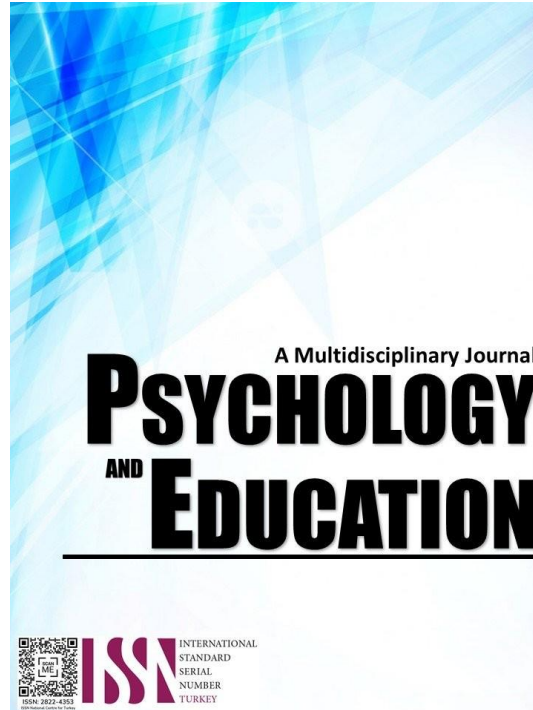


# EMPTINESS INSIDE: LANGUISHING AS EXPERIENCED BY GENERATION Z STUDENTS



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## Emptiness Inside: Languishing as Experienced by Generation Z Students

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### Abstract

Languishing, characterized by a lack of vitality, motivation, and engagement, has gained significant attention during the COVID-19 pandemic due to its impact on mental health. This study investigates the underlying factors and impacts of languishing among Generation Z students at Lipa City Colleges, exploring their experiences, daily life challenges, and coping mechanisms. Using a phenomenological design, participants aged 24 and below, identified through the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form and were purposefully selected. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's model, revealed four emerging themes: life transitions, emotional distress, apathy, and coping strategies (positive coping and avoidance). The findings indicate that life transitions contribute to feelings of languishing, leading to emotional distress and apathy, which affect their daily functioning. Participants employ both positive coping mechanisms and avoidance strategies. The study recommends collaboration among parents, instructors, program heads, and the institution's Guidance and Counseling Department to prioritize mental health support for Gen Z students. Future research should expand to include different age groups and generations, such as Generation X and Y, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** *languishing, mental health, Generation Z*

### Introduction

The prevailing emotion of emptiness and stagnation is later determined as languishing. It is originally defined through the spectrum of mental health continuum developed by Dr. Corey Keyes in 2002, wherein it includes flourishing, moderate mental health, and languishing, whereas languishing is characterized as a condition when people are devoid of happiness towards life, are not healthily interacting with others, or psychologically and are not reaching their full potential and are neither realizing their aims or dreams.

Languishing is the absence of well-being that exists between depressive states and flourishing. It does not exhibit signs of mental illness but also does not exhibit the qualities of mental wellness. It is a person's state of not operating to their maximum potential. The likelihood that a person will cut back on work is tripled when they languish since it affects their motivation and causes them to lose focus. In some ways, it may be a greater risk factor for mental illness because it seems to be more widespread than serious depression (Grant, 2021).

The recent global mental health statistics released by the study of AXA Philippines in March of 2023 showed that Asia had a larger increase in the proportion of people flourishing than the rest of the world, having it go from 19% to 22%, together with the decreasing percentage of people experiencing languishing in Asia at 12%, a 2% year-over-year drop. However, looking more closely at the Asian nations and territories in the poll reveals that the Philippines had the highest global percentage of individuals struggling to survive and languishing, at 39%, and Hong Kong came in second with 37%. Statistics also entails that the well-being of Generation Z is at risk of languishing (Business World, 2022). Consistently, Chan (2023) found that 54% of Generation Z respondents globally and 51% in Asia are mentally struggling or languishing.

Studies have highlighted how pandemic-related stressors, such as social isolation, uncertainty, and economic hardships, contribute to heightened levels of languishing (Czeisler et al., 2020). As these Generation Z students go along with their academic journeys, experiencing languishing due to these changes, stressful situations and challenges can occur as it is linked to emotional distress and psychological and social issues that restrict their daily life activities (Keyes, 2002 as cited in Knoesen & Naude, 2017).

Therefore, the study focused on the Generation Z students of Lipa City Colleges aged 24 and below. Lipa City Colleges is an educational institution providing services to its community since 1947 and adhering for research advancements since then. However, there has been no research on languishing mental health in the said institution, specifically belonging to this age group, the researchers selected the locale and students above as the official participants of this study. This assertion was proven by Wissing et al. (2019), who claimed the need for more qualitative exploration of the languishing state concerning younger people, specifically those 24 years of age and below.

There was lack of literature of this psychological construct. It was not relatively new; however, its qualitative exploration of languishing mental health is still needed to better understand the spectrum viewing of mental health. Specifically, the emerging causes of languishing among Generation Z students, their experiences, how it affects their daily life, and how they cope with it. Researchers established this research endeavors through providing proof of languishing existence among Gen Z students through administered Mental Health Continuum Short Form. Thus, after the revealed the existence of languishing that substantiate the need for further exploration.

## Research Questions

The present study identified and explored the emerging cause of languishing Generation Z students, their experiences, how it affects their daily lives, and how they cope with it. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the emerging cause of languishing among Generation Z students?
2. What is the experience of languishing among Generation Z students?
3. How does languishing affect the daily life of the participants?
4. How do Gen Z students cope with languishing?

## Literature Review

Languishing refers to low subjective well-being levels comprising psychological and social well-being. It is best described as the sense of distress that involves feelings of emptiness, stagnation, and lack of motivation (Keyes, 2002). In positive psychology, they defined languishing as the term that enters the popular discourse, including lack of motivation, depletion, fatigue, and sensations of hollowness and emptiness (Willen, 2022). Those who experience languishing thought of themselves as hollow, in a shell, and a void (Keyes, 2007, as cited in Maurer, 2017). It is also characterized by dissatisfaction, indifference, and a lack of engagement. Besides, being in a state of languishing may put an individual at risk for mental health issues, especially if they are also experiencing a string of unfavorable events or circumstances at the same time (Neuhaus, 2021). Moreover, Keyes (2016) has stated that being in a state of languishing is like living in a state without the motivation to strive, wherein their struggles constitute the depressed category. It is also determined that adults who are in a less than flourishing state of mental health are more likely to report physical illness and chronic diseases, making them prone to absenteeism, use more medications or hospitalizations, and several visitations, i.e., physical, and mental, and emotional causes, developmental disorders, and worse is to die prematurely.

In line with this, it is determined that languishing individuals are more likely to experience major depressive episodes two times more than individuals who have moderate mental health levels and six times more likely to experience depression than those who are flourishing (Keyes, 2002 as cited in Kading et al., 2015). Similarly, the study of Dore et al. (2020) yielded that non-flourishing mental health was found to be a risk factor for both severe anxiety and depression symptoms in the current investigation.

Studies have highlighted the emotional toll of relationship transitions and their potential link to languishing mental health (Kutob et al., 2017). Likewise, Wissing et al. (2019) have found that languishing people were more likely to be concerned with improving their relationships and seeking better parenting and more family time as for them, it is what they need and be missing. Languishing among young people is significantly associated with non-intact family conditions such as single-parent families, divorced parents, or being with a stepfamily. It is found that these factors negatively affect their ability to enjoy their life, believe in their abilities, cope with life stressors, study productively, and interact with other people (Appelqvist-Schmidlechner & Solin, 2019).

As a repercussion of the pandemic, Generation Z is found to be the most prominent languishers as the world proceeds to the new normal. These sudden adjustments or transitions are a known cause of uncertainty and uneasiness, thus related to poor well-being (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic poses a substantial challenge for Gen Z due to the profound changes in many facets of daily life and its detrimental effects on their academic and mental health. Gen Z has consequently experienced more frequent and severe psychological suffering due to these changes in their daily lives, including an increase in anxiety and depression symptoms, unhealthy habits, and poor sleep quality (Okunlola et al., 2020).

Consequently, languishing individuals generally have poor preventive skills and are typically less developed than those flourishing. Their system also becomes depleted, and they have fewer coping strategies for trying times. This correlates to the results of the study of Morrish et al. (2017) that languishing individuals more typically adopt social distancing and "avoidance" behaviors in which they use distraction and social disengagement as part of their engagement-oriented emotion regulation strategies. This prompted languishing prevalence in adolescents, which leads to bad habits such as cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, less physical exercise, and inadequate sleeping schedules (Venning et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Grant suggested the antidote to languishing is giving oneself some uninterrupted time, meaning an individual must set boundaries. Focusing on small goals is another way to combat languishing; because the pandemic was already a big loss for everyone, having small wins could clear the path toward managing difficulties. Specifically, finding a "flow" could ease the feeling of languishing. This pertains to the state of mind being completely engaged in a specific activity (Ranney & Engelbrecht, 2021).

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study used the phenomenological research design that focuses on the "essence" of people's accounts and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Whereby, it helped the researchers to lure out the important and viable data through the experiences of participants regarding languishing mental health along with the aims of the research to determine the emerging cause of languishing among generation z students, their experiences being at this mental health state, how does languishing affect their daily life, and how they cope up with it.

Additionally, this study used the focus group discussion methodology to collect the data needed from participants. Focus group discussions are a popular qualitative method for deeply examining social topics. Also, since the researcher and all the target participants were available at the same time and place, it is relatively easier to conduct this method (Nyumba et al., 2018). With this, it allowed the participants to relate their languishing experiences with each other however, challenges with availability and scheduling of the participants became evident.

## Participants

The researchers used purposive sampling as the primary method for choosing their participants. Creswell (2014) suggested being purposeful in choosing participants that might provide a better understanding and insights into the study's research questions. Purposive sampling allowed the selection of participants based on the characteristics and experiences that contributed to the study. Hence, the participants are chosen depending on the criteria.

In particular, the participants of the present study were nine (9) languishing Generation Z students aged 19 to 22 years old of Lipa City Colleges who voluntarily participated out of fifty-one (51) statistically yielded numbers of languishing students that were chosen through the help of Mental Health Continuum that served as the pre-survey. These individuals were the best fit for the study. Aside from having a few conducted studies on languishing mental health, it is part of their distinct characteristics that they were more open about their mental health status and the different challenges they faced.

## Instruments

A Mental Health Continuum Short Form served as the pre-survey instrument to select the appropriate participants, whether they were languishing or not. The MCH-SF has shown strong internal consistency ( $> .80$ ) and discriminant validity in adolescents and adults (Keyes, 2009). This short form was rated using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 5 (every day) and consisting of fourteen items that are comprised of three dimensions of well-being: (3) emotional well-being, (5) social well-being, and (6) psychological well-being (Keyes et al., 2009). In this case, the target participants are those who are languishing or those who reported that they “never” or “once or twice” experienced symptoms of positive mental health. Specifically, the languishing category requires the “never” or “once or twice” response on one or more symptoms during the past month under the emotional being category or items 1-3. It also requires the “never” or “once or twice” response during the past month on six or more symptoms under positive functioning or items 4-14.

For the group interview, a self-made, open-ended, semi-structured interview questionnaire was readily made. Since this is self-made there is a possibility for researchers' bias hence, the interview questions were validated by three subject matter experts (SME), an invitation letters were sent to formally invite them. After their acceptance to this invitation, a full sample script that will be used for the focus group discussion was sent to them. The submitted script was evaluated through these indicators: accept, minor revisions, and reject. Suggestions and recommendations were also raised by the SMEs that ensured the reliability and validity of the interview questions to make sure that it was aligned with the phenomenon being explored by the study as well as with its objectives. Therefore, the interview questions were affirmed to achieve its goal of exploring the languishing among Generation Z students.

## Procedure

The researchers ensured that all the necessary documents, including formal letters and informed consent, were prepared. Afterward, they carefully made interview questionnaires and consulted their research adviser regarding the proposed contents, which were validated by Subject Matter Experts afterward. After the approval of the experts, a Mental Health Continuum-Short Form survey was provided to Generation Z students of Lipa City Colleges through Google Forms. It was able to lure out the targeted languishing participants.

To ensure that the participants well understood the purpose of the study, they spent three to four days seeking permission from the participants along with informed consent by sending them a formal message and talking to them personally, explaining that this study was for academic purposes only and utmost confidentiality regarding their personal information would be prioritize. After they agreed to participate, there was a schedule arrangement based on the availability of the participants for focus group discussion. Once the agreed schedule day and time had come, they secured that the content of informed consent and the purpose of the study was well-explained and understood once again. After that, the signing of the informed consent and permission for audio recording was asked, and throughout the interview process, they took notes as the participants related to each other's experiences. After the interview concluded, they attentively listened to the participants' responses to the interview questions on the audio clip. Transcription of the recorded audio clip was made. Then, data reduction was done, and the data was processed by selection, reduction, and simplification. Then, there was the analysis of significant information by deducting irrelevant information. It was followed by manual descriptive coding, wherein codes and themes were generated and assigned.

## Data Analysis

This study utilized thematic analysis to analyze the collected data specifically, Braun's and Clark's (2020) six-phase process for qualitative analysis. The acquisition of first-hand experiences of the participants were made possible through the utilization of focus group discussion which then followed by the analysis of data using the analysis. Phase one: we familiarize ourselves with the data provided by the languishing participants. Phase two: we generate codes that eventually evolved to emerging themes. Phase three: we

generate themes after all pertinent data elements have been coded. Phase four: we review potential themes wherein we systematically examined the candidate themes in connection with the coded data and entire data set. Phase five: we defined and named the generated themes. Phase six: we then produced the analysis report that served as the concluding phase of our qualitative research.

The familiarization process involves thoroughly reading and revisiting the complete dataset to establish a deep familiarity with the data. Thus, generating initial codes that later established distinct codes that gave rise to sub-themes and themes. Meanwhile, the generated sub-themes and themes were thoroughly reviewed and examined to systematically determine its connection with the entire data set. The researchers then sought guidance with its research adviser and mentor examined the data set initially extracted from the lived experiences of the participants. Suggestions for further improvement of the data set were given that ensured its richness and vastness.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations, data privacy, and confidentiality were prioritized in this research as stipulated and mandated by the law of the Philippines and APA code of ethics implemented involving the following areas: Competence, Human Relations, Privacy and Confidentiality, and Research and Publication.

**Competence.** In this study the researchers guaranteed that they aligned all processes and procedures in adherence to professional standards in the discipline of psychology with enough understanding of factors associated with human attributes such as age, gender, gender identity, race, culture, sexual orientation for efficient conducting of our research endeavors.

**Human Relations.** Researchers adhere to the fact that no discrimination happened throughout the research process. Any harassment or demeaning of the participants was strictly avoided therefore any conflict of interest was not evident. They also cooperate with subject matter experts to appropriately conduct this study appropriately as they consider that this was about mental health. Likewise, they obtained informed consent from their participants, ensuring that they understood their rights and the purpose of the study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality.** Regarding the Republic Act No. 10173 or Data Privacy Act of 2012, they adhere to protect the privacy and confidentiality of their participants' information and the experiences they have shared. Their anonymity and any information related to them was treated with utmost confidentiality. Hence, they ensure that they obtain permission from their participants before they audio record their experiences with the assurance that it will be appropriately discarded afterwards as it is for data gathering process purposes only.

**Research and Publication.** Researchers ensure that prior approval from their research adviser, department head, and Vice-President for Internal affairs were obtained before proceeding conducting the study. Letters were sent and signed by the mentioned authorities together with the informed consents, subject matter experts approved and validated questionnaires, and validated qualifier survey. Debriefing was also conducted afterwards to ensure that no after-effects will be experienced by the participants

## Results and Discussion

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

<i>Formulated Meanings</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>	<i>Themes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty to conform</li> <li>• Estrangement</li> <li>• Shift to Reality</li> <li>• Unanticipated load of tasks</li> </ul>	Social Adjustment  Personal Adjustment	Transition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spacing out</li> <li>• Ambiguous emotions</li> <li>• Irritable</li> <li>• Feeling of dismay</li> </ul>	Overwhelmed Agitation Self-disappointment	Emotional distress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overthinking</li> <li>• Hopelessness</li> <li>• Restlessness</li> </ul>		Emotional despair
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of concentration</li> <li>• Lack of energy</li> <li>• Loss of interest</li> <li>• Unsatisfaction</li> </ul>		Apathetic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging oneself to hobbies and interests</li> <li>• Maladaptive coping mechanism</li> <li>• Digital escapism</li> </ul>		Positive coping  Avoidance

Table 1 presents the thematic table based on the lived experiences of Generation Z students on languishing mental health. The study provided six unique themes: transition, emotional distress, emotional despair, apathetic, positive coping, and avoidance. The themes

extracted delineates its emerging cause, their firsthand experiences regarding languishing, how it affects their daily lives, and how they cope with it. The participants of this study were purposely selected through Mental Health Continuum-Short form that served as the qualifier survey thus determined the Gen Z students that exhibited low levels of well-being or languishing mental health. Therefore, they were invited to focus group discussions (FGD) to share and relate their experiences with other Gen Zs who share the same experiences regarding languishing mental health.

## Transition

Transition was revealed by the analysis to be the emerging cause of languishing among the Gen Z participants. Pertaining to the emerging cause of languishing among Generation Z students, the transitions happening in their lives cause them to experience languishing mental health as various changes accompany this. In this sense, it is supported by the Transition Theory proposed by Norman Brown (2016), wherein the transition is defined as an event or series of events that causes fundamental changes in the so-called “fabric of life,” which means what people do, where they do it, and with whom. During the transition, the stability of things is interrupted, thus affecting the well-being of an individual (Meleis et al., 2000, as cited in Volstad et al., 2020). Generally, changes or transitions could be very stressful for Generation Z, which is linked to mental health issues (Lundberg et al., 1975, as cited in Heanoy et al., 2022).

In line with the sub-theme social adjustment, the participants conveyed their concerns as they socially adapted to the changes within their social and interpersonal environment; hence, two codes comprised this sub-theme, with difficulty conforming to the first. Languishing Generation Z students had trouble in conforming to the new environment they were part of. Consequently, the feeling that they do not belong and feel pressured also prevailed, making it more challenging to conform as per the following statements:

*Parang nafefeel ko na naleft-out ako – (GENZ3)*

[It seems like I am being left out]

*Need ko lang maki adapt so parang kahit hindi siya okay sakin - (GENZ8)*

[I need to adapt, so it is like even if it is not okay with me]

*Nakakapressure yung environment na kinabibilangan ko ngayon - (GENZ4)*

[The environment I am currently in is pressuring]

*Ang hirap po makibagay since galing kaming senior high school adjusted to college - (GENZ1)*

[It is not easy to fit in because we came from senior high school and adjusted to college]

*Sa school nahihirapan po akong makasabay - (GENZ7)*

[I find it difficult to keep up in school]

Meanwhile, changes in relationship status, such as marriage, divorce, or bereavement, are critical life transitions. Studies highlight the emotional toll of relationship transitions and their potential link to languishing mental health (Kutob, 2017). As part of the sub-theme of social adjustment, losing former closeness and affection or failure to maintain interpersonal relationships can generate negative emotions for languishers as supported by this statement:

*Nawala po yung tao na mahal ko – (GENZ2)*

[The person I love has disappeared]

On the other hand, personal adjustment serves as the other sub-theme attributed by the code shift to reality. It is inevitable for an individual to encounter personal changes as part of their life-long journey, so being worried while still adapting to these transitions might be normal but with imposed emotional difficulties. This further emphasizes the worrisome the graduating student feels as she faces the reality of an unpredictable world, specifically not knowing what path to take after graduation:

*Lalo't graduating parang wala akong direction – (GENZ6)*

[Especially when graduating, it feels like I have no direction]

Meanwhile, Kloep et al. (2015) have stated that young adults (ages 18 to 20) transitioning from high school to university must quickly adjust to the new post-secondary education environment to meet their developmental and academic needs. Similar claims also exist in the longitudinal study of Conley et al. (2018), wherein they measured the psychological well-being of first-year students in the USA. Their participants showed heightened levels of psychological distress and reduced psychological well-being, suggesting that the transition to university demonstrated significant challenges for students. In line with this, an unanticipated load of tasks is the last code that regards the existence of the sub-theme of personal adjustment. The languishing participants expressed that it is a big adjustment for them to do all the school activities simultaneously with different levels of difficulty, complexity, and submission deadlines as part of the new academic year based on their statements below:

*Daming gawain tapos sunod sunod pa yung binibigay yung deadline ng professors tas kailangan agad ipasa – (GENZ5)*

[There's a lot of work, and the deadlines given by professors are one after another, and it needs to be submitted quickly]

*Sa sobrang dami pong ginagawa mga duty – (GENZ9)*

[There's so much work, like of duties]

### Emotional Distress

On the other hand, the qualitative analysis also revealed emotional distress as the languishing experiences of the participants. Thus, this encompasses the emotional repercussions of languishing mental health which are also manifested in different ways. This claim is substantiated by the Mental Health Continuum Model of Corey Keyes (2002), wherein languishing was defined as associated with emotional distress and psychosocial challenges, thus affecting their daily functioning. Similar results existed in the investigation of Dore et al. (2020), wherein languishing individuals primarily experience emotional distress aligned with their experiences of severe anxiety and depression symptoms. Moreover, being in a languishing state is also linked to emotional distress, emotional breakdowns, and exhaustion (Cooks-Campbell, 2021).

In line with this assertion, being overwhelmed by languishing participants of this study conveys a sense of being unable to manage the intensity or magnitude of various emotions that they manifested through spacing out, wherein they have experienced being absent-minded and unable to be aware of their surroundings for a short period as substantiated by the following statements:

*natutulala kana lang na in a moment na hindi mo alam kung pasaan ka – (GENZ8)*

[staring blankly that you find yourself in a moment not knowing where to go]

*nararanasan ko na din po yung breakdown na walang iyak nakatulala lang – (GENZ2)*

[I also experienced breaking down without tears just staring blankly]

Furthermore, languishing is also associated with emotional distress, thus affecting the decision-making skills of an individual, their behaviors, and their emotions toward oneself, other people, and the world. Some instances of a languishing state also relate to existential crisis because being in this phase can make an individual question one's purpose and have a negative view of oneself (Gillette, 2023). Hence, being overwhelmed, as experienced by the languishing Generation Z students, also revealed that they feel an undetermined number of emotions that made it difficult actually to describe or name the current state of their emotions. Thus, the second code, named ambiguous emotions, also contributes to the sub-theme of being overwhelmed. This is aided by these statements:

*deep down sobrang deep inside naguguluhan ako – (GENZ3)*

[deep down, way deep inside, I am confused]

*hindi ko alam kung masaya ba ako or malungkot – (GENZ6)*

[I don't know if I am happy or sad]

Meanwhile, emotional distress can also be manifested through different symptoms such as emotional numbness, unusual irritability, and feelings of anxiety and depression symptoms (Tartakovsky, 2022). Thus, the sub-theme of agitation comprises their emotional distress as well. Their responses convey a sense of being easily annoyed, and they become prone to respond to different situations by being irritable, which serves as the code for this sub-theme. Thus, this emotional state became their initial reaction due to heightened stress and factors that affect their tolerance for stimuli and interactions with people around them as supported by the following statements:

*napapansin ko na ang bilis ko maiyamot or mainis – (GENZ4)*

[I notice that I easily get annoyed or irritated]

*mainitin ang ulo ko ganun na parang may nagawa ka saking konting mali parang mabilis akong magalit – (GENZ9)*

[I have a short temper, it's like even if you've done a small mistake, I get angry quickly]

Similarly, Pomerantz and Rudolph (2003, as cited in Orth et al., 2018) yielded that emotional distress predicted a negative view of oneself and the world as time goes by. It was also found that emotional distress was associated with high levels of feelings of uncertainty when doing certain tasks, making it a contributing factor to lower levels of self-esteem, and causing undermining of competence. Self-esteem acts as a protective factor against self-disappointment; however, when experiencing emotional distress, self-esteem typically levels down, which fosters the feeling of self-disappointment. In the same manner, Swaim (2022) identified psychological signs of languishing, which include self-disappointment. After these claims, another part of their emotional distress is self-disappointment, wherein it involves non-fulfillment of their expectations. This encompasses the feeling of dismay, as what the languishing participant felt as their initial reaction towards their unmet expectations for themselves, as justified by this statement:

*Ang emotions ko po ay parang nadidismaya sa sarili – (GENZ1)*

[My emotions are like getting disappointed in myself]

### Emotional Despair

Even though languishing is not as critical to be considered a mental disorder, if left unchecked, languishing is determined to deteriorate the sense of purpose, prompt the self-reinforcing circulation of negative thoughts, and increase chances of experiencing depression and anxiety symptoms (Burke, 2022). Consequently, another manifestation of their languishing experience was determined as emotional despair. The first pertains to overthinking, they have shared that they excessively dwell on thoughts that focus on different aspects of their lives and future happenings. Hence, they consider these negative emotions as they often feel this throughout their everyday life, making them sad and worried. This was further supported by their statements as:

*Yun din po overthinking din po lagi ko po nafeel na negative emotion minsan po kasi na kahit maliliit na na actions minsan po inoovethink ko po sya – (GENZ7)*

[I also tend to overthink, often feeling negative emotions. Sometimes, even small actions make me overthink]

*lagi kong iniisip yung mga bagay na di pa nangyayari na mangyayari pa lang – (GENZ9)*

[I always think about things that have not yet happened]

Experts have associated languishing with feelings of emptiness and not feeling anything at all which is attributed to feelings of hopelessness and restlessness (Gillette, 2023). Hence, as languishing individuals experience depression symptoms, it was primarily studied by Shanahan et al. (2019) that emotional despair is a core symptom of depression due to internal and external causes. This encompasses the feelings of sadness, hopelessness, hostility, loneliness, and apathy. This imposed inability to tolerate pleasure and reward that could lead to a lack of motivation and execution of actions. On the other hand, hopelessness also established the theme of emotional despair as participants experienced having a pessimistic view of life and feeling powerless to change the situation, leading them to lose hope towards improving their lives. Thus, their ability to persist and improve seems impossible because they lose the willingness to take life more seriously, led by lacking purpose and discontentment with oneself.

*nawalan kana ng will to live wala na po ako naging plano – (GENZ2)*

[I've lost the will to live, and I don't have any plans anymore]

*hindi ko tinatake ang life seriously – (GENZ3)*

[I am not taking life seriously]

*Not contented kasi parang di ko na kayang gawin yung mga bagay na gusto kong gawin – (GENZ5)*

[I am not contented because it feels like I can't do the things I want to do]

Consistently, the languishing Gen Z students in this study have experienced the feeling of restlessness attributed to the theme of emotional despair. This feeling was manifested by the consistent feeling of unrest no matter how hard they tried to rest physically. A simple rest cannot ease their tiredness, but they feel like they need more than that and cannot even identify and make themselves aware of it as supported by the following statements:

*parang gustong gusto ko na matulog kasi alam ko sa sarili ko na parang maghapon na akong pagod pero wala kahit na anong sabihin ng utak ko na matulog kana pero parang yung katawan mo mismo yung ayaw na sumunod – (GENZ6)*

[It's like I really want to sleep because I know within myself that I've been tired all day, but no matter what my mind tells me to sleep, it's as if my body itself refuses to follow]

*Alam mo yung pagod na hindi siya puwede ipahinga lang – (GENZ8)*

[You know that kind of tiredness that cannot simply be rested]

*parang di po ako aware na napapagod po ang isip ko lagi pag mag-isa po ako – (GENZ4)*

[It is like I am not aware that my mind gets exhausted whenever I am alone]

### Apathetic

The theme apathetic is comprised of four codes identified as: lack of concentration, lack of energy, loss of interest, and unsatisfaction that, attributed to formulate the existence of the said theme. Apathy is defined conventionally as the absence or lack of feeling, emotions, interest, or concern. Furthermore, its significance to human functioning has expanded. This is demonstrated by the fact that it occurs in reaction to personal tragedy, a calamity from nature, societal loss, environmental deprivation, and shifting roles (Marin, 1990, as cited in Theleretis et al., 2023). Initially defined as a lack of motivation, it was recently defined as the quantitative reduction in goal-

directed behavior (Levy & Dubois, 2006, as cited in Cathomas et al., 2015).

Relating to apathy, it was determined that languishing individuals manifested apathy when working or doing something wherein they demonstrated this by being disconnected or disassociated with other people, irritable, confused, or sad, inability to get excited about upcoming events, procrastination or lacking motivation to complete a task, and inability to concentrate (Cooks-Campbell, 2021). As for the languishing participants, lack of concentration represents their inability to focus and maintain full attention when doing a certain daily task, thus causing them to get things undone. The statements of GENZ3, GENZ7, and GENZ2 can justify wherein they have said:

*hindi ako makafocus sa isang task* - (GENZ3)

[I can't focus on a task]

*hindi po ako makapagfocus sa isang bagay* – (GENZ7)

[I can't focus on one thing]

*super nahihirapan po ako mag-concentrate kasi andami pong thoughts* – (GENZ2)

[I am having a really hard time concentrating because there are so many thoughts]

Consequently, Moore et al. (2019) yielded that languishing students had low school connectedness scores that are below the expected scores that their institution has. Institution's counselors yielded that many of the 91 students involved in their study had attendance problems and failed one or more subjects. Additionally, aligned with apathy and languishing being related to poor emotional health and limiting daily activities and functioning, it makes work absenteeism more evident (Keyes, 2002, as cited in Espiritu et al., 2022). In line with this, another part of being apathetic of languishers is a lack of energy; they have reported that they cannot muster the energy necessary to attend their regular classes and do their daily responsibilities and activities that was evident on these statements:

*tapos yun po parang minsan nawawalan na po ako ng gana pumasok* – (GENZ9)

[I sometimes lose the motivation to go to school]

*parang wala ng energy na babyahe nanaman na papasok nanaman* – (GENZ6)

[It feels like I have no energy to commute and go to school again]

*Kasi nakahiga lang ako buong maghapon wala akong ginagawa* – (GENZ5)

[Because I've been lying down all day, I haven't been doing anything]

In the same way, according to Dr. Shemiah Derrick, languishing in mental health can also mean apathy, restlessness, discomfort, or a general lack of interest in life or the things that typically bring people joy. It is stagnation and emptiness, making for a life of quiet suffering (The Recount, 2021). Concurrently, another apathetic manifestation of languishing participants was identified through their lack of interest in the things that often make them happy and after completing a task that they found already disinteresting. This is established by the statements of GENZ8 and GENZ4, wherein they have said:

*umaayaw na ako kasi di na ako nage-enjoy di ko na siya nakikita bilang stress reliever* – (GENZ8)

[I am starting to give up because I am not enjoying it anymore, and I no longer see it as a stress reliever]

*Parang hindi ko na siya nararamdaman na ay ang saya ko dahil nagawa ko to natapos ko siya* – (GENZ4)

[It's like I no longer feel that joy because I did it, I finished it]

Moreover, languishing individuals commonly expressed frustration about their lives being unsatisfying, unfulfilling, or stagnant; they were troubled by thoughts of being "stuck in a rut" or that "the grass was greener on the other side" (Frederickson, 2009, as cited in Gloria & Steinhardt, 2013). Their feeling of apathetic is obvious, and they often feel unsatisfied thus, a languishing participant expressed that she could not reach her self-satisfaction when she did or finished certain tasks, which also affected her studies and productivity.

*hindi ko po narereach yung self-satisfaction ko lalo't affected yung studies and productivity ko* – (GENZ1)

[I cannot seem to reach my self-satisfaction, especially when my studies and productivity are affected]

### Positive Coping

In the aspect of how they cope with languishing, they employ contrasting coping strategies which includes positive coping and avoidance. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress (1984) posits that coping is an evolving process that varies from situation to situation and an effort to handle various internal and external demands. Furthermore, the findings show how participants cope with this mental health state.

With positive coping to languishing, Dr. Adam Grant has suggested that it is the antidote for languishing, this pertains to the state of mind being completely engaged in a specific activity. This could help languishers lose awareness of time and provide joy and an opportunity to learn something new (Ranney & Engelbrecht, 2021). Positive coping can also be done through writing, painting, praying, doing house chores, and going outdoors to enjoy nature (Healthwise Staff, 2022). Thereby, the languishing Gen Z students have expressed that they can cope by engaging themselves in their hobbies and interests by doing things that allow their minds to wander around instead of thinking of the stressful circumstances they are going through. Hence, they explore their creative sides by diverting negative emotions into productive and calming activities, such as reading the bible and philosophy books, painting, hiking, sports, and house chores. These manifestations were attributed by the following statements:

*Nagbabasa ng philosophy for the past month – (GENZ3)*

[I've been reading philosophy for the past month]

*kapag sobrang gulo ng utak ko naglilinis ako – (GENZ8)*

[When my mind is too cluttered, I clean]

*ineengage ko po yung sarili ko sa mga activity parang nagvolleyball po ako ganyan and then nagluluto parang nagbabasa po ng libro, nanonood ng movies – (GENZ4)*

[I engage myself in various activities, like playing volleyball and cooking, as well as reading books and watching movies]

*nagpapainting na lang ako or nagbabasa ng bible – (GENZ7)*

[I either engage in painting or read the Bible]

*gumagala po ako palagi sa mga bundok ganun basta yung mga may magagandang tanawin – (GENZ9)*

[I often go hiking in mountains or anything as long as with beautiful views]

### Avoidance

Meanwhile, they also cope through avoiding its mental health repercussions through different external outlets. Since they are still at the age of not being able to fully acquire or develop efficient coping mechanisms, they avoid it instead (Newport Academy, 2022). The study of Morrish et al. (2017) supports this claim wherein languishing individuals more typically adopt social distancing and “avoidance” behaviors in which they use distraction and social disengagement as part of their engagement-oriented emotion regulation strategies. Similarly, Wissing et al. (2019) yielded the same results as languishers avoid negative situations instead of facing them.

The adolescence phase concluded that teenagers are still developing and honing coping mechanisms. They have not acquired or developed efficient coping mechanisms for managing stress, anxiety, or other challenging emotions, which causes them to use avoidance as a fallback coping strategy (Newport Academy, 2019). They used to avoid their stressful and challenging circumstances instead of facing them. Avoidance coping is the strategies individuals use to evade or minimize stressors rather than directly confronting or resolving them. It can be manifested in various forms, such as procrastination, distraction, denial, or substance abuse (Sirois et al., 2019). In the same way, the theme avoidance has yielded that languishers also employ maladaptive coping mechanisms, in which they engage in unhealthy ways of coping through alcohol consumption and high intake of nicotine. This is one of the ways they use to avoid problems, as per the statement of GENZ2:

*masaya lang po ako kapag may inom ganun o kaya super taas po ng take ng nicotine – (GENZ2)*

[I only feel happy when I drink or when the nicotine intake is very high]

On the other hand, it's part of Generation Z characteristics to be digital pioneers. Research suggests that using smartphones, social media, and online gaming is a form of digital escapism, allowing individuals to temporarily avoid real-world stressors (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Avoidance coping mechanisms, such as scrolling through social media feeds for extended periods, can be a strategy to avoid confronting the negative emotions they feel (Perloff, 2014). Additionally, Hence, Subudhi and Sahu (2020) identified the type of escapist activities that include “Active Pursuits,” which primarily happen when an escapist gives actual input for escapism through activities like watching online videos, playing online games, listening to music, etc., to escape from their current situation. Meanwhile, this is one of the ways they used to cope while in a languishing state. They used the emergence of technology to escape from their stressful or challenging situation. In line with digital escapism manifestation among languishers are playing mobile games and watching videos from different social media platforms as attested by these statements:

*panonood ng mga videos, paglalaro ng online games – (GENZ5)*

[Watching videos and playing online games]

*tinatakan ko sya sa pamamagitan ng tiktok – (GENZ6)*

[I escape from it by using TikTok]

*I'm so much in digital games dun po ako nakakatakas para di ko maisip yung mga bagay na makakapaglala ng anxiety ko – (GENZ1)*

[I'm so much into digital games to escape from thinking things that can trigger my anxiety]

With the existence of thematically analyzed themes the results indicate that transitioning from one state or condition to another is the emerging cause of languishing to generation z students. This includes interpersonal, personal, social, and academic transitions. Thus, they experienced emotional distress and despair having this kind of mental health affecting their emotions and feelings towards themselves, others, and the world. Furthermore, this made them feel apathetic that affects how they do, accomplish, and feel about certain tasks in their everyday life. However, they employ contrasting ways of coping with languishing mental health through positive coping and avoidance.

## Conclusion

The results of the study explore the nature and experiences of languishing mental health among Generation Z students. Wherein the key findings of this study indicate that different life transitions cause them to languish, and they experienced relative emotional distress and despair. With this, it makes them feel apathetic in their everyday life and prompt them to employ contrasting coping strategies. Likewise, it uncovered their common experiences aligned with their age frame that increases the chance of developing severe mental health concerns if left unchecked. Therefore, mental health support and interventions is indeed necessary to holistically address the repercussions of this mental health phenomenon.

Therefore, recommendations are proposed to address the consequences of this mental health phenomenon. For the participants, we encouraged them to seek guidance from peers, colleagues, friends, superiors, mentors, or family members during the transformative periods of their lives. This could foster a safe and belonging space wherein they can express their thoughts, concerns, and questions. For the Guidance and Counseling Department, they may formulate a program to combat languishing and its emotional toll on Gen Z students by strengthening support systems, teaching them coping mechanisms, and addressing the root causes of this problem. Meanwhile for teachers, they may develop more strategies that will serve as scaffolding to develop students' concentration and interests. They can provide students with opportunities to enhance their engagement with other students and people outside the institution, like outreach programs, to encourage social engagement and thus realize their purpose. Likewise, teachers may foster connections with the parents of languishing students to address the problem. Finally, Gen Z should engage with healthy coping mechanisms like mindfulness-based approach through moment-to-moment awareness of thoughts and situations and self-care.

This study also presents limitations. Since, this study only focuses with one specific age frame which is Generation Z that may affect the generalizability of the key findings. Thus, future researchers may explore other age frames like Generations X and Y to have an expanded data and include other psychological constructs as well. Correspondingly, they may propose specific and test the effectiveness of intervention or counseling programs to combat languishing. Further studies regarding languishing can expand the understanding of languishing as a psychological construct and generally, mental health.

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