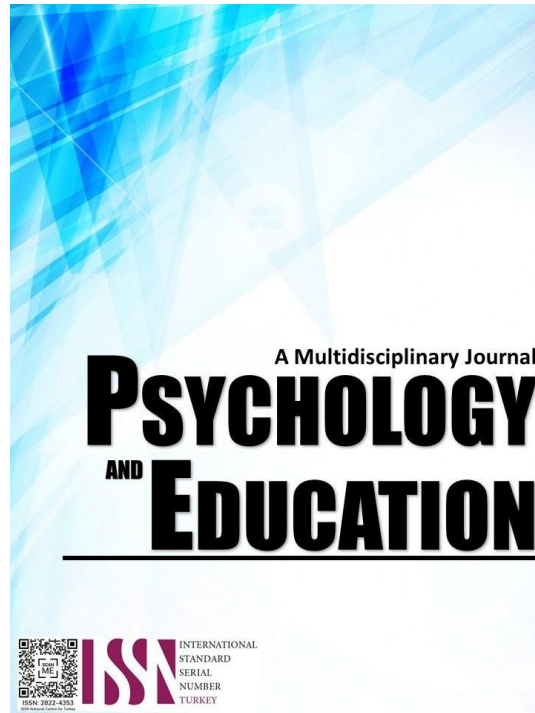


EXPLORING RESEARCH ANXIETY AMONG BACHELOR OF ARTS IN PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS IN LIPA CITY: AN APPLICATION OF COLAIZZI'S DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY



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Exploring Research Anxiety among Bachelor of Arts in Psychology Students in Lipa City: An Application of Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenology

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Abstract

Research anxiety is a common issue among college students, especially when faced with deadlines, complex projects, and challenging research topics. The present study explored the research anxiety of psychology students enrolled in research writing course. A screening tool was used to determine students experiencing research anxiety. Ten participants experiencing high to very high levels of research anxiety were subjected to focus group discussions. Six major themes emerged: psychological and physiological disturbances, interpersonal conflicts, environmental conditions, healthy social systems, and self-care habits. The psychology students experienced feelings of sadness, demotivation, persistent negative thoughts, elevated stress, and anxiety that led to self-defeating thoughts and behaviors. Moreover, the psychology students perceived they had inadequate technological and vocabulary skills essential for research writing. They also experienced physiological problems such as lightheadedness, tremors, eating problems, and restlessness. Conflicting responsibilities at home, school, and work seem to also contribute to the research anxiety. It is noted that psychology students cope with research anxiety through quality time spent with family, friends, and significant others. The findings have implications for the academic and health of psychology students. Further studies are recommended to obtain a more in-depth understanding of students' self-defeating behaviors related to research anxiety.

Keywords: *research anxiety, research, psychology*

Introduction

Psychology has long been established as the scientific study of the human mind and behavior (Cherry, 2022). However, generating a comprehensive understanding of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings raise challenges in the discipline (Poldrack & Farah, 2015). This circumstance did not prevent persistent researchers in psychology as they continuously conducted investigations to unravel the paradoxes in the human psyche.

Psychological research plays a vital role among psychologists and researchers in seeking scientific answers to “questions” about human nature; understanding and predicting human behaviors; proposing reliable diagnoses and interventions; and, describing and explaining certain human personality traits (AllPsych, 2021; Feist et al., 2017).

Scientific research in psychology also encompasses the efforts made to find empirical evidence and answers to intriguing phenomena in the field, like exploring a psychological concept like anxiety (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.). In addition to research's societal significance and contributions to psychology, research is a requirement for these students to earn their degrees, thus, it is inevitable for undergraduate students to conduct and write research (Ministry of Higher & Tertiary Education, Science & Technology Development, 2018, as cited in Muzira et al., 2020).

This is especially challenging among undergraduate students, who in most cases consist of first-time researchers (Ifeoma, 2019). According to Miri and Joia (2018), anxiety is the most common emotion that students experience in research writing. This is also prevalent since students perceive this academic requirement as laborious and need decent competency in written communication skills and command of the English language (Rohmah & Muslim, 2021). In research writing, written communication skills like using a second language (e.g., English) can contribute to feelings of research anxiety, which may diminish writing performance (Daud et al., 2016; Li, 2022). In relation to this, research writing requires grammatical, vocabulary, and rhetorical skills that can be unconventional when undergraduate students are not accustomed to or comfortable with this endeavor (Altukruni, 2019).

Therefore, the present study aimed to understand how research anxiety develops; unravel its corresponding effects on the students' competencies, attitudes, and performance in research; and identify coping strategies that can be employed to manage research anxiety. The psychology department has not been able to conduct such a study.

This is an excellent opportunity to spearhead scientific research in line with the recommendations of related literature that can fill the research gap in the institution. A phenomenological study is also appropriate to explore research anxiety and students' perceptions, motivations, and challenges in writing undergraduate theses. Certainly, this will not be possible unless the existence of research anxiety has been substantiated. Hence, the researchers initially administered a qualifying or a screening survey that assessed the levels of research anxiety among psychology students enrolled in Research 1. This revealed that there were elevated levels of anxiety that need to be investigated.

Research Questions

The main objective of the present study is to explore research anxiety based on the experiences of psychology students. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does research anxiety develop among psychology students?
2. How does research anxiety affect the students?
3. What strategies do the students employ to cope with research anxiety?

Literature Review

Over the past years, research evinced itself as a pivotal agent of change by uplifting numerous countries' economic and societal growth (Bornmann, 2012, as cited in Ashok et al., 2022). Besides that, Moresan and Gogu (2012, as cited in Nadjib, 2022) stated that research, too, is consequential in the academe, specifically in tertiary education, since it is part of the five pillars of education together with teaching, community service, innovation, and industrialization that are essential for the students' holistic academic development.

Interestingly, Harahap and Syarif (2022) found that college students who are conducting their research experience high levels of anxiety in writing the introduction and the background of the study. The results show that insufficient writing practices and strategies, linguistic challenges, time constraints, and fear of negative feedback are the common causes of elevated levels of anxiety. Furthermore, Ommering et al. (2020) suggest that students' research perception and motivation are related to the success of research endeavors. The study also recommends future research in other programs (e.g., psychology), trying to uncover and promote positive perceptions and motivations for the students and strengthening their research competencies despite research anxiety.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive phenomenology, which is a qualitative research design that emphasizes the lived experiences of selected people about the phenomenon being investigated (Gumarang et al., 2021). Additionally, focus group discussions were also employed to collect rich qualitative data. A research moderator facilitates interactions among the participants, which allow them to respond, object, and/or further develop the shared insights and experiences of others (Willig, 2008). Thus, using these methods, the researchers were able to explore research anxiety from the perspectives of students. It also enabled an in-depth analysis and description of the nature of the topic including "how" psychology students developed, experienced, and adapt to this phenomenon during their research writing.

Participants

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select the participants of the study. This method is a non-probability sampling that is extensively used in qualitative research to obtain the participants that can provide valuable data regarding the phenomenon being investigated (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The study participants were selected based on the following criteria: they must be bonafide students of the target higher education institution, currently enrolled in the Research Writing 1 course, and pursuing a psychology program at the said institution. These groups of students were chosen since they are currently conducting and writing their undergraduate theses, were susceptible to experiencing research anxiety, were capable of providing vivid descriptions of their research experiences, activities, and developments, and were available for focus group discussions to make the qualitative data analysis of the study possible.

A qualifying survey was initially administered and received 27 responses from a total of 32 enrolled students in the course. Thereafter, ten psychology students were selected based on scores ranging from "very high" to "high" levels of research anxiety. These results made them suitable and essential for the group interview and data analysis of the study.

Instruments

Research anxiety among the participants was measured using a qualifying survey. This scale was a standardized questionnaire that measures Research Writing Anxiety among college students (Ferolino et al., 2022).

This questionnaire has a total of 20 items that consist of three sub-factors: personal factors that contribute to the feelings of research anxiety (7 items); peer factors that refer to the influence of groupmates on research anxiety (6 items); and thesis mentor factors that cover the research anxiety as influenced by research advisers (7 items).

The scale can be rated using a 5-point Likert scale that can be responded by numerical values of 1(not at all), 2(only a little), 3(to some extent), 4(much), and 5(very much). The mean scores can be interpreted using these verbal interpretations: 1.00 – 1.79 = very low level, 1.80 – 2.59 = low level, 2.60 – 3.39 = moderate level, 3.40 – 4.19 = high level, and 4.20 – 5.00 = very high level of research anxiety. The qualifying survey was also pilot tested on 32 college students that were not part of the participants of the study. The reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of .94 indicating outstanding reliability.

For the group interview, semi-structured open-ended interview questions were initially constructed and validated by three subject matter experts (SMEs). The SMEs were invited through letters of invitation and/or electronic mail. Once they had voluntarily accepted the invitation, a document containing the full sample script of the focus group discussion and guide questions was attached. Thereafter, they evaluated them by marking the evaluation form using the following indicators: accept, minor revision, major revision, and reject. The SMEs have also provided relevant feedback and recommendations to ensure the validity and reliability of the interview questions in correspondence to the objectives of the study and the phenomenon being investigated. The researchers also conducted pilot-interviews to selected students that are not included in the participants of the study. This guaranteed that the interview questions could execute their purpose in exploring research anxiety among college students.

Procedure

For the data-gathering procedure, the researchers prepared pertinent documents such as formal letters, validation forms, and informed consent. These documents were initially submitted to the Dean of the respective department which is the respective department of the target participants of the study. Thereafter, the documents were signed and endorsed by the Dean to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) for approval of the conduct of the study in the institution.

After getting the approval, the researchers underwent pilot test and interview, and statistical analysis of the qualifying survey instrument and interview questions. Eventually, the qualifying survey was administered to the participants via google forms. Thus, the results of the qualifier substantiated the existence of research anxiety which prompted the need for further investigation of the concept.

Case selection was then employed to select the students for the focus group discussion. When the participants accepted the invitation, they were divided into three groups based on their availability for the scheduled group interview. During the focus group discussion, the participants were briefed about the background and objectives of the study; the projected duration of the discussion; risks, benefits, and confidentiality; and their rights as the participants of the study.

The participants were also given the chance to ask questions or clarifications about the procedure. After signing the informed consent, the researchers asked permission to have an audio recording of the group interview. They also discussed the guidelines to be followed for the focus group discussion. These consisted of the flow of the discussion; giving time to answer the questions; ethical considerations to be observed.

During the interview, the researchers first established rapport to make the participants comfortable before proceeding to the interview questions. Afterward, the participants were able to interact, relate, and provide essential answers to questions pertaining to research anxiety. Succeeding the group interview, the researchers debriefed and assured the participants about the privacy and confidentiality of the data obtained from them.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations, data privacy, and confidentiality stated in the APA code of ethics for research and the Data Privacy Act of the Philippines were prioritized in this research. The participants were presented with a letter of invitation stipulating the objectives and methods of the study, the duration of the procedure, the rights of the participants, and the significance of their involvement. The participants were also allowed to ask questions or clarify important aspects of the research. It was emphasized in the study that their participation is voluntary and will not cause any harm or consequences.

The focus group discussions were conducted in secure places where others would not hear the information revealed by the participants. Code names were assigned to protect the participants' identities, and the personal information and audio recordings of the focus group discussions were securely deleted after the data transcription. This ensured that the data would not be leaked, which may have caused significant risks among the study participants.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of the study was anchored on Nicola Colaizzi's seven-step method in descriptive phenomenology (1978, as cited in Morrow et al., 2015). Following such rigorous analysis, the researchers began by conducting focus-group discussion interviews, through which valuable first-hand accounts from the participants were obtained.

Each audio recording was transcribed and reread on multiple occasions to aid in the familiarity of the qualitative data. Afterwards, the researchers extracted relevant codes, further allowing the procurement of significant statements about the phenomenon being studied. From these statements came formulated meanings; such meanings were then sorted into categories, cluster of themes, and common themes observed across all accounts. A comparative validation of the data was performed to arrive at a consensus between the researchers.

The researchers also sought the assistance of subject matter experts to further examine the existing data, on the basis of its richness and completeness. Similarly, the validated data were presented to the research participants to check whether it accurately represents and reflects their experiences. Eventually, the researchers were able to arrive at a comprehensive and integrative description of research anxiety.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Themes and sub-themes obtained from the participants*

Formulated Meanings	Sub-themes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of research skills• Lack of sufficient vocabulary skills• Technical illiteracy• Negative Self-Image• Deflated self-esteem• Sadness• Demotivation• Disorganized thinking• Emotional ambivalence• Persistent negative thoughts and behaviors• Difficulty concentrating• Procrastination• Stress and anxiety• Frustration and mental fatigue• Unproductivity	Perceived feelings of inadequacy	Psychological disturbances
Wary of the future	Negative cognitions	
• Self-doubts about the capability to finish thesis writing.		
• Negative conception of the professional career		
• Discouraged to pursue graduate studies	Feelings of uncertainty	Physiological disturbances
Self-defeating behaviors	Eating difficulties	
• Loss of appetite		
• Dysphagia (inability/problem swallowing the food)		
• Inability to eat regularly	Trouble resting	
• Sleep deprivation		
• Forgoing sleep to perform unfinished tasks		
• Problems in attaining a decent rest	Physical manifestations of anxiety	
• Light headedness		
• Hand tremors		
• Stiffness of fingers		
• Increased heart rate		
• Tearfulness	Conflicts in responsibilities	
• Panic attack		
• Restlessness		
• Pressure in balancing leadership (research leader), social, and student organization responsibilities		
• Participant feels pressured to support her family after graduation		
• Experienced difficulties due to bulk of school activities (Academic and Non-Academic)	Bulk of school activities	Interpersonal conflicts
• Decreased social interactions with significant others	Problems with social interactions	
• Family conflicts	Problems with expressing ideas	
• Group conflicts	Troubles with internet connections	
• Struggles to express ideas related to research		
• More stable internet connection at night		Environmental conditions
• Sufficient guidance from research advisers	Support from social systems	Healthy social systems
• Joint efforts of group members		
• Psychosocial support from the family		
• Spending quality time with significant others	Intrapersonal coping strategies	Self-care habits
• Satisfying food cravings		
• Doing recreational activities		
• Taking adequate rests		

Table 1 presents the thematic table based on the experiences and perceptions of psychology students regarding research anxiety. The study has six distinct themes: psychological and physiological disturbances, interpersonal conflicts, environmental conditions, healthy social systems, and self-care habits. These themes represent the contributors to their research anxiety, including how it affects their psychological and physiological states. The themes also represent the impact of research anxiety on their social systems. Nevertheless, the participants also identified coping strategies they employ to manage research anxiety, including its detrimental impact effectively. The study purposively selected ten psychology students who exhibited very high to high levels of research anxiety on the qualifier that

has been administered. These students were invited to scheduled focus group discussions (FGD) to share unique experiences and insights about research anxiety. In particular, the essence of FGDs is to understand the nature of research anxiety and how it develops and discover its effects and the coping strategies of psychology students. Table 1 presents the six emergent themes pertaining research anxiety.

Research anxiety is a phenomenon that occurs among students conducting research/thesis writing as described by the students below:

Ang research anxiety po is about pagpapanic sa pag-gagawa po ng research, and also po kung how po ima-manage yung paper and group po. – (P4[Participant number], 78[Statement number])

[Research anxiety is about the panic brought about by the conduct of research and cooperation of group members.]

Another student describes the fear and pressure associated in the process of research writing.

Same po, yung takot, yung pressure. Yung pagkatakot mo po sa failure, pag-gawa ng research. Natatakot po akong mag-fail as a leader. – (P6, 80)

[It is also the pressure coming from fear of failure in the conduct of research and leadership role]

Common manifestations of research anxiety in terms of psychological domain are panic, pressure, and fear of failure. These associated features also make them unproductive and unable to execute the research tasks as attested by the following statements:

Mas lalo po akong walang nagagawa. Dagdag yung pressure, hindi ko alam yung uunahin. – (P8, 198)

[(Research anxiety) makes me more unable to do my task, and there is also this pressure that obstructs my next course of action]

The student also experienced a time when the overwhelming research anxiety led to unproductivity.

Nakaka stress, anxious po ako sa research kaya di po siya tinutuloy, di po ako productive. – (P9, 199)

[(Research anxiety) makes me stressed and anxious about research which is why I discontinue my progress, making me unproductive]

There are also social factors that contribute to research anxiety, such as, the participation and commitment of group members. Undergraduate thesis writing requires group of students to work together. Team-chemistry, cooperation, and open communication are essential factors needed to make the group functional. Group members that are showing signs of negligence and not communicating well with the group are found to be contributing to the research anxiety based on their statements below:

Kapag yung ibang member din po, lalo na if may mga ka-group na chill at mahirap kontakin. – (P4, 108)

[If the other group members are too laid-back and difficult to get in touch with]

Psychological Disturbances

On the other hand, the analysis reveals the psychological consequences of research anxiety among the participants. Psychological disturbances encompass the experienced psychological problems of the participants as a result of research anxiety, which are further indicated under its clusters of themes. The first pertains to feelings of inadequacy resulting from the participants' perceived lack of sufficient research knowledge and skills to accomplish their research tasks. Specifically, the participants reported problems with vocabulary skills and technological literacy:

Hindi ganoon ka-lalim at ka-lawak yung vocabulary ko, nahihirapan ako mag-explain ng topic. – (P2, 13)

[I do not have an expansive vocabulary, which is why I experience difficulties explaining a topic]

“First factor po kasi nasa technology and innovation na po tayo. Kapag ang mga kagrupa ko ay katulad ko rin na hindi ganun ka techie and alam naman po natin na ang mga related literature ay compiled na online, nahihirapan po kaming pumunta sa website at intindihin kung paano siya nagwo-work” (P1, 9)

[The first factor is we are in a technologically advanced and innovative world. If my groupmates are like me, who are not good with the utilization of technology, then we have a hard time finding related literature on online websites as well as understanding how they work]

As substantiated above, the students primarily experience problems with English vocabulary. A decent command of the second language is a crucial aspect in research/thesis writing. This skill is constantly being observed and evaluated in research. Thus, the students acknowledge that they should exhibit sufficient vocabulary to write scientific research. They also expressed concerns in terms of their technological skills. This is another essential skill, since research nowadays requires using websites, Microsoft applications, research-related software (e.g., SPSS), and other technology-related platforms. Moreover, the feelings of inadequacy greatly contribute to the existing research anxiety of the participants.

Research anxiety also affects the cognitive functioning of the participants. The most common complaint is the loss of focus due to

emotional turmoil. There are also reports of persistent negative thoughts that deflate their self-esteem. The conglomeration of these cognitive disturbances renders the participants distracted and dysfunctional as mentioned below:

Nawawalan po ako ng focus in a sense po na napupuno kasi yung emotions, nagha-halo-halo. Tapos po nagagalit din po ako sa sarili ko. Pag ganun na madami akong iniisip diko alam kong anong uunahin ko, literal na nawawala ako sa focus. Nakikita ko sarili ko na hindi ko natatapos yung ginagawa ko. Nadi-distract ganun. – (P5, 122)

[I lose focus due to emotional ambivalence and I get mad at myself. I also see myself distracted which is why I can't finish my tasks]

Another student emphasized the persistent negative thoughts that lead to anxiety towards possible negative outcomes.

Tumatambak po yung mga negative thoughts sa akin, marami akong naiisip na negative scenarios. – (P2, 46)

[I get overwhelmed by negative thoughts that makes me think of numerous negative scenarios (in relation to research)]

The cognitive disturbances also influence the participants' outlooks of their future careers. Some of them actually feel discouraged to take the board examination and enroll in the graduate school. This can be explained by their persistent negative thoughts about themselves, perceived inadequacy to substantiate the requirements needed in those milestones, and fear and anxiety of conducting research to earn a graduate degree. Alarmingly, there are instances where the participants performed self-defeating behaviors, such as displacing frustration to oneself which results to low self-esteem; intentional skipping of meals as a form of negative punishment for not accomplishing the assigned tasks; intensely grabbing one's hair out of frustration; and throwing things at home because of anger. These self-defeating behaviors are described by the participants below:

Sinasabunutan, hinihila ko po yung buhok ko, sinasampal ko po yung sarili ko. Nagba-bato din po ako ng gamit out of frustrations. – (P7, 201)

[I grab my hair, slap myself, and throw my things out of frustration]

There is also an instance when a student deliberately skipped eating a meal because of the inability to find the related literature that they are looking for. This leads to significant weight loss as reported by the participant.

Hindi po ako kumakain hangga't 'di ko nahahanap yung related literature, kaya nangangayayat po ako. – (P9, 206)

[I don't eat until I find the related literature that I'm looking for, this is also the reason why I lose weight]

The participant 10 also described the feeling of discouragement to proceed with further education because of the challenging experiences brought about by research/thesis writing.

Parang ayoko na po magtuloy ng master (degree), parang natatakot na po ako. – (P10, 227)

[It seems like I no longer want to proceed pursuing my master's degree because I'm afraid]

Right now not conditioned po ako na 'di na ko magpupursue ng kahit anong related sa research. Parang hindi pa rin po ako sure kung magte-take ako ng mga exam (Licensure exam). Kasi 'di ko po alam kung kaya ko pa po mag review or aral. – (P10, 234)

[Right now, I'm not in the condition to pursue any career that is associated with research. I'm also doubting whether I will take the board examination (for psychometricians) because I don't know if I can take the intensive review]

The findings reveal concerning data about the potential impact of research anxiety in terms of cognition and the health of the students. The self-defeating behaviors posit significant harm to one's self which may also cause significant health damage (e.g., ulcers due to not taking meals regularly). The displacement of anger or frustration may also cause irreversible harm to the self and the people around. Meanwhile, the pessimistic views of the future may also influence the career paths of the participants.

Physiological Disturbances

Research anxiety also prompt physiological disturbances among the participants. The prevalent indicators are eating problems, trouble resting, and physical manifestations. The associated features of eating problems are significant loss of appetite which makes the participant unable to eat regularly; and subjective reports of the inability to swallow food or dysphagia. The participant 3 described these experienced below:

May experience din po ako na 'di ko malunok yung kinakain ko; Ako po kasi ay sakitin, sabay-sabay yung mga gawain. Kakaisip ay nagkakasakit po ako. – (P3, 41 & 45)

[There are instances where I cannot swallow the food that I'm eating; I can easily get sick, and when I'm preoccupied with the tasks to be accomplished simultaneously, I tend to get sick]

The eating problems mentioned above also posit adverse effects on their mental and physical health. It is undeniable that a proper diet is needed to have a well-functioning mind and body. Disregarding this may also disturb the bodily functions and psychological processes that are substantial to perform in significant aspects of life, like school, occupation, at home, and in other important facets of

life. The participants also encounter problems with finding or taking a decent rest. There are times when they experience sleep deprivation, and lack of urge to sleep due to their preoccupation with the research tasks needed to do based on the following statements shared by participant 5 and 10:

Minsan po kahit natutulog ako yun na po yung napapanaginipan ko. – (P5, 113)

[Sometimes even in my sleep, I still dream about doing research]

Hindi rin po ako makatulog, hilaw yung tulog ko, iniisip ko may 'di pa ako nagagawa. Para sa akin 'di masaya matulog na may 'di ka pa natatapos. – (P10, 205)

[(There are instances) when I can't sleep or I barely get a decent one because I'm bothered and occupied by the tasks I still need to accomplish]

The participants 3, 10, 4, and 7 also described the physical manifestations of research anxiety. They reported feelings of light headedness and restlessness, hand tremors, stiffness of fingers, increased heart rate, tearfulness, and panic attack that affect not just their physical domain but also their overall functioning.

Nanlalamig po yung kamay at tainga ko, light headed ka kaya di mo na ma-check yung paper. Nangingilid na po yung luha ko, naninigas yung mga daliri ko. – (P3, 40)

[I feel my hands and ears get cold, and I also feel lightheaded so I can't finish checking my work. I feel teary-eyed while my fingers get stiff]

Kinakabahan, ang bilis po ng tibok ng puso, parang naiiyak, nai-stress, nawawalan ng gana. – (P10, 197)

[I feel nervous and my heart beats faster. I feel like I'm about to cry, I feel stressed out, and I am losing my interest]

Minsan naiiyak na lang po ako sa dami ng kailangan gawin. Nanginginig na lang po, minsan 'di makatulog. – (P4, 112)

[Sometimes, crying is the only thing that I can do because of how overwhelming the requirements that are needed to be accomplished. I can also feel myself shaking and being unable to sleep]

Nanginginig, nangangatal, name-mental block po ako, kapag nasa climax po ako ng feeling ko nasasaktan ko po yung sarili ko, gigil na po ako. – (P7, 200)

[My body is shaking and I get mental-blocked. At the peak of my research anxiety, I have a tendency to hurt myself]

Interpersonal Conflicts

Interpersonal conflicts also intensify the research anxiety among the participants. The findings identified conflicts in responsibilities, bulk of school activities, problems with social interactions and expression of ideas as contributory factors to the phenomenon. A majority of participants are leaders with an additional academic responsibility like being a member of a student organization, while some participants are working students. Conclusively, numerous academic tasks make it more difficult for them to balance these interpersonal conflicts. As a result, the participant sacrifices their quality time with their family, friends, and significant others just to suffice the requirements of the academe and organization, and perform their duties and responsibilities at work. Maintaining a healthy equilibrium in these facets of life greatly contribute to their research anxiety. Furthermore, the students also feel pressured about their cultural obligation, to help and support their family after graduation. Given that thesis is a partial fulfillment for the degree, this adds to the pressure of the students, since they know how laborious and challenging thesis writing is as attested by participants 8, 1, and 4:

Since ang leader ko po ay kasama ko din sa org, marami din po siyang ginagawa, nandoon po yung anxiety na kaya ba naming ito tapusin within that specific period of time, marami din pong kailangan pa na tapusin. – (P8, 174)

[Since we are part of the same student organization, I'm aware of the number of tasks that we need to accomplish, so I feel anxious if we can fulfill our duties in the organization and thesis writing]

Tulad din po sa bahay kapag umaga ka gumawa, mauutusan ka bumili ng ganto ganyan. – (P1, 28)

[I can't do much of my research tasks during the morning (at home) because of my duties and responsibilities for my family]

Yes po, yung sa mama ko po. Dahil kumbaga ako na po yung tutulong sa kanila. – (P4, 99)

[Yes, for my mom, because I will be the one who will help the family after graduation]

Environmental Condition

Additionally, the findings show that the participants experience problems with internet connection at home. This issue also contributes to their research anxiety since it delays their progress. It makes it hard for them to navigate the internet to find related literature. There is also a deadline that they need to meet, given that most of them have other roles that need to be played (e.g., working student), hence,

there is only a limited time in which they can perform their research tasks as described by participant 3.

“Sa akin po ay internet connection, mas malakas po sa gabi. (Specific time to do research)” – (P3, 25)

[In my case, my internet connection is stronger at night]

Healthy Social Systems and Self-Care Habits

Based on the results of the study, there is a myriad of problems connected with research anxiety in terms of psychological, physiological, interpersonal, and environmental domains. Nevertheless, there were identified coping strategies being utilized by the students. The first one is their social support system. Under this facet, sufficient guidance and motivation from the research advisers help the students conquer their research anxiety. Cooperative and responsible groupmates decrease the research anxiety since the participants feel that there are peers that they can rely on. Lastly, unconditional psychosocial support from the family helps them overcome the strenuous thesis journey.

The participants 8 and 9 also employ intrapersonal coping strategies. They spend quality time with family, friends, and significant others during their breaks. This helps them uplift their mood and divert their mind from the challenges in research. They also satisfy their food cravings while doing recreational activities.

“Sa akin po me time, at lumalabas po ako.” – (P8, 36)

[For me, spending some time for myself (helps to alleviate research anxiety) like going out]

“Sa akin po tulog at kumakain. At nanonood po ng shows, series ganyan.” – (P9, 37)

[For me, I sleep and eat, then watch tv shows and series (helps to alleviate research anxiety)]

Conclusion

The study utilized a descriptive phenomenology to explore the research anxiety based on the lived experiences of the students. Colaizzi's methods of analysis were also used to generate significant themes from the qualitative data. Six emergent themes of research anxiety were identified, these were psychological disturbances, physiological disturbances, interpersonal conflicts, environmental conditions, healthy social systems, and self-care habits.

In psychological disturbances, feelings of inadequacy in vocabulary and technical skills were prevalent among the participants. The reported problems with the English language have been proven in the literature to cause anxiety among writers (Huerta et al., 2017). Technological literacy is also important among students since it permits the collection of valuable information not just for research, but in terms of their academics (Corpuz, 2019). The experienced cognitive disturbance, like anxiety, also demonstrates significant effects on academic performance (Luigi et al., 2007, as cited in Ambrose et al., 2021).

Hancock (2001, as cited in Myers et al., 2021) discovered that high levels of anxiety decrease the motivation and engagement of students in comparison with those who exhibit lower levels. On the other hand, the concerning self-defeating/destructive behaviors in this study are classified under deliberate self-harm (DSH). The DSH is a direct result of high levels of frustration, problems with emotional regulation, low distress tolerance, constant negative self-evaluations, and inadequate problem-solving skills (Nock, 2010, as cited in Sedgwick et al., 2019). Alarmingly, Duarte et al. (2020) also found that deliberate self-harm is associated with suicidal ideations.

The reported eating problems, trouble resting, and sleeping problems of the participants are proven to be significant results of emotional disturbances (Garabiles et al., 2019; Hill et al., 2021). Meanwhile, physiological changes such as lightheadedness, hand tremors, stiffness of fingers, increased heart rates, and others are commonly being observed among people manifesting high levels of anxiety (Bartholomay & Houlihan, 2016).

Interpersonal relations, such as family and student-adviser relationships show significant influences on anxiety (Zheng et al., 2023). Group or intergroup conflicts are also proven to posit threats that will more likely lead to anxiety and frustration (Krueger et al., 2022). However, Krueger et al. recent findings also suggest that conflict-related emotions will not always result in negative outcomes (e.g., anxiety) as they may also result in otherwise, as long as it will be handled appropriately. Thus, collaborative learning and efforts are essential for group activities like research, to elevate the students' engagement, enable deeper learning, and develop group communication skills and self-regulation (Falkner et al., 2013). On the other hand, research anxiety also creates interpersonal conflicts such as family conflicts and problems with peers (Kimberley et al., 2007, as cited in Tang et al., 2022). Students may also experience challenges in expressing ideas within the group as a result of anxiety and self-doubts (Gilbert & Procter, 2006, as cited in Gilbert, 2020).

It is also not surprising that the participants experience problems with internet connectivity. The Philippines is known for its slow internet speed, which falls short compared to its neighboring countries, like Singapore and Thailand (Ordinario, n.d.) The unreliable internet access makes it harder for the students to accomplish their research tasks since not all relevant information are present in the library. Thus, it is inevitable for students to browse the internet to find research-related documents that are indispensable for their

research. Furthermore, the identified coping strategies such as perceived psychosocial support helps reduce anxiety (Jin & Dewaele, 2018). Similarly, Alnazly et al. (2021) found that adequate social support is beneficial in decreasing the adverse effects of anxiety, stress, and even depression. Doing recreational or leisure activities also promote better psychological and physical functioning among individuals (Pressman et al., 2009, as cited in Feeney & Collins, 2014).

The results of the study describe the nature and manifestations of research anxiety. The data also identified the factors that increase or intensify it. There is also the unexpected discovery of self-defeating or destructive behaviors among the students. Therefore, significant recommendations are proposed to address the prevailing research anxiety and its associated features that posit harm to the participants. Guided workshops and upskill training that focuses on technological literacy and enhancing vocabulary skills could be beneficial. Continuous research consultation and/or coaching may also address the students' concerns and conflicts. Team building activities could help the groups of student researchers to establish better connections and chemistry. Psychological programs about conflict management, emotion regulation, and healthy/adaptive behaviors against anxiety could be effective in addressing the problems associated with research. The research teachers, advisers, and the guidance department could have a joint effort to manage the psychological problems or disturbances of the students.

There are also limitations identified in this study. The results are not representative of a general population since the researchers only managed to explore research anxiety in one program. Thus, future researchers may expand this into other programs to have more generalized and complete data. The researchers were not able to conduct a deeper investigation into the self-defeating/destructive behaviors of the participants. This may be addressed by more extensive research that will focus on this particular phenomenon.

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