

# Psychosocial, Psychospiritual Challenges and Coping Among Religious Sisters: Basis for a Psychological Adaptation Program

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenging experiences of religious sisters during their transition to community life, and to identify how they are coping with these challenges. The results provide a basis for a psychological adaptation program for religious sisters. A sequential explanatory mixed method was used, with data collected through interviews using simple random sampling technique, survey questionnaire and descriptive correlational to investigate relationships between two variables: the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges experienced by religious Sisters. The researcher concludes that physical manifestation of stress ( $M= 2.74$ ,  $SD= 0.68$ ) were recorded to be high among the 142 participants and low frequency of having the psychospiritual challenge related to their relationship with God ( $M= 1.97$ ,  $SD =0.57$ ). There was no correlation between the variables—other than one (1) coping strategies by the sisters. That is, working on Oneself (Avoiding) has been found to be significantly correlated to both measure of Psychosocial ( $r= .171$ ,  $p= <.05$ ) and Psychospiritual Coping ( $r= .221$ ,  $p= <.01$ ). This resulted for religious sisters encountering these psychosocial challenges in their community life and mission, physical health, technology, and vows. Meanwhile, psychospiritual challenges are faced in their relationships with God, others, and self. The coping strategies of the young sisters include avoidant coping, approach coping, and emotional coping. Based on the findings of the study, the Psychological Adaptation Program was designed by the researcher to help the young sisters (a) develop self confidence and self-esteem, (b) identify stress that may affect knowledge and other necessary skills for their mission, (c) understand how to cope with stress and maintain good health, (d) understand their vows more deeply, and (e) strengthen and nurture their relationship with God and with one another.

Keywords: psychosocial, psychospiritual, coping, religious, community life, mission, Psychological Adaptation Program



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## INTRODUCTION

Challenges in time, faith, religion, academics, finances, responsibilities, relationships, family, friends, and daily hassles make people stronger, more courageous, and more mature (Carver, 2019). According to Sudhakar (2018), challenges may lead to self-discovery. Furthermore, challenges are part of life, where one may experience emotions like sadness, rage, tension, and anxiety. Indeed, Carver (2019) stated that challenges become a message and a tool to succeed regardless of age or life stage.

According to Husson et al. (2018), young adults are in a difficult stage of life because of all the changes in social, emotional, and developmental stages. In this stage young adults face many challenges such as depression, intentional self-harm, eating

disorders, and substance abuse. Gökmen et al. (2022) shared that young adults with psychological problems are at risk for experiencing personal, social, and economic difficulties, such as educational problems, poverty, social difficulties, and unemployment.

Whether they are a teenager, young, old, lay, or religious people, they have their own challenges (Hung, 2019). This is particularly true for young religious individuals. What are the challenges of religious life?

In religious contexts, challenges take on unique dimensions. For young religious individuals, like those in the Catholic Church, these challenges can be particularly acute. Tuyen (2022) highlights the internal conflicts that religious individual face, grappling with their beliefs and commitments in the face of

worldly temptations and personal doubts. They must navigate the complexities of pastoral work, community dynamics, and personal fulfillment amidst societal changes. The demanding nature of their work, which includes teaching, healthcare, and social services, often tests their physical and emotional stamina (Dinh, 2021). Balancing these responsibilities with their spiritual growth and personal well-being becomes a delicate dance, requiring resilience and adaptive coping strategies.

In a recent study, the challenges of young religious are to understand the anxieties and challenges of young religious facing some problems such as education, employment, mental health issues, social media, peer pressure, and anxiety related to body image (RM Admin, 2021). Additionally, there is a range of challenges in religious life, such as: community life, maturing into a religious life, challenges include adjusting to religious life, losing access to friends and family, and others (Gautier & Do, 2020).

According to Schlosberg et al. (2022), as of to the most recent population trend among religious institutes of women published at CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate) Special Report, 2014, the 2009 NRVC (National Religious Vocation Conference)/CARA Recent Vocations to Religious Life found that there are more Catholic sisters in the United States over age from 60 to 90 years old. Twenty-two percent (22%) belonged to 60-69 years old, 32% belonged to 70-79 years old, 26% belonged to 80-89 years old, and 30 percent are between the ages of 30 to 39. There is a decreasing population of young people, that may be due to the challenges brought by heavy apostolate and social work, coupled with their individual issues. In a Buddhist country like Vietnam, there is an increasing number of young religious women -- an average of nearly 22,000 religious brothers and sisters in 2018 belonging to more than 240 congregations. In 2019, there were around 33,087 religious brothers and sisters of which 28,099 are religious women (Dinh, 2021). The latest

statistics in 2022 revealed that there is an increasing number of religious orders in Vietnam with about 262 congregations. Meanwhile, the number of religious people decreased compared to previous years. Moreover, demographic trends indicate a decline in the number of young people entering religious life (Schlosberg et al., 2022). This trend poses significant challenges for religious congregations globally. Religious life, upon entering active ministry, encounter a variety of psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges.

Despite the comprehensive formation provided by their own congregation, there remains a gap in supporting them during the crucial transition years. The initial years of ministry can be overwhelming, marked by loneliness, burnout, and doubts about vocational choices. There is no intervention program for the young sister during the transition to mission life. They have to face the challenges amid the day-to-day changes of an ever-evolving society. Therefore, a psychological adaptation program is needed to support and help young sisters in this transition period to have direction and solid support for their vocation.

A structured psychological adaptation program could offer invaluable support during this critical phase, providing guidance and resources to help young sisters thrive in their chosen path. This study aimed to explore the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges faced by young religious sisters and identify effective coping mechanisms. By understanding these challenges more deeply, the research seeks to inform interventions that could enhance the support system for religious sisters in Vietnam. Maintaining a strong relationship with God, serving the marginalized, and nurturing a sense of community are central to their mission and identity (Hung, 2019). This research endeavor is driven by a desire to accompany and empower religious sisters in their journey of faith and service, ensuring they receive the necessary support to flourish personally and spiritually.

**Philosophical Underpinnings.** Pragmatism was used as the methodological framework for this study, involving experimental, empirical, and purposive thought based on experience (Thayer & Rosenthal, 2023). This approach enabled the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge of the challenges of religious life and understand how young Vietnamese religious sisters cope with daily life in Vietnam.

**Statement of the Problem.** This study aimed to identify the challenging experiences of Vietnamese religious sisters and the coping mechanisms that help and support them. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenging experiences encountered by the Vietnamese religious Sisters?
2. What is the coping mechanism of the Vietnamese religious Sisters?
3. To what extent do Vietnamese religious sisters practice psychosocial and psychospiritual coping?
4. What is the relationship of psychosocial and psychospiritual coping of the Vietnamese religious sisters with the coping outcome?
5. Based on the findings, what psychological adaptation program can be developed for the Vietnamese religious Sisters?

**Scope and Limitation.** This study focused only on the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges and coping among the religious Sisters in Vietnam during their transition to community life. Their psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges were identified as well as the coping that help and support Vietnamese religious sisters. The results of the study were served as a guide to create the psychology adaptation program for Vietnamese religious sisters.

**Conceptual Framework.** Figure 1 indicates the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges and coping among sisters during their transition to community life. The input consists of the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenging experiences encountered by the young religious Sisters.

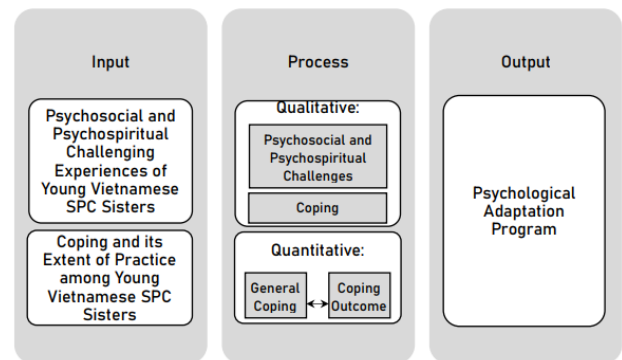


Figure 1  
*Conceptual Framework of the Study in IPO*

The second was the coping of the young religious Sisters and the third was to what extent sisters practice. The fourth was the relationship between psychological and psychospiritual. The last input is concerned with the effective coping of the young sisters. The process indicates the data collection through the interviews. The researcher used qualitative analysis of the data to categorize the theme. From the results of the interview, the researcher made a survey questionnaire and distributed these questionnaires to the young religious sisters. The researcher then used quantitative analysis to formulate the answers of the respondents to find the results from the surveys that showed how effective their coping and relationship of psychosocial and psychospiritual aspects, thus based on the output of the study, the researcher designed the Psychological Adaptation Program.

## LITERATURES

The challenges of young people today. Data was released by UNICEF in 2018 stating that 12% of young adults suffer from such mental illnesses. A study of Ballard (2019) saw that 30% of young adults say they frequently feel lonely and lack best mates (Emma et al, 2021).

Compared to previous generations, today's young adults take longer to commit to relationships and spend less time meeting new individuals. Nowadays research is starting to show how particular social media experiences may affect young people's mental health (Nesi, 2020).

Based on data showing that young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 show greater susceptibility to mental health troubles globally and that three quarters of all mental health problems begin by that age (Lugata et al., 2020).

Moreover, according to estimates, 10–20 percent of young people globally struggle with mental health issues (Sorscher, 2020) argued that young adults with psychological issues are more likely to face personal, social, and financial challenges, such as academic challenges, poverty, social challenges, and unemployment.

Serlachius et al. (2020) added that obstacles faced by young people include increased anxiety about their health and well-being, stress from schedule disruptions, scholastic and social difficulties brought on by inadequate access to physical and mental treatment, marital violence, and family stress. Livazović (2022) found that diseases defy particular age, culture, and social values and norms which are frequently used to identify behavioral problems. Gökmen et al. (2022) shared that young adults with psychological problems are at risk for experiencing personal, social, and economic difficulties, such as educational problems, poverty, social difficulties, unemployment, work stress, anxiety, depression, melancholy, guilt, low self-esteem, stress, lack of motivation, loneliness (Taylor & Moustafa, 2020). Meanwhile, Cuong (2021) described that young Vietnamese people today are facing a crisis of moral and ethical values, losing their personality and ideals. Recent studies have looked at protective variables that may help youth feel more valuable and deserving of their lives, such as safe connection and self-esteem (Imran et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding the risks and protective factors of psychological health problems is a critical step in designing

preventative approaches and interventions to foster young adults' mental health and well-being.

Psychosocial Challenges of Young Religious Life Today. The young religious people are also facing different challenges as they live their religious life. Scott (2017) said that young religious are challenged to respond to the changes and developments of the age of technology and that they must be an inspiration to religious families by their witness. Moreover, Lan (2022), said that social networks bring many unpredictable risks to the young religious, if they are not used with care, moderation, and purpose. Social media can have many negative effects on the prayer life and community relationship of consecrated people. However, social networks are very useful for young religious people during their training and learning, but it is also easy for them to become dependent, passive, lazy to think, or just copy knowledge without creative research. They will spend too much time on the internet which makes reading light, their understanding lacks depth, and spiritual life becomes dry and poor.

In a recent study, the challenges of young religious are to understand the anxieties and challenges of young religious facing some problems such as education, employment, mental health issues, social media, peer pressure, and anxiety related to body image (RM Admin, 2021). Additionally, there is a range of challenges in religious life, such as: community life, maturing into a religious life, challenges include adjusting to religious life, losing access to friends and family, and others (Gautier & Do, 2020). In Vietnam, young religious is increasing in every congregation.

According to Ha (2020), the schedule of activities and pastoral work is disturbed and changed, making many religious men and women feel physically tired. This fatigue causes problems with imbalanced physiological needs such as: insomnia, digestive disorders, stomach pain, headache, fatigue, sluggishness, restless legs, tremors, confusion, and sleep disturbance. In addition, there are a number of other symptoms related to psychological problems

such as stress, excessive anxiety, confusion, and fear.

The Psychospiritual Challenges of Young Religious Life Today. Bergmann (2022) claimed that one of the challenges faced by religious people is discernment. According to Quang et. al (2021), the biggest challenge of the religious community in general is how to "live in accordance with the direction of the Church." These challenges are the challenge of mission, the challenges of community life, and the challenge of living the vows. Hanh (2022) furthermore described that Vietnamese people attach great importance to the role of the family because they consider the family to be the domestic church that the young religious must cherish. Additionally, Long (2021) explained the acceptance of the moral challenges, insensitivity of the times and regional cultural challenges. Nguyen, et. al (2023) articulated the challenges of the Vow of Obedience. There is the challenge of the lack of joy and faith in the community life of consecrated people in living and serving (Hoa, 2021).

Coping Skills of religious life and their Challenges. According to Blumm and Silver (2018), coping is the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional process of managing a stressful or threatening situation or circumstance. Also, coping, as defined by Folkman and Lazarus (as cited in Biggs, 2017) and Krzysztof (2019), is the person's constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as exceeding the person's resources. In psychology, the word coping, in addition to this behavioral application, has been used as a broad heuristic in several other domains, including as a thought process and personality characteristic in social context (Sharma, 2003; Algorani & Gupta, 2023). Levels of health and psychological well-being are strongly influenced by how challenges are handled (Obrenovic et al., 2020). Considerable variation is seen among the coping mechanisms, which are used by the lonely, and the choices of coping mechanisms are affected by the individual's age, life experience, cultural background, and the

accessibility of loneliness-relieving methods (Yildirim et al., 2021).

According to the transactional model, there are two broad categories of coping (Stanisławski, 2019). The first one is called problem-focused coping, and the second one is called emotion-focused coping.

Problem-focused coping is based on one's capability to think about and alter the environmental event or situation (Sharma, 2003; Algorani & Gupta, 2023). Examples of this strategy at the thought-process level include utilization of problem-solving skills, interpersonal conflict resolution, advice seeking, time management, goal setting, and gathering more information about what is causing one stress (Kapur, 2022). Problem solving requires thinking through various solutions, evaluating the pros and cons of different solutions, and then implementing a solution that seems most advantageous to reduce the stress.

Likewise, in the emotion-focused skill, the focus is inward on altering the way one thinks or feels about a situation or an event (Sharma, 2003; Kubala, 2022). Some of these coping strategies are healthy, such as applying problem-solving skills (Tiffany, 2017); some are neither healthy nor unhealthy (Katharina, 2023) such as practicing some religious rituals; and some are unhealthy or maladaptive, such as denying a stressful circumstance even exists or using drugs to escape.

Choice of coping skills is influenced by the quantity and quality of available resources for coping that may be available to a person. These resources include information (such as understanding of how a workplace operates), skills (such as analytical skills), and attitudes (such as self-efficacy or confidence in one's ability to carry out a particular action), social resources (people with whom a person can exchange information), physical resources (such as health and stamina), material resources (money), and societal resources (policies and laws) (Sharma, 2003).

If young religious life lacks adequate coping mechanisms, they may find it difficult to deal with stressful situations, control their emotions (Nguyen, 2021), and are more likely to develop internalizing problems like depression, anxiety, and loneliness (Yen, 2020). Coping ability was linked to depression symptoms, according to earlier investigations (Orzechowska, 2022). Thus, coping skills are a positive factor in the prevention of depression (Wang et al., 2022).

## METHODS

The researcher used sequential explanatory mixed-method research to collect data to study the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges and coping mechanism of the respondents. With this, there were two data gathering instruments the researcher used: interview and survey questionnaires.

The tool used to gather data in this study is the semi-structured interview that explore the collection of the person's responses which included their perceptions, ideas, and views. Additionally, semi-structured interview permitted greater flexibility of coverage and capability in observing of the boarders of young Vietnamese sisters in deep. The interview was started with the following questions:

1. What are the psychosocial challenging experiences you encountered as a young religious Sister during your transition to mission life?
2. What is the psycho-spiritual challenging experiences that you encountered?
3. How do you cope or deal with these challenges?
4. When can you say that you have successfully coped? What is coping for you?

The survey questionnaire was formulated by the researcher and sent a letter of request to validate the modified instrument that includes the Statement of the Problem and the Questionnaire. The validation was done by three (3) experts in the field of psychology of Guidance and Counseling and Christian Formation in Saint Paul University Manila. The researcher computed Cronbach's alpha of the

researcher-made questionnaire. The results revealed acceptable to good internal or inter-item consistencies. That is, there is good reliability for both the psychosocial ( $\alpha = .843$ ) and psychospiritual ( $\alpha = .856$ ). An acceptable reliability was found in the coping ( $\alpha = 0.746$ ).

For the qualitative methodology of the study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to explore the challenging experiences of participants. For the quantitative part, the descriptive correlational was used to investigate relationships between two variables: the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges experienced by young Vietnamese Sisters. Data collection was conducted through online individual interviews and survey questionnaires administered via Google Forms. Thematic analysis identified patterns and themes in the qualitative data, and descriptive statistics (mean) were calculated to understand the frequency and intensity of coping strategies. Pearson correlation analysis explored relationships between variables.

Using the coping questionnaire, the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral methods of dealing with problems were assessed. Some items focusing on cognitive and emotional approaches were adapted from Coping Strategies Scale by Holahan and Moos (1987), while other cognitive and emotional items were original. The remainder of the items were adapted from Spitzberg and Copach's (2008) framework for assessing coping in response to stalking. Adapted items were reworded to focus on general coping patterns (versus a response to a specific situation), and then simplified to suit a community sample in which some have limited reading levels and educational attainment. The scale can determine someone's primary coping styles as either psychosocial coping or psychospiritual coping. Out of 26 items, 13 coping strategies were chosen to be included in the questionnaire. The scales used the 4-point Likert, as follows: Mostly true about me (4), Somewhat true about me (3), A little true about me (2), Not true about me (1). Below are two examples of the items in the questionnaire:

1. When dealing with Psychosocial, I spend time trying to understand what happened.
2. When dealing with a psychospiritual, I try to see the positive side of the situation.

The researcher used survey questionnaires in the context of an online platform (Google Form). Mean was used and Likert scale was employed. Likert scale is a tool wherein the respondents was asked to answer the item that corresponds to what they think or perceived to be. The scales used the 4-point Likert scale of frequency from Never (1), Sometimes (2), Oftentimes (3) and Always (4). This was used as a tool to interpret the data gathered noting the effectiveness of coping on young Vietnamese sisters are.

**Participants.** The simple random sampling technique was used to select 142 respondents from 60 religious communities in Danang Diocese, Vietnam according to their age (from 26 – 35 years old), year in religious life (who have finished professional vows) and where they work in various fields such as education, health, and pastoral care.

**Research Locale.** The researcher chose 142 religious sisters among 60 religious communities in Danang Diocese, heavily influenced by economic, political, and social factors before and after the Vietnam War (1954–1975). The diocese has many religious congregations that serve the church and people in various fields, with religious sisters playing a major role in pastoral work, education, healthcare, and social services. The Vietnam War's effects significantly impacted the lives of religious sisters from 1975 to the present.

**Research Instruments.** Mixed-method research was used to collect data on the challenges and coping mechanisms of the respondents, utilizing interviews and survey questionnaires.

**Qualitative Analysis.** Thematic analysis was used to identify, clarify, and interpret patterns in the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges and coping mechanisms of the participants. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Coding units were defined as words or groups of words that could be

categorized under one criterion. Themes were described and identified to categorize the levels of psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges and coping mechanisms faced by the young sisters. This analysis informed the development of a psychological adaptation program. From the data gathered through the semi-structured interviews, the researcher used thematic analysis to identify, clarify, and interpret patterns on the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges and coping among young Vietnamese sisters. Analyzing qualitative data from thematic analysis involves searching through a data set to find, analyze, and interpret patterns.

The data from the interviews was recorded and transcribed. The transcripts served as the primary sources of data for thematic analysis and were consolidated then coded under one criterion category responses to each question.

After the themes are described and identified, the researcher categorized the level of psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges, experiences, and coping of the young sisters are facing. These could answer and determine the needs of the young Vietnamese sisters for the counselor to come up with a psychological adaptation program. The researcher made a survey questionnaire to find out the effects sisters' practice of psychosocial and psychospiritual coping in their lives.

**Quantitative Analysis.** The psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges and coping of the young sisters were revealed through the findings of the qualitative analysis. A survey questionnaire was analyzed, assessed, and categorized, based on their responses that would show the efficacy of this field-collected coping.

In this study, simple statistical data analysis used mean. The mean was used to find the effects of psychosocial and psychospiritual coping of young religious sisters. This was one of the key trend indicators that was used to get the data collected by the average.

To analyze the significant correlation between the psychosocial and psycho-spiritual coping of the young sisters with their identified coping outcome, a Pearson Correlation Analysis was computed through SPSS version 26 using 0.05 significance level. Pearson correlation was an inferential statistics method that aims to look into the relationship between two variables. The higher the correlation, the more it indicates that they were related to each other. This was used to ascertain the accuracy of the quantitative questionnaire to be created as a result of the qualitative analysis. The questionnaire served as the tool to measure effectiveness of the program to be created as an output of the study.

## RESULT

**Psychosocial Challenges.** As can be seen from Table 1 below, the various psychosocial challenges are experienced in varying intensities.

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics of the Psychosocial Challenges Experienced by the Vietnamese religious Sisters (N= 142)*

Challenges	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Community Life and Mission: Interpersonal Challenges	2.40	0.65	Low
Physical Manifestations of Stress	2.74	0.68	High
Keeping up with times: Technological Challenges	2.46	0.70	Low

Legend: 1.00-1.75= Very Low; 1.76-2.50= Low; 2.51-3.25= High; 3.26-4.00= Very High

Although most of the interviewees shared concerns about their community life and mission (M= 2.40, SD= 0.65) and the use of technology (M= 2.46, SD= 0.70), they noted that this is experienced in a low frequency. This may mean that, despite the low frequency, it cannot be disregarded as some of the psychosocial challenges the young religious sisters experience.

All the while, physical manifestations of psychosocial concerns and stresses (M= 2.74, SD= 0.68) were recorded to be high among the 142 participating young Vietnamese religious sisters of the survey.

**Psychospiritual Challenges.** Moreover, as presented in the Table 2 below, the participants noted a low frequency of having the psychospiritual challenge related to their relationship with God (M= 1.97, SD =0.57) and their vows (M= 2.06, SD= 0.63). However, as reiterated above, this still shows that this is still experienced by the young religious sisters.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics of the Psychospiritual Challenges Experienced by the Vietnamese religious Sisters (N= 142)*

Challenges	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Relationship with God	1.97	0.57	Low
Relationship with Others	2.57	0.76	High
Relationship with Self	2.51	0.64	High
Vows: Challenges on Letting go and Letting God	2.06	0.63	Low

Legend: 1.00-1.75= Very Low; 1.76-2.50= Low; 2.51-3.25= High; 3.26-4.00= Very High

The survey among 142 young religious sisters in Vietnam also showed high frequency of challenges in their Relationship with Others (M= 2.57, SD= 0.76) and Self (M= 2.51, SD= 0.64).

**Coping of Young Vietnamese Religious Sisters.** To analyze the extent of the coping practices of the young religious sisters in Vietnam (Table 2), descriptive statistics (i.e., Mean and Standard Deviation) was used.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics of the Coping of the Vietnamese Young Religious Sisters (N= 142)*

Coping	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Working on Oneself (Avoiding)	3.01	0.58	High
Acceptance and Improvement	3.63	0.40	Very High
Dialogue/ Plan	3.09	0.49	High
Prayer	3.70	0.27	Very High
Forgiveness, Going Forward, and Understanding	3.49	0.40	Very High
Positive Thoughts	3.49	0.40	Very High

The survey conducted among the 142 young Vietnamese religious sisters recorded high to very high frequencies of usage of various Action-based and Emotion-based coping. That is, the religious sisters often utilize Avoidance (M= 3.01, SD= 0.58) and Dialogue (M= 3.09, SD= 0.49) as their coping; and always use Acceptance and Improvement (M= 3.63, SD= 0.40) and Prayer (M= 3.70, SD= 0.27) to cope with the challenges they experience or go through.



The results also suggest that the religious woman in this study is forgiving and have positive thoughts.

Relationship of psychosocial and psychospiritual coping of the religious sisters with the identified coping outcome. In assessing the significant relationship of the psychosocial and psychospiritual coping of the religious sisters with the identified coping outcome, the researcher computed Pearson r correlation statistics using SPSS version 26 (IBM, 2019).

**Table 3**  
*Pearson R Correlation Between the Young Vietnamese religious Sisters' Psychosocial and Psychospiritual Coping and their Coping Outcome (N= 142)*

Coping Outcome	Psychosocial			Psychospiritual		
	r	p-value	Interpretation	r	p-value	Interpretation
Working on Oneself (Avoiding)	.171	.042	Significant	.221	.008	Significant
Acceptance and Improvement	.011	.895	Not Significant	.011	.895	Not Significant
Dialogue (Plan)	-.083	.326	Not Significant	-.136	.106	Not Significant
Prayer	-.066	.438	Not Significant	-.033	.698	Not Significant
Forgiveness, Going Forward, and Understanding	-.098	.247	Not Significant	-.071	.400	Not Significant
Positive Thoughts	-.012	.884	Not Significant	-.015	.858	Not Significant

As shown in Table 3, results revealed that, mostly, there was no correlation between the variables—other than one (1) coping strategies by the sisters. That is, Working on Oneself (Avoiding) has been found to be significantly correlated to both measure of Psychosocial ( $r = .171, p < .05$ ) and Psychospiritual Coping ( $r = .221, p < .01$ ).

This means that when the sisters work on themselves and/or use distractions and deviation of attention to what cause them stresses and problems, the Vietnamese young religious sisters experience significant coping.

The result revealed that during transition to the mission life, young sisters have different challenges, in term of psychosocial challenges: community life and mission, technological challenges, and physical manifestations of stress; and psychospiritual challenges: Relationship with God, relationship with others, relationship with self, and their vows. The young religious sisters who experienced physical

manifestation challenges in items: 1) My health condition hinders me to enjoy hanging out with others; 2) Stress makes me feel tired, drained, and low in performance; 3) Pressure from work makes me feel sick; 4) I do not like to work under time pressure; 5) I get stressed easily with multiple tasks at the same time. And relationship with others in items: 1) I do not pray for others when I am angry; 2) I complain to God about other people (see Table 1).

The findings (see Table 3) show that the young sisters are faced with stressful situations in their mission. Most of the young religious sisters are using Working on Oneself/ Avoidant coping in item: 1) I tend to avoid and stay quiet when there are challenges; 2) I read books, play piano, visit the elderly or do gardening when I am worried; 3) I listen to music and meditate when in distress; 4) I encourage my myself that I can do it. They used avoidant coping as a coping skill to solve their stress.

This means that individuals do not want to directly address the problem or face the challenges, but instead, they turn their attention away from it. In other words, the individual gets involved in other activities to avoid thinking about the challenges. In addition, Avoidant coping includes avoiding stressful conditions, experiences, or challenging thoughts and feelings as a way of dealing with them. They are able to think less about their challenges that make them stressed.

## DISCUSSION

The result of the study found the psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges and coping mechanism among young religious sister in Vietnam.

There are many causes of stress in religious life (Yen, 2020). The previous study showed that the obstacles young people and religious face including increased health anxiety, academic, family and social difficulties that are consistently a cause of stress in their lives, they have to balance stress with relaxation (Serlachius et al., 2020). The schedule of activities and pastoral work is disturbing and

changing, making many men and women religious feel physically tired (Ha,2020). This fatigue causes problems with imbalanced physiological and psychospiritual needs and lead those things to stress.

There are three ways to cope with stress as a religious Yen (2020). First, emotion-focused coping is making an effort to change or reduce negative emotions associated with stress. Reduce negative emotions caused by stress of community transformation by: sharing with classmates or acquaintances who have gone before, people with more experience than themselves, and even people in the same situation to ease easier to empathize with. In addition, they can also do things they like to relax, such as spending time listening to music, reading books, or going for a walk. If the stress is too much and needs immediate relief, we can still turn to the help of headache medications and tranquilizers.

Second, problem-focused coping is the individual's efforts to manage or change an existing problem that causes stress. To solve a problem, the individual needs to consider specific solutions, weigh the costs and benefits of these solutions, and then choose an alternative. Reducing negative emotions due to stress transforms the Community by directly dealing with the problem, investing more time and trying to learn, participate in activities and work in the new place of assignment. They can actively initiate conversation and get to know the sisters, who are around them to learn, and can also learn by observing and following the guidance of their companions. They can even actively follow their own experiences in similar circumstances and accept even risks or failures.

Third, the fundamental and important way for religious is a life of prayer and contemplation because contemplation always accompanies apostolic ministry. For those who live in religious life, the spiritual life is a source of comfort, a source of life, and an indispensable source of peace every day. Therefore, when experiencing stress, everyone can turn to God to share, confide and ask God through the

intercession of Mary, Saint Joseph and the Saints to help them reduce stress in life. In the religious life, maintaining and developing an intimate relationship with God will help religious to obtain the sacred resources and the necessary graces to fulfill their apostolic work well. When religious put their whole heart and mind in Christ and have a close relationship with God, with members of the Community, they will find meaning in their work and be able to overcome the stresses of life, directly in the transfer of the Community and the apostolate. The Vietnamese Church is divided into three provinces (North, Central, and South). Religious Sisters in different congregation have been called to serve as a missionary to preach Gospel to the people in the most of dioceses and parishes with multiple missions. They are also play an important role in education, medical, social and pastoral ministries in the Church.

For young religious Vietnamese sisters who professed their vows in different congregations. In the first 2 years after first profession, they are sent to various communities and parishes. They work an expert in their fields as they are assigned in the dormitory, orphanages and homeless elderly. Some sisters are assigned in the kindergartens, disability school, leprosy center and social work center and others assigned in the hospital and a small clinic. They work with many classes of society, and circumstances where they are sent. Besides above those assignments, the young sisters also join in activities in the parishes nearby community, such as: catechesis, flower arrangement, sacristy, practice the choir and other things. Indeed, this is the time young sisters face many psychological and spiritual challenges.

During transition to community and mission life, young sisters begin to practice what they were trained in the formation house. They have to adjust their lives in each environment where they are sent, this means junior sisters cannot apply all what they did in the formation house. For example, for the prayer life, they have more time to pray, reading spiritual book; for the community life, they shared work with groupmates. When they transfer to in the

community and mission life. Young sisters follow schedule of the community, and they also adapt lifestyles of the community with different members in the community they are sent. For their mission, most of the young sister often play the role of a facilitator, educators, administrators or pastoral workers where they are sent. They are and they usually adapt to the pressures of their work. They have to develop skills to adapt to their environment and/or the demands of fulfilling responsibility brought about by the stress that they have to fight every day. These challenges affect their psychological and spiritual life.

Based on the personal experience of the researcher, as a young religious sister, there is a need to take good care of health to carry out the assigned mission since health is the most important key that opens the door to happiness. Being sick does not have the strength to do the tasks and are worried. Individual limitations such as ages, different backgrounds, habits, dialects and even beliefs affect the relationship towards one another in the community. Joining in activities in the community makes them exhausted, disappointed and feel tired due to work pressures. Multi-tasking hinders them to help other sisters. This is the cause of stress in every situation. To lessen stress, the young sisters used Working on Oneself/ avoidant coping as a coping to cope with their stress. This is used to cope with stress as a religious, to relax, spending time listening to music, reading books, going for a walk or do other things by themselves.

Moreover, no significant correlation was found among other action-based and emotion-based coping of the sisters with the identified coping outcome. More specifically, their use of Acceptance and Improvement ( $r = .011$ ,  $p = .895$ ;  $r = .011$ ,  $p = .895$ ), Dialogue and planning ( $r = -.083$ ,  $p = .326$ ;  $r = -.136$ ,  $p = .106$ ), Prayer ( $r = -.066$ ,  $p = .438$ ;  $r = -.033$ ,  $p = .698$ ), Forgiveness ( $r = -.098$ ,  $p = .247$ ;  $r = -.071$ ,  $p = .400$ ), and Positive Thoughts ( $r = -.012$ ,  $p = .884$ ;  $r = -.015$ ,  $p = .858$ ) do not significantly result to their psychosocial and psychospiritual coping, respectively.

The young Vietnamese sisters during transition to community and mission life are able to cope with their psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges with Acceptance and Improvement, Dialogue and planning, Forgiveness, Prayer and Positive Thoughts coping. Stresses caused by these coping strategies are manageable by the young sisters. For example, when they have misunderstanding, they will seek God's help (Prayer/ religious coping), dialogue, or seek advice from someone to find solutions (Dialogue/ Plan coping). They accept and learn from it as God's will (Acceptance and Improvement coping). When they are hurt by someone. They go beyond it by forgive and humbly go forward with God's grace (Forgiveness/ emotional coping). However, the young sisters cannot cope with the stresses brought about the physical health condition. For example, they feel tired because of too much work to do and to finish it. Most of the ache and pain they feel in their body are cause by the physical stress. The only thing to solve stress is less work, more time to rest, take care physical health. That is the cause the young sister used those above coping, but it is not correlated with their physical manifestation challenges, that they are encounter in during transition to the mission life.

**Conclusions.** Based on the above findings of the study, it can be concluded that:

1. The study found out that the challenges of the young Vietnamese religious sister in terms of psychosocial challenges: Community and mission life: interpersonal challenges; Keeping up with Time: Technological Challenges; Physical manifestation of stress. All the while, physical manifestation of stress ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) were recorded to be high among the 142 participating young Vietnamese religious sisters of the survey.
2. In term of psychospiritual challenge, the most challenging experience of the young religious sisters are relationship with others: relationship with God; relationship with others; relationship with self and their Vows: Challenges on Letting Go and Letting God.

3. The survey conducted among the 142 young Vietnamese religious sisters recorded high to very high frequencies of usage of various Action-based and Emotion-based coping. That is, the religious sisters often utilize Avoidance (M= 3.01, SD= 0.58) and Dialogue (M= 3.09, SD= 0.49) as their coping; and always use Acceptance and Improvement (M= 3.63, SD= 0.40) and Prayer (M= 3.70, SD= 0.27) to cope with the challenges they experience or go through.
4. The results revealed that, mostly, there was no correlation between the variables—other than one (1) coping strategies by the sisters. That is, working on Oneself (Avoiding) has been found to be significantly correlated to both measure of Psychosocial ( $r = .171$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Psychospiritual Coping ( $r = .221$ ,  $p < .01$ ).
5. The Vietnamese religious sisters used the coping Working on Oneself (Avoiding) to lessen their stresses and problems, the Vietnamese young religious sisters experience significant coping.
6. The output of this study is a psychological adaptation program for young religious sisters. The psychological adaptation program helps the sisters improve their psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges, increasing self-esteem and reducing stress. This program also helps young sisters to believe more in themselves and become more effective and efficient in their vocation, as well as creative in their mission. The program and activities were designed for the young religious sisters to become joyful, creative, and holistic Christ Centered religious sisters for the needs of the mission.

Recommendations. Based on the results and conclusions drawn, the following are the recommendations of the study:

1. Religious Congregation in Danang Diocese. Implement the Psychological Adaptation Program for all sisters to help them

- transition to community life and deepen their relationships with God and others.
2. Other Religious Congregations. The program could benefit priests, sisters, and brothers in dealing with physical and relational stress, helping them become better individuals in their vocations.
3. Guidance Counselors. Utilize counseling competencies to assist young sisters in coping with psychosocial and psychospiritual challenges, strengthening their relationships within the community.
4. Future Researchers. Use this study as a reference for further research on the challenges and coping mechanisms of Vietnamese religious sisters, providing insights for improvement.

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