College Students' Homesickness: An Interpretative Phenomenology

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Abstract

One of the most significant challenges that college students face, especially those going away from home to pursue college for the first time, is homesickness. Students who experience homesickness have trouble concentrating and adjusting to college setting, lonely, shy, confused were led to decrease in academic performance. Multiple studies provided the effects of homesickness to college students but less focused on the extent effects of homesickness to the college students' attitude towards school. This study aimed to gather information based on the real experiences of the participants regarding homesickness and elaborates the effect of this phenomenon to the life of college students. This study utilized a purposive sampling technique wherein participants were interviewed to further explain and share their lived experiences about homesickness. The participants in this study were 8 selected college students coming from Cebu Technological University, Ginatilan Extension Campus, Ginatilan, Cebu. Their lived experiences were analyzed using Heideggerian Phenomenology analysis. After analyzing the data gathered, the researchers of this study come up to three themes - The Critical, The Comfort Zone and The Constant Communication. The researchers from this study concluded that the life of a student away from home or their loved ones is quite a struggle since several adjustments has to be done in order to survive in the new situation, they are in. This study helps in understanding why some college students are homesick and became very emotional when faced in a difficult situation. Teachers, parents, and students should be sensitive enough to understand the homesick students' challenges and tribulations they are facing in their college life.

Keywords: Homesickness, College Students, Depression, Anxiety, Decision-making, Belongingness

Introduction

Despite the fact that the general public has traditionally viewed the transition to college as a positive experience and a chance for personal growth, students face a variety of difficulties (Ando et al., 2022), such as learning to manage their lives on their own, making new friends, and adjusting to the new routines and academic standards (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007; Thurber & Walton, 2012). Being away from one's home and family might cause homesickness. Due to being away from one's home, environment, and loved ones, the afflicted person goes through an emotional state known as longing. One of the numerous reasons people live away from home is to study and receive a top-notch education. Thus, it experiences both mental and physical effects from homesickness.

People develop emotional ties with objects, people, and places as soon as they are born (Abucejo et al., 2022). These connections grow over time to create what will ideally be a stable environment (Cabello et al., 2022). When one leaves home, the feeling of a true loss, much like to mourning when a friend or another person close to passes away. This loss is normal and typically resolves itself over time, much like sadness. It is possible for this loss to "get stuck" or to be very severe, though. This situation is similar to college students who are used to be with their family and left for the purpose of schooling.

The issue is that a lot of people have a tendency to hold them in high regard because they believe they should be able to handle situations but are unable to (Bahinting et al., 2022; Riconalla et a., 2022). Lack of strength does not indicate homesickness. It could be challenging to focus and work. Loss of focus, sobbing, melancholy, trouble sleeping or eating, emotional waves, disruption of the menstrual cycle, nausea, headaches or dizziness, shaking, and a feeling of being either too hot or too cold are all symptoms of homesickness.

A person who moves to another place for work, for study purposes, and for a vacation and many more activities may often result to homesickness which refers to having sad feelings from being apart from other people or to their loved ones (Ferrera et al.,2022). One of the many reasons why people often have this feeling is because they have hard time accepting their new situation by which they have to make some adjustments in order to cope up with their new surroundings (Olleras et al., 2022). According to Polay (2012), the changes of student's life from high school to college differ as several changes and adjustments has to be done in order to be successful in their field of study. Since this phenomenon is common

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to people of all groups and ages, it cannot be denied that it has a big impact to one's lives especially to the college students who are about to be separated from home.

Demetriou et. Al (2022) stated that being away from home often has a positive effects and negative effects for the life of the student. One positive effect is that students are being taught to become independent (Daniyarovna, et al. 2022) thus making their life away from their parents may often hard but at the same time fulfilling. Fulfilling in the sense that they strive to accomplish things without asking the help of others. It also gave them the freedom to make their own decision and find solution to their problems. Meanwhile, this may also lead to negative effects as homesickness may affect the overall performance (Choudhury, 2022) of an individual from school concentration to losing an appetite. As a result, the level of success of the learner has been greatly affected by which they have to deal mostly with the negative effects as it unusual for them to be away from home.

This study investigated and explicated the lived experiences of the students who are away from home because of schooling. Further, this study explored the students who are experiencing the condition of being alone, and how this situation affect their perspective, for living independently, and how they cope with the academic tasks. By doing this, the teachers, parents, and students will have the idea on how to deal with these conditions and to be sensitive enough in understanding the homesick students.

Literature Review

Like any study, this article focuses on homesickness which an individual may experience as they separate from people they love and places they knew. This article will also elaborate how homesickness affects college students and how they are going to cope with as they experienced this phenomenon upon entering in the college setting.

These are the articles that will discuss further how homesickness affects college students as they experienced this phenomenon upon entering college. Furthermore, the researchers were able to give the relatedness of these articles in terms of their connection. According to Agterberg & Passchier (1998), homesickness affects the lives of many people since this doesn't choose certain age or culture. This includes depression and anxiety which every individual may experience. Abbas et al. (2018) stated that depression and anxiety can affect physical health, personal relationships as well as difficulty dealing with

everyday challenges in life. Some studies have shown that homesickness may led to decrease in academic performance as this may result to fear of thinking what might happen to them being away from the guidance of their loved ones (Brewi et al., 1989; Burt ,1993). Students who experience homesickness have trouble concentrating, and adjusting to college setting while some may opt to return home because of the challenges they have experienced along the way (Demetriou et al., 2022).

Studies shown by Brewin et al. (1989) & Strobe et al. (2002) emphasizing that girls can easily cope with these changes compared to boys. This supports that females may usually spend their time talking or doing enjoyable things to other people than boys. Regardless of how a person feels, this feeling will not last forever. Making oneself busy, creating routines and engaging to any other activities can help a person in overcoming homesickness. In general, adapting to the new environment is the best thing one can do to address this problem.

Strobe et al. (2002) says that the adjustment period for homesickness may take a little longer if one possesses low confidence in dealing their own feelings and behavior which may oftentimes lead to depression. This is a struggle that needs to be overcome since an individual may feel afraid to make mistakes for the high expectations (Madeeha et al., 2022) of the people around them. A depress individual may experience the feeling of tiredness in doing school work, low self-esteem and poor concentration that may lead to poor academic performance (Dhamija et al., 2021).

In addition to this, the longer a person stays in one place where changes have been taking place and are welcomed wholeheartedly may result to less homesickness (Strobe et al., 2004). Several researches has been made to look upon the extent on how this feelings affect college students whom they experienced a life away from home. According to Thurber & Walton (2007), several problems arouses to both children and adolescents like coping up to their new environment, and thinking, reasoning and remembering may find it hard for them to focus on. Smith (2007) also says that students who are away from home felling lonely may score lower on self-efficacy than those who are not.

The idea of Fisher (1989) about the feeling of being away from home is somewhat alike with Lin's (1986). Being homesick (Marschall, 2015) becomes more severe especially when that somebody is being forced to move from one place to another. This greatly affects the sense of mentality and especially the socialization

matter because one needs to adjust the new place (Orleans, 2020) just to normalize one's feeling. And with that, it was Fisher who abled to make and realize the five ideas on how was the feeling of being way from the ordinary home causes a change in someone.

Fisher had first the "Loss and Attachment Model" which concludes that being away from friends or somebody closes to his/her heart and the things common to him/her may let him/her has the feeling of being down (Schmuck et al., 2019) and wrecked making that person feel with anger, apprehensive uneasiness and nervousness (Barros et al., 2020). If this happens continuously, the feeling turns into indifference or lack of interest or concern. It also leads to impassiveness which means lack of feeling or emotion according to Van Tilburg, et al. (1996).

Next is the "Interruption and Discontinuity Model", which basically meant that if a person is interrupted with what he/she uses to do or being strange to the new environment (Sivalingam & Prabakar, 2019) because of the displacement (Rather & Ali, 2021), these may lead him/ her to experience the feeling of phobia, uneasiness and of course a so much stress. Her/his old self may loss to the right path and the feeling of happiness and excitement are no longer present. He/ She still needs to blend and adjust to the new place, new people or shall we say the unordinary environment (Shin, 2020) which are not that easy to be done. He /She still needs more time and effort to make all of these possible or otherwise become impossible.

Then the "Reduced Personal Control Model", in which the newly displaced person has no ability of being flexible which literally means that he/she does not able to control herself/himself with the unfamiliar environment (Shin, 2020). He /She lacks coping mechanisms (Windarwati, et al., 2021) or lacks the capability of adjusting helping him/her to rebuilt and adapt the new him/her. The other model was the "Change and Transition Model", states that a newly displaced person has to surrender the old self while adopting the new one. And this make him/her suffer many challenges resulting him/her to feel stressful. The last model was the "Conflict model", showing that a person may find a conflict in adopting the new world for her/him making him/her realize to come back home but there's still an issue in his/her mind which are the sense of security and safety (Barboza, et al., 2018).

As a whole, homesickness or the sense of being apart/away from the usual home felt by the students admitted in college education causes anxiety, grief, and anger. And make them feel uneasy to cope with

the new adjustments causing so much stress and sometimes it becomes more severe resulting to lack of emotion and interest. And the mentioned literatures above are really connected and make a big contribution to this study which aims not to literally eliminate these feeling of being homesick but at least to minimize the sense of such to the newly displaced first year college students to continue education with excitement and persistence and relieve the feeling of being homesick or wanting to come back to the usual home.

Methodology

This qualitative study utilized the Heideggerian Phenomenology design. This design is very effective in exploring and explicating the lived experiences of the participants toward a certain phenomenon. Since, this study aims to gather information based on the real and lived experiences of the participants regarding homesickness, this design can be best utilized. In addition, the design can elaborate further the effect of this phenomenon to the life of college students.

Sampling Design

This study utilized a purposive sampling technique wherein participants were interviewed to further explain or share their experiences about homesickness. Furthermore, interview guide questions through a semi-structured questionnaire (Smith, 2019; Cabello, 2022) were given to the selected participants of this study for them to answer.

Inclusion Criteria

Participants were 8 college students of Cebu Technological University, Ginatilan Extension Campus, Ginatilan, Cebu. The participants were chosen regardless of their year level, course, and major taken. These college students are living far from the university and will be going home once a month only.

Data Collection

An approval letter was sent to the dean of Cebu Technological University, Ginatilan Extension Campus, Ginatilan, Cebu for the conduct of the study on College Students' Homesickness: An Interpretative Phenomenology. After which, a transmittal letter was crafted and sent to the participants to gain their approval to conduct an interview. This was followed by sending them the interview guide questions for them to answer and share using digital platforms

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(messenger). Ethical considerations were strictly observed in gathering the data from the participants. The data elicited will be treated in the highest degree of confidentiality and anonymity.

Research Rigor

The researchers utilized Poortman et al.'s (2012) to support the study's rigor. Moreover, these quality criteria foster the assessment quality and implications of the study.

Results and Discussion

After analyzing the data gathered, the researchers of this study come up with three important themes namely; the critical, the comfort zone, and the constant communication. The three themes being discussed exhibits the real experiences of the College students upon experiencing the life away from home.

The Critical

Some college students find homesickness as a great challenge for themselves since they are not used to be away from their usual home and adjusting to their new environment seems to be a burden. They do not see the positivity of this opportunity (Sun et al.,26) in a way that it can trigger so much stress and anxiety. Thinking so much of their home can really affect their studies as less concentration to their respective classes arises.

Watt et al. (2009), stated that the need to belong to a certain place away from what is usual is essential and significant. Individuals (like the college students) who are not fully accepted in the school or community were mostly to develop homesickness. This critical stage showed that personal attitudes towards adjustment is what really matters to go through this kind of feeling.

Participant #1 mentioned that,
 "I face lots of challenges such as comfy to work or move in this house because in my own house I can do whatever I want".

This statement expresses the feeling of being uncomfortable with the new setting. They experience the feeling of nervousness which is out of their control resulting to uneasiness (Peterson, 2009). These feelings made them think a lot about their ordinary homes. It can really be challenging but if one can adapt faster than what is expected from him/her, this can reduce stress resulting to less homesick.

Participant #7 mentioned that,
 "The main challenge that I face everytime I'm away from home is that I can't stand alone. I still need to ask help from my family because I am dependent to them.

It is really hard on the part of the college students who used to rely on their parents in everything, like the decision making (Fisher & S, (2016) in all the things they have been doing. In this case, they will find a hard time in adapting since they considered it as a new beginning to them. Having self-esteem (Smith et al.2007) motivates a homesick person to overcome the negative feelings associated with trying out new things on their own without depending on others.

It was participant #2 who said that,
"*Dealing this kind of situation is so hard since I am not used to stay away from my parents and by staying away from them makes me feel independent and isolated."*

When that person has not experienced being away from his/her habitual home yet even in a shorter time and for the reason of pursuing college education, he/she needs to be displaced to other places for the very first time, he/she would really feel isolated because he/she has not managed to be alone in the past. Being independent and isolated (Niel et al.,2016), entails positive and negative impacts to the college students. Independent in terms of doing things on their own including social and emotional support from new circle of friends.

Participant #8 said,
"I feel empty when I think of home."

Emptiness (Singh & H,2022) is the most corrupt feeling a homesick person could ever feel. It results to different unusual emotions like extreme sadness, anxiety, uneasiness and even lack of motivation in pursuing the goals in life. Therefore, these persons are needing constant support and guidance from their loved ones who were far away home to help them recover little by little. Until they will fully recover especially when they start meeting new friends.

The Comfort Zone

According to Prazeres (2020), homesickness is a normal feeling of a person who is away from the usual home wherein he/she is longing for the comfort and familiarity of the place where he/ she uses to. But, to some college students, they have foreseen the positive side of it. They have find ways to deal with it and to be

stronger while venturing outside their comfort zones. Some make themselves busy to eliminate moments of thinking about home. Others also have scheduled time to visit their houses.

Participant #8 cited that,
"It is a great challenge when you're worn out and missing home yet you have to get things done for your family, for yourself and of course for the future."

The uneasiness or nervousness (Shoukat et al., 2021) experienced by the college students always have positive ways on how to get it overcame. They can think of it as for the betterment of their loved ones, for themselves and for their tomorrows. They have to focus it in mind that what they are doing is for the sake of their education, which has been said that it is the only treasure that cannot be stolen by anyone. Through this, they will get motivated to concentrate their studies instead of focusing the feeling of homesickness.

Participant #4 once said,
"One of the challenges I've encountered when I left home is that I feel homesick especially I used to lock myself in my room when pandemic started and quarantines us for so long, I've got used to it. It is a challenge for me now to get out my shell and to my comfort zone, but I need to be adaptive to new environment and new mood of life in order to make progress."

It is always advisable to be flexible enough in any challenges in life. Same with the college students' ability to adapt to the new mood of life (Rathakrishnan et al., 2021). Despite of the unusual feelings like anxiety and nervousness, there would be also advantages in which they can have new circle of friends and they can also exercise the feeling of being independent resulting them to develop and grow personally.

Participant #8 also mentioned,
"It happened out of the blue that I was thinking about home. That was when I worked in the city. So, I didn't have any choice but to travel far from home in order to support my necessities and my education, as well as to spend some time for myself."

Other college students are also working for scholarship. In some part of their lives, they feel homesick too but they have no choice but to focus in their work just to support their needs especially in education. This is somewhat the very practical way, in

which they can prove to themselves that even poverty does not hinder their success (Crouch et al., 2019).

The Constant Communication

With the advancement of technology, it really imparts a great help to the homesick college students as the social media influences them with their distance to their habitual home. Using any digital platforms, they can easily communicate with their loved ones and friends.

Participant #7 discloses that,
"Social media is very helpful especially when I need to travel away from our place for schooling purposes. It helps me to give information and update to my parents for my doings. Social media influenced us to be more active to this even how far we are, it gives direction and information for everyone."

Homesickness in some college students are often alleviated or shall we says the social media helps them feel a little less homesick. Through constant communication, they are less stressed and can easily manage to focus on their studies. Also it influenced them to update with their peers, entertain new circle of friends making their lives more meaningful and exciting.

Utilizing social media platforms like Facebook, Messenger and other digital tools helps the students to alleviate homesickness. By communicating through technologies, students can make social connections, seek help and support, fostering social presence to recreate the sensation of home, establish connections with people and places, and control their emotions (Kelly et al., 2021). Using communication tools also help students to keep in touch with their family, meet new friends, make new contacts and maintain relationships with peers both at school and at home. Through constant communication with their loved ones, they feel secured and loved, they are more motivated to pursue their academic interests, and most importantly, it contributes to their overall happiness. With this, homesickness may be prevented and relieved.

Conclusion

The life of a student away from home or their loved ones is quite a struggle since several adjustments has to be done in order to survive in the new situation, they are in. The data gathered from the participants

construed a better understanding why some college students are homesick and became very emotional when faced in a difficult situation which is unusual for them. Dealing this kind of phenomenon needs to be given full attention as well as different strategies to cope up and achieve recovery. Some ways to help a homesick person are being able to identify the reason what hinders their growth and development and give proper treatment to help them overcome the negative feelings to achieve a successful and meaningful college life.

The lived experiences of the participants towards homesickness accentuates that their way of living is critical as this can affect their academics. The comfort zone is so far from them that they need to have constant communication. With all of these, what's there to be positive at, is that one should tell themselves that there is nothing wrong with being sad or distress as long as they are trying their best to get rid of the bad influence made by homesickness. It is the recommendation of the study to create engaging activities among these students and so, they will have productive diversions.

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Table 1. Data Analysis

Horizons	Textural	Themes
* I face lots of challenges such as comfy to work or move in this house because in my own house I can do whatever I want. *P#1*	Uneasiness	The critical
*The main challenge that I face every time I'm away from home is that I can't stand alone. I still need to ask help from my family because I am dependent to them. *P#7*	Used to be dependent	
*Dealing this kind of situation is so hard since I am not used to stay away from my parents and by staying away from them makes me feel independent and isolated. *P#2*	Feeling isolated	
* I feel empty when I think of home. *P#8*	Feeling empty	
*It is a great challenge when you're worn out and missing home yet you have to get things done for your family, for yourself and of course for the future. *P#8*	Thinking for the Positive Side	The comfort zone
*One of the challenges I've encountered when I left home is that I feel homesick especially I used to lock myself in my room when pandemic started and quarantines us for so long, I've got used to it. It is a challenge for me now to get out my shell and to my comfort zone, but I need to be adaptive to new environment and new mood of life in order to make progress. *P#4*	Flexibility	
*It happened out of the blue that I was thinking about home. That was when I worked in the city. So, I didn't have any choice but to travel far from home in order to support my necessities and my education, as well as to spend some time for myself. *P#8*	Practicality	
*The social media helps us both (me and my parents) to communicate with each other from a distance. *P#3*		The Constant Communication
*Social media is very helpful especially when I need to travel away from our place for schooling purposes. It helps me to give information and update to my parents for my doings. Social media influenced us to be more active to this even how far we are, it gives direction and information for everyone. *P#5*	Influenced by Social Media	
*One of my learning opportunities is to be strong, active, positive and be happy. *P#6*	Positive Outlook in Life	
*I see it as an opportunity to be independent and a learning to stand alone and make the decision to live in peace. *P#8*		