

Counseling Services: From the Viewpoints of College Students

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights of college students in seeking counseling services. A qualitative phenomenological design was utilized to capture the participants' in-depth perspectives. A total of ten college students from Davao de Oro State College – Main Campus were selected through purposive sampling, comprising individuals who had previously accessed counseling services and those who were reluctant to pursue them. Data were gathered using in-depth interviews and analyzed through thematic analysis. The results identified four key themes: hesitation due to stigma and fear of judgment, diverse coping mechanisms, both adaptive and maladaptive, barriers such as lack of awareness and cultural perceptions, and students' insights on the importance and impacts of counseling. The majority of participants initially showed hesitation or held misconceptions about counseling, but those who engaged with the service found it emotionally beneficial and supportive. The study concludes that there is a pressing need to raise awareness, normalize the behavior of seeking counseling, and improve the accessibility and trustworthiness of school counseling services. It is recommended that higher education institutions create student-focused programs that tackle stigma and advocate for mental health support.

Keywords: guidance and counseling, counseling services, lived experiences, stigma, coping mechanisms, mental health support, phenomenological design, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Background

Counseling services play a crucial role in every college student's overall well-being. However, the reluctance of young adults to seek mental health treatment has been attributed to poor mental health literacy, stigma, preference for self-reliance, and concerns about confidentiality (Shahwan et al., 2020). In addition, despite the availability of in-house school counseling services, students do not fully utilize school counseling services (Chen & Kok, 2017; Lubman et al., 2017).

In China, a study conducted by Ning et al, (2022) revealed that university students have several challenges when it comes to seeking guidance and counseling, including inadequate mental health literacy, stigma associated with mental illness, mistrust of on-campus counseling facilities, and challenges in obtaining mental health treatments. Due to these obstacles, students are far less likely to ask for assistance, which hurts their mental health.

In addition, the study conducted by Dimalaluan et al (2017) in Palawan revealed that college students often deal with personal issues like time management, lack of self-control, anxiety, poor study habits, fear

of failing, and lack of confidence. It also revealed that among the 300 respondents 91% did not visit the Guidance and Counseling Office for counseling since they wanted to solve their problem. This implies that the school's guidance and counseling services for students should offer Intervention activities that will enable students to manage their issues, including training, workshops, retreats, seminars, and symposiums.

Meanwhile, in the local context, the guidance counselor in one of the higher education schools in Davao de Oro mentioned that only 3% of their total student population sought school counseling services. Much of the existing research focuses on understanding students' lives experiences in seeking counseling uses a quantitative design (Ning,X et al., 2022). However, there is a lack of in-depth exploration into the opinion of the students wherein they can share their whole experience in counseling. Through knowing the students' lives experiences, challenges, coping mechanism and shared experiences in seeking counseling the researcher can deeply understand the students view on counseling.

Purpose of the study

The primary purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights of college students in seeking counseling. It was important to note that this study encompassed more than their experiences in counseling; hence, it also focuses on students' views about counseling. A total of 10 college students participated in the in-depth interview to provide diverse perspectives on the subject matter. This qualitative approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of personal experiences, views, and understandings of counseling services.

Review of Related Literature

Counseling has been deemed important because of its significant influence on the holistic development of the college students. Thus, theories, concepts, published articles of personal testimonies, and various works of literature relevant to this study are discussed in this section to provide strong frame of references. Counseling Services. The academic year is a period of academic, social, personal, emotional and intellectual growth for most adolescents (Getachew, 2020). Hence, counseling services at colleges and universities are essential in assisting students who encounter various personal, emotional, and academic difficulties. These services include a variety of options, such as one-on-one counseling, group support, and advocacy, all designed to improve students' academic achievement and social skills (Sultana, 2013; Khomariyah et al., 2023). As stressed by Xiong et al (2021), in high school environments, guidance services have been demonstrated to greatly improve positive growth in areas such as academics, personal-social interactions, and career paths, while also reducing mental health problems like anxiety and depression.

As discussed by Haris et al (2020), the establishment of guidance and counseling programs in educational settings is essential for promoting self-sufficiency and optimal personal growth, as it aids students in dealing with personal, social, and academic hurdles. The study found that guidance and counseling services greatly improve children's self-adjustment in kindergarten, showing higher average scores in schools that provide these services than in those that do not. Educators offered individualized support, which contributed to enhancing children's development and adjustment skills (Lessy et al., 2022).

In addition, the impact of counseling services at universities greatly improves students' academic success and personal growth. It fosters better coping, social, and study abilities, resulting in improved adaptation to campus life, as evidenced by significant research results from Melaka's higher education institutions (Thuryrajah & Jeyakumar, 2017). They play a crucial role in enhancing adolescents' subjective well-being, sense of self-efficacy, and emotional skills, which subsequently aid in diminishing academic stress

and promote healthier psychosocial growth, an important basis for both educational achievement and future career endeavors (Fatima & Khan, 2020).

Beyond these emotional and psychological advantages, counseling also encourages significant improvements in personal skills, heightened academic concentration, and an increased commitment to remaining in school. Students experience significant reductions in mental health issues, which positively impacts both their well-being and academic success. These benefits are especially pronounced among older students and those residing on campus, who typically show even greater progress (Winterrowd et al., 2016).

Moreover, psychological counseling has been empirically demonstrated to considerably improve students' mental health and academic outcomes, especially in mitigating symptoms of anxiety and depression (Pizzo et al., 2024). Gender-sensitive counseling is equally vital, as entrenched gender norms can impede access to mental health resources, underscoring the necessity for inclusive methodologies (Irawan et al., 2024). Gender-sensitive counseling is based on the understanding of various gender identities and the sociocultural influences that shape personal experiences. Important elements involve recognizing gender identity, issues of gender subordination, and experiences of gender-related trauma, all crucial for establishing a therapeutic setting that is both inclusive and affirming (Hauenstein & Schimmels, 2024; Zakhour et al., 2024). By taking these factors into account, counselors can enhance therapeutic engagement and cultivate trust with their clients. Personalized treatment methods that reflect individual gender experiences not only diminish stigma but also increase the relevance and effectiveness of interventions. This customized approach improves client outcomes by tailoring care to each person's distinct needs, thereby fostering a more supportive and empowering counseling experience (Hauenstein & Schimmels, 2024).

Understanding gender differences is essential for effective counseling practices, as it enables counselors to recognize the distinct mental health requirements and help-seeking behaviors of both men and women. Studies show that men frequently encounter cultural stigmas and socialization influences that impede their willingness to seek assistance. By recognizing these variations, counselors can offer interventions that are culturally competent and sensitive to gender, ultimately creating a therapeutic space where male clients feel understood and are more inclined to engage in personal growth and development (Evans, 2013).

Additionally, acknowledging gender differences is essential for the success of counseling interventions as it recognizes the unique roles, pressures, and power imbalances that men and women face. Gender-sensitive counseling places individual struggles within their sociopolitical and cultural framework, examining how societal expectations affect mental well-being. By incorporating gender conversations, counselors can gain a deeper insight into clients' specific experiences, confront oppressive systems, and encourage empowerment, ultimately resulting in more effective therapeutic outcomes for both genders (Joshi, 2015).

Further, student counseling has a significant impact among students including improved mental health and academic retention. Research indicates that students utilizing counseling services have higher retention rates compared to their peers, suggesting a strong correlation between counseling and academic success (LeViness, 2024).

Furthermore, effective counseling services are typically defined by a collaborative approach, where trained professionals implement psychological principles to improve students' self-awareness and coping abilities. Successful counseling initiatives not only tackle urgent mental health concerns but also promote

personal development and self-awareness, which are crucial for the overall growth of students (Sultana, 2013).

School counselors are essential in promoting involvement from various stakeholders by working closely with parents, educators, and members of the community to enhance students' academic performance and prepare them for their careers. By fostering open dialogue and forming strategic collaborations, they tackle the difficulties encountered by marginalized groups and execute focused strategies to guarantee fair educational opportunities (Paolini, 2015).

A collaborative method is fundamental to effective counseling services, highlighting the establishment of a solid partnership between the counselor and the client. This method consists of sharing knowledge, negotiating meanings, and nurturing mutual understanding, all while recognizing power dynamics and institutional limitations that may influence the therapeutic process. Such collaboration fortifies the therapeutic alliance and improves the quality of communication, ultimately leading to more significant and effective results (Strong et al., 2011).

In addition to individual counseling, collaboration also involves engaging community members and organizations in the creation and application of mental health interventions. This wider, community-centered approach focuses on building trust, fostering open communication, respecting cultural differences, and promoting ongoing professional development. By including stakeholders and customizing interventions to align with community-specific needs, counseling services become more adaptable and sustainable, thereby enhancing long-term mental health outcomes (Attila et al., 2024).

Moreover, the impact of school counselors on counseling services is considerable, as they play a vital role in the educational and personal growth of students. The research indicates that individual and small group counseling, classroom guidance, and consultation activities positively influence students' academic success and personal lives. Counselors are essential in tackling emotional, social, and behavioral challenges, assisting students in acquiring the coping and social skills needed to adapt to campus life. Their interventions are critical for enhancing student performance and overall well-being (Jeyakumar, 2017).

Constructive engagement with stakeholders is crucial for enhancing school counseling services, especially in university environments. By promoting the exchange of context-specific insights and clarifying the types of trauma faced by students, the involvement of stakeholder aids in customizing trauma-focused, evidence-based treatments to meet the distinct needs of the campus community. Consequently, this boosts the spread and execution of mental health services within university counseling centers ("Engaging Stakeholders for Change: A Learning Community Methodology for Implementing Evidence-Based, Trauma-Focused Care on College Campuses," 2022).

Furthermore, engaging stakeholders encourages teamwork and inclusivity by fostering cultural understanding and establishing trust. These factors cultivate common values and creativity, leading to counseling results that are more adaptive and robust. When stakeholders actively participate, school counseling services better reflect the needs and experiences of the varied communities they serve, which ultimately improves their overall effectiveness ("Engaging Stakeholders," 2025).

Truly, counseling services within higher education institutions are integral to facilitating students' academic and personal growth; however, their engagement often remains insufficient. Although advantages exist, obstacles to accessing counseling services persist, including time limitations, prompting students to propose alternatives such as online or weekend appointments (Huenergarde, 2018). The study of (Peyton, 2019) showed that while knowledge of available services is fairly widespread, actual

participation remains low, with only a small fraction of students making use of these resources, underscoring a disparity between awareness and active engagement. It explored how students view counseling and psychological services, showing that although 78.9% of respondents were aware of these services, only 19.6% took advantage of them. Students demonstrated varying opinions about the sufficiency and effectiveness of these services, pointing out obstacles to access and different expectations regarding available options. This implies that many students might not fully recognize the benefits of counseling for addressing mental health concerns, highlighting a disconnect between awareness and the actual use of resources provided.

In addition, empirical studies suggest that although undergraduate science students in West Africa acknowledge the advantages of counseling, including enhanced academic self-efficacy and time management skills, they frequently face obstacles that prevent them from seeking assistance (Kabumle & Abosede, 2024). Likewise, career counseling services are indispensable for equipping students to navigate the dynamic job market; however, numerous institutions, particularly in South Africa, do not offer sufficient contextually relevant career guidance, which is crucial for catering to diverse student demographics (Khurumova & Pinto, 2024; Lewis, 2024).

Additionally, the implementation of counseling services encounters various notable obstacles across multiple contexts, especially within educational environments. In schools, challenges such as a lack of awareness among students, educators, and the community, alongside inadequate training for counselors and insufficient facilities, impede effective service provision (Fitriani et al., 2022). University counseling services similarly suffer from low usage rates, with merely 2% to 4% of students taking advantage of them, frequently because international students tend to favor informal support from peers rather than seeking professional assistance (Kambouropoulos, 2015).

The growing incidence of serious psychological problems among students has heightened the need for these services, especially due to a mental health crisis impacting numerous institutions (Stewart et al., 2015; Feeny et al., 2024). Innovative approaches that counseling centers can implement consist of mindfulness-based techniques, cognitive-behavioral methods, and neurofeedback. These neuro-informed counseling strategies boost treatment results by decreasing relapse rates, enhancing emotional regulation, and promoting increased engagement and motivation among those in recovery (Anika et al., 2024).

In conclusion, augmenting the accessibility and pertinence of counseling services is imperative for promoting student achievement within higher education contexts. These services are crucial in aiding students' growth both academically and personally, as they offer a well-rounded structure that caters to different facets of student development. These services are vital for the overall development of students' capabilities (Yulianti et al., 2024).

Experiences of Students in Seeking Counseling. According to (Rosli & Harun, 2023), students who seek counseling have a complicated route that is influenced by their mental health issues, perceived benefits, and support systems. Their choices to seek counseling are shaped by various interconnected factors, such as stigma, gender, cultural background, psychological distress, and access to services (Al-Darmaki, 2014). It is also affected by recognizing the issue and the effectiveness of the support system, emphasizing the significance of both informal and professional networks of support (Pantaleon et al., 2022).

Research shows that stigma continues to be a major obstacle, particularly in cultures where seeking assistance is viewed unfavorably, like in certain Arab communities (Al-Darmaki, 2014). Similarly, (Kang'ethe & Muhuro, 2014) found that cultural and societal beliefs greatly impact how students view counseling, frequently linking it with shame and inadequacy. Their readiness to pursue counseling services

is additionally hindered by issues like a lack of trust in counselors, language obstacles, and a tendency to rely on family support instead of professional assistance. Additionally, gender differences also have an impact, with women typically reporting higher levels of psychological distress and a greater inclination to seek help (Al-Darmaki, 2014).

The study of Sigal and Plunkett (2023) asserts that male students expressed more unfavorable views regarding mental health care, experienced greater self-stigma, and showed a lesser inclination to pursue treatment than their female counterparts. However, another study suggests that transgender clients tend to have utilized mental health services more frequently and report having less support from their families than cisgender clients. This underscores the necessity for customized counseling approaches that consider diverse backgrounds (Bartholomew et al., 2019). Overall, gender differences play a crucial role in shaping students' experiences in counseling, impacting their career decisions and available opportunities. Elements like societal norms, family pressures, and gender discrimination present distinct obstacles, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive strategies in counseling to effectively cater to various backgrounds (Gao, n.d.).

Moreover, the study of Rosli and Harun (2023) indicates that many students have poor mental health and coping skills, which are related to how they feel about seeking counseling. Factors such as self-concealment and social support are crucial in influencing students' readiness to seek counseling services (Mahfar et al., 2018). Issues related to accessibility, including the availability of services and awareness of counseling options, further complicate the decision-making process (Flansburg, 2012; Onabule & Boes, 2013). Despite a high general readiness to use mental health services, barriers such as cultural attitudes and a lack of information significantly hinder students' willingness to seek help. Therefore, increasing student mental health outcomes requires raising awareness of the benefits of counseling and removing obstacles (Aligawesa, 2024).

The students' tendencies to seek help are influenced by their recognition of problems and the effectiveness of their support networks, highlighting the need for counseling services that cater to student requirements (Pantaleon et al., 2022). Their journey in seeking counseling highlights a multifaceted interaction of variables that affect their access to mental health support. Around 10% of college students seek counseling, often encountering notable academic and social difficulties due to mental health challenges, with 87% indicating that these issues disrupt their academic performance (Schwitzer et al., 2018; Krumrei et al., 2010).

However, the connection with counselors, especially trainee counselors, plays an essential role; displaying positive regard and supporting autonomy significantly enhance the counseling experience. According to qualitative evaluations, despite ongoing operational challenges, well-being advisers in school settings provide accessible assistance, fostering a feeling of community and concern, (Bennett et al., 2024).

As a result, students shared their experiences with trainee counsellors, which were largely positive. They emphasized the significance of the therapeutic relationship and the counsellor's affirmative regard. With that, a number of participants expressed a sense of empowerment and support in their autonomy, resulting in higher self-efficacy. This suggests that most students viewed the counselling services as supportive and advantageous for their mental health and overall well-being (Forman & Andrews, 2021).

As highlighted by (Kadambi et al., 2010), counselors in higher education share various positive experiences during their interactions with students, highlighting intrinsic rewards like affirmation of their beliefs, significant therapeutic relationships, and beneficial results in therapy. These experiences play a role in enhancing counselors' professional satisfaction and self-efficacy. Although the research mainly

centers on the counselors' viewpoints, it suggests that the supportive and affirming atmosphere fostered by counselors could also result in positive experiences for students, thereby improving the overall quality of the counseling services offered.

Moreover, students recounted favorable interactions with school counselors, emphasizing how these connections aided them in self-advocacy, fostering confidence, and providing motivation. Individual sessions, career advice, and college planning were especially appreciated in their pursuit of college access and persistence (Waalkes et al., 2023). They discovered significance in their positions, enhancing the welfare of students and communities, which cultivated a sense of purpose despite the obstacles encountered (Goodman-Scott & Pérez, 2023).

In conclusion, these findings emphasize the necessity of accessible and compassionate counseling in promoting both student well-being and academic achievement.

Challenges of the Students in Seeking Counseling Services. College students encounter substantial obstacles when attempting to access counseling services, primarily attributable to mental health stigma, self-stigmatization, and perceived impediments. Both societal stigma and self-imposed stigma serve as significant deterrents, inhibiting students from obtaining the necessary support. Empirical research has underscored the prevalence of this phenomenon among community college students, those engaged in STEM disciplines, and Filipino college students (Tan et al., 2025; Kalkbrenner & Miceli, 2022).

As highlighted in the research involving Chinese university students, the main obstacles preventing students from utilizing counseling services consist of misunderstandings and skepticism regarding on-campus counseling, stigma associated with mental health issues, limited understanding of mental health, and challenges in obtaining mental health services (Ning et al., 2022). Additionally, cultural beliefs about discussing personal matters, hesitance to open up to strangers, and a tendency to seek assistance from friends or fellow international students instead of professional counselors also adds up to these barriers (Kambouropoulos, 2015).

In addition to stigma, perceived barriers further exacerbate students' reluctance to pursue counseling. A deficiency in awareness regarding the advantages of counseling, combined with insufficient social support and cultural influences, frequently dissuades students from reaching out for assistance (Aligawesa, 2024). These elements engender a challenging environment wherein students grapple with prioritizing their mental well-being. Additionally, research has suggested that a significant barrier to students seeking help and utilizing on-campus resources is the fear of stigma associated with mental illness (Turosak & Siwierka, 2019). Moreover, as highlighted in the research conducted at King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University, another obstacle preventing students from pursuing counseling services consist of the belief that their concerns are not significant, worry that others will not comprehend their issues, and challenges related to accessing care (Alaqeel et al., 2023).

Personal factors that cause students to hesitate in seeking counseling services include feelings of stigma, fear about disclosing personal information, concerns about being misunderstood by counselors, and doubt about developing a connection with a counselor. Moreover, those who typically hide their emotions often have negative perceptions of counseling, despite being more likely to seek assistance. Additionally, factors such as gender and race play a crucial role in shaping how students view and decide to use counseling services, influencing their willingness to request help (Flansburg, 2012).

According to Ramdass et al (2020), some religious beliefs may lead individuals to perceive spiritual guidance as more advantageous than engaging in psychological therapy. In addition, factors that contribute to students' reluctance to seek counseling services include societal pressures related to traditional

masculinity, which discourage emotional vulnerability and the act of seeking assistance. In the study of Yılmaz-Gözü, (2013), female students showed a greater inclination towards seeking help compared to male students, who were affected by the gender of the counsellor and the nature of the issue. In addition, the study of You et al (2022) states that female college students frequently experience feelings of pressure during the initial phases of counseling but indicate that they undergo positive transformations as they continue, emphasizing their need for empathy and support regarding their distinct experiences.

However, males demonstrated hesitation as a result of masculine beliefs, whereas females were less influenced by these elements in their experiences with seeking help (Yılmaz-Gözü, 2013). Moreover, negative feelings and concerns about jeopardizing one's masculine identity can hinder men from acknowledging mental health issues (Beebe, 2017). Further, the demands of a busy schedule may hinder students from accessing these services, along with a strong conviction in self-reliance, as many believe they are capable of handling their problems independently (Ramdass et al., 2020). Moreover, learners see social stigma and self-stigma as major obstacles to pursuing counseling, worrying about negative stereotypes and judgment from others. This internalized stigma causes them to regard themselves as weak or unstable, which discourages them from accessing mental health services (Johnson, 2016).

Mitigating these challenges necessitates proactive interventions, including initiatives aimed at reducing stigma and transforming negative perceptions associated with mental health. Awareness campaigns may play a pivotal role in educating students about the benefits of counseling, while fostering supportive environments can facilitate help-seeking behaviors. By executing these strategies, educational institutions can cultivate an inclusive atmosphere that empowers students to access the counseling services they require, thereby enhancing their overall mental well-being (Aligawesa, 2024).

Coping Mechanism of the Students in Seeking Counseling Services. Students who do not experience mental health issues demonstrated higher scores in positive coping strategies and lower scores in negative coping strategies compared to those who do have such issues. The use of positive coping mechanisms had a significant impact on their willingness to seek professional help, underscoring the role of coping strategies when pursuing counseling services (Zhou, 2010).

Students use various strategies to cope when accessing counseling services, which are shaped by their mental health conditions, gender, and socio-demographic elements. At Busitema University, a study was conducted by Kagoya et al (2025) on students dealing with mental health issues engage in behaviors such as alcohol and substance use, participating in social initiatives, and utilizing faith healing, in addition to seeking counseling services.

According to the study of Kim (2024), students who seek counseling services frequently note lower stress levels and enhanced well-being. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these services is constrained by elevated counselor-to-student ratios and cultural stigma, which may prevent students from accessing these vital mental health resources.

Colleges and universities can create specific coping strategies and mechanisms for student counselors to reduce stress among students. This method seeks to improve overall health, well-being, and academic performance, motivating students to seek assistance for mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression (Ashipala & Albanus, 2023). In addition, connection between mental health, coping strategies, and perceptions of counseling is notable. The work of Rosli and Harun (2023) mentioned that effective coping strategies are linked to a more favorable attitude toward seeking professional help. Women indicated increased feelings of anxiety and stress, a lower social self-concept and a higher tendency to pursue personal counselling relative to men. The social self-concept acted as a mediator in the connection

between gender and the desire to seek counselling among first-year undergraduate students (Miles & Naumann, 2023). Further, research shows that there are gender differences in the pursuit of counseling, with women typically holding more favorable views on professional psychological assistance than men. Additionally, cultural background influences these differences, as Caucasian Americans tend to exhibit greater disparities compared to Asian and Asian American populations (Nam et al., 2010).

Research indicates that college students frequently use problem-focused strategies to handle academic pressure. These strategies involve taking advantage of academic resources, like counseling services, which have been associated with lower stress levels and better well-being (Vetrivel et al., 2024). This underscores the significance of university support systems, as they are vital in fostering effective coping strategies. Besides utilizing institutional resources, students also implement personal techniques such as developing organized schedules, engaging in mindfulness practices, and establishing achievable goals, all of which aid in reducing stress and improving overall academic success and mental health (Islam & Rabbi, 2024). Moreover, the study of Aloka (2023), highlights the importance of adaptive coping strategies, including seeking assistance and counseling services, which enable students to tackle stressors effectively. These methods are associated with better health and well-being, unlike maladaptive strategies that can result in adverse consequences.

Adaptive coping strategies, which entail proactively addressing stressors, are closely associated with positive mental health results among students. These strategies encourage increased engagement, improved resilience, and heightened emotional well-being (Aloka, 2023; Sitinjak et al., 2024). Students displaying high-adaptive or adaptive coping patterns generally experience better mental health than those exhibiting high-maladaptive or low coping patterns (Moon & Lee, 2023).

Students facing academic pressure often utilize various adaptive coping methods to handle stress effectively. Among these, problem-focused coping techniques such as organizing time, making plans, and setting priorities are commonly employed to tackle academic difficulties directly, leading to lower stress levels and enhanced academic outcomes (Vetrivel et al., 2024; Islam & Rabbi, 2024).

Moreover, students frequently implement emotion-focused techniques, such as mindfulness, meditation, and relaxation practices, to regulate their emotional reactions to stress (Handayani et al., 2024; Islam & Rabbi, 2024). Additional beneficial strategies include engaging in consistent physical activity and embracing a healthy lifestyle, both of which positively impact students' mental health. Cognitive restructuring, which entails altering negative views of stressors, is also utilized to diminish the psychological effects of academic stress (Handayani et al., 2024).

These adaptive methods are linked to improved academic performance, increased involvement, and greater resilience, allowing students to reconnect more effectively with academic responsibilities. Overall, fostering the adoption of these adaptive coping strategies is vital for assisting students in managing academic pressures in a constructive manner and for enhancing their overall well-being (Aloka, 2023).

On the other hand, maladaptive coping strategies, typically marked by avoidance, catastrophizing, and rumination, correlate with greater disengagement, negative thinking patterns, and elevated stress levels, contributing to poorer mental health outcomes, especially among adolescent girls (Sitinjak et al., 2024). These mechanisms play a major role in escalating psychological distress among students by encouraging avoidance and emotional repression, which impede effective stress relief. Research reveals that students frequently turn to maladaptive actions like rumination, substance use, and social isolation when confronted with academic and personal challenges, resulting in increased levels of distress (Rose et al., 2024) (Aloka et al., 2024) (Dahanayake et al., 2024).

For example, students from sexual orientation minorities often engage in maladaptive coping tactics, which are linked to higher rates of suicidal thoughts and psychological distress (Rose et al., 2024). Furthermore, research demonstrates that maladaptive coping serves as a complete mediator in the connection between victimization experiences and psychological distress, highlighting its harmful effects on mental well-being (Sarraf, 2023).

Additionally, the research shows that the severity of symptoms is linked to the intent to seek mental health assistance. Increased severity of mental health problems might elevate the chances of seeking help, as students become aware of the gravity of their situations. Nevertheless, although mental health professionals are available in schools, there are considerable obstacles to seeking help, indicating that while the seriousness of the issues matters, other factors, like perceived behavioral control, also play a crucial role in students' willingness to reach out for assistance (Allouche et al., 2021). These insights underscore the necessity of encouraging positive coping strategies while discouraging harmful ones to improve students' mental health outcomes and boost the use of counseling services.

Overall, understanding these dynamics can aid in developing targeted interventions and counseling approaches that cater to the diverse needs of university students.

Shared Insights of Students in Seeking Counseling Services. The insights shared by students regarding their pursuit of counseling services encompass both willingness and reluctance in seeking assistance, views on the effectiveness of counseling, the significance of a positive therapeutic relationship, and how the counselor's cultural awareness influences their experiences (Najmi, 2013).

Nonetheless, in spite of this awareness, obstacles such as stigma, insufficient knowledge, and unfavorable perceptions regarding counseling services frequently impede students from seeking assistance (Kabumle & Abosede, 2024; Forman & Andrews, 2021). These perceived impediments exhibit a negative correlation with intentions to seek help, underscoring the necessity for strategic interventions aimed at mitigating these issues (Aligawesa, 2024). In addition, students provided feedback suggesting that misunderstandings and skepticism about on-campus counseling, the stigma associated with mental illness, limited knowledge of mental health, and challenges in accessing mental health services greatly impede their readiness to pursue counseling, emphasizing the necessity for enhanced mental health education (Ning et al., 2022).

Moreover, numerous students express experiencing considerable psychological distress, with challenges such as anxiety, depression, and stress adversely impacting their academic performance and social interactions (Huenergarde, 2018; Krumrei et al., 2010). While counseling services have been proven to enhance student retention and overall well-being, various obstacles hinder students from pursuing assistance. These obstacles include misunderstandings about counseling, insufficient time, and a lack of mental health knowledge (LeViness, 2024; Ning et al., 2022). Further, students typically learn about counseling services through marketing efforts, which underscores the necessity for more effective outreach initiatives and better accessibility (Huenergarde, 2018).

However, students identify numerous advantages associated with counseling, encompassing elevated academic performance, improved decision-making abilities, and more effective emotional regulation (Kabumle & Abosede, 2024). A considerable proportion (84.94%) demonstrate a pronounced intention to pursue mental health counseling, indicative of their recognition of these benefits (Aligawesa, 2024). In the study of (Forman & Andrews, 2021), students expressed that positive counseling experiences arise from the rapport and respect shown by the counselor, the encouragement of autonomy and resilience, and unexpected advantages even when feeling initially anxious. Nevertheless, a small number indicated a desire for more seasoned therapists to handle intricate needs.

Counseling services, especially those offered on campus, are regarded as essential for promoting student mental health and well-being, with favorable experiences often associated with the counselor's capacity to encourage clients' autonomy and resilience (Forman & Andrews, 2021). Students who engage in counseling sessions frequently report notable reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly when they attend six or more sessions (Huenergarde, 2018). Also, counseling has been found to improve academic performance, leading to higher GPAs and less academic distress, although retention rates do not appear to be influenced (Pizzo et al., 2024).

Additionally, students recognize the benefits of counseling especially group counseling, in addressing mental health concerns through various significant outcomes. Enhanced social support, greater self-awareness, and better emotional regulation contribute to more stable psychological conditions, enabling students to build resilience against academic and personal obstacles (Wang & Sheibani, 2024). The cultivation of positive thinking habits and an optimistic perspective further emphasizes the importance of counseling, positioning it as a valuable intervention for fostering mental well-being. Ongoing evaluations also contribute to fine-tuning the counseling framework to more effectively address student needs.

Moreover, counseling has proven to be beneficial in alleviating depressive symptoms and enhancing students' capacity to recognize, understand, and communicate their emotions. By promoting mentalized affectivity, an increased awareness and comprehension of one's emotional states, students not only find relief from symptoms but also undergo significant psychological transformation (Franchini et al., 2024). This emotional awareness enables more precise interventions, making counseling particularly pertinent to the unique mental health issues encountered by university students.

Students have diverse views on how effective counseling is for addressing mental health concerns. A number of students share positive experiences, particularly noting the encouraging relationship with trainee counselors, which promotes a sense of autonomy, empowerment, and resilience (Forman & Andrews, 2021). Some students are surprised by the benefits they have gained, feeling more in control during their sessions. Those who participated in six or more sessions reported significant improvements in their levels of depression, anxiety, and stress when compared to those who attended fewer (Huenergarde, 2018).

Social support is instrumental in motivating students to pursue counseling, with empirical evidence revealing a positive correlation between social support and the intention to utilize mental health services (Aligawesa, 2024). The existence of robust support networks can substantially augment students' readiness to engage with counseling services (Forman & Andrews, 2021).

Theoretical Lens

This study was anchored in Help-Seeking Behavior Theory of Arthur Kleinman (Rickwood et al., 2005) explains the psychological and social process individuals go through when deciding to seek professional support for mental health concerns. Help-seeking refers to the action of actively pursuing assistance from others. It involves reaching out to individuals to receive help regarding understanding, guidance, information, treatment, and overall support in reaction to a challenge or troubling experience. Help-seeking represents a coping mechanism that depends on social connections and interpersonal abilities.

Unlike many other social transactions, the objective in help-seeking is intensely personal. Help can be obtained from a variety of sources that differ in their level of formality. Informal assistance comes from personal relationships, like friends and family. Formal assistance is provided by professionals with recognized roles and proper training in giving help and guidance, such as mental health and health

professionals, educators, youth workers, and clergy members. However, there is a growing trend of seeking help from sources that do not require direct interaction with others, such as online platforms.

This theory outlines four key stages: Problem recognition, where an individual acknowledges emotional distress or mental health issues; Decision to seek help, influenced by personal attitudes, stigma, and perceived benefits of counseling; Service selection, where the individual evaluates available mental health services based on accessibility, affordability, and institutional support; and Service engagement, where the person either continues or discontinues counseling based on their experience and the effectiveness of the intervention. Therefore, the students' attitudes towards seeking counseling are dependent upon their prior experiences, whether positive or negative.

Figure 1 presents the fundamental components that influence students' perceptions regarding counseling services. At the center is the primary theme, "Students' Viewpoints on Counseling Services," which is shaped by four interrelated factors: experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and collective insights. Experiences pertain to the concrete interactions and scenarios that students have encountered while utilizing counseling services. Challenges underscore the obstacles or impediments that students encounter in their efforts to access or derive benefits from these services. Coping strategies articulate the methods by which students navigate personal or academic difficulties, either autonomously or with the assistance of counseling. Collective insights encapsulate the reflections, feedback, and knowledge acquired by students, which may contribute to the enhancement of counseling methodologies. The arrows depicted in the diagram signify the dynamic interplay of these components, illustrating how each factor contributes to and influences students' comprehensive views on counseling.

Research Questions

This study aimed to navigate the students' experiences in seeking counseling in Davao De Oro State College-Main Campus. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of participants in seeking counseling services?
2. What are the challenges experienced by the participants in seeking counseling services?
3. How do the participants cope with the challenges that they experience in seeking counseling services?
4. What insights can be gained from their experiences in seeking counseling services?

Scope and Delimitation of the study

The focus of this study was to explore the experiences, coping mechanisms, challenges and shared insights of the students of Davao de Oro State College – Main Campus, Compostela, Davao de Oro. The study was delimited 10 college students enrolled in the Academic Year 2024-2025.

To gain a clearer insight into students' genuine feelings regarding counseling, this research primarily utilized an In-Depth Interview (IDI) to collect information. This interview created a comfortable environment for students to express their thoughts and experiences openly and honestly. Through individual conversations, the study aimed to gather authentic narratives that showcase how students perceive and connect with counseling services.

Significance of the Study

The result of the study would be beneficial for the following:

Learners. The findings of the study would help develop programs that will cater to the students' needs towards counseling and reduce stigma in the context of counseling.

Teachers. The findings of the study would help educators better understand the mental health struggles and emotional pressures their students may be facing. These understandings could help the teachers manage classroom dynamics with sensitivity and help promote student well-being holistically.

Guidance Counselors. The findings of the study would be beneficial for the guidance counselor since this would serve as a basis for program development and services. The study would also help them in understanding the different perspectives of the college students towards counseling services.

School Administrators. The findings of the study could provide empirical data that would help when it comes to their decision-making about mental health services. This would help them in providing allocations for the trainings, resource allocation, and crafting policies especially in students' mental health and well-being.

Parents and Guardians. The findings of the study would help the parents and guardians in fostering a positive home environment that helps envision the programs of the college.

Future Researchers. The findings of this study would greatly contribute to a vast number of researchers who want to conduct a related study about counseling services in college, and the findings of the study would be used as background for their study.

\Methods

This chapter provides an overview of the various approaches employed in the study. This study encompasses various components, including the research design, research locale, role of the researcher, research participants, data collection procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness and credibility, and ethical consideration.

Research Design

In the pursuit of determining college students' viewpoints on counseling services, this study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach. This design represented a methodology that is useful in qualitative research as it facilitates an in-depth investigation of human experiences, highlighting the significance of grasping the meanings and interpretations that individuals attribute to their lived experiences (Štureková & Šaňáková, 2023). Additionally, this method focuses on comprehending each person's subjective experiences related to phenomena. It is based on philosophical principles from scholars such as Husserl and Heidegger, enabling researchers to investigate meanings, perceptions, and interpretations, which enhances understanding of participants lived experiences (Daruhadi, 2024).

Furthermore, by emphasizing the perspectives and lived experiences of 10 participants, the phenomenological design offered a profound comprehension of intricate human phenomena, thereby rendering it an invaluable approach within the realm of qualitative research.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Davao de Oro State College (DDOSC), a public academic institution established under Republic Act 10598 to serve Davao de Oro and nearby municipalities, with its Main Campus located at P-10 Poblacion, Compostela, Davao de Oro and four branches in New Bataan, Montevista, Laak Extension, and Maragusan. Offering programs such as BS Criminology, BS Agriculture, BS Secondary Education, BEEd, and BS Entrepreneurship, DDOSC serves as a key center for higher education in the province. Compostela, a first-class municipality in the Davao Region with a land area of 287.00 square kilometers (6.29% of the province), thrives on banana and rice farming, corn production, and small-scale mining due to its fertile soil and favorable climate. It is culturally diverse, hosting Lumad and migrant communities, and celebrates its annual fiesta with parades, traditional dances, and agricultural exhibits that enhance local identity and tourism. With its scenic environment, active local governance, and

balance of rural charm and progressive development, Compostela provides a conducive setting for academic Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative-phenomenological study, the researcher served as the primary instrument for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information. The researcher explored, investigated and comprehended the lived experiences of college students with regard to the counseling services available at Davao de Oro State College–Main Campus. Considering the qualitative-phenomenological focus of the study, the researcher took on multiple critical roles throughout the research process.

According to Fink (2020), these roles encompass thematizing, designing, conducting interviews, transcribing data, analyzing results, verifying findings, and reporting the conclusions. Each phase necessitated the researcher's active involvement and reflexivity to ensure that the authenticity and depth of the participants' experiences are accurately captured and meaningfully interpreted.

In this initial phase, thematizing, the researcher outlined what would be examined, its significance, and the approach to be taken. This encompassed developing research questions and identifying essential themes that were pertinent to the study. By thematizing the information, the researcher categorized phrases, responses, or observations into central ideas or classifications.

In designing, the researcher carefully designed the methodology by choosing suitable participants. Also, data collection techniques such as In-Depth interviews were utilized in data gathering, and ethical guidelines was strictly followed.

Acting as the primary data collector, the researcher conducted an In-Depth Interview with the participants using an interview guide, which was validated before use. This required sensitivity, impartiality, and attentiveness to foster genuine sharing of experiences. Ethical considerations like informed consent and voluntary participation were strictly adhered to.

After the interviews, the researcher transcribed the spoken data into written form, making sure that the responses were accurately and completely documented. This stage was vital for maintaining the integrity and detail of the participants' narratives.

The transcribed data was examined through coding and categorization. Emerging themes, patterns, and insights that answered the study questions was identified by the researcher. This process required careful interpretation to avoid any.

At this point, the investigator dedicated time to thoroughly review the information collected from the interviews to ensure that the participants' perspectives were depicted accurately. The researcher considered the explicit content of what was expressed and the underlying significances of the participants' statements. Finally, the researcher compiled and presented the findings in a detailed report. Participants' identities were coded to protect anonymity, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. The results served as the foundation for suggesting informed programs, policies, or recommendations that tackled the issues revealed during the research.

Research Participants

This study focused on the selected students of Davao de Oro State College – Main Campus, who were the most suited participants for achieving the goal of this study. Students enrolled during the A.Y. 2024-2025 who have already experienced counseling services and those who were hesitant to seek the said services were the research participants.

The qualitative method in this study focused on purposive sampling, which is not based on probability sampling. Purposive sampling plays a crucial role in qualitative research, particularly within

phenomenological methods, as it emphasizes the selection of individuals who can offer valuable and pertinent insights connected to the research questions, thereby making sure that the sample is in line with the specific goals and context of the study (Bell et al., 2022).

Individuals who took part in the study received orientation regarding the research and completed a consent form indicating their voluntary participation in the study. Participants were requested to engage in an In-Depth Interview (IDI) as a method for gathering data and their participation was delimited to these criteria: first, they had to be entrepreneurship student of DDOSC – Main Campus who were enrolled in A.Y. 2024-2025; second, they had to have experienced counseling services and have been reluctant to seek the services; and third, they had to be willing to share their experiences.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher followed a systematic and ethical approach to ensure the success of this research, which entailed securing the necessary approvals, briefing participants, conducting a preliminary survey, selecting qualified participants, administering data collection tools, and analyzing the gathered information.

The research endeavor was initially subjected to a comprehensive ethical assessment conducted by the Ethics Review Committee (ERC) of the Graduate School. After acquiring the ethics certificate, the researcher secured an official endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School. The instrument was validated by experts. Results of the validation were used to finalize the interview guide based on the comments of the panel of experts.

Thereafter, a formal letter of request was given to the President of Davao de Oro State College, soliciting authorization to engage in the research within the confines of the institution. After which, the researcher proceeded to the data collection for a four-week period.

A preliminary survey was conducted with a larger group of students enrolled for the Academic Year 2024–2025. This survey aimed to identify students who have relevant experiences with the college's counseling services. The findings from this survey were utilized to purposefully select participants for the In-Depth Interview (IDI).

The researcher conducted an In-Depth Interview (IDI) with the chosen participants, who received an orientation regarding the aims, methods, and importance of the research. They were requested to sign an informed consent form that details their voluntary participation, the confidentiality of their answers, and their entitlement to exit the study at any time without repercussions. This was done via face-to-face or with the use of online platforms.

The interviews took place in a quiet, private location that was mutually agreed upon by the researcher and the participant. Each session lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded (with the consent of the participant) to ensure accuracy.

Once the interviews of the participants were complete, their responses were gathered and transcribed. To uphold confidentiality, the researcher ensured that all data was accurately documented and stored safely. Then, the collected information was arranged and compiled for analysis.

Data Analysis

This research aimed to collect students' views on the counseling services. The researchers employed thematic analysis to evaluate the qualitative data that was gathered in the study.

Thematic analysis is a flexible and effective method for evaluating qualitative data. It can be utilized in various paradigmatic or epistemological approaches. This method is appropriate for examining experiences, ideas, or actions within the data. Themes are patterns (or meanings) intentionally developed

from data collection that respond to a research question. The development of themes can occur either deductively or inductively (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

The analysis was conducted using the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), as it is the most widely utilized technique for thematic analysis in qualitative research. The six-step method outlined in the most generally used framework for theme analysis was as follows: Step 1: the researcher begun by familiarizing herself with the interview data; Step 2: initial codes were generated; Step 3: patterns across the data was examined to search for emerging themes; Step 4: the identified themes were reviewed and refined; Step 5: each theme was clearly named and defined, and finally, Step 6: a comprehensive report was produced to present the findings in relation to the students' experiences and perspectives on counseling services.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The trustworthiness of data collection, according to (Ahmed, 2023), is crucial for building the credibility and reliability of qualitative results. This encompasses aspects like credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthy qualitative research findings are also essential for guiding policy decisions and enhancing service delivery across different sectors.

In credibility, to ensure that the findings of this study truly mirror the real experiences of the participants, the researcher thoroughly chose students who had either sought or were seeking counseling services. These students were selected based on the results of a preliminary survey, which helped the researcher in identifying the participants for the study. The researcher conducted an In-Depth Interview (IDI) as a tool for collecting data. However, before the conduct of an in-depth interview, the participants were provided with a consent letter outlining their rights as participants and assuring the confidentiality of their responses. Participants' responses during the interview served as the basis for the study's conclusion, which presented reliable information. After the interview, the researcher accurately transcribed and interpreted their responses, ensuring that the information they provided was analyzed in a methodical and impartial way. Transferability is the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to other situations or settings. This suggests that the results of the research are relevant to comparable situations.

Hence, the researcher aimed to ensure that the findings of this study would be beneficial to a broader population. In addition to the DDOSC Main Campus, this research was also considered highly valuable to other DDOSC branches and to educational institutions within the Davao Region that lacked qualitative research regarding college students' perspectives on counseling services.

From a broader standpoint, it served as an additional resource for the schools' counseling unit to develop programs that motivated students to feel comfortable seeking counseling services.

In dependability, the researcher ensured that all information was carefully coded to guarantee dependability. This was achieved with the used of audio and recording devices. For the benefit of those who reviewed this research, the researcher translated the Bisaya or Filipino responses of the participants into English. The researcher made sure that the proper procedures for data collection were adhered to.

Hence, the study on the viewpoints of the college students in seeking counseling services gave a wider perspective of the replicability and dependability of this study and its results.

Confirmability pertains to the extent of neutrality in the findings, highlighting how much the results reflect the respondents' views and experiences instead of the researchers' biases, motivations, or interests, thereby ensuring objectivity in the research process (Kyngäs et al., 2020).

To ensure objectivity, the researcher reported all the steps that was taken and ensured that the findings of this study truly reflected the viewpoints of the participants towards the school's counseling services and

not from the bias of the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

The following ethical considerations were diligently observed by the researcher throughout the conduct of this study. These are based on the ethical standards of the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB) and adhered to the principles of integrity, respect, and protection of research participants. The study prioritized participants' rights and well-being, ensuring that all procedures were implemented with professionalism and ethical responsibility.

Social Value. This study aimed to provide valuable insights into college students' lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and shared reflections regarding counseling services at Davao de Oro State College. At the institutional level, findings will assist the Guidance and Counseling Unit, faculty, and administration in crafting student-centered programs that promote mental health awareness and well-being. At a broader level, the results may contribute to policy discussions and program development across other higher education institutions in Davao Region and beyond. The research supported the national call for improved mental health services in schools, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in ensuring access to quality mental health care and inclusive education.

Informed Consent. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the conduct of interviews. Each participant was oriented on the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Participation was entirely voluntary, and students were assured of their right to refuse or withdraw at any stage without any consequences. An Informed Consent Form (ICF) was provided and signed, indicating their willingness to participate. Students were encouraged to ask questions for clarification and were informed that they can take breaks or discontinue the interview if they feel uncomfortable at any point.

Risk, Benefits, and Safety. Since the study involves in-depth interviews on sensitive personal experiences, potential risks might include emotional discomfort or psychological distress. To address this, interviews were conducted in a private, safe, and non-judgmental environment through a secure online platform. Counseling support was made available if any participant shows signs of distress during or after the interview. Participants were not pressured to answer any question they find too personal. The benefits include contributing to the improvement of mental health services in DDOSC and raising awareness about students' perspectives on counseling, which may help others seek support more confidently in the future.

Privacy and Confidentiality of Information. All data collected were treated with the highest degree of confidentiality. The identities of participants remained anonymous through the use of code names during transcription and analysis. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored in a password-protected device and will be deleted after the completion of the study. The handling of information strictly followed the Data Privacy Act of 2012, ensuring the ethical use of participants' personal and emotional disclosures.

Justice. The selection of participants was based on clear inclusion criteria: they had to be enrolled Entrepreneurship students at DDOSC – Main Campus in the A.Y. 2024-2025 and had actual experience with the college's counseling services. The sampling process ensured that all qualified students have equal opportunity to participate, and the voluntary nature of participation was strictly respected. Their contribution was acknowledged in the final report (without revealing identities), and the value of their shared stories was upheld throughout the research process.

Transparency. The researcher will declare any potential conflict of interest; however, none are anticipated, as the research is purely academic. Should there be opportunities to present the findings in forums or publications, full transparency will be observed regarding the methodology and data interpretation.

Participants will also be informed of any future use of the data for academic dissemination, and findings will be shared with stakeholders in ways that protect participant confidentiality.

Qualification of the Researcher. The researcher is currently a graduate student at Assumption College of Nabunturan, taking up a Master of Arts in Education major in Guidance and Counseling. With training in qualitative research, counseling principles, and adherence to ethical guidelines, the researcher is equipped to handle sensitive discussions with care and professionalism. Past academic experience, attendance in research seminars, and guidance from faculty mentors also support the integrity of the research process.

Adequacy of Facilities. Interviews were conducted in a safe and quiet environment using secured online platforms. All equipment, including recording devices, were used with consent and stored responsibly to ensure data protection.

Community Involvement. The study acknowledged the broader DDOSC community's role in shaping a supportive mental health environment. The researcher ensured that the research tools and processes are respectful of the local culture, language, and values of Compostela, Davao de Oro. Feedback may be shared with the college's guidance office and administration, so they can incorporate the findings into programs that reflect the actual needs and voices of students.

FINDINGS

Presented in this chapter are the findings to the research questions that explored the experiences of the college students in seeking counseling services in terms of the challenges that they encountered, coping mechanism and shared insights that emerged from the information gathered through the In-depth interview.

The responses were subjected to content analysis where the themes across all responses were drawn. The presentation of the study's findings followed the chronology of the main questions, which was the purpose of the study. To gather information that would address the main research questions and the topic under the inquiry, specific questions were formulated. Also, to cover the identities of the research respondents, codes had been used.

What are the lived experiences of participants in seeking counseling services?

This section presents the results of the 1st major research question, "What are the lived experiences of participants in seeking counseling services?" Four specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather responses on the experiences of the research respondents in seeking counseling services.

Personal Experience About Seeking Help from the School Counselor

The themes from this section were drawn from the specific research question 1.1 "How would you describe your personal experience about seeking help from the school counselor? The responses generated eight themes: felt hesitant and nervous, stigmatized perception, fear of judgement, lack of awareness about counseling services, emotional relief, supportive and approachable counselors, development of self-direction, and promotes mental health.

Felt Hesitant and Nervous. Numerous students are reluctant to pursue counseling as they may feel anxious, uncertain if their issues are significant enough, or fear being judged. Some are concerned about the opinions of others especially their family while others find it difficult to share personal thoughts with someone unfamiliar. There is also a worry about consuming the counselor's time unnecessarily. These

responses highlight the need for a more friendly, inviting, and compassionate environment in the guidance office, where students can feel secure and supported.

Respondent 6 pointed out that:

Para sa akong ma'am is, if ever na muadto ko sa guidance office for the counselling ma'am. Kung without any reason ma'am kay kanang maka feel kog nervous gud ma'am at that moment so para sa akong kay makulbaan ko unya akong dughan kay mag buto-buto. Nganung naa ko diraa? Nganung muadto man kog guidance office? Unsa diay purpose in ana?

(For me, ma'am, if ever I go to the guidance office for counseling, even without any specific reason, I would feel nervous at that moment. I would feel anxious, and my chest would be pounding. I would start to wonder, why am I here? Why am I going to the guidance office? What is the purpose of this?)

Similarly, Respondent 7 voiced out his hesitation saying that:

Actually, hesitant ko muadto kay dili man gud ko sure sa akong mga concern kung major ba jud kaayu na, basin mag take rana sya ug time tapos dili pajud kaayu na sya importante or relevant sa counseling bantog hesitant jud ko muadto ug mangayog tabang sa guidance office or sa counseling jud ma'am. Feeling nako akong concern is not just severe or not that relevant or need for counseling. Unya naa jud sa akong mind nga mag overthink lagi mag in-ana. Basin lagi mag sayang-sayang rag oras ang kanang tig counsel sa akong human dili ra diay kaayu importante akong concern or mga problema.

(Actually, I am hesitant to go because I am not really sure if my concerns are serious enough. I feel like it might just take up time and may not really be that important or relevant for counseling, so that is why I am hesitant to go and ask for help from the guidance office or through counseling. I feel like my concern is not that severe or relevant, or something that truly needs counseling and I keep overthinking about it. I worry that I might just waste the counselor's time if my problems turn out to be not that important after all.

In addition, Participant 7 continued the sharing by expressing that:

Naay various na mga influences nganung hesitant ko ma'am. For example, akong family mo ingon sila nganung nagpa counsel man ka, unya nganung niadto man pud kag counsel sa inyung skwelahan? Nganu naa diay kay problema? Nganu dili man nimu isulti sa akong? Nganung gi una paman nimu sa akong? One of the considerations jud nako na sya ma'am kay basin mo ana akong family na gi una nimu ug sulti imung problema sa skwelahan

without knowing na naa mi diria na pwedi man nimu isulti sa amoa. That is why hesitant ko maam.

(There are various reasons why I feel hesitant, ma'am. For example, my family might say why did you go for counseling? Why did you seek help from your school's counselor? Do you have a problem? Why you did not tell us first? Why did you tell the school before telling us? That is really one of my main considerations, ma'am that my family might think I prioritized telling my problems to the school instead of telling them first, even though they are just here and I could have told them. That is why I feel hesitant.)

Additionally, Respondent 9 stressed out that:

Also, ma shy pud mi mag share sa among personal problems and nag depende pud na sya like sa akong na dili naga share ug problem sa dili ko comfortable sa akong ka istorya. Gusto man gud nako na kanang comfortable gani ko na ang akong ka istorya na counselor kay dili bitaw sya strikta manulti ug kanang mura kag open arms na istoryahon. Para dili pud ka ma stress or ma kuan like e judge ko ani after nako ma ingon akong mga problems like that. Wala pud mi kabalo kung kinsa ang ano kanang sa guidance.

(Also, we are shy to share our personal problems and it also depends. Like for me, I do not really open up about my problems if I am not comfortable with the person I am talking to. I want to feel comfortable, like the counselor should talk in a way that is not too strict or harsh, someone who feels approachable and open. That way, I would not feel stressed or worried that I will be judged after I share my problems. We also do not really know who exactly is in the guidance office.)

This was supported by Respondent 10, who contended that:

Aside man gud sa busy pud ko kay murag maulaw man gud ko mag adto didtua kay mostly man gud na if mag adto sa guidance kay lahi ang perception sa ubang tao if ever na mag adto ka didtua. Actually, naa najud ko sa may dome kay murag naajud or wala ko kabalo if modayon ba ko. Ang akong man jud gud ato kay muadto ko pero wala nalang jud ko nidayon kay like nakulbaan ko ato na time. Ang akong man pud gud maam kay murag nag self-diagnose rako ba. Gusto jud unta nako na naa jud professional na mo ingon jud sa akong nga ing-ana ko. Kay kanang as kuan lang jud ba kay naga self-diagnose lang ko so dili ko gusto na dili ingun ana ang paagi. Mao to gusto ko mag seek ug help so, nakulbaan ko or naulaw ko.

(Aside from being busy, I also felt shy to go there because most of the time, people have a different perception when someone goes to the guidance office. Actually, I was already near the dome. I was already there but, I was not sure if I would go through with it. I really planned to go, but in the end, I did not push through because I got nervous at that moment.

What I really wanted was to go because I felt like I had been self-diagnosing myself. I really wanted a professional to confirm and tell me what I was going through, because I did not want to just rely on my own assumptions. That is why I wanted to seek help but I got nervous and felt shy.)

Stigmatized Perception. This theme constituted the negative perceptions of the students on counseling. Respondent 2 conveyed that the word guidance office associates with punishment or serious problems. He was also worried that he might get negative feedback from other students if he seeks counseling service. He stated that:

Pag maka dungog kog guidance office maam is murag syag kanang maka trigger sa akong huna-huna nga, ang muadto raman gd dapat diha kay kung naa kay sala or naa kay ipa guidance, ana maam. Para sa akoo maam na hesitant ko kay kay maka feel kog worry bitaw maam. Kay for example kung mag alinlangan ko muadto maam kay maka feel kog hesitant kay maka worry man gd ka maam kay basin nay negative feedback na makuan sa akoo maam. Kay for example naa koy kuan, kanang problem dayun kay for example maam gi bully, kanang muduol ko, huna-hunaon sa jud nako usa ko moudol, with that kay kung kinsa to imung g kuanan kay mag huna huna sa ko daan.

(When I hear guidance office, it kind of triggers a thought in my mind that only those who did something wrong or those who need to be corrected are supposed to go there. For me, I feel hesitant because I get worried. For example, when I am unsure about going, I feel hesitant because there is that worry that I might receive negative feedback. Like for example, if I have a problem, say I am being bullied, before I go and seek help, I really think hard about it first because I also worry about the person I am reporting. I consider that before deciding to approach someone.)

Meanwhile, Respondent 8 emphasized his trust issue on the counselor, the lack of awareness, and the gender stereotyping about the counseling services. Social norms also played a big role. He conveyed that:

Main reason nganung hesitant ko ug isa pa, base sa akong nadak an kay dili man gud na sya uso gud ang counseling or kanang mangayog advice sa counselor. Kung sa lalaki jud imung pangutan-on parehas sa amoa ba kay dili man sya ingun na necessary gud nga magpa counseling pero naay time na gusto ko muadto. Pero naa koy duha ka reason, kadto kay wala ko kabalo na naa diay counseling department sa school. Unya isa pa naa pud koy trust

issue pud kay basin mag leak unya pa lain pud baya pamiwon na lalaki ka unya magpa counseling ka. Kay majority rapud baya sa magpa counseling kay mga babae ra unya kanang lakin-on. Kay kasagaran rapud bay na gina portray namo maam kay dili rajud baya kaayu mi affected.

(The main reason why I am hesitant is because, based on how I was raised because counseling or seeking advice from a counselor was not really something we practiced. If you ask men like us, we usually do not see counseling as something necessary but, there are times I do want to go. I have two reasons for my hesitation: first, I was unaware that the school had a counseling department. Second, I also have trust issues. I worry that what I share might leak out, especially because I am a man and they will know that I seek counseling services. Because most of the time, it is girls who go to counseling and those who are boyish. Most of us men usually act like we are not really affected by problems.)

Fear of Judgement. This emerging theme is one of the primary reasons why students are hesitant to seek counseling services. They are afraid that their classmates, friends, neighbors, and even family will misunderstand and label them or talk about them.

Respondent 6 pointed out:

Kay mahadlok ko ma judge sa mga classmates maam ba. Basin maka ingun sila na hala nisulod syag guidance? Naa syay gi buhat? ingun ana maam mag overthink sila. Kay para sa akoo man gud maam ang guidance kay kung nay away-away kay ipa guidance man gud maam. So maka kuan sya maam ba basin naay e judge akong mga classmates sa akoo. nge! Basin ingun ana ang hinungdan, gipa guidance.

(I am afraid of being judged by my classmates, ma'am. They might say things like; he went to the guidance office? Did he do something wrong? Things like that. They might overthink the situation. For me, ma'am, going to the guidance office usually means there was a fight or some trouble. I am concerned that I may be judged by my classmates. Maybe that is the reason he got sent to guidance!)

This was supported by Respondent 7 who said that:

Another consideration pud maam is ma issue ka like mahimo kang talk of the town ka sa imung classmates or even sa imung mga friends or even sa mga silingan nimu na judgemental kaayu. Isa jud na sa gikahadlok nako kay tungod nagpa counsel ka. Mo ana sila kini sya naa ni syay something wrong sa iyaha maong ma hesitant ko. Ma hesitant pud ko magpa counsel

pud ko kay basin maguol akong mama or akong family kung unsa jud na ka big akong gi dala-dala na dili ko mo ingon sa ilaha.

(Another consideration is being the focus of rumors like being the talk of the town of my classmates, or even my friends and even neighbors who are so judgmental. That is something I really worry about because I went for counseling, people might start saying, there must be something wrong with that person. That is why I am hesitant. I am also hesitant to go counseling because my mother or my family might think that I am dealing with really big problems since I have not told them anything.)

Respondent 8 also had his view about his fear of being judge. He shared that:

Kay kung lalaki ka murag dili nimu need nimu magpa counseling. Kay naa man gud tay gina tawag na fear of judgement. If lalaki ka dili nimu gusto e label imung kaugalingon. Kay murag kung magpa counsel ka kay mas mo lalapa ang sitwasyon.

(If you are a man, you are not supposed to need counseling because we have this thing we call the fear of judgment. If you are a man, you do not want to label yourself. It is like going to counseling might just make the situation worse.)

Lack of Awareness about Counseling Services. The student acknowledges the desire to seek guidance during the time of stress or emotional struggle but expressed difficulty accessing counseling services.

Respondent 9 conveyed that:

Para nako kay medyo lisod sya kay bisan bitaw naa man jud ginapahitabo na orientation sa school. Naa man jud time na kanang ma pressure ka or gusto nimu mag seek ug guidance or advice coming from the counselors or those professionals na kabalo mo guide sa imuha if you are depressed or stressed or kana bitaw na pin down naka sa imung problema. Para sa akoo, as a college student is maglisod pud ko anang mag ask bitaw ka ug guidance from the counselors. Una sa tanan kay wala pud mi kabalo ug asa bitaw ilang office para makig meet sa ilaha like that kay ang amo raman nahibal-an maam kay naa counseling services sa school pero wala mi kabalo ug asa dapita.

(For me, it is kind of difficult because even though there is an orientation in school, there are still times when you feel pressured or when you want to seek guidance or advice from counselors or professionals who know how to help you when you are feeling depressed, stressed, or overwhelmed by your problems. As a college student, I also find it hard to ask for guidance from the counselors. First of all, we do not even know where their office is so we

can meet them. What we only know, ma'am, is that there are counseling services in school, but we do not know exactly where they are located.)

Despite the negative experiences of the students about seeking counseling services as mentioned above, there are also more positive experiences that they shared.

Emotional Relief. The students emphasized the positive impact of visiting the guidance office and seeking help from the school counselor. Respondent 2 felt emotionally relieved and supported. He stated that:

Para sa akong mam kay dako jud kayo syag tabang mam kay napagawas nako tanan nakong mga kasakit because they are willing to listen. Nigaan akong kuan mam pakiramdam. Dako jud kayo syag impact mam na nabuhat sa akong because mao to napagawas nako tanan Nakong gibati kay willing man pud sila maminaw and then nagahatag pud sila og advise og unsaon nako pag handle those problems. So dako jud kayo syag impact mam.

(It was really a big help for me, ma'am because I was able to let out all the pain I was carrying since they were willing to listen. I felt relieved. It really had a big impact on me because I was able to express everything I felt, and they were truly willing to listen and also gave me advice on how to handle those problems. So, it really had a huge impact on me.)

This was supported by Respondent 3 who contended that:

So first, nag visit ko sa guidance actually group me ato na nag visit mam kay I think it was my first time sa college kay sabay-sabay me nabagsak sa among previous na course which is ang Education and then we are required to visit sa guidance office para hatagan meg insights ni sir didtoa sa amoang pag shift. So katong pag hatag ni sir og insights niya is nakatabang ra pud sya sa amoa para ma lessen among worry bitaw maam kay katong pagka bagsak namo is kanang murag tanan gyud me ba nasakitan bitaw tas na down na and feeling namo is nawad'an nag purpose among pag skwela.

(So first, I visited the guidance office. We went there as a group because I think it was our first time in college. We all failed our previous course, which was Education, and we were required to visit the guidance office so that the counselor there could give us insights regarding our decision to shift courses. The insights that sir gave us were really helpful because they somehow lessened our worries, ma'am. When we failed, all of us were really hurt and felt down, and it felt like we had lost our sense of purpose in continuing our studies.)

Supportive and Approachable Counselors. The student experienced strong and consistent support from the counseling office, from the initial assessment to his ongoing mental health journey. Respondent 4 shared his positive experience and said that:

Una kay gi assess ko nila kung unsay nahitabo ana then after nila na assess ko kay full support jud kaayo sila mam. Sila pay nangita og sakyanan padulong kay Doc then after ato na experience mam didto, while interviewing kay Doc naa gihapon ang full support ni counselor. Until sa pag cope up nako sa akoang mental health, naa gihapon si counseling mam na naga assist sa akoo. Kato na approach mam kay ma feel pud nako na grabi kayo ang full support sa counseling office sa atong school kay total hands on jud sila maam regarding sa akong mental health. Mao to sya mam grabi kayo akong experience with the counseling office mam like grabi gyud ilang support po.

(First, they assessed me to understand what had happened, and after that, they gave me their full support, ma'am. They were even the ones who looked for a vehicle to take me to the doctor. While I was being interviewed by the doctor, the counselor was still there, supporting me fully. Even as I was trying to cope with my mental health, the counseling office continued to assist me. That kind of approach, ma'am, really made me feel the strong support from our school's counseling office. They were truly hands-on when it came to my mental health. That is why, I had a really impactful experience with the counseling office because they gave their full support.

Development of Self-Direction. The counseling experience of the students helped them to develop self-direction. They became motivated to continue their studies and had improved decision-making. Respondent 3 conveyed that:

So katong iyahang gihatag na insights na ana sya pwede pa namo ipadayon among gusto murag nilahi lang gyud ang direction. So, despite sa among road naagian, kung unsa jud among tumong na himuog goal is makuha ra gyapon namo. So didtoa murag na motivate me na mopadayon and mao to murag na okay ra pud me.

(So, with the insights that he gave us, he told us that we could still continue pursuing what we wanted. It is just that the direction just changed a bit. So, despite what we went through, whatever goal we originally had, we could still achieve it. Because of that, we felt motivated to keep going, and that helped us feel okay again.)

Similarly, Respondent 5 shared that:

Based sa akong na experience, naapektuhan ko through improving sakong decision making kay that time man gud sakong pag voluntary shift

indecisive kayko. But tungod sa counseling kay naka decision dayon ko, if akoo bang ipadayon or dili. Then akoo jud syang gipadayon na mo shift nalang kay tungod sa counseling daghan kaayo kog learnings ug realization na nakuha, which is dako kaayo ug tabang sa akoo karon.

(Based on my experience, I was affected in a positive way, especially in improving my decision-making because at that time, when I voluntarily shifted courses, I was very indecisive. But because of counseling, I was able to decide right away whether I should continue or not. Then, I chose to continue shifting to other course because through counseling, I gained a lot of learnings and realizations, which are a big help to me now.)

Promotes Mental Health. Students shared positive experiences with the counseling services emphasizing the counselor's approachability and genuine care. Respondent 1 appreciated the mental health awareness and ease of access of the counselor. He contended that:

Ang impact sa akoo ato maam kay murag gina about man to sa awareness sa mental health maam ba. Mao to. Nindot man didtoa maam kay murag tabangan man ka nila maam unsay mga problem nemo, in'ana gud mam. Okay mam sya maam kanang dali ra sila maduolan mam ba.

(The impact it had on me was that it was about raising awareness on mental health. It was nice because they really try to help you with whatever problems you are going through. It is good because they are very approachable.)

In like manner, Respondent 4 affirmed:

Well, actually at first mam, katong during sa pag avail gyud nako sa ilang counseling mam kanang overwhelming kayo sya mam ba kay gina accommodate gyud ka nila regarding sa unsa imong unsay nasinati. Kay during man gud atong time na nag undergo ko mam with my mental health kay sila jud ang una asikaso sa akoo regarding sa unsaon nako pag cope up specially kato ganing nag sagunson na jud akong pressure sa mental health.

(Well, actually at first, during the time that I availed the counseling service, it felt really overwhelming because they really accommodate you regarding on what you are going through. During the time that I was struggling with my mental health, they were really the first ones to attend to me on how to cope up specially when the pressure on my mental health was piling up.)

Initial Perception of Counseling

The themes in the section were coming from the specific research question 1.2 "What was your initial perception of counseling before considering it?" under the 1st major research question "What are the lived

experiences of participants in seeking counseling services?” The responses generated seven themes: counseling as form of disciplinary action, stigmatized perception, counseling as ineffective, unfamiliar to counseling, counseling as helpful and safe, counseling as preventative action, and counseling as last resort for mental breakdown.

Counseling As Form of Disciplinary Action. The students initially have negative perceptions of the guidance office and counseling as they often associate it with punishment and discipline due to what they hear from others students and even parents. Respondent 1 shared that he felt nervous visiting guidance office because he has his negative views on the latter caused by what he heard. He stated that:

Kuan sya mam murag negative bitaw sya mam. Katong last time man gud maam katong gipaadto kog office mam ba murag nakulbaan ko mam ba, kay syempre gipatawag gud ko ato mam. First time nako to mam. Nakulbaan ko ato mam kay syempre pag moingon man gud kag office mam nya pa guidance kuan sya negative kayo sya nga kuan ba kay tungod bitaw atong gina ingon sakong palibot na pag muadto kag guidance murag kag naay mali na nabuhat, in-ana ba. Kanang sa mga classmate pud mam, mga parents kanang naa silay ginapabaon sa ilang mga anak na ayaw pagbinadlong kay basin mka adto kag guidance. Mao ng pangit akong panglantaw sa guidance.

(It felt negative. That last time I was called to the office, I felt really nervous because I was asked to go there. That was my first time. I was nervous at that time because when people say you are going to the office or to the guidance, it has a negative connotation. I had these negative views because of what people in my surroundings are saying that if you go to the guidance office, it is like you did something wrong. Even some classmates and parents would tell their children to not misbehave or they will end up in the guidance office. That is why I used to have a negative impression of guidance.)

Respondent 3 added that:

So, wayback sa high school pa lang mam pag moingon sila og counseling, most likely ang gina ingon sa ubang students is mahadlok sila kay basin daw kasab-an basin kanang murag naay buhaton na daotan na murag maka trauma sa mga students ba pero naa pud koy some na nadungog na gikan mismo didtoa is nakatabang sa ilaha nga murag bag'ohon ilahang behavior kay murag gihatagan silag advises sa professional na tao. Like naa man guy mga bugoy na students mam ba and then after pag kuan na og counseling murag makita na nemo na naay mga changes bitaw sa ilahang behavior. Medyo mas ni better na sila.

(So, way back in high school, whenever they say counseling, most students would say that they were scared because they might get scolded or

something bad would happen, something that could even be traumatic for students. But I also heard from some who actually went through counseling that it helped them change their behavior because they were given advice by a professional. Like for example, there were some students who used to be troublemakers but after undergoing counseling, you could really see changes in their behavior. Somehow, they become better.)

This was supported by Respondent 9 who pointed out that:

Since highschool kay magkuan akong classmates sa guidance, hala gipatawag si kuan sa guidance. So among pagtuo kay ang guidance kay strict or kana bitaw naay nahitabo sa imuha na murag mo ana bitaw na nganung imu man tong gihimo na murag something na mahadlok ka moduol sa ilaha. Murag since highschool ang perception nako sa guidance kay negative. Pag college na na change kay naa may orientation and didtu pami na dili diay kuan ang guidance.

(Since high school, my classmates would say things like; Oh no! he/she was called to the guidance office. So, we used to think that the guidance office was strict or that something happened and they would say like, why did you do that?. Something that would make you scared to approach them. So ever since high school, my perception of the guidance was negative. It was during college that my perception has changed because there was an orientation and that is when I realized that guidance is not like that.)

Stigmatized Perception. The students expressed different hesitations about seeking counseling because of fear of judgment, vulnerability, and lack of trust to the counselor. Respondent 5 revealed that he expected it to be difficult and he can't share his side and that he's afraid of being judged. He said that:

Actually, dati nag expect ko na lisod sya or I mean basin dili nako kaya na mo sulti sakong side kung unsa akoang reason sa pag balhin kay tungod lagi indecisive ko. Aside pud ana kay mahadlok ko kay basin ma judge ko.

(Actually, before, I expected it to be difficult or I thought maybe I would not be able to express my side or explain my reason for shifting courses because I was really indecisive. Aside from that, I was also afraid that I might be judged.)

Similarly, Respondent 7 also expressed his fear of being judged or fear of having their private experienced exposed. He shared that:

One of the reason pud nganung dili ko magpa counsel kay, I'm one of the people na fragile and vulnerable. Naa man gud mga experiences na dili nako gusto e share sa uban nga sa akong lang gyud kaugalingon. Naa pud koy perspective na kanang moduol ko sa ilaha unya mogawas nako akong mga secrets kay ma overshare unya lisod na mabawi. Kay murag dili safe akong information dibale dili full akong trust sa office. kay wala jud pud

baya ko kaila personally kung kinsa ang mga counsel nimu. Kay based sa katong orientation namo kay kung mag seek daw ug counseling kay didtu radaw adto sa guidance unya pag human naka limot ko sa pangalan.

(One of the reasons why I do not go for counseling is because I am one of the people who is fragile and vulnerable. There are experiences that I do not want to share to other people and I just keep it to myself. I also have this perspective that if I open up to them, I might end up oversharing my secrets and I do not fully trust the office once that happens because I think the information that I share is not safe. I also do not personally know who the counselor is because base on our orientation, they said that if we want to seek counseling, we just go to the guidance office but after that, I even forgot the name.)

Respondent 10 acknowledged a prevalent stigma around counseling but also recognized its positive impact more. He disclosed that:

Although naa ko negative na perception, kay syimpre if mag counseling kay maka ingun pud baya na hala naa syay sakit kay ingun ana baya if ever mag adto sa counseling. If sa akoo lang pud, naa syay perception na in-ana pero at the same time nangibabaw ang perception na ang counseling is for positive nga side. Murag fear jud akong ne feel sa counseling dili jud sya negative.

(Although I had a negative perception, because of course, when someone goes to counseling, people might say; Oh, something is wrong with him, since that is usually what others assume when someone seeks counseling. For me, I had that kind of perception but at the same time, I perceived it more positively. It was more of fear that I felt toward counseling, not really a negative view.)

Counseling As Ineffective. There is a doubt of the effectiveness of counseling as personal experience is seen as useful guide in decision making as counselor's advice is not applicable sometime. Respondent 8 claimed that:

To be honest, para sa akoo lang kay murag dili sila maka tabang gihapon para sa akoo lang jud. Imaginon nimu na modoul ka sa ilaha and the mohatag silag advise and the at the end of the day kay imung experience ra diay imung magamit, dili ilang advise. Kay kung about najud sa personal ba kay e imagine nimu mag share ka sa ilaha and then maghatag silag advise and then at the end of the day dili man gud nimu magamit ilang advise gud.

(To be honest, for me, it feels like they still can not really help. Just imagine going to them, and they give you advice but at the end of the day, it is still your own experience that you rely on, not their advice. When it comes to

personal matters, imagine opening up to them and they give you advice, but in the end, you can not really apply or use what they told you.)

Unfamiliar To Counseling. Students revealed a lack of awareness and understanding about counseling services. Respondent 8 disclosed no exposure or prior knowledge about counseling. He shared that:

Wala jud kaayu koy ma istorya ana kay kumbaga since birth wala kaayu ko na orient ana. Maka dungog rako ana kay sa documentary rajud ug sa TV. Personal, kanang mga naka uban nako ever since wala jud, wala jud ko kabalo wala pud ko ka experience nga naa pud koy na amigo na niadto sa counseling department.

(I do not really have much to say about that because, ever since I was born, I was never really oriented about it. I only hear about it through documentaries or on TV. Personally, the people I have been with ever since have not talk about it, and I have never experienced having a friend who went to the counseling department either.)

In like manner, Respondent 9 also expressed his view of counseling. For him, he did not know the process of counseling. He didn't know the questions that they will ask to him and what they will do after you share your problems. Despite this, he emphasized that students should know about counseling services as its beneficial to them. He conveyed:

Pero that time I was hesitant kay wala ko kabalo ug unsa ilahang questions sa imuha like that or unsa ilang buhaton sa imuha after nimu mag sulti sa imung mga problems. Murag dili ko sure sa process. Bisan ang mga student dili moduol kay wala kabalo ang mga student na ang kanang counseling kay maka hatag siya ug giya or help sa mga student. Dependi lang sa student, mas better jud ug kanang makabalo ang mga student na naa diay ingun ana na services sa ilang skul. Same nako, kabalo ko na naay counseling services pero wala ko kabalo na inguna ana diay ang trabaho sa council. Kay few lang jud kaayu ang naka balo ana maam na makahatag diay nag help sa mga student. Wala ko kabalo na pwedi mangayo ug ingun na tabang sa guidance office.

(But at that time, I was hesitant because I did not know what kind of questions they would ask or what they would do after I shared my problems. I was not really sure about the process. Even other students do not approach them because they also do not know that counseling can actually offer guidance or help to students. It really depends on the student, but it would be much better if students were aware that those kinds of services exist in their school. In my case, I knew there were counseling services, but I did not know that is actually what counselors do. Only a few students are really aware that counseling can help them. I did not know that you could ask for that kind of help from the guidance office.)

Counseling As Helpful and Safe. Despite the negative perception of some students about counseling, still, there are students who viewed it positively emphasizing the support that they can get from the counselor as the latter is willing to listen and gives useful advises.

Respondent 2 stressed that:

So naa na jud koy background anang counseling mam kay way back katong elementary pa pud ko, niadto pud kog guidance counselor because of, problema lagi. So, mao to mam, naa na koy background nila na mohatag silag advise, they are willing to listen, and so on and so forth. Akong nahibalan kay confidential kayo inyong kuan, dapat kamo ra jud ang naka balo. So, wla man koy negative na kuan mam about counseling.

(So, I already have a background about counseling because way back when I was still in elementary, I also went to the guidance counselor because of some problems. So, from that experience, I already knew that they give advice, they are willing to listen, and so on. What I also know is that everything is very confidential. it should only be between you and the counselor. So, I do not have any negative thoughts when it comes to counseling.)

Respondent 4 opened up that there was a change of perception that happened to him with regards to counseling. He revealed that:

Na change akong perspective mam regarding sa counseling gud kay actually ang akoang pang huna-huna gud sa counseling kay pag once naa kay mali na nabuhat, sila gyud ang una-una gud na mo disiplina sa imoha. Well in fact kanang tungod pud ato sa nahitabo kay murag na change akong perspective mam ba regarding sa counseling tapos gina support diay sa mga counselors ang unsay regarding sa mga mental health.

(My perspective about counseling changed because I used to think that when you do something wrong, they are the first ones who will discipline you. In fact, because of what happened, my perspective about counseling changed. I know now that counselors actually provide support with regards to mental health issues.)

Despite saying some negatives about counseling, Respondent 6 has shared his positive views and feelings about it. He uttered that:

Para sa akoo maam is ang positive ana maam kay kuan maam which akong gi ingon maam kay ang negative man to sya maam. So ang positive ana maam kay maka feel kog positive gud maam kung muadto ka dira sa sulod kay kanang tambagan ka maam ba unsang tamang buhaton maam. Kay kuntahay maam, naa koy problema maam kay ang guidance maam mag hatag silag feedback maam unsay angay buhaton nako maam kay na

depress ko maam kay nakuan na siya sa akong huna-huna maam so niadto kog guidance para maka feel ko safe.

(What I mentioned earlier was the negative part. So, the positive thing about it is for me, I feel a sense of positivity when I go inside (guidance office) because they give you advice on what is the right thing to do. For example, ma'am, if I have a problem, the guidance office gives feedback on what I should do. I was depressed because something was bothering my thoughts, so I went to the guidance office to feel safe.)

In like manner, Respondent 9 affirmed:

Naa naman kuy kuan ana na ang kanang counseling services kay maka provide na syag support sa mga students or those individuals na naga seek ug guidance or gusto ma assess ang mga challenges na gi face sa ilang lives. Financial problems, job loss, or something like stress sa academic. I know na maka provide ang guidance counseling services ug way na kanang murag dili bitaw ka ma pressurized or something. Maghatag ug way na ma come up na nimu na mahatagan ug solusyon gani.

(I already have an idea that counseling services can provide support to students or individuals who are seeking guidance or want help in assessing the challenges they are facing in life like financial problems, job loss, or academic stress. I know that guidance and counseling services can offer a way for you to not feel so pressured. They help you find ways to come up with solutions to your problems.)

Likewise, Respondent 10 pointed out that:

Actually, ang counseling jud kabalo jud ko na if magpa counseling kay ang ilang e kuan lang jud sa imu kay mag advise. Mag heart to heart talk, kanang e ingun nimu if ever kung unsa ang willing nimu e share sa ilaha. At the same time, pag human nimu ug share kay diha na sila maghatag ug mga advise sa imuha or kung unsa ang mas better na pamaagi for you. For example, naa kay gina experience. Maka help sila kung unsaon nimu pag cope up sa ingun ana na sitwasyon. So, ang counseling para sa akua kay more on advising on how to cope in certain situations.

(Actually, I know that in counseling, what they really do is give advice. It is more of a heart-to-heart talk, where you share what you are willing to share to them. After you have opened up, that is when they start giving you advice or suggest better ways to deal with your situation. For example, if you are going through something, they

can help you figure out how to cope with that situation. So, for me, counseling is more about advising on how to cope with certain situations.)

Counseling As Preventative Action. Students highlighted the importance of early counseling intervention as it helps in preventing the worsening of mental health issues. This proves that counseling is not just crisis intervention; rather, it is crisis prevention. Respondent 7 emphasized its importance and said that:

Sa initial perception pud nako sa counseling, it is good kay beneficial man jud sa mga students na ano unya maduolan man jud atong counselor. Pero, sa ako lang experience akong manghud niduol jud sya sa counselor sa ilang skwelahan tapos ingun sya na nindot jud ang counseling. Maong as early as possible magpa counsel naka or magpa talk naka about ana sa imung mga problema. Kay dili man gud nimu malikayan, ug wala pud ka kabalo kanus'a molala imung anxiety or imung depression. So, as early as possible nindot jud sya maam.

(My initial perception of counseling is that it is good because it is really beneficial for students, and our counselor is approachable. In my experience, my younger sibling actually went to their school counselor and said that counseling was really good. That is why, as early as possible, it is better to seek counseling or talk about your problems because you can not really avoid it, and you never know when your anxiety or depression might worsen. So, it is really good to seek help early on.)

Moreover, Respondent 9 added that:

Samot na sa kana ganing mga campuses na prone sa suicidal thoughts or kana ganing mga students na mag suicide or kanang cases na suicides. Maka hatag man pud gud na sya ug way na dili mo abot ana na point na mag suicide ang student kay naa man gud counseling services na naa sa school.

(Especially in campuses that are prone to suicidal thoughts or where there are students who attempt or commit suicide. Counseling can really provide a way to prevent students from reaching that point of committing suicide because counseling services are available in school.)

Counseling as Last Resort for Mental Breakdown. Student perceived counseling as the last resort when problems feel so overwhelming. Respondent 4 shared that it's like you carry the world when you seek counseling. He narrated that:

Kuan pud mam, pag magpa counseling na pud mam kay mura gud og pasan na pasan na gyud nemo ang kalibutan. In'ana ang akong perception sa counseling mam. So, in'ana na gyud ka grabi ba kay kailangan na gyud nemo mo seek og guidance kay para kana gud murag pasan na pasan na

kaayo nemo ang kalibutan murag padulong na gud ka mabuang. In'ana akong perception sa counseling mam.

(For me, when you go to counseling, it feels like you are already carrying the weight of the world. That is how I perceive counseling. It means things have become so overwhelming that you really need to seek guidance. It is like you're already at the point where you feel like you are going crazy. That is my perception of counseling.)

Post-Counseling Perception

The themes in the section were coming from the specific research question 1.3” How do you perceive counseling now, after your experience?” under the 1st major research question “What are the lived experiences of participants in seeking counseling services?” The responses generated six themes: counseling as a space for emotional release and coping, positive perception despite lack of direct experience, deepen understanding, strengthened mindset, positive shift in perception, and lack of insight due to no experience.

Counseling as a Space for Emotional Release and Coping. This theme emphasizes that counseling serves as a safe space for students to express their struggles, which helps them release emotional burdens and better cope with mental health challenges through support and guidance from counselors.

Respondent 4 stressed out that counseling services can be a venue in helping someone to cope with their different traumas in life. He stated that:

Kuan mam kanang good diay ang counseling po regarding sa kana gud pagkumbati sa mental health po kay dati man gud kanang naa man jud perspective ang mga tao na dili nila kaya, eluom lang gyud nila ilang problema regarding sa financial, sa ilang stress tapos trauma, pressure sa kaugalingon o pressure sa life. So, murag gina luom-luom lang sa student mam ba. Karun, kanang murag na perceive na nako na mas better. Si counseling diay kay ginatabangan diay nila na maka cope up sa ilahang trauma, unsaon nila pag cope up ang trauma through giving them advises. In'ana. Bali ma feel pud nila mam ba na, I mean pag ma speak up na gud nila ilang problem with the counselors kay ma ease na ilang pain, stress and ma relief na ilang mga gipang bati specially kanang mag combat sila sa ilang mental health po mam.

(Ma'am, counseling is truly helpful when it comes to dealing with mental health because before, individuals believed that they could not handle things and kept their problems to themselves, such as financial concerns, stress, trauma, or personal and life pressures. Students, ma'am, tend to keep things to themselves. But now I see that counseling is genuinely beneficial. It assists individuals in coping with their trauma by providing advice. It is as if talking about their concerns with the counselors relieves their agony and

stress. They feel relieved, particularly when it comes to their mental health, ma'am.)

Positive Perception Despite Lack of Direct Experience. This theme highlights the value of counseling even to those who have not yet undergone counseling. This revealed that this helps individuals reflect an open and positive attitude toward its role in emotional support and personal growth.

Respondent 6 sees it as potentially safe and helpful based on instinct and observation. He stated that:

For me, I did not experience counseling because it is hard to express my own emotions to others, that was what I feel based on my perception and observation from the others to be judged. That is why, I think carefully when I go to. But in my instincts also or the positive thoughts about counseling, it could be helpful and safe because they can provide guidance and advice on what I should do or what we should do.

Respondent 7 believes counseling is beneficial and necessary, especially for students. Stressed out that:

Wala jud koy experience about sa counseling pero based on the information and observation sa mga nag pa counseling, Counseling is needed and good for everyone especially students.

(I really do not have any experience with counseling, but based on the information I have heard and my observations of those who have tried it, I believe that counseling is necessary and beneficial for everyone, especially students)

Respondent 10 imagines counseling as a dynamic process that adapts to individual emotional and mental needs. He said that:

As someone nga wala pa naka experience going on counseling, I still perceived it or like I often imagine it as dynamic, nga it adapts to the changing needs of individuals especially on their thoughts and emotions.

(As someone who has not experienced counseling yet, I still perceive it and often imagine it as something dynamic. It adapts to the changing needs of individuals, especially when it comes to their thoughts and emotions.)

Deepen Understanding. This theme stresses out that counseling can contribute to person's self-awareness, emotional insight, and ability to reflect on experiences, leading to personal growth and better decision-making.

Respondent 2 shared that it helped to deepen their understanding during their younger college years through supportive listening and guidance. He stated that:

Katong during college days mam mas nag palalom pa ang counseling para sa akua like kuan pa biya ko ato no bata pa. Mas na deepen pa akong understanding. Naghatag silag advise sa akua mam and then willing gyud kayo sila maminaw sa akong mga hinanaing, and then mao to mam.

(Back in my college days, ma'am, counseling really deepened my understanding. I was still young then, but through counseling, I gained a better grasp of things. They gave me advice, ma'am, and they were very willing to listen to my concerns. That is what made a difference.)

Respondent 5 emphasized the practical value of counseling, highlighting how it helped them gain meaningful learning applicable to both personal life and academic development. He stressed that:

Sa karon maka ingon ko na dako jud kaayo sya ug tabang sa akua, kay tungod ato daghan ko ug na learned which is good para sa akua ug para sa course na akong gi take sa pagka-karon

(Now, I can say that counseling has really helped me a lot, because I learned many things from it which is good for me and also relevant to the course I am taking right now.)

Strengthened Mindset. Counseling helped shift the mindset from negative to positive. Through the guidance counselor's support and motivation, students learned to focus on optimism and perseverance, which improved their outlook as a student.

Respondent 3 narrated that:

So, after counseling mam nindot man diay siya kay ginatabangan ka sa mga kuan parehas kay sir AI, guidance counselor, naa syay specific knowledge about ana nga natabangan me niya to ano, ma motivate pa mismo mam. Kanang mas tan'awon pa namo ang positivity compared sa negativity sa life or as a student nga magpadayon lang. Unlike dati na kanang naa bitaw me mga negative thoughts na murag na bungkag ra pud to ni sir AI tungod ato iyang mga advises.

(So, after counseling, ma'am, I realized it was actually a good experience because we were helped by people like sir, our guidance counselor. He has specific knowledge that really helped us. It was motivating, ma'am. It helped us focus more on the positive side of life rather than the negative and encouraged us to keep going as students. Unlike before, when we had negative thoughts, sir helped break those through his advice.)

Positive Shift in Perception. This theme shows students' views of counseling improve over time especially when exposed to mental health advocacy and encouragement from guidance programs.

Respondent 1 shared that their view of counseling changed positively due to the consistent promotion of mental health awareness by the guidance office, even on social media. He stated that:

Naay changes kay tungod atong gitabangan ko nila mam, bisag naa lay, bisag sa facebook lang mam kay kusog kayo sila mag promote og mental health awareness murag gina motivate ka nila mam ba sa atong counsel, sa atong guidance mam ba. Dako og tabang ang counseling bitaw mam kay

gina promote man gud nila ang mental health awareness mam. Naa silay mga post na positive na posts.

(There were changes, ma'am, because they helped me even just through Facebook. They actively promote mental health awareness, and it feels like they are motivating us through our counselors and guidance services. Counseling really helps because they constantly promote mental health awareness, ma'am. They even post positive messages online)

Lack of Insight Due to No Experience. This highlights the need for greater access and exposure to counseling services in educational settings.

Respondent 8 stated that:

I do not know, ma'am because I did not experience counseling before.

Respondent 9 added that:

Wala pa koy nasinati nga experience about counseling po.

(I have not had any experience with counseling yet.)

Description of Counseling Journey

The themes in the section were coming from the specific research question 1.4” How do you perceive counseling now, after your experience?” under the 1st major research question “How would you describe your counseling journey in one word or phrase?” The responses generated four themes: helpful, supportive and transformative, lack of insight due to no experience, personal growth and positive outlook.

Helpful, Supportive and Transformative. This theme highlights the powerful impact of counseling on students’ emotional well-being. Through professional guidance, students found a safe space to express their feelings, receive support, and gradually experience personal growth and healing.

Respondent 2 viewed counseling as a turning point, realizing that genuine support exists, which led to personal growth and emotional improvement. He stated that:

In one word mam, helpful jud kayo sya kay now I am a better person. Naa man diay mga person na willing maminaw sa akong mga problems.

(In one word, ma'am helpful. It really helped me because now I am a better person. I realized that there are actually people who are willing to listen to my problems.)

Respondent 3 highlighted the value of professional advice in improving mental health, emphasizing how expert guidance is more reliable than self-coping or peer comparison. He pointed out that:

Kuan mam, better. So better sya tungod kay mas na pa better among mental health unlike na katong wala jud tambag bitaw sa professional na tao is mag buhat-buhat lang me or naa me mabasa, murag didtoa ra namo gina compared ang among emotions ba unlike didtoa pag professionals, murag mas nakabalo sila kung unsa juy sakto na gibati namo dili me murag mag

ano self-rely. So mas napa better jud pag professional ang mag tambag sa amoa.

(It was better, ma'am. It became better because our mental health improved. Unlike before, when we did not receive any advice from professionals, we just dealt with things on our own or read stuff, and compared our emotions based on that. But with professionals, they know what we are really feeling. We no longer must rely only on ourselves. So, it really got better with professional help.)

Respondent 4 experienced emotional relief through counseling, recognizing its role in creating a safe space for expression and healing despite initial discomfort. He narrated that:

It was so rough mam but at the end it was so fulfilling po kay at the end pud gud mam kay naka ingon jud pud ko mam ba na naa diay mga people na kaya mo give sa ilahang hand to help you out specially if you are combating with menatal health po. Ako man gud na pagka person mam kay dili jud nako gina show akong emotion specially pag stress na kayo ko. So para sa ako it was so rough na e showcase gud nako akoang emotions but at the end it was fulfilling kay kato na gud na express na nako akong mga pressures, like mga trauma, fulfilling kayo sya mam kay naa diay si counseling office na kaya mo help sa imoha, na motabang to combat that kind of ano po, in'ato na nahitabo.

(It was so rough at first, ma'am, but in the end, it was very fulfilling. I realized that there are people who are willing to help, especially when you are struggling with mental health. I am the kind of person who does not show emotions, especially when I am stressed. It was hard to express my emotions, but in the end, it felt fulfilling because I was finally able to release my pressures and trauma. I realized the counseling office is really there to help combat experiences like that.)

Lack of Insight Due to No Experience. This theme reflects how the absence of personal experience with counseling limits the respondents' ability to provide insights, though some still express awareness of its possible importance for others.

Respondent 6 stated that:

Wala mam kay wla man koy experience pa ana.

(None, ma'am, because I have not experienced it yet.)

Respondent 7 added that:

To be honest, I do not know since personally, I did not experience it.

Respondent 8 also stated that:

Same ra jud mam. I do not have any counseling journey in my life and I do not expect it too, in the near future.

(It is the same, ma'am. I have never had any counseling experience, and I do not expect to have one in the near future.)

Likewise, respondent 9 supported:

As what my answer in the last question po wala pa koy ika sulti about ana po.

(As I said in the last question, ma'am, I have nothing to say about it because I have not experienced it yet.)

Furthermore, respondent 10 also affirmed the idea and stated that:

Since wala pa koy experience going on counseling, I do not have an idea on what an actual counseling really is. But to those nga naay experience ani, I know that it must be tough but, I know nga needed nila.

(Since I have not experienced going through counseling, I do not really have an idea of what it was like. But for those who have, I believe it must be tough, and I know they need it.)

Personal Growth. This theme centers on how counseling helped the respondent rediscover inner strengths and develop emotional resilience, contributing to both academic and personal growth.

Respondent 5 viewed counseling as a transformative process that fostered self-awareness, emotional healing, and stronger coping skills, marking a significant step toward personal growth. He expressed that:

Siguro ma describe nako as a journey of self-discovery or healing. Kay as-in personally tungod sa counseling didtoa nako na discover na naa pa d I koy laing ability and strength na mas worth na e padayon instead na mag stay ko sa kung unsa akoang kaya before. About sa healing pud kay dako sya ug tabang pag-abot sa emotional aspect kay tungod ato kay naka learned ko ug unsaon pag handle like sa pressure when it comes sa academic or even personal aspect.

(I would describe it as a journey of self-discovery or healing.” because personally, through counseling, I discovered that I still have other abilities and strengths that are worth pursuing, instead of just staying within what I used to be capable of. When it comes to healing, it really helped me emotionally because I learned how to handle pressure, whether in academics or in personal matters.)

Positive Outlook. This theme highlights how counseling inspired a more hopeful or forward-looking mindset in the respondent.

Respondent 1 stated that:

Para sa akong mam is optimistic mam.

(For me, ma'am, it is optimistic.)

How do the participants cope with the challenges as regards to seeking counseling services?

This section presents the results of the 2nd major research question, “How do the participants cope with the challenges as regards to seeking counseling services?” Four specific questions were used to gather data for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather responses on the challenges of the research respondent in seeking counseling services and how they cope up with these challenges.

Barriers in Accessing or Continuing Counseling Services

The themes from this section were drawn from the specific research question 2.1 “Can you describe any specific challenges you encountered that made it difficult for you to access or continue counseling?” The responses generated six emerging themes: hesitant and uncertain what to do, shyness and fear of judgment, unavailable staff, never tried once, negative perception of guidance office, and prefer peer support over professional help.

Hesitant and Uncertain What to Do. The reluctance of respondents to pursue counseling stemmed from internal struggles and personal doubts regarding the significance of their issues, fear of being judged, and uncertainty about the scope of counseling services. Respondent 7 showed uncertainty of his concern as he viewed it as a minor concern, not fitting to share to the counselor and that doing so might lead him to be judged. He stated that:

One of the specific na challenge is during sa BP (Business Plan) writing and at the same time gusto najud ko mgpa counsel that time pero tungod lagi sa akong perspective ug basin pud e judge ko nila that time base ra sa akong concern na sa BP (Business Plan) ra unya dili worth it akong concern na iduol didtu.

One specific challenge I faced was during the Business Plan (BP) writing. At that time, I really wanted to seek counseling, but because of my perspective and maybe out of fear that others would judge me, since my concern was only about the BP. I felt like my problem was not worth bringing to the guidance office.

In like manner, Respondent 8 added that his hesitant to seek the help of the counselor as he's uncertain about the scope of counseling services and thought that his concern is not within the counselor's responsibility. He shared that:

Kadto raman tong time pag share namo about sa counseling department unya pa expire na among contract ato sa comprehensive high school na 3rd

year 1st sem pako. Kay didtu man gud ko na platar na kay akong work and klase ato is balance rajud. Ang among contract ato pahuman na kay dapat sa 2024 December wala nami contract ato unya kadto didto najud na time na naglibog najud ko sa akong buhaton maam ba kung mo padayon pa ba. Kanang namili nako ato kung asa akong unahon, mo trabaho ba or mopadayon pa ug skwela.

(That was during the time when we were sharing about the counseling department, and our contract at the comprehensive high school was about to expire. I was still in 3rd year, 1st semester then. That was the time when things were going smoothly for me because my work and classes were well-balanced. But since our contract was ending by December 2024, I started to feel confused about what to do whether I should continue working or go back to school.)

Meanwhile, Respondent 10 revealed that he was hesitant to approach the counselor because he was having an internal battle about whether he was ready to ask for help. He disclosed that:

Siguro kay katong mga time na first time na almost ko nag attempt. 1st year man gud to tapos nag pile up ang tanan na nhitabo. Murag nag pile up jud ang mga panghitabo. Mao to naka try ko ug hapit ko nag attempt ug kanang sa akoang life. Mao to murag lisod kaayu sya sa akoo na mag seek ug counseling ato na time kay murag dili ko ready wala ko kabalo kung unsa akong himuon. Wala ko kabalo kung maka help ba sila ato na time sa akoo kay, mismo ako sa akong kaugalingon wala ko kabalo kung need ba nako or although need jud nakog help. Pero para sakoo if need jud nako ug help ba kay dili man gani nako kay tabangan akong kaugalingon ato na time.

(It was probably during that time when I almost made an attempt for the first time. Everything just piled up. That is when I almost made an attempt on my life. It was really hard for me to seek counseling at that time because I was not ready, and I did not know what to do. I was not sure if they could even help me at that moment because I could not even help myself at that time, though I really did need help.)

Shyness And Fear of Judgement. Seeking counseling services is not easy specially for those students who haven't experienced it yet. The respondents shared their feelings of shame and fear of judgment as their hindrance in seeking help from the counselor. Respondent 2 shared that despite his trust to the guidance office, he's ashamed of crying in front of them. He pointed out that:

Kanang ulaw sya mam kanang mohilak ka sa atubangan. Maulaw ka mo open up pero naa man kay salig sa ila, Nawala ra man akong kaulaw mam. Basta, you have a heart and open ear nga maminaw pud sa ilahang mga advises mam.

It is embarrassing, ma'am especially when you cry in front of them. You feel shy to open up, but because you trust them, the embarrassment eventually goes away. As long as you have a heart and an open ear to listen to their advises.

Likewise, Respondent 4 shared that one of the biggest challenges before going to counseling was the fear of being seen as "crazy." This perception made him feel ashamed and hesitant, showing how stigma can deeply affect someone's willingness to ask for help. He stressed that:

Kuan mam katong at first mam katong wala pa jud ko nagpa counseling kay kanang one of the challenges na akong ma kuan jud mam is kana gud pag muadto ka sa counseling kay ang panan-aw sa mga tao sa imoha kay padulong na ka mabuang. So ang challenges ba kay maulaw. Maulaw ko muadto sa counseling office kay kato laging perception na ingnon og buang.

(At first, before I ever went to counseling, one of the challenges I really felt was the idea that if you go to the counseling office, people will think that you are going crazy. So, the challenge was really the shame. I felt ashamed to go to the counseling office because of that perception that people who go there are crazy.)

Moreover, hesitation to speak up stemmed from a deep fear of judgment and a lack of confidence, particularly in unfamiliar or public settings. That is what Respondent 5 pointed out as his barrier in seeking counseling service. He admitted that:

Siguro ang kahadlok like as-in na puno ko ug kahadlok that time kay siguro mahadlok lang jud ko e judge. Since, dili pud ko sanay na mo pagawas gud sa akoang side kay di jud ko vocal or sadyang lack of personal confidence in speaking especially in public or sa tao na dili nako close.

(Maybe it was the fear like I was really full of fear at that time because I was really afraid of being judged. I am not also used to express my side because I am not vocal or I just lack personal confidence when it comes to speaking, especially in public or to people I am not close with.)

Unavailable Staff. Students may hesitate to seek counseling due to the counselor's unavailability and feelings of having less important concerns compared to others especially when others seem to have more urgent concerns. Respondent 1 stated that:

Siguro katong time na kuan wala bitaw tao mam. Walay tao sa office ba.

(Maybe it was that time when there was no one in the office.)

Respondent 3 also shared the challenged he experienced in seeking counseling. He felt like other students had more significant concern than him. He shared that:

Ah siguro mam kanang naa bitaw like events bitaw sa school parehas anang mga students na mag adto sa guidance para magpa pirma, so ang katong mga students na gusto mag like, mag seek lang og counsel from sir is murag ma compromise sya mam ba kay busy pud si sir, atong guidamce counselor

and then naa pa jud ubang students. So, imbes na mag seek kag help didto, murag e baliwala na lang nemo kay murag maulaw ka ba kay daghan nangayo og tabang nya ikaw, mangayo ra man kag tambag from sir AI dili man jud ka as in na murag dili kayo relevant nag imong kuan ba, gipangayo nga tabang unlike sa other students.

(Maybe when there are school events like students are going to the guidance office to have their paper signed on. So those students who want to seek counsel from sir, it is like their needs are compromised because our guidance counselor is also busy and there are other students, too. So instead of seeking help there, you would just set it aside because you might feel shy since there are already many people asking for help, and you are just going there to ask for advice. It is like your concern does not seem as relevant compared to the other students.)

Never Tried Once. Respondent 6 perceived himself as a well-behaved student and so, he never experienced some challenges related to it. He stated that:

I never tried paman. Wala paman gd ko naka experience so wala kaayu koy kanang feedback sa akong kaugalingon na mga challenges kay first and foremost wala ko ka try. Kay sukad dati kay para sa akua sukad dati kay goodboy ko na pagka tao mao ng wala koy ingun ana maam.

(I have not tried it yet. I have not really experienced it, so I do not have much personal feedback about any challenges because, first and foremost, I have not tried it. Since before, I have seen myself as a good boy, that is why I do not have those kinds of problems, ma'am.)

Negative Perception of Guidance Office. One of the reasons why students are afraid to visit the office is because of the negative perception that they have. Respondent 9 admitted that:

Ang akua lang maam kay mahadlok ko moduol kanang wala jud challenges. Murag naa naman gud sa amoa na mahadlok mi mo open up if ever na muadto mi sa guidance. Murag na instill na sa among huna-huna na kung guidance office kay hadlok.

(For me, ma'am, I do not have any challenges. It is just I am afraid to approach. It is like there was already something in us that makes us afraid to open up if ever we go to the guidance office. It is like it was been instilled in our minds that the guidance office is something to be afraid of.)

Prefer Peer Support Over Professional Help. Friends are really the ones we can count on specially in times of distress and troubles. Respondent 10 revealed that:

Pero hantod karun murag naa gihapon sa akua na gusto nako mag attempt. Pero karun mas kuan nalang ko kay naa koy mga friends ba na maka help sa akua, murag dili na nako need ug counseling kay naa nakoy mga friends nga pwedi nako istoryahan nako sa mga na experience nako sa adlaw-adlaw.

(But until now, I still kind of have the desire to try. But now, it is more like I am better because I have friends who can help me, so I feel like I do not need counseling anymore because I already have friends I can talk to about my daily experiences.)

Personal Coping Before or After Counseling

The themes from this section were drawn from the specific research question 2.2 “What personal strategies did you use to manage your situation before or during counseling?” The responses generated five emerging themes: seeking support from family, counselor and trusted people, meditation, recreational activity, and avoidance of negative triggers, self-management, isolation, and creative expression and community.

Seeking Support from Family, Counselor and Trusted People. The respondents used different personal and social strategies to cope with the challenges they experienced. While some seek the help of the counselor, others turned to their leaders, friends and family for advices. These highlights the value and benefits one can get from the counselor and the trusted people around. Respondent 2 shared that:

Strategy na gigamit mam is naminaw ko sa ilahang mga advise na gihatag sa akua and then, mao to mam.

(The strategy that I used was I listened to the advices that they gave to me.)

Similarly, Respondent 3 opened about how seeking advice from the counselor and his sister helped him in coping up with his struggles. He shared that:

And nag seek lang kog advice from my sister po. From out of sa akong family is my sister po kay sya ang murag mas nakasabot. Nabagsak man gud me ato mam around 2nd year, 1st semester pagka 2nd semester didto me nabagsak. Nakatabang sya mam kay murag na minimize nako ang akoang mga bad na thoughts napadaplin lang nako sila pero mas nakatabang gyud tog dako tong nag sulod na me sa counseling.

(I just sought advice from my sister, ma'am. Among my family, it was my sister who seemed to understand me more. We failed during our second semester in the second year. She helped me a lot because she somehow helped me minimize my negative thoughts. I was able to set them aside. But entering the counseling really helped me the most.)

Likewise, Respondent 5 also shared his strategies in coping with his challenges. He stated that:

During that time isa sa akoang strategy kay gi kalma lang akong kaugalingon and gi feel ug gi grabbed nako ang opportunity na maminaw ug maka learn gikan sa ilaha samot na, na kato na time need jud kaayo nakog advise na gikan sa ilaha.

(During that time, one of my strategies was to calm myself down and to take the opportunity to listen and learn from them specially that time when I really need advice from them.)

Meanwhile, Respondent 7 shared how the people around him; his leader, instructor and family became his refuge in those times of distress and how they helped him to cope up. He expressed that:

During ato na time, akong gi sandalan lang jud nako ato is among mga leader in which nag share nalang jud ko kung unsa jud among kahimtang ato that time. Then, nag share nalang pud ko sa akong manghud na naa sa Tagum ug nag share pud ko sa akong parents. Nag share ko kay Maam in which nihilak jud ko ato during sa katong REC. At the same time, when talking to others kay mogawas jud imung emotion or imuhang stress imung anxiety na mahitabo ning in ana. Mahadlok man gud ko magka mali ato na time and sabay pressure pud. In talking someone, maka relief jud syag stress maam. Labi na naay kay instructor na maistoryahan.

(During that time, I really leaned on our leaders where I shared with them our situation back then. Then, I also shared it with my parents and my sister who was in Tagum. I shared with ma'am, and I really cried during the REC process. At the same time, when you talk to others, your emotions, stress, and anxiety really come out. I was really afraid of making mistakes during that time, and there was pressure, too. Talking to someone really helps relieve stress, especially when there is an instructor you can talk to.)

Moreover, Respondent 8 expressed that there are a lot of people from whom she can get support. But despite having support from people around him, he struggled to balance work and academics, leading to tough decisions. He narrated that:

Kadto sya daghan man jud nuon kog support na maduolan during ato na time. Ang akong gika balak'an ato is kanang what if ba nag undang gani kog work ato na December 2023 gi ingnan nami na last month na namo to. Didtu nako na time na murag nalibog najud ko ato kay nag self-supporting rajud baya ko ato maam as working student. Actually, nakuha raman jud nako to kanang wlang jud guro ko kabalo na murag go with the flow lang jud guro to na time. Gamit lang pud nako akong nailhan gipang duolan rajud nako to. Kadto na time na lami najud kaayu makig istorya unya mangitag back up plan pero hesitant lang jud kaayu ko ato na time.

(At that time, I actually had a lot of support I could turn to. What I was really worried about was what would happen if I lost my job. Around December 2023, we were told it would be our last month. That was when I started feeling confused because I was really self-supporting, as a working student. Actually, I think I just got through that time by going with the flow. I approached the people I knew who could help me. During that time, I really wanted to talk to someone and make a backup plan, but I was very hesitant.

Meditation, Recreational Activity, and Avoidance of Negative Triggers. The respondents utilized different healthy coping strategies which help them regulate their emotions and manage stress. Respondents 1 emphasized his abstinence in using social media and avoided listening to some sad love songs and dramas. He narrated that:

Wala na ko nag social media mam. Wala na ko naga tan-aw og drama, mga sounds na drama gud gihapon mam kanang mga love songs, mga in-ana ba, basta mga negative na kuan. Sauna man gud mam kay hilig kayo ko motan-aw ana mam. Na come up man gihapon ko mam kay tungod atong mga gipang tan-aw nako sa una na mga movies, mga inspirational, mga good music, kanang maka pabuhi bitaw og dugo bitaw mam.

(I stopped using social media, ma'am. I do not watch dramas or listen to emotional songs anymore, like love songs and those kinds of negative things. I used to watch those. But I was able to move forward because of the things I watched before like inspirational movies and good music, things that felt uplifting and gave me energy.)

Respondent 7 discovered his own healthy way of coping up with challenges. Aside from sharing, he indulged himself into physical activities like exercise and engaged himself into gardening. He pointed out that:

Aside sa talking naga exercise pud ko gamay para ma relief. Kana pud e lingaw nimu imu kaugalingon sa isa ka work na dili related sa BP (Business Plan) na ma relief jud imung anxiety and stress ato imu kaugalingon about ato para maka tulog ka. Like kanang mag tanom ug bulak ug gulay and through ana kay maka relax ko and dako syang tabang. Kanang maka pangita kag way na kanang malingaw ka para mawala sa huna-huna ang BP (Business Plan).

(Apart from talking to someone, I also exercised a bit to get relief. I kept myself busy with work that was not related to our Business Plan so I could relieve my anxiety and stress about it and sleep better. I did things like planting flowers and vegetables, and through that, I felt more relaxed. It really helped. Finding something that makes you happy can help take your mind off the Business Plan.)

Moreover, meditation also helped a lot in dealing with problems as Respondent 3 were able to reflect on his past and was able to make good actions. He shared that:

So, before ang counseling happened, first nag meditate sa ko mam like ako lang sa bitaw mismo. Na gusto nako e murag e reflect ang unsay nahitabo from the past almost two years or three years kapin. Kung unsay murag mali, unsay kulang, unsay pwede pa nako mas nabuhat and then somehow medyo na okay-okay ra pud nako sya medyo na manage-manage na pud nako akong emotions, wala ko ingon na nagbuhat og mga butang na samot pag kasakit sa akoo.

(So, before the counseling happened, I meditated alone first. I wanted to reflect on everything that had happened about what went wrong, what was lacking, and what I could have done better in the past two or more years.

Somehow, it turned out to be good. I was able to manage my emotions. I did not do anything that would have caused me more pain.)

Similarly, this was supported by Respondent 4. He also practiced not just meditation but also physical exercises. He pointed out that:

Well, actually maam katong during jud sa time na hesitant pa jud gud ko maam nga mag seek og guidance from the counseling office. Well, actually naga self-meditate nako ato maam katong gaadto na kog gym, gadagan ko para ma ease lang gud akong pain. Kanang ma combat lang jud nako kung unsa ang dagan sa akong huna-huna ba. So naga gym ko, naga run ko every Friday para mawala gud ang mga pressure as akoo maam. Maghinay-hinay syag kawala ba. Nya kuan pud sya murag coping mechanism pud nako na sya that time maam na basta ma stress gud ko maam, idagan na lang nako.

(Well, actually, ma'am, during the time when I was still hesitant to seek guidance from the counseling office, I was already practicing self-meditation. I would go to the gym and go for a run to ease the pain I was feeling. It helped me to combat the thoughts in my mind. I go to the gym, ran every Friday to slowly release the pressure in me. It became my coping mechanism at that time that when I am stressed, I would just run.)

Self-Management. The respondents demonstrated resilience and problem-solving in managing academic and personal challenges. Respondent 6 highlighted the significance of time and financial management as his strategies for coping up as a working student. He stressed that:

Sa akoang pag manage ana kay first and foremost as a working student is time management. Kay kung naa kay time management kay mabuhay nimu na tanan kay naka laan naman na diha tanan kung unsa imung angay buhaton kay naka manage naman sa imung time. Sa financial pud kay gigamitan nakog strategy na makatipid and mangita kog way na maka provide.

(In managing that, first and foremost, as a working student, it was about time management. Because if you have time management, you can do everything since it is already scheduled. For the financial aspect, I used strategies to save money and looked for ways to provide for myself.)

Meanwhile, creativity and determination are what Respondent 9 showed. He narrated that:

Naay isa ka time na nag hatag ug report card ang among class adviser dili to sya card na original copy, murag card lang sya na gihatag sa amoa tapos e uli to sya dili to sya gision or dili sya walaon. Ang nahitabo ato kay nalaksi sya napanit sya. Ang akong gibuhay ato kay nangita kog paagi na maka edit kog parehas bitaw ug format sa report card and grabi kaayu ang pressure ato. Ang ako lang jud gibuhay ato kay nag ampo jud ko kay God ato na

tabangan ko. Wala damha naka kita kog format ug naka edit ko gamit lang ang selpo tapos naka edit ko unya gipasabot nako sa among maestro.

(There was a time when our class adviser gave out report cards. It was not the original copy, just a temporary one that we had to return. It was not supposed to be torn or lost. What happened was it ended up getting torn. What I did was I find a way to recreate a similar format of the report card. The pressure that time was so intense. What I did was I just prayed to God to help me. Unexpectedly, I found the right format and managed to edit it using only my cellphone and I explained everything to my teacher.

Isolation. Though not typically recommended, some find isolation as a helpful and effective strategy. As what they say, “there is peace in solitude”. Isolation provided Respondent 10 with a sense of peace and comfort. He admitted that:

Actually, akong coping mechanism ato na time kay isolation jud. Although dili gud sya recommended kay syempre mao man na sya ang isa ka rason nganung na ingun ana ko ba. Pero mas naa man gud koy comfort, naa koy peace of mind if mag isolate ko if ako kanang ako lang isa, murag in ana gud. Wala ko kabalo if sa in ana na isolation kay maka hatag syag peace of mind sa akoo. Although murag syag ironic kaayu pero kana gyud ang coping mechanism ato na time. Sa pag isolate man gud nako kay didtu pud nako na relax akong mind na kanang naka realize gud ko sa mga bagay bagay na nahimo nako at the same time na kuan sya na naka meditate ko.

Participant paused and continued by saying that sharing to others has also become his coping mechanism. He shared that:

Sa karun maam kay na happy ko na Nakaya nako sya ug share kay sauna dili kanang dili pa nako kaya e share sa ubang tao na hapit ko na in'ani na in'ana. Kay ang nakabalo lang jud ana kay akoo rang mama ug akoo rang friends. Murag isa pud sa akong coping mechanism kay e share gud sya kay murag testament pud sya sa akoo na Nakaya nako sya na e overcome kay dili jud baya sya lalim.

(Actually, my coping mechanism during that time was really isolation. Although it is not recommended since it is actually one of the reasons why I ended up that way, it still gave me comfort and peace of mind when I isolated myself, when I was just alone. I do not know why, but that kind of isolation gave me peace of mind. Although it sounds ironic, but that was really my coping mechanism during that time. Through isolation, I was able to relax my mind and reflect on the things I had done. It was also a form of meditation for me.

As of now, ma'am, I am happy that I was able to share it because before, I could not really talk about this with others how I almost reached that point. Only my mom and close friends knew about it. I think one of my coping mechanisms now is sharing it, because it also serves as a testament that I was able to overcome it because it really was not easy.)

Creative Expression and Community. Writing is one way of expressing oneself and that's how Respondent 1 cope up with his challenges. He stated that:

Dako pud og tabang ang pag apil nako sa spoken poetry mam kay parehas-parehas ra man gud meg problema mam as a student bitaw mam. Parehas ra gyud meg problema tanan mam. Gusto pud ko mam na pinaagi bitaw sa tula ma share nako ang akong kangitngit na kaagi.

(Joining spoken poetry really helped me a lot, ma'am, because we students actually have similar problems. We all go through the same struggles. I also want to use poetry as a way to share my dark experiences.)

Feeling of Discouragement While Seeking Counseling

The themes from this section were drawn from the specific research question 2.3 "Can you describe a time when you felt discouraged while seeking counseling? The responses generated five emerging themes: no discouragement, internal conflict, unwelcoming environment, fear and hesitation, and unavailable staff. No Discouragement. Most expressed appreciation for the support and understanding they received and saw the guidance office as a positive and welcoming space and did not feel discouraged. Respondent 2 also mentioned that he appreciated the counselor's advice a lot. He shared that:

I think wala man ko na discourage mam kay ganahan man kayo ko sa ilahang mga dvises sa akoo and then kuan pud kayo sila, understandable. Ana sila hilak lang, so mao to mam wla koy discouragement nga na feel.

(I think I did not feel discouraged, ma'am, because I really liked the advice they gave me, and they were also very understanding. They said, just cry it out, so that is why I did not feel any discouragement.)

Likewise, Respondent 3 added that:

I did not think naa koy in-ana na kuan mam except for katong high school naa me murag lain na thought sa about counseling pero pag abot nag college wala man kayo ko nahadlok jud mag adtog guidance counseling po mam.

(I do not think I had anything like that, ma'am, except during high school when we had a different idea about counseling. But when I got to college, I was not really afraid to go to guidance counseling anymore.)

Respondent 4 also added that he instead received their full support. He stated that:

Wala man maam. Kanang wala jud instances sa kuan maam. During sa time sa pag combat nako sa mental health, wala jud discouragement na nahitabo kay all out support jud sila mam. So wala jud discouragement.

(None, ma'am. There were no any instances, ma'am. During the time I was dealing with my mental health, there was no discouragement at all because they gave full support, ma'am. So, there was really no discouragement.)

Similarly, Respondent 5 affirmed that:

Actually, wala pud biya ko na discouraged that time. Natural lang jud siguro sa akoo na always mag think ug positive nga butang, bisan paman sa unsa kalisod na situation. Kay siguro pud fully aware lang jud siguro ko na tanan problema or butang naa jud syay solution.

(Actually, I did not feel discouraged at that time either. Maybe it is just natural for me to always think positively, no matter how difficult the situation is. Maybe it is also because I am fully aware that every problem or situation really has a solution.)

Additionally, Respondent 7 conveyed that:

Sa guidance office kay wala jud. Apil naman pud sa akong personality na naa ang kaulaw, bantog di naka mag seek ug counseling or di naka moduol sa counseling sa skwelahan kay naa ang kaulaw. But, overall wala jud ko na discourage sa counseling service sa atong school.

(In the guidance office, there was really none. It is just part of my personality to feel shy that is probably why I don't seek counseling or go to the counseling office at school, because of the shyness that I had. But overall, I was not discouraged by the counseling service in our school.)

Lastly, Respondent 9 expressed that:

Wala man pud nuon maam. Mahadlok lang jud ang akoo maam.

(None, ma'am. I just really feel scared.)

Internal Conflict. The respondent acknowledges desire to reach out to the guidance office during the times of emotional distress but hesitated due to internal doubts and overthinking. He disclosed that:

Kuan maam, kung sa panahon na gusto ko moadto sa counseling maam. Usa kahigayon na gusto nako maam is kanang bug-at najud kaayu akong gi bati maam ba akong problema. Kuntahay sa skwelahan, sa balay, sa klase ug kanang kapoy najud kaayu ang huna-huna maam ba. Maka ingon ko sa akong classmate na gusto ko muadto ug guidance pero maka kuan ko sa akong kaugalingon ba, ngano? maka question ko maam ba murag kanang maka feel gud kag ma overwhelm gud ka maam kanang dika ka explain ba kanang unsay mga panghitabo nganung muadto kag guidance office.

(There are times when I really want to go to counseling, especially when my problems feel so heavy like with school, at home, in class and I felt so tired thinking about it. I even told my classmate that I want to go to the guidance office, but then I ask myself, why? It was like I get overwhelmed, and I can not explain everything that was happening and why I want to go to the guidance office.)

Participant paused and continued by saying that he can not think properly which results to answering differently. He shared that:

Ug murag kanang dili nagud ka maka huna-huna ug tarong maam. Kay muadto kag counseling unya ingun imung gusto ipahiwatig sa kuan maam but murag mag lisod gud ka sa imung huna-huna maam kanang malahi maam. Imbis tama imung tubag kay malahi na kay ma pressure ka or maratol ana maam ba. Nag overthink ko daan. Kay feel nako maam dako kaayug impact kung muadto kag guidance.

(It was like I can not think clearly anymore. I want to express something when I go to counseling, but then my thoughts get messed up. Instead of saying the right thing, I ended up saying other things because I feel pressured or nervous. I overthink in advance. I feel like going to the guidance office has a big impact.)

Unwelcoming Environment. The experiences of the respondents revealed their fear of judgment and prior negative experiences which were the reasons for their discouragement in seeking counseling services. Respondent 7 shared the emotional burden of being pre-judged by friends. He expressed that:

Yes, like mangita kag tabang sa uban kay naa man gud silay ma say sa imuha. Kanang wala pa gani ka naka sugod ug storya kay mostorya na gani sila. For example, sapag talk nako sa friend nako kanang mangayo kog advices kay before ko nila hatagan ug advice kay pirmente naa silay say. Like unsa naman pud na? Nganung kailangan man jud nimug advices? Naa jud silay say, pinaka una jud na before ka nila hatagan ug advice.

(Yes, like when you try to seek help from others, they always have something to say about you. Even before you start talking, they already have

something to say. For example, when I talk to my friend and ask for advice, before they give me any, they always have something to say first. They asked like, what is it this time? Why do you always need advice? They really always say something first before actually giving advice.)

Additionally, Respondent 8 emphasized the importance of facial expressions and demeanor of the counselor and staff as significant factors for students to enter the office or not. He revealed that:

Number one jud na maka discourage is ang nawng jud sa guidance counselor kay murag judgemental kaayu. Mao jud nay number one na maka discourage sa tinud anay lang jud kung muadto kag guidance office sa high school. Arang-arang lang jud tong babae na naka assign didtu karun kay murag mo smile na sya pag naay tao. Pero naa jud toy tao diraa na pagsulod palang nimu daan kay murag di sya ganahan ug naay mosulod. Pero naa jud tay time diraa na 3rd year 1st sem to na time or basin bad mood lang jud sya ato basin sa evaluation. Kay dapat before ka magpa sign kay maka evaluate paka daan. Kung siguro dili pud ta kanang judgemental, pero siguro kana pud bitaw pag sulod nimu ma feel nimu dili naka welcome daan unya mag open paka mao nang diha na mogawas ang fear of judgement.

(The number one thing that was really discouraging was the face of the guidance counselor because he looks very judgmental. That was honestly the main thing that discourages you from going to the guidance office in high school. It was somehow better now with the woman assigned there because she smiles when someone enters. But there was really someone there who, the moment you entered, it felt like she did not like it when someone entered. There was really a time during third year, first semester, maybe she was just in a bad mood or because of the evaluation because before you can get your form signed, you have to complete an evaluation first. Maybe if we are not that judgmental, but still, when you enter and you already feel unwelcomed, then you will open up, that was when the fear of being judged really starts to come out.)

Fear and Hesitation. The combination of internal and external barriers is what hinders most, to abstain from seeking help. Respondent 10 held back due to the feeling of shyness and negative social perception associated with visiting the guidance office. He revealed that:

Aside man gud sa busy pud kay murag maulaw man gud ko mag adto didtua kay mostly man gud na if mag adto sa guidance kay lahi ang perception sa ubang tao if ever na mag adto ka didtua. Naa najud ko sa may dome kay murag naajud or wala ko kabalo if modayon ba ko. Ang akua man jud gud ato kay muadto ko pero wala nalang jud ko nidayon kay like nakulbaan ko ato na time. Ang akua man pud gud maam kay murag nag self diagnose rako ba. Guto jud unta nako na naa jud professional na mo ingon jud sa

akoa nga ing ana ko. Kay kanang as kuan lang jud ba kay naga self diagnose lang ko so dili ko gusto na dili ingun ana ang paagi. Mao to gusto ko mag seek ug help so, nakulbaan or naulaw ko.

(Aside from being busy, I also feel shy about going there because usually, when you go to the guidance office, other people have a different perception about it. I was already at the dome, unsure whether I would go there or not. My intention was really to go, but I did not push through because I got nervous at that time. For me, I feel like I am just self-diagnosing myself. What I really want is for a professional to tell me that I am actually like that because I am just self-diagnosing, and I do not want it to be this way. That was why I wanted to seek help, but I felt nervous or shy.)

Unavailable Staff. The availability of the staff to cater the urgent concerns of the student is vital. This unavailability may be due to various reasons such as being out of the office, attending other duties. As a result, students may experience delays, redirection to other staff with different roles which often leads to their dissatisfaction. Respondent 1 shared his discouragement on the availability of the staff. He revealed that:

Na discourage ra man ko ana nila mam kay kanang pag muadto bitaw ka mam nya wla sila mam ba. Unya kaning wla sila nag ingon na nay lakaw, in'ana bitaw mam. Naay tao mam pero kanang lahi man gud to sya mam murag naa biya ata na silay lahi-lahi na position maam na unya ipasa-pasa na lang bitaw ka sa lain mam. Murag kanang kung sa customer service pa mam, dli bitaw nemo ma promise ang customer satisfaction bitaw mam.

(I just got discouraged, ma'am, because when you go there, they were not around and they did not tell me if they went somewhere. There was someone there but it was someone else. They have different roles or positions and so, you just get passed around to others. It was like if it was in customer service, you can not guarantee the satisfaction of the customer.)

Common Misconceptions About Counseling

The themes from this section were drawn from the specific research question 2.4 "What do you think are the common misconceptions students have about counseling or those who seek it?" The responses generated four emerging themes: counseling as punishment and for the problematic, perceived inaccessibility of counselors, non-functional or unimportant, and counseling for severe cases.

Counseling As Punishment and for the Problematic. Many students associate being called to the guidance office with punishment and weakness. These beliefs stemmed from their experiences in their early years at home, from friends and even in school where guidance was portrayed as a disciplinary tool rather than a supportive service. Hence, the responses of the eight respondents revealed a widespread misconceptions and stigma about counseling. Respondent 1 explained that he viewed counseling negatively because of what he heard from other parents way back then. He expressed that:

Pinaka common gyud mam is katong gi ingon nako na kung wala ka nka attend og seminar or webinar ba na kay kanang pangit gyud ang guidance. Murag negative sya tan'awon bitaw mam. Mao nay mga maling akala bitaw sa mga studyante mam kay tungod man gud na program man gud ang mga estudyante mam parehas sa ako na program pagka bata pa ba hangtud hayskul na pag moingon og guidance, pag naa kay mali na gibuhad ipa transfer kag lahi na skwelahan. Ang maling akala man gud ana nila pag muadto ang studyante sa guidance, murag gipatawag, murag naay sala ang estudyante. So, pag itawag jud automatic naay sala.

(The most common is what I told you that if you have not attended seminars or webinars, you would really have a negative view of the guidance office. It was seen in a negative light. That was one of the misconceptions students have because ever since we were young and even in high school, we were conditioned to think that if you did something wrong, the guidance office will transfer you to other school. The common misconception is that when a student is called to the guidance office, it means they did something wrong. Even I experienced it. So, whenever someone is called there, they automatically assume it was because of a mistake.)

This was supported by Respondent 3 and added that when they heard the word "guidance" they feared for they associated it with terror and discipline. He said that:

Una is katong kuan mam pag moingon og counseling is kato bitawng part of counseling is ang word na guidance bitaw mam mahadlok sila ana na pag ingon og guidance, terror na sila diraa, kasab'an ka and then murag hatagan kag punishment sa imohang gibuhad. Pag mag seek kag help mura syag kumbaga weak ka na pagkatao kay nganong kailangan pa nemo muadto draa. Just to ano, help yourself pero naa man pud gud ubang tao pud mam na dili nila ma gets ba na naay mga laing tao pud ba na naay mental disability na dili jud nila kaya e help ilang kaugalingon and need nilag like professionals para matabangan sila.

(First, ma'am, it was like when someone mentions counseling, the word guidance is part of that, and students get scared when they hear it. They associate it with the staff being terror, they will get scolded and will give you punishment for what you did. When you seek help, it was like you are weak because you went there and ask for their help and not handle things on your own. But some people, they don't understand that there are others who have mental disabilities and they truly can not help themselves so they really need professionals to help them.)

In addition, Respondent 5 also shared that:

Syempre, ang kahadlok lang man jud. Sa akoang na experienced ug sakong mga kauban pud kay puros lang jud kahadlok ug kaulaw among na felt. Kay feeling man gud namo dati kay kanang e deep talk mi, tas basin kasab-an mao lang jud sya. Na expectation vs. reality hinoon.

(Of course, it was really just fear. Based on my experience and that of my peers, what we all felt was mostly fear and shyness. Because back then, we thought that if we were called, we would be subjected to a deep talk, and maybe even get scolded but it turned out to be just expectation versus reality.)

Similarly, Respondent 6 affirmed:

Ang mga students gud maam na mag think na e punish sila unya some feared their problems kanang ma criticize sila maam ba or ma judge. para sa akong maam kay maka think kag wrong idea maam ba. Kay parehas atong niagi maam oh akong mga classmates kay nagpa guidance, which is kanang ang huna-huna namo ba kay patay panishan to si kuan didtu ba kay kini mao na, basin palayason nato sa school kay apil mani sa orientation. Basin pa limpyohon, pa limipsaon ug 3 hour 5hours, then pahawaon sa school. Murag dako kaayu ang negative maam basta guidance.

(Students think that when you go to the guidance office, you will be punished. Some fear that their problems will be criticized or that they will be judged. For me, too, ma'am, it makes you think of negative things. Like, for example, before, my classmates went to the guidance office, and our initial thought was, oh no, that student is going to get punished, maybe even kicked out of school since this was included during the orientation. We would even think they might be made to clean for 3 to 5 hours or be expelled. I guess the word guidance itself has a really negative connotation for us.)

Participant paused and continued by saying that when you are called to the guidance office, you did something wrong. He shared that:

Mga misconceptions sa uban maam kay kanang ma judge gud maam if mag ask for help sa counseling gud maam. Akong ma huna-hunaan maam sa tao na modoul didtu kay basin naay mali na gibuhad ang isa ka studyante nganung gipa adto sya ddtu. So usa jud na sa rason maam kung nganung paadtuon ang isa ka student sa guidance kung naa ba syay gi buhat na mali. Para sa akong maam if ever na wala syay gibuhad na mali so di jud sya pwedi muadto ug guidance, Ingun ana gud maam.

(There are also misconceptions from others, ma'am, that if you seek counseling, people will judge you. What I think of when a student goes there is that he did something wrong that is why he was called to go there. So, that was one of the reasons, ma'am, why the student was being called to the guidance office, it was to know if he did something wrong. For me, if someone did not do anything wrong, they should not even go to the guidance office.)

Moreover, Respondent 7 disclosed the common misconception most students have towards counseling is being mislabeled. He explained that:

Most of the students kay ang common misinterpretation with it comes sa counseling kay kanang about sa confidentiality and at the same time sharing to others kay kanang ma judge ka kay tungod nag seek kag ingun ana. Ang uban pd mo ingun na basin e rehab ka kay tungod ingun ana. One of the misconceptions labi nag dili nimu kaila ang atoa kay ma judge jud nimu ang tao. Like ahh naa diay ni syay problema gi dala-dala basin ma dala ni sya sa mental hospital or basin ingun ana. Imbis imu syang e encourage to be better, imu gihapon sya ma discourage unya pagka human ma judge pajud nimu ang isa ka tao without knowing sa rason nganung nag seek sila. Mao jud na, ma judge jud sila bisan wala pa sila kaila jud.

(Most students have a common misinterpretation when it comes to counseling, especially about confidentiality and the idea of sharing with others. They fear being judged just because they sought help. Others would even say that you might end up in rehab. One of the misconceptions, especially when you do not know the person, is that you tend to judge the person saying things like; Ah, this person is having a problem, maybe he will be sent to mental hospital. Instead of encouraging the person to be better, you end up discouraging and judging him without even knowing the real reason why that person sought help. That was really it. They get judged even though they do not know the person personally.)

Further, Respondent 8 narrated that:

Feel nako, mao jud to akong common misconception maam na wala jud ko kabalo na cover diay sa guidance dako diay ug cover na area ang guidance. Feel lang jud nako na dapat nagpa guidance lang ka if stress ka or kung naa lang ka. Parehas atong klasmet nako dati na gibagsak sya unya gusto na sya mag hikog. Gi tug-an man nako to dati sa Program Coordinator. Actually, kay pa end na ang semester. Mao jud to ang common misconception namo sa guidance maam na wala mi kabalo na dako diay kaayu na silage cover. Main reason lang jud nako na dapat magpa guidance ka is stress naka or naka huna-huna nakag

suicide ug kanang ni agi kag abuse. Mao rajud na akong nailhan na worth it ka magpa guidance, the rest wala na.

(I feel like that was really my common misconception, that I did not know the guidance office actually covers a wide range of concerns. I just felt that you only go to guidance if you are stressed or if you have a problem. Like what happened to our classmate before who failed a subject and who wants to commit suicide. I reported that to our Program Coordinator. Actually, the semester was about to end that time. So that was really our common misconception about the guidance office. We did not know that it actually covers a lot. My main belief was that you should only go to guidance if you are already stressed, thinking about suicide, or have experienced abuse. That is all I knew that made it worth going to guidance and nothing else.)

In addition, Respondent 9 shared the fear he had about the guidance office. He revealed that:

Maghatag sila ug kanang parehas sa highschool, nadala man jud ko sa guidance. Di bale mao rapud toy naka kuan na hadlok diay sa guidance kay mura bitaw kag makapasakit ug istorya. Kato na time kay Nawala akong envelope unya gipatawag ko sa guidance. Gi uli sa guidance ang akong envelope pero naay pakapin istorya. So akong misconception kay kung sa guidance kay makasab an ka. Ang mahuna-hunaan nako sa mga students na makita namo sa guidance sa office kay naa silay nahimo or need nila ug guidance or need nila magpa assess sa ilang problems like that. Karun pako kabalo diay na ang guidance diay dghan ug trabaho.

(They give you that kind of impression, just like when I was in high school, I was called to the guidance office. That was probably what made me scared of guidance, because they can say hurtful words. That time, I lost my envelope, and I was called to the office. They returned my envelope, but there was also a lecture that came with it. So, my misconception was that if you are called to guidance, it means you are going to get scolded. What I think of when we see students going to the guidance office is that they must have done something wrong, or they need guidance, or they need to be assessed for their problems. It is only now that I have realized that the guidance office actually has a wide scope of responsibilities.)

Finally, Respondent 10 added that:

Murag stigma na sya maam ba na If mao na gani kung mag counseling ang isa ka tao kay ang perception sa uban tao kay naay sakit, kanang murag lain sa ilaha ba. Kay mostly ang kuan jud baya sa ubang tao especially kay kanang oldies na ba if naa kay kuan sa imung huna-huna kay e pray lang daw. Pero wala sila kabalo nga kanang mas deeper ang kuan sa mental

health, murag ingun ana gud. Unya ang misconception sa counseling kay ingun ana ba. Kanan ang stigma jud sa mga tao towards sa mga naga seek ug help.

(It is like a stigma, ma'am, that when a person seeks counseling, other people perceive them as having mental illness. It is like they are not fine with it. Most of the time, people, especially the older generation, would say that if you are struggling mentally, you should just pray. But they do not realize that mental health issues go much deeper than that. That is the kind of misconception people have about counseling. There really is a strong stigma from others toward those who seek help.)

Perceived Inaccessibility of Counselors. Students may avoid seeking help due to embarrassment and the misconception that counseling is only for those who have committed serious offenses.

Respondent 2 highlighted the need to correct misconceptions about counseling and make counselors more approachable. He stated that:

Kanang maulaw sila mag open up sa ilang problem mam and then abi pud nila og unreachable ang counselor, ang office. So mao na mam maong dili sila ganahan kay maulaw sila mag open up sa ilang mga problems in life kay abi nilag dili maduolan ang guidance counseling. Ang misconception sa mga students nila kay dako kayo kag sala nganong na pa guidance ka. Kay ang kasagaran biya na perception sa mga tao mam kay kung nagpa guidance ka is naa kay dakong sala, so mao to mam.

(Students often feel shy to open up about their problems because they think that the counselor or the office is hard to approach or unreachable. That is one of the reasons why they hesitate to seek help they are too shy to talk about their personal issues, thinking the guidance office is not approachable. Many students also have the misconception that going to the guidance office means you have done something wrong. There is a strong perception among students that if you go to counseling, it is because you're in big trouble, which discourages them from reaching out.)

Non-functional or Unimportant. Some students perceive counseling as ineffective or irrelevant, contributing to their reluctance to seek help.

Respondent 4 shows how a lack of visibility and relevance of counseling services can lead students to dismiss them as unimportant, reinforcing stigma and further discouraging help-seeking behavior. He revealed that:

Ang perception nako sa counseling jud is kuan lang murag butik-butik. Sorry sa word mam mura ra syag butik-butik sa school maam ba. Kanang murag walay function kay dili namo ma feel ba. Ay actually maam pag gikan sa guidance no kanang ipa counseling na dayon ka maam. In'ana ang among perception. On my perspective lang maam ang misconception sa

mga students kay pag once mag seek kag counseling kay kana, nabuang. Kana sya maam.

(My perception of counseling is that it feels insignificant, like something just added for formality. Sorry for the term, ma'am, but it is like a small, useless part of the school. It seems to have no real function because we do not really feel its presence. Honestly, ma'am, when someone is referred to counseling, the impression is that something is wrong or you are already crazy. That is the common misconception among students once you seek counseling, it means there is something seriously wrong with you.)

Counseling for Severe Cases. Some students believe counseling is only necessary for extreme or privileged cases, minimizing everyday struggles.

Respondent 8 explained that:

Kuan lang OA lang jud. Mag lagot gani ko mag huna-huna. Pwedi raman na ilaag isa ka adlaw uy maulian raman na. kanang siguro lang maam, dipendi jud lagi na sya sa imung background kay majority sa mga nag dako sa kalisod kay murag common naman gud na sya. Maliban nalang siguro kung kwartahan jud ka, kanang pina babay-baby jud ka. Parehas sa amoa na nagdako na daan sa kalisod, nga kabalo najud sa background sa kanibuhi ba bata palang naka agi najud kay murag kabalo nami kay murag OAhan nami ba. Wala rana sa amoa kay murag Makaya raman. Maka ingun nalang jud mi na, sus! Kanang ingun ana na butang, naagian na namo na uy. Sobra pa jud ana

(Honestly, I find it a bit overacting. I even get irritated thinking about it. Some of those problems could be resolved in just a day, people recover quickly. It really depends on your background. For those of us who grew up in hardship, those situations are already normal. Maybe if you were raised in comfort or spoiled, you would need counseling. But for us who have experienced struggles from a young age, we have become used to it. That is why we often see others as overreacting, because we have been through worse. We just think, we have already gone through that and even more.)

What insights can be shared to the academe and the community on counseling services?

This section presents the results of the 3rd major research question, "What insights can be shared to the academe and the community on counseling services?" Three specific research questions were used to gather data and information for this major research question. The questions were intended to gather responses insights of the research respondents in seeking counseling services. These insights help the academe and the community understand how to improve awareness, accessibility, and acceptance of counseling, and how to better support students' emotional and mental well-being.

Enhancing Accessibility and Effectiveness of Counseling Services

The themes in the section were coming from the specific research question 3.1 “Based on your experience, what improvements can the college implement to make counseling services more accessible and effective for students?” under the 3rd major research question “What insights can be shared to the academe and the community on counseling services?” The responses generated three themes: Increase Counseling Accessibility and Awareness Campaign, Foster Welcoming and Safe Environment, and Utilization of Peer Counselor Organization.

Increase Counseling Accessibility and Awareness Campaign. This theme highlights the need for better promotion, regular orientations, and more visible counseling services to help students understand, access, and trust the guidance program.

Respondent 1 provides suggestions that focuses for the 1st year to help them prepare in the next college years. He suggested that:

Sa mga classroom palang bitaw daaan maam, dapat ipamalay sa mga taga counseling kung unsa ng guidance and counseling bitaw maam. Kay kung tibuok studyante naay uban dili mangadto unya dili maminaw. Unya kung online pd, naay dili mosulod unya dili pud maminaw. Dapat e by room lang sya bahalag tagaan lang ug pipila ka oras para naay kamalayan ang mga estudyante kung unsa ang guidance and counseling. Kay kung daghan pd kaayu ang uban mag tabi raman. Labi na sa mga first year pud bitaw maam dapat pag tuonan jud pd sila maam. Bahalag sa ilaha lang ang room to room.

(Even inside the classrooms, counselors should already raise awareness about what guidance and counseling is. Not all students listen or attend, especially in online setups. It would be better to do it room-to-room, even just for a few hours, so students are aware. In big groups, others just talk. First-year students especially need attention. Even just room-to-room visits for them would help, because third year is the hardest.)

Respondent 5 also added that:

Para mas effective and ma improve nila ang college/ students is dapat mas mag increase sila ug awarenes ug e encourage pa nila ang students na mo share sa ilang mga thoughts or ideas specifically sa freshman year kay based sa akoang experience mao na sya ang time na need ug advise ang students. Especially, when it comes sa mental health kay maybe nabag-ohan or mag lisod ug adjust sa time management kay lahi ilang naka sanayan. Then naa pud uban dili aware ug asa dapit pangitaon ang counseling unit.

(To make it more effective, they should increase awareness and encourage students to share their thoughts most especially during freshman year, which, based on my experience, is when they really need advice. Many struggles with adjusting when it comes to their mental health or managing time, and some do not even know where to find the counseling unit.)

Respondent 6 highlights the importance of consistent mental health integration in discussions and flexible scheduling to improve student access and comfort. He suggested that:

Based on my experience maam if the college can improve counseling services which is by increasing sa awareness gud maam through regular orientation gud maam and also by integrating mental health topics sa pag orientation maam ba sa mga classroom discussion. Also, maam mag offer syag kanang flexible schedule for only counseling gud maam among the students para maka hatag ug support or can make the support more accessible gud maam sa student na mag kuan sa counseling.

(Based on my experience, counseling can be improved by raising awareness through regular orientations and integrating mental health topics into classroom discussions. Also, they should offer flexible counseling schedules to make it more accessible to students who need support.)

Respondent 7 also highlighted the importance of advertisement and enhance student awareness. He said that:

I think mas nindot jud kung naay sign or naay announcement like kini doula kung gusto ka mag seek ug counseling. Base man gd sa akong observation like sa akong friend kay kabalo jud ko need niya magpa counsel kay need jud niya. Ako sya gina encourage na muadto pero dili sya kay dili lagi daw major iyang problem. Aside sa maulaw pud kay ang information about counseling kay gamay ra or limited ra sya like, kung naa ba na syay page sa facebook or naa bay website. Ug wala pud mi kaila jud kaayu like wala jud namo nailhan ang name sa atong counselor.

(It would be better if there were signs or announcements saying something like, 'Come here if you want counseling.' I know a friend who needed counseling, but did not go because she thought her problem was not big enough. She was also shy. Information about counseling is also limited. Its presence was clearer for me, when we are on our 4th year. We do not even know our counselor's name.)

Participant paused and continued by suggesting that it would be more effective if the guidance office have a separate orientation. He explained that:

Most of the time kay naging visible jud sya katong pag fourth year namo. Sa orientation rapud magpa ila-ila like walay next orientation for the next activity. Kay during sa general orientation man gud kay naa sya sa last so murag wala nay gana ang mga studyante, di na makita ba kung unsa sya ka importante. Kung pwedi naay separate na orientation sa kana na unit. Murag mas effective sya kung naa syay separate na orientation for the specific office ug naa jud silay page sa FB para kung gusto sa mga student

na dili na mag adto sa office kay mag chat lang sila. Especially jud sa mga 3rd year ug 4th year students.

(They only introduce themselves during orientation and usually at the end part, when no one's paying attention. A separate orientation and a Facebook page would help especially to those individuals who wants to do it through chat. This is especially useful for third- and fourth-year students.)

Respondent 9 also affirmed:

Para sa akoo is mag conduct sila ug murag mag hatag silag information na ang guidance diay kay para ma enlighten ang mga students na ang guidance kay daghan ug cover dili lang purely mag hatag ug guidance o mag hatag advice sa mga students na naay mga problems. Ang nahibal an raman gud namo maam kay mag counsel lang sya. Wala mi kabalo mi na daghan diay na syag trabaho. Mga ka batch nako ug mga ig agaw nako, kana ra amo nahibal an.

(For me, they should provide more information drive about what guidance really covers to enlighten students that it is more than just giving advice to those with problems. What we know is that they only give counseling. My batchmates and cousins only knows that. We did not know they had many other responsibilities.)

Respondent 10 also added that:

Murag dapat nila e emphasize nila na very welcome jud kaayu sila na muadto sa ofis na e help jud sila kanang in-ana. Kanang dili lang jud during sa orientation nila e inform ang mga students. Like from time to time or as much as needed, like every month naa silay bisag post lang sa ilang page.

They should emphasize that students are truly welcome to visit the office for help not just say this during orientation. From time to time, or maybe even monthly, they should post reminders on their page.

Foster Welcoming and Safe Environment. This theme emphasizes the importance of creating a friendly, judgment-free, and emotionally safe space to encourage students to seek counseling.

Respondent 2 suggested that friendly counseling environment helped the respondent open up, reduce fear, and become emotionally stronger. He stated that:

So, para sa akoo mam friendly jud dapat kayo ang environment sa guidance counseling mam. It should be friendly para mka attract silag mga students na need to seek counseling and then para sa akoo mam is dako jud kayo syag effect sa akoo mam no because kay through that, I am a better person

now. I know how to handle my stress now because of their advises and then mao to mam dapat ang environment jud sa guidance counseling mam is friendly kanang ang mag seek og counseling is kanang dili sila ma, they are not afraid to seek counseling.

(For me, ma'am, the guidance counseling environment should be very friendly. It should be friendly to attract those students who need help. Personally, it had a huge impact on me. I am a better person now because I know how to manage my stress through their advice. That is why the environment must be friendly, so students would not be afraid to seek counseling.)

Respondent 3 also added that:

Actually mam, accessible man jud ang atong guidance a school. Ang problema man gud murag naa bitaw kahadlok kay katong time daw na wala sya nisulod sa ilahang schedule kay naa man syay kahadlok mam, murag naay ubang students na gigukod ata sya kay para e force na muadto didtoa. Mura syag na trauma kay gi bantayan sya tas gi gukod para ingnon na muadto didtoa which is nisamot syag murag gina push pa niya hinuon ang kuan, katong pag kuan sa counseling.

(Our school's guidance is actually accessible, ma'am, but the problem is students are afraid to go. I have a friend who was forced to go because her mental health is not okay, and she felt even more pressured. She was even chased and watched to ensure she went, which traumatized her.)

Participant paused and suggested that it is better to also have a female counselor in school as this is preferred by other female students.

So, kani sya is girl ni sya and murag mas gusto niya na ang guidance counselor or ang mag kuan sa iya is kanang babae daw po kay naa syay mga kahadlok sa mga lalaki. In general jud naa syay kahadlok. So in'ana mam, siguro dungagan og babae na counselor.

(She also said she'd feel more comfortable with a female counselor due to her fear of men. So maybe there should be more female counselors.)

Respondent 8 also suggested that the guidance office should have some programs which helps build rapport between them and the students: He explained:

Dapat naa jud silay program nga kanang ganahan lang jud na mga studyante na mag open sa ilaha ba. Murag feel man gud nako maam mag build paman gud kag trust para mag open ka sa usa ka tao. Parehas anang mo ditso ka sa guidance nya wala nimu kaila unya mag open ka didtu murag

naa jud syay trust issue usahay or fear of judgement na mogawas. Kanang ma common unta sila ba kanang ma known sa whole campus. Ug dili man lang, kanang untang ibutang nato na naa silay isa ka tao na kanang approachable jud pud ba na hilig makig halobilo sa mga studyante na kanang ma known jud bitaw sya incase of kuan dali ra sya maduolan kay kabablo naman ang tanan. Unya usahay pud gud sa guidance, malibog man gud kag kinsay maduolan nimu. So unta mailhan jud ang mga personnel.

(There should be programs or efforts that encourage students to open up. I believe that you need to build trust before you can open up to someone. It is hard to share personal issues with someone you do not know, especially when there is fear of judgment. Guidance counselors should be more visible and known throughout the campus. Ideally, there should be at least one approachable person who loves to mingle with students, someone everyone recognizes and feels safe to approach. Sometimes students are unsure who to talk to in the guidance office. I hope the personnel would really be known or recognized

Respondent 10 highlights the proactive outreach and reassurance from guidance counselors reduce stigma and make students more willing to seek help. He suggested that:

Everytime gud na naay orientation or gani kanang sa mental health awareness month kay sila jud ang mo reach out kanang sila jud ang mo kuan na dili tungod mo adto kag counseling kay naay lain sa imuha kanang murag gina encourage nila ang mga students na mag seek ug help kung need najud ug help or kanang dili najud Makaya kay naa man sila always na mag help sila na e guide ka, always na e guide me if ever na mag adto mi didtua. Kanang day by day na makuan ang mga students na ay dili siay ko maulaw na mag seek ug help kay muadto man ko para e guide ko, para e boost kung unsa ang dapat na himuon if ever maka cope up para sa mga in'ana na sitwasyon.

(Every time there is an orientation or mental health awareness month, the guidance office really makes the effort to reach out. They tell us that seeking counseling does not mean something is wrong with us. They encourage us to ask for help if we really need it or if things become overwhelming. They are always ready to help and guide us whenever we go there. Day by day, they make students realize that there is nothing to be ashamed of when seeking help. We go there not because we are weak, but because we need guidance and support to cope.)

Utilization of Peer Counselor Organization. This theme highlights the role of peer-led mental health support groups in providing accessible, relatable, and structured assistance to students. This peer organization helped promote an avenue for students to share their concerns.

Respondent 4 viewed mental health support groups as a valuable support system that enables peer-based mental health assistance, acting as a bridge to professional counseling through a structured referral process. He revealed that:

Ang atoang school man gud karun maam is naa na syay organization regarding sa combating the mental health. Which is wala na pud koy other type na mahuna-hunaan po na kailangan e improve sa atong school kay naa naman ang peer organization na gina mugna sa counseling office para matabangan ang mga students specially when they are fighting mental health. With that group, maka provide pud sila og support, peer to peer so that dili na mahitabo na masobraan na ilahang mental health. Naa silay structure na gina follow which is pag once naa kay problema nya giadto nemo sa peer organization, pag ma assess na nila na kailangan jud nemo mag seek, pwede sila mohatag og referral sa counselors kay para maistoryahan ang regarding sa imong problema. So in'ato po ilang structure. Naa silay referral.

(Our school now has an organization focused on addressing mental health issues. I honestly can not think of anything else the school needs to improve because the peer organization already exists. It is a peer organization created by the counseling office to help students, especially those struggling with mental health. With that group, students receive peer support, which can help prevent their mental health from worsening. They follow a structure: when a student has a problem and brings it to the peer organization, it is handled through peer-to-peer support first. If they assess that the student needs further help, they can refer them to the guidance counselors. So, that is their structre. They provide referrals.)

Advice or Message to Student Hesitant to Seek Help

The themes in the section were coming from the specific research question 3.2 “What pieces of advice or message would you give to fellow students who might be hesitant or afraid to reach out for help?” under the 3rd major research question “What insights can be shared to the academe and the community on counseling services?” The responses generated three themes: do not be afraid, hesitated and shy to ask for help from the guidance counselor, normalize visiting guidance counselor, and start talking someone you trust.

Do No Be Afraid, Hesitated and Shy to Ask for Help from the Guidance Counselor. This theme reflects students' encouragement for their peers to overcome fear, shame, or hesitation in seeking guidance. It emphasizes the importance of reaching out for help, especially in mental health situations, and trusting the support system available through guidance counseling.

Respondent 2 contended that students should not fear speaking up, as the guidance office offers a safe space where their voice is valued and their struggles are heard. He stated that:

My advice that I can give to them mam is do not be afraid to seek help to the guidance counseling because at the end of the day, ikaw ra gihapon ang

mka benefit kay kung mag seek kag guidance nila kay mohatag gyud silag advise mam on how to handle your problems. Open kaayo sila mam na maminaw sa imong mga problema beacsue kanang need jud nato na ma heard mam, dli maulaw if they are feel afraid, adto lang mo sa guidance offie kay mao to. Sa guidance counseling mam is imong voice is importante kaayo.

(My advice to them, ma'am, is not to be afraid to seek help from the guidance office, because in the end, you will be the one to benefit. If you seek their guidance, they will really give you advice on how to handle your problems. They are very open to listening to your issues because sometimes, what we really need is to feel heard. Do not be shy if you are afraid, just go to the guidance office. In guidance counseling, your voice truly matters.)

Respondent 3 also added that:

So akoa lang ma message sa other students, uhm, walay kahadlok na muadto ka sa guidance kay ang guidance naga hatag na sila og tabang para sa imohang problema specially sa imohang mental health and dako pud na sya na tabang sa atoa if atoang e try and e set aside sa nato ataong kahadlok kumbaga.

(My message to other students is, do not be afraid to go to the guidance office. They offer help for your problems, especially with mental health, and it can really help you if you just try. You just have to set aside your fear for a moment.)

Respondent 4 emphasized that counseling offers professional, caring guidance for students who feel burdened and alone helping them cope with emotional challenges safely. He stated that:

For me, never hesitate to state your problem specially when in terms to mental health. Akong ma advice lang jud sa ilaha kay kung problemado kaayo ka in terms of pressure sa life, gina away ba ka sa imong ginikanan tapos wala kay ma sultihan, ang counseling office jud ang pinaka the best option for you to cope up and to ease the pain that you have kay si counseling office man gud, gina studyhan jud nila maam ba kung unsaon nila pag approach na dili kayo masakitan ang students. Tapos, unsa pud ilang way nga para makatabang sa mga students na naga combat sa ilang mental health. So in'ana sya mam. Dapat dili sila hesitant na e share unsa ilahang naa sa huna-huna og kasing-kasing kay si counseling office maam ba nahulog syag nga maga guide sa mga students po, unsaon nila pag combat sa ilahang ginabati.

(For me, never hesitate to share your problems, especially when it comes to mental health. My advice is that if you are feeling overwhelmed by life's pressure, or if you are being scolded at home and have no one to talk to, the counseling office is the best place to cope and ease the pain. The counselors really study how to approach students gently, in a way that doesn't hurt them emotionally. They look for ways to help students who are struggling with mental health. So, students should not hesitate to share what is on their mind and in their heart because the counseling office serves as a guide on how to deal with what they are going through.)

Respondent 5 also affirmed that fear of judgment should not hold students back as seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. He advised that:

Akoa lang ma advice kay do not let the fear of being judged stop you like as-in ayaw unhi imong kaugalingon sa puro kahadlok ug kaulaw lang, dapat kanang imohang e boost imong confidence, imong atubangon kung unsa man ang dapat atubangon. Normal lang man jud sa atoa mga tao na maka feel ug kakapoy, kasakit, ug mga challenges sa life.

(My advice is do not let the fear of being judged stop you. Do not let yourself be consumed by fear and shame. Instead, boost your confidence and face whatever needs to be faced. It is normal for people to feel tired, hurt, and face challenges in life.)

Respondent 6 conveyed that letting go of negative assumptions and being open to guidance can lead to positive change. He shared that:

Dili sila mag huna-huna ug negative maam ba. Nga which is kung muadto ug guidance and counseling, dili mag huna-huna ug negative kung unsay angay buhaton para there are possible na mahatag na guidance para sa usa ka studyante kanang dili lang jud mahadlok muadto.

(They should avoid thinking negatively, ma'am. If they go to guidance and counseling, they should not assume the worst about what will happen. There is guidance available that can truly help students. They just should not be afraid to go.)

Respondent 7 highlights the importance of ignoring misconceptions and taking the step to seek help can prevent problems from worsening. He stressed that:

My message for my fellow students is dapat dili jud nila unahon ang kaulaw bisan unsa sila ka vulnerable na tao. Dapat gyud kung na feel najud nila ang ka pressure ug anxiety, dapat jud mag seek najud sila ug counseling. Dili lang jud sila maniwala sa mga misconception sa counseling ug kanang gipang ingun sa uban. Kay kung maniwala man gud sila ug dili nila e try

kay naay possibility na mulala ilang situation or kanan dili na siya maagapan.

(My message for my fellow students is that they should not prioritize shame, no matter how vulnerable they feel. If they are really feeling the pressure and anxiety, they should seek counseling. They should not believe the misconceptions, or the negative things others say about counseling. If they believe those and do not try it, there is a possibility that their situation might get worse or go beyond help.)

Respondent 10 reminded that seeking help is courageous, and trusting professionals can lead to hope and healing. He added that:

Dili mahadlok na mag seek ug help kay wala may mawala sa imuha, especially sa mga professionals kay sila man pud ang mas nakahibalo unsaon pag cope up sa mga certain situations nga gaka experience nimu sa life. Tapos, aside sa dili mahadlok, ayaw pud kawala sa or ayaw pud kawala ug pagloam sa mga tao na kaya ka tabangan.

(Do not be afraid to seek help because you have nothing to lose, especially when it comes from professionals who know how to help you cope with difficult situations. Also, aside from not being afraid, do not lose hope in the people who are capable of helping you.)

Normalize Visiting Guidance Counselor. This theme promotes the idea that seeking help from the guidance office should be a regular, stigma-free part of student life. Counseling is positioned as a proactive, supportive, and essential tool, not only for mental health crises but also for everyday academic and emotional challenges.

Respondent 1 advised that regular visits to the guidance office even without urgent problems can help sustain motivation and mental wellness, especially for struggling students. He stated that:

Akong ma advise sa ilaha, kung naa man silay problema o wala. Duol lang sila kay matabangan man sila sa guidance and counseling labi na sa college kay murag isa jud sya sa mga tulay para mo graduate. Kung gusto jud ka moduol para maayu jud imung mental health imung mga negative thoughts jud himuon jud na nilag positive thoughts. Mao na akong advise sa mga studyante na dapat jud sila moadto. Kung pwedi lang kada adlaw jud sila muadto didtu maam. Kana pud mga studyante na nawad'an nag gana, kanang gitapol na silag skwela pwedi jud kaayu na sila.

(My advice for them, whether they have problems or not, is to just go to the guidance and counseling office because they can really help especially in college, where it acts as one of the bridges to graduation. If you truly want to take care of your mental health, they can help turn your negative thoughts into positive ones. That is my advice to students; they really should go. If possible, they should go every day. Especially those students who feel like

they have lost motivation or are getting lazy to attend classes, they can really benefit from it.)

Respondent 7 highlighted that counseling serves as early intervention. It helps prevent stress from escalating into more serious mental health issues. He suggested that:

That is why, kay dapat e try lang jud nila ug reachout sa counseling kay feeling nako sya ang pinaka nindot na ug benefits para sa mga studyante labi na sa 3rd year ug 4th year. All students should reach them, dili man gud mabal an isa ka situation kung lala ba sya o dili kung dili ka mo reach sa expert sa counseling. Para matagaan ug advices ang mga students kung unsa ilang buhaton. In that way, ma prevent to ilang stress na dili na mahimong depression and anxiety.

(That is why students should really try reaching out to the counseling office. I believe it is one of the most beneficial things for students, especially those in their third or fourth year. All students should connect with them because you would not really know how serious a situation is unless you talk to a counseling expert. Through that, students can receive advice on what actions to take. This can help prevent stress from turning into depression or anxiety.)

Respondent 9 added that:

Ako rang mahatag na advise kay if dili najud nila makaya ilang mga problems na sila lang jud mismo mo pas-an, they can seek guidance from the office or the guidance counselor. Para mahatagan pud sila ug way na wala sila nag inusara. Dili nila na himuon na way na ma down najud kaayu na mahimo na silang suicidal. So, kay ma access man sa students ang counseling or sa guidance pwedi na sila mauadto didtoa. Syimpre naa man jud na ang maka feel sila ug hesitant pero mas better jud pud na naa sialy madunggan na other voices coming form the professionals no na naa diay better ways na maka overcome sila ana ilang problems if dili najud nila makaya.

(My only advice is that if students really can not handle their problems anymore and feel like they are carrying everything on their own, they should seek help from the guidance office or a counselor. That way, they would not feel alone and would not focus too much on negative thoughts. They should not let those thoughts pull them down to the point of becoming suicidal. Since counseling is accessible, students can go there. Of course, they may feel hesitant, but it is much better to hear other voices, especially from professionals, who can show them better ways to cope if things become too much.)

Start talking Someone You Trust. This theme emphasizes the value of opening up to trusted friends, teachers, or adults as a first step in dealing with emotional or mental struggles. It highlights the importance of building a support system and promoting mature communication.

Respondent 8 conveyed that confiding in trusted friends or teachers can be a helpful first step. Encouraging mature, supportive conversations can lead students toward proper help when needed. He suggested that:

Actually, wala man kaayu koy ma advice kay wala man kaayu ko nakasulod sa guidance. Pero ug ingun ana man lang gani na naay mga student pareha dati naka experience man jud ko pero wala nako to gi treat as serious. Pero kung naa man gani silay problem, mas better gihapon na mouna sa mga trusted na amigo. Unya, unta ang mga amigo mo istorya pd sa dili lang sa mga gawas ba naa pud untay contact sa mga teachers. Parehas atong amoa sauna na naa si sir na dali ra kaayu namo e contact mao to na kuan ra dayun. Be mature enough lang jud siguro maam.

(Actually, I do not really have much advice because I have not personally gone to the guidance office. But if there are students who are experiencing something just like what I went through before, even though I did not treat it as serious at the time it is still better to talk first to trusted friends. And hopefully, those friends will also talk not just among themselves but also connect with teachers or other adults. It was the same for us before, we had a teacher who was very easy to reach, and that made things easier to handle. I guess the key is to be mature enough to know when to reach out.)

Ways the College Community Can Support Students' Mental Health and Encourage Help-Seeking Behavior

The themes in the section were coming from the specific research question 3.3 "In what ways can teachers, staff, and the college community better support students' mental health and encourage help-seeking behavior?" under the 3rd major research question "What insights can be shared to the academe and the community on counseling services?" The responses generated four themes: be observant and actively refer students to counseling, show empathy and be approachable, foster welcoming and safe environment and increase counseling awareness campaign.

Be Observant and Actively Refer Students to Counseling Services. This theme emphasizes the responsibility of the college community, especially teachers and staff to notice behavioral changes, create a safe space for students, and take proactive steps in encouraging and referring them to seek professional help. Support should be visible, empathetic, and consistent.

Respondent 1 highlighted that students need more than encouragement. They need personal support and guidance to help them take the first step in seeking help. He conveyed that:

Base sa akong experience, kanang diritsohon nalang bitaw ug storya. Example, kung makita an bitaw nimu ang isa ka studyante ubanon nimu mismo or kamong duha mismo ang moduol didtu sa guidance and counseling. Kay kana man gud sila, bsan unsaon nimu na silag encourage na kung naa moy problema, kailangan ninyu moadto didtu kay maulaw man gud na sila. Dili man gud sapat lamang ang istorya lang kay kailangan man jud gud na alalayan para ma feel jud niya na naay tabang.

(Based on my experience, sometimes you need to directly talk to the student. For example, if you notice something off about a student, you can personally accompany them to the guidance and counseling office. That is because no matter how much you encourage them by saying they should go if they have problems, some students still feel shy. Talking alone is not enough, they need someone to assist them, so they truly feel that there is help available.)

Respondent 5 added that being observant allows teachers and staff to provide quiet but impactful emotional support, making students feel they are not alone. He revealed that:

Siguro, must be aware and can be observant ang teachers and staff within the organization kung unsa ang changes behavior sa students. Kay kasagaran biya student kay dili vocal sa ilang mga problema so dapat maging observant both teacher and staff. Para maiwasan or mabawasan ang problema sa student. By these ang student maka feel lang man ug kanang support, love and acceptance from their second family. Kung baga para dili nila ma feel ang loneliness.

(Teachers and staff should be aware and observant of changes in students' behavior. Most students are not vocal about their problems, so both teachers and staff must be attentive. This way, they can help prevent or lessen student issues. Through this, students can feel support, love, and acceptance from what becomes their second family in school, helping them feel less lonely.)

Respondent 7 highlighted that early identification from instructors and their gentle encouragement can lead students to seek help to the guidance counselor before problems worsen. He pointed out that:

For me, as a student kay need sa mga instructors na e assess ilang mga studyante kay kanang ilang mga studyante or feeling nila na naa nay symptom or mao ni ilang situation. Dapat e assess jud sila or e encourage sila na kana gud mag seek sila ug help sa counseling nato kay kung dili na ma assess or dili nila mabantayan na ingun ani na diay ang situation sa isa ka bata kay dili sya matagad kung dili sya e talk sa instructor ug hinay-hinay na e push jud na mag seek ug help.

(For me as a student, instructors should assess their students, especially if they feel that a student might be showing symptoms of distress. They should really be assessed and encouraged to seek counseling. If instructors fail to notice or talk to students about their situation, their problems might go unnoticed. That is why instructors should gently push students to seek help.)

Respondent 6 added that:

Then also maam by referring them sa mga counseling services kung kailangan maam. Ug maka hatag ug encouragement sa mga student maam na maka organize ug mental health awareness para ang huna-huna sa ka student kay dili sila ma stress, ma manage maam with the support of staff and instructors.

(Also, ma'am, students should be referred to counseling services when needed. Instructors and staff can also encourage students to organize mental

health awareness activities, so students can manage their thoughts better and feel less stressed, especially with the community's support.)

Respondent 9 affirmed:

Ang mga instructors kay pwedi sila mag inform sa mga students like if ever kung naa moy mga problems or challenges na inyuhang na face karun na katuigan or na pin down mo sa situation pwedi man mo mag seek ug advice sa guidance. Kasagaran man gud sa mga instructors wala naga open up sa counseling services. Ang uban kay naningkamot maka skwela, unya kanang grabi ilang struggles para makahuman. I think need pud nila ug mga instructors na mo kabit pud sa ilaha ba na if ever naa moy problems, pwedi mo maka adto guidance.

(Instructors can inform the students that if they are experiencing problems or challenges, they can always seek advice from the guidance office. Most instructors do not talk about the availability of counseling services. Some are really working hard and are struggling to finish school. I think they need that instructors should also be involved, reminding students that they can go to the guidance office if they have problems.)

Participant paused and continued by sharing that the staff should not rely solely on the guidance office in informing the students that the office exists. He stated that:

Kibale ang mga staff mismo ang wala nag initiate or wala nag inform sa mga students. Kasagaran man pud gud sa akong mga classmates kay broken family ug working students unya need jud sila ug advice. Dapat ang mga staff and instructors kay dili lang mag salig sa guidance office na magpahibalo sa mga students na naa mi, nag exist mi sa school. Ang instructor during sa klase pwedi randomly mo istorya na kung naa na sa inyuha diri naay mga problems, so pwedi ra kaayu moduol.

(The staff did not initiate to inform the students. In my class, many of my classmates come from broken families or are working students, they need guidance. The staff and teachers should not just rely on the counseling office to inform students that they exist. During class, an instructor could casually mention, if any of you have problems, you are free to go to the guidance office.)

Show Empathy and Be Approachable. This theme emphasizes the need for instructors to be understanding, nonjudgmental, and accessible. When students feel safe and respected, they are more likely to open up about their struggles and be receptive to support whether emotional or academic. Teachers' empathy can make a significant difference in a student's mental health journey.

Respondent 2 opened up approachable and empathetic instructors can help prevent serious mental health issues by encouraging students to seek help early on. He stressed that:

Ang akoo mam sabton gyud sa mga instructor ang mga students and then dapat naa silay understanding towards the student's behavior. Dapat approachable pud sila kay maulaw man gud ang mga students mag open up if dili approachable ang ilang mga instructors. Para maging open sila, ang

mga students sa mga instructors and then para ma advise-an pud sa instructor na moduol sila, muadto sila sa guidance counseling because mental health issue is very rampant kayo nowadays specially sa amoang mga students who suffered from stress or depression because killer man gud ang ma stress or depression. Dghan biya kaayog cases karun nga students nag hikog because of depression.

(For me, ma'am, instructors should really understand their students and be aware of their behavior. They also need to be approachable, because students often feel shy opening up if their instructors aren't approachable. If the students feel comfortable with them, they will be more open and can then be advised by the instructor to visit the guidance office. Mental health issues are very rampant nowadays, especially among students suffering from stress or depression. Stress and depression can be deadly. There are so many cases now of students committing suicide because of it.)

Respondent 4 highlighted that instructors play a key role in connecting students to support systems, especially when students can't reach out on their own. He stated that:

Actually mam, mutual support lang man jud ang kailangan po. Ang akoo lang jud maam no kay tan'awon sa mga instructors if kaya ra ba sa mga students ang works. tapos kung once naa silay mga problemas, dapat si instructor pud mismo ang middleman regarding sa unsaon pag hatag og services from counseling office to the students po. Murag ma himo si instructor as a middleman para matabangan.

(Actually, ma'am, what we really need is mutual support. What I believe is that instructors should assess whether students can handle the academic workload. And once students are struggling, the instructor should act as a middleman someone who connects students to the guidance office or counseling services so they can get the help they need.)

Respondent 8 highlights that empathy means seeing beyond the surface. Understanding students' backgrounds and avoiding assumptions can unlock their full potential. He narrated that:

Para sa akoo maka support jud ang mga instructor if ever kana gud day 1 palang kanang tan awon niya ang background sa studyante kung nag lisod ba ni ug sulod diri o wala. Kay usahay man gud naa koy instructor na gina label gina tan aw mi niya as naa mo diri sa wala kaayu mo nag lisod. Naa jud bayay uban na naglisod. Mao nay isa sa problema jud kaayu maam. Naa gani toy instructor dati na mga first na murag ma question nimu imung kaugalingon ba na imbes problemado nag ani ka ma problema pa nuon kag samot. Kay kung akoy pa istoryahon maam, ang mga instructor since day 1 kay mag take sila sa profile sa mga studyante kay maynalang maka adjust sila.

(Support starts when, even from day one, the instructor takes time to understand a student's background. I had an instructor who labeled us as if none of us were really struggling, but the truth is, some students really are. That became a big problem. I remember one instructor who, instead of

helping, made me question myself more. Even though I was already going through a lot, it felt like I was being misunderstood even more. If it were up to me, instructors should collect students' profiles from day one so they can adjust and see who needs more help, who is weak, and who is doing okay.)

Foster Welcoming and Safe Environment. A welcoming and safe environment is essential in promoting student mental well-being. When instructors and staff are non-judgmental, empathetic, and create safe spaces for open conversations, students are more likely to feel supported and empowered to seek help. Respondent 6 conveyed that A non-judgmental and empathetic environment helps students feel safe and open, making it easier for them to talk about their struggles. He suggested that:

Ang way na himuon sa usa ka instructor or staff maam para maka support sa mental health sa mga studyante kay by creating a safe or kanang non-judgemental environment maam. Where ang mga students kay maka feel gud ug comfortable maam and also, they can encourage students by promoting open conversation showing their empathy.

(The way instructors or staff can support students' mental health, ma'am, is by creating a safe and non-judgmental environment. In this kind of space, students will feel comfortable. They should also encourage students by promoting open conversations and showing empathy.)

Respondent 9 highlighted that hurtful behavior from instructors can damage a student's self-esteem. Respect and sensitivity are crucial in creating a truly safe space. He shared that:

Naa man ko kaila na student na mura bitaw syag na bully sa instructor na mura syag maulaw na gani mag open up. Luoy kaayu sya uy ana akoang friend maam, mura syag nawad an gani ug confidence sa iyang kaugalingon gani. Mura syag maulaw na making istroya kay murag mismo ang instructor na ang nag degrade sa iyaha kay chubbyhon man gud sya. Mura syag na bodyshame unya ang instructor ang nag kuan sa student na mag huna-huna ug something gani. Tapos ang mga classmates pud nag sige ug katawa. Murag sya na pressure ato na time. Basta luoy daw kaayu sya uy. Unya nag advise na gud mi ato na naay guidance.

(I know a student who seemed to be bullied by her instructor, and it made her feel ashamed to open up. My friend said the student lost her self-confidence because the instructor body-shamed her for being chubby. The instructor's words made her overthink, and her classmates just laughed. She felt pressured and humiliated. We even advised her to go to the guidance office.)

Respondent 10 also added that even simple gestures of support, like offering a safe space, can have a meaningful impact on students' mental health. He stated that:

Siguro kay mag provide sila ug safe space, although naa naman kay naa man mga adviser. Kanang mag offer sila ug safe space sa mga students nila although kuan naman kaayu sa mga instructors. Pero feeling nako kay effective pud siya ug naay ingun ana maam.

(I think instructors can provide a safe space, especially since students already have advisers. If they offer a safe space to their students, even if some instructors seem distant, I think it would still be effective if such spaces exist.)

Increase Counseling Awareness Campaign. Raising awareness about counseling services helps students understand that support is available and accessible to everyone, which encourages them to seek help without hesitation.

Respondent 3 suggested that simple and visible campaigns like posters and announcements can make students more aware that counseling services are open and available for them. He shared that:

Ano siguro mam, magbutang siguro og like murag announcement or like posters na every student can access to our guidance regardless if part ba ka dria sa school mismo or dili. So, pwede ka mag seek og help sa imohang mental health didto sa atoang school na guidance po mam, something in'ana po.

(I think, ma'am, it would help if there were announcements or posters placed around the campus saying that every student can access the school's guidance services, whether they are officially enrolled or not. This way, students will know that they can seek help for their mental health at our guidance office something like that, ma'am.)

Chapter IV

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the discussions, conclusions, and recommendations of this phenomenological study that unveiled the experiences, challenges, coping mechanism, and insights of the students in seeking counseling services.

Discussions

This section presents the themes which were the results of the study and corroborated with related literature and studies. The arrangement of the sequence of the presentation is based on major research questions in the interview guide.

Experience About Seeking Help from the School Counselor. The emerging themes in this structured theme are felt hesitant and nervous, stigmatized perception, fear of judgment, emotional relief, supportive and approachable counselors, development of self-direction, promotes mental health, and lack of awareness about counseling services. These were the views of the college students in seeking counseling services.

The findings revealed that although counseling services hold considerable potential for enhancing students' emotional and mental wellness, there are still significant barriers that hinder their effective utilization. Many of the students expressed hesitation and nervousness about visiting the guidance office. These emotions often tied to uncertainty about the relevance or seriousness of their concerns while some believe that their issues are not significant to seek help. Also, there is a prevailing stigma surrounding counseling services. Some students associated the guidance office with disciplinary action. In addition, several students feared being judged or talked about by classmates or even neighbors if seen visiting the office. The fear of being misinterpreted or perceived as weak, troublesome, or mentally unwell prevented them from reaching out for assistance. Moreover, although counseling services were accessible, some

students were unaware of the office's location or the process for reaching out. While orientation initiatives were recognized, a lack of awareness remained, making it difficult for students to access the services.

This is aligned with the views of Al-Darmaki (2014) who emphasized the stigma continues to be a major obstacle, particularly in cultures where seeking assistance is viewed unfavorably. In addition to stigma, the lack of awareness regarding the advantages of counseling, combined with insufficient social support and cultural influences, frequently dissuades students from reaching out for assistance (Aligawesa, 2024). Moreover, research has suggested that a significant barrier to students seeking help and utilizing on-campus resources is the fear of stigma associated with mental illness (Turosak & Siwierka, 2019). Further, issues related to accessibility, including the availability of services and awareness of counseling options, further complicate the decision-making process (Flansburg, 2012; Onabule & Boes, 2013). Furthermore, as highlighted in the research conducted at King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University, another obstacle preventing students from pursuing counseling services consist of the belief that their concerns are not significant, worry that others will not comprehend their issues, and challenges related to accessing care (Alaqeel et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, the findings also revealed that students who utilized counseling services noted significant advantages. Even though they were initially hesitant, individuals who sought counseling services experienced emotional relief and beneficial results. Students valued having someone to talk to who would listen without passing judgment. Additionally, students who sought help shared positive experiences with their counselors. Counselors were described as hands-on, compassionate, and genuinely concerned about students' well-being which made a significant impression on those students who utilized their support. Moreover, counseling also played a role in the personal growth and development of students. It assisted them in becoming more decisive, clarifying their goals, and addressing both academic and emotional difficulties. Further, the counseling services were seen as helpful in raising awareness and addressing mental health issues. Students appreciated that counselors provided a safe environment for them to share their thoughts and emotions, especially during the times of emotional distress or intense academic stress. The finding is consistent with the study of Xiong et al (2021), as he stressed that guidance services have been demonstrated to greatly improve positive growth in areas such as academics, personal-social interactions, and career paths, while also reducing mental health problems like anxiety and depression. In addition, as discussed by Haris (2020), the establishment of guidance and counseling programs in educational settings is essential for promoting self-sufficiency and optimal personal growth, as it aids students in dealing with personal, social, and academic hurdles. These services have a beneficial and quantifiable influence on the mental health and comprehensive development of students. They play a crucial role in enhancing adolescents' subjective well-being, sense of self-efficacy, and emotional skills, which subsequently aid in diminishing academic stress and promote healthier psychosocial growth, an important basis for both educational achievement and future career endeavors (Fatima & Khan, 2020). Therefore, these services are crucial in aiding students' growth both academically and personally, as they offer a well-rounded structure that caters to different facets of student development. These services are vital for the overall development of students' capabilities (Yulianti et al., 2024).

Initial Perception of Counseling. The emerging themes in this structured theme are counseling as form of disciplinary action, stigmatized perception, counseling as ineffective, unfamiliar to counseling, counseling as helpful and safe, counseling as preventative action, and counseling as last resort for mental breakdown. These were the initial perception of college students on counseling services.

The findings revealed that students' views on counseling services are influenced by their initial experiences, cultural stigma, and lack of awareness. Many students, especially during their earlier academic years, perceived counseling as linked to misconduct or disciplinary action. Another major barrier to seeking counseling is the fear of being judged. Students were concerned that peers would perceive them as weak, mentally unwell, or having significant issues. Also, male students, especially, experienced additional pressure from societal norms regarding masculinity and how emotions should be expressed. To add, some students were not familiar with the basic information regarding counseling services and some had never had personal experience or known anyone who had utilized counseling. Moreover, although many perceived counseling as helpful, a few questioned its effectiveness. One student mentioned that even though they received guidance, they still depended on their personal experiences to address their issues. This is aligned with the views of Aligawesa (2024), which highlighted that a lack of understanding about the benefits of counseling, along with inadequate social support and cultural factors, often discourages students from seeking help. Another personal factors that cause students to hesitate in seeking counseling services include feelings of stigma, fear about disclosing personal information, concerns about being misunderstood by counselors, and doubt about developing a connection with a counselor (Flansburg, 2012). In addition, the apprehension of being judged, in conjunction with the internalized conviction that seeking assistance signifies weakness, is particularly pronounced among male students who subscribe to traditional constructs of masculinity (DeBate et al., 2022).

Males demonstrated hesitation as a result of masculine beliefs, whereas females were less influenced by these elements in their experiences with seeking help (Yılmaz-Gözü, 2013). Moreover, research emphasizes that confronting and acknowledging negative beliefs, such as concerns about being scolded or punish, can lessen stigma and enhance perceptions of counseling, especially among male students who have not sought assistance before (Ægisdóttir et al., 2011).

Regardless of some negative views about counseling, the findings also revealed that those who have availed of counseling generally recognize its value in providing emotional relief, guidance, and mental health support. Some students who utilized counseling services noticed a change in perspective. They started to view it as a safe place for receiving emotional assistance, advice, and direction. Several students also acknowledged the importance of early counseling intervention to prevent more significant mental health concerns. They viewed counseling as a tool to handle anxiety, stress, and emotional difficulties before they developed into crises. Also, many students view counseling as something to consider when they feel completely overwhelmed or emotionally drained. Rather than reaching out for help sooner, they think that counseling is intended solely for severe situations.

This is parallel to the views of Lessy et al., (2022) who emphasized that the study found that guidance and counseling services greatly improve children's self-adjustment in kindergarten, showing higher average scores in schools that provide these services than in those that do not. Educators offered individualized support, which contributed to enhancing children's development and adjustment skills. Students experience significant reductions in mental health issues, which positively impacts both their well-being and academic success (Winterrowd et al., 2016). Moreover, counseling acts as a proactive measure for college students by implementing outreach programs and psychoeducational groups to raise awareness about relationship violence, foster healthy relationships, and motivate students to seek help and create personal safety plans (Hays et al., 2015). Further, counseling is frequently considered a final option because of the stigma associated with seeking help, cultural norms that prioritize self-sufficiency, and the

belief that counseling is only necessary for serious problems, resulting in individuals postponing their search for treatment (Topkaya et al., 2017).

Post-Counseling Perception. The emerging themes in this structured theme are counseling as a space for emotional release and coping, positive perception despite lack of direct experience, deepen understanding, strengthened mindset, positive shift in perception, and lack of insight due to no experience. These were perception of the college students about counseling services after their experience.

The findings revealed that counseling is viewed by many students as an important way to express hidden emotions and deal their internal conflicts. Instead of keeping their pain and trauma, those who have gone through counseling discovered it to be an environment where they could communicate openly and start the healing process. Also, a several students shared positive opinions about counseling despite not having participated in it themselves. Additionally, students who had experienced counseling revealed that it helped them in gaining a better understanding of themselves and their different situations. The experience fostered self-reflection, emotional insight, and more thoughtful decision-making.

Moreover, the guidance counselor helped them shift their negative mindset to positive mindset when it comes to shifting from being pessimist to being a pessimist individual. Additionally, school efforts like mental health awareness campaigns and social media communications had been a contributing factor in reshaping students' viewpoint of counseling. However, the lack of counseling experience hinders some students to share strong opinions or insights regarding counseling.

This is parallel to the views of Nikolaichuk et al (2013) which expressed that counseling created an accepting environment for emotional expression, enabling participants to examine their feelings and manage their distress. Many students reported that they experienced a sense of recovery, normalized their emotions, and improved their coping skills as a result of therapeutic practices and the assistance of psychologists. Additionally, positive views on counseling can be held by people who haven't personally engaged with it, since these views are frequently influenced by recognizing the benefits of counseling and the attributes of counselors (Setiawan, 2011).

Moreover, favorable views about counseling, especially concerning its effectiveness, greatly improve the likelihood of individuals seeking assistance. Efforts to promote understanding and trust in counselors can strengthen mindsets, leading to a positive shift in perceptions and increased likelihood of seeking counseling support (Setiawan, 2011). However, there is a limited understanding in counseling services which arise from a lack of experience, since insight is an internal process shaped by the traits, attitudes, and interactions of both the counselor and the client (Türküm, 2014).

Description of Counseling Journey. The emerging themes in this structured theme are helpful, supportive and transformative, lack of insight due to no experience, personal growth and positive outlook. These were description of the college students of counseling after their counseling journey.

The findings revealed that students who have experienced counseling have reported that it was deeply helpful and transformative. Additionally, many students described counseling as a path to self-exploration and emotional recovery. Besides addressing immediate concerns, counseling also helped enhance emotional awareness, build coping mechanisms, and foster a more defined sense of purpose in life. also expressed that counseling promoted a more positive outlook. Also, it motivated them to talk about challenges with a more optimistic approach and to have faith in the potential for growth and progress. However, some students could not provide detailed feedback about counseling because they did not have experienced on it.

This corresponds to Haris (2020), who noted that the establishment of guidance and counseling programs in educational settings is essential for promoting self-sufficiency and optimal personal growth, as it aids students in dealing with personal, social, and academic hurdles. Counseling services also provide support and foster transformation, enhancing students' self-awareness, relationships with others, and academic achievements. They assist in tackling academic difficulties and encourage positive social interactions, ultimately leading students to reach their full potential and effectively manage their educational experiences (“Guidance and Counselling Service: A Path to Enhance Academic Achievement for Secondary Schools’ Students,” 2023).

Moreover, it received positive feedback from most students, with key themes of support, empathy, and non-judgmental listening emphasized. Notable enhancements in emotional well-being were noted, reinforcing its significant effect on students' mental health (McKenzie et al., 2011). However, there is a limited understanding in counseling services which arise from a lack of experience, since insight is an internal process shaped by the traits, attitudes, and interactions of both the counselor and the client (Türküm, 2014).

Barriers in Accessing or Continuing Counseling Services. The emerging themes in this structured theme are hesitant and uncertain what to do, shyness and fear of judgment, unavailable staff, never tried once, negative perception of guidance office, and prefer peer support over professional help. These were the barriers of college students in accessing or continuing counseling services.

The findings revealed that students expressed uncertainty about pursuing counseling, not because they lacked the need for support, but due to self-doubt over whether their issues were valid or significant enough to deserve professional assistance. Students also believed that their fear of judgment, labeling, or being misunderstood stopped them from seeking counseling. Additionally, students may hesitate to seek counseling due to the staff and the counselor’s unavailability during the time when they needed help. Moreover, some respondents had never pursued counseling and as a result they thought that they could not recognize any personal issues with the service. Further, despite the effort of the college, some students still associated the guidance office with punishment and fear which can trigger their anxiety rather than their feel of comfort. Furthermore, students openly expressed that they tend to rely more on friends than on counselors, feeling that their emotional needs are more effectively addressed through support from peers.

This is aligned in the views of Nakash et al (2018), who emphasized that individuals frequently face emotional distress and interpersonal problems when trying to access mental health services, which can lead to feelings of doubt and reluctance. Additionally, research has suggested that a significant barrier to students seeking help and utilizing on-campus resources is the fear of stigma associated with mental illness (Turosak & Siwierka, 2019). Also, personal factors that cause students to hesitate in seeking counseling services include feelings of stigma, fear about disclosing personal information, concerns about being misunderstood by counselors, and doubt about developing a connection with a counselor (Flansburg, 2012).

Moreover, the research found that inaccessible staff members are a major obstacle to accessing counseling. Students indicated that the friendliness and accessibility of support services, along with prompt access to staff, are essential for alleviating barriers to seeking help on university campuses (Dunn, 2014). Similarly, negative views of the guidance office arise from a misunderstanding of the responsibilities and functions of school counseling, which can result in false beliefs about its goals and efficiency among students (Rahmadewi, 2022). Further, cultural beliefs about discussing personal matters, hesitance to open up to

strangers, and a tendency to seek assistance from friends or fellow students instead of professional counselors also adds up to these barriers (Kambouropoulos, 2015). However, there is a limited understanding in counseling services which arise from a lack of experience, since insight is an internal process shaped by the traits, attitudes, and interactions of both the counselor and the client (Türküm, 2014). **Personal Coping Before or After Counseling.** The emerging themes in this structured theme are seeking support from family, counselor and trusted people, meditation, recreational activity, and avoidance of negative triggers, self-management, isolation, and creative expression and community. These were the coping mechanism of the college students before or after their counseling experience.

The findings of the study revealed that students depend significantly on family, close friends, teachers, and counselors as dependable sources of support, direction, and emotional validation. Expressing concerns and receiving advice from others alleviates stress and fosters mental clarity. Students often manage their stress by using self-regulation methods like meditation, managing their time and finances, engaging in physical exercise, and enjoying leisure activities. Additionally, showed impressive self-management abilities by effectively managing their time, budgets, and resources, reflecting their determination, initiative, and a strong sense of responsibility. There is one student who found participating in creative activities such as spoken poetry created a secure environment for emotional expression and release. The student noted that performing poetry enabled them to work through and communicate their difficult experiences, while also connecting them with others who share similar challenges, cultivating a feeling of solidarity and healing. However, although not ideal, some students turned to isolation as a way to cope. For these students, solitude offered peace and a chance for deep self-examination.

This is in support of the point of Mitchell et al (2024), who noted that getting help from family, friends, and counselors is vital for mental well-being, as studies show that social support is positively associated with effective coping strategies and negatively associated with feelings of depression and anxiety, particularly in tough situations. Additionally, the connection with counselors, especially trainee counselors, plays an essential role; displaying positive regard and supporting autonomy significantly enhance the counseling experience. According to qualitative evaluations, despite ongoing operational challenges, well-being advisers in school settings provide accessible assistance, fostering a feeling of community and concern, (Bennett et al., 2024).

Moreover, students frequently implement emotion-focused techniques, such as mindfulness, meditation, and relaxation practices, to regulate their emotional reactions to stress (Handayani et al., 2024; Islam & Rabbi, 2024). Additional beneficial strategies include engaging in consistent physical activity and embracing a healthy lifestyle, both of which positively impact students' mental health. Cognitive restructuring, which entails altering negative views of stressors, is also utilized to diminish the psychological effects of academic stress (Handayani et al., 2024). Although not preferred by many, solitude can improve self-discipline, helping students handle their time and academic responsibility more efficiently, which in turn lowers anxiety. Being alone can lessen social interruptions, allowing students to focus more intently on their studies and tasks (Akese et al., 2024).

Feeling of Discouragement While Seeking Counseling. The emerging themes in this structured theme are no discouragement, internal conflict, unwelcoming environment, fear and hesitation, and unavailable staff. These are the discouragement student feel while seeking counseling.

The findings revealed that many students expressed feeling encouraged when it came to seeking help from the guidance office. They felt supported, understood and even inspired by the counselors. Some student acknowledges desire to reach out to the guidance office during the times of emotional distress but hesitated

due to internal doubts and overthinking. Additionally, the fear of being judged, even before starting to speak, affected the students' willingness to seek help. Some students noted that the unfriendly expressions, and perceived negativity of some staff created a barrier to open communication. Students expressed that how others view them affected their choices. They were concerned about being labeled or misinterpreted for just going to the guidance office. However, students may hesitate to seek counseling due to the staff and the counselor's unavailability during the time when they needed help.

This is aligned to the view of LeViness (2024), who emphasized that study shows that approximately two-thirds of clients at counseling centers believe that the services they received supported their continuation in school, implying that students tend to feel more encouraged than discouraged when they seek counseling, which in turn positively impacts their retention rates. Despite this, some students reportedly expressed to having internal struggles such as fear, shame and denial which hinders them from pursuing counseling. These barriers make it difficult to acknowledge the necessity for assistance, which can, in turn, affect personal development and the effective use of psychological resources. In addition to this, the unfriendly atmosphere also greatly hinders individuals from pursuing counseling, especially within marginalized communities. Elements such as stigma, cultural perception, and limited access contribute to this barrier. For example, Black millennial men frequently encounter harmful stereotypes related to mental health, resulting in hesitance to seek assistance due to concerns about their masculinity and pride (Cofield, 2024).

Moreover, research has suggested that a significant barrier to students seeking help and utilizing on-campus resources is the fear of stigma associated with mental illness (Turosak & Siwierka, 2019). The study emphasizes that individuals with fewer fears generally have more favorable views on seeking professional assistance, indicating that addressing these concerns is essential for encouraging timely access to mental health (Zartaloudi & Madianos, 2010). Further, the research found that inaccessible staff members are a major obstacle to accessing counseling. Students indicated that the friendliness and accessibility of support services, along with prompt access to staff, are essential for alleviating barriers to seeking help on university campuses (Dunn, 2014).

Common Misconceptions About Counseling. The emerging themes in this structured theme are counseling as punishment and for the problematic, perceived inaccessibility of counselors, non-functional or unimportant, and counseling for severe cases. These were the usual misconceptions students have about counseling.

The findings of the study revealed that students continue to view counseling as a type of punishment or something meant exclusively for those who are problematic or misbehaving, a belief that was frequently developed in early childhood and reinforced throughout their high school years. This perspective is further strengthened by parental cautions and assumptions from peers. Another significant finding is that many students view the counseling services and personnel as difficult to access and unwelcoming. Several students perceive that guidance counselors are not easily approachable or that they are only accessible in specific situations.

Additionally, some students view the counseling services as ineffective, unimportant, or lacking visible results, describing them as superficial within the educational system. Moreover, some students expressed the idea that therapy is only for individuals experiencing severe emotional problem and not for regular stress or everyday challenges. Others trivialize the act of seeking counseling, especially those who have grown up in hardship and feel that struggles are part of life and should be dealt with independently.

This corresponds to the views of Sembiring (2019) and Dumigan (2017), who pointed that students commonly view counseling as a type of punishment because of its connection to disciplinary measures and the highlighting of problematic behaviors. In addition, studies show that counseling is often associated with students facing academic or behavioral challenges, like low GPAs, disciplinary referrals, or misconduct, which can lead to a stigma surrounding the act of seeking help. Moreover, primary factors that contribute to the belief that counselors are hard to access include stigma and concern about being judged for mental health struggles, unfavorable previous experiences, a lack of knowledge about available resources, and doubts about confidentiality, all of which prevent students from pursuing guidance counseling (Tolentino, 2024).

Further, students view the guidance office as ineffective or insignificant because they are unclear about its roles, feel apprehensive about reaching out to counselors, and have minimal proactive involvement, resulting in the underuse of accessible counseling resources and support (“Student’s Perception of the Function of Guidance and Counseling in Schools,” 2022) Furthermore, students frequently view counseling as something needed only for extreme situations because of the stigma associated with mental health, resulting in decreased willingness to seek help. This stigma is especially common among males, younger people, and individuals from specific cultural backgrounds (Mitchell et al., 2013). Similarly, it is because of societal beliefs that considerable psychological difficulties are an inherent part of student life (Strepparava et al., 2017).

Enhancing Accessibility and Effectiveness of Counseling Services. The emerging theme in this structured theme are increase counseling accessibility and awareness campaign, foster welcoming and safe environment, and utilization of peer counselor organization. These were the insights of the students on how to make counseling services more effective and accessible.

The findings revealed that counseling services should proactively engage students in smaller, more intimate environments instead of just depending on general assemblies. Personalized room-to-room orientations, especially for incoming freshmen and students in their third year, are regarded as more successful in raising awareness, particularly during times of academic transition or elevated stress levels. Also, students highlighted the importance of establishing a welcoming environment where confidentiality and understanding are guaranteed. Counseling centers ought to focus on fostering an atmosphere that is friendly to students, ensuring inclusivity and psychological safety. Moreover, the creation of peer organizations received a positive assessment among students. Interactions between peers provide a different avenue for support, especially for individuals who might be reluctant to approach a counselor directly. Enhancing peer support systems offers accessible and relatable assistance, while simultaneously reducing the pressure on professional counselors.

This is connected to the views of Comaling (2024), who emphasized that improving access to counseling and implementing awareness campaigns greatly boost student well-being by reducing mental health stigma in community colleges. These approaches motivate students to pursue essential support, helping to remove obstacles that hinder their access to counseling services. In addition, peer support in mental health environments minimizes feelings of solitude, challenges stigma, and encourages optimism and empowerment. It aids in recovery processes and nurtures a sense of community, resulting in positive outcomes (Stefancic et al., 2021). Moreover, it highlights that cultivating an inviting atmosphere promotes a feeling of belonging, essential for students. Maintaining confidentiality and demonstrating empathy build trust, enabling students to participate more actively in their educational experiences and feel secure during their placements (Tremayne & Hunt, 2019).

Further, the article highlights that creating a supportive atmosphere in child and adolescent psychiatric nursing promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion, all of which are essential for maintaining confidentiality and facilitating understanding in counseling. This, in turn, strengthens the therapeutic relationship and enhances the effectiveness of mental health support (Üzar-Özçetin, 2024). Furthermore, engaging with a peer counseling organization for support provides individuals with a safe space to talk about their struggles, especially when it comes to academic procrastination. It promotes open communication and mutual support among peers, increasing the chances of overcoming difficulties through collective experiences and empathy (Liqoiyah et al., 2024).

Advice or Message to Student Hesitant to Seek Help. The emerging theme in this structured theme are do not be afraid, hesitated and shy to ask for help from the guidance counselor, normalize visiting guidance counselor, and start talking someone you trust. These were the advice or message of the students to those who want to seek help from the counselor but are hesitant.

The findings of the study revealed that many students highlighted the significance of conquering fear, shame, and reluctance when seeking counseling. Students understand that reaching out to counselors is a sign of strength, not weakness, and this should be promoted as an essential aspect of self-care and mental health. In addition, students also emphasized that going to the guidance office should not be viewed solely as a backup option or only in times of crisis. Encouraging regular visits to the guidance office is important to prevent emotional challenges from worsening, particularly during high-pressure times such as transitioning to college or approaching graduation. Moreover, they emphasized that although professional counseling is essential, some participants recommended that students first reach out to a trusted individual, such as a close friend, teacher, or family member, particularly if they aren't yet ready to visit the guidance office.

This corresponds to the views of Dilag (2023), who emphasized that guidance and counseling services offer vital emotional support and encouragement for students. Consulting with a guidance counselor can help address difficulties, unlock potential, and create effective learning approaches tailored to individual interests and abilities, enhancing a positive educational experience. Similarly, it plays a crucial role in helping students recognize their strengths and make educated choices. Consulting a guidance counselor promotes personal growth, improves decision-making skills, and equips individuals to face future obstacles, enabling them to achieve their maximum potential ("To Study the Missing Component of Higher Education: Guidance & Counseling," 2022). Moreover, trust plays a crucial role in effective communication by promoting openness and vulnerability. Interacting with someone you trust enables better understanding, encourages asking questions, and promotes a supportive environment which ultimately improves collaboration and lessens uncertainty in complex situations (Denton, 2011).

Ways the College Community Can Support Students' Mental Health and Encourage Help-Seeking Behavior. The emerging theme in this structured theme are be observant and actively refer students to counseling, show empathy and be approachable, foster welcoming and safe environment and increase counseling awareness campaign. These were the insights of the students on how college community can better support student's mental health and encourage them to seek help.

The findings of the study revealed that instructors and staff should be attentive to behavioral changes of the students and personally guide or accompany them to the counseling office when needed. Timely intervention through careful observation and direct referrals from educators or staff enhances the chances that students in distress will receive support. They also pointed out that they are more inclined to open up to instructors who demonstrate empathy and kindness. Instructors who exhibit compassion and

accessibility cultivate trust, making it simpler for students to express their difficulties or seek advice on where to get help. Moreso, students also emphasized the significance of fostering a judgment-free environment that ensures they feel emotionally secure. It was also shared by one of the students that there is an incident of body shaming or insensitive comments from teachers which lead to substantial emotional turmoil and a decline in self-esteem.

This is in support to the view of Coleman (2022), who stressed that educators and staff members need to be observant and proactively direct students to counseling since they are often the first point of contact for students in need, facilitating timely support and intervention, which is essential for effectively tackling mental health challenges. In addition, instructors should also show compassion be approachable to foster a supportive learning environment, allowing students to feel recognized and valued. This builds stronger relationships, improves the learning experience, and motivates students to participate more actively in their academic journey (Franzese, 2017).

Moreover, a collaborative method is fundamental to effective counseling services, highlighting the establishment of a solid partnership between the counselor and the client. This method consists of sharing knowledge, negotiating meanings, and nurturing mutual understanding, all while recognizing power dynamics and institutional limitations that may influence the therapeutic process. Such collaboration fortifies the therapeutic alliance and improves the quality of communication, ultimately leading to more significant and effective results (Strong et al., 2011).

In addition to individual counseling, collaboration also involves engaging community members and organizations in the creation and application of mental health interventions. This wider, community-centered approach focuses on building trust, fostering open communication, respecting cultural differences, and promoting ongoing professional development. By including stakeholders and customizing interventions to align with community-specific needs, counseling services become more adaptable and sustainable, thereby enhancing long-term mental health outcomes (Attila et al., 2024).

Constructive engagement with stakeholders is crucial for enhancing school counseling services, especially in university environments. By promoting the exchange of context-specific insights and clarifying the types of traumas faced by students, the involvement of stakeholder aids in customizing trauma-focused, evidence-based treatments to meet the distinct needs of the campus community. Consequently, this boosts the spread and execution of mental health services within university counseling centers ("Engaging Stakeholders for Change: A Learning Community Methodology for Implementing Evidence-Based, Trauma-Focused Care on College Campuses," 2022).

Furthermore, engaging stakeholders encourages teamwork and inclusivity by fostering cultural understanding and establishing trust. These factors cultivate common values and creativity, leading to counseling results that are more adaptive and robust. When stakeholders actively participate, school counseling services better reflect the needs and experiences of the varied communities they serve, which ultimately improves their overall effectiveness ("Engaging Stakeholders," 2025).

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings, the following implications for practice are offered.

On experience about seeking help from the school counselor. Students revealed mixed emotions, from being hesitant and fear to relief and support. This highlights the importance of making the counseling office look more approachable and non-threatening. School counselors may ensure that students should feel the welcoming environment so that they feel safe, valued, and free from prejudice at the time of their first visit.

On Initial Perception of Counseling. The initial perception of counseling as a venue of punishment or solely for those problematic students is another factor for students to undergo counseling services. Counselors and school administrator may launch an information drive and classroom-based mental health discussions that will redefine counseling services as proactive and support service for all students not just to those in crisis situation.

On Post-Counseling Perception. Students who underwent counseling revealed that they have improved coping-mechanism, personal growth, and emotional healing. This implies the value of counseling and suggests that the school counselor and the college may invest more in showcasing the life-changing impact of counseling and if possible consented post-counseling testimonies.

On Description of Counseling Journey. Students describe their counseling journey as helpful, supportive, and even life-changing; this supports the integration of tailored, continued care in the school counseling programs. Counselors may be consistent in their sessions in order to build deeper trust and long-term impact.

On Barriers in Accessing or Continuing Counseling Services. This finding revealed various emotional barriers such as shame, judgment, and uncertainty about the scope of counseling services. School counselors may orient the broad range of issues that they can offer and initiate flexible ways for help-seeking such as anonymous sign-ups and consultation requests.

On Personal Coping Before or After Counseling. Many students rely on their family, friends, or solitary coping strategies such as avoidance or silence. This highlights the need for guidance counselors to incorporate coping skills training into group sessions or classroom visits, allowing students to explore healthy personal and social methods while receiving professional assistance.

On Feeling of Discouragement While Seeking Counseling. Students who put off seeking help due to self-doubt or fear of not being prioritized highlight the significance of responsive, timely, and inclusive care. Guidance office may maintain enough personnel and scheduling procedures to ensure that children are never ignored or deemed unworthy of assistance.

On Common Misconceptions About Counseling. The common idea that counseling is only for serious problems or mental breakdowns indicates a deeper societal misunderstanding of what can counseling do. Counseling may be normalized in schools as part of everyday wellness and introduced to students earlier by the utilizing the general orientation and through activities and conversations that breakdown its process and remove the stigma.

On Enhancing Accessibility and Effectiveness of Counseling Services. Students' suggestions include online advertisement, visibility and clearer communication. Through this, guidance counselors may expand their presence not just physically but also digitally. In this manner 21st century students will notice and acknowledge the presence and impact of counseling services. Improving school platforms and recruiting more peer advocates will greatly improve its effectiveness.

On Advice or Message to Students Hesitant to Seek Help. Respondents who have experienced positive results of counseling services had been eager to encourage their peers to be open in seeking counseling services as early as possible. Counselors can utilize it by organizing peer-led mental health discussions in which students share their experiences and break down worries among hesitant individuals.

On Ways the College Community Can Support Students' Mental Health and Encourage Help-Seeking Behavior. The students highlighted the need of help beyond the advice office. To promote a campus-wide culture in which students feel constantly supported and understood, faculty, staff, and student leaders may receive basic mental health awareness and referral procedures training.

Implications for Further Research

To the extent that the research was conducted to the students in Davao de Oro State College, the following are the implications for future research presented to be taken into account:

First, future research may be conducted of the same focus to another state college in order to investigate the same phenomenon on unveiling the perceptions of college students towards counseling services. Second, this study was done in only one State College. Further research could be done to investigate the same phenomenon among other state colleges and universities including private school institutions.

Third, a re-interview of the respondents can be done over a period of time if their perceptions of the counseling services have changed. Finally, the findings of this study were viewed from the perceptions of selected college students. Another research could be conducted to understand the perceptions of the college instructors regarding the counseling services.

Concluding Remarks

This study reveals the college students' unspoken experiences while seeking counseling services, experiences which is filled with hesitancy, stigma, vulnerability, and, eventually, transformation. It is also evident that, many students have prejudice of the counseling services in which they feared or misunderstood the purpose of counseling. Those who had courage to seek counseling acquired not just relief, but a deeper understanding of themselves as an individual. This implies that every person who hesitates to step in the doors of the guidance office is a person who is longing to be heard, seen and helped. Counseling services serve as a haven, an instrument for self-reflection, and a stepping stone for healing. As students shared their different experiences, ranging from negative such as anxiety to positive such as gaining confidence and emotional uplift it became evident that counseling services are more than just a crisis intervention. However, emotional and societal barriers still hinder them from receiving the necessary help and guidance. The student responses highlight the need to break down the barriers and make counseling more accessible, visible, and integrated into the students' daily lives.

Ultimately, the findings call for collective responsibility in promoting a school community that supports mental well-being. Counselors, instructors, peers, administrators and other stakeholders play vital roles in shaping the desired school community wherein help-seeking is encouraged rather than being feared. Being comfortable with speaking out and seeking help, students are most likely to feel accepted and empowered. This study affirms that appropriate support will lead students to become survivors and authors of their holistic growth.

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