

Mental health literacy of select senior high school students in a sectarian university

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Abstract

Mental health literacy (MHL) is a critical determinant of mental well-being, encompassing the knowledge and beliefs that enable individuals to recognize, manage, and prevent mental health issues. This study explores the MHL of senior high school students in a sectarian university in the Philippines, focusing on their ability to identify mental health conditions, attitudes toward seeking help, and factors influencing help-seeking behaviors. Using a qualitative research design, the study employed the vignette method to assess students' understanding of mental health conditions and their responses to hypothetical scenarios. The findings reveal varied levels of MHL among participants, with many demonstrating an ability to recognize common disorders such as anxiety but exhibiting misconceptions about professional treatment and reliance on informal support systems, such as family and friends. Stigma and cultural beliefs were identified as barriers to accessing professional mental health care, highlighting the need for targeted educational programs and stigma reduction initiatives. The study underscores the importance of school-based mental health interventions, including integrating MHL into curricula and providing accessible counseling services. By addressing these gaps, this research contributes to fostering a supportive academic environment and promoting mental well-being among students in sectarian institutions, ultimately advocating for the prioritization of mental health education in the Philippines.

Keywords: mental health literacy, vignette, young people, Philippines

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1. Introduction

Mental health literacy (MHL) refers to the knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders that aid in their recognition, management, and prevention (Sampaio et al. 2020). The concept of mental health literacy was first introduced by Jorm et al. (1997) and has since been expanded upon by researchers to include a range of competencies, such as recognizing specific disorders, understanding risk factors and causes, knowing how to seek mental health support, and developing positive attitudes toward treatment and professional help. Emphasizing the importance of positive mental health, scholars suggest that mental health literacy should enable individuals to “understand how to obtain and maintain good mental health” (Sampaio et al. 2020). Additionally, high levels of mental health literacy must be linked to help-seeking behaviors to ensure that individuals can assist both themselves and others in need (DeBate et al. 2022).

The growing significance of mental health literacy is evidenced by an increasing body of research that investigates its role in improving overall mental well-being, reducing stigma, and promoting effective interventions. However, despite the rise in academic studies on the topic, there remains a significant gap in research between high-income countries (HICs) and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Studies indicate that research on mental health literacy is disproportionately concentrated in HICs, where resources, funding, and institutional support for mental health initiatives are more readily available (Sweileh 2019). Conversely, LMICs, where mental health awareness and literacy are crucial due to higher levels of untreated mental illness, lag in both research and policy implementation.

Mental Health Literacy in Low- and Middle-Income Countries - Mental health literacy among youth in LMICs is often characterized by limited knowledge about mental health conditions, widespread stigma, and low confidence in professional healthcare services (Renwick et al. 2021). Many young individuals in these regions lack basic understanding of common mental disorders, making early intervention and appropriate treatment more difficult. Additionally, social stigma and cultural beliefs about mental health often discourage open discussions, exacerbating mental health crises among young people (Kusaka et al. 2020). School-based mental health literacy programs have been introduced in several countries to address these issues, yet there remains a lack of comprehensive research on their effectiveness in LMICs (Kusaka et al. 2020). In many instances, these programs are limited in scope, reaching only select schools and failing to address deep-seated societal attitudes toward mental illness. This gap in knowledge highlights the urgent need for targeted studies that assess the impact of mental health literacy interventions among youth in LMICs, including the Philippines.

Mental Health Literacy in the Philippines - In the Philippines, mental health literacy remains an underexplored and pressing concern. According to a national survey conducted by the Department of Health, nearly half of Filipino adults cannot recognize mental health or neurological issues when presented with scenarios describing anxiety, eating disorders, bipolar disorder, and depression (Redfern et al. 2022). The findings suggest that mental health awareness is generally low, contributing to the country's limited access to mental health services and the prevalence of untreated mental disorders. Studies focusing on Philippine universities reveal disparities in mental health literacy levels among students from different types of institutions. Christian et al. (2021) found that students from state universities demonstrated significantly higher mental health literacy scores than their peers from private universities. The study also noted that students from private universities reported substantially higher levels of anxiety compared to those in state universities. These differences may be attributed to factors such as access to mental health resources, the presence of school-based awareness campaigns, and varying cultural perceptions of mental health.

Further research by De Luna et al. (2021) examined mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviors

among senior high school students. The study found that students' willingness to seek professional counseling was influenced by several factors, including mental health literacy levels, exposure to awareness campaigns, and educational initiatives aimed at reducing stigma. The study highlighted the importance of integrating mental health education into school curricula to encourage early recognition of mental health issues and promote positive help-seeking behaviors.

Given these findings, this research aims to assess the mental health literacy levels of senior high school students in a sectarian university in the Philippines. The study will explore students' ability to recognize mental health conditions, their attitudes toward seeking help, and the factors that influence their willingness to access mental health resources. This study seeks to answer the following research questions: What is the mental health literacy level of senior high school students in a sectarian university? How does their mental health literacy influence help-seeking behaviors? These questions will help determine whether students in a sectarian university are adequately equipped with the knowledge and attitudes necessary to recognize mental health issues and seek appropriate support. Understanding these aspects is essential for developing effective interventions that promote mental well-being among young individuals.

2. Related Literature

2.1 Youth and Well-Being

The well-being of young individuals is a multidimensional concept encompassing physical health, emotional stability, social relationships, and access to resources that support overall development. Research suggests that adolescence and young adulthood are critical periods for mental health, as these life stages involve significant psychological, emotional, and social transitions (Renwick et al., 2024). Ensuring positive youth well-being requires a combination of mental health awareness, access to appropriate care, and supportive environments that promote resilience. In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), including the Philippines, youth well-being is often compromised due to limited access to mental health resources, stigma surrounding mental health issues, and a lack of effective support systems in schools and communities (Renwick et al., 2024). Adolescents and young adults in these regions frequently experience stress related to academic performance, family expectations, and societal pressures, yet they often lack the knowledge and resources needed to address their mental health concerns (Redfern et al., 2024).

Mental health literacy (MHL) plays a crucial role in ensuring the well-being of young individuals. Christian, Reyes, and Delariarte (2021) emphasize that young people with higher levels of MHL are more likely to recognize symptoms of mental health conditions, seek help, and engage in preventive measures. However, despite the importance of MHL, many young individuals, especially those in LMICs, struggle with identifying mental health issues and understanding where to seek support (Renwick et al., 2024). In the context of the Philippines, research highlights that mental health literacy among students varies depending on their educational background. A study by Christian, Reyes, and Delariarte (2021) found that students in state universities demonstrated higher MHL levels compared to those in private institutions. The disparity suggests that access to mental health education and resources differs across institutions, which may contribute to variations in student well-being and mental health outcomes.

2.2 Mental Health Literacy

Mental health literacy, as defined by Jorm et al. (1997), refers to “the public’s knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management, or prevention” (p. 182). It encompasses several components, including the ability to recognize symptoms of mental disorders, knowledge about risk factors and treatment options, and awareness of where to seek professional help. Over the years, scholars have expanded on Jorm et al.’s (1997) foundational work, emphasizing the role of MHL in promoting mental well-being and reducing stigma. Sampaio et al. (2022) argue that increasing MHL is a necessary step in bridging the gap

between mental health awareness and effective intervention. They stress that while knowledge about mental health has improved globally, efforts to translate this knowledge into action remain insufficient.

In the Philippines, Ines (2016) examined the mental health literacy of Filipino college students and found that many students lacked the ability to accurately identify mental health conditions. The study highlighted widespread misconceptions, such as the belief that mental illnesses are solely caused by personal weakness or poor discipline. These findings align with the research of De Luna et al. (2024), who explored MHL among senior high school students and found that low literacy levels contributed to negative attitudes toward seeking professional help. DeBate et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative assessment of MHL and help-seeking behaviors among male college students, emphasizing that cultural factors play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward mental health. Their findings revealed that male students were particularly hesitant to seek professional help due to perceived stigma and societal expectations about masculinity. Similar challenges are present in the Philippine context, where cultural norms often discourage open discussions about mental health, especially among young men (Ines, 2016).

Studies also highlight the importance of school-based interventions in improving MHL. Kusaka et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review of mental health literacy programs for parents of adolescents and found that parental involvement significantly enhances youth MHL. The findings suggest that integrating mental health education into family settings can improve early recognition of mental health conditions and encourage help-seeking behaviors. Despite these insights, research on MHL in the Philippines remains limited. Sweileh (2021) notes that most studies on MHL are concentrated in high-income countries, with LMICs contributing a relatively small share of global research output. This gap underscores the need for localized studies that assess MHL in different educational and cultural contexts, particularly in sectarian institutions where religious beliefs may influence attitudes toward mental health.

2.3 Services and Support on Mental Health

The availability and accessibility of mental health services and support systems play a crucial role in addressing mental health concerns among youth. Effective mental health services include professional counseling, peer support networks, educational initiatives, and digital resources that provide young individuals with the necessary tools to manage their mental well-being (De Luna et al., 2024). In the Philippine setting, mental health services in educational institutions vary widely. Redfern et al. (2024) highlight that while some universities have well-established counseling centers, many lack adequate funding and trained personnel to support students' mental health needs. This disparity contributes to unequal access to mental health care, with students in resource-rich institutions receiving better support compared to those in underfunded schools.

Christian, Reyes, and Delariarte (2021) examined the mental health support available to Filipino college students and found that students in private universities were more likely to experience anxiety due to limited access to mental health services. Conversely, students in state universities, where MHL programs were more prevalent, exhibited higher levels of mental health awareness and were more likely to seek help. These findings suggest that improving MHL may positively influence students' willingness to utilize available support services. Help-seeking behavior among youth is influenced by multiple factors, including perceived stigma, cultural beliefs, and awareness of available services. De Luna et al. (2024) found that students with higher MHL levels were more likely to seek counseling services, especially when mental health awareness campaigns were actively promoted in their schools. However, many students remained reluctant to seek professional help due to fears of being judged by peers or labeled as “weak.”

Digital mental health resources have emerged as a potential solution to address gaps in mental health support. Kusaka et al. (2022) discuss the effectiveness of online mental health platforms in providing accessible and anonymous support to young individuals. In the Philippines, mental health hotlines and online counseling services have gained popularity, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person services were

limited (Redfern et al., 2024). However, digital literacy and internet access remain challenges, especially for students in rural areas. The role of religious and community support in mental health care is another important aspect to consider. Many sectarian universities integrate faith-based counseling into their mental health programs, offering spiritual guidance alongside psychological support. While faith-based approaches can provide comfort and encouragement, they may also present challenges if religious beliefs conflict with evidence-based mental health interventions. DeBate et al. (2022) note that students from religious backgrounds often struggle with balancing faith-based perspectives with professional mental health care, which can influence their willingness to seek help.

Despite ongoing efforts to improve mental health services, challenges persist in ensuring that all students have equal access to support systems. Sweileh (2021) emphasizes the need for policy reforms that prioritize mental health funding, integrate MHL into school curricula, and promote collaboration between educational institutions and mental health professionals. Strengthening these initiatives is essential for fostering a culture that prioritizes mental well-being and encourages help-seeking behaviors among youth. The existing literature highlights the complex relationship between youth well-being, mental health literacy, and access to mental health services. Studies consistently show that improving MHL is key to enhancing youth well-being, reducing stigma, and encouraging help-seeking behaviors. However, challenges remain in ensuring that mental health services are accessible, culturally appropriate, and effectively integrated into educational settings.

3. Methodology

Research Method - This study employs a qualitative research design using the vignette method to assess mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviors. The vignette method has been widely utilized in mental health research (Jorm et al., 1997; DeBate et al., 2022) and involves presenting participants with hypothetical scenarios that depict symptoms of common mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. Participants will be asked to: Identify the mental health issue presented in the vignette, suggest ways in which the individual in the vignette can be best helped, and identify possible sources of information and support for the individual in the vignette. Additionally, participants will complete a structured questionnaire to assess their perceptions of various mental health resources. The questionnaire will use a Likert scale to measure students' confidence in different support systems.

Participants - A total of eight participants were selected through purposive sampling from a senior high school institution. Participants will be aged 16 to 19 years old and must have no formal training in psychology or mental health studies to ensure that their responses reflect general mental health literacy rather than specialized knowledge. To maintain ethical standards, informed consent will be obtained from both the participants and their parents or guardians. Participation will be voluntary, and students will be assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Data Analysis - Vignette Method to Assess Mental Health Literacy and Help-Seeking Behaviors - The vignette method is a research technique used to assess mental health literacy by presenting participants with hypothetical scenarios depicting symptoms of mental health conditions. Participants are then asked to identify the disorder, suggest appropriate ways to help the individual, and determine sources of support. This method provides insights into people's ability to recognize mental health problems, their beliefs about treatment, and their willingness to seek help. The vignette method has been widely used in mental health research, first introduced by Jorm et al. (1997) and later adapted in various studies (DeBate et al., 2022; Ines, 2016). It allows researchers to explore misconceptions, stigma, and attitudes toward mental health without requiring direct self-disclosure from participants.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common patterns in students' perceptions of mental health and preferred coping strategies. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviors among senior high school students in a sectarian university.

Through thematic analysis, the study can provide a comprehensive picture of how senior high school students perceive mental health, their ability to recognize mental health issues, and their willingness to seek support.

There are various approaches to conceptualizing and studying mental health literacy. One widely used method is the vignette technique, which presents participants with hypothetical scenarios that depict symptoms of mental health conditions. Participants are then asked to identify the disorder, describe how the individual in the scenario should seek help, and suggest potential sources of information and support. The vignette method was first employed by Jorm et al. (1997) to assess people's ability to recognize mental disorders. Since then, numerous studies have replicated and adapted this approach to measure mental health literacy across different populations. For example, DeBate et al. (2022) utilized vignettes to evaluate university students' mental health literacy in an international context, while Ines (2016) applied the method to examine the mental health awareness of Filipino college students.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Results of Vignette Survey

Vignettes are short, descriptive scenarios or narratives used in studies to explore participants' perceptions, attitudes, or decision-making processes. They present hypothetical or real-life situations, allowing researchers to assess how individuals might react in different contexts, often in psychology, ethics, or social sciences (See Appendix A). In the first Vignette question, the responses provided by participants indicate varying levels of understanding and interpretations of John's condition. Some participants explicitly identify “anxiety” as the issue, while others express uncertainty or suggest additional contributing factors like stress, panic attacks, and external life circumstances (See Table 1).

Table 1
Vignette Question 1

Theme	Description	Representative Responses
Explicit Recognition of Anxiety	Participants explicitly identify anxiety or related symptoms as the condition John is experiencing.	“Anxiety” “Severe stress and anxiety” “From my understanding, he is experiencing anxiety or at least, frequent runs of panic attacks”
Uncertainty and Ambiguity	Participants express doubt or lack of confidence in identifying what John is experiencing.	“I'm unsure why he is feeling this way. It's either a physical illness or a mental illness that can cause physical illness”
Stress and External Factors	Participants note potential external causes or contributing factors such as stress, school, or family.	“John might be experiencing signs of anxiety. The other factors in life such as school and seeking parental validation could potentially lead these feelings to develop further.”

The participants' responses to the vignette question reveal two primary themes: explicit recognition of anxiety and uncertainty or exploration of contributing factors. The majority of participants identify anxiety as the primary issue, demonstrating an understanding of its symptoms and potential manifestations. However, some participants express uncertainty about the diagnosis or delve into possible contributing factors, such as stress, external pressures, or physical health. This analysis highlights the varying levels of mental health literacy among participants. While many can accurately identify anxiety, others exhibit uncertainty, indicating a need for further education or awareness to improve understanding of mental health conditions and their potential causes. Moreover, responses that explore the interplay of life factors, such as school and parental expectations, suggest a more nuanced grasp of how external circumstances can influence mental health.

In the second Vignette question, the responses reflect a variety of perspectives on how John can be helped. Some participants emphasize professional intervention, such as therapy or diagnosis, while others suggest lifestyle changes, such as rest, relaxation, or support systems. A few responses highlight the importance of self-reflection and mindset change as a way to cope with anxiety (See Table 2).

Table 2
Vignette Question 2

Theme	Description	Representative Responses
Professional Intervention	Recommendations for therapy, diagnosis, or seeking professional help to address John's issues.	"Therapy" "The best way I can see John being helped is to get professional help to unlearn his anxious mindset." "I believe getting diagnosed will help."
Rest and Recovery	Suggestions for taking breaks, relaxing, or engaging in self-reflection to alleviate stress.	"Days of rest, recovery, and self-reflection." "By letting John relax and take breaks from time to time." "Perhaps a short getaway from university with his family could help."
Mindset Change and Self-Reflection	Emphasis on unlearning negative thought patterns, focusing on the present, or improving mental clarity.	"Unlearning a mindset built on fear can help in being able to control your thoughts more clearly." "Focus on what's present right now."
Support Systems	Highlighting the role of family, friends, or trusted individuals in helping John cope with his struggles.	"Working on the self and having a strong support system from trusted people could aid in his troubles." "A short getaway with family could ease him into relaxing more often."

The thematic analysis reveals that participants suggest a combination of professional intervention and lifestyle changes to help John. While therapy and diagnosis are seen as crucial for addressing the root of his struggles, many responses also emphasize the importance of rest, relaxation, and support systems in alleviating stress and promoting recovery. The focus on mindset change and self-reflection suggests an understanding of the need for long-term strategies to manage anxiety. These findings underscore the importance of a holistic approach to mental health, combining professional guidance with lifestyle adjustments and emotional support from trusted individuals.

In the third Vignette question, the responses suggest a variety of sources where John could access additional information about his concern. These sources include professional help (e.g., therapists, counselors, doctors), online resources, and institutional support (e.g., clinics, schools). Some responses reflect the need for professional diagnosis, while others emphasize online research and behavioral studies (See Table 3).

Table 3
Vignette Question 2

Theme	Description	Representative Responses
Professional Guidance	Recommendations to consult therapists, psychologists, or doctors for reliable information.	"From therapists?" "Through a therapist/psychologist or searching how to lessen and control anxiety online." "Through doctors who know what his diagnosis needs."
School or Institutional Support	Suggestions to approach school counselors or university-based guidance services.	"He could get more information from approaching the guidance counselor of his university." "Guidance counseling in school."
Online Research and Resources	Using online platforms, behavioral studies, or general research to gain knowledge.	"Research" "From behavioral studies online or nearby therapists." "Searching how to lessen and control anxiety online."
Medical Facilities and Specialized Care	Recommendations to visit clinics or psychiatric hospitals for more information and diagnosis.	"First check with a regular clinic and then pass on over to a psychiatric hospital."

The thematic analysis reveals four key sources of information for John: professional guidance, school/institutional support, online resources, and medical facilities. While most participants emphasize the importance of professional help (e.g., therapists, doctors, or psychologists), others highlight the accessibility of

online research and school-based resources. These findings suggest that participants recognize a combination of formal (professional, medical facilities) and informal (online research, school support) pathways as valuable avenues for accessing information. This reflects an understanding of the diverse resources available to individuals experiencing mental health concerns. Additionally, the emphasis on professional guidance underscores the importance of seeking expert advice for accurate diagnosis and management.

4.2 Discussions on Mental Health Literacy of a Sectarian University

Mental health literacy (MHL) is a critical component in fostering awareness, reducing stigma, and promoting help-seeking behaviors among students in academic institutions. Sectarian institutions recognize the importance of mental health education and has implemented programs to enhance MHL among its stakeholders. The Mental Health Literacy program of insitutions aims to educate the university community about key aspects of mental health, including mental health facts, common disorders, first aid strategies, and evidence-based treatments and management (Ines, 2016). This initiative seeks to empower students, faculty, and staff with knowledge and practical skills to address mental health challenges effectively. A study examining the MHL of 797 first-year Filipino college students revealed important insights into their understanding of mental health conditions, particularly depression. The study found that 55.2% of the students were able to correctly recognize depression in a given vignette (Ines, 2016). This suggests that while a majority of students have basic knowledge of mental health conditions, nearly half still lack the ability to identify symptoms accurately. This gap in recognition could hinder early intervention and timely help-seeking behavior.

Encouragingly, 95.7% of the surveyed students expressed their intention to seek help if they were to experience a mental health issue. Their preferred sources of support included family (58.5%), friends (48.8%), and counselors (38.1%) (Ines, 2016). This finding highlights the critical role that personal relationships play in students' mental health support systems. However, it also underscores the need to strengthen formal support networks within the university, such as counseling services and mental health professionals, to ensure that students receive appropriate care. The study also revealed that students attributed depression to various causes, including daily life stressors, childhood trauma, guilt, and other psychological triggers commonly recognized by mental health professionals (Ines, 2016). Despite this awareness, misconceptions persisted regarding treatment options. Many students exhibited a preference for non-prescribed remedies such as tea, organic medicines, and vitamins over clinically recommended treatments such as antidepressants and antipsychotics (Ines, 2016). This preference suggests a need for more targeted educational interventions to enhance students' understanding of evidence-based treatments and the importance of professional care in managing mental health conditions. Moreover, while counseling was widely regarded as a beneficial intervention for depression, students' perceptions of stress management strategies did not always align with professional recommendations. For example, avoiding stress was considered an effective preventive measure, despite expert advice that stress management techniques, rather than avoidance, are more effective in building resilience (Jorm, 2012). These discrepancies highlight the necessity of refining mental health education programs to address misconceptions and promote accurate information about mental health management.

Another key finding from the study was the distinction between personal and perceived stigma among students. While participants may have demonstrated openness to discussing mental health and seeking help, they also recognized that stigma exists within their broader social circles (Ines, 2016). This difference suggests that while individual attitudes toward mental health may be improving, societal stigma remains a significant barrier to help-seeking behaviors. Addressing this issue requires not only enhancing MHL at the individual level but also fostering a campus-wide culture that normalizes conversations about mental health and encourages supportive behaviors.

Given these findings, Mental Health Literacy programs serve as a crucial initiative to bridge knowledge gaps and reduce stigma within the university. Through interactive discussions, first-aid strategies, and referral training, the program equips students with essential skills to support themselves and their peers. Moving forward,

expanding this initiative to include more targeted interventions—such as workshops on medication awareness, stress management techniques, and stigma reduction campaigns—could further strengthen the mental health support framework.

4.3 Discussions on the Perception on Mental Health Literacy of Select Senior High School Students

Understanding the perception of mental health literacy among senior high school students is crucial in shaping future mental health education strategies. Senior high school students are at a transitional stage where academic pressures, social challenges, and personal development intersect, making them particularly vulnerable to mental health concerns (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2010). Their perceptions of mental health literacy influence not only their attitudes toward seeking help but also their ability to support peers who may be experiencing mental health difficulties. A preliminary assessment of senior high school students' perceptions of MHL suggests that while there is growing awareness of mental health issues, gaps in knowledge, stigma, and misconceptions persist. Many students recognize the importance of mental well-being and acknowledge the impact of mental health on academic performance and daily life (Wei, McGrath, Hayden, & Kutcher, 2015). However, their understanding of specific mental health conditions, their causes, and the appropriate interventions often varies.

One of the primary concerns among senior high school students is the stigma associated with mental health issues. Some students expressed concerns that discussing mental health problems or seeking professional help might lead to judgment from peers, teachers, or family members (Corrigan, 2016). This fear of being labeled or misunderstood may discourage students from reaching out for support, even when they recognize the need for help. Addressing this barrier requires proactive efforts in normalizing mental health discussions within school environments. Integrating MHL into the curriculum and providing platforms for open dialogue can help reduce stigma and foster a more supportive atmosphere. Another critical perception among students is their reliance on informal support systems. Similar to the findings from the college-level study, senior high school students tend to turn to family and friends as their primary sources of support when dealing with mental health issues (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005). While these support networks are valuable, there is a need to enhance students' trust and awareness of professional mental health services. Many students are unaware of the specific roles that counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists play in mental health care, leading to hesitation in seeking professional help (Jorm, Korten, Jacomb, Christensen, & Rodgers, 1997).

Additionally, misconceptions about mental health treatments persist among senior high school students. Some students believe that mental health conditions can be managed solely through willpower or lifestyle changes, without the need for medical or therapeutic interventions (Reavley & Jorm, 2011). Others associate professional mental health care with severe mental illness, reinforcing the misconception that counseling or therapy is only necessary for extreme cases. These misunderstandings highlight the importance of targeted educational programs that clarify the spectrum of mental health care and emphasize that seeking help is a proactive and beneficial step for overall well-being.

5. Conclusion

Mental health literacy plays a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors regarding mental health. The case of DLSU's Mental Health Literacy program highlights the significance of structured educational initiatives in raising awareness, reducing stigma, and promoting help-seeking behaviors among students. The study on first-year college students at DLSU underscores both strengths and gaps in mental health awareness, particularly in recognizing depression, understanding treatment options, and addressing stigma (Ines, 2016). Similarly, the perceptions of senior high school students reveal critical areas for improvement, particularly in reducing stigma, promoting professional help-seeking, and correcting misconceptions about mental health care (Corrigan, 2016). By strengthening mental health education at both the high school and university levels, institutions can create a more supportive and well-informed academic environment.

Mental health literacy plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to recognize mental health conditions, seek appropriate help, and reduce stigma. By examining the mental health literacy levels of senior high school students in a sectarian university, this research aims to provide insights into how well these students recognize symptoms of mental disorders, their attitudes toward mental health care, and their willingness to seek help when needed. Findings from this study may benefit educators, school administrators, and mental health professionals by identifying gaps in mental health literacy and recommending strategies to improve awareness. Schools and policymakers can use the results to develop targeted interventions, such as mental health education programs, peer support initiatives, and school-based counseling services. Ultimately, this research contributes to fostering a more supportive and informed school environment that promotes mental well-being among students.

By addressing the existing research gap and exploring mental health literacy in a sectarian university context, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on mental health education and awareness in the Philippines. Through evidence-based recommendations, it aims to empower young individuals with the knowledge and resources needed to prioritize mental well-being and seek help when necessary.

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Appendix A:

Vignette Scenario and Question

John is 18 years old, works part-time, and is currently enrolled in classes at a university. He complains of dizziness, heart palpitations, ringing ears, trembling, and sweating palms. Additional periodic symptoms include a sore throat, cough, or dry mouth and throat. Periods of extreme muscle tension and feelings of being “wound up” or “edgy” are also present. These symptoms often interfere with his concentration and have been present more often than not for the past 2 years. John constantly worries about failing his classes, completing projects at work promptly, and being able to please his parents. He keeps a low profile and avoids going out with friends or meeting new people.

1. Given what is just described about John, what do you think he is experiencing?
2. Describe how John can best be helped.
3. Where could John get more information about his concern?

