



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mental-Well-Being of Basilan State College during Post-Pandemic: A Sequential-Exploratory Mixed Method Approach

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Aug 21, 2024 Accepted: Oct 16, 2024	This study investigates the mental well-being of students at Basilan State College during the post-pandemic recovery phase, highlighting significant challenges such as anxiety, social isolation, and stress from returning to in-person learning. While students express hope and motivation for their academic futures, they face barriers in accessing mental health resources and call for more tailored support. The findings underscore the urgent necessity for improved communication and targeted interventions within educational settings to address these mental health needs effectively.
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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the mental health of students around the world, leading to a noticeable increase in psychological distress among young adults. As schools and universities shifted to online learning, students encountered a host of challenges: a sense of social isolation, mounting academic pressure, and uncertainty about their future prospects. These stressors have resulted in rising levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, making it crucial to address mental well-being within educational environments (Son et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, the pandemic's effects were felt across various sectors, especially in mental health, education, socio-economics, and healthcare. Research by Kecojevic et al. (2020) revealed that college students faced significant psychological distress, characterized by heightened anxiety and depression levels. This finding underscores the urgent need for mental health resources and support systems within universities. Reyes et al. (2021) explored the landscape of education during this tumultuous time, identifying numerous challenges in the shift to online learning, such as access to technology and the widening digital divide. They also highlighted adaptive strategies employed by educational institutions to ensure continuity in learning despite these hurdles.

The socio-economic ramifications of the pandemic have been equally profound. According to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) (2021), widespread job losses, decreased household income, and food insecurity affected many families, calling for targeted interventions to support vulnerable populations. In the healthcare sector, Alonzo et al. (2021) pointed out significant issues, including inadequate infrastructure, limited medical access, and an increased burden on

healthcare workers. These findings highlight the urgent need for systemic reforms to bolster healthcare resilience in the wake of the pandemic. Additionally, recent studies shows that the mental well-being of faculty members at Basilan State College (Arriola, 2023) and teachers at Isabela City Schools Division (Jaafar & Arriola, 2024), also fell within a moderate range.

Recent research has emphasized the critical need for mental health support in educational settings. Wang et al. (2020) reported that students experienced heightened psychological distress throughout the pandemic, with many individuals showing symptoms of anxiety and depression. Similarly, Kecojevic et al. (2020) called for universities to establish comprehensive mental health support systems, noting that access to counseling services and mental health resources can significantly mitigate the pandemic's adverse effects on students' overall well-being. Calago and Arriola (2024) also shows that well-being of administrators in higher education institution in Basilan has minimal impact on their work-life balance.

A survey by the World Health Organization (2021) revealed a troubling rise in feelings of loneliness and anxiety among young adults during the pandemic, reinforcing the urgency of mental health interventions in educational institutions. These findings resonate with the concerns of students at Basilan State College (BaSC), where the transition back to in-person learning has prompted increased anxiety about mental health.

In response to these pressing challenges, Basilan State College has implemented various programs designed to support students' mental health. These initiatives, which include counseling services, peer support groups, and mental health awareness campaigns, aim to create a nurturing and supportive environment for students. However, the effectiveness of these programs in meeting students' mental health needs during the post-pandemic recovery phase has yet to be thoroughly evaluated.

This study intends to analyze the mental well-being of Basilan State College students during the post-pandemic recovery, focusing on the impact of the institution's mental health initiatives. By examining students' experiences and the support systems in place, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of mental health in educational contexts, particularly in regions facing unique socio-economic challenges.

The Problem

The post-pandemic period presents a unique opportunity to assess the mental well-being of students at Basilan State College as they navigate the challenges of returning to in-person learning after an extended period of online education. While various initiatives have been implemented to support mental health, there is a need to understand the specific factors influencing students' mental well-being during this transition. Specifically, to answer the following questions:

1. What are the primary mental health challenges faced by students at Basilan State College during the post-pandemic period?
2. How effective are the mental health resources and support systems provided by Basilan State College in addressing the psychological needs of students during the post-pandemic recovery phase?

These research problems aim to explore the complexities of mental well-being among BSC students, providing insights that can inform the development of targeted interventions and support systems to enhance their overall mental health and academic success.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing a sequential-exploratory mixed-method design that combines interviews and surveys to gather insights from students at Basilan State College. In the qualitative phase, we selected a diverse group of 20 students from various academic programs for one-on-one interviews. This approach allowed us to delve deeply into their personal experiences and perspectives, providing rich, nuanced insights into their mental health challenges and needs. Following this, we moved to the quantitative phase, where we expanded our reach to include 250 students from different degree programs. These participants completed a structured survey designed to capture a broader understanding of student attitudes and perceptions. The survey

questions were carefully crafted based on the qualitative feedback gathered during the interviews, ensuring that they resonated with the students' real-life experiences. To quantify the responses, a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" were employed. This scale provided a clear framework for measuring students' views on the mental health resources and support systems available at the college, allowing us to analyze the data effectively and draw meaningful conclusions about their mental well-being.

FINDINGS

Preliminary findings suggest that students at Basilan State College have experienced a range of mental health challenges during the post-pandemic period. Many reported feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about their academic futures. However, the college's initiatives, such as increased access to counseling services and peer support, have been positively received by students. The analysis identified several primary mental health challenges faced by students during the post-pandemic period, categorized into three main themes:

1. Primary Mental Health Challenges of Students

a. Anxiety and Uncertainty

A significant number of students shared their struggles with heightened anxiety, particularly concerning academic performance and the uncertainties of their futures. Student 1 poignantly expressed,

"I feel overwhelmed with the pressure to catch up on everything I missed during online classes. It's like I have to prove myself all over again."

This sentiment resonated with many of her peers. Student 3 added,

"Every time I sit down to study, I feel this wave of panic. I worry that I won't remember anything or that I'll fail."

Another student, Student 8, reflected,

"The fear of not meeting expectations is always in the back of my mind. It's exhausting."

These quotes illustrate a collective struggle among students, revealing how the pressure to succeed academically is compounded by the lingering uncertainties of a post-pandemic world.

b. Social Isolation and Loneliness

Despite the return to in-person classes, many students reported feelings of social isolation and loneliness that persisted from their time spent in lockdown. Student 20 noted,

"Even though we are back on campus, I still feel disconnected from my peers. It's hard to rebuild friendships after being away for so long."

This feeling of disconnection was echoed by Student 12, who shared,

"I see familiar faces, but it feels like we're all just passing each other by. It's like we've forgotten how to socialize."

Another student, Student 16, expressed,

"I miss the casual conversations and laughter we used to have. Now, it feels awkward to even say hi."

These reflections highlight the lingering effects of isolation experienced during the pandemic, which continue to impact students' social interactions and their ability to form meaningful connections.

c. Stress from Transitioning Back to In-Person Learning

The transition from online to in-person learning has proven to be a challenging adjustment for many students. Student 5 shared,

"Adjusting back to a classroom setting has been tough. I'm not used to being in a physical classroom again, and it feels exhausting."

This sentiment was echoed by Student 7, who remarked,

"I thought I would be excited to return, but it's actually really stressful. I have to relearn how to focus in a classroom."

Another student, Student 14, added,

"Sitting in class for hours is a lot different from being at home in my pajamas. I feel drained by the end of the day."

These quotes reflect the difficulties students face in adapting to a new learning environment after a prolonged period of remote education, emphasizing the need for additional support during this transition.

2. Effectiveness of Mental Health Resources and Support Systems

The analysis also evaluated the effectiveness of the mental health resources and support systems provided by Basilan State College, revealing two key themes:

a. Awareness and Accessibility of Resources

While many students recognized that mental health resources were available, a significant number expressed confusion and uncertainty about how to access these services. Student 12 shared,

"I know there are counseling services, but I'm not sure how to reach out for help. It feels like there's a barrier to accessing support."

This sentiment was echoed by Student 10, who added,

"I've heard about mental health workshops, but I don't know when they are or how to sign up. It's frustrating."

Another student, Student 18, remarked,

"Sometimes I feel like the information is out there, but it's not reaching us. I wish there were clearer announcements or flyers around campus."

These reflections indicate a pressing need for improved communication and outreach regarding available mental health services, ensuring that students are not only aware of the resources but also feel empowered to utilize them.

b. Mixed Perceptions of Support Effectiveness

Students had varied perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the support systems in place, with some expressing disappointment in the services offered. Student 14 remarked,

"I attended a mental health workshop, but it didn't really address my specific concerns. I think more personalized support would be helpful."

This sentiment was shared by Student 15, who stated,

"The workshops are nice, but they feel too general. I want to talk about my own experiences, not just listen to a presentation."

Another student, Student 19, expressed frustration, saying,

"I tried to talk to a counselor, but I felt like they didn't really understand my situation. I left feeling more confused than when I went in."

These quotes highlight the importance of tailoring mental health resources to meet the diverse needs of students, emphasizing the necessity for more individualized support and a deeper understanding of the unique challenges they face.

After the in-depth interviews, these findings were translated into a quantitative survey questionnaire to validate the perceptions of selected students from different programs within the institution. The newly constructed instruments were validated and further tested for reliability. The newly constructed instrument was administered to a sample of 250 students, and the following tables show the mean scores of the respondents:

Table 1: Mean Distribution on the Primary Mental Health Challenges of Respondents under the Area of Anxiety and Uncertainty

Anxiety and Uncertainty	Mean	Standard Deviation	Qualitative Interpretation
1. I do not feel motivated to catch up on my studies after online classes.	4.0600	.77122	Agree
2. I do not approach my academic performance with confidence.	4.0520	.78214	Agree
3. I do not believe in my ability to succeed in my future career.	4.0000	.81650	Agree
4. I do not feel optimistic about my academic future.	4.0080	.78639	Agree
5. I am not determined to demonstrate my academic abilities after the disruptions caused by the pandemic.	3.9640	.90220	Agree
6. I am not focused on meeting my academic expectations.	4.1120	.80377	Agree
7. I do not feel prepared and capable when studying for examinations or assignments.	4.0720	.82312	Agree
8. I do not effectively manage the pressures related to my education.	4.1080	.71721	Agree
9. I do not believe my academic responsibilities contribute positively to my mental health.	4.0960	.75436	Agree
10. I do not feel that my peers and I support each other in our academic journeys.	4.1120	.76799	Agree
Average	4.0584	.30726	Agree

Legend: 5-Strongly Agree; 4-Agree; 3-Neutral; 2-Disagree; and 1-Strongly Disagree

The data presented in Table 1 illustrates a troubling landscape of anxiety and uncertainty among respondents, indicated by mean scores consistently above 4, which reflect agreement with negative statements concerning their academic experiences. With an average score of 4.0584, students express a pervasive lack of motivation to catch up on studies, confidence in their academic performance, belief in their future career success, and optimism about their academic future. They feel unprepared for examinations, ineffective in managing educational pressures, and disconnected from peer support, highlighting significant gaps in their ability to navigate their educational landscape positively. Furthermore, there is a notable sentiment that academic responsibilities do not contribute positively to their mental health, suggesting an urgent need for improved resources and support systems to address these pervasive challenges. Collectively, these findings underscore the critical state of mental health among students, which necessitates targeted interventions to foster resilience and a supportive academic environment.

Table 2: Mean Distribution on the Primary Mental Health Challenges of Respondents under the Area of Social Isolation and Loneliness

Social Isolation and Loneliness	Mean	Standard Deviation	Qualitative Interpretation
1. I do not feel a sense of connection since returning to in-person classes.	4.0360	.87966	Agree
2. I am not actively working to rebuild friendships after the pandemic.	3.9640	.80828	Agree
3. I do not enjoy engaging with my peers at college.	3.9520	.88136	Agree

4.	I do not look forward to the casual interactions I can have with friends.	4.1720	.76469	Agree
5.	I do not see familiar faces on campus and do not look for opportunities to reconnect with them.	4.1440	.69657	Agree
6.	I do not embrace engaging in social activities to strengthen my connections after being away from campus.	4.0640	.74169	Agree
7.	I do not feel confident initiating conversations with classmates.	3.9480	.92776	Agree
8.	I do not appreciate the new dynamics in my social circles since the pandemic.	4.0120	.94628	Agree
9.	I do not actively seek out opportunities to connect with my peers socially.	4.0200	.91155	Agree
10.	I do not feel a sense of belonging even when I am surrounded by other students.	4.0000	.90514	Agree
Average		4.0312	.30098	Agree

Legend: 5-Strongly Agree; 4-Agree; 3-Neutral; 2-Disagree; and 1-Strongly Disagree

The data presented in Table 2 highlights significant mental health challenges related to social isolation and loneliness among respondents, evidenced by an average mean score of 4.0312, indicating a general agreement with negative sentiments towards their social experiences after the pandemic. Respondents express feelings of disconnection, as reflected in higher mean scores for statements indicating a lack of connection since returning to in-person classes (4.0360) and a disengagement from rebuilding friendships (3.9640). Notably, there is a strong agreement that respondents do not enjoy interacting with peers (3.9520) or look forward to casual social interactions (4.1720), suggesting a pervasive sense of isolation. The scores also reflect a reluctance to initiate conversations (3.9480) and a lack of engagement in social activities to strengthen relationships (4.0640), further indicating confidence issues in social settings. Additionally, the absence of a sense of belonging is underscored by a mean of 4.0000, emphasizing the emotional toll of these social dynamics on the respondents' overall mental well-being. Collectively, these findings point to an urgent need for supportive measures to foster social connection and belonging within the academic environment.

Table 3: Mean Distribution on the Primary Mental Health Challenges of Respondents under the Area of Stress from Transitioning Back to In-Person Learning

Stress from Transitioning Back to In-Person Learning	Mean	Standard Deviation	Qualitative Interpretation
1. I am not embracing the opportunity to adjust back to in-person classes.	4.1320	.65444	Agree
2. I do not feel invigorated after attending in-person classes for long periods.	4.0720	.84716	Agree
3. I do not focus well in a classroom setting, building on my online learning experiences.	4.0040	.79404	Agree
4. The transition from online to in-person learning has not helped me grow and adapt.	3.9920	.80156	Agree
5. I am not positively adapting to the demands of being physically present in class.	4.0920	.76280	Agree
6. After being in class for hours, I often do not feel fulfilled and accomplished.	4.1240	.72576	Agree

7. I do not appreciate the time I take to adjust to the classroom environment after remote learning.	4.0920	.78358	Agree
8. I do not enjoy the structure that in-person classes offer and do not value the flexibility of online learning.	4.0600	.73931	Agree
9. I do not feel well-supported as I manage the transition back to in-person learning effectively.	4.0200	.76809	Agree
10. I do not feel excited about the change from the comfort of online learning to engaging in in-person attendance.	4.0760	.71010	Agree
Average	4.0664	.30628	Agree

Legend: 5-Strongly Agree; 4-Agree; 3-Neutral; 2-Disagree; and 1-Strongly Disagree

Table 3 reveals significant stress and challenges faced by respondents as they transition back to in-person learning, with an average mean score of 4.0664 indicating a consensus of agreement with negative statements regarding their experiences. The data shows that respondents are largely not embracing the opportunity to adjust to in-person classes (mean = 4.1320) and do not feel invigorated by extended attendance in these classes (mean = 4.0720), pointing to a sense of fatigue or disengagement. Many feel they struggle to focus in the classroom given their online learning backgrounds (mean = 4.0040) and express that this transition has not fostered growth or adaptation (mean = 3.9920). Additionally, the scores indicate a lack of positive adaptation to the physical demands of attending classes (mean = 4.0920) and feelings of unfulfillment after long class periods (mean = 4.1240). Respondents also report not appreciating the necessary adjustment period to acclimate back to the classroom environment (mean = 4.0920), and indicate dissatisfaction with the structure of in-person classes compared to the flexibility of online learning (mean = 4.0600). The perception of inadequate support during this transition is also highlighted (mean = 4.0200), along with a lack of excitement for moving away from the comfort of online learning to in-person attendance (mean = 4.0760). Collectively, these findings underscore a prevalent struggle among students to effectively navigate the shift back to traditional learning environments, necessitating targeted support and resources to address their concerns.

Table 4: Mean Distribution on the Effectiveness of Mental Health Resources of Respondents

Effectiveness of Mental Health Resources	Mean	Standard Deviation	Qualitative Interpretation
1. I do not feel well-informed about the mental health resources available at Basilan State College.	4.0440	.75121	Agree
2. I do not find it straightforward to access the mental health resources offered by the institution.	4.0400	.76992	Agree
3. The institution does not provide clear and helpful information about mental health support services.	4.0840	.72598	Agree
4. I do not believe I have received excellent support from mental health resources on campus.	3.9760	.87320	Agree
5. The counseling services provided have not made a positive difference for me.	4.0240	.69379	Agree
6. I have not actively participated in mental health workshops offered by the institution.	3.9760	.84039	Agree
7. The materials and topics covered in mental health workshops do not align well with my needs.	4.1040	.66253	Agree
8. I do not feel that mental health support services at Basilan State College truly understand my unique challenges.	4.0560	.76891	Agree
9. I do not believe that personalized support enhances the effectiveness of mental health services.	3.9800	.80386	Agree
10. My experiences with mental health resources have not greatly enriched my well-being.	3.9000	.85141	Agree
Average	4.0184	.34429	Agree

Legend: 5-Strongly Agree; 4-Agree; 3-Neutral; 2-Disagree; and 1-Strongly Disagree

The data presented in Table 4 illustrates a concerning perception of the effectiveness of mental health resources among respondents at Basilan State College, with an average mean score of 4.0184, which indicates agreement with negative statements regarding the available services. Respondents express a lack of information about mental health resources (mean = 4.0440) and find it challenging to access these services (mean = 4.0400), suggesting a communication gap between the institution and its students. The majority agree that the institution does not provide clear and helpful information about mental health support (mean = 4.0840) and express dissatisfaction with the level of support received from mental health resources on campus (mean = 3.9760). Additionally, there is a consensus that counseling services have not made a positive impact on their well-being (mean = 4.0240) and that the materials covered in workshops do not align with their needs (mean = 4.1040). Furthermore, the respondents feel that these support services do not adequately understand their unique challenges (mean = 4.0560) and express skepticism about the effectiveness of personalized support in enhancing service outcomes (mean = 3.9800). Overall, the findings highlight a strong sense of dissatisfaction and a pressing need for improvements in mental health resource availability and effectiveness, underscoring the importance of enhancing communication, access, and relevant support to better meet student needs.

CONCLUSION

The qualitative findings from students at Basilan State College reveal a complex landscape of mental health challenges in the post-pandemic era. Key issues include anxiety about academic performance, feelings of social isolation, and the stress associated with returning to in-person learning. These themes highlight the difficulties students face as they adapt to this new educational phase, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive environment that nurtures both mental well-being and academic success.

The study also uncovers significant gaps in awareness and accessibility of mental health resources at the college, along with mixed perceptions regarding the support provided. Students expressed a need for better communication about available services and a more personalized approach to mental health care. Addressing these gaps is vital for fostering an environment where students feel encouraged to seek help and prioritize their mental health.

The data reveals alarming levels of anxiety and uncertainty among respondents, evidenced by mean scores above 4 across various aspects of their academic and social experiences. Students report a pervasive lack of motivation, confidence, and optimism regarding their studies and future careers, alongside feelings of unpreparedness for examinations and inadequate peer support. Additionally, there is a prevalent sentiment of social isolation and disengagement since the pandemic, with respondents expressing difficulties in reconnecting with peers and a significant reluctance to engage in social interactions. As they transition back to in-person learning, students struggle with focus and adaptation, indicating fatigue and dissatisfaction with the rigid structure of traditional classes compared to online learning. Meanwhile, perceptions of mental health resources at Basilan State College are similarly negative, with students highlighting a lack of information, accessibility issues, and dissatisfaction with the counseling services provided. Collectively, these findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions and improved support systems to address the critical mental health challenges faced by students, aiming to foster resilience, social connection, and a supportive academic environment.

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