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SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND STRESS RESILIENCE AMONG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study investigates the correlation between social integration and stress resilience among junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela. Employing a descriptive-correlational research design, the study analyzed data from 300 students using validated measurement tools. The findings reveal that social integration is widespread among the participants, with most students demonstrating a Developing level of stress resilience. The observed positive correlations between indicators of social integration—such as peer relationships, school engagement, inclusivity, and support systems—and stress resilience underscore the critical role that social factors play in fostering resilience. These results have several implications. First, they suggest the need for tailored interventions and curriculum enhancements to strengthen student support systems and improve stress resilience. By addressing areas where social integration can be improved, educators and policymakers can develop more effective strategies to bolster student well-being. The research emphasizes the importance of nurturing supportive and inclusive school environments, which are crucial for enhancing adolescents' coping mechanisms and overall resilience. The study also contributes to the broader understanding of adolescent development by highlighting the interconnectedness of social integration and stress resilience. It provides actionable insights for creating environments that support students' mental health and development. This research offers valuable implications for practitioners and policymakers, underscoring the importance of fostering engaging and supportive school settings to promote the well-being and future success of adolescents in San Agustin, Isabela.

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INTRODUCTION

In the intricate tapestry of adolescence, the transition from childhood to adulthood is marked by a myriad of challenges and opportunities. The junior high school phase, situated at the crossroads of these formative years, becomes a crucial battleground where young minds grapple with academic pressures, identity formation, and social dynamics. This study delves into the nexus between social integration and stress resilience within the unique context of San Agustin, Isabela. The importance of social integration extends beyond immediate emotional well-being, influencing academic performance, self-esteem, and identity formation. When teenagers feel connected and integrated within their social circles, it creates a ripple effect that resonates across different dimensions of their lives, forming a foundation for overall growth and resilience. This interconnectedness is particularly crucial during the junior high school years when students are navigating significant developmental changes.

Research highlights both the positive and negative aspects of social integration. On the positive side, studies underscore the importance of supportive friendships in buffering against the inevitable stressors of adolescence. Rokeach and Wiener (2020) found that the dynamics of supportive friendships are critical in mitigating stress, suggesting that it's not just about having a social circle, but the quality of support embedded within those connections. Conversely, negative outcomes have been observed when social integration is lacking. Wheele et al. (2023) discussed how the absence of a sense of belonging and connection can lead to detrimental effects on mental health, identity development, and academic performance. This underscores the significance of fostering a sense of belonging and connection among students to enhance their resilience and overall well-being.

This study focused on junior high school students enrolled in both public and private schools in San Agustin, Isabela, during the School Year 2023-2024. Understanding the social integration patterns and stress resilience levels of these students is essential for tailoring interventions and support systems to their specific needs. The socio-cultural landscape of San Agustin adds layers of nuance that may influence the dynamics of social bonds differently. Local customs, traditions, and community dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the social experiences of these students. Despite the wealth of research on social integration and stress resilience, a notable gap exists in the literature concerning the specific dynamics at play among junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing insights into the social fabric of junior high school students in the region and its implications for stress resilience.

The study also integrated data on social integration and stress resilience for male and female junior high school students. Sex differences in social experiences and stress responses are critical to understanding how social integration impacts resilience. This nuanced approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the varying needs and experiences of male and female students, thereby informing more targeted and effective interventions. The concepts explored in this study align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). By enhancing our understanding of social integration and stress resilience, the study contributes to promoting mental health and well-being among adolescents and improving the quality of education through tailored support systems.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to explore the relationship between social integration and stress resilience among junior high school students in Cordon, Isabela. Utilizing Taro Yamane's Sample Size Calculator, the researchers determined a sample size of 300 students from a population of 1,194, ensuring a margin of error of 0.05. To assess the level of social integration experienced by the students, five distinct instruments were employed. The Peer Relationship Scale by Fu et al. (2021) evaluated peer interactions, while the Student Engagement in Schools Questionnaire by Hart, Stewart, and Jimerson (2011) measured classroom engagement. Extracurricular involvement was assessed using the Extracurricular Activities Questionnaire by Bakoban and Aljarallah (2015), and inclusion and diversity were examined through the Survey on Inclusive Education by Agani-Destani et al. (2015). Additionally, the Social Support Survey Instrument by RAND Corporation (n.d.) evaluated the support systems available to students. Modifications were made to these instruments to ensure they were contextually appropriate for the respondents. The social integration survey used a rating scale ranging from "Very High" to "Very Low" to gauge the frequency and quality of social support.

To measure stress resilience, the study employed the abbreviated version of the Nicholson McBride Resilience Questionnaire (NMRQ), which assessed the resilience of respondents on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The scoring scheme for the NMRQ ranged from 0-37 (Developing level) to 49-60 (Exceptional level). The researcher calculated the mean and standard deviation for each dimension of social integration (peer relationships, classroom engagement, extracurricular involvement, inclusion and diversity, and support system) to understand the central tendency and variability among the respondents. Similarly, the perceived levels of stress resilience were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The relationship between perceived social integration and stress resilience was examined using the Pearson correlation coefficient, which measured the strength and direction of the association between these two variables. This comprehensive approach allowed the study to provide valuable insights into the social integration and stress resilience of junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings, presented in Table 1, indicate that junior high school students in San Agustin, Isabela, generally experience high levels of social integration across various indicators: peer relationships, classroom engagement, extracurricular involvement, inclusion and diversity, and support systems. Students reported strong peer interactions, with high scores for popularity (Mean = 2.86), adeptness at making friends (Mean = 3.08), overall satisfaction with peer interactions (Mean = 3.02), and peer assistance (Mean = 3.12). However, peer support during illness was notably lower (Mean = 2.39), highlighting a potential area for improvement. Classroom engagement received very high assessments, with students showing strong interest in learning (Mean = 3.56), liking their school (Mean = 3.55), striving academically (Mean = 3.59), participating actively in school activities (Mean = 3.17), and using active learning strategies (Mean = 3.45). Extracurricular involvement was also highly rated, with activities deemed suitable (Mean = 3.04), serving needs (Mean = 3.04), various (Mean = 2.96), useful (Mean = 3.43), and fostering a desire for repeated participation (Mean = 3.42). In terms of inclusion and diversity, students felt a

strong sense of belonging (Mean = 3.11) and found both peers (Mean = 3.15) and teachers (Mean = 3.35) approachable, input is valued (Mean 3.20), and peer assistance during challenges scored slightly lower (Mean = 2.99). The support system was positively evaluated, with high scores for having someone to rely on for listening (Mean = 3.23), providing information (Mean = 3.25), offering crisis advice (Mean = 3.14), confiding in about personal problems (Mean = 3.06), and wanting advice (Mean = 3. 04). Overall, the findings suggest a supportive and integrated school environment, although peer support in specific contexts could be enhanced. These results align with Mendoza and King's (2020) research, demonstrating that school engagement positively influences peer relationships and academic success.

Table 1. Assessed Level of Social Integration Experienced by the Respondents

Indicators	Mean	Qualitative Description
Peer Relationships		
I am popular with my peers.	2.86	High
I am good at making peer friends.	3.08	High
On the whole, I am satisfied with my interactions with my peers.	3.02	High
I have some peers to help me if I need help.	3.12	High
I have some peers to care for or visit me if I am sick.	2.39	Low
Classroom Engagement		
I am very interested in learning.	3.56	Very High
I like my school.	3.55	Very High
I try hard to do well in school	3.59	Very High
I am an active participant in school activities.	3.17	High
When I study, I try to understand the material better by relating it to things I already know.	3.45	Very High
Extracurricular Involvement		
Activities available at the school are suitable for my tendencies.	3.04	High
Activities available at the school serve my needs.	3.04	High
Activities available at the school are various.	2.96	High
Activities are useful.	3.43	Very High
I like to participate in the same activity more than one time to improve myself.	3.42	Very High
Inclusion and Diversity		
Do you feel a sense of belonging in the school environment?	3.11	High
Are your fellow students generally approachable and friendly toward you?	3.15	High
Do you perceive the teachers as approachable and friendly?	3.35	Very High
Do you believe your input is valued when class rules are discussed?	3.20	High
When you encounter challenges, do you receive assistance from your peers?	2.99	High
Support System		
Someone you can count on to listen to you when you	3.23	High

need to talk		
Someone to give you information to help you understand a situation	3.25	High
Someone to give you good advice about a crisis	3.14	High
Someone to confide in or talk to about yourself or your problems	3.06	High
Someone whose advice you want	3.04	High

Table 2 illustrates the assessed levels of stress resilience among the respondents, categorized into Developing, Established, and Strong levels. The majority of respondents (182, 60.70%) reported being at the Developing level, indicating that a significant portion of the sample is in the process of enhancing their ability to cope with stressors. This suggests a need for interventions to improve coping mechanisms and resilience skills, such as mindfulness, problem-solving, and seeking social support. A substantial portion of respondents (92, 30.70%) indicated an Established level of stress resilience, demonstrating a solid foundation for managing stress and adversity. These individuals show resilience and determination, even on tough days, highlighting the importance of perseverance and support systems. A smaller percentage of respondents (26, 8.70%) reported a Strong level of stress resilience, exhibiting a high capacity for recovery and psychological well-being. These individuals are adept at turning setbacks into opportunities, showcasing high adaptability and proactive approaches to challenges. The findings highlight the diverse levels of stress resilience among students and suggest that while many are on the path to resilience, targeted strategies to promote resilience-building activities, foster supportive relationships, and provide resources for coping skills development are essential. These results align with Feltz-Cornelis et al. (2020), who found a high level of resilience among students during the COVID-19 lockdown, underscoring the importance of resilience in navigating challenging times.

Table 2. Assessed Level of Stress Resilience of the Respondents

Level of Resilience	Frequency	Percent
Developing	182	60.70
Established	92	30.70
Strong	26	8.70

Table 3 presents the relationship between respondents' assessed levels of stress resilience and their social integration, measured across various indicators of peer relationships, classroom engagement, extracurricular involvement, inclusion and diversity, and support systems. All correlations are statistically significant, with correlation coefficients (r-values) ranging from 0.19 to 0.52, and significance levels (p-values) of 0.00, indicating a robust relationship between stress resilience and each aspect of social integration. In the domain of peer relationships, the highest correlation is with the statement "I am good at making peer friends" ($r = 0.36$, $p = 0.00$), suggesting that students who perceive themselves as better at making friends tend to have higher stress resilience. Other significant correlations include being popular with peers ($r = 0.31$, $p = 0.00$), satisfaction with peer interactions ($r = 0.35$, $p = 0.00$), having peers to help in times of need ($r = 0.33$, $p = 0.00$), and having peers to care for or visit in sickness ($r = 0.27$, $p = 0.00$). This implies that fostering supportive peer environments can enhance students' stress resilience. Regarding classroom engagement, the strongest correlation was with "I like my school" ($r = 0.42$, $p = 0.00$), indicating that a positive attitude towards school is linked to higher stress resilience. Other significant indicators include interest in learning ($r = 0.34$, $p = 0.00$), striving to do well

academically ($r = 0.19, p = 0.00$), active participation in school activities ($r = 0.38, p = 0.00$), and trying to understand the material better ($r = 0.36, p = 0.00$). These findings suggest that promoting a positive school environment and active engagement in learning can significantly enhance students' ability to cope with stress. In extracurricular involvement, the strongest correlations are with activities that serve students' needs ($r = 0.47, p = 0.00$) and activities suitable for student tendencies ($r = 0.41, p = 0.00$). Other positive relationships include the availability of varied activities ($r = 0.35, p = 0.00$), the usefulness of activities ($r = 0.30, p = 0.00$), and repeated participation in the same activity ($r = 0.31, p = 0.00$). These findings imply that providing diverse and suitable extracurricular activities can support students' stress resilience.

Indicators of inclusion and diversity also show strong positive correlations with stress resilience. Significant relationships include the sense of belonging in the school environment ($r = 0.43, p = 0.00$), approachable and friendly teachers ($r = 0.46, p = 0.00$) and fellow students ($r = 0.40, p = 0.00$), and feeling that student input is valued ($r = 0.47, p = 0.00$). The highest correlation in this category is with receiving assistance from peers when encountering challenges ($r = 0.52, p = 0.00$), highlighting the importance of peer support in fostering stress resilience. For the support system, significant positive correlations are observed for all indicators. The strongest correlation is with receiving good advice during a crisis ($r = 0.44, p = 0.00$), suggesting that having reliable sources of advice is crucial for stress resilience.

Other substantial correlations include having someone to count on to listen ($r = 0.37, p = 0.00$), someone to provide information ($r = 0.39, p = 0.00$), having someone to confide in ($r = 0.43, p = 0.00$), and valuing someone's advice ($r = 0.39, p = 0.00$). These findings underscore the importance of robust support systems in bolstering students' ability to manage stress effectively. Overall, these results emphasize the critical role of social integration in enhancing students' stress resilience. Schools should focus on fostering a supportive and inclusive environment where students feel connected to their peers, teachers, and the broader school community. Providing diverse and engaging extracurricular activities can further bolster students' stress resilience. These findings corroborate Wilson, Weiss, and Shook (2020), which showed that perceived social support improves psychological well-being, leading to lower levels of negative outcomes like depression and perceived stress

Table 3. Relationship Between the Respondent’s Assessed Levels of Stress Resilience and Social Integration

Indicators	Stress Resilience	
	<i>r-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Peer Relationship		
I am popular with my peers.	0.31*	0.00
I am good at making peer friends.	0.36*	0.00
On the whole, I am satisfied with my interactions with my peers.	0.35*	0.00
I have some peers to help me if I need help.	0.33*	0.00
I have some peers to care for or visit me if I am sick.	0.27*	0.00
Classroom Engagement		
I am very interested in learning.	0.34*	0.00
I like my school.	0.42*	0.00
I try hard to do well in school	0.19*	0.00

I am an active participant in school activities.	0.38*	0.00
When I study, I try to understand the material better by relating it to things I already know.	0.36*	0.00
Extra-Curricular Involvement		
Activities available at the school are suitable for my tendencies.	0.41*	0.00
Activities available at the school serve my needs.	0.47*	0.00
Activities available at the school are various.	0.35*	0.00
Activities are useful.	0.30*	0.00
I like to participate in the same activity more than one time to improve myself.	0.31*	0.00
Inclusion and Diversity		
Do you feel a sense of belonging in the school environment?	0.43*	0.00
Are your fellow students generally approachable and friendly toward you?	0.40*	0.00
Do you perceive the teachers as approachable and friendly?	0.46*	0.00
Do you believe your input is valued when class rules are discussed?	0.47*	0.00
When you encounter challenges, do you receive assistance from your peers?	0.52*	0.00
Support System		
Someone you can count on to listen to you when you need to talk	0.37*	0.00
Someone to give you information to help you understand a situation	0.39*	0.00
Someone to give you good advice about a crisis	0.44*	0.00
Someone to confide in or talk to about yourself or your problems	0.43*	0.00
Someone whose advice you want	0.39*	0.00

*Correlation is significant

CONCLUSION

The implications of this study are both extensive and significant. First, the pervasive use of social networking sites for diverse purposes, including social interaction and academic engagement, underscores their integral role in contemporary society. Acknowledging these platforms as essential tools for communication, information dissemination, and collaborative learning can guide the development of educational strategies and professional practices that are well-aligned with the demands of the digital age. Such recognition is crucial for adapting educational frameworks to leverage the benefits of digital technologies effectively.

The observation of moderate levels of self-esteem among respondents—characterized by both confidence and insecurity—highlights the complex nature of self-perception among students. This variability underscores the importance of comprehensively understanding students' self-concept to inform the design of interventions aimed at enhancing self-esteem and mental well-being within educational contexts. Tailored interventions that

address the multifaceted aspects of self-perception can significantly impact students' overall mental health and personal development.

The study's identification of significant correlations between social networking behaviors and different dimensions of self-esteem reveals the intricate relationship between online activities and individual self-perception. Recognizing these correlations is essential for educators and mental health professionals to promote healthy online behaviors and foster a supportive digital environment conducive to positive self-esteem development. Overall, this study advocates for a holistic approach that integrates digital literacy, psychological support, and social-emotional learning. Such an integrated approach is crucial for equipping individuals to navigate the complexities of the digital era while fostering their well-being and personal growth.

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