

Self-Stigma of Seeking Help as a Predictor of Mental Well-Being Among Filipino College Students

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Abstract. The mental health of Filipino college students is a growing concern due to the challenges posed by academic pressures, social isolation, and emotional distress. Counseling interventions are crucial in addressing these challenges by equipping students with strategies that build resilience and personal agency. However, many students remain hesitant to seek professional help despite its availability due to the self-stigma associated with mental health support. This study addressed a crucial gap in the literature by exploring how stigma predicts mental health outcomes in the Filipino context, offering valuable insights for improving student well-being and academic success. The pervasiveness of mental health concerns among college students and understanding barriers to seeking professional help also present a timely context. This study used a quantitative, predictive correlational design to examine the relationship between self-stigma and mental well-being. G*Power was used to compute the sample size, and a purposive sampling technique was utilized to recruit college students (n=300) across higher education institutions in Pampanga, Philippines. The data was collected through standardized instruments, including the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale and the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale. The findings revealed a weak and significant negative correlation ($R=-0.17$, $p < 0.001$) between self-stigma and mental well-being, indicating that higher levels of self-stigma are associated with lower levels of mental well-being. Moreover, the data revealed that 2.9% of self-stigma can predict mental well-being among college students. These findings highlighted that as college students experience higher self-stigma around seeking help, mental well-being tends to decrease, making the students less likely to seek psychological support and more vulnerable to mental health challenges. Higher educational institutions are encouraged to create an environment that fosters open discussions on mental health, making it more accepted and normalized. School counselors are encouraged to implement stigma-reduction programs to help students feel more comfortable seeking mental health support without fear of judgment.

Keywords: College students; Counseling; Mental well-being; Seeking help; Self-stigma

1.0 Introduction

Academic pressures, social isolation, emotional distress, and other life stressors challenge the mental well-being of Filipino college students. Empowering students to manage these difficulties through counseling services is vital to building resilience and enhancing their capacity to navigate personal and academic challenges. It is crucial to foster academic success and holistic development by recognizing the factors that hinder or promote mental health among students. Many students remain reluctant to seek professional help despite the availability of counseling services and mental health programs. One major obstacle is self-stigma, which encompasses the internalized negative beliefs and attitudes about seeking help. Self-stigma can discourage individuals from seeking mental

health services, even when such support is desperately needed. This raises a crucial problem: How does the perceived self-stigma of seeking help impact the mental well-being of Filipino college students, and to what extent does the self-stigma of seeking help predict their mental health? According to Sheehan (2021), self-stigma not only deters people from seeking help but also increases psychological distress. Many students hesitate to seek help because of the fear of judgment or misunderstanding. This reluctance can lead to a deterioration of mental well-being and may even strain relationships with close family and friends. Guarneri et al. (2019) indicate that self-stigma instills feelings of shame and reinforces negative self-perceptions, making it one of the most pervasive barriers to addressing mental health issues. Furthermore, Mills et al. (2020) revealed that people with mental health problems often experience self-stigma, which negatively affects psychological well-being. These false beliefs and stereotypes lead to fear, avoidance, and overall discomfort towards people with mental distress who are often seen as unpredictable, impulsive, and dangerous. Therefore, recognizing self-stigma is essential in creating supportive environments where students are encouraged to seek help without fearing judgment or discrimination.

A study by Koutra et al. (2024) found that 77% of university students experienced moderate to severe psychological distress, with a significant number struggling with self-stigma related to seeking mental health support. Similarly, Conceição et al. (2022) discovered that 24% to 37% of college students in need of psychological help avoided seeking assistance due to internalized stigmatization. Dagani et al. (2023) found that self-stigma leads to maladaptive coping strategies, including reduced reliance on instrumental support, such as seeking advice or help, and an increase in self-blame. The self-stigma of seeking help (SSOSH) stands as a critical obstacle for students who may otherwise benefit from mental health services. SSOSH involves internalizing negative societal messages about help-seeking, often portraying it as a sign of weakness or failure. Help-seeking is perceived by some individuals, particularly those from underrepresented groups, as a threat to their identity, further decreasing their likelihood to seek help (Johnson, 2020). AlSamhori et al. (2024) point out that stigma is still a significant attitudinal factor limiting access to mental health services. It was emphasized that stigma closely connects with help-seeking behaviors, significantly influencing students' decision-making processes (McDermott et al., 2017; Punla et al., 2022). Shim et al. (2022) highlighted the potential of psychoeducation to reduce stigma and foster understanding. Educating and training students about mental health issues not only enhances their awareness but also promotes accepting attitudes toward mental health care. Nonetheless, the rates of mental health help-seeking among college students still vary, influenced by factors such as psychological well-being, stigma, and demographic variables such as gender and age. While numerous studies have already examined the prevalence of psychological distress among college students, as well as the influence of self-stigma on help-seeking behaviors, there is still a limited exploration of how Self-Stigma of Seeking Help (SSOSH) is related to mental well-being, particularly within the population of Filipino college students. These existing studies also emphasize the role of stigma as an obstacle to accessing mental health services but fail to investigate its predictive relationship with the mental well-being of students. Moreover, as previously mentioned, interventions like mental health education have shown some effectiveness in reducing stigma. However, there is still insufficient evidence on how it can address the adverse effects of stigma on overall mental health outcomes. This study addresses these gaps by delving into the relationship and predictive role of SSOSH on the mental well-being of Filipino college students. The current study provides insights specific to this demographic. It contributes to developing more targeted mental health education and stigma-reduction programs that promote help-seeking among Filipino college students.

Stigma is an important factor that reduces help-seeking behaviors across different groups. For instance, Li et al. (2020) highlighted the significant relationship between self-stigma and mental health outcomes, stressing the key role of shame as a mediating factor. Likewise, the study by Yap et al. (2017) found that stigma significantly lowers the willingness of youth diagnosed with anxiety and depression to seek mental health support. Similarly, Vidourek et al. (2014) examined college students' views on the benefits and barriers to mental health treatment, discovering that stigma-related attitudes play an essential role in determining their willingness to seek help. Omondi (2024) suggested that future research should explore deeper into how mental health stigma influences help-seeking behaviors. Supporting this, in the context of young adults, Kim et al. (2021) found that higher levels of self-stigma are linked to a more negative attitude toward seeking mental health treatment. Building on these findings, this study determines the relationship and prediction between SSOSH and mental well-being among Filipino college students; this underscores the necessity for comprehensive interventions to address stigma,

involving theoretical advancements, practical strategies, and policy reforms. Proposed methods include contact-based anti-stigma interventions, practitioner training programs, and public awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of mental health care. Practical recommendations include reducing public stigma through media and educational initiatives, addressing self-stigma with cognitive-behavioral therapy and peer support, and enhancing access to care through telehealth services and culturally sensitive practices.

Mills et al. (2020) highlighted that self-stigma could result in reduced self-esteem, diminished self-efficacy, and a sustained negative impact on psychological well-being. While self-help interventions that lower self-stigma have demonstrated the potential to alleviate these adverse effects, the deeply rooted cultural stigma surrounding mental health remains a significant challenge. In the Philippines, Rubio (2023) noted that cultural beliefs associating mental health issues with personal weaknesses or supernatural causes reinforce the idea that mental disorders are socially unacceptable. As a result, individuals frequently turn to family and friends for support rather than seeking professional care. Glinoga et al. (2022) further revealed that self-stigma, along with societal stigma, hinders many Filipino students from seeking help from mental health professionals due to fears of judgment and discrimination. Stigma, confidentiality concerns, and a lack of mental health literacy are barriers to help-seeking. Addressing these challenges requires strategies to reduce stigma, increase awareness, and improve access to confidential mental health support (Yadav, 2023). Hence, effective mental health programs should consider how individuals conceptualize mental health and mental illness since it varies across cultures and contexts (Adebayo et al., 2024). Despite these insightful findings, existing research only focused on the effects of stigma and general interventions, failing to investigate the specific relationship and predictive role of self-stigma of seeking help (SSOSH) on mental well-being, particularly among Filipino college students. This study fills the gap by exploring this relationship and predictive role, calling attention to formulating stigma-reduction programs tailored to the Filipino context.

The Modified Labeling Theory (MLT) provides a valuable framework for understanding how societal stigma surrounding mental illness leads to self-stigmatization, which in turn discourages help-seeking behaviors. According to MLT, people who are aware of negative stereotypes about mental health conditions may internalize these beliefs, even without being directly labeled or stigmatized by others. This internalization creates a deep-seated fear of being judged, misunderstanding, and discrimination, preventing individuals from seeking the professional help they need. The mere anticipation of being labeled as "mentally ill" can cause individuals to avoid mental health services entirely, resulting in isolation and worsening of their mental well-being (Fox & Earnshaw, 2023). It underscores the cyclical nature of self-stigma: the more individuals fear societal labeling, the less likely they are to seek support, prolonging their mental health issues. In the Filipino context, where cultural norms often highly value family reputation and emotional resilience, this fear of being labeled as "mentally ill" can be extreme. Self-stigma poses a significant barrier, perpetuating avoidance behaviors and blocking efforts to promote mental health care. As noted by Onie et al. (2021), the fear of societal judgment and discrimination deters individuals from accessing the help they need, stressing the critical importance of targeted interventions to address stigma and create a more supportive environment for mental health. While existing studies highlight the effects of stigma on help-seeking behaviors, there is still a notable gap in understanding the relationship and prediction between SSOSH and mental well-being, especially among Filipino college students. This study examines how SSOSH influences mental well-being and its predictive role on mental health outcomes among this demographic to fill the gap. By integrating the principles of MLT into counseling practices, Filipino guidance counselors can better understand the complex relationship between societal stigma and self-stigmatization. This understanding capacitates counselors to develop programs that counter negative stereotypes, promote positive attitudes toward help-seeking, and establish safe spaces where students feel supported in prioritizing their mental health. Through this, the study aims to inform policies and practices that reduce self-stigma, encourage help-seeking behaviors, and eventually improve mental health outcomes for Filipino college students.

While several studies have investigated the interplay between self-stigma, help-seeking behaviors, and mental well-being, more research within the Filipino context is still necessary. A significant portion of the existing literature focuses on special populations, such as individuals diagnosed with mental health conditions, resulting in an underrepresentation of the general population of college students. Additionally, while previous studies have focused on general help-seeking behaviors, this investigation concentrates on the self-stigma associated with seeking mental health assistance; this research primarily evaluated the level of perceived self-stigma of seeking

help and its relationship and prediction with mental health among Filipino college students. The research provided valuable insights that can aid school counselors and educators in developing culturally sensitive and evidence-based interventions. These may include stigma-reduction programs and initiatives designed to cultivate a supportive environment for mental health. By addressing self-stigma, the study intends to improve mental well-being among Filipino college students, empowering them to overcome academic and personal challenges.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

A quantitative research methodology was employed to explore the relationship between Filipino college students' mental health and the self-stigma of seeking help. Specifically, the researchers utilized predictive correlational design to gauge the association and prediction of the variables. Predictive correlation in behavioral sciences involves examining the association between variables and predicting the outcome variable (Smith et al., 2022). In this research, self-stigma of seeking help served as the predictor, while mental health functioned as the outcome variable.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Pampanga, Philippines. Based on the respondents' declared demographics, 16 HEIs are included in this context. This locale was selected because Pampanga is home to a diverse range of HEIs, providing a representative sample of Filipino college students, which is ideal for this research.

2.3 Research Participants

This study recruited Filipino college students ($n=300$) in several higher education institutions in Pampanga, Philippines. The researchers determined the needed sample size through the G*Power 3.1.9.7. The set parameters are a statistical power of 95%, an effect size of 0.15, and a significance level of 0.05. In this case, there is a 95% chance that the real value is within 5% of the measured value. Moreover, researchers used the convenience sampling technique to recruit the students in the study. The convenience sampling technique is a non-probability sampling method wherein the researchers select participants who are easily accessible (Benites et al., 2023).

2.4 Research Instrument

This study used two open-access instruments to gather all the data needed. The first scale is Self-Stigma of Seeking Help (SSOSH), developed by Vogel et al. (2006), which measures how much participants believed seeking mental health care could impair their self-esteem. The instrument has a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The scale includes 10 items, with items 2,4,5,7 and 9 reverse-scored to control for response bias. The SSOSH measures participants' agreement and has demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha > 0.86$). This scale has been validated among university students (Larrahondo et al., 2021). The SSOSH quantifies self-stigma, a potential barrier to accessing mental health services, offering valuable insights into how stigma impacts help-seeking behavior and mental well-being among Filipino college students. Permission to the authors is sought to convert this scale into Google Forms. The second scale used is the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS) which assesses the positive mental health of the various populations. The 7-item instrument has a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1 - None of the time" to "5 - All of the time", summed to provide a single score. The SWEMWBS measures the frequency of positive mental health and has established excellent reliability ($\alpha > 0.89$) among the general population (Ng Fat et al., 2017). The scale is scored by first summing the scores for each of the seven items, which are then transformed into metric scores using the SWEMWBS conversion table. Approval from the authors were requested to convert these two scales into a digital format.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers followed ethical standards to ensure all respondents' confidentiality and voluntary participation. The target population included Filipino college students from various higher education institutions in Pampanga, Philippines. The researchers employed a convenience sampling technique to guarantee representation across diverse demographics. First, the researchers engaged with potential participants during their free time, affirming comfort and voluntary participation. After getting verbal consent, the researchers sent the survey link through a messenger application. After obtaining enough responses, the researchers utilized JAMOVI 2.4.14 to clean, code, and analyze the dataset for accurate and reliable results. The analysis followed a systematic approach, starting

with descriptive statistics to summarize key features of the data. The total number of the sample, mean age, levels of mental health, and self-stigma of seeking help were determined through descriptive analysis. Subsequently, researchers performed a correlation analysis using Pearson's correlation test, which revealed a significant negative relationship between self-stigma and mental well-being. The R-value indicated the direction and strength of this relationship. Finally, researchers conducted a regression analysis to determine how self-stigma predicted mental well-being. The coefficient of determination (R^2) provided insights into the proportion of variance in mental well-being that self-stigma explains. In summary, the data-gathering and analysis procedures enabled the researchers to thoroughly examine the relationship between the self-stigma of seeking help and mental well-being among Filipino college students. The analysis set a foundation for understanding how self-stigma predicts students' willingness to seek help and their overall mental health. This offers practical implications for creating targeted interventions in school counseling programs.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researchers prioritized safeguarding the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants throughout the study. Recognizing the sensitive nature of topics such as mental well-being and self-stigma, the researchers ensured that participants encountered no harm or distress during any phase of the research process. Efforts were made to create a safe and supportive environment, allowing participants to engage comfortably and openly. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their voluntary involvement. They were free to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, confirming they understood their rights to confidentiality and anonymity. In adherence to Republic Act 10173, the Data Privacy Act of 2012, all personal information was handled with strict confidentiality. Sensitive details such as gender, age, and self-stigma experiences were protected, and the collection of identifying information was optional to preserve anonymity. Data were securely stored on a password-protected device which can only be accessed by the researchers. The nature of this research undertaking was explained with great sensitivity, guaranteeing the study did not perpetuate further stigmatization. Language and practices were carefully chosen to respect the participants' unique cultural and social context as Filipino college students. Transparency, honesty, and a commitment to integrity guided every research step. The findings were reported accurately, free from biases or misinterpretations, to reflect the true experiences of the participants. By adhering to these ethical standards, the study not only contributed valuable insights into the relationship between self-stigma and mental well-being but also promoted a deeper awareness of the barriers Filipino students face in seeking mental health support. This commitment reflects the researchers' dedication to fostering a culture of empathy, understanding, and mental health advocacy in educational settings.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of the respondents in terms of Age

Table 1 presents a summary of the student demographic profile based on age. The 300 students in the sample range in age from 17 to 21. 104 students, or 34.7% of the sample, are 19 years of age or younger, making up the biggest percentage of responses. Closely behind, making up 21.7% (65 students) of the respondents, are students aged 21 and above. Furthermore, the sample's age distribution is as follows: students aged 18 make up 21.3% (64 students), and the student population includes 61 twenty years old (20.3%) and 6 seventeen years old (2%).

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age		
Program	Frequency	Percentage (%)
17	6	2.0%
18	64	21.3%
19	104	34.7%
20	61	20.3%
21	65	21.7%
Total	300	100.0%

Overall, the distribution of students in this demographic breakdown is even between the ages of 18 and 21, with a lower proportion of students who are 17 years old. Most of the student sample is between the ages of 18 and 21, which is the average range for college students. This gives the study a balanced perspective on this demographic. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), the demographic parameters of college students, notably their age distribution, are normally within the range seen in this study. This shows that the sample accurately represents the general college student population, which increases the study's relevance and

applicability to broader educational contexts. Furthermore, Morena et al. (2024) stated that college students may have an existing mental health condition but are not engaged in treatment. Hence, conducting studies that tackle stigma, insufficient social support, negative attitudes, and emotional invalidation are important with this population.

3.2 Levels of the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help among Filipino College Students

Table 2 revealed that while participants have mild concerns about seeking psychological help, particularly regarding feelings of inadequacy and fears of diminished self-esteem, the overall attitude toward therapy is neutral to slightly negative. For instance, "I would feel inadequate if I went to a therapist" received a mean of 2.72, while "Seeking psychological help would make me feel less intelligent" received a mean of 2.23, indicating moderate reservations. However, on average, people responded that therapy would not severely undermine their self-esteem and/or self-confidence. In contrast, the mean score for "My self-confidence would be the same if I sought professional help" is 2.57. The findings indicate that although therapy is not outright hated, there are, however, self-image and stigma-related barriers that would be softened to increase the self-efficacy of seeking help.

Table 2. *Levels of the self-stigma of seeking help among Filipino college students*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I would feel inadequate if I went to a therapist for psychological help.	2.72	1.03	Disagree
2. My self-confidence would NOT be threatened if I sought professional help.	2.56	1.09	Agree & Disagree Equally
3. Seeking psychological help would make me feel less intelligent.	2.23	1.07	Disagree
My self-esteem would increase if I talked to a therapist.	2.40	0.93	Disagree
5. My view of myself would not change just because I made the choice to see a therapist.	2.53	1.06	Agree & Disagree Equally
6. It would make me feel inferior to ask a therapist for help.	2.60	1.09	Agree & Disagree Equally
7. I would feel okay about myself if I made the choice to seek professional help.	2.13	0.84	Disagree
8. If I went to a therapist, I would be less satisfied with myself.	2.43	0.98	Disagree
9. My self-confidence would remain the same if I sought professional help for a problem I could not solve.	2.57	0.98	Agree & Disagree Equally
10. I would feel worse about myself if I could not solve my own problems.	3.26	1.10	Agree & Disagree Equally
Overall Weighted Mean	2.59	1.01	Agree & Disagree Equally

This table measures the variability of responses for each statement, reflecting how many individual answers differ from the average. A higher SD indicates more variation, while a lower SD shows more participant agreement. For example, statements like "My self-confidence would NOT be threatened if I sought professional help" (SD=1.09) and "It would make me feel inferior to ask a therapist for help" (SD=1.09) show more variability, meaning participants had mixed opinions. In contrast, statements like "I would feel okay about myself if I chose to seek professional help" (SD=0.84) have lower SDs, indicating more consensus among respondents. Overall, the SD values suggest that while some aspects of therapy are widely agreed upon, there is notable diversity in how participants feel about its impact on their self-esteem and confidence. According to Sheikhan et al. (2023), mental illness stigma significantly hinders care-seeking and undermines mental health services across various global settings. Stigma causes individuals to delay seeking help and can lead to service refusal. This mental health stigma is particularly observed among low to middle-income countries (Javed et al., 2021). Stigma, a complex construct involving public, self, and structural components, directly affects people with mental illness, their support system, provider network, and community resources. Understanding stigma is crucial for reducing its negative impact on care-seeking and treatment engagement. Strategies to counteract stigma should include programs for mental health providers, mental health literacy, cultural competence, and family engagement campaigns. This supports the review of Kaur et al. (2021), wherein stigma reduction interventions were found to be crucial for improving mental health outcomes and narrowing the treatment gap. Moreover, designing comprehensive, evidence-based interventions that address stigma at multiple levels, including governmental and structural levels, is needed to combat mental health stigma and improve access to care effectively. Policy change is essential to overcome structural stigma that undermines government agendas promoting mental health care. Expanding research on the connection between stigma and care-seeking is also essential.

3.3 Levels of Mental Well-Being among Filipino College Students

Table 3 presents the mean levels and standard deviations of various indicators of students' mental well-being. The responses were measured on a Likert scale, with higher mean values indicating more favorable levels of mental well-being. The item "I've been able to make up my mind about things" has the highest mean score of 3.57 (SD=0.98), suggesting that students feel a strong sense of independence and decisiveness.

Table 3. *Levels of mental well-being among Filipino college students*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I've been feeling optimistic about the future	3.20	0.94	Some of the time
2. I've been feeling useful	3.16	0.97	Some of the time
3. I've been feeling relaxed	3.07	0.98	Some of the time
4. I've been dealing with problems well	3.37	0.93	Some of the time
5. I've been thinking clearly	3.23	0.94	Some of the time
6. I've been feeling close to other people	3.33	1.00	Some of the time
7. I've been able to make up my own mind about things.	3.57	0.98	Often
Overall Weighted Mean	3.28	0.82	Some of the time

This is closely followed by the item "I've been dealing with problems well," with a mean score of 3.37 (SD=0.93), indicating that students generally feel capable of managing their challenges effectively. "I've been feeling close to other people" also scores relatively high, with a mean of 3.33 (SD=1.00), reflecting positive social connections. In contrast, "I've been feeling relaxed" has the lowest mean score of 3.07 (SD=0.98), suggesting that students may experience some relaxation or stress management challenges. The overall weighted mean of 3.28, representing an average of these indicators (SD=0.96), would provide insight into the general mental well-being of students in this sample. This data suggests that students generally exhibit positive levels of well-being across most indicators, though some areas, such as relaxation, might benefit from further support or intervention. This mirrors the findings of Long et al. (2021) that mindfulness-based coping programs have shown promise in improving students' stress management, emotion regulation, and overall flourishing. Additionally, fostering stronger social support networks could further improve students' mental well-being, as reflected in the relatively high scores on social connectedness. This supports Newhart's (2023) claims that social competence and perceived social support have been identified as significant predictors of psychological well-being and reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among college students. Moreover, self-awareness and the separation of personal identity from mental health challenges can likewise improve the mental health of college students. The feelings, behavior, and awareness that people are distinct from their issues are all relevant elements of mental well-being (Zevo Health, 2024).

3.4 Relationship between Self-Stigma of Seeking Help and Mental Well-Being

Table 4 presents the relationship between the self-stigma of seeking help and mental well-being among Filipino College students. The findings reveal a weak negative correlation ($r=-0.17$) between self-stigma of help-seeking and mental well-being, with a p-value of less than 0.001. Since the p-value is below the typical significance threshold of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected.

Table 4. *Relationship between self-stigma of seeking help and mental well-being*

Variables	R-value	p-value	Decision	Remarks
Self-Stigma of Seeking Help and Mental Well-Being	-0.17	<.001	Reject H_0	Significant

The result indicates a statistically significant relationship between self-stigma of help-seeking and mental well-being, suggesting that higher levels of self-stigma are associated with lower levels of mental well-being. This finding emphasizes the potential impact of self-stigmatizing beliefs on students' mental health, underscoring the importance of reducing stigma around help-seeking to promote better mental well-being among students. The findings of the study are consistent with the research of Dagani et al. (2023), wherein it was found that psychological distress was found to be positively correlated with coping strategies, which in turn was negatively associated with the stigma of seeking help. In addition, Thai and Trang (2024) found that the self-stigma of seeking help increased the risk of mental health issues. Furthermore, Conceição et al. (2022) highlighted in their study that both personal and perceived depression stigma negatively impact attitudes toward professional help-seeking.

3.5 Regression Analysis Between Self-Stigma of Seeking Help and Mental Well-Being

Table 5 illustrates the relationship between the predictor variable and the criterion variable. The results indicate a significant intercept with an estimated mean score of 3.752 and a p-value of less than 0.001, suggesting a strong baseline effect. The predictor variable, Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Level, also shows a significant negative relationship with the criterion, as evidenced by an estimate of -0.188 and a p-value of 0.003. With an R^2 of 0.029 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.026, the model accounts for a small but noteworthy portion of variance, leading to the decision to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 5. Linear regression of self-stigma of seeking help and mental well-being

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Intercept	3.752	0.16	22.88	<.001	Significant
Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Level	-0.188	0.06	-2.98	0.003	Significant

Note. Criterion = Mental Well-Being, $R^2 = 0.029$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.026$, F-value = 8.86

These findings suggest that higher levels of self-stigma of seeking help can influence poorer mental health outcomes among Filipino college students, highlighting the need to address stigma in mental health interventions. This backs the investigation of Singh et al. (2021), which indicates that stigma significantly impacts mental health help-seeking behaviors among college students. Personal stigma negatively affects attitudes toward treatment and help-seeking intentions. This also supports that perceived public stigma influences help-seeking behavior, although its effect is mediated by personal stigma (Maeshima & Parent, 2020). Despite the small effect size, this prediction indicates that reducing self-stigma could contribute to improved mental well-being. Mental health programs should minimize self-stigma to encourage help-seeking behaviors, enhancing overall mental health support. In the case of Kirschner et al. (2020), interventions addressing stigma improve the students' attitudes toward help-seeking. Online interactive educational programs utilizing avatars depicting distressed individuals have effectively reduced stigmatizing attitudes.

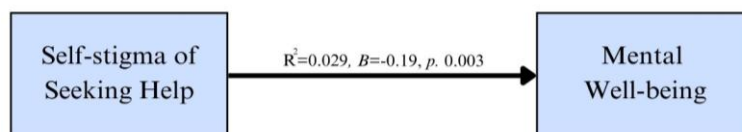


Figure 1. Simple linear regression

4.0 Conclusion

The researchers concluded that the self-stigma of seeking help is significantly associated with the mental health of Filipino college students. This self-stigma impairs Filipino college students' self-esteem, which discourages students from seeking help and exacerbates their mental health issues. Moreover, researchers suggested that reducing students' self-stigmatizing beliefs can foster healthier help-seeking behaviors. When individuals feel ashamed or consider themselves less worthy because of mental health issues, they become less likely to seek help from peers, counselors, or mental health professionals. According to Martinez et al. (2020), Filipinos across the world have general reluctance and unfavorable attitudes toward formal help-seeking despite high rates of psychological distress. The population prefers seeking help from family members and friends. Barriers cited include financial constraints and inaccessibility of mental health services. In comparison, overseas Filipinos were hampered by immigration status, lack of health insurance, language difficulty, experience of discrimination, and lack of acculturation to host culture. Filipinos are also prevented from seeking help by their sense of resilience and self-reliance. Filipinos utilized special mental health care only as a last resort or when symptoms became severe. Parungao (2024) reinforces the importance of addressing these barriers, noting that university students' mental health outcomes are significantly influenced by their coping styles and the availability of social support. This finding underscores the need for targeted mental health initiatives in academic settings to mitigate the negative impact of stigma and enhance students' coping mechanisms. Efforts to normalize discussions about mental health and build accessible support systems are crucial for fostering a healthier, more inclusive environment. Higher educational institutions are recommended to create a supporting environment where open discussions on mental health are encouraged and normalized. Designing initiatives such as mental health workshops, peer support groups, and awareness campaigns can contribute to a culture of understanding and acceptance, allowing students

to voice out difficulties and seek help without judgment. Daniele et al. (2022) stated that adolescents often experience discomfort due to individual experiences and the influence of the environment, which leads to mental health problems. Empowering students to seek assistance can benefit mental health, leading to positive academic performance and emotional resilience. Moreover, teachers play a crucial role in facilitating these interventions by promoting open conversations, reducing stigma, and creating a supportive environment for students to seek help, ensuring mental health support is integrated into the academic experience. Furthermore, school counselors are recommended to promote effective counseling alliances with students. Prim et al. (2023) indicated that self-stigma and perceived stigma negatively affect attitudes toward both face-to-face and online counseling, as well as intentions to seek help. Students identify several barriers to accessing school counseling services, including stigma, desire for self-reliance, lack of positive counselor relationships, and concerns about confidentiality (Auger et al., 2018). On the other hand, students who do seek help report more positive relationships with their school counselors and perceive them as more available (Yablon, 2018). To promote help-seeking behavior, it is crucial to address stigma and foster positive attitudes toward counseling. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct qualitative studies that delve deeper into the personal narratives of Filipino college students regarding the self-stigma of seeking help and its impact on psychological well-being. Such research would offer a richer understanding of these students' unique challenges. Additionally, it is recommended that future studies use advanced statistical techniques, including moderation, mediation, and structural equation modeling, to explore further the complexities of the relationship between self-stigma and mental well-being. This approach would help broaden the understanding of these dynamics across various student populations, providing valuable insights for developing more targeted and effective mental health interventions for Filipino college students.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

All the authors declare equal contributions to each section. The authors reviewed and approved the final work.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in the publication of this paper.

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