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Applicability of General Strain Theory to Drug Users of National Capital Region

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the applicability of General Strain Theory to perceived strains and coping strategies among persons deprived of liberty convicted of illegal drug use in the National Capital Region, Philippines, including the moderating influence of demographic characteristics. A mixed-methods design involved 400 purposively selected respondents from four Bureau of Jail Management and Penology city jails and 40 interview participants. Data from researcher-developed questionnaires and interviews were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Spearman's correlation, moderated multiple regression, and thematic analysis. Respondents recognized all three strain categories, particularly removal of positively valued stimuli (M = 2.99), presentation of negatively valued stimuli (M = 2.93), and failure to achieve positively valued goals (M = 2.92). Adaptive coping was less frequently reported (M = 2.08) than maladaptive coping-related difficulties (M = 2.92). Major themes included family conflict, economic hardship, discrimination, relationship loss, and perceived failure. Perceived strain was significantly associated with coping strategies (r_s = 0.625, p = 0.001), with a significant moderating effect of demographic characteristics (β = 0.215, p = 0.032). Findings support the contextual applicability of General Strain Theory without establishing causality. Strengthening coping skills, family support, livelihood opportunities, and community-based rehabilitation is recommended. Purposive sampling, custodial settings, and self-reported measures limit generalizability. The study provides an empirical foundation for community-based drug prevention and rehabilitation, supporting public health, institutional sustainability, and collaborative governance aligned with Sustainable Development Goals 3, 16, and 17.

Keywords: *Adaptive Coping, Community Rehabilitation, General Strain Theory, Illegal Drug Use, Maladaptive Coping, Persons Deprived of Liberty, Psychosocial Strain*

1. INTRODUCTION

Illegal drug use remains a significant public health and criminal justice concern, influenced by psychological distress, adverse life experiences, socioeconomic difficulties, and inadequate coping resources. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2024) estimated that 292 million people worldwide used drugs in 2022, representing a 20% increase over the preceding decade. In the Philippines, methamphetamine hydrochloride, commonly known as *shabu*, accounted for 92.06% of reported treatment and rehabilitation admissions in 2022, emphasizing the continuing need for responsive prevention and rehabilitation initiatives (Dangerous Drugs Board, 2022). Understanding illegal drug use requires examining the stressful conditions and emotional experiences that may influence substance-related behavior. Grummitt et al. (2022) established significant associations between adverse childhood experiences and subsequent substance misuse, while Stellern et al. (2023) identified substantial difficulties in emotional regulation among individuals with substance use disorders. General Strain Theory (GST) offers a criminological framework for examining these relationships by explaining how stressful experiences may generate negative emotions and influence coping responses (Seyidoğlu, 2024). Accordingly, this study examined the applicability of GST among selected persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) with illegal drug use convictions in the National Capital Region (NCR), focusing on perceived strains, adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, and the moderating role of demographic characteristics.

Research Problem

Illegal drug use is associated with multiple interacting personal and environmental stressors that may increase vulnerability to harmful coping behaviors. Research has linked adverse childhood experiences, family dysfunction, abuse, and other stressful life conditions with substance misuse (Grummitt et al., 2022). Similarly, Steele and Durkin (2024) demonstrated that victimization, homelessness, and poor health were associated with opioid use among rural adolescents, with depression and anxiety mediating certain strain-related relationships. These findings support the relevance of examining stressful experiences and emotional responses when investigating substance use. Within the Philippine context, substance use presents distinct rehabilitation challenges. Harada et al. (2023) identified differences in dependence severity and relapse risk among individuals receiving community-based and residential treatment, emphasizing the importance of addressing individual circumstances and treatment needs. The Dangerous Drugs Board (2022) likewise reported that 24.53% of treatment and rehabilitation admissions originated from NCR, underscoring the region's relevance to substance-use research. Despite the established contribution of GST to understanding delinquency and substance-related behavior, its applicability to the perceived strains and coping strategies of Filipino drug users within custodial settings requires further contextual examination. Existing evidence from different populations and social environments cannot automatically establish how the theory operates among PDLs in NCR. Consequently, this study investigated whether the three categories of strain identified in GST correspond to respondents' experiences, how these strains relate to their adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies, and whether demographic characteristics moderate this relationship. The investigation was intended to provide a theoretical and empirical basis for appropriate community-based drug prevention and intervention strategies.

Assumptions of the Study

The study was guided by the assumption that individuals involved in illegal drug use may experience different forms of strain arising from unmet aspirations, the loss of valued relationships or opportunities, and exposure to unfavorable circumstances. Consistent with GST, these experiences may generate negative emotions and influence the selection of coping strategies, although exposure to strain does not necessarily result in deviant behavior (Seyidoğlu,

2024). Individual differences in emotional regulation, coping resources, and social circumstances may also affect responses to stressful experiences (Stellern et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2024). The study further assumed that respondents' perceptions of strain and their reported coping strategies could be systematically assessed and that demographic characteristics might influence the relationship between these variables. For statistical testing, the study formulated two null hypotheses: there is no significant relationship between perceived types of strain and employed coping strategies, and demographic characteristics do not significantly moderate this relationship. These assumptions and hypotheses served as the basis for empirical investigation rather than predetermined conclusions.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to determine the applicability of Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory in explaining the perceived strains and coping strategies of selected drug users in the National Capital Region. Specifically, it sought to describe respondents' demographic characteristics in terms of age, sex, educational attainment, and income class; assess their experiences of strain involving failure to achieve positively valued goals, removal of positively valued stimuli, and presentation of negatively valued stimuli; determine the adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies employed to manage these strains; examine the significant relationship between perceived types of strain and coping strategies; and establish whether demographic characteristics significantly moderate this relationship. The findings also served as the basis for developing a Community Illegal Drugs Intervention and Prevention Program (CIDIP) Plan responsive to identified stressors and coping needs.

Theoretical or Conceptual Basis

The study was anchored on Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory, which explains criminal and deviant behavior through the interaction of stressful experiences, negative emotional responses, and available coping mechanisms. GST identifies three principal categories of strain: failure to achieve positively valued goals, removal of positively valued stimuli, and presentation of negatively valued stimuli. These conditions may generate anger, frustration, anxiety, or depression, potentially increasing vulnerability to maladaptive behavioral responses when legitimate coping resources are insufficient (Seyidoğlu, 2024). The theory recognizes that strain does not automatically produce criminal behavior because individuals differ in their emotional responses, social support, and available coping resources. Steele and Durkin (2024) provided empirical support for strain-related pathways to substance use, identifying associations involving victimization, psychological distress, and opioid use. Similarly, Al-Badayneh et al. (2024) demonstrated the relevance of GST in examining adverse experiences and delinquency-related processes in a different social context. These studies support the theory's broader applicability while emphasizing the need for population-specific investigation. Within the present study, the three categories of strain constituted the independent variable, while adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies represented the dependent variable. Respondents' age, sex, educational attainment, and income class served as potential moderating variables. Adaptive coping included constructive approaches to managing stressful circumstances, whereas maladaptive coping involved potentially harmful responses to distress. Setiawan et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of social support, psychological coping, spiritual experiences, professional intervention, and increased awareness in managing substance-related recovery challenges. The conceptual framework therefore examined how perceived strains relate to coping responses and whether demographic characteristics influence the strength or direction of these relationships. This framework provided a structured basis for assessing the applicability of GST among selected PDLs in NCR and for identifying considerations relevant to community-based drug intervention and prevention.

The study aligns primarily with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), particularly Target 3.5, which emphasizes strengthening the prevention and treatment of substance abuse. By investigating strain-related experiences and coping strategies among drug users, the research contributes evidence that may inform psychological support, rehabilitation planning, and community-based drug prevention initiatives. Its proposed intervention plan recognizes the importance of addressing underlying stressors and strengthening constructive coping resources, consistent with evidence supporting comprehensive approaches to substance-use recovery (Harada et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2024). The study also supports SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), particularly Target 16.a concerning institutional capacity to prevent violence and combat crime. Examining the experiences of PDLs may help correctional institutions, law enforcement agencies, and local authorities formulate more responsive rehabilitation and prevention measures. Furthermore, its proposed Community Illegal Drugs Intervention and Prevention Program supports SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), particularly Target 17.17, through collaboration among government agencies, barangay officials, families, educational institutions, religious organizations, and community stakeholders. These connections reflect the broader emphasis on effective institutions and coordinated action within the sustainable development agenda (United Nations, 2026). Overall, the study contributes to public health, socio-economic, community, and institutional sustainability by providing a localized basis for understanding drug-related strains and promoting coordinated, evidence-informed prevention and rehabilitation strategies. Its contribution lies in identifying factors that can guide the design of more responsive interventions rather than establishing the effectiveness of those interventions before implementation.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the relationship between perceived strains and coping strategies among drug users. The quantitative component assessed the applicability of the three types of strain identified in GST, coping strategies, and the moderating influence of demographic characteristics. The qualitative component explored participants' experiences and responses to stressful circumstances through interviews. Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings allowed a more comprehensive interpretation of the research problem, consistent with the methodological principles discussed by Guetterman and Manojlovich (2024).

Research Locale or Study Setting

The study was conducted in four selected city jails under the supervision and administration of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) in the National Capital Region, Philippines. These facilities included Manila City Jail, Quezon City Jail, Caloocan City Jail, and Taguig City Jail, representing the first, second, third, and fourth districts of NCR, respectively. The facilities were selected based on BJMP records indicating comparatively high populations of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) with drug-related cases. Their geographical distribution provided access to qualified respondents from different custodial settings within the region.

Participants or Data Sources

The quantitative component involved 400 PDLs convicted of illegal drug use and incarcerated in the selected BJMP facilities, with 100 respondents representing each city jail. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula, based on BJMP records identifying 21,186 PDLs charged with drug-related cases. Purposive sampling was employed to select individuals who satisfied the established inclusion criteria, particularly those convicted of illegal drug use and confined in participating facilities. PDLs whose cases were still undergoing trial were excluded. This approach facilitated the selection of respondents possessing characteristics directly relevant to

the research objectives (Alchemer, 2021). Additionally, 40 participants were included in the qualitative component through interviews to obtain detailed accounts of their experiences of strain and coping responses.

Research Instruments or Materials

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire based on the principal constructs of Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory. The instrument comprised five components covering respondents' demographic characteristics, failure to achieve positively valued goals, removal of positively valued stimuli, presentation of negatively valued stimuli, and adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. A separate qualitative interview guide containing 24 questions written in Filipino was utilized to facilitate participants' understanding and encourage detailed responses. The questionnaire employed a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree), while perceived theoretical applicability was interpreted from Totally Not Applicable to Highly Applicable. Mean scores were categorized using the intervals 1.00–1.75, 1.76–2.50, 2.51–3.25, and 3.26–4.00, with higher scores indicating greater agreement or applicability. The instrument underwent expert validation, adviser review, BJMP consultation, and pretesting among selected PDLs before final administration. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a recommended minimum reliability coefficient of 0.70 (Taherdoost, 2016). The instrument obtained an overall coefficient of 0.88, while individual coefficients were 0.87 for removal of positively valued stimuli, 0.86 for lack of conventional coping mechanisms, 0.85 for failure to achieve positively valued goals, and 0.83 for presentation of negatively valued stimuli, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher initially reviewed relevant literature and developed a questionnaire aligned with GST. Correspondence with Robert Agnew confirmed that he had not developed a dedicated research instrument for the theory, supporting the preparation of a researcher-developed questionnaire. Following instrument development and validation, the researcher secured the necessary permissions from the research adviser, BJMP authorities, and officials of the participating city jails. Qualified respondents were identified through purposive sampling based on the prescribed inclusion criteria. Before questionnaire administration, the study's objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of participation were explained, and informed consent was obtained. Completed questionnaires were retrieved and examined for completeness and consistency, achieving a 100% retrieval rate. Qualitative interviews were subsequently conducted with 40 participants. All collected responses were coded, organized, and prepared for statistical and qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency counts, percentage distributions, and ranking were employed to describe respondents' demographic characteristics, while weighted means determined the perceived applicability of the three categories of strain and the coping strategies employed. Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to establish the significance of the relationship between perceived strain and coping strategies. Moderated multiple regression analysis examined whether respondents' age, sex, educational attainment, and income class influenced this relationship. Qualitative interview responses were examined through thematic analysis to identify recurring experiences, perceived sources of strain, and coping mechanisms. The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive assessment of the applicability of GST among the respondents.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed ethical procedures to protect participants' rights, privacy, confidentiality, and welfare. Necessary institutional and BJMP permissions were obtained before data collection, and respondents received explanations regarding the research objectives, procedures, and intended use of their responses. Written informed consent was secured, emphasizing voluntary participation and the right to refuse questions or withdraw without consequences affecting their rights or treatment while incarcerated. Participant identities were protected through codes or aliases, and collected information was used exclusively for research purposes. Research data were handled confidentially to prevent unauthorized access or disclosure, following applicable data privacy requirements and institutional regulations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The findings revealed that most respondents were aged 40–49 years (45.8%), followed by those aged 18–29 years (26.5%) and 30–39 years (21.0%). Males comprised 74.3% of the respondents, while females accounted for 25.8%. Regarding educational attainment, 48.5% had no formal schooling, 24.3% had primary education, 15.3% had some secondary education, and 10.5% had completed secondary education. Most respondents were classified as poor (94.3%), while 4.3% belonged to the low-income but not poor category. These findings indicate that the respondents were predominantly middle-aged males with limited educational attainment and substantial economic disadvantages. These characteristics provide important context for understanding their experiences of strain but do not independently establish that poverty or educational disadvantage causes illegal drug use. Harada et al. (2023) similarly identified educational attainment as relevant to relapse risk among individuals with substance use disorders in the Philippines. Consistent with the broader observations of Jurczyk (2024) and Worthington (2022), adverse experiences and limited coping resources may be relevant to understanding deviant behavior. The findings emphasize the need to consider socioeconomic circumstances when developing rehabilitation and reintegration interventions.

3.2 Perceived Applicability of the Types of Strain Under General Strain Theory

The respondents generally agreed that the three categories of strain identified in GST were applicable to their experiences, obtaining an overall mean of 2.95. Removal of positively valued stimuli received the highest mean (2.99), followed by presentation of negatively valued stimuli (2.93) and failure to achieve positively valued goals (2.92). Although the differences were relatively small, all three categories were recognized by respondents as relevant to their experiences of illegal drug use. These findings support the contextual relevance of GST in examining substance-related experiences among the selected respondents. The theory recognizes that stressful circumstances may generate negative emotional responses, which can influence behavioral decisions depending on available coping resources (Seyidoğlu, 2024). Steele and Durkin (2024) likewise demonstrated associations between strain-related experiences and opioid use among adolescents. However, the present findings establish perceived applicability rather than causal relationships between specific strains and illegal drug use.

3.2.1 Failure to Achieve Positively Valued Goals

The respondents generally agreed that failure to achieve positively valued goals was associated with their experiences of illegal drug use, obtaining an overall mean of 2.92. Inadequate social support networks, absence of mentorship and guidance, and competing demands received the highest mean scores of 3.55, interpreted as Strongly Agree. Rigid bureaucratic structures followed closely with a mean of 3.54, while family responsibilities obtained 3.53. Conversely,

family dysfunction and unresolved trauma received the lowest mean scores of 2.31, interpreted as Disagree. The findings suggest that difficulties involving social support, guidance, institutional barriers, and competing responsibilities were more strongly endorsed than certain family-related and psychological difficulties. These experiences reflect barriers to achieving valued personal, occupational, and social objectives. Sinha (2024) emphasized the relationship between persistent stress, environmental adversity, and substance-related vulnerability, while Setiawan et al. (2024) highlighted the role of supportive relationships and psychological coping resources in recovery. The findings therefore suggest that prevention and rehabilitation efforts should address both individual coping difficulties and the structural circumstances that respondents identify as sources of strain.

3.2.2 Removal of Positively Valued Stimuli

The removal of positively valued stimuli obtained an overall mean of 2.99, interpreted as Agree. Loss of a romantic relationship received the highest mean (3.55), followed by loss of family relationships, unemployment, and chronic illness, each obtaining 3.54. Death of a loved one, destruction of valued possessions, displacement, homelessness, and rejection obtained mean scores of 3.53. In contrast, loss of friendship received the lowest mean of 2.33, indicating disagreement with its perceived association with illegal drug use. These findings indicate that the loss of important relationships, economic stability, and valued personal circumstances represented meaningful experiences of strain among respondents. Under GST, losing valued sources of emotional security, belonging, or financial support may create psychological distress and increase vulnerability to maladaptive responses. Rocheleau et al. (2025) demonstrated that negative emotions mediated the relationship between victimization and substance use, with variations associated with marital status. Similarly, Steele and Durkin (2024) identified homelessness and other adverse circumstances as predictors of opioid use in their study population. These findings emphasize the importance of considering relational losses, unemployment, and social instability in individualized substance-use assessments.

3.2.3 Presentation of Negatively Valued Stimuli

The presentation of negatively valued stimuli obtained an overall mean of 2.93, interpreted as Agree. Physical or sexual assault, racial bias, and loneliness received the highest mean scores of 3.49, followed by work-related stress, disability-related prejudice, financial debt, and unfavorable environmental conditions, each obtaining 3.48. Witnessing violence also received a relatively high mean of 3.47. Meanwhile, natural disasters, gender-related prejudice, lack of social connection, economic uncertainty, and interpersonal conflict were among the lowest-rated indicators, each obtaining 2.29. These findings suggest that respondents associated their experiences of illegal drug use with victimization, discrimination, emotional distress, financial obligations, and adverse living conditions. Ebrahimi et al. (2024) identified significant associations between racism-related experiences and substance use in their systematic and meta-analytic review. Similarly, Grummitt et al. (2022) established associations between adverse childhood experiences and later substance misuse. Although the present findings do not establish that these stressors directly caused drug use, they support the importance of assessing exposure to harmful experiences and providing appropriate psychosocial assistance.

3.2.4 Qualitative Experiences of Strain

The qualitative analysis of interviews with 40 participants identified five major themes: family conflict, abuse, and relationship breakdown; economic hardship, unemployment, and occupational insecurity; discrimination, bullying, humiliation, and social devaluation; loss of significant relationships and valued life circumstances; and role burden, perceived failure, and threats to self-worth. Participants described parental and marital conflicts, financial difficulties, unemployment, social rejection, bereavement, family separation, and challenges in fulfilling

expected responsibilities. These experiences frequently overlapped, particularly when economic hardship intensified family conflict or diminished participants' ability to fulfill parental and household obligations. The findings demonstrate that participants experienced strain across interconnected familial, economic, social, and personal dimensions rather than through isolated events. Barnert et al. (2024) identified associations between adverse childhood experiences, substance misuse, and mental health difficulties among young adults returning from jail, emphasizing the relevance of trauma-informed support. Grummitt et al. (2022) similarly highlighted the long-term implications of adverse childhood experiences for substance misuse. Consistent with GST, the qualitative findings suggest that repeated exposure to difficult circumstances and the loss of meaningful relationships may intensify emotional distress, particularly when effective support and coping resources are limited.

3.3 Coping Strategies Employed by the Respondents

The findings revealed differences in respondents' reported adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. Adaptive coping obtained an overall mean of 2.08, interpreted as Disagree, whereas maladaptive coping obtained a higher mean of 2.92, interpreted as Agree. The combined mean of 2.50 indicated an overall response within the Disagree category. These results suggest that respondents reported relatively limited utilization of adaptive coping strategies and greater agreement with difficulties associated with maladaptive responses. The observed difference highlights the importance of coping resources in understanding responses to stressful circumstances. Stellern et al. (2023) identified emotion regulation difficulties among individuals with substance use disorders, while Setiawan et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of psychological coping, social support, and professional interventions during recovery. The findings indicate potential areas for strengthening coping skills, although the reported scores do not independently demonstrate the effectiveness or consequences of particular coping strategies.

3.3.1 Adaptive Coping Strategies

Adaptive coping strategies obtained an overall mean of 2.08, indicating disagreement with their general utilization. Seeking emotional support received the highest mean of 2.68, followed by seeking information or advice, obtaining practical assistance, and using relaxation techniques, each receiving 2.67. In contrast, problem-solving skills and effective time management received the lowest mean scores of 1.56, interpreted as Strongly Disagree. Positive reframing obtained 1.57, while expressive writing and identifying positive meanings in challenging situations each received 1.58. The findings indicate that respondents reported greater reliance on interpersonal assistance than on independent problem-solving, time management, and cognitive coping strategies. Setiawan et al. (2024) identified social support, psychological coping, spiritual experiences, professional intervention, and increased awareness as important components of substance-use recovery. Similarly, Hechanova et al. (2026) demonstrated the relevance of recovery skills, life skills, and family support in a Philippine jail-based rehabilitation program. These findings support the potential value of incorporating structured problem-solving activities, emotional regulation, time management, and supportive interpersonal interventions into rehabilitation programs.

3.3.2 Maladaptive Coping Strategies

Maladaptive coping-related indicators obtained an overall mean of 2.92, interpreted as Agree. The inability to perform effective problem-solving and manage time received the highest mean scores of 3.44, followed by difficulties in positive reframing (3.43), expressive writing (3.42), and identifying positive meaning in challenging experiences (3.42). Difficulties in spiritual practices also received a relatively high mean of 3.27. Conversely, inability to seek emotional support received the lowest mean of 2.32, while difficulties in obtaining information, practical

assistance, and relaxation support each obtained 2.33. These findings suggest that respondents perceived deficits in constructive coping skills, particularly problem-solving, time management, and cognitive reframing, as relevant to their involvement in illegal drug use. Stellern et al. (2023) demonstrated that emotion regulation difficulties are associated with substance use disorders, while Sinha (2024) discussed how persistent stress and disrupted stress responses may contribute to maladaptive coping and continued substance use. The findings emphasize the potential importance of structured psychosocial interventions that strengthen practical coping abilities rather than relying exclusively on behavioral restrictions or punitive approaches.

3.3.3 Qualitative Experiences of Coping Strategies

The qualitative findings identified five major coping-related themes: social withdrawal and emotional suppression; distraction through recreational and physical activities; reliance on alcohol as an alternative coping strategy; problem-solving and practical coping with limited or unsuccessful outcomes; and spiritual coping with diminishing or mixed effectiveness. Participants described isolating themselves, suppressing emotions, crying privately, engaging in sports or entertainment, consuming alcohol, seeking employment, pursuing additional income, and relying on prayer or religious activities. Although several participants attempted constructive responses, these strategies often provided temporary relief or failed to resolve their underlying difficulties. These findings indicate that participants did not necessarily lack coping strategies entirely; rather, some available strategies were avoidant, temporary, or insufficient to address persistent stressors. Setiawan et al. (2024) highlighted the value of psychological coping, social support, spiritual experiences, and professional interventions during recovery. Sinha (2024) likewise discussed how chronic stress may interfere with adaptive responses and contribute to maladaptive coping patterns. The qualitative findings therefore underscore the potential importance of helping individuals develop sustainable coping resources while addressing the practical difficulties that may limit the effectiveness of their existing strategies.

3.4 Relationship Between Perceived Strain and Employed Coping Strategies

The correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between respondents' perceived applicability of the types of strain and their employed coping strategies ($r_s = 0.625$, $p = 0.001$). The result indicated a moderate-to-strong positive association, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level. This finding establishes that respondents reporting higher perceived strain tended to obtain higher scores on the coping measure used in the study. The significant relationship supports the relevance of examining strain and coping together within the framework of GST. Lee (2024) found that negative emotions partially mediated associations between strain and delinquency, with the strength of certain relationships influenced by criminal coping propensity. Rocheleau et al. (2025) similarly demonstrated relationships among victimization, negative emotions, and substance use that varied according to marital circumstances. However, the present correlation does not establish a causal direction or determine whether greater strain specifically increases adaptive or maladaptive coping. These distinctions are important when interpreting the results and developing interventions based on the respondents' reported coping needs.

3.5 Moderating Effect of Demographic Characteristics on the Strain–Coping Relationship

Moderated multiple regression analysis revealed a statistically significant interaction between perceived types of strain and respondents' demographic characteristics in relation to employed coping strategies ($\beta = 0.215$, $p = 0.032$). The result was significant at the 0.05 level, leading to the rejection of the second null hypothesis. This indicates that the relationship between perceived strain and coping strategies varied according to the demographic characteristics included in the tested interaction. The finding suggests that demographic differences are relevant when

examining how individuals respond to stressful experiences. Lee (2024) demonstrated that the relationship between negative emotions and delinquent behavior may vary according to individual coping-related characteristics. Rocheleau et al. (2025) similarly reported differences in strain-related substance-use processes according to marital circumstances. Within the Philippine custodial context, Hechanova et al. (2026) identified gender-related differences in outcomes of a jail-based substance-use rehabilitation program, supporting the importance of considering participant characteristics in intervention planning. Nevertheless, the present analysis tested a combined demographic interaction and did not establish which specific characteristic independently accounted for the moderating effect. Further examination of individual interaction terms would be necessary before identifying particular demographic groups as more vulnerable to specific coping responses. Overall, the findings provide contextual support for the applicability of General Strain Theory among the selected PDLs in NCR. The respondents recognized all three categories of strain, reported limited adaptive coping and greater agreement with maladaptive coping-related difficulties, and demonstrated significant relationships between perceived strain and coping strategies. The qualitative findings further illustrated the interconnected nature of family, economic, social, relational, and personal stressors. These results provide an empirical basis for the proposed Community Illegal Drugs Intervention and Prevention Program (CIDIP) Plan, particularly its emphasis on addressing sources of strain, strengthening constructive coping resources, and encouraging coordinated community-based interventions.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established the contextual applicability of Robert Agnew's General Strain Theory among selected persons deprived of liberty convicted of illegal drug use in the National Capital Region. Respondents experienced all three categories of strain, particularly inadequate social support, loss of valued relationships, unemployment, discrimination, and adverse personal circumstances. Qualitative findings further revealed interconnected family, economic, social, and emotional difficulties. Respondents reported limited utilization of adaptive coping strategies, particularly problem-solving, time management, and positive reframing, while relying more frequently on interpersonal support. A significant positive relationship between perceived strain and employed coping strategies was established, with demographic characteristics significantly moderating this association. These findings indicate that individuals' responses to strain are associated with their personal circumstances and available coping resources. Overall, the study supports the relevance of General Strain Theory for understanding strain-related experiences and coping patterns within the selected custodial population, providing an empirical foundation for context-responsive prevention and rehabilitation initiatives.

The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, local government units, and relevant community organizations should strengthen rehabilitation and prevention initiatives addressing the principal strains identified in the study. Priority should be given to structured coping-skills programs emphasizing problem-solving, time management, emotional regulation, and positive reframing. Barangay officials, educational institutions, religious organizations, and families should collaborate in establishing mentorship, counseling, and social support mechanisms. The Department of Labor and Employment and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority may support livelihood training, employment assistance, and skills development for economically disadvantaged individuals. The Department of Social Welfare and Development and rehabilitation providers should strengthen family counseling, trauma-informed assistance, and community reintegration services. The proposed Community Illegal Drugs Intervention and Prevention Program should be considered for implementation with appropriate monitoring and evaluation. Future researchers should examine individual demographic moderating effects and

extend investigations to other custodial and community-based populations to strengthen the evidence supporting targeted interventions.

The study was limited to 400 persons deprived of liberty convicted of illegal drug use in four selected Bureau of Jail Management and Penology city jails in the National Capital Region, with 40 participants providing qualitative information. Purposive sampling restricted the representativeness of respondents, particularly concerning individuals outside custodial facilities or undergoing community-based rehabilitation. The reliance on self-reported questionnaires and interviews may have influenced the measurement of perceived strain and coping strategies. Furthermore, the correlational analyses did not establish causal relationships, while the combined demographic interaction did not identify individual moderating effects. Future studies may address these limitations through broader sampling and additional analytical approaches.

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