

Engagement in leisure activities and mental health status of Senior High School students

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ABSTRACT

The survey - correlational research was conducted to determine the engagement in leisure activities and mental health status of senior high school students. The participants of this study were the 164 selected students of Mianay National High School who were officially enrolled during school year 2024-2025. Researcher-made questionnaire in engagement in leisure activities and modified questionnaire in mental health status were used in gathering the data needed for the study. Data gathered from the investigation was subjected to computer-processed statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and Pearson r. The alpha level of significance was set at 0.05 level of significance. The major findings of the study are: The engagement in leisure activities was “moderate”. The mental health status of senior high school students was “moderate”. There was a significant relationship between engagement in leisure activities and mental health status of senior high school students.

Keywords: leisure activities, mental health status, Senior High School students

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INTRODUCTION

Engagement in leisure activities plays a vital role in human life as it provides individuals with a pause from daily tasks and obligations. These activities are widely recognized as one of the most accessible ways to prevent common mental health conditions such as anxiety, stress, and sadness, which are among the most prevalent issues young people face today. For students, the demands of school, including examinations and heavy workloads, often generate significant pressure. Participation in enjoyable activities not only alleviates this stress but also fosters improved mental health, which in turn enhances learning and academic achievement. Activities

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such as painting, for example, have been shown to reduce anxiety and depression while improving overall well-being (Raffo & Forbes, 2020).

Research highlights that recreational and leisure sports exert significant influence on an individual's physical, psychological, and social health (Pomohaci & Sabin, 2018). Leisure activities are multidimensional, with impacts manifesting at micro levels, such as individual health, and macro levels, such as societal well-being (Fancourt et al., 2023). For instance, a study by Lian and Yang (2016) involving 258 Chinese foreign students in Korea revealed that participation in recreational activities improved academic satisfaction, psychological comfort, and emotional well-being, which facilitated better adjustment to student life. Conversely, adolescents' preferred free-time activities at home, such as physical exercises, games, and socializing, also contribute to both academic and health outcomes (Spurr et al., 2012).

Leisure activities are particularly crucial for adolescents as they support both mental development and general wellness (Auhuber et al., 2019). However, teenagers today are increasingly inclined toward screen-based leisure rather than physical or artistic pursuits. While social interactions such as meeting friends remain popular, interest in cultural activities like theatre, orchestra, or dancing is relatively low (Auhuber et al., 2019). Nonetheless, outdoor sports provide valuable opportunities for adolescents to build connections with peers outside classroom settings, fostering social interaction and improved relationships (Allen et al., 2010). Leisure itself is commonly defined as voluntary activities undertaken outside obligatory time such as school, work, or sleep, and is associated with self-determination, enjoyment, and personal growth through actions like reading, sports, or social activities (International Journal of Transport Science and Technology, 2016).

The health benefits of leisure have been widely documented, showing protective effects against medical conditions such as dementia, chronic pain, cognitive decline, and cardiovascular disease. For individuals already experiencing depression or chronic stress, recreational engagement assists with symptom management, and evidence suggests leisure contributes to longevity through biological, psychological, behavioral, and social mechanisms (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Countries like Sweden have demonstrated the importance of institutionalizing leisure for adolescents by providing hiking paths, parks, swimming pools, and sports facilities. The integration of sports as a compulsory subject in Swedish schools has shown positive effects on student health and learning, aligned with the nation's public health policy (Müllersdorf et al., 2010; Larsson & Karlefors, 2015; Elvstrand & Närvänen, 2016).

Leisure time is broad and encompasses activities such as sports, travel, and hobbies, all of which greatly impact human life and behavior (Awang Mahzan & Ahmad, 2015; Nur Ain, 2015). For students, participation in such activities—whether outdoors or indoors—encourages healthy lifestyles, strengthens family bonds, and promotes well-being (Welfare Malaysia Report, 2013). Evidence further indicates that leisure enhances cognitive skills including memory, language, and executive function, while also supporting emotional and physical well-being and expanding social networks (Faulk, 2013; Caldwell, 2016; Fallahpour et al., 2016). Despite disruptions caused by crises such as pandemics, leisure remains a crucial coping mechanism for stress and adjustment (Shen, 2020).

Adolescence is a critical stage of psychological growth, where leisure activities contribute significantly to mental health and well-being (Rodriguez et al., 2019). Yet, the association between recreational engagement and the development or prevention of mental

illness remains uncertain, requiring further exploration to guide prevention strategies. Evidence suggests that unhealthy or chaotic use of spare time, such as substance abuse or poor habits, has detrimental effects on adolescents' mental, physical, and academic health (Havzi & Rasimi, 2015; Wehrmeister et al., 2018). In Sweden, where about 30% of high school students drop out despite free education, factors such as depression, lack of motivation, family problems, and poor mental health have been linked to school failure (Skolverket, 2019; Wehrmeister et al., 2018).

Globally, mental health remains a pressing concern. The World Health Organization (2020) underscores mental health as a state of well-being enabling individuals to cope with life's stresses, contribute productively, and realize their abilities. Alarming, 10–20% of children and adolescents suffer from mental health issues, most beginning by age 14, yet many remain undetected until later in life (WHO, 2021). These problems not only lead to risky behaviors like self-harm and substance abuse but also contribute to rising suicide rates among individuals aged 15–24 (Murdock et al., 2023). Physical activity has been shown to mitigate such risks by improving psychological well-being and reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression (Gmmash et al., 2023; Meng et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2022). Policies such as the National Fitness Plan (2021–2025) in China have emphasized exercise as a pathway to strengthen youth mental health, underscoring its importance for national development (Rodríguez-Romo et al., 2022).

The mechanisms underlying these benefits are diverse, involving creative expression, aesthetic enjoyment, cognitive stimulation, emotional evocation, and social interaction (Dunphy et al., 2019; Fancourt & Finn, 2019). These processes collectively reduce stress, enhance mood and self-esteem, and foster resilience through physiological, psychological, and behavioral pathways (Fancourt et al., 2021). Yet, psychosocial stress remains a leading factor in adolescent mental health problems (Moeller et al., 2020). Understanding how leisure activities can serve as a buffer against stress, depression, and risky behaviors is therefore essential in strengthening preventive measures for youth well-being.

Despite increasing awareness, leisure's role in adolescent mental health is often undervalued in national health reports (Jung & Kim, 2016). Governments and educational institutions must implement supportive policies that promote students' involvement in sports, arts, and other extracurricular activities. By encouraging healthy engagement in leisure, young people can better manage daily pressures, develop resilience, and improve their overall quality of life. Such initiatives are not only beneficial for individual students but are also vital for broader social progress, given that the well-being and insight of the youth are integral to the advancement of every nation.

Statement of the problem

The study was conducted to find out the engagement in leisure activities and mental health status of senior high school students of Mianay National High School for the school year 2024-2025. Specifically, the study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of engagement in leisure activities of students?
2. What is the level of mental health status of students?
3. Is there a significant relationship between engagement in leisure activities and mental health status of students?

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study was to determine the engagement in leisure activities and the mental health status of senior high school students of Mianay National High School for the school year 2024–2025. To accomplish this, the study employed the survey-correlational method of research. The survey design is a fact-finding approach that emphasizes describing existing conditions, practices, situations, or phenomena, while correlational research is intended to estimate the extent to which different variables are related within a population (Navarra, 2019). In this study, the independent variable was the engagement in leisure activities, while the dependent variable was the mental health status of students. The statistical tools used for analysis included the mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's r , with all inferential tests set at the 0.05 level of significance.

The participants of the study were 164 senior high school students enrolled at Mianay National High School during the school year 2024–2025. Stratified random sampling was employed to select the respondents, ensuring representation across categories. The demographic profile of the participants indicated an equal distribution of sex, with 82 males (50%) and 82 females (50%). In terms of age, 148 students (90.2%) were below 20 years old, while 16 students (9.8%) were above 20 years old. Of the total sample, 92 students (56.1%) were in Grade 11, while 72 students (43.9%) were in Grade 12. Regarding family monthly income, 137 students (83.5%) reported income below ₱15,000, 13 students (7.9%) had a family income between ₱16,000 and ₱20,000, and 14 students (8.5%) reported income above ₱20,000.

The study utilized structured instruments to gather the necessary data. The first instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire on engagement in leisure activities, which consisted of 30 items. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale with response options: 5 = Always, 4 = Often, 3 = Moderate, 2 = Rarely, and 1 = Never. The scale for interpreting the mean scores was as follows: 4.21–5.00 (Very High), 3.41–4.20 (High), 2.61–3.40 (Moderate), 1.81–2.60 (Low), and 1.00–1.80 (Very Low). The questionnaire was subjected to content validation by a jury of three members, whose recommendations were incorporated into its modification. A pilot test was conducted with 30 students from Mianay National High School. Using Cronbach's Alpha through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), the reliability coefficient of the instrument was computed at .861, indicating that the instrument was reliable. According to Calmorin (2007, as cited by Clores, 2021), a questionnaire is considered reliable if the coefficient is equal to or greater than 0.80 but not more than 1.0.

The second instrument was a modified 30-item questionnaire designed to assess the mental health status of students. This instrument consisted of several sections: a 7-item measure of emotional well-being, a 6-item measure of academic pressure, a 5-item measure of coping strategies, a 5-item measure of stress and anxiety, and 7 general items. Responses were scored using the same five-point Likert scale: 5 = Always, 4 = Often, 3 = Moderate, 2 = Rarely, and 1 = Never. The descriptive interpretation of mean scores was as follows: 4.21–5.00 (Excellent), 3.41–4.20 (Very Good), 2.61–3.40 (Good), 1.81–2.60 (Fair), and 1.00–1.80 (Poor). Like the first instrument, the mental health questionnaire underwent content validation by a jury of three experts, and revisions were incorporated before administration. A pilot test with 30 students from the same school was conducted to assess reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient

for this instrument was .892, again indicating strong reliability consistent with Calmorin's standard (2007, as cited by Clores, 2021).

The data-gathering procedure was undertaken only after obtaining the necessary approvals. Permission to conduct the research was requested from the Dean of the Graduate School of Filamer Christian University, the Schools Division Superintendent of Capiz, and the Principal of Mianay National High School. Consent from both the student participants and their parents was also obtained. Participants were fully informed of the nature and purpose of the research, and they were assured of confidentiality and privacy of their responses in compliance with the provisions of the Data Privacy Act. Following approval, the researcher personally distributed the questionnaires and ensured their retrieval after completion, which resulted in a 100% retrieval rate.

Once retrieved, the data were encoded, tallied, and tabulated for analysis using SPSS software. Several statistical techniques were applied: frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the demographic profile of the participants, the mean was employed to determine the levels of engagement in leisure activities and mental health status, and the standard deviation was calculated to identify the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the responses. Finally, Pearson's *r* was used to determine the significance of the relationship between engagement in leisure activities and the mental health status of students, with the level of significance set at 0.05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 164 senior high school students from Mianay National High School participated in this study during the school year 2024–2025. These participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure equal representation across sex, age, grade level, and family monthly income. As presented in the methodology, validated and reliable questionnaires were used to measure the independent variable, engagement in leisure activities, and the dependent variable, mental health status. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as the mean and standard deviation, while Pearson's *r* was applied to determine the significance of the relationship between the two variables at the 0.05 level of significance.

The descriptive results on the level of engagement in leisure activities revealed that students' overall engagement was at a "Moderate" level, with a mean score of 3.16 and a standard deviation of 0.54. This interpretation falls within the descriptive range of 2.61–3.40, which corresponds to "Moderate." The result implies that students demonstrated neutral participation in leisure activities. This may suggest that senior high school students had limited free time within the school setting, leading to reduced opportunities for leisure involvement. The demands of academic work, including take-home assignments, may also consume much of their supposed leisure time. Another contributing factor is financial constraints, as most of the respondents came from families with a monthly income below ₱15,000. Such insufficiency may hinder students from participating in activities that require financial resources, such as enrolling in sports training sessions, traveling to new places, or attending concerts and movies.

The moderate level of engagement in leisure activities also suggests that students have the potential to increase their participation in the future. Leisure activities are beneficial to well-

being, particularly in improving mood, cultivating positive emotions, and reducing the risks of depression, which is increasingly prevalent among young learners in today's Generation Z. At the same time, the moderate result may raise concerns among parents, as it might indicate a possible decline in students' interest in engaging with leisure activities. Parents play a critical role in motivating their children to participate more actively, and their support can foster meaningful family bonding. Wheeler (2014) highlighted that parental assistance and direction in organizing, financing, and transporting children to leisure or recreational sites strongly influence their participation. Similarly, Esranur et al. (2024) reported that students who manage their spare time effectively experience enhanced well-being through an appreciation of leisure, while those who fail to do so face elevated stress levels, poor time management, and lower achievement. Physiological and psychological stressors, coupled with the inability to prioritize responsibilities, can negatively affect life satisfaction, making effective management of free time essential.

In terms of mental health status, the findings revealed that the students were also at a "Moderate" level, with a mean score of 3.28 and a standard deviation of 0.54. This result falls within the range of 2.61–3.40, which is described as "Good." The implication of this finding is that students were able to maintain stable mental health despite the pressures associated with adolescence. Specifically, the instrument measured areas such as emotional well-being, academic pressure, coping strategies, stress, anxiety, and general mental health concerns. The results indicate that students were able to balance these aspects of their lives, suggesting resilience amidst the high risks of stress, anxiety, and depression associated with their age group.

This outcome also implies that students place value on their mental health and are capable of adapting to both positive and negative circumstances. Although young adult learners are highly susceptible to mental health challenges, sometimes leading to extreme outcomes such as suicidal cases, the "Good" result suggests that the participants still have a strong chance of protecting and improving their mental health. Efforts such as adopting healthier lifestyles, availing of counseling, engaging in leisure activities, and fostering strong family support can strengthen this stability. Teachers also play a vital role as second parents in guiding and supporting students' mental health. By initiating conversations that foster comfort and trust, teachers can help students feel more secure, which in turn enhances motivation and academic performance. Positive interactions inside and outside the classroom can reinforce these outcomes. The results also demonstrate that students are moderately capable of managing their mental health status despite internal and external stressors, suggesting that they remain both responsible and flexible in prioritizing their well-being.

The inferential analysis sought to determine whether there was a significant relationship between engagement in leisure activities and mental health status. Using Pearson's r , the analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.468$ with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 alpha level. This indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between engagement in leisure activities and mental health status among senior high school students. The interpretation of this result is that higher engagement in leisure activities is associated with higher levels of mental health, while lower engagement corresponds with lower levels of mental health.

This finding underscores the holistic role of leisure activities in shaping mental health outcomes. By engaging in meaningful leisure pursuits, students were able to maintain and even improve their mental health despite daily stressors. The flexibility and mindfulness demonstrated

by the respondents in balancing schoolwork and personal well-being may explain this relationship. These results support the assertion of Chen et al. (2020) that participation in leisure activities helps reduce stress and promotes psychological comfort. Chang (2018) further emphasized that greater autonomy and emotional involvement in leisure are key strategies in lowering stress levels. In line with these perspectives, the current findings confirm that leisure activities contribute significantly to reducing stress, enhancing coping strategies, and fostering overall psychological health.

Given these results, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between engagement in leisure activities and mental health status of senior high school students is rejected. Instead, the study concludes that engagement in leisure activities is significantly related to mental health. This emphasizes the importance of promoting leisure activities both at school and at home as a strategy to protect and enhance the mental health of students. With the right support from parents, teachers, and educational institutions, students can achieve a balance between academic responsibilities and leisure engagement, which in turn leads to healthier, more fulfilling lives.

CONCLUSION

This survey-correlational research was conducted to determine the engagement in leisure activities and the mental health status of senior high school students at Mianay National High School during the school year 2024–2025. The study involved 164 participants, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across sex, age, grade level, and family monthly income. Data were collected using validated and reliable questionnaires on leisure engagement and mental health status, and were analyzed through statistical measures such as frequency counts, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's r , with a significance level set at 0.05. The study sought to address three main questions: the level of engagement of students in leisure activities, their level of mental health status, and whether a significant relationship exists between these two variables.

The findings revealed that the engagement of senior high school students in leisure activities was at a “moderate” level, with a mean of 3.16 and a standard deviation of 0.54. This result indicates that while students participate in leisure activities, their involvement remains limited, possibly due to insufficient free time brought about by school-related tasks and responsibilities. The findings also suggest that financial constraints, given that the majority of students came from families with incomes below ₱15,000, may hinder participation in leisure activities that require monetary resources such as sports training, travel, and other recreational experiences. The moderate level of engagement raises concern, as limited opportunities for interaction and recreation may contribute to stress, anxiety, or even depression among students. Nevertheless, it also reflects potential for improvement if parents and teachers provide sufficient encouragement and support. Parental involvement is particularly critical, as guidance, financial assistance, and shared activities can motivate learners to actively engage in leisure pursuits that foster well-being and family bonding.

The results also showed that the mental health status of students was at a “Good” level, with a mean of 3.28 and a standard deviation of 0.54. This implies that students were able to

maintain balance in terms of emotional well-being, coping strategies, academic pressure, stress, and anxiety despite the risks associated with adolescence and their vulnerability as members of Generation Z. The findings indicate that students have developed awareness of their mental health and have been able to stabilize it, though challenges such as online distractions, low coping mechanisms, and exposure to stressors remain prevalent. The results affirm that strong support systems—such as friends, family members, teachers, and counselors—play a vital role in guiding young people and providing them with direction and resilience. Teachers, in particular, as second parents, are in a unique position to offer guidance and support, which can foster trust, improve motivation, and enhance academic performance.

Inferential analysis further confirmed that there is a significant relationship between engagement in leisure activities and mental health status, with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.468$ and a significance value of 0.000. This positive relationship implies that students who engage more actively in leisure activities are more likely to experience improved mental health, while lower engagement is associated with poorer outcomes. The results highlight that leisure activities provide psychological, emotional, and social benefits that strengthen students' ability to cope with stress, anxiety, and depression. By rejecting the null hypothesis, the study affirms that leisure participation directly and meaningfully affects mental health.

In light of these findings, several implications emerge. Students must be encouraged to maximize their free time by engaging in meaningful leisure activities that expand knowledge, develop new skills, foster social interaction, and promote holistic well-being. Schools, through administrators and coordinators, should provide opportunities, materials, and facilities that accommodate students' interests and talents, while also raising awareness about the benefits of leisure for physical and mental health. Parents, on the other hand, must serve as role models at home, offering moral, emotional, and even financial support to ensure that their children can explore productive activities instead of overindulging in less beneficial pastimes such as excessive smartphone or social media use. Moreover, students should be continuously educated about mental health awareness to enable them to identify, understand, and manage the challenges they face. For those struggling to cope, accessible counseling services should be made available, with schools providing licensed counselors, safe spaces for discussions, and seminars that raise awareness and sustain healthy practices among learners, parents, and teachers alike.

Ultimately, the results of this study emphasize that leisure engagement is not merely recreational but serves as a protective factor for mental health. By fostering collaboration among students, teachers, parents, and school administrators, institutions can create a supportive environment that promotes active engagement in leisure while safeguarding students' psychological well-being. Such efforts are essential to reduce risks of stress, anxiety, and depression, to prevent severe outcomes such as suicidal tendencies, and to ensure that young learners are fully equipped to pursue their academic and personal goals with resilience and confidence.

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