

Features of university faculty and staff mental health policies: Insights from top 10 global universities

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Abstract: The COVID 19 pandemic and the extended lockdowns are causing mental health (MH) crises. However, most of the MH research focused on the pandemic's impact on students, faculty, and workers. This paper attempts to fill the gap by analyzing the mental health policy of top QS universities to uncover insights for university leaders as workplace MH policymakers in the Philippines in preparation for the Next Normal. In addition, MH policymaking is mandated by the Mental Health Act (RA11036) and DOLE (2020) Department Order 208 entitled "Guidelines for the Implementation of Mental Health Workplace Policies and Programs." Content analysis was used to uncover the common features of the policies for the six areas of DOLE 208 s2020, such as training, wellbeing, social policy, treatment, benefits, and support. The results showed three features of the university MH policies: inclusivity, accessibility, and holistic. The study results suggest a university mental health-oriented leadership as policymaking to implement the mandates of RA 11036, specifically DOLE 208 s. 2020 in terms of mental health advocacy and training, well-being, social policy on non-discrimination, treatment and referral system, benefits, and support. This paper also recommends an urgent implementation of the MH law because mental health cannot wait.

Key Words: workplace mental health; policy development; DOLE 208 s. 2020; faculty wellbeing; RA11036

1. INTRODUCTION

"Good mental health and well-being are essential for all of us to lead fulfilling lives, to realize our full potential, to participate productively in our communities, and to demonstrate resilience in the face of stress and adversity" (World Health Organization, 2005, p. v.). The Mental Health Act of the Philippines defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes one's own abilities and potentials, 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" (Republic of the Philippines, 2022). The definition of mental health indicates the need to put mental health at the forefront of policies and programs in every organization. The World Health Organization (2005) argues that "a mental health policy for the workplace helps to define the vision for improving the mental health of the workforce and to establish a model for action. When well-formulated, such a policy will also identify and facilitate the agreements needed among the different stakeholders in the workplace. Without policy direction, lack of coordination and fragmentation will reduce the impact

of any workplace mental health strategy” (p. 3). However, “Mental health is one of the most neglected areas of health globally. This was true before COVID-19 (coronavirus). Still, the pandemic has further worsened the status of mental health” (Kovacevic, 2021). The author further explains that some reasons include the stigma, “a fragmented service model,’ and lags in policy changes.

Lags in policy changes can be observed in the Philippines. For example, the IRR of RA100036, signed in 2018, requires the Department of Education, the Commission On Higher Education, and TESDA to collaborate and develop age-appropriate materials within two years. However, to date, these materials have not been published. These three government institutions have not published mental health policies despite the increasing mental health problems brought about by the pandemic. Moreover, the Department of Labor and Employment has mandated all private organizations to provide workplace mental health policies and programs (DOLE 208 s 2020). However, there were no templates or guidelines for crafting these policies in programs. This paper will attempt to address the gaps mentioned above by uncovering common features of mental health policies among the top 10 global universities

2. METHODOLOGY

The policies were collected from websites of the top 10 global universities based on the QS (2021) ranking. These universities were: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, Harvard University, Caltech, University of Oxford, ETH Zurich, University of Cambridge, Imperial College London, University of Chicago, and University College London. Content analysis was used to uncover the features of the policies. A coding guide was created to systematically search for policies corresponding to the six areas of DOLE 208 2020: training, wellbeing, social policy, treatment, benefits, and support (Table 1).

Table 1
Coding Guide

| DOLE 208 2. 2020 Components and Implementation Strategies | Codes | Parameters |
|---|-------|------------|
| | | |

| | | |
|---|-------------|--|
| 1. Advocacy, Information, Education, and Training | MH training | <p>Education and training on the following: Mental health and impact on the workplace</p> <p>How to identify mental health problems</p> <p>RA11036 and IRR</p> <p>Confidentiality of medical records</p> <p>CSR for families and the community</p> <p>Capacity building of HR officers</p> <p>Training of workers and program implementers</p> |
| 2. Promotion and enhancement of employee wellbeing to have healthy and productive lives | Wellbeing | <p>Information campaign through leaflets, posters, and workshops on awareness of mental health and mental health conditions</p> <p>Promotion of work-life balance</p> <p>Mental health programs</p> <p>Capacity building of managers</p> |

| | | |
|---|---------------|--|
| | | Psychosocial support during disasters |
| 3. Social Policy | Social policy | Non-discrimination Confidentiality Disclosure Work accommodation |
| 4. Treatment, rehabilitation, and referral system | Treatment | Workers' assistance program for treatment and referral system |
| 5. Benefits and compensation | Benefit | Compensation for the diagnostic, treatment, and rehabilitation Third-party health care providers to include mental health |
| 6. Support mechanism program (counselor for employees and family members) | Support | Counselors for employees and family members |

The parameters were from the DOLE 208 2020 guidelines. Next, a matrix was created to organize the top 10 universities' mental health policies for each of the six areas in the coding guide. This table was also used for the analysis of common features of university mental health policies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis showed three features of university mental health policies: inclusivity, accessibility, and holistic. In

this paper, inclusivity refers to mental health policies that include dependents, retirees, employees with disabilities, and LGBTQ+. Inclusivity ensures that universities implement RA11036 which mandates that private organizations provide mental health training and support to the community as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR). On the other hand, accessibility refers to resources and services that are available 24/7. Lastly, the analysis of policies showed that the policies on mental health and wellbeing are holistic. The policies not only cover the prevention and treatment of mental health problems, but they also include support and services for health in general and personal, professional, legal, financial, and family problems. Table 2 shows the three common features in terms of MH policies for training, wellbeing, and social policies, while Table 3 shows the details for treatment, benefits, and support.

Table 2
Common Features of University MH Policies for Training, Wellbeing, and Social Policy

| Features | Training | Wellbeing | Social Policy |
|---------------|--|---|---|
| Inclusivity | Faculty Staff Dependents Retirees Employees with disabilities LGBTQ+ | Faculty Staff Dependents Retirees Employees with disabilities LGBTQ+ | Employees with disabilities Employees with mental health conditions |
| Accessibility | Internal and EAP providers | n/a | all policies are online |
| Holistic | Mental health literacy + wellness Training and resources on how to deal with personal and work challenges, including recommendations for legal, financial, and caregiving concerns. | Holistic wellbeing programs | Social policy for diversity and inclusion for all Work accommodation for those with bereavement issues |

A review of the top 10 universities' MH policies showed that training and education on mental health awareness include staff, teachers, managers, and their dependents. The University of Chicago, for example, even includes retirees. In addition, almost all the universities included in the study have specific MH training and resources for

the LGBTQ+ staff and teachers. In addition, the MH training programs are also accessible 24/7 through the university portal and EAP providers. For example, MIT subscribes to KGA Inc. for the MIT MyLife. “MyLife Services is a one-stop resource offered through KGA, Inc., an external provider of Employee Assistance Programs known for its leading work-life and personal wellbeing services. MyLife Services provides MIT faculty, staff, postdocs – and families – 24/7 access to a network of experts available to help with life concerns” (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022). Imperial College London’s free mental health first aid certification program is a promising policy on training. It encourages its employees and teachers to be certified. The mental health first aiders are their first line of support. Imperial College London has a 1:100 ratio of MH first aiders and targets 1:50. In addition, the training programs are holistic such as UCL’s seven-week Mixed Mental Arts program delivered by Tough Cookie.

The policy and commitment to workplace mental health of the University of Cambridge are worth emulating. The University of Cambridge (2022) has created a “Managing Stress and Promoting Wellbeing at Work. “The University of Cambridge is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment for its staff and recognizes the importance of fostering psychological and physical wellbeing. This commitment arises from the University’s duty of care to all its staff and, more generally, the recognition that a safe and healthy working environment contributes to the motivation, job satisfaction, performance, and creativity of all staff. Specifically, the University is committed to the promotion of health, to the prevention of work-related stress and to the provision of support to any member of staff who may suffer stress” (University of Cambridge, 2017). There are also guidelines for employees and management. The latter topics include management guidance, risk assessment, individual stress risk assessment, HSE management standards indicator tool, and a summary of actions.

A review of university policies and programs on promoting and enhancing workers' well-being to have healthy and productive lives uncovered different approaches such as wellness, wellbeing, and work/life, among others, exemplifies inclusivity and a holistic

approach. Harvard University has a separate unit called Harvard’s Office of Work/Life. It “supports the health, wellbeing, work/life integration of benefits-eligible faculty, staff and postdoctoral fellows as well as their spouses/partners and dependents. Below is a list of programs.

1. Best practices in work/life management, including flexible work arrangements, Assisting employees in crisis – personal and family matters, domestic violence, addiction, legal and financial concerns.
2. Workplace/workgroup consultation
3. Stress management and mindfulness
4. Supports for the child- and elder care
5. Harvard resources for LGBTQIA (Harvard University, 2022)

Social policies are also inclusive, holistic, and accessible in all top10 global universities. A review of university social policies for faculty and staff includes non-discrimination, confidentiality, disclosure, work accommodation, and arrangement policies. The review showed that some universities did not have a specific policy on mental health. The provisions are part of the equality and diversity initiatives. Examples are given below.

For example, MIT’s policy states, “The Institute's nondiscrimination policy applies to faculty, staff, students and all other members of the MIT community. It is included in the MIT Bulletin (course catalog) and in other publications describing MIT's academic programs. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology is committed to the principle of equal opportunity in education and employment. The Institute prohibits discrimination against individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, or national or ethnic origin in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, employment policies, scholarship and loan programs, and other Institute administered programs and activities...” (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, n.d.).

The University of Oxford has an Equality and Diversity Unit which implements policy support for those with disabilities. For example, it has a statement on “reasonable adjustments for mental ill-health” where it provides examples and ideas for policies on the support that are “reasonable, proportionate and effective” (University of Oxford, 2021). It also guides managers when they have a staff member who discloses a mental health problem. For example, the managers are given instructions on how to handle a difficult conversation with an employee who discloses mental health conditions, how to talk about treatments, and how they can create a plan to support those in need because of mental health concerns.

It is worth noting that the University of Cambridge does not have a specific policy on staff mental health, but it has a general set of guidelines for assisting staff who develop disabilities. The University of Cambridge's (2022) redeployment policy is worth reading:

If a return to the same post is impracticable, consideration should be given to redeployment by transferring the individual to fill an existing vacancy. This should take into account the job opportunities available, the entry qualifications and skills required, and the suitability of the person concerned for the available job opportunities. A member of staff who has recently developed a disability should be interviewed by the Head of the institution. A representative of the appropriate authority should be present at the interview and the member of staff may be accompanied by a staff representative.” (The University of Cambridge, 2022).

Table 3 shows that treatment, benefits, and support policies on workplace mental health are also inclusive, holistic, and accessible among the top 10 global universities through in-house and external services that are available 24/7. For example, the University of Stanford subscribes to Meru Health, “an online healthcare provider that offers an evidence-based program to reduce anxiety, depression, and burnout” (Meru Health, 2022). The university website on mental

health also provides information about the short-term counseling, up to 10 sessions, provided by The Stanford Faculty Staff Help Center. On the other hand, Harvard University has an Employee Assistance Program that provides free consultation for their employees and their adult family members. Counseling in most of the top 10 universities includes grief, substance abuse, smoking cessation, life changes, and LGBTQ+ support. For example, ETS Zurich has partnered with the Institute of Applied Psychology (IAP) at ZHAW for counseling support on the following topics.

- a. Feeling overwhelmed at work
- b. Dealing with fear and uncertainty
- c. Dealing with stress
- d. Difficulties in one's personal life
- e. Dealing with staff who are facing mental health issues

It is also worth noting that all 10 universities subscribe to health insurance and services that respond to the needs of employees and staff concerning diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

Table 3
 Common Features of University MH Policies for Treatment, Benefits, and Support

| Features | Treatment | Benefits | Support |
|---------------|--|---|---|
| Inclusivity | Faculty Staff Dependents | Faculty Staff | Faculty Staff Dependents Retirees Employees with disabilities LGBTQ+ |
| Accessibility | Internal and EAP providers | EAP Providers | all policies are online |
| Holistic | Mental health conditions Substance abuse Smoking Sleep problems Bereavement | Mental health conditions Substance abuse Smoking Sleep problems | Upstream/ Downstream -upstream for prevention and downstream for those with mental health conditions Bereavement |

4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper aims to address the lack of guidelines in crafting workplace mental health policies and programs in universities to implement DOLE 208-2020 by analyzing the top 10 global universities' online documents. The results showed some insights on what university leaders in the Philippines can include in their workplace mental health plans in terms of MH advocacy and training, promotion of wellbeing, social policies on non-discrimination, disclosure and work accommodations, treatment and referral systems, compensation, and benefits of those at risk or those suffering from mental health conditions. Future researchers may explore the current implementation of DOLE 208-2020 in universities to uncover strengths and gaps. Mental health promotion used to be a nice-to-have in schools and the workplace, but the Covid19 pandemic has shed light on the importance of well-being. Consequently, DOLE 208-2020 is an urgent and pressing call to action that all private organizations, especially universities, must enact seriously. Mental health cannot wait.

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