



# Psychological Distress of The Elderly in Selected Barangays in Caoayan, Ilocos Sur

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**Abstract:** The study determined the level of Psychological Distress of elderly in Selected Barangays in Caoayan, Ilocos Sur CY 2017. It also looked into the relationship between the level of psychological distress and their socio-demographic profile. The following results are: the respondents are 60-66 years old, male, married, lives in poblacion, elementary graduate, nuclear family structure, have a family monthly income of P5,000, with support of family members, roman catholic. The respondents have a “likely to be well” level of psychological distress. A relationship exists between the level of psychological distress and the age, number of family members, educational attainment, family monthly income, family structure, civil status, religion, place of residence and support system of the respondents. It is recommended that: (1) The local government unit should strictly implement RA 9994, an act granting additional benefits and privileges to senior citizens as a program of the government for the elders; (2) The family members should strengthen family ties by giving moral, financial support and to uplift social stability and socio-economic status of the elders; (3) The Senior citizen should actively participate in programs, activities, and gatherings to highlight social support to the organization as long as they can manage.

**Keywords:** Elderly, Mental Disorder, Depression, Anxiety.

## 1. Introduction

Every individual has been consistently wanting and dreaming of a long and joyous life and existence. Perennially, this aim was exclusively for chosen and the few. Those individuals were blessed with money, prestige, pieces of advice from other respected people and those who have the means of good living. The dream of having a good and a long life is seemingly an epidemic that spread all-throughout the society of every community. The increase numbers of elders in a community is an expectation. The delusion of facing the world long often does not render into a happy certainty.

Elder people are apt to have higher incidence of severe illnesses, physical incapacities, mental complaints, are linked with psychological distress. A wide-ranging array of factors like psycho-social concerns such as moving out of children from parents' home to look for a decent job, parting them lonely without any corporal upkeep in regular tasks; abuse to ageing parents; low level of information and responsiveness about the threat issues; nourishment and dietary necessities; psycho-emotional anxieties such as isolation, mental pressure, emotional disturbance; economic restraints such as low income upon retirements, that may lead subsequently to psychological distress of the elderly if it is not given much attention.

Psychological distress comes and can be seen in any forms, at any rate, in any situation and different degree of randomness. In fact, it is considered a mental uneasiness. Many negative experiences and symptoms may be attached to it and if worst scenario comes a mental disorder. This is an antecedent from multiple affects – a personal, psychological, or behavioral disturbances. Further, it is a broad concept of negative situation and feelings where in it is somewhat associated with and part of daily routine as life goes on. In minor cases, psychological distress may be handled through different ways and means; physically or emotionally, However, if the case or situation cannot be manipulated, already, it is advice that one seek assistance from expert or specialist ([www.sharecare.com/health/mental-health-basics/what-is-psychological-distress](http://www.sharecare.com/health/mental-health-basics/what-is-psychological-distress)).

The researchers are interested to study the psychological distress among elderly because they are considered as more vulnerable than of the other age groups. The researchers believed that elders often

thought that they are neglected, not given much attention, worthless and useless as members of the family and the society at large because of their physical incapacity. The results of the study will help the local government or the policy-makers to intensify their campaign in helping the ageing persons through various programs and initiatives that may ensure their social stability. It is also hoped that through this research, the health institutions may formulate better and effective approach in the delivery of care services to uplift the welfare of the elderly. Further, it will serve as an eye-opener for the family members to extend larger understanding and bigger psychological support and responding as well to the needs of the elders who have feelings of psychological distress.

**2. Research Methodology**

This study made use of the descriptive –correlational research design. The descriptive method analyzed the profile of the respondents and their psychological distress. Moreover, the correlational method described the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

The 118 respondents were taken from barangays Don Dimas Querubin, Villamar and Nansuagao in Caoayan, Ilocos Sur. The respondents are 60-70 years old regardless of civil status, living in a nuclear or extended family. The samples were determined utilizing the Slovin’s formula while purposive sampling were used to select the respondents of the study. The questionnaire- checklist was adapted from Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). Part I elicited data on the profile of the respondents. Part II elicited on the level of psychological distress of the respondents. The respondents answered the questions by encircling the best that represents how they have been feeling over the past 30 days.

The researchers secured permission from the municipal mayor and barangay captains to conduct the study and personally administered and retrieved the questionnaires from the respondents.

Frequency and percentage, mean, pearson and chi square correlation analysis are used to interpret and analyzed the data gathered.

**3. Result and Discussion**

**On Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents.**

A great number of the respondents (39 or 33.1%) belong to an age group 60-66, the mean age of the respondents is 70, (46.6%) are married, (39%) are residing in the Poblacion, (33.1%) are elementary graduate.

Majority of the respondents (66.9%) are male, (58.5%) were nuclear in family structure, (62.7%) have a family income of Php5, 000.00, 55.9% have a family member of 5-8 and the mean is 5, (69.5%) have a support system coming from family members. Almost all of the respondents 115 (97.5%) are Roman Catholic. All of the respondents (100%) are members of the Senior Citizen organization.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Psychological Distress among the Respondents

<b>K10 Scale</b>	<b>Nansuagao</b>	<b>Villamar</b>	<b>Don Dimas</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>30 and above</b>	7	13	9	29	24.58
<b>25-29</b>	10	17	1	28	23.73
<b>20-24</b>	7	9	8	24	20.34
<b>Under 20</b>	4	5	28	37	31.58

Norm:

- Under 20 - likely to be well
- 20-24 - likely to have a mental disorder
- 25-29 -likely to have a moderate mental disorder
- 30 and above - mental disorder

The psychological distress of the respondents as to the K10 scale is under 20 which means “**likely to be well**”. This implies that the respondents are still managed to overcome feeling of psychological distress with the strong support from family members and significant others who are the most valuable in their life. Family members and significant others that are always there to cheer them up and will

always show compassion and love and care. The feeling of loneliness, anxiousness and worthlessness are overcoming. The” likely to be well” level of psychological distress may be regarded to their membership to different senior citizens’ organizations, social organization, spiritual affiliation, attending to social amenities and gatherings, or simple social interactions with their neighborhood, social media engagement, simple gossips and card playing and the like. Further, diversional activities like gardening such as agricultural and horticultural propagation wherein psychological delight is ensured. This is also related to the findings of Chen et al (2015), believed that there is an essential benefit if more members in the family and more time to be spend with them. Elder member would feel sad, secluded and feeling of emptiness if live solitarily or unaccompanied. However, if family members are present and always there with them, negative thoughts and anxiety that cause other medical illness will be eradicated. Teramoto (2015) also support the finding when he states that social support by family was related to lower psychological distress.

**Table 2.** Correlations coefficient between interval and ordinal dependent variables and level of psychological distress of the respondents

<b>Socio-demographic profile</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>
<b>Age</b>	.187*	.042
<b>Sex</b>	.127	.171
<b>Number of Family Members</b>	.253**	.006
<b>Educational Attainment</b>	-.405**	.000
<b>Family Monthly Income</b>	-.480**	.000
<b>Family Structure</b>	.237**	0.010

\*Significant at 0.05 level

\*\*Significant at 0.01 level

**On Age.** There is a significant relationship between the level of Psychological distress and the age of the respondents ( $r= .187$ ). This may imply that the older the persons are, the more they are vulnerable to psychological distress. The older the individual the more they feel tired, nervous, hopeless, restless, and even worthless because of the age related physical changes that one experienced as they grow old. According to Byles, et al (2012) as cited by Atkins (2013). Age shown linked to affect psychological distress in later life. According to Schilling (2018), the following are the most common causes why older adults easily get tired that may lead to psychological distress; (a) with aging, the blood vessels get more atheromatous deposits. In effect, the major parts of human system will slow down on its orderly movement. Conflation of such can cause a person feel weak and tired especially in old age. Merely with a reason that the normal human process is not as affective during its younger years. (b) Hormones get out of balance. Human growth hormones that give mental and physical strength become almost negative during old age. (c) lack of exercise is often the cause of lack of energy in elderly. If one exercise regularly this elevates the HDL cholesterol ( good cholesterol) which dissolves some of the plaque inside the arteries. This will improve circulation of the key organs and supply them with nutrients (d) older people often loose good friends getting them into negative thought patterns and depression. It is important to spot depression in older adult and treat it. Depression can be source of a lack of energy.

**On number of family members** ( $r=.253$ ) also shows a significant relationship with the level of Psychological distress of the respondents. This may imply that those with lesser family members have higher level of psychological distress due to the fact that there are less people who will cheer them up, support them, and uplift their morale and appreciate their contribution in the family. Noh, et al (2017) concluded in their study that the stress level is significantly associated with household figures. The likelihood of understanding stress accelerated among female which is dependent to family members as against to those who are living solidarity. Teramoto et al (2015) found out in their study that, there is

lower psychological distress in male person with less than 65 years old and having significant family good relations. For female person aged 65 years old above, a full support from family members and social circles will likely lessen psychological distress. However, in contrast of the aforementioned findings, Thygesena et al (2009) highlighted that, household composition and perceived social support, were not related to psychological distress.

**On educational Attainment.** There is an inverse relationship between the psychological distress of the respondents and the highest educational attainment ( $r=-.405$ ). This means that those elderly who attained lower level of education have higher level of psychological distress and those elderly who attained higher level of education have lower psychological distress. This implies that those who achieved lower level of education know less and understand less the management and technique in coping distress. Further, they may also expose to other factors that cause them more pressure resulting to distress. Low educational attainment is a significant risk factor for mental health. Those who attained low educational attainment essentially may increase the rate of problems along psychological issues and mental soundness. However, Zhang et al (2015) notably concluded that education predicts lower levels of distress over time. School is a great avenue not only for educational development and practical skills but also a place for psychological progress and fortifying of coping mechanism. Thus, a foundation of a sound body and sound mind.

**On Family monthly income** ( $r=-.480$ ) shows also an inverse significant relationship with the psychological distress of the respondents. This means that those who have lower monthly income tend to have higher level of psychological distress than those who have higher monthly income. This may imply that elderly who have lower salary may tend to focus more on their survival and economic stability that cause them stress and uneasiness, unrelaxed, resulting to higher degree of psychological distress. Further, the elders may tend to think of their medical conditions due to lack of financial incapability. It is believed that most of the elders are suffering from age related diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, and the like that may tend to rise their psychological distress. Litwin, H. and Sapir E. (2009) noted that poor negative monetary anticipation also prognosticate greater financial distress in family hover to a lower level. Moreover Ferraro et al. (1999) stated that financial strain is associated with higher levels of psychological distress. According to Henning-Smith (2016), Higher socioeconomic status (income) was consistently associated with better quality of life and lower risk of psychological distress.

**On family structure** ( $r=.235$ ) also shows a significant relationship with the level of psychological distress of the respondents. This means that respondents who belongs to nuclear structure tend to have higher level of psychological distress. Respondents who mingle to limited family members is more stressful due to lesser people who can extend love, care and understanding than other type of family structure where may gain more support and more to mingle, listen with, and interact to. According to advantages of family living, the close relationship in the family especially for elderly parts can heal any negative thoughts. Further, numerous household members can greatly support them if they live together. In this sense, the whole family can partake the head duty, substantiate transcend lockstep with the households who need attention and advent change in their sap faster. In a larger family member, elders can voice out their personal experiences and situation with their love once who really care for their well beings. This then situates that a good family relation will lead into lessen effect of stress and advocates joy. (<https://completehomes.com>).

Table 3 presents the summary of chi square for significant relationship between nominal variables and level of psychological distress.

**Table 3.** Summary of Chi square test for significant relationship between nominal variables and level of psychological distress

<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<b>Chi square value</b>	<b>Significance</b>
<b>Civil status</b>	15.49	0.050*
<b>Religion</b>	17.72	0.023*
<b>Place of residence</b>	36.69	0.000**
<b>Membership in organization</b>	20.45	0.671
<b>Support system</b>	42.260	0.012*

\*Significant at 0.05 level

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

**On civil status.** There is a significant relationship between the level of psychological distress of the respondents and the civil status ( $r = .050$ ) of the respondents. This means those respondents who are married have higher psychological distress, and those single have lower psychological distress.

**On Religion.** There is a significant relationship between the psychological distress of the respondents and the religion ( $r = .023$ ). This means their religion contribute to their psychological distress.

**On place of residence.** The place of residence ( $r = .000$ ) shows a significant relationship with the level of Psychological distress of the respondents. This may mean that elderly who live in the Poblacion are more expose to psychological distress because of the many things to be attended to and there is less activities for leisure time in the urban area. The finding is support to the finding of Doherty et al (2009) and states that those living in large towns and living in open countryside locations showed the highest prevalence of psychological distress. According to Adli (2011) living in an urban environment is long known to be a risk factor for psychological distress. This is true even though infrastructure socio-economic conditions, nutrition and health care services are clearly better than in rural areas. Higher stress exposure and higher stress vulnerability seem to play a crucial role. Living in crowded areas is associated with increased social stress, since the environment becomes less controllable for the individual. The amygdala (a brain region that regulates emotions such as anxiety and fear) showed higher activation under stress from large cities compared to the counterparts from rural regions. Further, Lindenberg's (2008) in her experimental study as mentioned by Kwon (2016) found out that older people who were living in cities showed stronger activation in the amygdala and cingulate cortex (brain areas involved in processing and regulating emotion), respectively, compared with those from rural areas. This only means that living in urban areas is more prone to psychological distress than of from the rural. However, Erdem et al (2016) disagreed the finding as they stated that residing in socially cohesive neighborhood may reduce psychological distress among urban older adults. The social support group and social connections may subsequently intensify social relationships that may lead to lower down psychological distress.

**On Support system.** There is a relationship between the psychological distress and the support system. This means those respondents who have pension and support from the Local government unit have lesser psychological distress. The elderly who have these support are less worried of where they will get additional finances for they daily living.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The respondents have a “likely to be well” level of psychological distress, with their age, they still managed to overcome feeling of psychological distress with the strong support from family members, significant others who are the most valuable in their life and help of the government.

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