

Thriving solo: the lived experiences of students living away from home

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Abstract: This study delved into the experiences of students thriving solo as they live away from the comfort of their homes. The researchers explored the challenges that shaped students' academic, social, and personal development without any support from their close peers. Many of the students are affected as they transition to living independently. Thus, the researchers of La Consolacion College in Bais City intended that the experiences of students who are living alone be heard and validated. This study used phenomenology as the research design. After the validation of the research instrument, the respondents were reached out to personally. A total of nine students were interviewed. The findings revealed that students experience ups and downs in living alone. These experiences were reported to have impacted their well-being. Meanwhile, struggling students also reported the use of coping strategies to feel well. As an output of the study, the researchers recommended the creation of a "socioemotional well-being and learning club" as part of the school's guidance and counseling program.

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INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the struggles and experiences of students who are particularly living away from home. In today's generation, a lot of senior high school students choose to live independently because they live far away from their school and think that traffic will cause tardiness in class. Living alone can be both liberating and challenging. The advantage of choosing to live alone is that students can be equipped with valuable life skills such as cooking, and cleaning, help them grow as individuals, and provide a peaceful environment for studying. However, some disadvantages may ensue from living alone. Mental health issues may occur such as loneliness, depression, safety risks, financial burden, sleep problems, anxiety, solidarity, a lack of emotional support, and parental guidance. Furthermore, as a student who lives alone, a lot of responsibilities are tasked to them for their sake and well-being.

Moving up the educational or academic ladder is a difficult time for students, according to Costa et al. (2017). Previous studies have shown that the distance between the family home and the school location exacerbates the challenges teenagers face when relocating and

acclimating to school. Additionally, this transition tends to impact their mental health and well-being, increasing the likelihood that they will drop out of school (Wannebo et al., 2018).

Statement of the problem

This study intended to answer the following questions:

General Question: What are the lived experiences of students who are living alone?

Specific Questions:

- 1) What are the struggles that the students encounter when living alone?
- 2) How do the students survive their daily lives by living alone?
- 3) What are the most essential lessons students have learned while living independently?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study utilized a phenomenological research design, which focuses on understanding individuals' lived experiences through in-depth interviews. This approach allowed the researchers to deeply explore the challenges, coping mechanisms, and success strategies of students navigating life independently, away from home. By focusing on personal narratives, the study aimed to uncover the inner struggles and resilience of students who continue their academic journeys despite being separated from their families and familiar support systems.

Locale of the study and respondents

The research was conducted at La Consolacion College – Bais, a private Catholic institution in Bais City, Negros Oriental, that offers primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Nine senior high school students from grades 11 and 12, all residing away from their parents and immediate family, were purposefully selected as respondents. These students, who come from areas outside Bais City, were chosen based on specific criteria to ensure a relevant and insightful exploration of the independent living experience in an academic context.

Research instruments

Data collection involved a researcher-developed interview guide, which underwent validation by the guidance staff at La Consolacion College – Bais to ensure its relevance and effectiveness. This guide facilitated structured conversations around the respondents' personal challenges, survival strategies, and the life skills they have developed while living independently. The validation process aimed to align the interview content with the study's objectives, focusing on gathering comprehensive and meaningful data from each participant.

Data analyses procedure

The data gathered through interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within the qualitative data. This method enabled the researchers to uncover common themes related to financial challenges, emotional well-being, coping strategies, and the academic impact of independent living among the student respondents. Data saturation was achieved, ensuring that the themes and findings were robust and reflective of the shared experiences of students facing similar situations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis revealed that students living alone face financial and budgeting problems, loneliness, and relationship issues. This also includes feeling anxious over money,

arguing with loved ones, headaches, feeling unwell, difficulty sleeping, feeling guilty about spending money on non-essentials, stress, and even failing grades in school.

Playing and hanging out with friends are ways students cope with living alone. Playing and hanging out with friends help students keep themselves entertained despite being far from their parents and immediate family members. Students play video games, indulge in fun activities, and often hang out with friends to relieve stress and avoid loneliness.

Moreover, time management, scheduling, putting personal issues aside, and prioritizing academics are some of the strategies students use to balance their personal and academic lives when living on their own. Although some students have reported that balancing personal and academic demands is difficult, some have attested that the use of coping strategies can greatly assist students in completing daily tasks at school. By putting personal things aside, students can prioritize their studies to succeed academically.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has shed light on the experiences of SHS students who face the challenges of independent survival. Though students encounter problems related to money management and loneliness, they adjust well enough to such issues and come to terms with them via recreational activities like social networks and video games.

The experience has made students realize the importance of balancing personal and academic demands by employing time management and prioritization strategies. The challenges that come with dwelling alone have provided students with a new perspective regarding independence and resilience. These important lessons will be helpful for students as they navigate the complexity of independent living while at the same time maintaining a satisfactory academic performance.

A socio-emotional well-being and learning club is considered a promising approach to supporting students who are thriving solo. The recommendation is aimed at enhancing students' mental health while providing a platform for developing their talents and skills and fostering a sense of belongingness that will help students reduce loneliness and support them in their academic journey.

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