Analysis of College Students' Insights from a Mental Health Literacy Webinar

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Abstract— Recent studies indicate that Filipino college students possess average mental health literacy. However, they have likewise been found to lack knowledge of the causes of mental illness, how to seek and avail professional help, and evidence-based treatments. Increasing mental health literacy is a protective means to promote effective help-seeking behaviors and decrease psychological distress. While mental health awareness sessions have been deemed effective in raising mental health literacy, what the participants learned and valued was seldom explored. If college students are to truly benefit from these activities, knowing what they gained from participating in such sessions would be essential. The current research aims to fill this to fill this gap by investigating student perspectives after attending a mental health webinar.

The study employed a qualitative design using the phenomenological approach. Post-activity evaluations and survey responses of thirty-three (33) college students from a private, urban university in the Philippines who participated in a mental health literacy webinar were collected to serve as research data. Responses were coded and themed using Clarke and Braun's thematic analysis method. Research findings revealed that college students gained insights about caring for their well-being, effective help-seeking, and how to help those experiencing mental health distress. They similarly expressed a willingness to learn more about these topics. Mental health literacy information delivered as a webinar can be developed as a program to increase college students' capacity to care for their mental health and support others.

Keywords— College students, counseling, mental health literacy, qualitative design.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is described as a state of mental well-being that allows individuals to manage life's stresses, recognize their capabilities, learn effectively, work productively, and contribute to their communities. It is a fundamental aspect of health and well-being, essential for our ability to make decisions , form relationships, and influence the world around us" (World Health Organization , 2022, Concepts in mental health section).

Mental health is recognized as an important predictor of student success in education. Depression and anxiety are linked to academic performance and student retention (Eisenberg et al., 2009), while symptom distress is associated with academic habits and self-efficacy (Jeffries & Salzer, 2022).

In recent years, an increase in mental illness among college students has been documented, with reports indicating a rise in ADHD, insomnia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and panic attacks in the United States (Oswalt et al., 2018). Locally, Filipino college students have been identified as being at risk for depression and anxiety (Alibudbud, 2021). While academic difficulties have consistently been cited as a source of mental health distress

(Pedrelli et al., 2015; Alibudbud, 2021), psychological illnesses in college students have also been linked to financial concerns, loneliness, and lack of self-care (Orygen, 2017). Academic-related mental health distress is worsened by low treatment-seeking behavior and poor adherence to treatment protocols (Pedrelli et al., 2015). In a study among students with elevated suicide risk, barriers to help-seeking include the perception that treatment is not necessary, that time is lacking, and that the problem could be managed by one's self (Czyz et al., 2022). In the Philippines, college students are inhibited from seeking mental health assistance due to discomfort in sharing feelings with another person, denial that there is a problem, and embarrassment (Villamor & Dy, 2022).

There have been calls for the integration of mental health promotion into the educational system to address the rise of mental health distress on campus (Alibudbud, 2021). Learning institutions have always held a valuable role in improving students' mental health (Jorm, 2012). Orygen (2017) noted that mental health concerns in schools can be addressed through guidance provided by the government, particularly by establishing efficient data collection and effective information dissemination systems, as well as by providing a mental health framework to follow. In a systematic review of programs of mental health literacy training programs for university students , despite modest and relatively short-term outcomes, Reis et al. (2021) noted positive results in improving constructs such as attitudes, beliefs, norms, and stigmas as well as first-aid skills among participants. Considering the changes in education brought about by the pandemic, Ferrara et al. (2023) have similarly found that online mental health intervention sessions can sufficiently and positively influence the mental health attitudes of college undergraduate students.

Functional knowledge of mental health, known as mental health literacy, has been identified as a potent tool in protecting against mental health distress and facilitating well-being (Argao et al., 2021). According to Jorm et al. (1997, p. 168)," 'Mental Health Literacy' refers to knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that aid their recognition, management or prevention. Mental health literacy includes recognizing specific disorders; knowing how to seek mental health information; knowledge of risk factors and causes, self-treatments, professional help available; and attitudes that promote recognition and appropriate help-seeking." Noting however that Mental Health Literacy is not mere knowledge but something one can take action on to improve one's mental health or those of others, Jorm (2012, p. 231) refined the components of Mental Health Literacy to include: "(a) knowledge of how to prevent mental disorders, (b) recognition of when a disorder is developing, (c) knowledge of help-seeking options and treatments available, (d) knowledge of effective self-help strategies for milder problems, and (e) first aid skills to support others who are developing a mental disorder or are in a mental health crisis .

Mental health literacy helps young people recognize signs of psychological illness (Wright et al., 2007), appropriately seek help, and avoid potentially harmful reactions (Tay et al., 2018). Likewise, increasing mental health knowledge decreases discriminating behaviors and attitudes toward people with mental health problems and, in turn, increases confidence in reaching out to people experiencing psychological distress (Anderson & Pierce, 2012). In a local study, Villamor & Dy (2022) discovered that Mental health help-seeking enhances self-awareness/personal growth, improves mental health, and reduces stress. Ultimately, this lowers mental health-related morbidity and mortality and hastens recovery time (Tay et al., 2018). On the other hand, the recovery process is hindered by lack of knowledge about symptoms of mental illness, where to seek effective treatment, not

taking mental health problems seriously, and help-seeking preference for religious leaders and those who practice faith healing (Kayrouz et al., 2014).

The mental health literacy outlook in the Philippine tertiary education setting is evolving. Recent studies indicate that Filipino college students have an average level of mental health literacy (Argao et al., 2021), can recognize signs and symptoms of mental illness, and are willing to seek help if they observe these in themselves (Ines, 2019).

It was likewise observed, however, that Filipino college students have above-average psychological distress and heightened anxiety levels (Argao et al., 2021), as well as insufficient knowledge of the causes of mental illness, how to seek and avail professional help and evidence-based treatments (Ines, 2019).

College students are at a crucial transition point in their lives. Unmanaged mental illness and unmanaged psychological distress can negatively impact their long-term productivity and well-being. Given these, the researcher would like to explore the insights of college students from a mental health literacy webinar.

The current study hopes to identify what informants gain from attending a mental health literacy webinar, what is most helpful for them, and what they want to learn more about.

By doing so, the research hopes to establish knowledge and practices that help support the mental health of college students through campus-based programs and contribute to knowledge on mental health literacy and education.

METHOD

This section discusses the research design used in the study and the process of determining the informants. The theoretical foundation and components of the mental health literacy webinar are outlined. The procedure for gathering data, the evaluation material used, and how the responses were analyzed are explained in this section.

Research Design

The study employed the qualitative design using the phenomenological approach. Using this approach, the researcher seeks to observe how humans behave based on their worldview. The phenomenological approach processes phenomena in three steps: intuiting, analyzing, and describing the phenomena (Umanailo, 2019).

Informants

Informants The informants were drawn from participants of a mental health literacy webinar facilitated in March 2024. All were enrolled in a college program at a private, urban university during the time of data gathering. Thirty-three (33) students who completed the post-activity evaluation and consented to be part of the study were consequently included as informants for the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

After attending the two-hour webinar, the informants filled out an online form. Consequently, their responses were analyzed for themes that best represent the qualitative insights they gained from the mental health literacy webinar.

Mental Health Literacy Webinar

The webinar covered topics adopted from Jorm's Mental Health Literacy 2012 conceptual framework. Mental health-related terms were defined for the participants. The mental health continuum was discussed, a network of people to seek help from was explained, and a short list of evidence-based treatments, coping strategies, and self-care practices were reviewed. First–aid skills were discussed in a manner college students could easily understand and apply. An open forum where the participants freely asked questions and clarified their ideas closed the webinar.

Research Instrument

A researcher-made evaluation instrument, divided into three parts using an online form, was utilized in the study. The form collectively covered the purpose of the evaluation and survey, informed consent, respondents' demographic information, evaluation scales, and survey questions.

For the descriptive survey, the students answered five questions concerning their qualitative insights about the webinar and their mental health needs. Among these questions, the first three questions about participation in the webinar will be analyzed: 1.) What are my insights/ learnings during the mental health webinar? 2.) What learning from today's talk would help me the most? (Kindly provide an explanation) 3.) What would I like to learn more about the topics discussed? (Kindly provide an explanation).

Data Analysis

The responses of the informants to the open-ended questions on their insights and learning from the webinar were coded and themed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method.

Analyzing themes is a foundational approach to conducting qualitative research. Clarke and Braun (2016) proposed six phases in thematic analysis. The process involved getting familiar with the data, generating codes, searching for potential themes, mapping the themes analyzed, defining and naming the themes, and producing the report, which involves the selection of representative statements to the themes that provide the narrative that best responds to the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter aims to present and discuss the current study's findings in an orderly manner. Notably, it seeks to identify what college students gain from attending a mental health literacy webinar, what is most helpful, and what they want to learn more about mental health. Tables were used to present the themes generated supported by excerpts representative of the informants' responses.

Research Question 1: What are the insights gained by college students from a webinar?
The first research question focused on the insights gained by the informants from the mental health webinar. The responses of the informants to this question fall under the following themes: (1) care for well-being, (2) effective help-seeking, and (3) how to help others with mental health problems.

Table 1. Insights from the Mental Health Literacy Webinar

Main Themes	Excerpt
Care for well-being	Participant 22: "I learned that despite the mountain of responsibilities I have, I need to make time and effort to look after myself and my well-being."
Effective help-seeking	Participant 32: "Significance of grasping the concept of mental health and determining when it is appropriate to seek assistance from professionals."
How to help others with mental health problems	Participant 21: "I have gained valuable insights into mental health and effective approaches for aiding individuals in need. I have also learned to recognize signs indicating when someone truly requires assistance."

College students often struggle to find time for self-care, which leads to its neglect (Orygen, 2017), negatively affecting their well-being. The webinar helped the participants appreciate the importance of self-awareness and regular self-care, especially rest. Rest figured prominently in the responses of the informants. College students seemingly have little time for rest and can be reluctant to do so even when necessary. Consistent with the findings of Ines (2016), participants showed limited knowledge of seeking professional help. College students realized the value of help-seeking behavior and informed them about available professional assistance tailored to their distress, clarifying self-management-related dilemmas (Czyz et al., 2022). This finding resonates with that of Villamor & Dy (2022), who state that improving mental health help-seeking enhances self-awareness. The third theme observed is associated with helping others, such as having the knowledge and attitude necessary to approach individuals in need of mental health support, as well as recognizing signs and symptoms of mental illness in others. This theme, gleaned from the informants' insights from the webinar, aligns with the results of a study conducted in Australia, which found that "Mental health literacy training increases participant mental health knowledge, increases confidence in responding to mental ill health in others, and diminishes stigmatizing attitudes towards those experiencing mental ill health" (Anderson & Pierce, 2012, p. 265).

Research Question 2: What learning from the webinar did college students find most helpful?

The second research question inquired what learning college students think would be most beneficial for them. Two themes were identified from among the informants' responses: (1) recognizing signs and symptoms of mental illness and (2) positive attitudes and behaviors that foster mental health.

Table 2. What the Informants' Found Most Helpful from the Mental Health Literacy Webinar

Themes	Excerpt
Recognizing signs and symptoms of mental illness.	Participant 17: "I learned to be more self-aware scientifically and self-check my own psyche. I suspect I have an anxiety disorder so I must find a professional to diagnose."
Positive attitudes and behaviors that foster mental health	Participant 29: "Honestly, I learned to be more open when it comes to talking about mental illnesses and to be more respectful of each person. Mental illnesses are not seen by the naked eye, as such, one must be careful on how you always treat people."

The informants found recognizing signs and symptoms of mental illness the most beneficial. Through the webinar, they understood how to evaluate their psychological distress and considered seeking appropriate referral. Seeking and referring to receive proper diagnoses while being keen on how mental illness develops and how it impacts everyday life are critical ideas in recognizing signs and symptoms of mental illness. This is comparable to the findings made by Wright et al. (2007) in a study among Australian youth that correctly naming mental illness leads to appropriate help-seeking and treatment options, consequently decreasing the prospect of addressing the mental health problems on one's own.

Likewise, college students also identified positive attitudes and behaviors that foster mental health as the learning most beneficial for them. Through the webinar, the informants adopted a more open attitude towards mental health: both their own and others. This observation supports the findings that online seminars on mental health literacy positively impacts the mental health attitudes (Ferrara et al., 2023) and that mental health literacy initiatives improve the first-aid skills of college students (Reis et al., 2021).

Research Question 3: What college students would like to learn more about mental health?

The last research question concerns what the college students would like to learn more about mental health. Two themes were generated from among the responses provided by the informants: (1) stress management, and (2) how to better help others.

Table 3. What the Informants Would Like to Learn More About Mental Health

Themes	Excerpt
Stress management	Participant 8: "I would like to learn more concrete ideas or steps on how I can effectively deal with stress and pressure."
How to better help others	Participant 1: "The different ways to deal with people suffering from these illnesses, how to better support them."

College students experience numerous stressors (Orygen, 2017). After the webinar, the informants expressed interest to learn more about managing stress and developing healthy and effective habits. This can be attributed to mental health literacy webinar helping the informants grow in self-awareness and seek personal growth (Villamor & Dy, 2022).

More attention should be given to the experiences of college students and how they can promote mental health and well-being among their peers (Crisp et al., 2020). The informants also wanted to learn more on how to help others. They expressed desire to learn about illnesses and conditions that they think they have observed in other students and what they can do for them. This evinces increase in mental health information-seeking, considered integral to Jorm's (1997) conceptualization of mental health literacy.

It is notable how the themes from the three questions seem to parallel each other, revolving around self-care, effective help-seeking, and mental health first-aid. This leads to the essential understanding that college students want to learn more about what they found helpful during the webinar.

CONCLUSIONS

College students learned about mental health self-care, help-seeking, and how to help others through the mental health literacy webinar. What the informants found most helpful was learning how to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness as well as positive attitudes and behaviors that foster mental health. In the future, the college students would like to know more about how to prevent mental illness, emphasizing coping with everyday stressors and how to help others by learning more about specific mental health conditions they have seen among their peers as well as having activities that can lead to an exchange of experiences and ideas about mental health.

Facilitating webinars should be continued in view of the helpful insights college students gain from participating in it. Other topics aligned with mental health literacy can be developed for topics like self-care and mental illness prevention, talks on empirically based approaches to stress management and coping can be offered. Variations in delivery of the activity may be explored, from talks to small group discussions.

In close coordination with counseling and other student affairs professionals, college students should be encouraged and guided to start their mental health initiatives in their respective groups. Student-led mental health initiatives could advance discourse and involvement, increasing mental health literacy in institutions of higher education facilitating higher mental health outcomes.

In view of future research, while looking for immediate outcomes is helpful, it would also be useful to investigate the long-term impact of mental health literacy activities among students at the individual and university levels.

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