

The Students' Experiences of Mental Health Crisis

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Abstract:- This research is a qualitative study that involves seeing patterns, themes, and holistic features revealed through secondary data of the selected 23 students aged 16 to 25. Cool and warm analyses of the data were the mental health continuum and the categories of mental disorders indicated in the Diagnostic of Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V). Findings revealed five faces of mental health distress categorized either as mild, time-limited distress, or chronic condition. The ability of the subjects to glide from one condition to another was based on factors related to one's roots, innermost self, and connections. The study revealed the importance of the quality of family connectedness, social support, the individual's realistic capacity to hope, and the locus of control in addressing mental health concerns during the pandemic. Future interventions and research focusing on the clients' factors were recommended by the researchers.

Keywords:- Mental Health Conditions, Individual And Environmental Factors, Counseling.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faces a health crisis that led to many deaths and economic difficulties. A year ago, the United Nations (UN) monitored how the different countries responded to this crisis. Last July 2020, the UN noted how South Korea responded effectively while others, including the United Kingdom, deployed the worst response to address the problem (Lu, 2020). Today, many efforts are made to provide vaccines to people to solve the health crisis that had led to personal, economic, and trauma. The crisis is real, but the whole world continues to find the best solution. Meanwhile, people from all walks of life are continuously trying to cope by engaging in drastic changes in their lifestyles and decisions. This health crisis seemingly led to mental health crises as well.

By the time President Duterte declared the whole country under enhanced community quarantine on March 16, 2020, businesses and educational institutions were closed. Many people were forced to stay home while the medical practitioners, IT professionals, and other "frontliners" did their job and struggled to stay safe. They tried to make sure that essential health care and services are constantly available. There came a disruption in the routine lives of people due to experiences of isolation and separation from social groups to make sure that the viral infection is contained. Likewise, hearing the news death cases due to the COVID 19 infection, brought emotional and psychological reactions to many. With the entrants of the

vaccines, people seemingly became a bit confident that the country can survive this pandemic. The community quarantines were adjusted depending on the number of COVID-19 cases in the city or region. However, the danger is still not over. The new Delta variant has entered the country. This is coupled with the occurrence of what they call second or third surge in some cities in the country.

The halt in the routinary activities and the imminent danger that the new variant can bring may cause what sociologists call collective trauma (Onwuachi-Willig, 2016), which is accompanied by feelings of anxiety or fear of dying due to COVID-19. Mental health crises are real during this pandemic, although reactions to the situations varied depending on personal and probably institutional and environmental factors. It implies that a crisis for one may not be considered as such by another.

The challenge now is to maintain healthy well-being despite the threat brought about by the COVID 19 and the recently spreading Delta variant. Being healthy does not only pertain to one aspect, but it encompasses all aspects of one's person, including mental health.

As an initial attempt towards maintaining mental health, the Counseling and Career Services Center (CCSC) engaged in assessing the students' well-being at the start of the school year 2020-2021. The Self-Assessment, which was adapted from Beck's Depression Inventory, was distributed to students to understand their experiences during the pandemic. Based on the analysis of these data, the CCSC categorized students under mild, moderate, and chronic mental health conditions (Lancet Commission, 2019). The results guided the counselors in identifying at-risk students and providing mental health services such as counseling, consultation, psychoeducation, training of teachers on Psychological First Aid, and referral to other mental health professionals. Since the pandemic is far from over yet, it is fitting that CCSC continuously revisits its services and sees how else it can serve its clientele considering the new challenges brought about by the 'new normal. A research-based intervention was targeted for this purpose.

This research undertaking was meant to look at what clients considered mental health issues as revealed through counseling sessions, self-assessments, and group sessions. The researchers engaged in an analysis of the nature of concerns as well as the factors that they claimed to have caused their ability or inability to be mentally healthy. Being able to name the students' experiences would hopefully lead to a deeper understanding of the "faces" of mental health crises experienced by the students. An evaluation of the appropriateness of the existing

interventions and the creation of an improved set of services for the clients would be conceptualized after.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to look deeper into the students' experiences of mental health crises during this pandemic. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following:

1. What are the "faces" of mental crises experienced by the subjects?
2. What significant factors allow the subjects to glide from mild to time-limited distress up to severely disabling conditions or vice-versa.

Significance of the project

This study would provide a deeper understanding of the clients regarding what they consider a mental health crisis and the possible factors that help or hinder them from being mentally healthy. It would help the mental health professionals identify the effectiveness of the existing mental health interventions and possible improvements.

Research Paradigm

The continuum of school mental health services adapted by the National Association of School Psychologists shows that all mental health conditions can glide from mild to severe. Hence, students can avail of school-based prevention and universal interventions to maintain or address mild mental health conditions. Meanwhile, targeted school interventions with community support are given for those at-risk students. Following the framework by the National Association of School Psychologists (2006), the researchers were guided in the conduct of analyzing available data of students who availed of the counseling services and categorized as having mild, time-limited distress to chronic, progressive and severely disabling conditions (Patel, Saxena, Lund, Thornicroft, Baingana, Bolton, Chisholm, Collins, Cooper, Eaton, Herrman, Herzallah, Huang, Y., Jordans, Kleinman, Medina-Mora, Morgan, Niaz, Omigbodun, Prince, Rahman, Saraceno, Sarkar, De Silva, Singh, Stein, Sunkel, Unutzer, 2018). Patterns and themes that evolved from the analysis of available data would yield to the "faces" of the mental health crises experienced by students as well as the factors that facilitate change of mental health condition from mild to time-limited distress to chronic or severely disabling conditions or vice-versa.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research is a qualitative study that involves seeing patterns, themes, and holistic features revealed in the narrative statements of the subjects in questionnaires and after availing of counseling services. The researchers reviewed the clients' data recorded from counseling notes, student feedback after group guidance sessions, self-assessments through survey questionnaires, as well as the review of the data from the Personal Information Form based on the framework of the mental health continuum as a reference in categorizing them as well as the use of Diagnostic of Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM

V) as a guide in understanding the severity of the experiences of the clients.

Inclusion criteria were students aged 16 to 25 who had entries on the Personal Information Form pertaining to mental health issues, those who took for counseling, and those who took any of the assessments related to mental health (i.e., Self- Assessment, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, and Brief Resilient Coping Scale).

Subjects

The subjects of this study comprised a total of twenty-three students who availed of the counseling services (i.e., assessments, counseling, and group sessions) from across grade and year levels and programs enrolled specifically during the start of the pandemic up to the present.

Data Collection and Procedures

Data included in this study were from the Personal Information form that students accomplished at the start of the school year. Only questions pertaining to mental health concerns were considered relevant for analysis. Data coming from counseling notes were also included, particularly the records of clients' responses during the session. Assessment results from Self-Assessment (Adapted from BDI), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, and Brief Resilient Coping Scale) were also included. Student Feedback responses by those taken for counseling and group sessions were taken as relevant data for analysis.

Data Analysis

Cool and warm analysis was done to come up with significant answers to the research problem. The cool analysis involves identifying significant statements of the respondents, while warm analysis involves categorizing these data into themes that evolved.

Ethical Considerations

Students who accomplished the Personal Information form were informed that the data gathered would be handled with confidentiality and be used for the center's psychosocial support services. Consent forms created by the researchers were sent to students who took counseling, group sessions, and assessments.

Related Literature and Studies

The succeeding paragraphs provide a deeper understanding of the concept of mental health, including the various studies of authors that explored the topic of mental health from the start of the pandemic up to the present.

Concept of Mental Health

Understanding mental health can be easily understood by knowing how the mental disorder is defined. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) defines a condition as a mental disorder if there is already a clinically significant disturbance in cognition, emotion regulation, and behavior, reflecting dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes

underlying mental functioning. The presence of significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other activities is equivalent to a mental disorder. On the other hand, a person may respond culturally or as expected to a stressor like the death of a loved one, but this does not mean the person has a mental disorder. Moreover, socially deviant behavior (e.g., political, religious, sexual) and conflicts between society and individuals are not mental disorders except when the deviance or conflicts result in dysfunction.

Frankish, Boyce & Horton (2018) emphasized the importance of identifying the risk factors of mental health disorders as early as childhood or adolescents, including the experiences of violence, neglect, parental mental health issues, maltreatment, and poverty. They reiterated the urgent need to implement the recommendations of the Lancet Commission, which recognized that mental health is a global public good and it exists along a continuum from mild, time-limited distress to chronic, progressive, and severely disabling conditions (Patel et al., 2018).

Similarly, Rayco (2020) of the Philippine Mental Health Association explained that mental health is not a one-type condition but instead, it exists in a continuum. It means that a person can have a mild mental health condition that can limit distress and severely disturbing situations if not appropriately addressed through intervention such as counseling, psychoeducation, psychotherapy, or referral to professionals who can provide specialized intervention. The goal of mental health practitioners is to ensure that the person can actualize his full potential, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and contribute to the community (WHO). The critical element is early detection of the problem so that appropriate intervention can be provided.

Factors Related to Change

Counseling is said to be an effective intervention, especially if it leads to change in the student's overt behavior, improvement of the student's ability to make decisions, modification of beliefs or values, or reduction of the level of emotional distress (Patterson & Welfel, 2000). Morawetz (2006) pointed out four factors that can explain the changes in the student: a) client's factors which include personal strengths, weakness, and other characteristics; b) relationship factors or therapeutic relationship which include empathy, warmth, and acceptance perceived by the client; c) hope factors or the client's realistic hope that improvement or change is possible; and d) model or technique of counseling or the use of the right approach for a particular client or situation.

Similarly, Tallman & Bohart (2011) pointed out that "the client's capacity for self-healing is the most potent common factor in psychotherapy. It is the "engine" that does therapy works...therapists function as support systems and resource providers" p 91. It is the client and not the therapist or the technique that makes a successful therapy. They seem to validate an earlier theory by Lambert and colleagues (Asay & Lambert, 1999), stating that 40% of

change that happens in the student during the counseling session. It can be attributed to the client's factors or whatever they bring to the counseling relationship, such as but not limited to resilience, values, social support, perceptions, goals, strengths, and other resources. Approximately 30% of the change in a student is due to related factors such as respect that the client experienced, collaboration, acceptance, and validation from the counselor. Of the remaining variance, 15% is due to the client's positive expectancy and anticipation of change, while 15% is due to the counselor's theoretical model and intervention techniques.

Studies on Mental Health

The pandemic has brought new challenges to mental health due to the controls in movement and activities on people of all walks of life. Gines (2020) revealed several types of research on isolated or quarantined children and adults who had experienced Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), parents, and caregivers having increased stress levels by 35%, resulting in fussiness and disruptive behaviors.

Nurunnabi (2020) studied the coping strategies of university students in China as he found out that 66.90% of the students reported experiencing "normal" anxiety, and 23.80% reported it as "severe to the extreme." Findings of a narrative review of cross-sectional articles on the impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on mental health of children and adolescents revealed that the quality and magnitude of the impact are determined by age, educational status, pre-existing health condition, being economically underprivileged, or being quarantined due to infection and fear of infection (Singh, Roy, Sinha, Parveen, Sharma, & Joshi, 2020).

During the early phase of the pandemic in our country, researchers Tee, Tee, Anlacan, Aligam, Wincy, Kuruchittham, & Ho (2020) studied the prevalent psychiatric symptoms the factors contributing to the psychological impact of the pandemic to 1879 Filipino respondents. Of those who participated, 68% reported having minimal impact. 15.8% rated mild psychological impact, while 16.3% reported a moderate to the severe psychological impact. Male respondents were found to have a significantly lower level of anxiety than the female respondents. The youth is aged 12-21 years, single people, and those with no children had exceptionally high stress, anxiety, depression, and Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R) ratings.

Similarly, when Zhang, Ye, Fu, Yang, Luo, Yuan, & Tao (2020) studied the psychological impact of COVID 19 on 493 Junior High School and 532 High School students in China, they found out that for both high school and junior high school students, male respondents were found to have higher resilience than female respondents. Resilience was significantly associated with the father's college education ($p = .035$), whereas negative coping was significantly associated with COVID-19 patients ($p = .024$) among the junior high school students. Resilience was associated with

the mother's college education ($p = .007$) and siblings ($p = .013$) for high school students. These findings suggested the importance of resiliency and positive coping strategies in addressing the psychological impact of the pandemic. Positive coping strategies such as positive appraisal and thinking, distancing, problem-solving and help protect one from anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms. Negative coping was also seen as a threat to mental health since it is taken as a risk factor for anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms in both groups.

As to the impact of social support on mental health, Qi, Zhou, Guo, Zhang, Min, Li, & Chen (2020) explored how the strength of social support received impacted the level of depression and anxiety. The results revealed that more than half of the adolescents receiving low social support manifested more depression and anxiety symptoms. This implies that strong social support is necessary to prevent mental health problems. Just like in previous studies discussed, female respondents had a higher prevalence of depression and anxiety than males. Exposure to COVID 19 was also seen as significantly related to the occurrence of depression and anxiety symptoms.

A cross-sectional study on the self-reported psychological distress among children and adolescents in Guangdong province, China, revealed that high school students had increased psychological distress compared to primary school pupils. Moreover, the frequency of wearing masks and engaging in exercise were factors associated with psychological distress (Qin, Shi, Xue, Lin, Zhang, Liang, Lu, Wu, Chen, Zheng, Qian, Ouyang, Yi & Zhang, 2021).

Other authors focused on psychosocial correlates of posttraumatic growth among U.S. young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic and found out that resilience, family connectedness, and distress tolerance predicted growth (Hyun, Wong, Levy-Carrick, Charmaraman, Cozier, Yip, Hahm, & Liu, 2021).

Forte, Orri, Brandizzi, Iannaco, Venturini, Liberato, Battaglia, Nothen-Garunia, Vulcan, Brusica, Quadrana, Cox, Fabbri, & Monducci (2021) performed a cross-sectional study in three European countries (Italy, Croatia, and Romania) to explore the emotional reactions of 2105 adolescents of secondary school students during the COVID 19 pandemic. Adolescents who believed that family support was necessary during the lockdown were less susceptible to boredom, emptiness, and anxiety. Those adolescents who reported have the negative impact of the pandemic on relationships with parents were susceptible to sadness. On the other hand, adolescents who revealed spending time creatively during the pandemic were significantly less susceptible to experience of sadness, anger, and boredom/emptiness than those who spent less time in creative works.

Burton, McKinlay, Aughterson, & Fancourt (2021) conducted a qualitative study on the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the mental health and well-being of 22 adults with mental health conditions in the U.K. Findings

revealed five pandemic-related factors that contributed to mental health deterioration, namely: a) feeling safe but isolated at home; b) disruption to mental health services; c) uncertainty and lack of control; d) canceled plans and changed routines; and e) rolling media coverage. Previous experiences of adversity, social comparison and accountability, engagement in hobbies and activities, maintaining the connection with others, and perceived social support were identified coping strategies.

Research conducted during the pandemic period point out the challenges to mental health as well as the factors and strategies adapted to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the studies gathered were quantitative in design (Nurunnabi, 2020; Gines, 2020; Singh et al., 2020; Tee et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020; Qi et al., 2020; Qin et al., 2021; Hynn et al., 2021; Forte et al., 2021), and one qualitative (Burton et al., 2021). Tee et al., Zhang et al. (2020), and Qi et al. revealed that gender impacts the ability of the respondents to be resilient when they showed that female respondents had a higher incidence of distress, depression, and anxiety symptoms than male respondents. Qi et al. (2020), Hynn et al., and Forte et al. (2021) revealed the impact of family or social support on one's susceptibility to depression, anxiety, or psychological distress. Others pointed out the importance or impact of resiliency and coping strategies (Zhang et al., 2020), age, educational status, pre-existing health condition, social, economic status, the experience of being quarantined, and fear of infection on mental health concerns (Singh et al., 2020).

Among the studies gathered, the study of Burton et al. (2021) is similar to the current research in terms of design and the focus of the study. Due to the scarcity of qualitative research done locally, the current research ventured on using the qualitative approach in understanding the students' mental experiences using secondary student data. The researchers were guided by the framework discussed by Patel et al. and Rayco (2020) in terms of looking at mental health as existing in a continuum and analyzing the students' experiences. Asay & Lambert (1999) and Morawetz's (2006) explanation of the factors that influence change after counseling was used as the basis for analysis of the data available for this research. The findings of this current research would hopefully lead to adaptation and tailoring of existing interventions or services in answer to the changing needs or the students' experiences as the pandemic continues.

Major Findings

The significant experiences of the subjects recorded in the counseling notes, the assessments provided, and in the student feedback record after availing of counseling services revealed the face of a mental health condition they had since the start of the pandemic up to the present.

"Faces" of Mental Health

"Touch-Me-Not"

Some subjects can be likened to a plant called mimosa pudica. *Mimosa pudica* is known to be a creeping or

perennial flowering plant of the pea/legume family Fabaceae whose compound leaves when touched even slightly by a finger or shaken, fold inward and droop, defending themselves from harm, and re-open a few minutes later – "natatakot ako baka magka panic attack na naman ako katulad ng dati".

Due to previous experiences of depressive symptoms or mental health condition of a family member, two subjects seemingly try to shout to the world, "touch-me-not" for fear that they will experience the same feeling of distress or attempt suicide again- "Natatakot ako bumalik ang suicidal thoughts ko"; "Natatakot ako baka matulad ako sa mother ko na may Schizophrenia or I might attempt suicide again." They sought counseling so that they would know how to handle themselves when these feelings and thoughts come again—"Gusto ko malaman ano puede ko gawin para di na sya mangyari ulit". Like a mimosa pudica, their mental health is challenged or disturbed by the changes in their routine lives during this pandemic.

The Wolves Within

The story of two wolves attributed to the Cherokee speaks of the fight of two wolves within oneself—one is evil (he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego), and one is good (He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith). The tale tells us that this fight is going on inside every person.

This tale seemed to be true in some of the subjects of this study when they revealed their lingering guilt, self-hate, or anger towards themselves. These resulted in irritability, anxiety, restlessness, sleep disturbance, and even self-injurious acts – "naguguilt, nahihiya at naiinis na ako sa sarili kasi di na ako natuto"; "Bakit ganito ako?"; "May kaya ba akong gawin? Mananatili na lang ba akong ganito? May duda ako sa sarili ko".

Scarred

Since the subjects have no choice but to stay home with the family members, one revealed that the scars of the past hurt linger still, especially now that the lockdown has exposed her anew to more abusive acts and the wrath of her mother, who seems to be reacting as well to the impact of the pandemic—"binubugbog ako ni Mama noon, hanggang ngayon"; "lagi ako sinasaktan ni kuya ko...close ako sa mommy ko pero dahil ngayong pandemic, nasa probinsya ulit".

The pandemic has also disrupted available medical help due to the lockdown. Some subjects had to transfer residence which resulted to the loss of support groups that used to be the source of their strength—"I experienced witnessing a violent act...nagigising sa gabi, may flashback...Nawala nung lumipat ako ...kasi may pinsan ako sa medical profession pero nitong lockdown, nagsimula ulit".

More Than Moodiness

The pandemic has resulted in adjustments to the teaching and learning process and the movement of individuals in the community. Subjects taken for counseling experienced a disturbance in their mood and how they address online classes' requirements. One subject experienced self-doubt and stress during online classes—"Na overwhelm ako sa online classes kasi sa age ko, eh di ko maintindihan. Gusto ko na sumuko pero sabi ng mga anak ko sayang daw".

One was challenged and led him to diverse reactions like procrastination and absenteeism -- "Nalito ako sa changes ng classes...two weeks ako nag absent; I tried to shift to hobbies. Pero now nakakaadjust na ng konti sa online classes".

Push and Pull

Subjects taken for group guidance sessions revealed the constant struggles equivalent to an experience of push and pull. Mental stress results from their effort to manage their time and priorities during online classes as well as the pressure of setting a career goal despite the current situation they are in--"I struggle this SY because I can't handle my time." It resulted in negative thoughts, feeling of being overwhelmed by the tasks before them, and being less productive-- "Sometimes, I'm still confused about how to balance things to do because it's not like the usual class."

Some struggle to pursue what they wish to and follow what their parents tell them to do. The tension becomes real, especially now that they are expected to make decisions – "Before the session, it was tough for me to decide what I want for the future. My family always tells me that I don't have any dream for myself, but the truth is I want to be a doctor. I'm just afraid that they will not accept it because it will cost a lot of money". The constant need to manage the push and pull situations sometimes led to panic and cramming as well as laziness to some –"paano ko mapipilit ang sarili ko na gawin ang bagay."

Factors That Facilitate or Hinder Mental Well-being

The stories shared in counseling and the subjects' responses on the brief resiliency coping scale and the perceived social support have revealed significant themes and patterns related to the experiences of mental wellness and distress.

Their roots

The family is where individuals have the first experience of love and affection, which become the foundation of one's ability to deal with the complex demands of life. In the case of the majority of the subjects who underwent counseling, they related their stories of physical violence, hurtful words, traumatic events involving a family member, and growing up in an abusive environment. They revealed that these have left them wounded for a long time. Although it happened earlier in their lives, the effects remain intrusive, especially when the current health crisis triggers similar feelings. One subject even revealed that the abuse is still done until now--

"...hanggang ngayon binubugbog ano ni Mama, kinukurot, binabatukan...". Predisposition to mental health conditions was valid for one subject who revealed that his mother was diagnosed with mental health disorder—"ang mother ko may schizophrenia dati".

Some subjects perceived or experienced the lack of social support as expressed in the assessments. One issue that frequently availed of counseling revealed that she neither agrees nor disagrees when it comes to whether or not her family tries to help her or gives her the emotional help and support she needs. She answered "neutral" on these two items in the assessment on social support. Another subject likewise, expressed in counseling and of the evaluation given her that she very strongly disagrees that her family tries to provide her with the emotional help and support she needs—"I felt neglected; not given attention so may time na gusto ko na magpakamatay; lumayas ako dati at pumunta ako sa auntie ko". On the other hand, those who regarded their family as a source of help and emotional support related their struggles but focused on their goals to help the family.

Their innermost self

Three subjects who took counseling showed difficulty and struggles in coping with their concerns. One who said that they do not get the emotional help and support from their family also revealed that she does not look for creative ways to alter difficult situations. She does not believe she can grow in positive ways by dealing with difficult situations. She does not actively look for ways to replace the losses encountered in life. On the other hand, one subject seemed unable to decide if she has creative and positive ways of dealing with difficult situations. Her response to whether or not she actively looks for ways to replace the losses she encounters in life remains neutral. The subject prefers to be alone and feels sad for no reason at all.

There is a typical pattern in how subjects can glide from time-limited distress to mild mental state conditions. Despite their seeming struggles in coping, they all revealed their recognition of their ability to look for creative ways and positive ways of dealing with difficult situations. One still hopes to have a good life after she finishes her studies. It makes her patiently endure the pain inflicted by circumstances in the family—"Kailangan kong makatapos para makasimula ako ng sarili ko at makaalis sa sitwasyon ko ngayon."

Their connections

When asked if they have friends who try to help them and with whom they can share their joys and sorrow, some subjects who continue to struggle with their mental health concerns revealed that they strongly disagree that there is a particular person to whom they can ask help and share their joys and sorrows.

Subjects who were pliant enough to accept directions through counseling revealed that they had identified at least a particular person there when they need help, one with whom they can share their joys and sorrows.

III. DISCUSSION

Rayco (2020) explained that one could have a mental health condition at any given time, and it comes in a continuum. Findings of this study revealed mental health conditions that can be categorized as mild (i.e., "touch me not," "push and pull" experiences), time-limited distress (i.e., "wolves within," "more than moodiness" experiences), and chronic conditions (i.e., "scarred").

This study revealed that some subjects went to counseling not because they were experiencing mental health crisis as described in the DSM V. But because the current situation tends to trigger certain emotions similar to what they had before when their mental health was first challenged. They were fearful that they might again succumb to depression, anxiety, or distress—provided validation of their feelings as well as psychoeducation to help them process their experience.

An experience of inner conflict is that experience of wanting to do what is perceived as good, yet a part of oneself makes it difficult ("wolves within"). It caused distress leading to varied reactions like thoughts of hurting self and the like. The "push and pull" experience is similar to this brought about by the seemingly overwhelming demands of learning and surviving new ways. This experience led to the surfacing of thoughts of giving up and even behavioral reactions like laziness and absences. The counselor assumed an active role in guiding them to accomplish behavioral contracts. The cognitive-behavioral approach refutes dysfunctional thoughts and empowers them through tasks that would test their sense of responsibility.

Being scarred appeared to be one of the most challenging conditions revealed. Some subjects related their experiences of being scarred due to the abusive environment they had while growing up. The effects of these experiences of neglect, abuse, violence, and bullying linger and still causing distress in the subjects, especially at the start of the pandemic, especially for those who had no choice but to stay home with their family members. As Frankish, Boyce & Horton (2018) pointed out, the childhood or adolescents experience of violence, neglect, parental health issues, maltreatment, and poverty can become risk factors contributing to mental health disorders.

The findings of this study showed the impact of resiliency, one's ability to cope creatively, and social support such as the family and special people or friends on the power of the subjects to overcome mental health distress. This claim validates what Qi et al. (2020), Zhang et al.'s (2020), Hynn et al. (2021), and Forte et al. (2021) said about the impact of family and social support as well as psychological factors such as resiliency and coping strategies in the experience of boredom, emptiness, and anxiety.

Although subjects experienced mental health distress, their ability to engage in creative ways of handling difficult situations facilitates their movement along the mental health

continuum. It proves what Asay & Lambert (1999) theorized, stating that 40% of change that happens in the student during the counseling session can be attributed to client's factors or whatever they bring to the counseling relationship such as but not limited to resilience, values, social support, values, perceptions, goals, strengths, and other resources. Moreover, Morawetz (2006) pointed out that the client's factors, including personal strengths, weaknesses, and other characteristics, may explain the change process after counseling. Tallman & Bohart (2011) likewise acknowledged that the client's capacity to engage in self-healing is the most critical factor in psychotherapy. The role of the helper or the therapist is to provide the support system and resource provider.

The findings resonate with the role of one's locus of control when it comes to the ability to overcome mental health distress. Locus of control was based on Rotter's social learning theory which looks at personality as an expression of the interaction of the individual with the environment and that it is changeable. He posits that if you change how a person thinks or changes the environment, they are responding to, the behavior will change (Rotter, 1954).

Rinn & Boazman (2014) based their discussion of the locus of control in Rotter's learning theory saying that the locus of control can either be internal or external and that individual with an internal locus of control sees failures and successes as the product of own's effort while those with an external locus of control regard failures and successes as due to something outside of their control. Subjects who revealed that they were scarred and still experience the abuse of their family members might have acquired an external locus of control. They consider themselves the victim of what others do and are not capable of saying no to violence or abuse. Another way of understanding their behavior is to look into the possible interplay of Filipino values, particularly that of being family-oriented and having a high regard for authority. These can be considered strengths of Filipinos, but they can also become the source of weakness if the high respect for the family and authority leads an individual to become passive and lacking initiative (Davis, 2018). These same individuals were the ones who revealed not engaging in creative ways of coping with difficulties. On the other hand, those subjects who have experienced mental distress in the past but remained hoping that they will not share again what they had before continued to try to cope creatively, even seeking help from the counselor. It implies that they are operating based on an internal locus of control, recognizing that they can do something to avoid recurrence of mental health conditions.

Similarly, Briones & Bernardo (2016) explored the concept of hope among three adolescents with end-stage renal disease. He pointed out how hopefulness associated with a positive sense of self enabled them to achieve goal attainment.

As Bernardo (2013) explained, the theory assumes that individuals are driven to attain their goals if they possess hope, but they need to manage the challenges that may be present. Hope served as a protective factor for people in distress. Morawetz (2006) pointed out that with hope factors or the client's realistic hope, improvement or change is possible.

The external support may power the capacity to hope received from family or friends. Whatever internal conflict and wounds the subjects of this study experienced, external controls may have significantly provided the push towards change. It further validates what Burton, McKinlay, Aughterson, & Fancourt's (2021) findings revealed the importance of connecting with others and support systems. In their study, mental deterioration was associated with the lack of connection with people at home but in isolation).

As in the case of those who were scarred and who continuously experience the violence and abuse in the family, the capacity to hope may become more challenging since the family or unique persons or friends who expected to push them towards change may not be there. There might be a pinch of strength or sign of internal locus of control that allowed them to survive the pandemic. Unless they find a particular person or a friend who can ignite that inner strength, the changes that may be happening in their environment may continue to affect their way of responding. They might continue to see failures and successes or joys and pains as dependent on how others or life treat them.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study focused on understanding the faces of mental health of the subjects included and the factors that facilitated or hindered them from gliding within the mental health continuum –mild to time-limited distress to a severe or chronic mental condition.

Indeed, the study revealed the faces of mental health distress that can be categorized as mild, limiting, and chronic. Mild mental health distress was experienced by those who feared that previous experiences of mental health disturbance would again occur. Others experienced a more disturbing condition in the form of inner conflict ("wolves within"), moodiness, and more, as well as the push and pull experience as they seemed to be overwhelmed by the demands of the situation. Some revealed the scars brought about by their past experiences of violence and abuse, which sometimes are still present since the pandemic started.

Three significant themes were revealed when it comes to the factors that facilitate or hinder one from gliding within the mental health continuum: a) from their roots— these are those related to one's experiences with their loved ones or their family; b) from their innermost self-- these are those that they possess, their capabilities and limitations as well as weaknesses; and c) from their connections- these are those that point to their social support including friends and particular persons in their lives. Some subjects responded to mental health distress based on what they have experienced in their family, their ability to cope and respond to

difficulties, and the help, support, and connectedness they received from significant others. It may be unfair to stigmatize individuals to have a mental health condition without knowing their strengths and the amount of support and help they are getting.

The study revealed the importance of family connectedness, social support, the individual's realistic capacity to hope, and the locus of control in the manner the subjects faced the mental health conditions they had during the pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Exploration of the phenomenological experiences of mental health distress revealed the unique ways of responding to the pandemic depending on the quality of social support and the individual's capacity to hope and locus of control. The counseling intervention provided to them was based on the perceived problem or needs of the individual. Based on the findings of this study, it seems not enough to identify the client's presenting problem based on the intake interview at the start of the session. In crafting the counseling plan, the counselor must be mindful of the loci of control of the individual—whether the client has an internal or external locus of control. It means the helper must know how the individual views herself, others, and the world. It seems easier to observe the amount of support a client gets from family members or friends. Still, it is difficult to decipher how much client's hope there is that would push the client to seek help when there seems to be a threat against an experience of normalcy or when there is less support available to them. Future helpers and researchers might want to focus on understanding the role of the client's factors, including hope, personality, and loci of control, in effecting behavior change. After all, the therapist is there to provide support and resources; the client's capacity to self-heal brings success towards change (Tallman & Bohart, 2011).

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