

**The effect of romantic relationship on the
Perceived development of anxiety
amongst High School Students**

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ABSTRACT

Romantic relationships are a major developmental milestone among adolescents, but when young and unprepared high schoolers explore them, it can be a source of great anxiety resulting in emotional upheavals. This study aimed to ascertain the perceived anxiety level of high school students involved in a romantic relationship according to gender, age, and length of relationship. Furthermore, it aimed to assess if there is a significant difference in the respondents' responses to the perceived level of anxiety. The importance of this research was to evaluate the effect of romantic relationship on the development of anxiety amongst science high students to come up with programs that would help mitigate the impact of such relationship on the emotional wellbeing of its students as they can go on struggling unnoticed by administrators, teachers, and parents. A quantitative research design was utilized to unravel the effect of romantic relationships and the respondents' level of anxiety. Significant findings of the study revealed that in terms of gender, male respondents have severe anxiety while female respondents have moderate anxiety. In terms of age and length of relationship, the level of anxiety of both males and females is severe anxiety. The manifestations may be presented as worry, restlessness, and fear. Moreover, the participants' responses for the various indicators can be deduced to an analysis that there is no significant difference in their level of anxiety according to gender, age, and length of relationship. The factors that may trigger anxiety amongst the participants are misunderstanding, jealousy, and insecurity.

Keywords: *romantic relationship, high school, anxiety, Benguet, descriptive*

I. Introduction

Romantic relationships are an inevitable social aspect in the life of a high school student. It presents a new and dynamic kind of relationship where sexuality, love, and intimacy can be explored. According to Ellis (2018), around twenty-five percent (25%) who are age twelve have experienced a romantic relationship, fifty percent (50%) who are age fifteen have also been into a romantic relationship, while seventy percent (70%) of eighteen years old account involvement in a romantic relationship (Ellis, 2018). In the Philippines, almost seventy-five percent (75%) of teenagers ages fifteen to eighteen are already looking for romantic partners, according to the National Youth Commission (PhilRights, 2014).

Romantic relationships are an entirely different kind of relationship compared to parent, sibling, and peer relationships. It brings about intense feelings, heightened emotions, volatility, and confusion as emotions in romantic relationships run higher than peer or sibling relationships. It can also trigger fear, sadness, anger, and anxiety as they try to cope with the challenges of the new relationship. As such, the shift to a romantic relationship from a mere parent-to-child relationship may be quite difficult for a teenager who lacks social skills, incompetent in handling conflicts, and incapable of coping with stress and frustration (Capaldi, 2018). Therefore, a romantic relationship can bring about anxiety due to unwanted events in the relationship, such as fights, break-ups, and unfaithfulness (Seery, 2016).

Anxiety is considered to be the top presenting concern, followed by depression amongst students at present. Based on the records of the Center for Counseling and Student Development of University of Baguio Science High School for the half quarter of SY 2019-2020 (CCSD), there were one hundred six (106) students from ages fourteen to nineteen who sought guidance because of difficulty in handling intense emotions such as anxiety, depression, grief, self-condemnation, and aggression (CCSD, 2020).

A study conducted by Bernales (2010) shows that students strongly agree that they become anxious about their partners not loving them enough or worse would leave them. Another study entitled

“Anxiety Prevalence Among High School Students,” states a significant number of high school students experiencing anxiety (Hess, 2014). Syokwaa 2014, also studied the relationship between anxiety levels and academic achievement among students in selected secondary schools in Lang’ata District, Kenya. The result indicates that there is indeed a correlation between anxiety and academic achievement and that higher anxiety levels had a more negative impact on the quality of academic results.

The following research focuses more on the effect of romantic relationships on academic performance, while little is known about the effects of romantic relationships in developing anxiety amongst students. Given the present time and age, where millennials are more prone to anxiety and are easily lured to fleeting romantic relationships, it is high time to assess the relationship between anxiety and romantic relationship among secondary students.

1.1 Significance of the Study

The theory of love states that students who are in a romantic relationship are prone to developed anxiety. These students can go on struggling unnoticed by administrators and teachers. Therefore, this research aims to evaluate the effect of romantic relationships on the development of anxiety amongst science high students to develop programs that would help mitigate the impact of romantic relationships on the emotional well-being of its students. It also aims to strengthen and enrich the curriculum of Values Education by incorporating lessons regarding anxiety, effects of romantic relationships on emotions, and mental wellness. It also seeks to inform the parents regarding the impact of romantic relationships on developing anxiety amongst their children.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to understand the effects of romantic relationships on anxiety among high school students. Specifically, it sought to answer the following objectives.

1. To assess the perceived anxiety level of science high students involved in a romantic relationship according to:
 - a. sex
 - b. age
 - c. length of relationship
2. To determine the significant difference on the perceived level of anxiety of science high students involved in a romantic relationship based on the seven indicators according to:
 - a. sex
 - b. age
 - c. length of relationship

H₀: There is no significant difference in the responses of the perceived level of anxiety of science high students involved in a romantic relationship based on the seven indicators according to:

- a. sex
- b. Age
- c. Length of relationship

2. Conceptual Framework

Romantic relationships are usually an offshoot of romantic love. There are different theories and forms of love as proposed by several psychologists. According to Rubin (2019), as cited in Cherry (2019), romantic love comprises three elements: attachment, caring, and intimacy. Another psychologist named Hatfield (2019), as cited in Cherry (2019), there are two basic types of love: compassionate and passionate love. Compassionate love is characterized by mutual respect, attachment, affection, and trust, while passionate love is distinguished by intense emotions, sexual attraction, anxiety, and affection.

Moreover, Lee (2019), as cited in Cherry (2019) discusses the three styles of love, namely: eros, ludos, and storge. He described eros as a kind of erotic love involving both physical and emotional passions; *ludos* is defined as playful, fun, and not ready for commitment, while storge means familial love as exhibited in a parent-child relationship. The last theory is the triangular theory of love with three components: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Intimacy is said to be the feeling of attachment, closeness, and connectedness. *Passion* is defined as the fiery depth and intense feeling normally associated with romantic and sexual attraction, while commitment comes to bind the two together to decide to remain with one another (Quiem, 2014).

There are also different stages of a relationship such as euphoric stage, early attachment stage, crisis stage, and deep attachment stage. The Euphoric stage is the early part of a relationship where both

partners are in love. This stage may last from six months to two years. Studies show that at this stage, there is a decrease in the activity in the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex has been implicated in decision making, moderating social behavior, and determining good and bad (Science of Psychotherapy, 2017). The next stage is early attachment, where the ventral pallidum part of the brain takes over. Ventral pallidum is linked with feelings of attachment, vasopressin, and oxytocin hormones which are termed as “love hormones.” Early attachment is also the stage where both partners can sleep better and not be thinking of each other 24 hours a day. The crisis stage comes next, and this is often referred to as the “seven-year itch.” It is a crucial stage as either partner can make or break the relationship. The last stage is the deep attachment, where couples have been together for many years, and the relationship is quite secure and calm.

On the other hand, anxiety affects the emotional and well-being of an individual. According to Hailes (2020), anxiety is a normal emotion as it helps, protects, and causes the person to act. It becomes unhealthy when these feelings become excessive, irrational, ongoing, distressing, or interferes with the daily routine in life. Anxiety should be managed by using interventions and strategies such as therapy and relaxation. The different levels of anxiety would be mild, moderate, and severe. According to Chartered Accountants Benevolent Association (CABA, n.d.), mild anxiety is what most people experience on a day-to-day basis. It may be presented as social anxiety or shyness. It may also be observed that the person cannot control their worrying or be unable to relax for the majority of the days in a week (Hull, 2021). At the same time, severe anxiety levels can lead to irrational thinking, feelings of panic, and social withdrawal (CABA, n.d.).

3. Methodology

The study utilized was quantitative, descriptive research design. The independent variable was the romantic relationship, while the dependent variable was anxiety. It sought to establish the effect of romantic relationships on the perceived development of anxiety amongst the respondents and compared the level of anxiety according to sex, age, and length of the relationship.

The participants of this research were grade 8 to 12 high school students from Benguet, Philippines. The inclusion criteria were students who are in a romantic relationship and whose relationships are approved by either parent. In most cases, students enter into a romantic relationship without their parent's knowledge; thus, these students were not allowed to engage in the said research.

The sampling design utilized in this study was purposive. There were 15 students who were permitted by their parents to participate in the research as they are currently in a romantic relationship and their parents are aware of it.

Data was collected using a two-part questionnaire where Part A represents the respondent's profile while part B is the level of anxiety as affected by the romantic relationship. There are seven (7) items or indicators in Part B of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was derived from Bernales' (2010) research and GADS -7 by Dr. Robert L. Spitzer. The researcher modified it to suit the needs of the study. GADS -7 underwent reliability and validity test from November 2004 to June 2005 and it showed good reliability and validity (Kroenke, Lowe & Spitzer, 2006).

A reliability test of the questionnaire used in this research was conducted to ensure the participants' consistency. Based on Pearson product-moment correlation, a pre-requisite for Spearman-Brown for reliability, the seven questions are coherent to each other based on the computed value of 0.84. Furthermore, Spearman-Brown Formula yielded a value of 0.93 which, means that the seven indicators in the questionnaire are excellently reliable.

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the perceived anxiety level of the participants. Specifically, the mean was utilized to get the average of the responses of the participants per indicator in the questionnaire. The total score was interpreted based on the scale created by Dr. Robert L. Spitzer.

Table 1
Interpretation of Level of Anxiety

Total Score	Level of Anxiety
0 to 4	Mild anxiety
5 to 9	Moderate anxiety

10 to 14
15 to 21

Moderate severe anxiety
Severe anxiety

From Kroenke, K., Lowe, B., Spitzer, R. (2006). *A Brief Measure for Assessing Generalized Anxiety Disorder: The GAD 7*. Retrieved from <https://www.statisticssolutions.com/generalized-anxiety-disorder-7-gad-7/>

On the other hand, inferential statistics, particularly T-test, were used to analyze if there was a significant difference in the level of anxiety between gender, age, and length of the respondents' relationship as affected by their romantic relationship.

3.1 Ethical Consideration

The participation of the respondents was purely voluntary. The researchers did not force anyone to take part in the study. Despite their voluntary participation, they were still informed that they could withdraw their engagement anytime or discontinue answering the questionnaire should they feel the questions are quite overbearing. Their identity and responses were kept confidential as the indulgence of names in the questionnaire was optional. In terms of risk management, the researchers first discussed the aim of the study to the participants and parents and read the questions to them to orient the student regarding the indicators that will be asked. The researchers allowed the participants and parents to ask questions on areas or indicators that are not clear to them. They were further instructed that if they feel uncomfortable in accomplishing the questionnaire, they should contact the researchers to mitigate any negative impact that may have caused them. The researchers did not ask for any additional document, information apart from what is written in the questionnaire and what was discussed with the respondents and parents. The researchers also assured them that they would be informed of the result of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Level of anxiety of High school students involved in a romantic relationship according to sex, age, and length of relationship

A. Sex

The level of anxiety of High school students involved in a romantic relationship according to sex is presented in Table 2. As seen from the data, the total mean score of responses of the male and female participants from the seven indicators is 18.37 which means severe anxiety and 14.90 which is moderate severe anxiety.

Table 2
Level of Anxiety according to Sex

Indicator	Sex	
	Male	Female
1. I feel nervous when my boyfriend/girlfriend is not around or when I don't hear from her/him.	2.67	2.22
2. I can't stop worrying thinking that my relationship won't work out.	2.17	1.56
3. I worry too much about my boyfriend/girlfriend finding someone new.	1.83	1.67
4. I have trouble relaxing when we have misunderstandings.	3.50	2.67
5. I am so restless when my boyfriend/girlfriend is sick	0.56	0.56
6. I am easily annoyed when my boyfriend/girlfriend is talking to someone.	2.67	1.56
7. I feel afraid when I think my boyfriend/girlfriend will leave me.	2.33	2.33
Total Score	18.37	14.90
Level of Anxiety	Severe anxiety	Moderate severe anxiety

B. Age

According to age, the level of anxiety of High school students involved in a romantic relationship is presented in Table 3. The division of the ages of the population was based on the categories of students enrolled in such as Junior High school, ages 13-16, and Senior High school, ages 17-18. As seen from the data, the total mean of responses of ages 14-16 and 17-18 from the seven indicators is 16.80 and 16.00, respectively which means severe anxiety.

Table 3
Level of Anxiety according to Age

Indicator	Age	
	14-16	17-18
1. I feel nervous when my boyfriend/girlfriend is not around or when I don't hear from her/him.	2.20	2.50
2. I can't stop worrying thinking that my relationship won't work out.	1.80	1.80
3. I worry too much about my boyfriend/girlfriend finding someone new.	2.00	1.60
4. I have trouble relaxing when we have misunderstandings.	3.00	3.00
5. I am so restless when my boyfriend/girlfriend is sick	3.00	3.00
6. I am easily annoyed when my boyfriend/girlfriend is talking to someone.	2.20	1.90
7. I feel afraid when I think my boyfriend/girlfriend will leave me.	2.60	2.20
Total Score	16.80	16.00
Level of Anxiety	Severe anxiety	Severe anxiety

C. Length of Relationship

The level of anxiety of High school students involved in a romantic relationship according to the length of the relationship is presented in Table 4. The division of the length of the relationship was based on the number of years of the romantic relationship of the participants. Based on the data collected, all participants fall under the Euphoric Stage of relationship, which may last up to two years (Abram, 2020).

Therefore, categorizing the length of a relationship into the different stages of the relationship is not possible as all of the respondents fall under one stage. As seen from table 4, the total score of the mean of responses according to the length of relationship from the seven indicators is 16.57 and 16.00, respectively which means severe anxiety.

Table 4
Level of Anxiety according to length of relationship

Indicator	Length of relationship	
	< 1 year	> 1 year
1. I feel nervous when my boyfriend/girlfriend is not around or when I don't hear from her/him.	2.43	2.38
2. I can't stop worrying thinking that my relationship won't work out.	2.00	1.63
3. I worry too much about my boyfriend/girlfriend finding someone new.	1.71	1.75
4. I have trouble relaxing when we have misunderstandings.	3.14	2.88
5. I am so restless when my boyfriend/girlfriend is sick	3.29	2.75
6. I am easily annoyed when my boyfriend/girlfriend is talking to someone.	1.71	2.25
7. I feel afraid when I think my boyfriend/girlfriend will leave me.	2.29	2.38
Total Score	16.57	16.00
Level of Anxiety	Severe anxiety	Severe anxiety

4. 2 Significant Difference on the level of anxiety of High school students involved in a romantic relationship according to sex, age, and length of relationship

A. Sex

The significant difference in the students' level of anxiety involved in a romantic relationship according to gender at alpha 0.05 level of confidence is presented in Table 5. As seen from the data, there is no significant difference in the responses of the male and female respondents for indicators 1, 3,4,5,6, and 7 because the p-value is larger than 0.05. However, for indicator 2, there was a significant difference in the responses of the male and female respondents because the p-value is less than 0.05.

Table 5

Significant difference on the Level of Anxiety per indicator according to sex ($\alpha = 0.05$)

Indicator	Sex	N	Mean	P(T<t)	Interpretation
1. I feel nervous when my boyfriend/girlfriend is not around or when I don't hear from her/him.	Male	6	2.67	0.17	Not significant
	Female	9	2.22		
2. I can't stop worrying thinking that my relationship won't work out.	Male	6	2.17	0.03	Significantly different
	Female	9	1.56		
3. I worry too much about my boyfriend/girlfriend finding someone new.	Male	6	1.83	0.78	Not significant
	Female	9	1.67		
4. I have trouble relaxing when we have misunderstandings.	Male	6	3.50	0.11	Not significant
	Female	9	2.67		
5. I am so restless when my boyfriend/girlfriend is sick	Male	6	0.56	0.56	Not significant
	Female	9	0.56		
6. I am easily annoyed when my boyfriend/girlfriend is talking to someone.	Male	6	2.67	0.08	Not significant
	Female	9	1.56		
7. I feel afraid when I think my boyfriend/girlfriend will leave me.	Male	6	2.33	1.00	Not significant
	Female	9	2.33		

B. Age

The significant difference in the students' level of anxiety involved in a romantic relationship according to age at alpha 0.05 level of confidence is presented in Table 7. As shown from the data, there is no significant difference in the responses of the participants according to age for all the seven indicators because the p-value is larger than 0.05.

Table 7

Significant difference on the Level of Anxiety per indicator according to age ($\alpha = 0.05$)

Indicator	Age	N	Mean	P(T<t)	Interpretation
1. I feel nervous when my boyfriend/girlfriend is not around or when I don't hear from her/him.	14-16	5	2.20	0.34	Not significant
	17-18	10	2.50		
2. I can't stop worrying thinking that my relationship won't work out.	14-16	5	1.80	1.00	Not significant
	17-18	10	1.80		
3. I worry too much about my boyfriend/girlfriend finding someone new.	14-16	5	2.00	0.54	Not significant
	17-18	10	1.60		
4. I have trouble relaxing when we have misunderstandings.	14-16	5	3.00	1.00	Not significant
	17-18	10	3.00		
5. I am so restless when my boyfriend/girlfriend is sick	14-16	5	3.00	1.00	Not significant
	17-18	10	3.00		
6. I am easily annoyed when my boyfriend/girlfriend is talking to someone.	14-16	5	2.20	0.58	Not significant
	17-18	10	1.90		
7. I feel afraid when I think my boyfriend/girlfriend will leave me.	14-16	5	2.60	0.57	Not significant
	17-18	10	2.20		

C. Length of relationship

The significant difference in the students' level of anxiety involved in a romantic relationship according to the length of the relationship at alpha 0.05 level of confidence is presented in Table 8. As shown from the data, there is no significant difference in the responses of the participants according to the length of the relationship for all the seven indicators because the p-value is larger than 0.05.

Table 8

Significant difference on the Level of Anxiety per indicator according to length of relationship (alpha = 0.05)

Indicator	Length of relationship	N	Mean	P(T<t)	Interpretation
1. I feel nervous when my boyfriend/girlfriend is not around or when I don't hear from her/him.	Less than a year to one year	7	2.43	0.87	Not significant
	More than a year	8	2.38		
2. I can't stop worrying thinking that my relationship won't work out.	Less than a year to one year	7	2.00	0.21	Not significant
	More than a year	8	1.63		
3. I worry too much about my boyfriend/girlfriend finding someone new.	Less than a year to one year	7	1.71	0.95	Not significant
	More than a year	8	1.75		
4. I have trouble relaxing when we have misunderstandings.	Less than a year to one year	7	3.14	0.63	Not significant
	More than a year	8	2.88		
5. I am so restless when my boyfriend/girlfriend is sick	Less than a year to one year	7	3.29	0.26	Not significant
	More than a year	8	2.75		
6. I am easily annoyed when my boyfriend/girlfriend is talking to someone.	Less than a year to one year	7	1.71	0.34	Not significant
	More than a year	8	2.25		
7. I feel afraid when I think my boyfriend/girlfriend will leave me.	Less than a year to one year	7	2.29	0.87	Not significant
	More than a year	8	2.38		

5. Discussion

The difference in the level of anxiety between the male and female participants is due to the higher scores computed in males for indicators 2, 4, and 6, which are worrying that the relationship will not work out, restlessness during a misunderstanding, and being annoyed when their partner is talking to someone. This finding is corroborated by Meyers (2006), stating that anxiety was a strong predictor for response in men compared to women during conflicts in a relationship. It was noted in the study that men were uncomfortable in confronting relationship conflicts as they are more passive participants. This explains the higher score computed for indicator #4, where they have trouble relaxing when they have understanding, and indicator #2, where they cannot stop worrying that their relationship will not work out. Furthermore, a study from APS (2013) reveals that men are more jealous of sexual infidelity than emotional infidelity. This finding corroborates the result for indicator #6, where the score of the male participants was higher compared to females.

The result generated in Table 3 implies that regardless of age or category in High School, students will be exhibiting the symptoms of either panic or withdrawal as affected by the romantic relationship. This finding is corroborated by the study of Lantagne & Furman (2017), stating that jealousy in a romantic relationship does not appear to change across the High School years. Moreover, Hess (2014) states that differences in anxiety do not exist between students in different grade levels.

The level of anxiety for all lengths of relationships is the same, which is severe anxiety. The result suggests that students will exhibit the same symptoms of panic or withdrawal from 0 to two years of length of the relationship since they all belong under the level of severe anxiety. This finding is corroborated by Lantagne & Furman (2017), stating that long-term adolescent relationships were notable in that they were both supportive, turbulent, elevated levels of control, negative interactions, and jealousy.

The level of anxiety according to gender shows no significant difference in the responses of the male and female respondents for all indicators because the p-value is larger than 0.05. This implies that both male and female participants present the same anxiety symptoms, such as worry and restlessness, as affected by the romantic relationship. This finding is supported by Price (2016), stating that romantic concerns in male and female adolescents are greatly associated with mental health issues. Therefore,

romantic relationship is a source of anxiety as they try to maintain, repair, and keep their relationship at such a vulnerable time of their adolescent stage.

In terms of age, there is no significant difference in the responses of the participants for all the seven indicators because the p-value is larger than 0.05. This finding is supported by Scanlan et al., (2012), saying that younger adolescents, ages 10-17, typically experience more costs and fewer benefits from being involved in a romantic relationship as it appears that the relationship is more stressful and less supportive compared to older adolescents, who tend to experience the romantic relationship as more rewarding both emotionally and sexually. Furthermore, this implies that adolescents, ages 10-18, who are in a romantic relationship may find the relationship challenging because of their age and stage of development as the processing of thoughts and controlling of emotions are harder at this age (Scanlan, et al., 2012).

Lastly, according to length of relationship, there is no significant difference in the responses of the participants for all the seven indicators because the p-value is larger than 0.05. This means that new and emerging romantic relationships will present the same anxiety symptoms, such as irrational thinking and worry, compared to a two-year-old romantic relationship. Since the length of the relationship of all the participants falls under the euphoric stage, there is evidence that there is a decrease in the brain's activity at this stage. This means that people have less control over their social behavior, automatically follow their inclinations more, and are quite impulsive (Abram, 2020). This further implies that a romantic relationship at the euphoric stage will be very challenging for adolescents as they are inclined to become very irrational and impulsive, which can hurt the relationship regardless of the relationship is new or developing.

Therefore, romantic relationships among adolescents usher them to a myriad of strong emotions and interpersonal skills such as conflict management, communication, and interaction. If left unmanaged, it can go out of control and lead to severe anxiety amongst young people.

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