

Exploring the Well-Being of Guidance Counselors in the Philippines: A Phenomenological Study



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ABSTRACT. Guidance Counselors are professionals with a specialized practice that ensures the holistic development of students. Despite their crucial role, there is little research exploring the experiences and perceptions of guidance counselors in terms of wellness programs, well-being, self-care practices, and retention. This study aims to create research and evidence-based interventions to improve well-being and maintain work satisfaction among guidance counselors. Using Giorgi's phenomenological qualitative approach, this study is based on interviews conducted with twelve (12) guidance counselors from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. The findings suggest improving wellness programs, namely, physical, mental, and spiritual programs, a strong support system among colleagues, and other incentives and forms of compensation. It was also found that a healthy work environment is a key to FGC retention, which consists of harmonious work relationships, a strong support system, psychological safety, counselor training, further education, and a flexible and accommodating workload and schedule. Financial elements also come to play and other long-term benefits of employment. Intrapersonal factors

include self-care and personal commitment. The current research recommends utilizing the proposed wellness and retention program framework and offered mental health and wellness programs of FGC.

1.0. Introduction

As of May 2020, the Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines only has 1,096 active counselors. With roughly 20 million public school students, it has become unattainable to meet the recommended ratio of one guidance counselor for every 500 students. It was mentioned that there are over 5,398 open positions for the profession, but only 20% have been filled, citing low compensation as the primary reason. Now, with the COVID-19 pandemic rising and online education in play, DepEd has recognized the need for guidance counselors and, as a result, has partnered with different organizations to help address the need for psychosocial support among students and teachers (Magsambol & Chi, 2020). However, the reasons that hinder the rate of engagement, satisfaction, and wellbeing among guidance counselors remain. For years, the Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association (PGCA) has pushed the government to improve guidance counselors' salary grades.

Lack of human resources, compassion fatigue, and burnout are just some of the chronic problems that contribute to the overall decline of guidance counselors' well-being (Lawson & Myers, 2011). Taken to an extreme, guidance counselors may even choose to leave the profession from frustration and dissatisfaction (Baker, 2000). It is regrettable to witness competent guidance counselors leave an honorable profession for reasons and problems that can be addressed with proper effort and intervention. Thus, it is high time that the well-being of guidance counselors be paid more attention to, and the problems that debilitate must be properly researched and analyzed. This study aims to create research and evidence-based interventions to improve well-being and maintain work satisfaction among guidance counselors to achieve this. The end goal is to retain employees effectively and humanely in their institutions by bringing back holistic care for students and guidance counselors alike.



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2.0. Framework of the Study

The study presents the proposed PERMA-V framework based on the gathered literature. With this, well-being is theorized to be comprised of the domains of PERMA-V, which are Positive Emotions (Happiness and Well-being), Engagement (Employee Engagement), Relationships (Supervisor and Institution), Meaning (Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation), Accomplishment (Professional Development, Supervision, and Training) and Vitality (Self-Care Practices). This operational definition of well-being proposes that the well-being of guidance counselors is an amalgamation of their self-care practices, level of engagement and commitment to their work/organization, relationship with their co-workers, supervisors, and institution, the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for their work, and the sense of accomplishment they derive from it from career development and contribution to the overall profession. It is proposed that guidance counselors will have better well-being and may deliver their services and duties more efficiently by improving and maintaining these domains. It will also encourage them to remain in their institution without feeling stifled in their work and personal lives.

3.0. Methodology

The qualitative data collected from online interviews and surveys was analyzed utilizing the phenomenological descriptive design by Giorgi (2009). A combination of convenience and purposive sampling methods was used to obtain a representative sample of the target population. Participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) Filipino citizen, (2) registered guidance counselor, and (3) with ten years or more experience in counseling-related and supervisory work. Participants were from various private and public educational institutions in the Philippines.

Before the initial interview, each participant was requested to complete a demographic questionnaire to recheck their eligibility based on the inclusion criteria and understand their identities and experiences. The instrument used for this study proper was an unstructured interview guide that collected precise, in-depth, and first-person perspectives on participants' experiences on employer-sponsored wellness and retention management. A Ph.D. holder in psychology, an active registered guidance counselor, a certified counseling psychologist, and an active guidance director externally validated the interview guide. It underwent a total of 15 pilot tests.

The researchers searched for counselors willing to interview through common affiliations and social media sites. Emails were sent to school counselors inviting them to participate in this study, and these emails included a brief introduction of the study. Based on the set criteria, potential respondents were contacted and invited through phone or email to participate in the study. A formal letter of informed consent explaining the purpose of the study, the process of interview, maintenance of confidentiality, and their valuable participation was sent to those willing to participate in the study. Consenting participants were scheduled for an interview at the most convenient date and time for them and the researchers. Thus, a copy of the interview questions was also provided for them to prepare. Before the initial interview, each participant was requested to complete a demographic questionnaire. This was done primarily to recheck their eligibility based on the inclusion criteria and understand their identities and experiences. The participants were interviewed via Google meet video conferencing for one to two hours and all interviews were properly documented through physical handwritten notes and audio recording, observing strict confidentiality and data protection.

After completing interviews for this study, the researchers analyzed and coded the data. Throughout this process, the researchers maintained an open dialogue and used self-reflexivity, bracketing previous knowledge and experiences of wellness programs and Filipino Guidance Counselors' well-being, and followed the notion of epoché. Each statement or phrase was positioned as having equal value and meaning, allowing for developing an initial codebook known as the process horizontalization (Langridge, 2007). This research adhered to the principles and standards stipulated in the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB) code of ethics and has also obtained the approval of the Miriam College Higher Education Unit Ethics Committee to conduct the study.

4.0. Results and Discussion

This study indicates the themes and relating subthemes that came out from the interview transcripts conducted with the Filipino Guidance Counselors on their well-being, wellness programs, self-care practices, and retention that led to the interpretation and implications of this study's results, particularly the five significant themes namely (1) self-care practices, (2) healthy work environment,

(3) support of the administration, (4) professional development, and (5) the emergent theme of personal commitment. These are the components of well-being that ultimately affect and lead to the retention of guidance counselors. Thus, the study also presents the Emergent Framework of Well-being of Guidance Counselors in the Philippines.

Self-Care Practices

About guidance counselors' perception of well-being in their own lives, the participants highlighted a sense of connectedness and social support among significant others, self-reflection and introspection, and faith and spirituality through prayer as factors to well-being. Counselor 8 stated, *"The first and foremost measure of my well-being is when I get connected with the people I love. That is where I get energy, and that is where I unload whatever burdens I have that I usually get from work."* Counselor 7 said, *"I respect my "me" time and break time at work. If you are entitled to a 15-minute break, then use that 15-minute break. Otherwise, if you saturate yourself, you will not become effective as a counselor."* And, Counselor 10 mentioned, *"It includes journal writing, prayer moments or time to catch up with myself. Aside from me time, I do gardening, planting, and driving around the province."*

The first domain, pleasant life, or positive emotions, focuses on joy and hope. They are emotions that encourage optimistic and resilient thinking that cultivate general satisfaction, quality of life, resilience, and better work outcomes (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009 cited in Coffey et al., 2014). These emotions can be derived from both internal and external (Hill, 2020). Positive emotions were contextualized as the result of internal forces, particularly of self-care practices among guidance counselors, which have been documented to increase psychological well-being among counselors (Mahomed et al., 2020). These are reflective of the PERMA domains of Positive Relationships and Meaning.

Strong Sense of Connectedness and Strong Support System among Significant Others

This theme focuses on the strength of inner social circles and support. Social support proves to be the greatest de-stressor among the participants. Thus, these profound interactions are a source of strength that helps and encourages the participants to thrive and flourish in their life endeavors. As Counselor 1 narrated, *"It is important for us to maintain certain connections just like having regular virtual reunions in time of pandemic because one of the reasons why a person feels unwell is when he perceives that he has no source of support or connection from others."*

Diener et al. (2003) and Roxas et al. (2019) suggested that Filipino counselors derive more resources from healthy social relationships in optimizing their sense of subjective well-being, considering that Filipino culture is collectivist in nature. It may also be because happiness, like Seligman's (2012) definition of authentic happiness, comprises the positive relationships in one's life (Fitzgerald et al., 2015).

Engagement, particularly employee engagement, is an amalgamation of various work attitudes. It generally encompasses the commitment, satisfaction, and value an employee places in their work or institution (Vance, 2006). At its peak, engagement can increase productivity, retention, attendance, customer/client satisfaction, worker satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and decrease turnover rates (LePine et al., 2020; Awang et al., 2015; Mohammed & Al-Swidi, 2019). Flow is a psychological state wherein a person is emotionally, physically, and mentally engrossed in certain activities or tasks. Flow affects counselors' concentration, focus, sense of autonomy and control, and perception of working hours as they fulfill their counseling roles and responsibilities (Salanga & Mateo, 2018). As Counselor 5 mentioned, *"If I have some issues, I call my friends. We call ourselves Fab, so whenever we feel like spending fun moments, even virtual, that is my kind of self-care. Then, of course, I have my family with me."* Overall, the participants' personal social support system is a form of coping and helps them foster a healthier and longer life.

Self-Reflection and Introspection

Self-reflection, among the FGCs, is a deliberately allocated time to unwind and take a step back from their fast-paced work life. Counselor 4 even said, *"As a rational being, I always go back to my inner self and ask myself these questions, why am I here? What is my motivation? Motivation and all the things that drive me. Vision about myself? I usually go back to those things. I get to put things into perspective. This is my kind of self-care."* This is, in essence, like PERMA's meaning and

positive emotions through self-care. Augustine and Anuradha (2015) described self-care practices as self-remedy and reward, ultimately improving psychological well-being. Self-care practices can be founded on various fields of well-being, such as physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and relational (Keesler & Troxel, 2020). Thus, self-care is called a purposeful behavioral effort (Thompson et al., 2011). It requires a counselor to purposefully make time from their busy schedules, with the mindset that it must be done despite the disadvantages and difficulties they will face to implement it. In other words, it must become a counselor's priority.

Strong Faith and Spirituality through Prayers

Lastly, prayer is the main source of self-confidence and empowerment for the FGCs that connect them with a higher power, other people, and the world--a sentiment reminiscent of PERMA's meaning in that it connects them with an idea or being larger than themselves. As Counselor 12 explained, *"What I usually do is I pray, It gives me psychological peace. I am at peace with myself"*. Or, as Counselor 2 described, *" Strong faith and spirituality through prayers is the main source of self-confidence and empowered psychological well-being."*

Myers and Sweeney (2008) defined faith and spirituality as essential to well-being, as it incorporates a sense of purpose and meaning in one's life. It can also nurture optimism tailored to a person's beliefs and values (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991). Its practical applications are thus quite varied from nutrition, exercise, spiritual practice to more psychological approaches such as meditation and therapy (Witmer & Granello, 2005; Bilot, 2012). One documented method is the consistent practice of gratitude, positively correlated with resilience and negatively correlated with burnout (Palmieri, 2017). This presents that meaning is also related to positive relationships, especially within community-building.

Healthy Work Environment

This theme is a broad domain of the participants' well-being that focuses on work-specific factors. However, they are similar to their self-care practices in that it focuses on the domain of positive relationships and positive emotion from a stable and nurturing environment. Counselor 8 narrated, *"A healthy workplace is an environment that encourages wellness while doing work. Meaning you can breathe, behave well, and freely express yourself. We are just providing ourselves with a healthy workplace because we want to function as much as possible. Thus, my getting engaged, my getting related with the people around, indicates that engagement, the relationship is staying power."*

This also supports Raley et al. (2005) and Tsao et al., (2016), who found that the working environment, particularly its physical and social environment, is important to an individual's psychological needs, particularly relatedness, autonomy, and competence when based on another theory, that is Self-Determination Theory, which explores motivation and well-being. Employee engagement has been plugged as the next "edge" that will help organizations achieve success due to passionate employees who will ensure productivity in the workplace (Claypool, 2017). As a result, companies worldwide struggle with how to better engage their employees in the workplace (Froiland, 2015). The problem is that there are varied sources on what exactly can nurture employee engagement to begin with. The working environment, job design, and the employee's personality are just some factors that contribute to this complex concept (LePine et al., 2020).

Strong Support System

In the same way the participants seek social support from their personal lives, they also seek a similar system at work but among colleagues and, to some extent, their direct supervisor and the institution they belong to. As Counselor 1 stated, *"It has to be an organization that first and foremost looks at relationships as vital in its growth and development. Because if we look at relationships as vital, everything follows. The virtues of handling and encouraging positive emotions will follow. Work and the delegation of work will be easier. Communication becomes more open."*

Frey & Osborne (2013), Cicolini et al. (2014), and Stewart & Townley (2020) noted that positive relationships at work increase work satisfaction and work retention. Employees want to believe that they are part of something bigger and have a unique and powerful opportunity (Gasta, 2016). At work, when a counselor finds meaning and values his/her work as meaningful, s/he is more prone to experience positive emotions, engagement, satisfaction, motivation, and an overall better sense of well-being (Selby et al., 2010; Ehteshami et al., 2018; Mercurio, 2019).

In terms of providing support for each FGC, Counselor 12 emphasized, *"We communicate online with our fellow counselors and other counselors in the region. So, we usually communicate, exchange ideas, and exchange sentiments through messenger, online. And through this, we are given psychological support through inspirational messages and encouragement to keep going despite the adversities."* Supportive colleagues help the participants improve and learn from their failures, celebrate victories and even small wins.

Psychological Safety

Creating a safe environment where everyone feels included is vital as it impacts and takes a toll on mental health and the participants' sense of belonging. As Counselor 4 narrated, *"It must encourage growth and development, a concept known as Psychological Safety in the workplace, it is an environment where people, are not afraid to speak up. They are not afraid to talk. They are not afraid to be themselves. And they are not afraid to admit to their mistakes. So, I think that is a healthy workplace. You are free to express yourself. It is a non-threatening environment."* Psychological safety is showing and employing oneself without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status, or career (Kahn 1990, p. 708). It can be defined as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking. It increases job performance, enhances work relationships, work emotions, work habits, well-being, work satisfaction, and work retention.

Work can serve as a basic need for survival, but it also serves as a means of self-determination. Work, as a way to self-determination, means that an individual can find ways to sustain their energy and motivation in their jobs, even when faced with challenges, because it caters to intrinsic or extrinsic motivation in them. This can range from a desire to help others, gain approval, or because the person deems it an important part of who they are (Blustein, 2008).

Strong Support of Administration

This domain focuses on the support from a broader social component-- the institution and organization itself. Unlike the more intimate collegial support, this theme centers more on policy and enforcement of humane working conditions controlled by the administration. Counselor 1 indicated, *"The perception that the organization is taking care of you and that you have a perception of a strong system. And that they are taking care of their psychosocial, emotional wellness in general, and spiritual wellness. It is a combination of all those factors to have this perception that they are taken care of, have venues for growth, and could also find meaning in what they're doing."*

An important aspect of work relationships is the person atop who supervises and nurtures the harmony of a team. Team culture, after all, largely depends on a leader who can facilitate a sense of community among employees-- ultimately reducing negative emotions such as anxiety and hostility (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006). Among other things, a leader's communication style greatly impacts the working environment. A strategic leadership style, for instance, involves implementing a strategic direction, exploring and maintaining unique core competencies, developing human capital, sustaining an effective organizational culture, emphasizing ethical practices, and establishing balanced organizational control (Hitt et al., 2001; Jooste & Fourie, 2009). Nonetheless, it is still reminiscent of PERMA's engagement, positive emotions, and positive relationships.

Workload and Schedule

Jo (2008) and Butler (2020) discovered that "to retain school psychologists, the administrative supervisors must offer support, job flexibility, and connect their school psychologists to the surrounding community. Thus, creating an appealing work environment is a must, offering competitive salaries, manageable workloads, and building healthy relationships" (p. 41). Furthermore, Counselor 11 stated, *"We are on a skeletal basis. I am reporting here Tuesday and Wednesday. I feel the support of each one, so it is a healthy place to be in. This is healthy for me because we have the support of the administration. We can get things done as long as we present our programs. We can work our way to make guidance programs possible because of the supportive administration."* Practicing self-care can be quite difficult, considering how arduous their workload and schedules are. Thus, self-care is called a purposeful behavioral effort (Thompson et al., 2011). It requires a counselor to purposefully make time from their busy schedules, with the mindset that it must be done despite the disadvantages and difficulties they will face to implement it. In the context of guidance counselors, a school principal or dean can explicitly attend to their relationships with guidance counselors. They

can, for example, provide job flexibility (Butler, 2020), clearly define the roles and responsibilities of a counselor, provide adequate staffing, communicate directly with their counselors, and include them in school leadership teams (Clemens et al., 2009). Overall, many FGCs reported limited salaries but an increasing workload. In behaviorist terms, there is a lack of positive reinforcement, that is, monetary reinforcement that motivates or compensates the level of investment the participants have given.

Mental Health Programs

There is a lack of mental health programs experienced by the participants. While some cite effective programs such as physical recreational activities, religious retreats, and programs focused on coping and stress management, others have not felt their institutions' efforts in bettering their well-being. Most participants shared that they are responsible for arranging such events for themselves and other stakeholders. As Counselor 9 stated, *"We do not have institutional programs for wellness. So, it is the responsibility of every department to create, design, and initiate. Then, our HR, the school, or the institution will support the concept of shared leadership, wherein they allow each office to take charge and design wellness programs for the people under them. But in general, there is no standardized wellness program."*

It is important for professionals because it instills feelings of efficacy and competency, thus bolstering motivation and a sense of belonging in their work community (Zhang & Byrd, 2005; Huang et al., 2007; Flores, 2007; Poyrazli et al., 2012). There are many ways for counselors to achieve this. Attending courses, workshops, and seminars to enhance their skills and knowledge is one method, but this works hand-in-hand with institutional support. Counselors' respective institutions must allow and provide such opportunities for their counselors (Certion, 2018). One key skill that should be nurtured among employees, particularly counselors, is coping strategies. Coping strategies are adaptive ways counselors can deal with stress, which ultimately impacts chronic physical and mental health (Galla et al., 2015; Razzoli & Batolomucci, 2016; Saliba & Barden, 2017). This is especially important when dealing with the nature of a counselors' work. Thus, as previously written, this study proposed a framework to tackle the lack of or inefficiency of programs in the current institution of the researcher.

Incentives and Other Benefits

An important key for the well-being and retention of FGCs is the long-term monetary investments an institution is willing to provide for its counselors. Thus, Counselor 8 even carried this claim as she stated, *"We also have service awards, recognition, and even departmental awarding ceremonies. It helps boost our morale and passion for the profession. We also have CBA or Collective Bargaining Agreement as it secures our rights as employees. We have hospitalization benefits and other allowances that help us become productive in our responsibilities."*

Hollingsworth (2015) supported the inclusion of finances and time management in well-being and mental health within work wellness. This is in line with a study outcome conducted by Jo (2008) and Raley et al. (2005), stating that hiring and retaining qualified staff members is often challenging due to limited funds for competitive and adequate salaries. The idea is to create an appealing work environment that offers competitive salaries, a manageable workload, and healthy working relationships (Butler, 2020). After all, "when school counselors feel like they are trusted and respected by their principal, they are more satisfied in their job and less likely to seek employment outside of their school" (Clemens, 2008, p. 75).

However, despite a counselor's practice that focuses on improving the well-being and wellness of their students, counselors may not effectively transmit their training to themselves, especially in self-care practices that manage stress and other deterrents of well-being (Wester et al., 2009). Many counselors struggle with low salaries, limited social opportunities, heavy workload, and difficulties in transitions of lifestyle (Cosgrave et al., 2015). All these factors are ultimately detrimental to the well-being of guidance counselors and their overall level of commitment and functioning at work. Thus, without proper compensation, employees, or counselors, are more tempted to leave their institution out of dissatisfaction.

Professional Development

Professional Development is an umbrella theme for the participants' career development consisting of their overt efforts and the institution's efforts and opportunities. Counselor 5

accentuated, *"The school is very generous to send and equip us with skills and competencies. It is like you have the power to navigate your creativity. When you are confident and competent, you feel well. We also advocate coaching and mentoring to new Guidance Counselors through supervision, and we work closely with psychologists and psychiatrists as we collaborate for referrals and various programs."* Guidance Counselors may also derive meaning from training the new generation of counselors to continue the community and work that they are involved in (Carswell, 2011). This is closely related to PERMA's Positive Accomplishment domain.

Counselor Support

An essential aspect of career development is an institution's placed value in a counselor's position and work. Counselor 1 specified, *"Some schools failed to recognize the role of guidance counselors in the organization. A good guidance orientation is crucial as if all can see our profession's importance in the quest for wellness and mental health. So, if the counselor feels that they are important in the organization and that his skills are important, he is most likely to stay."* As Clemens (2008) stated, *"When school counselors feel like they are trusted and respected by their principal, they are more satisfied in their job and less likely to seek employment outside of their school."* (p. 75). Equally encouraging feel that their work is valued and can develop good working relationships with their supervisors (e.g., a school principal). They can advocate for themselves and their role as counselors (Meyer & Ponton, 2006; Trusty & Brown, 2005).

In addition, Clemens (2008) found that it is more beneficial to include school counselors in developing professional and well-being activities. McNall et al. (2009) and Ssali et al., (2019) suggest intervention before this happens, including regulated workload and stability in work tenure. In general, monetary incentives can contribute to work-life imbalance and recognition, flexibility, and compassion towards employees' situations that can improve their quality of life (Jo, 2008; Arshad & Puteh, 2015; Blount et al., 2018).

Counselor Training and Education

Aside from monetary incentives, Blount et al. (2018) and Arshad and Puteh (2015) noted that an employee's decision to leave or stay in an institution is also dependent on work-life balance and recognition from their employers. Counselor 4 accentuated, *"Institutions can think of creative ways of improving the wellness of their people. There must be separate activities or programs like wellness programs for Filipino Guidance Counselors aside from the usual career advancement training. The more that employees will get encouraged, the more it may lead to increased energy and productivity in terms of job satisfaction."* Equally important is the institution's flexibility for counselors to attend various seminars, training programs, and further education to bolster their skills and competencies (Huang et al., 2007). Awang et al. (2015) found that academic development and organizational climate-induced stronger organizational commitment and reduced turnover intention. It was reported through the interviews that counselors were more satisfied and committed if institutions offered career development opportunities. Positive achievements are about setting goals for growth and development, and the satisfaction one feels after reaching a milestone or accomplishing a goal. A consistent approach to positive achievements is the Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Bound Model or the SMART Model. The idea is to set achievable and challenging goals to optimize growth (Hill, 2020). By creating that nurturing environment, counselors become more self-aware of their competencies and plan more effectively and efficiently for their professional development (ASCA, 2016). Therefore, much like other domains of the PERMA Model, the positive achievement is a collaborative effort from different stakeholders and partnerships.

Personal Commitment

This emergent theme combines all domains of the PERMA model. It is heavy on meaning, as personal commitment measures counselors' value and engagement in their work. This, in turn, gives counselors a sense of fulfillment and achievement when they see the effect their work has, especially with their clients (i.e., students). As Counselor 12 recounted, *"Yes, I am serving in this profession, because there is harmony, we feel like we belong in a big happy family, and aside from that, there is this drive within us, the inherent interest to help others, and we feel happy if we were able to help. The benefits may not be financial, but psychological, by being happy to be of help to others. Somehow you are being validated by the people you help. It is not financial but way beyond."*

Meaning can also be derived from the basic premise of helping others and making a difference in their students' lives (Zyromski et al., 2019). Therefore, growth and a personal sense of transformation can be a reliable source of meaning, encouraging counselors to continue their work (Thompson et al., 2011).

A study conducted by Salanga and Mateo (2018) revealed that counselors who expressed greater satisfaction with their lives seem to view the counseling experience as rewarding and are more attuned to their emotions. Additionally, experiencing "flow," or colloquially known as "being in the zone" during counseling, is a result of complete engagement in what one is doing (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Another similar concept is "flourishing," defined by Seligman (2012) as a positive personal disposition, environment, and experience that transcends happiness and well-being that connects one to meaning and purpose in life.



Figure 3. Emergent Framework of Well-being of Guidance Counselors in the Philippines

Figure 3 presents the emergent themes derived from the results and analysis of data. The emergent framework above presents how well-being among guidance counselors depends on both internal and external forces - a combination of psychological first aid and self-care counselors provide for themselves, the working culture, and overt efforts of their institutions in providing quality care for their employees. Diener et al. (2003) and Roxas et al. (2019) suggested that Filipino counselors derive more resources from healthy social relationships. Frey & Osborne, (2013), Cicolini et al. (2014), and Stewart & Townley, (2020) noted that positive relationships at work increase work satisfaction and work retention. Giving importance to self-care strategies is also helpful, but these strategies will depend on the institution if they nurture a culture that would encourage such behavior among employees and teams (Wolf et al., 2012; Buseman-Williams, 2014; Blount et al., 2020). This can be done by focusing on career-sustaining behaviors that enhance the counselor's professional satisfaction and alleviate the difficulties experienced at work, such as supervision or scheduled breaks (Lawson & Myers, 2011). This study proposed a framework to tackle the lack of or inefficiency of programs in the current institution of the researcher.

It shows that the well-being of FGCs measured through the five (5) domains, namely, (1) **self-care practices**, which include a strong sense of connectedness and support system among significant others, strong faith, and spirituality through prayer, and self-reflection, and introspection. Consistent self-care greatly prevents burnout; therefore, it is important to integrate it into one's life, bleeding into a counselor's actions, habits, and attitudes both at work and at home (Wilson, 2015; Kruger, 2018); (2) **work environment**, which includes a support system, and a culture that values psychological safety and stability. The good life or engagement is found primarily through engagement in activities that absorb and promote full participation in life. It is "cultivating your most fundamental strengths and using them every day in work, love, play, and parenting" (Seligman, 2012, p.13). Employee engagement is beneficial not only for organizations but also for the employees themselves. Particularly with counselors, high levels of employee engagement have led to a more positive quality of life, emotional awareness, and overall satisfaction (Salanga & Mateo, 2018); (3) **support from the administration**, which includes institutional effort in adjusting workload and schedules, initiating mental health programs, and providing ample incentives and other benefits.

With the proper social support system at work, a person can derive more satisfaction, thus

increasing general performance, retention, and work habits (Frey & Osborne, 2013; Cicolini et al., 2014; Stewart & Townley, 2020). It can also reduce rates of burnout (Gunduza, 2012). Positive work relationships are not only limited to one's co-workers, however. Often than not, one's leader and the institution or organization itself can outweigh the positives or negatives of one's immediate social circle. With the proper leader, employees will feel motivated, engaged, and happy in their work-life (Froiland, 2015); (4) **professional development**, including counselor support and counselor training and education.

For counselors, meaning can be derived from differing aspects of their jobs. There is meaning derived from career advancement and the feeling of taking charge and making changes to the system, profession, and approaches to their clientele (McMahon et al., 2009; Slaten et al., 2013; Gambrell et al., 2011; Certion, 2018). For counselors, accomplishment can be associated with professional development, which is the continuing education and growth of one's profession and the maintenance or retention. It is important for professionals because it instills feelings of efficacy and competency, thus bolstering motivation and a sense of belonging in their work community (Zhang & Byrd, 2005; Huang et al., 2007; Flores, 2007; Poyrazli et al., 2012); and (5) **personal commitment**, which is an employee's sense of value and meaning in the work and institution they belong to.

The last category, *personal commitment*, is an amalgamation of core values the participants had and nurtured that determined the level of investment they felt towards their work. These core values are commitment, purpose, service, leadership, accountability, and teamwork. In the end, it is not only the counselor who benefits from this commitment. When counselors steadily practice self-care and begin to feel its benefits, their performance, and demeanor change as well. Their more positive disposition unconsciously invites others to follow suit, especially their students. Through modeling, counselors can also make a difference in their student's lives and their institutions, creating a synergistic cycle of well-being (Wolf et al., 2012; Wolf et al., 2014; Todd & Chehaib, 2019). Rather than the timely, expensive, and exhaustive idea of treating burnout and other psychological concerns after the fact, turning counselors into agents of change to promote well-being is a much more effective and personal approach (Blount et al., 2018).

These data support the integrated lived experiences of guidance counselors within their organization and institution and how their work-life not only affects the growth of their career, personal lives, and overall well-being. It becomes glaringly evident that there is a need to develop a holistic well-being framework that would help improve the working lives of guidance counselors and aid administrators in understanding well-being as a holistic system that is ultimately beneficial for their institution. Hopefully, this framework could recommend ways and practices for guidance counselors to practice self-care and stress management and provide institutions with programs focused on well-being. Thus, this study aims to provide the said framework through evidence-based research derived directly from guidance counselors across the Philippines, with a phenomenological approach. Specifically, the study looks into the lives of guidance counselors, what responsibilities they carry with them, the consequences of these responsibilities, and how they may or may not cope with or without the help of their institutions.

Notably, a profession grounded in wellness places little emphasis on counselors and counselor educators to incorporate self-care and wellness practices into their personal lives (Coaston & Cook, 2018). This framework may help bridge the gap between the expectations and actual practice of self-care, wellness, and retention here in the Philippines. The end goal of improving well-being is to increase retention rates among guidance counselors—in other words, to maximize the length of time or duration of a guidance counselors' commitment and stay in their institution (Cosgrave et al., 2015).

5.0. Conclusion

The current research recommends utilizing the proposed framework and program focused on well-being for FGCs in the Philippines. School employers occupy a significant role in retaining FGCs, and it is essential to pay attention to various key factors that will strengthen retention. The findings suggest a need to improve and enhance employer-sponsored wellness programs to attain positive outcomes. These programs may include physical, mental, and spiritual programs, strong support systems among colleagues, and other incentives and forms of compensation.

It was also found that a healthy work environment is a key to FGC retention, which consists of harmonious work relationships, a strong support system from colleagues and administration,

psychological safety, counselor training, further education, and a flexible and accommodating workload schedule. Financial elements also come to play, such as a competitive salary fit for the qualifications of an FGC and other long-term benefits of employment. Intrapersonal factors include self-care and personal commitment, but these clusters of factors must integrate to achieve the desired result of consistent FGC retention.

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