

Gauging the Influence of Psychological Distress on the Critical Thinking Disposition among Criminology Students

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the relationship between critical thinking disposition and psychological distress among criminology students in Negros Oriental State University Bais Campuses I & II. A descriptive correlational design was employed to assess whether the respondents' level of psychological distress significantly affects or is associated with their critical thinking disposition across the identified dimensions. The research, further, utilized standard tools such as Kessler Psychological Distress Scale and EMI Critical Thinking Disposition Scale to identify the findings of the study. A total of 202 respondents participated, the majority of whom were males (56.93%) and aged 18-20 yrs. old (83.66%). In terms of the interpretation of the results, different statistical tools were used such as frequency and simple percentage, weighted mean and Person r. This paper revealed that respondents demonstrated low level of psychological distress and an overall high critical thinking disposition which implied that psychological distress may not necessarily determine an individual's critical thinking disposition as other factors such as learning environment, personal motivation, resilience and educational experience may also influence critical thinking skills. Furthermore, based on findings and conclusions, this paper proposed a guidance program on Integrated Mental Health and Cognitive Skills Development for adoption.

Keywords: Guidance and Counseling, Psychological Distress, Critical Thinking Disposition, Descriptive-Correlation Method, Negros Oriental State University

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking disposition and psychological distress are two significant constructs in higher education that substantially influence students' academic performance and overall personal development. These constructs are significant for criminology students considering their field requires strong analytical reasoning, sound judgement, and evidence based decision making skills. Facione (2015) ,emphasizes that critical thinking encompasses analytical thinking, logical reasoning, and reflective evaluation which guide individuals in forming informed decisions and dealing problems. Psychological distress, on the other hand, incorporates states of anxiety, depression, and emotional strain that impair functioning (APA, 2013). Paul & Elder (2018), also indicate that critical thinking disposition is linked with academic competence and professional readiness, while, psychological distress is associated reduced cognitive performance and academic difficulties (Stallman, 2018).

Given these contrasting influences, it is important to consider the specific challenges faced by criminology students. Majority have experienced difficulties contributing to psychological distress such as academic pressure, field related challenges, and career frailties. APA (2013), emphasized that common manifestations of distress are emotional fatigue, difficulty in concentrating, and reduced motivation. Researches correspondingly reveal that psychological distress negatively affects cognitive processes such as reasoning, memory, and decision making (Kessler et al., 2002). When criminology students experience .prolonged emotional strain, their ability to critically analyse cases, logically evaluate evidence, and make sound judgment may be compromised. This situation highlights the need to explore how emotional distress may relate to their disposition toward critical thinking.

The probability consequences of prolonged psychological distress are particularly alarming in the context of criminology education. The continued experience of distress may impair academic and intellectual growth chronic stress can weaken higher-order thinking skills that are very essential for criminology students. This statement is supported with the idea of Stallman (2010) that further emphasizes those higher education students who are experiencing high levels of distress tend to have poor academic performance. For criminology students, poor critical thinking does not only affect academic performance but also hinder future professional competence in law enforcement, investigation, and criminal justice practice. Therefore, examining the relationship between psychological distress and critical thinking disposition is crucial.

The concern has becoming even more significant in a broader global and national mental health context. World Health Organization (2022), reported that leading causes of disability among adults are depression and anxiety. Several studies also using Kessler Psychological Distress Scale indicated that university students signified significant levels of psychological distress (Kessler et al, 2003). In the Philippines, there have been increasing mental health concerns which pave the way for the enactment of Republic Act 11036. This statistics also correlate that like other university population, criminology students also face substantial psychological distress that affect academic functioning.

With a larger mental health lens, it is essential to investigate the different dimensions that shape both psychological distress and critical thinking disposition among criminology students. Several factors may influence these constructs: coping strategies, resilience, academic stability, and intellectual engagement. Other factors which include peer support, academic climate, school services also contribute to student well-being. Kessler et. Al. (2002), suggested that decreased motivation and reduced cognitive engagement are associated with high levels of distress. These findings imply a potential association between psychological distress and critical thinking disposition among criminology students.

For better understanding of the different constructs it is essential to define both psychological distress and critical thinking disposition. Psychological distress as defined by APA (2013) is an emotional state mostly marked by symptoms associated with depression and anxiety. For criminology students, distress may bear from academic requirements, training difficulties, and career expectations. Stallman (2010) presented that elevated distress are associated with impaired cognitive functioning such as reasoning, concentration, and judgement. Provided that criminology students focus on analytical evaluation, rational judgement, psychological distress may significantly influence students' intellectual engagement and thinking disposition.

Contrastingly, Facione (1990) defined critical thinking disposition as habitual inclination of applying critical thinking skills. This ability is considered as essential among criminology students considering the nature of their work, evaluating criminal evidence, interpreting laws, and making ethical decisions. However, emotional stability is with equal importance in maintaining efficient reasoning and reflective thinking. Paul & Elder (2008) emphasized that intellectual perseverance require emotional regulation which might be compromised in the presence of psychological distress

Despite the associations of the different theoretical and empirical links between emotional functioning and cognitive processes, there are still few researches linking between the two variables. Most existing researches focus on general university populations than focusing one professional program that demand strong analytical reasoning. Furthermore, there is also a scarcity in terms of local studies exploring this relationship.

In the Philippines, criminology students are trained for criminal justice and investigation, and law enforcement. This academic program requires application of logical reasoning and ethical analysis. However, the presence of psychological distress interfere critical thinking disposition, hence, understanding the relationship between the two among criminology students can provide guidance in terms of support services and improvements in the academic program.

In Negros Oriental State University Bais Campuses I & II, greater number of criminology students are being referred to the Guidance Office which common concerns include behavioral issues, academic difficulties, stress, absenteeism, conflicts with peers, and adjustment-related concerns. The growing numbers of referrals from the College of Criminal Justice Education implied that students may experience psychological and

emotional pressures steering from the demands and nature of their profession. Considering that criminology students are expected to develop sound judgment, emotional stability, and strong critical thinking skills as future law enforcement professionals, there is a need to examine the factors that may affect the psychological well-being and cognitive disposition of the students.

Thus, this study aims to examine the correlation between critical thinking disposition and psychological distress among criminology students in Negros Oriental State University Bais Campuses I & II during the academic year 2025–2026. Specifically, it seeks to determine the levels of psychological distress and critical thinking disposition among criminology students and to examine the correlation between the two variables and assess its significance. The findings may serve as a key for developing integrated mental health and cognitive skills development tailored specifically for criminology students.

Theoretical Background

This study is grounded on established theories explaining **psychological distress** and **critical thinking disposition**. Specifically, it draws from Cognitive Theory, Cognitive Appraisal Theory, Dual Appraisal Theory, and Self Regulated Learning Theory supported by relevant Philippine legal frameworks, namely Republic Act No. 9258 and Republic Act No. 11036.

Cognitive Theory developed by Beck explained the idea that psychological distress arise from maladaptive patterns and distorted cognitive schema which also emphasized that automatic negative thoughts and dysfunctional beliefs significantly contribute to anxiety and depressive symptoms. (Clark & Beck, 2019). Individuals interpret situations through cognitive filters which include emotional and behavioural responses as intensified by the Cognitive behavioural framework (Beck, 2020). Psychological distress, which then include emotional and physiological symptoms which resulted from distorted appraisals. Researches continue to validate the role of maladaptive cognition in terms of anxiety and depression predictively among students (Cohen et al., 2016). Thus, the concept of Cognitive Theory provides profound conceptual bases for understanding psychological distress.

Beck's Cognitive Theory further exemplifies students' heightened psychological distress may be developed due to distorted and irrational beliefs on academic demands. For an instance, catastrophizing academic failures and overgeneralizing downfalls may intensify stress reactions. Beck's theoretical perspectives support the assumption that maladaptive cognition influences emotional well-being among students. Some studies show that cognitive restructuring interventions effectively lower distress levels, providing additional support for the theory's relevance. Within this context, psychological distress can be affected by the way students interpret and assess academic and environmental challenges. Cognitive Theory plays a crucial role in explaining the processes behind psychological distress and its possible connection to critical thinking disposition.

This concept suggested that distorted thinking not only increases psychological distress but may also hinder the development of critical thinking disposition, as both rely on rational and reflective cognitive processes. Students experiencing persistent negative thoughts, emotional instability and maladaptive patterns may have difficulty in making fair and sound judgment, problem solving, and being objective. In comparison, students who are capable of regulating their emotions are more likely to demonstrate openness, cognitive maturity, and logical reasoning. This perspective supports the assumption that psychological distress may influence how students process information, evaluate situations, and make decisions.

On the other hand, the Cognitive Appraisal Theory of Richard Lazarus (1991) explains that emotional responses arise from an individual's evaluation or appraisal of environmental stressors. The theory highlights two important processes: primary appraisal, which involves evaluating whether a situation is threatening or significant, and secondary appraisal, which involves assessing one's coping resources and ability to manage the situation. These appraisal processes require reflection, judgment, and evaluation, which are closely associated with critical thinking disposition. This variable involves an individual's willingness to engage in reflective reasoning, open-mindedness, and systematic analysis when confronted with problems or challenges.

The theory further suggests that the way individuals cognitively appraise stressful situations influences their emotional and psychological responses. Students who possess strong critical thinking disposition are more likely to assess academic challenges rationally, evaluate situations objectively, and utilize adaptive coping strategies rather than engage in catastrophic thinking. Studies have shown that adaptive cognitive appraisal contributes to better emotional regulation, reduced anxiety, and improved problem-solving abilities. In this study, cognitive appraisal is assumed to influence psychological distress, while critical thinking disposition enhances adaptive appraisal processes. Thus, the theory supports the study model by explaining how students' cognitive evaluations of stressors may affect their level of psychological distress and how critical thinking disposition serves as a protective factor in managing stressful academic experiences.

The Self-Regulated Learning Theory developed by Barry J. Zimmerman explains that learning is an active process wherein individuals regulate their thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and learning strategies to achieve academic goals. According to Zimmerman (2002), self-regulated learners are capable of setting goals, monitoring their progress, managing their motivation, and reflecting on their performance. The theory further emphasizes the interconnected three stages of self-regulation. The forethought phase which involves setting and planning goals, while, the performance phase includes the application of strategies and monitoring of actions. The third phase is the self-reflection phase which concerns on evaluating outcomes and adjusting approaches respectively. Effective self-regulation allows students to manage academic demands, maintain motivation, and cope with stressful situations in a productive manner.

In contrast, poor self-regulation, low perceived control, and ineffective coping strategies may contribute to psychological distress among students. Learners who struggle to manage their emotions, behaviors, and academic responsibilities are likely to experience stress, anxiety, frustration, and feelings of helplessness. Psychological distress may also negatively affect students' ability to think critically, make rational decisions, and engage in reflective thinking processes. In relation to this study, Self-Regulated Learning Theory provides a relevant framework in terms of understanding how students' ability to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and coping behaviors may influence both their psychological distress and critical thinking disposition. Criminology students who possess strong self-regulation skills are more likely to manage academic challenges effectively, maintain emotional stability, and demonstrate higher levels of engagement, cognitive maturity, and innovativeness despite stressful situations.

Cognitive Theory describes the internal thought patterns that contribute to psychological distress while Cognitive Appraisal Theory describes how evaluative cognitive processes influence emotional reactions. Self-Regulated Learning Theory theory emphasizes self-regulation leads to setting goals, monitoring their progress, managing their motivation, and reflecting on their performance. Together, these frameworks emphasize the central role of cognition in both factors, offering a comprehensive theoretical basis for exploring the connection between psychological distress and critical thinking disposition.

Supporting these theoretical concepts are the different legal bases that will provide more propounding and substantial framework of the study. Republic Act 9258 or the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004 was enacted to professionalize the practice of Guidance and Counseling in the Philippines which mandate to provide competent counselling services in educational institutions. This ensures promoting holistic development and mental well-being of students. The law provided emphasis on the implementation of preventive and developmental guidance programs addressing emotional, academic and psychosocial concerns of students. Provisions of this act also directly support initiatives aimed at identifying and managing psychological distress among students.

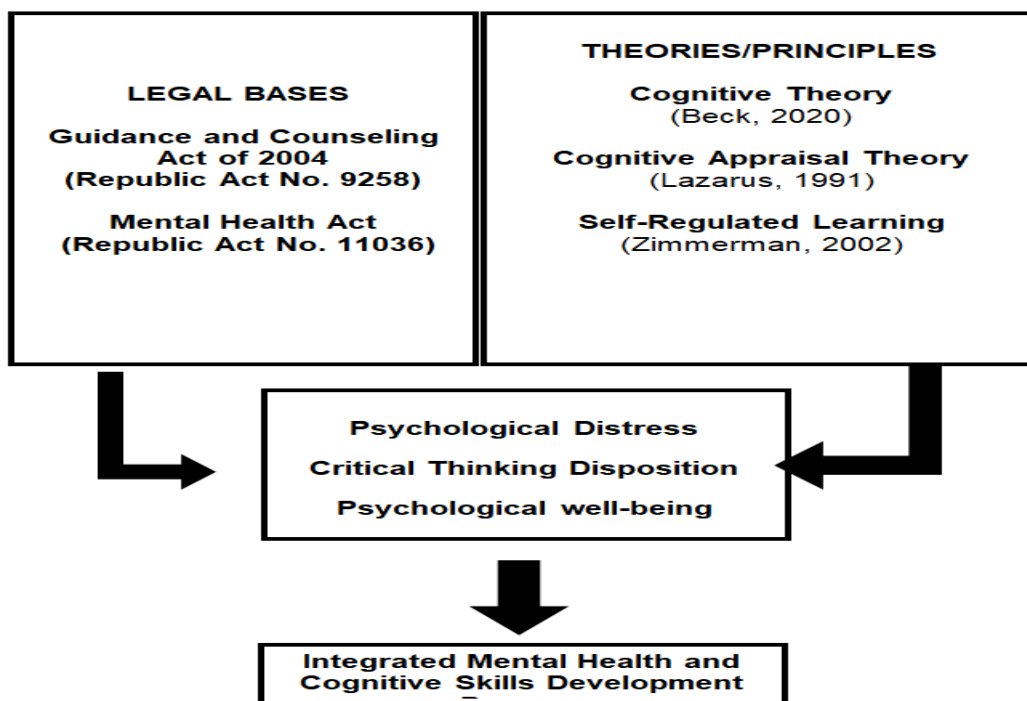
RA 9258 also justifies the intent of the study, examining the psychological distress and critical thinking disposition, as guidance counselors are tasked to implement programs that target students' holistic development. Educational institutions, such as universities, have a responsibility to offer support systems that address students' mental health needs. Producing empirical evidence, this study can guide the creation of organized counseling and intervention programs.

Another legal base is the Republic Act 11036, Philippine Mental Health Act 2018, which aims to enhance accessibility to comprehensive and integrated mental health services in the country. The act promotes mental

health education, prevention strategies and early interventions in schools. This law underscores the essence of promoting mental well-being and protecting individuals from psychological conditions. The law aligns with this study's objectives by encouraging evidence-based mental health initiatives and research in academic settings.

The law supports the integration of behavioral and cognitive development by encouraging educational institutions to implement programs that foster resilience, emotional regulation, coping skills, reflective thinking, and positive decision-making among students. These competencies are closely associated with critical thinking disposition, particularly in terms of engagement, cognitive maturity, and innovativeness. In relation to this study, Republic Act No. 11036 supports the need to examine psychological distress and critical thinking disposition among criminology students, as future law enforcement professionals are expected to demonstrate both mental stability and sound cognitive judgment. Thus, the law aligns with the objectives of the study by advocating evidence-based mental health initiatives and integrated student development programs that promote both psychological well-being and cognitive growth in academic environments.

These laws have provided strong policy framework in terms of assessing psychological distress and critical thinking disposition among students. RA 9258 mandates professional guidance services within education institutions, whilst, RA 11036 institutionalizes mental health promotion and research. Both these legal frameworks justify the implementation of the intent of the study strengthening cognitive and emotional well-being.



Statement Of The Problem

This research determined the level of **psychological distress** and **critical thinking disposition** among Bachelor of Science Criminology Students of **Negros Oriental State University, Bais Campuses I & II** during the **Academic Year 2025-2026** as bases for a proposed integrated mental health and cognitive skills development. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:

1.1. age;

1.2. sex;

1.3. SHS Track/ Strand; and

- 1.4. persons they live with
2. What is the respondents' level of **Psychological Distress**?
3. What is the respondents' level of **Critical Thinking Disposition** in terms of:
 - 3.1. Engagement;
 - 3.2. Cognitive Maturity; and
 - 3.3. Innovativeness?
4. Is there a significant relationship between **Psychological Distress** and **Critical Thinking Disposition**?
5. Based on the findings of the study, what integrated mental health and cognitive skills development can be formulated?

Null Hypothesis

This study is set on a 0.05 level of significance and stated as follows:

H0: There is no significant relationship between **Psychological Distress** and **Critical Thinking Disposition**

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for the following:

Negros Oriental State University.

The results of the study will provide substantial information in terms of the development of mental health programs, student-support services, and academic enhancement activities. The paper will also serve as basis for future policies that will promote psychological well-being and cognitive development among higher education students.

Dean, Faculty, & Staff of the College of Criminal Justice Education.

The findings of the study will provide valuable insights to the dean, faculty members, and staff in terms of understanding the psychological challenges of criminology students and how these influence critical thinking disposition. This awareness will provide support in the development classroom interventions, mentoring programs, teaching strategies and guidance services that foster both emotional resilience and higher-order thinking skills.

Criminology Students. The study will increase students' awareness in terms of the impact of psychological distress toward their cognitive functioning that includes decision making and academic performance. This will encourage the students to practice self-care including proper stress management and proactively cultivate critical thinking skills which are all crucial for law enforcement, public safety, and criminal justice profession.

Researcher. As a counselor educator, this study will allow the researcher to have in-depth knowledge in relation to the context of psychological distress and critical thinking within the framework of criminal justice education. This will also strengthen research competencies and provide practical insights relevant to student development and academic support services.

Future Researchers. The results of this study served as a reference for future researchers who will be conducting studies dealing with variables similar to this undertaking.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a detailed description and discussion of the research design, study flow, respondents, environment, instrument, data gathering procedure, statistical treatment, and scoring procedures.

Design

The study utilized a quantitative research employing descriptive and correlational methods. Specifically, the research intended to identify the demographic profile of the respondents, their level of psychological distress, and extent of critical thinking disposition in terms of engagement, cognitive maturity, and innovativeness of the respondents. Moreover, the research tested the significant relationship between the respondents' psychological distress and critical thinking disposition. Additionally, the relationship analysis sought to determine whether the respondents' level of psychological distress significantly affects or is associated with their critical thinking disposition across the identified dimensions.

This methodological approach is appropriate given the nature and objectives of the study. Quantitative research enables the systematic measurement and analysis of variables through numerical data, thereby establishing patterns, trends, and relationships objectively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, psychological distress served as the independent variable, while critical thinking disposition served as the dependent variable. The descriptive method was employed to describe the characteristics, behaviors, and conditions of the respondents as they naturally occur without manipulation, while the correlational method is employed to identify the degree of the relationship between the variables under investigation (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019).

Furthermore, this study utilized the universal sampling method to ensure comprehensive coverage of the target population. Universal sampling refers to the inclusion of all members of a defined population who meet the criteria of the study (Laerd Dissertation, 2023). In this study, a population of 202 criminology students from Negros Oriental State University were included as respondents. This approach allowed the researcher to gather data from the entire population of interest and comprehensively analyzed the respondents' level of psychological distress and critical thinking disposition, as well as the correlation between these variables.

Flow of the study

The first stage determined the input of the study, which refers to the needed information based on the variables considered. Such included the profile, the level of psychological distress in terms of bodily stress responses, depressive manifestations, fatigue and loss of energy and psychological strain and level of critical thinking disposition in terms of engagement, cognitive maturity, and innovativeness.

The second stage is the process of the study. This process incorporated the following tasks: the researcher transmitted the necessary documentation before data gathering, including the letter allowing the study's conduct and the respondents' consent form. After approval, the researcher began distributing the questionnaire to the respondents to ensure that all parts of the questionnaire would be completed. The researcher then proceeded to tallying, organizing, summarizing, interpreting, and analyzing the data results. Appropriate statistical tools were used in the treatment of data.

The last stage was the formulation of the output of the study. A guidance and counseling development program focused on integrated mental health and cognitive skills development was proposed to address the needs of the first year criminology students of Negros Oriental State University.

Environment

This study was conducted at Negros Oriental State University (NORSU), Bais Campuses I and II. The external campus is consisted of two sub-campus situated within Bais City, Negros Oriental. Campus I is located in Barangay San Jose, while Campus II is situated along Taveras Street, both serving students from Bais City and neighboring municipalities. The school was established in 1972 with a former name of Bais School of

Fisheries. The institution has significantly developed and expanded through the years into a comprehensive state university campus under the Negros Oriental State University system. The campus is approximately 40 kilometers north of Dumaguete City and continues to provide accessible and quality tertiary education to students in the northern part of Negros Oriental.

Negros Oriental State University Bais Campuses I and II offer a variety of undergraduate programs, including the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, Bachelor of Arts in General Curriculum, Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education, and Bachelor of Science in Criminology. Among these programs, the Bachelor of Science in Criminology has consistently attracted a growing number of students due to the increasing demand for professionals in the fields of law enforcement, public safety, criminal justice, and security services. The campus environment provides an appropriate setting for this study because criminology students are exposed to academic and practical training that requires critical thinking, emotional resilience, discipline, and decision-making skills. These characteristics make the institution a suitable locale for examining the relationship between psychological distress and critical thinking disposition among criminology students.

Respondents

The respondents of this study were 202 Bachelor of Science in Criminology students of Negros Oriental State University Bais Campuses I & II. Table 1 presented the distribution of the respondents' population. The respondents came from different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and senior high school strands prior to entering the Criminology program. In addition, universal sampling was employed, wherein Criminology students enrolled during the Academic Year 2025–2026 were included in the study. Respondents were selected considering the nature of their profession requiring strong critical thinking skills, sound decision-making, emotional resilience, and the ability to cope with stressful and challenging situations. These students, being at the law enforcement and criminal justice profession, they are expected to demonstrate high objectivity, logical reasoning, and emotional stability in terms of dealing problems.

Instrument

The research instrument employed in the study is consisted of three parts designed to gather necessary data from the respondents.

Part I. Profile of the Respondents. The first part focused on the demographic profile of the respondents, that included, age, sex, SHS Track/ Strand, person they live with and number of siblings. This part aimed at describing the background characteristics of the respondents.

Part II. Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) is a standardized instrument which measures state of psychological distress. The instrument is composed of ten questions which involve emotional states with a five-level response scale and is used to screen levels of distress.

The response categories of the 10-item likert scale are as follow: (1) none of the time, (2) a little of the time, (3) some of the time, (4) most of the time, and (5) all of the time. Each of the items is scored from one to five, wherein, the total score is obtained from summing all the responses from the items. The item scores from 10 as being the lowest to 50 as the highest. A lower score directly correlates to lower levels of psychological distress, while, higher scores indicate higher level of psychological distress. Kessler et al (2003), provided the interpretation of the scores which as follow: if a person gets 10-19 it interpreted as likely to be well, 20-24 signifies mild disorder, 25-29 indicates moderate disorder, and 30-35 with a severe disorder.

Part III. Critical Thinking Disposition. The Critical Thinking Disposition of Rickets & Rudd (2005) is developed to assess a person's ability to engage in critical thinking. The instrument consists of items grouped into three dimensions: Engagement, which reflects active involvement in reasoning and problem-solving; Maturity, which denotes awareness of complexity and openness to diverse perspectives; and Innovativeness, which represents intellectual curiosity and openness to new ideas.

The five-point likert scale has the following response categories: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The tool measures the respondent's level of agreement with the given statements. To obtain the scores per dimension, responses under each subscale are summed, and the total critical thinking disposition score is computed by adding all the total scores of all the items. The interpretation of the scores is as follow: 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.

Data Gathering Procedure

Preliminary Stage. The researcher submitted a formal letter of request to the Campus Director seeking permission to conduct the study. Following the approval, the researcher arranged with the Dean of the College of Criminal Justice Education for the schedule of the dissemination of the survey questionnaire.

Data Gathering Stage.

The researcher conducted an orientation on the important details of the study such as the purpose, the different procedures, and the measures to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents. After the orientation, the researcher then administered the examination providing clearer instructions in terms of answering the assessment tool. The respondents were also given assistance and enough time was provided until completion. The retrieval of the survey questionnaire followed after.

Post Data Gathering Stage.

The generated data were statistically interpreted, summarized, organized, and analysed. An Integrated Mental Health and Cognitive Skills Development program was proposed to address the needs of the Criminology students of Negros Oriental State University Bais Campuses I and II.

Statistical Treatment of the Data

After data collection, all generated data were interpreted and analyzed using different statistical tools with the guidance of a statistician. To attain reliable results, the following statistical tools were used:

Frequency Count. This tool was used to determine the number of characteristics in which the respondents fell in the same category particularly in the profile.

Percentage. This tool was utilized to determine the proportion of the respondents within a given category in relation to the total number of respondents correspondingly on their specific profile.

Weighted Mean. This statistic was used to numerically describe the perceived level of seminary formation development and the quality of the discernment practice of the respondents and its interpretation based on the descriptive rating.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC). This measurement was used to test the significance of the relationship of the level of psychological distress and cognitive thinking disposition of the respondents.

Scoring Procedure

Data that were collected through survey questionnaires were calculated and interpreted according to the following procedures:

To determine the respondents' perceive level of psychological distress the following numerical and descriptive ratings were used:

To determine the extent of critical thinking disposition, the following numerical and descriptive ratings will be used:

Definition Of Terms

To ensure a better comprehension of the concepts used in the study, the following terms are defined respectively.

Bodily Response. This pertains to the physiological reactions associated with psychological or emotional experiences, such as increased heart rate, muscle tension, fatigue, sweating, or changes in sleep patterns, which may occur as manifestations of stress or distress.

Cognitive Maturity. This is the ability of an individual to recognize the complexity of issues, consider multiple perspectives, tolerate ambiguity, and make reflective and well-reasoned judgments. It is a component of critical thinking disposition.

Critical Thinking Disposition. This is the sustained internal motivation or willingness of an individual to engage in reflective, analytical, and open-minded thinking when confronted with problems or decisions. This also emphasizes the ability to apply critical thinking skills rather than the skills themselves.

Depressive Manifestations. These are observable symptoms associated with symptoms of depression specifically prolonged sadness, lack of interest or pleasure, state of hopelessness, low energy, and difficulty concentrating.

Emotional Regulation. This is the ability to monitor, manage, and appropriately respond to emotional experiences in order to maintain psychological balance and adaptive functioning.

Intellectual Curiosity. This refers to the desire to seek new knowledge, explore unfamiliar ideas, and engage in learning activities. It is a trait associated with openness and innovativeness in critical thinking disposition.

Psychological Distress. This is a condition of emotional turmoil characterized by signs of anxiety, stress, and depressive tendencies that may impair an individual's cognitive, behavioral, and social functioning.

Psychological Strain. This is a mental and emotional tension experienced when individuals perceive that environmental demands exceed their coping resources, often resulting in stress-related symptoms.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

The following presents a synthesis of relevant literature that provides empirical foundations for examining the relationship between psychological distress and critical thinking disposition among first-year criminology students of Negros Oriental State University Bais Campuses I & II. Through this synthesis, the chapter identifies existing knowledge, highlights research gaps, and establishes the rationale for the present investigation.

Related Literature

Psychological distress has remained a growing concern globally including higher education institutions. Findings from the World Health Organization (2022) indicated that prevalent among college students are manifestations of depression and anxiety. The same research statistics from across countries indicated significant portions of college students meeting criteria for at least one common mental disorder. (Auerbach et al., 2018). Psychological distress has been linked with poor academic performance, impaired concentration, and reduced cognitive efficiency. Report from the American College Health Association (2023) further affirmed that states of anxiety, stress, and depression are among the primary barriers to students' academic success.

From a conceptual standpoint, university students are exposed to continuous evaluative pressures, performance expectations, and future career uncertainties that may contribute to emotional strain. Within cognitive frameworks, prolonged distress is understood to affect executive processes such as attention control, working

memory, and reasoning. Maladaptive cognitive appraisals may intensify emotional reactions and interfere with rational judgment (Beck, 2020).

Provided psychological distress has been influencing cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, decision-making processes, and critical thinking disposition, it is very important to recognize the importance of reflective and analytical reasoning.

Critical thinking disposition, on the other hand has been a core attribute in the higher education institution. Contemporary findings highlight critical thinking development requires both skills and dispositional components (Dwyer, 2017). The concept has been grounded in the idea that effective reasoning depends not only on cognitive competence but also on an individual's habitual inclination to apply such competence across competence.

Educators greatly emphasize that intellectual curiosity, open mindedness and reflective scepticism are important incorporation of technical skills for analysis. Furthermore, recent educational frameworks position critical thinking disposition as a protective academic factor that supports adaptive learning behaviors, resilience in complex problem-solving situations, and sound decision-making in professional preparation programs (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019). Thus, within higher education, critical thinking disposition is widely regarded as a foundational attribute that integrates cognitive rigor with reflective judgment.

The literature suggests that psychological well-being and cognitive processes are interconnected. Emotional distress can impair executive functioning, reasoning, and decision-making due to cognitive overload and attention disruption. Individuals who demonstrate stronger reflective and analytical dispositions may be better equipped to regulate maladaptive thoughts and cope with stress.

Related Studies

The following presents empirical studies related to psychological distress and critical thinking disposition providing fact-based foundation for the present research and to identify existing research gaps.

The study of Auerbach and his colleagues examined first year university students across countries utilizing several diagnostic assessments that assessed common mental disorders that include anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and suicidal behaviors. The findings revealed that substantial proportion of students identified to meet criteria for at least one mental disorder, and some having number of cases before entering university. The research demonstrated that psychological distress was strongly associated with significant role impairment particularly in social relationships, academic performance, and daily functioning. The researchers also emphasized that despite the high prevalence rates, a large treatment gap exists, as many affected students do not seek or receive adequate mental health services. (Auerbach et al., 2018)

Eisenberg et al (2016), on the other hand, conducted a study in the United States examining trends in mental health among college students, highlighting the increasing prevalence of anxiety and depressive symptoms. Their study highlighted that a substantial proportion of students experienced significant psychological distress, with little amount of treatment. The study also demonstrated that untreated mental health problems had been strongly associated with lower grade point averages, increased risk for dropping out, and reduced academic persistence. The authors also emphasized that psychological distress not only affect students' mental well-being but also undermines their academic routes, reinforcing the need for institutional mental health support.

The research titled, Effects of Covid-19 on College Students' Mental Health in the United States: Interview Survey Sty by Son et. Al 2020, investigated the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on university students. Respondents were 195 university students from a public university whose findings revealed significant increases in stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms among the respondents. The participants reported difficulties in concentrating, disrupted sleep patterns, academic performance frailties, and career problems. The abrupt transition to online learning and social isolation intensified feelings of inability and emotional strain. The study emphasized that situational stressors and environmental uncertainty can

intensify students' underlying vulnerabilities, highlighting how external crises can increase psychological distress and impair cognitive and academic performance.

The study on the Psychological Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic on College Students in China by Cao et al (2020), scrutinized the anxiety levels among 7, 143 college students from various universities in China. Their research provided common predictors of psychological distress were concerns relating to financial difficulties, academic challenges, and family members' health condition. The research also emphasized that when available coping strategies were overwhelmed with perceived demands, anxiety levels tend to increase. Students also with economic frailties and graduation uncertainty were most likely to report moderate to severe anxiety. These findings support the notion that emotional distress in higher education settings is significantly influenced by socioeconomic and academic pressures.

Huckins et al (2020), in their study Mental Health and Behavior of College Students during the Early Phases of COVID-19 Pandemic investigated the psychological well-being of the undergraduate college students utilizing smartphone sensing technology to longitudinally monitor behavioural changes during campus lockdowns. The participants were university students whose mobility patterns, phone usage, and daily activities were passively monitored and combined with their self-reported mental health assessments. The study presented that heightened anxiety and depressive symptoms were linked to increased sedentary behaviour, reduced mobility, and increased phone usage. Self-reported measures additionally verified a decline in mental health during times of social restriction. Combining passive sensing data with psychological assessments, the study offered objective proof that environmental stressors like isolation and disruption of routine directly affect student well-being, demonstrating the dynamic relationship between contextual changes and psychological distress.

Moreover, the research of Ibraim et al (2016), provided a systematic review concerning the global prevalence of depression among university students. The study revealed increased depression level higher than being observed in the general population. The review attributed to vulnerability to financial stress, social adjustment, academic pressures and developmental transitions. The authors emphasized that university period represent a critical stage where mental health disorder may first emerge. Authors' conclusion stresses that psychological distress is persistent and widespread issue in the higher education that requires systematic prevention and intervention strategies.

The World Health Organization (2022) also posited that young adults particularly in the tertiary education often faced heightened risks for psychological distress with anxiety and depressive symptoms. The report expounded developmental transitions, identity formation, academic competition, and socioeconomic uncertainties contributing vulnerability during late adolescence and early adulthood. Psychological distress has been a public health concern and an educational issue creating an impact on productivity, learning capacity, and a long-term life outcome.

Another study of Stallman (2016), Psychological Distress in University Students: A Comparison with General Population Data, abstracted psychological distress in university settings as a population level phenomenon rather than an individual pathology. The participants were Australian university students with states of psychological distress being compared to the overall population using standardized mental health outcomes. Stallman postulated that institutional demands such as heavy academic workloads, competitive grading systems, and financial pressures supersede students' coping strategies. She further proposed a framework suggesting that distress arises from a mismatch between environmental demands and available support services. This perspective shifts from individual to structural and context paradigms, highlighting the importance of schools in shaping mental health outcomes.

Another study of Bewick et. Al. (2017), Changes in Undergraduate Students' Psychological Well-Being as They Progress through University, assessed fluctuations in psychological distress across academic terms. The findings with the undergraduate respondents revealed that stress levels typically peaked during examination and assessment periods. Academic workload, deadlines, and performance expectations were recognized as major factors contributing to emotional strain. The recurring nature of distress indicates that academic structures may amplify psychological vulnerability at predictable times, highlighting the direct link between academic pressures and students' emotional well-being.

Furthermore, the American College Health Association (2023), consistently reports that primary impediments to academic success among college students are psychological states of anxiety, depression, and stress. The report revealed that many students have interfered concentration, class attendance and academic engagement due to overwhelming anxiety and persistent feelings of sadness. The findings emphasize the significant link between psychological distress and lower academic performance, course withdrawal, and diminished motivation. The report underscores the critical need to enhance campus mental health programs to support both student well-being and academic success.

Other related studies covering the concept of critical thinking disposition, as another variable of the study are provided in the succeeding context. The study of Dwyer (2017), conceptualized critical thinking as a multidimensional construct composing both cognitive skills and dispositional components. Dwyer argued that reasoning skills alone is insufficient, individuals must also possess motivation, willingness, and habitual inclination to utilize these skills once confront with decisions. He further added that critical thinking disposition involves tendencies of open-mindedness, perseverance and a commitment to reflective judgement. His framework emphasizes that higher-order thinking is not just a technical skill but also a reflection of intellectual character. Therefore, disposition acts as a fundamental factor that influences whether students actively participate in analytical reasoning, especially in challenging academic fields.

Buttler (2017), in his study, *The Effect on Critical Thinking: A Meta-Analysis*, investigated the proficiency of instructional interventions targeted to enhancing critical thinking among students across higher education settings. Findings indicated that explicit and thoughtfully structured instructional methods especially those incorporating active learning, problem-based tasks, and formative feedback greatly enhanced students' critical thinking abilities. Butler highlighted that these educational strategies not only bolster cognitive skills but also nurture the disposition to think critically. The results indicate that critical thinking disposition is adaptable and can be cultivated through deliberate teaching practices, underscoring the vital role of higher education institutions in promoting both the capacity and motivation for reflective reasoning.

Another study of Ku & Ho (2019), *Metacognitive Strategies that Enhance Critical Thinking* examined the association between metacognition and critical thinking among university respondents. The study further, investigated students' ability to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own thinking patterns influencing analytical engagement. Findings revealed that students demonstrating higher levels of reflective awareness were more inclined to exhibit critical thinking disposition. The authors also connected disposition to self-regulated learning, noting that learners who actively manage their cognitive processes are more likely to tackle problems with curiosity, persistence, and openness. This study underscores the strong relationship between metacognitive competence and the growth of critical thinking disposition within higher education settings.

Halpern (2018), also emphasized the critical thinking disposition encompasses traits of intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness, and willingness to transfer learning across contexts. The author further emphasized that motivation also plays a major role in determining whether individuals apply their thinking skills beyond familiar situations. According to Halpern, even highly developed reasoning skills go underused without a disposition for inquiry and reflection. Her research emphasizes that fostering students' willingness to question assumptions, seek evidence, and consider alternatives is just as crucial as teaching logical analysis.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019), with its framework, acknowledged critical thinking as a core competent for traversing complex and uncertain global environments. The framework stresses reflective judgement, ethical reasoning, and responsible decision-making important for future-ready graduates. This highlights that beyond technical knowledge, students must develop the disposition to evaluate information critically, challenge biases, and engage in thorough discussion. This perspective is fundamental key outcome of modern education system.

Tiruneh et al (2016), on the other hand, in their study *Effectiveness of Critical Thinking Instruction in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Intervention Studies* postulated that problem-based learning and structured reasoning activities significantly improves both critical thinking skills and disposition. The study demonstrated that when reasoning tasks are embedded into coursework, students perform better analytically and showed

increased willingness to engage in critical inquiry. The findings support the idea that academic context plays a crucial role in shaping students' disposition toward analytical thinking.

The findings of the study, Relationship between Academic Engagement, Cognitive Flexibility and Critical Thinking Disposition Among University Students by Ren et al (2020), stressed that academic engagement, and cognitive flexibility were significant contributors to stronger critical thinking disposition. The researchers discovered that academic engagement and cognitive flexibility played key roles in enhancing critical thinking. Proactive students who actively engaged in learning activities and showed the ability to adjust their thinking strategies in response to new information were more likely to possess a stronger tendency toward critical analysis. These findings indicate that engagement and cognitive adaptability promote a mindset conducive to reflective judgment and evaluative reasoning in higher education settings.

The study of Fong et al (2017), The Effectiveness of Critical Thinking Instruction: A Meta-Analysis synthesized that targeted instructional strategies significantly increase critical thinking performance and students' attitudinal disposition toward critical thinking. The results intensify perspective that critical thinking is not merely innate trait but a competency that can be systematically developed through structured instruction. Fong and colleagues further highlighted that continuous practice, active involvement, and guided reflection are crucial for developing lasting critical thinking dispositions.

Another study of Carvalho et al (2018), highlighted the importance of reflective classroom dialogue in fostering open mindedness among university students. The study revealed that critical thinking disposition develops when students engage in structured discussions that encourage questioning, justification and alternative of viewpoints. The findings highlight that social interaction and collaborative inquiry can enhance intellectual humility and analytical engagement.

The study of Karakus (2024) also reported a strong association of cognitive flexibility and critical thinking disposition. Findings revealed that students who can demonstrate adaptability in shifting perspectives and revising judgments are more inclined to analytical reasoning. Cognitive flexibility allows individuals to explore various perspectives and modify their thinking based on new information, thereby enhancing their inclination toward reflective and rational decision-making. This study highlights adaptability as a crucial psychological element that supports critical thinking tendencies.

The literature review presented a comprehensive discussion of the relevance of examining relationship between psychological distress and critical thinking disposition among students. These literatures explored theoretical concepts on psychological distress, focusing on cognitive, emotional, and behavioural implications in higher education. Likewise, the three dimensions of critical thinking disposition: engagement, innovativeness, and cognitive maturity which are fundamental to reflective judgement and sound decision-making were discussed. The review of related highlighted the significant findings on both constructs, providing a profound understanding how psychological distress may influence students' inclination to think critically. In light of the existing literature, the present study aimed to examine in more detail the interaction between psychological distress and critical thinking disposition.

Presentation, Data Analysis, And Interpretation

This chapter underscores the generated data on the profile, level of psychological distress, and extent of critical thinking disposition among the respondents. The significance between the correlation of psychological distress and critical thinking disposition was also examined. Provided the results of the survey questionnaire, the different findings of the study are presented below:

Profile Of The Respondents

This section provides information about the profile of the respondents in terms of their age, gender, person whom they live with, and senior high school track and strand.

Age of the respondents

Table 2 Age of the respondents

Age	f	%
18-20	169	83.66
21-23	29	14.36
24-26	3	1.49
27-29	1	0.50
Total	202	100.00

Table 2 illustrated the distribution of the respondents in terms of age. The majority of the respondents belong to the 18-20 age range, accounting for 83.66% of the total sample. The second-largest group is the 21-23 age range, representing 14.36 % of the respondents. The third-largest group fall within 24-26 age bracket, corresponding to 1. 49 %. Lastly, respondents age 27-29 make up only .50% of the sample.

The data in Table 2 indicated that majority of the respondents fall within late adolescence to early adulthood stage which are characterized with cognitive, emotional, and social growth. At this onset, students are expected to develop further their cognitive abilities particularly applying critical mindedness. On the other note, individuals at this period may also experience personal pressures leading to psychological distress. Arnett (2000), further emphasized that emerging to adulthood entails identity exploration, instability, and adjustment to increasing responsibilities which can affect a person's emotional well-being and cognitive disposition.

Sex of the respondents

Table 3 Sex of the respondents

Sex	f	%
Male	115	56.93
Female	87	43.07
Total	202	100.00

Table 3 presented the sex distribution of the respondents. The majority were males, comprising 115 respondents or 56.93% of the total sample. Meanwhile, female respondents accounted for 43.07%, totaling 87 respondents.

The findings of the study revealed common trend in criminology programs, which are dominated by male primarily due to the nature of their work which is associated with law enforcement and public safety. Despite the statistics in terms of gender, both can still be prone with psychological stress coming from rigorous training, academic demands, and future career expectations. Ware et.al emphasized that criminology students are vulnerable to mental health due to exposure to crime-related topics and emotionally demanding experiences affecting overall well-being.

Senior High School Track/ Strand of The Respondents

Table4 Respondents' track/strand

Track/Strand	F	%
GAS	15	7.43

ABM	38	18.81
HUMSS	142	70.30
TVL	7	3.47
Total	202	100.00

The distribution of the respondents in terms of senior high school track and strand revealed that the majority belonged to the Humanities and Social Sciences strand, with 142 respondents. This number was followed by the Accountancy, Business, and Management strand with 38 students, and the General Academic Strand with 15 criminology students. The least number of respondents generated from the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood strand, with only 7 respondents.

The findings suggested that greater number of the criminology students is from the Humanities and Social Sciences strand, indicating a strong foundation emphasizing social issues, behavior, communication, and critical thinking. The strand provided students with training on interpersonal and analytical skills which are relevant to understanding justice system and community engagements. Dagdag and Decano (2023) also emphasized that senior high school strand alignment also influence academic preparedness, learning adjustments, and performance in college programs.

Persons with Whom They The Respondents Live

Table 5 Persons whom the respondents live with

Persons living with	<i>F</i>	%
Living with both parents	140	69.31
Living with a single parent	26	12.87
Living with a Guardian	27	13.37
Living with siblings	7	3.47
Living alone	2	0.99
Total	202	100.00

The table presented the data of the respondents in terms of the people they live with. The majority are living under the same roof with their parents, totalling 140 respondents or 69.31%. This was followed by respondents living with a single parent, with a total of 26 respondents or 12.87%. Correspondingly, those living with a guardian came next, with 27 respondents or 13.37%. Respondents living with siblings comprised 7 respondents or 3.47%, while those living alone accounted for the lowest percentage, with 2 respondents or 0.99%.

The findings implied that most of the respondents belonged to family-oriented living arrangements, which particularly contributed to emotional, financial, and social support. Betro et. Al (2024), emphasized students living with family members often receive more support and guidance leading to better academic performance and social adjustment. Luo (2024), also stressed that students when provided enough affection can increase their behaviour, motivation, and overall well-being. This suggested that presence of parents and guardians presents significant stability and support affecting students' personal development.

Level of Psychological Distress of The Respondents

Table 6 Respondents' level of psychological distress

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel tired out of no reason?	2.20	0.95	Low
2	In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel nervous?	2.22	0.93	Low
3	In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down?	2.13	1.00	Low
4	In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel hopeless?	2.28	1.06	Low
5	In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel restless or fidgety?	2.31	0.99	Low
6	In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel so restless you could not sit still?	2.37	1.02	Low
7	In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel depressed?	2.44	1.06	Low
8	In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel that everything was an effort?	2.55	1.09	Low
9	In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?	2.40	1.07	Low
10	In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel worthless?	2.60	1.12	Low
	Aggregate Mean	2.35		Low
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		1.03	
Legend: 4.21-5.00-Very High; 3.41-4.20-High;2.61-3.40-Moderate; 1.81-2.60-Low;1.00-1.80-Very Low				

Table 6 revealed the respondents' level of psychological distress. The results highlighted the overall level of psychological distress which resulted to a mean of 2.35 reflecting a low score. Provided from the indicators, the item with the highest mean of 2.60 was, "In the past four week, about how often did you feel worthless?" The lowest mean of 2.55, was obtained in the item, "In the past four weeks, about how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down?" The findings indicate that although the respondents experienced certain manifestations of psychological distress which include feelings of sadness, nervousness, and restlessness, these experiences occurred at a generally low level.

The findings indicated that students experience occasional stress related feelings and able to maintain stable emotional and psychological states. According to the World Health Organization (2024), academic pressure, social adjustment, and personal challenges often lead to psychological distress. However, strong support system coming from loved ones and healthy coping mechanisms reduce the severity of psychological distress. Zhang et. Al. (2024), stressed that students who are less likely to experience psychological distress are those with adequate emotional support, resilience, and positive coping strategies. .

Level of Critical Thinking of The Respondents In Terms of Engagement, Cognitive Maturity, Innovativeness

Table 7 Respondents' level of critical thinking disposition in terms of engagement

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I am interested in many issues.	3.22	0.94	Moderate
2	I enjoy learning about my topics.	3.99	0.67	High
3	I ask a lot of questions in a learning environment	3.78	0.73	High
4	I enjoy finding answers to challenging questions.	3.83	0.71	High
5	I strive to be well-informed	3.79	0.75	High
6	I enjoy learning even when I am not in school	3.77	0.80	High
7	I am able to explain things clearly.	3.50	0.75	High
8	I ask good questions when trying to clarify a solution	3.84	0.70	High
9	I present issues in a clear and precise manner.	3.65	0.74	High
10	I keep on working on things until I get them right	4.07	0.71	High
11	I ask many questions when making a decision.	3.99	0.71	High
	Aggregate Mean	3.77		High
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.75	
Legend: 4.21-5.00-Very High; 3.41-4.20-High;2.61-3.40-Moderate; 1.81-2.60-Low;1.00-1.80-Very Low				

Table 7 presented the respondents' level of critical thinking disposition in terms of engagement. The data generated a mean of 3.77 which indicates high level of engagement. The indicator, "I keep on working on things until I get them right", has the highest weighted mean of 4.07. On the other hand, the statement "I am interested in many issues" obtained the lowest weighted mean of 3.22, analysed as moderate. Overall, the findings indicate that the respondents possess strong engagement in learning activities, curiosity, persistence, and active participation in decision-making and problem-solving processes.

The findings emphasized increased critical thinking engagement behaviour from the respondents. American Psychological Association (2024), stressed that engagement is an important dimension of critical thinking disposition since it focuses on willingness and active participation towards learning. This further emphasized on seeking questions, and dealing with decisions. A study by Li & Yang (2024), indicated that students who are more likely to demonstrate better analytical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and academic performance are those with high levels of engagement. This suggested that the respondents' strong engagement disposition may contribute positively to their academic achievement and decision-making skills.

Table 8 Respondents' level of critical thinking disposition in terms of cognitive maturity

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I listen carefully to the opinion of others even when they disagree with me	3.93	0.87	High
2	I am able to relate to a wide variety of issues.	3.35	0.75	Moderate

3	I am confident that I can reach a reasonable conclusion.	3.50	0.78	High
4	I am likely to change my opinion when I am given new information that conflicts with my current opinion.	3.79	0.74	High
5	I try to consider the facts and not let my biases affect my decision.	3.94	0.72	High
6	I can get along with people who do not share my opinions.	3.59	0.76	High
7	I consider how my own biases affect my opinions.	3.73	0.75	High
	Aggregate Mean	3.69		High
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.77	

Table 8 showed the respondents' level of critical thinking disposition in terms of cognitive maturity. The results revealed a mean of 3.69 indicating high level of cognitive maturity. The statement "I try to consider the facts and not let my biases affect my decision" obtained the highest weighted mean of 3.94, which described as high. On the other hand, the statement "I am able to relate to a wide variety of issues" obtained the lowest weighted mean of 3.35, verbally described as moderate. Overall, the findings indicate that the respondents possess the ability to think objectively, consider differing viewpoints, and reflect on their own biases when making decisions and forming opinions.

The results implied positive characteristics exhibited with cognitive maturity. Cognitive maturity emphasizes the ability to make sound and informed decisions, evaluate situations rationally, and discern multiple perspectives (APA, 2024). Students with high cognitive maturity are capable of adapting diverse viewpoints, resolving conflicts, engaging in sound decision making enabling them to become more rational and objective (Ramirez & Lee, 2024). This suggested that high level of cognitive maturity contribute to improve interpersonal relationships, academic performance, and critical decision making skills.

Table 9 Respondents' level of critical thinking disposition in terms of innovativeness

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	I look for opportunities to solve problem.	4.20	0.68	High
2	I am a good problem solver.	3.34	0.76	Moderate
3	I enjoy solving problems.	3.56	0.77	High
4	I am able to apply my knowledge to a wide variety of issues.	3.77	0.68	High
5	I search for the truth even when it makes me uncomfortable.	4.01	0.80	High
6	I will go out of my way to find the right answers to a problem.	3.95	0.74	High
7	I try to find multiple solutions to problems	3.90	0.69	High
8	I believe that most problems have more than one solution.	4.28	0.69	Very High
	Aggregate Mean	3.88		High
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		0.73	

Table 9 presented the respondents' level of critical thinking disposition in terms of innovativeness. The results revealed high level of innovativeness, as reflected by the aggregate mean of 3.88. Among the indicators, the statement "I believe that most problems have more than one solution" obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.28, verbally described as very high. Meanwhile, the statement "I am a good problem solver" obtained the lowest weighted mean of 3.34, interpreted as moderate. Overall, the generated data indicate that the respondents possess a strong inclination toward creativity, flexibility, and openness in addressing problems and seeking solutions.

The findings suggested that the respondents demonstrated strong innovative skills specifically on exploring different approaches and seeking effective solutions. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2024) stressed that innovativeness is an essential factor of critical thinking as it enables individuals to adapt to complex situations, generate ideas, and develop multiple solutions to problems. High level of innovativeness means also to be more creative, adaptable, and efficient problem-solver (Che & Martines, 2024). This suggested that the respondents' high level of innovativeness may contribute to their ability to think creatively, make sound decisions, and respond effectively to various challenges.

Summary on the Level of Critical Thinking Disposition

Table 10 Summary on the respondents' level of critical thinking disposition

Components	WM	SD	Verbal Description
Engagement	3.69	0.77	High
Cognitive Maturity	3.88	0.73	High
Innovativeness	3.77	0.75	High
Grand Mean	3.78		High
Grand Standard Deviation		0.75	

Table 10 presents the summary of the respondents' level of critical thinking disposition. The results entailed an overall high level of critical thinking disposition reflecting the grand mean of 3.78. From the three dimensions, cognitive maturity obtained the highest mean of 3.88, followed by innovativeness with a mean of 3.77, and engagement with the lowest mean of 3.69, still depicting high interpretations.

The findings implied that the respondents are strongly capable in terms of demonstrating positive thinking behaviours which are necessary for success, decision making and problem solving. UNESCO (2024) emphasized that for students to be more analytical, innovative, and responsible in addressing complex social challenges, high critical thinking must be embodied. Hassan & Ibrahim (2024), emphasized that students with high levels of critical thinking disposition tend to exhibit more reason skills and academic engagement. This suggested that the respondents' high critical thinking disposition may help them effectively analyse situations, make informed decisions, and adapt to various academic and real-life demands.

Relationship Between Psychological Distresses and Critical Thinking Disposition Of The Respondents

Table 11 Test of significance of the relationship between the psychological distress and critical thinking disposition of the respondents

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Psychological Distress and Critical Thinking	0.034	Negligible Positive	0.628	Do not reject Ho	Not Significant

Disposition					
*significant at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)					

Table 11 presented the test of significance of the relationship between the psychological distress and critical thinking disposition of the respondents. The results revealed a weak positive correlation between psychological distress and critical thinking disposition which yielded an r-value of 0.034. Moreover, the computed p-value of 0.628 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance; hence the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means that there is no significant relationship between the respondents' level of psychological distress and their critical thinking disposition. The findings suggested that the respondents' ability to think critically, engage in reflective thinking, and demonstrate innovativeness is not significantly affected by their level of psychological distress.

The findings implied that psychological distress may not directly affect critical thinking disposition as other factors such as personal motivation, resilience, learning environment, and educational experience may also play a huge part. Psychological Association (2024), emphasized that although psychological distress may affect emotional functioning and academic performance, individuals may still maintain effective cognitive and reasoning abilities when supported by adaptive coping mechanisms and positive learning experiences. Wilson & Carter (2024) found that psychological distress does not always significantly impair critical thinking disposition, especially among students who possess resilience and strong academic engagement. This suggested that despite experiencing certain levels of stress or emotional challenges, the respondents may still demonstrate strong critical thinking characteristics necessary for learning and decision-making.

Summary

The study examined the association between the level of psychological distress and extent of critical thinking disposition among criminology students of Negros Oriental State University Bais Campuses I & II. The research specifically, the study sought to determine the respondents' demographic profile in terms of age, sex, persons living, with and senior high school track & strand. The study also assessed the level of psychological distress and extent of critical thinking disposition in terms of engagement, cognitive maturity, and innovativeness and the significant relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, the study also aimed to develop an intervention plan that will help the students manage emotions and foster cognitive thinking skills.

The study utilized a descriptive correlational method of research wherein data were gathered through survey questionnaires administered to the respondents. Statistical tools used where Kessler Psychological Distress for administering level of psychological distress and EMI Critical Thinking Disposition for the identification of Critical Thinking Level.

The different statistical tools used for the interpretation of data were frequency count, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, and pearson r correlation. The significance of the relationship between psychological distress and critical thinking disposition was tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

Findings

The results were the bases for the findings of the study which are summarized below.

The demographic profile of the respondents revealed that the majority belonged to the 18 to 20 age bracket, were predominantly male, and mostly lived with both parents.

In terms of psychological distress, the respondents demonstrated low, with an aggregate mean of 2.35. This indicated that although the respondents occasionally experienced feelings of nervousness, sadness, hopelessness, and restlessness, these manifestations were generally minimal.

In terms of critical thinking disposition, the respondents exhibited a high level of engagement, with a mean of 3.77. The findings suggested that the respondents actively participated in learning activities, asked questions, and demonstrated persistence in solving problems and making decisions.

In relation to cognitive maturity, the respondents manifested a high level of 3.69 which signified that respondents were objective and capable of considering different perspectives and evaluate their own biases when making judgments.

On the other hand, in terms of Innovativeness, the respondents demonstrated high level with an aggregate mean of 3.88. The findings implied that the respondents were adaptable, and willing to explore multiple solutions to problems and challenges.

Overall, the respondents exhibited a high level of critical thinking disposition, with a grand mean of 3.78, indicating strong engagement, cognitive maturity, and innovativeness in dealing with academic and real-life situations.

The test of significance indicated no significant relationship between the two variables with strong indication of r-value of 0.034 and a p-value of 0.628 higher than the 0.05 level of significance.. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, the respondents revealed low level of psychological distress with a manifestation of a high level of critical thinking disposition with the three dimensions: engagement, cognitive maturity, and innovativeness. The respondents were able to maintain positive thinking behaviors, open-mindedness, and problem-solving abilities despite experiencing some level of emotional and psychological challenges.

Furthermore, the study concluded that psychological distress does not significantly influence the respondents' critical thinking disposition. This suggested that factors such as learning experiences, resilience, motivation, and social support may play more important roles in the enhancement of critical thinking skills than psychological distress alone. Overall, the respondents demonstrated the capacity to think critically, adapt to challenges, and engage effectively in academic and personal decision-making processes.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusion arrived in this study, it is recommended that a guidance program on Integrated Mental Health and Cognitive Skills Development for Criminology students be crafted and implemented. The program may include activities and seminars focusing on stress management, emotional regulation, coping strategies, and mental health awareness to help students effectively manage psychological tensions. Furthermore, trainings on enhancing critical thinking disposition, problem-solving, and making decision making may also be conducted to further strengthen the students' cognitive abilities.

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