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Privacy and Relationships of Roommates in the Situation of Covid 19

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Abstract

The lack of privacy affected the student roommates' relationships. This study investigates the relationship between privacy and roommates' relationships in the COVID-19 situation and investigates the relationship between sensitivity to the lack of privacy and relationship status among roommates during COVID-19. Data was collected by behavioral traces in 4 bedrooms, conducting interviews and focus group discussions with eight students, and distributing questionnaires to 61 students. Findings found that in COVID-19, half of the sample felt more negatively about their privacy being disturbed. Privacy and relationships were positively correlated, and relationship status did not affect sensitivity to the lack of privacy.

Keywords: Privacy; Relationships; Bedroom; Roommates

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1.0 Introduction

The COVID-19 situation affects room usage behaviors among students who share residential spaces, e.g., online learning and the amount of time in residential spaces. The room is used for many activities, such as eating, quarantining, or doing homework. The room usage behaviors during the COVID-19 Pandemic may increase the lack of privacy, stress, and negative feelings that may affect the relationship between students' roommates who share the residential space. Previous research on the privacy of roommates in the situation of COVID-19 found that the lack of privacy increased stress and negative feelings in students. Noise, disturbing lights, being overstepped, lack of storage, and lack of obscuring vision were the problems that interfered with privacy. Besides, the noise was the most problematic factor that interfered with privacy. In addition, the informants attributed their sensitivity to a lack of privacy may be related to the relationship status between roommates (Sanpaychudayan & Kutintara, 2022).

Thus, this study aimed to 1) investigate the relationship between privacy and the relationships of students who share a residential space in the COVID-19 situation. 2) investigate the relationship between sensitivity to the lack of privacy and relationship status among students who share a residential space in the COVID-19 situation. 3) identify how stress from lack of privacy affects the relationship between roommates.

2.0 Literature Review

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2.1 The Relationship between privacy and stress in shared residential spaces

Privacy is one factor that affects the stress on residents, and if residents lack privacy, it will increase negative feelings on residents. Previous research by Lewinson (2017) and Sanpaychudayan & Kutintara (2022) consistently found that the lack of privacy caused stress to residents who used a residential space. It is also consistent with Pable's (2012) findings that privacy reduced stress for residents.

2.2 The Relationship between territory and stress in shared residential spaces

Previous research by Samura (2016), Pable (2012), and Lewinson (2007) have consistent findings that if residents can modify, create territory, or whether ownership of their residential space, the residents will feel more relaxed and feel free to use the room or space they own. This is also consistent with Whettingsteel's (2020) findings that if the space is easy to modify and create territory, residents who use the space will feel more relaxed and better adapted to college life.

2.3 Relationship between roommates

Previous research by Shook & Fazio (2008) found that racial differences among roommates affected student satisfaction with living due to difficulty in adapting to different cultures. Yao (2016) found that in the relationship between Chinese and American roommates, Chinese roommates were more likely to be culturally dependent on their American roommates. However, there was a need for more communication to understand each other concerning the space management in the room and the cultural differences that occur. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between persons who shared the room.

2.4 The impact of the COVID-19 situation on students

The COVID-19 situation affects the room usage behaviors of the students, e.g., online learning, the amount of time students have used in residential spaces daily, and quarantines, which increased psychological stress and mental disorders in students. Zakaria et al. (2021) found that in the situation of COVID-19, students in college or university felt unhappy because they were away from family and could not predict when the pandemic would end. Nur Izzuddin Izham et al. (2022) found that in online learning, students' lack of interaction and learning by screen or text messages might create a sense of isolation while learning.

The literature review found that previous research found relationships between privacy and stress, territory, the relationship between different nationalities roommates, and the impact of the COVID-19 situation on students. All the findings turn into knowledge between lack of privacy to stress and the patterns that residents use to solve lack of privacy problems. There needs to be research conducted on the relationship between the lack of privacy and roommate relationships, especially in COVID-19. Thus, further study to investigate the relationships between privacy and roommates' relationships in COVID-19 needs to be done.

3.0 Methodology

Due to the COVID-19 situation, this research was conducted entirely online. The researcher used the snowball method to select the informants and case studies by asking acquaintances to help contact the student informants that used bedrooms together during the situation of COVID-19 and asked for cooperation in collecting data. The case studies of this research were four bedrooms in private dormitories and houses shared by two students or more in the COVID-19 situation, including 1) houses, 2) private dormitories A, 3) private dormitories B, and 4) private dormitories C. The informants were the eight students who used the bedroom in the case studies. A sample group was 61 students willing to answer the online questionnaire, with a minimum of 20 subjects required to reach broad conclusions (Baker & Edwards, 2012). The researcher used a purposive sampling method to select the sample group by publishing online questionnaires on various social media groups, e.g., Twitter and Facebook and asked for cooperation from informants to publish questionnaires online.

The data were collected in 3 steps. 1) Observed behavior traces about privacy in the four bedrooms from the pictures the informants sent back to the researcher according to the list of photographs. 2) Conducted two online focus group discussions and individual interviews with eight informant students about privacy issues. 3) Online google forms questionnaires about room usage, the relationship status between roommates, privacy, and relationships between privacy and the relationship of roommates, was conducted from 31 March - 18 May 2022 with 61 sample group students who shared a room with roommates in the COVID-19 situation.

Qualitative data from behavioral traces, interviews, and focus group discussions were analyzed through content analysis, data grouping, prioritizing, and description. Quantitative data from the online questionnaire were analyzed by descriptive statistics, correlations, and one-way ANOVA.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Demographic profile of the sample, informants, and case studies

Table 1 shows the general information data of students who shared a room with roommates during the COVID-19 situation in Thailand obtained from the online questionnaire distributed through online platforms during 31 March - 18 May 2022. Responses from 61 students found that the sample used an average room of 2 people/room, spending an average of 14 hours/day in a bedroom. Regarding

relationship status between roommates, most of the sample group (74%) shared the room with friends. Half of the respondents (56%) stayed in private dormitories, and most (75%) were female. Two-thirds of the respondents (72%) were studying for a bachelor's degree.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and descriptive analysis (A sample of students who shared a room with roommates in the COVID-19 situation)

Variable (n=61)	n	(%)	Mean (±SD)
Current number of room users (person)			2.3 (±0.6)
Time spent in the bedroom per day (hours)			14.4 (±5.2)
<u>Relationships status</u>	Friend	46	74
	Family	10	16
	Partner	5	10
<u>Residential types</u>	Private dormitory	34	56
	Dormitory	16	26
	House	8	13
	Townhome	3	5
<u>Gender</u>	Female	46	75
	Male	15	25
<u>Educational level</u>	Bachelor's degrees	44	72
	High school	15	25
	Above bachelor's degrees	2	3

Table 2 describes the types of case studies, the informant population within the case study, and the relationship status between roommates within the case study. The Case studies were four bedrooms, including 1) House, 2) Private dormitory A, 3) Private dormitory B, and 4) Private dormitory C. Informants were eight students who used a bedroom in the case studies. The informant student groups with relationship status were family, including students A and B from the house case study and students B and C from the private dormitory A case study. The informant student groups with relationship status were friends, including students E and F from the case study of private dormitory B and students G and H from the case study of private dormitory C.

Table 2. Data grouping (A student's informants in case studies)

(n=8)	Gender	Informants	
<u>The groups with relationship status were family.</u>			
House	Female	Student A	Student B
Private dormitory A	Female	Student C	Student D
<u>The groups with relationship status were friends.</u>			
Private dormitory B	Male	Student E	Student F
Private dormitory C	Female	Student G	Student H

4.2 Privacy before and after the situation of COVID-19

Table 3 shows the effect between privacy disturbances and negative feelings in the pre-post COVID-19 situation. Half of the sample group (53%) felt that in the COVID-19 situation, privacy disturbances increased negative feelings. Some of the Informants from the focus groups felt uncomfortable when the roommates looked at their computer screens. Student C said, "I felt uncomfortable when the roommate looked at the computer screen; it is a bit tense." (Fig. 1)

Table 3. Descriptive analysis

Variable (n=61)	n	(%)
<u>Privacy disturbances and negative feelings in the COVID-19 situation</u>		
Privacy disturbances increased negative feeling	32	53
Privacy disturbances did not increase negative feeling	29	17

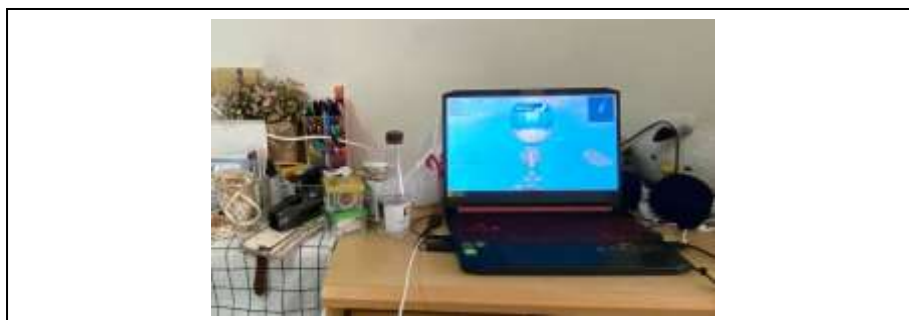


Fig. 1: Student C felt uncomfortable when the roommate looked at the computer screen.

4.3 Privacy and the relationship between roommates

Table 4 shows the mean levels of lack of privacy that affected roommate relationships. As a result, on a scale ranging from 0 (least) to 10 (the most), the level of lack of privacy affecting the relationship between roommates was at an average of 5 (moderate), the level of disturbance privacy by roommates was at an average of 5 (moderately disturbing), the level of relaxed feeling while using a room with roommates was an average of 6 (moderately relaxed), the level of intimacy with roommates after sharing a room was an average of 8 (more intimate), and on a scale ranging from 0 (very bad) to 6 (very good), the good relationship between roommates had an average of 2 (poor).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics about the levels of lack of privacy affected roommate relationships

Variable (n=61)	Min	Max	Mean (±SD)
<u>Lack of privacy affecting the relationship between roommates</u>	0	10	5.0 (±2.9) (Moderate)
<u>Disturbance of privacy by roommates</u>	0	10	5.2 (±2.7) (Moderately disturbing)
<u>The relaxed feeling while using a room with roommates</u>	0	10	6.3 (±2.3) (Moderately relaxed)
<u>Intimacy with roommates after sharing a room</u>	3	10	7.7 (±1.9) (More intimate)
<u>A good relationship between roommates</u>	1	3	2.3 (±0.7) (Poor)



(a)



(b)

Fig. 2. (a) House; (b) Private dormitory C



(a)



(b)

Fig. 3. (a) Private dormitory B; (b) Private dormitory A

Informants from focus groups and interviews believed that the lack of privacy annoyed informants feelings. Nevertheless, it did not affect the relationship that much. Student B said, "If the room is very messy, then there will be an annoyance. However, it is not that messy." (Fig. 2) Student G said, "There is a little bit. After a little while, we will reconcile." (Fig. 2) However, there was an interesting opinion from the student in the private dormitory B. Student E indicated that the level of intimacy with roommates was related to the degree of disturbance by the lack of privacy in the relationship. Student E said, "I am quite close, so I do not have many problems." (Fig. 3) Student C indicated that their relationship status with roommates might influence their sensitivity to a lack of privacy. Family members were less susceptible to a lack of privacy than friends. Student C said, "Not much; it might also be about the person. I have been with two roommates. First time with another roommate, and now with my sister. Being with other people is more uncomfortable. There are more problems." (Fig. 3)

After analyzing independent variables of privacy while using the room and dependent variables of the relationship between roommates with correlations, the correlations showed that disturbance privacy by roommates and good relationship between roommates were moderately related in the opposite direction ($r=-.513^{**}$, $P=.000$). Therefore, if roommate disturbs privacy while using the room, the relationships between roommates will be worse. On the contrary, if roommates do not disturb privacy while using the room, the relationships between roommates will be better.

Relaxed feelings while using a room with roommates and a good relationship between roommates were moderately correlated in the same direction ($r=.506^{**}$, $P=.000$). Therefore, if students feel more relaxed while using the room with their roommates, the good relationship between roommates will be better. On the contrary, if students feel less relaxed while using the room with their roommates, the good relationship between roommates will be worse.

Privacy while using a room with roommates and the good relationship between roommates were moderately correlated in the same direction ($r=.400^{**}$, $P=.001$). Therefore, if students feel more privacy while using the room with their roommates, the relationship between roommates will be better. On the contrary, if students have less privacy while using the room with their roommates, the good relationship between roommates will be worse. (Table 5) (Fig. 4)

Table 5. Correlations

Variable (n=61)	Relationships between roommates
<u>Disturbance of privacy by roommates</u>	
Pearson Correlation	-0.513**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
<u>The relaxed feeling while using a room with roommates</u>	
Pearson Correlation	0.516**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
<u>Privacy while using a room with roommates</u>	
Pearson Correlation	0.400**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001

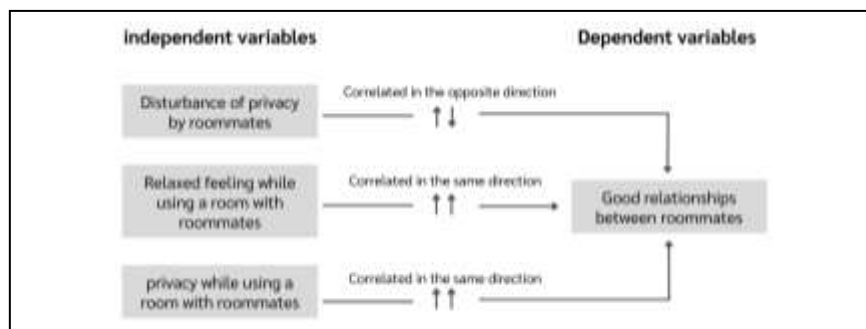


Fig. 4: Correlations

4.4 Relationship status and privacy



Fig. 5: Private dormitory B

In the online focus group, Student C indicated that relationship status affected sensitivity to lack of privacy between roommates. The relationship status with roommates might influence their sensitivity to a lack of privacy. A family member is less susceptible to a lack of privacy than friends. (Fig. 5)

On the other hand, the result from One-Way ANOVA found that the sample groups in each status had the same average sensitivity to negative feelings from lack of privacy ($F=.969^{**}$, $P=.395$). On a scale of feeling ranging from 0 (least) to 10 (the most), the level of lack of privacy caused negative feelings was averaged at 6 (moderate). The sample group with family relationship status had an average of 7 (relatively high). The relationship status of the samples as friends had an average of 6 (moderate), and the samples with relationship status as lovers had an average of 5 (moderate). Therefore, the sample group of relationship status among family members, friends, and lovers had the same average level of negative feelings from lack of privacy.

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA

Variable (n=61)	n	Mean (±SD)	
<u>Relationships status</u>			F = .969
Family	6	7.2)±1.835)	Sig. = .386
Friend	45	5.5)±3.138)	
Lover	10	5.0)±3.559)	
Total	61	5.6)±3.117)	

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Privacy before and after the situation of COVID-19

Half of the sample groups felt that privacy disturbances increased negative feelings during COVID-19, and the informants felt uncomfortable when the roommates looked at their computer screens. The findings of this study were consistent with the findings from Sanpaychudayan & Kutintara (2022) and Lewinson (2007) that lack of privacy affects stress. The findings of this study expanded knowledge of the impacts of COVID-19 on students (Zakaria et al., 2021; Nur Izzuddin Izhah et al., 2022).

5.2 Privacy and the relationship between roommates

There was a conflict between the conclusions from the informant groups and the sample groups. The informant group believed that the lack of privacy annoyed the informant's feelings, but it did not affect the relationship much. On the other hand, results from the sample groups indicate that lack of privacy affects the relationship between roommates.

After analyzing independent variables of privacy and dependent variables of the relationship between roommates with correlations, the correlations showed that privacy while using the room with roommates and relaxed feeling while using the room was correlated in the same direction with a good relationship between roommates. Moreover, the disturbance of privacy by roommates was related in the opposite direction from a good relationship between roommates.

The privacy findings are consistent with Lewinson's (2017) and Pable's (2012) findings that decreasing privacy causes stress to residents. This study asserts that negative feelings from decreasing privacy affected the relationship between roommates. If residents have privacy while using the room, good relationships between roommates will increase. Moreover, if residents lack privacy while using the room, good relationships between roommates will decrease.

5.3 Relationship status and privacy

The informants from interviews and focus group discussions believed that relationship status between roommates might affect sensitivity to negative feelings from lack of privacy. Informants mentioned that a family member would be less sensitive to a lack of privacy than a friend. In conflict with the result from the online questionnaire, the result from One-way ANOVA analysis showed that relationship status did not affect lack of privacy. The findings of this study expanded knowledge about the relationship between roommates by Shook & Fazio (2008) and Yao (2016) by studying the relationship between relationship status and sensitivity to lack of privacy. This study asserts that relationship status did not affect the sensitivity of lack of privacy. Future research should consider other variables like familiarity or intimacy with roommates.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

In conclusion, this study found that in the COVID-19 situation, privacy disturbances increase negative feelings in students who use the room with roommates, negative feelings from decreasing privacy affect the relationship between roommates, and relationship status does not affect sensitivity to lack of privacy.

However, the study about the relationship between roommates in this research only focuses on the relationship status between roommates, privacy feeling in using the room with roommates, disturbance in privacy from roommates, relaxed feeling while using a room with roommates, intimacy with roommates after sharing a room, and good relationship between roommates. These factors happen after using the room. The research in the future should consider other factors in data collecting, such as intimacy status before using

the room with the roommates, description of the moment of using the room, and the faculty that the resident studied, which might affect behavior while using the room.

For those involved in dormitory management or designers, privacy issues should be considered in rooms that are shared between roommates. This will reduce the stress that causes the relationships between roommates, and the relationship between roommates might affect the psychological and emotional well-being of the residents. To improve privacy in the residential space shared between roommates, the authors suggested that furniture should be placed separately to improve privacy by obscuring vision from roommates, reducing noise disturbance, and avoiding light disturbance.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study found that privacy and relationships between roommates were positively correlated, and lack of privacy affected the relationship between roommates, and relationship status did not affect sensitivity to lack of privacy.

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