Communicating Online Counseling for Mental Health:
Awareness and Perceptions of PSAU Students

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Abstract
The general objective of this paper was to determine how online counseling for mental health is communicated to the Pampanga State Agricultural University (PSAU) students by knowing its influence on their awareness and perceptions. In determining this, 380 college students at PSAU were surveyed online using the quantitative research method. The results of the study showed that the respondents have a high level of awareness and have a positive perception towards online counseling for mental health. It was found in the study that anxiety, academic concerns, and depression are the issues that would lead most of the respondents into seeking online counselling. Most of the respondents agreed that they would consider getting psychological help through online counseling if they were worried or upset for a long period of time because of its accessibility. The respondents also have a positive perception that if online counseling were available at no charge, they would probably consider trying it. The study recommends to the PSAU Guidance and Counseling office to implement their own program in which they can offer free online counseling services to the PSAU students. This would serve as a safe space for PSAU students where they can share their thoughts or concerns that are affecting their mental well-being and interfering with their ability to function properly as individuals and students.

Keywords: Online Counselling, Mental Health, Information Sources

Introduction

Defining Mental Health

Health is every individual's source of everyday life. It is a positive concept, highlighting the personal and social resources of every individual, including their physical abilities. Furthermore, health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization, 2021).

Focusing on mental health, it refers to an individual's state of well-being, which includes how they think, feel, and act. It can also relate to a person's emotional, social, and psychological well-being (Felman, 2020). However, there is a condition that affects an individual's way of thinking, interpersonal relationships, and day-to-day functioning and it is called mental illness. It affects people of all races, ages, religions, sexes, and genders (Harvard Medical University, 2021). Mental illnesses are also mental health conditions characterized by changes in an individual's emotions, including their way of thinking and/or behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

Mental Health and Its Problems

In connection, different mental health concerns have been identified as a result of this, including depression, generalized anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, obsessive- compulsive disorder, and a lot more (Harvard Medical University, 2021). Furthermore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has classified depression, a type of mental illness, as a severe public health problem since it is a primary cause of harm and disease for individuals all over the world (University of Southern California, 2020). Anxiety and depression, for example, can become communication problems because they can cause speech impairments during a conversation, such as long pauses, which can impact a person's social skills. Therefore, it has an impact on how a person lives, communicates, and builds relationships with other people (Williamsville Psychiatry, 2022).

With regards to this, globally, the most vulnerable to mental health issues are those aged 15–29. The related deaths, along with the issues of mental health at these ages, are the second highest cause of mortality (World Health Organization, 2020). In addition, there are around 970 million people around the world who have been diagnosed with mental health disorders, and anxiety is the most common mental illness in the world that affects 284 million people According to the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Psychiatry, mental illnesses are responsible for 14.3 percent of deaths worldwide, or approximately 8 million deaths each year. Because of this, it demonstrates the necessity for more programs and campaigns that will help to overcome the stigma around mental health (World Health Organization, 2020).

Mental Health in the Philippine Context

Focusing in the Philippines, according to Maravilla and Tan (2021), one of the stigmas and beliefs of Filipinos around mental health issues is that mental illnesses are non-existent and something to be ashamed of. To address this issue, country's Department of Health (DOH, 2018) has created and continuously creates different programs and activities that focus on mental health. One of these activities were the creation of free online counselling sessions.

In line with this, according to Bennette (2018), the word counseling is most likely to be associated with face-to-face or in-person counseling. It is where an individual who seeks mental health treatment will undergo therapy in the counselor's office or space. However, counseling for mental health issues could be done not only in-person but also online. Focusing on online counseling, currently, it is one of the avenues used in order to address mental health problems. This is done in order to provide accessible mental health treatment and services to those who need them. Also, it will be easier for mental health advocates to break the stigma that has always been associated with mental health issues (Cherry, 2021).

Online Counselling in the Academe

However, according to Acosta et al. (2014), the literature or studies about online counseling in the Philippines is still somewhat lacking. It could be explained by the fact that not all Filipinos are aware of the availability of online counseling. Thus, an effort should be made to improve the image of online counseling for mental health concerns as the attitudes of the potential clients depend on the availability of quality information for mental health treatments (Musiat et al., 2014). In addition, Filipinos' attitudes and receptions to online counseling may differ depending on their characteristics (Acosta et al., 2014).

In line with this, one of the negative sides of online counseling is that the treatment and access of mental health care mostly occurs in urban areas, in which those who live in rural areas might not have access to mental health services because of its limitations and the absence of mental health practices in their area. Meanwhile, on the positive side, online counseling is convenient because clients can often schedule their own sessions that will be suitable for their own time. In addition, seeking mental health care services online does not require an individual to be clinically diagnosed with mental health issues first because online therapy is an avenue for everyone who wants to start asking for help for their mental well-being from professionals (Cherry, 2021).

Therefore, it is relevant to study how online counseling for mental health is communicated to PSAU students because it could help and benefit the current and future mental health programs, movements, and campaigns. PSAU college students were chosen to be the respondents of this research because, according to Brown (2012), about 12–18% of students in college universities were diagnosed with mental illness. On the other hand, this study may serve as a source of information not only for the PSAU college students but also for all the Filipino students about the existence of online counseling that may help them address their mental health concerns.

Methodology

In this case, the research utilized quantitative research design-descriptive approach. quantitative research methods refer to evaluating and understanding the problem of the study with the use of data collection processes and analyzing the results along with statistical techniques (Apuke, 2017). With this, a descriptive research approach was used in the study. The purpose of the descriptive research approach is to explain and describe the characteristics and issues or problems of the study; this research approach is more appropriate for answering the question ‗what' rather than answering the questions ―how and -why. Therefore, this descriptive approach that is often used in different research became relevant in collecting and gathering the data for this study (Nassaji, 2015).

The study was conducted in Pampanga State Agricultural University, a state-owned university with six colleges and is located at the foothills of Mt. Arayat. To determine the number of respondents, Slovin's formula was utilized, in which lead to the studies' 380 respondents. Stratified random sampling was also utilized to identify the specific number of respondents per college.

After getting permission from the university, due to the pandemic, the survey questionnaire was administered online to ensure the safety of the researchers and the respondents. The questionnaire was based from the research's objective and relevant literature. The data collected from the survey was then analyzed using several statistical methods, including the Frequency Distribution Table (FDT), mean (average), and Chi-square Test. These statistical tools allowed the researcher to process and interpret the data to draw meaningful insights and make conclusions about the research objectives and questions.

Conclusion

Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents. It was seen from the results of the study that most of the respondents were 20 to 21 years old. Most of them were female, and the majority of them had a family monthly income of less than 20,000 pesos.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
18-19	47	12.37
20-21	200	52.63
22-23	127	33.42
24-25	6	11.58
Sex		
Male	257	67.63
Female	123	32.37
Family's Monthly Income		
Below 20,000 pesos	237	62.37
21,000 – 30,999 pesos	95	25
31,000 – 40,999 pesos	34	8.95
41,000 – 50,999 pesos	8	2.10
51,000 – 60,999 pesos	1	0.26
61,000 pesos or above	5	1.32

Sources of and Exposure to Information. The Internet is the respondents' source of information that they always used, which is where they have been more exposed and helped them acquire information and/or promotions regarding online counseling for mental health, while the least used source, where they have never been exposed to the information and/or promotions of online therapy, is the magazine.

Table 2. *Respondents' sources of information and exposure to online counseling*

Sources of Information	Mean	Descriptive Rating
Television	2.44	Seldom
Radio	1.81	Seldom
Internet	3.64	Always
Social Media	3.58	Always
Newspaper	1.79	Seldom
Magazines	1.72	Never
Books	2.49	Seldom
Seminars/Webinars	2.94	Often
Family	3.18	Often
Friends	3.32	Always
School	3.20	Often
Church	2.99	Often

Information acquired by the respondents' regarding online counseling. Regarding the information that the respondents have seen or heard about online counseling for mental health, most of them acquired information about mental health organizations' social media pages and accounts. On the other hand, the least amount of information that they have acquired from their source of information is the cost of online therapy.

Table 3. *Information acquired by the respondents' regarding online counseling*

Statements	Frequency
Online counseling counselors, psychologists, or psychotherapists	170
Online counseling websites	177
Free online counseling services	212
Online counseling advertisements	126
Online counseling benefits	142
Webinars on online counseling	224
Social media pages/accounts of mental health organizations	278
Cost of online therapy/counseling	52
Articles regarding online counseling	152
Mental health crisis hotlines	169

Awareness of the Respondents towards Online Counseling for Mental Health. Regarding the awareness of the PSAU students towards online counseling for mental health, most of the respondents have a high level of awareness towards online therapy since there is only one statement in the third category, which is online counseling limitations, where most of the

respondents got the wrong answers. But then, aside from that, the majority of the respondents got the correct answers for the three categories, which are: online counseling communication tools, online counseling benefits, and online counseling limitations.

Table 4. *Awareness of the Respondents towards Online Counseling for Mental Health*

Statements	Frequency of Correct Answer	Percentage of Correct Answers
Online counseling is providing mental health services over the Internet.	354	93.16
Online counseling cannot be done through mobile device apps.	287	75.53
Online counseling can be done through online chats.	307	80.79
Online counseling can be done through video conferencing only.	181	47.63
Online counseling can be accessed via computer, laptop, or mobile phone	365	96.05
Online counseling is not easily accessible and available.	219	57.63
Online counseling reduces time wasted in face-to-face counseling.	244	64.21
Privacy/Confidentiality is kept even in online counseling.	337	88.68
Online counseling is an easier method to get counseling for mental health.	318	83.68
Online counseling contributes to solving the problems facing people who need counseling and shy to use the traditional way in face to face counseling.	358	94.21
Accessibility in online counseling is limited to those who have Internet access and electronic devices only.	312	82.11
Everyone can undergo online counseling.	110	28.95
Online counseling lacks human interaction but it doesn't decrease the sense of trust between the client and counselor.	93	27.47
Online counseling lacks in non-verbal cues.	201	52.89
Miscommunication in online counseling is possible.	348	91.58

Remarks
3.26 – 4.00   Always
2.51 – 3.25   Often
1.76 – 2.50   Seldom
1.00 – 1.75   Never

Perceptions of the Respondents towards Online Counseling for Mental Health. With regards to the PSAU students' perceptions about online counseling for mental health, most of the respondents chose anxiety, academic concerns, and depression as issues that they might seek in online therapy. On the other hand, most of the respondents agreed that if they were worried or upset for a long period of time, they would get psychological help through online counseling because of its accessibility. They also have a positive perception that if online

counseling were available at no charge, they would probably consider trying it. Meanwhile, most of the respondents disagreed that online therapy would be their last option to consider if they have problems and need help.

Table 5. *Perceptions of the Respondents towards Online Counseling for Mental Health*

Statements	Mean	Descriptive Rating
I think if I were to seek counseling services, I would consider trying it online and I would prefer doing it through emails.	2.89	Agree
If I believed I was having a mental breakdown, my first preference would be to get professional help through online counseling with the use of mobile device apps.	2.96	Agree
I think if I were to seek counseling services, I would consider trying it online and I would prefer doing it through online chats.	2.91	Agree
I think if I were experiencing a serious emotional crisis at this point in my life, I would be confident that I could find relief in online counseling through video conferencing.	2.99	Agree
I think if I were worried or upset for a long period of time, I would want to get psychological help through online counseling because of its accessibility.	3.02	Agree
I think if online counseling were available at no charge, I would consider trying it.	3.41	Strongly Agree
I think if I have a friend who has personal problems, I might encourage him or her to consider online counseling because it does not consume much time compared to face-to-face counseling.	3.34	Strongly Agree
I think if I feel anxious, I would want to get psychological help, specifically online counseling because it has more of a sense of privacy compared to face-to-face counseling.	3.07	Agree
I think I would consider trying online counseling because it is an easier way of getting professional help.	3.16	Agree
I believe it could be worthwhile to discuss my personal problems with an online counselor.	3.10	Agree
I think if I were having a personal problem, seeking help through online counseling with an online counselor would be the last option I would consider.	1.92	Disagree
I think I would feel uneasy trying online counseling and discussing emotional problems with an online counselor.	1.79	Disagree
I think if I were to seek counseling services it would be difficult for me to trust and discuss my problem(s) with an online counselor.	1.83	Disagree
I think I would be afraid to discuss stressful events and express myself during digital counseling with an online counselor.	1.81	Disagree
I believe I would be anxious explaining my problems to an online counselor.	1.85	Disagree

Remarks
3.26 – 4.00   Strongly Agree
2.51 – 3.25   Agree
1.76 – 2.50   Disagree
1.00 – 1.75   Strongly Disagree

Relationship between variables. Considering the significant relationship between:

1. The study's findings revealed that the respondents' age and sex have no significant relationship with their awareness and perceptions regarding online counseling for mental health. However, it was also found in the findings of the study that the family's monthly income of the respondents has a positive relationship with their awareness but has no significant relationship with their perceptions.

2. The level of exposure to the sources of information of the respondents has no significance to their total level of awareness. However, in the first category, which is online counseling communication tools, this got a negative low significance, which means the level of exposure to the sources of information of PSAU students slightly influences their awareness regarding online therapy. Meanwhile, the level of exposure to the sources of information of the respondents had no influence on their perceptions regarding online counseling for mental health.

Table 6. *Relationship between variables*

Variables	p-value	Verbal Interpretation
Age Vs Awareness	0.075	Not Significant
Age Vs Perception	0.727	Not Significant
Sex Vs Awareness	0.898	Not Significant
Sex Vs Perception	0.159	Not Significant
Family's Monthly Income vs. Awareness	0.000	Highly Significant
Family's Monthly Income vs. Perception	0.557	Not Significant
Exposure to Information vs. Awareness	0.243	Not Significant
Exposure to Information vs. Perception	0.107	Not Significant

Acknowledgements

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