

Mental Health Literacy Predicts General Help-Seeking Intentions among Filipino Public School Teachers

Ivy Rose G. Carodan¹, Teresita T. Rungduin¹, Darwin C. Rungduin¹, and John Ray B. Acopio²
Philippine Normal University-Manila, Philippines¹
Mapua University-Makati, Philippines²

This research investigated the predictive relationship between mental health literacy (MHL) in relation to general help-seeking intentions in Filipino public school teachers. Based on a cross-sectional predictive research design, 1,213 Philippine public school teachers were surveyed in various regions in the Philippines to gather information on mental health literacy constructs: mental health problem knowledge, flawed belief constructs, first-aid competence, and self-help procedures, as well as help-seeking intention constructs of personal-emotional problems and suicidal thoughts. Results derived from multiple regression analysis procedures demonstrated that flawed belief constructs and first-aid competence were predictive of help-seeking intention goals in relation to the outcome variables in comparison to other constructs that failed to establish significance as predictive elements. This research demonstrates that belief patterns shared by the community, in addition to practical mental health knowledge elements, influence the intention of these professionals to seek mental health support.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is one of the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), alongside its other member countries, including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Across these countries, well-being emerged as an increasing concern for teachers, as research identifies critically high rates of stress, anxiousness, and burnout among them. In Thailand and Indonesia, for example, it is noted that 40 to 45 percent of middle school instructors have exhibited moderate to high stress and anxiousness levels (Rahmi, 2024; Ratanasiripong et al., 2022). These numbers starkly outweigh countries in Europe such as the United Kingdom and Finland, where the statistics of teacher burnout are around 15 to 20 percent, due almost exclusively to more effective institutional mental help and in-place workplace wellness initiatives (OECD, 2023; Harding et al., 2023). This

Author info: Correspondence should be sent to: Ivy Rose G. Carodan, College of Advanced Studies, Philippine Normal University-Manila, 104 Taft Ave, Ermita, Manila, 1000 Metro Manila, Philippines. *Email:* gravidez.irb@pnu.edu.ph.

North American Journal of Psychology, 2026, Vol. 28, No. 2, 692-716
© NAJP <https://doi.org/10.65696/001c.159393>

comparison highlights an enduring imbalance in systemized help and suggests the need for more culturally responsive interventions within the ASEAN educational systems. Apart from structural limitations, cultural values also have an important contribution to the help-seeking behaviors of Filipino teachers. The presence of cultural values, such as *hiya* (shame and sense of embarrassment) and *pakikisama* (social harmony), could prevent open discussion of one's experiences regarding psychological distress and the act of reaching out to seek help, even in the presence of available resources. These cultural values could partly account for the knowledge-practice gap, where knowledge of mental health resources is insufficient to predict actual behaviors of seeking help.

Viewed through the perspective of the culture of the Filipinos, mental distress among teachers is not solely generated by heavy loads of work and professional demands but also by ingrained cultural beliefs that shape perspectives about emotional release and asking for help. The concepts of *hiya* (*intense sense of shame*) and *pakikisama* (*need for compatibility or consistency in relationships*) frequently lead individuals to conceal their personal issues, avoiding actions that would be labeled as disruptive or weak (Hechanova & Waelde, 2017; Martinez et al., 2020). As much as these cultures value community coherence, they also prevent open discussion about mental issues. Increasing mental health literacy among teachers could fill gaps, reframing seeking help as an act of being self-aware and conscientious, more than an indication of weakness. More knowledge about mental health can help teachers better recognize symptoms, learn more about available resources, and make professional help-seeking an accepted natural part of personal as well as institutional well-being (Nalipay et al., 2024; Wei et al., 2020).

Among Filipino teachers, mental health issues present the same profile as in other professions but with more immediate ramifications for learning communities. According to recent research, about one in four public school teachers displays depressive symptoms, a rate comparable to that among college faculty but slightly lower than among healthcare workers who experience moderate to severe stress (Mesa & Lopez, 2023; Gojar, 2024; Clarion & Palarisan, 2024). While mental distress is common in many professions, teachers occupy a unique position in that their own health directly affects classroom relationships as well as students' accomplishments. Comparisons such as these drive home the need for specifically designed, culture-sensitive programs that address teachers' mental health literacy and cultivate more open and welcoming mental health seeking behavior.

Systemic challenges, such as inadequate resources for mental health programs, add to the teacher's struggle to attend to their own well-being while navigating their various roles (Gojar, 2024). In the Philippines, the teacher education institutions are tasked with bridging the issues related to teachers' mental health. They assist in enhancing education and promoting teachers' well-being. They achieve that by providing teachers with appropriate knowledge and competencies for promoting mental health knowledge and resilience development, in accordance with UNESCO's emphasis on

teachers' well-being for enhanced education standards (Bourn et al., 2017). In Southeast Asia, reforms must adhere to ASEAN standards promptly (Vandeweyer et al., 2020). This paper examines the manner in which educational environments and teacher training schools address mental health concerns, which are critically relevant for education but tend to receive inadequate prominence compared to learners' needs. It is significant to explore public school teachers' knowledge on mental health in the Philippines and whether it influences their desire for help, as it compensates for prior education plans that did not concern teachers' well-being adequately, while it is central to the development of productive learning environments. Hence, this paper contributes to the standards of teacher education in ASEAN (Vandeweyer et al., 2020) and also improves mental health literacy and supports sustainable development through empowered educators and teacher preparation programs with international standards (Bourn et al., 2017).

Mental Health in the Philippines and Beyond: An Issue in Higher Education

Recent global reports highlight that teacher mental health is a common issue in diverse education systems, albeit by region in terms of pervasiveness and form of expression. In ASEAN, recent reviews revealed an alarming incidence of stress and burnout among teachers in Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, often associated with excessive workload and unsatisfactory organizational support (Munusamy et al., 2024; Rahmi, 2024; Ratanasiripong et al., 2022). Comparable results were also reported in Singapore and Vietnam, where teachers identified emotional exhaustion as a main detractor of instruction quality (Suwanwong et al., 2024).

On the other side of the world, OECD and European nations, including Finland, the UK, and Canada, had lower reported incidences of psychological distress among teachers (15-20%). Reasons for this include well-designed supporting mechanisms and efficacious mental health policy (see OECD, 2023). Despite ASEAN and OECD nations experiencing a rise in mental health issues among teaching professionals, it is evident that the context in which these issues are being faced is quite different.

Recent studies indicate that Philippine teachers find themselves in a precarious position. Mesa and Lopez (2023) established that there was higher stress and depression among public school teachers when they resumed face-to-face teaching. Guzman (2024) and Nalipay et al. (2024) established that inadequate mental health training makes it challenging for teachers to attend to their own mental health and that of their students. These ASEAN and global findings put the present study in a larger global discussion on teachers' mental health, illustrating just how widespread the problem is and why solutions based on local demands are paramount.

The Role of Mental Health Literacy (MHL) in Enriching School-Based Programs

Mental health literacy (MHL) is the capacity to identify mental problems, comprehend mental illness, and know when and how to seek professional assistance (Jorm, 2015). It is significant that teachers possess such skill

because they must demonstrate positive intentions regarding mental health (Wei et al., 2020; Jorm et al., 2010). It would benefit both students and the teachers for the mental health literacy to increase, enabling better help-seeking actions for a healthier school climate. However, studies show that MHL of Filipino teachers remains underdeveloped (Nalipay et al., 2023; Satparam, 2023; Cardinez & Mahinay, 2023), especially in comparison with global standards. The Mental Health Act of 2018 stresses that mental health services must be integrated into schools, and yet gaps continue to exist in how the programs are developed and delivered to enhance MHL among teachers (Harrison et al., 2023; Mesa & Lopez, 2023). The ASEAN Mental Health Framework in 2016 promotes cross-country collaboration in the aspect of mental health with emphasis on integration into education systems. However, although some ASEAN countries like Singapore have significantly advanced their national mental health literacy programs, there are still some member states like the Philippines that have faced significant challenges in rolling out similar initiatives. The ASEAN Cooperation Plan on Social Welfare and Development has objectives that could be useful in strengthening mental health services and, by extension, for the Philippines to enhance its MHL programs, particularly for teachers (Affandy et al., 2024).

Existing mental health programs in schools have mainly concentrated on students and thus neglected teachers' mental health, who are key elements in implementing the teaching-learning experience (Tumalon, 2020). Supporting the emotional needs of students without receiving proper mental health training or support for teachers places a heavy toll on their own mental health (Guzman, 2024). While mental health first aid programs have yielded effective results globally in improving teachers' MHL toward help-seeking intentions (Wei et al., 2020; Jorm et al., 2010), their implementation in the Philippines has encountered challenges, especially because of cultural factors such as the preference for informal support systems and the stigma pertaining to mental health (Sibanda et al., 2022). These cultural barriers affect the ability of teachers in recognizing their own mental health needs and eventually obtaining professional help, which is why culturally sensitive interventions are needed to be developed.

Filipino Cultural and Systemic Factors that Determine MHL and Help-Seeking Behaviors

Philippine cultural values greatly affect Filipinos' knowledge of mental health and attitudes toward seeking help (Martinez et al., 2020). Filipino culture generally values the family and community more than mental health services and stigmatizes mental health problems intensely (Hechanova & Waelde, 2017; Tuliao & Velasquez, 2014). Focus on informal assistance may lead to delays in seeking technical help, including from teachers who know basic mental health information. Social pressure to fit in and avoid embarrassment may lead teachers to hide their mental health problems, further aggravating the issue (Hechanova & Waelde, 2017).

Systemic issues matter a great deal (Chan & Litam, 2021). Notwithstanding the Mental Health Act of 2018, the Philippines continues to experience problems in applying mental health programs for teachers by reason of low appropriations, absence of professional training, and no regular mental health policies among schools (Harrison et al., 2023; Mesa & Lopez, 2023). These areas of deficiency hinder access of teachers to help, which they so much need, and reduce the inclination of teachers to seek help for themselves or their students (Anero & Tamayo, 2023). As such, while teachers remain paramount in bringing functional mental health to schools, their own mental health is often not properly supported.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Existing Mental Health Programs

In implementing mental health programs in the Philippines, context is still a primary concern, as most evidence-based programs that were observed to be globally effective (Jorm et al., 2010; Kidger et al., 2016). Mental health first aid programs, for instance, have lowered stigmatization and prompted individuals to access help in Western nations (Jorm et al., 2010; Kidger et al., 2016). These programs have been researched very little. Cultural obstacles also make them ineffective since they contribute to the overdependence on unofficial care and stigmatization, which is one of the greatest concerns when it comes to the health of the mentally ill (Sibanda et al., 2022). In addition, funding the Filipino teachers makes the problem even worse despite the Philippine Government's Mental Health Act of 2018's intentions to rectify the issue. There have been financial concerns and very little professional training, as well as an unstructured mental health assistance regime, that make the widespread arrival of such programs difficult to achieve (Harrison et al., 2023; Mesa & Lopez, 2023). It is notable that not very much data exist regarding the influence of mental health programs have on help-seeking behavior among Filipino teachers (Nalipay et al., 2024). Research conducted globally revealed that mental health programs have the potential to elevate the level of mental health awareness and stigmatization reduction (Li, 2023), but responses by Filipino teachers to the same programs have never been studied before and require further investigation. This gap in the literature therefore calls for further research on how Filipino teachers respond to mental health programs and, specifically, what challenges they experience when adopting help-seeking behaviors.

Although mental health programs implemented for educators are quite different across ASEAN countries in terms of effectiveness, developed ones like Singapore and Malaysia come closest to achieving greater success in increasing their respective MHL (Low, 2023; Daluwatta, 2024). These countries show an increase in MHL as evidenced by lowering the negative attitudes associated with mental illness through curricula and the inclusion of MHL in teacher training programs (Suwanwong et al., 2024). Cultural and systemic barriers have limited the program implementation in states like the Philippines. For example, the mental health first aid training in Thailand and Malaysia has demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing stigma (Ratanasiripong et al., 2022; Munusamy et al., 2024) and enhancing help-seeking behavior; its application in the Philippines is significantly hampered by the prevailing cultural factors of social stigma and informal support systems (Sibanda et al., 2022). Cultural sensitivity and a fit within the context of the Filipino teacher's experiences and values would be essential in applying these globally proven programs.

Mental Health Literacy (MHL) of Filipino Teachers and Help-Seeking Intentions

The gap between knowing the specific MHL needs of Filipino teachers and how it can be translated into workable mental health programs is notable (Bangalan et al., 2024). These gaps include the unavailability of what predicts mental health literacy (MHL) and how these influence the way they seek help for their mental health concerns. This being said, it is important that teachers' mental health are addressed for them to effectively provide for the needs of their students - academically and psychologically (Cabaluna & Moleta, 2023). In addressing these concerns there are three identified effects of understanding MHL as it informs mental health help-seeking: (1) mental health competency programs that may make teachers able to help students and contribute to overall school climate; (2) avenues for teachers to seek help whether it is through community health centers or through mental health apps; and (3) sources of mental health concerns, once identified how to provide actionable strategies to address these, may provide opportunities for teachers to develop the efficacy to seek help.

While culturally collectivistic, the processes that are employed in this study are perceived to be aligned with the existing literature on teachers' mental health in the ASEAN countries. By examining how Filipino teachers interact with mental health programs and by identifying help-seeking barriers, this research will contribute to the improvement of interventions focused on mental health that are more effective and responsive to the Philippine context and may be applied to countries characterized by similar cultural and systemic characteristics, enlightening opportunities and challenges in improving teacher mental health literacy across the globe.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws on the theoretical basis provided by Anthony Jorm and other researchers through the conceptual framework called MHL or Mental Health Literacy (Jorm, 2015). MHL, in essence, pertains to the beliefs or knowledge about mental disorders that promote its detection, treatment, or

avoidance (Arthur, 2018). It is therefore well-appealing when related to the Filipino public school teacher context, due to a more structured method on which it bases an individual's mental health literacy, impacting the person's intentions to seek help.

The MHL framework comprises components that include the knowledge of mental health problems, attitudes that identify the problem and seek for help, beliefs about mental health services, and self-help strategies (Jorm, 2000). The components explain relationships specific to acknowledging mental health concerns in their lives (Suwanwong et. al., 2024). Despite being considered in terms of new theoretical frameworks such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and Health Belief Model in understanding health-related behaviors, the components of mental health literacy were employed in this study because it has a direct focus on knowledge, beliefs, and help-seeking intentions of teachers in relation to mental health issues. In addition, it provides scope for cultural explanations in settings where issues of stigma, social cohesion, and coping strategies affect help-seeking in terms of accessing mental health professionals.

Even with this strong foundation that Jorm's Mental Health Literacy (MHL) framework presents in examining knowledge, belief, and help-seeking practices, its utilization within non-Western societies requires necessary cultural adaptation. Within the Philippine social context, values like *hiya* (the idea of shame or social discommitment) or *pakikisama* (the concept of maintaining social harmony within Filipino society) are believed to play an important part in influencing Filipino attitudes about psychological issues and seeking professional psychological assistance. Even with adequate levels of mental health knowledge, these cultural mindsets could hamper more active help-seeking practices, an important factor that could explain why some specified constructs of MHL were identified in this research—namely, inappropriate beliefs about mental health issues and first aid skills—as important predictive variables. Though alternative theories like those presented within either the Theory of Planned Behavior or the Health Belief Model could explain well enough psychological phenomena on decision-making within healthcare contexts, this research stuck with using MHL primarily due to its prime preeminence on mental health issues about knowledge and helping-seeking practices, which closely relate well with this research.

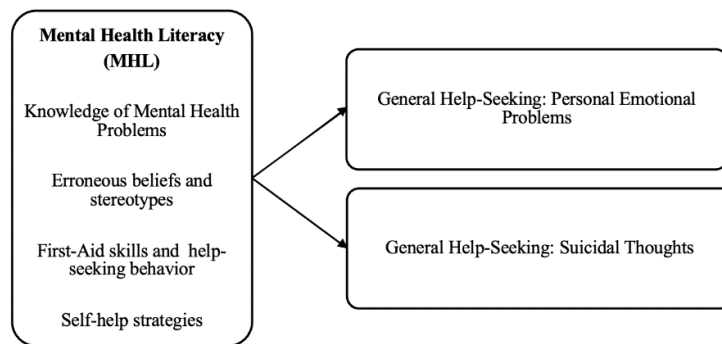
The MHL framework also shows that it is worth learning professional help and self-help channels (Rey et al., 2022). Teachers are well aware of the mental health help they have access to and are confident enough to reach out for help and are most likely to access help when they need it (Andrews et al., 2014). The framework also, therefore, stresses the point that teachers need to acclimatize themselves to mental health help and undergo mental health first-aid training so that they are prompted to handle mental health concerns. Though other models like the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Health Belief Model may also provide insight on decision-making related to health, the model that was chosen for this research, based on its focus on knowledge,

belief, and seeking behavior related to mental health, is the Framework on Mental Health Literacy.

In addition, personal experience plays a big role in the MHL service. If teachers have had positive experiences, their chances are high that they will reuse the service if they are faced with difficulties (Maravilla et al., 2023; Harrison et al., 2023). It is stipulated how much the establishment of warm learning and teaching environments is important, where one will feel free and able to discuss the need for assistance without feeling embarrassed.

In general, the MHL framework guides us to have an additional look into the way Filipino public school teachers perceive their mental health. It is focused on key elements including awareness, misconceptions toward seeking help, first-aid help, the way people gain access to help, and means to help oneself. The framework gives key recommendations on bolstering awareness toward mental health and triggering the desire to access help for the teachers. Feeling this is very vital while planning the mental health initiatives planned to sustain the teachers and come out with a healthy school environment.

Figure 1.
Mental health literacy predicts general help-seeking intentions.



In summary, the MHL framework serves as a thorough lens through which one can explore the mental health literacy of Filipino public school teachers. By emphasizing the various elements such as knowledge, misconceptions about seeking help, first-aid skills, help-seeking behavior, and self-help strategies, this framework offers invaluable insights into the ways mental health literacy can be improved to boost help-seeking behaviors. Ultimately, grasping this understanding is essential when designing mental health programs aimed at supporting teachers and nurturing a healthier educational environment.

Research Questions

The study investigated to what extent mental health information would affect the inclination of public school teachers to ask for help. It also wanted to answer the following specific questions:

RQ1: What is the profile of the respondents in terms of the following:

- a. Mental Health Literacy
 - i. Knowledge of mental health problems
 - ii. Erroneous beliefs and stereotypes
 - iii. First-aid skills & help-seeking behaviors
 - iv. Self-help strategies
- b. General Help-Seeking
 - i. on personal-emotional crisis
 - ii. on suicidal thoughts

RQ2: What is the relationship between mental health literacy and the following in terms of:

- a. General Help-Seeking
 - i. on personal-emotional crisis
 - ii. on suicidal thoughts

RQ3: What is the extent of predictability of mental health literacy components to the following in terms of:

- a. General Help-Seeking
 - i. on personal-emotional crisis
 - ii. on suicidal thoughts

RQ4: What inputs to mental health policies for public school teachers can be made regarding mental health literacy and general help-seeking intentions toward seeking mental health assistance?

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

H1: Mental health literacy is significantly associated with general help-seeking intentions.

H2: Components of mental health literacy significantly predict help-seeking intentions for personal–emotional concerns and suicidal thoughts.

METHOD

Research Design

This research utilized Johnson's (2001) cross-sectional predictive research (type 5) design to examine how mental health literacy predicts general help-seeking intentions among public school teachers. This study was suited to using such a research design, as the data collection happened over a short period and was applied to each participant at a given time. Such a design was suitable because it provides an efficient way to assess the predictability of mental health literacy on help-seeking intentions among Filipino public school teachers at a given point in time. This gives a 'snapshot' of association, thus best suited for investigating such variables with minimal long-term follow-up (Huff et al., 2024). It is appropriate for large studies with data collection from more than 1,200 participants with low costs (Abubakar et al., 2024). It also gives useful information for specific interventions, increasing mental health literacy and the likelihood of asking for help, with potential for further research in the future.

Participants and the Sampling Technique

The study consisted of 1,213 full-time public school teachers from DepEd Grades 1-12. They are said to be vulnerable to acquiring issues related to mental health, even when they understand the protective factors (Thomas & Morris, 2017). Being primary mental health care givers in the education sector, most of them also consider students' emotional needs aside from performing their duties as a teacher (Daniszewski & Rodger, 2013). Therefore, enhancing their mental health literacy is essential to promote a healthy school environment. Participants were Filipino citizens, currently working as public school teachers in Luzon, and recruited online through Google Forms. Participation was voluntary, with no incentives. The sample consisted mostly of females (82.11%), married individuals (65.54%), with the majority living in Region 4 (64.06%) and working in urban areas (57.29%). Most were Teacher 1 rank holders (51.27%), the entry-level position. A majority taught junior high school (31.65%) and various subjects (25.72%).

Measures

In the current study, the internal consistency reliability of the Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire was supported by previous reports of Cronbach's alpha values ranging from acceptable to good. Though this scale has been proven to be sound in its psychometric properties in previous studies, a confirmatory factor analysis and test of its measurement invariance were not done in this study. Thus, while making conclusions based on this study, one has to take into consideration its limitations, especially with regard to cross-group comparisons.

Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire

The Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire (MHLQ) consists of four subscales, with a total of 29 items measuring individuals' thoughts on issues related to mental health (Dias et al., 2018), using a five-point response scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Dias et al. (2018) indicated item

correlations of .29 to .49 and internal consistency of $\alpha = .84$ for the whole scale and $\alpha = .60$ to $\alpha = .74$ for dimensions. The present instrument was adopted in works by Pekas et al. (2022) who assessed the Filipino teachers' mental health during the pandemic, and by Liao et al. (2023), who investigated students' mental health literacy improvement through teacher-led interventions. Construct validity was confirmed in the original form's validation, but it may also be assessed in future works in terms of criterion-related validity in help-seeking behavior or mental health results. Using the MHLQ is, therefore, a psychometrically sound measure of teachers' mental health literacy that well fits the present study.

General Help-Seeking Questionnaire

General Help-Seeking Questionnaire assesses the propensity of seeking for help from diverse help-giving agencies, including professionals in the field of mental health and lay help-providers (e.g., friends, parents, etc.), for suicidal tendencies and personal and/or emotional problems (Wilson et al., 2005). The General Help-Seeking Questionnaire contains 10 items each for personal-emotional problems and suicidal tendencies, with a seven-point response scale ranging from extremely likely to extremely unlikely. A Cronbach's alpha of .85 and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .92 (over a three-week period) were reported (see Wilson et al., 2005). For each problem type, Wilson et al. (2005) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .83 for suicidal problems and .70 for personal-emotional problems. The test-retest reliability coefficients (over a three-week period) were .86 for suicidal problems and .88 for personal-emotional problems (Wilson et al., 2005). Validity evidence was noted through the relationship between intentions to seek help and the actual seeking of help from each identified source (Wilson et al., 2018). Thus, the scale is reliable and valid, making it appropriate for the current study.

Data Gathering Procedure

This study follows three phases: presurvey, survey, and post-survey. In the presurvey phase, a letter of request was sent to the authors of the instruments to obtain permission to use them in the study. The researchers carefully reviewed the materials and prepared them accordingly. Then, the researchers maintained the methodological integrity of the study by obtaining ethical approval from the Philippine Normal University' Research Ethics Committee (REC Code: 11112020-044). After securing the University's Research Ethics Committee approval, the researchers sought permission from the Undersecretary of the Department of Education, which oversees government schools in the Philippines, to conduct their study. A memorandum was released granting permission to conduct the study in various School Division Offices (SDOs), which was later cascaded to the different SDOs and then communicated to all supervised public schools under each SDO's jurisdiction.

In the survey phase, invitations were sent to teacher networks across the Philippines, encouraging participation from different regions. Participation remained voluntary, incentives were not provided, and confidentiality was assured. Informed consent detailing the comprehensive conduct of the study (including the manner of data collection, data processing, and data storage)

was provided to the identified participants, allowing them to signify their willingness to participate. After securing the participants' consent, the MHLq and GHSQ were administered. During the duration of the study, no participant reported adverse experiences. The collected data were kept in a password-secured computer for seven (7) years to ensure that the participants' identities were kept confidential.

In the post-survey phase, data integrity was ensured through checks for completeness and duplication. Responses were analyzed using JASP software, applying descriptive and regression analyses to examine relationships between variables and derive key findings.

Data Analysis

Prior to carrying out regression analysis, interrelationships among predictor variables were investigated via correlation matrices to determine whether redundancy of variables existed. Although variance inflation factors were not calculated as part of the multicollinearity diagnosis, intercorrelation values did not suggest redundancy of predictors to be excessive. Because of the nature of this study and the size of its samples, regression analysis was deemed sufficient to explore predictive associations. The variable distributions were visually inspected, as well as the scatterplots, as a means of assessing general patterns of linearity and distribution. Because of the sample size, small departures from normality were not viewed as critical, which is in keeping with recommendations for parametric analysis in social science research.

Frequencies and percentages were utilized to identify the teachers' profiles using the JASP statistical package. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression were employed to delineate different regression models in this study. Data were screened for completeness and consistency prior to regression analysis. Descriptive statistics were inspected to ascertain distributional properties of the variables. The assumptions of multiple regression, such as linearity, normality, and multicollinearity, were examined through the correlation matrices and variance estimates. All the analyses were done using JASP version 0.16. Given the sample size in this study, small variances from normality were assumed to be unproblematic. Lastly, R^2 was interpreted with the knowledge that modest effect sizes are acceptable according to conventions in psychosocial research.

RESULTS

Following the processes involved in data collection, the online survey was extracted for responses and subsequently organized for analysis. Results were presented based on how mental health literacy predicts help-seeking intentions among public school teachers. The predictability of components such as knowledge of mental health problems, erroneous beliefs and stereotypes, first-aid skills, and self-help strategies was also examined.

Respondents' Mental Health Literacy, General Help-Seeking Intentions

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables in this study. In terms of MHL, public school teachers demonstrated a consistent level of

mental health knowledge, behaviors, and strategies. Evidently, they have shown a low presence of erroneous beliefs and stereotypes, knowledge of first-aid skills, and a willingness to seek help, as well as a strong understanding of various self-help strategies to maintain good mental health.

In terms of general help-seeking intentions, public school teachers almost equally tend to solicit help concerning personal-emotional problems and suicidal thoughts. With a mean nearing the top score, this indicates active searching for help whenever they face problems from people they have significant relationships with, including their parents, a mental health professional, and/or their partner. Likewise, it can be inferred that in the absence or unavailability of their primary support group, they would likely turn to a minister, a relative, or a helpline.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of MHL and General Help-Seeking Intentions

	Score Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
A. Mental Health Literacy			
Knowledge of Mental Health Problems	1-5	4.22	0.11
Erroneous Beliefs and Stereotypes	1-5	2.61	0.26
First Aid Seeking Skills and Help-Seeking Behaviors	1-5	4.50	0.12
Self-Help Strategies	1-5	4.73	0.05
B. General Help-Seeking			
Personal-Emotional Problems		5.51	0.89
Intimate Partner (e.g., girlfriend/boyfriend, husband, wife)	1-7	5.98	1.25
Friend	1-7	4.55	1.79
Parent	1-7	6.20	1.30
Other Relative/Family Member	1-7	5.16	1.52
Mental Health Professionals (e.g., psychologist, social worker, counselor)	1-7	6.20	1.16
Phone Helpline (Hopeline)	1-7	4.71	1.80
Doctor/General Practitioner	1-7	5.80	1.37
Minister or Religious Leader	1-7	5.53	1.52
Suicidal Thoughts		5.36	1.20
Intimate Partner (e.g., girlfriend/boyfriend, husband, wife)	1-7	5.86	1.54
Friend	1-7	4.72	1.91
Parent	1-7	5.81	1.69
Other Relative/Family Member	1-7	5.02	1.75
Mental Health Professionals (e.g., psychologist, social worker, counselor)	1-7	5.88	1.47
Phone Helpline (Hopeline)	1-7	4.62	1.97
Doctor/General Practitioner	1-7	5.56	1.65
Minister or Religious Leader	1-7	5.45	1.68

Relationship between MHL and General Help-Seeking Intentions

Table 2 indicates the correlation analysis of the variables. This analysis shows that some components of MHL are correlated with general help-seeking intentions. Although their correlations are established, the statistical significance indicates that some variances are shared between and among them. Their correlations indicate that public school teachers who have high

mental health literacy are most likely to show similar general help-seeking intentions.

Table 2 Correlation Matrix among MHL and General Help-Seeking Intentions

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
General Help-Seeking	—					
1. Personal-Emotional Problem						
2. Suicidal Thoughts	0.765 ***	—				
Mental Health Literacy			—			
3. Knowledge of MH Problems	0.255 ***	0.208				
4. Erroneous beliefs & stereotypes	0.106 ***	0.098 ***	-0.036	—		
5. First-aid skills and help-seeking behaviors	0.413 ***	0.344 ***	0.495 ***	0.000	—	
6. Self-help strategies	0.251 ***	0.200 ***	0.513 ***	-0.021	0.533 ***	—

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Extent of Predictability of MHL Components on General Help-Seeking Intentions

Model 1 examines whether components of MHL predict general help-seeking intentions when teachers experience personal-emotional concerns, while model 2 analyzes whether MHL components predict general help-seeking intentions when teachers experience suicidal thoughts. The results showed that the overall regression for model 1 and model 2 was significant, indicating that the predictors accounted for less than 20% (model 1: 18%; model 2: 13%) of the variance in general help-seeking intentions, thereby supporting the notion that erroneous beliefs and stereotypes as well as first-aid skills and help-seeking behaviors contribute to the general help-seeking intentions when experiencing personal-emotional problems and suicidal thoughts. While other factors for both models accounted for no significance.

Table 3 Multiple Regression Analysis on General Help-Seeking Intentions (Personal-Emotional)

Predictors	B	SE	β	T	P	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F
Knowledge of mental health problems	0.009	0.004	0.064	2.01	0.044				
Erroneous beliefs and stereotypes	0.019	0.005	0.109	4.19	< .001				
First-aid skills and help-seeking behavior	0.086	0.008	0.369	11.47	< .001	0.43	0.18	0.18	69.35 < .001
Self-help strategies	0.011	0.014	0.024	0.72	0.466				

Another significant predictor for general help-seeking intentions based on models 1 and 2 was first aid skills and help-seeking behavior components. This suggests that higher knowledge of first-aid skills and help-seeking behaviors is associated with higher intentions to seek help when experiencing personal-emotional problems as well as suicidal thoughts.

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis on General Help-Seeking Intentions (Suicidal Thoughts)

Predictors	B	SE	β	T	<i>p</i>	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F
Knowledge of mental health problems	0.009	0.006	0.051	1.56	0.117				
Erroneous beliefs and stereotypes	0.024	0.006	0.100	3.73	< .001				
First-aid skills and help-seeking behavior	0.098	0.010	0.314	9.44	< .001	0.36	0.13	0.12	45.340
Self-help strategies	0.005	0.020	0.009	0.25	0.799				< .001

Although the regression models explained a modest proportion of variance on help-seeking intentions (13% to 18%), their effect size is comparable to other research involving human behaviors. The results reflect that, although mental health literacy is a factor influencing help-seeking behavior, other, as yet unidentified, variables may also contribute importantly.

DISCUSSION

The readiness of teachers, in general, to address their personal-emotional issues and suicide-related ideations is evident, suggesting a greater willingness to get assistance among colleagues from both social and professional settings. This further suggests the potential for emerging supportive social norms within educational settings. Consistently, public school teachers showed favorable intentions in seeking help concerning mental health, which was rated as having the desire to be provided professional help whenever they feel distress.

The results must be considered in the context of the study being cross-sectional. While there have been significant associations found between components of mental health literacy and intentions to seek help, it cannot be concluded that there is causation. Instead, the data point to certain patterns that might be useful for future development.

Erroneous beliefs and stereotypes as a component was identified as a significant predictor for general help-seeking intentions when experiencing personal-emotional concerns and suicidal thoughts. Since teachers are non-mental health professionals, it is common that they have misconceptions regarding common mental health disorders (Wu et al., 2021). However, holding stereotypes and having misconceptions about mental health do not necessarily prevent individuals from seeking mental health assistance when they experience personal-emotional problems. This becomes even more highlighted when they have suicidal thoughts, which are bolstered by their

negative thoughts (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Although the negative impacts of stereotypes can be mitigated by having an awareness of the resources available for mental health, it may still become a hindrance to availing prompt intervention (Corrigan et al., 2014).

Enhanced mental health literacy equips individuals with knowledge about available resources and the benefits of seeking help. Enhancing teachers' understanding of first aid skills, as well as their awareness of where to find assistance or whom to approach in times of personal-emotional challenges, can significantly bolster their readiness to seek help when necessary. Such knowledge may elevate their confidence in the caliber of mental health services available, thereby amplifying their inclination to reach out for support during moments of distress (Gulliver et al., 2010), whether faced with personal-emotional issues or thoughts of suicide.

This study of mental health literacy in Philippine public school teachers presents significant results for mental health enhancement and education well-being promoting policies. Since mental health literacy is a significant factor for teachers' help-seeking behavior, this scholarly inquiry bears significant results for formulating and creating specially designed programs and policies addressing the unique educational demands faced by teachers.

Among the most important parts of educating mental health policy must be enhancing mental health literacy of teachers. Mental Health Collaborative (2024) identifies core components of mental health literacy helpful in stigma reduction and enhancing help-seeking efficacy. Nevertheless, integrated training programs that specifically address teachers' mental issues remain a dire necessity (Gatt et al., 2024). Incorporating mental health education in the curricula of pre-service school teachers in academic contexts is most likely to better prepare potential teachers with proper knowledge (Schwartz-Bechet 2023) and skills for proper identification of mental health problems as well as proper responses to them (Adams et al. 2023).

The other important input for mental health policies is creating a supportive environment within schools (Alibudbud, 2023). The study emphasizes that the past experiences of teachers regarding mental health services significantly influence their willingness to seek help in the future. Therefore, policies should focus on developing good relations between teachers and mental health professionals. Resource availability and accessibility are imperative for teachers to consider seeking help for their mental health concerns (Wiederman, 2023).

Removal of stigma regarding mental health is also necessary to improve the help-seeking behaviors of teachers (Liao et al., 2023). The assumptions that mental illness is bad or that it is bad to discuss mental illness deter help-seeking. Educational authorities must change the discussion of mental health and authorize campaigns that make it okay to discuss, in an effort to change perceptions and encourage teachers to seek help when they need it.

This research offers mental health policy frameworks that promote well-being among public school teachers. Jorm (2015) highlights that individuals need to comprehend mental health problems, adopt positive help-seeking attitudes, believe in expert help, and familiarize themselves with self-help methods (Jorm, 2000). Improving mental health literacy, creating helping contexts, and minimizing stigma are significant instruments for educational policymakers to better students' and teachers' environment (Dey, Marti, & Jorm, 2022). It would help both students and their teachers become more resilient and better performing.

The findings of the study can guide ASEAN countries, including Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, that are encountering the same issues of teacher mental health (Huang et al., 2023). In Malaysia, the government values mental health in school settings, but there is still mental health literacy deficit among teachers (Lee et al., 2023). Policies need to integrate mental health training for teachers so that they can better handle their mental health and that of students.

In Thailand, where teachers face extreme stress and burnout (Sujarwanto, Saroinsong, Boonrourrut, & Purwoko, 2024), having a structured mental health program in schools will create a supportive environment. These policies can provide immediate support for teachers who may be struggling with their mental health by mandating the presence of mental health professionals in educational institutions, thereby fostering a culture of openness and proactive help-seeking.

In Indonesia and other ASEAN countries, the first step to improving help-seeking behaviors among teachers is addressing cultural stigma surrounding mental health (Ariyati, 2023). Many teachers in these regions may prefer informal support mechanisms to professional mental health care, and this may discourage their seeking of help (Prastowo, 2023). Therefore, policies should aim at reducing stigma through awareness campaigns that normalize discussions about mental health and boost mental health literacy. Through promoting a supportive environment where there is comfortable talk of teacher mental health challenges, educational institutions can improve the well-being of teachers. This will not only benefit the educators themselves but also positively impact the students they serve, creating a healthier and more resilient educational environment across the ASEAN region.

There are a number of key takeaway lessons from the results and several possible directions on how to improve the provision of support to the mental health of teachers in the Philippines. First, educational interventions on the topic of mental health literacy can possibly be incorporated into the INSET program to address misconceptions and enhance skills in giving standard first aid. Another possible direction is to link the schools to a referral system in coordination with the LGUs and in consultation with professionals in the area of mental health. Another approach is to work within a cultural context in recognizing the presence of stigma and the reliance of the community on community resources.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This research investigated to what extent mental health literacy is predictive of general help-seeking intention in Filipino public school teachers. Its findings suggest that debunked beliefs and first-aid knowledge play an important role in shaping the intention of these educators to seek assistance in regard to personal-emotional issues as well as suicidal ideas.

The current research explored the link between mental health literacy and intentions to seek help among Filipino public school teachers. Results show that inappropriate beliefs and first-aid knowledge are important predictors of help-seeking intentions, establishing the relevance of addressing stigma and mental health knowledge in academic settings.

This study contributes to the existing literature regarding mental health literacy, especially for low- and middle-income settings, but it has some inconsistencies regarding measurement validation and research design. For future studies, it would be valuable to include longitudinal research, qualitative studies regarding factors of influence, and a more thorough assessment of mental health literacy instruments from a psychometric approach.

Although the sample size was considerable, subgroup analyses—such as by gender, region, or teaching level—were not carried out. In this regard, considering that respondents were unequally distributed, especially regarding the predominance of female teachers, further subgroup differences using inferential methods such as t-tests or ANOVA may be considered. Despite the acceptable internal consistencies of the instrument, the confirmatory factor analysis and invariance analysis of the measures have not been carried out in the present study. Therefore, it is impossible to guarantee the equivalence of the constructs in the different groups. Future studies should aim to perform the CFA and invariance analysis to enhance the research validity of the measures in the Philippines. Although this study has found many applications, it is important to note that it has some limitations. It is cross-sectional, and all the data is obtained from self-reports. In future studies, it would be beneficial to not only test the causal associations but also have some qualitative information. The sampling population might be widened, including all levels of education.

Funding

No funds, grants, or other support were received.

Disclosure Statement

The authors have no competing interests to declare relevant to this article's content.

Acknowledgement

The authors express their appreciation to the Department of Education (DepEd) for granting permission to collect data from public school teachers.

Ethics Approval

The Philippine Normal University Research Ethics Committee (REC Code: 11112020-044) has considered the ethical aspects of this paper. The committee recommends that this paper be approved.

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