

Prevalence of mental health conditions among learners at Gov. Feliciano Leviste Memorial National High School-Lemery, Batangas, S.Y. 2022-2023

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Abstract

Studies reported that COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the mental health problems in young people and caused increased anxiety, depression, and PTSD. For S.Y. 2021-2022, DepEd recorded 404 learners from public schools who died of suicide. This prompted the researcher to conduct this study participated by 1,098 respondents (478 or 43.53% males and 620 or 56.47% females) or 20.77% of the 5,286 total students. The PHQ-9 and GAD-7 were answered via google form by the respondents chosen through convenient sampling. Result showed that the most common problems bothering the learners nearly every day in relation to depression were “Feeling tired”, “Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much”, and “Feeling bad about self-or that they are a failure or have let self or family down”, while in relation to anxiety; “Becoming easily annoyed”, “Worrying too much about different things”, and “Feeling afraid, as if something awful might happen” which they also experience nearly every day. There were 73 or 6.65% of the respondents experiencing severe depression, while 137 learners or 12.48%, admitted to have severe anxiety. To improve their conditions, the following interventions were proposed: Intake Interview, Counseling, Administration of C-SSRS, Parents consent, Referral to outside professionals, and practicing self-care. Since mental health issues is a serious concern, it is recommended that school administrators shall take this matter seriously and be given significant attention by providing financial and moral support to improve the mental health services particularly in public schools.

Keywords: mental health conditions, depression, anxiety, counseling, referral to professionals

Prevalence of mental health conditions among learners at Gov. Feliciano Leviste Memorial National High School-Lemery, Batangas, S.Y. 2022-2023

1. Introduction

WHO defines mental health as a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. During the COVID-19 pandemic, several studies have reported an increase in prevalence of insomnia, anxiety, and depression which contributed to the growing – and often unmet- mental health needs.

The prevalence of common mental health disorders is expected to rise during the post-pandemic time as a result of the long term effects of the pandemic, the restrictive measures such as social distancing and quarantine and the socio- economic effects. This has implications for mental health services. World Health Organization stated that COVID-19 pandemic triggers 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide. This is a wake-up call to all countries to pay more attention to mental health and do a better job of supporting their populations' mental health. For S.Y. 2021-2022, DepEd recorded 404 learners from public schools who died of suicide. This data is an alarming figure that implies that we have to look into the mental health and well-being of our learners. This prompted the researcher to conduct a study on the prevalence of mental health conditions among learners for SY 2022-2023.

Statement of the Problem/Purpose - This study aimed to determine the status of the mental health conditions of learners during the first year of the implementation of the full face to face classes after pandemic. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- What is the profile of the respondents in terms of Gender and grade level?
- What are the common problems bothering the learners nearly everyday?
- How prevalent is the mental health conditions of the learners in terms of depression level and anxiety level?
- What intervention may be proposed to promote the mental health condition of learners?

Scope and Limitations - This study is confined to Governor Feliciano Leviste Memorial National High School during the Academic Year 2023-2024. The respondents of the study are the officially enrolled learners, who have an access to internet or data connection, during the conduct of the study. The profile of the respondents is limited only to the gender and grade level. The researcher was able to get a sample population of 1,098 to serve as the respondents of the study. It is equivalent to 20.77% of the total number of the students which is well above the suggested minimum sample size of 10% of the population. Non-probability sampling particularly convenience sampling was utilized.

2. Research Methodology

A research design encompasses the method and procedures employed to conduct research. In this study, the descriptive method of research was utilized. the descriptive research design is a study that describes the characteristics of a population. the descriptive research design is a study that describes the characteristics of a population. Creswell (2003) mentioned that the descriptive research design is a study that describes the characteristics of a population. This study sought to describe the mental health conditions of learners in terms of

depression and anxiety level after pandemic. Furthermore, this study sought to determine the most common problems bothering them nearly everyday in relation to depression and anxiety. Hence, the descriptive method of research is most appropriate.

3. Related Literature

Studies conducted measuring the psychological effects of COVID-19 during the early phase in 2020 showed that respondents reported moderate to severe anxiety, and moderate to severe depression. Malolos, et al (2021) on the study on “Mental health and well-being of children in the Philippine setting during the COVID-19 pandemic”, in terms of General mental health implications of COVID-19 on Filipino children, stated that the situation brought by the COVID-19 add burden to the mental well-being of children. In the general public, there was an increase in the incidence of depression, anxiety, stress, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, somatic symptoms, sleep disorders, delirium, psychosis, self-mutilation, and suicide (del Castillo et al., 2023; Moreno et al., 2020)

According to Naff et al. (2022), the pandemic exacerbated mental problems in young people and caused increased anxiety, depression, and PTSD. In another study by Kupcopa (2023) on the Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health, anxiety, and depression, a higher tendency to anxiety was exhibited by female participants and the age group under 30 years of age. The level of education has been identified as a significant factor for changes in mental state, as participants with higher levels of education tended to be in a worse mental state.

4. Results and discussion

Profile of the Respondents - The profile of the respondents is presented in the following tables.

Table 1

The Frequency and Percentage Distribution Table of the Respondents According to Gender

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------|-----------|----------------|
| Male | 478 | 43.53% |
| Female | 620 | 56.47% |
| Total | 1, 098 | 100.00% |

As shown in Table 1, there were a total of 1,098 respondents, 620 or 56.47% are females while 478 or 43.53% are males. According to World Health Organization (2023), depression can happen to anyone. However, women are more likely to have depression than men. WHO also stated that more women are affected by anxiety disorders than men.

Table 2

The Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents According to Grade Level

| Grade Level | Number of respondents | Percentage (%) |
|-------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Grade 7 | 165 | 15.03% |
| Grade 8 | 297 | 27.05% |
| Grade 9 | 348 | 31.69% |
| Grade 10 | 288 | 26.23% |
| Total | 1, 098 | 100.00% |

Table 2 shows the frequency of the respondents per Grade Level. As shown, there are 165 or 15.03% Grade 7 respondents, 297 or 27.05% are Grade 8, while 348 or 31.69% are Grade 9 respondents and 288 or 26.23% are Grade 10. Majority of the respondents are Grade 9 with 31.69%.

Prevalence of Mental Health Conditions Among Learners

The next objective of this study is to determine the mental health conditions among learners. The data are

presented in tables, along the specific problems that bothered the learners and are extensively discussed.

Table 3

Frequency Table of the Problems that Bothered the Learners based on PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire)

| Over the last two weeks, how often you been bothered by the following problems? | Not at all 0 | Several Days 1 | More than half the days 2 | Nearly everyday 3 |
|--|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Little interest or pleasure in doing things | 341 | 379 | 264 | 114 |
| Feeling down, depressed or hopeless | 423 | 355 | 221 | 99 |
| Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much | 356 | 369 | 207 | 166 |
| Feeling tired or having little energy | 221 | 445 | 261 | 171 |
| Poor appetite or overeating | 433 | 340 | 199 | 126 |
| Feeling bad about yourself-or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down | 562 | 249 | 140 | 147 |
| Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television | 485 | 349 | 175 | 89 |
| Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or the opposite -being so figety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual | 601 | 288 | 146 | 63 |
| Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself | 655 | 201 | 147 | 95 |

Table 3 shows the responses of learners on the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) measuring depression severity. As shown in the table, the problems that bothered the respondents the last two weeks nearly every day were as follows: “feeling tired or having little energy”(171), “trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping to much”,(166) “Feeling bad about self-or that they are a failure or have let self or family down” (147), “poor appetite or overeating”(126) “little interest or pleasure in doing things”(114), “feeling down, depressed or hopeless”(99), “thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting self”(95), trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television(89), and “moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed or the opposite -being so figety or restless that they have been moving around a lot more than usual.

It shall be noted that item number 9, “Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself” is a screening question for suicide risk. Based on the table, there are 201 learners who answered “Several days”, 147 who responded “More than half the days”, and 95 who admitted they experienced it “Nearly every day”, that need further assessment on the risk of suicide (using C-SSRS) particularly those who experience it “Nearly every day”.

Table 4

Frequency Table of the Problems that Bothered the Learners based on GAD-7 (General Anxiety Disorder –7)

| Over the last two weeks, how often you been bothered by the following problems? | Not at all 0 | Several Days 1 | More than half the days 2 | Nearly everyday 3 |
|---|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge | 403 | 428 | 165 | 102 |
| Not being able to stop or control worrying | 366 | 397 | 199 | 136 |
| Worrying too much about different things | 302 | 396 | 220 | 180 |
| Trouble relaxing | 478 | 340 | 168 | 112 |
| Being so restless that it is hard to sit still | 539 | 338 | 146 | 75 |
| Becoming easily annoyed or irritable | 228 | 347 | 223 | 300 |
| Feeling afraid, as if something awful might happen | 376 | 360 | 211 | 151 |

Table 4 shows the responses of the respondents on how often they experience the given problems related to General Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7). It can be gleaned from the table that the most common problems that bothered the respondents nearly every day in relation to anxiety are as follows: “Becoming easily annoyed or irritable” (300), “Worrying too much about different things”(180),“Feeling afraid, as if something awful might happen”(151), “Not able to stop or control worrying” (136), “trouble relaxing”(112), and “Being restless that it is hard to sit still” (75).

Table 5*Frequency and Percentage Distribution Table of the Respondents on the Depression Severity*

| PHQ Scores | Depression Severity | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| 20-27 | Severe depression | 73 | 6.65% |
| 15-19 | Moderately severe depression | 149 | 13.57% |
| 10-14 | Moderate depression | 226 | 20.58% |
| 5-9 | Mild depression | 298 | 27.14% |
| 0-4 | Minimal depression | 352 | 32.06% |
| | Total | 1,098 | 100.00% |

Table 5 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the learners on the severity of depression. As shown, majority of the respondents reported to have a minimal depression with 352 or 32.06%, followed by mild depression with 298 or 27.14%, while there are 226 or 20.58% are experiencing moderate depression, 149 or 13.57% reported to have moderately severe depression, and 73 learners or 6.65% of the respondents are experiencing severe depression. It can be noted that although majority of the respondents are experiencing minimal depression, we cannot ignore the 149 or 13.57% and the 73 or 6.65% of the respondents who admitted to be experiencing moderately severe and severe depression that need to be given immediate attention.

Table 6*Frequency and Percentage Distribution Table of the Respondents on the Anxiety Severity*

| Total Score | Anxiety Severity | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------|------------------|-----------|------------|
| 15-21 | Severe anxiety | 137 | 12.48% |
| 10-14 | Moderate anxiety | 251 | 22.86% |
| 5-9 | Mild anxiety | 322 | 29.33% |
| 0-4 | Minimal anxiety | 388 | 35.33% |
| | Total | 1,098 | 100.00% |

Table 6 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents on the Anxiety Severity. As shown, majority of the respondents' experience minimal anxiety with 388 learners or 35.33%, while 322 or 29.33% reported to experience mild anxiety, 251 or 22.86% with moderate anxiety and 137 or 12.48% with severe anxiety. It can be garnered that majority of the respondents' experience minimal anxiety. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the 137 or 12.48% of the learners who admitted to be experiencing severe anxiety. According to WHO (2023), anxiety disorders are the world's most common mental disorders, affecting 301 million people in 2019. Symptoms of anxiety often have onset during childhood or adolescence.

Proposed interventions to promote the mental health conditions of learners

After determining the results, the following actions were taken by the researcher:

- Identify the learners with mental health issues; with moderately severe to severe depression, and those with moderate to severe anxiety to validate about their responses and follow-up on their condition through the Intake Interview.
- Counseling. Following the Guidelines of the DepEd's Counseling and Referral System of Learners, identified learners with moderately severe to severe depression and with moderate to severe anxiety shall undergo counseling session/s.
- Administration of C-SSRS, Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale. Respondents with severe depression those who have "Thoughts that they would be better off dead, or of hurting themselves" nearly every day shall be given an assessment using C-SSRS to determine the risk of suicide.
- Parents' Consent and Referral to outside professionals. Conforming to the confidentiality rule, and other ethics in counseling, consent of parents/guardian of learners identified to have high risk for suicide shall be sought. Referral to outside professionals who are in better position to address their

needs shall be made.

- Practicing Self-care. In order to help the learners manage their conditions, they shall be taught on how to practice self-care such as, doing activities they enjoy, staying connected to family and friends, exercising regularly, sticking to a regular eating and sleeping habits, avoiding alcohol and dangerous drugs, talking to someone about your feelings, and to seek help when needed. They shall also have to develop a help seeking behavior when there are symptoms; but on a voluntary basis and shall not be forced to seek help.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the results, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Majority of the respondents were females with 620 learners or 56.47% of the total respondents; most of the respondents were from Grade 9 with 348 or 31.69% of the total respondents.
- The most common problems bothering the learners nearly everyday in relation to depression were “Feeling tired”, “Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much”, and “Feeling bad about self-or that they are a failure or have let self or family down”
- On the other hand, the most common problems bothering the learners in relation to anxiety were “Becoming easily annoyed”, “Worrying too much about different things”, and “Feeling afraid, as if something awful might happen” which they experience nearly everyday.
- On the severity of depression and anxiety, result shows that there were 73 or 6.65% of the respondents with severe depression, while 137 learners or 12.48% of the total participants, reported to have severe anxiety.
- To improve the conditions of the respondents, interventions such as Intake Interview, Counseling, Administration of C-SSRS, Parents consent shall be sought and Referral to outside professionals, and practicing self-care, were proposed.

5.2 Recommendation

Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety is a serious concern that when left unattended can lead to suicide. School administrators shall therefore take this matter a seriously and shall be given urgent attention by providing budget for the counselors’ professional development, improvement of counseling facilities, testing materials and other support that can be provided to improve the mental health and other guidance services particularly in public schools.

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