

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Relationship between socioeconomic status dimensions and academic anxiety of college students

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative correlational research investigated the association between dimensions of socioeconomic status (SES) and academic anxiety among 330 Filipino university students. Data were collected using online surveys through two modified tools: a 10-item Socioeconomic Status Questionnaire and an 11-item Academic Anxiety Scale. Statistical tests probed correlations between SES measures, such as parental education, parental job, family income, family size, gender, age, and academic anxiety. Results indicated that paternal education was a significant correlate of academic anxiety—negative for fathers who had elementary or high school diplomas and positive for college graduates, implying differential effects of educational attainment on levels of student stress. Maternal occupation was positively correlated with office jobs and negatively with manual labor jobs, suggesting varying academic expectations depending on maternal work roles. Increased family income (₱20,001 and more) was also positively correlated with academic anxiety, perhaps because of increased expectations or pressure to excel. Paternal education, paternal occupation (office), family size (3–5 members), and student age were found to be significant predictors of academic anxiety by regression analysis, and together they explained 19.9% of the variance in academic anxiety. The results highlight the subtle effect of SES—particularly paternal variables on academic anxiety. Implications for practice are creating such support programs as parental education workshops, financial literacy instruction, and student coping skills courses. Future studies must explore mediating factors, cultural factors, and long-term consequences using longitudinal or qualitative methods.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic anxiety is increasingly problematic in international higher education. With students experiencing rising pressures about academic success, changing social roles, and economic instability,

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many develop heightened levels of stress and anxiety. Academic anxiety—defined by chronic concern, tension, and fear of failure—has been associated with both poor academic performance and reduced psychological well-being (Cassady & Johnson, 2002). Of the numerous predictors of academic anxiety, socioeconomic status (SES) has been an overarching key predictor of educational performance and mental health (Munir et al., 2023). Students of low SES backgrounds usually face additional adversities such as restricted learning resources, lower academic support from home, and greater economic pressures, all of which tend to exacerbate academic stress and anxiety. However, the association between SES and academic anxiety is not absolute; it is culturally and context-dependent.

In the Philippines, socioeconomic disparities are rooted deeply in the education system (Bai, 2023). Filipino university students, especially those who belong to low-income families, usually balance academic work with family and economic obligations (Bernardo & Resurrection, 2018). While SES is usually quantified using metrics like family income, parental occupation, and education (Lawson et al., 2018), these elements could play differently in the Philippines, where paternal roles frequently bear unique cultural significance within family expectations and authority determinations. A disaggregated look at paternal and maternal SES can provide evidence on locally unique stress dynamics among students.

While past research has established the relationship between SES (Rezaabadi, 2016), gender (Siddiqui & Rehman, 2014), and age (Cebu et al., 2023) with academic anxiety, much is yet to be understood on how these interplay in the sociocultural environment of Filipino learners. The differential impact of maternal versus paternal SES is notably less understood. Further, as studies consistently identify that female students cite more academic anxiety (Pulido et al., 2023), how gendered experiences overlap with socioeconomic origin in the Philippines has not been well understood. This research seeks to bridge these gaps by investigating the interconnection of SES measures—namely, fathers' and mothers' education and occupation, household income, and household size—and gender and age to academic anxiety among Filipino college students. Guided by Lazarus's Transactional Model of Stress, which highlights how individuals evaluate and respond to stressors, and Sociocultural Theory, which considers the role of family and cultural norms in shaping individual experiences, this study hypothesizes that paternal education and occupation will be significant predictors of academic anxiety (Ruiz-Camacho & Gozalo, 2025). By placing the analysis within a culturally specific context, the study aims to make theoretical and practical contributions, informing interventions like parent-centered education, financial assistance, and culturally adapted mental health services among Filipino students.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, correlational design to examine relationships between socioeconomic status (SES), gender, age, and academic anxiety of Filipino college students in Metro Manila. A correlational design was most appropriate because it allows statistical examination of associations among naturally occurring variables without manipulation.

The population targeted included currently enrolled college students in colleges and universities in Metro Manila. A stratified probability sampling technique, with gender as the stratum, was employed to provide fair representation. There were 330 respondents (50.6% female, 49.4% male) with a mean age of 21.2 years in the final sample. Students had to be enrolled at the time of the study and living in Metro Manila to be eligible to participate. Students with self-reported histories of mental health diagnoses were excluded because such conditions might independently increase anxiety and mask the effect of socioeconomic factors.

Data were obtained using an online survey sent through social media websites. A blanket electronic call for participants included a brief description of the research, inclusion criteria, and an address for the online form. While the internet-based format provided wide accessibility and ease, it posed the possibility of sampling bias in that only those with stable internet and social media connections were likely to respond. This would restrict the generalizability of findings, particularly for students in low-income communities who might lack adequate digital connectivity.

The survey tool had four components: (1) study overview and informed consent, (2) demographic queries, (3) a 10-item SES questionnaire modified from Ragma and Molina. (2017), and (4) an 11-item Academic Anxiety Scale of Cassady et al. (2019). The SES tool assessed parents' occupation and education, income, and household size. Filipino Licensed psychologists and educators validated the tool's content in the local setting through expert review. Education and occupation items were adapted to align with Filipino socioeconomic classifications. Academic Anxiety Scale, scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), had proven to have high internal consistency in this research (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.903$). Cultural appropriateness was confirmed with a pilot test among 30 Metro Manila students.

Survey responses were exported and cleaned in Microsoft Excel. Scoring methods involved converting categorical SES responses to ordinal numeric values and computing average scores for the Academic Anxiety Scale. JASP (2023) was used for data analysis. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships between variables. Multiple linear regression was employed to establish which SES factors significantly predicted academic anxiety (Nagasu et al., 2021).

This research followed the Philippine Psychological Association and APA ethical guidelines. Although official ethics board approval could not be secured because of institutional constraints and the non-invasive nature of the study, ethical procedures were followed. Informed consent included a distress protocol outlining available mental health support in case of discomfort during participation, as well as anonymity assurance, and disclosure of the right to withdraw at any time were given to participants. No information identifying individuals was obtained. All data was saved confidentially on a password-protected device.

Limitations include possible sampling bias in the online data, restricted SES subgroup control beyond gender, and moderate ($\alpha = 0.648$) reliability of the SES measure (*Academic Anxiety Scale—Academic Anxiety Resource Center*, 2023). These may limit the generalizability of the outcomes and should be explored in future studies.

RESULT

The findings of this research are structured into three key analytical components. First, descriptive analysis presents a lengthy description of the participants' socioeconomic status in terms of parental education, occupation, family income, and family size.

Table 1 summarizes parental educational attainment. Among mothers, 58.5% held college degrees, followed by 31.5% who were high school graduates. For fathers, 49.7% had college degrees, while 35.5% were high school graduates. These patterns mirror observed global trends in tertiary educational attainment, where female enrollment in higher education has exceeded male enrollment over the past two decades (World Bank, 2024).

Table 1. Parents' educational attainment profile of Filipino college students

Parents' Educational Attainment	Mother		Father	
	f	%	f	%
None	9	2.4	9	2.7
Elementary Graduate	25	7.6	40	12
High School Graduate	104	31.5	117	35.5
College Graduate	193	58.5	164	49.7
Total	330	100	330	100

Table 2 shows the occupational status of parents. A notable 45.5% of mothers were not employed, while 41.2% held office jobs. For fathers, the most common occupations were manual labor jobs (43%), followed closely by office jobs (40%). These figures are consistent with national labor market statistics showing lower female labor force participation and the predominance of manual labor employment among men.

Table 2. Parents' occupation profile of Filipino college students

Parents' Occupation	Mother		Father	
	f	%	f	%
None	150	45.5	56	17
Manual labor	44	13.3	142	43
Office	136	41.2	132	40
Total	330	100	330	100

Table 3 presents family monthly income, with 51.8% of respondents reporting a household income of ₱20,001 or above. This aligns with the Philippine Statistics Authority's (2022) data on median family incomes in urban regions.

Table 3. Family monthly income profile of Filipino college students

Family Monthly Income	f	%
₱ 0	1	0.3
₱ 1000-5,000	16	4.8
₱ 5,001-10,000	32	9.7
₱ 10,001-15,000	57	17.2
₱ 15,001-20,000	54	16.4
₱20,000- above	171	51.8
Total	330	100

Table 4 displays family size distribution, where the majority of participants (61.2%) came from families with 3–5 members, in line with national household data (Esri, 2022).

Table 4. Family size profile of Filipino college students in Metro Manila

Family Size	f	%
3-5 members	202	61.2
6-8 members	90	27.3
7-9 members	28	8.5
10 above members	10	3
Total	330	100

Table 5 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among SES indicators and academic anxiety. A number of statistically significant associations were observed:

Father's education was negatively correlated with academic anxiety among elementary ($p = 0.017$) and high school graduates ($p = 0.011$), but positively correlated among college graduates ($p < .01$). This indicates that lower levels of paternal education might be associated with decreased academic pressure. In comparison, higher levels of paternal education could increase expectations and stress.

Mother's occupation (office) was significantly correlated with academic anxiety ($p = 0.017$), perhaps indicative of greater academic expectations or more competitive home environments.

Father's occupation showed distinct patterns, whereas a positive correlation was found between office jobs and academic anxiety ($p < .001$), indicating that students with fathers in professional roles may experience heightened academic pressure. Conversely, manual labor paternal occupations were negatively correlated with academic anxiety ($p = 0.007$), possibly reflecting lower academic stress or different parental involvement styles.

Family income of ₱20,001 and more was significantly related to academic anxiety ($p = 0.017$), indicating that students coming from affluent families might feel greater academic competition or pressure in performing.

Table 5. Academic anxiety and its correlates

SES Dimensions	r	p-value	Interpretation
Father's Educational Attainment			
Elementary Graduate	-.144	.017	Negative Correlation
High School Graduate	-.152	.011	Negative Correlation
College Graduate	.217	.001	Positive Correlation
Mother's Occupation			
Office Jobs	.144	.017	Positive Correlation
Father's Occupation			
Manual labor Jobs	-.164	.007	Negative Correlation
Office Jobs	.024	<.001	Positive Correlation
Family Monthly Income			
₱20,001-above	.144	.017	Positive Correlation

The multiple linear regression tested how well different socioeconomic and demographic variables predict academic anxiety in Filipino university students. The overall model was significant, explaining 19.9% of the variation in scores for academic anxiety ($R^2 = 0.199$, $p < .001$). Of interest, paternal education was a strong predictor; the students whose fathers had an elementary or high school education reported significantly less academic anxiety than those whose fathers had higher education (elementary: $\beta = -10.745$, $p = 0.003$; high school: $\beta = -8.807$, $p = 0.009$). This indicates that lower paternal education may be related to less academic pressure placed on students. On the other hand, having a father working in an office job was positively correlated with academic anxiety ($\beta = 4.063$, $p = 0.006$), suggesting that offspring of professional fathers might perceive additional academic pressure and concomitant worry. Surprisingly, family size of three to five individuals was associated with reduced academic stress in comparison to small or extended family size ($\beta = -6.314$, $p = 0.043$), which might result from more evenly balanced familial support and resource division in the medium-sized families. Moreover, student age also showed a strong negative correlation with academic anxiety ($\beta = -6.645$, $p = 0.037$), which suggests that the older students are less anxious, possibly as a result of gained academic experience and better coping strategies developed over time. These results together highlight the complex interplay of socioeconomic and demographic factors on academic anxiety among the Filipino college students.

Table 6. Multiple regression analysis for socio-economic status dimensions, gender, age, and academic anxiety of Filipino college students in Metro Manila

SES Dimension	Unstandardized	p-value	Interpretation
Father's Education (Elementary)	-10.745	.003	Negative
Father's Education (High School)	-8.807	.009	Negative
Father's Occupation (Office)	4.063	.006	Positive
Family Size (3-5 member)	-6.314	.043	Negative
Age (25)	-6.645	.037	Negative

DISCUSSION

This research analyzed the relationship of socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and age to academic anxiety among Filipino college students using Lazarus's Transactional Model of Stress and Sociocultural Theory. Results indicated that students whose fathers were better educated or had office jobs reported a significantly higher level of academic anxiety. Lazarus's model suggests that these SES variables influence the way that students evaluate academic difficulties. In contrast, high parental achievement could increase stress responses by raising internalized expectations and lowering perceived coping resources. Secondary appraisals, such as worrying about living up to family expectations, might amplify anxiety when students perceive high costs of failure.

Likewise, Sociocultural Theory sheds light on how Filipino cultural norms like family honor and "*utang na loob*" (debt of gratitude) magnify stress related to performance. As pointed out by Zheng et al. (2023) and Budiongan et al. (2024), students belonging to wealthy families tend to internalize higher academic expectations, creating pressure.

Notably, the research revealed that students whose fathers had manual labor occupations reported less academic anxiety. This contradicts the expected assumptions that lower SES means more stress. In the Filipino cultural context, it is possible that some working-class families do not focus as much on academic status, and therefore would have fewer stressors internalized. Sociocultural Theory corroborates this by highlighting the importance of cultural expectations in determining individual responses to stress.

One unexpected result was the negative correlation between higher academic anxiety and smaller family size. Although this conflicts with Mahajan (2015), it could imply that students from smaller families have fewer coping resources available to them, like academic guidance or emotional support. From Lazarus's point of view, less access to coping resources can impair stress management, leading to more anxiety. This explanation must be considered carefully and confirmed by subsequent empirical studies.

The positive link between family income and academic anxiety complicates the narrative of financial ease as a buffer against stress. Indeed, it may be an assessment of larger stakes in high-SES worlds, where more resources are bet on student success and more is anticipated in return. For Lazarus's model, students might be perceiving larger academic risks, and Sociocultural Theory would further imply that elite standards of performance in affluent Filipino families would increase anxiety. This is in line with Budiongan et al. (2024), who cited excessive parental pressure among more affluent youth.

Lastly, older students reported less academic anxiety, confirming Sheldon et al. (2005) and in line with Transactional Stress Theory, that with time, students build better coping skills and reappraise academic stressors as surmountable. These findings confirm the study's aim to explore how demographic variables and SES affect academic anxiety and prove the value of understanding results in culturally grounded theoretical traditions.

Several limitations need to be recognized. Self-reported measures are susceptible to social desirability bias, which can confound reports of anxiety. Cross-sectional design prevents causal interpretation, and collection of data through the internet could have introduced sampling bias in favor of students with greater digital access—usually those of higher SES. This has the potential to underrepresent more disadvantaged populations, and hence may overestimate SES-anxiety correlations. Furthermore, the moderate reliability of the SES scale constrains precision, and therefore advice is given when interpreting fine-grained SES findings.

Subsequent research needs to use longitudinal designs to trace changes in academic anxiety through time and identify causal processes with greater precision. Including maternal SES measures, peer support, and institutional climate might provide richer insights. A mixed-methods approach, with qualitative interviews as a specific component, could examine how Filipino students perceive and navigate academic pressure in their respective sociocultural contexts. This would enhance theoretical applications of Lazarus's model and Sociocultural Theory, elucidating the processes of stress and coping in various student populations.

CONCLUSION

The present research highlights the significant contribution of paternal socioeconomic characteristics, specifically fathers' education and occupation, to academic anxiety among Filipino college students. Results showed that students from wealthier families or with more educated fathers experienced higher levels of academic anxiety, likely due to increased parental expectations and internalized performance pressure. In contrast, students from manual labor families reported lower anxiety, suggesting that academic pressure may be less emphasized in specific working-class settings. Additionally, students from smaller families exhibited greater anxiety, potentially due to reduced access to academic or emotional support. These findings emphasize the complex interplay between family structure, socioeconomic status, and cultural expectations in shaping students' academic stress. Theoretically, this research affirms the relevance of Lazarus's Transactional Model of Stress and Sociocultural Theory in understanding how culturally embedded values such as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and family honor—interact with socioeconomic pressures to influence stress appraisal and coping strategies. Practically, the results underscore the need for culturally responsive interventions tailored to the Philippine context, including coping-skills training, family-based support programs, financial literacy education, and parental engagement initiatives. Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs to examine how academic anxiety evolves and to clarify causal relationships. Integrating qualitative methods can further illuminate students' lived experiences and the nuanced impact of cultural and familial dynamics on academic stress. These directions will help inform the development of more targeted and culturally sensitive support systems to promote student well-being.

DECLARATION

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Author contribution statement

Marypaul Louise Apolonio conceived and designed the study, oversaw data collection, and performed the statistical analysis. Marie Chiela Malcampo, research mentor, contributed to the interpretation of

results. Teresita Rungduin, research course adviser, provided feedback on the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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