Long Paper

Family Communication Patterns as Predictor of Help Seeking among Selected State University Students in Times of Distress

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Abstract

        Mental health is one of the most serious issues in the Philippines, as well as the rest of the world. Seeking help is one method of coping with mental health concerns, and the family dimension has been left out of this subject. This study aims to examine the significance of family communication patterns in how help seeking might be encouraged using a quantitative, cross-sectional design. A survey was done among randomly selected Filipino undergraduate students. Results revealed that academic concerns were the most reported source of distress, followed by family-related issues, and general relationship

and support. The top reasons for not seeking help in times of distress include lack of available and accessible sources or means to seek help; self-reliance; and to not be a burden, a bother, or a cause of concern. The most widely reported family types were pluralistic and protective. The type of help (informal vs formal), gender, age, and family communication patterns were significantly related to seeking help. Since family communication has been established to influence help seeking, families and concerned institutions must be equipped with adequate mental health resources for providing immediate assistance and enhancing the coping skills students need to get through difficult situations.

Keywords – family communication, help seeking, mental health, students

INTRODUCTION

Mental health has become one of the pressing concerns not just in the Philippines but also in the whole world. In fact, depression affects around 280 million people globally (World Health Organization, 2023). In addition to this, more than 700,000 individuals commit suicide yearly, with many more attempting suicide (WHO, 2019; WHO, 2023). It is also a fact that suicide affects people of all ages and was the world's fourth major cause of death among 15–29-year-olds in 2019 (WHO, 2019; WHO, 2023). In the Philippines, the situation is not much different. Approximately 3.6 million Filipinos are dealing with at least one form of mental, neurological, or drug-related disorder (WHO, 2020). The data from WHO (2020) also shows 5,570 suicide deaths in the country. Indeed, the gravity of the mental health crisis is evident in today's society.

The prevalence of these health concerns can be attributed to the rapidly changing society. The adolescents and emerging adults are of particular concern taking into account the prevalence of mental health issues in this stage, and the significant life transitions that these individuals experience. According to program consultants in South-East Asia (Barker, 2007), the conventional family support has been weakened because of changes in the social and economic systems, including academic attainment, rapid urbanization, and rising alternatives for young women in the modern economy. Increased prevalence of psychological concerns such as family conflicts, emotional or identity issues, and substance abuse among adolescents are generally traced to these trends. Furthermore, emerging adulthood has its own complexities, with some overlaps with adolescence. Following the introduction of a curriculum reform that increased the length of the basic education program from ten (10) to twelve (12) years, Filipino college students would generally find themselves in these life stages. With academic responsibilities and major life transitions, college students then are facing a variety of social, economic, psychological, and emotional challenges. Indeed, it is no surprise that mental health among these groups has emerged as one of the world's most prevalent concerns.

Considering the substantial impact of family dynamics on child outcomes, specifically on how they function inside and outside of their "homes", the present study investigates its relationship to mental health. In particular, the study aims to explore the influence of family communication patterns to the help-seeking intention and behavior of Filipino college students through the Family Communication Patterns Theory. It is then argued that exploring the family communication patterns would generate insights on how help seeking can be encouraged in this crucial life stage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Distress

This paper describes psychological distress as "...the unpleasant feelings or emotions that [one] may have when [they] feel overwhelmed. These emotions and feelings can get in the way of [one's] daily living and affect how [they] react to the people around [them]" (Cardiac College, n.d.). Dy et al. (2015) examined the challenges confronted by Filipino college students. In their study, the Filipino college students ranked their top stressors which are (listed from highest ranked to lowest ranked): (1) difficulty in academics, (2) workload related to academics, (3) time management, (4) the obligations that come with living on their own, (5) economic difficulties, (6) extracurricular engagements, (7) student performance under parental pressure, (8) post-graduation plans, and (9) workload related to activities in affiliated organizations and (10) peer interactions. Many of these challenges are observed to have been made complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic as the situation brought about drastic changes. For one, the Philippine government suspended all classes in March 2020 in response to the mounting COVID-19 cases. The state university in the study, like many other higher education institutions, opted to implement a flexible learning mode in the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021, with the course syllabus, delivery, and assessment methods adjusted and modified based on the demographics and circumstances of the students. Asynchronous classes were primarily facilitated using online learning systems, whereas synchronous sessions were facilitated via video conferencing platforms and virtual meetings (ex. Zoom, Google Classroom or Google Meet). These arrangements were also adopted for a significant portion of the next academic year, 2021-2022. Eventually, the state university has accommodated a limited number of students as the campus is gradually reopened. Indeed, the pandemic caused considerable changes in the educational system, which students are striving to keep up with.

Help Seeking

In general, individuals suffering from distress are encouraged to ask for assistance in dealing with their condition and avoiding severe health consequences. There are several methods of dealing with difficulties, and getting help is just one example of an

'approach' coping technique – in which an issue is identified and purposefully treated in a certain manner. These are commonly useful coping mechanisms (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993, as cited in Rickwood, Deane, Wilson & Ciarrochi, 2005). However, the challenge lies with the willingness of these individuals to seek help. Thus, it is no surprise that there have been numerous studies that aim to understand the facilitators and barriers to help seeking.

In the Filipino context, the few studies on help seeking have tackled the following variables: availability and accessibility of mental health services (Tuliao, 2014; Tanaka et al., 2018; Martinez et al., 2020); financial constraints (Pinggolio & Mateo, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020); comfort in reaching out to professionals (Tuliao, 2014; Pinggolio & Mateo, 2018); previous experiences with mental health providers (Martinez et al., 2020); social support (Tuliao & Velasquez, 2014, Arnado & Bayod, 2020, Martinez et al., 2020); cultural and social factors influencing stigma and conceptualization of mental health-related issues (Tuliao, 2014; Tuliao et al., 2016; Pinggolio & Mateo, 2018; Tanaka et al., 2018; Ines, 2020; Martinez et al., 2020); misconceptions surrounding mental health and mental disorders (Ines, 2020); and self-reliance and resilience (Arnado & Bayod, 2020; Martinez et al., 2020). While some of these (e.g. Tuliao, 2014; Tuliao & Velasquez, 2014; Tuliao, Velasquez, Bello & Pinson, 2016; Arnado & Bayod, 2020) have touched on the role of family in the discussion of help seeking through the form of general social support, it is still apparent that the family dimension is not specifically addressed in the literature. This seems to present a major research gap considering the role that families play in an individual's life, particularly to a Filipino.

Family Communication Patterns

Filipinos are known for their close family ties. In addition, the families are considered to play a major role in their lives. Thus, in understanding certain issues surrounding them, it is rational that the family dimension be explored. In this regard, it is imperative that the communicative behavior such as help seeking be studied in the context of the family. Reiss (1981), as cited in Koerner & Fitzpatrick (2002), has stated that families are defined by their distinctive commonly shared perspectives and the value and belief systems that distinguish them in their social context. These value and belief systems impact the members' perceptions of their social environment and their role within it, which dictates how they communicate inside and outside the family.

In the discussion of family communication, it is imperative to discuss Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT) as it is one of the only few "major theories" of family communication since it encompasses the broadest range of communication patterns within families (Koerner & Schrodt, 2014). The Family Communication Patterns Theory identifies family communication into two dimensions: conversation and conformity orientation. Families high in conversation orientation stress the importance of open communication on various topics among family members (Koerner & Fritzpatrick, 2002; Koerner & Schrodt, 2014). Families high in conformity orientation, on the other

hand, value the atmosphere of homogeneity of thoughts and attitudes among family members (Koerner & Fritzpatrick, 2002; Koerner & Schrodt, 2014). The interplay between conversation and conformity orientations generates different family types which are: consensual (high in conversation orientation, high in conformity orientation), pluralistic (high in conversation orientation, low in conformity orientation), protective (low in conversation orientation, high in conformity orientation, and laissez-faire (low in conversation orientation, low in conformity orientation).

Family Communication Patterns and Help Seeking

Family communication patterns theory (FCPT) has been proven to be beneficial in assessing and explaining a wide range of family behaviors and outcomes. For instance, the influence of family communication patterns on information processing, behavioral, and psychosocial outcomes have been demonstrated by Schrodt et al. (2008). Conversation orientation significantly affects psychosocial outcomes more than behavior and information processing. Specific to support seeking, the study of High and Scharp (2015) discovered that children who grow up in families that encourage open communication (high in conversation orientation) are more likely to ask for support actively. With all the empirical evidence available, the FCPT has established its usefulness in understanding various outcomes by focusing on family communication.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional design was used to achieve the objectives of this study. Analyzing numerical data gathered from survey research methods and undergoing statistical analysis were included in this approach. Generalization of results, objectivity, accuracy, and replicability were enabled through these strategies. The open-ended questions covering the students' sources of distress and reasons for not seeking help were categorized and subjected to frequency count. Through this method, the data was clearly represented given its qualitative and quantitative aspects.

Population and Sample

In the present study, Filipino college students in the Philippines were investigated. A total of 194 selected undergraduate students from a state university in the Philippines were surveyed. These students were (1) enrolled in the university, (2) age 18 years old and above, and (3) Filipino nationals currently residing in the Philippines at the start of the survey. A simple random sampling of the total population was employed to ensure unbiased results. Each student was given equal probability of being chosen with this

approach. The number of participants were identified using the following formula (Equation 1):

$$n = \frac{\dfrac{Z_{\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2 * p(1-p)}{\varepsilon^2} * N}{\dfrac{Z_{\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2 * p(1-p)}{\varepsilon^2} + N - 1}$$

Equation 1

Wherein:
- N = population size
- E = margin of error
- ∝ = alpha; level of significance
- P = population proportion

Data Gathering Procedure

An online survey on socio-demographic information, sources of distress, family communication patterns, and help-seeking intention and behavior were answered by the respondents.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the validity of the research and the safety of the researcher and participants, ethical guidelines were strictly implemented. The study was submitted to an ethics board for review. In the implementation and presentation of research, priority to objectivity and academic integrity were maintained through strict compliance to empirical frameworks.

Research Instruments and Measures

Self-administered questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data. Demographic characteristics (age, gender, and family income levels) were asked. With the operationalized definition of psychological distress as a guide, the respondents were asked with the question: What were the sources of your distress in the past six (6) months? Also, a set of scales measuring help-seeking and family communication patterns were included in the survey form. The Actual Help Seeking Questionnaire was adopted from Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, and Ciarrochi (2005). Respondents were asked whether they seek help for the problem cited in the past six (6) months. Details from whom they seek help were also asked. In addition, the General Help Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) (Wilson, Deane, Ciarrochi and Rickwood, 2005), a self-administered questionnaire that aims to measure help-seeking intention according to the problem and from whom to seek help, was also used. GHSQ is answered on a scale ranging from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely) based on their intent to seek help from a given source. The internal

consistency of the questionnaire and its test-retest reliability over a span of three weeks for personal-emotional problems were observed (α = 0.70; r = 0.86) (Wilson, et al., 2005). Lastly, the Revised Family Communication Pattern Instrument (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Ritchie, 1991; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990), as cited in Koerner and Fritzpatrick (2002), is a self-report questionnaire that asks respondents to agree or disagree with 26 statements regarding their family's communication (on a 7-point scale). Two (2) of these statements are: *"In our family we often talk about topics like politics and religion where some persons disagree with others"*, and *"In our home, my parents usually have the last word."* Cronbach's alpha has a mean score of 0.79 and 0.89 for conformity and communication, respectively (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002). Also, Bakar and Afthanorhan (2016) showed that all items of the RFCP instrument has high Cronbach alpha (ranging from 0.76 to 0.80) which makes it a good measure of family communication patterns. Through RFCP, the respondents' families were classified according to family types - consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire - under the Family Communication Patterns Theory.

Data Analysis

The objectives, statistical assumptions, as well as the kind and distribution of the data, justify the selection of the appropriate data analysis approach. In general:

1. Descriptive statistics – was used to describe and understand the characteristics of a data set which include sociodemographic variables, and help seeking intention and behavior. For the open-ended questions such as the problem type and reasons for not seeking help, response categories were identified and counted.
2. Z-test and Chi-square tests – were employed to determine whether help seeking intention or behavior are different across sociodemographic variables and family types.
3. Phi coefficient correlation – was employed to confirm the association of family communication patterns and help seeking.
4. Simple logistic regression – was used to identify whether predicting relationship is significant among family communication patterns and help seeking.

RESULTS

Respondent's Profile in Terms of Sociodemographic Characteristics, Help Seeking and Family Communication Pattern Types

As can be seen from Table 1, the average age of the Filipino college students in the selected state university in the Philippines is 20 ($\pm$ 0.116), with the youngest being 18 and the oldest being 32. Majority (78%) of the respondents are female. Their monthly household income is on average 68,415.38 ($\pm$ 6844.645) pesos, with the lowest earning no income and the highest earning 700,000 pesos.

Table 1. The respondents' profile

Characteristics	Categories	Statistics	Min-max	N
Age (mean ± SD)	-	20.79 ± 0.116	18-32	194
Gender	Male	15.98%	-	31
	Female	78.35%	-	152
	Non-binary	1.55%	-	3
	Transgender	0.52%	-	1
Income (mean ± SD)	-	68,415.38 ± 68,44.645	0-700,000	158
Help Seeking behavior	Did not seek help	41.75%	-	81
	Sought help	58.25%	-	113
Sources of support sought*	Informal	57.73%	-	112
	Formal	16.49%	-	32
Help Seeking intention	Would likely seek help	52.11%	-	99
	Would not likely seek help	32.63%	-	62
Sources of support likely to be sought*	Informal	97.42%	-	189
	Formal	50.00%	-	97
Family Type	Pluralistic	36.60%	-	71
	Protective	35.05%	-	68
	Consensual	15.98%	-	31
	Laissez-faire	12.37%	-	24

* See Appendices 4 and 5 for detailed information on all types of support

Findings showed that the most reported source of distress of the students is academics (29%), followed by family-related issues (13%) and then, general relationship and support (9%) (see Appendix 2 for detailed information). Results also show that more than half (58%) of the respondents sought help, while a significant portion of the population (42%) represents those who did not. Some of the reasons of the students for not seeking help include (see Appendix 3 for detailed information): (1) Lack of available and accessible sources or means to seek help - e.g., time, finance, ability to communicate, significant social support (23%); (2) self-reliance (20%); and (3) to not be a burden, a bother or a cause of concern (15%). It is also quite notable that for those who sought help, the sources with the higher responses are those considered to be informal sources of support (58%) (see Appendix 4 for detailed information).

Around 52 percent of the respondents would also intend to seek help in times of distress. Aside from this, the students rated how likely it is for them to consult various sources of support from 1 (Extremely Unlikely) to 7 (Extremely Likely). Summing up the

responses for (a) ratings 1-3, (b) rating 4, and (c) ratings 5-7, Appendix 5 shows the number of those who responded for each source. In general, 97 percent of the students intend to seek informal help, while 50 percent of them would intend to seek formal help.

Lastly, the frequently reported family communication pattern types were pluralistic (37%) and protective (35%). These results were used in the succeeding sections to answer the main objective of the study.

Help Seeking

The help seeking intention and behavior were measured in the present study. The differences of help seeking were also explored across gender, age, income classes and type of support.

Differences in Help Seeking

As can be seen from Table 2, female students (66%) are more likely than male students to seek help (38%). Furthermore, at 5% level of significance, there is enough evidence to conclude that more students (58%) have sought informal help than formal help (16%). Also, far more students intend to seek informal help (97%) than formal help (50%).

Table 2. Z-test analysis of help seeking across gender and type of support

Variable	N	%	p-value	
			Two-tailed	One-tailed
Have sought help (Behavior)				
Gender			**0.4348**	**0.2174** [a]
Male	16	51.61%		
Female	90	59.21%		
Would seek help (Intention)				
Gender			**0.0092***	**0.0046*** [a]
Male	9	37.5%		
Female	86	65.65%		
Have sought help (Behavior)				
Type of Support			**< 0.0001***	**< 0.0001*** [b]
Informal	112	57.73		
Formal	32	16.49		
Would likely seek help (Intention)				
Type of Support			**< 0.0001***	**< 0.0001*** [b]
Informal	189	97.42		
Formal	97	50		

* Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$
[a] Using the alternative hypothesis, Female > Male
[b] Using the alternative hypothesis, Informal > Formal

As can be seen from Table 3, results showed that gender positively affects a student's help-seeking intention, with female students being three (3) times more likely to want to seek help than male students. Also, age positively affects a student's help-seeking intention. This means that for every one-year increase in a student's age, their chances of wanting to seek help also increases by 1.31 times.

Table 3. Logistic regression of predictors of help seeking intention

Variable	Odds ratio	Coefficient	S.E.	Z	P-value
Gender (Female)	3.19	1.16	1.465	2.52	0.0120*
Age	1.31	0.27	0.154	2.28	0.0220*

* Significant at α = 0.05

The respondents were grouped according to an adapted threshold for income classes provided by Albert et al. (2018) (as cited by Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2020) which they based on the poverty data reported by Philippine Statistics Authority in 2018, (see Appendix 1). As shown in Table 4, among the respondents from the middle class, the majority intend to seek help (63%) and have sought help (64%). Interestingly, among those from the upper income, more respondents intend to seek help (55%) and yet relatively less have sought help (46%). Despite this, there is no significant difference in help seeking among the income classes.

Table 4. Cross-tabulation and chi-square test of independence between help seeking and monthly family income

Variables	Monthly family income						p-value
	Low income		Middle class		Upper income		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
HS Behavior							0.0880
Have sought help	20	57.14	69	64.49	24	46.15	
Have not sought help	15	42.86	38	35.51	28	53.85	
HS Intention							0.6030
Would likely seek help	18	58.06	57	63.33	24	54.55	
Would not likely seek help	13	41.49	33	36.67	20	45.45	

Family Communication Patterns and Help Seeking

Differences in Help Seeking Across Family Types

Table 5 shows that at 5% level of significance, there is a significant relationship between a student's help-seeking intention and their family type. More students from families with high conversation orientation (consensual and pluralistic families) intend to seek help from parents than students from families with a low conversation orientation (laissez-faire and protective families). Specifically, 76 percent of the students from consensual families would likely seek help from parents, while almost half (47.37%) of the

students from families belonging to the laissez-faire would not likely seek help from parents.

Table 5. Cross-tabulation and chi-square test of independence between help seeking and family type

Variables	Family type				p-value
	Laissez-faire	Protective	Pluralistic	Consensual	
HS Behavior (parents)					**0.1220**
Have sought help	13 (54.17%)	36 (52.94%)	44 (61.97%)	20 (64.52%)	
Have not sought help	11 (45.83%)	32 (47.06%)	27 (38.03%)	11 (35.48%)	
HS Intention (parents)					**<0.0001***
Would likely seek help	10 (52.63%)	30 (52.63%)	37 (61.67%)	22 (75.86%)	
Would not likely seek help	9 (47.37%)	27 (47.37%)	23 (38.33%)	7 (24.14%)	

* Significant at α = 0.05

Correlation of Family Communication Patterns and Help Seeking

As shown in Table 6, at 5% level of significance, there is a very weak, positive correlation between a respondent's help seeking behavior with their parents' and their conversation orientation. Likewise, there is a moderate, positive correlation between help seeking intention and conversation orientation. These findings show that a respondent who comes from a family with high conversation orientation tends to want to seek help and did seek help from their parents. Conversely, respondents that come from families with high conformity orientation tend to not want to seek help from their parents.

Table 6. Phi Coefficient correlation between help-seeking and family communication patterns

Variables	Coefficient*	p-value
HS behavior (parents) &		
Conversation orientation	0.17	0.0178*
Conformity orientation	-0.05	0.4885
HS intention (parents) &		
Conversation orientation	0.60	<0.0001*
Conformity orientation	-0.34	<0.0001*

* Significant at α = 0.05
Coefficient & Strength meaning:
0.00 – 0.20 : Very Weak   0.21 – 0.40 : Weak   0.41 – 0.60 : Moderate
0.61 – 0.80 : Strong   0.81 – 1.00 : Very strong

Family Communication Patterns as Predictor of Help Seeking

As can be seen in Table 7, at 5% level of significance, a student who intends to seek help is 12 times more likely to seek help from parents. A family's conversation orientation

appeared to be another contributing factor. Students from households with high conversation orientation are significantly twice more likely to seek help from parents than those who are not.

Table 7. Logistic regression of predictors of help seeking behavior from parents

Variable	Odds ratio	Coefficient	S.E.	z	p-value
HS Intention	12.28	2.51	4.987	6.18	<0.0001*
Conversation orientation	2.00	0.69	0.586	2.36	0.0180 *

* Significant at α = 0.05

DISCUSSION

The results of this study contributed to the discussion of those from related studies. For one, the challenges confronted by Filipino college students appear to be consistent when compared to a study by Dy et al. (2015) which investigated the challenges confronted by Filipino college students. However, as expected, the results reflect the current pandemic situations. Many of the difficulties mentioned are observably exacerbated by the crisis. Indeed, while the current concerns of Filipino college students are congruent with the frequent challenges they face, as found in a prior study, it is evident that the pandemic has not only exacerbated these difficulties but has also introduced new ones to address.

Second, the findings of the study substantiate those of Martinez et al. (2021) which reported that Filipinos prefer to seek help from family and friends rather than from mental health experts in general. They also noted that Filipinos seem to consider reaching out to mental health professionals only when all their other options have failed. While informal sources of help may not be able to provide technical assistance to those in need, the findings indicating a high percentage of people seeking help from them may still show benefits. In their study of Filipino college students, Tuliao and Velasquez (2014) found that those who are willing to seek psychological help from family members and other informal sources are also more likely to seek help from mental health specialists. Furthermore, these findings are in line with that of World Health Organization's service organization pyramid for an optimal mix of services for mental health (WHO, 2009). This approach suggests several methods for strengthening mental health services which includes promoting informal community care services. As vital members of the community, WHO (2009) highlights that people would prefer and have easier access to obtaining informal help, contributing to the strengthening of mental health services. However, while informal support plays an important role, mental health services should not solely revolve on this.

Third, Bunagan et al. (2011), as cited in Tuliao (2014), found that Filipinos' attitudes on reaching out to mental health professionals do not differ across gender, contradicting the present study's findings. The results of an international study of Rickwood et al.

(2005), on the other hand, aligns to those of the present study which revealed that girls are more likely to want and seek help, which is particularly apparent among older girls seeking help from friends. With these points in consideration, Tuliao's (2014) argument on gender differences has become apparent in which they stated that help-seeking mechanism has produced conflicting outcomes. This study has made an important contribution to the literature by confirming the gender effect on help seeking. Further comparisons to recent empirical studies on help seeking were found to be difficult because age is not covered much in the literature focusing on Filipinos in the Philippines, necessitating recommendations for further research. As for the income class, Martinez et al. (2021) found that one of the most identified barriers to formal help seeking among Filipinos was financial challenges owing to high fees, an inadequate access to health insurance, or an unstable employment situation. This contradicts the findings of the current study, which indicated no significant differences in help seeking between income classes. This calls for additional discussion.

Fourth, results showed that most of the respondents came from pluralistic households. As discussed in the previous sections, conversation orientation is high in pluralistic homes, whereas conformity orientation is low. All members of these households are encouraged to communicate honestly and openly. Parents acknowledge that they do not have to make decisions for their children, and that all family members, including children, can make strong arguments and participate in decision-making. Children in these homes begin to value family dialogues while also learning to be self-sufficient and independent, which develops their communication skills and confidence in making their own decisions. Protective families are a close second to pluralistic families. Protective families are characterized with low conversation orientation and high conformity orientation. These families value parental authority more than open discussion among the members. Children in these families tend to not regard family dialogues of highest importance and not be confident of their own decisions-making skills. This, then, makes them more susceptible to be easily influenced by others. Due to them being conformity-oriented, they tend to have unfavorable perception of conflict (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997, as cited in Koerner and Schrodt, 2014). The members then believe that disagreements should be avoided, and homogeneity of thoughts be prioritized. Considering all these factors, these families tend to have less skills in resolving conflict.

Pluralistic and protective families being the mostly reported family types reflect observable differences among families of the respondents in the current world. Medina (2015), in the discussion of Filipino families, explained the changing parent-child relations where they stated that Filipino parents have always cherished and are devoted to their children. Children then show their parents discipline and commitment. Furthermore, children have demonstrated reliance on their parents, as reflected by them reaching out to their parents for support in times of distress. It is no surprise, then, that Filipino parents have significant influence on the decisions of the children. Filipino parents, according to Medina (2015) are progressively reacting to current changes and modifying their child-rearing approach from reliance to autonomy, strictness to allowing, complete

control to independence, and conservatism to openness and self-reliance. The changing family dynamics then provides a strong basis for the contrasting degrees of conversation and conformity orientations of the two most reported family types of the Filipino college students.

Finally, various studies on family relations and seeking help or support (e.g., Fallon & Bowles, 2001; High & Scharp, 2015) have emphasized the role of parents in creating and modeling problem-solving skills. High and Scharp (2015) even suggested that families should reserve time to speak about life events and ask about their children's need for support. Furthermore, these studies have advocated these behaviors based on their findings, emphasizing the critical role that families contribute to the overall stress responses of each member. While the results of the analysis on family communication patterns and help seeking only covered that of help seeking from parents, these are nevertheless significant. The willingness to seek psychological help from family and nonfamily members was linked to less stigma and more positive attitudes on getting help (Tuliao & Velasquez, 2014). This supports that informal source of help, such as family members, can still play an important role in encouraging people to seek help in general.

CONCLUSIONS

College students are facing a variety of social, economic, psychological, and emotional challenges. Their daily problems, like those of other populations, have been aggravated by the global pandemic. It is no surprise, then, that mental health among these groups has emerged as one of the world's most prevalent concerns. The present study confirms that family communication pattern predicts help seeking behavior among Filipino college students. This adds it to the lengthy list of variables that family communication pattern influences, including mental and physical health in young adult children, communication apprehension, adult children's romantic partner conflict, resiliency, family rituals, confirmation and affection, conflict management, parent-adolescent understanding information processing, behavioral, and psychosocial outcomes. The crucial role of communication in safeguarding the integrity of social institutions such as the family is undeniable. Indeed, the family is essential in helping children establish the coping resources they will need to withstand a crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Implications

There are few studies on the topic of help seeking among Filipinos residing in the Philippines, and a few of them include college students as participants. Future research may want to focus on high school students as their target population to fully determine the effect of age on help seeking and learn more about help seeking across the ages. Also, it was stated how finances might impact a person's decision to seek help. This contrasts with the current study's findings, which found no significant differences in help seeking

between income groups. This also necessitates further discussion. In addition, the study only covered family types and help seeking from parents. Future research may want to investigate other sources of support and uncover new discussion points. Also, the study did not include non-binary and transgender in the statistical analysis due to limited samples from these groups. This was done to avoid underrepresentation and inaccurate findings. Hence, future study that focuses on all gender identities is advised.

Practical Implications

The findings revealed that the students seek help from informal rather than formal sources. While professionals and experts should be prioritized in providing support especially in emergency situations, the value of these informal sources should not be overlooked. Informal forms of support are critical in providing immediate assistance and precursor to availing formal services. Institutions must establish strategies on how these informal sources of help might contribute to directing persons in distress to formal sources. One effective way of equipping the school faculty and staff, parents, students, and other members of the institution - of the needed skills and knowledge on this is through mental health literacy campaigns and dissemination of educational materials on mental health and when it is necessary to seek professional help. Also, there may be opportunities to improve the use, access, and integrity of the underutilized sources of assistance presented in the study.

It is critical that elements associated with help seeking intention be included when developing programs. For instance, because help seeking differs by gender, programs geared specifically for males might be developed. This is not to imply that other genders are to be less prioritized in campaigns; rather, it is to encourage administrators to devote more time to researching approaches that are appropriate for a specific group. It would be more sustainable and effective to have these context-specific practices. Moreover, concluded on the basis that help seeking among Filipino college students increases with age, expanding mental health literacy initiatives as early as high school would be advantageous. Since the DepEd curriculum incorporates mental health subjects as early as Grade 7, it would also be beneficial if schools were more driven to implementing mental health-related programs and events, such as assigning special days to observe Mental Health Awareness Month. This also implies the important presence of mental health professionals in the school setting such as guidance counselors, school psychologists, or teachers who have undergone guidance training.

Higher education institutions, public, private, and volunteer organizations should also see to it that schools are provided with the best resource persons if they need them for their mental health awareness activities. Conducting these events and programs partnered with the teaching based on the curriculum would be effective in improving the mental health literacy of the students since these young individuals are drawn to these extracurricular activities.

Additionally, given family communication has been shown to influence help seeking, parents' mental health orientation – for both them and their children – and how they may support their children should be conducted. These can be done separately or in conjunction with parent orientation sessions, parent-teacher conferences, and other school meetings. Parents must be provided with literacy materials such as pamphlets, brochures, or guides that include not just general information on mental health but also hotlines, mental health services internal and external to the school, and emergency protocols. In this regard, the importance of having a high conversation orientation among families in promoting help seeking must be emphasized in these dialogues. The characteristics of these families must be articulated to inspire others.

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DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all respondents.

Ethics Approval

The research was granted ethics clearance by an ethics review board.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1

Table A1. Income classes according to monthly family income (adapted from Albert et al., 2018, as cited by Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2020)

Income group (Albert et al., 2018, as cited by PIDS (2020)	Income group (adapted in the study)	Range of monthly family incomes (for a family size of 5 members) in 2018 prices
Poor	Lower income	Less than PhP 10,957
Low income (but not poor)		PhP 10,957 to PhP 21,914
Lower middle income		PhP 21,914 to PhP 43,828
Middle middle class	Middle income	PhP 43,828 to PhP 76,699
Upper middle income		PhP 76,699 to PhP 131,484
Upper income (but not rich)	Upper income	PhP 131,483 to PhP 219,140
Rich		At least PhP 219,140

Appendix 2

Table A2. Sources of distress of Filipino college students

Variable	N	%
Academics	191	28.51
Family-related	84	12.54
General relationship and support	62	9.25
Financial problems	54	8.06
Intrapersonal issues	53	7.91
Health issues of self and others	45	6.72
Current national issues	28	4.18
Other responsibilities (home, work, etc.)	27	4.03
Pandemic-related	25	3.73
Worries about the future	23	3.43
Extracurricular activities	19	2.84
Physical environment	19	2.84
Weight concerns & body image	12	1.79
Romantic relationship	12	1.79
Unexpected events	6	0.90
Thoughts about life & existence	5	0.75
Others	5	0.75

*Multiple Responses

Appendix 3

Table A3. Reasons of Filipino college students for not seeking help in times of distress

Variable	N	%
Lack of available and accessible sources or means to seek help (e.g. time, finance, ability to communicate, significant social support)	44	23.28
Self-reliance (able or prefers to handle things on their own)	38	20.10
To not be a burden, a bother or a cause of concern	28	14.81
Other people might or will have negative responses (misunderstanding, judgment, invalidation)	19	10.05
Other people have problems of their own	15	7.94
Needs or wants to appear independent or self-reliant	13	6.88
Uncomfortable with sharing to others	12	6.35
Will not make things better	8	4.23
Negative experiences in the past	4	2.12
Fear of knowing things about themselves (diagnosis and related issues)	3	1.59
Topic might be too sensitive for someone's religion	2	1.06
Others	3	1.59

*Multiple Responses

Appendix 4

Table A4. Sources of support sought by Filipino college students in times of distress

Variable	N	%
Friend	104	27.88
Parent	89	23.86
Other relative or family member	52	13.94
Partner	38	10.19
Teacher	34	9.12
Mental health professional	24	6.43
Minister or religious leader	13	3.49
Family Doctor/GP	11	2.95
Phone help line	1	0.27
Others	7	1.88

*Multiple Responses

Appendix 5

Table A5. Sources of support likely to be sought by Filipino college students in times of distress

Source	N	Ratings					
		Unlikely*		Neutral**		Likely***	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Partner	181	52	28.73	20	11.05	109	60.22
Friend	194	21	10.82	20	10.31	153	78.87
Parent	193	89	46.11	26	13.47	78	40.41
Other relative / family member	194	101	52.06	19	9.79	74	38.14
Teacher	194	115	59.28	40	20.62	39	20.10
Minister / religious leader	192	146	76.04	17	8.85	29	15.10
Mental health professional	194	72	37.11	30	15.46	92	47.42
Phone help line	194	133	68.56	26	13.40	35	18.04
Family doctor / GP	194	130	67.01	21	10.82	43	22.16
No intention to seek help	190	99	52.11	29	15.26	62	32.63
Others	136	111	81.62	11	8.09	14	10.29

* Responses of 1 (Extremely unlikely) to 3 (Unlikely)
** Responses of 4 (Neutral)
*** Responses of 5 (Likely) to 7 (Extremely Likely)