

Self-care Practices and Mental Well-Being of UBian Students

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Mental Health Law of the Philippines 2017 heightened the emphasis on good mental health or wellness. Concerning this, self-care is seen as contributing to a person's healthy mental well-being. The observation implies that even as students who are in a transitional phase, they engage in a continuous effort to look into their well-being to deter compromises in their mental health. To address this in the University of Baguio, quantitative descriptive research was used to look into the self-care practices, and mental well-being of first-year college students. The findings showed that the students' physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and relations self-care practices were carried out. However, research findings showed that male students tend to look more into their physical self-care practices while the female students tend to look more into their emotional self-care practices. When it comes to their general well-being, research findings showed that first-year college students perceived that they have a high level of well-being. Having considered the research findings, a program on mental health and wellness was crafted

Keywords

self-care practices, mental health, mental well-being, adolescents, emerging adults

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Introduction

The concept of positive mental health and its contribution to all aspects of human life had gradually obtained an international interest in as much as it is considered a complex construct, which is generally accepted as covering both emotional and psychological functioning. The term itself is often used interchangeably with the term mental well-being and has been recognized as having significant consequences for health and social outcomes

In the Philippines, the emphasis on good mental health or wellness has only been heightened through the implementation of the Mental Health Law of the Philippines 2017. In as much as that is the case, there are already various models of wellness which tries to explain the different aspects to be considered for an individual to have good mental health or wellbeing

Among these wellness models, The Indivisible Self of Myers and Sweeney is the most encountered. This model sees wellness or mental health as a way of life directed towards optimal health and well-being.

Part of the group of individuals who are to look into their mental health and well-being are the college students. Conley, Travers, and Bryant⁴ state that the transition to college brings various developmental challenges and stressors to new students. Rathus⁵ even adds that first-year college students are now encountering a record level of stress.

Filipino college students are not exempted from being subjected to such transitional phases. Mina⁶ states that many students experience stress due to being faced with the demands of studying while wanting to have time for friends and family still.

Mak and Ouano⁷ add that looking into how students cope when they are faced with perceived stressful academic situations is essential, mainly since how these students

handle college life experiences more or less influence personal and academic success.

This study aimed to provide a basis for coming up with an intervention program for first-year students who may or may not yet be at risk of psychiatric mental health concerns by promoting the development of personal self-care practices.

The study specifically aimed to identify the self-care practices of UBian first year college students and if there are significant differences in the self-care practices when compared according to sex.

More so, the study looked into the well-being of the first-year students considering their wellness practices. Then from these responses, a mental health and wellness program was to be proposed

Methods

The study used the quantitative descriptive research design to look into the self-care practices, and mental well-being of first-year college students enrolled for the school year 2019-2020. More so, total enumeration of the new first-year college students who willingly participated as respondents was carried out. The first year college students who felt uncomfortable to answer the questionnaire were excluded.

The self-care assessment tool of Saakvitne, Pearlman, and staff⁸ which has six sub-areas: physical self-care, emotional self-care, psychological self-care, relational self-care, professional self-care, and spiritual self-care is one of the survey instruments that was used. The professional self-care area was omitted, however, since it was not yet applicable to college students. More so, the tool has not been subjected to reliability or validity but has been used in several types of research already. The study conducted by Parsons⁹ established the Cronbach's alpha of the tool at .795, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the six subscales. Further, the Warwick Edinburgh Mental

Wellbeing Scale short version, which is a 7-item scale, was used as the second part of the survey tool, which has a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.89 using student sample.10

To look into the self-care practices and the mental well-being of the students, weighted means were computed and interpreted. The t-test was used to compare the mean values according to sex.

Results

Profile of the Respondents

A total of 639 first year college students participated in the study where there were more males (339) than females (300).

The weighted means and standard deviations of the self-care practices are shown in Table 1. Higher means indicate that the self-care practiced is very much carried out by the students. Results indicate that the students practice physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual and relational self-care

Table 1. Self-care practices of UBian students

SELF-CARE PRACTICES	WTD MEAN	SD	Descriptive Interpretation
PHYSICAL			
1. I eat my meals regularly (breakfast, lunch and dinner).	2.75	.84	practiced
2. I exercise.	2.47	.84	not practiced
3. I get medical care when needed.	2.79	.85	practiced
4. I rest when I am sick	3.01	.82	practiced
5. I do physical activities (dance, swim, run, walk, etc.)	3.03	.82	practiced
6. I get enough sleep.	2.43	.85	not practiced
7. I take vacations.	2.71	.86	practiced
8. I take time away from the use of gadgets.	2.43	.81	not practiced
9. I take time away from social media.	2.51	.80	practiced
Area Mean	2.68	.83	practiced
PSYCHOLOGICAL			
10. I take time for self-reflection	2.90	.78	practiced
11. I listen to my thoughts	3.19	.68	practiced
12. I listen to my feelings	3.16	.74	practiced
13. I keep a journal.	1.96	.95	practiced
14. I say no to extra responsibilities.	2.33	.80	practiced
Area Mean	2.71	.79	practiced

EMOTIONAL

15. I spend time with others who I enjoy being with.	3.43	.67	very practiced	much
16. I stay in contact with important people in my life.	3.54	.65	very practiced	much
17. I praise myself.	2.68	.90	practiced	
18. I love myself.	3.33	.80	very practiced	much
19. I review my favorite movies.	2.97	.87	practiced	
20. I allow myself to cry.	3.18	.93	practiced	
21. I find things that make me laugh.	3.50	.67	very practiced	much
Area Mean	3.23	.78	practiced	

SPIRITUAL

22. I spend time in nature.	3.00	.74	practiced	
23. I am open to inspiration.	3.27	.69	very practiced	much
24. I cherish hope.	3.36	.67	very practiced	much
25. I pray.	3.38	.80	very practiced	much
26. I know what is meaningful to me.	3.37	.69	very practiced	much
27. I get experiences of awe.	3.02	.67	practiced	
28. I listen to inspirational music.	3.33	.75	very practiced	much
Area Mean	3.25	.72	practiced	

RELATIONAL

29. I make time to see my friends.	3.23	.72	practiced	
30. I visit my relatives.	2.92	.82	practiced	
31. I make time to be with my family.	3.33	.77	very practiced	much
32. I make time to reply to messages (email, phone messages, etc.)	3.22	.74	practiced	
33. I stay in contact with faraway friends.	3.09	.79	practiced	
34. I ask help when I need it.	3.10	.83	practiced	
35. I share my fears to someone I trust	3.04	.095	practiced	
Area Mean	3.13	.80	practiced	
Overall Mean	3.00	.78	practiced	

The t-test was used to analyze the data collected and see if there are significant differences in the responses when compared according to sex. Table 2 presents the means, p-values and interpretation. Results showed that there was

significant differences in the physical and emotional self-care practices of the students.

Table 2. Self-care practices when compared according to sex

SELF-CARE PRACTICES	Female (n=300)	Male (n=339)	p-value	Interpretation
Physical	2.69	2.83	.00	s
Psychological	2.78	2.73	.20	ns
Emotional	3.31	3.23	.02	s
Spiritual	3.33	3.30	.39	ns
Relational	3.20	3.16	.36	ns

Legend: ns-not significant, s-significant

The weighted means and standard deviations of the mental well-being of students are presented in Table 3. Higher means indicate that they see themselves with a high level of well-being. Results showed that the respondents saw themselves as having a high level of well-being amidst the challenges faced by a first-year college student.

Table 3. Mental well-being of UBian students

Mental indicators			well-being	WTD MEAN	SD	Descriptive Interpretation
1	I've been feeling optimistic about the future		2.93	.78	High level of well-being	
2	I've been feeling useful		2.72	.77	High level of well-being	
3	I've been feeling relaxed		2.60	.80	High level of well-being	
4	I've been dealing with problems well		2.69	.79	High level of well-being	
5	I've been thinking clearly		2.73	.77	High level of well-being	
6	I've been feeling close to other people		2.85	.81	High level of well-being	
7	I've been able to make up my own mind about things		3.06	.77	High level of well-being	
Overall Mean			2.80	.78	High level of well-being	

Discussions

The study identified that the first year college students see themselves as students who carry out different self-care practices. Specifically, they practice physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual and relational self-care.

Self-care as a general term is defined as various activities an individual engages in to maintain one's health and is usually used interchangeably with self-management. When it comes to spiritual self-care practices, these would now involve activities that look into the interconnectedness of creation or

personal experiences of transcendence¹¹ The research finding could then be attributed to the Filipino nature of being religious.¹² This is further supported by the study conducted by Estacio¹³, which showed that adolescents show a high degree of belief in God. Santrock¹⁴ on the other hand would explain this through the cognitive religious development of adolescents which leads them to examine different religious and spiritual concepts or ideas. Further, the data presented show that first-year college students practice emotional self-care. Emotional self-care is the conscious effort to welcome the various emotions experienced by an individual, whether positive or negative, or the ability to understand the value of one's emotions. Pickhardt¹⁵ suggests that the "tools" used by adolescents to manage their emotions are those learned from their parents through social modeling. Furthermore, emotional self-care helps individuals become more productive by enabling them to handle everyday life stresses better. With these, it is implied that first-year college students generally come from families with excellent family dynamics, thereby allowing them to develop and carry out emotional self-care practices.¹⁶⁻¹⁸

Relational, which refers to self-care practices that either strengthen relationships or enhance the quality of one's relationship with others, is another area where the first-year college students of the university practice self-care. The effort of the students to take care of their relationships can be explained through the psychosocial development which adolescents undergo. Erikson's stages of development show that this is the phase where adolescents would form close ties to help them clarify their identities and have a source of social judgment. Furthermore, relational self-care helps adolescents develop social competence and psychological adjustment.¹⁹⁻²²

Another area where first-year college students of the university practice self-care is the psychological aspect, which in this study refers to paying attention to one's thoughts and mental state. The practices carried out by first-year students under the psychological aspect can be attributed to the hypothetical thinking which they discover as adolescents. Hypothetical thinking allows them to project themselves into various situations and assess whether their preconceived thoughts are correct, thus allowing them to try on what best works for them. More so, thinking about what one thinks about oneself and others helps address self-generated stress and improve distressing emotions.²³⁻²⁵

Also, self-care practices that look into one's physical being are carried out by first-year college students in the university. These self-care practices involve healthy behavior that ensures that the body is well-nourished or cared for. As much as the first-year college students practice physical self-care, it is notable that it obtained the lowest average mean. This finding is corroborated by Demeritt,²⁶ who stated that for the adolescents of today's generation, getting enough sleep and being able to manage personal stress are key factors that have been influencing their health. In as much as first-year college students intend to get the needed sleep, college workload and academic demands affect the amount of sleep that they get, thus the self-evaluation that they do not have enough sleep. This scenario

also accounts for the lack of time to exercise and engage in other physical activities.²⁷

Further, significant differences were reflected in the physical and emotional self-care practices of the students. The higher physical self-care practices among the male respondents are corroborated by Woolfolk and Perry,²⁸ who mentioned that males consistently give themselves higher ratings in physical domains. Evolutionary psychologists suggest that these differences were fashioned by natural selection in response to adaptation problems that were repeatedly encountered from one generation to another. The female first-year college students on the other hand rated themselves higher in emotional self-care. This finding is corroborated by the statement that women are gender-typed as affectionate, agreeable, and emotional.²⁹ Thus, the female respondents are merely living up to the expectation that as young women, it is second nature that they are mindful of their emotions and how they regulate these.

Moreover, the study showed that the first-year college students of the University of Baguio have a high level of well-being. This implies that in as much as the respondents are in a phase of storm and stress, they are able to look into their overall mental health or well-being. On the other hand, the study of Cleofas³⁰ demonstrated that all measures of well-being and distress are significantly correlated, both positively and negatively, to the quality of life of the youth.³¹

Conclusion

On account of the derived research findings, the first-year college students of the University of Baguio carry out physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and relational self-care practices to look into their well-being. This implies that there is a degree of personal responsibility to look into personal wellness, which the university can strengthen through various student development activities.

Further, male students tend to look more into their physical self-care practices while the female students tend to look more into their emotional self-care practices.

Then when it comes to mental well-being, first-year college students generally saw themselves as having a high level of well-being amidst their school experiences.

In as much as the first-year college students of the University of Baguio carry out self-care practices for their wellness and consider themselves as having a high degree of well-being, the provision of different student development activities on mental health and wellness would still be helpful, considering that 1) they are in a transitional phase in human development, and 2) there is an apparent lack of these self-care practices when they start moving up the educational level.

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