

Addressing the Anxiety of the Junior High School Students in Sta. Teresita National High School Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The threat of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is not solely focused on one's physical health, it has also affected one's mental health. Studies suggest that COVID-19 led to a heightened level of anxiety (Racine *et al.*, 2021). This study attempted to assess the level of general anxiety, the anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and academic-related anxiety of the junior high school students of Sta. Teresita National High School for the school year 2020-2021. An online survey was conducted utilizing the General Anxiety Disorder -7 (GAD-7) screening tool together with questions on COVID-19 and academic-related anxiety. The respondents of the study were 290 junior high school students, which were selected randomly from the total population of 1,179. The study showed that 53% of the male students experience only Minimal Anxiety, while 38% of the female students experience Mild Anxiety. Additionally, the data showed that the majority of the students (54.25%) have experienced an increase in anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It can also be noted that 44.14% stated that they were having difficulty adapting to the Modular (Printed) Distance Learning, 43.10% expressed difficulties in answering the Self-Learning Modules (SLMs) and 48.62% affirmed that they experience difficulty in concentrating on their lessons. To address the anxiety of the junior high school students, the proponents recommend the utilization of Project EASED (Easing Academic Stress Experienced During pandemic) to control the anxiety of the students through Art activities.

Keywords: COVID-19; General anxiety; Academic-related anxiety.

1. Introduction

The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) which started in China has wreaked havoc all over the world and the Philippines is one of the countries that has been hugely affected by the pandemic. The threat to physical health has extensively affected the various sectors of our society. The economy struggled when the business sector plummeted; the health sector strained to its near limits; the educational sector explored diverse options to maintain quality education during the pandemic; these are some of the many changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. And aside from the threat to physical health, stress and anxiety are also undeniable.

The Department of Education is one of the government agencies in the country that has adapted to the emerging needs of the new normal caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The drastic change from face-to-face classes to distance learning modalities was not an easy adjustment for the students. The routines that the students follow regularly were disrupted abruptly, and the unexpected changes in their daily routine put a strain on their mental health (Lee, 2020). The toll on the student's mental health directly affects their motivation, concentration, and social interactions (Unger, 2007).

In Sta. Teresita National High School, the teachers and administrator conducted the Learner's Enrollment Survey Form (LESF) to determine the distance learning modality that the students and parents prefer. There were 1,179 LESF respondents and based on the results, the students and parents prefer the Modular (Printed) Distance Learning. The radical shift of learning modality from Face-to-Face to Modular (Printed) Distance Learning has driven the proponents to conduct a study that aims to identify the severity levels of anxiety symptoms related to the pandemic, and anxiety related to academic concerns. The proponents sought to address this through the implementation of project EASED (Easing Academic Stress Experienced During pandemic). This project aims to provide art-related activities that would help in controlling the anxiety experienced by the students.

2. Literature Review

This presents literature on gathered information from electronic sources that support the underlying concepts of the present research.

The most common psychological disorder among school-aged children and adolescents worldwide is Anxiety (Costello *et al.*, 2003). It has affected students of different age groups, gender, and social standing (Deb *et al.*, 2010). The current health crisis we are facing today has created a lot of concern leading to an increased anxiety level (Roy *et al.*, 2020).

In the Philippines, schools were closed since March 2020; the educational approach shifted from face-to-face to distance learning. Its closure triggers a sense of uncertainty among students and intensifies the mental health challenges (Hossain *et al.*, 2019). Anxiety is the strongest direct predictor of performance among students. The students with higher anxiety achieved less in the examination and showed higher procrastination scores (Macher *et al.*, 2012). Academic-related concerns during pandemic increased the anxiety experienced by the students. The problems with electricity and the internet are one of the main concerns of the students. Some students also find it difficult to motivate themselves to do the assessments due to the different atmosphere (Karal *et al.*, 2010).

Addressing anxiety may be done in various ways. The most common way to deal with it is through therapy but, due to the stigma attached to this, people afflicted with it sometimes opt to look for alternative ways to cope with the mental illness. Expressive art therapy is one alternative method that utilizes creativity to facilitate creativity in treatment. Art therapy has been described to be helpful in trauma work, as it enables the processing of traumatic experiences by accessing and integrating traumatic memories. It has also been researched to improve positive symptoms of emotional control, interpersonal relationships, and body image (Schouten *et al.*, 2015). Color therapy is another way to control anxiety. It combines elements of art therapy and meditation. It was concluded that coloring Mandalas reduce anxiety, as the act of coloring the symmetrical form of the Mandala with its repeating patterns and complexity purportedly helps to draw individuals into a state similar to meditation (Curry and Kasser, 2005).

3. Research Question

This study aimed to determine and address the anxiety of the Junior High School students in Sta. Teresita National High School during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Particularly, this study pursued to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of general anxiety of students in terms of:
 - a. Age
 - b. Gender
 - c. Grade Level
 - d. Social Class
2. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the anxiety experienced by the students?
3. How severe is the academic-related anxiety experienced by the students during this COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What art activities may be proposed to address the anxiety of the junior high school students?

4. Scope and Limitation

This study was conducted at Sta. Teresita National High School during the academic year 2020-2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak. Its focus was to determine the level of COVID-19 and academic-related anxiety experienced by the junior high school students; it does not cover other mental illnesses such as depression and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). It also focuses on providing activities that will help in controlling the student's anxiety.

5. Research Methodology

This part presents the research design, subjects of the study, description of the instrument, the procedure employed in accumulating data, and statistical tool utilized in this study.

5.1. Sampling

The respondents of the study were 290 junior high school students of Sta. Teresita National High School for the school year 2020-2021, which were selected randomly using a 95% confidence level with a margin error of 5% from the total population of 1,179.

5.2. Data Collection

The study utilized an online survey questionnaire that focuses on socio-demographics, General Anxiety Disorder (GAD), anxiety caused by COVID-19, and academic-related Anxiety.

5.2.1. Construction of Instrument

The researchers worked collaboratively to obtain the suitable tool appropriate in determining an individual's General Anxiety Disorder. In constructing the online survey questionnaire, the researchers adopted the National HIV Curriculum's General Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7) screening tool.

5.2.2. Validation of Instrument

The researchers collaborated with junior high school Grade Leaders (GL) and meticulously deliberated on the factors that causes COVID-19- related anxiety and academic-related anxiety to students. The collaboration led to the re-evaluation and re-validation of the items in the online survey questionnaire that tremendously helped the study.

5.2.3. Administration of Instrument

The researchers randomly selected 290 junior high school students from a total population of 1,179; they requested the assistance of the grade 7 to grade 10 advisers to disseminate the link of the online survey to their students. The researchers requested the respondents to answer the items in all honesty and that the result of the study is treated confidentially.

5.2.4. Scoring Instrument

The following cut-offs correlate with level of anxiety severity:

GAD-7 Score	Interpretation
0-4	Minimal Anxiety
5-9	Mild Anxiety
10-14	Moderate Anxiety
greater than 15	Severe Anxiety

Source: <https://www.hiv.uw.edu/page/mental-health-screening/gad-7>

5.3. Data Analysis

The data gathered was subjected to Descriptive analysis.

Percentage. This was used to determine the percentage of respondents in each demographic variable.

Mean. This was used to assess the level of General Anxiety of the junior high school students per grade level.

6. Discussion of Results and Recommendation

This part delivers the presentation of statistical data relative to the problem posted in the Statement of the Problem. The corresponding analysis and interpretation of data are incorporated in this portion of the study.

Q1. What is the level of General Anxiety of students in terms of age, gender, grade level and social class?

The researchers compared the mean of the General Anxiety Level of the students in terms of age, gender, grade level, and social class. The percentage was also applied to determine the proportion of respondents in each demographic variable.

Table-1. Demographic variables in association with General Anxiety Disorder -7 (GAD-7)

Variable	n (%)	Minimal Anxiety n (%)	Mild Anxiety n (%)	Moderate Anxiety n (%)	Severe Anxiety n (%)
Age					
12-13	121 (42%)	60 (50%)	41 (34%)	16 (13%)	4 (3%)
14-15	99 (34%)	30 (30%)	35 (35%)	24 (24%)	10 (10%)
16-17	60 (21%)	20 (33%)	17 (28%)	15 (25%)	8 (13%)
18-19	10 (3%)	1 (10%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)
Mean		30.75%	34.25%	23.00%	11.50%
Gender					
Male	98 (34%)	52 (53%)	18 (18%)	24 (24%)	4 (4%)
Female	192 (66%)	61 (32%)	73 (38%)	40 (21%)	18 (9%)
Grade Level					
Grade 7	71 (24%)	31 (44%)	28 (39%)	11 (15%)	1 (1%)
Grade 8	87 (30%)	45 (52%)	20 (23%)	14 (16%)	8 (9%)
Grade 9	63 (22%)	19 (30%)	25 (40%)	13 (21%)	6 (10%)
Grade 10	69 (24%)	16 (23%)	25 (36%)	20 (29%)	8 (12%)

Social Class					
Lower Class	86 (30%)	35 (41%)	29 (34%)	17 (20%)	5 (6%)
Middle Class	166 (57%)	74 (45%)	49 (30%)	28 (17%)	15 (9%)
Upper Class	38 (13%)	18 (47%)	11 (29%)	5 (13%)	4 (11%)

As gathered from table 1, the majority (34.25%) of the students aged 12-19 experience Mild Anxiety. The data also revealed that the majority (53%) of the male students experience only Minimal Anxiety, while the majority (38%) of the female students experience Mild Anxiety. In terms of the Grade Level, the data shows that for grade 7, majority (44%) of the students only experiences Minimal Anxiety; for grade 8, the majority (52%) of the students also experiences Minimal Anxiety, while for the grade 9 students, the majority (40%) of the students experiences Mild Anxiety and for grade 10, it can also be seen that majority (36%) of the students experiences Mild Anxiety. The result also establishes that the majority (41%) of the students who belonged to the Lower Class experiences Minimal Anxiety, the majority (45%) of students who belonged to the Middle Class also experiences Minimal Anxiety, and majority of the students who belonged to the Upper Class experiences Minimal Anxiety as well.

The result of table 1, corresponds with the study of Deb, S., & Walsh, K., that anxiety affect students of different age groups, gender, and social standing (Deb et al., 2010).

Q2. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the anxiety experienced by the students?

To determine if there was an increase, decrease, or unchanged level of anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the proponents used percentage to ascertain the proportion of students who experienced changes in their anxiety level. The researchers also used the Mean score to compare the changes in the anxiety of the students per grade level.

Table-2. COVID-19 related anxiety

Grade Level	n (%)	Increased level of Anxiety n (%)	Decreased level of Anxiety n (%)	Anxiety level remained the same n (%)
Grade 7	71 (24%)	46 (65%)	11 (15%)	14 (20%)
Grade 8	87 (30%)	51 (59%)	13 (15%)	23 (26%)
Grade 9	63 (22%)	33 (52%)	10 (16%)	20 (32%)
Grade 10	69 (24%)	28 (41%)	14 (20%)	27 (39%)
Mean		54.25%	16.50%	29.25%

Table 2 illustrates the COVID-19 related anxiety experienced by the students. It shows that the majority (54.25%) of the students experienced an increased level of anxiety, while 16.50% of the students stated they experienced a decrease of anxiety and 29.25% of the students stated that their anxiety level remained the same despite the pandemic.

The result of table 2 coincides with the conclusions of the *Study of knowledge, attitude, anxiety & perceived mental healthcare need in Indian population during COVID-19 Pandemic* wherein Roy, D., Tripathy, S., Kar, S., Sharma, N., Verma, S., and Kaushal, V, stated that the psychological and emotional impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was evident and it has created a lot of concern for people leading to an increased anxiety level.

Q3. How severe is the academic-related anxiety experienced by the students during this COVID-19 pandemic?

The researchers computed for the percentage to determine the severity of academic-related concerns of the students.

Table-3. Severity level of academic-related anxiety

Academic Related Concern	n (%)	None n (%)	Mild n (%)	Moderate n (%)	Severe n (%)
Difficulty in adapting to the Modular (Printed) Distance Learning	290 (100%)	80 (27.59%)	67 (23.10%)	128 (44.14%)	15 (5.17%)
Difficulty in answering the learning tasks in the Self-Learning Modules (SLMs)	290 (100%)	63 (21.72%)	86 (29.66%)	125 (43.10%)	16 (5.52%)
Difficulty in concentrating in lessons	290 (100%)	70 (24.14%)	66 (22.76%)	141 (48.62%)	13 (4.48%)

As reflected on table 3, majority of the students experience moderate level of academic-related anxiety; 44.14% of the students stated that they experience Moderate anxiety in terms of adapting to the Modular (Printed) Distance Learning, 43.10% of the students also expressed that they experience Moderate anxiety due to the difficulty in answering their SLMs, and 48.62% of the students also stated that experience Moderate anxiety caused by the difficulty in concentrating on their lessons.

In relation with the result of table 3, it may be constructed that this result concurs with the study of Hasan Karala, Ayça Çebi, and Memnüne Pekşen wherein they concluded that academic-related concerns during pandemic increased the anxiety experienced by the students.

Q4. What art activities may be proposed to address the anxiety of the junior high school students?

The researchers referred to the study of Schouten, de Niet, Knipscheer, Kleber, and Hutschemaekers that concluded that art therapy enables the processing of traumatic experiences. The proponents also referred to the study of Curry & Kasser that concluded that coloring Mandala helps to draw individuals into a state similar to meditation.

Table 4 presents that art activities that will be used in Project EASED (Easing Academic Stress Experienced During pandemic).

Table 4. Action plan in addressing the students’ anxiety Project EASED (Easing Academic Stress Experienced During pandemic)

Objectives	Activities	Person(s) Involved	Timeline	Success Indicator
Minimize the percentage of students who experience mild academic-related anxiety by 50%.	Provide art-related activities that will help in controlling the anxiety experienced by the students.	School head Teachers Parents	Year round	The percentage of mild academic-related anxiety
	1. Gratitude journaling. The habit of recording and reflecting on things that we are grateful for. In essence, we are rewiring the brain to focus more on the positive aspects of our life and build up resilience against negative situations.			was reduced to 50%.
	2. 1 Minute brain dump. A mind clearing tool to get a fresh perspective.			
	3. Mind and Body Connection The mind and body are closely connected and can influence each other in a feedback loop whereby the mind creates feelings of tension in the body, and heightened feelings in the body leads to overthinking in the mind.			
	4. Mind Map Anxiety. To sift through the mind and identify the thoughts and beliefs that contribute to stress. It is used to reflect and organize the tangle of thoughts in our head.			
	5. Be Positive! Another tool that is used to re-wire our brain so that we would focus on the positive things in life instead of the negative and the challenges in our lives.			
	6. Inside out’s emotion chart. This chart will help us in determining what we’re feeling so that we can address it properly.			
	7. What’s in your Heart? Identification of feelings			

	promotes health expression of emotion.			
	8. My Family / My Friends Another tool used to help us focus on the positive things in life.			
	9. Comfort castle. This activity will help us to identify the things that calm us so that we can use those activity whenever we feel anxious.			
	10. Coloring Mandala. Coloring Mandala helps to draw individuals into a state similar to meditation			

7. Recommendation

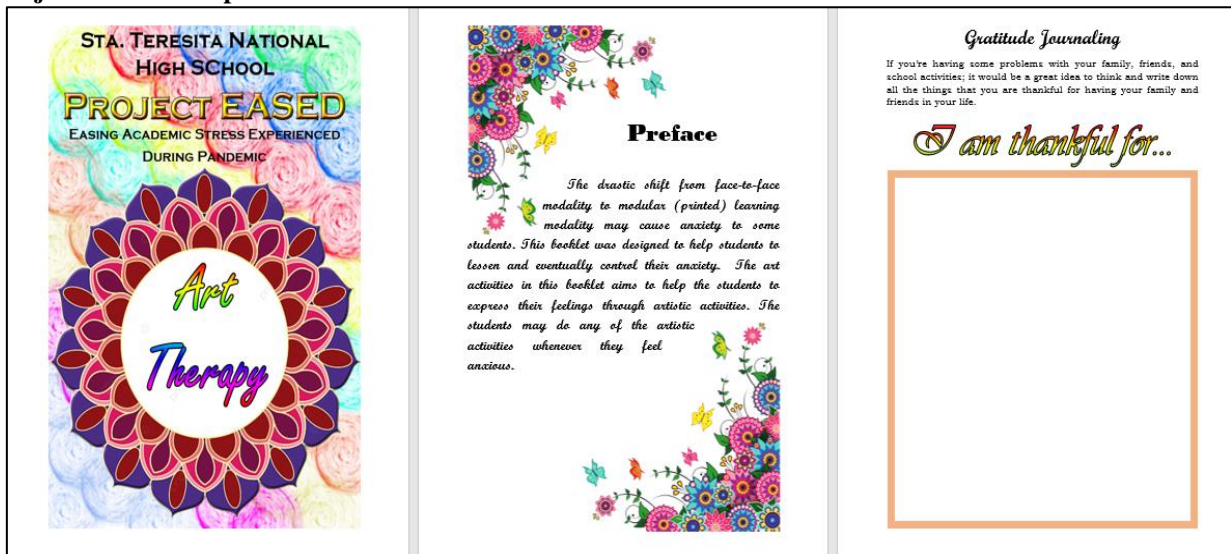
Based on the result, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Create an art therapy booklet that will help the students to control their anxiety.
2. Monitor the anxiety level of the students through the General Anxiety Disorder -7 (GAD-7) screening tool.
3. Other schools may utilize Project EASED to address their learners' anxiety.

8. Dissemination and Advocacy Plans

This part presents the method on how project EASED will be disseminated to the junior high school teachers and students of Sta. Teresita National High School. The research findings will be presented to all the junior high school teachers through virtual LAC. The project EASED booklet will be printed and will be distributed to the students together with their self-learning modules (SLMs).

Project EASED Output



Brain Dump

What are the things that are making you feel sad today? Write down all the negative things you are feeling at the moment. After writing down all the negative things you are feeling look at your gratitude journal one again to remind you of the things that you should be thankful for despite all the negative things in your life.

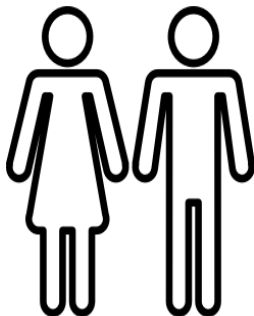


Mind Body Connection

The mind and body are closely connected and can influence each other in a feedback loop whereby the mind creates feelings of tension in the body, and heightened feelings in the body leads to overthinking in the mind.

In this exercise, take a minute to reflect on physical feelings in your own body in this moment and consider if your body is feeling any tension, pain or discomfort in any areas.

- Pain
- Tight
- Heavy
- Restless



Mind Map Anxiety

Are you feeling anxious at the moment? Complete the mind map by focusing on the issues that is causing you anxiety at this time.

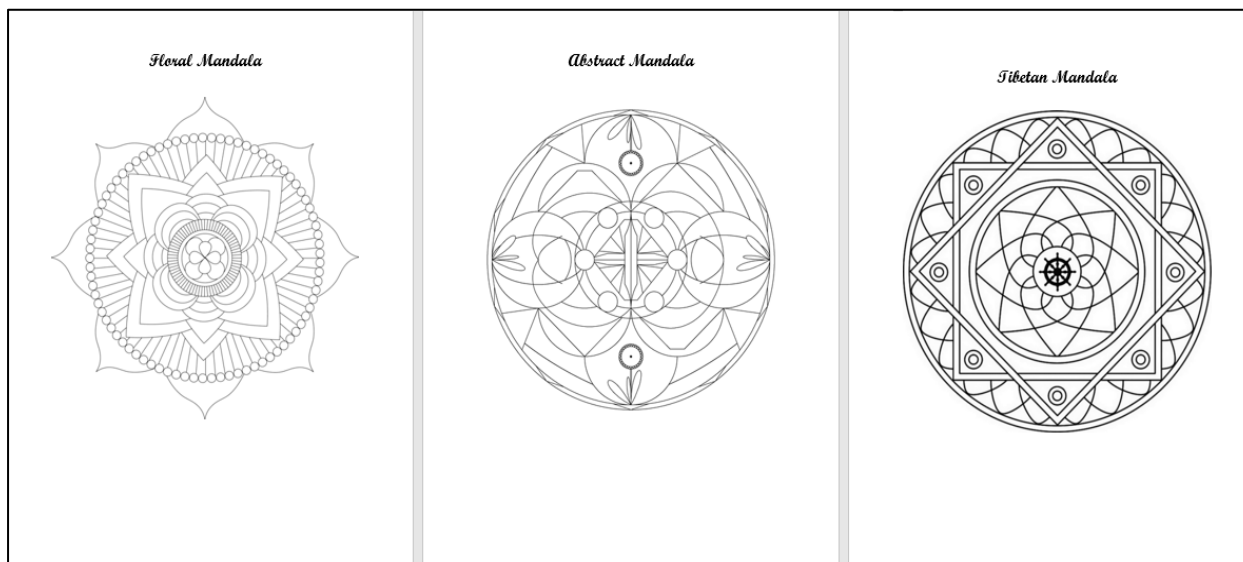


Now it's time to be positive! With all the things that's causing you anxiety, write down all the positive things in your life. Doing this will help you shift your focus on the positive side of your life.

Inside out Emotional Chart

Are you confused on what you are feeling at the moment? Does it feel like you are feeling a lot of negative emotions all at once? Look at this emotional chart to help you identify what you are feeling at the moment.

Excitement	Melancholy	Disgust	Surprise	Discomfort
Joy	Sadness	Disgust	Fear	Anger
Excitement	Melancholy	Disgust	Surprise	Discomfort
Joy	Sadness	Disgust	Fear	Anger
Excitement	Melancholy	Disgust	Surprise	Discomfort
Joy	Sadness	Disgust	Fear	Anger
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