

**Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies Among the Manual Laborers of Nueva Vizcaya**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explored the occupational stress and coping strategies among manual laborers employed by the Provincial Government of Nueva Vizcaya. Given the physically demanding nature of their work and the often precarious job conditions, the research aims to determine their frequency of stress, identify the coping mechanisms they employ, and assess whether these experiences vary based on demographic and work-related factors. Using a quantitative, descriptive-comparative research design, data were collected from 203 randomly selected manual laborers through standardized instruments: the Occupational Stress Scale and the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale. Results revealed that the respondents generally experienced a moderate frequency of stress, with the highest stressors related to excessive workload, unclear job roles, and limited promotion opportunities. Significant differences in stress levels were found based on sex, educational attainment, employment status, and years of service. However, age and socioeconomic status showed no significant effect. In terms of coping, the most frequently used strategies were religiosity, problem-solving, and relaxation or recreation—indicating a preference for adaptive and culturally relevant coping mechanisms. This study underscores the importance of work conditions in stress management and provides practical recommendations for employers, policymakers, and psychologists to support the mental well-being of manual laborers. It also contributes to occupational psychology by emphasizing the role of coping strategies in sustaining psychological resilience in labor-intensive professions.

*Keywords:* coping strategies, employment status, job stress, manual laborers, occupational stress

**INTRODUCTION**

Occupational stress is a pervasive issue that affects employees across various sectors, but manual laborers are particularly at risk due to the physically demanding and repetitive nature of their tasks. These workers often engage in strenuous activities such as lifting heavy loads, prolonged standing or bending, and exposure to harsh environmental conditions. Such physical demands can result in fatigue, injury, and long-term health complications. Compounding this is the limited job security and often meager compensation these workers receive, which further heightens their vulnerability to stress-related problems (Villanueva et al., 2020).

Research by Silva (2020) highlights that job demands and physical exertion are significant contributors to stress, while a recent study by Estrella et al. (2023) at Rizal Technological University investigated how coping strategies influenced the relationship between occupational stress and job satisfaction among graveyard shift security guards. While the study observed a low positive correlation between coping strategies and job satisfaction, it concluded that coping strategies did not significantly moderate the impact of occupational stress, suggesting a limited buffering effect in high-stress shift environments. These findings underscore the importance of adopting positive coping mechanisms to mitigate the adverse effects of occupational stress. Furthermore, the study by Reyes et al. (2024) provides insight into how laborers in similar physically demanding roles adapt to stress, which can be relevant for manual laborers at the provincial government.

The findings from these studies underscore the need to explore both the sources of stress and the effectiveness of coping strategies in the context of this study. By examining these aspects, this study aims to propose practical recommendations to enhance job satisfaction and

performance, ultimately benefiting both the workers and the organizational efficiency at the Provincial Government of Nueva Vizcaya.

The investigation into occupational stress and coping strategies of manual laborers at the Provincial Government of Nueva Vizcaya is crucial for improving both the well-being of the employees and the overall efficiency of the local government. Manual laborers in this setting face unique challenges due to the physical demands of their jobs, which include tasks that are often labor-intensive and require sustained physical effort. This can lead to high levels of stress, which may manifest as physical fatigue, mental exhaustion, and reduced job satisfaction. Understanding the specific stressors encountered by these workers, such as prolonged physical exertion, repetitive tasks, and limited control over work conditions, is essential for addressing their needs effectively. Silva's (2020) study on stress and job satisfaction among blue-collar workers provides valuable insights into how job characteristics contribute to stress. Silva emphasizes that the physical demands and job conditions are significant stressors, leading to decreased job satisfaction and higher levels of burnout. This framework is useful for identifying similar stressors faced by the manual laborers at the Provincial Government and understanding how these factors influence their overall work experience.

Hence, in addition to identifying stressors, it is important to explore the coping strategies employed by these workers. Coping strategies are mechanisms that individuals use to manage the negative effects of stress and can significantly influence their ability to maintain job performance and satisfaction. Reyes et al. (2024) further contribute to this understanding by examining coping strategies among farm laborers, revealing that these workers employ methods such as engaging in leisure activities and seeking support from peers to manage stress related to farm mechanization. These findings suggest that similar strategies might be beneficial for manual laborers at the provincial government, providing a basis for developing tailored interventions to improve their coping abilities.

The Provincial Government of Nueva Vizcaya, as a local government institution, plays a significant role in the community, and the well-being of its manual laborers directly impacts its operational effectiveness. High levels of stress among these workers can lead to increased absenteeism, reduced productivity, and lower overall morale. Therefore, addressing occupational stress through targeted interventions is not only beneficial for the workers but also for the organization as a whole. By identifying the sources of stress and evaluating the effectiveness of current coping strategies, this study aims to propose practical recommendations that can enhance the work environment and support systems for manual laborers. The goal is to create a healthier, more supportive work environment that enables employees to manage stress effectively and maintain high levels of job satisfaction and performance. This approach will not only improve individual well-being but also contribute to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Provincial Government's operations, benefiting both the employees and the community they serve.

This research is also vital for enhancing both employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. The physically demanding nature of manual labor, coupled with challenging work conditions, can lead to significant stress that impacts job satisfaction and productivity. By identifying specific stressors, such as physical strain and job insecurity, and examining how laborers cope with these challenges, the study aims to develop targeted interventions that can improve their work experience.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study used a descriptive-comparative type of quantitative research design to investigate the occupational stress levels and coping strategies of manual laborers. Descriptive-comparative design is valuable for comparing two or more variables through

collecting and assessing numerical data. This study is descriptive since it aims to describe the level of stress and coping strategies of the manual laborers. Also, it is comparative since it aims to understand if there is a relationship between the profile variables of the participants' stress levels and coping strategies.

The study was conducted at the Provincial Capitol Compound, Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya. The study's target participants are the manual laborers of the provincial government. The researchers used a probability sampling, particularly simple random sampling, to select 207 manual laborers as respondents. This ensures that each individual had an equal chance of being selected to participate, which minimized selection bias. This population of 203 was suitable for the researcher in achieving a representative of the larger population of the manual laborers. With this number, the study can provide insights representative of the entire population, making the study's findings more generalizable. Additionally, the population of the manual laborers is accessible and well-defined, which makes simple random sampling both effective and feasible.

The study employed a survey questionnaire containing the Occupational Stress Scale (House et al., 1979, as cited by Fields, 2002) and the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale (Rilveria, 2018), as the primary method for data collection. It was given to the respondents in person. It includes sections for profiling, along with chosen tools designed to measure the stress levels and coping strategies of the manual laborers.

The respondents for the survey questionnaires were recruited through different ways: the researchers asked the authorized personnel where they could find their respondents, received instructions on how to get in touch with the respondents, or followed the authorized personnel to the respondents' location. Additionally, the researchers identified the respondents through local event/s connected to manual laborers that were ongoing at the time of data collection. The researchers arranged a time for the respondents to complete the questionnaire when they were free and available to do the said questionnaire in circumstances like their day-off, during breaks, shift changes, or after work hours.

To contact the participants, the researchers visited the Provincial Capitol Compound in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, either with or without the help of the office's authorized personnel. After obtaining the necessary responses, the researcher proceeded with the analysis and encoding of the data. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to analyze and interpret the data that was gathered. Descriptive statistics was utilized to analyze and summarize respondents' characteristics quantitatively, including profile variables of the participants as well as to reveal the participants' extent of stress and their coping strategies at work. This provided an overview of the frequency, mean, standard deviation, and range of the occupational stress and coping strategies scores among the manual laborers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Section 1. Extent of Occupational Stress Among Manual Laborers

**Table 1**

*Extent of Occupational Stress among Manual Laborers*

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
1.	How often do you feel that you have too little authority to carry out your responsibilities?	2.53	.80	Sometimes
0.	How often do you feel unclear about just what the scope and responsibilities of your job are?	2.55	.86	Sometimes
0.	How often do you not know what opportunities for advancement or promotion exist for you?	2.62	.82	Sometimes

0.	How often do you feel that you have too heavy a workload, one that you could not possibly finish during an ordinary workday?	2.78	.88	Sometimes
0.	How often do you think that you will not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of various people around you?	2.60	.82	Sometimes
0.	How often do you feel that you are not fully qualified to handle your job?	2.42	.88	Seldom
0.	How often do you not know what your superior thinks of you, how he or she evaluates your performance?	2.54	.90	Sometimes
0.	How often do you find yourself unable to get information needed to carry out your job?	2.40	.96	Seldom
0.	How often do you worry about decisions that affect the lives of people you know?	2.61	.96	Sometimes
0.	How often do you feel that you may not be liked and accepted by people at work?	2.45	.89	Seldom
0.	How often do you feel unable to influence your immediate supervisor's decisions and actions that affect you?	2.34	.88	Seldom
0.	How often do you not know just what the people you work with expect of you?	2.45	.93	Seldom
0.	How often do you think that the amount of work you have to do may interfere with how well it is done?	2.45	1.1 1	Seldom
0.	How often do you feel that you have to do things on the job that are against your better judgment?	2.35	1.0 5	Seldom
0.	How often do you feel that your job interferes with your family life?	2.46	1.2 4	Seldom
Total/Overall		2.50	.59	Sometimes

*Mean Ranges: 1.00 – 1.49: Never; 1.50 – 2.49: Seldom; 2.50 – 3.49: Sometimes; 3.50 – 4.49: Frequently; 4.50 – 5.00: Nearly all the time*

Among the indicators, the highest extent of occupational stress is linked with having a workload that could not possibly finish during an ordinary workday (mean = 2.78, SD = 0.88), which is rated as “sometimes.” Similarly, uncertainty about opportunities or promotions (mean = 2.62, SD = 0.82) and decisions affecting others' life (mean = 2.61, SD = .96), also the challenge of not being able to satisfy the conflicting demands of various people around them (mean = 2.60, SD = 0.82) are notable. In contrast, the lowest extent of occupational stress is linked to inability to influence the supervisor's decisions (mean = 2.34, SD = .88), and having to do things that go against the individual's better judgement (mean = 2.35, SD = 1.05), both of which are rated as occurring “seldom.” Additionally, feeling unqualified to handle the job (mean = 2.42, SD = 0.88) and unable to get information needed to carry the job (mean = 2.40, SD = .96) are also less frequent concerns. This suggests that most workers believe that they are capable of doing their jobs, despite the fact that they face occasional challenges.

These findings are consistent with role overload and job insecurity theories, which indicate that high job demands and lack of career advancement can significantly contribute to stress in the workplace (Bakker & de Vries, 2021; Giorgi et al., 2020). Studies have shown that workload demands beyond one's control can result in chronic stress, affecting both physical and mental health. Moreover, Lee and Lee (2020) found that role ambiguity and role conflict are moderately associated with decreased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance, indicating that unclear or conflicting job expectations can negatively affect employee well-being and effectiveness.

Although numerous studies support the notion that high job demands, role overload, and job insecurity contribute to workplace stress, other research offers a more nuanced perspective. For instance, Bakker and van Woerkom (2020) emphasized that challenge stressors, such as time pressure or high workload, can promote engagement, learning, and personal development, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and performance. Similarly, Schmitt et al. (2021) found that role ambiguity, when paired with high autonomy and creativity, may foster innovation and flexibility rather than stress. The updated Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework continues to support this by highlighting those organizational resources—such as supervisor support,

feedback, and autonomy—can buffer the negative effects of high job demands and sustain employee motivation (Bakker et al., 2023).

## Section 2. Coping Strategies Among Manual Laborers in Different Domains

**Table 2**

*Coping Strategies Among Manual Laborers in Different Domains*

Domain	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
Cognitive Reappraisal	2.50	.58	Most of the times
Social Support	2.51	.54	Most of the times
Problem Solving	3.18	.69	Most of the times
Religiosity	3.38	.60	Most of the times
Tolerance	2.38	.65	Sometimes
Emotional Release	1.92	.45	Sometimes
Overactivity	2.32	.57	Sometimes
Relaxation/Recreation	2.72	.51	Most of the times
Substance Use	1.63	.54	Sometimes

*Mean Ranges: 1.00 – 1.49: Never; 1.50 – 2.49: Sometimes; 2.50 – 3.49: Most of the times; 3.50 – 4.00: Always*

The table shows how often manual laborers use different kinds of coping strategies. The three most often used coping strategies were religiosity with a mean of 3.38 (SD = .60), problem solving with a mean of 3.18 (SD = .69), and relaxation/recreation with a mean of 2.71 (SD = .51) wherein all of the said coping strategy were interpreted as "most of the times." The three least often used coping strategies were substance use with a mean of 1.63 (SD = .54), emotional release with a mean of 1.92 (SD = .45), and overactivity with a mean of 2.32 (SD = .57) wherein all of the said coping strategies were interpreted as "sometimes." In addition, some also were used frequently but not like the most used coping strategy like social support (mean = 2.51, SD = .54) interpreted as "most of the times", and cognitive reappraisal (mean = 2.50, SD = .58) interpreted as "most of the times," while the other was used occasionally like tolerance = (mean = 2.38, SD = .65) interpreted as "sometimes."

Religiosity was mostly used as a coping strategy among Filipino manual laborers. According to Castillo and Alino (2020), religion plays a significant role in the lives of many Filipinos and is often used as a coping mechanism in times of stress and difficulty. This is perhaps because religion, particularly Catholicism, is deeply ingrained in Filipino culture and daily life. It shapes family values, traditions, and social norms (Pineda, 2024).

Moreover, the second most used coping strategy was problem solving. Since most of our respondents were male manual laborers, they will likely use problem-focused type of coping Ptacek et al. (1994). Problem solving was also linked with the cultural values of Filipinos like *bayanihan* and *pakikipagkapwa*, which could be the reason why Filipino manual laborers were accustomed to using problem solving as a coping strategy.

The third most used coping strategy of manual laborers was relaxation/recreation. Engaging in leisure activities has been associated with an increased sense of purpose and meaning, as well as serving as distractions from everyday worries. Similarly, leisure activities have been associated with better mood, and lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Lagunes-Cordoba, 2022).

The least used coping strategy was substance use. Sy and Hechanova (2020) found that Filipino adolescents may have tendencies to use substances under difficult or stressful situations as a form of avoidant coping behaviors. But it could be the least used coping strategy for Filipino manual laborers because of the social stigma put into using substances/drugs. The second least used coping strategy was emotional release. Many people believe venting is helpful because it enables them to release their frustration and anger, and they are better able to problem-solve afterwards (Tran & Szabo, 2023).

Lastly, the third least used coping strategy was overactivity. Studies show that participating in physical activities Cevik (2020) are quite influential while trying to cope with stress. Since manual laborers always use their physical strength in doing their work, it will most likely make them tired/exhausted afterwards, so having an over activity as a coping strategy will not least likely to happen.

Social support and cognitive reappraisal were the coping strategies not mostly used by the respondents. As stated by Taylor, cited in Akbar and Aisyawati (2021), social support is the most vital psychosocial protective resource, where emotionally satisfying social bonds reduce the effects caused by stress and its bad effects on health. Meanwhile, Dawel, et al. (2023) said that cognitive reappraisal was most beneficial for individuals or in situations characterized by additional vulnerabilities (e.g., average or high levels of stress, neuroticism, difficulty identifying feelings, or poor self-efficacy). Tolerance was also occasionally used as a coping strategy. According to Seligman (2020), distress tolerance coping strategies may be emotion-focused, as they reflect the ability to reduce negative emotions associated with distress. Emotion-focused coping strategies are also more likely to be effective if the stressful situation is perceived to be uncontrollable.

While the current study highlights religiosity, problem-solving, and relaxation as the most frequently used coping strategies among Filipino manual laborers, recent research indicates that avoidant and emotion-focused strategies, such as substance use, emotional release, and negative religious coping, are also prevalent among similarly stressed populations. For instance, a study by Chow et al. (2021) found that healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic who engaged in negative religious coping, that is, interpreting stress as divine punishment or spiritual failure, experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression. This suggests that not all forms of religious coping are beneficial, and negative interpretations can exacerbate psychological distress. Similarly, Rashid et al. (2023) observed that informal caregivers of COVID-19 patients in Pakistan who utilized negative religious coping strategies reported increased psychological distress. The study emphasized the complex relationship between religiosity and mental health, highlighting that certain coping mechanisms may be maladaptive in high-stress situations. Furthermore, Fatima et al. (2022) examined young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that negative religious coping was associated with increased self-blame, a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy. This indicates that negative religious coping can lead to detrimental emotional responses, further impacting mental well-being.

These findings underscore that coping styles vary across settings, and reliance on problem-solving or religious strategies may not be universal. In environments where workers feel overwhelmed, unsupported, or disempowered, maladaptive coping mechanisms such as negative religious coping may become more prevalent.

## **Conclusion**

The study revealed that most of the respondents were male, aged between 41-50 years old, and high school graduates. The majority were employed under a job order contract, had three months of service, and belonged to the low-income socioeconomic group. The manual laborers generally experience a moderate level of stress, with the highest stressors being excessive workload, unclear job responsibilities, and uncertainty regarding career advancement. While stress levels varied across different workplace factors, the overall findings suggest that stress is a significant concern among manual laborers. Moreover, statistical analysis showed significant differences in stress levels when respondents were grouped according to sex, employment status, educational attainment, and years of service. Female laborers, job order employees, and those with lower educational attainment reported higher stress levels. However, age and socioeconomic status did not significantly affect stress levels. This indicates that job-related factors, rather than personal demographics, play a more crucial role in determining stress among manual laborers. Also, manual laborers commonly use religiosity, problem-solving, and relaxation/recreation as coping strategies. These strategies align with cultural values and

provide emotional and psychological relief from workplace stress. On the other hand, substance use, emotional release, and overactivity were the least used strategies. This suggests that manual laborers rely more on constructive and adaptive coping mechanisms rather than avoidance-based approaches.

### Recommendations

Employers and organizations can reduce workload and clarify job responsibilities to minimize stress from role ambiguity and provide clearer career advancement opportunities and pathways for promotions. Additionally, they can implement regular mental health activities to support employee well-being.

For manual laborers, they can continue utilizing effective coping strategies such as problem-solving and relaxation techniques, seek social support from colleagues, family, and supervisors to manage work-related stress and explore stress management workshops and training to enhance coping skills.

Moreover, policy makers and labor organizations implement policies that provide better employment security for job order employees.

Future research can explore the long-term effects of stress among manual laborers, examine the effectiveness of different coping strategies in reducing workplace stress and investigate additional factors influencing stress levels, such as work environment and leadership styles.

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