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Impact of Psychoeducation on Self-Concept of Selected Bataan Peninsula State University Students Affected by Ghosting in Bataan, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital age, the practice of ghosting has emerged as a dissolution strategy in relationships, leaving individuals emotionally unattended and questioning their self-worth. This study explores the role of psychoeducation on the self-concept of selected college students at Bataan Peninsula State University - Main and Balanga Campus who have been ghosted by their previous partners online. The researchers employed the program "Ghosted: Healing from Abandonment" by Sabriya Dobbins, consisting of six sessions designed to address the impact of ghosting on self-concept. Twenty participants were randomly assigned into two groups and underwent two different treatments: a one-session psychoeducation summarizing the program and a full six-session. The Robson Self Concept Questionnaire was utilized to precisely measure participants' self-concept before and after the program. The findings revealed that the program significantly improved the participants' self-concept from both experimental ($p = .037$) and control groups ($p = .013$). This study explores the lasting psychological effects of ghosting, aiming to offer support and insights to those affected by this modern relationship phenomenon. It further unfolds the potential advantages of psychoeducation for personal growth and well-being, particularly in shaping one's self-concept.

INTRODUCTION

Ghosting, a modern dissolution strategy facilitated by technological advancements (Timmermans *et al.*, 2020), entails ending a relationship abruptly without explanation, often characterized by ignoring communication attempts such as phone calls and messages (LeFebvre *et al.*, 2019). This phenomenon has garnered attention due to its detrimental psychological effects on individuals. Research indicates that ghosting can evoke feelings of worthlessness and hinder the healing process, often proving more distressing than traditional breakups (Koessler *et al.*, 2019). Approximately 20 to 40% of the general population has encountered ghosting either as a victim, perpetrator, or both, highlighting its prevalence in contemporary social dynamics (Freedman *et al.*, 2019; LeFebvre *et al.*, 2019; Pancani *et al.*, 2021).

The psychological toll of ghosting, which Lerida *et al.* (2023) characterized by feelings of confusion, pain, and self-doubt, extends to a detrimental impact on the ghostee's self-concept—a composite of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-efficacy, that interconnectedly contribute to their next direction in life (Lichner *et al.*, 2020). It is also how people observe, understand, and appreciate themselves in different situations and roles, shaping their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Wehrle & Fasbender, 2019). This connection between ghosting and self-concept was further explored by Konings *et al.* (2023), who illustrated that ghosting lowers self-esteem and causes ghostees to reevaluate their worthiness and think that something is wrong on their part.

Thus, experiences like ghosting may affect a person's

capability to grasp a positive outlook on himself/herself. As mentioned by Petric (2023), it leaves the individuals feeling disposable, inadequate, and unlovable which may undermine confidence in anybody, but is detrimental to those who already have poor self-esteem. In addition, they may feel abandoned, struggle with trust issues, and feel a sense of hopelessness when attempting to form new connections (Mereta, 2023). This results in more complicated and challenging effects of ghosting, particularly to those who have previously experienced abandonment.

According to Pancani *et al.* (2021), ghostees nevertheless can shift their focus from the apparent negative consequences to potential positive outcomes, such as personal growth and professional pursuits. But this does not guarantee complete acceptance of the situation due to a lack of clear reasons (LeFebvre, 2017). With that, a support program referred to as psychoeducation is employed in the study. As outlined by Sarkhel *et al.* (2020), it can give insights and assist individuals in gaining a better understanding of the situation they are currently going through. However, limited studies focus on this aspect, especially in the Philippines. Previous research also concentrated more on identifying correlations rather than drawing causal inferences (Di-Santo *et al.*, 2023). As such, preventive programs or initiatives should be developed to support ghostees in enhancing their mental health and well-being (Lerida *et al.*, 2023). The researchers further aspire to fill these gaps to contribute and develop deeper understanding to the problem at hand.

Consequently, the study aimed to investigate the impact

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of psychoeducation on the self-concept of participants, specifically selected college students from Bataan Peninsula State University - Main and Balanga Campus who have been ghosted and are suffering from the adverse effects of it. To attain this objective, it seeks to provide answers to the following research questions: Is there a significant difference in pre-and post-test scores of self-concept in the experimental group? Is there a significant difference in pre- and post-test scores of self-concept in the control group? Is there a significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the self-concept post-test scores?

The findings of the study on ghosting can greatly assist individuals affected by this phenomenon and can also be used by educational institutions, particularly their guidance offices, to support students suffering from its effects.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

The study employed an experimental research design, which involves the researcher implementing an intervention in individuals' lives to assess its impact (Boniface, 2019). The objective of the experiment is to formally organize a program to identify cause-and-effect relationships.

In alignment with the study's objectives, the researchers utilized two distinct research methodologies. Independent measure, also known as between-subjects design, a method commonly employed to assess intervention effectiveness (Choueiry, 2021). This involves evaluating pre-test and post-test outcomes within randomly assigned control and treatment groups.

Moreover, the study integrates a repeated measures design, adopting a within-subjects approach. In this design, the same subjects undergo testing repeatedly under all treatment conditions. The researchers' focus is to examine overall differences among related group means (Boniface, 2019). Participants, all of whom share the common experience of being ghosted, undergo pre-test and post-test assessments under various conditions.

Participants

To ensure reliability and validity, the study used inclusion and exclusion criteria for participant selection. Participants were college students from Bataan Peninsula State University - Main and Balanga Campus who had been ghosted by their previous online partners (labeled or not) lasting at least 2 months (up to a year) and who were ghosted between 2020 to 2023. Twenty participants were selected at random regardless of gender, aged between 18 to 27 years old.

Students who were already self-assured, currently in another new relationship, or had previously participated in a program focused on ghosting were excluded to isolate the program's impact. This ensured that any observed improvements in self-perception could be attributed primarily to the program. Additionally, participants from

the experimental group who attended only one or two sessions were ineligible to continue, as their data could not accurately reflect the program's impact.

Ghosted: Healing from Abandonment

The psychoeducation program, "Ghosted: Healing from Abandonment," developed by Sabriya Dobbins, aims to address the detrimental effects of ghosting on the self-concept of college students at Bataan Peninsula State University - Main and Balanga Campus. The sessions will be facilitated by a team of researchers, assisted by their research advisor.

1. The opening session, 'Group Welcome and Defining Your Ghosted Experience(s)', will delve into the concept of ghosting, exploring its various forms and contrasting it with no contact. Participants will also have the opportunity to share their own ghosting stories.

2. Delving into our childhood experiences, the second session, 'Historical Experiences of Abandonment,' will investigate the different types of attachment styles and how they contribute to your individual attachment style.

3. The third session, titled 'Redefining the Ghosts that Haunt Us,' dives into the haunting phenomenon of ghosting, exploring how our relationship views influence both who ghosts and how we react to it. We'll also examine the various reasons why people choose to ghost.

4. 'Ghost Alert: Managing Emotional and Mental Experiences,' the fourth session, delves into the emotional and mental aftershocks of being ghosted. It explores key concepts like building emotional resilience, managing emotional contagion, and understanding defense mechanisms, equipping you to navigate the emotional and mental landscape post-ghosting.

5. The fifth session, aptly titled 'Facing the Ghost(s) of Life Head-On,' unveils the transformative GETSMART acronym. This mnemonic, standing for Goal oriented, Emotional management, Thought Restructuring, Self-soothing, Mindfulness, Attachment style, Reaching out to others, and Transformed Behavior, provides a comprehensive toolkit to conquer unhealthy emotional and mental responses triggered by ghosting or its potential threat.

6. The final session, 'Becoming the Hero of Your Story and Group Closing,' marks the culmination of our session. Here, we'll revisit and solidify the GETSMART acronym, ensuring you have a firm grasp of its empowering tools. Then, we'll delve into the nuanced difference between loneliness and being alone, helping you navigate both with self-awareness and acceptance. Finally, we'll conclude with a powerful affirmation exercise, empowering you to claim your own narrative as the hero of your story.

Measures

The researchers employed the Robson Self Concept Questionnaire (SCQ), created by Philip Robson in 1989, to assess the self-concept of the participants who had been ghosted. The construct is comprised of subscales that are categorized into five distinct themes, namely

“attractiveness, approval by others,” “contentment, worthiness, significance,” “autonomous self-regard,” “competence, self-efficacy,” and “the value of existence.” The self-report instrument employed in this study utilizes an 8-point Likert scale comprising 30 statements that span from “completely disagree” (0-1) to “completely agree” (6-7). The reliability of the SCQ has been demonstrated to be high, as indicated by a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .89, and its clinical validity has been found to be strong, with a coefficient of 0.70 ($P < 0.00001$) (Ghaderi, 2005).

Procedure

The researchers randomly selected 10 participants for each group, control and experimental, from Bataan Peninsula State University - Main and Balanga Campus. To ensure suitable candidates, they administered a thorough criteria test, assessing their level of self-assurance and tolerance towards being ghosted. Both the control and experimental group were required to complete a pre-test as a baseline assessment before the psychoeducation was implemented. Prior to implementing the program, the researchers provided informed consent forms to the participants, who carefully reviewed the document before returning it. The support program employed in this study was psychoeducation, a carefully designed approach that aimed to provide psychological and educational support to the participants. The psychoeducation program spanned for three weeks and consisted of 6 sessions—2 sessions per day, each week, lasting for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. While the experimental group received the full program, the control group only had one session. At the end of both sessions of each group, the participants received tokens prepared by the researchers. Afterwards, through a comparison of the post-outcomes and experiences of both groups, the researchers intended to evaluate the impact of the psychoeducation program in rebuilding the ghosted students’ self-concept.

Ethical Considerations

The research study on the impact of psychoeducation on the self-concept of selected ghosted college students adhered to Section 10 of the Code of Ethics for Philippine Psychologists and Psychometricians (2022). In addition, all information obtained was kept with confidentiality in compliance with Republic Act 10173 or the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Risks were minimized by being responsive to participants’ verbal and nonverbal cues and letting them take a break or withdraw. They also had the opportunity to seek clarification before, during, and after their participation in the study. Lastly, proper acknowledgment of others’ works was upheld in the research paper through accurate citations and references.

Data Analysis

The present study utilized Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) V. 25 with a 0.05 level of significance, an instrument often used in various disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and medicine because of its

ability for accurate data management and documentation (Rahman & Muktadir, 2021). Descriptive statistics, particularly mean and standard deviation, were employed to determine the average and distribution of scores in experimental and control groups.

Moreover, Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was applied, a statistical method that evaluates paired observations (Derryberry *et al.*, 2010; Oyeka & Ebuh, 2012) and is recommended in small samples as it is free of the normality assumption (Doane & Seward, 2007; Meek *et al.*, 2007). It is therefore relevant to use when comparing the means of 20 ghosted individuals before and after the program and identifying if a significant change was established. Additionally, it was performed to analyze the subscales of Robson Self-Concept Questionnaire, which utilized a Likert scale, because of its efficacy in analyzing the scores of Likert scaled tests under various conditions such as sample size and group size ratio (Simsek, 2023). The Mann Whitney U was also used to examine if a significant difference exists between the means of the experimental and control groups. This nonparametric test compares average values between two independent sets of participants (Sundjaja *et al.*, 2020) and assesses the treatment’s impact on outcomes (Wu *et al.*, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was utilized to assess in-group within-group differences in pre-test and post-test scores. The mean score of the experimental group increased, from 105.60 to 135.10. However, the standard deviation also increased from 16.33 to 27.58, indicating that the scores of the participants became more scattered. This suggests that the psychoeducation program may have a favorable influence on the SCQ scores in the experimental group. However, a large standard deviation implies that the program may not have an even effect on all participants. Nevertheless, the significant value of .037 implied that the psychoeducation program implemented improved their self-concept with a large effect size of 0.66. From these results, the null hypothesis can be rejected, inferring that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group. Similar findings emerged in the control group. Scores significantly increased from 80.70 to 117.30, demonstrating a higher average following one-session psychoeducation program. This rise was accompanied by an increase in standard deviation, from 21.37 to 33.31, indicating greater data dispersion. This highlights the possibility of unaccounted variables influencing the results. These could include pre-test sensitization or the speaker delivering the psychoeducation program being a highly articulate presenter. Despite this variability, the program’s effectiveness is still evident. The significant improvement of .013 with a large effect size of 0.79 indicates a substantial positive impact on participants’ self-concept. Hence, a significant difference exists between the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Table 1: Mean Scores of the Experimental and Control Group

Groups	Before Psychoeducation		After Psychoeducation		P-value	Effect Size
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Experimental Group	105.60	16.33	135.10	27.58	.037	0.66
Control Group	80.70	21.37	117.30	33.31	.013	0.79

In accordance to the five subscales namely “attractiveness, approval by others”, “contentment, worthiness, significance”, “autonomous self-regard”, “competence, self-efficacy”, and “the value of existence”, the experimental group showed improvements on the most of the self-concept subscales measured. The most

significant was observed in “attractiveness, approval by others,” with a mean score increase from 16.80 to 24.20 yielding a p-value of .017. This suggests a substantial positive impact on how participants within the program viewed themselves in terms of seeking approval from others.

Table 2: Mean Scores on Subscales of the Experimental Group

Measure	Before the Psychoeducation Program	After the Psychoeducation Program	Difference	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	p
Attractiveness, Approval by others	16.80	24.20	-7.4	.017
Contentment, Worthiness	16.40	22.60	-6.2	.126
Autonomous Self-Regard	23.70	27.50	-3.8	.109
Competence, Self-efficacy	24.70	31.30	-6.6	.102
Value of Existence	18.60	23.30	-4.7	.405

Moreover, the results showed an enhancement of the participants’ scores from the control group on the subscales “attractiveness, approval by others” (mean of 15.70 to 21.40, p-value = 0.40), “contentment, worthiness, significance” (mean of 10.00 to 19.30, p-value = 0.37),

“autonomous self-regard” (mean of 15.10 to 22.60, p-value = .009), and “the value of existence” (mean of 13.40 to 21.20, p-value = .024). As evidenced, the domain value of existence had the most significant change in mean score after the psychoeducation program.

Table 3: Mean Scores on Subscales of the Control Group

Measure	Before the Psychoeducation Program	After the Psychoeducation Program	Difference	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	p
Attractiveness, Approval by others	15.70	21.40	-5.7	.040
Contentment, Worthiness	10.00	19.30	-9.3	0.37
Autonomous Self-Regard	15.10	22.60	-7.5	.009
Competence, Self-efficacy	22.80	26.60	-3.8	.513
Value of Existence	13.40	21.20	-7.8	.024

The Mann-Whitney U Test revealed no significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. The results displayed a z-score of -1.362 and a significant value of .173. Hence, the psychoeducation program may not have had a differential effect on self-concept in either group.

Discussion

The research study aimed to determine the impact of psychoeducation on the self-concept of selected students who have been ghosted. In relation to the presented hypotheses, a significant difference exists between the pre- and post-test scores of the experimental (from a mean of 105.60 to 135.10 with a p-value of .037) and control group (from a mean of 80.70 to 117.30 with a p-value of .013).

This indicated that participants’ self-concept significantly improved after the program’s implementation, denoting that their actual engagement further contributed to their understanding of the ghosting phenomenon, increased their self-awareness, and enhanced their coping skills. These findings aligned with the study of Cartwright and Hooper (2017) as cited by Qian *et al.* (2022) which obtained a notable enhancement of self-esteem among college students through psychoeducational lectures. Moreover, the quantitative data suggests that participants from the experimental group have perceived their physical appearance more positively, as shown in the increase of their mean scores on the attractiveness subscale. On the other hand, the control group has developed their self-concept in several aspects including attractiveness,

approval by others, contentment, worthiness, significance, autonomous self-regard, and the value of existence. These categories are significant as they comprise thoughts about oneself and having them clear or stable enhances an individual's overall self-beliefs and confidence (Yusop *et al.*, 2018).

In addition, it was found that a significant difference was not established between the experimental group, which received six sessions in a span of three weeks, and the control group which underwent one session. The potential factors influencing this result may include the aspect that both groups received psychoeducational lectures, with the only distinction being the number of sessions attended. The limited sample size has also had an impact on the veracity and reliability of the research outcome (Faber & Fonseca, 2014), making it more challenging to detect any significant difference (Dibao-Dina *et al.*, 2014; Oldfield, 2016).

On the other hand, it is also crucial to note that although no significant difference exists between the two groups, the control group presented a statistically higher difference, contradicting previous research findings such as in the study conducted by Ime and Ümmet (2024) which implemented a psychoeducation on two groups and later suggested that the experimental group demonstrated more significant improvements. Several possible reasons may contribute to this outcome. One important factor is that there were different speakers with various ways of conveying the information during each session in the experimental group while the control group only had one individual who summarized the topics to be discussed. Another aspect to consider could be the scores of the experimental group before the program's implementation. While it is still within the below to average range of scores that researchers assessed and enabled them to be included as participants, it is comparably higher than the pre-test scores of those in the control group. This is further explained by the ceiling effect, which occurs when a substantial number of participants in a group scored at or near the highest possible amount on a measurement instrument, hindering the researchers' ability to accurately detect the improvements within the data (Garin, 2014). Additionally, the self-concept questionnaire, which was US-normed due to the unavailability of scales contextualized in the Philippines, may not be better aligned with the participants' ghosting experiences, all of whom are Filipinos.

Nevertheless, it may also suggest that a single session of psychoeducation is already effective in helping the affected individuals navigate the aftermath of ghosting and rebuilding their self-concept. The findings of the study further emphasized that the consequences of being ghosted can be profound, leading to emotional distress, uncertainty, as well as damage to one's self-worth (Daraj *et al.*, 2023) and one of the ways for individuals to cope with the situation is to learn and develop an understanding of the reasons behind it (Jahrami *et al.*, 2023).

By shedding light on the focused problem, mental health professionals will be informed about the significance

of support programs that can provide appropriate counseling, resources, and guidance to those who have been ghosted and struggled to see their worth and value after the relationship. People will also be more aware that it is an issue that should not be taken lightly and treated as a norm in the dating world which in turn, can empower society in fostering open communication and healthier relationship practices, especially among young adults. Moreover, the results inferred can provide relevant information that may help lawmakers in the Philippines in offering a resolution to the act of declaring ghosting as an emotional offense or House Bill 611, aiding them in gaining a comprehensive understanding that will ensure that the proposed bill can accurately address the needs and conflicts of all the parties involved.

Limitations

The limitations present in the study are crucial to note for future researchers who will delve into this phenomenon. First, ghosting that took place online is the only context investigated. Other settings such as in-person or face-to-face should be explored as well to arrive at a new perspective and understanding of its motivations and consequences. There is also an unequal number of male and female participants, which has prevented the study from drawing general conclusions between the two sexes. For more precise findings, increasing the sample size, specifically male participants, is encouraged.

Moreover, the adapted "Ghosted: Healing from Abandonment" by Sabriya Dobbins lacked a substantial research foundation and was tailored to address the ghosting experiences of individuals from a different cultural background. A program contextualized in the Philippines or specifically designed for Filipinos who encountered the phenomenon may better align with their situation and concerns. Furthermore, due to conflicting schedules, the implemented program was constrained to three weeks and had lengthy gaps between each session. Establishing shorter and consistent intervals is preferred to ensure and enhance participants' understanding of the topics discussed. Lastly, inadequate prior research, specifically on the impact of psychoeducation on the self-concept of those who have been ghosted, also became a barrier to the complete investigation of the problem.

In addition, it is worthwhile to consider the inclusion of two experimental groups: one with psychoeducational lectures and another with a social support program to grasp which approach coincides more effectively with ghostees' needs. Future research could also focus on examining ghosting not only in romantic relationships but also in other contexts such as family, friendship, and workplace which may generate relevant findings and fill the gap in knowing the implications of ghosting across various interpersonal facets.

CONCLUSION

The present study explored the profound impact of ghosting on the self-concept of selected college

students at Bataan Peninsula State University - Main and Balanga Campus. Through the implementation of the program “Ghosted: Healing from Abandonment” by Sabriya Dobbins, the researchers aimed to address the psychological effects of ghosting on various individuals, recognizing it as a significant concern in modern relationships. Subsequently, a notable enhancement in the self-concept of participants was observed in both the control and experimental groups, highlighting the effectiveness of the program.

The findings further emphasized the potential advantages of psychoeducation in promoting personal growth, resilience, and well-being, particularly in the context of one’s self-concept, as well as offering valuable insights and coping mechanisms that can aid affected individuals in gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences and rebuilding their worth. Moving forward, the study suggests the importance of continued research and the development of preventive programs or interventions to support those navigating the challenges posed by ghosting. In addition, the research can be applied by mental health practitioners in promoting healthier relationship dynamics and encouraging especially young adults in fostering open and effective communication skills.

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