

Re-Opening of Classes, Philippine Setting: The State of Mental Health and Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

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The rapid transmission of COVID-19 throughout the world has had health, social, psychological, economic and, of course, educational consequences. In fact, school closure has been, on a global scale, one of the most widely used measures for helping to maintain social distancing and to decrease infections. This research is an opinion on how schools were opened in the Philippines and their impact on mental health and adaptation. This research is an opinion study that uses several literatures to corroborate opinions. I believe that what we are suffering now is just temporary, sooner we will be healed. Through our prayers, and the observance of health protocols, coupled with the support of the government, our country, the Philippines and Indonesia too, and the whole world will recover from this unpleasant and dreadful effect of pandemic. Our country Philippines is very hopeful that the word pandemic will be changed to endemic.

Keywords

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Introduction

Schools in the Philippines have been closed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Philippines had one of the longest school breaks in the world, without any type of formal classes from March 2020 to October 2020. An estimated 27 million students in the Philippines have lost more than a year of in-person learning. Schools have confronted unprecedented challenges as they moved to quickly shift classes to an online format. And now we are learning about the broad impacts on students as a result of schools about to re-open

The rapid transmission of COVID-19 throughout the world has had health, social, psychological, economic and, of course, educational consequences. In fact, school closure has been, on a global scale, one of the most widely used measures for helping to maintain social distancing and to decrease infections [1,2].

The pandemic has not only affected the mental state of students. Teachers too have also accumulated a high level of stress since the beginning of the crisis. Adapting to online teaching using different modalities of delivering the subject matter, struggles due to poor connectivity and the use of technology are just few among their stressors. Signs and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbance as a consequence of the increased workload resulting from home teaching are very evident to teachers [3].

Among children, the shift to online classes and excessive use of gadgets and technologies has been associated with developmental delays and has resulted in sleep schedule disruptions. The situation is aggravated by the strict implementation of the confinement of children at home, restrictions on movement and rigid practices of health protocols, disruption of regular daily routine, and the decrease of social support from school peers [4].

Children living with preexisting mental health concerns, and living in cramped households and communities, faced worse circumstances, ultimately, all of these add burden to the mental well-being of the children resulting to fear and anxiety.

The pandemic itself has caused much worry, stress, and grief. These stressors can cause mental health challenges for anyone and can cause acute symptoms to appear in people who may experience preexisting mental health challenges.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has subjected the mental health and well-being of Filipino children to drastic conditions. Among Filipino children aged 5 to 15, 10% to 15% are affected by mental health problems. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 16.8% of Filipino students aged 13 to 17 have attempted suicide at least once within a year before the 2015 Global School-based Student Health survey.

According to the National Statistics Office (NSO), now PSA (Philippine Statistics Office) [4], mental health illnesses rank as the third most common form of morbidity among Filipinos. In the assessment conducted on the Philippine mental health system, a prevalence of 16% of mental disorders among children was reported. With this alarming number of cases, I agree that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges to students, educators, and parents. Children already coping with mental health conditions since they started schooling have become vulnerable to the changes, and now we are learning about the broad impacts on students as a result of schools about to re-open, MANILA, Philippines, Vice President Sara Duterte, in her first order as the education secretary directed all public and private schools in the country to transition to five days of face-to-face classes beginning November 2, 2022. This

was contained in the Department of Education (DepEd) Order 34, s. 2022, containing the calendar of activities for the school year 2022 to 2023, which was made public on Tuesday, July 12, 2022 "Starting November 2, 2022, all public and private schools shall have transitioned to five days in-person classes. After the said date, no school shall be allowed to implement purely distance learning or blended learning except for those that are implementing Alternative Modes,". However, CHED (Commission on Higher Education), allows colleges, and universities to decide on face-to-face classes.

MANILA, Philippines – The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) said on Wednesday, July 13, 2022, that it will not require all schools to shift to in-person classes, letting colleges and universities decide on the appropriate mode of learning applicable to them [7].

"Some degree programs need a lot of face-to-face, especially skills-based programs, while other programs can be delivered via flexible learning. So, we are leaving it to the universities to decide what is the appropriate mix," said CHED chairperson Prospero de Vera III. "For example, we cannot require all schools to do face-to-face because there are schools that have been doing distance learning and flexible learning even before the pandemic," he added.

Method

This research is a subjective qualitative research based on the experience and expertise of the author, so the results shown are more of the author's perspective. This research is an opinion study that uses several literatures to corroborate opinions. This paper is expected to contribute to the handling of Covid-19, especially in schools.

Result and Discussion

A. Is it safe for children to go back to school?

Global data shows that schools are not main drivers of COVID-19 transmission [8]. Globally, children account for a very small proportion of confirmed COVID-19 cases. They have milder cases or reported deaths [9]. Children of primary school age and younger appear to be less likely infected and less likely to pass on the infection to others [8]. In the Philippines, children and adolescents comprise a very small proportion (9%) of total reported cases [5]. Therefore, children and schools are unlikely to be the main drivers of COVID-19 transmission, when community transmission is low.

UNICEF is supporting the Department of Education and Department of Health in planning for the phased, voluntary and safe reopening of schools in pilot low-risk areas in the Philippines. Low-risk areas are municipalities with less than 1 COVID-19 case per 100,000 population and negative growth rate in the last 2 weeks [9]. To ensure the safety of children

who will be attending in-person classes, all possible steps to mitigate virus transmission in school must be taken, including:

- Mask, face shield and other PPE policies for teachers, school staff and students in accordance with national and local guidelines
- Enhanced hygiene measures and adequate handwashing facilities
- Frequent cleaning of surfaces and shared objects
- Adequate and appropriate ventilation
- Cohorting and alternating physical presence to maintain physical distancing and small groups
- Information-sharing mechanisms with parents, students and teachers
- Setting criteria and mandatory procedures for temporary school closure in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak in the area
- Handwashing with soap is one of the most effective ways to stop the transmission of COVID-19. Schools need to ensure enhanced hygiene measures and adequate handwashing facilities.

B. How to support your child through reopening of classes

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, family life for many has been upended by lockdowns, school closures, and remote work. For many families, this has meant spending a lot of time together at home navigating stressful and uncertain situations. Many children have become used to having their parents or caregiver by their side at all hours of the day. Here are a few tips that you can apply to your child experiencing separation anxiety.

- Listen to your child. Take their worries seriously and talk to them about their concerns.
- Help them prepare. Ask your child how they feel about going back to school and make sure you inform their teacher if they have any significant concerns.
- Keep calm. Remember that children pick up on adults' behavioral cues. To help your child stay relaxed and feel safe, modeling calm behavior yourself is important.
- Have a leaving plan. To keep goodbyes from becoming difficult for older children, try the following: Make goodbyes positive, Announce that you're leaving, Make your explanation for leaving clear and short, Remind your child that you will be back for them, Do not hesitate when leaving, Do not return until the planned time, Follow the same routine every time you leave or drop off your child.

Looking after our mental health, as our country introduces measures to restrict movement as part of efforts to reduce the number of people infected with COVID-19, more and more of us are making huge changes to our daily routines. The new realities of working from home, temporary unemployment, home-schooling of children, and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends, and colleagues take time to get used to. Adapting to lifestyle

changes such as these, managing the fear of contracting the virus, and worrying about people close to us who are particularly vulnerable, are challenging for all of us. They can be particularly difficult for people with mental health conditions. I believe that you in your beloved country Indonesia suffered too from these great changes. Fortunately, there are lots of things that we can do to look after our mental health and to help others who may need some extra support and care. Here are tips and advice that I hope will find useful.

- Keep informed. Listen to advice and recommendations from your national and local authorities. Follow trusted news channels, such as local and national TV and radio, and keep up-to-date with the latest news from @WHO on social media.
- Have a routine. Keep up with daily routines as far as possible, or make new ones.
- Minimize newsfeeds. Try to reduce how much you watch, read, or listen to news that makes you feel anxious or distressed. Seek the latest information at specific times of the day, once or twice a day if needed.
- Social contact is important. If your movements are restricted, keep in regular contact with people close to you by telephone and online channels.
- Avoid using alcohol and drugs as a way of dealing with fear, anxiety, boredom, and social isolation. There is no evidence of any protective effect of drinking alcohol for viral or other infections. The opposite is true as the harmful use of alcohol is associated with an increased risk of infections and worse treatment outcomes.
- Screen time. Be aware of how much time you spend in front of a screen every day. Make sure that you take regular breaks from on-screen activities.
- Video games. While video games can be a way to relax, it can be tempting to spend much more time on them than usual when at home for long periods. Be sure to keep the right balance with offline activities in your daily routine.
- Social media. Use your social media accounts to promote positive and hopeful stories. Correct misinformation wherever you see it.
- Help others. If you can offer support to people in your community who may need it, such as helping them with food shopping.
- Support health workers. Take opportunities online or through your community to thank your country's healthcare workers and all those working to respond to COVID-19.

Conclusion

I believe that what we are suffering now is just temporary, sooner we will be healed. Through our prayers, and the observance of health protocols, coupled with the support of the government, our country, the Philippines and Indonesia too, and the whole world will recover

from this unpleasant and dreadful effect of pandemic. Our country Philippines is very hopeful that the word pandemic will be changed to endemic. As Caroline Wright said “You have to find a way to respect these new boundaries [related to coronavirus], but still live the version of life you’re used to. That’s what life is, regardless of circumstance.”

Conflict of Interest

I declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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