High School Students Responding to Psychic Difficulties When School Closed because of Covid-19: Case Study in the Suburbs Area of Hanoi


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Abstract

This study applies the Adolescent Coping Scale - ACS by Erica Frydenberg and Ramon Lewis (1991, 1993) to find out the actual reacting status of high school students in the suburbs of Hanoi when facing psychological difficulties during the period of school closures in Covid 19 disease. This paper also uses the Life Orientation Test - Revised - LOT - R scale of Scheier, Carver and Bridges (1994) to classify the state of students' optimism when participating in this study. This study used an online questionnaire survey method using Google form and Zalo form. Survey was conducted from March 2020 to June 2021. The result implied that the influence of optimism on students' responding methods, The result implied that different responding to psychic difficulties accompanied with learning setting can contribute greatly to students' learning and life process.

Keywords: School Psychology, Optimism, Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Introduction

School psychology has included numerous principles of psychology in education, development, clinical, community fields and behavioural analysis in order to meet the needs of study, physical and mental health of learners through the collaboration between educators and parents (P. Wylleman; C.G. Harwood; A.-M. Elbe; A. Reints; D. de Caluwé 2009). School psychologists are educated in specific majors, relating to both general and personality theory in child and adolescent psychology, family practice and parenting, and even overall development. Those knowledge and experience belong to creating effective teaching at school in terms of performing psychological testing and psychological assessment, counselling (Fulya Yuksel-Sahina 2012; Korkut, F. 2003; Tolmacheva et al., 2021; Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. 1996).

The individual reaction is a psychological phenomenon that many scientists around the world are interested in researching. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the reaction is understood as a dynamic process, the characteristics of which are determined not only by the circumstances but also by the stages of the development of the conflict, and the collision of the subject with the surrounding world. In this way, a person may have the ability to solve problems if they know how to respond appropriately when encountering real dangerous situations. Recently, a range of students have faced difficulties at school as a jeopardy psychological problem (Kiriakos Zafiriadis; Miltos Livaditis; Kiriakos Xenitidis; Miranta Diamanti; Evgenia Tsatalmpasidou; Ioannis Sigalas; Nikitas Polemikos 2005; Hussin et al., 2021). When dealing with those issues, if students release a positive response, it will help them solve the problem and gain lessons for themselves after any stage. On the other hand, if their reaction is expressed in the negative direction, the trouble can become worse and
directly impact their study outcomes as well as mental condition.

Many studies have shown the relevance of optimism impact on the way students cope with difficulties in their life. School psychological difficulties consist of common problems in learning, friendship relationships, interactions with teachers and parents (Yuen, K.F., Leong, J.Z.E., Wong, Y.D., & Wang, X. 2021). This study explores the correlation between optimism and how students respond to potential worries during the schools' closure due to the Covid-19 epidemic.

**The Pandemic Situation**

Currently, the COVID-19 epidemic keeps continuously influencing every region because of its complicated nature (Yuen, K.F., Leong, J.Z.E., Wong, Y.D., & Wang, X. 2021). With the appearance of the new Delta variant and fast-spreading, although many countries have strong economic strength and widespread vaccine coverage, the earth has got stuck in coping with this detrimental pandemic.

There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has seriously ruined all industries of socio-economic life globally, including the field of education (Quang V.N., Dung C.A., Son N.H. 2020; Widana et al., 2020). During the two-year 2020 and 2021, the education field has faced serious consequences from the pandemic (Lennox, J., Reuge, N., & Benavides, F. 2021; Kearney, C.A., & Childs, J. 2021). Obviously, learning is a continuous process for students to accumulate knowledge, but the four "waves" of the pandemic have interrupted the teaching and studying work in all grades many times (Kai Yan Wong, Tajularipin Sulaiman, Amalina Ibrahim, Abdul Gaffar Kunchi Mohd, Omrah Hassan, Hussin, Wan Marzuki Wan Jaafar 2021).

Although Vietnam's education industry has created many innovations in recent years, it is undeniable that the quality of education has been greatly degraded by the complicated growth of the pandemic (Kai Yan Wong, Tajularipin Sulaiman, Amalina Ibrahim, Abdul Gaffar Kunchi Mohd, Omrah Hassan, Hussin, Wan Marzuki Wan Jaafar 2021; Quang V.N., Dung C.A., Son N.H. 2020). In addition, an inconspicuous consequence of the epidemic can cause long-term effects in the psychology of teachers, parents and children when they need to adjust with the new working environment. In this way, they might lose their communication skills, social emotion, psycho-physiology (Thiago Wendt Viola, Magda Lahorgue Nunes 2021). With the repeat of school closures on a large scale, students who frequently get restricted from going out can be a victim of psychological problems.

In fact, recent studies reveal that schoolchildren are struggling with the increase of mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic (Yuen, K.F., Leong, J.Z.E., Wong, Y.D., & Wang, X. 2021). The risk factors during COVID-19 which can lead to debilitating mental health problems, worsen existing mental illnesses, or cause health problems new mentality relates to social distancing, routines disruption, parents losing their jobs, lack of income, online learning, relationship limitation; domestic violence, etc. According to statistics from the Central Psychiatric Hospital, among those with abnormal psychological symptoms who have come to the examination and counselling over the pandemic period, the number of students accounts for 30% (June 2, 2021 at https://cand.com.vn).

Many psychologists and education experts raise concerns about the psychological consequences affecting the young generation so that the necessary mission at this time is to research to assess the students' level of optimism and psychological responses to school (Duong, C. D. 2021). The research results will be a piece of scientific evidence which helps educational administrators, the professional sector, society and families to make appropriate changes for the post-covid-19 period. Furthermore, the study can take a step to get closer to reducing the negative impacts on students' mentality and learning development.

**Theoretical Framework**

1. **The Optimism**

Optimism is a mental attitude that reflects the belief or hope that the positive outcome or favourable, and desirable result of some particular endeavour and working process (Rand, Kevin L.; Shanahan, Mackenzie L.; Fischer, Ian C.; Fortney, Sarah K. (2020; Kevin L. Rand; Allison D. Martin; Amanda M. Shea 2011).

In the typical sense of the word, optimism is defined as expecting the best possible outcome from any given situation. This statement is often referred to as context-independent optimism in psychology. Moreover, optimism reflects the belief that future conditions will have the best result. For this reason, it is considered a trait that promotes resilience in the case of dealing with stress (Weiten, Wayne; Lloyd, Margaret 2005; Rand, Kevin L.; Shanahan, Mackenzie L.; Fischer, Ian C.; Fortney, Sarah K. (2020; Kevin L. Rand; Allison D. Martin; Amanda M. Shea 2011).

Many studies have shown that optimism is a desirable factor of successful adaptation to pressure situations associated with positive
behavior in the operating process (Huan, Yeo, Ang and Chong, 2006; Elpida Bagana; Andreea Raciu; Luminita Lupu 2011). Facing difficulties, optimists often respond with positive emotions and expect great results. Their demeanour is confident and steadfast. These people usually believe that there are numerous ways to cover the defects in terms of using the action-reaction strategy that focus on solving problems rather than avoiding them (Scheier and Carver, 1985; Najman & Novianti, 2020). In contrast, pessimists are described as cynical and hesitant when getting stuck in struggles, when they often predict negatively under adverse conditions (Scheier and Carver, 1992; according to Carver, Scheier and Segerstrom, 2010).

2. The Respondent

Depending on the approach to the problem, the reaction can be studied in the form of coping behaviour, ways of coping, coping strategy or coping model, coping skill. Exploring a variety of perspectives on responding, we found that scholars around the world pay more attention to individual efforts that they consider as a fundamental attribute when individuals deal with difficult situations in reality. Corsini (1999) claimed that responding is cognitive and behavioural efforts that can change frequently to address necessary needs from outside or inside or both. Moreover, the author also describes coping behaviour as a positive, incentive, and endeavour rather than avoidant or defensive characteristic in dealing with difficult or threatening circumstances. Snyder and Dinoff (1999) have provided a definition that combines many previous opinions: coping is a response to relieve the physical, emotional, and psychological burden associated with stressful life events and complicated daily incidents.

From the view of psychological science, coping has several of the following characteristics: (1) Coping is a conscious activity which activate to be suitable for the purposes and psychophysiological idiosyncratic of each individual; (2) The response is expressed through the subject's perceptions, feelings and actions; (3) Responding shows the subject's initiative in the case of adverse changes in the life background; (4) Responding also emphasizes the individual effort to improve the living standard in a beneficial way to develop themselves.

In this study, I use the term coping to find out how to deal with school psychological difficulties of high school students in the suburbs of Hanoi and solutions to improve those approaches as meaningful responses.

Research Methodology

1. Research Objectives

The research objectives aim to assess students’ ability to cope with psychological difficulties during the schools closure because of the Covid-19 epidemic.

2. Research Sample

The study was conducted in the suburban area of Hanoi, Vietnam. The scoped area is based on the recommendation of a number of high school officials and teachers to facilitate the examination. The study period lasts from March 2020 to June 2021.

The range of this study is a convenient, random sample. The official survey sample was 431 students who voluntarily participated and answered the question. The survey form is online through Google forms.

3. Research Tool

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a major research method used in this study. Specifically, this paper uses the Adolescent Coping Scale - ACS of Erica Frydenberg and Ramon Lewis (1991, 1993) to assess the ways of coping with school psychological difficulties of high school students in the Hanoi suburban area. The ACS scale was first developed in 1993 by Frydenberg and Lewis (Professor of Psychology, La Trobe University) then this measure has been researched, revised and supplemented many times in Australia, Italy, Germany, Northern Ireland, Colombia, China, Singapore, Slovenia, etc. ACS is widely applied in evaluating student responses. This measurement is both pieces of research, and a clinical tool to enable the judgement of student response success. ACS delivers a set of self-assessment questions including 80 categories (items), 79 closed questions and one open question. The questions will represent for 18 response options divided into 3 groups:

+ The problem-solving response team includes the following ways of responding: focusing on problem-solving; focus on the positive side; improve social relations; hard working and achieving success; physical exercise; relaxing - entertaining.

+ Ineffective response groups include: giving up; blaming themselves, ignoring the problem; reducing stress; avoiding other people to know about your problems; ambiguous dreams; frequent worry.

+ The response team, which tends to seek support from others, includes ways of coping:
participating in social activities; finding professional assistance; depending on close friends; seeking social support; laying on superstition support.

Open-ended questions' base scores range from 1-5 (1 - Never, 2 - Rarely, 3 - Occasionally, 4 - Frequently, 5 - Always). The score of the responding result is equal to the sum of the scores of the questions belonging to each alternative.

Marking method: On the scale of the actual situation and how to cope with school psychological difficulties of high school students in the suburbs of Hanoi, the propositions are evaluated with 5 levels of student answer corresponding to the scores as follows: Never (1 point); Rarely (2 points); Occasionally (3 points); Always (5 points). Therefore, the total score in different responding approaches presents the realistic aspects of facing school psychological difficulties. Furthermore, the higher the average score of any response method, the larger the time of students using certain coping methods when facing school psychological difficulties and vice versa.

**Life Orientation Test – Revised**

Life Orientation Test-Revised -LOT-R by Scheier, Carver and Bridges (1994) shows the test of determining the pessimistic or optimistic personality traits of high school students. On that basis, the researcher can find out the influence of this personality characteristic on the direction of dealing with school psychological difficulties. The LOT-R test is designed to measure the differences between individuals in terms of observing through optimism and pessimism perspectives in daily life. Besides, LOT-R is quite suitable for behavioural and affective studies. In practice, this examination includes 10 items, of which the three items 1, 4, 10 evaluate the optimism and the other three items 3, 7, 9 used to estimate the pessimism. Item numbers 2, 5, 6 and 8 stick to a “filling” function, avoiding the audience knowing they are in the evaluation for optimism. In each item category, there are 5 levels of answers from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

The calculation of this variable is as follows: Do not count items no 2, 5, 6 and 8 (because these are items with "filling" function); 1, 4 and 10 items explaining optimism will be scored according to the following levels: strongly agree = 4 points; agree = 3 points; hesitant (neither agree nor disagree) = 2 points; disagree = 1 point; strongly disagree = 0 points. On the other hand, with 3, 7 and 9 items explaining pessimism will give the opposite side: strongly agree = 0 points; agree = 1 point; hesitation = 2 points; disagree = 3 points; strongly disagree = 4 points.

**4. Research Direction**

The research team guided students to follow these steps:

- **Step 1:** Forming a group, including main members and supporting experts.
- **Step 2:** Discussing the topic to be researched, which is the psychological turn down of students due to the closure of schools during the Covid-19 epidemic.
- **Step 3:** Finding and developing a research implementation plan.
- **Step 4:** Forming a research tool, which is built and tested many times. The final toolkit is used for surveying.
- **Step 5:** Conducting survey, collecting information, cleaning data, use SPSS software version 2.0 for data analysis.
- **Step 6:** Evaluating research results, discussing and suggesting recommendations for the relevant subjects.

In this study, the research team consisted of:

01 Associate Professor, 06 PhDs and 07 high school teachers from the following schools: Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics; Hanoi National University of Education; Education Management Academy; Tan Trao University; Hong Duc University; Xuan Giang High School, Hanoi; Chu Van An High School, Hanoi; Le Quy Don High School, Hanoi; Thuong Thanh Secondary School, Hanoi; Hai Phong Specialized High School.

Dr. Nguyen Van Luong plays the role of research leader, who actively participated in every process of the research and always being the initiator and proponent of the main ideas of the study.

Currently, Dr M.Q. Khanh - a psychologist who is working actively at Hanoi National University of Education contributed consultations to build a toolkit for assessing student psychology, students' responses when facing difficulties during the school closure period because of the Covid-19 epidemic.

However, Dr T.T. Tinh, Dr L.T. Hieu, Assoc.Prof.Dr. N.H Hau, Dr L.H. Quang and 07 high school teachers who participated in the research process were responsible for geographic analysis, implementing a system of survey tools in localities where students are absent due to school closures (may also include fresh graduates).

Since the survey results were available, the research team had calculated the statistics, entered data and cleaned the data. In detail, there are several members of the group...
performing data analysis through SPSS 2.0 software. Results from SPSS 2.0 software will be recorded and concluded by the research team.

The final part focuses on the recommendations of the research team for students to cope with psychological difficulties during the school closure due to the Covid-19 epidemic.

Research Result
1. Actual Results of Coping with School Psychological Difficulties of High School Students During the School Closure Period Due to the Covid-19 Epidemic in the Hanoi Suburban

Survey results show that the mean and standard deviation of ineffective response groups in high school students around the suburbs of Hanoi: Self-blaming (3.47, 0.90), Worrying (3.68, 0.65), Problem ignoring (3.57, 0.85), Giving up (3.51, 0.77), Pressure reduction (3.53, 0.74)

Survey results show that the mean and standard deviation of Problem-solving team of high school students in the suburbs of Hanoi: Positive focusing (3.65, 0.62), Working hard and achieving success (3.78, 0.61), Focusing on problem solving (3.80, 0.70), Social relationship improvement (3.36, 0.80), Relax and entertainment (3.61, 0.86)

Survey results show that the mean and standard deviation of Team of seeking support from others around high school students in the suburbs of Hanoi: Seeking support from the society (3.60, 0.71), Social activities participating (3.29, 0.68), Depending on close friends (3.72, 0.73), Searching for professional assistance (3.41, 0.86), Following to the superstitious incentives (3.59, 0.78)

The data results show that the majority of students participating in this study would choose to be involved in the problem-solving group, then support the seeking team in the second position and ultimately ineffective response team.

2. Results of the Optimism Influence on Coping with School Psychological Difficulties of High School Students During the School Closure Period due to the Covid-19 Epidemic in Suburban Areas of Hanoi

Results reveal that students' optimism rate stays at an average level. In general, students tend to choose the optimistic direction while the score of pessimism accounts for a lower number (Optimism 7.78, Pessimism 7.40). This is an advantage for the process of dealing with school psychological difficulties of students according to a bunch of studies proving that optimism helps children maintain positivity, enthusiasm, hope and confidence. Hence, this point creates more motivation for students to determine positive ways of dealing with the school psychological problem during the study semester.

- The correlation between ways to react with optimism - pessimism of high school students during the period of school closure because of the covid-19 epidemic in the Hanoi suburban

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responding team</th>
<th>Optimism rate</th>
<th>Correlation coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective team</td>
<td>-0.144&quot;**</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving team</td>
<td>0.174&quot;**</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support-seeking team</td>
<td>0.184&quot;**</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ** when p<0.01

In this category, Table 1 illustrates that the optimistic reaction has a great correlation with the problem-solving team and the group of support-seeking from other people. However, the last group of ineffective respondents present a negative connection with the optimism rate. In this way, the more optimistic students are, the more likely students join the problem-solving response team and the support-seeking response group. Conversely, the higher number of the students showing optimism, the less likely the student will work for the ineffective response team.

- The impact of optimism on coping approach with school psychological issues during the schools closure due to the Covid-19 epidemic of high school students over the suburbs of Hanoi

The impact of optimism on three groups in dealing with school psychological difficulties of students.

Survey results show that, Ineffective team (F=9.07**, R²=0.01), Problem-solving team (F=13.44**, R²=0.02) and Support-seeking team (F=15.06***, R²=0.03).

Note: Independent variable: Optimism; Predictive variable (F, R²) and * when p < 0.05; ** when p < 0.01; *** when p < 0.001.

The analyzing consequence of the optimism impact on dealing with school psychological difficulties has demonstrated that: optimism can
affect and change about 2% of the responding methodology with the mental problem, about 1% with coping strategies of an inefficient group, and about 3% with the one who tries to search for support from others. However, the influence of optimism on all these reactions is not significant.

Findings

In terms of experiencing school psychological difficulties, the research results have shown that students participating in this study have a variety of many different coping practices such as problem-solving response, ineffective response, and finding help from others. In which, the majority of students choose to deal with problems, following with the group of seeking instruction from others, and ineffective reaction in the last position.

The analysis also delivered a higher score of students’ optimism compared to pessimism, as well as a positive relationship with the expression of problem-solving and looking for assistants. In contrast, the inefficient response group stands for a negative connection to the optimism characteristic. It is clear that optimism has an essential impact on students’ coping strategies when they have psychological troubles in school. Specifically, if students stay cheerful, they will tend to respond more positively, whereas if students have low confidence, they will tend to react more negatively.

Conclusion

This study has similar outcomes with other studies in the same category (Kearney, C. A., & Childs, J. 2021; Duong, C. D. 2021; Huyen B.T.T., Phuoc H.A. 2019: Quang V.N., Dung C.A., Son N.H. 2020). The psychological crisis of high school students in the context of Covid-19 requires a team of teachers with in-depth knowledge of the mental condition, school psychology counselling. Especially, there is a rising demand for quality homeroom teachers and parents responsibility. The Covid-19 pandemic affects not only children but also lecturers, students’ families and the whole society. Therefore, psychological counselling for children in the current period is fundamental these days.

This paper can serve as a reference for various teachers and parents groups, which helps them to understand the impact of optimism on students’ responses to school psychological difficulties better. Therefore, they may pay more attention to improving and developing a cheerful atmosphere for students. Moreover, the co-results of this study also let students know that there are many ways to tackle the school psychological problem, in both efficient and inefficient steps. If they get the positive ability, this characteristic can limit the expression of negative responses, increase more choice to get over the mental issue.

References


