilian and American adolescents ranked differently then. For instance, Americans ranked sense of accomplishment comparatively higher than the Brazilians, while social recognition was ranked high for Brazilians and low for Americans. Differences in responses of males and females were also noted.

Female respondents ranked a sense of accomplishment higher as compared to the male respondents.

Youth's View of Problems and Coping in Different Contexts

One study that attempted to look into adjustment and coping issues of adolescents in Asia was a research done on Singaporean adolescents by Yeo, Ang, Chong, and Huan (2007). In examining the emotional adjustment of young adolescents in Singapore, they found out significant gender differences. Specifically, girls showed "more positive attitude toward school, better friendship skills, and stronger relationships with parents than did boys" (p. 63). However, girls appeared to have more worries and to be experiencing greater emotional distress compared to boys. In general, Singaporean youth were seen as having limited coping skills, making them at risk for psychological maladjustment. The authors concluded the need for a school-based program that would address this limitation by teaching the adolescents specific teaching strategies to deal with problems and in the process developing psychological resilience. The researchers identified the use of positive self-instructions as appropriate for the youth in Singapore.

Pritchchard, Wilson, and Yamnitz (2007) studied American freshmen undergraduates at the beginning and end of their first year by looking into their physical health, alcohol use and smoking habits, stress levels, perfectionism, self-esteem, coping tactics, optimism, extroversion, and psychological adaptation to college. Results indicated that negative coping tactics and perfectionism predicted poorer physical health and alcohol use at the end of the year. On the other hand, optimism and self-esteem predicted better physical and psychological outcomes.

Similar findings were seen by Türkel and Tezer (2008) in their study, pointing out that those who have a broader range of coping skills were likely to deal better with challenging or threatening situations than those who have few skills. For Turkish adolescents, learned resourcefulness was found to be related to perceived parenting styles. There was a high level of learned resourcefulness when parents were seen as authoritative compared to when parents were viewed as authoritarian or neglectful. Likewise, those who perceived their parents as indulgent also had a higher level of resourcefulness compared to those who saw their parents as authoritarian or neglectful. The results of the study emphasized the importance of parenting styles in developing coping skills. Seemingly, authoritative and indulgent parenting styles enhanced learned resourcefulness whereas authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles appeared to be deteriorating factors.

Another factor that was seen to be relevant to how adolescents cope with the stresses in their life was their physical activity. A study conducted by Dishman et al. (2006) suggested that physical activity and sports participation reduced depression risk among adolescent girls. The authors found a strong positive relation between global physical self-concept and self-esteem. Apparently, how one views physical self related to self-worth in general.

A study of young people from low-income families in Hong Kong looked into indicators for positive development of youth who were at an economic disadvantage. Service participation, friendship networks, and family factors were all found to be important (Ngai, Ngai, Cheung, & To, 2008).

For Lam et al. (2004), individualistic values ensued from advancements in society and were associated with increasing behavioral and emotional problems. They found out that values of self-direction and independence and of respect and obedience for elders were associated with adolescent suicidal ideations and attempted suicide, though not consistently positively associated. For instance, the value of self-direction buffered the risk for suicide.

Further, Brissette, Scheier, and Carver (2002) replicated studies that examined the role of optimism on American adolescents' social network development, coping, and adjustment. Results of their study revealed that greater optimism was associated with increases in social support such as having larger, quality friendship networks. In addition, optimism was found to be associated with better adjustment to stressful life events. Optimistic adolescents reported less stress and feelings of depression as compared to the pessimists. This was for the reason that optimists possessed better coping strategies because of their ability to establish quality social networks that served as support in times of distress. It was apparent that their aspirations served as sufficient motivators to get past present hurdles. The youth's optimism played an important role in helping them cope with life's stressful events.

Filipino Adolescents' Views and Understanding of Well-being and Coping

Filipino youth were viewed to seek the assistance of other people when solving problems. More so, Filipino youth generally took comfort in sharing their problems with someone. For example, data from the Filipino Youth Study conducted by the Ateneo Research Group in 2001 presented in the State of the Philippine Population Report, 2nd Issue, of the Philippine Population Commission (2004, 2nd Issue, Table 30, p. 85) show the mother

as the person most often confided in by youth in rural areas, followed by female and male friends and classmates. In urban areas, female friends and classmates were the preferred confidantes of youth, with their mothers, a close second for youth's choice with whom they talk about their problems. It was interesting to note that only 3% among the rural participants and 2% among the urban participants said that they talked to no one when they have problems. In the same Ateneo study, three values of Filipino youth surfaced: sense of community (reflecting young people's need to be connected), uniqueness (pointing to their need to be recognized for individuality), and self-expression (calling attention to their need to express their beliefs, thoughts, and feelings, their *saloobin*).

METHOD

Consistent with the social constructivist frame, the method used in this qualitative research was the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Seven FGDs were conducted with youth, younger males and females (13 to 16 years old) and older adolescents (17 to 20 years old). The discussions were content-analyzed for themes that cut across the FGDs, and possible explanations were given for the similarities as well as the variations in the themes that emerged. Using a social constructivist perspective, the themes were developed from the actual verbalizations of the respondents' experiences and how they viewed these in relation to their respective situations and context.

Participants

There were 29 youth from Metro Manila and 33 from Apalit, Pampanga who participated in the FGDs for the study. One FGD was conducted with four female and six male University of the Philippines Manila students, who were between 17 and 20 years of age. Two FGDs were done with youth residing in Maharlika Village in Taguig City in Metro Manila (one with three females and 10 males of age 13 to 16 years, and another with one female and 5 males of age 17 to 20 years as participants). In rural Pampanga. four FGDs were done. One FGD was conducted with 11 female participants who were 13 to 16 years old. A second FGD was with seven males of the same age group, while the third FGD was with four females of age 17 to 20 years old. The fourth FGD was conducted with 11 males who were 17 to 20 years old.

Instrumentation

To be able to describe what Filipino youth viewed as problematic, and how Filipino youth coped with problems, an FGD guide was formulated by the researchers aimed at drawing out their key issues and concerns. The final FGD guide consisted of nine trigger questions. The specific trigger FGD questions to look into what Filipino youth view as "problems" were: a) *Sa tingin mo, ano ang sitwasyon ng isang taong walang kaproble-problema?* [Can you describe the situation of people you know who for you seem to have no problem at all?]; b) *Magisip ng isang mabigat na problema kung saan pati ang araw-araw mong gawain ay naapektohan na. Anong mga salita ang unang naiisip mo kapag naalala mo ang mga problemang ito?* [Think about a problematic situation you faced before, for which even your day-to-day living was already affected. What words come to your mind as you think about it?]; and c) *Anu-anong problema ang hinaharap ng mga kabataan tulad niyo na sobrang bigat na kahit sa matalik mong kaibigan ay hindi madaling masabi?* [What kinds of problem do young ones like you have that are so serious that you can't talk about these problems easily, even with a close friend]. To be able to describe youth's coping, six trigger questions were prepared: a) *Ano ang una mong ginagawa kapag may ganito kang mga problema?* [What is the first thing that you do when you have these kinds of problems?]; b) *Kanino o saan ka pumupunta para humingi ng tulong?* [Who or where do you go to for help?]; c) *Anong klaseng tulong ang inaasahan mo mula sa isang taong pinagkakatiwalaan mo tungkol sa mga problemang ito?* [What kind of help do you want from others to whom you could confide in about these problems?]; d) *Maliban sa paghingi ng tulong sa iba, ano pa ang maaaring makapagpapadali ng paglutas ng problema niyo?* [Aside from going to the people who you would ask for help, what else would make it easier for you to solve these difficult problems?]; e) *Ano pa ang maaring magpalala sa mabigat niyong problemang hinaharap?* [What would make it even more difficult for you to solve these already-difficult problems?]; and f) *Ano ang meron sa kabataan na nakakayanan nilang lutasin ang mga mabibigat na problema sa buhay?* [What do young people have that makes them able to solve these very difficult problems in life?].

Procedure of FGDs

Selection of FGD participants. Four FGDs on mental health were done in the rural setting, with residents of Barangay Cansinala in Apalit, Pampanga as the FGD participants. The researchers recruited participants from the

identified area to be able to describe the situation of rural youth. Effland (2000) stated that rural areas were often characterized as agricultural communities. As of 2007, Apalit, an agricultural municipality, had a total population of 97,296. Barangay Cansinala ranked 9th in terms of population density among the 12 barangays in Apalit, and was home to 6,704 individuals. Effland stated that gradual developments in rural areas over time encouraged the establishment of other nonfarm industries such as mining, small-town manufacturing, timber, and fishing, among other things. In Apalit, small industries were situated in their larger barangays, such as San Vicente and San Juan. The participants of the rural FGDs were recruited through the assistance of a former employer of the adolescents' parents.

The researchers selected adolescents from Manila and Maharlika Village in Taguig to be able to describe the views and concerns of urban youth like them. As of the 2007 Census of Population, Manila was classified by the National Statistics Office (NSO) as a highly urbanized city with 1,667,714 inhabitants. Similarly, Taguig was declared a highly urbanized city on December 8, 2004. It had 613,343 dwellers. A total of 16,475 inhabitants came from Maharlika Village. Participants from Taguig were referred by a local of the identified community in Maharlika Village. The participants from UP Manila were recruited through the assistance of a student from the university who invited her friends to participate in the focus group discussion. There were three FGDs on mental health conducted among urban residents, one, in Manila and two, in Taguig.

FGD facilitators. The FGD facilitators were senior faculty members of the De La Salle University Psychology Department, assisted by a junior faculty member and a graduate student research assistant.

FGD flow. To find out Filipino youth's views on mental health, the FGD facilitators guided the discussion using trigger questions. In particular, the participants were asked to describe the situation of people they know who for them seemed to have no problem at all. They were then asked to think about a problematic situation that they faced before, for which even their day-to-day living was already affected. Then the youth were asked what words came to their mind as they thought about those situations. The facilitators also elicited from them the kinds of problems that young ones like them have that were so serious that they could not talk about these problems easily, even with a close friend. Afterwhich, they were asked what is the first thing they do when they have these kinds of problems, who or where they go for help, and what kind of help they want from others to whom they could confide in about those problems. They were also asked, "aside from going to the people who you would ask for help, what else would make it easier for you to solve these difficult problems?" and "What

would make it even more difficult for you to solve these already-difficult problems?"

FGD data validation procedures. The opinions and stories shared by the participants were written by the FGD facilitators' assistants on Manila paper posted in front of the discussants who were arranged in a semi-circle during the FGDs. The participants were thus able to see their responses actually being documented. This allowed them to clarify, reiterate, and validate the data there and then. The discussions were also audio-recorded for documentation purposes.

Data Analysis

The data generated in the seven focus group discussions conducted for the research were analyzed through thematic content analysis. The members of the research team individually elicited a short-list of initial themes from the interview transcripts. From the initial themes, consensus was arrived at to generate the final list of themes. To organize the data, analysis was done with the use of the computer software QSR NVIVO. Verbatim statements and exemplars were identified in the document transcripts to highlight the identified themes and content categories. Themes were derived from the explicit statements of the youth, as well as based on conceptual similarities of these statements.

RESULTS

In this research, the meanings that Filipino youth make of their problems and their points of view on how they cope with these problems were described. Male and female Filipino youth residing in rural and urban areas who were 13 to 21 years old and who participated in seven focus group discussions expressed their views about their problems and how they coped, and their constructs regarding mental health were identified. With a social constructivist perspective, emphasis was given on the narration and language used in the presentation of the main findings.

Filipino Youth's Problems and Concerns

The qualitative analysis of the FGD data revealed that the problems confronting the youth respondents revolved around their lack of resources sometimes even for very basic needs, and conflict within themselves or with others. Among the 17 to 20 year old youth, negative influence of peers and

excessive drinking (whether by themselves or with their peers), were specifically cited as their problems. For the younger respondents, 13 to 16 years of age, parents' and older siblings' excessive drinking was what they specified as their problem. Unique to the youth in the urban setting was their concern over planning for the future, compared to the present-problems orientation of their rural counterparts whose concerns were more immediate (no money for tuition, parents' inability to pay back their debts, no food and therefore hunger in the family, and separation from siblings because of OFW-parents).

For the older youth living in a rural area, *chismis* (rumors) and unwanted pregnancies were among the problems that confront them. For the male respondents coming from both rural and urban areas, disagreement within their *barkada* (friends) was of serious concern. The female youth in the FGDs conducted in the rural areas cited betrayal of friends as a big problem, with both male and female participants saying that engaging in vices only complicated problems. For the city-based FGD participants, not doing anything to address or acknowledge a problem made the problem even more difficult to solve.

Filipino Youth's Way of Coping

Positive, negative, and avoidant coping with problems were noted as the youth's responses to the question "How do Filipino youth cope with their problems?"

When faced with worries or concerns, the youth sought help from family, peers, and some others in their environment. For the older youth, seeking the support of their friends was a typical coping strategy. Among the urban youth, peers were the preferred source of help. Online peers were also identified as sources of support. As a female respondent from the older adolescent group in the urban area said, *"Internet...a lot of people...there are ways to keep things private other than e-mail,"*.. The youth also found that their peers' music or sports groups were helpful to them as they tried to cope with their problems. For example, *"Sa banda. Kahit hindi ka humingi ng tulong, para siyang escape para makalimutan mo yung problema"* [bandmates; even when you are not asking for help, just being with the other members of the band make you forget your problems] was a comment made by a male FGD participant, also from the older adolescent FGD group in the urban area.

Among the youth in the rural area, some said they did not seek help from anyone when they have problems; what they do was to go to a place of

refuge known among themselves as a place where people go to self-reflect and find solace. Older females in rural areas would first seek help from their parents, while the male youths living in the rural area said they usually sought help from stronger, older figures like the police, the boss, their teachers, or their barangay officials.

Help was sought by the youth generally for mediation, for money, and for work. *"Kapag po kasi konting away, lalaki. Katulad halimbawa sa mga bata, lalaki na po yun, pupunta na sa barangay"* [We go to the barangay to immediately resolve disagreement, for instance fights among children. Otherwise, these may escalate and become bigger]. *"Sa mga kandidato, kapag mayroong maysakit nagbibigay sila ng tulong,"* [We approach candidates for help when one of us is sick] *"Yun mga galing sa mga kandidato... Pera, tulong,"* [We get help from candidates such as money] and *"Tulong sa paghahanap ng trabaho"* [we seek assistance in finding work] were some of what the youth said during the FGDs.

The youth expected others to help them in various ways: materially, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Across all ages, gender, and setting, the youth expected listening, understanding, and empathy from those whose help they seek.

The more affluent city-based FGD participants said that listening and guidance were what they generally want from those they approach for help. For some of the older participants, all they want was for someone to listen to them. *"For me I don't want to look for their empathy. I just want them to listen. Unless I ask for help, don't help me. Parang I don't want to get their advice. Just listen,"* said a male respondent from the urban-based older adolescent group. On the other hand, the youth coming from rural communities and from the lower socio-economic status groups said that they expect more concrete assistance such as money in addition to *payo* (advice) and *tulong* (help).

When asked, *"Ano ang meron sa kabataan na nakakayanan nilang lutasin ang mga mabibigat na problema sa buhay?* [what do the youth have that enable them to solve their problems]" the researchers found that the youth's cognitive and emotional management skills, certain values and attitudes, and engagement in physical activities were among the factors that facilitate coping. Among the youth who participated in the FGDs, there was a realization that engaging in activities like sports, music, and "malling" (going to the mall) served more as a distraction than as active seeking for a solution to a problem.

Internal factors that enable the youth to solve their problems included self-confidence and belief in one's self, inherent talents, skills, and intelligence, and a belief in God. Their own strength was cited by the youth as helping

them deal with their problems. For example, younger participants from the urban areas said that *lakas ng loob* (inner strength) helps them face their problems. Similarly, the older youth in the urban areas said that being *madiskarte sa buhay* (resilient and resourceful) facilitates problem-solving. Both the younger and older youth from rural areas identified *tiwala sa sarili* (faith in one's self) and self-confidence help them cope. A statement made by a young girl from Taguig exemplified the assertion among the youth that self-confidence facilitates coping with problems.: *"tiwala sa sarili... Kailangan pong lakasan niya yung loob niya para malutas yung problema"* [confidence in self ... *She needs to be strong so that she can solve her problems*].

Adolescents' outlook on problems and attitudes towards setbacks was also a facilitating factor in the way they cope with worries or problems. As one FGD participant observed about themselves, youth is on their side and they still have time ahead of them to correct their mistakes: *"Youth itself, "confidence" ... we can make mistakes and learn from it (Siguro yung parang youth itself na parang may idea ka na since bata pa, may room tayo to make mistakes and nabibigyan tayo ng chance to learn from it)"* was an opinion given by a female participant belonging to the older adolescent group from the urban area.

Hope that things will change for the better also made the youth cope better, facing their problems with greater resiliency.: *"Hope ...[We] can still change, idealism, fuels resiliency (I feel that there's a certain amount of idealism in all of us at this age which fuels motivation na parang there's hope that things will change and we can get through this"*-- this was what one male older adolescent FGD participant from the urban area said.

Filipino youth living in urban areas identified not only inner strength but their own abilities and talents as well as helping them deal with problems - talents in singing and dancing as an outlet, for instance, or being part of a band. They saw their abilities not only in academics but also in non-academics.

The youth in the FGDs conducted in Manila and Taguig and the older youth in the FGDs in Apalit saw the importance of social support in dealing with their problems, seeing friends and peers, and family as sources of support. For Filipino adolescents, making friends and having many friends helped in coping with their problems, as well as support from family. Filipino adolescents in the FGDs conducted in the rural area expressed wanting to help their families as well as wanting their family members to help them. They recognized the need for *sipag at tiyaga* [industriousness and perseverance] and *pagsisikap* [effort] for their respective families to be able to cope with problems that they collectively face. Helping in the family was

two-way between the rural-based adolescents and their family members. This reciprocity in helping or *pagtutulungan* as a facilitative factor in coping was also expressed by younger urban-based adolescents, although for them it was more so when it happens among friends. This mutually supportive orientation was not limited to one's friends or immediate family. *"Makikipagtulungan sa mga pinsan; pagkakaisa* [cooperating or seeking the help of cousins; unity]*"* was what one male participant from the younger adolescent group in the rural area said.

In general, friendship, forming a positive identity (being *masunurin* [obedient], *mabait* [good], *mapagkumbaba* [humble], and *may tiwala sa sarili* [having faith in oneself]), and the self were the values that were often cited. In addition, the low socio-economic status youth in rural areas particularly valued education, money, and good family relationships.

The values of the youth who participated in thefocus group discussions were not just abstract principles lived by, but very concrete expressions of what they held important. Invariably, these were anchored on valued relationships. *Tulungan at pagsikap* [helping each other and striving], for instance, were expressed as important for the well-being of the family, of relatives, of the *kabarkada* [peer group], and *kaibigan* [friends].

The youth also valued overall well-being. This was intertwined with good nutrition as well as with environment, so much so that for the youth in Pampanga, just being in an environment that is pure, safe, and natural could suffice in alleviating distress brought on by their problems in life. As several participants said, *Pumupunta sa ibang lugar. Dito po sa CERAMIC. Nilalasap mo yung hangin. Kapag may problema, diyan lang po. Kasama mo yung boyfriend mo. Tumitingin ng mga puno. Ako po pag may problema ako diyan lang ako pumupunta... Kapag uwi namin po magsasaing na lang kami. Di na namin naiisip."*[We go to 'Ceramic' where we can breathe in fresh air. Just being there with a special friend looking at the trees around us is enough. Afterwards, when we go back home, we will just cook rice, and our problems do not bother us any longer].

Finishing one's studies was also expressed as a value by our respondents, across all FGD groups, rural and urban, young and old, and male and female. Aside from well relationships and well selves, support was valued by our young adolescent FGD participants. This support could be financial: *"Pagbibigay ng materyal, financial. Kung sinuman ang dadating, magpapadala ng dollar, food, damit, celphone, at pambili ng load"* [Giving us material and financial help... whenever someone comes from abroad, dollars, clothes, clephones, and money for celphone credits are sent to us], or emotional: *"Pinapahalagahan ko yung mga kaibigan ko. Sa kanila ako*

humihingi ng tulong... Sandalan sa problema [I value my friends, from whom I ask for help... I depend on them when I have problems]" said a 17-year-old adolescent from Apalit. Actually, this statement was typically shared by our FGD participants. An older female FGD participant in Apalit said: *"Humihingi ng tulong sa kaibigan. Humihingi ng advice kung anong pwede niyang gawin. Marami na kasi akong kaibigang nabuntis. Tinatanong niya kami kung anong pwde niyang gawin* [We seek help from our friends, asking for advice on what to do. I have many friends who have gotten pregnant, who ask us what to do]." A third kind of support sought by the youth in our study was spiritual: *Humuhingi ng gabay sa Diyos, pagpupunta sa simbahan* [We ask for guidance from the Lord; we go to the church].

In this research, the meanings that Filipino youth make of their problems and their points of view on how they cope with these problems were described. In summary, Filipino youth worried most about their families' lack of resources (sometimes even for very basic needs), and about conflict within themselves or with others. The youth recognized that some of their coping strategies were positive (e.g., seeking help, actively resolving the problem, and even just talking about the problem). They also noted how other strategies they use to cope with their problems such as engaging in negative and escapist behaviors, excessive drinking, taking drugs, acting out, or simply ignoring the problem, are not desirable.

Findings show that the youth worry most about their families' lack of resources (sometimes even for very basic needs), and about conflict within themselves or with others. The youth recognize that some of their coping strategies are positive (e.g., seeking help, actively resolving the problem, and even just talking about the problem). They also note how other strategies they use to cope with their problems such as engaging in negative and escapist behaviors, excessive drinking, taking drugs, acting out, or simply ignoring the problem, were not desirable.

The main goal of the study was to capture the point of view of the youth who participated in the focus group discussions, and not to generalize about the problems and coping styles of Filipino youth. There was no attempt to generate a comprehensive list of the youth's problems and their coping strategies, or to compare and contrast problems and coping according to gender, age, or youth's environment (rural or urban).

DISCUSSION

The youth survey reports published between 2000 and 2004 conducted by various national government agencies such as DSWD and NSO, non-

government organizations such as HAIN, and research institutions such as SWS, McCann Erickson, and UPPI presented and discussed some of the trends in the youth's views and perceptions about themselves and their world, some of which were expressed once again by the youth with whom we conducted our focus group discussions. The youth also worried about increasing drug-dependency of people in their neighborhood, and about becoming victims of random harassment (being picked on by idle persons or groups hanging out in the neighborhood's streets). Among their immediate concerns were looking for work, how to help their parents, and what to do the next day. For their future, their hope was that they would not get sick, and that they could go back to school.

There have been various intervention strategies recommended to help adolescents cope with either their problems or simply life situations. Some of these strategies were more problem-oriented, looking into the prevention of problems and psychopathology. On the other hand, a number of suggestions focused on positive psychology, in particular positive youth development.

Larson (2000) emphasized the importance of initiative in positive youth development. He claimed that initiative was best developed in structured voluntary activities (e.g., sports, arts, and participation in organizations) by which individuals experienced both intrinsic motivation and deep attention. Among Filipino youth, they thrived when the activities they engage in are not imposed on them (voluntary), e.g., joining a band, jamming with peers, and playing basketball. Needless to say, these activities called for some structure as well as responded to adolescents' need to belong, work with, and gel with their peers. Similarly, leaders and coaches needed to ensure that they allow "participants' actions to be self-directed, voluntary, and intrinsically motivated yet also structured and challenging enough" (p.179). Furthermore, Larson envisioned a society in which the youth in general, regardless of contexts (gender, age, socio-economic status), could explore various activities that will allow them to have enough structure and flexibility.

Help-seeking was also a positive aspect of youth's coping. In the study of Timlin-Scalera, Ponterotto, Blumberg and Jackson (2003), help-seeking behaviors of white male adolescents were influenced by several factors such as family openness towards asking for help and types of problems experienced. Of those who sought help, they would go to a friend for everyday social concerns they had in common. On the other hand, they would seek their parents' advice, their mothers in particular, for academic problems, and older male role models for more complex social issues. These trends were likewise noted in the FGD's conducted.

Given that there were so many shared experiences among the youth, it may be worthwhile to consider developing peer counselors not only in the school setting but in the community as well. This approach was usually seen in rehabilitation centers (for drug abusers, and in diversion programs for children in conflict with the law) where graduates of programs were actually tapped as counselors or *"kuya"* [older brother] of the younger youth. While some posited the importance of having social skills training offered by schools or other professional organizations (Hess & Copeland, 2001), this research on Filipino youth emphasized the role of peers in helping and supporting others like them who are experiencing problems.

Seeking help was not only limited to seeking friends' and parental advice, and the support of face-to-face peer groups. Results of the focus group discussions conducted by the research team, particularly with the urban youth, highlighted also the role of the internet and the World Wide Web as source of help. As one respondent stated, "the internet is a source of support that they turn to; it goes beyond simple emailing and keeping in touch." Studies showed that online support groups are becoming a prevalent trend as the general public becomes more accustomed and comfortable with the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) technology (Dorman & White, 2001). A number of internet users utilized the world wide web to seek out mental health care to understand and treat emotional and psychological problems that they, or someone they love, experience (King & Moreggi, 1998). Among the many available resources for help-seeking individuals were self-help forums, social networks, and blogs. With these resources, one could either actively participate or simply lurk in these forums in order to find the help needed. In fact, previous research about blogging showed that many blog authors find writing about their experiences cathartic. In a 2008 study by Baker and Moore, blogging was seen as a means to cope with stressful situations they encounter, particularly those about which they feel inadequately linked with social support systems. Through blogs, they were able to engage in an online community where this need is supported.

These online support groups posed numerous benefits, as well as disadvantages, to the users. Among the benefits was the availability of support when needed, especially since many online fora are available 24/7 (24 hours a day, seven days a week). Dorman and White (2001) also pointed out that geographic and transportation barriers become a non-issue for the help-seeker. This allowed a wider audience to seek help, despite living far from help centers or resources for help. An additional benefit seen in online support systems was that typically stigmatizing diseases, disorders and experiences are de-stigmatized. Although online groups have became a valuable resource

for health education and support, the effectiveness and efficiency of these programs have not yet been explored. On the other hand, Whitlock, Powers, and Eckenrode (2006), in a study on the internet and adolescent self-injury, pointed out that while these online communities do provide social support for adolescents, particularly to those who are feeling isolated and perhaps even ostracized, these sites may also encourage or normalize self-injurious behaviors.

As more and more activities of daily life became either available or exclusive to internet access, the need for availability of access was emphasized. In the Philippines, an organization known as Gearing Up Internet Literacy Access for Students (GILAS), pointed out that information literacy is a need for survival in today's society as this has implications to academic performance, operating efficiency and business, competitiveness and quality of human lives. In Gawad Kalinga communities, out-of-school youth now have a new *tambayan*, or hang-out: cyberspace. The e-tambayan was a project spearheaded by The Last Mile Initiative program of the EMERGE, a project supported by the United States Agency for International Development or USAID. In partnership with Gawad Kalinga, the e-tambayans aimed to provide an "on-line resource and guidance portal to facilitate self-directed learning and community development through the use of information and communications technology." With the technology, the youth could improve their daily lives as they are equipped with the necessary life skills, practical knowledge, and attitudes. Examples of resources available in the Philippines include crisis intervention hotlines, such as the Suicide Prevention Hotline Crisis Line of the In Touch Community Services and websites such as http://www.in-touch.org/ and http://ofwparasapamilya.com.

The role of technology, whether in the utilization of the World Wide Web or its more simple counterpart, the cellular phone, in reaching out to the youth appeared to be widely acceptable to many of the Filipino youth, as seen in this research. Not only did it provide a support system for them, but they themselves sought it and viewed it as a source of help that they can rely on.

The family, both as a context and as a source of help, must also be considered. Gastardo-Conaco, Jimenez, and Billedo (2003) noted that the family is seen as a major influence in the socialization of the adolescent. Psychological bonding between family members provided the adolescent with a sense of security. In the absence of a strong family affiliation, adolescents turned to formal groups for identity development and feelings of belongingness. In this study, aside from approaching members of their

families, adolescents said that they seek help from friends, turn to organizations such as their bands, and find refuge in their environment and even in media. This ability to find help from others demonstrated their resilience, identified in this study, as one of the resources of the youth.

Our results were consistent with that of Gastardo-Conaco, et al. (2003) which showed that adolescents, despite difficulties experienced, tap into their inner strength and strive to achieve their goals, dreams, and aspirations. Their desire to help their families and to obtain a decent job were their primary motivations (Gastardo-Conaco et al., 2003). Other factors included self-actualization needs, influence of significant others, and pro-active involvement in the community.

In the present study, not only were the youth motivated but they also remained hopeful in the face of problems, thinking that things will change and that they can overcome their difficulties. The same findings were ascertained by Grote, Bledsoe, Larkin, Edward, and Charlotte (2007). Their study found that being optimistic in the face of stressful situations buffer the development of depression. The researchers noted how optimists, when exposed to stressors, utilize constructive coping, while pessimists tend to cope through maladaptive strategies. Similarly, the perception of being in control of their situation also served as a buffering agent to mental distress. The same principle may explain why the Filipino youth managed to cope with their problems in the absence of adult intervention. To quote a male respondent from Manila, "I feel that there's a certain amount of idealism in all of us at this age which fuels motivation *na parang* there's hope that things will change and we can get through this."

In sum, the present study highlighted the inner strength of Filipino youth in addressing their problems and worries. *Tiwala sa sarili* (faith in onself) and *lakas ng loob* (guts and being daring) were the most important constructs that came out in the experiences of the Filipino youth. Whereas there were many concerns that beset them from familial to peer and personal concerns, they seemed to have the ability to overcome them on their own. Many of them preferred to seek the help of their peers before they go to their parents and other family members. With a social constructivist perspective, this study emphasized the importance of looking at the themes and constructs from the point of view of the Filipino youth as they experienced them given their own familial and environmental context. This study looked into the problems and coping strategies of a sample of adolescent respondents; a large scale study on adolescents may be conducted to further understand Filipino youth's current concerns and coping. Researchers may also look into other aspects of mental health such as youth's self-care and their

activities, and how these help enhance their well-being and mental health. Likewise, future youth research may further examine the efficiency of tapping one's internal resources (e.g., dispositional characteristics of *lakas ng loob* [guts or daring] and *tiwala sa sarili* [faith in oneself and efficacy], and external resources (e.g., social environment and community resources) in addressing their concerns and resolving their problems. Filipino youth's specific coping behaviors given particular predicaments may generate deeper insight into their concerns and ways of coping.

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