



## A Genre Analysis of Mental Health Policies and Strategies of Selected Universities

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### **Abstract:**

Mental health and well-being are now part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), because of the increasing number of young people who suffer from depression, addiction, and other mental problems. Countries around the world are now setting mental health as a top priority, and schools are increasingly mandated to take the lead. In the Philippines, The Mental Health Act (RA11036) signed in 2018 calls for educational institutions to create policies and programs to ensure the mental health of students, staff, and teachers. However, despite some counseling guidelines and mental health fora for students in some universities, what seems to be missing is a reference that universities can use to craft a student mental health policy and strategy. This paper attempts to fill the gap through a genre analysis of university mental health policies and strategies available online. The results of the analysis showed some obligatory sections that higher education institutions can use to review and to plan their university mental health policy and strategy.

**Key Words:** mental health; policies; universities; mental health of students; mental health strategy

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The definition of mental health as a "state of psychosocial well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, copes adequately with the normal stresses of life, displays resilience in the face of extreme life events, works productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a positive contribution to the community" (RA11036, 2018, p.2) is indicative that mental health is critical to success in the workplace and in schools. It is no wonder that mental health and well-being are now part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), because of

the increasing number of people who suffer from depression, addiction, and other mental illness (Votruba, 2018). For example, World Health Organizations (2001) estimates that one in four will experience a mental health problem in their lifetime. In schools, one in five children and youth "have a diagnosable emotional, behavioral or mental health disorder and 1 in 10 young people have a mental health challenge that is severe enough to impair how they function at home, school or in the community" (Association for Children's Mental Health, 2020).

Research on students' mental health in universities shows an increasing number of referrals



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(Stallman and Shochet, 2009; Macaskill, 2013; Schwartz and Kay, 2009). In addition, a recent study in the Philippines found that young Filipinos lack health literacy, including mental health literacy (Javier, Tiongco, and Jabar, 2019). Stigma also complicates the issue on mental health in the Philippines (Rivera and Antonio, 2017).

Countries around the world are now setting mental health as a top priority, and schools are increasingly mandated to take the lead. In the Philippines The Mental Health Act (RA11036) signed in 2018 calls for educational institutions to create policies and programs to ensure the mental health (MH) of students, staff, and teachers.

A university MH policy is critical because of several reasons. First, universities are blamed for suicide, self-harm, increasing anxiety and depression of students (Shackle, 2019). A policy document creates a holistic and unified approach to address promotion of mental health, prevention of mental health problems, addressing stigma, and support for those at risk and have a lived experience. In fact, a study found that a policy can reduce suicide rate (Healthy Sydney University, 2016) Second, a university MH policy is a shared language among stakeholders like students, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and the community. "Educating and informing staff and students about mental health at an individual level can be useful to reduce stigma and improve knowledge, however it may not necessarily change outcomes or behaviour. In comparison, changing the environment of a university, whether that is the academic environment of curricula or the physical environment of a classroom, seems to be more effective at supporting improved mental health outcomes and behaviours for both staff and students. This applied not only to the studies with mental health outcomes but also for studies looking at creating smoke-free campuses" (Healthy University Sydney University, 2016, p. 20). Third, it is a legal obligation that takes into account the Mental Health Act, the Data Privacy Act, and the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons). In fact, Chapter 5 Section 24 of RA 11036 states that "Educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, universities, and technical schools, shall develop policies and programs for students, educators, and other employees designed to raise awareness on mental health issues, identify and provide support and

services for individuals at risk, and facilitate access, including referral mechanisms of individuals with mental health conditions to treatment and psychosocial support" (p.21). Lastly, "universities must also demonstrate how they can play a positive role in the community and wider society in destigmatising mental health difficulties and providing support to underpin talented students with mental health challenges, leaving behind the deficit model of support of the past" (Universities UK, 2015, p. 5).

A university MH strategy, a leadership imperative, provides clear action steps based on its vision. This strategic document is very important because of several reasons. First, it drives organizational change by developing a culture that supports mental health and wellbeing (Beyond Blue, 2018). Second, the process of creating a strategy facilitates collaboration among stakeholders. This ensures ownership of the plan of action and puts everyone on board. organizational change because it clarifies. Third, a university MH strategy facilitates a whole university approach to promote mental health for all, to provide support for those at risk, and to facilitate access to services needed by those who have mental health conditions.

However, at present, there seems to be a lack of guidance on how schools will prepare a mental health policy and an MH strategy in the Philippines. The present study attempts to address this concern by analyzing university MH policies and strategies of selected higher education institutions in the hopes of bringing to the fore obligatory sections and organizational patterns that could serve as a reference for universities and colleges.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Genre analysis was chosen as a method to analyze 10 university MH policy documents and 10 university MH strategies available in the public domain. This method of analysis of school mental health policies because it helps researchers to see patterns as well as deviations (Plata, 2019).



Convenient sampling was employed in selecting the policies and strategies. Almost all of the samples came from UK universities based on the Google search. The analysis followed three stages. The first stage was an initial reading and coding of the parts of each policy. Each major part was considered a move or a communicative strategy. The second stage was creating a table for checking those moves that were present in the samples. After this, the occurrence of moves was ranked to see which ones were more prominent.

The following university MH policies were included in the study:

University of Oxford  
University of West London  
University of Brighton  
University of Liverpool  
Roehampton University  
University College London  
London Metropolitan University  
University of Glasgow  
Heriot- Watt University  
Durham University

The following university mental health strategy documents were included in the study:

Queen's University  
University of York  
University of Bristol  
Bangor University  
Cambridge University  
Australia National University  
University of Sheffield  
University of Oxford  
University of Windsor

University of St. Andrews

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Part 1 MH Policy Analysis

The analysis of university mental health policies showed that more than half of the documents were created to provide a student mental health framework (60%). An example is shown below:

"This Policy sets out how the collegiate University seeks to provide a coherent institutional approach to supporting the mental health of Oxford students" (University of Oxford, 2017, p.1). Other policies were created to provide a set of MH guidelines or principles while one policy stated its commitment to student mental health.

All policies have an introduction that provides the purpose and context of the policy such as the needs of university students with regard to mental health support and duty of the university to provide such support. This is an example from Roehampton University (2017), "The University recognises and understands its legal obligations in relation to people with mental health difficulties. These are found primarily but not exclusively within disability legislation which sets out duty of care responsibilities. Disability legislation, along with other diversity and equal opportunity-related duties and responsibilities are dealt with in the University Diversity and Equal Opportunities Policy" (p.1).

In addition, all the policies have a section on student welfare and services. It provides a list of university centers as well as programs for students who are experiencing mental health problems or those who are experiencing distress or anxiety. In addition, it also enumerates a list of hospitals and websites that provide support. Some policies specifically state the persons who should be first responders. An example is from University College London (2020) "Responsibility for helping students with problems rests, in the first instance, with the departmental tutor, the Programme Tutor or Graduate Tutor, or, in the case of research graduates post-graduates, the main supervisor" (p.2).



Another common section is a definition of terms (70%). Most policies define mental health and mental health difficulties, so that the intended readers will have a shared language to avoid stigma and to promote MH. Moreover, 70% of the sample policies also state the roles, rights and responsibilities of students, staff, and the university. It is worth noting that students are often reminded that they have a responsibility for their mental health through practices that well ensure wellbeing.

Other common sections that appear in more than 50% of the policies are protocols for crisis, policies for confidentiality and disclosure, policies for interruption of studies and accommodation, legal framework, and policy of the implementation and review.

The result of the analysis showed that university mental health policies provide proactive guidelines for stakeholders in each university. The results also suggest a whole university approach to mental health.

The organization of the policies vary, but the common moves are the following:

- Providing an Introduction: purpose and context
- Defining terms
- Enumerating student welfare and services
- Identifying first responders
- Stating the protocols for a crisis
- Enumerating the policies for confidentiality and disclosure
- Stating the policies for accommodation and interruption of studies
- Explaining the legal framework
- Stating the policy of implementation and review

## **Part 2 MH Strategy Analysis**

More than half of the strategy documents aim to promote mental health in the whole university

while others state the goal in terms of a whole university commitment or support or approach to students' MH. An example is from Griffith University (2019), "The Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy represents one element of Griffith University's overall Healthy University Framework that emphasises staff and student physical and mental wellbeing, a healthy lifestyle, healthy places, and a healthy community" (p.3). Most of the strategy documents start with an introduction that provides a background about the strategy. In addition, seven out of 10 strategy documents state the vision for the strategy. An example is that of University of Oxford (2019) "Our vision for the collegiate university is an environment which allows all students to flourish at Oxford personally and academically, and equips them with the skills to thrive throughout their lives" (p.1).

Another common section is a list of objectives or strategies or themes with specific action plans. One example is University of Bristol's MH strategy based on the eight themes (leadership, transitions, early intervention, support, staff, partnerships, data and research of Universities UK #StepChange (2018). Other strategies are targeted to four tiers of students such as the general population for promotion of MH and prevention of MH problems, students at risk of developing mental health problems, students who are experiencing mental health problems, and students who are at risk of self harm. An example is Griffith University MH strategy four strategic goals for the first tier of students or for the general population while there is one strategic goal with specific action plans for tier 2-4 students. Another result worth noting is the inclusion of a plan for the implementation and monitoring of the strategy. An example is from the Australian National University (2016). It specifies the period of the review and number of meetings: "An evaluation and review of the strategy will occur every three years, with the next review due in 2017. The working group will meet four times annually to discuss the progress achieved in the associated Operational Plans."

Compared to university MH policies, strategy documents set targets for implementation and specific steps to implement and to measure the success of each key result area. A research component also



differentiates a policy document from a strategy. In fact, one research-oriented strategy document is that of Cambridge University. It provides a background of the research process and presents a SWOT analysis before it presents the vision of the strategy, aims, and action plans. The University of Griffith MH Strategy is another example of a narrative that focuses on the process of finalizing the strategy.

The results showed two ways of organizing an MH strategy: process-oriented approach and strategy-oriented approach. The former should provide the context and the stages of the research process in order to create a strategy approved by various stakeholders. On the other hand, those who wish to follow the strategy-oriented approach may include the following:

- Providing an introduction
- Stating the vision
- Enumerating the plans for each theme or strategy
- Explaining the plan for implementation and monitoring

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This pilot study was conducted to differentiate university mental health policy documents from university MH strategies to uncover common sections that would be helpful for colleges and universities who wish to start planning for their documents to comply with RA11036, requiring all schools to create policies on student mental health. The results showed that policy documents provide the framework for promoting student mental health while strategy documents aim to promote mental health with key result areas to address different groups of university students such as the general population, those at risk, and those who have mental health problems. A strategy document is also anchored on research with monitoring and measuring the success of implementation as a differentiation from a policy. This research is a preliminary study that could be expanded with more samples. In addition, a closer look at each country's mental health policy, legal

mandates, and MH strategies could provide a larger perspective on the mental health promotion in universities.

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