



Psychosocial Services for Students in Metro Manila Universities Offering Social Work Degree Programs

Maria Alexandria T. Cauilan*

Affiliate : College of Social Work and Community Development, University of the Philippines Diliman

*Correspondence: mhsmap.swresearch@gmail.com

Jose Ramil M. Reyes

Affiliate : College of Social Work and Community Development, University of the Philippines Diliman

Abstract

The state of mental health among Filipino college students remains a major concern, especially in the context of the pandemic. Cases of mental health-related problems have been seen to have risen, particularly among tertiary-level students. Fortunately, academic institutions are working to address these ongoing issues that hinder students' social functioning. However, there is a need for further research on the actual presence of psychosocial support services in universities to know and understand how school systems address the concerning problem about the mental health of their students. Identifying and discerning these support systems, as well as the gaps that come with them, is crucial in providing relevant knowledge and information for the students, faculty, and university administrators alike, to be more aware of the pressing need to come up with strategies and plans in the form of equipping more effective and more efficient psychosocial support systems to ultimately help college students in need. This paper identifies the psychosocial support systems in place among Metro Manila universities that offer social work degree programs, including the benefits, opportunities, risks, and challenges they have come across, to provide a background of what is happening and what is needed to attain social functioning, all for the students' well-being.

Keywords: psychosocial support, mental health, tertiary-level students, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

Background of the Study and Review of Related Literature

Cases of mental health issues and problems have been constantly seen on the rise in the Philippines, then and now. With the onslaught of the pandemic, the mental health landscape has been consistently worsening. The prolonged quarantine, as well as the occurrence and implementation of remote learning, has added to the mental stress among university students who are forced to adjust to the system being taken into place. With this, there has been an ever-growing demand for school-based mental health services to cater to the needs of those who are in dire need of it; however, the supply seems to be not enough to be able to sustain the totality of those who have mental health issues and problems in the country (Tee et al., 2020). While there have been efforts to provide school-based mental health services, the need for a more inclusive and interdisciplinary approach in giving and providing interventions has been as relevant as ever. It needs immediate attention to have a more effective and efficient service delivery to different client systems.

The mental health situation among Filipino college students has been one of the primary concerns among those who study and practice in the field of mental health. To address the growing need for these kinds of services, school-based mental health services have been developed and presented to aid with the growing demand of college students for it. Such services oftentimes included interdisciplinary approaches, where different disciplines and professionals have been trained and present to give appropriate and adequate interventions to students. Furthermore, with this kind of setup,

social workers are greatly needed as they are trained to use theories dedicated to the holistic development of a person, which is needed in attaining the social functioning of a client concerning their mental health. However, the roles of social workers among such school-based mental health services have been overshadowed by different professions practicing psychosocial interventions, like psychiatrists, psychologists, psychometricians, and guidance counselors, among others, are more preferred and more present than social workers themselves (Ines, 2019).

The need to identify and develop school-based mental health services has been the call to address mental health issues and problems among Filipino college students. With the pandemic still lingering in the foreground, school-based mental health services need to strengthen their services; now more than ever, the need for social workers to adapt to the changing setup of service delivery, and interventions are also needed for more effectiveness of the practice. This research paper aims to identify the gaps in whether schools have existing school-based mental health services, i.e., psychosocial support systems or the lack thereof, and ultimately, to provide understanding among university administrations to have a better grasp on the importance of implementing such services for the betterment of the overall well-being of university students.

State of Mental Health in the Philippines

In the Philippines, culture is deemed as an important factor in the ongoing discrimination of people suffering from mental health issues (Maravilla and Tan, 2021). Generally, Filipinos believe that such problems are brought by the personal characteristics of an individual: individualism, lack of one's faith, selfishness, among others (Maravilla and Tan, 2021). Tanaka et al. (2018) reported that there are three themes that explain why Filipino mental health has been stagnant for centuries: First, someone who experiences mental health problems is at risk of familial exclusion as those who are deemed to have it is oftentimes rejected and disowned by their families, in relation to the preservation of the honor and dignity of a family. Secondly, the contrasting optimism and pessimism greatly contributed to this ongoing discrimination, as the dismissal of problems in connection to one's faith as a show of positivism has been on the go to solve these kinds of problems (Tanaka et al., 2018). Lastly, the oversimplification of the challenges being faced by people who need mental health assistance has been pervasive, as shown in people who will deem the challenges as just a phase instead of treating it more seriously, thus preventing people with mental health issues seek further help from qualified professionals, including social workers (Tanaka et al., 2018).

The Philippines, as of the moment, has enacted its first mental health law: Republic Act No. 11036 or the Mental Health Act. Its declaration of policy states that the state is responsible for affirming the mental health of every Filipino as part of their fundamental human rights (Republic Act No. 11036, 2018). This is a huge step towards furthering the approach to cater to the needs of those who are in dire need; however, there are still things that need to be done as it seems that there is still a long way to go for our mental health services to be inclusive to all. According to the Department of Health (2020), only 5% of the healthcare budget is being directed and allocated to the mental health sector in the country. Martinez et al. (2020) claimed that the country has the third-highest number of mental health access in the Western Pacific region, as mental illness is the third most common disability in the Philippines, and six million Filipinos suffer from mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety.

In the context of the pandemic, service delivery has been the main problem as many mental health institutions that deliver services have shifted and adapted virtually (Tee et al., 2020). The prolonged staying at home, especially by women, has contributed to higher levels of stress and anxiety as cases of domestic abuse have been seen on the rise. Furthermore, the concern about the possibility of getting and contracting COVID-19 among people who live in high-risk areas is also a key factor in the growing number of mental health issues, in particular depression and anxiety problems, that hinder them to perform holistically and effectively in their lives (Tee et al., 2020).

Mental Health among Filipino College Students and Young Adults

A study conducted by Ines (2019) found that among 797 college students examined, 55.2% recognize that depression does exist and refer to their respective appropriate labels and 95.7% were reported to express willingness to seek mental health assistance if there is a need. The prevalence of mental health issues among Filipino young adults has become a major focus of mental health professionals in recent years, as it greatly affects their educational attainment and employment (Maravilla and Tan, 2021). In response to the growing demand for mental health services in the country, the Department of Health launched its Mental Health Psychosocial and Psychosocial Support program that ultimately caters to patients who have mental health needs and those who have pressing mental health issues and problems that needs to be addressed (Department of Health, 2013). However, because of the nature of the psychosocial interventions being given in a hospital setting and through a

reactive approach, there is still a need to widen its reach to other aspects and areas such as schools and universities to cater to the needs of the students who might and ultimately can also experience mental health issues and problems. In this regard, Philippine universities are being tasked on their own whether or not they should and can adapt to these issues concerning their students' mental health as others did not adapt and come up with support systems to strategize addressing mental health concerns while others have successfully initiated doing so, in the case of the University of the Philippines Diliman's PsycServ, were originally designed to address contemporary needs that were later on institutionalized to cater the growing demands for the promotion of student's mental health and well-being, have been rampant and have seen to be effective and efficient in addressing mental health concerns of numerous students of the said university (Encarnacion, 2018).

Psychosocial Support Systems and Importance to Academic Institutions

For the purpose of this study, the researchers will be focusing on psychosocial support systems under the general scope of school-based mental health services. To expound our understanding of the subject, we must also learn what encompasses psychosocial support. The term "psychosocial" refers to the dynamic relationship between our psychological (i.e. thoughts, emotions, and behaviors) and social (i.e. relationships, family and community networks, social values, and cultural practices) aspects, (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2016, p. 8).

Swick and Powers (2018) also provided a comprehensive background to highlight the necessity of delivering mental health services to schools, such as the barriers that prevent children and the youth from reaching out for such services. Notable barriers include, but is not limited to the following: (a) the family's access to the services, i.e. knowledge on where and how to get access, time and location restrictions; (b) the costs to avail of these services i.e. medical service, insurance, and travel fees; (c) reluctance to seek treatment due to the stigma within the issue i.e. negative attitudes and beliefs held by the public; and (d) previous experiences from initial approaches to such services i.e. problems with the service providers.

Furthermore, the National Association of School Psychologists (2021) published a resource article, focusing on school-based mental and behavioral health services, emphasizing on the topic with five main points, namely: (a) that past research they have conducted have proven that children who receive the appropriate mental and behavioral health support yield large improvements in terms of output, whether academically or in their social life, as opposed to those who do not receive such support; (b) in relation to said research, according to a report done by the US Department of Health and Human Services, even though there is a significantly high record of children and adolescents with mental and behavioral health-related issues, there's not enough services to accommodate them; (c) with such issues unmet, schools are then perceived to be able to provide an adequate avenue to meet the needs of the children and adolescents as it is easier for them to access the services; (d) in order for such services to be adequate, it is necessary that the concerned personnel, not only professionals delivering these services, but the administration and teaching faculty as well, are well-informed and trained adequately, and that the school management properly integrates the students' overall learning plan with these services and; (e) if such mental and behavioral health services are properly integrated within the school environment, it will also lead to increased academic performance of the students which will also benefit the school itself;

In fulfillment of the previously mentioned definitions and as stated in the article (Daquioag, 2020) by Dr. Elizabeth P. De Castro who conducted the study of mapping out of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) in the Philippines during the pandemic that these services should be delivered within general health services, whether in a national or local scale, further stresses the importance of psychosocial support systems in academic institutions.

Relevance to the Social Work Profession

It has been highlighted that psychosocial encompasses all aspects of the well-being of an individual, and the promotion of well-being is one core of the social work profession. While there may be existing literature on studies surrounding the history and existing models for school-based mental health services, many of these studies were carried out more than a decade ago. While they are still relevant and necessary, we still need further research that builds upon them, taking the current context into consideration.

Furthermore, there are already present guides and recommendations that schools and concerned professionals can refer to when discussing and planning the implementation of school-based mental health services i.e. providing the foundations, components, interventions for a culture-specific intervention model (Nastasi et al., 2004). In relation to this, while there are also studies that evaluate their effectiveness in cooperation with psychologists and teachers (Franklin et al., 2017), there is little

to no studies regarding psychosocial support systems in academic institutions by or in relation to social work professionals, more so within local literature i.e. evaluation and assessment, effectiveness. Even in a report (Mattingly, 2017) published by K4D Helpdesk Service, reports suggest a more comprehensive evaluation to develop a better understanding of approaches to psychosocial support, as to which are most effective in specific situations.

The researchers recognize that in order to be able to conduct an in-depth assessment of services, there would be a need to identify and describe the existing services in place first. The above-mentioned sources further support that research on school-based mental health services i.e. psychosocial support systems, such as this study, is relevant, as it can contribute to the growing literature upon which concerned professionals i.e. school-based social workers and social work educators can make reference to, for further research and practice.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study is to describe an area of school-based mental health services i.e. the psychosocial support systems in place among selected Metro Manila universities. Specifically, the study aims to:

- a. identify psychosocial support systems,
- b. determine their provision and delivery of psychosocial services, and
- c. identify the gaps within said psychosocial support systems and the need to provide support to the students.

The significance of this study is to contribute to the growing literature on school-based mental health programs and services.

Methodology

The researchers employed a descriptive research design of the existing school-based mental health services i.e. psychosocial support systems in Metro Manila universities offering social work degree programs, that succeeding researchers and practitioners can utilize. The target participants of this study were the managing bodies, whether formal or informal, i.e. any university-wide- or college-wide-recognized group, organization, committee, or department offering mental health services (psychosocial support) within the aforementioned universities. Aside from resource constraints i.e. time, manpower, financial situation, among others, the researchers chose to narrow their target participants to universities with psychosocial courses as they perceive that universities with existing psychosocial professionals within would be a good starting point for the study, as these concerned professionals are expected to be more informed with the needs of the academic body as they regularly interact with the students.

The researchers utilized mixed methods of research in the study by using an online survey questionnaire containing close-ended and open-ended questions to obtain the necessary data. Purposive and snowball sampling was used in choosing the target participants.

The researchers applied thematic data analysis i.e. inductive coding for collation and organization of the data, and formal report writing and tabulated statistical figures i.e. pie charts for the presentation of data to better understand and visualize the gathered information relevant to the research.

As the participants were profiled, the researchers chose to use the project-specific formal systems model as a lens and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, mainly the five ecological systems, as the main working theory to discern the data for inductive coding and discuss it accordingly in relation to their role in the students' well-being, specific to their mental health.

After transcribing the survey responses in tabular form, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data and using the survey research questions as a guide, the researchers formulated their initial set of themes. The researchers identified the initial set of codes that represented the data from the survey using the initial set of themes and after this initial categorization, the researchers discussed whether the initial themes can represent the identified codes. After recognizing that some themes can still be modified, the researchers proceeded to rename and re-arrange the themes in order to accurately represent the grouped codes. After setting the themes and codes, the researchers began to formulate a narrative based on them. The researchers also utilized a hierarchical coding frame in order to present the summary of the coded data (Figure 5).

Results and Discussion

The researchers managed to gather nine participants from six out of the fifteen universities and colleges they reached out to, specifically representatives of the psychosocial support giving offices of

each university or school that participated. Oftentimes, the participants were guidance counsellors, head of the social work department, or personnel of the psychosocial support office of the university.

Results

On Mental Health Concerns

At the outset, the respondents were questioned whether they regard mental health as a concern for the students and whether they have encountered such concerns. Figures 1 and 2 show that nine out of nine respondents agree to these statements. The respondents' further elucidation on their responses were categorized accordingly in the latter parts of this section.

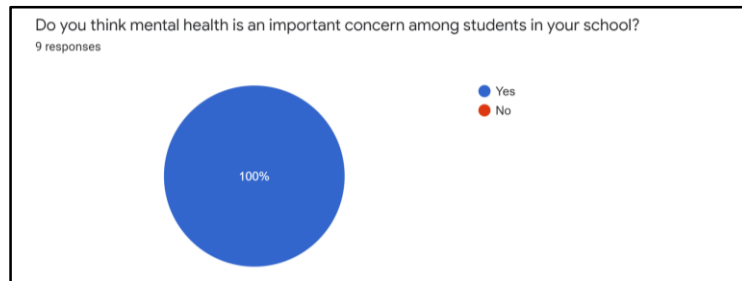


Figure 1. Mental Health as an Important Concern

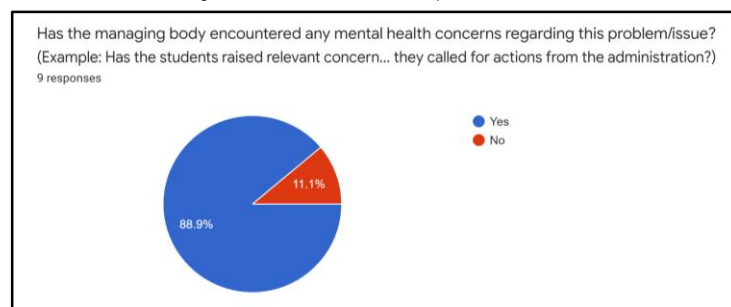


Figure 2. On Encountering Mental Health Concerns

On Mental Health Initiatives

These respondents were then requested to provide information regarding their respective institutions' managing bodies, detailing on said bodies' (a) purpose and (b) initiatives i.e. past and ongoing mental health-related programs and services. The participants were also asked regarding their perceptions on the mental well-being of the students, especially during the pandemic, with the shift to remote learning.

Figure 3 shows that eight out of nine respondents have offered initiatives that address mental health concerns, especially regarding the shift to remote learning due to the pandemic.

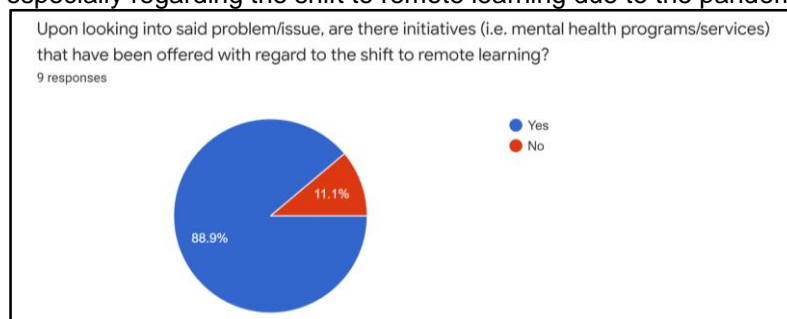


Figure 3. Initiatives on Remote Learning

Mental Health i.e. Psychosocial Programs and Services

Figure 4 shows the mental health-related programs and services provided by the universities and colleges that participated in this study that have been compiled by the researchers. The average number of the variation of services surveyed is more than what the researchers had initially expected.

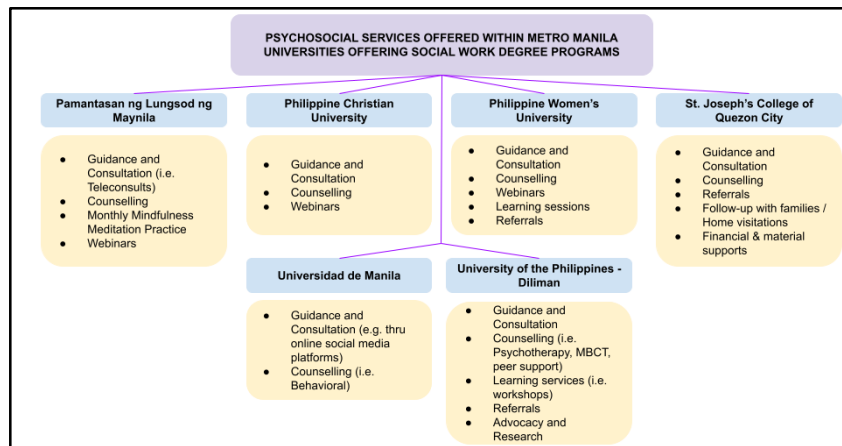


Figure 4. Chart of Compiled Psychosocial Services Offered Within Metro Manila Universities Offering Social Work Degree Programs

The results convey that while there may be several factors that limit the provision and implementation of mental health-related services, which were even more affected by the pandemic, the managing bodies continue to deliver to the best of their capacities for the sake of the students of their respective institutions.

Moving on, based on the answers provided by the respondents, the researcher was able to categorize their statements into four general themes, (a) Benefits and Opportunities, (b) Insights and Recommendations, (c) Actions Taken, and (d) Risks and Challenges, the first three of which falls under the Positive aspect and the last under the Negative aspect. Each general theme has their own sub-themes, under which the codes have been categorized.

Figure 5 shows a hierarchical coding frame of the general themes and their sub-themes identified while the code-groups under each sub-theme shall further be discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

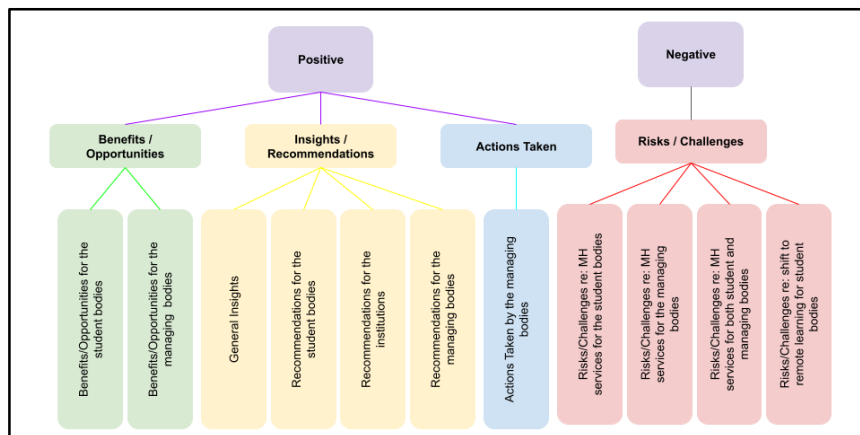


Figure 5. Hierarchical Coding Frame of Results and Findings

As an overview, the researchers will first be discussing the Actions Taken theme, which presents the past and ongoing initiatives provided by the managing bodies, in connection with the already presented chart of Psychosocial Services in Figure 4. By doing so, the researchers will have an idea of which models and methods are already being tried and tested. The researchers will then introduce the Benefits and Opportunities theme, as well as the Risks and Challenges theme, that came about in their preparation, conduct, and evaluation of said initiatives. Both themes have been divided in statements pertaining to both the student bodies and managing bodies, and the Risks and Challenges theme will be further divided into categories, pertaining to the type of concern the researchers have identified. By tackling these themes, the researchers will be able to point out which factors affect the implementation of mental health initiatives. Lastly, the researchers will present the Insights and Recommendations theme wherein the managing bodies have put forward after considering said positive and negative aspects of the initiatives after considering their resources and their student bodies' feedback. Accordingly, for each theme, there are the sub-themes to highlight which statements are meant for either the student bodies or the managing bodies and under those sub-themes, there are code-groups which summarize the essence of the statements by the respondents.

Actions Taken By the Managing Bodies

Under the Actions Taken theme, as the target respondents were managing bodies, the sub-

theme is specified as Actions Taken by the Managing Body. Figure 6 depicts the hierarchical coding frame of actions taken by the managing body.

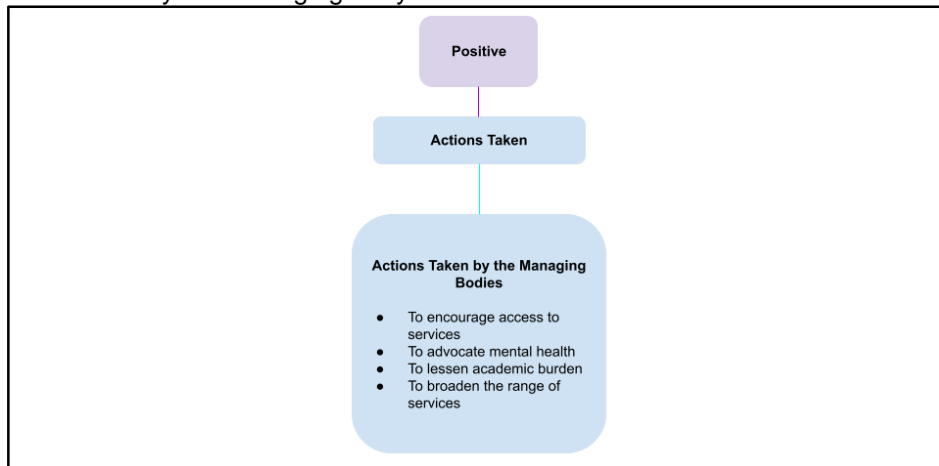


Figure 6. Hierarchical Coding Frame of Actions Taken

This includes the encouragement of access to services, advocating mental health, lessening the academic burden, and broadening the range of services.

For the actions taken by the managing body, two out of nine respondents answered that their institutions conduct mental health breaks wherein there are days in their academic calendar where students have no classes to prioritize their mental health and well-being. On the other hand, One respondent shared that they do this by having all of their students have an initial record in their guidance office. Moreover, to address mental health concerns of students, two out of nine respondents responded that the managing body conducts webinars open to the student body to discuss relevant themes related to the promotion of mental health and well-being. Furthermore, there are also five respondents who conduct mindfulness activities, counselling, and therapy sessions to their students who need psychosocial and mental health help. In addition to the regular counselling sessions, with the occurrence of the pandemic, tele consults were conducted to replace the traditional face-to-face consultations. Lastly, one out of nine respondents already reached out with existing managing bodies inside their institution to talk about collaborations in giving psychosocial and mental health help to students who need their help in order to expand their resources and amplify their call to further their advocacy.

After inquiring about the participants' initiatives, the researchers questioned the performance i.e. effectiveness (or the lack thereof) of said initiatives.

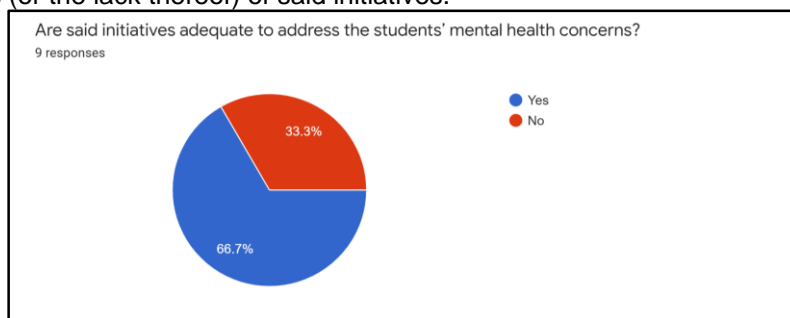


Figure 7. Adequacy of Initiatives to Address Mental Health Concerns

Figure 7. shows that six out of eight respondents agreed that their current initiatives are adequate enough while the three did not feel their initiatives adequate enough to address the mental health concerns that have been brought up. The researchers will further expound on this under the Benefits and Opportunities and Risks and Challenges themes in the following parts.

The managing bodies have already encouraged the students to avail the accessible services they have made to cater those who are in need of mental health and psychosocial services. In addition, the managing bodies advocated mental health by conducting webinars that tackle mental health issues and how to address them and providing insights on the students' mental health and well-being for guidance. Moreover, there was a broadening of the range of services and to lessen academic burden to improve the quality of mental health and well-being of the student body.

Benefits and Opportunities

Under the Benefits and Opportunities theme, there are two sub-themes, (a) Benefits and Opportunities for the student bodies and (b) Benefits and Opportunities for the managing bodies (as depicted in the hierarchical coding frame in Figure 8).

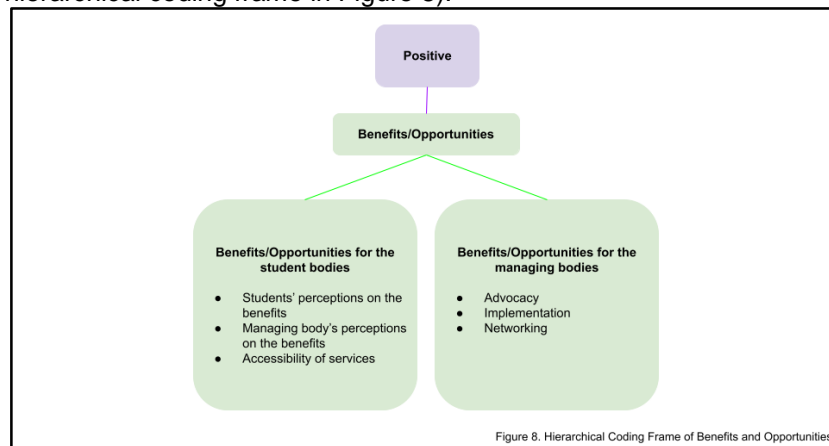


Figure 8. Hierarchical Coding Frame of Benefits and Opportunities

The student body benefits include students' perceptions on the benefits of the initiatives being rendered by the managing bodies, managing body's perceptions on the benefits, and accessibility of services. Meanwhile, benefits and opportunities for the managing bodies include advocacy, implementation, and networking.

For the benefit or opportunity for the student body sub-theme, five out of nine respondents stated that their students, after receiving some form of help from the managing bodies through mindfulness practices they offered, have seen improvement in their mental health and well-being. On the other hand, two out of nine respondents declared that the webinars the managing bodies conducted were helpful to promote mental health and well-being of the students as per the students' perception and feedback. Moreover, two out of nine respondents stated that the initiatives given by the managing bodies were helpful for the students as they benefited from these activities as students were able to have help. Furthermore, through the managing bodies' orientations and workshops that they offer to the student body, two out of nine respondents answered that the students were able to know more about their offered services to them and that were assured that at the very least, their institutions have ways on how to address their psychosocial needs should they need further assistance from them. Lastly, there are respondents who pointed out that the referrals and the guidance the managing bodies make to their students benefited them as more services will be provided by the managing bodies given the feedback from the students.

For the benefit or opportunity for the managing body sub-theme, two out of nine schools answered that their managing bodies have various objectives targeted to promote mental health to the student body, and that they use them as a guide to give relevant services unto them. There is also a response that says that there is a tapping of relevant government agencies that can help and assist them in delivering mental health needs to those concerned. Also, through research, there is a response that said that the managing body has benefitted from conducting research as they were able to gauge the needs and concerns of the student body so they can formulate appropriate and relevant interventions to students who need psychosocial help and support. Moreover, the initiatives were seen to be added avenues to release the feelings of students, as two out of nine respondents stated that their initiatives as managing bodies has helped them and the students gauge their similarities and differences in pursuit of a common goal for mental health promotion.

The codes for students' perceptions on the benefits touch the client's individual self as there is a relationship between the client as an individual and their perceptions to themselves. Moreover, there is also a found relationship between the student's perception with the professionals involved in the managing body that contributes and relates to the student's microsystem.

The promotion of advocacy, networking, and implementation of services by managing bodies are considered to be part of the mesosystem as this is done within the institution for the benefit of the student body. On the other hand, for the managing bodies' perceptions on the benefits, this also involves the ecological system's microsystem as there is a found relationship between the students and the managing body, wherein there is a shared common interest of seeking outlet for their mental health concerns and providing appropriate mental health interventions, respectively. Moreover, for the accessibility of services, this falls under the formal systems model, wherein the service providers (managing bodies) give inputs and outputs to the psychosocial program or institution they are involved in to provide these services (inputs and outputs) to the student body. The availability (or lack) of services

in a managing body influences the students' accessibility to relevant services that can help promote their mental health and well-being.

Risks and Challenges

Under the Risks and Challenges theme, there are four sub-themes, (a) Risks and Challenges regarding mental health services for student bodies, (b) Risks and Challenges regarding mental health services for the managing bodies, (c) Risks and Challenges regarding mental health services for both the student and managing bodies, and (d) Risks and Challenges regarding the shift to remote learning for the student body (as depicted in the hierarchical coding frame in Figure 9).

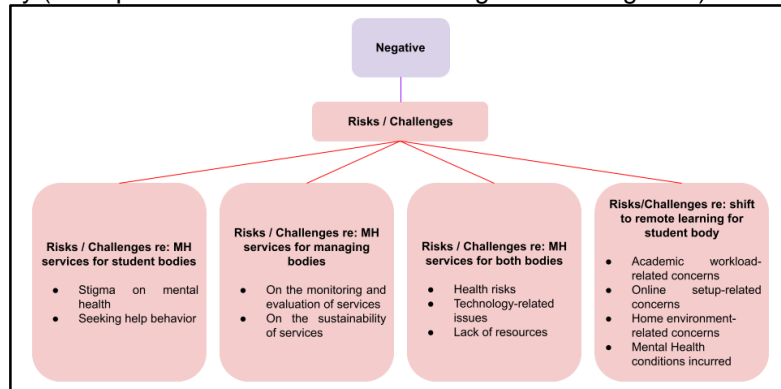


Figure 9. Hierarchical Coding Frame of Risks and Challenges

For the risks and challenges regarding mental health services for the student body sub-theme, three out of nine respondents have brought up that even when services are readily available, there can be other other factors as to why students may feel reluctant to reach out. Two respondents implied that if the students' overall condition or situation is not good, it will also affect their motivation and capability to seek help. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the professional conduct of the service providers themselves i.e. how they respond to students who do reach out is crucial. One respondent shared that students were accused of lying about their condition and taking advantage of the situation when they came forward to consult with their problems. This kind of reception will leave a bad impression to students who are currently seeking help and/or planning to do so.

For the risks and challenges regarding mental health services for the managing body sub-theme, three out of nine respondents have admitted that they are unable to provide a more comprehensive provision and delivery of services due to difficulties in implementing monitoring and evaluation of already existing services.

For the risks and challenges regarding mental health services for the student and managing bodies sub-theme, seven out of nine respondents shared about the constraints that both they (as service providers) and the students (as clients) face that largely impact service provision and delivery. Four emphasized the lack of human resources i.e. professional personnel, and material resources i.e. financial support and well-functioning gadgets and conducive learning spaces, both for the implementation and monitoring of the services. Three respondents which specified technology-related issues such as poor internet connection due to the shift to an online system and raised the issues of health risks, not only pertaining to acquiring the virus in the course of the latter face-to-face appointments, but as well as their (the service providers) own mental well-being that may affect their performance of their duties and obligations. Two out of nine respondents have also specified how a poor financial situation hinders not only the students availing the services, but also the managing bodies that are supposed to provide the services. One respondent included their program's status as a special project, meaning their services are temporary and therefore, unstable, which may negatively affect students with ongoing arrangements with them.

For the risks and challenges regarding shift to remote learning for student body sub-theme, nine out of nine respondents have brought up different, but interrelated factors which can affect the students' mental well-being, as well as their capability to address the problems that are both affected and influenced by said well-being. Five out of nine respondents have stated that the shift to remote learning i.e. online classes have greatly affected the students' mental well-being as the students are unable to adjust to the online class setup and its accompanying requirements, therefore affecting their academic performance in the process as well. Six out of nine respondents have identified that another factor that affects their mental well-being can be attributed to pressures at home such as, but not limited to meeting basic needs (i.e. food and housing). Other factors associated with the home environment also include other societal roles that the students have to play i.e. filial duties, household chores,

breadwinner, among others, which add on to the burden the students have to carry alongside their academic workload. Furthermore, most respondents have also raised that due to the shift to remote learning, there has been an increase in students with either emerging or intensifying cases of mental health conditions, i.e. mild anxiety, burnout, severe depression, bipolar disorder, and even suicidal ideations.

As the researchers have now presented the results regarding the initiatives and their accompanying benefits and risks, the researchers will now move on to the results regarding the insights formed from the aforementioned findings, as well as the recommendations for future initiatives.

The monitoring and evaluation of services fall under the formal systems model's outputs of the service providers under the psychosocial program (managing body), and with the advent and influence of the pandemic, there have been significant changes that led to the limitations and difficulties in doing monitoring and evolution of these services provided by the managing bodies. On the other hand, the sustainability of services falls under the outputs aspect of the service providers (managing bodies) being rendered to the clients (students) and like the monitoring and evaluation, the sustainability of the services provided by the managing bodies are also facing challenges during the pandemic as there is a limited amount of resources to be used in order to fully implement psychosocial programs and services

Both of the aforementioned stakeholders are affected by the health risks primarily imposed by the pandemic and that there have been changes that needed to be done in order to adapt with the health protocols in place and with this, health risks fall under the mesosystem and microsystem. Furthermore, the lack of resources and technology-related issues are caused by factors that are encompassed by macrosystem and mesosystem as there is a wider and societal reasons such as poverty, lack of access to health facilities and help, lack of budget, lack of access to gadgets and internet devices, among others, that contribute to the lack of resources of both the students and the managing bodies.

Academic workload-related concerns, as well as online setup-related concerns have been rampant since the start and the duration of the pandemic due to changes seen in the online learning and delivery setup being imposed by the universities and colleges that participated in this research study and with this, they fall under the mesosystem and macrosystem as these entails university and school administration concerns as well as the shared dilemma and challenges of universities and schools on how to mitigate the effects of the changing learning environment and setups for the student body. Mental health conditions incurred by the students, which fall under the exosystem and macrosystem, also affected much of the mental health and well-being aspect of the student body as the pandemic exacerbated the need to immediately adjust and readjust with the learning setups being mandatorily imposed. Lastly, home environment-related concerns fall under the microsystem as this happens within the family as well as macrosystem as there is a societal trend that the home and school classes affect the mental health of the students given the blurring of distinction between the academic and house work and roles.

The stigma on mental health falls under the mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. With the rampant use of social media and social networking in the lives of the students, the stigma on mental health has seen some improvements in alleviating it as there are multiple educational materials available on the internet to know about more on mental health and well-being but still there is so much work to do. The exosystem is also related to the stigmatization of mental health. The macrosystem tells us that the society and the environment students are in has direct effects on their mental health and well-being and is continuously affecting the students' need for mental health and psychosocial-related services.

General Insights and Recommendations

Under the Insights and Recommendations theme, there are four sub-themes, (a) General Insights, (b) Recommendations For The Student Bodies, (c) Recommendations For The Institutions, and (d) Recommendations For The Managing Bodies (as depicted in the hierarchical coding frame in Figure 10).

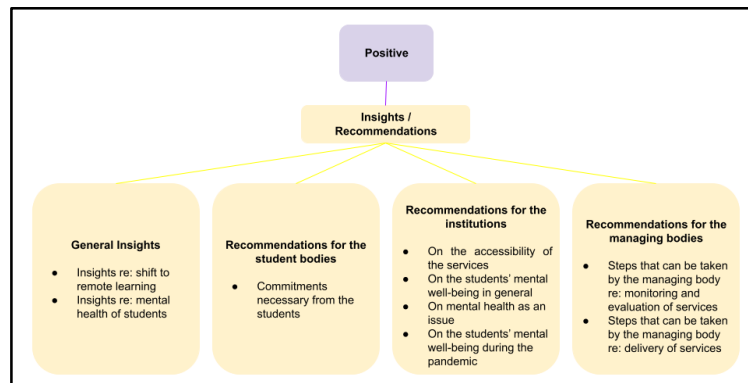


Figure 10. Hierarchical Coding Frame of Insights and Recommendations

For the general insights sub-theme, all of the respondents recognize that at present times, mental health is indeed a concern and greatly affects students' overall well-being, simultaneously affecting their academic performance. Furthermore, their responses imply that there is a two-way relationship between the students and their environment and as such, must be taken into consideration when tackling the overall needs of the students that can be addressed by the respective institutions. In addition to that, there is also a recognition that the sudden shift in the method of education delivery has affected the students' mental health and well-being, and has since been a concern and point of reference for the managing bodies to work on as time goes by.

For the recommendations for students sub-theme, two out of nine respondents answered and recommended that in order to further the mental health advocacy, students should be entrusted first by the managing bodies that they are truly needing help by presenting credible and reliable proof and that they must also show commitment by attending their sessions with the managing bodies rendering their mental health services. Furthermore, there is also a need to look at a multitude of factors concerning mental health of the students as academics does not only contribute as the stressor of the students but also there are other factors that play into the scene such as their home, peers, career issues, among others. Three out of nine respondents recommended that there must be some sort of continued monitoring and checking of the current status of the student body with regards to mental health and well-being aspect as this will help them gauge the relevance of their managing bodies' delivery of services to those who need their help.

For the recommendations for the institution sub-theme, one out of nine respondents recommended that in order to alleviate mental health concerns of students, professors must be considerate to their students' needs especially in giving requirements and that students should also raise concerns regarding their classes should the need arise, as long as they are polite in doing so. Moreover, three out of nine respondents said that there must be changes in administering school protocols such as giving enough health breaks, changes in leniency in synchronous and asynchronous class schedules, and professors and students who are compassionate and understanding with each other. Furthermore, three out of nine respondents stated that there must be an increase in the number of mental health professionals such as psychiatrists and guidance counselors working in these managing bodies as their expertise on the field is necessary to effectively address mental health needs and concerns. Two out of nine respondents have stated that they recognize that mental health is a right, therefore the mental health concerns experienced by students should be addressed and provided for by their institutions whilst taking into account the students' disposition and capabilities. One respondent emphasized that the provision and delivery of mental health-related services should be regardless of the students socioeconomic standing.

For the recommendations for the managing body sub-theme, two out of nine respondents pointed out that there must be a continued monitoring and checking of the students with regards to their status as their experiences vary from the environment they are in and that the pandemic exacerbated the effects of it on their mental health and well-being. There should also be a developed openness within the managing bodies when rendering their mental health to engage the students more. Two out of nine respondents shared that taking steps to ensure that the students feel the availability and accessibility of the services is necessary to enable the students to reach out to them (the service providers).

Insights regarding the shift to remote learning were very telling of the present conditions of students and institutions about the sudden shift in learning modes and delivery as everyone adjusted and redesigned themselves to be fit with the newly introduced setup. On the other hand, insights regarding mental health of students were focused on the admission that mental health and well-being

is very crucial and important to maintain the welfare of all the students as this will be the key to further their growth and development as students and as individuals.

Moreover, the need for the students to commit to the services being given by the managing bodies for the attainment of their mental health and well-being is imminent and present, as perceived by the managing bodies. The accessibility of the services, on the institution's side which includes the professor's method of teaching delivery and adjustments, were identified to be further recommended to be improved further on. More so, for the students' general well-being in general, the constant monitoring of the students were seen to be an important initiative to be done by the institutions to gauge the overall and general feel of the student body with regards to their mental health and well-being as this will be the basis for their future interventions should the need arises. Furthermore, the view that mental health is an issue is recommended to be established as well to internalize the importance of mental health in the daily and social functioning of the student body. Lastly, for the students' mental well-being during the pandemic, there is also a need for constant checking of their experiences during the pandemic to also gauge if there should be further steps and pathways to be made to promote mental health and well-being for all.

There are recommendations about the steps that can be taken by the managing body regarding the monitoring and evaluation of services and that includes the continued monitoring of the status of the students, as well as constant checking on them for their experiences in attending school during the pandemic. On the other hand, there are also recommendations to further the steps that can be taken by the managing body regarding the delivery of services as there is an impending need to have more mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, guidance counsellors, and social workers to give service delivery of mental health-related services to the student body.

Discussion

As indicated previously, mental health is an impact of covid-19 pandemic. It is an important concern/issue that needs to be addressed as students with poor mental well-being negatively affects their social functioning e.g. their academic performance within their respective institution. There are several factors that influence the students' mental well-being which stem from varying system levels the researchers have previously mentioned.

While the managing bodies do acknowledge this fact, and have taken, are taking, and will be taking steps in order to address this, there are a variety of difficulties that the managing bodies come up against in the implementation and/or improvement of mental health programs and services. Specifically, the pandemic has not only introduced additional stressors to the students mental well-being, but also directly and indirectly intensified the difficulty of already existing problems being addressed by the managing bodies.

As the targeted participants of this study are managing bodies, we are unable to determine the percentage of the respective student population that are aware of the existing programs and services, but it can be inferred from the results that accessibility despite the availability is a significant concern. A key factor impacting the implementation of mental health programs and services are the clients themselves (students) because even if the programs and services are operational, if the clients are not able and willing to avail of said programs and services, then the efforts will be in vain. Stigmas i.e. misconceptions about mental health influence the students' help seeking behavior and in order to address this, there is a need to confront stigmas on mental health.

The researchers have clarified that spreading awareness about mental health is a crucial step in the implementation and/or improvement of mental health programs and services, which emphasizes the role of advocacy and research. If the researchers talk about advocacy and research, it is inevitable to discuss policy-making. With the current political climate of the Philippines, it is difficult to say whether the issue of mental health will be taken seriously or even be recognized at all. Nevertheless, a bottom-up approach can still be utilized in promoting mental health. Presently, social media is a powerful tool that can be wielded and is being wielded by mental health advocates. However, it must be wielded cleverly and appropriately, especially here in the Philippines where misinformation across social media platforms can easily prevail.

Additionally, by using platforms that are easily accessible to most, if not all of the student population, and that allow anonymity, those who are currently unable to break free of the stigma can still be inspired to seek help. Accordingly, the professionals within the institution, whether they belong to a managing body or not, have obligations to the mental health concerns of the students. One such concern is wherein the professor themselves stigmatized students who are seeking help is a negligence of this obligation. Although it is an isolated case in this research, there may still be other cases that this has happened before and it may happen again, thus, the researchers felt the need to include this. Despite the availability of mental health programs and services and the steps being taken to promote

said programs and services and mental health as whole, if the concerned individuals and/or groups who are and can be a bridge for the students who want to and do seek help are not upholding their obligations and duties, then the students would be even less inclined to come forward.

Taking the previous factors into consideration, as the managing bodies are still struggling to build and/or improve the provision and delivery of mental health services to accommodate an online system, the partial return to face-to-face learning might influence the ongoing processes that said managing bodies are already undertaking. However, it is hard to predict what type of consequences might come about from this. Be that as it may, it is clear to both the managing bodies and the researchers that the involvement of the university administration and in extension, the institution as a whole, plays a critical role in the functioning of the managing bodies. With the university administration and staff actively participating in the promotion, provision, and delivery of services, not only can there be, internally, (a) an increase in the scope of students reached and (b) mental health-related trainings for the institution's members, but also externally, as with (c) the institution providing and supporting an avenue to connect to non-university bodies to boost their programs and services. The mental well-being of the students can be further given importance by bringing up the drawbacks of having poor mental well-being. It can be inferred that if the students have poor academic performance, it may also reflect poorly on the institution.

The researchers have encountered several limitations during the course of the data gathering process, heavily influenced by the pandemic. The nature of the study is descriptive and is meant to describe and identify the existing managing bodies within the specified institutions and their perceptions of their current functioning, especially during the pandemic and shift to remote learning. The study is unable to accommodate a more comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of these managing bodies as the researchers see the need to target respondents from the student body first in order to discuss this particular topic on a deeper level.

For the respondents, the researchers chose to target universities within Metro Manila that offer social work degree programs. The initial plan was to include Metro Manila universities offering degrees with psychosocial-related courses such as psychology, however, the researchers are only two individuals who are also students with other academic subjects therefore, were unable to handle the workload required and had to revise the target respondent description. Furthermore, the allotted time for the data gathering was only a little over two months, including the writing process.

For the data gathering proper, due to the health risks brought by the pandemic, the researchers have been advised to conduct the process online. As the researchers have no prior contact with the majority of the target respondents, the researchers found difficulty in reaching out to the target respondents as many respond slowly over email, with a few being completely unresponsive. Per the request of some respondents, the researchers personally went to present their request for data gathering to a number of universities. However, a few who have given their vocal consent when we visited them personally were unable to commit as they were still unresponsive over email. Another limitation the researchers encountered was that as the target respondents are universities, there are those who are unable to accommodate the request on account of their semestral calendar as they were either in their midterms or finals week during the period of the data gathering.

In social work, we believe in the concept of PIE, person-in-environment in which the individual is both influenced by and influences the environment in which the individual exists within (Allen & Friedman, 2014). In the case of this research, the student (individual) is influenced by their environment i.e. the aforementioned factors and influences these factors. With this, in addition to the ecological systems framework, individuals and groups, either on micro-, meso- or macro-levels, that are concerned with the overall well-being and social functioning of their clients, must not neglect their mental health aspect, which has been further emphasized through this study. Consequently, social work practitioners, especially those who are working in school-based mental health services (managing bodies), are tasked to look at the multitude of factors concerning an individual (student) as they come up with relevant interventions needed to promote mental health well-being in schools and universities as such factors, in the perspective of person-in-environment, are strongly related to the interrelationship of the individual i.e. the student and their environment.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusion

The results conveyed how the pandemic has impacted the promotion, implementation, and monitoring of mental health-related services and how the managing bodies addressed, is addressing, and will be addressing said impacts for the student bodies' mental well-being, and in turn, their overall well-being within their respective institutions. The researchers found that the factors that surfaced from

the results are consistent with the factors formulated during the formation of this study's conceptual framework.

It has been repeatedly stressed that mental health is an important concern/issue that needs to be addressed as students with poor mental well-being negatively affects their social functioning e.g. their academic performance within their respective institution. There are several factors that influence the students mental well-being which stem from varying system levels the researchers have previously mentioned.

Suggestions

For the scope of target respondents, the researchers recommend expanding the geographical area of the study, extending outside of Metro Manila, further reaching into even the rest of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Additionally, future researchers can target student bodies as respondents as well to acquire a more holistic assessment of the provision and delivery of mental health programs and services, especially on their accessibility and effectiveness.

For those with further interest in extensive studies similar to this paper, the researchers would recommend reaching out to the National Association for Social Work Education, Inc., also known as NASWEI, as they are the recognized association of schools of social work in the Philippines and can be a great help for future researchers to ease their contacting process should they also focus on social work schools and universities. The researchers also propose to further widen the range of respondents aside from universities and colleges with social work degree programs, by including those offering psychology or any other psychosocial-related degrees. Even better, further studies may cover universities and colleges regardless of the presence (or lack thereof) of psychosocial-related degrees. It may be interesting to see a comparison of the quality of programs and services provided throughout said universities and colleges. This may also contribute to the construction of a comprehensive map of existing mental health programs and services.

As there is not enough survey data tackling stigma, the researchers did not further delve on this particular topic for this paper, but the researchers recommend a deeper discussion as it is also a critical factor when advocating for mental health. And as previously mentioned in the Implications section in this chapter, the researchers recommend looking into the utilization of social media platforms in raising awareness and bringing a positive light into the recognition of mental well-being. Popular media such as movies, drama series, songs, etc., and influential personalities such as public officials and celebrities can have a significant impact on the public's perception on multiple issues, and this includes their perception on mental health issues.

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Authors' Brief Bio

Jose Ramil Macawile Reyes is a BS Social Work student at the University of the Philippines Diliman. He has previously worked with international non-government organizations and has participated in ASEAN and intercountry dialogues and exchanges in pursuit of knowledge and skills building towards community engagement and sustainable development. His research interests include social work case management, medical and school social work, mental health advocacy, cultural diversity, children's rights, migration, and migrant workers' welfare.

Email: jmreyes23@up.edu.ph / joseramilreyes@gmail.com

Maria Alexandria Torres Cauilan is a BS Social Work student at the University of the Philippines Diliman. She has previously worked with multiple local organizations to pursue her passion including, but is not limited to children's rights, mental health advocacy, school social work, environmental social work, and cultural diversity.

Email: mtcauilan@up.edu.ph / alexandria.cauilan@gmail.com

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