

Adverse Impact of Socioeconomic Status and Economic Issues on Mental Health in the Philippines

Dear Editor,

In 2018, the Mental Health Act was passed into Law. The Philippine Mental Health Act aims to promote positive mental health and provide mental health services to all Filipinos. However, due to limited financial, human, and physical resources, the implementation of the Mental Health Act has been challenging and perceived as a made-up “act,” even though the act aims to provide the rights of patients to be free from discrimination and receive human treatments.^[1] The limitations in funding, public and private facilities, and mental health professionals made both specialized and non-specialized programs difficult to access.^[2]

The Philippine government only spends less than 1% (.22%) or 12.19 PHP per capita. This implies that people with mental disorders should pay for their treatment. Recent statistics indicate that there are only 2,051 mental health professionals in private and public institutions.^[3] In terms of facilities, there are 217 and 155, outpatient and inpatient facilities, respectively.^[2] Furthermore, there are only 4.13 hospital beds allotted for every 100,000 Filipinos with the annual admission exceeding the ratio almost thrice (11.2) (WHO, 2018). The limited funding, professionals, and facilities make mental health services inaccessible to the people.^[3]

The financial challenges of the people make it challenging to seek private professional help which may cost between 1000 PHP and 4500 PHP. The cost of private mental health services provides more reason to have affordable or free specialized and non-specialized mental health services and programs. There are affordable outpatient public and private mental health fees that may range from 100 PHP to 600 PHP for each consultation but securing a session or consultation in these institutions is difficult. PhilHealth (Philippine Health Insurance) excludes outpatient mental health services in their coverage.^[4] The financial conditions hamper several Filipinos to receive mental health services along with the distress caused by their financial difficulties taking into consideration the 610 PHP minimum wage.

Meanwhile, the Philippine government loses up to 68.9 billion PHP per year due to mental health expenditures and loss of workforce. To regain the loss, the government is expected to invest 143 billion PHP in 10 years and gain 217 billion PHP in 10 years once a healthy life from mental health disorders is gained.^[5] To address the economic toll of mental health to the people and to the economy, the government should increase the funding and improve their leadership in implementing the Mental Health Law.

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There are no conflicts of interest.

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