

***Kumusta ka? Challenges, mental health and well-being
assessment among DNSC employees during the
COVID-19 pandemic***

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to identify the work challenges encountered by the employees due to the pandemic, their current depression, anxiety, stress, mental well-being, and perception of the institution's capacity to manage the current crisis and mental healthcare needs. Online surveys were utilized as a method. The results revealed that the top on the list of the work challenges encountered by most of the employees due to the pandemic was: internet connection, too many distractions at home, balancing work and personal life, general anxiety of getting infected, and technology-based communication like virtual meetings, while for teaching personnel doing modules, checking and monitoring students and conducting online classes were among their concerns. Out of 73 sample population, 64% were at normal level, 36% were at mild to extreme levels in depression subscale. About 58% were at the normal level for the anxiety subscale while 42% fell on the mild to extreme levels. For the stress subscale, 23% were mild to severe, and the rest were on a normal level. As to the wellbeing level, 22% of the samples were in the low level, 67% were in the average, and 11% were in the high level. Though most of the employees were confident towards the institution's leaders in handling the crisis, they still felt worried about the impact of the pandemic on the institution. The employees strongly agreed on the necessity of the presence of mental health professionals in the institution and suggested conducting debriefing/processing to ease the mental and psychological burden brought by this pandemic.

Keywords: *mental health, work challenges due to Covid-19 pandemic, depression, anxiety, stress, well-being*

INTRODUCTION

The intensity of mental health concerns and issues in the era of COVID-19 pandemic has increased significantly and is continuously increasing due to the widespread uncertainty and health-related fears. The government preventive measures and protocols like lockdowns and quarantine periods have also contributed to psychological burdens such as anxiety and depression. Emerging research assessing the mental health implications of COVID-19 has identified a heightened prevalence of moderate-to-severe self-reported depressive and anxious symptomatology among the general public (Wang et al., 2020). Stress, anxiety, and depression go hand in hand with the COVID-19 pandemic; results from studies done globally have shown the increasing prevalence of mental health disorders among various population groups (Mohindra et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2020b). Premier Value Provider Inc. or PVP surveyed how the pandemic and community quarantine affected the mental health of workers in the country. The PVP is an insights and solutions company for human resources, organizational development, and consumers. The said survey was conducted online among 450 employees from May 5 to May 16 of 2020 to determine the impact of the enhanced community quarantine or ECQ on the mental health of Filipino employees. The results showed that a substantial

percentage of the respondents reported experiencing critical levels of stress (15%), anxiety (29%), and depression (21%) (Mendez, 2020).

The drastic shift into work from home and technological means of communication and work activities due to strict home quarantine measures fuel the pre-existing financial, family, and health issues. Working at home is not easy and is not something we are accustomed to, challenges like balancing time in taking care of children, doing household chores and work, determining the workspace, financial at the stake of internet connectivity, and connectivity per se are some of the concerns that may aggravate distress and anxiety. Also, doing work at home at some point, employees may lose boundaries over working hours which may cause to lessen work motivation. According to Park (2020), a professor of labor and employment relations at Illinois, information communication technologies such as smartphones and tablets enable employees to work anywhere and anytime, thereby blurring work and non-work boundaries. In his study, he found out that when work intrudes after hours in the form of pings and buzzes from smartphone alerts, it can cause spikes of stress that lead to a host of adverse effects for workers, including negative work rumination, poor effect, and insomnia. Aside from technology-based communication, for instructors, the shift from face-to-face class to online

also contributes to the increasing level of stress and anxiety knowing that they are not used to the platforms, they have to undergo training in a limited time, the internet connectivity factors and the like.

With the information abovementioned, the Gender and Development (GAD), in coordination with Human Resource Management Office (HRMO) was encouraged to conduct this study. The study generally aimed to identify the work challenges encountered by the employees due to the pandemic, their current depression, anxiety, stress, mental well-being, and perception of the institution's mental healthcare needs and capacity in managing the current crisis. Consequently, it aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived work challenges that the DNSC employees encountered due to COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the current levels of mental health in terms of depression, anxiety, stress, and well-being among DNSC employees?
3. What are their perceptions of the following: mental healthcare needs and the institution's capacity to handle the pandemic crisis?

According to the World Health Organization (2001), mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities but looking after ongoing wellness and happiness. It is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the everyday stresses of life, can work productively, and can contribute to his/her community. An individual has high well-being if one can function well, has positive feelings day-to-day and overall, and think his/her life is going well.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design and Participants

A cross-sectional study design was utilized to assess the mental health and well-being of the DNSC employees amidst the COVID-19 pandemic using DASS-21 and WEMWBS. A stratified random sampling technique was employed in the study. There are two divisions, the non-teaching personnel (administrative division) and teaching personnel were considered as strata - a sample size of 73 with 95% confidence level and with 10% level of precision. The sample size was proportionally allocated using the formula below that was initially proposed by Bowley (1926):

$$n_i = \frac{N_i}{N}$$

Where n represents sample size, N_1 represents the population size of each stratum, and N represents the population size. In this study, $N = 264$; $n = 73$ (Table 1).

Procedure and Survey Instrument

The study used an online survey to minimize face-to-face interaction in coordination with the Human Resource Office on various social network groups of the employees. All respondents provided informed consent and data privacy consent at the beginning of the survey to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. Data were collected last October 21-29, 2020.

The survey instrument was composed of four sections: the demographic data, work challenges due to the pandemic, mental health and well-being assessment section, the perceived capacity of the institution in handling the pandemic crisis and mental healthcare needs.

Table 1. Distribution of sample employees by division of office.

Division	Total Number of Employees	
	N_1	n_1
Non-Teaching Personnel (Administrative Division)	124	34
Teaching Personnel (Academic Division)	140	39
Total	264	73

The demographic and selected characteristics data collected were age, current address (city/municipality), the composition of households (whom they were currently living with), gender, marital status, employment status, institute/department, job position, designation, current overall physical health, medical history, mental/emotional health before COVID-19 pandemic and the top 5 work challenges encountered due to the pandemic.

For the mental health and well-being assessment, the study utilized the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS 21) and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). The DASS 21 is a self-report tool containing 21 items that assess three constructs: Depression, Anxiety, and Stress (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995). The scale was a valid and reliable instrument in the assessment of depression, anxiety, and stress levels (Sariçam, 2018). Also, WEMWBS was used to assess the well-being of the employees as it measures subjectively perceived wellness and psychological function on a 5-point Likert scale over two weeks (14–70 points, where a higher score means better mental health). The third section consisted of two parts: perception of the institution's capacity in handling the current pandemic crisis and mental healthcare needs. Both are also a self-reported questionnaire developed by the researchers. It employed a 5-point Likert

scale that ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Descriptive statistics was used in the study to analyze the finding. Frequency and percentage were used to estimate the results of the study

RESULTS

Participants Demographic and Selected Characteristics

The demographic and selected characteristics of the study population are shown in Table 2. Among the 73 employees, more women (67%) participated in the study; most also resided at Panabo City (56%) where the college is situated. The respondents who lived with their parents were 36%, while 73% were single, 53% have a contract of service or job order, or casual employment status, and 34% of the respondents were under administrative office. In terms of job positions, teaching personnel was 53% while non-teaching was 47%; it is essential to note that 40% of the respondents were designated in other responsibilities aside from being teaching personnel like being a dean, director, and vice-president. Table 3 showed the common work challenges encountered by employees due to the pandemic.

Results of the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale & Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale

Table 4 shows the results of the DASS 21 scale. For depression subscale, 64% of the samples were on the normal level, 14% of the sample were reported mild

depressive symptoms, 15% were reported moderate, 4% were reported severe, and 3% were reported extremely severe depressive symptoms.

For the anxiety subscale, 58% of the sample was on the normal level, 8% were considered to have mild anxiety symptoms, 16% were considered moderate, 11% were considered to have severe, and 7% were considered to have extremely severe anxiety symptoms. For the stress subscale, 77% were on the normal level, 12% of the samples were

Table 2. Demographic and Selected Characteristics (N=73).

Age	N	%
20-30	52	71
31-40	10	14
41-50	7	10
50+	4	5
<i>Address (City/Municipality)</i>		
Asuncion	2	3
BE Dujali	2	3
Caramen	4	5
Kapalong	0	0
New Corella	0	0
San Isidro	0	0
Sto. Tomas	1	1
Talaingod	0	0
IGACOS	1	1
Panabo	41	56
Tagum	13	18
Outside Davao del Norte		
Davao City	8	11
Davao de Oro	1	1
<i>Currently living with:</i>		
Own Family (with husband & children)	26	36
Parents	32	44
Relatives	1	1

Continuation of Table 2

Friends	0	0
Boarding house	10	14
Others	4	5
Gender		
Male	21	29
Female	49	67
LGBTQ+	3	4
Civil Status		
Single	53	73
Married	19	26
Single Parent	1	1
Widow/er	0	0
Employment Status		
Plantilla (Temporary & Permanent Position)	34	47
Non-Plantilla (Contract of Service, Job Order, Casual)	39	53
Institute/Department		
Institute of Aquatic and Applied Sciences	8	11
Institute of Education	9	12
Institute of Information Technology	11	15
Institute of Management, Governance and Continuing Studies	21	28
Administrative Office	25	34
Job Position		
Teaching Personnel	39	53
Non-Teaching Personnel	34	47
Having Designation		
Yes	29	40
No	44	60
Current Overall Physical Health		
Excellent	11	15
Very good	33	45
Good	26	36
Fair	3	4
Poor	0	0
Mental/Emotional Health before CoViD-19 pandemic		
Excellent	19	26
Very Good	37	51
Good	13	18
Fair	4	5
Poor	0	0

Table 3. Work Challenges encountered by employees due to the pandemic.

Work Challenges	N	%
Internet connectivity	39	13
General anxiety of getting infected of COVID-19 on my life	25	8
Too many distractions while working at home	25	8
Balancing Personal/Life and work hour	21	7
Having too many reports and pressures in meeting deadlines	20	6
Doing modules	19	6
Technology-based communication like virtual meetings and the likes	17	6
Transportation Going to the workplace	18	6
General anxiety about the impact of COVID-19 on life	17	6
Checking and monitoring of students	15	5
Conducting online classes	14	5
Keeping a regular schedule	11	4
Working remotely/at home	13	4
Following safety health protocol	9	3
Having no gadgets/technologies needed to do the job at home	9	3
Physical workplace at home	9	3
Social Isolation	8	3
Childcare while working at home	6	2
Using Technology/various online platforms	6	2
Monitoring employees' performance and overseeing if they are doing their jobs	1	0
New procedures for new normal	1	0
Overlapping Meetings and webinars	1	0
Too many reports required by national agencies	1	0
Too many online interactions (e.g. too many Group Chats)	1	0

Continuation of Table 3

Work Challenges	N	%
Accomplishing all the tasks and targets considering the limitations imposed by the pandemic crisis	1	0
Far from the family	1	0

reported mild stress symptoms, 10% were reported moderate, 1% was reported severe, and no one was reported extremely severe anxiety symptoms.

The results of the WEMWB scale are shown in Table 5, wherein 22% of the participants fell in the range of 14-42, representing low levels of mental well-being, while 67% of the participants scored 43-59, showing middle-range well-being, and the remaining 11% were in the range 60-70 suggesting good mental health.

Table 4. Results of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS 21)

Depression	N	%
Normal	47	64
Mild	10	14
Moderate	11	15
Severe	3	4
Extremely Severe	2	3
Anxiety	N	%
Normal	42	58
Mild	6	8
Moderate	12	16
Severe	8	11
Extremely Severe	5	7
Stress	N	%
Normal	56	77
Mild	9	12
Moderate	7	10
Severe	1	1
Extremely Severe	0	0

Table 5. Results of Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being (WEMWB)

Scale	N	%
Low	16	22
Average	49	67
High	8	11

The perceived capacity of the institution in handling the pandemic crisis

Approximately 57% of the respondents are worried about the impact of the pandemic on the institution. However, 78% agreed that they are confident that the leaders of DNSC institution will make the right decisions to manage the pandemic crisis. In fact, 73% believe that they have the right support system inside the institution that helps them go through these challenging times while 75% of them believe that they also have a proper support system outside DNSC. About 77% are also confident that the management is currently doing well in handling the said crisis.

Perceived mental healthcare needs

About 68% of the employees who responded to the survey agreed that it would be nice to talk to someone about their worries and life crisis due to the pandemic, while 49% strongly agreed that it is necessary to get mental help if they experience psychological distress. Further, 60% strongly agreed that it is necessary to have mental health professionals in the institution, and 56% suggest that employees should undergo

debriefing/processing somehow to ease this pandemic's mental and psychological burden.

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic takes a toll on one's mental health that includes the employees, not just the healthcare sector but also those in the academe. The employees in the academe also experienced a plethora of challenges that may somehow have an impact on their mental health and well-being. This study identified some of the challenges that the non-teaching and teaching personnel of the institution experienced during the pandemic.

Internet connectivity is the topmost concern that most employees encountered. Since this pandemic caused most employees to forcibly shift into online/remote working/working from home schemes, speedy internet connectivity becomes necessary. However, this challenge is present nationally or even globally. The Philippines is one of the many countries that suffer from slow internet connection; however, the government is now making its steps to upgrade telecommunication communication services, including internet speed. Also, the college is doing its part to enhance internet connection in the institution by purchasing additional internet broad bands.

Working from home carries other challenges such as too many distractions at home: kids, household chores,

environment, etc., that usually lead to losing the balance between personal and work hours. This study also proved that most of the employees in the institution faced the same dilemma. According to the study of Shahid (2020), working from home is entirely dependent on the presence of their children at home, comfortable space at home, quiet environment at home, and good internet connectivity. Thus, without these things, complications may arise that will cause a loss of work-life balance. While working at home, employees are constantly agitated that their immediate supervisors will contact them without a time limit, completely altering the scheme adapted by the employees.

Another top challenge respondent's list is the general anxiety of getting infected with the virus. The general population is experiencing such and this study proves that employees of the institution are not exempted. The rapid transmission and the increasing cases of infection lead to panic and anxiety of the public, people are afraid of their health and the health of their family members (Xian et al., 2020).

Despite the pandemic, enormous workloads such as the increasing number of reports have not been uncommon. Many employees received more work on their plate than in a typical week, and these usually lead them to feel exhausted or always under excessive pressure. Moreover, this scenario has also become a challenge faced by the participants. Aside from the increased workload, this study revealed that employees found

it strenuous to use technology-based communication like virtual meetings. The employees' experience may be due to internet connection and unfamiliarity with using technology or application.

In addition, for most teaching personnel, doing modules, checking and monitoring students, and conducting online classes are among their encountered challenges during this pandemic. Remote learning is the new expected delivery of education. Thus, this brought specific difficulties for educators, from preparations of modules, conducting online classes to checking and monitoring students to ensure good quality of learning even in the absence of face-to-face interaction.

Anxiety, depression, and stress are prevalent nationally and globally in these times of pandemic. It is comforting to know that many employees are still at their normal level or show no signs of anxiety, depression, and stress. Unsurprisingly, it also showed several employees experiencing mild to moderate symptoms/anxiety, depression, and stress levels. It is important to note that there are employees manifesting severe symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Approximately one-half of the sample population think that psychological debriefing/ processing will somehow help them ease the burden brought by this pandemic. Hence it would be helpful to undergo such. Even though most of the participants are at their normal level, they see the necessity to be debriefing/process to unleash somehow some emotional and psychological turmoil they are experiencing during this pandemic.

Most of the employees are confident that the institution is managing well the pandemic crisis and that most of them believed that they have the right support system inside and outside the company. However, more than half of the sample size population felt worried about the impact of the current crisis on the institution; they were anxious about the impact of this crisis in their personal lives and professionally. This pandemic and its consequences brought uncertainty in diverse aspects of the employees' lives. It becomes a burden; thus, they experience stress that increases anxiety and depression, and decreases mental well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address critical factors that arise in the study, below is the proposed intervention program.

Key Factors:

- ❖ Life-Work Balance & Increase Workload
- ❖ General Anxiety of the impact of the pandemic towards personal and professional life
- ❖ New Teaching Modality
- ❖ Severe Cases of Depression and Anxiety
- ❖ Mental Health Care

Table 6. Recommendations to address the mental health and well-being challenges of DNSC employees

Objectives	Strategies
<i>To promote life-work balance and workload management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Train employees who work from home on working from home safely and effectively and good management practices, including those related to health and safety and stress management. ✓ Encourage employees to take breaks and relaxation between work hours ✓ Remind immediate heads to observe work boundary hours ✓ Educate managers about best practices for dealing with remote workers so they are better able to mentor and support their subordinates
<i>To decrease the general anxiety felt by the employees</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Conduct a series of small group debriefing and processing to all employees in the context of pandemic
<i>To assess the need to ease teaching personnel in adjusting the new normal modality of learning and teaching.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourage employees who are at a severe level of depression and anxiety to consult mental health professionals. Provide mental healthcare support for further psychological assessment and counseling ✓ Promote mental health awareness and practical coping related to employees concerns through regular sessions/workshops. ✓ Provide opportunities for employees to look after their mental health and well-being, such as physical activity, stress-buster activities, and social events. ✓ Integrate psychological support initiatives into the workplace COVID-19 response plan. ✓ Provide information on mental health and psychosocial support services and counseling programs and facilitate access to such services.

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