

Homeroom guidance program: Approach towards promoting psychosocial and mental health in the new normal among grade 8 students of Nanhaya National High School, S.Y. 2022-2023

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the level of psychosocial and mental health of five Grade 8 students of Nanhaya National High School who were found to have mild to moderate psychosocial problem as shown by their pre- test on Psychosocial Awareness. In his blog, Jean Holthaus discussed that mental illness affects 19% of the adult population, 46% of teenagers and 13% of children each year. People struggling with their mental health may be in the family, live next door, teach children, work in the next cubicle, or sit in the same church pew. If untreated, mental illness can contribute to higher medical expenses, poor performance at school and work, fewer employment opportunities and increased risk of suicide. To determine the level of psychosocial and mental health of the respondents, the researcher conducted a 20- item test to Grade 8 students. Likert Scale, Mean and Percentage were utilized in analyzing and interpreting the data. Based on the results of the study, the students were found to have problems in their families and at home, in schools and in the neighborhood which caused the slight- moderate degree of psychosocial and mental health problems. The researcher recommends that parents must strive to help their children alleviate feelings of depression and spare them from traumatic experiences brought about by family and personal problems. Activities such as exercise, adequate sleep and well-balanced diet can be of help as provided in the Homeroom Guidance Program of the Department of Education.

Keywords: anxiety; homeroom guidance; psychosocial health; mental health

1. Context and Rationale

For more than two years, the Philippines along with other countries suffer from an unseen enemy which caused a tremendous fright all over the world. The occurrence of COVID- 19 Pandemic in March 2019 has put a surprise and eventually brought fear to every Filipino's lives. The world, including the first- class countries was greatly affected. In the Philippines, different agencies, companies and organizations, and business industries stopped. Affected places in the whole country were put into lockdown and quarantines. And the Department of Education is not an exempt to this. Around 22.71M of students have been affected and classes were disrupted. The burden is on the shoulders of teachers and leaders who play a big role and decide the fate of the learners. Amidst doubt, fear and ridicule of the public, DepEd Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones remained steadfast in her pronouncement: "education must continue." With the support expressed by Pres. Rodrigo R. Duterte, classes officially opened on October 5, 2020.

In the quest for knowledge and the mission to continue education, students were set to study using different Distance Learning Modalities offered by the DepEd. As the number of cases of

COVID victims arises, so is the number of students who get scared and fear for their lives on the ongoing health crisis. This situation brought an impact to students who suffer from mental and emotional illness due to the trauma they are experiencing in the moment. Cases of students committing suicide, depression and anxiety are increasing rapidly. A student who burnt a module caught the attention of netizens and the subject of condemnation for weeks were found to be suffering from burn- out, thus, his misbehavior.

There are many factors that can be attributed to students' psychosocial and mental health conditions in this time of pandemic and some of these are: Pressure to Succeed, Social Media and Technology, Lack of Sleep, Lack of Exercise. Likewise, an adolescent who has low psychosocial and mental problem may also affect his academic achievement as shown by decreased attendance rate, reduced self- confidence, impaired ability to concentrate and discouraged continuing education.

Alarmed with the foregoing incidences, the Department of Education conducted series of Psychosocial and Mental Health webinars among which, students, parents, teachers, and non-teaching personnel are the participants. Likewise, a well- tailored program should be implemented to avoid further occurrence of mental problems among students.

In a desire to help find a solution to decrease if not eliminate the increasing problem of psychosocial and mental health, this study is hereby conducted: Homeroom Guidance Program: Approach Towards Promoting Psychosocial and Mental Health During Pandemic Among Grade 8 Students of Nanhaya National High School S.Y. 2022- 2023.

2. Key Literature

The World Health Organization (WHO) in an article entitled COVID- 19 in the Philippines stated that the coronavirus disease (COVID- 19) is an infection disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China in December 2019. On January 30, 2020, the Philippine Department of Health reported the first case of COVID- 19 in the Philippines with a 38- year old female Chinese national as a patient. This continued and the first local Transmission of COVID- 19 was confirmed on March 7. Since then, WHO worked closely with the Department of Health in responding to the COVID- 19 out-break. And on March 16, General Community Quarantine was immediately imposed in a move to prevent the fast spread of the virus. The country was soon placed to a state of calamity or World Health Crisis. Schools all over the country closed and learning of students suddenly stopped.

Malindog (2020), stated that the Philippine economy has been sternly affected by the pandemic. Sectors such as tourism, services, trade, real state and manufacturing are experiencing difficulties. Around 7.3 million Filipinos have temporarily or permanently lost their jobs due to business closures because of the pandemic.

"We are living amidst what is potentially one of the greatest threats in our lifetime to global education, a gigantic educational crisis." As of March 28, 2020, the COVID- 19 pandemic is causing more than 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of school in 161 countries. This is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students. We were already experiencing a global learning crisis, as many students were in school, but were not learning the fundamental skills needed for life. The World Bank's "Learning Poverty" indicator- the percentage of children who cannot read and understand at age 10- stood at 53% of children in low- and- middle income countries- before the

outbreak started. This pandemic has the potential to worsen these outcomes even more if we do not act fast.” World Health Organization (2020)

During one of the press releases on educational issues, DepEd Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones firmly stated: “Whatever is happening in the country; whatever challenges we are facing, education must continue. Education cannot wait; our learners cannot wait. We continue with the process so we can give hope and continuity, and contribute to the normalization of activities in the country,” thus, the continuity of education and opening of classes on October 5, 2020 amidst the gargantuan challenges from internal and external stakeholders.

This situation in country where COVID- 19 pandemic brought a new dimension in the Philippine Education System and born out the so- called “new normal.” Tumapon (2020), in her article in The Manila Times explained that “before the onset of the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19), we prefix what we say with “the 21st century.” We used to say or write “21st century teaching, 21st century learning, 21st century knowledge and skills,” defining these as the 21st century competencies — critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. However, with the coronavirus pandemic, we have a new catchword — the new normal. The Oxford Dictionary defines catchword as “a briefly popular or fashionable word or phrase used to encapsulate a particular concept.” So, what is the concept embracing the new normal? The American Dictionary defines new normal as “a previously unfamiliar or atypical situation that has become standard, usual, or expected.”

The new normal also resulted to difficulty of students to adjust to the current situation. Staying at home for a long time and now studying through the Distance Learning Modality only bred anxiety which causes them to meet psychosocial and mental health problems. According to google.com, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) includes any support that people protect or promote their mental health and psychosocial well- being. One major component of MHPSS is treatment and prevention of psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In a blog written by Jean Holthaus, he discussed that mental illness affects 19% of the adult population, 46% of teenagers and 13% of children each year. People struggling with their mental health may be in the family, live next door, teach children, work in the next cubicle, or sit in the same church pew. And only half of those affected receive treatment, often because of the stigma attached to mental health. Further, if untreated, mental illness can contribute to higher medical expenses, poor performance at school and work, fewer employment opportunities and increased risk of suicide.

The National Institute of Mental Health affirmed that although the general perception of mental illness is still powerful, largely due to media stereotypes and lack of education, the people tend to attach negative stigmas to mental health conditions at a far higher rate than to other diseases and disabilities, such as cancer, diabetes or heart disease.

Similarly, watsonhealth.com.ph confirmed mental health illnesses as the third most common form of illness among Filipinos according to the National Statistics Office (NSO). Between 17 and 20 percent of Filipino adults experience psychiatric disorders, while 10 to 15 percent of Filipino children aged 5- 15 suffer from mental health problems. Among the signs and symptoms of these adults, young adults and adolescents are the following: Confused thinking, Prolonged depression (sadness or irritability), Feelings of extreme highs and lows, Excessive fears, worries and anxieties, Social withdrawal, Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits, Strong

feelings of anger, Strange thoughts (delusions), Seeing or hearing things that aren't there (hallucinations), Growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities, Suicidal thoughts, Numerous unexplained physical ailments and Substance use.

An online article published by PLOS ONE on October 1, 2019 presented a study on the Effect of psycho- social support by teachers on improving mental health and hope of adolescents in an earthquake- affected district in Nepal: A cluster randomized controlled trial, cited that globally, 10- 20% of children and adolescents are affected by mental health problems. Adolescence is a period between 10 and 19 years of age when major physical, psychological and behavioral changes take place. Many adolescents become prone to mental health problems as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Around 50% of the mental health problems are believed to start by the age 14. However, most of the problems in adolescents often go unnoticed, particularly in low- resource settings.

To address the increasing problem of mental health among teachers and learners, the Department of Education thru DepEd Memorandum no. 058, s. 2020 (Orientation for Regional and Schools Division Offices on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services in the Time of COVID- 19 for Learners and DepEd Personnel) and DepEd Order (DO) No. 12, s. 2020 (Adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020- 2021 in Light of the COVID- 19 Public Health Emergency), recognizes as a priority the promotion and protection of the mental health and general welfare of learners and personnel in the time of the COVID- 19 pandemic. As such, DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2020 (Guidelines on the Required Health Standards in Basic Education Offices and Schools) discussed the provision of mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) to increase the mental resilience of learners and DepEd personnel.

It is not enough that teachers are undergoing webinars on these topics. There must be a clear program that will equip the learners and teachers to become resilient and adaptive in this time of pandemic. Hence, the Homeroom Guidance Program which will be taught and used as reinforcement in promoting mental health awareness among youngsters.

Homeroom Guidance Program provides wholesome learning experiences in the classroom that will foster positive attitudes, behaviors and values and improve relationship between teachers and students. Its philosophy states that every learner is unique and has the ability to develop his self/ herself using his or her own learning experiences from family, community, school and society. This shall be realized through the collaborative efforts of family, school, community, government and other institutions. Additionally, HG promotes rational thinking, healthy behavior, and positive disposition. (Google.com)

In the study made by Pascual (2021) about homeroom guidance, it was found out that through homeroom symposiums, the desire to continue studying at home and develop their potentials is sustained.

Furthermore, Homerooms are units of organization which give the importance to the individual student and make him the core of all activities undertaken to help develop his personality and cultivate his social relationships with classmates- DepEd Memorandum No. 86, s. 1959 "Clarification of the Guidance Provisions of the Revised Philippine Educational Program."

2.1. Action Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of psychosocial and mental health of Grade 8 students as manifested by their reflective journals and test questionnaires?
2. How can Homeroom Guidance help achieve a healthy psychosocial and mental health among Grade 8 students after the COVID- 19 Pandemic?
3. Is Homeroom Guidance a factor towards attainment of positive psychosocial and mental health of Grade 8 students?

3. Action Research Methods

3.1. Participants and/or other Sources of Data and Information

Participants to this study are Grade 8 students who have experienced difficulty and challenges as manifested by the results of self- assessment test. This will be conducted in Nanhaya National High School, a secondary public school situated in the poblacion of Brgy. Nanhaya, Victoria, Laguna. Families have low- average income where fishing, farming and small- scale industries are the main source of living. In this time of pandemic, the researcher will try to find out the effect of this crisis to the psychosocial and mental health of Grade- 8 students and the possibility of intervention through a Homeroom Guidance Program.

3.2. Data Gathering Methods

The researcher will administer a 1-20 item test on Psychosocial and Mental Health. Students who will be found having a low mental state will be given extra attention by the teacher by giving advice and other relevant activities. Classes on HGP will be held every Wednesday, 3:00-5:00 pm. The researcher will use descriptive method for the statistical treatment.

3.3. Data Analysis Plan

The researcher will use questionnaires, interviews, and observations in gathering data. Further, Mean and Percentage will be utilized to find the effect of Homeroom Guidance Program as an Approach towards Promoting Psychosocial and Mental Health of Grade-8 students of Nanhaya National High School S.Y. 2022- 2023.

4. Discussion of Results

The researcher gave a 20-item survey questionnaire on Psycho- social and Mental Health of Grade 8 students. 2 out of 5 respondents fell below the mean level which showed that they have moderate to severe anxiety and depression. Results of observations, focal group discussions and interviews also manifested similar findings. These were carefully noted by the researcher through journals and anecdotal records. With the underlying results, the researcher conducted series of activities using the Homeroom Guidance Psychosocial Support Activity Pack to minimize if not alleviate the symptoms of anxiety and depression being experienced by the respondents.

5. Recommendation and Reflection

5.1. Recommendation

1. Adolescence is a period when major physical, psychological and behavioral changes take place. Hence, both parents and teachers should carefully handle them to avoid bringing negative impact in their life as learners.
2. Schools should create a culture of love and respect for students. They should provide wholesome learning experiences that will foster positive attitudes, behaviors and values.
3. School administration should strengthen effective Child Protection Program to prevent the occurrence of incidences of bullying which may result to anxiety and depression of students.
4. Homeroom Guidance Program should continually be taught as reinforcement in promoting mental health and minimizing anxiety and depression among youngsters.
5. This study could be utilized as reference to future researchers who wish to conduct researches of similar topic.

5.2. Reflection

Truly no one is free from anxiety and depression. People of different ages and even high school students could experience depression and anxiety of varied intensity. As parents and teachers, we have a big role in molding our children into becoming beautiful human beings. We should treat them with respect and love, and guide them properly. The love and care we give to them will be emitted to their peers and the people whom they come in contact with.

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