



Psychological safety, compassion fatigue and burnout among mental health providers in higher education institutions

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Abstract

Mental health providers play a vital role especially in the educational setting. They deal with the students' adjustment to new environment, day-to-day experiences and career choices and the needs of the higher education institution they work with. This study used sequential explanatory mixed method which combined quantitative and qualitative method. Results showed that the respondents were experiencing low levels of psychological safety and average levels of compassion fatigue and burnout. Work relationship was the theme that emerged for the respondents' psychological safety while self-care was the theme that emerged for both compassion fatigue and burnout. Results also suggests that respondents were vulnerable to psychological safety, compassion fatigue and burnout as the results revealed no significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and the three (3) variables. It was also found out that compassion satisfaction is negatively correlated with exhaustion, mental distance and overall burnout. Results also suggests that burnout is positively correlated to exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment and the respondents' overall burnout. More so, it was found out that secondary traumatic stress is positively correlated with exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment, emotional impairment and overall burnout. An intervention module tailored to the needs of the mental health providers in the province.

Keywords: *mental health providers, psychological safety, compassion fatigue, burnout*

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Introduction

Mental health is the state of well-being where an individual can realize his/her own abilities and potentials, could cope with normal stresses of life, display resiliency during difficult times, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a positive contribution to his/her community. Through a sound mind and a healthy body, one can cope with different stressors, address the needs of their community, maintain a good social relationship and play various roles expected of him/her. This also helps an individual to achieve his/her highest potentials.

Professionals who ensure that the mental health of individuals are found in different settings. Mental health providers are seen as psychiatrist, psychologist, guidance counselors and other related professions in general (Adair, 2022). In school they can be found in the Guidance Office or Wellness Centers as Guidance Counselors, Guidance Facilitators, Guidance Advocates or as Instructors who are trained in providing psychological first aid or are mental health advocates. Like other individuals, mental health providers experience personal and work-related situations that can challenge their mental health as well. Their psychological safety in their respective offices may be challenge as they suggest programs, discuss cases or suggest interventions for different clients. As they maintain their personal relationships, explore other areas where they can improve and level up their careers to provide better contribution to their respective community, they dwell on different clients with different levels of problems that they might absorb as they help in addressing other's concerns. They absorb their client's trauma and stress which might lead to compassion fatigue, an occupational hazard experienced by professionals who uses their heart, emotions and represents the cost of healing or helping others (Edmondson & Lei, 2023). According to Schaufeli (2020), components of compassion fatigue are burnout, which can lead to depression and anxiety, physical and emotional exhaustion, less enjoyment of work and more arguing, and secondary traumatic stress or the indirect exposure to trauma due to helping others.

They are also expected to provide innovative ways to provide timely counseling services, write progress reports of their clients, communicate with other mental health providers for a better plan for their clients, meet the needs and demands of the institution and the society where they work and maintain a professional relationship. Overwork can lead to burnout, which is a psychological syndrome that develops over an extended period in

response to persistent interpersonal stressors in the workplace. Unreasonable time pressures, lack of communication and support from management, lack of role clarity, unmanageable workload, and unfair treatment are factors that can contribute to burnout (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022).

CALABARZON is a fast-growing region both in industrial and educational aspect. It now has a total of a total of 366 Higher Education Institutions (HEI), 61 are from Batangas Province. This is composed of 44 private HEI, four (4) local universities and colleges (LUC) and three (3) state universities and colleges (SUC), one of which has 11 campuses. As of Academic Year (AY) 2022-2023, Batangas province has a total of 156, 374 enrollees, 90,646 of these are from public HEI and 65,728 are from private HEI respectively. For each HEI with at least 1000 student, one (1) registered guidance counselor is needed and additional one (1) per every 1000. With the dearth for this professionals, other HEI tend to hire guidance advocates, guidance facilitators and tap other organizations or trained mental health providers to address the need.

The observations on the experiences of individuals in the province and the need for additional mental health providers lead the study on the present condition of mental health providers in HEIs in Batangas province. The study aims to determine the psychological safety, compassion fatigue and burnout of mental health providers in HEIs in Batangas province to be able to create a program that would enhance the mental health status of these professionals in the province through crafting a selfcare plan tailored with their needs.

Methodology

This study used mixed method through sequential explanatory design. Data were first collected and analyzed with three standardized tests namely: (1) psychological safety scale, (2) professional quality of life scale, and (3) burnout assessment tool version 2.0 before collecting and analyzing the qualitative data gathered through the use of a 5-item structured interview questionnaire. This study was participated by 35 participants. Purposive sampling was used as this study focused on guidance counselors, guidance facilitators, and mental health providers in higher education institutions in Batangas province.

Frequency and percentage were used to interpret and describe the levels of psychological safety, compassion fatigue and burnout of the respondents. Moreso, rank, mean and standard deviation were used. Kruskal Wallis was used to determine the significant

difference between independent variables. Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare independent groups and spearman rho was used to measure associations between the ranked variables. Furthermore, the answers of the respondents in the interview underwent thematic analysis. Coding was applied as the respondent's answers were transcribed and grouped according to their respective themes. Triangulation was used to ensure that the answers of the respondents were properly interpreted.

Moreover, ethical considerations were highly observed in this study with an informed consent for the participants which states the purpose of the study, the extent to which their answers and participation were used. Furthermore, this study underwent series of review and approval from the University's Ethics Review Committee.

Findings

The gathered demographic profile in this study revealed that majority of the respondents of this study are female with 71.4%. Most of the respondents are ages 31-40 years old having a permanent employment status. Majority of them are working as Guidance Facilitator with 34.3%. Lastly, majority of them are in their 1 to 6 years of service.

Table 1

Respondents' level of psychological safety, compassion fatigue and burnout (n = 35)

	Mean	Std Dev	Interpretation
<i>Psychological Safety</i>	40.29	4.73	Below median
<i>Compassion Fatigue</i>			
Compassion Satisfaction	40.51	6.56	Average
Burnout	23.03	4.71	Average
Secondary Traumatic Stress	23.20	6.68	Average
<i>Burnout</i>			
Exhaustion	2.83	0.77	Average
Mental Distance	2.23	0.85	Average
Cognitive Impairment	2.15	0.86	Average
Emotional Impairment	2.08	0.86	Average
Overall	2.39	0.73	Average

Note.

Psychological Safety: score of at least 50 – most psychological safe

Compassion Fatigue: 22 or less (low), 23 – 41 (Average), 42+ (high)

Burnout: for overall 1.00 – 1.60 low, 1.61 – 2.40 average, 2.41 – 3.29 high, 3.30 – 5.00 very high

for exhaustion 1.00 – 1.75 low, 1.76 – 2.70 average, 2.71 – 3.74 high, 3.75 – 5.00 very high

for mental distance 1.00 – 1.20 low, 1.21 – 2.40 average, 2.41 – 3.59 high, 3.60 – 5.00 very high

for cognitive impairment 1.00 – 1.80 low, 1.81 – 2.59 average, 2.60 – 3.39 high, 3.40 – 5.00 very high

for emotional impairment 1.00 – 1.20 – low, 1.21 – 2.19 average, 2.20 – 3.19 high, 3.20 – 5.00 very high

This study found out that the respondents are experiencing low psychological safety and average levels of compassion fatigue and burnout as presented in table 1. The themes work efficiency, collaboration, professionalism, lack of collaboration, lack of awareness on school policies, healthy working relationship and lack of professionalism are the emerging concepts among the respondents for the aspect of psychological safety. More so, emotional regulation, physical regulation, selfcare, setting boundaries, knowledge, altruism and social wellness are the emerging themes for the aspect of compassion fatigue. Lack of self-regulation, selfcare, wellness, and altruism are the emerging aspects reflected for the mental health providers' burnout.

Table 2

Correlation matrix of the variables of the study

	Psychological Safety		Burnout					
			Compassion Satisfaction		Burnout		Secondary Traumatic Stress	
	Rho	p-value	Rho	p-value	Rho	p-value	Rho	p-value
Psychological Safety	-	-	.208	.231	-.160	.359	.013	.940
Exhaustion	.222	.200	-.352*	.038	.606**	.000	.613**	.000
Mental Distance	.087	.621	-.468**	.005	.491**	.003	.677**	.000
Cognitive Impairment	.066	.707	-.221	.203	.339*	.046	.499**	.002
Emotional Impairment	-.171	.327	-.187	.282	.265	.124	.342*	.044
Overall	.048	.784	-.389*	.021	.557**	.001	.642**	.000

Note. * Significant at 0.05 alpha level; **significant at 0.01; N=35

It was also found out that regardless of the respondents' demographic profile their psychological safety is low, and they are experiencing average levels of compassion fatigue and burnout when significant differences were tested between the variables and the respondents' demographic profile. Results reflected in table show that compassion satisfaction is found to be negatively correlated with exhaustion, mental distance and overall burnout of the respondents. It also suggests that burnout is positively correlated to exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment and the respondents' overall burnout. It was also found out that secondary traumatic stress is positively correlated to the respondents' exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment, emotional impairment and overall burnout.

Conclusion

Mental health is an individual's ticket in achieving his/her dreams, finding his/her purpose and contribution to the society. It is through this that an individual can achieve his/her highest potential. Based on the results gathered in this study, it was found out that the respondents were experiencing low levels of psychological safety and average level of burnout and compassion fatigue. It was also found out that this was experienced by all the respondents regardless of their demographic profile. Results also revealed that compassion satisfaction is negatively correlated with exhaustion, mental distance and overall burnout of the respondents. It also suggests that burnout is positively correlated to exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment and the respondents' overall burnout. Lastly, secondary traumatic stress is found to be positively correlation to the respondents' exhaustion, mental distance, cognitive impairment, emotional impairment and overall burnout. With the abovementioned findings, the researcher proposes an intervention module that focuses on using existential approach. The activity in this module focuses on selfcare practices and teambuilding activities that will alleviate the respondents' low levels of psychological safety and the presence of compassion fatigue and burnout due to their type of work.

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