



Short Paper

Exploring the Public Perception of Filipinos Towards Psychology Students in Quezon City

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the public perception of Filipinos towards Psychology students in Quezon City. The study comprises 50 participants, all of whom were gathered within a 5-kilometer radius of Trinity University of Asia. The participants were recruited through a Convenience sampling technique. Utilizing the narrative research design, this research used a face-to-face interview method to acquire the participants' narratives. This method was chosen to promote engagement with the participants whilst allowing for a more natural expression of thought. The study utilized Braun and Clarke's 6-step Thematic Analysis for analyzing the gathered data. Findings of the study revealed that the saturated data of Filipinos in Quezon City perceive psychology students along with the following themes: empathetic nature, analytical, diverse opportunities, psychology as a medical field, and influence. The researchers recommended that the sample size and population be increased to gather more perceptions towards the said subject, and to ensure that the results of the study would be reliable enough to draw a more substantial conclusion.

Keywords – public perception, psychology students, thematic analysis, narrative research, Filipino participants

INTRODUCTION

“Manghuhula ka ba?” “Basahin mo nga isip ko.” These are just some of the misconceptions or banters frequently cited by Psychology majors in the Philippines. Gaining a richer and deeper understanding of psychology can help people achieve insights into their actions, as well as a better understanding of other people. Lamont (2020) said that Psychology majors can take questions and presumptions about human behavior and test them scientifically, assessing the truth or falsehood in some commonly held beliefs. By using scientific methods, experimenters can investigate human issues objectively and fairly (Longino, 2020). Psychology relies on all of these methods to investigate human behavior, while utilizing the scientific method to conduct research, which means that variables are controlled and operationally defined (Haslam et al., 2024). With that being said, Psychology is often presumed to be a “soft science” by others (Broers, 2021). Some would say it is an easy course, while others would disagree.

Despite Psychology being ever-prevalent, the notions with Filipino students taking this course are still aligned with some misconceptions. Going along the lines of *“Mag-dodoctor ka? Bakit hindi ka mag-medtech o kaya nursing?”* – Psychology is often generalized as solely a pre-med course in the Philippines (Catabijan, 2022). Contrary to popular belief, earning a bachelor's degree in psychology can be a good choice for students heading to medical school. According to Robiner et al. (2021), psychology majors bring unique strengths to med school, including a focus on behavioral science and applied research. Ultimately, this

research aims to gain authentic responses and the general perception of Filipinos in Quezon City towards psychology and its students, to acquire the necessary information needed to complete the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychology Curriculum in the Philippines

Psychology, in general, has been present in our society for decades on end (Wertheimer & Puente, 2020). Its curriculum, however, is not generally known to the masses. Likewise, this provides somewhat of some discourse as to why one should take up this course. In the Philippines, two (2) types of Psychology courses are offered in most universities, BS and AB Psychology – both of which are prerequisites for further studies, such as Doctorate and Law. According to the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order 34, series of 2017, the BS/AB Psychology Curricula shall consist of the following: Basic Courses, Required courses, Electives, Natural Sciences Courses, Thesis, and NSTP. The AB and BS Psychology programs' objectives are almost the same, excluding the fact that the BS Psychology program shall have an additional 20 units of natural science electives. These may be in different unit contributions, provided they total 20 units. Another discourse with this is that Psychology does not offer subjects that involve computing. That being said, subjects such as Psychological Statistics include certain computations needed for future use in the field. Given that in Psychology, students are confronted with large amounts of data, statistics allow psychologists to organize data in ways that are easier to comprehend (Haslam et al., 2024). Visual displays such as graphs, pie charts, frequency distributions, and scatter plots provide researchers with a better overview of the information, making it easier to find patterns they might otherwise miss. Furthermore, researchers can conclude about a given sample or population. According to Haslam et al. (2024), psychologists use statistics to help determine whether their hypothesis should be accepted or rejected, making inferences based on data.

Current Overview of Psychology in the Philippines

The perception of the psychology course is scarce. Interestingly enough, a lack of understanding of the field is common in the Philippines and most often leads to inaccuracy in terms of information (Navarro & McKinnon, 2020). This case is almost the same globally. Bernstein et al. (2023) have debunked 50 common misconceptions about psychology and provided evidence to correct them. In this case, with education or not, people are ingrained with their theories about behavior, and it's often based on what they feel about it is about and not because of the science of it. Moreover, it is a part of human nature's fundamental dispositions. A common belief among non-psychologists is that psychology is just common sense (Campbell & Reiman, 2022). Considering the socioeconomic status in the country, it would be hard to conform to something they feel common sense could solve on its own.

However, as scientists have pointed out, common sense isn't as widespread as we might think, and Rogers et al. (2024) added that psychological science sometimes asks us to doubt our common sense and ignore our intuitions. According to Siegel (2020), understanding another person's thoughts and emotions is a crucial part of social interaction. Our viewpoints aren't innate; they evolve as we interact with the world. Shaped by factors like our beliefs, education, family background, personal experiences, culture, age, and personal interests, they continuously adapt throughout our lives. Some of the sources of misconceptions by Bamberger (2021) include word of mouth, a desire for easy answers and quick fixes, and misleading film and media portrayals. According to Martinez et al. (2020), in the Philippines, research showed that a significant majority, 91% of Filipinos, rely on personal recommendations from people they know when making decisions. With intuition being a basis of aid when it comes to psychological concerns, in some cases, some of these also come from answers that are easy and offer quick fixes. A study conducted by Grinker (2021) also states that people are still stigmatizing people who are mentally ill, and it is something that is still being ignored by society. Moreover, Rizzo et al. (2025) said that the media should still be a platform to fight prejudice and promote positivity towards people suffering from mental illness. According to Tsfati et al. (2020) regarding media impacts, how much someone reads news magazines was notably linked to fewer misunderstandings. News magazines frequently discuss psychology-related topics, and this regular reading might indicate a preference for more reliable information sources. This could also suggest that students who engage in critical thinking tend to seek out such resources. Although many researchers have examined many aspects of the myths and misconceptions of psychology (Rodriguez-Prada et al., 2022), there is very little research on specific beliefs and stereotypes that people hold about the field of psychology, such as about what can be done with a bachelor's degree or the kinds of students who tend to major in it. Given the wide range of subfields present in the field of psychology and paralleling the misconceptions research, it is not surprising that students have inaccurate views about the field, the type and levels of education needed for particular jobs, and the characteristics of those who work in psychology.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researchers utilized narrative research that, according to Andrews (2021), is an approach that emphasizes the use of storytelling to generate data. Also, it focuses on collecting narratives and has an in-depth understanding of data based on the experiences of individuals. Nigar (2020) also said that it is an essential form of communication that allows people to ascribe meaning to their experiences. The researchers also used face-to-face interviews to properly interpret the narrative responses provided by the participants. This enabled researchers to assess and analyze the data from various viewpoints provided by the respondents.

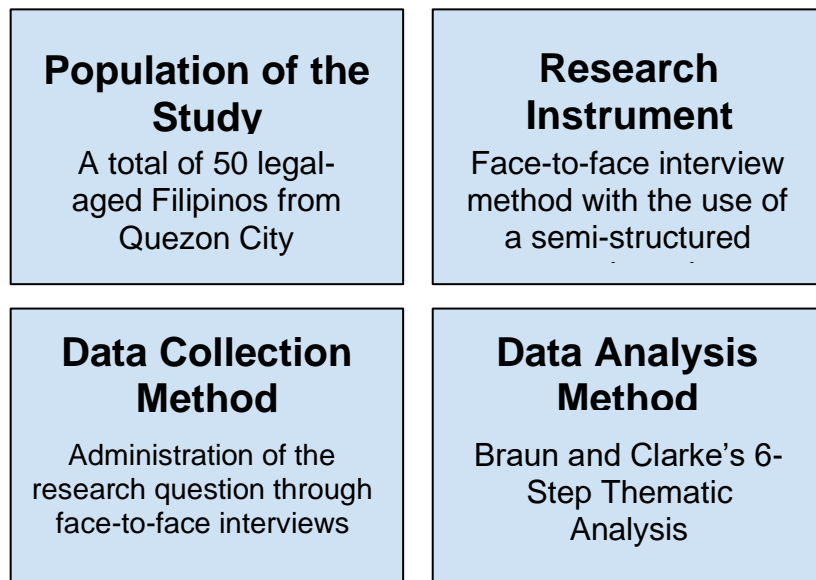


Figure 1. Research Design of the Study

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

This research utilized data drawn from Quezon City, specifically within a 5-kilometer radius of Trinity University of Asia. The study utilized fifty (50) participants from around the city. For participant selection, convenience sampling was implemented. This technique involves selecting participants or subjects who are easily accessible and convenient for the study. This method utilized efficiency. Therefore, the researchers used the convenience sampling technique to gather the general public's perception of people studying Psychology.

Research Locale

The research locale of this study is the general public, all of legal age (specifically 18-50 years old), in Quezon City. Only those who possess the above qualifications participated in this study. Participants were selected through Convenience sampling to ensure a representative sample. The collected data was kept confidential and used exclusively for this research.

Data Collection Procedures

As part of the data collection process, the researchers followed multiple procedures to ensure that the data gathered and assessed had gone through the correct procedures and that it was approved by all concerned individuals and the school administration. This process involves the submission of the research adviser endorsement form and the

student's application form, both signed by the research adviser, department head, college dean, and the approval of the members and head of the University Institutional Ethics Review Committee (TUA-IERC).

The researchers composed an endorsement letter to the University Research Development Center, which was addressed to the Dean of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Education. The communication letter for approval of data gathering addressed to the Dean and other University Administration members included the following details: the title of the Research Paper, a brief background on the focus of the research, the scope, and limitations, along with the demographics of the respondents. The names of researchers were also included in the aforementioned letter.

The creation of a consent form was essential to ensure that all respondents were aware of its potential risks and benefits, and the researchers' commitment to confidentiality. It also includes the right ' participants to withdraw from the interview at any point. Should a participant choose to withdraw, their responses will be immediately removed from the study and securely deleted. In line with the consent, topics such as confidentiality, background study, and intervention, as well as the roles and responsibilities of both the participant and researchers, will be thoroughly discussed. Once the consent form had been drafted, it was sent to both the research adviser and professor for checking before it was released and used in the data-gathering procedure. Once all documents have been approved, the researchers proceed to interview individuals within a 5-kilometer radius of Trinity University of Asia.

By the University Research and Development Center, all documents that are required by the TUA-IERC were submitted once available and have gone through the checking and approval of both the research adviser and the professor.

Procedures Before Data Gathering

The researchers were given enough time to prepare and brainstorm possible question/s that would be relevant to the study, while maintaining its intended purpose. This has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Trinity University of Asia. Once approved, the researchers then proceeded to gather the necessary data within the designated research locale.

Procedures During the Data Gathering

The researchers employed Convenience sampling to gather the participants. Before conducting the said interviews, the researchers provided a consent form that indicated the purpose of the study, including its potential risks and benefits, and the researchers' commitment to ultimate confidentiality. Following the participant's consent to undergo

the interview, researchers proceeded with the question proper. Participants had the right to withdraw from the interview at any point. Should a participant choose to withdraw, their responses were immediately removed from the study and securely deleted. No data from withdrawn participants will be included in the final analysis. Ultimately, strict confidentiality measures were observed throughout the process, and the collected data were thoroughly analyzed by the researchers.

Procedures After Data Gathering

Once the data was collected, the researchers proceeded to analyze the recordings and transcribe them into one document. With this, the data collected underwent Braun and Clarke's 6-step Thematic Analysis and were able to gather five (5) themes along with various sub-themes.

Data Analysis Procedures

After collecting the data, the researchers utilized Braun and Clarke's 6-step Thematic Analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2024) to analyze the patterns in the meaning of the data to find themes. Thematic Analysis is a rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible. According to Braun & Clarke (2023), this method's primary concern is with representing the stories and experiences voiced by study participants as accurately and comprehensively as possible. The first step in the analysis is familiarization. Before investigating the analysis of each item, the researchers will first conduct a comprehensive review of all the data they have gathered. The second step is generating initial codes, The data will be coded, which entails highlighting specific portions of the data, typically phrases or sentences, and developing abbreviations or codes that represent the contents of the highlighted parts. The third step is searching for themes. With the aid of these codes, the researchers can quickly summarize the key ideas and recurring themes encountered throughout the collected data. The following step involves reviewing themes, The researchers will assess the codes constructed, find patterns among them, and begin to develop themes. Next is defining and naming themes. The process of defining themes requires precisely defining each concept and determining how it contributes to the understanding of the data. Creating a clear, concise name for every theme is the process of naming them. Finally, producing the report. Every theme will be covered in turn in the results of the findings.

RESULTS

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of data and how the researchers utilized Braun and Clarke's 6-step Thematic analysis method. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data, generated initial codes, gathered essential themes, reviewed themes, defined themes, and came up with the conclusion based on all the data gathered in the study. Overall, the researchers gathered a total of 5 themes (Table 1).

Table 1. Prevalence of Themes

Theme name	Times mentioned across all interviews	How many participants mentioned it (X/50)
Theme 1: Empathetic Nature	20	18
Theme 2: Analytical	16	15
Theme 3: Diverse Opportunities	3	3
Theme 4: Psychology as a Medical Discipline	10	9
Theme 5: Influences	15	14

Theme 1: Empathetic Nature

This theme finds that psychology students tend to exhibit empathetic tendencies as perceived by the general public, including in this study. Fernandez & Zahavi (2020) said that empathy is defined as the ability to understand people's emotions and view things from their perspective. However, empathy can also work towards the self. This means observing the aspects of yourself with openness. Based on the findings, psychology students are empathetic by nature because they are concerned with mental health issues. With this characteristic, they are also naturally empathetic towards self and others.

1.1 Concern towards self and others

This subtheme was formed from the perception that psychology students are attentive not only to others but also to the self. Moreover, their ability to understand emotions, which they learn as students, is useful in consoling others' emotions, and the same with their own.

“Sa tingin ko sila yung mga taong.. Isa sa mga tao na malaki yung empathy sa katawan.”

“Gusto nilang maintindihan yung ... nararamdaman ng kakilala nila. “

This perception shows that psychology students lend a helping hand by understanding others' feelings when it comes to problems, especially in mental health. They have the knowledge and skills to offer emotional support to those who are struggling with mental health.

"..sila yung malalapitan mo kapag, uh, sa oras na, uhm... kapag may problema ka or rants,"

"Kasi ano, parang sila yung mga taong mapagsasabihan mo and pwede mo silang mapagkatiwalaan."

The participants perceive psychology students as people whom you can lean on when times are hard. Moreover, the students are perceived to be trustworthy, making it comfortable for them to open up. Linked to their empathy is their ability to be aware of their own emotions and understanding. Self-awareness can be defined as discerning one's reflection in others is another aspect of self-awareness. London et al. (2023) said that being able to tune in to one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors is known as self-awareness.

"I think one of the reasons ba't nila tinatake yon, is to know more about themselves."

This response highlights that their motivation to study psychology is to understand their feelings and behaviors. More specifically, findings also showed how this motivation might be linked to understanding their past experiences and their relationship to their present self.

"Ahm, bale parang basta based siya sa parang childhood nila, or sa naging experiences nila before – kaya sila nag psych."

Another perception shows how psychology students are studying to understand themselves. The public's perception is that they took the course to learn about their feelings and emotions, and it might relate to their childhood experiences. That being said, psychology students are perceived to have this desire to help others and themselves. Also, they have been motivated by their own experiences and, in turn, may develop a deeper understanding of empathy in helping oneself and others.

Theme 2: Analytical

The theme Analytical is formed with the gathered data, since it involves interpreting people's perceptions regarding the abilities of psychology students to understand others' thoughts and behavior.

2.1 Understand behavior

This sub-theme is formed both from the idea that psychology students understand behavior by being able to read thoughts and behavior. More specifically, the students were also associated with understanding behavior through their observations.

Findings show that psychology students understand behavior through reading a person's thoughts, as perceived by the general public.

"...nag-aaral ng... kung pano yung takbo ng isip ng tao..."

"...for me, isa sila sa mga nag aayos ng utak at nagbabasa ng utak..."

This perception highlights that the study of psychology includes understanding how the human mind thinks. Essentially, this notion was also associated with curing mental illnesses, stating that the study is about curing the brain by understanding how it works.

"...napag-aaralan niyo yung mga human mind"

"...parang inaalam mo lahat yung gusto mong maano lagi kung ano ang insight ng mga tao."

In addition, understanding behavior was also associated with reading thoughts by learning about a person's insight and comprehension.

While being able to read thoughts, individuals also perceived psychology students to be able to read behaviors. In a narrative shared by a participant, they stated how students showcase analytical skills through their reading behavior:

"I think yung naiintindihan nila uhm kaya nilang basahin yung vibe ... or yung entire room"

"...need nilang pansinin yung behavior ng tao sa paligid nila. Yun lang."

This perception highlights that psychology students are perceived to be able to read behaviors naturally/with ease. Moreover, individuals associate reading behavior based on their need to do so.

"...sa mga kilala kong psych students eh masyado silang observant sa mga behavior ng mga tao sa paligid nila like mga simple things mao-observe nila agad..."

“Observant po sila kasi marunong sila tumingin ng behavior ng tao and mga kilos nito...”

Also, the public associated the psychology student's behavior with reading based on their observant nature. These observations also involve even the small details. Essentially, psychology students are being perceived as observant because they know how to understand a person's behavior as well as their actions.

Theme 3: Diverse Opportunities

This theme revolves around gathered perceptions that see Psychology students as people who could pursue fields related to psychology, such as industrial and educational settings, while also being able to be of use outside of the psychology field. Spector (2021) also said that diverse fields draw on psychological knowledge and apply it to different areas, including education, research, marketing, and politics.

3.1 Career

Although some individuals only think about psychology in clinical settings, responses show that there are perceptions towards Psychology students being seen as relevant outside of mental health facilities.

“So I thought all along, lahat ng mga psychology students are para sa medical field. Later ko nalang na-realize na they could also be pala in the ano, in the industrial field – other fields, even teaching field din pala”

The participant initially assumed that Psychology is for the medical field only, but realized later on that Psychology majors can also work within related fields to Psychology.

“...kasi may mga kaibigan ako na nag-ttake ng law and bago sila mag law is nag-ttake sila ng psychology, and also may mga kaibigan din ako na psychology students”

This perception shows that there is an awareness of the use of a Psychology degree as a pre-law. Psychology as a pre-law major gains a certain set of abilities and information that are applicable in a variety of legal situations. According to Ko (2022), Psychology provides the research and writing skills, analytical competency, and fundamental education in human behavior needed for law school.

Theme 4: Psychology as a Medical Discipline

4.1 Considered as a Pre-Med Program

This study explored the perceptions of Filipinos towards Psychology students. One of the emerging themes from the data is the widespread perception that psychology is a medical discipline, with psychology students being seen as diagnosing and treating mental illnesses similar to medical doctors.

"Naalala ko nung nag-aaral ako, sila kasi yung mga estudyanteng mga nakaputi sa dati kong school. So nung time na nagaaral ako, yun yung nasa isip ko. Ah sila yung mag-dodoctor or yung mga ganon."

This participant's perception highlights a common misconception that psychology students are solely focused on the medical field.

"Ang nasa isip ko po ay isa siyang pre-med. Pang pre med na mga estudyante. Ah yon. Na ano, mga taong gustong mag enter ng medical field courses."

Several responses made by participants also have perceptions linear to the medical field. The perception that Psychology students are solely focused on the medical field may lead to a further lack of awareness as to what Psychology students are studying.

"Tingin ko ma'am yung ano, sila yung nakakapag diagnose ng may sakit sa pag-iisip. Tulad ng mentalidad. Tapos yung pag ano, anxiety. Sila yung nag-susuggest kung ano yung pwedeng gawin."

This highlights one's perception towards the critical role that Psychology students play in providing mental health support and guidance to individuals struggling with various conditions. According to van Rooij & Baggio (2021), Psychologists use psychological science to help people tap into their potential and help them perform at an optimal level.

Theme 5: Influences

This theme circulates the idea that one's general perception towards Psychology students is essentially influenced by one's surrounding environment, both external and relational.

5.1 External

The most prominent key influence is media influence, with references to social media, unspecified TV shows/movies/TV, and news. The media has the potential to disseminate knowledge, raise awareness, and shape individuals' attitudes and behaviors. McCombs & Valenzuela (2020) said that as the media extensively covers emerging topics, it can

significantly impact people's understanding and opinions. This suggests various media sources contribute to shaping perceptions, potentially positive or negative, depending on the content encountered.

“Nakuha ko lang to actually sa social medias”

“Pansin ko lang sa mga nakikita kong post, magaling silang mag comfort ng tao”

These responses imply that their perception of Psychology students is heavily influenced by what social media portrays them to be. While other participants mentioned how specific platforms such as movies, TV shows, and news outlets have become significant in shaping their perceptions.

“Tulad ng mga ano.. Yung mga nababalita ngayon...”

This participant implies that their perception towards Psychology students comes from prevalent news headlines, which signifies how influential a platform such as news outlets can be.

“Kung bakit ko nasabi yon? Siguro mahilig akong manood ng mga movie. Kasi ano diba estudyante sila ng psychology and then parang nabaliw sila, tas parang nag-intent sa kanila na pumatay. Psych, doon na papasok yung sinasabi nating “psych”.”

This implies that one's perception can also be influenced depending on how they are depicted on a specific medium. If, say, a person pursuing a Psychology degree is portrayed as a “psychopath”, this may give the negative assumption that “all” students who pursue Psychology are as such. According to Wickens & Carswell (2021), human senses can process real-world information from outside stimuli, and the way this information is interpreted is what leads to one's perceptions of the world.

5.2 Relational

Friends, social media mutuals, and having a romantic partner appear as another key influence on one's perception. This denotes the impact of peer groups and online communities in shaping perceptions, potentially through shared experiences or information within circles.

“Ahhhh, though pabiro ko siyang naririnig – naririnig ko siya from my friends... Kasi ‘di raw nila maintindihan yung sarili nila eh, so might as well take the subject”

“Base sa aking experience, sila yung tumulong sa akin nung mga panahong di maayos yung aking pag-iisip, yung way ng aking pag-iisip”

The first participant's response pertains to his perception of Psychology students taking the course to understand how their brain works. Meanwhile, the second participant's response implies that their perception of Psychology students is deeply rooted in interactions made with such students.

Lastly, experiences within romantic relationships with psychology students can also impact how others view the field.

“Based sa experience ko, last naging girlfriend ko psychologist. Hindi ako makalabas ng bahay basta-basta kasi di siya pumapayag basta-basta.”

This indicates that their personal experience being in a relationship with a Psychology student has shaped their perception of one, which was stated along the lines of:

“Kasi ano, ahmmm, ‘di sila pwede lokohin... Kasi ang galing nila bumasa ng utak. ”

The concept of parental priming was also seen as a key influence, where a child's perception can be shaped by their parents' attitudes towards a particular subject. As some of the earliest and most influential figures in a child's life, parents can unknowingly transmit their own biases from generation to generation.

“So sa totoo lang, lumaki ako na walang nakikitang trabaho sa psychology kasi yun yung tinuro sakin ng mga magulang (ko)... tinuro sakin ng magulang ko na hindi ako magiging successful sa psychology.”

A study made by Goldin-Meadow (2020) suggests that biases can be conveyed through words, gestures, body language, and facial expressions, and that children pick up on these cues to form their own biases.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study, which aims to understand the perception of the general public towards Psychology students, has arrived to the following conclusions: (1) the Psychology students are empathetic towards themselves and others; (2) Psychology students are analytical, specifically adept in understanding behavior in association to their ability to read thoughts and behavior, as perceived by the public; (3) the field of Psychology has diverse opportunities ranging from careers related to the field and outside of the field; (4) the Psychology students are studying a course that is linked to the medical field, specifically dedicated in understanding the mind and the brain; (5) and these perceptions are shaped by influences from the media as well as relational factors.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have significant implications for awareness towards the public's perception of psychology as a course and enhancing the program for the career program for psychology students. The following are the specific implications of this study:

This study showed that from the data saturated within Quezon City, some Filipinos were not aware that there are various fields readily available for Psychology graduates. That being said, those who have access to social media must be socially responsible in spreading information and in how they portray Psychology students. It is recommended that, if one encounters new information from what they watch or online, fact-checking must always be practiced to avoid the spread of misinformation.

Similarly, awareness through interpersonal interactions is crucial in fully understanding what Psychology students study and eventually pursue. Psychology departments should collaborate with local schools and community organizations to offer engaging presentations or workshops. This can expose audiences to the world of Psychology and help them become well-informed in the field. Connecting Filipinos with individuals from diverse psychology careers can also foster valuable interactions. Through talks and seminars, speakers can share their career journeys, expertise, and insights, providing a realistic perspective within the field of Psychology. Moreover, Filipinos should practice scrutinizing any information about Psychology and its students before sharing it with friends and loved ones in everyday conversations, both formal and informal.

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DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared no conflicts of interest. Each co-author has reviewed the manuscript and concurs with its contents. This submission was written for no financial gain, and it is an original work that is not under review by any other publication.

Informed Consent

The authors of this assignment claim that no personal information about the respondents is included in the study and that the raw data was disposed of securely to prevent data leaks. Each respondent signed an informed consent form before answering the questionnaire, thereby permitting the authors to utilize their responses for the study. The authors ensured that participants were provided with the needed information regarding the study's purpose, potential risks, and benefits, thus allowing them to participate voluntarily.

Ethics Approval

The research was cleared and ethically approved by Trinity University of Asia's Institutional Ethics Review Committee, with the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board protocol code 2024-2nd-CASE-Alcala-v1.

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