



## How COVID-19 Pandemic Affects the Types of Boredom High School Students in Bangkok Feel

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### Abstract

Despite the fact that numerous researches regarding the psychological impact of COVID-19 pandemic are conducted, an investigation into relations of boredom received little empirical attention. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the relationships of the 5 types of boredom proposed by Goetz et al. (2013), among high school students with at least one social media account in Bangkok during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data was collected through an anonymous online questionnaire asking the participants to rate their emotions from 1 to 5 towards several statements representing each type of boredom. This was distributed twice, once in April 2020 and once in April 2021, to measure the difference of boredom types students felt after a one-year period. A total of 100 students were randomly selected to participate in the survey in April 2020. The following year, another 100 students were selected to take part in the survey. Findings revealed that having been in a stressful environment as a global pandemic for a year can enhance one's level of arousal. Mean levels of boredom types with higher levels of arousal increased in the latter year while the ones with relatively low arousal decreased.

**Keywords:** Boredom, COVID-19, Emotions, Mental health, High school students

### INTRODUCTION

Since December 2019, our world has been facing one of the most severe obstacles that human beings can encounter, an infectious disease. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19, many would not have imagined a pandemic coming, most of us were not ready. This pandemic has completely changed our way of living. Face masks have become our necessity in everyday life. Most of us choose to stay in instead of going out, to protect ourselves from the disease. Countries all over the globe have been severely affected by this disease. As of April 2021, there are over 140 million COVID-19 cases worldwide, with a total of over 3 million deaths (Worldometers, 2021). Every doubling of newly infected cases is associated with a 4.16% fall in bookings in the tourism industry (Hu et al., 2020). In Thailand alone, more than a third of the country's

tourism-related businesses have already been shut down (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2021). Not only did COVID-19 affected economically, but it also affected people on a psychological level. Stressors include longer quarantine duration, infection fears, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies,

inadequate information, financial loss, and stigma (Brooks et al., 2020). In this research, we focus on one of the aforementioned stressors, boredom.

Though there was much research done on the psychological impact of COVID-19, the area of boredom has still been seldom explored. The feeling of boredom is expressed as being trapped and restless, yet lethargic, with associated guilt and, in some cases, depression (Martin et al., 2006). Goetz and Frenzel

(2006) first proposed four types of boredom, which are differentiated based on degrees of valence and arousal: indifferent, calibrating, searching, and reactant boredom. However, further research suggested an additional fifth type, referred to as “apathetic boredom.” (Goetz et al., 2013)

#### Goetz’s Types of Boredom Model

**Indifferent Boredom:** This type of boredom corresponds with low arousal and slightly positive valence. People who experienced this type of boredom expressed so as feeling relaxed and cheerful fatigue, and reflected a general indifference to, and withdrawal from, the external world. **Calibrating Boredom:** This type of boredom is associated with high (but still relatively low) arousal compared to indifferent boredom and slightly negative valence. People who experience this type of boredom usually have wandering thoughts, not knowing what to do, and a general openness to behaviors aimed at changing the situation or cognitions unrelated to the situation. They represented a slightly unpleasant emotional state associated with receptiveness to boredom- reducing options but not actively searching for alternative behaviors or cognitions.

**Searching Boredom:** It corresponds with a more negative valence and higher arousal than calibrating boredom. It is described as a sense of restlessness and an active search for alternative actions. This type of boredom is more unpleasant and people who experience it are often actively searching for specific ways to mitigate feelings of boredom.

**Reactant Boredom:** It is associated with the highest levels of arousal and negative valence. People with this type of boredom experience restlessness, aggression, as well as persistent thoughts about

specific, more highly valued alternative situations. There’s a strong need to escape the situation. This is the most damaging type of boredom.

**Apathetic Boredom:** People experiencing this type of boredom experience learned helplessness, similar to depression. Apathy is a protective mask for anger, and it arises in situations where you cannot express your anger openly.

#### METHODOLOGY

Participants completed a questionnaire containing five statements representing the five types of boredom—indifference, calibrating, searching, reactant, and apathetic (Goetz et al., 2013). A 5-Likert scale was used for each statement, ranging from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (5), so participants can choose which number best expresses their feelings of boredom. The survey was distributed through an online platform to high school students with at least one social media account all over Bangkok, who are currently in a stay-home period due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a total of 100 respondents. The participants were asked to do the survey twice, in April 2020 and April 2021, to see how their emotions have altered a year after the start of the spread of COVID-19. The 2021 survey also included a new section asking participants to describe their emotions. After the responses were returned, analysis was done using descriptive and inferential statistics. Each type of boredom was shown in the form of a mean score calculated from the data collected from the 5-Likert scale. The mean of each type of boredom in each year was also found to see the relationship between time that has passed and the type of boredom people experienced. Finally, the data was turned into bar graphs and tables.

#### Figure 1: Questionnaire given to participants

#### RESULTS

You feel relaxed and calm. \*

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ strongly agree

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You feel the urge to do something but you don't know what it is. \*

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ strongly agree

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You feel the urge to do something and are constantly searching for activities and hobbies. \*

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ strongly agree

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You feel aggressive and want to get out of your current situation. \*

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ strongly agree

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You are not interested or moved by anything. \*

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ strongly agree

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After a one year period, how have your feelings towards COVID19 changed? (ex. You feel more depressed and stressed.) \*

Long answer text

## RESULTS

Two questionnaires were used to test the hypothesis that an increase would be seen in reactant boredom and apathetic boredom high school students feel within a one year period of the spread of COVID-19. A total of 100 high school students from Bangkok participated in the study.

**Types of Boredom High School Students in Bangkok Feel During COVID-19 (2020)**

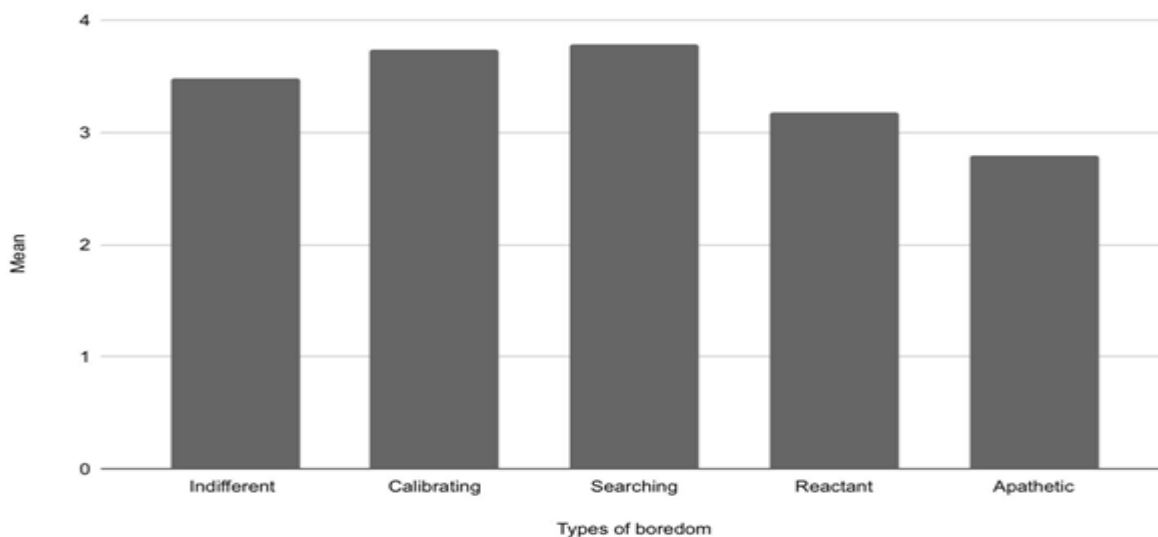


Figure 2. Means of types of boredom high school students in Bangkok feel during COVID-19 in 2020. Note. Means of likert scale values from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Figure 2 depicts the mean values of the types of boredom high school students felt during April in 2020. Data shows that respondents tended to select the more passive types of boredom: low arousal-indifferent boredom, calibrating boredom and searching boredom. There were no significant differences between the most and the second-most experienced boredom types - searching boredom and calibrating boredom - with identical mean values of 3.78 and 3.74. This suggests that the majority of

respondents experienced an unpleasant feeling of restlessness resulting from a desire to do something but not knowing what to do and are generally seeking alternative activities. Indifferent boredom was characterized as the third-most experienced type of boredom with a relatively high mean of 3.48 out of 5.00. In contrast with the first two most experienced types, searching boredom and calibrating boredom, there is a comparatively large gap between searching boredom ( $\mu=3.78$ ) and reactant boredom ( $\mu= 3.17$ ) of 0.61 difference.

Finally, the type of boredom with the lowest mean level is apathetic boredom, a feeling of helplessness similar to depression, with just 2.79 out of 5.00.

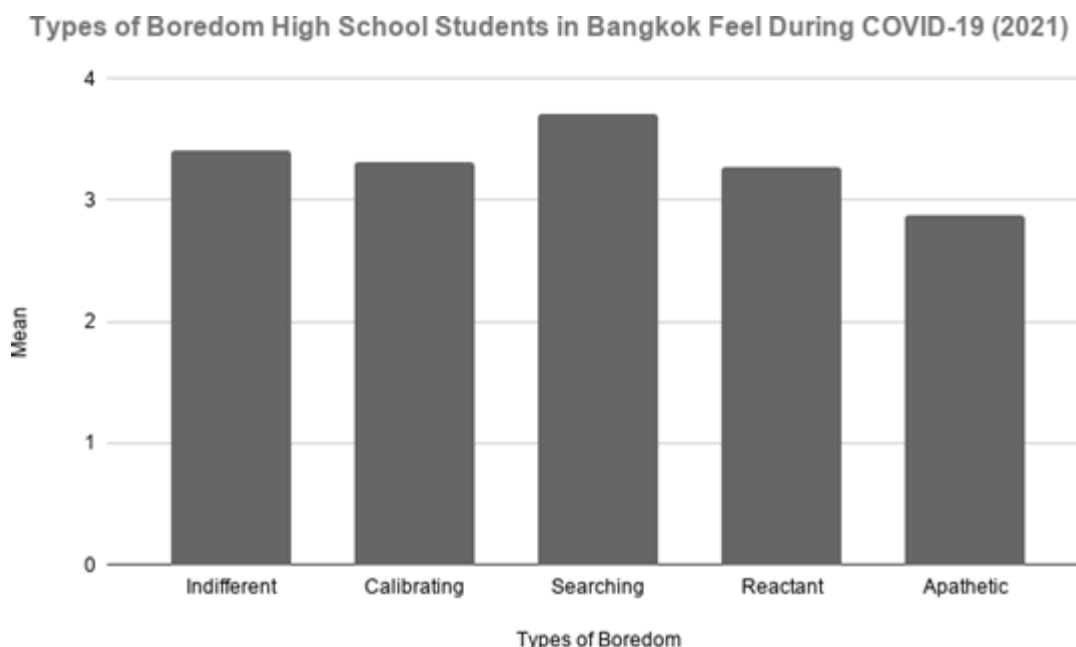


Figure 3. Mean Values of Five Types of Boredom High School Students in Bangkok Feel During COVID-19 in 2021 Note. Means of likert scale values from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The bar graph above illustrates the mean for each type of boredom after a 1-year period of the spread of COVID-19. The results indicate that high school students predominantly experienced searching boredom, a sense of restlessness and an active search for alternative activities, with the mean of 3.71 out of 5.00. Interestingly, the second-most experienced type of boredom for high school students is indifferent

boredom, the feeling of relaxation and a cheerful fatigue, which was rated 3.41 out of 5.00. However, the gap is relatively large between indifferent boredom and searching boredom, with a 0.30 score difference, meaning that students experienced searching boredom substantially more. Conversely, the rate for calibrating boredom and reactant boredom--ranked third and fourth--are almost identical, with scores of 3.30 and 3.27, respectively. Lastly, the type of boredom students went through the least is apathetic boredom, rating 2.88 out of 5.00; they disagreed with the idea of experiencing learned helplessness, similar to depression, during the stay-home period.

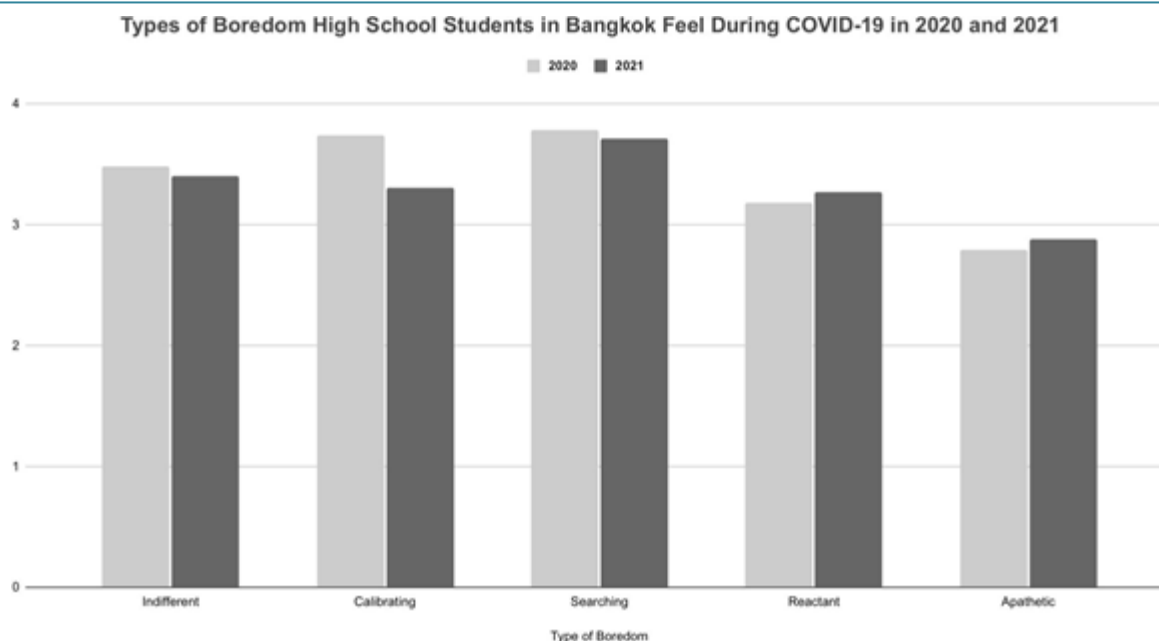


Figure 4. Means of types of boredom high school students in bangkok felt during COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021

Figure 4 compares the mean of the 5 types of boredom participants experienced during 2020 and 2021. Looking from the data shown in figure 4, any trends that are present are insignificant since the overall movement of the graph doesn't show a net direction either of increase or decrease. However, this excludes calibrating boredom which had a relatively large gap between the mean values with a drop of 0.43 in 2021. This suggests that participants are experiencing less dullness compared to the responses collected in 2020. The rest of the figures including indifferent boredom and searching boredom decreased by 0.08 and 0.07, respectively. On the other hand, both reactant boredom and apathetic boredom's mean values showed an increase of 0.09.

#### Emotions Described by Participants

In the 2021 survey, we added a new section in which participants were asked to describe how their feelings changed after a year of COVID-19. The results are as follows:

Participants who ranked indifferent boredom the highest--from the 5-likert scale-- described their emotions as:

"I've learnt to just chill and spend time with myself. It's actually helped me reach another level of self-love

and everything. Still, I can't wait for it to be over, I'm tired of getting so many

experiences and opportunities taken away from me."

"New norm, I can adapt."

Participants who ranked calibrating boredom the highest described their emotions as:

"I feel more uninspired and lazier." "Lack of enthusiasm sometimes."

Participants who ranked searching boredom the highest described their emotions as:

"I'm tired of this situation, even if I found a way to spend my days and got used to it. Still, school life could have been better for me if there was no COVID-19. Students should enjoy their lifetime but we can't meet our friends, activities are cancelled and we can't travel on the holidays like we used to. Then how could anyone be okay with a situation like this?"

Participants who ranked reactant boredom the highest described their emotions as:

"Like I am living in jail."

"Yep, I felt more depressed and stressed. Someday, I don't have anything to do. I want to come and see many people, friends. This situation makes me unhappy."

Participants who ranked apathetic boredom the highest described their emotions as:

"More depressed, so fed up with it."



"I feel tired and bored with COVID-19 like when will this disease end. I wanna go out and shop like normal. I don't want to wear a mask anymore."

## DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the differences and relations of the mean values of all 5 types of boredom (Goetz et al., 2013) high school students in Bangkok experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic in April, 2020 and 2021. The hypothesis of the present research proposed that students would feel more depressed and aroused because of the extended duration of the stay-home period in 2021. This was measured based on the increase of the mean level of boredom types with negative valence and high arousal, in other words, reactant boredom and apathetic boredom which is claimed to be similar to depression (Goetz et al., 2013).

Boredom is a prevalent emotion prone to negative consequences. (Van Hooft and Van Hooft, 2018) Examples of potential negative effects are declined motivation, effort, academic performance (Pekrun et al., 2010), frustration (Van Hooft and Van Hooft, 2018) and depression (Goldberg et al., 2011; Sommers and Vodanovich, 2000).

As an extension of the previous studies which uncovered various negative consequences of boredom, we focused on just one of these possible aftermaths of boredom, specifically, the potential of having depressed feelings stemming from boredom during the pandemic. Although boredom and depression seem independent, they are highly correlated. (Goldberg et al., 2011)

The results prove that students are starting to have more emotions similar to depressed feelings and a sense of helplessness compared to the data collected in April 2020 when the Thai government first announced a nationwide curfew. A previous study conducted by Jiang, Yan-Li, Pamanee and Sriyanto (2021) found that 33.2% of the students in Thailand were under stress, 47% suffered from anxiety, and 46.2% from depression during COVID-19. The findings of our research can be a potential factor of previous findings.

However, the generalizability of the results is limited by the samples assessed in both years which involved different sets of 100 high school students in Bangkok. Further research should use the same set of a larger sample size (e.g. elementary school students and

university students) to analyze how much our results can be generalized. Another limitation of this study is the reliability of the 5-Likert scale used in the questionnaire. Each individual may have different interpretations of the scale levels resulting in an inaccurate result. Therefore, future studies are recommended to use a more specific type of response format such as an interview. Lastly, we did not take into account how the participants' socioeconomic background, mental health, physical health or other external factors prior to this questionnaire will affect their answers. An investigation into these external factors could help the results to be more precise in future research.

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