

Mental Health Competence of Faculty in a State University

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This study aimed to determine the mental health competence of faculty in a higher education institution in the Philippines and explore their dominant characteristics demonstrated by their functions, practices, and behavior. Utilizing a descriptive survey research design, this integrates methods to comprehensively assess the 123 purposively chosen faculty members' mental health awareness competence. Drawing on a standardized questionnaire (Siason, A., 2021), the research delves into faculty competence (Kourgiantakis et al., 2023) with three sub-categories: functions and responsibilities within the academic environment, practices in addressing students' mental health issues, and student perceptions of faculty attitudes toward mental health concerns. Findings indicate a high level of mental health competence among the faculty members who maintain a classroom atmosphere that promotes respect for individual and cultural differences. Faculty demonstrated proficiency in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities, fostering a collaborative learning atmosphere, and recognizing individual uniqueness and preferences. This contributes to the evolving role of teachers in making students confronting mental health difficulties feel accepted and respected as unique people. Notably, there was a difference in the behaviors or impressions of students as exhibited by teachers in a public HEI when grouped according to marital status.

Keywords. Mental health, competence, well-being, Sustainable Development Goal 3, advocacy program

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The enactment of Republic Act 11036, popularly known as the Mental Health Act 2019, marked a significant turning point for the Mental Health Advocacy campaigns in the Philippines. According to the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, this legislation presents a plan to develop a comprehensive national mental health strategy. The purpose of this policy is to protect the rights of people requesting psychiatric, neurologic, and psychosocial health treatments while enhancing the delivery of integrated mental health services.

Higher education institutions must also create programs and policies to raise awareness of mental health issues (Berwick, 2020), provide support and services for people at risk (Priestley et al., 2022), ensure accessibility (Harris et al., 2022) and incorporate age-appropriate content about mental health into their curricula (Farley, 2023). One way to help people with mental health disorders obtain treatment and psychosocial support is to put in place referral mechanisms (Campbell et al., 2022).

The law specifies the responsibilities and functions that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must fulfill. All educational levels should incorporate age-appropriate mental health content into their curricula (Milin et al., 2016); guidelines and standards for age-appropriate, evidence-based mental health programs should be established (Lattie et al., 2022); educational institutions should implement strategies to promote mental health and well-being (Halat et al., 2023); and mental health promotions (Barry, 2019) should be adequately supported by licensed mental health professionals.

Teachers have a critical role in meeting students' mental health needs since they develop educational curricula (Leeman et al., 2020) and implement them (West & Shirley, 2024). Teachers could make great progress in offering solutions for developing resilient and well-adjusted kids because of their extensive professional training and the amount of time they spend with students (Zheng, 2022). Teachers' expertise, experience, and the accessibility of mental health services all play a part in how effective they are in this capacity (Madill et al., 2022).

Instructors must be able to recognize the warning signals of risk-taking behaviors in students as a sign that they require assistance (Singh et al., 2020). Teachers should be aware of actions that may indicate serious mental health difficulties requiring help for children who may not openly communicate their feelings or problems. It is imperative to address and steer these behaviors in the direction of prosociality (Miles et al., 2022). In addition, it is critical to help students identify indicators of emotional distress (Oviatt et al., 2018),

create workable alternatives to handle emotionally taxing situations, and acquire self-calming techniques (Khatib & Abo-Rass, 2022). In addition to helping pupils with their academic endeavors, a teacher's role encompasses promoting their general wellbeing (Zurbriggen et al., 2023). Adopting a whole-child approach highlights the value of treating and relating to kids as whole people, appreciating each one of their skills, and assisting with their whole development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Teachers may guarantee that students grow into healthy individuals with the necessary abilities to deal with the problems of an uncertain world by meeting their needs holistically (Cantor et al., 2021).

According to Harvard University's National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007), wise investments in families and children pay off in the form of a lifetime of production and civic responsibility for the following generation. Emphasizing holistic child development is essential in the post-pandemic situation, with special attention paid to the mental health area. According to the World Health Organization (2022), mental health is characterized as a condition of mental well-being that enables people to successfully manage life's challenges, acknowledge their own potential, perform well in school and at work, and actively participates in their communities. As children go from early childhood to preschool and early primary school, it is essential to provide them with regular, high-quality assistance for their learning and development, according to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2015). It is necessary for all professionals who work with children to have a common knowledge and skill set in order to achieve this consistency and quality.

Experts in child care and education across age groups and contexts ought to be well-versed in developmental science and its content (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020); adept at methods that support children's personalized learning and development trajectories (Wu et al., 2021); cognizant of the challenges associated with working with a variety of child populations (Hummelstedt et al., 2021); able to cooperate with families and other professionals (Epstein et al., 2018); and capable of participating in ongoing professional development to stay current and improve their practices (Thompson et al., 2020). The importance of students' mental health and well-being has grown significantly (Nurunnabi et al., 2020). As students overcome challenges in their personal development, overall quality of life, and academic performance, addressing mental health issues among young individuals becomes crucial (Ebrahimi et al., 2021). Educators play a vital role in integrating mental health education into the curriculum,

offering immediate support through the inclusion of topics such as stress management, coping mechanisms, and self-care practices (Gass, 2021). Through these efforts, teachers can empower students with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate their mental well-being. According to Pressley's research (2021), individual factors, job nature, and family situations can all have an impact on temporary work absences. There is a dearth of research assessing therapies for going back to work, even though numerous articles have described moderately successful approaches in reducing teacher stress. Furthermore, according to the World Health Organization, mental health illnesses will be the main contributor to disability worldwide by 2030, a prediction that has been supported by previous research (Bartha, 2018).

Mental health includes more than just not having mental health problems (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2021). Mental health disorders and difficulties can show themselves as a range of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that can affect social interactions, employment, family, and school life. Furthermore, Corrente's study (2022) shows that instructors are becoming more conscious of mental health issues; nonetheless, more work needs to be done to address these issues and support individuals who are struggling (Brunzell et al., 2018).

The dominant narrative emphasizes how crucial it is to keep an eye on and improve the mental health and wellbeing of teachers since it can have an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of students (Sandilos et al., 2023). Teachers' stress levels and mental health are important aspects that affect their performance as holistic classroom managers and leaders, as Asio and Bayucca's study from 2021 indicates that teachers are the front-runners in the Department of Education and are essential to provide students with the curriculum, services, and skills mastery.

The growing and pervasive concern about mental health in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) serves as the foundation for this study. This academic work, which is a descriptive research study, includes empirical data about mental health literacy (Aluh et al., 2019), young adults' mental health (Singh & Mishra, 2020), and positive mental health (Teixeira et al., 2022). This study's main goal is to evaluate the faculty members' competency in mental health within a public higher education institution in the Philippines. This study presents the profile of the respondents and the mental health competence of faculty towards a support program on Sustainable Development Goal 3, focusing on good health and well-being.

Objectives

Specifically, the present research sought to answer the following objectives:

1. To find out the level of mental health competence of the faculty in a public higher education institution;
2. To identify the dominant characteristics of mental health competence of faculty as demonstrated by their functions, practices, and perceived student behaviors; and
3. To determine the significant differences on the mental health competence of faculty as demonstrated by their functions, practices, and behaviors by students when grouped according to gender, marital status, and income classification per month.

Method

Sample

Sampling design is selecting an appropriate number of units from the population of interest to provide accurate information about the entire population. The researchers used the total population sampling (Sharma, 2017). Total population sampling is a type of purposive sampling technique where one can examine the entire population with a particular set of characteristics. As shown in Table 1, the total data collected from the 123 faculty members in a public HEI. The variables are sex, marital status, and income classification per month which was based on Philippine Institute for Development Studies (2022).

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 123)*

Demographics	Categories	n	%
Gender	Men	26	21.1
	Women	97	78.9
Marital Status	Single	39	31.7
	Married	83	67.5
	Widowed	1	0.8
Income Classification per Month	Poor	12	9.8
	Low Income	14	11.4
	Low Middle Class	50	40.7
	Middle Class	33	26.8
	Upper Middle Income	13	10.6
	High Income	1	0.8

Note. Income: (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2022).

Measures

Participant Consent Form

The researchers explained to the participants through the Consent Form the real purpose of the study and their cooperation by answering truthfully the questions asked is important and assuring them their answers were treated with the utmost confidentiality in compliance of the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2022 and proper concurrence to the ethical considerations and protection of the participants.

Demographic Information Questionnaire

A demographic information questionnaire was utilized to record and gather data on the participants' sex, marital status, and income classification per month for profiling and further validation of the results of the study.

Mental Health Competency Questionnaire

The researchers utilized a standardized adopted questionnaire on mental health awareness competency from the study of [Siason \(2021\)](#). Mental Health Competence Questionnaire ([Siason, 2021](#)) of faculty was divided into three sub-categories; that is functions and responsibilities exhibited by teachers in school; practices of teachers in attending or responding to students who experience mental health issues or problems; and behaviors or impressions of students toward teachers. The instrument was submitted for pilot and reliability testing. According to [Fraenkel et al. \(2012\)](#), the reliability coefficient should be at least .70 or higher for research purposes. The Cronbach's alpha for mental health competence of the research instrument's items was found to be .92 in the current study.

Procedure

The researchers conducted specific ethical considerations by sharing the questionnaire with a consent form to secure the voluntary participation of each participant. Moreover, participants were also allowed to discuss terms or constructs that may not be familiar with them. They are also given time to understand their privacy and the confidentiality of the data taken from them. Finally, the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences was elaborated to all the participants. All the participants were informed about the aims and objectives of the study. Before handing out the

research protocol, detailed research instructions were given to the participants. The researchers informed the participants that they could be reached anytime, mainly if questions arose regarding the study or the survey instruments. It took the participants 15 to 20 minutes to answer the questionnaire.

Results

Table 2 provides the scales of means to analyze the gathered data gathered from the participants.

Table 2: *The Scale of Means and its Equivalent Level of Competence*

Scale of Means	Description
3.26-4.00	Highly Competent
2.51-3.25	Competent
1.76-2.50	Moderately Competent
1.00-1.75	Incompetent

Examining the level of mental health competence among faculty of an HEI, revealed that faculty members of HEI are all competent as described in their functions and responsibilities ($M = 3.01$, $SD = .53$) as exhibited by teachers in school and practices of teachers ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .65$) in attending or responding to students who experience mental health issues or problems. On the other hand, in terms of behaviors or impressions of students ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .48$) toward teachers, faculty members exhibited highly competent.

Results based on the functions and responsibilities indicated dominant characteristics of mental health competence of faculty in a public HEI. On the mental health competence among faculty of an HEI, findings showed that higher education institution faculty members are highly competent as described in their functions and responsibilities exhibited by teachers in school on maintaining a classroom atmosphere that promotes respect for individual and cultural differences ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .57$), able to identify and uphold student's right ($M = 3.49$, $SD = .66$), aware how my cultural beliefs and background may affect my relationships with students ($M = 3.37$, $SD = .67$) and observe and interview students to get to know them in an individual and personal basis for accurate assessment of their mental health needs ($M = 3.28$, $SD = .76$).

Mental health competence among a public HEI can also be gleaned through their existing practices of HEI faculty members showing that the faculty members of an HEI are highly competent as

described in their practices in attending or responding to students who experience mental health issues or problems by collaborating with other teachers on solutions and additional support for them ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .71$), and competent on reading materials to increase awareness and acquire skills on supporting their needs ($M = 3.24$, $SD = .75$).

In addition, findings indicated behaviors and/or impressions of students can also signify the mental health competence of public HEI faculty members. It has been found that faculty of HEI is highly competent as described by their behaviors or impressions of students on feel that they accept and respect them because they acknowledge their uniqueness as persons ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .50$), feel that they accept and respect them because they acknowledge their uniqueness as persons ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .57$), feel safe and secure in the classroom and that their well-being in the classroom is given priority ($M = 3.57$, $SD = .56$), and enjoy as they learn because of the classroom activities and lessons that cater to their development needs and interests ($M = 3.56$, $SD = .60$).

Additionally, a significant difference is shown particularly of the mental health competence of a public HEI faculty's functions and responsibilities, practices, and behaviors or impressions of their students. There was a significant difference in the behaviors or impressions of students ($p = .02$) as exhibited by teachers in a public HEI when grouped according to marital status. Meanwhile, results revealed that faculty of HEIs have nonsignificant difference in their functions and responsibilities ($p = .86$, $p = .53$, and $p = .62$) as demonstrated by teachers when grouped according to sex, marital status, and income classification, practices ($p = .73$, $p = .36$, and $p = .86$) in attending or responding to students who experience mental health issues or problems when grouped according to sex, marital status, and income classification, and behaviors or impressions of students ($p = .99$, $p = .39$) as revealed by teachers when grouped according to sex and income classification respectively.

Discussions

The study aimed to assess the mental health competence of faculty members in a Higher Education Institution (HEI), focusing on how well they can address mental health issues among college students in the context of post-pandemic learning. The study's findings indicated that faculty members at a state university were deemed competent in handling mental health concerns. Based on significant a result of the study on the behaviors or impressions of students as exhibited by teachers in a public HEI when grouped according to

marital status, this supports the discussion of [Ofovwe et al. \(2013\)](#) on the strong association found between marital dissatisfaction and psychological disorder that provides empirical evidence on the need to educate married couples as well as the general public on the mental health implication of marital discontent. Moreover, [Peng and Photchanachan \(2021\)](#) demonstrated that professional mental health of university teachers is the foundation of psychological education. In turn, the competency of HEI teachers has a significant mediating effect between college teachers' mental health and social support from their families and the academic community.

Notably, the faculty demonstrated high competence in fulfilling their functions and responsibilities, especially in creating a classroom environment that fosters respect for individual and cultural differences ([Jean & Rotas, 2019](#)). This competence extends to upholding their students' rights, cultural beliefs, and individual differences. This suggests that faculty members play a crucial role in supporting students' mental health after the pandemic ([Naff et al., 2020](#)). This can also contribute to teachers' work motivation and satisfaction ([Siason Jr., 2023](#)), while they implement their vital role in the mental health support program for the university students.

The study's results align with the observations made by [Asio and Bayucca \(2021\)](#), emphasizing the significance of teachers' mental health and stress levels. These factors are pivotal in enabling teachers to function as holistic managers and leaders within the classroom. With this, the competence displayed by faculty members in this study not only underscores their ability to handle mental health issues among students but also positions them as essential figures in promoting a conducive and supportive learning environment, especially in the challenging post-pandemic context ([Zajac et al., 2022](#)).

The study's findings underscore the importance of HEIs in the Philippines aligning their programs and projects with sustainable development goals ([Kopnina, 2020](#)). A key recommendation involves supporting and encouraging faculty members to participate in training and seminars related to mental health. This targeted approach is seen as instrumental in enhancing the faculty's competence in assisting students within the classroom, especially in the post-pandemic learning context. The study aligns with previous findings, which highlights that teacher practices promoting mental well-being in the classroom positively impact students' feelings and perceptions.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the observed high competence among HEI faculty members, particularly in their practices related to

addressing students experiencing mental health issues (Ormiston et al., 2021). Creating a collaborative learning environment is a significant factor in achieving this competence. Previously it has been found that the crucial role of teachers in creating spaces and practices that enhance students' well-being through collaborative efforts with the school learning community (Yu & Chao, 2023). Furthermore, the study identifies the need for supplementary instructional materials to support faculty members' mental competence (Zizka, & Probst, 2022) emphasizing the importance of investing in resources that aid this endeavor. The recommendation extends to engaging in public-private partnerships as a strategic initiative (Joudyian et al., 2021). This collaboration is crucial for ensuring that all stakeholders within the university community benefit from quality health and well-being, serving as support mechanisms for Sustainable Development Goal 3 which focuses on preventing needless suffering from preventable diseases and premature death by addressing key targets that boost the health of a country's overall population.

This study strongly advocates a holistic approach, encompassing faculty development, collaborative learning environments, and strategic partnerships, to bolster the mental health competence of faculty members within the university context (Besse, et al., 2022). By embracing such a multifaceted strategy, the research posits a significant contribution to the broader goals of sustainable development in the academic realm. The study underscores the crucial importance of integrating mental health support, especially in response to the evolving challenges posed by the post-pandemic educational landscape, highlighting the need for not just academic but also emotional and psychological support to foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment (Aithal & Aithal, 2023).

A noteworthy finding from the research is the faculty members' demonstration of highly competent practices in acknowledging students' uniqueness and preferences. Teachers were observed to prioritize students' safety, protection, and recognition of their interests. This approach is pivotal, as faculty members in HEIs are crucial as secure attachment figures for students (Vallotton et al., 2019). The study suggests that students are more likely to establish trusting relationships with their teachers when they feel valued for their intrinsic qualities rather than purely academic achievements. This trusting relationship, rooted in trust and confidence, is deemed essential for holistic learning to thrive, as highlighted by Siason (2021).

The study aligns with the concept that emphasizing individuals' well-being yields tangible benefits, such as increased productivity and

a healthier disposition in life (Maccagnan et al., 2019). This connection between well-being and positive outcomes supports the notion that supporting Sustainable Development Goal 3 involves nurturing individuals who contribute productively to society. In essence, the study supports an approach that addresses not only academic needs but also prioritizes students' emotional and psychological well-being, recognizing the interdependence of these factors in fostering a conducive learning environment.

This research emphasizes the significance of a comprehensive approach to faculty development, collaborative learning environments, and strategic partnerships in promoting mental health competence. It sheds light on the role of faculty in providing secure attachment for students and emphasizes the importance of recognizing students for their individuality. This holistic perspective aligns with the broader goals of sustainable development and underscores the interconnectedness of academic success and emotional well-being in the university context.

Limitations and Suggestions

Despite the innovative nature of the topic, the sample size in this study is insufficient to generalize its findings nationally. To enhance the potential for broader applicability to university students in the future, it is advisable to employ a larger sample size in subsequent research. There is a recommendation to focus on specific aspects of mental health among university students in future studies. Notably, the data collection for this study occurred exclusively in a single higher education institution in a rural area. Hence, it is conceivable that university students and faculty members in other municipalities and cities may present distinct perspectives and experiences regarding mental health. Accordingly, future research endeavors should investigate whether the mental health competence of university faculty members in various municipalities and cities yields similar results. Future researchers are encouraged to adopt a more comprehensive scope that captures the mental health competence of faculty members in diverse university settings.

Implications

The study illuminated the mental health challenges university students face by emphasizing the importance of enhancing teachers' mental health competence to comprehend the predictive role of this paradigm in academic success. The findings of this research are

poised to assist educational institutions in developing insights into the nature of mental health issues among university students and understanding how professors can effectively alleviate anxiety while fostering an inclusive and conducive learning environment. The results of this study have strong implications for the policy and program implementation of a state university in ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing in the entire university. The findings are also essential as this higher learning institution advocates for Sustainable Development Goal 3, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being. The data from this study will be instrumental and be used as a basis of the Strategic Performance Management System for policy making and for the adoption of mental health programs such as online psychosocial first aid training for teachers and the dialogues-of-the-heart program participated by parents and university students to address their mental health concerns.

Conclusion

Findings showed that the state university's faculty members have demonstrated a competent level of mental health awareness. Therefore, this mechanism should be sustained as the university's top priority program to elicit more human-centered support initiatives. Considering their marital status and/ or social relationships, faculty as mental health advocates need to support not only the academic pursuits but also to nurture the students' personal wellbeing. Likewise, parents are encouraged to participate and be involved in school activities relative to mental health awareness and advocacy as they are the university's strongest partners in advancing students' healthy mental state and well-being.

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