

# Crime-Related Content on Social Interaction Anxiety among Senior High School Students

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**Abstract:** Social interaction anxiety among adolescents has become an emerging concern as increasing exposure to crime-related content on social media may influence students' perceptions of safety and interpersonal engagement. This study examined the relationship between exposure to crime-related content on social media and social interaction anxiety among 300 senior high school students. A quantitative descriptive–correlational research design was employed using structured questionnaires to measure exposure to crime-related content and social interaction anxiety. Descriptive results showed that exposure to crime-related content obtained an overall mean of 3.141 (SD = 0.537), interpreted as High, while social interaction anxiety recorded a mean of 2.939 (SD = 0.573), also interpreted as High. Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between the variables ( $r = 0.485$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that increased exposure to crime-related content is associated with higher social interaction anxiety. These findings emphasize the potential psychological influence of crime-related information encountered in digital environments and highlight the importance of strengthening media literacy initiatives and school-based mental health support for adolescents.

**Keywords:** *Crime-Related Content; Social Media Exposure; Social Interaction Anxiety; Adolescents.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Social interaction anxiety among adolescents has become an increasingly serious concern, particularly as young people navigate critical developmental stages that require active social engagement and peer interaction. Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health conditions affecting adolescents globally, often manifesting as fear of negative evaluation, avoidance of social situations, and emotional distress during interactions (World Health Organization, 2023). UNICEF (2021) emphasized that persistent anxiety during adolescence can interfere with emotional regulation, social participation, and overall well-being. At the same time, the widespread use of social media has exposed adolescents to large volumes of distressing and crime-related content, which may intensify feelings of fear, insecurity, and anxiety in everyday social contexts (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Ahmad et al., 2020).

International studies consistently demonstrate a relationship between exposure to negative or threatening online content and increased anxiety among adolescents. Research conducted in the United States indicates that a substantial proportion of adolescents experience social anxiety symptoms, ranging from mild discomfort to severe impairment in social functioning (Evans, 2023). Systematic reviews and large-scale studies in Europe and Asia similarly report that social media exposure—particularly to emotionally charged or threatening content—is associated with heightened anxiety, fear, and social withdrawal among young people (Valkenburg & Peter, 2024; Keles et al., 2020). Studies further suggest that repeated exposure to crime-related content can distort adolescents' perceptions of safety and increase vigilance and fear during social interactions, even when actual crime risk is low (Ahmad et al., 2020; Prieto-Curiel et al., 2020).

In the Philippine context, adolescent anxiety has been identified as a growing public health concern requiring immediate attention. The Department of Health reported a steady increase in anxiety-related cases among Filipino youth, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Herbosa, 2023). Local empirical evidence shows that senior high school students experience heightened emotional distress, low self-esteem, and reduced academic motivation associated with anxiety symptoms (Serrano et al., 2023). These psychological difficulties are linked to challenges in peer relationships and social participation, which are essential aspects of adolescent development. However, while studies have documented general anxiety among Filipino adolescents, limited local research has examined how specific types of social media content—such as crime-related information—may contribute to social interaction anxiety.

The consequences of unaddressed social interaction anxiety during adolescence are substantial, affecting academic engagement, peer relationships, and long-term mental health outcomes. Prolonged anxiety may lead to social withdrawal, avoidance behaviors, and reduced confidence in interpersonal situations, potentially persisting into adulthood (Gordon, 2023). Despite extensive international literature on social media use and adolescent anxiety, there remains a significant gap in Philippine-based research that specifically investigates the relationship between exposure to crime-related content on social media and social interaction anxiety among senior high school students. Addressing this gap is urgent, given the high level of social media use among adolescents and the increasing visibility of crime-related content online. Understanding this relationship is essential for informing school-based interventions, media literacy programs, and mental health initiatives aimed at promoting adolescents’ social and emotional well-being.

➤ *Significance of the Study*

This study is significant in advancing the goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being and SDG 4: Quality Education, by addressing adolescent mental health risks linked to digital environments. SDG 3 emphasizes the promotion of mental health and well-being, recognizing anxiety disorders

among adolescents as a major public health concern that can impair emotional functioning and quality of life (World Health Organization, 2023). By examining the relationship between exposure to crime-related content on social media and social interaction anxiety, this study contributes evidence relevant to understanding preventable risk factors affecting adolescents’ psychological well-being. In addition, SDG 4 underscores the importance of inclusive and supportive learning environments, as students’ mental health is closely associated with their academic engagement, classroom participation, and social development (UNICEF Innocenti, 2021). Anxiety that interferes with social interaction can hinder students’ ability to communicate effectively, collaborate with peers, and fully benefit from educational opportunities. Through generating context-specific evidence, this study supports the development of school-based mental health programs, media literacy initiatives, and supportive policies that align with the SDGs’ call for holistic development, safe learning environments, and the promotion of adolescents’ social and emotional well-being.

➤ *Statement of the Problem*

This research aims to investigate the relationship between the crime-related content shared on social media and social interaction anxiety among senior high school students. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

- What is the level of exposure to crime-related content in terms perception of crime on social media, personal awareness, and credibility of information; and the level of social interaction anxiety in terms of social phobia, scrutiny fear, and social interaction among senior high school students?
- Is there a significant relationship between exposure to crime-related content and the social interaction anxiety among students?

➤ *Hypothesis*

This study was tested at 0.05 level of significance

Ho: There is no significant relationship between exposure to crime-related content and the social interaction anxiety among students

➤ *Conceptual Framework*

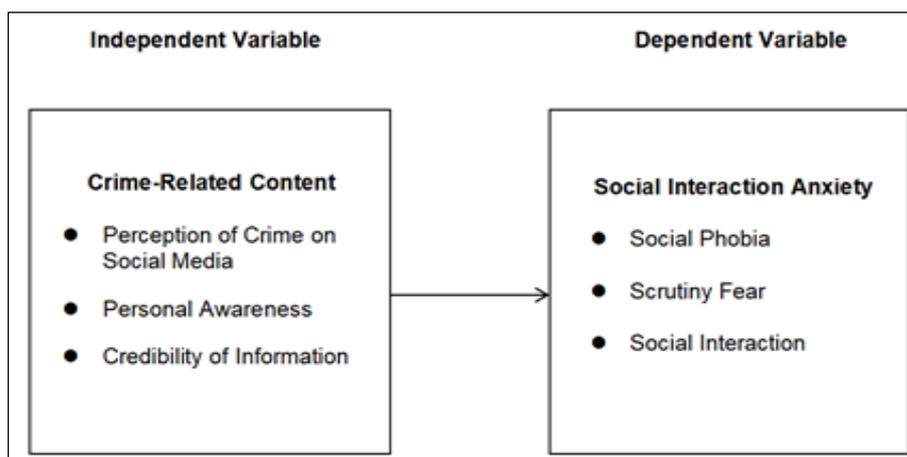


Fig 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

## II. METHODOLOGY

### ➤ *Research Design*

This study employed a non-experimental quantitative descriptive–correlational research design to examine the relationship between exposure to crime-related content on social media and social interaction anxiety among senior high school students. A non-experimental design is appropriate when variables are observed as they naturally occur without manipulation, which is necessary in studies involving psychological conditions and media exposure due to ethical and practical constraints (Apuke, 2017; Bhandari, 2022). The descriptive component of the design was used to determine the levels of exposure to crime-related content and social interaction anxiety among the respondents, as descriptive research systematically summarizes and quantifies existing conditions within a population (Bhandari, 2022). The correlational component was applied to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables without implying causation, which is consistent with the purpose of correlational research in behavioral and educational studies (Slater & Hasson, 2024). This design provided an appropriate and statistically sound framework for analyzing naturally occurring associations between crime-related social media exposure and social interaction anxiety.

### ➤ *Sample and Sampling Design*

The study involved three hundred (300) senior high school students enrolled during the School Year 2025–2026. The respondents were drawn from different academic strands under the Academic Track—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM), and Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS)—as well as from the Technical-Vocational–Livelihood (TVL) Track. Students were included if they were officially enrolled as senior high school students and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The research utilized simple random sampling, a probability sampling technique in which each member of the target population has an equal chance of selection, thereby reducing selection bias and improving the representativeness of the sample (Bhandari, 2022). This sampling approach was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to obtain a sample that reflects the characteristics of the senior high school population while enhancing the generalizability of the findings regarding exposure to crime-related content on social media and social interaction anxiety.

### ➤ *Research Instrument*

Data were collected using two structured questionnaires measuring the study variables. Exposure to crime-related content on social media was assessed using the Crime-Related Content Questionnaire adapted from Abraham and Lucernas (2025), which includes three domains: perception of crime on social media, personal awareness, and credibility of information. Social interaction anxiety was measured using an instrument adapted from the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale developed by Mattick and Clarke (1998), covering the

domains of scrutiny fear, social phobia, and social interaction. Both instruments utilized a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree). Prior to the main data collection, the questionnaires underwent expert review by specialists in psychology and social sciences to establish content validity, followed by a pilot test with Grade 12 students not included in the final sample. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients of 0.780 for the Crime-Related Content scale and 0.891 for the Social Interaction Anxiety scale, both exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 for acceptable reliability (Taber, 2018). These results indicate that the instruments demonstrated adequate to high internal consistency for measuring the intended constructs.

### ➤ *Data Analysis*

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, were computed to determine the overall levels of exposure to crime-related content on social media and the level of social interaction anxiety among the respondents. The mean was used to summarize the central tendency of responses obtained from Likert-scale items, which may be treated as continuous data for parametric analysis, while the standard deviation was used to determine the degree of variability or dispersion of responses within the group (Field, 2018; Huh & Gim, 2025). To examine the relationship between exposure to crime-related content and social interaction anxiety, Pearson's product–moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was employed to measure the strength and direction of the linear association between the two variables. Pearson's correlation is appropriate when analyzing relationships between variables measured on interval or continuous scales and when the objective is to determine statistical association without implying causation (Huh & Gim, 2025). All statistical tests were evaluated at the 0.05 level of significance.

### ➤ *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study to protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from the respondents, ensuring that participation was voluntary and based on a clear understanding of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained by excluding identifying information from the questionnaires and reporting results in aggregate form. All personal data were handled in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) to ensure secure storage and responsible use of information. The study adhered to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and non-maleficence, ensuring that no physical, psychological, or social harm was inflicted on participants during the research process. These procedures align with established ethical standards for research involving human participants, promoting integrity, transparency, and responsible conduct throughout the study (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019).

### III. RESULTS

➤ *Descriptive Results*

Variables	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
<b>Crime-Related Content</b>	<b>0.537</b>	<b>3.141</b>	<b>High</b>
Perception of Crime on Social Media	0.690	3.041	High
Personal Awareness	0.614	3.246	High
Credibility of Information	0.547	3.137	High
<b>Social Interaction Anxiety</b>	<b>0.573</b>	<b>2.939</b>	<b>High</b>
Scrutiny Fear	0.600	2.991	High
Social Phobia	0.635	2.902	High
Social Interaction	0.640	2.920	High

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics summarizing the levels of exposure to crime-related content on social media and social interaction anxiety among the respondents. The results indicate that crime-related content obtained an overall mean of 3.141 with a standard deviation of 0.537, interpreted as High. This suggests that senior high school students are frequently exposed to crime-related information on social media platforms. Among its indicators, perception of crime on social media recorded a mean of 3.041 (SD = 0.690), personal awareness obtained a mean of 3.246 (SD = 0.614), and credibility of information had a mean of 3.137 (SD = 0.547), all interpreted as High. These findings imply that students commonly encounter crime-related content, maintain a heightened awareness of safety-related information, and often evaluate the credibility of such content across different online sources.

With regard to the dependent variable, social interaction anxiety registered an overall mean of 2.939 and a standard deviation of 0.573, interpreted as High, indicating that students generally experience noticeable levels of anxiety in social situations. The specific dimensions—scrutiny fear (M = 2.991, SD = 0.600), social phobia (M = 2.902, SD = 0.635), and social interaction (M = 2.920, SD = 0.640)—were likewise all rated High. These results suggest that a considerable proportion of students experience discomfort, concern about negative evaluation, and hesitation when engaging in interpersonal communication or group interactions. The relatively moderate standard deviation values further indicate that responses were fairly consistent across participants, reflecting similar patterns of exposure to crime-related content and comparable levels of social interaction anxiety among the respondents.

➤ *Correlational Results*

Variables	Social Interaction Anxiety			
	r-value	r <sup>2</sup>	p-value	Decision on H <sub>0</sub>
<b>Crime-Related Content</b>	0.485	0.235	< .001	Reject

Table 2 presents the results of the correlation analysis examining the relationship between exposure to crime-related content on social media and social interaction anxiety among senior high school students. The analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation between the two variables, with a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.485. This indicates that higher levels of exposure to crime-related content are associated with higher levels of social interaction anxiety. The positive direction of the relationship suggests that as students' exposure to crime-related information on social media increases, their anxiety during social interactions also tends to increase.

exposure in shaping students' social anxiety levels. Furthermore, the p-value of less than .001 is well below the 0.05 level of significance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This confirms that the observed relationship between crime-related content exposure and social interaction anxiety is statistically significant and unlikely to have occurred by chance.

The coefficient of determination (r<sup>2</sup>) of 0.235 indicates that approximately 23.5% of the variance in social interaction anxiety can be explained by students' exposure to crime-related content on social media. While this suggests that other factors also contribute to social interaction anxiety, the proportion of explained variance is substantial for a behavioral study, highlighting the meaningful role of crime-related content

Overall, these findings indicate that exposure to crime-related content on social media is significantly associated with increased social interaction anxiety among senior high school students. The results underscore the importance of considering the psychological effects of online content exposure, particularly crime-related information, as a contributing factor to adolescents' anxiety in social contexts.

## IV. DISCUSSION

### A. Discussion on the Descriptive Findings

#### ➤ Crime-Related Content on Social Media

Research consistently shows that adolescents are widely exposed to violent and crime-related content through social media environments. Large-scale surveys of young people indicate that exposure to real-world violence online has become common, with many adolescents encountering content such as physical fights, threats, gang-related material, and weapon-related imagery across multiple platforms (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024). Much of this exposure occurs unintentionally, often through shared posts, algorithm-driven feeds, or platform recommendations rather than deliberate searching. These patterns highlight how the design and circulation mechanisms of social networking platforms increase the likelihood that adolescents repeatedly encounter crime-related content during routine online activities (Youth Endowment Fund, 2024).

Existing criminological and media studies further demonstrate that frequent engagement with online environments can heighten perceptions of risk and vulnerability. Increased interaction with social networking services has been linked to greater exposure to victimization experiences, which in turn elevates fear of crime and perceived insecurity in online and offline contexts (Park & Vieraitis, 2021). Adolescents' developmental sensitivity and high frequency of social media use also amplify their susceptibility to harmful content, including misinformation, cyberbullying, and other online threats that shape their beliefs and perceptions about safety (Lahti et al., 2024). These findings collectively suggest that crime-related content encountered through digital platforms is not merely informational but can influence adolescents' awareness, perceived risk, and behavioral responses.

#### ➤ Social Interaction Anxiety

Scholarly evidence indicates that adolescents' exposure to social media threats and negative online experiences is associated with various psychological outcomes, including anxiety symptoms. Studies examining multiple forms of online risk—such as cyberbullying, harassment, discrimination, and misinformation—have found that repeated encounters with these threats are systematically related to poorer self-rated health, depressive feelings, and heightened anxiety among young people (Lahti et al., 2024). Such risks may be intensified when adolescents communicate extensively online or interact with unfamiliar users, as these contexts increase vulnerability to harmful interactions that affect emotional well-being.

Complementary findings from youth mental-health surveys also show that adolescents themselves recognize the potential negative psychological impact of social media engagement. A substantial proportion of teenagers report that social media can harm the well-being of people their age, while parents frequently identify these platforms as a significant contributor to mental health concerns among youth (Faverio et al., 2025). Fear of online victimization has likewise been shown to discourage participation in social activities and increase apprehension in social contexts, reflecting how perceived online risks may translate into broader interpersonal anxiety

(Park & Vieraitis, 2021). Taken together, existing evidence supports the interpretation that social interaction anxiety among adolescents can be influenced by sustained exposure to stressful or threatening experiences within digital social environments.

### B. Discussion on the Correlational Findings

The significant positive relationship between exposure to crime-related content on social media and social interaction anxiety is supported by growing evidence that adolescents' encounters with online risks and threats are associated with poorer psychological outcomes. Lahti et al. (2024) found that frequent exposure to various forms of social media threats—including cyberbullying, misinformation, harassment, and harmful online challenges—was systematically associated with increased depressive feelings, poorer self-rated health, and anxiety symptoms among adolescents. Similarly, Vieraitis and Park (2021) reported that greater engagement with social networking services was linked to higher fear of online victimization, particularly when adolescents had prior experiences of online threats. These findings indicate that repeated exposure to threatening or crime-related digital content may heighten adolescents' perceptions of vulnerability and risk, which can extend beyond online contexts and influence emotional responses during social interactions.

Further empirical work also supports the broader relationship between patterns of social media exposure and adolescent mental health outcomes. Using large-scale population data, Pagliaccio et al. (2024) demonstrated that cumulative digital risk exposures—including cyberbullying, problematic use, and other adverse online experiences—were associated with higher levels of general psychopathology among youth. In a large survey of adolescents, Bear et al. (2025) similarly found that specific online behaviors—such as exposure to harmful content and risky interactions—were related to higher anxiety, depression, and loneliness scores. Evidence from nationally representative clinical data further shows that adolescents with existing mental health symptoms tend to spend more time on social media and experience stronger emotional responses to online feedback and social comparison processes (Fassi et al., 2025). At the level of the broader research literature, systematic and scoping reviews consistently report that social media use is frequently associated with anxiety and other internalizing symptoms, although the strength and direction of these relationships vary depending on how social media engagement is measured (Kerr et al., 2025; Hilty et al., 2023). Collectively, these studies support the interpretation that exposure to potentially threatening or stressful online content can contribute to adolescents' anxiety-related experiences, reinforcing the observed association between crime-related content exposure and social interaction anxiety.

### C. Conclusion

This study established that senior high school students experience substantial exposure to crime-related content on social media and demonstrate notable levels of social interaction anxiety, with findings further indicating a statistically significant positive relationship between these variables. The results suggest that repeated exposure to crime-related information in digital environments may be associated

with heightened perceptions of risk, vulnerability, and apprehension during interpersonal interactions. While exposure to crime-related content does not solely determine students' anxiety levels, it represents a meaningful contributing factor that interacts with other developmental and environmental influences. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of understanding how digital media environments shape adolescents' psychological well-being and social functioning, particularly during a developmental stage characterized by increased sensitivity to social evaluation and peer interaction.

#### D. Recommendations

In light of these findings, it is recommended that schools strengthen media literacy and digital citizenship programs that help students critically evaluate crime-related content and manage emotional responses to distressing information encountered online. Guidance counselors and educators may also implement targeted mental health support initiatives, including social skills development and anxiety management interventions, to assist students who exhibit heightened social interaction concerns. Parents and guardians should be encouraged to monitor adolescents' social media engagement and promote open communication about online experiences to reduce fear and misinformation. Future researchers are advised to examine additional variables—such as coping strategies, parental support, personality factors, and frequency or type of social media use—to better explain the remaining variance in social interaction anxiety, and to consider longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to explore how exposure to crime-related content influences adolescent behavior over time.

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