

YouTube, TikTok replace consultation

# Students self-diagnose their mental health

By **Brontë H. Lacsamana**  
Reporter

FILIPINO university students are “overwhelmed with responsibilities” and have little to no time for self-care and a social life, leading many to self-diagnose their mental health instead of seeking professional help, according to study by the University of Santo Tomas (UST).

Conducted from 2021 to 2022, the study funded by the Department of Science and Technology surveyed over 200 students with anxiety and depression from six universities in Manila, Palawan, Benguet, Leyte, South Cotabato, and Albay.

Of the UST respondents, 20% performed self-diagnosis. Of those from Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT), 71.4% self-diagnosed.

“There are some ways they get to the point of, ‘maybe there’s something wrong with me,’” said Maria Carinnes P. Alejandria, project leader and UST associate

professor, at an April 28 virtual summit that presented the results of the study.

These methods include taking a psychology class on mental health, conversing and consulting with peers, reading online articles and watching YouTube videos on their problems, and observing their own behavioral and emotional changes.

Jean S. Taypa, assistant professor at MSU-IIT, shared that one participant became aware of her condition through mental health professionals disseminating information on short-form video platform TikTok.

“Although they are self-diagnosed, the participants themselves notice the symptoms. ... Despite the awareness of mental health services, students chose not to access help,” she said. Reasons cited for not doing so include long processes, the expensive cost of services, a lack of family support, and social stigma.

The study also found that the top external factors affecting the youth’s mental health are disasters (such as the coronavirus pandemic), family, peers, history of trauma and abuse, and academic pressure.

According to Ms. Alejandria, the delivery of mental health services can be improved by funding at the national and institutional level for mental health programs, and hiring of more psych personnel.

**UNFILLED GAPS**

The clamor for emergency sessions and consultations was so high when the pandemic started that clinics and services in the country were flooded by these requests, according to speakers at the summit.

“Now, we’re still plagued by the same problems: Where do we get support? How can we afford it? Are we getting the right kind that we need?” said Jun Angelo M. Sunglao, a psychologist from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

“There are still unfilled gaps,” he added, citing that the National Center for Mental Health struggled with nearly double the distress calls in 2020 than they did in 2019.

Filipino workers are also overwhelmed by multiple mental health challenges, with a 2021 study by mental health

firm MindNation showing that 53% of Filipino workers suffered mentally during the global health crisis.

The survey pointed out top external factors affecting the workforce that were similar to that of the students – the coronavirus pandemic, family matters, personal problems, and pressure (but this time from work and financial matters).

Stigma against even having these mental health challenges was also found to play a part in workers’ low focus, motivation, productivity, and self-confidence.

**MENTAL HEALTH MAP**

Philippine-based health and wellness clinic LifeScience Center launched in February a genetic test called the Genomind Mental Health Map.

Leslie K. Lim-Carlos, a psychotherapist at LifeScience Center, said that Filipinos can use genetics to proactively understand “what we have no control over, while the rest is modifiable and changeable based on actions and habits.”

The service, which costs P23,600, starts off with an ap-

pointment for a registered medical technologist to collect one’s cheek swab. After this, the specimen is sent to the Genomind laboratory in Pennsylvania, USA, where the test originated.

Analysis takes two to three weeks and yields results for seven core genetic health capabilities – stress and anxiety, mood, focus and memory, sleep, eating behavior, habits and substance abuse, and social behavior. The client can access the report online to view these.

For instance, those who test as predisposed to heightened stress and/or decreased working memory can get insights on brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that helps produce neurons and their healthy connections to the brain’s fear center.

Based on this result, the website then recommends eating more food with omega-3 fatty acids to boost BDNF and box breathing exercises to calm the system. It also links to a self-reported questionnaire by Mental Health America that screens for generalized anxiety disorder

– for people to track symptoms over time.

On top of receiving a health map, those who want their results and recommendations explained to them can book a 30-minute consultation with an expert.

“Factors like genetics, environment, lifestyle, are all cumulative in one’s mental health journey,” said Dr. Harris Nguyen, a Genomind pharmaceutical expert in a video call with *BusinessWorld*.

Like the free mental health assessment offered by Break Your Stigma, the LifeScience test is open to those already diagnosed with mental health conditions and those who don’t have any history but want to understand themselves better.

What sets it apart is the deep dive into how various factors come together plus personalized, evidence-based recommendations that a consultation then interprets.

**FULL STORY**



Read the full story by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or by typing the link [-bit.ly/MentalHealth050422>](https://bit.ly/MentalHealth050422)

**OPINION**

## Filipinos urged to get recommended vaccines

Filipinos of all ages should get their routine and catch-up vaccines, as the current pandemic does not diminish the risk of other diseases.

This was the main message of partner stakeholders from government, the private sector and civil society who gathered for the Health Connect media forum held on April 25 as the country celebrated World Immunization Week 2022 with the theme “Long Life for All, Kaya sa Healthy Pilipinas.”

World Immunization Week celebrated on April 24–30 aims to highlight the collective action needed and to promote the use of vaccines to protect people of all ages and communities against vaccine-preventable diseases.

“We must prioritize the vaccination of infants, toddlers, youth, adults and those who missed their vaccines during this pandemic. They need to catch up with recommended vaccines in private clinics, health centers, schools, workplaces, or hospitals,” said Dr. Benito Ateniya, president of the Philippine Medical Association.

The country’s childhood immunization coverage in 2019 was around 70%, which dropped to 48.5% in 2021 due to the pandemic, according to Dr. Beverly Ho, head of the Department of Health (DoH) Health Promotions Bureau and Disease Prevention and Control Bureau.

She explained that the only reason disease outbreaks have yet to occur in the country is because in between those periods, the DoH in partnership with the Philippine Pediatric Society (PPS), Philippine Foundation for Vaccination (PFV) and local government units (LGUs) implemented numerous supplemental immunization activities.

“We are pushing for a more active immunization campaign this year, particularly now that our health workers are fully vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19 thereby lowering their infection risk while conducting immunization activities,” Dr. Ho said.

Dr. Ho announced that the DoH will conduct a supplemental immunization activity in which the last Thursdays and Fridays of April, May and June will be dedicated to catch-up immunization of children who missed their recommended vaccines during the last two years of the pandemic.

She called on parents to bring their children to the nearest health centers so they can receive their free vaccines.

Dr. Restituta Magpantay, DoH Calabarzon Family Health Unit head and Regional Vaccination Operations Center chairperson, said that DoH Calabarzon is implementing “Chikiting Bakunation Days” in which the last Thursdays and Fridays of April, May, and August will be dedicated to routine and catch-up of children with incomplete vaccinations in 36 areas with the lowest immunization coverage.

PPS president Dr. Joselyn Eusebio stressed that immunization prevents and protects against vaccine-preventable diseases, as well as promotes general wellness of our children. “*Ang bakuna ay panlaban, hindi kalaban. Kinabukasan para sa lahat, kinabukasan una sa lahat.*”

Immunization is important not just for children, but also for adults and older adults, as it provides not only health benefits but socioeconomic benefits as well, according to Dr. Minette Rosario, chairperson of the Adult Immunization Committee, Philippine Society for Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (PSMID).

“When people are vaccinated, they become more productive. Absences from work due to illness are reduced. Children are less likely to miss school due to sickness, and their parents don’t have to take a leave from work to take care of their kids. High immunization coverage of the population also helps ease the burden on our healthcare system and health workers.”

Dr. Eduardo Poblete, president of the Philippine College of Geriatric Medicine, cited a study showing there is low

awareness on influenza and pneumonia vaccines among older adults.

“We should adopt targeted strategies to increase vaccination of our senior citizens.”

He recommended fighting ageism or prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of a person’s age, one example of which is the misconception that getting sick is normal among the elderly; broadening further the Expanded Senior Citizens Act to include free vaccination for all senior citizens, not just select ones; providing support and incentives to encourage vaccination among older adults; offering transportation to and from vaccination sites; creating senior lanes in health centers; setting exclusive vaccination days for seniors; and conducting house-to-house vaccination for seniors.

To facilitate the active participation of nurses in immunization activities in the country Philippine Nurses Association National President Melvin Miranda recommended to strengthen interprofessional education and practice; consider nurse-led clinics as extension facilities to bolster existing immunization programs; and include nurses in LGU Health Boards to maximize immunization programs and reach Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs).

PFV Executive Director Dr. Lulu Bravo called on all stakeholders to work together in fighting misinformation and disinformation, especially about vaccines.

“The time to act is now to win this war for the sake of our people.”

TEODORO B. PADILLA is the executive director of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Association of the Philippines (PHAP), which represents the biopharmaceutical medicines and vaccines industry in the country. Its members are at the forefront of research and development efforts for COVID-19 and other diseases that affect Filipinos.



**MEDICINE CABINET**  
**TEODORO B. PADILLA**

**Next president,**  
from SI/1

“As it is, players in the public infrastructure sector have told us that ongoing construction projects have little budget cover and the risk of contractors not getting paid on time is worrisome.”

The Philippines ended 2021 with P11.73 trillion in outstanding debt, pushing the GDP ratio to a 16-year high of 60.5%. This was higher than the 60% threshold considered manageable by multilateral lenders for developing economies.

The country also borrowed P1.3 trillion and received grants worth P2.7 billion to fund its pandemic response, including coronavirus vaccines.

Outstanding debt stood at a record P12.09 trillion at the end of February. — **Tobias Jared Tomas**

**Prices,**  
from SI/1

Nearly all eight commodity groups monitored by the agency posted growth on an annual basis in February. Only beverages and tobacco saw slower growth at 4.1% from 7.3% in February 2021, and eased from 4.4% in January.

The heavily weighted food index, which contributed 36.8% in the theoretical wholesale basket of goods, went up by 4.9% year on year in February from 3.9% the previous month.

Manufactured goods classified chiefly by materials likewise increased by 6.6% in February from 6.4% the previous month. This group accounted for a fifth of the wholesale market basket under 2012 prices.

**FULL STORY**



Read the full story by scanning the QR code with your smartphone or by typing the link [-bit.ly/Prices050422>](https://bit.ly/Prices050422)

**E-sabong,**  
from SI/1

“The Duterte administration’s order to stop e-sabong operations would depend on the government’s capability to implement it,” he said. “His decision could have done more damage than good – imagine the government losing revenues while e-sabong continues to thrive in the underground economy.”

Mr. Duterte previously refused to suspend e-sabong because of the revenues it generates for the government, which saw its budget deficit widen during the pandemic.

The Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp. (PAGCOR) earlier estimated revenues from online cockfighting averaged P400 million monthly last year and P640 million a month since January 2022.

Mr. Duterte acknowledged that the government’s previous stand was only based on e-sabong’s economic benefits. “It’s working against our values,” he said of the game. “The impact on families and on people, it turns out players are not sleeping for 24 hours.”

E-sabong gained popularity during the pandemic, as Filipino gamblers only needed to place bets using their mobile phones. However, the disappearance of at least 30 people allegedly linked to online cockfighting sparked a Senate investigation and prompted calls for its suspension.

Sought for comment, PAGCOR Chair Andrea D. Domingo said via text message that the regulator has to implement the President’s decision.

“We are duty bound to follow whatever is the decision of the President on e-sabong, which I am sure is always guided for the people in general,” PAGCOR President and Chief Operating Officer Alfredo C. Lim said via Viber.

Mr. Duterte gave Mr. Año until Tuesday (May 3) to finalize the order to terminate e-sabong operations. As of 5 p.m. yesterday, Malacañang had yet to release the order.

“Providing no certainty as to the exact date of the closure is unhelpful,” said Michael Henry Ll. Yusingco, a fellow at the Ateneo de Manila University Policy Center. “This date should have been settled before the announcement was even made.”

Mr. Yusingco said Mr. Duterte’s decision might push Congress to evaluate the domestic gaming industry and make it more responsive to emerging security and social threats.

“The broader context, the responsibility of re-examining the gaming industry falls on Congress,” he said in a Messenger chat. “Establishing a legal framework that is responsive to the times is the job of our legislators... So the future of this revenue-generating activity, and similar activities as well, is in the hands of our lawmakers.”

Congress has been urged to pass a law regulating online cockfighting. PAGCOR previously issued licenses to several e-sabong operators.

Mr. Yusingco said lawmakers should ensure “public safety and the general welfare are protected in the

gaming industry now that we are on the path of digitalization.”

“E-sabong is only one activity, it should be examined among many others in a holistic way, including all forms of gambling,” said Edna Estifania A. Co, a professor and former dean of the UP National College of Public Administration and Governance.

“The government should rationalize its decisions by weighing the positive and negative aspects in terms of management. Financial gains, regulatory framework, and social impacts,” she added.

Senators welcomed Mr. Duterte’s latest decision.

“The suspension of e-sabong operations in the country, while delayed, will pave the way for families to recover from their financial losses,” Senate President Vicente C. Sotto III said.

Senator Ronald M. dela Rosa, who previously pushed the President to suspend e-sabong, said there is no time for Congress to act on a bill that would transfer the authority to issue permits for e-sabong operators from PAGCOR to Congress.

“(This) would mean demise of the e-sabong industry unless the next administration would decide to resurrect it,” he said.

Senator Francis N. Pangilinan, meanwhile, said the debates on e-sabong should be left to the next Congress to give lawmakers more time to assess the popular online game. — *with inputs* from **Tobias Jared Tomas**

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