

Wellbeing in the Workplace: A Post Covid-19 Survey of Mental Health among Academic and Support Personnel



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ABSTRACT: This paper is a straightforward assessment of the mental health of the academic and support personnel in a university setting within the context of the post-era of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study utilized a mental health questionnaire (Masanda, 2020) that covers a spectra of mental health functioning among adult individuals. Faculty members and academic support personnel across the 9 campuses of the National University Philippines participated in this study. Results yielded high scores which suggested that they were able to use various life skills effectively, able to work comfortably with other people, able to meet the demands of everyday life, have a healthy expression of emotions, generally optimistic, they tend to feel good about themselves, responsible, adaptable, assertive, and team players. Furthermore, there is no significant difference between the academic and support personnel in terms of their mental health ($t=2.04$, p value: 0.42). It can therefore be inferred that the academic setting among the participants provided an equal opportunity for their employees to flourish personally and grow professionally amidst the post-pandemic era. Pertinent recommendations about an institutionalized and comprehensive mental health program are put forth that are aimed to maintain a good, effective, and functioning mental health among its personnel.

KEYWORDS: Mental Health, Wellbeing, Academe, COVID-19, Psychosocial

Good mental health is an essential individual need that one must maintain (Shami, Tareh, & Taran, 2017). Thus, mental health is vital in maintaining an active life. It was found that during the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers suffered from mental health problems due to different socio-economic factors (Palma-Vasquez, Carrasco, & Hernando-Rodriguez, 2021). Although they found no direct causal relationship between socio-economic factors and mental health, they established that there is indeed a significant relationship. This poses an essential insight that mental health well-being should be viewed as a social issue that needs to be addressed by different institutions. Despite the wide range of academic and contextual approaches to mental health, current definitions of mental health share two characteristics. To begin, mental health is examined from a biopsychosocial perspective, which takes into account biological, psychological, and social variables. Second, mental health refers to a state of being free of mental illness. The World Health Organization, for example, defines mental health as “a condition of well-being in which every individual fulfills his or her own potential, can cope with the usual demands of life, can work successfully and fruitfully, and can contribute to her or his community” (World Health Organization, 2018). This concept aided significant progress in mental health research and practice by broadening the definition of mental health beyond the absence of mental illness to include the presence of positive characteristics (Torano et. al., 2020)

In the Philippines, many institutions are still not equipped to address mental health issues. Hence, there is a gap in the existing literature that shows comprehensive knowledge about mental health initiatives. This gap urged the researchers to investigate mental well-being, particularly from the perspective of academic employees. Mental health is truly one of the timely topics of the 21st century both at a national and global level. However, this doesn't always necessarily mean that it is correctly and meaningfully understood. It is quite the opposite as apparent to numerous engagements I have had in the past 4 years about this topic here in the country and abroad. In 2016 (updated in July 2017), Magtubo reported some elucidation about the status of mental health in the Philippines by the numbers. Firstly, mental health illnesses are the third most common form of morbidity for Filipinos. That is around 1.4 million people with identified disabilities showed that mental disability accounts for 14 percent of all disabilities. In this number, one in five people suffers from a mental health problem. In terms of governmental response, only 5% of the total budget of the Department of

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Health is allocated for mental health. With a population of over 100 million, there are only 700 psychiatrists and a thousand psychiatric nurses.

Between 17 to 20 percent of Filipino adult experience psychiatric disorders, while 10 to 15 percent of Filipino children, aged 5 to 15, suffer from mental health problems. In the NSO (now PSA) study, 88 cases of mental health problems were reported for every 100,000 Filipinos. According to the latest numbers from the new Philippine Health Information System on Mental Health (PHIS-MH), schizophrenia is the top mental health problem in the Philippines, affecting 42 percent of the study cohort. Most of them were male. Other mental health disorders in the list are depression, anxiety disorder, schizoaffective disorder, acute and transient disorder, and stimulant-related disorder. This survey included 2,562 patients in 14 participating public and private hospitals from May 2014 to May 2016. The PHIS-MH was conducted to collect data on mental health in the Philippines as a tool to put together a mental healthcare database in the country. During the typhoon Yolanda calamity in 2013, 800,000 Filipinos suffered from depression, anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Overall, the most common mental health disorder in the country are schizophrenia (1% of the total population mainly from 22-44 age group), substance abuse disorder (96.74% were methamphetamine hydrochloride, 24.94% were marijuana, and 1.11% were cocaine), post-traumatic stress disorder (roughly recurring yearly due to natural calamities), and depression (mainly due to poor socioeconomic status) which is the leading cause of suicide. Suicide is another creeping problem in the Philippines. In 2012, 2,558 Filipinos committed suicide, and of the number, 2,009 were males.

Fairly recently, the Philippine Mental Health Law (R.A. 11036), after its long and winding battles in the houses and senate, was finally enacted in June 2018. It is an act "establishing a national mental health policy for the purpose of enhancing the delivery of integrated mental health services, promoting and protecting the rights of persons utilizing psychiatric, neurologic and psychosocial health services". There are four components of the Mental Health Law: it secures the rights and welfare of mental health professionals and persons with mental needs; it provides mental health services in hospitals and barangay; aims for an improved mental health facility; and to integrate mental health education in schools and workplaces. Lastly, through the Mental Health Law, PhilHealth coverage for mental health diseases has been expanded to outpatient checkups and medicines. Indeed, through this legislation, mental health in the Philippines is having a bright future for all the Filipinos.

Not all countries across the globe have legislative enactment of mental health in their legal system. In fact, in the Southeast Asian region, only the Philippines has, thus far, a law specifically for the uplift of its citizens' mental health. Though it is not entirely a requirement to legislate on this cause, doing so could curb various issues and challenges that relate to people's mental health. Here is a rundown of the global cases and statistics about mental health and related conditions: mental illness is the most neglected health problem in the developing world (Banis, 2019). Based on the World Health Organization (WHO) data, Ritchie & Roser (2018) reported the following: they predicted that by 2030, mental disorders will account for 13% of the total global burden of diseases; around 1-in-6 people globally (15-20 percent) have one or more mental or substance use disorders; the largest number of people had an anxiety disorder, estimated at around 4 percent of the population. Further, mental health disorders are more common in women. Education & employment are strongly linked to mental health. The prevalence of mental health disorders has not significantly increased in the last 26 years. Global statistics on mental health are poorly defined, measured, and understood (Ritchie, 2019). Truly, issues in mental health are still a global concern and much work to advocate for it is most definitely needed. Until it becomes an active part of everyone's support and embedded in our collective consciousness, mental health will remain to be an elusive psychological, social, cultural, and political issue.

Given this information, this study aims to explore the wellbeing in the academe through the National University's academic employees as a post COVID-19 psychosocial response for the promotion of mental health. The researchers utilized a quantitative research approach using a questionnaire: a 50-item Mental Health Questionnaire (Masanda, 2020) with an internal reliability index of 0.88 designed to measure wellbeing (in 10 dimensions) among adult professionals using a 7-point Likert scale. A total of 167 employees across the 9 campuses of the National University Philippines participated in this study through online survey. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and t-test to assess significant differences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper generates novel information regarding the experiences of the academic and support personnel of the National University Philippines in relevance to their psychological or mental health. The results provide deeper understanding on the different factors that may have affected the psychological well-being of academic and non-academic employees alike inside the university.

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These results can assist employees in gaining further understanding of their own experiences about their work engagement which affects their mental health status.

Table 1. Frequency of the participants per area of functioning of the mental health spectrum.

Scores	Percentage	Verbal Interpretations
1.00 – 2.70	1%	<i>Poor</i> Diminished sense of wellbeing and that your mental health, in general, might be suffering
2.71 – 5.25	20%	<i>Fair</i> Reasonable sense of wellbeing and your overall mental health is properly functioning
5.26 – 7.00	79%	<i>Good</i> Worthy sense of wellbeing and your mental health in total is thriving and enable you to function fully and optimally.

Based on table 1, many NU Philippines employees experience a *good* level of mental health and are functional. This indicates that they feel a variety of good feelings, including joy, happiness, love, and fulfillment. They also feel as though their lives have meaning and purpose. On the other hand, they can feel unpleasant emotions like grief, rage, and worry, but they also know how to control them. They do not allow these feelings to rule them or direct their actions.

In terms of relational capacities, they have solid, wholesome connections with other people. Their friends and family make them feel loved and supported. While at the same time, they are conscious of their own feelings, ideas, and actions. They can recognize how their emotions and thoughts influence their actions. On a general sense, they have the capacity to overcome obstacles and overcome failures. They refuse to let adversity define them. Both their physical and emotional wellbeing are taken care of. They seem to consume wholesome foods, get enough rest, and engage in regular exercise. In totality, they are active in their relationships, interests, and jobs. They believe that they are changing the world.

Table 2. Summary of scores of the participants per domain of the mental health spectrum.

Domains	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Uses life skills	5.79	0.89	High
Being comfortable with other people	5.79	0.81	High
Meeting the demands of everyday life	5.54	0.94	High
Healthy expression of emotions	5.48	0.85	High
General optimism	5.97	0.82	High
Feeling good about oneself	5.91	0.86	High
Uses "I message"	5.14	0.68	High Average
Adaptability	5.48	1.01	High
Assertiveness	5.50	0.78	High
Being a team player	5.82	0.77	High
Overall Mental Health	5.64	0.84	High

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In a more specific terms, table 2 shows that they are aware of their strengths and areas for improvement. Before selecting a choice, they consider the advantages and disadvantages of several possibilities. When faced with a task, they persevere. They are resourceful and relentless in their search for answers. They can perceive things from several angles and generate fresh concepts. They are kind and considerate of others and they have faith in themselves and are optimistic about the future. They are empathetic and eager to lend a hand while being able to maintain their own wants and set limits. They have effective coping mechanisms in place to handle trying circumstances and can set priorities for their work and adhere to deadlines.

Table 3. Summary of the scores of the participants in terms of area of work in the mental health spectrum.

Participants	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Academic Support Personnel	5.55	0.92	High
Faculty Members	5.71	0.55	High

Table 3 presents the level of well-being in the mental health spectrum between the teaching and non-teaching personnel of the National University Philippines. It shows that the Faculty Members ($M = 5.7$, $S = .55$) of the National University Philippines have a higher score in the mental health questionnaires than the Academic Support Personnel ($M = 5.5$, $D = .92$). Similarly, the Faculty Members have lower variances in terms of their responses in the mental health questionnaire. However, both set of personnel shows a good, functioning, and effective sense of well-being. As it suggests, teaching and non-teaching personnel performs their jobs with a “high” level of well-being.

Table 4. Test of difference of the participants’ scores in terms of area of work in the mental health spectrum.

T-Test: Two-Sample assuming unequal variances		
	<i>Academic Support Personnel</i>	<i>Faculty Members</i>
Mean	5.545217391	5.713636364
Variance	0.846662451	0.302358562
Observations	23	44
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	30	
t Stat	-0.805812145	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.426692618	
t Critical two-tail	2.042272456	

The results indicate that the Mental Health Scores of Academic Support Personnel and Faculty Members of the National University Philippines had no significant difference with the p-value level of .43. This means that the level of wellbeing of both personnel are not different from one another. In a more specific terms of their mental health in the work setting, both they have an ability to receive, assimilate, understand, and regulate one’s own emotions and those of others. They have the capacity to manage and repair of the emotions that arise in the work context, as well as an understanding of social situations at the workplace of these professionals.

Mental health among many sectors has become a growing concern. With the adverse effect of different social factors and the Covid-19 pandemic, many institutions are faced with various mental health problems that affect their employees (Barona et.al., 2020). Despite the increasing concern for mental health problems among academicians and even students, and the lack of an institutionalized comprehensive mental health program as a response to address such issues, both personnel tend to be more satisfied in their sphere of work as can be reflected from these results.

Other factors that could further affect employees’ mental health as can be inferred from the results of the study include task management, working time, services available, personal conflict, job security, and healthcare provision. These psychosocial factors are conceived as the conditions present in work situations related to the organization of work, the environment, the type of position, and the tasks to be carried out, which all affect the development of both work and mental health (Musilek, 2019). These factors therefore seem to facilitate the quality of working life and personal development of the personnel.

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As a future trend in this line of study, this paper emphasizes that research must not only be the evaluation and management of the psychosocial risks, but also the application and development of policies of good organizational practices to avoid the appearance of burnout and the costs it brings with it. Any intervention must be supported by a theoretical foundation and scientific evidence. Hence, it is highly recommended that the National University Philippines craft and design a comprehensive mental health program contextualized within the needs of the employees. The said program must include an informative module preventing burnout syndrome and encouraging the development of professional and personal skills and competences of both academic and support personnel.

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