



**THE ROLE OF GUIDANCE COUNSELORS IN PROMOTING
MENTAL HEALTH IN THE NEW NORMAL:
BASIS FOR GUIDANCE PROGRAM**

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ABSTRACT

This study looked into the role of the ten Guidance Counselors in different schools in the province of Laguna in the new normal. As an output of the study, a guidance program for guidance counselors to promote mental health in the new normal was proposed.

The research design used was qualitative with phenomenology as an approach. Using the interpretative phenomenological approach, the study generated ten emerging themes which were Describing Responsibilities as Guidance Counselor in the New Normal, Memorable Experience, Different Preparation for Counseling Students in the New Normal, Students' Obstacles in Online Platform, Challenges and Adjustments made by Counselors in New Normal, Ways of Promoting Mental Health, Varied Motivation in Promoting Mental Health, Different Strategies in Promoting Mental Health, Best Feeling, and Varied Enrichment Activities.

The first theme showed challenges in communication with the students and exploring guidance and counseling. For the second theme, Counselors experienced handling cases of child abuse, broken family and relationship causing behavior or attitude problems, running away from home, self-harming, grief, and counselor-psychiatrist collaboration. For the third theme, the ten participants enumerated their preparation by scheduling referrals, online counseling sessions, home visiting, tele-counseling, and preparing themselves psychologically and emotionally to

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deliver proper guidance. On the fourth theme, counselors revealed that students encountered a lack of internet connection and gadgets, lack of motivation, lack of support from family, and distractions. Under the fifth theme, it shows the counselors' challenges and adjustments in terms of communicating with students and handling a large population of students. Under the sixth theme, counselors promote mental health by using assessment forms to check the students, video clips about mental health, orientation about guidance services, and psychological first aid through homeroom guidance. Under the seventh theme, counselors believed that promoting mental health was the need of the country to cope with the disruption of Covid-19. Under the eighth theme, counselors' strategies were online consultation, tele-counseling, segments like talk shows, stress management, and relaxation, celebrating mental health awareness, and home visitation. Under the ninth theme, counselors felt a sense of fulfillment whenever there was progress for their students. Under the tenth theme, counselors' activities that may enhance guidance programs were the counselors enrolling in certification training, engaging activities, proper orientation about guidance function and services, and lastly, online counseling.

Keywords: role, guidance counselor, mental health, new normal, guidance program

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INTRODUCTION

"Counseling has to do with intuition, with work on oneself, with the quietness of one's mind and the openness of one's heart." – Ram Dass

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important the role of licensed guidance counselors is for learners. Barnard (2020) an education expert from Forbes said that guidance counselors were on the frontline of supporting students as they moved through their educational journey as well as increasing a person's opportunities and choices in life, promoting mental health and wellbeing as a core role in education helped students flourish in their education journey, built resilience against adversity, developed protective factors from mental ill-health, and provided them with skills and confidence to self-seek help for early intervention.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the operations of schools in which face-to-face interaction is temporarily suspended. Kaznosky (2021) claimed that students who have had to adjust to virtual learning outside of the traditional school building may be experiencing stress, anxiety, and depression, they were worried about their academics, they had fears beyond their schooling, and to boot they may have barriers accessing helpful resources with these issues to school counseling services, guidance counselors were commonly first responders to students' needs so they also must adapt to helping students virtually to cope with all of the academic and mental health concerns they were experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic. By investigating the root causes of learners' distress using evidence-based resources from American School

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Counseling Association, licensed guidance counselors can continue their work virtually during quarantine due to COVID-19 pandemic. Various learners' problems when online learning was decreased achievement, mental health, inability to coping strategies and misinformation. Learners needed guidance and counseling services during the Covid-19 pandemic with the use of technology to reduce their learning problems. Licensed guidance counselors as professionals, one of whose role was to provide services to learners to help in solving their own problems. The right counseling was provided to investigate students' problems, namely online individual counseling services to investigate any problems of the students during the covid-19 pandemic. Guidance counselors open programs and services in online counseling with social media to help learners with psychological difficulties. Guidance counselors needed to inform the students about the limitations and risks of online counseling so that problems related to technology will be avoided.

As it is, licensed guidance counselors are certified professionals working at academic institutions, they are assisting and provide learners with options for personal and academic decisions. They are providing private counseling to learners, assessing their potential and ability of learners, and coordinating with fellow professionals on learners' matters. They might be suggesting outside resources for additional support to the learners.

Meadows (2018), a middle school counselor, stated that their duties included referring students to outside agencies for mental health concerns, they did scheduling, meditations, suicide prevention programs, referrals to outside services, individual counseling, and homeroom lessons.

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As it was seen, guidance counselors took responsibilities to help students to improve their lives, both in and out of the school. Guidance counselor's typical tasks according to Bureau of Labor Statistics was to identify issues affecting academic performance such as addressing social and behavioral problems, absenteeism, counseling individuals and small groups, helping students develop skills needed for academic success, helping students achieve academic and career goals, and assessing students' abilities and interests. Since guidance counselors were working closely with students, they were also trained to detect and report cases of abuse or neglect.

In addition, mental health is more than the absence of mental illness. Mental health is a state of well-being where people cope with normal stresses, can meet their learning potential, and are connected to their friends and to the community. National Association of Mental Illness (2016) revealed that 20% of students ages between 13 and 18 years were living with mental health difficulties. These mental health conditions can hinder them from succeeding socially, academically, and emotionally. As the COVID-19 pandemic came and brought stress to everyone's lives, it also worsens existing mental health conditions among people, many of them were students who have had to adapt quickly to online learning. This was a difficult transition for the learners. But the way that guidance counselors and teachers support each other during this difficult time can protect the mental health of learners, helping to reduce the risks of self-harming and suicide.

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With these in mind, the study explored the roles of guidance counselors in promoting mental health in the new normal and discover the different approaches and techniques of the Guidance counselor in promoting mental health awareness. It also identified the concerns and issues that the students had experienced and how the guidance counselors handled the learners. Lastly, through the experiences of the counselors, new insights, new activities, and new strategies may conceive and implement to enhance the guidance and counseling program of the academic institution.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This presents the descriptions of research methodology including research design, population and sampling, research instrument, and treatment of qualitative data analysis.

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach that is the best way of presenting the information to be gathered by the researcher. It primarily used the phenomenological style of research in ascertaining the normal, typical and current conditions of the people in a particular place. Through shared experience from the participants, by narration, the study will investigate the effects and perceptions of such experiences. The study believed that such method was the most personal, appropriate and it secured evidence concerning existing or current situation. Creswell (as cited in Arrieta 2021) stated that the fundamental goal of the approach was to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon. Patton (2015) also added that phenomenological

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approach mainly focused on the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a phenomenon for a person or group of people.

Population and Sampling

In conducting this qualitative research, this study used purposeful sampling wherein it was the process of identifying a population of interest and developing a systematic way of selecting cases that was not based on advanced knowledge of how the outcomes would appear. Patton (as cited in Nicolita 2018) stated that the purpose of purposeful sampling was to increase credibility not to foster representative for it was widely used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. In addition to knowledge and experience, the study gave importance to the availability and willingness of the participants that participated and communicated their experiences and opinions in a reflective manner. Researcher had interviewed ten selected Guidance Counselors in Laguna

Instrument

This study used the guide question according to the research statements of the problem and the participant's lived experience. The equipment used in this study included a laptop, internet connection, application used for communication such as google meet and semi-structured interview guide. A semi-structured interview guide consisted of a list of open-ended questions based on the topic areas that the researcher intended to study.

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The researcher utilized the following interview questions for the guidance counselors. Researcher recorded the interview with the approval of the participants to capture the behavior needed for this research.

1. Describe your work as a guidance counselor in the new normal.
2. What unforgettable experience do you have as a guidance counselor?
3. How do you prepare for counseling students in the new normal?
4. In your counseling sessions with the students, what do you consider the top three challenges of students in online learning?
5. What are the challenges you encounter as a guidance counselor in the new normal?
6. How do you promote mental health among your students in the new normal?
7. What motivates you to promote mental health among students in the new normal?
8. What are your strategies in promoting mental health among students in the new normal?
9. How do you feel when you accomplish your task as a guidance counselor in the new normal?
10. Based on your experience in counseling students (face-to-face and virtual), what activities will enhance the guidance and counseling program?

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Treatment of Qualitative Data

The following steps for treatment were applied to the study using Colaizzi Method. First step, the researcher familiarized herself with the data, by reading through all the participant responses several times. Second step, the study identified all statements in the responses that were of direct relevance to the phenomenon under investigation. Third step, the study identified meanings relevant to the phenomenon that arose from a careful consideration of the significant statements. Forth step, the study clustered the identified meanings into themes that were common across all responses. Fifth step, the researcher wrote a full and inclusive description of the phenomenon, incorporating all the themes produced at the forth step. Sixth step, the study condensed the exhaustive description down to a short, dense statement that captured just those aspects deemed to be essential to the structure of the phenomenon. And lastly, the researcher returned the fundamental structure statement to all participants (or sometimes a subsample in larger studies) to ask whether it captures their experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This presents the analysis and interpretation of the gathered data in the phenomenological inquiry concerning the lived experience of guidance counselors in the province of Laguna. Methods of inquiry included phenomenological reflection on the data elicited through interviews conducted using a semi structured interview guide.

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Interview Question 1. Describe your work as a guidance counselor in the new normal.

Thematic Chart A

Describing Responsibilities as Guidance Counselor in the New Normal

Participants	Responses	Subordinate Themes
Counselor 2	"It's challenging."	Challenging
Counselor 3	"Mahirap silang.. mahirap."	
Counselor 4	"Challenging."	
Counselor 5	"It's challenging."	
Counselor 7	"Hirap na hirap."	
Counselor 9	"Hirap as in sobrang hirap."	Same As Before New Normal
Counselor 1	"Doing online consultations, online webinars, inclusion of online.. online modality."	
Counselor 6	"Same pa din naman yung responsibilities although merong pagbabago kasi wala tayong face to face ngayon."	
Counselor 8	"Katulad pa din naman nung dati, nung face to face, parehas pa din naman po. Ang goal namin ngayon ay maimplement pa din siya, na kahit new normal na."	Explorable
Counselor 10	"I explore a lot".	

With the theme, **Describing Responsibilities as Guidance Counselor in the New Normal**, guidance counselors has different responses as to describing their work as a guidance counselor in the new normal. They expounded their duties into **Challenging, Same As Before New Normal** and **Explorable**. The prominent answer was they had challenges in constant communication with the students and they cannot see the actual progress of the students, only the online learning that has changed from face-to-face interaction but same duties and responsibilities, and exploring different aspects of guidance and counseling.

Online learning equipment is indeed an essential tool for communication. It allows counselor to connect with student. Since online learning is already implemented in the Philippines for over a year now, counselor and some of students had already adjusted in the challenging

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situation but unfortunately, most of the students especially from public schools, they do not have means to attend online learning and online counseling. Moreover, guidance counselor still serve students with tele counseling, in this way, they can still reach out for student and continue their work. Lastly, it is a great way to explore and be knowledgeable into different areas of guidance counseling. Attending webinars, enroll in certification course or trainings and take a part time job outside school regarding counseling may enhance skills in guidance and counseling.

Alexander et al. (2021) found in their study that guidance counselors were struggling to fulfill their role supporting students' mental health during the pandemic. Function ambiguity and conflict have likely increased as a result of the unique pressures of enacting their role during remote/hybrid schooling and organizational limits.

On the other hand, Arnout et al. (2020) stated that regarding this phenomenon, mental health services can no longer be done face-to-face, because counselors or psychologists and counselees/clients must conduct social and physical distancing during the counseling process, but psychological distancing was not permitted. This has ultimately led to all counselors or psychologists around the world implementing an online/cyber counseling process, whether through chat, email, WhatsApp, video call, or even telephone.

An article from Online Counseling Programs Powered by 2U, Inc. (2020) entitled "Professional Development for School Counselors, stated that guidance counselors' role was to develop and implement a guidance program that best suit to the needs of the learners and aligned

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with the mission of their academic institution. Covers all of these duties and responsibilities and reaching competency, licensed guidance counselors can expand their experience and knowledge through specialty trainings or additional certifications. Added to that, in their another article entitled Counseling Skills & Techniques on 2020, they mentioned that exploration was the process of learning much more about their students or clients and why they needed to come for counseling. Exploration was essential in understanding a student's or client's feelings and thoughts related to their problems.

Interview Question 2. What unforgettable experience do you have as a guidance counselor?

With a theme, **Memorable Experience**, guidance counselors had different responses as they shared their most unforgettable experience as a guidance counselor. They expounded their cases in **Handling Abuse Cases, Supporting Students With Family Issues, Witnessing Crime, Dealing With Emotional Disconnection, Shifting of Work Environment, Engaged With Clinical Issues**. The prominent answer was they handled child abuse cases. One of the cases was killing the student and, the others were sexual abuse cases. On the other hand, broken family and relationship cases affected students' behavior or attitude problems causing other people in trouble and ran away from home. Others' situations were self-harming and grief because of losing connection with their close friend. Lastly, collaboration with a psychiatrist to help the clinically diagnosed student to be functional to be able to finish her study.

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Thematic Chart B

Memorable Experiences

Participant	Response	Subordinate themes
Counselor 4	<i>"nung bago palang ako sa pagiging guidance counselor nagkaroon kami ng student na nagkaroon ng malaking problema. Narape siya so as newbie nalilito pa ako kung paanong gagawin ko."</i>	Handling Abuse Cases
Counselor 5	<i>"initerview ko yung bata, pinakwento ko sa kanya kung ano yung abuse na nanyare so for me it was shocking talaga."</i>	
Counselor 10	<i>"one of my student council so she's a college student by that time so it was narrated to me by that student kung paano nanyare yung sexual abuse."</i>	
Counselor 7	<i>"may nahandle ako na bata na although separated yung parents niya ah. . meron nang family both sides, para bang kitang kita mo sa kanya na gustong gusto niyang ituloy yung dating sila."</i>	Supporting Students With Family Issues
Counselor 3	<i>"may nag ran away so we help the parents to find the child."</i>	
Counselor 6	<i>"pinadalhan ako ng death threat."</i>	Witnessing Crime
Counselor 9	<i>"may binaril na estudyante sa mismong school namin, yung mga bata naka move on na, ako hindi pa."</i>	
Counselor 8	<i>"hindi ko malilimutan kasi about ano siya. . loss of connection."</i>	Dealing With Emotional Disconnection
Counselor 1	<i>"when I transfer to DepEd."</i>	Shifting of Work Environment
Counselor 2	<i>"humawak ako ng may clinical diagnosis na bata"</i>	Engaged With Clinical Issues

As a student, being abused is a really hard situation to be with especially if the case is being sexually harassed. Experts like guidance counselor are the first mental health professionals that students can ask for help legally and psychologically. Guidance counselors also help students to report cases of abuse in order to rescue the student from being abused. When dealing with family and relationship problems, if the situation is already too late to fix, the guidance counselor can help students to learn with coping mechanism to handle one's feelings or emotions. Collaboration with clinical experts like psychiatrist can help with clinical diagnosis of students to be able to perform activities and make treatment effectively. Every guidance counselor has a

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story of their most unforgettable cases they had handled, every story surely affect student's psychological well-being. Through their skills and knowledge, they are able to help students to deal with their critical cases.

An article from American School Counselor association entitled "The School Counselor and Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention," Alexandria (2021) stated that licensed guidance counselors were a key link in the child abuse prevention network. Licensed guidance counselors' responsibility to report suspected cases of neglect or child abuse to the authorities. Licensed guidance counselors were able to assist and guide neglected and abused learners by providing appropriate guidance services. Licensed guidance counselors were committed to provide high-quality guidance services, with research-based intervention techniques, to learners who were being abuse and neglect.

Also, Karaman et al. (2021) claimed that COVID-19 pandemic affected psychological symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, negative self-concept, and somatization among high school learners. Guidance counselors needed to be prepared to deal with this kind of situations. In this sense, guidance counselors were working on online intervention programs to help students to cope with psychological symptoms, such as anxiety and depression. The more emotion regulation and mindfulness self-regulation techniques were included in these intervention programs, the better the results can be.

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Lastly, Blake (2016) discussed in his article entitled "Why Collaboration Is Essential in Mental Health Care" that it was important for all mental health providers to be well connected to and collaboratively engaged with multidisciplinary networks to ensure the most effective and integrated treatment that can occur did occur. Therapists, therapeutic case managers, psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors and other mental health professionals best served people when they shared perspective and responsibility in meeting people's needs and ensuring therapeutic progress toward established treatment goal.

Interview Question 3. How do you prepare for counseling students in the new normal?

Thematic Chart C

Different Preparation for Counseling Students in the New Normal

Participant	Response	Subordinate Themes
Counselor 1	"A student will be referred to me."	Scheduling Referrals
Counselor 3	"Whoever refers should fill up the referral sheets."	
Counselor 5	"First, setting all the schedule and the interviewing yung nag rerfer."	
Counselor 8	"Iniischedule natin for counseling session pero yun nga through online."	Parent's Permission
Counselor 4	"Kinakausap ko muna yung mga parents kung bibigyan ka ng permission ng parent na makausap mo yung bata."	
Counselor 6	"Home visit."	Home Visitations
Counselor 9	"Webinar and home visitation."	Analyzing the Case Tele Counseling
Counselor 7	"Inaanalyze mo tapos titignan kung anong best."	
Counselor 2	"My cellphone has this load which you can call the other networks, I have my own office so I am alone and I don't have a problem with the privacy."	
Counselor 10	"I need to be prepared psychologically preparation, emotionally preparation kase counseling is not an easy job."	Psychological and Emotional Prepared

With the theme, **Different Preparation for Counseling Students in the New Normal**, guidance counselors had different responses as they divulged their preparation in counseling students in the new normal. They explained their preparations from **Scheduling**

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Referrals, Parent's Permission, Home Visitations, Analyzing the Case, Tele Counseling

and **Psychological and Emotional Prepared.** The prominent answer was they scheduled referrals with the use of google form, after the teacher or the parent fill out the referral form, next was the students needed to agree with the informed consent and then they will start online counseling session thru Google Meet, Microsoft office, Zoom, Messenger or even thru E-mail. Others conducted home visiting commonly in public sector. The other one was analyzing the situation of the students and then providing best guide to help the students make solutions to his/her own problem. Another counselor was using tele-counseling, using only a cellphone or telephone, she can make her way to have a constant communication with her students. Lastly, according to this counselor, she was preparing herself psychologically and emotionally to deliver proper guidance to the student because counseling was not an easy job.

Being prepared with the materials such as laptops, internet connectivity, and cellphones, forms and applications for communication such Google Meet, Zoom and Messenger is important in counseling in the new normal, without this tool, counselor cannot deliver proper counseling to its students because there will be no means for communication and for tele-counseling. Unless, other schools or guidance program conduct home visiting to check on their students' situation also to provide guidance services. Having the skills to analyze a situation was one of important ingredients in counseling to be able to provide proper guide to help students make solutions to their problems. Lastly, being psychologically and emotionally prepared before conducting

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counseling was one of the best part in preparation because as a human being, counselor will not perform if they were exhausted and burned out.

Correspondingly, Meyers (2020) mentioned that because safeguarding the mental, emotional and physical welfare of students is the essence of what school counselors do, these professionals have typically been at the center of the problem-solving process since the arrival of the coronavirus. The licensed guidance counselors responded to the requests of teachers to find out why students were not showing up for online class, conducted check-in phone calls to make sure learners had the necessary equipment and internet access, coached families on how to set up a structured school day, reassured stressed-out parents, provided moral support to teachers and administrators and made mental health referrals for learners in crisis.

Meanwhile, DuFresne and Arnekrans (2020) agreed that home counseling, which was sometimes referred to community counseling, was effective and beneficial with multiple client, it included families, old adults, children, and individuals with developmental disabilities. Anxiety disorders, behavior problems, family disturbances, mood disorders, and psychotic disorders are the usual problems that benefited home counseling. It was advantage to have a licensed guidance counselors in a home-base environment to observe contextual considerations, relational issues and maladaptive behaviors. Home counseling benefited individuals who were unable to come to a guidance counselor's office to avail guidance services.

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Moreover, Dowshen (2015) mentioned in his article entitled "Counselors Help You Cope" that guidance counselors can give you all sorts of tips and support on solving problems and making good decisions. Licensed guidance counselors gave you guides to stand up for themselves if they were being bullied, talking to their parents, managing stress, and deal with their anger issues and other irritational moods. Licensed guidance counselors also help them deal with their problems with a teacher, such as questions about their grades and communication difficulties.

Furthermore, another study of Lee et al. (2021) emphasized that as the pandemic continues, children and parents needed more mental health intervention to reduce mental health problems, as well as assistance in carrying out educational activities at home. Innovative solutions that utilized telehealth help to meet these challenges.

Lastly, Kim and Lambie (2018) stated that the first step in dealing with adolescents who will experience anxiety or depression was for the guidance counselor to be psychologically and emotionally healthy and prepared. They cannot help and guide their students if they were unable to give counseling and other guidance-related actions themselves. They may face burnout, internet tiredness, and emotional stress while they assisted the kids because they were human. A study found that teaching mindfulness practices, self-awareness, and communication skills to school counselors could be beneficial. Providing a supportive environment and appreciating school counselors' efforts may help them feel more important at work.

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Interview Question 4. In your counseling sessions with the students, what do you consider the top three challenges of students in online learning?

With a theme, **Students' Obstacles in Online Platform**, the guidance counselors had different responses as they explained in detail the top three challenges of students in online learning . They enumerated the challenges from **Lack of motivation and support from the family in all aspects, Lack of means to have internet connection and gadgets and also distractions** and Lastly, **Difficulty to establish rapport**. Most of the answers were that they all found on the side of the students the lack of internet connection and the right gadget to attend online learning. Lack of motivation to study, lack of support from family in terms of financial, moral, and helping out students through his/her activities. Having distraction in online learning and having a difficulty in establishing rapport with the students because there was no interaction between counselor and students.

Thematic Chart D

Students' Obstacles in Online Platform

Participants	Responses	Subordinate Themes
Counselor 1	<i>"Number 1 is the motivation Number 2 is the socio-economic status. And then the third one..., they don't have in terms of formation of the students, they don't have shared purpose."</i>	Lack of Motivation and Support from the Family in All Aspects
Counselor 2	<i>"First actually it's the internet connection. Second, the gadget that they'll be using ... the third is yung support. ..."</i>	
Counselor 4	<i>"Unang una yung distance, ... Second, of course yung support ng parent, So third kailangan kasi ng bata ng gadget kailangan ng stable internet."</i>	
Counselor 8	<i>"Ang unang una motivation, ... Pangalawa yung concerns about connectivity, internet connection, gadgets at yung konti pa yung awareness nila pag dating sa online learning. And lastly, yung a</i>	

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Counselor 3	<i>lot of activities, sa dami ng hinahandle nilang activities per subject."</i> <i>"First is studies of course, coping with online difficulties. Next one is family.... And third one, .. not used to stay alone so yung loneliness, depression kasi hindi sila makalabas."</i>	Lack of Means to Have Internet Connection and Gadgets and also Distractions.
Counselor 5	<i>"I myself, I think number 1 is yung connectivity. And then number 2 is yung distraction. So number 3 I think yung ano.. lack of interest."</i>	
Counselor 6	<i>"First and for most yung wala silang gadgets aside from walang gadgets, walang cellphone, walang laptops, wala din silang kakayahan magpakabit ng internet. Second, ..., they can read pero walang comprehension,... Third may mga nagtatrabaho na, ..."</i>	
Counselor 9	<i>"First yung network ...t. Second kulang sa guidance ng magulang ... third may mga bata na imbis na turuan ay binubully pa ng family."</i>	
Counselor 10	<i>"First is connection, ... second is yung availability of the gadgets to use and the third one is sustaining attention of the students during virtual or online learning."</i>	
Counselor 7	<i>"First one is mahirap magdevelop ng rapport so. Number two hindi sila nagsasabi basta, ... Third, isa pang nakikita ko na challenges is sa online hindi mo naman agad mamonitor yung progress niya doon sa problema nila, hindi mo basta basta mamonitor."</i>	Difficulty to establish rapport

Lack of support from family in terms of providing online learning material such as Laptop, Cellphone, tablet and internet connection, moral, students' formation and not helping out students towards his/her studies which leads to lack of motivation to study online followed by distraction where students do not pay much attention during online classes, lack of interest in studying, loss of sense of purpose, doing part time work, excessive interaction with peers and lastly, not doing assigned activities because she cannot understand the modules.

In support to that, an article from Caduceus International Publishing (2021) entitled "Combatting Lack of Motivation in Online Learning" claimed that, 76% of undergraduates and

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56% of graduate and professional students pointed to low motivation as their biggest obstacle to online learning success. This lack of motivation stemmed directly from the many other challenges that online students face, including distracting home environments and lack of access to appropriate study spaces. Also, an article from OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus COVID-19 (2020) entitled "Strengthening online learning when schools are closed: The role of families and teachers in supporting students during the COVID-19 crisis" emphasized that students' attitudes and dispositions were influenced to a great degree by the support they received from families and teachers and by the role models they were exposed to.

Moreover, Amos et al. (2020) mentioned in their study that accessibility, convenience, privacy, and mobility as some of the major advantages of online therapy. On the contrary, their main barriers to online therapy were the lack of nonverbal clues, mistrust, and inadequate internet access.

Interview Question 5. What are the challenges you encounter as a guidance counselor in the new normal?

Thematic Chart E

Challenges and Adjustments Made by Counselors in New Normal

Participants	Responses	Subordinate Themes
Counselor 1	"Here in the public system parang na one man standing ka eh, if the population of that school is 1,650 student, I handle everyone. Right now we're doing online "	Shortage of Counselor
Counselor 2	"The challenge is nahihirapan akong makipag communicate sa mga bata. It's telecounseling hindi siya virtual kasi in telecounseling children are responsive kasi"	Lack of Proper Communication with Students
Counselor 3	"Yung adjustment sa online ..., we do it thru teams (Microsoft teams), google meet or zoom noh. . so instead of using messenger... aside from that we also have thru e-mail."	

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- Counselor 4 *"Yun connection ko sa bata ngayon, mahirap. Kung walang connection yung mga bata hindi namin mareach out thru online eh."*
- Counselor 5 *"Communication, They don't want to communicate to us. We have this program which we call it online kumustahan. Its kumustahan na. . you just have to talk to students via messenger or google meet, zoom.."*
- Counselor 6 *"Wala kaming constant communication unlike nung face to face. Limited yung face to face but we can do home visitation."*
- Counselor 7 *"Nahihiya silang tumawag sayo. ... "*
- Counselor 8 *"Yung communications with our students. Kasi ang hirap kumausap ng students thru online.."*
- Counselor 9 *"So ayun nga pag pinupuntahan mo wala. As guidance counselor malaking responsibilidad humawak ng 1000 plus na estudyante lalo ngayon hindi kami nagkikita face to face kundi yung online lang and paminsang home visiting. "*
- Counselor 10 *"Yung sa virtual. Because I prefer talking to them personally but hindi naman pwede so we're doing it virtually kaya mahirap isustain yung kanilang attention.I explore"*

With a theme, **Challenges and Adjustments made by Counselors in New Normal**, most guidance counselors had the same responses as they answered the question about what challenges they had encountered as a guidance counselor in the new normal. They elaborated it into **Shortage of counselor** and **Lack of proper communication with students**. The prominent answer was they were struggling in terms of communicating with students and because of limited resources. The other counselor shared that the challenged she was facing right now was handling big population of students.

Without constant communication, there will be no proper counseling or there is no counseling at all. Because of the problem in communication that they face, both counselors and students, counselors in new normal cannot perform their duties and responsibilities well and effectively to the students. On the other hand, with this pandemic, a lot of students are

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psychologically affected for some reason, and some school like in public sector, they cater 1,650 students there with only one guidance counselor. Because of shortage in registered guidance counselor, this may lead to exhaustion and burn-out to the only one registered guidance counselor who is handling such population of students. Despite these challenges, they learn to adjust to the new normal and are able to have a communication among their students. They are the ones who called the students first so that the students do not need to buy or conserve load. If the students do not have gadgets for communication, some counselors conduct home visitations to check the students' well-being.

Rotas and Capahay (2020) claimed in their study entitled Difficulties in Remote Learning: Voices of Philippine University Students in the Wake of COVID-19 Crisis that internet connectivity as one of the main difficulties they encountered in the practice of online based learning. The poor network was commonly a major problem for developing countries with telecommunication systems and ICT, not being properly developed. Although there were many existing internet bundles in the country, they were "fluctuating" and were not created equally in terms of speed and stability.

Support to this, Reyes-Chua et al. (2020) agreed that another issue in online counseling is about the unstable internet connection. Both students and guidance counselors experienced internet connection problems that prevented them from fulfilling their duties and responsibilities.

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Meanwhile, an article entitled 'Hire more school counselors' by Cruz (2021) shared that party-list legislator on Sunday urged Congress to "decisively address" the shortage of school guidance counselors whose services were needed to help students deal with a wide range of learning difficulties associated with COVID-19-era distance education.

Interview Question 6. How do you promote mental health among your students in the new normal?

With the theme, **Ways of Promoting Mental Health**, guidance counselors had different responses as they divulged on how they promoted mental health in the new normal. They discussed their ways into **Through Assessment Questionnaire for Students, Providing Pre-recorded Videos on Mental Health, Conducting Orientation on Mental Health for Parents and Students, Remind students to take care of themselves** and **Psychological First Aid and Homeroom Guidance**. The prominent answer was that they used assessment form to check the needs of the student, creating video clip regarding mental health, conducting orientation to let the students and parents be aware about guidance services in school, remind students to take care of themselves psychologically and physically and lastly, provided psychological first aid through homeroom guidance program.

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Thematic Chart F

Ways of Promoting Mental Health

Participants	Responses	Subordinate Themes
Counselor 1	<i>"We have an assessment questionnaire for students, and they're gonna answer it and then based on their answer, I will actually giving them feedback so.."</i>	Through Assessment Questionnaire for Students
Counselor 3	<i>"Distribute the needs assessment through google forms during our orientation and then from there, we tried to see what are the priorities, the top needs of the students."</i>	
Counselor 2	<i>"We're trying to make it pre-recorded videos already para whenever they have the load, whenever they have an access, they could see it, they could see the videos that our school prepared."</i>	Providing Pre-recorded Videos on Mental Health
Counselor 7	<i>"Video clips. Nagpapalabas ako and activities na pwedeng makatulong sa kanila like sa stress management, time management and relaxation especially yung iba sa kanila nagtatrabaho."</i>	
Counselor 4	<i>"Nagconduct din ako ng orientation regarding sa health ahh.. Mental health sa mga parents at saka sa ilang estudyante namen."</i>	Conducting Orientation on Mental Health for Parents and Students
Counselor 6	<i>"We discuss mental health among our students."</i>	
Counselor 5	<i>"Magcoconduct ng orientation bawat level so.. hindi pwedeng walang part si guidance doon para umpisa pa lang alam na nila na kinacater ng school ang mental health ng students."</i>	
Counselor 8	<i>"I always remind them to love their self and from time to time nireremind ko sila na they really need to take care of their mental health because it will really help."</i>	Remind Students to Take Care of Themselves
Counselor 10	<i>"Promotion of mental health by in terms of making them aware of self-care the importance of self-care."</i>	
Counselor 9	<i>"Through psychological first aid, yung home room guidance."</i>	Psychological First Aid and Homeroom Guidance

Disseminating assessment form thru the use of google form is one of the easiest and convenient way to keep in touch with students and to know if they need psychological help. Using video clips and pictures posted in school's Facebook Page is also a good way to promote mental health in the new normal especially not only the students from that school can see it but also people in community and for visual learners. Conducting webinars and orientation regarding to the importance of guidance and counseling can encourage students to see guidance counselor

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whenever they need help and also it can help to slowly remove the stigma in guidance and counseling that if the child goes to guidance office, he/she did something bad. Reminding students to take care of themselves will make them feel like there is someone who cares for them. Psychological First Aid thru Homeroom guidance program provides wholesome learning experiences in virtual classroom that will foster positive attitudes, behaviors and values to help students build good morals and personality and also improve relationship between teachers and students.

A blog from Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University entitled "DMMMSU holds webinar-workshop on Mental Wellness" (Galiste 2021) also mentioned that this webinar-workshop aimed to raise awareness on the significant role of mental health in overcoming various life challenges in the time of the pandemic.

In addition, Lawler (2021) claimed in her blog entitled "What Is Self-Care and Why Is It So Important for Your Health?" that the World Health Organization defined self-care as the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider. According to this definition, self-care included everything related to staying physically healthy including hygiene, nutrition, and seeking medical care when needed. It was all the steps an individual can take to manage stressors in his or her life and take care of his or her own health and well-being.

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Lastly, Subong (2020), who was also a guidance counselor and a career specialist from DepEd, shared that due to the COVID-19 situation in the country, students and teachers needed help to cope with the stress and anxiety. "Mental health is a basic aspect and everyone needs it," he said. Since guidance counselors were based in schools, they should be tapped for psychological first aid (PFA).

Interview Question 7. What motivates you to promote mental health among students in the new normal?

Thematic Chart G
Varied Motivation in Promoting Mental Health

Participants	Responses	Subordinate Themes
Counselor 1	"Our country needs help."	To Provide the Needs of the Students in Mental Health
Counselor 2	"Kailangan ng mga bata."	Securing Future of Generation
Counselor 3	"Need ngayon."	
Counselor 7	"Kailangan nila, kita ko na need nila."	
Counselor 8	"Kailangan talaga tayo."	
Counselor 4	"May mga anak din akong kinakailangan."	
Counselor 9	"Nung nakita ko yung anak ko, nasabi ko na ito ang kailangan ngayon."	Inclination to Do Good Increasing Rate of Depression and Anxiety
Counselor 5	"Natural inclination to help."	
Counselor 6	"Maraming mga may anxiety or depression."	
Counselor 10	"Maintain their mental health."	To Maintain Mental Health

With the theme, **Varied Motivation in Promoting Mental Health**, the guidance counselors divulged what motivated them to promote mental health. They shared their motivation **To Provide the Needs of the Students in Mental Health, Securing Future of Generation, Inclination to Do Good, Increasing Rate of Depression and Anxiety, To Maintain**

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Mental Health. The prominent answer was counselors believed that because of the Covid-19 pandemic, promoting mental health in the new normal was the need of the students, teachers, parents or even people in the community to cope with the disruption of Covid-19 had brought us. Counselors claimed that there were so many depression, anxiety, stress, and other psychological problems the country was facing. As parents themselves, seeing their children growing up in this kind of situation motivated them to do their duties and responsibilities to secure the future of the young ones, also to support them to maintain their mental health as well. Lastly, as a human being, people have a natural inclination to do well and to help other people who needed help and that was what motivated them to help.

Given that the role of guidance counselor is help the community to solve their problem on their own, giving counseling sessions to students or person who experienced trauma, depression or anxiety etc., providing guidance program to help students develop good behavior, providing career guidance, promote mental health and many more, their work is one of the most humanly job in the world. With their compassion, commitment, sympathy, empathy, skills, it is for sure that their goal is to help the nation and response to the nation's need, which mental health awareness.

In the light of Cherry (2020), she stated that motivation was the process that initiated, guided, and maintained goal-oriented behaviors. Motivation involved the biological, emotional,

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social, and cognitive forces that activated behavior. In everyday usage, the term "motivation" was frequently used to describe why a person did something.

Also, article of Psychology Today (2021) stated that intrinsic motivation was a drive that came purely from within; it was not due to any anticipated reward, deadline, or outside pressure. People who were intrinsically motivated to help do so because they loved the feeling of helping people, and it was an important part of their identity.

Interview Question 8. What are your strategies in promoting mental health among students in the new normal?

Thematic Chart H

Different Strategies in Promoting Mental Health

Participants	Response	Subordinate Themes
Counselor 1	"Online consultation for career and personal problems."	Through Online Platforms
Counselor 2	"Telecounseling."	
Counselor 4	"Nagpopost ako ng positive quotes sa FB page."	
Counselor 5	"Lecturing them online to balance their time."	
Counselor 6	"Tatanungin ko kung kamusta na sila, Online Kamustahan".	
Counselor 3	"Beshies Talk Series."	
Counselor 7	"Activity, stress management and relaxation."	Conducting Segments about Mental Health
Counselor 8	"Celebration of mental health"	
Counselor 10	"Invite them for talks about mental health".	
Counselor 9	"Tinitignan yung mga lack sa academic, underachievement tapos yung hindi gaanong nakakapag pasa ng output then follow up home visitation ulit"	Checking Academic Status

With a theme, Different Strategies in Promoting Mental Health, guidance counselors have different strategies in promoting mental health among students in the new normal. They elaborated these strategies into Conducting Segments about Mental Health, Conducting Segments about Mental Health, and Checking Academic Status. The prominent answer was

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through online consultation, tele counseling, and online platforms for meetings, they can still have communication with their students for counseling sessions to promote mental health. Conducting such segments that had engaging activities with the students like Beshies Talk Series, stress management and relaxation, celebrating mental health awareness, and talk shows about mental health were their effective programs in promoting mental health in the new normal. For those who cannot join the meetings or online classes for some reason and had difficulties in academics, guidance counselors did home visitation to check the situation of the students. Because of Covid-19 pandemic, approach in education has changed as well as in guidance and counseling. Guidance counselor has to think guidance program or guidance activities that can apply in online learning such as online consultation, and tele-counseling. Also, such activities like stress and time management and relaxation can help students to prevent unique stressor that can affect mental health. Segments and talk shows provide awareness on how to handle emotional and mental problems of students as well as teachers and parents. In this way, they will be knowledgeable in self-care.

Also, an article from St. Bonaventure University (2020) stated that a licensed guidance counselor occupied an important role during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their role was to listen to learners, support students' mental health during challenging times and help students transform their goals into actions. Due to COVID-19, some schools may go online or use a hybrid version, which presented challenges to the guidance counselors.

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Interview Question 9. How do you feel when you accomplish your task as a guidance counselor in the new normal?

With the theme, **Best Feeling**, the guidance counselors divulged same feeling when they accomplished their task as a guidance counselor in the new normal. All of counselors all of counselor felt the sense of fulfillment whenever they helped their students on their cases especially when they saw the progress of their students, because they knew that they executed their role well as a guidance counselor.

Thematic Chart I

Best Feeling

Participants	Responses
Counselor 1	"Fulfillment."
Counselor 2	"Fulfilling."
Counselor 3	"Fulfilled."
Counselor 4	"Fulfilled."
Counselor 5	"Fulfilled."
Counselor 6	"Fulfilling."
Counselor 7	<i>Blessed and fulfilled na nakakatulong, thankful dahil nabigyan ng chance yung tao.</i>
Counselor 8	<i>Syempre masaya, fulfilling, yun yung aming nararamdaman kasi syempre yung yung goal namen, makatulong.</i>
Counselor 9	<i>Masaya kahit nakakapagod, fulfilling lalo na kapag napapabalik mo sa eskwela yun bata.</i>
Counselor 10	<i>It gives you an inch of confidence in sense of achievement, sense of pride and fulfillment that you are able to help people and you are able to provide assistance to your students.</i>

As a human being themselves, the guidance counselor feels fulfilled in a sense that they fulfilled their task, roles, duties and responsibilities to be the number one psychological professional to their learners in school setting. They feel fulfilled when that after all of the counseling session, trauma therapy, behavioral therapy, career guidance, online kumustahan,

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homeroom guidance, home visitation and many more guidance services, they see the progress and accomplishment in the child's behavior. For them, they feel like they save another soul.

With that, an article entitled "How to Be Happy: Stop Looking for Happiness & Find Fulfillment Instead," Barbera (2021) stated that Fulfillment was the process of living a valued life, where one pursued things that matter to them or that they were passionate about. It generally came from choosing actions that moved a person towards what they valued, as well as achieving goals that were guided by those values.

Support to that, in the same article, Buniva (2021) mentioned that often meaning and fulfillment can be found most easily by focusing on others and how they might bring greater ease and happiness to their lives.

Interview Question 10. Based on your experience in counseling students (face-to-face and virtual), what activities will enhance the guidance and counseling program?

Thematic Chart J
Varied Enrichment Activities

Participants	Responses	Subordinate Themes
Counselor 1	<i>"I think it's best that there are inclusion training, continuous training."</i>	Further Training for Counselors
Counselor 8	<i>"Continuous training para sa aming knowledge or awareness regarding this cases at pag attend sa seminar ..."</i>	
Counselor 9	<i>"Yung trainings, continuous learning para sa mga guidance counselor, pag eenroll sa mga online training on how to handle trauma, mga suicidal attempts ahm.. Relaxation for teenagers."</i>	
Counselor 2	<i>"More engaging activities for the student para mas marami silang matutunan about mental health and also about learning about themselves."</i>	Engaging Activities for Students
Counselor 4	<i>"Sa mga activity I tried na naiinvolve yun mga parent na.. halimbawa may activity ako na piniprepare like sa mga exercise so may video sila kasama yung parent na nag eexercise dun sa video."</i>	

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Counselor 7	<i>"Sa team building na ginagawa ko, they can be who they are kaya enjoy naman sila sa mga activity, nagkakaroon kami ng rapport."</i>	
Counselor 10	<i>"I think activities that are more engaging, meaning activities that will encourage students to be actively involved in the project. For example, way back then, one of my programs in guidance is pair counseling."</i>	
Counselor 5	<i>"Referral system."</i>	Referral System
Counselor 6	<i>"Information dissemination."</i>	Information dissemination
Counselor 3	<i>"Online kumustahan."</i>	Online Counseling

With the theme, **Varied Enrichment Activities**, counselors came up with different ideas in activities that will enhance the guidance and counseling program. They shared the ideas and suggestions into **Further Training for Counselors, Engaging Activities for Student, Referral System, Information dissemination, and Online Counseling**. The prominent answer was for the counselor to enroll in certification trainings in order for them to enhance their skills and be more knowledgeable to common cases that he/she was commonly handling especially if the case was critical. Engaging activities for the students for them to enjoy interacting with their peers, parents, or other family members. Proper orientation to the students, parents, and teacher to slowly remove the stigma into the students that if the students went to guidance office, it meant he/she was not behaving well. In that way, students can seek help of guidance counselor without the feeling of shyness or think that he/she was a bad kid and lastly, thru the use of online counseling, guidance counselor can communicate with the student regarding personal issues.

Creating activities to enhance guidance and counseling is not just easy as it seems. It needs data-informed guide and expert opinion of guidance counselor itself, they are the

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professionals and experts when it comes to guidance and counseling. They know if it is going to be effective for the students or not. The suggestion of guidance counselor above may both help students, teacher, parents and the guidance counselor itself especially in trainings for the counselor and engaging activities for the students to avoid the feeling of being alone. And of course, the online counseling is also important because it is the only way of the guidance counselor to connect with students aside from home visitation in the new normal.

Inclined with this, a blog from Best Accredited Colleges (2021) entitled Guidance Counseling Continuing Education Programs mentioned that continuing education courses were designed to keep guidance counselors current on new research and technology in the field. Additionally, these courses allowed counselors to discuss current topics with other school counselors. Course topics vary widely, but a few included legal issues in school counseling, counseling techniques, harassment and bullying in schools, suicide prevention skills, and identifying and addressing mental health needs. Students in these courses may also further develop and enhance their motivational interviewing skills, as well as their knowledge of trauma-informed services.

Moreover, a blog written by Celestine (2021) entitled "25 Counseling Activities to Better Help Adults, Kids, & Groups" claimed that the practice of counseling was full of exercises, role-play, and metaphors. By wielding the power of experiential learning and analogy through such activities, counselors can help their clients discover the keys to lasting happiness and wellbeing.

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CONCLUSION

As for the essence of the lived experiences of the Guidance Counselor, their answers reflected that their role in promoting mental health in the new normal was important not only for the students but also to the parents, teachers and community. They provided mental health awareness as this was important as well as the physical health. With their skills and knowledge in counseling, they were able to help students cope with depression, anxiety, stress, abuse, trauma and other mental health distractions that situations brought to them. Because of their role in promoting mental health in the new normal, lot of students think positively and it helps to prevent suicide especially to the youths.

Despite all the challenges that both counselor and students were facing in terms of communication, building rapport, reliability and many other circumstances, the guidance counselor was doing their very best to adjust from the situation. They made alternative way to connect with the students, they even risk their health to check the students' well-being by doing home visitation. If the students cannot attend online webinar for counseling or mental health lectures, guidance counselor provide modules, leaflet, and fliers for students even if there is scarcity in paper just to reach all of the student with guidance and counseling program.

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