

Assessment of Teachers' Mental Health Literacy: Basis for An Action Plan

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Abstract

This study assessed the mental health literacy (MHL) of teachers at Lagundi-CCL National High School as basis for an action plan. Mental health literacy is essential in education as teachers are often the first to identify and respond to students experiencing psychological distress. Using a mixed-method descriptive-quantitative research design, data were gathered from 31 teachers through an adapted Mental Health Literacy Scale developed by O'Connor and Casey (2015), supplemented by interview guide questions to capture qualitative insights. Findings revealed that the overall mental health literacy of teachers obtained a mean score of 103.65 (SD = 11.80), indicating a moderate level of literacy. Among the six domains, teachers demonstrated higher competencies in knowledge of professional help available and recognition of mental health disorders. They also showed adequate understanding of self-treatment strategies. However, lower scores were observed in attitudes that promote recognition and appropriate help-seeking behavior, as well as knowledge on how to seek mental health information. These findings suggest that while teachers possess foundational knowledge of mental health conditions and services, stigma and limited proactive help-seeking attitudes remain concerns. Qualitative results further revealed several challenges in the implementation of mental health-related initiatives, including lack of training, insufficient support systems, low engagement in professional development activities, and limited alignment of programs with classroom realities. Despite these challenges, all respondents expressed willingness to learn more about mental health, recognizing its importance in improving student well-being and fostering a supportive learning environment. The study concludes that enhancing teachers' mental health literacy requires structured training programs, improved institutional support systems, and contextualized professional development initiatives. Strengthening these areas can empower teachers to better support learners' psychological needs and contribute to a more responsive school environment. An action plan is proposed to address identified gaps and promote sustainable mental health literacy development among teachers.

Keywords: Mental Health Literacy, Teachers, Professional Development, School Mental Health, Action Plan, Mixed-Method Research, Educational Well-Being

Introduction

Mental health has become a critical concern in education systems globally, with increasing implications for teaching and learning outcomes. In the Philippines, rising cases of anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders among learners have intensified calls for stronger school-based mental health interventions. Mental well-being significantly affects students' academic performance, social functioning, and emotional stability, yet the demand for mental health support continues to exceed institutional capacity.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed and exacerbated these challenges. At Lagundi-CCL National High School, both learners and teachers experienced heightened psychological strain, resulting in increased student demand for mental health support amid limited resources and institutional readiness. This situation underscores the need to strengthen teacher capacity in identifying and responding to mental health concerns within the school environment.

Teachers play a central role in early identification and intervention, as they are often the first to observe behavioral and emotional changes in learners. Evidence suggests that psychological and behavioral factors are strongly associated with student academic outcomes (Mallare, 2022), while teacher competencies significantly influence school readiness in addressing educational disruptions (Pelayo, 2022). Moreover, student mental resilience has been linked to improved academic performance, highlighting the interconnectedness of mental health and learning outcomes (Bravo, 2023).

Globally, approximately one in seven adolescents experience mental health conditions, with most cases emerging before adulthood (World Health Organization, 2024). In the Philippines, studies report alarming prevalence rates of anxiety, depression, and stress among students (Serrano et al., 2023), reinforcing the urgent need for school-based preventive strategies.

Mental health literacy (MHL) is increasingly recognized as a key competency for educators, enabling them to recognize, manage, and respond appropriately to mental health concerns. Teachers with higher MHL are better equipped to support students and facilitate early intervention (Satparam, 2023). However, existing studies reveal persistent gaps in teachers' mental health knowledge, particularly in identifying risk factors and addressing stigma, despite generally favorable attitudes (Baobao et al., 2022; Publico, 2020).

Although policy initiatives such as Republic Act 12080 (2024) and DepEd mental health programs have been implemented, challenges remain in translating these policies into effective school-level practices. Systemic constraints, workload pressures, and limited training opportunities continue to hinder full implementation (Oliveros et al., 2025).

Given these gaps, there is a need for localized evidence on teachers' mental health literacy to inform targeted interventions. This study therefore assesses the mental health literacy of teachers at Lagundi-CCL National High School and serves as a basis for developing an action plan to strengthen mental health support within the school setting.

Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed method of research, a descriptive-quantitative design of research was used to examine the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the teachers in the dimensions of mental health literacy, as well as to identify the possible aids through suggestions and recommendations on how to promote mental health literacy and mental health-related help to give to students.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Lagundi-CCL National High School, located in the municipality of Rizal. The school is a public secondary institution that caters to a diverse population of learners from various socio-economic backgrounds. It serves as one of the key educational institutions in the area, implementing DepEd programs and initiatives aimed at improving academic performance and student welfare

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study were thirty-one (31) teachers from Lagundi-CCL National High School, Rizal. They were selected through complete enumeration, considering that the population size of the teaching staff was manageable and all were deemed qualified to participate in the assessment of mental health literacy. The respondents included both male and female teachers with varying years of teaching experience and exposure to students with mental health concerns. This ensured a comprehensive representation of the teaching workforce within the school context. The selection of teacher-respondents was deemed appropriate as they play a critical role in identifying, responding to, and supporting learners experiencing mental health-related difficulties. All respondents were officially employed teaching personnel of the school during the conduct of the study and were directly involved in classroom instruction and student supervision. Their participation provided relevant and firsthand insights into the current level of mental health literacy and its implications for school-based support systems.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

This study employed a complete enumeration sampling technique, wherein all available teacher-respondents of Lagundi-CCL National High School were included in the study. A total of thirty-one (31) teachers participated, ensuring that every member of the teaching staff had an equal opportunity to be represented in the assessment of mental health literacy. Complete enumeration was deemed appropriate due to the relatively small population size of the faculty, allowing for a more comprehensive and accurate representation of the school's teaching workforce. This approach eliminated sampling bias and ensured that the findings reflected the actual condition of all teachers within the institution. The respondents were selected based on their official designation as teaching personnel during the conduct of the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was secured prior to data collection to ensure ethical compliance, confidentiality, and the protection of respondents' rights..

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary instrument used in this study was an adapted Mental Health Literacy Scale developed by O'Connor and Casey (2015). The questionnaire was designed to assess teachers' mental health literacy across six domains, namely: recognition of mental health disorders, knowledge of risk factors and causes, knowledge of self-treatment, knowledge of professional help available, knowledge of how to seek mental health information, and attitudes that promote recognition and appropriate help-seeking behavior. The instrument consisted of 35 items measured using Likert-scale responses to determine the level of mental health literacy among teacher-respondents. Each item was carefully structured to evaluate respondents' knowledge, attitudes, and perceived competencies in dealing with mental health-related concerns in an educational setting. In addition, a qualitative section was included at the end of the questionnaire to gather respondents' perceptions,

experiences, and suggestions regarding mental health literacy and related support mechanisms in schools. This allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the quantitative findings. The instrument was administered electronically to ensure accessibility, convenience, and efficiency in data collection. Responses were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The data gathering procedure commenced with the preparation and submission of a formal research proposal to the appropriate school authorities and academic officials to secure approval for the conduct of the study. Upon approval, a permission to conduct the research was obtained from the school head of Lagundi-CCL National High School. After securing the necessary permissions, the researchers oriented the respondents regarding the purpose of the study, its significance, and the ethical considerations involved, including confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained from all teacher-respondents prior to their participation. The data collection was conducted through an online survey questionnaire to ensure accessibility and convenience for all respondents. The instrument, adapted from O'Connor and Casey (2015), was distributed electronically, and respondents were given sufficient time to accomplish the survey at their own pace. Completed responses were retrieved, encoded, and securely stored for analysis. The researchers ensured that all data were handled with strict confidentiality and used exclusively for academic and research purposes. After data collection, responses were organized and prepared for statistical and thematic analysis in accordance with the study's objectives.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The data gathered in this study were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques in accordance with the mixed-method research design employed. For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation were used to determine the level of mental health literacy among teacher-respondents across different domains. The weighted mean was utilized to interpret the respondents' level of mental health literacy based on the Likert-scale responses. To determine significant differences among subgroups of respondents, independent samples t-test was applied, particularly in comparing mental health literacy scores according to sex and exposure to students with mental health problems. All statistical analyses were computed using appropriate statistical software to ensure accuracy and reliability of results. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns or themes from the respondents' open-ended responses. This involved coding the data, grouping similar ideas, and generating overarching themes that reflect teachers' perceptions, challenges, and suggestions related to mental health literacy. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings provided a comprehensive understanding of teachers' mental health literacy and served as a strong basis for the formulation of the proposed action plan.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to ethical standards in the conduct of research. Prior to data collection, permission was sought from the school authorities and concerned officials to ensure proper coordination and approval. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained, assuring them that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents were strictly maintained by not disclosing their identities and ensuring that all collected data were used solely for academic purposes. Additionally, the researcher ensured that no harm, discomfort, or bias would affect the participants throughout the process. All information gathered was treated with utmost respect and integrity, and results were presented honestly and objectively.

Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents reveals a predominantly female teaching workforce, with 20 teachers (65.5%) compared to 11 male teachers (34.5%), indicating a gender imbalance consistent with global trends in the education sector where female educators are more dominant. In terms of mental health training, all respondents (100%) reported having no prior training, highlighting a critical gap in professional preparation for addressing mental health concerns in the school setting. Despite this, almost all teachers (30 or 96.77%) reported exposure to students with mental health problems, while only 1 respondent (3.23%) indicated no such exposure. This suggests that teachers are regularly encountering learners with mental health-related issues despite lacking formal training, underscoring an urgent need for structured mental health capacity-building programs to enhance their preparedness, confidence, and effectiveness in handling such cases in the classroom.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Sex – Male	11	34.5
Sex – Female	20	65.5
With Mental Health Training	0	0
Without Mental Health Training	31	100
With Exposure to Students with Mental Health Problems	30	96.77
Without Exposure to Students with Mental Health Problems	1	3.23
Total Respondents	31	100

3.2 Mental Health Literacy Descriptive Statistics of Overall Sample and Sub-groups

The results show that there are no significant differences in mental health literacy (MHL) when respondents are grouped by sex, mental health training, and exposure to students with mental health problems, indicating a generally uniform level of MHL across subgroups. The overall mean MHL score of the teachers is 103.65 (SD = 11.80), which is comparatively lower than scores reported in related studies among educators in other contexts. This suggests that while teachers possess a baseline understanding of mental health, their level of literacy remains below ideal standards expected for educators who regularly encounter students with mental health concerns. The findings imply a substantial need to enhance teachers' MHL through targeted and systematic interventions. Strengthening MHL is essential, as literature emphasizes that teachers with higher literacy are better equipped to identify, respond to, and refer students experiencing mental health difficulties, thereby contributing to early intervention and improved student outcomes.

Table 2
Mental Health Literacy Descriptive Statistics of Overall Sample and Sub-groups

	MHL Mean	SD
Overall (31)	103.65	11.80
Male (n=11)	107.64	13.30
Female (n= 20)	101.45	10.60
With MH training (n = 0)	-	-
Without MH training (n =31)	103.65	11.80
With exposure to students with mental health problems (n= 30)	103.20	11.73
Without exposure to students with mental health problems (n= 1)	117.00	-

3.3 Mental Health Literacy Scores of the Respondents Across Domains

The results of Table 3 show that teachers demonstrated varying levels of mental health literacy across the six domains of the Mental Health Literacy Scale. The strongest domains were knowledge of professional help available (77.41%), recognition of disorders (77.22%), and knowledge of self-treatment (76.63%), indicating that teachers are relatively more confident in identifying mental health conditions, understanding basic self-care responses, and knowing where to refer individuals for professional support. Moderate scores were observed in knowledge of risk factors (74.25%) and knowledge of how to seek mental health information (73.70%), suggesting partial awareness but not yet fully developed understanding in these areas. In contrast, the weakest domain was attitudes that promote recognition and appropriate help-seeking behavior (53.55%), indicating persistent challenges in stigma, openness, and willingness to seek or encourage professional help. Overall, these findings suggest that while teachers possess foundational awareness of mental health concepts, their attitudes and deeper understanding of risk and help-seeking processes remain limited. This imbalance may reflect the influence of limited training, cultural perceptions, and gaps in institutional mental health support systems. The results highlight the need for targeted interventions focusing not only on knowledge enhancement but also on attitude change and stigma reduction to strengthen overall mental health literacy among teachers.

Table 3
Mental Health Literacy Scores of the Respondents Across Domains

Domain	Max Possible Score	Mean Score	Percentage	Rank
Recognition of Disorders	32	24.71	77.22%	2
Knowledge of Risk Factors and Causes	8	5.94	74.25%	4
Knowledge of Self-Treatment	8	6.13	76.63%	3
Knowledge of Professional Help Available	12	9.29	77.41%	1
Knowledge of How to Seek Mental Health Information	20	14.74	73.70%	5

Attitudes that Promote Recognition and Appropriate Help-seeking Behavior	80	42.84	53.55%	6
Total	160	103.65		

3.4 Addressing the Issues and Concerns About Mental Health Literacy

The thematic analysis highlights that mental health initiatives in education and community settings are strongly aligned with existing national and institutional policies. The first three themes—strengthening post-pandemic mental health support for students and teachers, building mental health awareness across all ages, and integrating mental health education into schools—are already embedded in Department of Education (DepEd) programs through the continuous implementation of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) as mandated in DTFC Memorandum No. 82, s. 2020. These initiatives demonstrate that mental health promotion in schools is not a new intervention but an ongoing institutional priority, further reinforced by the planned implementation of the Localized Referral System for MHPSS in the 2025–2026 school year. Meanwhile, the remaining themes emphasize the importance of strengthening community involvement through awareness campaigns and early intervention strategies. These are supported by national and global frameworks such as the Philippine Council for Mental Health (PCMH) Strategic Framework 2024–2028, jointly initiated by the Department of Health and the World Health Organization. The framework underscores key strategies including policy enhancement, improved referral systems, ethical mental health communication in media, and the integration of mental health programs in schools and workplaces. Collectively, these findings suggest that mental health promotion is being advanced through a multi-sectoral approach that combines educational, institutional, and community-based interventions aimed at building more resilient and mentally healthy populations.

Table 4
Addressing the Issues and Concerns About Mental Health Literacy

Common Themes	Sample Narratives
Strengthening Mental Health Support for Students and Teachers Post-Pandemic	“Revive and intensify the MHPSS directed by the DepEd among students. More so, the teachers should undergo an equivalent MHPSS also (not because of anything else, but because the aftermath of the pandemic are still "at large" where the mental capacity of people is the most affected). Although the mental-related indicators are not yet into the PMES COI, this should be giving utmost attention as early as now, it can be noted that more people are having mental breakdowns due to the current situations of this world we are living in”.
Building Mental Health Awareness and Education for All Ages	To improve mental health literacy, we should begin by educating people from a young age, teaching them about emotions, stress, and the importance of seeking help when needed. Schools and communities have an important role in providing this education, helping children understand their feelings and how to manage them. At the same time, raising awareness through social media and public campaigns can help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues, making it easier for people to talk openly about their struggles. Professionals can also contribute by leading information drives, ensuring that the facts shared are accurate and accessible to everyone. Health experts should be the ones to discuss mental health, as they can provide clear, reliable information that is easy to understand. By encouraging open conversations and making information available through trusted sources, we can create a more supportive environment where mental health is taken seriously and people feel empowered to seek help when they need it. To enhance mental health literacy in schools, it's important to include mental health topics in the curriculum, treating it as a regular part of health education, alongside physical health. Teachers should receive ongoing training to identify and assist students with mental health issues, ensuring they can offer appropriate support. Encouraging open discussions about mental health can help reduce stigma and make students more comfortable sharing their feelings. Schools should collaborate with mental health professionals and provide easy access to counseling services for all students. Fostering a safe and supportive school environment is crucial for students to feel comfortable and supported. By incorporating mental health

Integrating Mental Health Education in Schools for Student Well-being	education into school activities and programs, we can raise awareness and teach students the importance of caring for their mental well-being. To raise awareness and improve understanding of mental health, we can organize seminars and training sessions. These seminars can provide important information about mental health and teach people how to support those who may be struggling. Holding face-to-face seminars or orientations allows for direct interaction and discussion, helping learners better understand mental health issues. By offering these activities, we can create a more informed community where everyone feels more comfortable discussing mental health and supporting others. Every institution should organize at least one free talk or symposium about mental health each year to raise awareness and provide important information. It's essential to teach people how to recognize the signs of developing mental health problems, as early identification can lead to better support and treatment. Diagnosing mental health issues is crucial to ensure that people receive the help they need. Offering at least two sessions of counseling guidance per year can provide students and community members with regular opportunities to talk to a professional. Additionally, hosting events like dental missions, where medical professionals are available for free consultations, can encourage people to open and seek help. These sessions could help identify problems that individuals may not be aware of, allowing for early intervention and preventing further issues.
Raising Mental Health Awareness through Education and Community Engagement.	
Promoting Mental Health Awareness and Early Intervention through Community Events	

3.5 Suggestions on How to Improve One's Mental Health in the Context of Education

The findings indicate that key themes on enhancing educators' mental health are already reflected in existing national and international initiatives, although further strengthening and wider implementation are still needed. The first two themes—implementation of annual mental health checkups for educators and access to professional support and education—are aligned with PhilHealth Circular No. 2023-0018, which provides outpatient mental health benefits such as consultations, diagnostic follow-ups, psychoeducation, and psychosocial support services for accredited facilities. While this policy supports teachers' access to mental health care, its full utilization depends on further dissemination and endorsement across agencies and educational institutions. The next set of themes emphasizes holistic well-being through the integration of physical, emotional, and spiritual health, as well as the importance of support systems from family and community. These align with broader community-based mental health approaches, including faith-based initiatives such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) "Guide for Mental Health Ministry" (2024), which highlights the role of spiritual communities in supporting individuals experiencing mental health challenges. Lastly, themes focusing on sustaining educators' well-being for a positive learning environment and promoting work-life balance are supported by international evidence, including the WHO School Mental Health Package (SMHP), which has demonstrated effectiveness in improving teachers' mental health literacy and capacity to address mental health concerns. Overall, these findings suggest that while supportive policies and programs are already in place, their effectiveness depends on stronger implementation, institutional coordination, and sustained capacity-building for educators.

Table 5

Suggestions on How to Improve One's Mental Health in the Context of Education

Common Themes	Sample Narratives
Implementing Annual Mental Health Checkups for Educators	"If there's an annual physical checkup for educators, there's should be also an annual mental health checkup, and provide some info about handling mental illness". "Meeting with a professional can be very helpful for educators in managing their mental health. Professionals can conduct assessments and diagnostics to identify

The Role of Professional Support and Education in Educators' Mental Health	any mental health issues, allowing for better understanding and support. Attending seminars on mental health and wellness can also equip educators with the tools and knowledge to handle stress, anxiety, and other challenges. By being well-informed and supported, educators become better equipped to take care of themselves and their students, fostering a healthier and more positive learning environment.”
	Prioritize physical health, managing emotions and stress. Involve in spiritual activities to develop faith in the Lord.
	“Surrounding with loved ones and participating in the community of CFC”. (<i>CFC- Couples for Christ</i>)
Holistic Well-being: Balancing Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Health.	Supporting the mental health of educators is essential for creating a positive and productive learning environment. Schools can offer resources such as counseling services and stress management workshops to help teachers cope with the challenges of their job. It’s also important for teachers to take care of themselves by engaging in activities like exercise, hobbies, and spending time with loved ones, ensuring a healthy balance between work and personal life. The Department of Education should prioritize the mental well-being of teachers by providing licensed counselors, enhancing mental health programs, and offering seminars on stress management and other mental health topics. Teachers should also be given time to rest, with suggestions like having an asynchronous learning day on Wednesdays to reduce burnout. In addition, reducing non-teaching tasks and focusing on the mental health aspects of disaster risk management can help ease the burden on educators. Schools can foster a positive workplace culture by organizing regular bonding activities, such as open forums where teachers can share experiences and enjoy good food together. Finally, incorporating stress-free activities in the school routine can create a more relaxed atmosphere, allowing teachers to recharge and continue their vital work with energy and enthusiasm.
Building Support Networks through Family and Community Engagement.	
Supporting Educators' Mental Health for a Positive Learning Environment.	
The Importance of Self-Care and Work-Life Balance for Educators' Mental Health.	“To maintain good mental health, educators should prioritize self-care and set clear boundaries between work and personal life. This includes taking regular breaks, getting enough sleep, exercising, and eating a balanced diet. Managing stress and avoiding overwork are essential to staying healthy and focused. It’s important to take time for activities that bring joy and relaxation, such as hobbies or recreational activities, to help unwind and reset. Connecting with supportive colleagues and openly discussing feelings can also provide emotional relief. Seeking professional help when needed ensures that educators are properly supported. While it's good to improve professionally, it’s important not to push oneself too hard to the point of stress and burnout. Practicing self-care, setting boundaries, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance not only improve personal well-being but also help educators take better care of their students.”

Conclusions & Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, all teachers agreed to increase their knowledge and skills on mental health literacy as such would mean creating a safer and supportive environment for their learners, and offering help and aid for their colleagues. Every policy and order promoting mental health literacy and awareness are most welcome and adhere to in the education field. The significant role of knowledge on mental health would greatly contribute in fronting the future of education where culture and society are dictated by the ever-changing environment.

Moreso, it is recommended to conduct a more comprehensive investigation that explores additional variables or different contexts, as well as to involve different respondents from different educational setting and location. The monitoring and results of the proposed action plan once implemented could also be good probable research to work on.

Compliance with ethical standards

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