

The Efficacy of EFT on the Symptoms of Depression, Anxiety and Stress among College Students' during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Basis for the Development of Psychological Acupuncture Intervention



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ABSTRACT: The study's major goal was to determine whether lockdowns, remote learning, and other significant changes brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic caused students at a locally supported institution in Laguna to feel depressed, anxious, or stressed. Students enrolled from 2020 to the present or during the pandemic's duration made comprised the study's participants. This was a quasi-experimental design. It was designed to find out if students were displaying signs of stress, anxiety, or depression. An intervention, Emotional Freedom Technique, has been used to mitigate and address their degree of depression, anxiety, and stress. The participants' age, sex, course, and year level demographics were also noted. The research used simple random sampling and the researcher called all the participants who met the criteria. Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) was utilized to determine their level of symptoms. Moderate to extremely severe symptoms had been invited to participate in the experiment. Volunteered participants had been assigned to three experimental groups namely depression group, anxiety, and stress. Forty-five (45) participants had been subjected to 16 (sixteen) sessions of online intervention with a total of 48 sessions for three groups with an interval post-test within the sessions. Fortunately, after 16 sessions of the emotional freedom technique, the participants in the anxiety group had a baseline of 16.69 mean or severe but after three post-tests they became better as revealed by the last post-test mean of 4.84 or normal. As to depression, they had 22.77 mean or severe, but after sessions it was now 10.38 mean or mild. The participants had 25.50 mean or severe but afterwards 8.70 mean or normal in the stress group. Since quantifiable data has demonstrated how well the emotional liberation technique works, the hypothesis that it is ineffective for reducing the participants' levels of sadness, anxiety, and stress symptoms was rejected. Nevertheless, the researcher will create an intervention called "Psychological Acupuncture for Comfort" as the output for the study.

KEYWORDS: Emotional Freedom Techniques, Depression, Anxiety, Stress

INTRODUCTION

Online learning has become the most feasible way for students to keep track and continue their education. It offers a wide variety to enjoy learning while battling the difficulties and challenges of the present situation. However, as the researcher started teaching in the new normal, no two learners were the same, thus, their adaptations to the new normal would be different. Some students manifested alarming and potential problems related to academics and mental health issues.

Based on the researcher's observation, there were students who did not attend regular synchronous classes regularly, lacked attention and focus during the entire class session, ignored FB messages/audio/video call of the professors, late turn-ins of long-term due projects/assignments, accused teachers of being insensitive when denied the right to submit missed activities, tolerated rampant cheating, lacked self-regulation skills, complained a lot about grades, disregarded student discipline and others. Moreover, according to the light program, 73% of college students as surveyed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) experienced mental health crises while in tertiary. The mental health crisis can be caused by multiple factors like pressure to succeed in academics, financial stress, uncertainty about which major or career path to choose, increased social media use, and less stigma around seeking help.

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Furthermore, it seems that the pandemic has seized its day on everyone, especially college students. An investigation was initiated and finished last May 2021 in the university which revealed that selected engineering students had mild to moderate level of depression.

Hence, this paper focused on the manifestations of depression, anxiety, and stress along with the implementation of an intervention, Emotional Freedom Techniques, to mitigate and address them.

Foremost in the study were the symptoms of depression. The researcher observed that some students show noticeable signs on some occasions related to their lack of interest and involvement during synchronous classes.

Corollary to this, Church's study, quoted by Patterson, S. L (2016), found that after a brief group intervention applying the EFT, college students' depression levels improved with a mean in the "nondepressed" category.

Apart from the evidence of depression, the symptoms of anxiety have been also observed in some students. Some students expressed their anxiety and worry about the whole online classes because of reduced interaction with classmates. For board courses like Psychology, some students have a feeling of apprehension that what they have learned might not be enough to graduate with competence.

Added to this is another study by Ghasemzadeh, Ghamari, and Hosseinian (2019). They found the efficiency of emotional freedom techniques in decreasing anxiety and improving psychological well-being. The study was organized in Parsabad Moghan Branch, Islamic Azad University, wherein students were evaluated using standardized questionnaires by Reef and Catell. The researchers found significant changes in the anxiety level and psychological well-being of the participants after being exposed to the intervention, emotional freedom techniques.

Unfortunately, the students did not only show symptoms of anxiety and depression but also signs of stress. There are cases of students exhibiting symptoms of stress due to the numerous requirements and difficulty of staying connected during synchronous and even asynchronous classes. The reason for the heightened stress level could be the simultaneous assignment of projects and other classroom tasks coupled with problems at home.

To help alleviate the problem caused by the aforementioned symptoms the researcher preferred to use an intervention Emotional Freedom Techniques. Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) is considered part of the energy psychology, meridian-based energy sciences which was inspired by acupuncture but tapping the protocol-based points using the fingertips and not the needle. The idea is that a distressing event disrupts the body's energy system which eventually produces a negative emotion. The objective of EFT is to address the distortion in the smooth normal energy flow [Qi, Chi, Ki] in the body. The tapping sends a signal to the body's smoke detector, the amygdala, which suppresses and deactivates the arousal circuits in the brain. The person can quickly recover and copes better by addressing the unbalanced Qi movement, releasing the pent-up emotional issues, tapping and discussing an encountered distressing event, and accepting oneself.

Furthermore, the study by Gaesser (2020) pointed out the pleasing effect of emotional freedom techniques in relieving stress and anxiety. Apart from the incitement of protocol-identified points, the researcher mixed it with thought reframing, building of awareness, etc. Fortunately, as expected, the participants had reduced anxiety, a high tolerance for frustration, and improved confidence after a few sessions of the emotional freedom technique.

In an article Anthony (2018) stated that the EFT is psychological acupressure or tapping that relieves physical pain and emotional distress. It balances the energy system and addresses pain through tapping the different points. Negative emotions distort the natural smooth flow of energy in our body thereby resulting in different physiological and emotional issues. Even though many studies are continuously initiated dedicated to EFT, many practitioners around the world had witnessed how this intervention helps fight off anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, stress, depression, etc. In actuality, war veterans had been using EFT in battling the indications of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The effectivity of an energy psychology technique, emotional freedom, in decreasing the stress and anxiety of nursing students was studied. Undeniably, students are susceptible to feeling restless, tired, anxious, and stressed due to voluminous school-related activities. The researcher utilized standardized questionnaires to quantify the degree of stress and anxiety. Those who conformed to the criteria were subjected to a mixed method study. Experimental and qualitative methods were used to test the effectiveness of the intervention. The posttest revealed significant changes in the students' stress and anxiety after being exposed to the intervention. Moreover, the participants reported lighter feelings and fewer physical symptoms like pain, weakness, etc. (Patterson, 2016).

Colleagues have proven that the emotional freedom technique was efficacious in lowering academic anxiety and enhancing the communication skills of social work students. In addition, the experiences of the participants were also recorded and stated that because of the emotional freedom techniques, they experienced being calm and feeling comfortable. (Boath et al., 2017).

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The major depressive irregularities of adults at Bond University were significantly improved using cognitive behavior therapy and emotional freedom techniques after weeks of exposure to the treatments. (Chatwin, Stapleton, Porter, Devine & Sheldon, 2016)

The investigation was carried out in one of the universities in the province of Laguna. The school was selected since the lockdown started the researcher had witnessed how it was difficult for students to get by and adjust to the new normal.

The literature cited in this research validated that emotional freedom techniques are effective in different issues and problems like anxiety, trauma, depression, pain relief, anger, weight loss, school performance issues, relationship issues, women's issues, student stress, and depression. The researcher has determined that a western intervention, emotional freedom techniques, was helpful to Filipino students in decreasing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress brought by various issues like the pandemic, remote learning, familial issues, etc.

The data of this study can be the basis for the university to be vigilant in acting regarding providing comfort to the town's scholars and promoting their well-being.

This study will make a psychological contribution regarding the positive brunt of emotional freedom techniques for symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. An intervention was created as the output. The intervention, Psychological Acupuncture for Comfort, is a combination of mindfulness and EFT which focuses on helping students liberate themselves from negative, troubling emotions and to set free from emotional bondage. Breaking free from emotional bondage can help in the well-being of a person.

METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a quasi experimental design. The investigation began with a quantitative procedure that included a pretest. The latter was the foundation of the mediated method, EFT. The posttest then examined the variables researched and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data.

Research Hypothesis

The emotional freedom technique is not effective to decrease the level manifestations of depression, anxiety, and stress of the participants.

Participants

This study included college sophomores, juniors, and seniors. On the basis of the criteria, they were split into three experimental groups. The students had to fill out an online survey. Because their ages did not fall within the allowed range to answer the standardized questionnaire, first-year students were omitted from the study. Students along with anxiety, stress, and mild to moderate depression were assigned to one of three experimental groups at random. along with anxiety, stress, and mild to moderate depression The research used purposive sampling as the researcher called all who met the criteria. Eligible participants were selected hinged on the gauge for depression, anxiety, and stress signs using Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS). Those who met the criteria were contacted and invited to participate. An informed consent and orientation explaining what the study is, design, and schedule of the intervention was conducted for the eligible participants. The data on the number of students who answered the questionnaire, students who met the criteria, willing students, students who declined, and number of students who could not be contacted were presented.

Procedures

Two hundred thirty-eight (238) students, who are currently enrolled in a locally funded university in Laguna, willingly answered the DASS questionnaire. However only forty-five (45) volunteered to take part in the experiment. The students had moderate to severe levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Moreover, some of the participants during the experiment shared their experiences, focusing on the remarkable changes during the pre- intervention phase and post-intervention phase.

The researcher was really concerned about some of the alarming manifestations of possible disturbances related to students' demeanor, emotional/psychological, and academic performance. The researcher's observation was further validated by an undergrad research project that was recently finished in May 2021. The study revealed that selected engineering students had mild to moderate levels of depression. Thus, as she was browsing the net for possible ways to help, she came across a cost-efficient, easy to facilitate, and can be done online intervention called emotional freedom techniques.

Then the researcher conducted a review of outcome papers, mechanism papers, clinical reports, and review articles regarding emotional freedom techniques (EFT). The outcome papers were designed to answer whether EFT works. A mechanism

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paper addressed the question of how EFT works in the body. Clinical reports tackled various studies on the use of EFT in different cases. Review articles are published materials about the efficacy of emotional freedom technique. Fortunately, the researcher found approximately 100 studies on the positive impact on business owners, college students, school staff, military personnel, pregnant women (primigravida or primiparous), cancer patients, and many more. Various RCTs, meta-analyses, and only a few qualitative researches were reviewed for different conditions like physiological pain, anxiety, depression, stress, test anxiety, public speaking anxiety, food cravings/unhealthy eating, aggression, students' discomfort, phobia, obesity, and emotional stability. After this, the researcher registered in a short course to become an EFT practitioner in EFT-Pilipinas. In the short course, the facilitator taught how EFT started, who started it, and the rationale behind this fingertip acupuncture.

The proposal was presented to the professor in dissertation writing and approved by the panel of examiners. The researcher has also requested and was granted permission to carry out the research at the chosen institution. The link to the DASS questionnaire was uploaded to an online platform accessible to all students at the university. Students were asked to send a screenshot of their results along with other information such as date, cellphone number, course, year, and age.

The study employed simple random sampling, as the researcher called all the participants who met the criteria. The ethical considerations set forth by the PAP were implemented.

The experiment did not utilize a comparison group since the researcher was only given a short time to finish it. Future studies could do this to investigate this component and increase confidence in the impact of emotional freedom practices on college students' symptoms of sadness, anxiety, and stress.

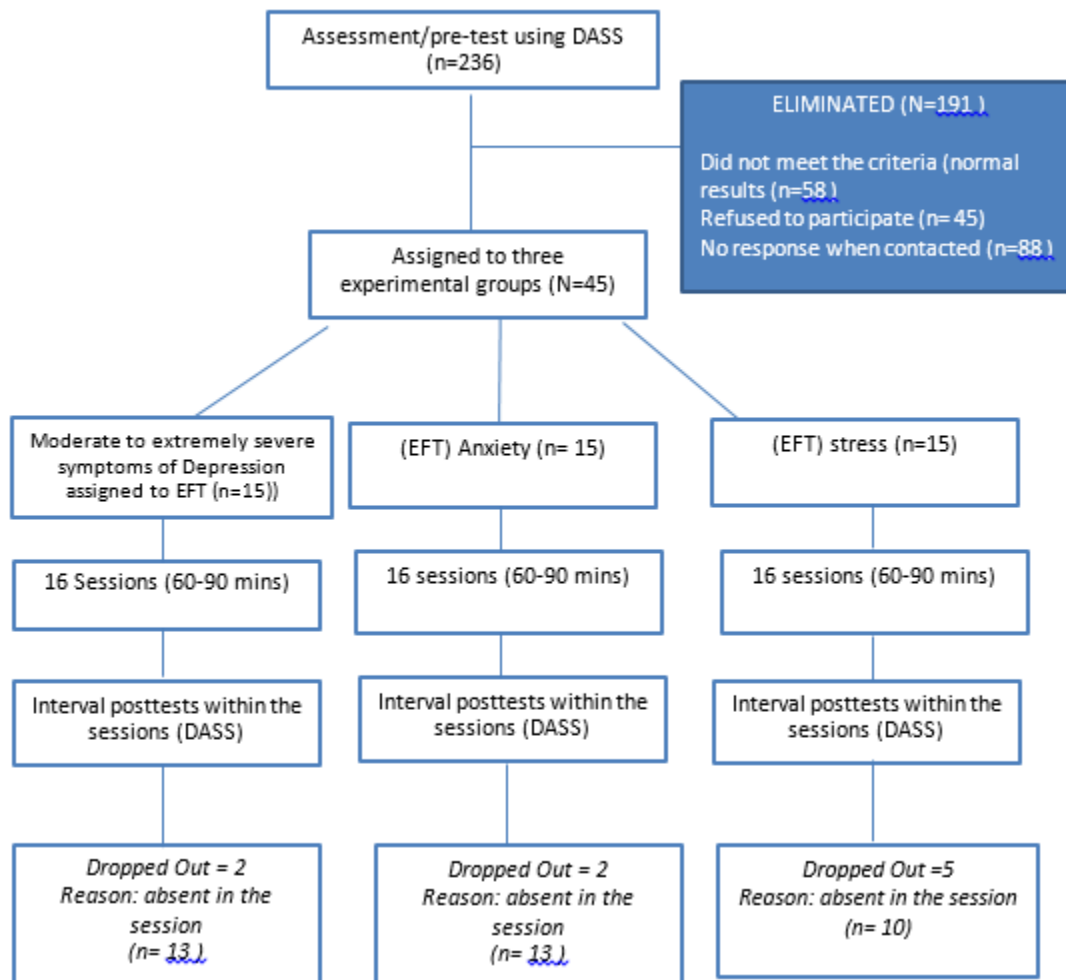


Figure 1. Flow of the Experiment

The figure represents how the experiment was conducted by the researcher.

For detailed schedule of the treatment. (Please see the appendix).

The pretest and posttest were accomplished through web-based DASS questionnaire.

Three experimental groups were created considering outcome of the pre-test. The three groups that were chosen were participants with moderate to severe anxiety, the experimental group of students who fit the criteria for moderate to severe

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depression, and the last experimental group with high levels of stress. For seven (7) weeks, the researcher conducted the intervention-emotional freedom technique experiment. As a result of the college students' ongoing vacation, there were three (3) sessions for two weeks and two sessions for the remaining weeks. Each session lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes, with one to five days in between. The number of sessions was determined based on the research review. The study used a quasi experimental within-subjects pretest-posttest design, with post- tests to see if the intervention was effective and how it proceeded over time.

Thus, after every two weeks of therapy posttests were carried out to ascertain whether adjustments should be made to make the intervention more appropriate for the participants.

The calibration of the posttests was assured to be similar to minimize threats in the experiment. The intervention was conducted from August 2, 2021 to September 19, 2021. A practicing clinical psychologist was present in all of the 48 sessions. It was done to avoid issues with participants since the researcher is not a licensed psychologist. Moreover, it was planned to create a secret group on facebook as advised by Miss Britney, assistant to Dr. Peta Stapleton. However, as the experiment progressed, the researcher realized that nearly all of the participants hid their whereabouts to avoid being identified. Dr. Stapleton had numerous published studies that utilized emotional freedom technique as the intervention.

The researcher waited for the response from Dr. Dawson Church regarding an online procedure of EFT called Personal Peace Procedure (PPP). Dr. Dawson pioneered various research on emotional freedom techniques. However, since the researcher was only given three months to finish the paper and there was no response from Dr. Dawson Church, the PPP was not utilized for the study. Some participants elaborated elaborate on what they felt before the intervention and described remarkable changes after the experiment.

The obtained information was treated with confidentiality. The series of post-tests were collected followed by tallying, tabulating, and processing of the data using statistics. Everyone (45 participants) in the experiment was eligible to be interviewed, but only five volunteered. The researcher analyzed, tallied, treated, analyzed, interpreted, and encoded the data.

Data Analysis

The effect of EFT was analyzed using repeated measures ANOVAs with the pre-test, series of post-tests in three groups. Changing within-group of the three groups from pre- to post- treatment were tested using paired t-tests.

Ethical Considerations

The guidelines of PAP as stated in Article 10, Research, has been considered for this research paper. They were requested to sign an Informed Consent for Research before participating in the study. A description of the experiment, schedules of treatment, length, and compensation after their participation. The participation to the experiment of participants was voluntary. The participants did not know where or which group they will be assigned to reduce risk of errors. To assure that the intervention did not cause any type of distress or harm to the participants the researcher decided to invite a supervising psychologist. The intervention involved tapping lightly the identified points of emotional freedom techniques. Every session the participants' permission was sought to record the session.

RESULTS

The table shows the frequency of participants in terms of course, year level, age, and sex. Forty-five participants volunteered to join, however, 20 percent or 9 of them had justified reason and stopped the experiment. The three different groups of participants included the Anxiety, Depression, and Stress.

The Anxiety group had 13 participants wherein the 10 or 76.9 percent belonged to Psychology and the other courses include Accountancy with 7.7%, BS Electrical and Computer Engineering with 7.7%, and BSFM with 7.7 percent. When it comes to the year level 69.2% or 9 were third-year level participants and 1 or 7.7 percent was second year level. In the aspect of age, 5 or 38.5% were 21 and 2 or 15.4 percent were 22 years old and 19 respectively. Moreover, 9 or 69.2% were female.

Table 1: Frequency Table for the Participants' Profile

Profile	<i>Anxiety Group n=13</i>		<i>Depression Group n=13</i>		<i>Stress Group n=10</i>	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Sex						
Male	4	30.8			2	20.0
Female	9	69.2	13	100	8	80.0
Age						

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19	2	15.4	1	7.7	-	-
20	4	30.8	10	76.9	9	90
21	5	38.5	2	15.4	1	10
22	2	15.4	-	-	-	-
Course						
Accountancy	1	7.7	1	7.7	-	-
BS Electrical and CompEng	1	7.7	1	7.7	-	-
Financial Management	1	7.7	1	7.7	1	10.0
Psychology	10	76.9	9	69.2	8	80.0
Nursing	-	-	-	-	1	7.7
Marketing Management	-	-	-	-	1	10.0
Year Level						
1st year						
2nd year	1	7.7	3	23.1	2	20
3rd year	9	69.2	8	61.5	7	70
4th year	3	23.1	2	15.4	1	10

In the Depression group, 9 or 69.2% were Psychology students and 8 or 61.5% were third year students. As to age, 10 or 76.9% were 20 and 1 or 7.7% are 19 years old. Majority were female participants with a number of 13 or 100%. In the stress group, 8 or 80.0% were psychology students and 1 or 10.0% belong to Financial Management and Marketing Management. Seven or 70% were third year students and 1 or 10% was fourth year student. As to age, 9 or 90% were 20 and 1 or 10% was 21 years old. The vast majority of those taking part in the stress group were female, with 8 or 80.00%.

Table 2. Participant’s Level of Depression before the implementation of EFT

Baseline		
	Mean	Interpretation
Depression (n=13)	22.77	Severe

Legend: Anxiety: 0-7 (normal), 8-9 (Mild), 10-14 (Moderate), 15-19 (Severe), 20+ (Extremely severe); Depression: 0-9 (Normal), 10-13 (Mild), 14-20 (Moderate), 21-27 (Severe), 28+ (Extremely Severe) Stress: 0-14 (Normal), 15-18 (Mild), 19-25 (Moderate), 26-33 (Severe), 34+ (extremely Severe)

Table 2 shows the participants’ level of depression. In the depression group, the experiment started with the baseline of the participants who have a mean of 22.77 or severe level of depression.

Table 3: Participant’s Level of Anxiety before the implementation of EFT

Baseline		
	Mean	Interpretation
Anxiety (n=13)	16.69	Severe

Legend: Anxiety: 0-7 (normal), 8-9 (Mild), 10-14 (Moderate), 15-19 (Severe), 20+ (Extremely severe); Depression: 0-9 (Normal), 10-13 (Mild), 14-20 (Moderate), 21-27 (Severe), 28+ (Extremely Severe); Stress: 0-14 (Normal), 15-18 (Mild), 19-25 (Moderate), 26-33 (Severe), 34+ (extremely Severe)

Table 3 shows the participants’ level of anxiety. In the anxiety group, the result of the participants’ pretest or baseline was on severe level with a mean of 16.69.

Table 4: Participant’s Level of Stress before the Implementation of EFT

Baseline		
	Mean	Interpretation
Stress (n=10)	25.50	Severe

Legend: Anxiety: 0-7 (normal), 8-9 (Mild), 10-14 (Moderate), 15-19 (Severe), 20+ (Extremely severe); Depression: 0-9 (Normal), 10-13 (Mild), 14-20 (Moderate), 21-27 (Severe), 28+ (Extremely Severe); Stress: 0-14 (Normal), 15-18 (Mild), 19-25 (Moderate), 26-33 (Severe), 34+ (extremely Severe)

In the stress group, the participants’ level of stress prior to the experiment was severe which has a mean of 25.50.

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Table 5. Differences on the Participants' Level of Depression when compared according to Profile

	Sex		Age		Course		Year Level	
	t	p-value	F	p-value	F	p-value	F	p-value
Baseline	No difference is computed for sex since all participants for this group were female.		.806	.474	.989	.466	.806	.473
Posttest1			.168	.847	.253	.900	.547	.595
Posttest2			1.704	.231	.676	.627	1.993	.187
Posttest3			2.243	.157	3.153	.078	2.089	.175

Table 5 shows the differences on the participant's level of depression when compared according to profile. All profiles of the participants had no influences on the severity of depression. Even during the pretest period up to the three posttests there were no significant differences.

Table 6. Differences on the Participants' Level of Anxiety when compared according to Profile

	Sex		Age		Course		Year Level	
	t	p-value	F	p-value	F	p-value	F	p-value
Baseline	.479	.642	1.061	.413	3.319	.071	<u>5.497</u>	<u>.025</u>
Posttest1	.591	.566	.451	.723	<u>4.026</u>	<u>.045</u>	1.303	.314
Posttest2	.340	.740	<u>3.911</u>	<u>.049</u>	3.373	.068	.617	.559
Posttest3	-.055	.957	1.269	.342	<u>5.395</u>	<u>.021</u>	1.677	.236

Legend: those with underline is considered significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 6 shows the differences on the participants' level of anxiety when compared according to profile. A notable difference exists during posttest 1 between level of anxiety and course as evidenced by p-value of 0.45 which is less than 0.05 alpha level. Furthermore, on the pretest (baseline), the level of anxiety and year level had a significant difference with a p-value of .025. As to age, in the second posttest, a difference exists between the level of anxiety and age with a p-value of .049. In terms of age, the majority of participants belonged to the 19-22 age bracket. However, no differences were computed between level of anxiety and sex during the series of tests.

Table 7. Differences on the Participants' Level of Stress when compared according to Profile

	Sex		Age		Course		Year Level	
	t	p-value	t	p-value	F	p-value	F	p-value
	Baseline	-.632	.545	1.233	.253	<u>8.779</u>	<u>.012</u>	3.708
Posttest1	-2.295	.051	.183	.859	.254	.783	.174	.844
Posttest2	-.268	.796	-2.120	.067	.186	.834	3.041	.112
Posttest3	-.068	.947	-.778	.459	.276	.766	.480	.638

Legend: those with underline is considered significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 7 shows the differences in the participants' level of stress when compared according to profile. A prominent difference during the pretest between courses and stress was noticed. There were no significant differences between level of stress and year level, age, and sex of the participants.

Table 8: Participant's Level of Depression Before and After the Intervention

	Baseline		Post-test 1		Post-test 2		Post-test 3	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
Depression (n=13)	22.77	Severe	18.38	Moderate	14.92	Moderate	10.38	Mild

Legend: Anxiety: 0-7(normal), 8-9(Mild), 10-14 (Moderate), 15-19 (Severe), 20+ (Extremely severe); **Depression:** 0-9 (Normal), 10-

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13 (Mild), 14-20 (Moderate), 21-27 (Severe), 28+ (Extremely Severe); **Stress:** 0-14(Normal),15-18(Mild),19-25(Moderate),26-33(Severe), 34+ (extremely Severe)

Table 8 shows the participants' level of depression. In the depression group, the experiment started with the baseline of the participants with a mean of 22.77 or a severe level of depression. Fortunately, the symptoms had improved after 16 sessions of emotional freedom techniques (EFT), as revealed by the post-tests. The post-test 1 shows a mean of 18.38 or a moderate level of depression. It continued in the two post-tests, which showed 14.92 mean or moderate level of depression in post-test 2 and a 10.38 mean or mild level of depression in post-test 3.

Table 9 Participants' Level of Anxiety Before and After the Intervention

	Baseline		Post-test 1		Post-test 2		Post-test 3	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Anxiety (n=13)	16.69	Severe	9.46	Mild	6.77	Mild	4.84	Normal

Legend: Anxiety: 0-7(normal), 8-9(Mild), 10-14 (Moderate), 15-19 (Severe), 20+ (Extremely severe); **Depression:** 0-9 (Normal), 10-13 (Mild), 14-20 (Moderate), 21-27 (Severe), 28+ (Extremely Severe); **Stress:** 0-14(Normal),15-18(Mild),19-25(Moderate),26-33(Severe), 34+ (extremely Severe)

The anxiety group started out with a mean of 16.69, which was considered severe, but after three post-tests, they improved to a mean of 4.84, which was considered normal

Table 10. Participants' Level of Stress before and after the intervention

	Baseline		Post-test 1		Post-test 2		Post-test 3	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Stress (n=10)	25.50	Severe	14.00	Normal	12.40	Normal	8.70	Normal

Legend: Anxiety: 0-7(normal), 8-9(Mild), 10-14 (Moderate), 15-19 (Severe), 20+ (Extremely severe); **Depression:** 0-9 (Normal), 10-13 (Mild), 14-20 (Moderate), 21-27 (Severe), 28+ (Extremely Severe); **Stress:** 0-14(Normal),15-18(Mild),19-25(Moderate),26-33(Severe), 34+ (extremely Severe)

Prior to the trial, the stress level of the participants in the stress group was severe, with a mean of 25.50. The symptoms improved after using the emotional freedom technique, as evidenced by a mean of 14.00 or a normal level of stress in the first post-test. The situation has improved even further, as seen by the latest two post-tests. The second post-test revealed a normal stress level, with a mean of 12.40 and an average of 8.70, which is normal for post-test 3.

DISCUSSION

TABLE 1

These students willingly volunteered in the experiment while there were other students who had moderate to extremely severe level of depression, anxiety, and stress but denied taking part. The psychology course had the highest participants because they fully understood the essence of an intervention to alleviate and address the surges in their mental state. Most of the female, 21 years old, and third year were affected by the detrimental effects of the online classes and pandemic since the problems were too overwhelming to manage. The majority of university students come from backgrounds with poor socioeconomic standing. Their status has a huge impact on the students which manifested symptoms because of exposure to different issues like being compelled to adjust in the remote learning, financial stress, retrenchment of parents/breadwinner, school projects, and uncooperative group members.

This can be supported by several research studies.

A meta-analysis was conducted and found that manifestations of depression and anxiety were higher in college students at the time the pandemic began than before the pandemic. In addition to these two psychological conditions, the students also experienced sleep disturbances. Students suffer amid the pandemic because if there are academic or family problems, there is no opportunity for them to go and see a guidance counselor. (Deng et. al., 2021)

A disturbing result is that many college students experienced moderate- to-severe depression (35.9%), moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety (27.7%), and high stress (25.1%) in Germany. There was a possibility that students had been exposed

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to seeing alarming news about the number of positive cases, simultaneous school requirements, possible financial problems, anxiety about catching the virus and much more. When this happens, the school administration should take immediate action to provide appropriate assistance and comfort to the students. (Karing, 2021).

In addition, Forty-one percent of Chinese college students exhibited and experienced symptoms of anxiety. The pandemic has been very difficult for children, and it is expected that at the right time, the school, family, and people around them will address the difficulties these children face. Many risk factors came out, such as low economic status, lack of social support, etc. It only goes to show that the strain of COVID-19 pandemic can be threatening even to young learners. (Fu et al., 2021).

Added to this, college students in Wuhan, China, experienced symptoms of fear and worry during lockdown. People were frightened and apprehensive since COVID-19 had just begun. These feelings may be due to ignorance about the proper management, exposure to worrisome news about the rising number of COVID positive patients, a struggling government to protect people, sudden loss of freedom to socialize, fear of being infected or dying, and many other possible causes. (Li et al., 2021).

Additionally, a study reviewed if the pandemic had a direct impact on college students, and it turned out that they were affected psychologically. Their analysis revealed that those students had stress and depression. This means that this issue is a global issue and there is a need to give immediate consideration to the learners focused on giving competent interventions for their convenience. (Dilmen, Yasar, Erten, Ekmen, 2021)

Further, the current worldwide situation has significantly impacted students' mental health in the UK. They weren't exercising and were nervous and depressed. This could be due to students being forced to sit all day because of online lessons, being unable to exercise outside owing to the lockdown, and having to adjust to the new normal at school. The decline of young people's mental health is no longer a local issue, but rather a worldwide issue that requires professional intervention. (Savage, James, Magistro, Donadosn, Healy, Nevill, Hennis, 2020)

TABLE 2

In the depression group, the experiment started with the baseline of the participants who have a mean of 22.77 or severe level of depression. Some participants mentioned experiencing problems with undesirable relationships with people, overthinking about the future, losing focus, social isolation, low self-esteem, negative self-care, task escape, self-isolation before to and throughout the experiment.

A published study supports this finding that college students are currently experiencing symptoms of depression. In the study by Werner et al. (2021), it was highlighted that it turned out that the levels of depression, anxiety, and somatic complaints of college students in Germany were higher compared to the period before the pandemic. The elevation may have occurred due to various difficult situations brought on by COVID-19 such as anxiety to have COVID-19, forced adjustment to the new normal, and many others.

Furthermore, a group of undergraduate researchers discovered that tertiary students in the Philippines showed a moderate depression severity during the pandemic in comparison to their mild level of depression. The standardized test, Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ9), was utilized to measure pre- and post-level depression. Clearly, there was a surge in the severity of depression among engineering students during the pandemic. (Armando J. et al., 2021).

Table 3

In the anxiety group, the result of the participants' pretest or baseline was on severe level with a mean of 16.69. Participants reported feeling physically exhausted, socially disturbed, psychological suffering, self-hatred, intellectually preoccupied, struggling in school, unhealthy social relationships, self-neglect, and destructive self-practices before and throughout the EFT session.

The data can be supported by a study in India. The epidemic in India has caused mild anxiety and mild depression. College students cannot sleep well, and it has become more extensive among women. When there is no proper sleep, it affects a person's mental wellbeing. Poor sleep can lead to poor comfort, anxiety, and depression. Moreover, the researcher warned that a person needs to take care of themselves to avoid serious psychological conditions and suicide. (Verma, 2020).

Additionally, with the shift of instruction from face-to-face classes to online, students felt anxious, nervous, and uncertain. Some students are sometimes embarrassed to face the camera, nervous about answering the teacher, perhaps lacking motivation to study, or unable to keep up due to the associated costs. (Murphy, Eduljee & Croteau, 2020)

Table 4

In the stress group, the participants' level of stress prior to the experiment was severe which has a mean of 25.50. During the pre-intervention phase, participants in the stress group narrated their feelings of uncertainties for the coming academic year, questions of self-worth; self-doubt; concerns about employability; inquiry regarding future employment, dynamic acceptance of

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failed social connections; troubled about future employment, troubled about passing the board exam, overwhelmed to embark on the real world, mixed emotions about new possible experiences in work, negative emotions and exhaustion, pressure due to family obligations, and loss of self-confidence.

Researchers discovered that depression, anxiety, and stress impact 78.7%, 67.9%, and 58.7% of undergraduate students, respectively, and that these rates are higher during "home confinement." The mean sorrow, anxiety, and stress ratings were moderate in another study. Depression, stress, and anxiety have been linked to a variety of demographic, health-related, and lifestyle factors. A variety of attributes were also linked to depression, stress, and anxiety. (S. H. Hamaideh et al., 2022).

Table 6

The participants' level of anxiety has something to do with their course. It was mentioned during the sessions of the experiment that the students felt overwhelmed and nervous because they felt that since they were doing remote learning, their education might not be enough to make them competitive in their course. More than half of them were taking board courses in psychology and accountancy respectively. The sessions started two weeks before their vacation ended and continued until their online classes. They had difficulty with the number of professional courses they had to take, online on-the-job training, thesis writing, adjusting to new professors, and others.

Among the participants, the fourth-year students were outnumbered by third-year students. There was a noted significant difference since they were too anxious as they would face more professional courses, and felt obligated to attend family issues due to the pandemic. Participants who were working and attending remote learning were too problematic financially and mentally.

The age group, 19-22, had to force themselves to adjust to the new normal. Adjustment entails flexibility, resilience, and maturity to take on multiple roles. Some were working so hard to juggle different responsibilities, drastic changes brought on by the pandemic, and remote learning.

Table 7

The course had influenced their baseline score in the stress group because the participants were taking board courses and were too fidgety because of what they would experience in the new semester. It was difficult for them to take the new challenges, like stress about new professional courses, on-the-job training, and board exams.

Table 8

The subjects had significant depression prior to the intervention, which they described during the trial as social isolation, a loss of hope for getting through difficult times, a lack of self-esteem, and compelled people to stay in their lives.

After 16 (sixteen) sessions of the emotional freedom technique, they reported becoming more open to others, valuing more family and friends, avoiding dwelling on negative emotions, feeling happier, returning to routine, optimistic, relieved anxious thoughts, developing more love for themselves, avoiding toxic things for better mental well-being, and accepting that people leave and need space.

The effect of the emotional freedom technique on the level of depression in college students can be supported by a study.

Researchers conducted a meta-analysis involving various RCTs and outcome studies to determine the efficacy of emotional freedom techniques in lowering the symptoms of depression. Historically, depressive symptoms can be addressed by taking anti-depressant drugs, psychotherapy, lifestyle change, cognitive reframing, etc. The researchers initiated the study to determine whether emotional freedom techniques can be added to the list of interventions for depression. The investigation found that all outcome studies and RCTs favored the emotional freedom technique to reduce the symptoms of depression in any population or setting. Its posttest effect size was even higher than trials that used anti-depressants and psychotherapy. (Nelms and Castel, 2016).

Moreover, in Church's study, quoted by Patterson, S. L (2016), found that after a brief group intervention applying the EFT, college students' depression levels improved with a mean in the "nondepressed" category.

Consequently, the emotional freedom technique assisted the participants to change and improve the symptoms of depression.

Table 9

The anxiety group started out with a mean of 16.69, which was considered severe, but after three post-tests, they improved to a mean of 4.84, which was considered normal.

There were improvements in how the individuals felt, thought, and behaved after 16 (sixteen) sessions of the emotional freedom technique. They reported changes in attentive self-care, improved emotional regulation, enhanced productivity, and less awful thoughts during the experiment. This improvement in the level of anxiety using emotional freedom technique is supported by a study.

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The effectivity of an energy psychology technique, emotional freedom, in decreasing the stress and anxiety of nursing students was studied. Undeniably, students are susceptible to feeling restless, tired, anxious, and stressed due to voluminous school-related activities. The researcher utilized standardized questionnaires to quantify the degree of stress and anxiety. Those who conformed to the criteria were subjected to a mixed method study. Experimental and qualitative methods were used to test the effectiveness of the intervention. The posttest revealed significant changes in the students' stress and anxiety after being exposed to the intervention. Moreover, the participants reported lighter feelings and fewer physical symptoms like pain, weakness, etc. (Patterson, 2016).

As a result, the sessions were quite beneficial to those with anxiety symptoms. As a result of the facts and the information, the research hypothesis is rejected.

Table 10

Prior to the trial, the bulk of the participants in the final group were extremely stressed. During the pre-intervention phase, students displayed various indications. Distress about completing a degree, self-doubt, concern about future employment, overwhelmed by responsibilities, no peace of mind, negative connotations about good days, irritability, cognitive difficulty, social isolation, lack of motivation, lack of energy to do healthy routines, and no concern about appearance were among the manifestations.

Significant changes were observed after exposure to the intervention, as measured by the DASS and based on the participants' narratives. Mentally strong, controlled feelings, coped well with stress/grief/anger, good decision-making, decreased distress, positive thoughts/hope, lessened worries, positive disposition, decreased loneliness, acceptance of what she has accomplished thus far, improved focus on academics, revived passion for art, found relief from people, and accepted self-limitations were among the developments.

As a result, it was definitely obvious that the intervention had a positive impact on their perspective, disposition, and attitude toward challenges.

Emotional freedom technique was effective to decrease the manifestations of stress and can be supported by numerous studies.

Rogers and Sears (2015) published a study that further supported the impact of EFT on stress. They examined the efficacy of emotional freedom technique by addressing stress, since it has been demonstrated to be useful in many psychological problems. They put EFT to the test on college students who were dealing with various forms of study-related stress. They decided to split the group into two, with one receiving the emotional freedom technique and stimulating the spots according to the EFT protocol, and the other receiving sham stimulation. After a few sessions, it was shown that students who received the EFT intervention had a 39.3 percent lower stress level than those who received sham point stimulation, which only lowered stress by 8.1 percent.

Another study tested whether the emotional freedom technique is effective in alleviating high student stress in higher education. Students are exposed to a variety of situations that can increase their stress, affecting their wellbeing if not treated promptly. The study revealed that after two months of exposure, the students felt positive change and comfort. (Banerjee, Puri & Luqman, 2015)

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