



A Qualitative Inquiry on the Active Mental Health Help-Seeking Behavior of Filipino Young Adults

Camille V. De Leon

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Bataan Peninsula State University, Philippines

E-mail: cvdeleon@bpsu.edu.ph

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v8i4.2604>

Abstract

Mental health care is a basic necessity which directly influences a person's quality of life. It also depends on the help-seeking behavior of an individual. Although awareness and services were continuously advocated, studies determining the direct impact and facilitative factors of active mental health help-seeking behavior among individuals from diverse cultural contexts is still limited. This study delved into the active mental health help-seeking behavior of eight (8) Filipino young adults who have undergone formal psychological services. Their lived experiences were captured with the use of a validated semi-structured interview tool and were analyzed with the use of an interpretative phenomenological analysis lens. Findings showed four superordinate themes: facilitative factors were identified through gaining self-discovery and acceptance; having a support system; finding the right therapist; and struggles outweighing mental health relevant to the socially rooted barriers and impose a challenge in the help-seeking of the selected participants via disbelief; stigma and complexity of treatment and financial burdens. These provide an overview of the psychological gains from an active help-seeking behavior and how one overcomes barriers to mental health in today's generation. This research may serve as a basis in recommending a community-based mental health intervention that will focus on strengthening the coping resources of Filipinos in addressing their mental health concerns.

Keywords: *Filipino Mental Health; Active Mental Health Help-Seeking Behavior; Phenomenology; Psychological Treatment*

Introduction

There is no health without mental health. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as an integral aspect of our overall health that encompasses fulfilling potential; coping with life stresses; productivity; and being able to contribute to the community. It is highly influenced by various internal and external factors. When issues and concerns about a person's mental health arise, the need for

accessible and effective interventions is crucial in maintaining one's well-being. Given the diversity of cultural contexts, view of mental health varies as to how one must take appropriate action for proper supportive care and attending to this matter.

One's mental health is affected by various internal and external factors. Internal factors pertain to personal coping resources such as self-efficacy, resiliency, and physical capacity to function while daily life stress and uncontrolled events are some of the common external factors that weigh a person's adjustment to cope. In addition, our overall well-being can also be assessed through a continuum. We often stand in the middle of being categorized as having a serious mental health condition and having an optimal mental health condition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increase in specific mental health problems across various age groups globally. A study by Serrano et. al. (2022) revealed that Filipino college students have experienced mild to severe psychological distress and are confirmed to have used adaptive coping strategies in response to the stressors in their learning during the global health crisis. Other related Asian studies also identified psychological vulnerabilities of the student population in experiencing distress and anxiety from the demands and uncertainties of the pandemic (Cao et. al., 2020). With such experience, college students depend on employing novel ways of adjustment to maintain a balanced functioning, which is also considered as a coping and help-seeking strategy.

Exposure to stressors and disparities has influenced help-seeking behaviors among Filipinos, significantly impacting mental health equity and the utilization of psychological services (Chan et al., 2021). Stress-related mental illnesses were profoundly greater among people who struggled to cope at the height of the pandemic (Kar, et al., 2021). As such, it directs the exploration of mental health and personal resiliency tools as a relevant intervention to mitigate the negative psychological effects in the aftermath of a crisis. Relative to this, a part of one's internal process and positive resource pertains to mental health help-seeking behavior which is an important factor to be explored and see its beneficial influence to have an optimal view of mental health and well-being.

Formal mental health help-seeking is not highly regarded among Filipinos and is often viewed as a less helpful option due to factors such as reluctance to undergo professional consultations, as locals tend to prefer seeking advice from close family and friends (Martinez et al., 2020). This take on a serious note as to how mental health care may still be considered as a pressing concern especially in developing countries wherein a challenge to sustain mental health care is due to undervalued understanding and awareness of mental disorders as medical conditions, prevalent stigma and shame associated with mental illnesses, negative attitudes towards health care professionals, and cultural differences in perceptions and coping strategies which contribute to limited access and underutilization of mental health services in these regions (Lopez & Lopez, n.d.). Other societal factors such as income inequality, poverty line, and slower urbanization rates may further influence effective mental health care delivery. Moreover, one's mental health help-seeking behavior among the student population is sought to be affected by factors such as perceived campus culture influencing personal beliefs (Chen et. al., 2016); one's religious practice which demands for culturally sensitive spaces (Alviar, 2022) and stigmatizing attitude towards psychological illness (Schnyder et. al., 2017). Other research findings sought additional factors such as perceived stigma; difficulty in expression and care access; and self-reliance do hinder mental health help-seeking among young adults (Salaheddin & Mason, 2016) as well as a non-medical approach in viewing one's perceived psychological or emotional difficulties. However, cultural and contextual applicability of said factors are yet to be determined and still varies among individuals.

There are other situations which depict how people gain access for mental health care. A study initiated in 2015 showed that about 73% of young people relied on social media access to get information about self-harm instead of consulting with mental health professionals. However, there is no definite

relationship between social media exposure and one's help-seeking behavior as well as the direct role of these avenues as an alternative source to younger generations who have mental health concerns. There are views suggesting that mental health awareness via social media campaigns can be empowering, yet the disadvantages may lead to serious outcomes like misdiagnosis or exacerbation of mental health problems. Interventions such as increasing mental health literacy, alleviation of stigma and motivational enhancement were evident to improve attitude and behavior in help-seeking among developed nations, but limited to developed nations; hence, lacks empirical evidence from low and middle-income countries (Xu et. al., 2018).

This paper focused on exploring the phenomenon of help-seeking behavior. As a review, in-person formal help-seeking behavior from mental health professionals could positively impact preventive and responsive care to properly manage the risk of mental health problems as evident in the significant association of factors such as presence of personal intent and will to seek professional help for a serious emotional problem and feeling comfortable talking about personal problems with future help seeking and treatment use (Angermeyer et. al., 2017 as cited in Xu et. al, 2018; Mojtabai et. al., 2016). However, realization of help-seeking behaviors would only be expected if the individual experienced symptoms that necessitates a professional's attention (Gulliver et. al., 2012). Generally, research found out that there is low utilization of psychological services among Filipinos despite the evident need of interventions concerns from a high prevalence of psychological distress coming from academics, personal and familial relationships affecting physical, emotional and psychological functioning (Martinez, et. al., 2020; Serrano et. al, 2022).

There is still an existing gap in the assessment of help-seeking patterns in the Filipino context. As previously studied, there remains a concentration of reported barriers to mental health help-seeking among adults such as being self-reliant; opting for alternative sources; low perceived need, negative attitude or poor experience to seek mental help and financial constraint (Shi, et. al., 2020). This research addressed the limitations identified in the cited literature and explored the factors that promote mental health help-seeking behavior among Filipino individuals who actively sought professional help.

This qualitative study aims to uncover the prevailing factors that promote an active mental health help-seeking behavior among selected Filipino young adults and the attached meaning of this lived experience for their wellbeing.

Methods

Research Design

The study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework to explore and understand young adults' active mental health help-seeking behavior for their specific psychological concerns (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA's focus on phenomenology allowed us to capture each participant's perspective and lived experience of enacting actual behavior through actively seeking help and at the same time enabled us to interpret and understand how they made sense of such experiences with its hermeneutic feature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These said procedures allowed us to acknowledge the participants' expertise in their own life experiences and positioning the researchers' critical role as co-constructors of knowledge with the use of the participants' own words, through a scholar pursuit. We are guided to interpret the meaning that they ascribe to the said phenomenon and determine the factors strengthening the active mental health help-seeking behavior experiences.

Participants

A purposive selection was used to seek eight (8) Filipino adult participants aged 18 to 31 years, who were qualified to have an active mental health help-seeking behavior by having attended more than one (1) session from a qualified mental health professional through psychotherapy session, psychopharmacotherapy, psychological counseling, or life coaching sessions in Bataan and Metro Manila, Philippines. Relevant to the study, participants had experiences of actively seeking mental health services, having been clinically diagnosed with mental health concerns at the time of the study.

Table 1. Summary of Participants

Participant Code	Age	Psychological Services	Duration
R1	31 years	Psychological consultations and psychotherapy	4 months
R2	22 years	Pharmacotherapy	7 months
R3	19 years	Pharmacotherapy	2 years
R4	23 years	Pharmacotherapy	5 years
R5	22 years	Psychotherapy	6 months
R6	22 years	Psychological counseling and Pharmacotherapy	2 years
R7	19 years	Combined Therapy*	7 months
R8	22 years	Combined Therapy*	4 months

* *Pharmacological and psychological interventions*

Referrals from a partnered psychological center and information dissemination through online posting via social media pages helped to establish the careful selection of the study participants. A total of twenty-three (23) individuals participated during the pre-screening and preliminary interview. Four (4) were selected from online sources and the other four (4) from psychological clinic referrals. In summary, two (2) of the selected participants were mainly undergoing psychopharmacotherapy sessions from a qualified psychologist and psychiatrist; four (4) are consulting a psychiatrist for pharmacological treatment and two (2) are consulting a psychologist for psychotherapy sessions.

Data Collection

The individual interview sessions with each participant were conducted through an online modality that lasted approximately for an hour and half. A validated semi-structured interview was employed to guide the interview process, comprising neutral and open-ended questions that explored participants' daily life experiences with mental health concerns and their active help-seeking behaviors in seeking specific treatments. The participants' thoughts and feelings about their lived experiences as well as handling other people's view of their condition have been a part of the interview protocol. Before the data collection began, informed consent from each participant was obtained wherein indicated are the purpose of the study; permission for audio-recording the interview proceedings for data analysis procedures; direct benefit for voluntary partaking and the provision of confidentiality and privacy relative to the protection of their identification which is intended within the allowed purposes of this study only.

To ensure an ethical research practice, the participants were further subjected to a psychological debriefing after the interview. They were individually provided a brief life coaching session from our partnered psychological service provider. As of this date, no participants have been emotionally displaced after the interview sessions.

Data Analysis

The study's procedure of data analysis was informed through the IPA framework. The interview transcripts were then analyzed through a five-step process. Initially, we made use of a reflexivity journal to be aware of our experiences on the same phenomenon and bracket our personal views. This allowed us to have a phenomenological attitude and immersion in the interview transcripts to understand the captured lived experience of the participants.

After collecting the data and transcribing, multiple readings from the entire data transcripts of each participant were conducted to gain familiarity with the data extracts and review the notes within the margins of the transcripts. We then rooted the experiential statements from the participants' actual words along with the notes taken. The meaningful connections from each participant's shared experiences from the phenomenon was grouped, clustered and coded for initial meaning units. The fourth and fifth phases of analysis entails selecting direct quotes or actual data extracts lifted from the interview transcripts that best reflect the emerging superordinate and subthemes of the qualitative analysis. This procedure is to ensure that we have grounded our interpretation based on the participants' lived experience from actively help-seeking behavior as the main phenomenon.

To enhance the trustworthiness of our qualitative research, participants validated their transcribed interview accounts. In the discussion section, relevant literature is reviewed to interpret and contextualize how young adults understand their experiences of actively seeking mental health help.

Ethical Considerations

Process of obtaining informed consent; upholding confidentiality of sensitive information; and debriefing sessions of the participants were practiced in accordance with the code ethics for Philippine psychology. Further, this study has been granted clearance from the institutional research committee of Bataan Peninsula State University, Philippines.

Results

The data analysis resulted in four (4) superordinate themes that capture the lived experiences of eight selected Filipino young adults with an active mental health help-seeking behavior who sought varied psychological services and interventions. Three among these factors strengthen their help-seeking behaviors through gaining self-discovery and acceptance, having a supportive system and finding the right therapist. A prominent factor serves as a struggle outweighing mental health of the participants which has been evident from experiences of disbelief and stigma, sought complexity of their treatment and financial burden.

Gaining Self Discovery and Acceptance

This theme includes the activated self-awareness, hopes for further self-improvement as well as the impact and meaning of actively seeking professional help intended for the mental health concerns of the selected young adult participants. As stated by the participant, *"I need to seek help from a professional on how to solve this issue within myself."* - (R4) Acknowledging that they cannot handle a mental health concern alone facilitates their intention to seek help by consulting with a qualified professional.

It exemplifies how the participants shared their personal efforts in undergoing the ordeal of formal psychological services such as psychological consultation, psychopharmacotherapy, psychotherapy and/or counseling. The active and current seeking for professional help at more than one

occasion enabled them to achieve realizations; high regard for mental health awareness; and understanding the complexity of their emotion, action and behavior.

“I used to say before, it's just in a person's mind, it's like 'you can control it. But when I experienced it, you really need professional help for that or for certain situations like that. It's not something you should just dismiss. It's not normal.” (R2)

“Because after those sessions, I became okay. I really took gradual steps to help myself become completely okay. Compared to before, I used to sulk when I was frustrated, like I wouldn't move, but now that I'm seeking professional help, I don't dwell too much on it or when I make a mistake.” (R3)

This serves as the initial facilitative factor strengthening one's active help-seeking behavior which brings about a positive mindset that allows a direct effect of self-reflection, mindful living and improved decision-making and coping mechanisms buffering life stresses and challenges. By formally seeking help, they were able to realize that they are yet to attain a full recovery from their psychological symptoms and will still be needing continuous professional aid to effectively practice and apply their personal strength in combating social triggers and daily functioning.

“Actively seeking professional help in terms of mental health is actually a very good form of self-care. My personality became more toned down, and I became calmer in my words towards others and myself.” (R8)

The active help-seeking behavior also enabled those seeking professional help to be self-capacitated and how to challenge their defeating thoughts and negative patterns of behaviors. This is an important marker to track their prognosis. One of the participants described, *“Before it's like my thoughts were kind of dark but after seeking professional help, it lightened up.” - (R1)* Those who seek professional help have a personal commitment to enhance their well-being despite the recurrence of emotional concerns and triggers in their environment. Hence, it makes them thrive in the journey of understanding and accepting their mental health conditions. The essence of seeking professional help seriously impacts the way an individual will be able to view the importance of attending to their mental health as it serves as a life-saver.

Having a Supportive System

The theme covers the crucial role of the participants' existing support systems who comprise of family relatives, friends and even community members who primarily encourage them to seek professional help and extend an understanding of their experience in seeking professional help. The majority of the participants' family support has been instrumental to continually seek professional help. The primary financial resources coming from their family enabled them to access the necessary mental health service intended for their medical expenses; follow-up consultation and psychotherapy sessions. How they serve as protective factors provide an emotional backing that sets a positive environment to facilitate a healing process. Although traditional family systems have little faith over mental health services, how they see it effects on their family members opens an understanding and opportunity to discuss as well the need for mental health discussions. Participants' support systems are instrumental in their improvement.

“My mother is the one pushing me because there are times, I feel like giving up, she told me that I couldn't stop abruptly because I would go back to where we started.” (R4)

“With friends, it seems like they understand me more. Not that I'm always prioritized, but they understand my condition more, why I act in a certain way. They encourage me to do better, to hopefully be okay, like with [my] doctor.” (R5)

“There are other family members who are just very supportive throughout, they didn't mock or question me, they are just very supportive.” (R8)

An important aspect within one's support system is the emphasis on mental health discussions which is evident among the participants' experience and leads to lessening the stereotypic notion of availing psychological help within the community. Breaking down the stigma surrounding mental health concerns is influential in seeking mental health professional services. Timely social media campaigns and platforms aid in the ease of accessing psychological services among the young adult participants of this qualitative study. In addition, the shared experiences from others who have prior experience consulting with a qualified mental health professional influence their decision to actively seek professional help as well. Normalizing the conversations about mental health is a way to lessen the stigma surrounding it. The right empathy given to those people diagnosed with a psychological disorder and other mental health concerns while seeking professional help is a significant marker that builds an effective social support system.

Finding the Right Therapist

“I am gaining proper actions for myself through professional help”. As expressed by the participants, through the varied psychological services they have undergone and how it helped them to discover their strengths and resources to continue the journey towards emotional and psychosocial management also strengthen their active help-seeking behavior. From their point of view, how they perceive the establishment of a good client-therapist relationship enabled them to get an insight from the collaborative process of an intervention. Being able to find the right therapist has been the main concern by the participants as they were determining how they will be benefit from a proper treatment plan. Their respective therapists who are mostly qualified psychiatrists and psychologists, have aid in assisting them towards the right choice of action, reconstructing their self-defeating thoughts and actions and understanding the complex make-up of their emotions are the highlights of this factor.

“The coping mechanisms that the psychologist taught me really helped a lot to assist myself. They say that no matter what advice they give, if I don't follow it, I mean if I don't help myself as well, it's like it doesn't matter.” (R2)

“I've improved, like the negative thoughts that used to run in my mind have been minimized; I focus on something new that is healthier. I really find ways to remove the negative thoughts from my mind.” (R7)

The reinforcing approach from the therapist's interventions facilitate positive change in an individual's behavior is an essential factor of help-seeking behavior from this theme. On the part of the client, it translates to feelings of encouragement to try new patterns of behavior and be in control of themselves; cognitively reorganize their realistic thoughts and thinking rationally; and part of being sensitized from prior unpleasant situations that may evoke uncomfortable responses.

“It really helped alter my mindset. From the first session, [the psychologist] was already trying to pull me away from the unrealistic world I was in. Until now, I still use the professional advice they gave me, it helps me see small things, and it also helps me understand that big things come from small things. I still use it. My emotions are more controlled than I am controlled by my emotions.” (R6)

There is a shifted pattern of the participant's vulnerability into empowerment. Having the right mental health professional who attends to their psychological concerns transpired a significant shift in their mindset, emotional wellbeing and general approach to life after engaging through the psychotherapeutic interventions. This makes the positive impact of actively seeking professional help. It exemplifies how they have been gradually empowered and being able to make a better version of themselves by having a holistic personal transformation via improved mental state; be able to live in the present; have practical means of coping and a sense of gratitude.

Struggles Outweighing Mental Health

Despite the above-mentioned factors promoting one's active help-seeking behaviors, it is also noteworthy how the participants conveyed to address mental health concerns still impose challenges in order to get the right interventions within the Philippine context of mental health services. This theme examined their continuous struggle around experiences of disbelief and stigma; complexity of treatment process and financial burdens in undergoing treatment. Most of the participants recalled the initial fear and unpleasant reactions from their significant others at the point of knowing their diagnosis which could have affected as some time their continuance of seeking professional help. Emotional reaction from knowing the diagnostic assessment elicits unwarranted feelings of disbelief and often sought stigma surrounding the mental health condition that they have had.

"I'm nervous. I don't know what to expect because I'm thinking people might get scared of me if they find out." (R5)

"Why do I have this? why didn't I consult earlier, why did I neglect it? Where do I start, how will I treat it, what else do I need to do?" (R2)

Above remarks from the participants can directly affect their help-seeking if not given a proper explanation and support. In processing their disbelief and mixed of emotion, they have realized that these are short-term ambivalent responses at first thought of handling their mental health concern. Other help seeking struggles that were outlived came from family members' pressure to improve themselves in the treatment process; and personal hesitation as well as doubting of treatment's efficacy. Specifically, feelings of doubt on how they can be treated is still a cycle that revolves around help-seeking behavior. As the treatment for mental health concern comes as an individualized process, continuous effort and involvement of the participants in the therapeutic journey is necessary. They have to play part in the therapeutic relationship to see if it works for them.

"Until now, I don't have an answer. Because I still don't know what my illness really is, it's like I'm not satisfied with the doctor. The problem is with myself because there are times when it is really confusing if what I'm doing is truly helpful. I doubt it, that's why I often get confused. So, that was a challenge for me throughout my sessions." (R7)

Despite the ease of accessing an online and/or in-person mental health interventions, the financial resources of the participants' support system are being stricken among young adults actively seeking professional help. Delaying help-seeking is a crucial point to remedy their problems as stated by a participant, *"I considered stopping because it's expensive, why would I waste time and money just to talk to someone for an hour."*

"So, if I did not seek help, it is because of the financial problem. What I'm really thinking about is the financial problem because the fee is really expensive if you compare it to other medical professionals. That's probably the biggest challenge." (R4)

Medications, monthly psychotherapy sessions and follow-up consultations range differently. This adds to the personal struggle of the participants to be taken aback and felt discontinuing treatment which is sought necessary for their wellbeing. Despite the experienced financial difficulty, they continuously seek professional help as they have full awareness of its importance to their improved functioning. Early termination of the psychotherapeutic services would not be beneficial in seeing a positive change in their overall being that each participant is being mindful about. Despite these struggles about availing mental health services, the shared lived experiences of young adult individuals have been a helpful insight to continually advocate for relevant psychological services as the need is evident.

Discussion

Filipino young adults' preference to seek professional help when faced with serious psychological concern or mental disorder has been the highlight of the current research. The experiences among the selected participants' active mental health help-seeking behavior translates to their hope to be a better version of themselves and aims to change the unproductive pattern of their functioning that formerly affects their wellbeing. In addition, it also shows how they have regarded mental health as an important aspect of one's functionality and overall being. This study is the first to investigate the lived experience of selected Filipino young adult individuals who are actively seeking professional help for their mental health concerns. The analysis outlined relevant information about active help-seeking behavior in the Philippine context, as a cited limitation of other studies who investigated the said phenomenon (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Tuliao, 2014). Further, it delineates activated help-seeking behavior from a help-seeking attitude, as the findings relate to the actual experience of undergoing psychotherapeutic treatment and the challenges that they have sought along with it. It provides relevant information on the current perception of Filipino mental health services which covers their view on treatment efficacy and the factors that have led them to actively seek help.

According to studies, awareness of one's mental health condition is sought to be beneficial in initially buffering stress and later on improving one's growth and recovery (Villamor & Dy, 2022) and was substantially revealed in the research findings as one of the factors strengthening active help-seeking behavior of Filipino young adults. The expressed willingness of young adult individuals to solve their mental health problems with the aid of a mental professional in this study showed receptivity of today's generation to mental health services and showed a new trend from previous studies about reservation and underutilization of mental health services (Kessler et al., 2001; Tsang et al., 2020). The positive impact of help-seeking behavior is noted as the study participants' have improved in terms of being self-capacitated and harnessing personal strength to handle current mental health concerns. Moreover, this study adds an important aspect that is helpful in the alleviation of mental health stigma and the promotion of help-seeking behavior through a constant supportive system from their significant others.

The presence of mental health discussions was evident which provide accessible avenues to seek professional help and to share experiences from seeking professional help. In case of some studies about self-stigma as a barrier to help-seeking behavior (Pinggolio & Mateo, 2018; Tanaka et al, 2018), we have seen a positive change in how young adult individuals, especially among those who are college students have shifted their perspective opening conversation about mental health and having trust and confidence to mental health practitioners. The latter were seen as an authority who guides them in reforming their coping mechanism and enables them to deal with their psychological concern.

Finding a right therapist is seen as necessary for a collaborative therapeutic relationship to strengthen the reinforcement of positive behavior and obtain insight from the psychological interventions, as evident from the shared experiences of the participants. They have undergone multiple consultations before accepting the fitness and competence of their therapist to continue undergoing a mental health

service. As studied, employing a compassionate approach by mental health professionals could independently influence the help-seeking intent of individuals (Aruta et al., 2023). This factor could also serve as a reference for mental health practitioners in improving their compassionate sense with difficult clients and be able to understand the client's perspective about help-seeking behavior. In addition, it concurs with the study of Lingbaoan (2023) on how young adult participants understand the credibility of a treatment plan given to them which significantly decrease their stress; disbelief about mental health services and improve help-seeking intentions from seeing the positive impact it has on their wellbeing. This study aids in informing the current landscape of mental health in the Filipino context.

Realistically speaking, psychotherapeutic interventions are seen as an individualized approach. Hence, there is difficulty among help seekers in seeing a treatment's efficacy and places a burden on them at some occasion. Crucial factors that draw hindrance in help-seeking behavior were the complexity of treatment and disbelief from some support. Understanding the context and phenomenon of help-seeking behavior leads us to identify the facilitative factors strengthening access to its specialized services. However, accessible mental health care still poses a challenge in the community when it comes to economic restrictions and equitable care (Lally et al., 2019) as revealed in the struggles of young adult participants in seeking mental health services. Though they continuously attend psychotherapy sessions and consultations, it burdens them financially that outweighs psychological gains at times. In addition, it is important to further investigate the emphasis of cultural perspective when it comes to the confidence of the people about mental health discussion through expressions of *'hiya'* (a natural domain of behavioral psychology as an externally rooted sense of propriety or dignity [Salazar, 1985 mentioned in Pe Pua, 2019]) and personal stigmatization (Tuliao et al., 2016). Both can influence how an individual actively seeks professional help.

Our qualitative investigation identified facilitative factors in promoting an active help-seeking behavior within the Filipino context. Positive attitudes and personal realization of the participants are part of its positive impact and improves help-seeking intention for one's mental health which concur with the study by Zorilla et al. (2019). Moreso, mental health conversations and having social support emphasize the role of *'kapwa'* (a Filipino core value of shared identity) as influential in help-seeking behavior as previously resulted in the study of Gabriel (2017) on the role of one's culture in help-seeking. The final recommendation of this paper is inspired by the study of Hechanova and Regina (2019), wherein stated that mental health research should be able to reach the community level to provide solutions in addressing the pressing demands for accessible and equitable mental health services to resource-constrained settings like the Philippines.

Conclusion

This study provides an understanding of the facilitative factors that reside in selected Filipino young adults and the existing socially rooted barriers in their active mental health help-seeking behavior. The facilitative factors of help seeking behavior through gaining self-discovery and acceptance of mental health issues; having a supportive system as an external source of resiliency; and finding the right therapist place a positive impact on the thriving mental health of Filipinos. On the other hand, efforts to overcome struggles that outweigh mental health gives a connection to the usefulness of specific psychological services and treatment processes for mental health conditions.

This study is limited in investigating the lived experience of selected Filipino young adults who underwent different psychological interventions at more than one occasion. They also have different psychological diagnoses which can lead future researchers to compare the applicability of the cited factors affecting the active mental health help-seeking behavior from a group of participants with a uniform mental health diagnosis. Despite the expression of perceived stigma at certain aspects of a help-seeking

behavior, this study shared the narratives and actual experiences from an active mental health help-seeking behavior and the impact it has on selected Filipinos thriving in their mental health. It can serve as a basis in developing integrative approaches in the delivery of accessible mental health services especially in the Philippines.

In general, this study could also aid psychology practitioners to understand the dynamics of the client-therapist relationship; especially at points where pre-termination and guarded prognosis of clients during the course of psychological treatment is observed.

Acknowledgment

The researcher express gratitude to the support of the Research and Development Office of the Bataan Peninsula State University, Philippines throughout the study; Mr. Lawrence D. Balana; Ms. Bernadette Capistrano and Christiane Loraine Sabino for the technical assistance during the course of data gathering and analysis.

References

- Alviar, S., & del Prado, A. (2022). "You should pray about it": Exploring mental health and help-seeking in Filipino American Catholics. *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 13(1), 97. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/aap0000266>.
- Angermeyer, M. C., Van Der Auwera, S., Carta, M. G., & Schomerus, G. (2017). Public attitudes towards psychiatry and psychiatric treatment at the beginning of the 21st century: a systematic review and meta-analysis of population surveys. *World Psychiatry*, 16(1), 50-61. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20383>.
- Aruta, J. J. B. R., Maria, A., & Mascarenhas, J. (2023). Self-compassion promotes mental help-seeking in older, not in younger, counselors. *Current psychology*, 42(22), 18615-18625. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03054-6>.
- Cao, W., Fang, Z., Hou, G., Han, M., Xu, X., Dong, J., & Zheng, J. (2020). The psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on college students in China. *Psychiatry research*, 287, 112934.
- Chan, C. D., & Litam, S. D. A. (2021). Mental Health Equity of Filipino Communities in COVID-19: A Framework for Practice and Advocacy. *Professional Counselor*, 11(1), 73-85.
- Chen, J. I., Romero, G. D., & Karver, M. S. (2016). The relationship of perceived campus culture to mental health help-seeking intentions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 63(6), 677.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches Fifth Edition*. Sage Publications.
- Gabriel, M. G. (2017). The role of culture in the help-seeking behaviors of Filipino Americans (Doctoral dissertation).
- Gulliver, A., Griffiths, K. M., Christensen, H., & Brewer, J. L. (2012). A systematic review of help-seeking interventions for depression, anxiety and general psychological distress. *BMC psychiatry*, 12(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-12-81>.



- World Health Organization. (n.d.) *Health and Well-Being*. Retrieved December 21, 2023, from <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/major-themes/health-and-well-being>.
- Hechanova, M. R. M., & Regina, M. (2019). Development of community-based mental health interventions in the Philippines: an ecological perspective. *Psychological Research on Urban Society*, 2(1), 10-25. <https://doi.org/10.7454/proust.v2i1.41>.
- Hunt, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2010). Mental Health Problems and Help-Seeking Behavior Among College Students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 46(1), 3–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2009.08>.
- Kar, N., Kar, B., & Kar, S. (2021). Stress and coping during COVID-19 pandemic: Result of an online survey. *Psychiatry research*, 295, 113598. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113598>.
- Kessler, R. C., Berglund, P. A., Bruce, M. L., Koch, J. R., Laska, E. M., Leaf, P. J., & Wang, P. S. (2001). The prevalence and correlates of untreated serious mental illness. *Health Services Research*, 36(6 Pt 1), 987.
- Lally, J., Tully, J., & Samaniego, R. (2019). Mental health services in the Philippines. *BJPsych international*, 16(3), 62-64. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bji.2018.34>.
- Lingbaoan, J. (2023). Examining the relationships between causal beliefs, colonial mentality, treatment credibility, and help-seeking intentions among Filipinos (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia).
- Lopez J. A. F. & Lopez, J.A. F (n.d.). *Social Science Series#5: Mental health in developed vs developing countries*. Jacinto Convit World Organization. Retrieved December 21, 2023, from <https://www.jacintoconvit.org/social-science-series-5-mental-health-in-developed-vs-developing-countries/>.
- Martinez, A. B., Co, M., Lau, J., & Brown, J. S. (2020). Filipino help-seeking for mental health problems and associated barriers and facilitators: A systematic review. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 55, 1397-1413. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-020-01937-2>.
- Mojtabai, R., Evans-Lacko, S., Schomerus, G., & Thornicroft, G. (2016). Attitudes toward mental health help seeking as predictors of future help-seeking behavior and use of mental health treatments. *Psychiatric Services*, 67(6), 650-657.
- Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using interpretative phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological journal*, 20(1), 7-14.
- Pingolio, J. P. R. V., & Mateo, N. J. (2018). Help-seeking behaviors of college students: A mixed methods study. *Philippine Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 20(1), 1-12.
- Salaheddin, K., & Mason, B. (2016). Identifying barriers to mental health help-seeking among young adults in the UK: a cross-sectional survey. *British Journal of General Practice*, 66(651), e686-e692. <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp16X687313>.
- Serrano, J. O., Reyes, M. E. S., & de Guzman, A. B. (2022). Psychological Distress and Coping of Filipino University Students amidst the Global Pandemic: A Mixed-Method Study. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 373-386.



- Shi, W., Shen, Z., Wang, S., & Hall, B. J. (2020). Barriers to professional mental health help-seeking among Chinese adults: a systematic review. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, *11*, 442. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.00442>.
- Schnyder, N., Panczak, R., Groth, N., & Schultze-Lutter, F. (2017). Association between mental health-related stigma and active help-seeking: systematic review and meta-analysis. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, *210*(4), 261-268. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.116.189464>.
- Tanaka, C., Tuliao, M. T. R., Tanaka, E., Yamashita, T., & Matsuo, H. (2018). A qualitative study on the stigma experienced by people with mental health problems and epilepsy in the Philippines. *BMC Psychiatry*, *18*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-018-1902-9>.
- Tsang, Y. T., Franklin, M., Sala-Hamrick, K., Kohlberger, B., Simon, V. A., Partridge, T., & Barnett, D. (2020). Caregivers as gatekeepers: Professional mental health service use among urban minority adolescents. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000432>.
- Tuliao, A. P. (2014). Mental health help seeking among Filipinos: a review of the literature. *Asia Pacific Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, *5*(2), 124–136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21507686.2014.913641>.
- Tuliao, A. P., Velasquez, P. A. E., Bello, A. M., & Pinson, M. J. T. (2016). Intent to seek counseling among Filipinos: Examining loss of face and gender. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *44*(3), 353-382.
- Villamor, A. M. C., & Dy, M. F. R. (2022). Benefits Of and Barriers to Mental Health Help-Seeking Of Selected Filipino College Students. *International Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*, *7*(4), 78-90.
- Xu, Z., Huang, F., Kösters, M., Staiger, T., Becker, T., Thornicroft, G., & Rüsçh, N. (2018). Effectiveness of interventions to promote help-seeking for mental health problems: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological medicine*, *48*(16), 2658-2667.
- Zorrilla, M. M., Modeste, N., Gleason, P. C., Sealy, D. A., Banta, J. E., & Trieu, S. L. (2019). Depression and help-seeking intention among young adults: The theory of planned behavior. *American journal of health education*, *50*(4), 236-244.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).