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Exploring Help-Seeking Behavior of Mildly Distressed Guidance and Counseling Practitioners: Basis for Program Development

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ABSTRACT

Mental health concerns are one of the top problems being faced globally. It can affect people regardless of economic status, educational background, profession, age, and gender. Challenges to mental health can be experienced by anyone and that includes mental health service providers such as counselors and counseling practitioners, psychologists, and therapists. This study aims to understand and explore the help seeking behavior of distressed counselors. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions such as who the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioners are, what is the nature of the stress of the guidance and counseling practitioners, what is the help-seeking behavior of the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioners and what output may be proposed based on the overall results of the study. The study used qualitative research design, specifically case study and focused on 5 guidance and counseling practitioners in CALABARZON area who were selected purposively. Data gathered were analyzed through thematic analysis and cross case analysis. Ethical considerations were also given emphasis during the conduct of the study. Results showed that guidance and counseling practitioners of varying profiles experience mild distress and have difficulty seeking professional help. Guidance and counseling jobs contribute to their distress. Also, guidance and counseling practitioners have difficulty seeking help. There is a need for a program that contains discussion on mental health importance, nature of counseling profession and stress management activities and personal therapy to be included in the institutional training and personal development programs offered once or twice a year by the institution for its guidance and counseling practitioners. It is also recommended that guidance and counseling practitioners may engage themselves in activities that promote their own mental health welfare and may attend more training that helps them be more equipped in handling negativities in life that can affect their personal and professional life. Human resource department and the institution should work with different professionals who will serve as external counselors and facilitate training or conduct seminars and counseling and therapy for guidance and counseling practitioners to promote mental health. Future researchers may consider other mental health practitioners as participants to determine the way they perceived and experienced distress and how it influenced their lives as professionals.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

Mental health concerns are one of the top problems being faced globally. It can affect people regardless of economic status, educational background, profession, age and gender. Many professionals including counselors and psychologists experience distress influencing their mental health and how they do their job or live their daily lives. Many people are at risk of suffering from distress, too much pressure, stressful events and other mental

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health problems. Challenges to mental health can be experienced by anyone and that includes mental health service providers such as counselors and counseling practitioners, psychologists and therapists.

Guidance and counseling practitioners, like other mental health practitioners, are prone to experiencing distress not only because of work but also because of personal problems, environmental factors and cataclysmic events that they might encounter. Among the countries in the Southeast part of the world, the Philippines do not have enough counselors compared to the ratio of clients who need support and professional help. With the volume of clients that counselors have to deal with, while having their own mental health struggles as well, it is hard to handle clients and ensure the practitioner's efficiency in practice. In our country, only few pursued their career in counseling yet the number of students and clients that need to be catered continuously increases as time goes by making it really difficult for people living in provinces such as in Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon and many more, to meet all the demands of the clients and the profession.

With all of these being mentioned from different resources, there is really a gap in terms of studies focusing on mental health professionals that includes counselors, therapists, psychiatrists and psychologists. The population of those individuals who worked as counselors are considered as an under served population given the fact that most studies only focus on mental health or experiences of distress among teens, adults, elderly and those who work in other fields or professions.

In the Philippines and in other countries in Southeast Asia, dealing with mental health problems has been extra challenging. This is because of the lack of awareness of people and government support which aims to assist Filipinos on how to manage mental health problems and challenges. In CALABARZON, there are only a few guidance and counseling practitioners and yet there are no exceptions to experiencing distress. Counselors are one of those who help students and other clients handle their problems and mental health related concerns and yet counselors themselves are also prone to experiencing distress and no one to always turn to for help because of discrimination and stigma in terms of seeking help.

However, there are only a few studies that focus on distress, anxiety, depression and other psychological problems that mental health professionals such as counselors may also encounter while they are working in the field. It is not only the limitation of studies which give attention to counselors and psychologists mental health that seems to be a main concern but also the limited mental health programs which can help counselors and other mental health professionals deal with distress, anxiety, depression and many more for them to be able to cope up.

Distressed counselors are considered as an under served population since there is really no concrete program to help counselors address their distress and other mental health issues. As a mental health advocate and a practitioner, conducting a study which focuses on the factors that influences a counselor's mental health and what they go through as one tries to ask for help and how all of these affects a counselor's personal and professional life can really help them take care of their mental health through the program that can be created from this study. This study will help solve the need to also focus on mental health of mental health professionals which includes counselors, counseling practitioners and psychologists and not just focusing on distress that is experienced by clients.

It has been challenging for everyone, especially when the pandemic started to maintain their sanity and protect their mental health. Mental health professionals are in demand and are needed by many to help them address their mental health-related concerns. However, even mental health practitioners are not an exemption from experiencing issues related to their mental health and well-being.

This only pertains to mental health problems faced by Filipinos in general. Another issue that must be a topic of concern is about those professionals such as counselors who are also dealing with problems such as being distressed, depressed, anxious, or dealing with family, personal or marital problems and to whom they can seek help. This is the reason why there is a gap in terms of a mental health program for counselors in the Philippines which can help them manage their own experiences of distress, burnout, and personal and career-related problems that can also influence their efficiency in working as counselors.

Additionally, challenges on mental health are now a common experience not only among youth nor among adults but even mental health practitioners are no exception to this. The main reason for conducting this study is that it would shed light in uncovering the real experiences of mental health professionals such as counselors who are also humans and are also prone to experience stressful events or are also vulnerable to triggers or factors which can negatively impact their mental well-being.

With this reality that even the practitioners themselves might have encountered or have been diagnosed with psychological problems or disorders, it might never be easy for them to seek help or even consult other mental health professionals in the same profession. They might find it hard to seek help or to seek counseling because of different reasons such as stigma, personal issues or conflict, and discrimination.

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Even the mental health of people living in provinces or barrios, are not so aware of the importance of mental health, whom to seek help and why they need to ask for help. That is why, as you can reflect, there is no solid government program for mental health for citizens and how much more a program for counselors themselves who work for these people battling with mental health-related problems as well. Mental health has caught the growing interest of researchers and even commoners in past years.

The researcher understands the complexity and nature of counseling work as part of the exposure in the clinical setting in dealing with clients that need counseling. For a psychology practitioner, it is really challenging to counsel than to conduct other services provided by mental health practitioners. Counseling requires a lot of hard work and a part of yourself because the counselor is also an instrument for a counseling approach to be effective.

With this, counselors can also experience distress and difficulties in handling personal and professional issues and who can guide and help them deal with their stressors. It is very important for counselors to be given with programs that can assist them with handling their experiences of distress and highlight the importance of help seeking professionals to other professionals for proper assistance and support about their mental health.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

To have a better understanding of the study, the following literatures were used:

Counselor's Mental Health and Challenges

Guidance counselors are professionals with a specialized practice that ensures the holistic development of students. Despite their crucial role, there is little research exploring the experiences and perceptions of guidance counselors in terms of wellness programs, well-being, self-care practices, and retention. The study aimed to create research and evidence-based interventions to improve well-being and maintain work satisfaction among guidance counselors. Using Giorgi's phenomenological qualitative approach, this study is based on interviews conducted with twelve guidance counselors from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao (Ho et al., 2018).

As of May 2020, the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines only has 1,096 active counselors. With roughly 20 million public school students, it has become unattainable to meet the recommended ratio of one guidance counselor for every 500 students. The findings suggest improving wellness programs, namely, physical, mental, and spiritual programs, a strong support system among colleagues, and other incentives and forms of compensation. It was also found that a healthy work environment is a key to FGC retention, which consists of harmonious work relationships, a strong support system, psychological safety, counselor training, further education, and a flexible and accommodating workload and schedule. Financial elements also come to play and other long-term benefits of employment. Intrapersonal factors include self-care and personal commitment. The current research recommends utilizing the proposed wellness and retention program framework and offered mental health and wellness programs of FGC (Gallardo, 2022).

It was mentioned that there are over 5,398 open positions for the profession, but only 20% have been filled, citing low compensation as the primary reason. Now, with the COVID-19 pandemic rising and online education in play, DepEd has recognized the need for guidance counselors and, as a result, has partnered with different organizations to help address the need for psychosocial support among students and teachers. However, the reasons that hinder the rate of engagement, satisfaction, and well-being among guidance counselors remain (Magsambol & Chi, 2020).

Another study that aimed to create research and evidence-based interventions to improve well-being and maintain work satisfaction among guidance counselors to achieve this. The end goal is to retain employees effectively and humanely in their institutions by bringing back holistic care for students and guidance counselors alike (Magsambol & Chi, 2020).

In addition to that, a study indicated themes and relating sub themes that came out from the interview transcripts conducted with the Filipino Guidance Counselors on their well-being, wellness programs, self-care practices, and retention that led to the interpretation and implications of this study's results, particularly the five significant themes namely self-care practices, healthy work environment, professional development and the emergent theme of personal commitment. These are the components of well-being that ultimately affect and lead to the retention of guidance counselors. Thus, the study also presents the emergent framework of well-being and mental health of guidance counselors in the Philippines.

For years, the Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association (PGCA) has pushed the government to improve guidance counselors' salary grades. Lack of human resources, compassion fatigue, and burnout are just some of the chronic problems that contribute to the overall decline of guidance counselors' well-being (Magsombol & Chi, 2020).

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Taken to an extreme, guidance counselors may even choose to leave the profession from frustration and dissatisfaction. It is regrettable to witness competent guidance counselors leave an honorable profession for reasons and problems that can be addressed with proper effort and intervention. Thus, it is high time that the well-being and mental health of guidance counselors be paid more attention to, and the problems that debilitate must be properly researched and analyzed (Magsambol & Chi, 2020).

Mental health practitioners work in a culture of one-way caring from which they are expected to be emphatic towards clients without the expectation of receiving such care in return from their clients. To be effective in providing mental health services, practitioners must develop a professional alliance or working relationship with clients that maintains appropriate boundaries and levels of emotional or psychological involvement, and to do so consistently from one client to another. Establishing and maintaining these one-way working relationships takes significant effort and energy placing practitioners at increased risk for negative outcomes such as stress, burnout, and professional impairment. Ironically, while helping clients move toward well-being, practitioners often can overlook their own needs and indeed may not have "learned how to take the time to care and to nourish [themselves], having been trained to believe that this would be selfish" (Martinez et al., 2020; Vahabi and Wong, 2017; Knaak et al., 2017; Richards et al., 2016; Ho et al., 2018; Bernardo and Estrellado, 2017; Tuliao et al., 2016; Doblyte and Jimenez, 2017).

There are factors that can influence our mental well-being positively and negatively. There are risks and protective factors to consider in a person's mental well-being. Risk factors include poverty, discrimination, violence, abuse or neglect, peer rejection and isolation, stressful life events, lack of family support and poor physical health/long-term condition.

However, protective factors can include economic security, empowerment, feelings of security, mastery and control, positive interactions with others, physical activity, stable and supportive family environments, healthy diet and lifestyle (Ho et al., 2018).

Over time, experiencing poor mental well-being can contribute to the development of mental health problems such as depression or anxiety. Actions which address the risk factors and support the development of the protective factors highlighted above can make mental health problems less likely to occur (Harris et al., 2016). Moreover, stigma toward persons with mental illness refers to endorsing negative stereotypes and prejudices that reinforce discrimination or unfair behaviors toward the stigmatized. Research has shown that some mental health professionals hold negative attitudes consistent with stigma toward persons with mental illness, although most studies document more positive than negative attitudes on the whole (Asil et al., 2019).

The study surveyed over thousands of British psychiatrists and found their attitudes toward persons with mental illness, though still sometimes negative, were more positive than those of the general public. Nonetheless, other studies have found that stigma toward persons with mental illness within the mental health profession is similar to if not worse than stigma within the general population.

Attitudes toward persons with mental illness among mental health professionals may vary according to psychiatric diagnosis. Other research shows that mental health professionals may be accepting of their patients with mental illness while simultaneously being judgmental toward and skeptical of colleagues who present with the same (Elliott and Ragsdale, 2020; Asil et al., 2019).

In addition to that, it is unethical to stigmatize or judge mental health practitioners who have mental illnesses. However, it is distinct, determining the competence of professionals with mental illness who are conducting psychotherapy.

Thus, it would be not ethical to think that all therapists with mental illnesses were incompetent, but it would be ethical to raise the issue of competency in specific circumstances concerning the welfare of the client when professionals cannot handle the client at moments they have scheduled a session with them. The reasons why mental health professionals stigmatize people, including their colleagues, with mental illness are still not clear and are least explored. It might be a function of exposure to clients with serious and difficult to treat conditions, who frustrate them by not following treatment recommendations, or who confirm negative stereotypes about mental illness (Elliott and Ragsdale, 2020; Asil et al., 2019). A separate but related issue involves disclosure of one's lived experience with mental illness to one's clients. Therapist self-disclosure, in general, refers to verbal statements made by the therapist to the client revealing personal information, such as facts about the therapist, feelings the therapist has had or is having, insights the therapist has gained from their personal experiences, or strategies the therapist has used to cope with situations similar to what the client is presenting.

Historically, therapist self-disclosure of any form of personal information was discouraged based on the psychoanalytic principles of Freud and that anonymity, equanimity, and abstinence were key to facilitating client self-awareness and interpersonal change throughout the process (Harris et al., 2016).

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In contrast, contemporary clinical psychologists argue that therapist self-disclosure can be beneficial, provided that therapeutic boundaries are maintained, disclosure has a clear and intentional purpose, and it is used as a tool for change or to manage the therapeutic relationship (Miller & McNaught, 2016). Deciding when and what to disclose, however, should be based on a variety of factors, including characteristics of the therapeutic relationship and of the client.

There are potential benefits of therapists having lived experience with mental illness, apart from whether it is disclosed to the client. Although it is true that being impaired may negatively impact one's ability to provide quality therapy, a history of recovery from mental illness may be an on-the-job asset. Self-awareness and actively working on one's own recovery, either individually or in therapy may put therapists in a better position to understand their clients' experiences and promote their healing. Mental health professionals themselves report that their lived experience makes them more able to empathize with the situations of their clients (Boyd, Zeiss, et al., 2016) and is a driving force behind their passion to help others.

At the same time, mental illness on the part of mental health professionals can hinder them from practicing their profession and giving competent care to their clients. Mental illnesses affect mental health professionals just as they do the general population.

Stigma among mental health professionals toward people with mental illness is similar to, if not worse than, stigma in the general public. Moreover, stigma can discourage mental health professionals with mental illness from seeking treatment—treatment that could alleviate their problems and possibly even benefit their clients indirectly because one's healing journey can fuel someone else capacity to risk to trust themselves and their ability to recover and heal themselves as well (De Vos et al., 2016).

Moreover, there are mental health practitioners who reported experiencing indirect prejudice and discrimination. There are psychotherapists who reported indirect prejudice and described situations in which another mental health professional put down people who shared their diagnosis without realizing they were speaking to someone dealing with the very same condition that they are talking about. Others described biases toward mental illnesses that they did not have themselves.

On the contrary, there are practitioners who experienced direct prejudice and the study suggests that there is only a minimal number of therapists who reported incidents of direct prejudice when another mental health professional said something to their face that revealed a negative stereotype toward them based on their mental illness. Most of the therapists were selective about with whom they shared their mental health history, and exactly what they shared both with coworkers and with clients, mostly because of concerns over stigma (De Vos et al., 2016; Dean et al., 2020; Greenberg et al., 2020; Mehta et al., 2018; Hermannsdottir et al., 2016).

In contrast, very few mental health professionals reported indirect discrimination. Direct prejudice and discrimination were also relatively uncommon in the practice, in part because they were predicated on therapists being fairly open about their own mental illness, and many were not. Similarly, most therapists only shared information with their clients judiciously or made vague allusions to their past struggles with only two being open most of the time and two never sharing with clients. Despite indirect exposure to prejudice and the felt need to conceal one's mental illness on the job, almost all the therapists believed that having a mental illness made them better at their job. At the same time, half of them described ways in which their mental illness occasionally interfered with their job performance, and one third described ways in which practicing therapy risk their own mental health at times (Adame et al., 2017; McCormic et al., 2019; Helmus et al.,2019; Richards et al., 2016).

However, self-care or attending to one's own holistic well-being, can be a pathway towards preventing negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, stressful experiences and negative emotions.. Experienced therapists support including self-care as a primary objective for mental health practitioners and this should be recognized as a fundamental part of functioning in a helping career. The practitioner is a "powerful but vulnerable tool in the caring process" that requires attention and care in order to prevent not only practitioner ill-health (Butler et al. 2017), but also negative consequences for the clients they serve.

In fact, mental health practitioners have an ethical duty to provide responsible caring, maximizing benefits and minimizing harm for their clients. In order to provide effective care to their clients, practitioners must first be well themselves. To promote responsible caring, several regulating bodies have, therefore, included practitioner self-care in their code of ethics (Corey, 2017).

For instance, section II.12 of the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Canadian Psychological Association 2017) states that, in accordance with the Principle of Responsible Caring, members are to "engage in self-care activities that help to avoid conditions that could result in impaired judgment and interfere with their ability to benefit and not harm others". Regulatory bodies thus understand self-care as being an ethical obligation for the mental health professional such as psychologists and counselors.

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Psychologists and counselors can both experience stressors in relation to the heavy emotional demands associated with clients' presentations including client lack of improvement, symptom relapse, suicide ideation and attempts, aggressive or violent behaviors, as well as the practical demands related to paperwork, ethical practice, licensing, malpractice complaints, and professional isolation (Greenberg et al., 2020).

Bettney (2017) also identified the work-related issues of large caseloads and negative team environments as being additional stressors for mental health practitioners. Given the presence of such multiple stressors, it is no wonder that practitioners, including graduate trainees, report a high level of stress and distress and have the urge to seek for support or mental health services as well. Research has shown that for trauma therapists, work-related stress is related to their use of avoidant coping strategies, such as denial.

In addition to stress the mental health professionals might always encounter in practice, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, diminished self-efficacy, and reduced personal accomplishment can also reduce competence in their job from which they can also experience stigma from not performing well their duties (Dreison et al. 2018), highlighting the need for prevention or early treatment.

The cumulative effects of emotional and mental stress thus can lead to professional impairment in the provision of services. The potential for professional impairment is particularly increased for practitioners who work in the field of trauma, and is known variously as "secondary victimization", "vicarious traumatization", "compassion fatigue", and "empathy fatigue". Vicarious traumatization. This type of counselor impairment can significantly compromise therapeutic work, and pose harm to clients (Johnson et al. 2018). Unfortunately, research has shown that interventions in reaction to practitioner mental health related issues seem to demonstrate limited or no positive impact on the mental health of practitioners, thus shifting the spotlight toward preventative measures as a more desirable action.

With that being said, there is significant support for the beneficial effects of self-care practice such as help seeking to help oneself in the reduction of negative outcomes such as emotional distress, anxiety, depression and compassion fatigue for mental health practitioners. While a lack of self-care is related to higher levels of burnout and secondary traumatic stress symptoms, a greater risk of health status decline, and the experience of stress (Butler et al. 2017;Santana and Fouad 2017), engagement in self-care is associated with greater well-being (Colman et al. 2016), lower levels of stress and negative affect, higher levels of positive affect, flourishing, self-rated academic, and clinical performance (Zahniser et al. 2017), compassion satisfaction (Butler et al. 2017), and quality of life.

Overall, engagement in career-sustaining behaviors is linked to a greater sense of personal accomplishment and a lesser tendency to depersonalize clients. In fact, experienced mental health practitioners, or those who might be called "master therapists", refer to self-care as a key aspect of professional functioning. The study reported that such master therapists prioritize self-care in their profession and take "preventative action to protect what they consider to be their most important therapeutic tool: themselves". Further, it was found that more experienced practitioners engage in more self-care behaviors and report less stress than practitioners who are early in their career.

In addition to that, mental health practitioners often use a variety of self-care practices that address areas of awareness, balance, flexibility, physical health, social support, or spirituality. First, awareness involves having knowledge about what it means to be a mental health professional, including an understanding of the risks for and symptoms of burnout and professional impairment.

Practitioners also have to hold realistic expectations about the nature of the work they do and an understanding of how to assess the effectiveness of such work. It is discussed that it is encouraged for mental health professionals to view themselves as being vulnerable to the personal and professional stressors of their career, as it is only with this awareness that preventative measures are likely to be taken. When practitioners are aware of work stressors such as isolation, they can make a conscious effort to behave in ways that overcome or avoid such stressors, such as by planning and participating in regular case consultations with colleagues. Second, awareness refers to noticing and reflecting on one's internal and external experiences, and monitoring one's own needs. This awareness of the self is a conscious and continuous process (Straiton et al., 2018).

Practitioners must be aware of the many dynamics operating in the therapy room, including what is happening within the client, within themselves, and within the therapeutic interaction between them. As psycho therapeutic work can involve resistant clients, slow change/growth, and discussing primarily negative content, it is important that mental health professionals notice when they are feeling drained and take action to replenish their mental health (Straiton et al., 2018; Na et al., 2016).

Also, experienced practitioners emphasize the importance of self-reflection to their best development as a mental health professional. The more self-aware a practitioner is, the more likely they are to recognize and attend to their need, which in turn allows them to provide quality services. Essentially, "the better we know ourselves, the better we can know and be helpful to others (Straiton et al., 2018).

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It was found by Zahniser et al. (2017) that psychology doctoral students who demonstrated cognitive self-awareness engaged in more effective self-care than those who did not. Self-monitoring and awareness have also been related to practitioners experiencing lower levels of emotional exhaustion, burnout and compassion fatigue, a greater sense of gratification in their work, and an ability to maintain emotional balance in difficult situations. In contrast, a lack of self-awareness of issues of therapeutic process is linked to greater mental health problems or concerns.

Researchers have recommended a variety of methods for improving awareness among mental health practitioners, including participation in an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy course, mindfulness and meditation training and self-reflection (Knapp et al. 2017; Na et al. 2016). Creative writing is another practice that has been recommended to foster awareness among counselors.

While it has been argued that "too much" self-awareness can hinder professional work by distracting the practitioner during a therapy session, the literature generally supports the need for mental health professionals to practice on-going self-awareness of their experiences. Fostering attitudes and engaging in practices that promote healthy coping and ongoing growth can be thought of as forms of self-care as they promote well-being, and can be helpful in the prevention of negative outcomes (Knapp et al. 2017).

Conversely, mental health professionals face a variety of challenges throughout their careers. For example, it can be riddled with inconsistency, unanticipated challenges such as clients in crisis, and disappointments including slow progression or lack of therapeutic success, which often are not within the therapist's control. Confronted with such demands, having an inflexible coping response style can have a negative impact on practitioners' well-being and growth. Kaeding et al. (2017) found that counseling trainees who hold rigid, perfectionist expectations about their performance report experiencing greater burnout.

High performance standards in combination with low self-efficacy are also related to problematic emotion regulation, neuroticism, and high cortisol levels. What complicates matters is that mental health practitioners essentially are required to suppress or control their emotional reactions and limit self-disclosure in order not to interfere with the therapeutic process. While some research suggests expressive suppression may be beneficial in the short-term, it has also been associated with negative outcomes for the therapist, such as increased anxiety and depression, and to higher levels of stress.

To prevent the negative outcomes associated with the inevitable challenges of this career, practitioners need to find ways to internally manage and externally respond to the varying demands of their work. Practitioner flexibility in attending to and regulating their emotions is beneficial for their well-being (Miller and Sprang 2017). Specifically, practitioners who reappraise events report more positive and less negative emotions as well as better interpersonal functioning. In addition, psychologists and post-graduate psychologist trainees who hold an attitude of self-compassion report fewer difficulties in emotion regulation. Having an attitude of self-compassion and acceptance helps therapists to recognize and address their professional limitations. In fact, engaging in professional development on a regular basis is recommended for therapist self-care (Knapp et al. 2017), and is increasingly being made mandatory by professional associations. Other practices that can promote flexibility are setting and reappraising goals, engaging in expressive writing or journaling, and engaging in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Rudaz et al. 2017).

Personal support such as friends, family and personal therapy is a valuable element of self-care and a way to promote life balance for practitioners and may be more important than other types of support for graduate counseling students. Psychology professionals often more frequently seek out personal support and rate these relationships as most effective in addressing personal and professional stress. Satisfaction with personal support is linked to greater self-esteem, psychological adaptation, and professional functioning, lower anxiety and depression, and less use of avoidance coping among clinical trainees. In contrast, it was found that psychologists who discussed their work frustrations with spouses and colleagues reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion.

Although this finding might suggest a negative spillover of work stress into the personal life domain, it may also reveal that psychologists often seek support from outside sources when they are exhausted from work demands. Finally, personal therapy is recommended as a method of self-care. Unfortunately, there are many barriers to mental health practitioners seeking therapy, with concerns about confidentiality, cost, and time being identified as the most common obstacles. One study revealed that 59% of professional psychologists did not seek therapy despite knowing it would be to their benefit (Dreison et al., 2018).

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Counselors can also seek professional support from clinical supervisors, mentors, advisors, professional colleagues/peers, and professors. Experienced therapists place professional and peer supervision within the top three most important and useful coping strategies for managing self-care and feelings of incompetence. Zahniser et al. (2017) found that professional support had a number of benefits for clinical psychology students, including increasing professional development, life and daily balance, cognitive awareness, flourishing, positive affect, progress in clinical and academic work, and reducing perceived stress and negative affect. Professional support is not only a highly recommended practice for self-care, but methods such as supervision have become a mandatory requirement of many mental health professions.

In particular, clinical supervision can be a resource for increasing awareness of the risks and symptoms of negative outcomes experienced by mental health practitioners, while at the same time providing a safe space for such symptoms to be recognized. In fact, argues that ideally supervision should include the development and monitoring of self-care plans for supervisees.

In addition to supporting supervisee competence, supervision can help to identify gaps in training, provide checks on caseload and work-life balance, direct career development, encourage self-care, and serve as a support when supervisees face professional hazards. Clinical psychology graduate students report being most satisfied with their supervisors when they receive advice on self-care and work-life balance. In turn, work-based social support, such as supervision, helps trainees use adaptive coping styles (Dean et al., 2020; Greenberg et al., 2020; Mehta et al., 2018; Hermannsdottir et al., 2016).Study found that clients receiving help from supervised therapists showed significantly stronger working alliances, larger reductions in depression scores, greater treatment retention, and higher treatment satisfaction than those whose therapists were unsupervised. In contrast, some studies have shown professional support to have a negative impact on mental health practitioners (Dean et al., 2020; Greenberg et al., 2020; Mehta et al., 2018; Hermannsdottir et al., 2016)

Also, peer support and cooperation uniquely sits somewhere between the realms of professional and personal social support in that it is less hierarchical and as such can create space for self-care both in and outside the workplace. Peer consultation can help practitioners address biases about competence; help prevent therapists drifting away from therapeutic models, and positively impact practitioner burnout and anxiety. Further, socio emotional support from faculty members has been seen to be related to graduate students' program and overall life satisfaction (Hermannsdottir et al., 2016), while professional association involvement can help identify issues of professional impairment and address matters related to practitioners' mental, physical, and spiritual well-being.

Counseling professionals who receive mindfulness training report greater physical, emotional, and interpersonal well-being and that these effects continue as graduates transition into the professional workforce. Mindfulness training also helps clinical trainees cope more effectively with difficult experiences. Mindfulness-based stress-reduction is related to lower levels of perceived stress, negative affect, state and trait anxiety, rumination, and higher levels of positive affect and self-compassion, as well as to improved clinical skills such as empathy that in turn may reduce the risk of harm to clients (Leppma and Young 2016; Suyi et al. 2017; Rudaz et al. (2017). Professional psychotherapists who use mindfulness report improvements in their levels of attention, self-awareness, self-compassion, capacity for empathy, and ability to tolerate difficult emotions.

Practitioners are encouraged to engage in meaningful work as a form of self-care and to not be afraid of seeking help from other mental health practitioners if they need help from them in spite of the stigma or labeling attached to help seeking because this can implicitly be beneficial to their clients as well. Practitioners who practice gratitude and internalize the rewards of working in mental health move toward positive well-being and away from negative outcomes such as burnout. It also suggests that meaning-making can interrupt therapists' experiences of compassion fatigue and burnout. Having a sense of meaning and existential well-being in relation to one's work is associated with lower levels of depression, less stress and more social support, greater career satisfaction, joy, and less burnout and fewer psychiatric symptoms. For example, neurology residents and fellows who reported meaning in their work were more likely to experience career satisfaction and be at lower risk for burnout (Rudaz et al. 2017).

The study of Posluns and Gall (2020) explored the experiences of previous mental-health problems and how it affects clinical and counseling psychologists' approach to their practice. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six clinical and four counseling psychologists who had experienced mental-health difficulties. Data was then analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Analysis of the interviews highlighted five master themes which includes the use of the personal-self of psychologist, ambivalence, identity as a psychologist, psychologists as agent of change and finding meaning in suffering.

The results of several researches showed that psychologists with a history of mental-health problems actively draw upon their experience in fulfilling their obligations to their clients professionally. In managing their dual identity of service-user and professional, they reported a degree of ambivalence which influenced the way that they viewed themselves and their practice. Their personal experiences seemed to be closely tied up with their professional-identity, which either conflicted with their sense of self or complemented it through highlighting how fortunate they were compared to others.

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The interviews frequently highlighted how psychologists' experiences can provide an impetus to speak out for patients' rights to ensure that they are treated with respect and dignity. A number of psychologists with an experience of mental-health difficulties felt that they might not have pursued their career had they not had previous mental-health difficulties. There appeared to be mixed findings concerning whether the participants felt that their mental-health difficulties had helped or hindered their practice (Dean et al., 2020).

Having their own mental health struggles made these practitioners more capable of empathizing with their clients, however, they also experienced an increased sense of isolation from their colleagues and lessened energy and ability to concentrate in their relationships with their clients because of their personal mental health concerns And this paved way for the recommendation of self-care practices for psychologists and many other psychology professionals (Dean et al., 2020; Greenberg et al., 2020; Mehta et al., 2018; Hermannsdottir et al., 2016).

People frequently forget that healthcare mental health providers such as counselors, psychologists and therapists struggle with mental health disorders. One of the challenges in talking about our mental health struggles is the perceived judgment and shame from colleagues and patients. Many mental health professionals have concerns and fears that disclosing their mental health disorder can hurt their careers. Many mental healthcare professionals are using social media to talk about their mental health journey. When we talk about depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and other mental health disorders, we are often mistakenly referring to patients and the general population. People frequently forget that healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, and mental health providers, struggle with mental health disorders more often than the general population (Mehta et al., 2018).

Generally speaking, there is a stigma associated with mental health disorders and that remains pervasive, even though attitudes are shifting for the better. Because of this, many individuals in the general population choose not to seek help out of fear of being shamed, and it is even worse for healthcare professionals.

Moreover, healthcare professionals such as counselors, psychiatrists and clinical psychologists often fear that if they talk about their mental health disorders or seek treatment, they may be judged or shamed by their colleagues and patients, have their privacy invaded, and potentially face issues with renewing or receiving their medical license. As a result, seeking help for or even talking about mental health disorders among the mental health practitioner community is often taboo, leading to worsening symptoms, potential suicide attempts, and even jeopardizing patient care when these disorders and symptoms are left untreated (Dean et al., 2020).

According to Fuller (2022), there are also experiences about burnout and compassion fatigue which are two common underlying reasons why healthcare professionals including mental health professionals, have high rates of mental health disorders. However, these numbers are highly varied because most healthcare practitioners, including mental health professionals, are not comfortable disclosing their signs and symptoms out of fear they will be shamed or judged or potentially lose their license to practice. A recent Medscape survey found high rates of burnout among medical practitioners, including 42% of psychiatrists and mental health professionals.

There is also a high suicide rate among mental health professionals, with some studies suggesting that close to 30% have felt suicidal and nearly 4% have made a suicide attempt. One study of more than 1000 randomly sampled counseling psychologists found that 62% of respondents self-identified as depressed. Of those with depressive symptoms, 42% reported experiencing some form of suicidal ideation or behavior. One survey found that 61 percent of psychologists report experiencing clinical depression at least once in their lives.

Help -Seeking Behavior of Counselors

Help-seeking is a problem focused, planned behavior, involving interpersonal interaction with a selected health-care professional. Seeking help from a professional, also known as formal help-seeking involves seeking help from professional sources who can provide appropriate care. Seeking help from a professional is considered optimal for the receipt of evidence-based treatments. The conceptualization of help-seeking as a planned behavior aligns well with the TPB, as it suggests seeking help involves a conscious or planned decision to seek or not seek support. There is also evidence supporting attitudes and intentions as influential to mental health help-seeking behavior, further substantiating the relevance of the TPB in this area. Applying a theory that encompasses attitudes and intentions when investigating behavior like theory of planned behavior, it is recommended by scholars and has been a major focus of research across fields.

Seeking help during difficult times in life is one of the most important problem-solving strategies. However, people are often reluctant to seek help even if they are suffering from severe problems. Researchers have found that various factors affect help-seeking. Subjective needs are one of the most significant variables that influence help-seeking. People seek help to solve their problems; hence, awareness of subjective needs significantly affects the decision of whether or not to seek help. In fact, numerous studies have consistently reported a positive relationship between subjective needs and help seeking (Nagai, 2015).

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On top of that, there are reasons why practitioners are reluctant in seeking help and one of the challenges in talking about our mental health struggles is the perceived judgment and shame from our colleagues and patients. Healthcare professionals are viewed as superheroes because it is our duty to save lives, however, this is not exactly true (Fuller, 2022).

One survey study focusing on professional psychotherapists practicing in the state of Iowa found that there are therapists who have experienced depression, reported substance abuse, and shared that they had attempted suicide before. Another study on psychologists and social workers in Israel revealed that the majority have self-reported traits associated with disorders such as mood disorders, obsessive–compulsive disorder and eating disorders, however, most were sub clinical. A study on psychotherapists practicing in the United States found that the majority had received therapy themselves at least once for a variety of reasons, including marital problems, depression and anxiety or stress (Posluns and Gall, 2020).

Similar results were reported by Harris, et al. (2016) who found that the majority of mental health care providers had used mental health services. In fact, receiving personal therapy is so common among psychotherapists that those who have not might be in the minority. It is important to note, however, that receiving therapy does not indicate the presence of a mental illness, and psychotherapists may enter into therapy for a variety of reasons, such as for assistance with relatively mild personal problems or for their own training purposes (Hassan et al., 2016).

Regardless of the cause, stigma on the part of mental health providers has numerous potential negative consequences which include discouraging people from seeking mental health care (Harris et al., 2016). Moreover, this stigma may have similar negative effects on mental health professionals who have mental illness themselves (Boyd, Zeiss, Reddy, & Skinner, 2016; Harris et al., 2016).

Additionally, Hassan et al. (2016), focused on willingness of mental health practitioners to seek personal therapy. Self-report background characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, number of children, and practice site, served as independent variables. Results showed that the number of children, years in private practice, and number of client contact hours per week, gender, marital status, religion, profession, and practice site were significant in willingness to seek personal therapy. Specific gender data and differences across the professions are presented.

Moreover, mental illness stigma in the workplace discourages mental health professionals from seeking treatment (Knaak et al, 2017), reflecting an implicit agreement or culture of nondisclosure that discourages them from revealing mental illness to colleagues. Another deterrent is fear of losing one's professional license; given some state licensing boards equate having a diagnosis with being professionally impaired. This apparent tendency toward secrecy is unfortunate given that successful mental health professionals in recovery could serve as role models for others, granting hope for recovery and reducing stigma (Boyd et al., 2016).

Empirical research is presented in relation to specific domains of self-care practice, including awareness, balance, flexibility, physical health, social support, and spirituality. Findings from this review underscore the importance of taking a proactive approach to self-care and, in particular, integrating self-care directly into clinical training programs and into the quality assurance processes of professional organizations within the field of mental health (Hassan et.al, 2016).

However, there is no universally accepted theory or model in the area of mental health help-seeking, the body of research applying the TPB to understand mental health help-seeking continues to gain momentum, and the TPB has been favored as the most common approach to frame help-seeking in the literature. Studies on the TPB have identified predictors of mental health help-seeking intentions as well as behavior.

Mental Health Program for Counselors

A study about mental well-being and help-seeking behavior of mental health professionals are also important since it can help identify bio psychosocial factors such as how biological, psychological and social functioning are interacting, detecting trends and social determinants in population health. With the findings that were gathered from such studies, it can influence fields such as public health, health care and education.

Mental health research and evaluation can impact public health policies by assisting public health professionals in strategizing policies to improve population mental health. The results suggest that it helps us understand how to best promote mental health in different populations. From its definition to how it is discussed, mental health is seen differently in every community (Dean et al, 2020).

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Thus, mental health research and evaluation not only reveals mental health trends but also informs us about how to best promote mental health in different racial, specialized and ethnic populations. Stigma is also associated with experiences of mental health practitioners who are dealing with battles about their mental health as well and are doing their best in healing themselves so that they will be competent enough to help heal other people. Data aids us in understanding whether the mental health services and resources that are available meet mental health needs. Research establishes evidence for the effectiveness of public health policies and programs. Mental health research and evaluation help develop evidence for the effectiveness of healthcare policies and strategies as well as mental health promotion programs (Mehta et al., 2020)

On the contrary, there is a need to synthesize what is known about the TPB in the context of mental health help-seeking, to facilitate the identification of factors related to mental health help-seeking, which may provide viable targets for intervention to encourage mental health service utilization and potentially reduce the treatment gap. Recent research has attempted to improve rates of mental health help-seeking through TPB- based interventions; however these are yet to be reviewed. It is important to understand what efforts have been made to improve mental health help-seeking to progress the effectiveness of interventions and inform future directions.

In the study of Gallardo et al (2022), using Giorgi's phenomenological qualitative approach, this study is based on interviews conducted with twelve guidance counselors from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The findings suggest improving wellness programs, namely, physical, mental, and spiritual programs, a strong support system among colleagues, and other incentives and forms of compensation.

It was also found that a healthy work environment is a key to FGC retention, which consists of harmonious work relationships, a strong support system, psychological safety, counselor training, further education, and a flexible and accommodating workload and schedule. Financial elements also come to play and other long-term benefits of employment. Intrapersonal factors include self-care and personal commitment. The current research recommends utilizing the proposed wellness and retention program framework and offered mental health and wellness programs of FGC.

In addition to that, the utility of the TPB or a theory that supports how mental health and help seeking influences counseling professionals, to explain factors that contribute to decision-making, and how behavior change occurs, is thought to be particularly useful in understanding mental health issues, the help-seeking process, and developing interventions to facilitate mental health behavior change (Gallardo et al., 2022).

Conceptual Framework

The factors influencing a person's mental health are vital in understanding a counselor's help seeking experiences. Whether a counselor seeks help or not and what is narrated and reflected on one's personal experiences about help seeking, can be seen connected with the different factors that either positively or negatively affect their overall mental health. Mental health and help seeking experiences influences each other and a counselor's mental health and help seeking experiences in life contributes to how they fulfill their responsibilities as a counselor and their lives as a person. In the figure below, it can be seen how mental health has an impact on help seeking and vice versa. And in a broader perspective, this interactive relationship is vital in a counselor's personal and professional journey towards being an efficient counselor.

Guidance and counseling practitioner's mental health is just as important as their clients' mental health is. A counselor is also prone to experience events in life which includes personal stressors, work related problems and pressure, trauma and abuse, anxiety and depression and even cataclysmic events which can affect their mental health state. A person's mental health condition affects how he or she takes experiences related to different moments in their lives that they seek for help from other people and other mental health professionals.

The mental health and help seeking experiences of a counselor can result in different outcomes such as if a counselor is distressed because of emotional abuse and the moment he or she asks for help, the counselor experiences validation of emotions and support from other people, then it can result in a better version of her as a counselor. She can be more emphatic, genuine, effective and understanding.

On the other hand, if a counselor who is experiencing distress experience stigma and discrimination from colleagues and from other people, he may end up as more distressed, confused on whether he must continue to work as a counselor or quit his job and may also experience frustrations, stress, burnout which can result to not being competent enough to do his job.

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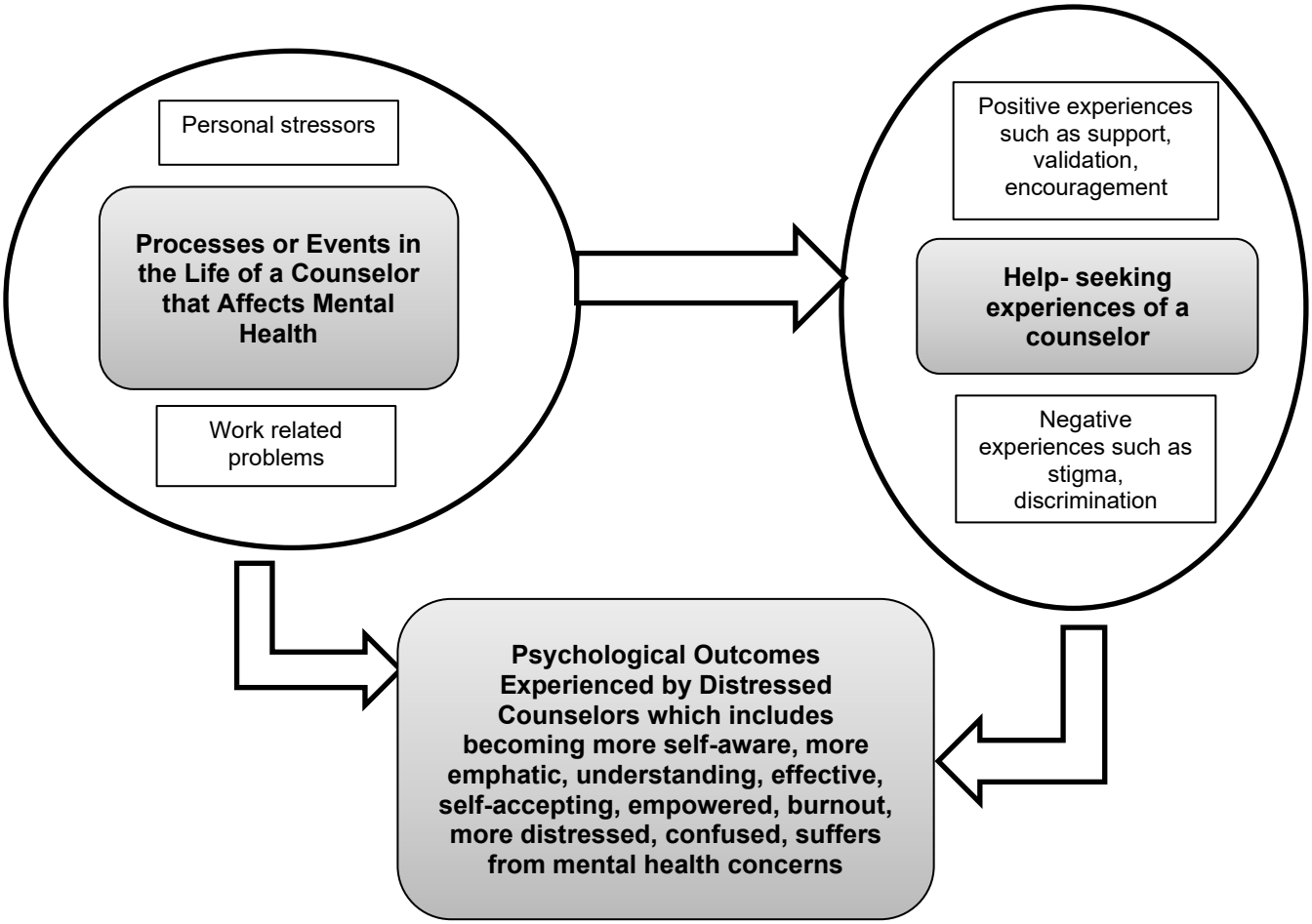

Figure 1. Psychological Mechanism of a Counselor's Mental Health and Help Seeking Experiences

Statement of the Problem:

This study aims to understand and explore help seeking behavior of distressed counselors. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. Who are the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioners?
2. What is the nature of the stress of the guidance and counseling practitioners?
3. What is the help-seeking behavior of the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioners?
4. What output may be proposed based on the overall results of the study?

METHODOLOGY

This portion of the study provided a discussion about the techniques and procedures to be used in this study. The components of this section include design, locale, participants of the study, methodology, the main research instrument, the data gathering techniques and the process of analysis of data.

Research Design

The study used qualitative design specifically case study research design. For this type of research, the researcher focused on providing an in-depth understanding of an issue in its real life context. The design is considered to be an appropriate research design to provide a complex discussion and understanding of how a counselor's experiences and deal with mental health issues or concern, issues related to their mental health, help seeking experiences in life and how stigma and discrimination and other factors influence the likelihood of seeking professional help from other people in the same practice or profession and doing their job as counselors. The in depth amount of data that gathered were useful in creating a suitable and timely mental health program design for Filipino practitioners in the field of psychology (Green and Thorogood, 2018).

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Participants

The participants of the study will be 5 distressed counselors within the CALABARZON area who are having their practice in counseling regardless of the years they have been working and if they are RGC or Non RGC employees and are considered as guidance and counseling practitioners.

They will be selected purposively through a screening instrument. All the respondents were given consent forms prior to the conduct of the interview. According to Vasileiou et al. (2018), 5-10 participants for a case study are enough to make a meaningful and saturated interpretation of the collected data for a case study design.

Data Gathering Instrument

The researcher used a Self-Reported Questionnaire (SRQ-20) and a score of above seven was used to identify positive cases. The SRQ-20 served as a screening tool to make sure that the participants are qualified and fall within the criteria for a distressed counselor. It has the potential of detecting cases and non-cases with sensitivity ranging from 63 to 90 and specificity ranging from 44 to 95. SRQ-20 has good psychometric properties for detecting individuals with mental distress.

On the other hand, the researcher used validated semi structured interview questions as the main data gathering instrument to collect data from the participants regarding their mental health and help seeking behavior experiences. It was validated by a registered psychologist, guidance counselor and subject matter expert.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher conducted an interview to the 5 selected participants of the study who will qualify on the criteria that is set by the researcher using a screening tool which is the SRQ-20 and then will be interviewed through Google Meet or face to face interview. The interview took 15-25 minutes for each participant.

The data collected during the interview will be analyzed using thematic analysis. With the data gathered, the researcher will develop a mental health program specifically designed to help address the gaps reflecting the real life experiences of Filipino counselors who might also be struggling with their mental health such as being distressed or burnt out and are possibly in the battle of seeking help or keeping their inner struggles within themselves while they are in the counseling practice.

Data Analysis.

The researcher used thematic analysis which will start with screening for the emerging concepts after the raw answers are coded to come up with the subcategories and categories that will help in deriving the themes from the participants' responses to make meaningful interpretations. There was a cross case analysis after all the presentation of the data collected to check data saturation.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher ensured to all the participants that their participation was voluntary and any of them are free to withdraw from this study whenever they wish to do so. The researcher informed the participants regarding the broad outline of the subject to be discussed, the type of information needed by the researcher, and the purpose of the study. In order to protect the participants' rights and well-being, the researcher incorporated ethical issues into the current study.

There should be no complications or discomforts associated with participating in this study. Section X, Article A, No. 1 of Ethical Guidelines of the Psychological Association of the Philippines states that in all aspects, we have to respect the rights, safeguard the dignity, and protect and promote the welfare of every research participant. Confidentiality was highly given importance. Informed consent was given to the participants and an introduction and purpose about the current study was discussed.

To ensure the safety and anonymity of the participants, it was not required to include their names in the written and verbal materials of this study. The given data and information by the participants was highly protected by the researcher and were only used for research purposes only.

Additionally, Section X, Article A, No. 4 of Ethical Guidelines of the Psychological Association of the Philippines states that Psychology practitioners shall respect the rights of research participants should they wish to discontinue their participation at any time. The participants are free to withdraw their participation anytime if they feel uncomfortable in this study..

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Furthermore, according to the Ethical Guidelines of Psychological Association of the Philippines, Section X Article A, No. 6 the researcher of the study must take reasonable steps to avoid harming the research participants to minimize harm where it is foreseeable but unavoidable. The researcher was responsible with their participants and should not put the participants in any harm. Also, the researcher took care of the emotional safety and caused no harm to the participants throughout their involvement in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Case #1

Profile of Counseling Practitioner #1

Counselor 1 is single and the eldest among three siblings. Her parents are almost 60 years old and their source of income has been affected by the pandemic and they are just starting again. She studied through the combination of the income of her parents as well as with the help of some scholarships before. According to her, she was a hardworking student before and her motivation at work is her family. She is living with her parents since she is the eldest and her parents are already turning seniors, it will be best if she is staying with them since no need to rent and she can assist them and her siblings.

The personal profile of counselor 1, Miss B is a 25 year old, single and currently residing in Alitagtag, Batangas is working as a counselor for 3 years in a private institution in Batangas and her designation is a guidance coordinator. She is not yet a licensed guidance counselor but is planning to take her master's degree in counseling and take the board exam eventually. According to her, the thought of it also adds up to her pressure and stress lately. Based on screening, there is an indication of a mild level of distress experienced by Miss B. She is currently handling 3 departments as of the moment because one of her colleagues is on leave because of personal reasons.

Nature of the stress of the guidance and counseling practitioner #1

Both personal and professional matters influence the overall mental health of a person working in the field of psychology, counseling and psychotherapy and promotion of overall mental wellness of individuals - our clients. With the reality of working in this profession with low compensation and limited benefits employees receive and the draining part of this job, it is indeed a downside of working in the counseling profession especially if the person is just starting to build your career. Due to the stress she is experiencing, she finds it difficult to focus on her tasks and give her full attention and effort. She is also worried if she is performing well at work.

Table 2 (See appendix A) presents the themes that were derived from the distressing experiences of the participants. The themes derived are (1) financial matters, (2) nature of work of counseling and (3) negative effects of distress. These are further supported by the categories and subcategories discussed below.

Financial Matters

Theme 1 which is financial matters is derived from Case 1 who experiences a lot of struggles handling her income because of the difficulty in managing her budget to support her own expenses and help her parents with the expenses at home and the tuition of her siblings. According to Miss B, her salary as a counselor is not enough to support herself and her family. That is why her parents really try to still earn in spite of their age. She added that she stays in her job because a small salary for now is better than no work and no income at all. She is planning to look for other jobs soon but for now, she is trying to make the most of her work and try to find meaning and passion in it.

The theme financial matters is derived from the category managing finances from which according to participant 1 is that she finds it hard to manage her income with all of her expenses. This is further supported by the subcategory (1) Struggle on budgeting income on expenses.

A. Struggle on budgeting income on expenses

The participant said that she struggled mostly with the adjustments on having a responsibility on her shoulder as a breadwinner because there is the pressure that every month she needs to be able to provide for her siblings and her parents. Though they are not obliging her, as the eldest, she wants to help that way.

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Problems about personal financial expenses

According to her, at her age, the need to be wise on spending her money adds up on the pressure she is dealing with. She knew that it is a disadvantage on her end that she doesn't have a license as a counselor and is not yet pursuing her master's degree.

Pressure on helping the family on financial expenses

The pressure to help the family is actually a self-invested pressure that she gives to herself. She grew up seeing how hardworking her parents are and because of their age, at some point, she wants her parents to enjoy life as well.

This is derived from the responses of the participant which indicate that the participant experiences (1) problems about personal financial expenses and (2) pressure on helping the family on financial expenses this is further evident in the following raw response and distress still affects her and she cited,

"Basically, financial matters such as paying my own bills, helping my parents pay for my siblings' tuition fees and of course, the pressure with the idea that I must have my own savings because I am not getting any younger."

She said that the pressure to keep things well planned causes stress as well because things and expenses must be followed or else it can lead to other problems.

According to Bustos (2016), for instance, a Guidance Counselor without a Master's degree and who is unregistered may somehow feel dissatisfied because of lack of professional qualification. However, since other factors interplay such as internal factors, for instance, she's able to use her abilities and be able to get recognition from her superiors or external factors, and thus gets satisfaction from it.

Moreover, the need for more guidance counselors has been highlighted by the increase in the number of students with mental health issues and recent suicides. It was mentioned in the DepEd-National Capital Region alone, there are currently 400 unfilled positions for guidance counselors. He said as much as the DepEd wants to rectify the problem, it can only do so much due to the unattractive salary for the position and lack of career progression (Hachero, 2023).

Nature of Work of counseling

Theme 2 is derived from the participant's responses and pertains to the realistic nature of the counseling profession. According to her, to work in this profession is both working with the good and bad. It is good as it is fulfilling and she is able to help others, however, it is also not good, since you will really be tired, drained and stressed. This is the reason why a counselor must be mentally fit to start this job and stay on it.

The theme of work of counseling is derived from the category (1) disadvantage of work as a counselor and sub category (1) challenges faced by guidance and counseling practitioners when dealing with many clients.

A. Disadvantage of Work as a Counselor

The participant's 3 years of work experience in this job is really stressful since it requires a lot of adjustments physically, emotionally and professionally. There are times they have many clients to deal with. Aside from this, even if they are guided by colleagues and superior, still, it is really stressful balancing between the numbers of students you are assigned and the papers you need to submit as well.

Challenges faced by Counselor When Dealing with Many Clients

The participant added that those times that there are many students going to their office give her a feeling of stress. She knows this is really part of the job and it is not every day that this is the situation; however, on days that there are many students, she needs to prompt herself first before starting to focus on her tasks that day.

Case 1 presents the nature of the work of counseling as it can be a tiring job since you will be dealing with many clients according to her and if you are just starting your career as a counselor, you will be compensated in a minimal amount which may be just enough or not enough to support yourself and your family. She added,

"The nature of work itself is also stressful. If we have a lot of clients during a certain period, it is really draining."

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Due to those times that there are many clients that they need to deal with, she often times feel stressed because according to her,

"There are times that I feel I am spacing out. I cannot really focus on my tasks. And sometimes, I am worried if I am doing my job well or not."

According to an article from Bradley University (n.d), becoming a professional mental health counselor can be a rewarding career. The opportunity to help individuals who struggle with home, life or substance abuse with expressing emotions and correcting behaviors in a healthy way draws many talented minds to the field. However, the profession is known to be demanding, both physically and mentally. Practicing long clinical hours with any number of different clients who present myriad issues and symptoms can be draining. The personal nature of the relationship between client and counselor also means that emergency visits will need to be arranged or calls will need to be taken when not on the clock.

Negative Effect of Distress

The participant discussed how distress influences her areas of functioning. She mentioned the cognitive impact of sources of stress to her. She said that there are a time she experiences things that she knows affects her especially at work. Theme 3 was derived from category (1) negative psychological effect of distress to a person's functioning and sub category (1) easily distracted and (2) worrying about the ability to be functional.

A. Negative Psychological Effect of Distress to a Person's Functioning

1. Easily Distracted

Based on participant's 1 sharing, she gets distracted due to stress because she cannot focus, she cannot perform her tasks well.

2. Worrying about Ability to be Functional

According to her, when she gets aware that she is not really putting enough focus and attention on her work, she then gets worried about her job performance and evaluation results. She added,

"There are times that I feel I am spacing out. I cannot really focus on my tasks. And sometimes, I am worried if I am doing my job well or not."

She added that "distress distracts her from functioning well at work because instead of giving her full attention and effort, she spaces out and thinks of what worries her instead"

Based on the American Psychological Association (2008), because of the nature of the work, every psychologist, therapist and counselor is at risk for occupational stress. Over the course of time, the interaction between events in the personal and professional life of a psychologist is certain to create stress, likely distress, and possibly impairment. This vulnerability to stress is not a reflection of pathology in the psychologist, but a reality of the challenge of our work.

Nature of help-seeking behavior of the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioner #1

Family welfare

Counselors shared the same soft spot for everyone, and that is, family. All the counselors interviewed are into social or familial consideration as one of the very first things they will consider as a signal to seek professional help when they are experiencing distress. Theme 4 was derived from category (1) concern about welfare of family and sub category (1) possible grieving experience that might be encountered (see Appendix B).

A. Concern about welfare of the family

According to participant 1, more likely, the effects of her distress on her family will push her to seek professional help more than the sole effect of distress to her. The participant added that as a person, it is really important to determine your limits and when the person reaches a certain point that is beyond your control, a person must be open to seek professional help not just for the family but for themselves.

1. Possible grieving experience that might be encountered

She also added that inevitable events such as death might cause a big impact on her mental health that is why she is more likely to ask for professional help when she encounters a situation like this. Counselor 1 always

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tries to handle negative events on her own as much as she can. But once she knows that her distress also affects her family, she will really consider asking for professionals that she trusts. They also know that once family members see that they are getting dysfunctional or are experiencing high levels of distress, they are the one who will suggest to her to go to a professional for consultation or counseling. Participant 1 mentioned,

"When it significantly affects me and the people around me, I believe it will be the driving force behind my decision to seek professional guidance."
She added that "even if what causes her stress affects her somehow, she is still optimistic about overcoming it on her own. However, if the effect of distress affects her family as well, then it is another thing. It is like a wake-up call that I must seek professional help to help me and my family."

According to the study of Natwick (2017), clients and counselors do not exist in isolation; however, there is always concern on welfare of the family. Filipinos are likely to have familial ties. Although family relationships are some of the most important and influential in clients' lives, they can also present unique challenges when it comes to counseling. Additionally, counselors may find themselves in situations in which their own family ties cause conflict in their work. This can lead to complicated ethical dilemmas for counseling practitioners. That is why for counselors, once their family is already affected or once their social relationships are negatively affected by their distress that is the time they will consider seeking professional help.

Possible lack of support

The participant mentioned that her worry of how her family or other people would react if ever she will seek professional help contributes a lot to her help seeking behavior. She does not want any judgment or experience of lack of support because it will only stress or demotivate her in life. Theme 5 is derived from category (1) possible lack of understanding or discrimination from family and sub category (1) fear of stigma.

A. Possible lack of understanding or discrimination from the family

She explained during the interview that there are people, even part of the family, who are not inclined into the importance of the mental health profession and help seeking benefits to people. They are traditional and limited with the idea that there is no need to consult or to ask for a counseling session because you can pray, talk to someone and process things on your own eventually.

1. Fear of stigma

But there are instances that family also becomes a reason why a person will not seek help because of the fear of judgment and the possibility that they will not support or understand them since they are counselors and the nature of their work requires capability to be able to know how to handle negative events in our lives. . The participant added,

"We are aware that there is a stigma associated with getting professional help, particularly when it involves mental health difficulties. Perhaps the people around me and the words they will use against me will prevent me from seeking professional help."

According to Reachout Australia (2023), the most frequently reported of all the barriers. Public, perceived and self-stigmatizing attitudes to mental illness create an embarrassment and fear of identifying with a mental illness or seeking help about it. Also prominent among people who worked in the mental health profession was a general concern about what others, including the source of help, might think of them if they were to seek help.

Self-presentation

Self-presentation is described by the participant as how she wants herself to be perceived by the people around her and if she will apply it in her work, it would be the image she wants her colleagues and clients to see on her. Theme 6 was derived from category (1) affiliation and reputation and sub category (1) maintenance of good image.

A. Affiliation and Reputation

According to her, having no license as a counselor increases the pressure on her need to maintain a certain good image and reputation. She is just starting this work and she does not want people to question her.

1. Maintenance of good image

The image she had must be maintained because students might question her capacity to do her job and her colleagues might criticize her potential in this profession. For counselors, there is a big expectation given to

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them by society that they must be able to know how to handle everything all the time and that influences how they present themselves as counselors in many situations, especially in their working environment. Counselor's help seeking behavior is affected since there are instances that they prefer to keep things to themselves instead of asking for help because they do not want others to question their credibility as professionals. Participant 1 cited,

"It doesn't affect because I am not yet a licensed counselor , therefore I must seek professional help from others."

She added that *"Being not licensed makes her more open to seek professional help so that she can be more qualified and equipped to help herself and others."*

Affiliation and reputation influences help seeking behavior of the counselors because of the pressure to maintain a certain image of competence. On the other hand, counselors have self-expectations, too. They expect themselves to be able to handle their own behavioral or emotional challenges all the time.

This is supported by the study which discussed those healthcare professionals such as counselors, psychiatrists and clinical psychologists often fear that if they talk about their mental health disorders or seek treatment, they may be judged or shamed by their colleagues and patients, have their privacy invaded, and potentially face issues with renewing or receiving their medical license. As a result, seeking help for or even talking about mental health disorders among the mental health practitioner community is often taboo, leading to worsening symptoms, potential suicide attempts, and even jeopardizing patient care when these disorders and symptoms are left untreated (Dean et al., 2020).

Lack of Help Seeking Experience or Personal Therapy

Participant 1 does not have an actual experience of help seeking or even encountered a personal therapy. Theme 7 was derived from category (1) without help seeking experience or professional help and sub category (1) no actual experience of asking for professional help.

A. Without Help Seeking Experience or Professional Support

According to her, she does not seek professional help while she is adjusting to her work or when she is stressed about finances because she lacks the opportunity to. There is limited time and resources on her part that is why she did not actually consider seeking professional help during those times.

1. No actual experience of asking for professional help

It is noted on the table presented that case 1 lacks experience on help seeking or engaged herself in personal therapy. But the subject is open with the idea of seeking professional help or support when the situation asks her to. She said,

"To be honest, I don't have any experience in seeking professional help. But if the situation asks me to seek help, then why not."

The participant also mentioned that*, "To have problems that causes you negative effects more than positive ones is difficult especially if even if you know you have people to talk to, you decide to keep it with yourself and learn to deal with it as time goes by because you are afraid your experiences and emotions will be invalidated and they will just tell you you are working as a guidance practitioner and yet you do not know what to do with your own struggles."*

She explained that these observed experiences made her more careful and worried that seeking help can also lead to the same invalidation encountered by other people.

During recent years, the mental health needs of healthcare providers have been gaining attention as a major public health concern and threat to quality care delivery. Healthcare professionals are exposed to multiple stress factors within their work, which may influence their physical, mental, and emotional well-being in negative ways. And most of these cases do not include reported cases of mental health professionals who are experiencing mental health concerns but lack the willingness or opportunity to ask for help from other professionals (Khanal et al., 2020; Muller et al., 2020).

Self-compassion Activity

The participant mentioned during the interview, what helped her on days she experiences distress are some effective coping strategies she is applying. Theme 8 was derived from category (1) expressive writing and (2) self-care and reflection and subcategories (1) creative journal and (2) practicing self-care techniques.

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A. Expressive writing

According to her, having a daily journal is her way of expressing things she cannot tell others and it gives her an opportunity to release negative emotions and process her thoughts. Writing what is going on inside your head in a journal is also therapeutic by nature because you do not keep it with yourself, within your mind, but you keep it with something that does not mind how you see and feel things. The participant said that this is another way of expressing yourself without the fear of being judged or misunderstood.

1. Self-care and reflection

Part of how she can extend compassion to herself is through self care and reflection because working on her job makes her understand why time for reflection is necessary. With self-reflection, she explained that she is capable of giving herself time to sort her thoughts, recognize her emotions and validate how she felt things as they are and reason out if her actions about those things are justifiable or not.

2. Creative Journal

According to the participant, having a creative journal eases the feelings of distress because she is using the journal as a way to have an alternative form of expressing negative thoughts and emotions. She does not need to worry about criticisms from others if they will know what she is negatively experiencing since it is just there written in her journal.

B. Practicing Self Care Technique

Having a general disposition of care and concern for clients is an essential characteristic of counselors. An essential practice that counselors must learn is to turn that care and concern toward themselves, or in other words have a practice of self-care. If counselors do not learn to care for themselves, they may experience stress in their personal and professional lives, leading to burnout. It has recently come to the attention of researchers, professionals, and educators that individuals in the counseling profession, and those training to become counselors, are not engaged in self-care. In fact, very few educational and clinical training programs are actually teaching students and new counselors about self-care strategies such as mindfulness (Nelson et al., 2017).

They know how to avoid distractions while working from home, so they can maintain focus and stay productive. They know what they need to do to achieve their fitness goals- and they follow through. Self-management means you understand your personal responsibility in different aspects of your life, and you do what you need to fulfill that responsibility. Participant 1 said during the interview,

"Seeking professional help is something that most of us need in times like this. The cases of mental health issues arise when COVID-19 pandemic hits the world."

The participant also added that,

"*Personally, taking good care of yourself, treating yourself, and making time for yourself is something that will help you to see your world and the world in a meaningful and positive way. That is something I wanted to learn and practice more because everything you do and will do in the future will start in you today."*

Openness to Help Seeking

According to participant 1, even if she did not experience seeking professional help in spite of moments that she is really stressed, she is very open to ask for a professional if it is really needed. The theme was derived from category (1) positive mindset about needing to seek help and subcategory (1) good perception of help seeking when necessary.

A. Positive mindset about need to seek for help

The participants have shared how positively she perceives help seeking since she did not encounter any event that discriminated against a professional from seeking help. And she thinks that it is a must that you empower your colleagues who are battling with mental health concerns.

1. Good perception of help seeking when necessary

Her good perception of help seeking is developed while she was a student and also, when she experienced working as a counselor. The participant explained the importance of being open to seeking professional help if a person actually needs it regardless of your job or the nature of your work. She added that, *"We have to be open with the idea about help-seeking that if we need professional help, then we need professional help. There is no need to be worried about what other people would say because what you have to be worried about is your own mental health.*

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Summary of Case 1

Counselor 1 has been a counselor for almost 3 years and as it is her first job, it is somehow difficult for her in the beginning to do this job. But, with her colleagues, she is able to adjust. However, she did not deny the fact that the work is at times stressful and according to her, she has not had any experience of seeking professional help even if she experienced a mild level of distress.

Welfare of the family is very important to her because more than herself being affected, she will have more reason to seek help from a professional once she observes that it is now her family who is being affected. Also, according to her, she can endure other events that can cause her distress, but, in term s of situations that concerns her family, may be, that is the time she cannot learn how to handle properly and will highly consider seeking for help especially that she is close to her family, she thinks that she cannot manage once she lose someone in the family. Another theme that has emerged is self-presentation. Part of the professional experiences of participant B makes her feel the need to always think and consider her image as a counselor and this is part of her affiliation and created social and professional image. She thinks that people expect her to know how to handle distress since she is working as a counselor.

The number of students who need support is a lot more than the number of counselors who can attend to their needs. This is one of the reasons why this profession is not an easy kind of job but this can also be stressful. Personal therapeutic ways can help a counselor lessen the amount of distress she is experiencing. According to Ms. B, self-management skills and self-compassion activities can be of great help such as having a daily journal since writing can be a therapeutic way of releasing negative emotions and experiences. Self-care habits can also help in de-stressing the negativities absorbed from work and the struggles she has from her personal life.

There are factors that can influence our mental well-being positively and negatively. There are risks and protective factors to consider in a person's mental well-being. Risk factors include poverty, discrimination, violence, abuse or neglect, peer rejection and isolation, stressful life events, lack of family support and poor physical health/long-term condition. However, protective factors can include economic security, empowerment, feelings of security, mastery and control, positive interactions with others, physical activity, stable and supportive family environments, healthy diet and lifestyle (Ho et al., 2018).

Over time, experiencing poor mental well-being can contribute to the development of mental health problems such as depression or anxiety. Actions which address the risk factors and support the development of the protective factors highlighted above can make mental health problems less likely to occur (Harris et al., 2016). Moreover, stigma toward persons with mental illness refers to endorsing negative stereotypes and prejudices that reinforce discrimination or unfair behaviors toward the stigmatized. Research has shown that some mental health professionals hold negative attitudes consistent with stigma toward persons with mental illness, although most studies document more positive than negative attitudes on the whole (Asil et al., 2019).

Case # 2

SOP1. Who are the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioner #2

Mr. C is a 33 year old married man with kids and is currently residing in Bayanan, San Pascual, Batangas, is working as a counselor for 12 years in a private institution in Batangas City and her designation is a guidance associate. He is not yet a license guidance counselor but is active in terms of attending seminars, webinars and training.

His role as a counselor and as a father inspires him to stay in this helping profession and always try to be optimistic and hopeful in life. Based on screening, there is an indication of mild level of distress experienced by Mr. C. He is assigned to handle high school students. Aside from their program, paper works also consume most of his time. It is also stressful when tasks are piling up while students' concerns are rising as well.

Nature of the stress of the guidance and counseling practitioner #2

Nature of work of Counseling

According to the participant, his years of working as a counselor leaves enough time for adjustment since he is on the point of being appreciative of the beauty of this profession. Theme 1 was derived from category (1) Job fulfillment and sub category (1) fulfilling yet tiring counseling job (see Appendix C).

A. Job fulfillment

He shared his personal experience which is proof why there is fulfillment even if he is tired working. With years of experience, the participant is able to appreciate the nature of his work as a guidance and counseling practitioner.

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1. Fulfilling yet tiring counseling job

Case 2 shows his realistic understanding of his profession, sharing the ups and downs of working as a counselor. There are times that he is tired because of workload and personal problems, however, there is still satisfaction whenever he works well and is able to help his students with their concerns. He said,

"With my years of working as a counselor, I can say that there are ups and downs in this profession. This work is fulfilling yet tiring especially with the volume of clients I am handling and high school students are in the stage that at my age, I also need to adjust to relate more with their concerns and help them properly."

He also added that, *"This work also gives meaning to you as a person because this career helps you grow, it helps you to be better and determine ways to face your problems, bounce back from your struggles and it also helps you to be happy in providing mental health services to those who are in need of it."*

Based on the study of Williamson et al. (2018), the situation described by case 2 is supported by the demanding nature of counseling work. It mentioned the positive and negative side of the counseling profession which happens for most of the people who choose a counseling career.

Positive work attitude

According to the participant, a positive attitude in this profession is really important because he is dealing with different individuals. He must be open and flexible in responding to the clients demands. Theme 2 was derived from category (1) flexibility on work demands and sub category (1) capability to adjust to different work situations.

A. Flexibility in work demands

According to him, as a responsible counselor, he is focused on learning to be adaptive on the age and needs of the students since he is working in the high school department and their concern revolves on teenage adjustments and many more.

1. Capability to adjust on different work situations

The subject is expressing satisfaction in his career for 12 years in spite being tired with work because he mentioned,

"This work is fulfilling yet tiring especially with the volume of clients I am handling and high school students are in the stage that at my age, I also need to adjust to relate more with their concerns and help them properly."

As an effective counselor, he can find a balance between realism and hope. He set realistic goals that engage the client and inspire a more optimistic outlook. As attainable goals are reached, clients will develop a sense of resilience and confidence that can help in all areas of life. These traits are why positive psychology is such an effective method of improving emotional health.

A good counselor will create a meaningful treatment plan that is individualized for each client. This means the counselor shouldn't follow a rigid schedule of treatment or have a one size fits all approach. It was found that some treatments are better than others for specific types of disorders. Matching the treatment to the client's stage of readiness is the most effective way to implement therapeutic techniques. Additionally, counselors need to be able to adapt and change course if treatment is not working for the client (Madeson, 2020).

Negative effect of Distress

According to the participant, he is aware that due to stress, his eating habits also change. Theme 3 was derived from category (1) changes in eating habits due to stress and sub category (1) stress eating.

A. Changes in Eating Habits due to Stress

Stress can affect a person positively or negatively. According to the participant, stress affects more of his eating habits. Due to stress, there are times that he is able to notice changes in his eating patterns but there are times he is not aware of it.

1. Stress Eating

Because of distress, according to him, there are times that he is eating more than usual. He is also aware of his health importance but he cannot control it sometimes when he engages in stress eating. He said that eating sweets and all he wants gives him a feeling of comfort and for some time, he tends to forget his stress.

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"Because of stress at work, there are times that I eat too much and I know it is not that good on my health considering that as we age, we have to be more careful with the amount of food we eat and the kinds of food because of health concerns."

There is much truth behind the phrase "stress eating." Stress, the hormones it unleashes, and the effects of high-fat, sugary "comfort foods" push people toward overeating. Researchers have linked weight gain to stress, and according to an American Psychological Association (2021) survey, about one-fourth of Americans rate their stress level as 8 or more on a 10-point scale and it really affects their eating habits.
In the short term, stress can shut down appetite. The nervous system sends messages to the adrenal glands atop the kidneys to pump out the hormone epinephrine. Epinephrine helps trigger the body's fight-or-flight response, a revved-up physiological state that temporarily puts eating on hold. But if stress persists, it's a different story. The adrenal glands release another hormone called cortisol, and cortisol increases appetite and may also ramp up motivation in general, including the motivation to eat. Once a stressful episode is over, cortisol levels should fall, but if the stress doesn't go away- or if a person's stress response gets stuck in the "on" position - cortisol may stay elevated.

Nature of the help-seeking behavior of the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioner #2

Awareness of mental health importance

According to participant 2, it is important that a person is aware that mental health is important. He said that if he is in good mental health, he is capable of deciding properly on matters for himself such as being aware when it is time to seek professional support. Theme 4 was derived from category (1) knowledge on advantages of having good mental health and sub category (1) learning the importance of mental health.

A. Knowledge on advantages of having good mental health

Based on the interview, the participant mentioned that working as a guidance and counseling practitioner helps him to widen his understanding about mental health and how to deal with his stressors. Through work experience and personal learning, he is able to have a better understanding and perspective about his profession, about the importance of making yourself efficient as a practitioner for you to be able to help yourself and your clients as well.

1. Learning the importance of mental health

The subject is aware that as a counselor, it is important that he knows how important mental health is. If you are in good mental health, you can make better decisions such as, according to him, determining whether or not to seek professional help.

"Being aware of a good mental health condition is one reason to maintain it. I am aware that if I am in a good condition, I can be better in decision making and other responsibilities."

He added that, *"A good mental health condition helps him be more capable of determining his limits as a person. That is why, he is aware if a situation or an effect of stress needs professional help or he can do something on his own to somehow help himself first."*

Mental health awareness helps to educate the public about mental health but also to reduce the stigma and discrimination that people with mental illness are often subjected to. Many people struggle with mental illness but do not realize it. This means that, although effective medicines and therapies are available, these individuals either do not receive treatment or do not receive it in time. A manner to prevent this, mental health awareness month's goal is to improve knowledge of mental health, their symptoms and treatment options available. Ultimately, healthcare professionals, communities and patients can only make informed decisions if they have the right knowledge and information (Alberts, 2021).

Family welfare

According to participant 2, he is really family oriented and it is his family who inspires him to work well and be able to provide for his family. Theme 5 was derived from category (1) Problems Affecting Self and Family and sub category (1) if a situation is too much and it affects people.

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A. Problems Affecting Self and Family

Based on the interview, he said that when the causes of distress and its impact on him also affects his family, it is the time he will seek professional help without a doubt and he is also thankful that in his profession, he knows professionals who can be asked for help.

1. A situation is too much and it affects people

According to Case 2, more than how distress affects himself, what can encourage him more to seek professional help is when he knows his distress affects the welfare of his loved ones.

"If the situation is too much and it will seriously affect me and my loved ones, I think I will seek professional help."

He explained that, *"Maybe, in order for some people to realize that help is needed in a certain situation or an event that causes you distress, one way is if you get to see your family and those closest to you get involved and have been negatively affected as well."*

Filipinos are known for having strong and close family ties. They place high regard and put importance on their family before anything else. They work all day and do all they can to feed and provide for their family (Goyala, 2019).

Advantage of Working as a Counselor

Participant 2 shares advantages of working as a counselor such as what he is observing around him that mental health professionals are always willing to help and there are people who are working in the same profession who are very willing to help or support his or her colleagues.

A. Accessibility of Professionals for Help-seeking

According to him, working as a counselor gives opportunities to meet and be helped by different professionals and also learn from them.

1. Access to support

Working as a counselor for almost 12 years is a big part of the counseling profession journey of the participant. Aside from personal matters that he considered as one of the causes of stress, it is the nature of his work that demands a lot of energy and optimism to be able to help clients, especially students. Because of his work as a counselor, he is aware that mental health is important and that professionals who can help people with mental health related concerns are available. He knows that when he is really in a high level of distress, there are colleagues who can help him. But, because of his wife's help, he has not had any help seeking experience with a professional. Instead of holding everything to him, he talks to his wife and tells her his worries. And also, in terms of his job, he always encourages students to seek help but he is not really considering seeking professional help due to stress because he always makes sure to open up to his wife or colleagues. He added,

"Because of my work as a counselor, and having a co-worker with a professional and a licensed guidance counselor, it makes me feel comfortable that I know, if ever I need to talk to them, they are always available and just around the corner of the school."

Lack of help seeking experience or personal therapy

Participant 2 does not have any experience of help seeking since according to him instead of considering this is that every time he has problems, he talks to his wife instead. Theme 7 was derived from category (1) without experience of asking professional support and sub category (1) no actual personal experience with asking for help from colleagues.

A. Without experience of asking professional support

Based on the interview, he did not resort to seeking help because most of the time, if he is in distress, he looks for people whom he can talk to and be his support during difficult and stressful moments.

1. No actual personal experience with asking for help from colleagues

Case 2 does not have an experience of seeking professional help because luckily he is able to find ways to manage distress and help himself. However, according to him, he is aware of his advantage in working in this job because there is an access to his colleagues on whom he can open up his problems that causes him distress.

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"As of the moment, I still do not have personal experience in seeking professional help. Maybe a small talk on other concerns with the co-workers (Registered Guidance Counselors), and concerns of the students and parents."

Self-Compassion Activities

Based on the sharing of experiences of participant 2, he said that compassionate things that he can do for himself includes talking to others especially to his wife because it is a form of self-expression instead of keeping it alone with yourself. Theme 8 was derived from category (1) seeking for social support and sub category (1) talking to significant others.

A. Seeking social support

Participant 2 added that his wife is his main support and if he needs other people to talk to, he believes that he has good people in their workplace on which he can easily open up and ask for professional help.

1. Talking to Significant Other

Seeking for social support includes talking to significant others because talking is a way to express ourselves. Self-compassion activities include activities that promote understanding and empathy. But as a counselor, this is not only needed for the clients but counselors need to be emphatic and understanding of them as well. For you to be emphatic and genuine to other people, you need to give it to yourself first. Participant 2 noted during the interview the importance of the role of his wife and other significant others of a person during the times one feel distress,

"Whenever I feel distressed, the first thing I do is to talk to my wife. Sometimes, she gives me advice that makes me feel relieved and light."

More so, mutually emphatic relationships are those in which there is non-judgment, openness, and willingness on each person's part to show vulnerability and share how they are affected and influenced by others. In this respect, when students are able to engage in mindfulness and self-kindness they are more effective helping their clients to do the same. When counselors model awareness of feelings and self-acceptance, they enhance the therapeutic connection with their clients. Practicing self-compassion should consequently allow one to engage in activities that promote one's sense of well-being. In fact, it is noted that self-compassion may give rise to enhanced stress coping by appropriately identifying emotions, and expressing them in a healthy manner. Instilling this skill set in counseling students at the beginning of their careers could be life-changing (Nelson et al., 2017).

Summary of Case 2

Counselor 2 has been working as a guidance counselor for almost 12 years and a lot has happened in his career - from learning the basics of counseling to finding this career as a noble profession. For almost 12 years, the counseling profession became a mixture of satisfaction of career to frustrations from both personal and professional expectations. Themes that have emerged from how personal and professional experiences influence help seeking behavior of this participant when he is in distress includes self-care consideration, social support and connection, self-management skills and self-compassion activities.

According to Sir C, it is to his advantage to be in the guidance and counseling profession because it gives him access to people he can ask for help when he needs it. When you know yourself, you make better decisions and you can decide if what you are dealing with is still tolerable or too much for you to handle and you need to ask for professional help or at least consider seeking help.

Sir C usually talks to his wife about anything or to his colleagues on what is bothering him. This is what helps him a lot according to Sir C, his wife and his ideas or support helps him feel better and think better. Companionship is best when given by people who you really trust and you know is genuine to you and listen without judgment.

There are potential benefits of therapists having lived experience with mental illness, apart from whether it is disclosed to the client. Although it is true that being impaired may negatively impact one's ability to provide quality therapy, a history of recovery from mental illness may be an on-the-job asset. Self-awareness and actively working on one's own recovery, either individually or in therapy may put therapists in a better position to understand their clients' experiences and promote their healing. Mental health professionals themselves report that their lived experience makes them more able to empathize with the situations of their clients (Boyd, Zeiss, et al., 2016) and is a driving force behind their passion to help others.

At the same time, mental illness on the part of mental health professionals can hinder them from practicing their profession and giving competent care to their clients. Mental illnesses affect mental health professionals just as they do the general population. Stigma among mental health professionals toward people with mental illness is

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similar to, if not worse than, stigma in the general public. Moreover, stigma can discourage mental health professionals with mental illness from seeking treatment—treatment that could alleviate their problems and possibly even benefit their clients indirectly because one's healing journey can fuel someone else capacity to risk to trust themselves and their ability to recover and heal themselves as well (De Vos et al., 2016).

With that being said, there is significant support for the beneficial effects of self-care practice such as help seeking to help oneself in the reduction of negative outcomes such as emotional distress, anxiety, depression and compassion fatigue for mental health practitioners. While a lack of self-care is related to higher levels of burnout and secondary traumatic stress symptoms, a greater risk of health status decline, and the experience of stress (Butler et al. 2017;Santana and Fouad 2017), engagement in self-care is associated with greater well-being (Colman et al. 2016), lower levels of stress and negative affect, higher levels of positive affect, flourishing, self-rated academic, and clinical performance (Zahniser et al. 2017), compassion satisfaction (Butler et al. 2017), and quality of life.

Case # 3

Profile of the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioner #3

Miss R is 43 years old, married with kids and is currently residing in San Pascual, Batangas, is working as a counselor for more than 2 years in a private institution in Batangas and her designation is institutional head of the guidance office. She is a licensed guidance counselor for years and is happy and fulfilled with her profession. Based on screening, there is an indication of a mild level of distress experienced by Ms. R. She works in a private institution and is handling guidance counselors in the whole institution which, according to her, consume most of her time. There are times she feels guilty because of more time with work than with her family. However, as much as possible, she is trying to find a way and time to bind with her family especially if work and the things she needs to do at home are already too draining since because of her work, sometimes, she had mood swings which she knows affect her family in the sense that being irritable makes her less appreciative of his family's presence and support.

Nature of the stress of the guidance and counseling practitioner #3

Nature of Work of Counseling

Based on participant 3, she described the nature of her work as stressful because she supervises her colleagues. It is not her sole source of stress but the pressure that comes with her responsibilities adds up on the stress. Theme 1 was derived from category (1) A. disadvantage of working as a counselor and sub category (1) counselors work struggles.

A. Disadvantage of working as a counselor

Participant 3 mentioned that as a mother, there are times it is hard to find balance between your work and your time that must be spent with your family. Your work as their superior demands a lot of your time because you need to deal with the students and supervise your colleagues as well.

1. Counselors work struggles

According to Case 3, she is in between appreciation of the nature of counseling and the help she is able to extend to the students. However, part of this tedious work includes a lot of sacrifices such as time for the family, time for yourself and many more. She said,

"My main stressors so far are the challenges and difficulty of the counseling profession. Even if counseling is a satisfying job, still, its nature includes stress as well because I am supervising my colleagues, I am juggling at work and I am also dealing with our clients or the students."

She acknowledges the positive side of her work, but she is honest with its demands. According to an article from Bradley University (n.d), counselors must be prepared with strategies to preserve the well-being of their own mental and physical health. It's important to remember that counselors are people with families, mortgages and even struggles of their own. Counselors need to make time for their own personal lives and achieve a measure of work-life balance that enables working counselors to maintain a successful clinical life and a healthy home life.

Achieving balance is easier said than done in many respects. Counselors feel a deep sense of duty and professional responsibility to their clients, and even the best-laid plans for leisure time or to reflect may be interrupted or hard to keep. Still, counselors have ways to practice the same habits and activities they'd recommend to clients. It may take time to balance the scales of professional and personal life, so the important thing is to keep

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at it and always be honest with you.

Positive Work Attitude

The participant mentioned that she developed a positive work attitude through time and handling diverse types of students and learned to adjust dealing with them. Theme 2 was derived from category (1) optimism about work and sub category (1) still satisfied about work.

A. Optimism about work

According to participant 3, through the years of working as a counselor, it made her see the good and appreciate how this profession made her able to help other people especially the students in their different areas of concern.

1. Still Satisfied about work

Case 3 mentioned that even if her job to mentor her colleagues while attending the needs of students is tiring, still, there is a satisfaction achieved in this career. She mentioned,

"Counseling is a satisfying job." This is probably because the opportunity to help students gives meaning and purpose on the part of the guidance and counseling practitioner.

According to Ikon Institute of Australia (2022), everyone has problems that they need to learn to overcome in their everyday lives, and counselors provide valuable assistance to those in emotional need. When stress occurs in life, people often elect to speak to a counseling practitioner to give them direction, support and guidance. You will be doing meaningful work and given real tools, to help real people in a real world.

Challenges of Multiple Roles and Tasks

Based on her experience, since she is a working mom and her work demands a lot of time, it is also difficult to balance all of the roles you have to fulfill. Theme 3 was derived from category (1) sources of pressure from personal and work life and sub category (1) balancing between work and personal values.

A. Sources of pressure from personal and work life

Based on the responses of participant 3, in terms of discussion of work as an employee, it differs when the discussion refers to a working parent since apart from the role at work; there is also a role at home that must be learned to be fulfilled with less pressure and stress.

1. Balancing between work and personal values

According to participant 3, she really worked hard for what she has now, be it in her profession or in her personal life and there is the pressure to always give your best in everything that you do for your family and for your career.

"I am supervising my colleagues, I am juggling at work and I am also dealing with our clients or the students."

The participant noted during the interview that *"It is a challenge for a mom like her to learn to balance work and motherhood. It is not an overnight thing to figure out because it takes a lot of consideration, support and trials if this way can work or not."*

According to Carolina Counseling Services (n.d), balancing work and family are very challenging responsibilities, especially for moms. Doing so can bring in a lot of difficulties into a marriage and to parenting. Unfortunately, juggling motherhood and work aren't something that all women can avoid. Seeking a job or career to keep the family financially afloat and sustaining one's personal growth and ambition to fulfill an emotional need are common reasons why women must juggle the two acts.

There are benefits when you work or maintain a career, but that can also mean a trade off. With all the responsibilities you have at home, including raising your children, which can go beyond toiling domestic work, the chance of becoming overwhelmed is high. Many unforeseen events can complicate your life, difficulties in the life of a child, a job promotion entailing new tasks, etc. Caught in this situation, juggling the two roles can cause you to wonder: how to do both without succumbing to overwhelm.

Negative Effects of Distress

According to participant 3, she experiences the effects of distress which becomes negative most of the time because of mood swings and it is unusual for her. Themes emerged from category (1) emotional or mood problems and sub category (1) impact of distress on emotional aspects.

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A. Emotional or Mood Problems

The participant mentioned that there are times she easily gets irritated or short tempered due to different tasks that need to be accomplished. Before, she is always calm and it worries her that distress affects her negatively.

1. Impact of Distress on emotional aspect

Case 3 experiences times in a week that she is having mood swings at home and at work. For her, this is not her usual mood; especially that she always wants to be calm to her family members and her colleagues. She said,

"Distress makes me have mood swings and it sometimes affects me at home and at school."

She added that, *"Due to stress, I have been more irritable and it happens both at home and at work. There are times when I become aware of that, but there are times that I am not aware of it and there are some people who inform me about it in a nice way."*

In relation to her situation and how distress affects her, stress can affect all parts of your life, including your emotions, behaviors, thinking ability, and physical health. No part of the body is immune. But, because people handle stress differently, symptoms of stress can vary. Symptoms can be vague and may be the same as those caused by medical conditions. So it is important to discuss them with your doctor. You may have any of the following symptoms of stress. Emotional symptoms of stress include becoming easily agitated, frustrated, and moody, feeling overwhelmed, as if you are losing control or need to take control and having a hard time relaxing and quieting your mind.

Nature of the help-seeking behavior of the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioner #3

Self-Presentation

Participant 3 shared during the interview that according to her experience and position, people expect her to know how to handle almost everything. It is hard to have expectations from people because sometimes you are being limited in expressing your stress and your emotions (see Appendix F).

A. Self-Expectations

She added that the expectations are sometimes self-expectations and others expectations. This is because of those times she put pressure to herself as someone with more experience in this profession, she thinks that she must always know how to cope up, deal with stressors and manage personal issues because her colleagues look up to her and also learn from her that is why there is pressure on her part that sometimes are from other people yet most of the time is from her mind.

1. Expectations that some people should be able to handle their own behavioral or emotional challenges

Changes on emotional and behavioral responses to situations are being experienced by participant 3. According to her, she also worries how she is affecting her colleagues and family members.

Case 3 mentioned that because of the training and seminars she has attended, she thinks that there is this certain image she must maintain such as her capability of handling situations all the time because she is a counselor, she must always know what to do since people are going to her for help. She added,

"*There is this thought that as a counselor, I expect myself to be someone that must know how to deal with the behavior because you have been into training and seminars already."*

Sometimes, this belief that there is a need to maintain a strong image as a counselor, it adds up on the pressure and stress she is experiencing. There are times she is thinking if there is something wrong with accepting she is just a human with weaknesses and limitations as well.

Empathy and Altruism

As a counselor, she mentioned that she is more emphatic and altruistic for others such as her clients than thinking of her own mental health. Theme 6 was derived from category (1) understanding their actual situation and mental health struggle and sub category (1) helping others who need to have access to counseling.

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A. Understanding their actual situation and mental health struggle

For participant 5, she is more focused on dealing with the needs of the students than on her personal needs such as considering her mental health when she is in distress.

1. Helping others who needs to have access to counseling

According to her, handling high school students demands a lot of time. One of the characteristics of an efficient counselor is that she is emphatic and altruistic. It is also important that a counselor has self-awareness and social awareness to determine the situation and needs of her clients. As counselors, we ask many of our clients in the process of therapy. We entreat them to sit with a stranger and, over time, reveal themselves, explore difficult emotions, and strive for self-awareness and work to transfer what they have learned to their lives outside the consulting room. This is a demanding, courageous act. Even if a counselor feels mentally well-balanced, through personal therapy he or she will still learn what it feels like to sit across from a counselor and to be understood or, just as valuable, to be misunderstood) by a counselor. Whatever the extent of the counselor's personal issues, the experience of being a client forms an authentic, indelible client perspective in the novice counselor's mind that balances and augments the counselor-centric perspective. Participant 3 cited,

"I seek professional help for the students, to assist them in their concerns because I know how it feels to keep things by you alone."

She added that *"There are times that I fail to reflect on myself if I am too tired or stressed because I am always focusing on the needs of others."*

Lack of help seeking experience or personal therapy

Participant 3 does not have an actual experience of seeking professional help because according to her, she is the one who seeks professional support for their students. Theme 7 was derived from category (1) without help seeking experience of asking for professional support or personal therapy and sub category (1) without experience of looking for professional support.

A. Without help seeking experience of asking for professional support or personal therapy

According to her, her focus is doing her job that is why she did not reach the point of asking for help for herself even if there are times she is really stressed.

1. Without experience on looking for professional support

Additionally, she added that even if she experiences distress, she did not reach the point of having an alarming level of stress. According to the National Mental Health Survey of India, common mental disorders like depression and anxiety are prevalent and burdensome, affecting 10% of the population. Barriers that prevent people from seeking help for mental health concerns are manifold. Broadly, these include stigma-related, attitudinal, and instrumental barriers. Some specific barriers to professional help-seeking for mental health concerns include stigma, unavailability of resources to seek help, lack of awareness about mental health or how to seek help, lack of support from others to seek help, and fear about the intervention or treatment. Some of the other, albeit infrequently reported, barriers include financial and time constraints and fears about the side effects of medication. Participant 3 noted that,

"Luckily until now I manage to be well and don't have any experience regarding seeking help for professional help."

She added that,

"With her learning from seminars and training, she is able to apply it every time she encounters something difficult."

Possible lack of support

Based on the interview, the participant said that due to her position, there is this fear that she will be questioned or it can also be possible that people will criticize or will not understand her situations.

A. Possible lack of understanding and discrimination from family

There are instances that she fears that she will be discriminated against because of her possible inability to handle sources of stress.

1. Fear of Stigma

She is honest with her thought that if she seeks help because of her mood swings and stress, others might see it as a way to question her credibility in doing her job. She is afraid that others might not support and understand her.

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"Fear or distrust of one's integrity or credibility that no one will support or believe in them anymore."

Family Welfare

Participant 3 is also concerned about her family welfare. Even if she is focused on helping her students, she is sensitive in terms of her family. She knows if her family is affected because of her distress, she will instantly seek help. Theme 9 was derived from category (1) concern about Welfare of the Family and sub category (1) possible negative experience of effect on family members.

A. Concern about Welfare of the Family

Based on the interview, participant 3 mentioned that family comes first. This is the reason why she is also open to the possibility of seeking professional help. She said that if her own distress affects her family already, she will step up and personally seek for other mental health professionals to help her.

1. Possible negative experience of effect on family members

Participant 3 places value on the welfare of her family. She considers seeking help if she knows that her family is already affected negatively.

According to the study conducted, Filipino employees place high value on their family and use them as a motivation to work harder and consider taking care of them if they know in the end they might end up leaving their family because they are no longer capable of helping them because of being dysfunctional in some aspects of their lives. She cited,

"If my family is affected already I will consider seeking professional help."

She added that, "If a family member is also affected by what causes her distress, she will probably seek help because her family is her top priority."

Self-Compassion Activities

Based on the interview, participant 3 said that there are relaxing activities she is doing and application of things she learned from training and experience at work. Theme 10 was derived from category (1) engaging in relaxing activity (2) mindfulness and use of CBT Techniques and sub category (1) finding temporary relief (2) application and use of mindfulness activities and CBT Techniques.

A. Engaging in Relaxing Activity

According to her, she engaged herself in relaxing activities such as reading books, cooking their favorite dish and gardening. It gives her comfort and a chance to rest her mind from stress.

B. Mindfulness and Use of CBT Techniques

Mindfulness tasks are helpful to the participant because she is able to relax and process her distress from time to time.

1. Finding temporary relief

The participant mentioned that going out with her partner for a quick break helps relieve stress.

2. Application and use of mindfulness activities and CBT Techniques

Usually, the participant asks her husband for a trip with nature to unwind and relax or just watch Television shows to de-stress herself from work and personal worries. Watching her favorite shows, movies and series comforts her as it somehow distracts her from her stress and tired mind and body. A moment with nature also helps her a lot because nature or a road trip is very therapeutic and a chance to bond with her husband or with her family and enjoy their company. She cited,

"*I usually watch television or I would request my husband for a road trip just outside Batangas."*

Also, practitioners who reappraise events report more positive and less negative emotions as well as better interpersonal functioning. In addition, psychologists and post-graduate psychologist trainees who hold an attitude of self-compassion report fewer difficulties in emotion regulation. Having an attitude of self-compassion and acceptance helps therapists to recognize and address their professional limitations (Miller & Sprang, 2017).

Summary of Case 3

Based on the data gathered, counselor 3 is mostly considering work and social or familial considerations before seeking help. She is also concerned with her image as a counselor and the expectations of the people that a

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counselor knows how to handle every situation and all emotions they feel. Also, she is more on being altruistic and extending empathy to clients than herself. She is busy attending to the needs of the clients more than thinking of the causes of her distress, the level of distress she is experiencing and a lot more.

According to the study of Johnson et al., 2020, situational barriers, fear about social consequences, and doubts about the nature of treatment were the top three barriers why mental health professionals do not consider seeking help regarding their mental welfare and overall mental health.

Counselors also deal with moments of peaks and valleys in their lives, experiencing births and deaths, joys and sorrows, wins and losses, and having some emotional care is always seen as helpful. In recent times, there has been a surge in the need for mental health counseling. Going through difficult times and seeking help should be normalized especially these days with the increasing number of counselors or professionals going through emotional problems. A study found out that 81 percent of the studied psychologists had a diagnosable psychiatric disorder. Therapists are known as wounded healers. The most common question asked by patients is if the therapist has undergone a therapeutic experience (Negash et al., 2020).

Case # 4
Profile of the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioner

Miss B, 25 years old and currently residing in Laguna, Batangas, is working as a counselor for 3 years in a private institution in Laguna and her designation is a guidance coordinator. She is an eldest daughter who helps her parents in sending her siblings to school. Based on screening, there is an indication of a mild level of distress experienced by Ms. KP.

According to her, work and personal stuff are the common cause of her stress but with her optimism and emotional support she is receiving from work and her family, she finds a way to deal with her negative experiences and emotions. Anyone can go through difficulties just like her but they handle each situation differently, she added. She is currently working in a private institution and handling high school students.

Nature of the stress of the guidance and counseling practitioner
Financial Matters

Participant 4 experienced financial struggles especially in her first year of working on this job. It is because of her expenses and the whole budgeting to finance all their expenses. Theme 1 was derived from category (1) managing finances and sub category (1) budgeting income.

A. Managing finances

The small salary she is receiving is hard to budget because of the high cost of living and the pressure to provide more for the family.

1. Budgeting income

According to the subject, as the breadwinner, it is difficult to manage finances because she is also helping with the expenses at home. There is no hard feeling with that, however, there are times that the pressure to provide gives her a headache. She wants to help her family financially, but her salary is not big enough to freely do that and achieve her other goals as well. She mentioned,

"I am usually stressed about my salary since it is only enough for the expenses, I cannot have extra funds for my other plans such as taking Masteral."

Nature of Counseling Work

According to participant 4, she described counseling work as fulfilling yet also tiring because of the ratio of students she is handling. Since she works in a small private school, they have limited employees in their department to cater the growing population of their students. Theme 2 was derived from category (1) fulfilling yet tiring job and sub category (1) too much workload.

A. Fulfilling yet tiring job

The participant said during the interview that she is happy with her work especially if the volume of students is just enough to her capacity to entertain.

1. Too much workload

Based on counselor 4, the workload she had is stressful and is somehow under compensated if she will compare the amount of work she does with that of how much she is being paid. On the other hand, she added,

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that she is aware that this is how it goes for most of the private institutions. This is her first job and she is somewhat pressured to take a master's degree to be more capable of doing her job.

"Also, the job as a counselor handling many students and the workload in general is a bit tiring and stressful."

Negative effect of Distress

Participant 4 experiences negative effects of stress such as changes in appetite and mood related concerns. According to her, she is not really someone who is easily irritated because she is really patient even if she wants to get mad or irritated, she will choose not to make her frustrations a big deal. Theme 3 was derived from category (1) changes in eating habits due to stress and (2) emotional or mood problems and sub category (1) stress eating and (2) mood swings and irritation.

A. Changes in eating habits due to stress

There are times that because of her stress, she tends to either eat a lot or not eat at all because she has poor appetite. She also added that stress eating is really literally a source of stress because she is weight conscious.

B. Emotional or Mood Problem

There are times that she is really easily irritable which are not normal on her because she is a calm person. According to her, she is not like this when she is not in distress.

1. Stress Eating

Changes in her appetite is experienced by the client due to stress and pressure. There are times that she find it alarming because she is concern about her health.

2. Mood swings and irritation

Participant 4 tends to experience negative effects of distress such as changes in her eating habits and mood swings as well. She is more irritable than usual. She tends to eat more than her usual appetite. And it stresses her more because she is weight conscious. The subject cited,

"Due to stress, I tend to eat more and have mood swings. I get more irritable than usual. "

According to the study of an article on Harvard Health Publishing (n.d), Stress also seems to affect food preferences. Numerous studies - granted many of them in animals - have shown that physical or emotional distress increases the intake of food high in fat, sugar, or both. High cortisol levels, in combination with high insulin levels, may be responsible. Other research suggests that ghrelin, a "hunger hormone," may have a role.

Nature of the help-seeking behavior of the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioner #4

Awareness of mental health importance

Participant 4 mentioned that it is important to her that she is aware of mental health importance because she will know when to seek help. Theme 4 was derived from category (1) positive Emotional and Social Help seeking Experience and sub category (2) considering Help seeking if needed.

A. Positive Emotional and Social Help seeking Experience

According to the participant during the interview, even if she has no experience of seeking help professionally, still, because of her positive observations on people who seek help, she is hopeful that when she is in need of help, she can also seek it and be helped properly without judgment.

1. Considering Help Seeking if Needed

As a counselor, participant 4 is aware of the importance of seeking professional help since she is just a human being with limitations and she said that she also gets tired not only physically but emotionally.

"I think there is no reason that could hinder me from seeking professional help if I am already experiencing distress, especially if it is already affecting my job and other people around me. Being a counselor I know in myself that I am not a superhero, I am still a human being that gets tired and drained not just physically but also emotionally because my mental health as a counselor is very important."

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Openness in seeking help

Based on the interview, participant 4 is open to seeking a professional because for her there is no shame in reaching out. It is normal for people to reach certain limitations. Theme 5 was derived from category (1) positive mindset about help seeking to professionals and sub category (1) highlighting benefits of help seeking.

A. Positive mindset about help seeking to professionals

According to her, the positive observations she had contributes to her positive mindset of help-seeking.

1. Highlighting benefits of help seeking

Based on the interview, she said that even if she has not experienced seeking professional help before, she is open about it especially if distress is affecting her job performance and interpersonal relationships. The participant added,

"I think there is no reason that could hinder me from seeking professional help if I am already experiencing distress especially if it is already affecting my job and other people around me."

As a counselor without an experience of seeking professional help or even personal therapy, she is open with the idea that given an opportunity, she will be willing to undergo personal therapy and ask for professional support when her level of distress causes a significant interference in her life in general. The participant noted that,

"Being a counselor, if in the future I would seek professional help I think the accessibility would be easy knowing that we are already in the helping profession and already know many professionals who can help us in our field but seeking professional help for sure would be not that easy. It is easy to say to others to seek professional help because we are not in their shoes but I think if I am in their situation and knowing that I am also in the helping profession myself it would be hard for me. Because as a human we would think of the judgment of other people but if I will be in this situation in the future even if it is hard I would ease to seek help for myself, for my family and for those people."

It is actually a good thing that stigma about help seeking is continuously becoming a thing in the past. People nowadays are starting to be open to help seeking such as in the case of participant 4. This is supported by the study of Erin (2019), it was mentioned that negative societal perceptions can discourage people from speaking openly about their mental health. This leaves many people feeling as though they are to blame for struggling with their mental health or mental fitness. But the tides have turned over the last decade. Much of the world is taking progressive steps toward ending mental health stigmas. While more people are given the tools and support they need to manage these conditions. This is reducing workplace discrimination and opening up new conversations about mental health. In turn, this has decreased the stigma associated with seeking help for depression, anxiety, and other conditions.

Family Welfare

According to participant 4, her family comes first. That is why she thinks that what can motivate her to seek help is if her distress affects her family. If she will reach that extent, she will immediately ask for professional help. Theme 6 was derived from category (1) Concern about welfare of the family and sub category (1) consideration of family members if they are being affected and will push her to seek help.

A. Concern about welfare of family

Participant 4 is mostly concerned more on family welfare than herself. For her, it will push her more to seek help if significant others are affected by her distress.

1. Consideration of family members if they are being affected and will push her to seek help

According to the participant, she will only consider seeking professional help if her family and colleagues have been negatively affected by her own distress. She added that she does not ever want to be a burden to anyone, especially to her significant others. She mentioned that,

"The reasons that will push me to seek professional help if I am experiencing distress are my family and my fellows. I don't want to be a burden to them and I really wanted to help more people, I think those were also the reasons that will push me to seek professional help."

Based on the study of Martinez et al (2019), it was cited that Filipinos' strong ties and valuing of family as motivators for help seeking.

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Self-Presentation

Participant 4 said during the interview that she is particular on the pressure to maintain a good image as a counselor because as a young counselor, she did not want people to question her because she might feel down about herself especially that she is not and RGC and not yet starting her master's degree. Theme 7 was derived from category (1) need to maintain good image as a counselor and sub category (1) maintenance of good image as a counselor.

A. Need to maintain good image as a counselor

For someone like her, she mentioned, it is very important that there will be instances that people can find lapses on her part as a counselor because she does not want people to think that she is incompetent because she did not have a license.

1. Maintenance of good image as a counselor

She always says during the interview that since she is just starting to establish her career, she is very careful with her image as a counselor. She needs to maintain a positive image as a counselor who knows how to handle difficulties and negative emotions. She cited,

"As a counselor it influences my help seeking since I want to maintain a positive image of myself as someone in the counseling profession."

She added "without the actual license, there is more pressure on my part to create and maintain a certain image to people especially to our clients that I can handle my own problems, I should know how to do this and that and that is where working in this is also difficult."

An article from Silver Oak Health (2019) mentioned that one of the primary barriers to improving access to mental health care in India seems to be the stigma attached to accessing professional help, such as going to a therapist or psychiatrist. We seem to be afraid to accept and seek help when we are unable to handle our distress. Counselors and other mental health professionals are careful to establish and maintain a certain strong image of themselves as clients look up to them.

Lack of help seeking experience or personal therapy

Based on the interview, participant 4 shared that she has no help seeking experience because her level of distress is still manageable and there is no time for her to try or do it.

A. Without personal experience on seeking help or personal therapy

According to her, she has no experience in personal therapy even before until now. This is because there are no circumstances that lead to a need to actually seek for help from which self-help techniques could no longer be of help.

1. No experience in professional help seeking

Participant 4 did not ever have a history of professional help seeking, however, she is open with the idea of considering it if her situation asks her to since she knows that she needs to maintain a good mental health for her to productively do her job and help students.

"Luckily until now I manage to be well and don't have any experience regarding seeking help for professional help."

She added "I am always trying my best to apply what I have learned from my personal and professional experiences such as what has been taught in seminars and training or how I have handled previous situations and the like."

According to the study of Samuel and Kamenetsky (2022), to manage stress and address mental health concerns, many students rely on informal sources of social support, who are, in general, not formally trained in providing mental health support. These sources may include family members and friends instead of seeking for actual professional support.

Self-Compassion Activities

According to her, when she is experiencing distress, she tries to find time to do relaxing tasks such as watching movies, going out and embracing positivity and hope through reflecting on what happened to her stressors and how she responded to situations like that. Theme 9 was derived from categories (1) engaging in

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relaxing activities and (2) embracing positivity and hope and subcategories (1) finding temporary relief and (2) acknowledging weaknesses and flaws while promoting positivity and hope.

A. Engaging in Relaxing Activities

Based on the interview, participant 4 mentioned that relaxing things is very helpful to her mental health because this is a way of escaping from stress and a way to relax her mind from negativities.

B. Embracing Positivity and Hope

Every time she thinks of what causes her stress, she still practices optimism and hopes that eventually, things will get better and that she hopes that she can later on determine how to respond properly to what causes her distress.

1. Finding temporary relief

The participant said that a road trip and quality a conversation with her husband makes her feel relaxed, comfortable and happy. Time well spent with his significant other helps her think clearly and determine what to do with his problems or stressors.

2. Acknowledging weaknesses and flaws while promoting positivity and hope

She mentioned the importance of self-help and ways of self-compassion activities that help her cope up with the stressful nature of work and handling personal stressors. She mentioned that,

"Every time I feel distressed I usually have a cup of black coffee and just listen to pop music."

She added, drinking coffee is de-stressing and it makes her heart happy. It helps in making her mind clear and free from worries for some time."

Summary of Case 4

Counselor 4 is reluctant to seek personal therapy, worried that it indicates they are less capable or flawed as helpers. We should consider the message this double standard sends to our clients and the public. In the September (2019), new perspectives column in Counseling Today, clinician Jason King said that if we refuse to participate in the services for which we advocate and base our career, what example are we setting for society and those marginalized then we are covertly reinforcing the shame and stigma associated with our profession.

The experience of personal therapy for novice counselors benefits not only the clinical dyad but also the profession overall because it decreases the stigma of therapy. Emphasizing personal therapy in the educational process would, early in counselors' careers, instill therapy as an accepted mental hygiene option, thus normalizing it, encouraging them to view it as another available tool and teaching them not to negatively judge its use by other counselors.

It was mentioned that there are over 5,398 open positions for the profession, but only 20% have been filled, citing low compensation as the primary reason. Now, with the COVID-19 pandemic rising and online education in play, DepEd has recognized the need for guidance counselors and, as a result, has partnered with different organizations to help address the need for psychosocial support among students and teachers. However, the reasons that hinder the rate of engagement, satisfaction, and well-being among guidance counselors remain (Magsambol & Chi, 2020).

According to Fuller (2022), there are also experiences about burnout and compassion fatigue which are two common underlying reasons why healthcare professionals including mental health professionals, have high rates of mental health disorders. However, these numbers are highly varied because most healthcare practitioners, including mental health professionals, are not comfortable disclosing their signs and symptoms out of fear they will be shamed or judged or potentially lose their license to practice.

Thus, mental health research and evaluation not only reveals mental health trends but also informs us about how to best promote mental health in different racial, specialized and ethnic populations. Stigma is also associated with experiences of mental health practitioners who are dealing with battles about their mental health as well and are doing their best in healing themselves so that they will be competent enough to help heal other people. Data aids us in understanding whether the mental health services and resources that are available meet mental health needs. Research establishes evidence for the effectiveness of public health policies and programs. Mental health research and evaluation help develop evidence for the effectiveness of healthcare policies and strategies as well as mental health promotion programs (Mehta et al., 2020).

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Case # 5
Profile of the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioner #5

Miss MA, 56 years old, widow and currently residing in Cavite, is working as a counselor in a private institution in Cavite for 13 years. She is not yet a licensed guidance counselor and is focusing on training and seminars since for her she is old to take the exam. Based on screening, there is an indication of a mild level of distress experienced by Ms. MA. Before, when she was not a counselor yet, she can still remember the time she asked for professional help and consulted about her marital problems. But since the time she lost her husband, it is work and personal matters that probably cause her distress. It is quite hard to live without your husband supporting you. Even if they had problems before, they were able to fix it back then and strengthen their bond as a couple and losing him makes facing battles difficult because you have to face it alone. She is working in a private institution and is assigned to several college departments. The overall job of a counselor and personal roles sometimes causes double burden and stress on her mental health especially that she is now a widow and she do tasks alone, she takes care of her children alone who have not had a family of their own is still partly dependent on her adding to the work tasks that are sometimes a lot.

Nature of the stress of the guidance and counseling practitioner #5

Challenges of Multiple Roles and Tasks

Multiple tasks or roles in life are stressful according to participant 5. Dealing with the roles of being a mother and an employee is hard at times. Theme 1 was derived from category (1) struggle of multiple roles in life and sub category (1) juggling at work and the stress it causes and (2) struggle of multiple roles in life.

A. Struggle of multiple roles in life

As a mother, struggles about her career and as a mom is difficult because since her husband died, she takes care of almost everything on her own.

1. Juggling at work and the stress it causes
2. Struggle of multiple roles in life

Based on the interview, participant 5 shared that it is difficult to be a solo parent. It is hard to handle everything all at once at home while thinking of all the work tasks she needs to do.

"I get stressed over all the tasks I need to do at work and at home. It is somehow hard to balance both personal and professional tasks."

In line with the experience of how distress affects participant 5, it is found out that despite the growing prominence in the workforce, working mothers are still found to be juggling hard between work and family responsibilities with their increasing share of dilemmas and disparities. The major findings of the survey highlighted that working mothers are mostly stressed with their primary responsibility of motherhood to the extent of forgetting one's own well-being and physical health. (Tripathi et al., 2019).

Negative effect of distress

Participant 5 shared that distress causes her to have negative psychological concerns such as changes in her mood, not being able to function properly at home and at work, that is why, these effects pushed her to seek help. Theme 2 was derived from category (1) negative Psychological effect of Distress to a Person's Functioning and subcategories (1) effect of marital problem on overall health and (2) effect on eating habits and mood.

A. Negative Psychological effect of Distress to a Person's Functioning
1. Effect of marital problem o overall health
2. Effect on eating habits and mood

Due to different stressors experienced by participant 5, she had difficulty falling and maintaining her sleep. There are nights that it gets more difficult than the previous nights. There are days of either eating too much or not eating at all. Even her work is also affected at that time since she cannot focus because instead of putting all of her attention to work, she keeps on being preoccupied with her problematic marriage. She said that,

"Due to stress, especially before we experienced marital problems, I can still remember that I had sleep disturbances, I had poor appetite and cannot focus my attention on my tasks because of what is going through in our marriage."

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This is supported by Wilson (2019), from which it mentioned that high levels of stress impair sleep by prolonging how long it takes to fall asleep and fragmenting sleep. Sleep loss triggers our body's stress response system, leading to an elevation in stress hormones, namely cortisol, which further disrupts sleep.

Nature of the help-seeking behavior of the mildly distressed guidance and counseling practitioner #5

Possible lack of support

Based on the interview, participant 5 is slightly concerned about others who will know that once in her life, she asked for professional help. Theme 3 was derived from category (1) fear of Perceived Inefficiency and sub category (1) worried of judgment.

A. Fear of Perceived Inefficiency

Based on the interview, she is hesitant to reach out or seek professional help because she is thinking of her image as a guidance and counseling practitioner. She did not want people to think that she is inefficient to do her job well.

1. Worried of judgment

According to participant 5, she has this fear and worry about people judging you if you are qualified to do your job if as a counselor, you once seek for help. When in fact, instead of judgment, it should be something empowering and be recognized by other people around you. She noted during the interview,

"I am worried that the world will judge me for my qualifications in terms of providing psychological support and empowering people with their difficult situations. I am scared that they will question my credibility and will not support me with my initiative."

This is supported by the study of Straiton et al. (2018) which explained that mental health professionals often have the fear of being misunderstood once they consult or seek for help intended for them. They know that stigma within this profession is still present and most of them choose to keep internal struggles with themselves.

Openness to help seeking

Participant 5 opens up about her hep seeking experience and she explained that what pushed her is that she realized how stressful she is because of how marital problems affect her. Theme 4 was derived from category (1) positive mindset about needing to seek help and subcategory (1) considering help seeking because of awareness of being not licensed.

A. Positive mindset about need to seek help

According to her, after her help seeking experience, she becomes more open on the importance of seeking professional help.

1. Considering help seeking because of awareness on being not licensed

Participant 5 has shared that she has fear or worry about people knowing her help seeking experience but that moment when she knows she cannot handle her situations anymore, she openly seeks professional help because she is being affected and her work also suffers. For her, an efficient counselor needs counseling as well, when circumstances require you to seek professional support because you become dysfunctional due to your distress. She added,

"It doesn't affect me because I am not yet a licensed counselor therefore I must seek professional help from others."

The study of Yee et al. (2020) mentioned that nowadays, people are more open to mental health concerns and seeking help from professionals. It was found out in this study that mental health awareness helps in promoting the importance of help seeking regardless of your age, gender, profession and background.

With help seeking experience

Participant 5 have help seeking experience because of help seeking due to personal matters. Her problem about marriage really affects her to the point that she went dysfunctional at home and at work. Theme 5 was derived from category (1) personal Challenges that pushed to seek help and sub category (1) personal experiences of Distress**.**

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A. Personal Challenges that pushed to seek help

1. **Personal experiences of Distress**

The participant shared on this point the reason why she sought professional help before and how it affected her negatively that she even reached the point of consulting and asking help on how to deal with their marital problem. She also highlighted that this was an event in the past and she sought help before she worked as a guidance counselor. She said,

"Marital problem, i wasn't able to sleep so i personally went to a psychiatrist to help me. But that was when I was not yet working as guidance designate."

The study of Muller et al. (2020) cited that because of different struggles of workers especially during the time of pandemic, finding it difficult to handle personal and work related problems, there are professionals who seek help regarding their mental health and the overwhelming experience brought by a lot of adjustments in different aspects of lives.

Theme 6. Self-compassion activity

According to participant 5, self-compassion activity helps her lot to regain her mental state aside from seeking professional help. Theme 6 was derived from category (1) positive re-framing and mindfulness and (2) self-care and self-reflection and subcategories (1) Diverting focus towards positive aspects and (2) practicing self-care techniques.

A. Positive Re-framing and Mindfulness

Re-framing helped the client in focusing on learning how to assess her emotions and process her thoughts. Through this, she is able to think clearly, assess her way of interpreting events in her life and the source of her distress and how it influenced her. Cognitive re-framing makes her more aware of her own thoughts and how it affects her emotions and behavior.

B. Self-care and Self Reflection

Based on participant 5, self-reflection made her find meaning and purpose in this time of stress. Through self-care habits, she is able to relax, de-stress and breathes from the stressful nature of her work and other worries in life.

1. Diverting focus towards positive aspects

According to participant 5, every time she tries to divert her way of perceiving things, her interpretations become clearer and she is able to appreciate the lessons behind the challenges.

2. Practicing self-care techniques

During the interview, participant 5 shared that in order to somehow help herself when she is experiencing distress, she tries to divert her attention, apply re-framing techniques and of course, have the courage and interest first to try to help herself.

"Accept but I divert that feeling into positive. Any can do. With the initiative to try in the first place, a lot of good things can happen to you and it can help you with your stress."

This is supported by the study of Jill et al. (2017) that self-compassion activities that promote optimal well-being is highly suggested to lessen effects of stress, anxiety, fatigue and many more that causes a person to be dysfunctional in his or her areas of functioning.

Summary of Case 1-5

All counselors who are part of this study said that it is probably the stigma, judgment, discrimination and their credibility are the reasons why as much as possible they do not seek to help even when they are distressed in life. To work as a counselor is both a privilege and a challenge. It is both fulfilling and at the same times a struggle because according to them, as a counselor, they can have access to names of professionals on whom they can ask for help any time they need to. However, it is a struggle as well when you know you can and you must seek professional help but you do not want to be judged for not being able to manage their problems in life. They do not want people to know that they once asked for help and question their efficiency as counselors if they can also help their clients deal with their difficulties and personal struggles.

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The counselors all suggested and think that it really helps them to engage in self-care and self-love routines and different ways to be an authentic counselor. There are both intrapersonal and interpersonal things that a counselor can do in order to help build strength within them to surpass events that cause them distress.

Cross Analysis Of The Nature Of The Stress Of The Guidance And Counseling Practitioners

The table presented (see Appendix P) a show that aside from the nature of work of counselors, financial matters is also a common source of stress experienced by those who are just starting their career in this profession. Based on the cross analysis for the description of the nature of distress experienced by the counselors, the nature of work of counseling occurs in most cases such as for case 1, 2, 3 and 4. Overall, they are realistic upon how they describe the field of counseling that it can be tiring yet it is a very fulfilling job because even if they experience a tired mind and body, they know they were able to help the students with their concerns. Another theme is negative effects of distress that appeared mostly on the cross analysis. According to them, distress cannot really have a good impact on them, such as using a positive defense mechanism or being more challenged to finish all the tasks well and be more motivated in life because instead of feeling that way, they ended up having poor appetite, mood related issues, less focused at work and many more.

The difficulty in budgeting the compensation and maximizing the benefits is also a struggle for those counselors who also served as breadwinners of their families such as in the case of participant 1 and 4. The nature of counseling work is also difficult in terms of having the need to attend with all the demands of the students, paperwork, activities that need to done and reports to be submitted, activities in school that the office is also a part of makes the job a bit challenging according to participant 1, 2, 3 and 4. On the other hand, participants 2 and 3 mentioned that in spite of the tiring nature of the counseling profession, with the number of years they have served, they learned to find meaning and fulfillment in challenges and stress they encountered as counselors and they still choose to have an optimistic work attitude. Furthermore, multiple roles and tasks that need to be done at home and at work is also a challenge for working mothers according to participants 3 and 5. This is true because one of the struggles of working parents includes work-life imbalance. Additionally, all of these results to negative effects of distress among the counselors who participated in this study. According to them, distress affects their physical, emotional and cognitive aspects because they have shared experiences of changes in their appetite, sleep disturbances, mood swings and distractions due to the negative effect of distress.

This is supported by the study of Ho et al. (2018) which mentioned that there are factors that can influence our mental well-being positively and negatively. There are risks and protective factors to consider in a person's mental well-being. Risk factors include poverty, discrimination, violence, abuse or neglect, peer rejection and isolation, stressful work and personal life events, lack of family support and poor physical health/long-term conditions that can result in stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health related conditions.

Cross Analysis Of The Help-Seeking Behavior Of The Mildly Distressed Guidance And Counseling Practitioners

The table presented (see Appendix Q) indicates a cross analysis of the factors that might contribute to help seeking behavior of counselors and their overall description of their help seeking experiences. Based on the results of the cross analysis for counselors overall description of their help seeking behavior, counselor 1, 2, 3 and 4 do not have help seeking experience because of different reasons such as their fear of experiencing lack of support or understanding if ever as counselors, they will seek for other people in this field for help such as in the case of case 1, 2, 3 and 5. Also, another reason why they do not reach the point of seeking professional help is that all cases from 1 to 5 make use of application of self-compassion activities to themselves to help themselves in dealing with the effects of distress.

According to participants 1, 2 and 3, the welfare of their family is most likely to influence them to consider seeking professional help rather than their own experience of the effects of distress on them. Aside from this, the possibility of people not supporting them, their struggles and mental health concern give them reason not to seek help and instead keep it within themselves or apply self-help ways that they can do to lessen or manage the level of distress the are experiencing based on the stories shared by participant 1, 2, 3 and 5. They are also after maintaining the image they have as counselors who should know how to deal with different stressors as to the reason why they are hesitant to consider seeking professional help according to participant 1, 3 and 4.

On top of this, participant 1, 2, 3 and 4 described their help seeking experience as none since it is either they tried to apply what they have learned from seminars or training those self-help ways to manage stress or they choose not to because of stigma, discrimination, possibility of being unsupported or misunderstood by family, friends, colleagues and clients. On the contrary, participant 5 has an experience of seeking for professional help but she reiterated that that was the time she is not yet working as a counselor. She asked for help before because physically and emotionally, her marital problem is affecting her negatively. All of the participants mentioned that

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one factor why they are not really considering seeking help, but they are open about it if needed, are the self-compassion activities they do for themselves when they are experiencing distress. Coping ways mentioned in the previous discussions are considered to be healthy coping ways they do to help them and not reach the point of having the need to consult or receive therapeutic interventions. According to all the participants of this study, their overall awareness of mental health importance helped them to be more open about the importance of help seeking and in determining when the time seeking for professional help is really needed. More so, according to participant 2,one advantage of his work as a counselor is the easy access of the available support and professionals who can help them with their mental health concerns.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study was to explore and analyze the dynamics of five counselors and their experiences of distress in their life. It tried to understand deeply the factors influencing the help seeking behavior of counselors when they are distressed and how distress affects them at work and at home and their coping ways whenever they are in distress. All the data gathered and analyzed helped in the formulation of a personal therapy that can help every counselor who is experiencing distress to manage difficult times in life as a counselor.

Overall, counselors are just like other people too, who experience problems or difficulties at work and at home. Their life is never perfect and they cannot handle all things at the same time and also need time to breathe, think and evaluate feelings and actions.

Common causes of distress include personal and work related matters such as financial problems, work life balance, family management and pressure at work. One out of the five counselors who participated in this case studies actually experienced seeking help from a professional but emphasized that when she sought help, she was not working as a counselor. But all five counselors who participated in this study said that they will probably seek help when distress also starts to have a negative effect on their work and personal life, especially their family.

All counselors who are part of this study said that it is probably the stigma, judgment, discrimination and their credibility are the reasons why as much as possible they do not seek to help even when they are distressed in life. To work as a counselor is both a privilege and a challenge. It is both fulfilling and at the same times a struggle because according to them, as a counselor, they can have access to names of professionals on whom they can ask for help any time they need to. However, it is a struggle as well when you know you can and you must seek professional help but you do not want to be judged for not being able to manage their problems in life. They do not want people to know that they once asked for help and question their efficiency as counselors if they can also help their clients deal with their difficulties and personal struggles.

The counselors all suggested and think that it really helps them to engage in self-care and self-love routines and different ways to be an authentic counselor. There are both intrapersonal and interpersonal things that a counselor can do in order to help build strength within them to surpass events that cause them distress.

The case studies of five counselors who have experiences of mild distress reveal that their personal experiences in life influenced their help seeking behavior in a way that they tend to have self-consideration, familial considerations and work consideration before considering seeking professional help. They evaluate first the situation and the people around them and their overall functioning before including asking for professional assistance in their options. Seeking professional help immediately is not the first option for counselors with experiences of distress.

Additionally, counselors with their years of working in the counseling profession are more into considering others first, attending to the needs of others first, before checking on themselves. But, working in this field also offers advantages for counselors because they can empower more of other people and feel a sense of fulfillment in this profession, they can have easy access to available support or professionals who can be asked for help. They can have access to more seminars and training that can help the counselors grow personally and professionally and be able to manage their life challenges properly.

Personal therapy is a self-help way that can be used to provide a preventive measure for counselors who are experiencing mild levels of distress. This is designed to help improve counselors or counseling practitioners in different areas of functioning that can be negatively affected by distress from personal and professional experiences.

Previous studies identified predictors of mental help-seeking (Shahwan et al., 2020). For instance, mental health literacy and previous history of help-seeking were found to facilitate greater mental help-seeking among Asian Americans (Cheng et al., 2018). Moreover, current experience of psychological distress also motivates help-seeking among Asian Americans (Cheng et al., 2018) and Canadian and American university students (Digal & Gagnon, 2020; Ward-Ciesielski et al., 2019). On the other hand, recent research documented several factors that could hinder people to seek help from mental health professionals including self-stigma (Cheng et al., 2018;

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Topkaya et al., 2017; Yee et al., 2020), public stigma, social network stigma (Topkaya et al., 2017), preference for self-reliance and low perceived need for care, masculine norms and restricted emotionality common among males.

Additionally, the colonial mentality was found to predict negative attitudes towards mental help-seeking among Filipino Americans (Tuazon et al., 2019). Furthermore, there exists an emerging but limited body of research (Heath et al., 2017, 2018; Wasylkiw & Clairo, 2018) that has given attention to the potential role of self-compassion in promoting mental help-seeking, which was the focus of this study.

In considering the importance of personal therapy for beginner counselors, I want to briefly emphasize that the benefits of personal therapy cannot be obtained through the supervisory relationship. Although supervision is helpful in highlighting and discussing how the counselor's personal beliefs are impacting his or her clinical work, supervision is a client-focused endeavor. Supervision cannot (and, by definition, should not) function as personal therapy. It cannot provide the thorough attention necessary to fully understand the counselor's behaviors and beliefs.

Therefore, it cannot give the new counselor a true taste of the client experience. Supervision can, however, be facilitated by personal therapy, providing the supervisory dyad with a more solid, broad foundation for understanding the counselor's experience and counter transference. The experience of personal therapy for novice counselors benefits not only the clinical dyad but also the profession overall because it decreases the stigma of therapy. Emphasizing personal therapy in the educational process would, early in counselors' careers, instill therapy as an accepted mental hygiene option, thus normalizing it, encouraging them to view it as another available tool and teaching them not to negatively judge its use by other counselors.

Distress Intervention Approach Nurturing and Empowering of Guidance and Counseling Practitioners

Rationale:

Mental health of guidance and counseling practitioners is vital in ensuring a healthier workplace, personal life and more effective delivery of mental health services. This is important because in these times that there is an increasing number of clients that need counseling, counselors and counseling practitioners are also dealing with their own battles that can add up on the stress they are absorbing from their clients which makes every the suggested seminars and workshops significant. Practitioners in the field of counseling must engage themselves in regular activities that promote proper coping and stress management skills and overall mental well-being.

This program was created based on the mostly experienced by guidance and counseling practitioners in terms of their help-seeking experiences related to their distress. Most practitioners exhibit the need to be more equipped in dealing with their stress and be more capable of stress management. With this, work-life balance can also be achieved as they are able to maximize their work efficiency and not sacrificing their personal life and overall mental health. It is also evident on the results of the study that through personal therapy, practitioners can also be helped in a way that professional help, support and guidance is more available for everyone in the counseling practice. Additionally, financial literacy is also included in the program to educate more the counseling practitioners on managing and growing their finances as to lessen their stressors that contributes to the level of distress that they are experiencing.

This program is based on the results of the study which focuses on the gaps found that deal with financial literacy, work life balance, stress management and inclusion of personal therapy.

General Objectives:

1. Promote financial literacy to counseling practitioners that can help them be more equipped with maximizing and growing their money.
2. Foster knowledge and strength that can be used for an effective work life balance and stress management skills.
3. Promote the importance of the impact of personal therapy on the overall mental health of guidance and counseling practitioners.

The proposed program indicates the first focus area based from the results of the study which is about financial literacy. It will be a seminar hosted by the institution to provide knowledge among counseling practitioners about better financial management tips which can help them have better financial management skills, more inspired about growing their money while working as practitioners and determine proper way of identifying and balancing between wants and needs. Based on the results of the study, work life balance has been identified as a need to be another focus area. Trabahong BalanSELF aims to lessen risk of distress and compassion fatigue among the practitioners while also helping them to determine ways to achieve work life balance.

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Additionally, stress Management is another important focus area that will be conducted through a STRESS seminar and workshop. This aims to make the counseling practitioners more equipped in dealing with different stressors and develop other coping strategies to manage negative effects of distress. Moreover, personal therapy as a focus area aims to include personal therapy session for guidance and counseling practitioners every academic year to help them determine self-help techniques that can be use whenever needed even without the presence of mental health professionals.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Guidance and Counseling Practitioners are in between age of young adulthood to late adulthood and are working as guidance and counseling practitioners for minimum of 3 years to maximum of 13 years and all are in mild level of distress that is why most of them do not have experiences of seeking professional help.
2. Guidance and Counseling Practitioners are considering the nature of work of counseling and negative effects of distress as main sources of their mild level of distress.
3. Possible lack of support, lack of help seeking experience and self-compassion activities as counselor's overall description of factors that can lead to possible help seeking behavior among selected guidance and counseling practitioners.
4. There is a need for a program that contains discussion on mental health importance, nature of counseling profession and stress management activities and personal therapy to be included in the institutional training and personal development programs offered once or twice a year by the institution for its guidance and counseling practitioners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Guidance and counseling practitioners may engage themselves in activities that promote their own mental health welfare and may attend more training that helps them be more equipped in handling negativities in life that can affect their personal and professional life.
2. Human resource department and the institution should work with different professionals who will served as external counselors and facilitate trainings or conduct seminars and counseling and therapy for guidance and counseling practitioners to promote mental health.
3. Future researchers may consider other mental health practitioners as participants to determine the way they perceived and experienced distress and how it influenced their lives as professionals.

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Appendices

Appendix A

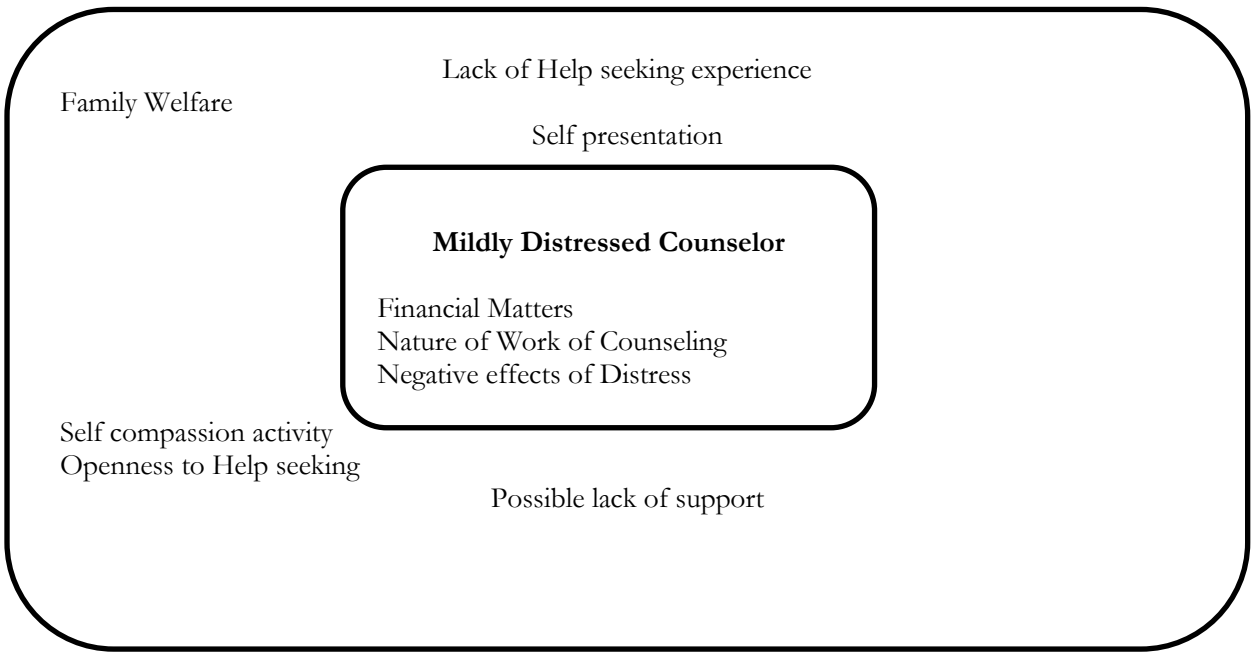

Figure 3. Overall Figure for the Summary of Case 1

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Appendix B

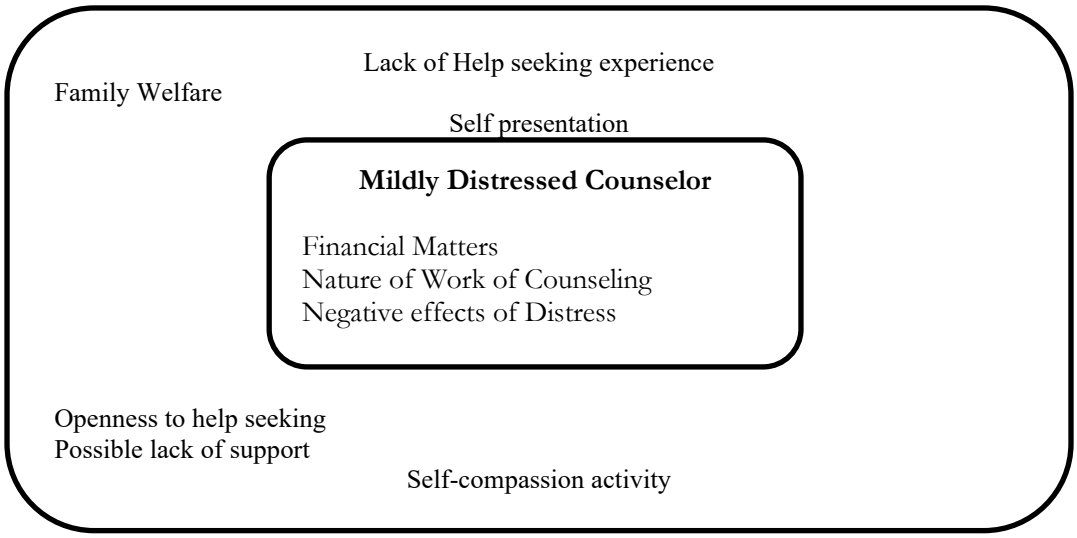

Figure 5. Overall Figure for Case 2

Appendix C

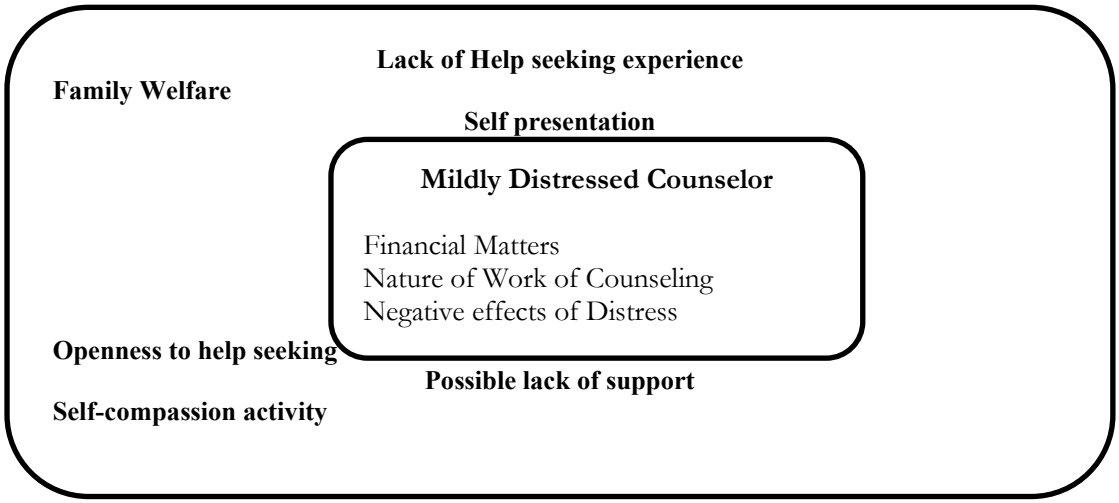

Figure 7. Overall Figure for Summary of Case 3

Appendix D

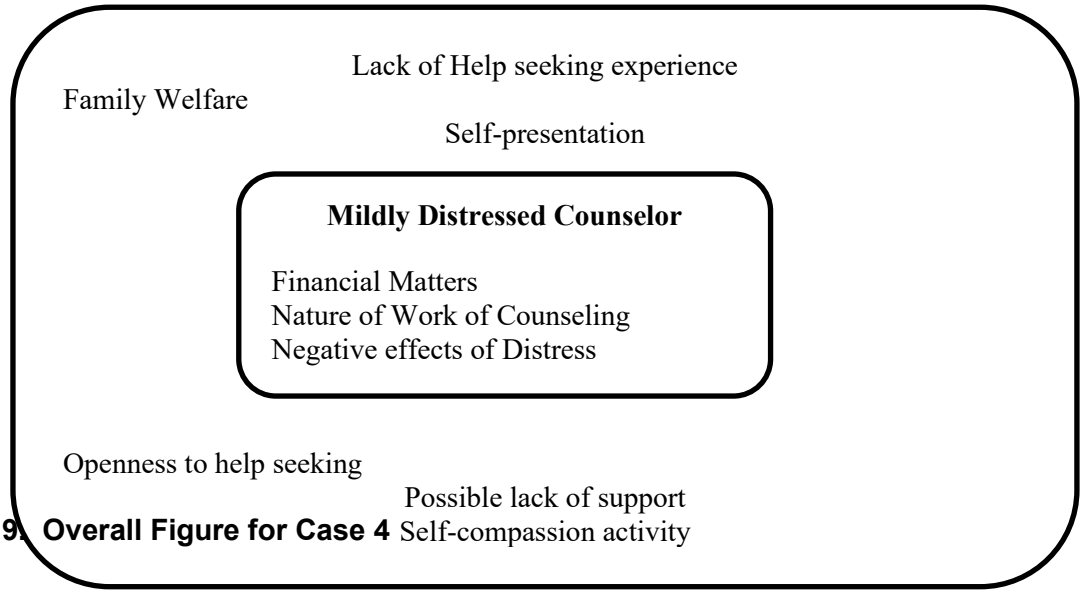

Figure 9. Overall Figure for Case 4

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Appendix E

Summary of Findings of Case 5

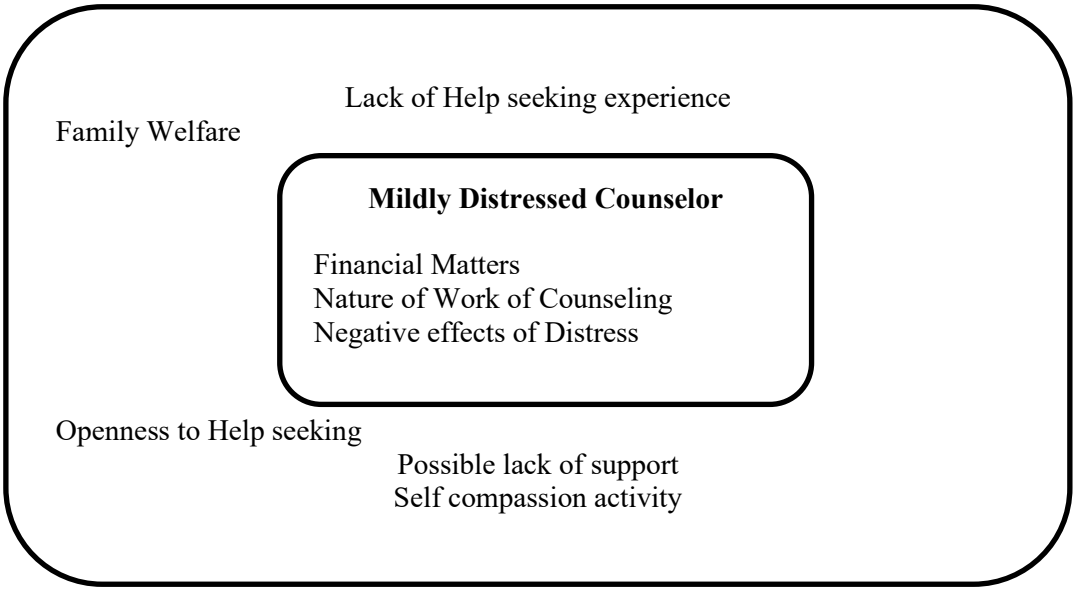

Figure 11. Overall Figure for Case 5

Appendix F

Table 2

Emergence of Financial Matters, Nature of Work of Counseling and Negative Effect of Distress as Contributory Factors to the Distress Experienced by the Counselor

Significant statements	Emerging concept	Sub categories	Categories	Themes
"Basically, financial matters such as paying my own bills, helping my parents on paying for my siblings tuition fees and of course, the pressure with the idea that I must have my own savings because I am not getting any younger. The nature of work itself is also stressful. If we have a lot of clients during a certain period, it is really draining."	Problems about personal financial expenses	Struggle on budgeting income on expenses	Managing finances	Financial Matters
	Pressure on helping the family on financial expenses			
	Draining aspect of the work as a counselor	Challenge faced by counselor when dealing with many clients	Disadvantage of working as a counselor	Nature of Work of Counseling
"There are times that I feel I am spacing out. I cannot really focus on my tasks. And sometimes, I am worried if I am doing my job well or not."	Spacing out and difficulty to focus on work	Easily distracted	Negative Psychological effect of Distress to a Person's Functioning	Negative effect of Distress
	Worry about job performance	Worrying about ability to be functional at work		

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Appendix G

Table 3

Emergence Of Family Welfare, Possible Lack Of Support, Lack Of Experience On Seeking Help And Personal Therapy, Self-Presentation And Self Compassion Activities As Factors That Could Possibly Influence Help Seeking Behavior Of Counselor's

Significant statements	Emerging concept	Sub categories	Categories	Themes
"Maybe if I endure excessive grief after losing someone I love and care about, I'll do get professional support."	Thinking of possible difficulty that cannot be manage once she lost a loved one	Possible Grieving experience that might be encountered	Concern about the Welfare of the family	Family Welfare
"We are aware that there is a stigma associated with getting professional help, particularly when it involves mental health difficulties. Perhaps the people around me and the words they will use against me will prevent me from seeking professional help."	Stigma to be judged	Fear of stigma	Possible lack of understanding or discrimination from family	Possible lack of support
"When it significantly affects me and the people around me such as my family if I am negatively affecting them and our overall relationship, I believe it will be the driving force behind my decision to seek professional guidance."	Significant effect on people around her can lead to considering seeking help	Evaluation of impact on significant others	Concern of the welfare of family	Family Welfare
"Usually, when anything upsets me and I feel distressed, I would write it down in a journal. That helped me to relax and think clearly."	Writing as form of relaxation	Creating of journal	Expressive writing	Self-compassion activity
"In line of work as Guidance Counselor/Coordinator known for guiding and supporting our students, it affects my help-seeking behavior to others. There's this thing that's holding me back to open up and seek help because of the name that I am affiliated with."	Pressure to maintain an image as a counselor	Maintenance of good image	Affiliation and reputation	Self-presentation
"To be honest, I don't have any experience in seeking professional help. But if the situation asks me to seek help, then why not."	No experience in seeking professional help	No actual personal experience of asking for help from colleagues in counseling profession	Without experience of asking for professional support	Lack of experience on seeking help and personal therapy
	Considering to seek for help if needed	Good perception of help seeking when necessary	Positive mindset about the need to	Openness to Help seeking

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			seek for help	
"Seeking professional help is something that most of us are needing in times like this. The cases of mental health issues arise when COVID-19 pandemic hits the world. Personally, taking good care of yourself, treating yourself, and making time for yourself is something that will help you to see your world and the world in a meaningful and positive way. That is something I wanted to learn and practice more because everything you do and will do in the future will start in you today."	Initiative to help one self	Practicing self-care techniques	Self-care and reflection	Self-compassion activity

Appendix H

Table 5

Emergence of Nature of Work of Counseling, Positive Work Attitude and Negative Effect of Distress as Contributory Factors to the Distress Experienced by the Counselor

Significant statements	Emerging concept	Sub categories	Categories	Themes
"With my years of working as a counselor, I can say that there are ups and downs in this profession. This work is fulfilling yet tiring especially with the volume of clients I am handling and high school students are in the stage that at my age, I also need to adjust to relate more with their concerns and help them properly."	There are ups and downs of counseling profession	Fulfilling yet tiring counseling job	Job fulfillment	Nature of work
	Adjusting based on the needs of the students so that it will be easier to relate with their concerns	Capability to adjust on situations	Flexibility in the demands of work	Positive work attitude
		Adjustment based on client's needs		
"Because of stress at work, there are times that I eat too much and I know it is not that good on my health considering that as we age, we have to be more careful with the amount of food we eat and the kinds of food because of health concerns."	Eating too much because of stressful work	Stress eating because of stress	Changes in eating habits due to effect of stress	Negative effect of Distress

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Appendix I
Table 6

Emergence Of Family Welfare, Advantage Of Working As A Counselor, Awareness Of Mental Health Importance, Lack Of Experience On Seeking Help And Personal Therapy And Self Compassion Activities As Factors That Could Possibly Influence Help Seeking Behavior Of Counselor's

Significant statements	Emerging concept	Sub categories	Categories	Themes
"Being aware of a good mental health condition is one reason to maintain it. I am aware that if I am in a good condition, I can be better in decision making and other responsibilities."	Awareness with importance of good mental health helps in making better decisions such as when to ask help	Learning the importance of mental health	Knowledge on advantages of having good mental health	Awareness of mental health importance
"If the situation is too much and it will seriously affect me and my loved ones, I think, I will seek professional help."	If the situation is too much and it will seriously affect me and my loved ones, I think I will seek professional help.	If the situation is too much and affects people	Problems affecting self and family	Family welfare
"Being a counselor brings me easy access to those people with the same profession as mine and it gives me easy access whenever I need someone to talk to."	Access to other counselors whenever help or support is needed	Access to Support	Accessibility of Professionals for Help seeking	Advantage of Working as a Counselor
"As of the moment, I still do not have personal experience in seeking professional	No experience of personally seeking for help	No actual personal experience of asking for help from colleagues in counseling profession	Without experience of asking for professional support	Lack of help seeking experience or personal therapy

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help. Maybe a small talk on other concerns with the co-workers (Registered Guidance Counselors), and concerns of the students and parents."				
"Because of my work as a counselor, and having a co-worker with a professional and a licensed guidance counselor, it makes me feel comfortable that I know, if ever I need to talk to them, they are always available and just around the corner of the school."	Access to other counselors whenever help or support is needed	Access to support	Accessibility of Professionals to ask for Professional Support	Advantage of Working as a Counselor
"Whenever I feel distressed, the first thing I do is to talk to my wife. Sometimes, she gives me advice that makes me feel relieved and light."	Talking as a way to express	Talking to significant other	Seeking Social Support	Self-Compassion Activity

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Appendix J
Table 8

Emergence of Nature of Work of Counseling, Positive Work Attitude , Challenges of Multiple Roles and Tasks and Negative Effect of Distress as Contributory Factors to the Distress Experienced by the Counselor

Significant statements	Emerging concept	Sub categories	Categories	Themes
"My main stressors so far are the challenges and difficulty of the counseling profession. Even if counseling is a satisfying job, still, its nature includes stress as well because I am supervising my colleagues, I am juggling at work and I am also dealing with our clients or the students."	Challenges of counseling profession	Counselor's work and struggle	Disadvantage of Working as a counselor	Nature of Work of Counseling
	Still find a satisfying aspect of the work	Still satisfied with work	Optimism about work	Positive Work Attitude
	Juggling at work and the stress it causes	Balancing between work role and personal roles	Sources of pressure from personal and work life	Challenges of Multiple Roles and Tasks
"Distress makes me have mood swings and it sometimes affects me at home and at school."	Distress can cause mood swings and effect in our lives	Impact of distress on one's emotional aspect	Emotional/ Mood problems	Negative effect of Distress

Appendix K
Table 9

Emergence of Self Presentation, Lack of Help seeking Experience, Empathy and Altruism, Possible Lack of Support, Family Welfare and Self Compassion Activities as Influential Factors to Help Seeking Behavior

Significant statements	Emerging concept	Sub categories	Categories	Themes
"There is this thought that as a counselor, I expect myself to be someone that must know how to deal with the behavior because you have been into training and seminars already."	Pressure to maintain an image as a counselor	Expectations that some should be able to handle their own behavioral or emotional challenges.	Self-Expectations	Self-Presentation
"Personally, I have none. I seek professional help for	No personal experience on help seeking	Without experience of looking for	Without experience of asking for	Lack of help seeking experience or personal therapy

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the students, to assist them in their concerns because I know how it feels to keep things by you alone."		professional support	professional support	
	Seeking help for students because you understand their situation	Helping others who needs to have access to counseling	Understanding their actual situation and mental health struggles	Empathy and Altruism
"Luckily until now I manage to be well and don't have any experience regarding seeking help for professional help."	No personal experience on help seeking	Without experience of looking for professional support	Without experience of asking for professional support	Lack of help seeking experience or personal therapy
"Fear or distrust of one's integrity or credibility that no one will support or believe on them anymore."	Stigma to be judged	Fear of stigma	Possible lack of understanding or discrimination from family	Possible lack of support
"If my family is affected already I will consider seeking professional help".	Thinking of possible difficulty that cannot be manage once she lost a loved one	Possible negative experience or effect to family members	Concern about the Welfare of the family	Family Welfare
"I usually watch television or I would request my husband for a road trip just outside Batangas."	Watching TV and nature trip	Finding temporary relief	Engaging in Relaxing Activities	Self-Compassion Activities
"The art of mindfulness Learning more of the cognitive behavioral therapy (this is for my students)."	Mindfulness and use of CBT Techniques	Application of mindfulness and CBT therapeutic approach	Mindfulness and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	Self-Compassion Activity

Appendix L

Table 11

Emergence of Financial Matters, Nature of Work of Counseling and Negative Effect of Distress as Contributory Factors to the Distress Experienced by the Counselor

Significant statements	Emerging concept	Sub categories	Categories	Themes
"I am usually stress about my salary since it is only enough for the expenses, I cannot have extra fund for my other plans such as taking Masteral. Also, the job as a counselor handling many	Stress about not enough salary	Budgeting income	Managing Finances	Financial Matters
		Too much Workload in	Fulfilling yet tiring	Nature of Counseling Work

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students and the workload in general is a bit tiring and stressful."		general	job as a counselor	
"Due to stress, I tend to eat more and have mood swings. I get more irritable than usual."	Eating too much because of stressful work	Stress eating	Changes in eating habits due to effect of stress	Negative effect of Distress
	Mood swings and irritation	Changes in mood	Emotional/ Mood Problems	

Appendix M

Table 12

Emergence of Family Welfare, Possible Lack of Support, Lack of experience on seeking help and personal therapy, Self-Presentation and Self-Compassion Activities as Factors that Could Possibly Influence Help Seeking Behavior of Counselor's

Significant statements	Emerging concept	Sub categories	Categories	Themes
"I think there is no reason that could hinder me from seeking professional help if I am already experiencing distress, especially if it is already affecting my job and other people around me. Being a counselor I know in myself that I am not a superhero, I am still a human being that gets tired and drained not just physically but also emotionally because my mental health as a counselor is very important."	No fear in seeking help especially if needed by self and others	Acknowledgment of own experience and vulnerabilities as a counselor	Positive emotional and social experience	Awareness of mental health importance
	Thinking of no hindrance in seeking for professional help	Considering help seeking if needed	Positive mindset about the need to seek help once needed	Openness in seeking help
"The reasons that will push me to seek professional help if I am experiencing distress are my family and my fellows. I don't want to be a burden to them and I really wanted to help more people, I think those were also the reasons that will	Family might push them to seek for professional help because she do not want to be a burden to them	Consideration of family members if they are being affected and will push her to ask for help	Concern about the Welfare of the family	Family Welfare

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push me to seek professional help."				
"As a counselor it influences my help seeking since I want to maintain a positive image of myself as someone in the counseling profession."	Need to maintain a good image as counselor is what influence help seeking	Maintenance of an image as a counselor	Need to maintain a good image as a counselor	Self-Presentation
"Luckily until now I manage to be well and don't have any experience regarding seeking professional help."	Ability to manage stressful events	No experience in seeking help professionally	Without personal experience on help seeking	Lack of help seeking experience or personal therapy
"Being a counselor, if in the future I would seek professional help I think the accessibility would be easy knowing that we are already in the helping profession and already know many professionals who can help us in our field but seeking professional help for sure would be not that easy. It is easy to say to others to seek professional help because we are not in their shoes but I think if I am in their situation and knowing that I am also in the helping profession myself it would be hard for me. Because as a human we would think of the judgment of other people but if I will be in this situation in the future even if it is hard I would ease to seek help for myself, for my family and for those people."	Advantage of working in the profession there is more access to professional help	Highlighting the benefits of seeking professional help and Raising awareness about the importance of mental health	positive mindset about the need to seek help once needed	Openness to Help seeking
"Every time I feel distressed I usually have a cup of black coffee and just listen to pop music."	Doing things that can set positive mood	Finding temporary relief	Engaging in Relaxing Activities	Self-Compassion Activities
"The personal therapy that I hope to learn and practice to promote overall mental health is acknowledging my weaknesses and my flaws and promoting positivity and hope that would help boost the confidence of every individual. To promote positivity and hope in every individual we must first acknowledge the weaknesses and flaws that we have and embrace the essence of positivity that would help us think that midst	Initiative to help one self	Acknowledging weaknesses and flaws while promoting positivity and hope	Embracing Positivity and Hope	Self-Compassion Activities

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all the weaknesses and the negativity that we have in our lives we must still been positive and embrace hope to go on with our lives."				

Appendix N

Table 14

Emergence of Financial Matters, Nature of Work of Counseling and Negative Effect of Distress as Contributory Factors to the Distress Experienced by the Counselor

Significant statements	Emerging concept	Sub categories	Categories	Themes
"I get stressed over all the tasks I need to do at work and at home. It is somehow hard to balance both personal and professional task."	Stress due to work and home tasks	Struggle of multiple roles in life	Juggling at work and the stress it causes	Challenges of Multiple Roles and Tasks
"Due to stress, especially before we experienced marital problems, I can still remember that I had sleep disturbances, I had poor appetite and cannot focus my attention on my tasks because of what is going through in our marriage."	Marital problem caused many negative effects on overall health	Effect of marital problem on overall health	Negative Psychological effect of Distress to a Person's Functioning Effect on eating habits and mood	Negative effect of distress

Appendix O

Table 15

Emergence of Family Welfare, Possible Lack of Support, With experience on seeking help and personal therapy, Openness to help seeking and Self Compassion Activities as Factors that Could Possibly Influence Help Seeking Behavior of Counselor's

Significant statements	Emerging concept	Sub categories	Categories	Themes
"I am worried that the world will judge me for my qualifications in terms of providing psychological support and empowering people with their difficult situations. I am scared that they will question my credibility and will not support me with my initiative to seek help."	Stigma to be judged	Worried of judgment	Fear of Perceived Inefficiency	Possible lack of support
"It doesn't affect me because I am not yet a licensed counselor therefore I must seek professional help from others."	No effect at all since not licensed and is willing to seek for help if needed	Consider help seeking because of awareness on being not licensed	Positive mindset about need to seek help	Openness to help seeking
"Marital problem, i wasn't able to sleep so i personally went to a psychiatrist to help me. but that was when i am not yet working as guidance designate."	Access to people who can help	Personal experiences of Distress	Personal Challenges that pushed to seek help	With help seeking experience

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"Accept but i divert that feeling into positive."	Acceptance of feelings and diverting it into something positive	Diverting focus towards positive aspects	Positive Re-framing and Mindfulness	Self-compassion activity
"Any can do. With the initiative to try in the first place, a lot of good things can happen to you and it can help you with your stress."	Positive mindset	Practicing self-care techniques	Self-Care and Self-Reflection	Self-Compassion Activities

Appendix P

Table 16

Cross-Analysis of the Emerged Themes as to the Commonalities and Differences in the Cases under Study

Themes	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5
Financial matters	✓			✓	
Nature of Counseling work	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Challenges of Multiple Roles and Tasks			✓		✓
Negative effects of distress	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Optimistic Work Value		✓	✓		

Appendix Q

Table 17

Cross-Analysis of the Emerged Themes as to the Commonalities and Differences in the Cases under Study

Themes	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5
Family welfare	✓	✓	✓		
Possible lack of support	✓	✓	✓		✓
Awareness of Mental health importance		✓		✓	
Advantages of working as a counselor		✓			
Lack of Help seeking experience or personal therapy	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Self-presentation	✓		✓	✓	
Empathy and Altruism			✓		
Openness in help seeking				✓	✓
Self-compassion activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
With Help Seeking Experience					✓

Appendix R

Distress Intervention Approach Nurturing and Empowering of Guidance and Counseling Practitioners

Key Result Area	Goals/ Objectives	Proposed Activities	Strategies	Persons Involved	Success Indicator	Evaluation
Financial Literacy	Help the participants learn different ways of handling their finances Assist in looking for	*Financial Literacy 101 Seminar Workshop – PeraParaan*	A seminar hosted by the institution or organization through the initiative of the human resource department about financial literacy, opportunities to grow money, and	Financial Advisor Speaker Human Resource Department Invited Entrepreneurs Guidance and	Better financial management skills and be more accountable about their finances. Improved and more mature considerations of needs and wants.	Online survey and personal interview

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	possible source of investments.		its impact to mental health. After the talk, there will be present entrepreneurs to make inspirations on how they start their businesses from small steps incorporating workshop activities.	Counseling Practitioners	Learned alternative ways of growing their money.	
Work Life Balance	Provide a mental health break to counseling practitioners to avoid risks of distress and compassion fatigue. Set a schedule which will serve as a breather for counseling practitioners from their challenging roles and tasks which affects their mental health.	*Trabahong BalanSELF" - Monthly Employee Wellness Activity Focusing on Work life Balance*	On a monthly basis, the Human Resource Department will have a whole day activity for counseling practitioners to have all hands off deck. They will not have any tasks to do on a scheduled day which will be allotted for pampering themselves. Human Resource Department can invite massage therapists, nail specialists, and hair stylist for counselors to enjoy.	Human Resource Department Invited Beauty and Care Specialists Guidance and Counseling Practitioners	Improved management and handling of psychological distress. Lesser to no cases of compassion fatigue.	Wellness Check Using Standardized Survey (DAS-21) Pre and Post
Stress Management	Be equipped in managing stressful situations in their lives. Provide self-help techniques that will be effective in different situations Learn coping mechanisms that are tailored-fit to their challenges and better manage risks of psychological distress	*STRESS: The Whats, Whys, and Hows: Stress Management Seminar Workshop*	Discussion and activities in between sessions that cultivate more resilient counselors who can find and use adaptive coping skills during stressful situations	Human Resource Department Speaker - Subject Matter Expert (Psychologists and Guidance Counselors) Counseling Practitioners	Decreased level of work-related stress Improved productivity and efficiency due to decreased level of stress impacting work performance.	Wellness Check Using Standardized Survey (DAS-21) Pre and Post Interview
Inclusion of Personal Therapy	Give counselors the opportunity to have a personal therapy for increased efficiency personally	*GABAY SA MGA TAGAPAMATNUBAY: Personal Therapy Sessions with Practitioners and Professionals*	There will be a voluntary counseling session which will serve as a personal therapy every start of the semester. Activities will be part of this event	Human Resource Department External Counselor or Counseling Psychologist Participants	Counselors will have more effective self-help techniques which they can use even without the presence of a mental health professional that they can utilize	Wellness Check Using Standardized Survey (DAS-21) Interview

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	and professionally. Be aware of tailored-fit therapeutic technique that will address psychological distress through self-help approaches.		which be part of the overall therapeutic intervention given to counselors		whenever that they needed.	

Appendix S

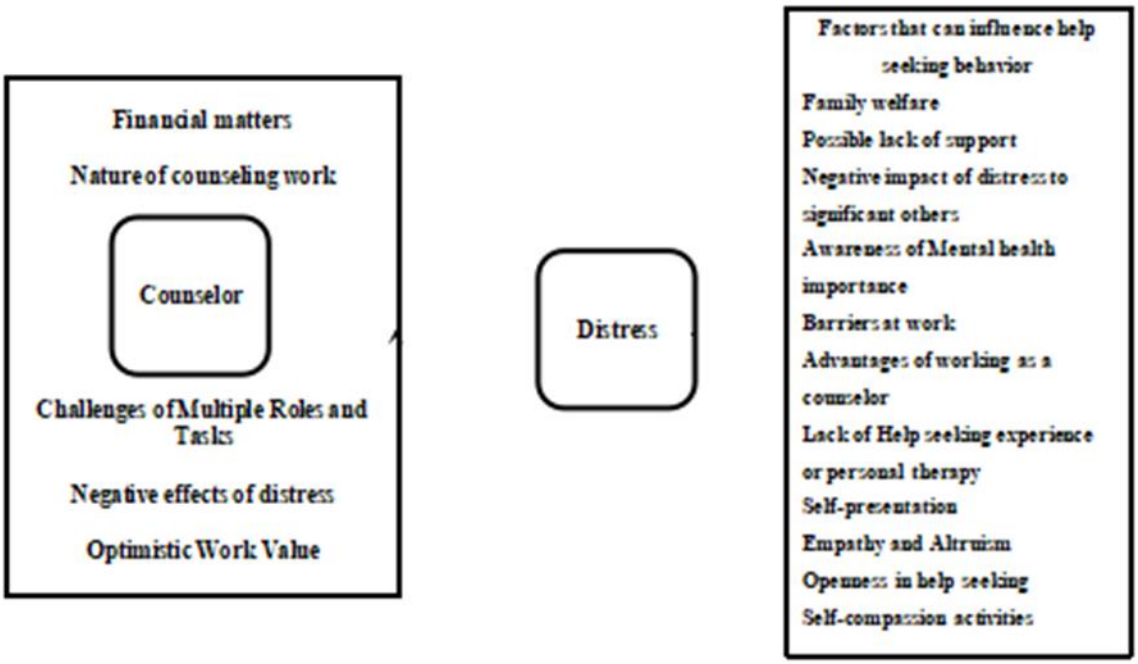

Figure 12. Overall Figure of the Themes that Have Emerged for Case 1-5 Causes of Distress and Described Help Seeking Experience among Counselors

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