

Needs and Demands for the Guidance and Counseling Services in the Promotion of Mental Health and Well-Being: A Mixed-Method Study

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10200385>

Received: 21 February 2026; Accepted: 26 February 2026; Published: 12 March 2026

ABSTRACT

This convergent-parallel mixed-method study examined the needs and demands for guidance and counseling services in promoting mental health and well-being at Camarines Norte State College (CNSC). Using a random sampling technique, data were gathered from administrators, counselors or designated personnel, and students across the various CNSC campuses. Data analysis included discourse analysis for the qualitative data and weighted mean formula for the quantitative data.

The study aimed to: (1) describe stakeholders' understanding of the terms 'guidance' and 'counseling' and how these perceptions influence the perceived need for and demand for services and professional counselors; (2) assess the needs of the Guidance Counselors in terms of availability of resources, implementation of services, and training and tools; and (3) determine the demand for services in promoting and enhancing awareness of mental health and well-being.

Findings indicated that, despite the limited number of counselors and resources, respondents recognized the vital role of Guidance Counselors and their services in fostering mental health and increasing awareness. Based on these findings, the study recommends expanding access to counseling services, allocating additional resources, strengthening service implementation, and enhancing mental health education initiatives.

Keywords: Guidance and Counseling, mental health, well-being, Camarines Norte State College, mixed-method study

INTRODUCTION

The psychological well-being of young people holds equal importance to their physical health. Strong mental health equips them with the resilience needed to confront life's obstacles and mature into well-rounded, flourishing adults. Alarming, a staggering 75% of children and young individuals struggling with mental health issues are not receiving the essential support they need (Mental Health Foundation, 2023).

According to the World Health Organization (2022), despite advancements in mental health policy, knowledge, and research, progress remains noticeably slow in enhancing the accessibility of psychotropic medications, public education, community engagement, and primary care treatment.

In the Philippines, despite the implementation of the National Mental Health Policy as early as 2001 (DOH Admin. Order 8) and the passing of the Mental Health Act (RA 11036) in 2018, there remains a significant deficiency in attention to the mental health issue (CPBRD, 2023).

The prevalence of mental disorders in the country ranged between 11.3% and 11.6%, with an average annual increase of 2.0%; increasing from 7.0 to 12.5 million Filipinos diagnosed with a mental disorder between 1990 and 2019. Anxiety (40.9%) and depression (22.8%) are the prevailing conditions. Despite the widespread

occurrence of mental health issues, however, Filipinos frequently refrain from seeking professional help due to cultural factors such as shame, stigma, and the collective mindset within their families or communities.

Mental health is influenced by various factors, and the greater the exposure to risk factors during adolescence, the more pronounced the potential impact on their mental well-being. Since adolescence marks a pivotal stage for cultivating social and emotional habits essential for mental well-being, it is crucial to nurture and support their environments within the family, school, and broader community.

This is one of the reasons the Philippine Mental Health Act (Republic Act No. 11036), particularly Section 24, mandates the mental health promotion in educational institutions, stating that schools of all kinds “shall develop policies and programs for clients, educators, and other employees designed to: raise awareness on mental health issues, identified and provide support and services for individuals at risk, and facility access, including referral mechanisms of individual with mental health conditions to treatment and psychosocial support” (The Lawphil Project, n.d.).

One of the key players in this endeavour, of course, are the Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs). School counselors advocate for the mental health needs of all students by offering instruction that enhances awareness of mental health, appraisal and advisement addressing academic, career and social/emotional development; short-term counseling interventions; and referrals to community resources for long-term support (American School Counselor Association, 2020).

The supply for Guidance Counselors in the country, however, remains problematic. There are only roughly 5,000 guidance counselors for around 28 million students.

This translates to a ratio of about one guidance counselor for every 14,000 students even though the ideal ratio of one counselor per 1,000 students. This ratio was actually already stretched out to 1:500 but to no avail – the Guidance and Counseling services are still so far from being completely catered to all academic institutions and students (Chi, 2023).

Research Objectives

This study sought to offer a comprehensive understanding of the significance of guidance and counseling services, particularly in promoting mental health and enhancing mental well-being.

Specifically, it aimed:

1. To describe the understanding of stakeholders on the terms ‘guidance’ and ‘counseling’ and how it impacts the needs of and demand for guidance and counseling services and counselors
2. To determine the needs of the Guidance Counselors in terms of:
 - a. availability of resources
 - b. implementation of services
 - c. trainings and tools
3. To determine the demands for the Guidance and Counseling services in terms of
 - a. enhancing mental health & well-being
 - b. promulgating awareness on mental health & well-being

Conceptual Framework

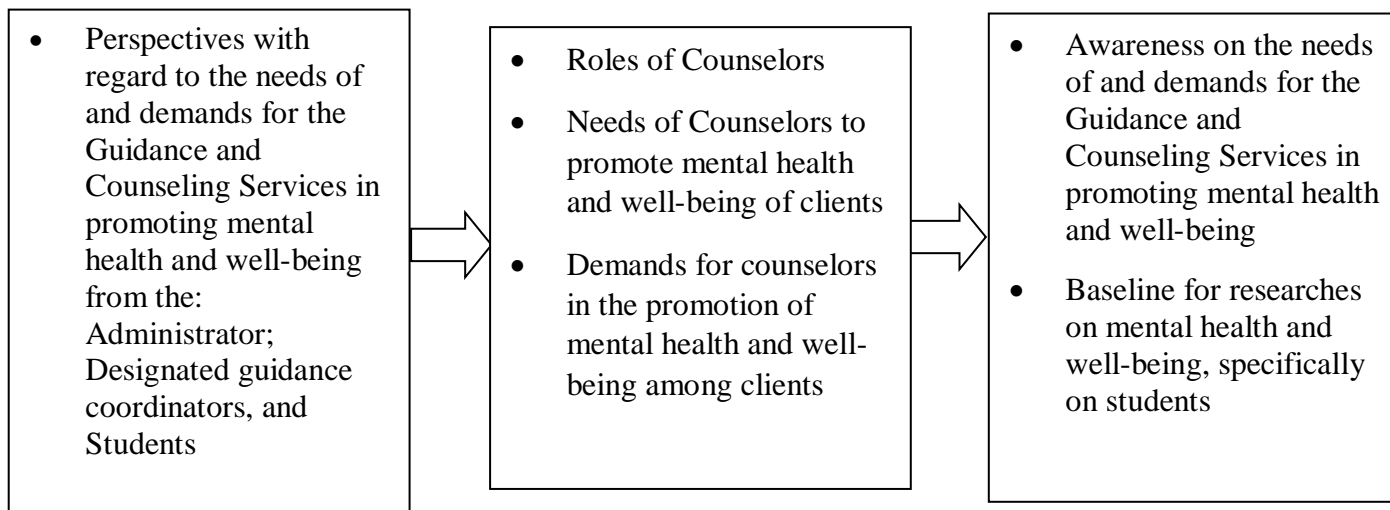


Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm

Figure 1 presented the fundamental framework of the study, which began with examining how stakeholders, including counselors, designated guidance coordinators, and administrators, perceived the needs and demands for Guidance and Counseling services in promoting mental health and well-being. By analyzing these perspectives, the study highlighted the roles and responsibilities of counselors, as well as the institutional needs of their respective offices. It also provided insights into stakeholders’ expectations and demands regarding the delivery of guidance and counseling services.

Through this framework, stakeholders, administrators, and counselors became more aware of the existing needs and service demands related to the promotion of mental health and well-being at Camarines Norte State College (CNSC). The findings of the study served as a strong baseline for future research focusing on well-being, particularly among students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a convergent-parallel mixed-methods design to provide a comprehensive analysis by integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches concurrently. The quantitative component involved collecting and statistically analyzing numerical data to generate measurable insights into the needs and demands for guidance and counseling services, including trends and mental health status. This enabled the identification of key factors such as the prevalence of mental health concerns and barriers to accessing support. The qualitative component employed discourse analysis to examine how participants construct and interpret their experiences and understanding of guidance and counseling. By merging both data sets, the study achieved a deeper and more contextualized understanding of stakeholder perspectives and service needs.

Respondents and Locale

Initially, this study focused on CNSC campuses; the deans and directors of each unit; guidance counselors and designated guidance coordinators; and selected students. Given the large population of CNSC, collecting data from the entire population was impractical. Therefore, sampling methods were employed to gather data from a subset of the population, which could then be analyzed to provide insights representative of the entire population. An estimate of 700 students was the sample to represent the overall student population of the institution.

As previously noted, CNSC had a substantial student population across six campuses, yet it only had two existing RGCs. This limitation suggested that the institution struggled to adequately provide guidance and counseling services, posing a significant barrier to the cultivation of robust mental health and well-being among its students.

Table 1. Respondents classification by roles

Roles	Frequency	Percentage
Deans/Directors	7	1%
Counselors/Designated Guidance Coordinators	5	1%
Students from		
College of Arts and Sciences	105	14%
College of Computing and Multimedia Studies	110	15%
College of Engineering	113	15%
College of Business and Public Administration	98	13%
College of Education	78	10%
College of Fisheries, Aquatic Sciences, and Technology	87	11%
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources	55	7%
College of Trades and Technology	52	7%
Ret. Judge Antonio C. Entienza Campus	48	6%
	<i>n= 758</i>	<i>100%</i>

Data Analysis Techniques

Discourse analysis was employed to interpret participants’ perspectives regarding their understanding of the terms “guidance” and “counseling.” Descriptive statistics were used to present the demographic profile of respondents and to summarize data from the researcher-made survey questionnaire, generating insights into service demand, availability, implementation, and stakeholder impact. Weighted mean scores were computed to determine overall perceptions of the effectiveness and accessibility of guidance and counseling services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the distribution of respondents, their perspectives, and their identified demands, as well as the needs of counselors in delivering guidance and counseling services to promote mental health and well-being within the institution. It also examines the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among students to provide deeper insights into their overall mental health and well-being.

Objective 1. The understanding of stakeholders on the terms ‘guidance’ and ‘counseling’ and how it impacts the needs of and demand for guidance and counseling services and counselors. In this study, understanding the terms ‘guidance’ and ‘counseling’ was essential because it shaped perceptions of the roles and services offered by RGCs. Recognizing this distinction influences how individuals and institutions perceive the need for professional counselors. When people understand the broad scope of these services, they are more likely to seek help and advocate for adequate staffing and resources to meet the growing demand for RGCs, especially in educational settings.

Table 2 presents the common terms and definitions associated with “guidance” in GC services as identified by the participants. It also included definitions from books, experts, and literature. Respondents generally understood ‘guidance’ in terms of "guiding" and "helping." However, one frequent misunderstanding is that clients expect counselors to solve their issues.

Table 2. Common Definitions on the Term “Guidance” According to the Respondents Compared with Definitions from Experts, Books, and Literature

Common terms associated with ‘guidance’ by the participants of the study	Common definitions associated with ‘guidance’ by the participants of the study	Definition of the terms associated with ‘guidance’ according to experts, books, and literature
advising	advising in making important decisions regarding education, career, personal development	Advice is a piece of suggestion provided by anyone preferably superior (My Fit Brain, 2023)
guiding	guide students to follow the good path; guide students with their troubles in school; guiding one entity to cope with fear and mental strength; guide students for enlightenment; guide students to make the right choices	Guiding is showing the way by conducting or leading; imposing direction on (Vocabulary.com)
helping	help students to make informed choices; helps to better understand self; helps understand decisions and consequences; helps understand potentials and options; helps reach goals	Helping is to give assistance or support to (someone) : to provide (someone) with something that is useful or necessary in achieving an end (Merriam-Webster, 2024)
solving	solve problems; resolve conflicts; solve issues and navigate challenges	Solving is to find an answer to a problem: to solve a problem (Cambridge Disctionary, 2024)
informing	informing how things work; informing people what they value; informing students to reach their potential	Informing is to give or impart knowledge of a fact or circumstance to; to give evident substance, character, or distinction to (Dictionary.com, 2024)

The role of RGCs is to help clients recognize their own capacities by clarifying their options, enabling them to make informed decisions and resolve their own challenges. In the book “Counseling: A Comprehensive Profession (8th Edition)” by Samuel T. Gladding (2018), guidance in GC services is defined as:

“One distinction between guidance and counseling is that guidance focuses on helping individuals choose what they value most, whereas counseling helps them make changes. Much of the early work in guidance occurred in schools and career centers where an adult would help a student make decisions, such as deciding on a course of study or a vocation. That relationship was between unequals and was beneficial in helping the less experienced person find direction in life.”

Another common misconception is the association of ‘guidance’ with “advising,” which implies a directive, instructional approach not typical of professional guidance. Guidance and counseling follow a supportive, non-directive method, empowering clients to make their own decisions and solve their problems. To delve deeper into the meaning of the term, the origin of "guidance" is explored in “The World of the Counselor: An Introduction to the Counseling Profession (4th Edition)” by Edward S. Neukrug (2011). This highlights the distinction between guidance as a facilitative process and advising as a prescriptive one.

This explains why there is still misunderstanding surrounding the term ‘guidance,’ as the profession initially began with an advising focus. Despite the fact that the guidance and counseling profession has been in existence for almost 100 years, there remains confusion regarding its true definitions and techniques. As a result, the

practice and implementation of these services often face misinterpretations. Therefore, it is indispensable to explore the full context of guidance and counseling to clear up these misconceptions. This ensures that the services are delivered effectively and that their benefits are fully realized.

Table 3. Common Definitions on the Term “Counseling” According to the Respondents Compared with Definitions from Experts, Books, and Literature

Common terms associated with ‘counseling’ by the participants	Common definitions associated with ‘counseling’ by the participants	Definition of the terms associated with ‘counseling’ according to experts, books, and literature
therapy	A form of talk therapy; Counseling is talking to a professional regarding own problems to be able to solve it in a positive manner	treatment intended to relieve or heal a disorder; the treatment of mental conditions by verbal communication and interaction; similar: psychotherapy (Oxford Languages, 2024)
talking to	talking with someone to get help with personal problems or challenges; communicating through talking and listening to help clients overcome their problems; when students receive professional guidance from counselors	to converse with someone; talk to used when one person is speaking and the other is listening (GeeksforGeeks, 2024)
support	offering support and helping people work through their challenges; supporting someone and help them understand their emotions and challenges to improve their well-being and decision-making.	give assistance to; similar: help, aid, assist ((Oxford Languages, 2024)

Table 3 highlights the common definitions of 'counseling' according to the respondents, compared with those provided by experts, books, and literature. Students generally perceive counseling as a form of therapy—specifically talk therapy, where one speaks with a professional about personal problems to resolve them positively. They describe it as a 'heart-to-heart' conversation in a confidential, structured relationship with a counselor.

Another definition coming from the students is that counseling as communicating with a professional or an authorized person to seek guidance. According to their perspectives, counseling involves discussing personal challenges with someone who can help, communicating through talking and listening to overcome problems, and offering a space for individuals to express themselves, share thoughts, or even celebrate happy moments. They understand counseling as receiving professional guidance from counselors to navigate personal issues. Moreover, they believe that counselors serve as a support system that encourages and empowers them. Counselors offer support by helping individuals work through their challenges, assisting them in understanding their emotions, and improving their well-being and decision-making.

Below is a quote from the renowned Gerald Corey (2016) in his book “Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy” regarding counselling:

“Counseling is an intimate form of learning, and it demands a practitioner who is willing to be an authentic person in the therapeutic relationship. It is within the context of such a person-to-person connection that the client experiences growth.”

Once again, the students demonstrated a thorough understanding of counseling, recognizing it not merely as a term but as a vital service. They comprehend that counseling involves person-to-person interaction, wherein the support can significantly aid them in moving forward.

Based on these analyses, students already understood the concepts of guidance and counseling. This awareness indicated that they know what to expect and recognize when they can benefit from GC services. It also suggested that they are open to receiving help and support as they navigate through life. These findings show an increasing acceptance of mental health and helping professionals at CNSC.

Objective 2. The needs of Guidance Counselors in addressing clients’ needs. To shed light on the needs of the guidance and counseling services and its professionals in connection with promoting mental health and well-being among clients and how they were met in CNSC, a survey questionnaire was given to the respondents, which yielded the following results.

Table 4. Needs of Guidance Counselors in terms of Resources

<i>needs of...</i>	Weighted Mean	Adjectival Rating
1. presence of registered counselors	3.6	Exceeds Expectations
2. adequate funds for services and initiatives	3.2	Matched Expectations
3. support from the administration and institution	3.4	Matched Expectations
4. help and backing from faculty and other staff members	3.4	Matched Expectations
5. appropriate venue and space for programs and initiatives	3.6	Exceeds Expectations
	3.4	Matched Expectations

Legend: 4.5-5.0 Greatly Exceeds Expectations; 3.5-4.49 Exceeds Expectations; 2.5-3.49 Matched Expectations; 1.5-2.49 Below Expectations; 1.0-1.49 None to Very Little Effort

Table 4 presents stakeholders’ assessments of the institutional needs of the Guidance and Counseling services, particularly in relation to counselor availability, resource provision, and the extent to which these needs are addressed by the institution. The findings indicate that respondents generally perceive the number of RGCs as adequate, suggesting that the institution had been responsive to the demand for professional counseling personnel. Additionally, the presence of designated GC offices in the main campus and selected satellite campuses, as well as the availability of venues for programs and seminars, reflected institutional support for service delivery. However, responses regarding funding reveal a comparatively lower level of agreement, implying that financial resources for GC initiatives may be insufficient. Overall, while CNSC appears to have met key structural and personnel-related needs, sustained attention to budgetary allocation remains essential, as adequate funding underpins the continuity, expansion, and effectiveness of all GC programs and interventions.

The findings of the present study, which indicated concerns regarding the adequacy of funding for Guidance and Counseling (GC) services, were supported by existing literature highlighting the importance of sustained financial investment in mental health systems. Heinrich et al. emphasized that sufficient funding was necessary for the effective implementation and evaluation of evidence-based interventions. This supported the study’s result that, although counselor availability and structural provisions were perceived as adequate, financial resources remained limited. Lestariningsih et al. argued that strengthening mental health care required coordinated investment to ensure accessible and quality services. In the educational context, Cania et al. found that inadequate facilities and institutional resources constrained optimal service delivery. These findings reinforced the present study’s implication that limited funding could restrict program implementation and sustainability. Overall, the literature affirmed that adequate budget allocation was fundamental to enhancing the effectiveness and long-term impact of GC services.

Table 5. Needs of Guidance Counselors in terms of Implementation of Services

<i>needs of...</i>	Weighted Mean	Adjectival Rating
1. programs, initiatives, and information dissemination hub or venue	3.4	Matched Expectations
2. sufficient time for counseling sessions, individual or groups, addressing issues, promoting changes in behavior, improving mental well-being	3.6	Exceeds Expectations

3. connection with linkages/agencies supporting clients to attain long-term plans for holistic development	3.2	Matched Expectations
4. availability of linkages/agencies assisting referrals for handling clients crises	2.8	Matched Expectations
5. access on agencies or linkages for sharing best practices	3.0	Matched Expectations
	3.2	Matched Expectations

Legend: 4.5-5.0 Greatly Exceeds Expectations; 3.5-4.49 Exceeds Expectations; 2.5-3.49 Matched Expectations; 1.5-2.49 Below Expectations; 1.0-1.49 None to Very Little Effort

Table 5 indicated that the implementation of Guidance and Counseling services generally aligned with stakeholders' expectations, particularly in providing RGCs with adequate time to conduct counseling sessions and promote mental well-being. This suggested that RGCs were structurally supported in managing core counseling functions and client engagement. The findings implied, however, that while RGCs were able to perform essential responsibilities, their capacity to expand services and apply globally aligned best practices could be strengthened. Another notable concern was availability of linkages/agencies assisting referrals for handling clients crises.

The present study's findings highlighting concerns regarding limited referral linkages for crisis situations are supported by existing literature emphasizing the critical role of crisis intervention in mental health service delivery. Hu et al. underscored that crisis interventions are essential in mitigating the adverse psychological effects of emergencies, although further sustained investigations are needed to determine their effectiveness across contexts and populations. In the school setting, Ismail et al. emphasized the vital role of school counselors in crisis preparedness and intervention, noting the need for stronger empirical foundations and structured implementation. Similarly, Kashyap & Kashyap described crisis intervention as an immediate, short-term psychological response delivered by trained professionals to stabilize individuals experiencing acute distress. Synthesizing these perspectives suggests that effective crisis management requires not only counselor competence but also established systems, referral networks, and inter-agency collaboration. Thus, strengthening external partnerships and crisis response frameworks is imperative to enhance the responsiveness and comprehensiveness of Guidance and Counseling services.

Table 6. Needs of Guidance Counselors in terms of Trainings and Tools

<i>needs of...</i>	Weighted Mean	Adjectival Rating
1. necessary training to provide clients with information and awareness based on their individual needs	3.2	Matched Expectations
2. advance knowledge on counseling sessions and other essential services	3.7	Exceeds Expectations
3. adequate time so each client could be catered based on their unique requirements	3.2	Matched Expectations
4. necessary assessment tools for clients to know their specific needs and situation	2.2	Below Expectations
5. focused training to ensure the application of globally accepted best practices are implemented	2.5	Matched Expectations
	2.9	Matched Expectations

Legend: 4.5-5.0 Greatly Exceeds Expectations; 3.5-4.49 Exceeds Expectations; 2.5-3.49 Matched Expectations; 1.5-2.49 Below Expectations; 1.0-1.49 None to Very Little Effort

Table 6 indicated that stakeholders held strong confidence in the competence of RGCs and in the core services delivered by the Guidance and Counseling Office, suggesting that professional expertise was perceived as a key strength in addressing clients' needs. The hiring of qualified RGCs was viewed as a strategic institutional response that effectively supported students' mental health and well-being. However, the limited availability of essential assessment tools emerged as a significant constraint, potentially restricting comprehensive client evaluation and evidence-based intervention planning. Overall, the findings suggested that although foundational

supports were in place, strengthening assessment resources and referral systems was necessary to enhance the depth, precision, and responsiveness of client-centered services.

The study’s findings, which emphasized the central role of RGC competence in effectively addressing clients’ needs, are reinforced by recent literature highlighting the multidimensional nature of counseling practice. Rego et al. underscored that addressing clients’ basic and immediate needs often forms the foundation of the therapeutic process before progressing to deeper psychological work. This perspective aligns with the current study’s indication that sufficient time and professional expertise are critical in delivering responsive and client-centered services. Moreover, Nam & Kim identified core counselor behaviors and multicultural competencies as essential components of effective practice, emphasizing structured training and behavioral standards to enhance service implementation. Synthesizing these studies suggests that counselor effectiveness depends not only on availability but also on continuous professional development and context-sensitive competencies. While RGCs at CNSC were perceived as capable and knowledgeable, strengthening assessment tools and specialized training would further support their ability to address diverse and complex client needs with greater precision and cultural responsiveness.

Objective 3. The demands for the guidance and counseling services and professionals in promoting and mental health and well-being. At CNSC, not all students sought help, even with the availability of RGCs. Only about 5% of students reported having spoken to a counselor during their time in school. Nevertheless, a majority of students still believe that counselors can significantly assist them in promoting mental health, raising awareness about life and mental health issues, enhancing academic progress, and improving overall quality of life.

Table 7 reflected a strong consensus among stakeholders regarding the expanding role of RGCs in promoting mental health awareness and well-being within the institution. The findings suggested that stakeholders expected counselors not only to provide individual support but also to actively engage in advocacy initiatives that reduce stigma and foster informed discourse on mental health. There was also clear recognition of the need for collaborative and multidisciplinary approaches, highlighting the importance of coordination with other mental health professionals to ensure comprehensive and holistic care. This demand indicated that guidance and counseling services were viewed as integral to institutional wellness rather than as peripheral support mechanisms. Overall, the results implied that stakeholders anticipated a more strategic, visible, and proactive engagement of the Guidance and Counseling Office in cultivating a mentally healthy academic community.

Table 7. Demands for Guidance Counselors in Enhancing Mental Health and Well-Being

<i>demands for...</i>	Weighted Mean	Adjectival Rating
1. services in fostering mental health and overall well-being	4.5	Strongly Agree
2. both individual and group counseling in fostering support among individuals facing similar mental health challenges	4.5	Strongly Agree
3. counselors in ensuring comprehensive care for clients by collaborating with other mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers	4.5	Strongly Agree
4. counselors’ best practices in mental health intervention	4.5	Strongly Agree
5. counselors’ advocacies for mental health awareness and destigmatization, such as public speaking engagements, workshops, and community outreach programs	4.6	Strongly Agree
	4.5	Strongly Agree

Legend: 4.5-5.0 Strongly Agree; 3.5-4.49 Agree; 2.5-3.49 Somewhat Agree; 1.5-2.49 Disagree; 1.0-1.49 Strongly Disagree

Table 8 further demonstrated that stakeholders placed significant emphasis on the proactive and community-oriented functions of RGCs in advancing mental health awareness. The findings suggested a strong expectation for counselors to extend their roles beyond direct service provision by facilitating capacity-building initiatives

among educators, employers, healthcare practitioners, and community leaders. This reflects a broader understanding of mental health promotion as a shared responsibility that requires informed and equipped sectors within and beyond the institution. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of strategic partnerships and policy advocacy, indicating that sustainable mental health promotion depends on systemic collaboration and structural support. Overall, the results implied that RGCs were expected to function not only as service providers but also as trainers, collaborators, and advocates within a wider mental health ecosystem.

Table 8. Demands for the Guidance Counselors in Promulgating Awareness on Mental Health and Well-Being

<i>demands for...</i>	Weighted Mean	Adjectival Rating
1. creating pamphlets, brochures, presentations, and online resources to educate the public about mental health issues, coping strategies, and available support services	4.3	Agree
2. partnering with local groups, schools, workplaces, and healthcare providers to reach a wider audience	4.5	Strongly Agree
3. disseminating information, share personal stories, and engage with the community on mental health topics	4.4	Agree
4. training sessions for educators, employers, healthcare professionals, and community leaders to increase their understanding of mental health issues and improve their ability to support those in need	4.6	Strongly Agree
5. advocating for policies and legislation that support mental health initiatives, increase access to mental health services, and reduce barriers to treatment	4.5	Strongly Agree
	4.5	Strongly Agree

Legend: 4.5-5.0 Strongly Agree; 3.5-4.49 Agree; 2.5-3.49 Somewhat Agree; 1.5-2.49 Disagree; 1.0-1.49 Strongly Disagree

The present study’s outcomes highlighting the increasing expectations placed on RGCs in mental health promotion were consistent with broader scholarship emphasizing the psychological vulnerability of adolescents within educational settings. Le et al. (2024) emphasized that systematic evaluation of students’ counseling needs was fundamental to delivering timely and appropriate interventions, reinforcing the preventive and developmental functions of school-based counseling. In a similar vein, Lacson (2024) underscored the necessity of coordinated efforts among educational authorities and policymakers to institutionalize evidence-based mental health programs. Furthermore, Abdulraof (2025) identified structural constraints such as excessive workload and limited resources as significant barriers to effective service delivery and advocated for expanded staffing and sustained awareness initiatives. Collectively, these perspectives suggested that the expanding role of RGCs in advocacy, collaboration, and intervention needed to be supported by institutional investment, policy reinforcement, and strengthened resource allocation to ensure comprehensive and sustainable mental health care within academic institutions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings identified several institutional gaps in CNSC’s Guidance and Counseling (GC) services, particularly in the areas of funding sustainability, crisis referral linkages, and the availability of standardized assessment tools. While stakeholders expressed strong confidence in the competence of Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs) and recognized their expanding role in mental health advocacy and training, structural limitations were found to constrain the full delivery of comprehensive services. These results suggested that strengthening systemic support mechanisms is essential to ensure that counseling services move beyond basic provision toward proactive, preventive, and evidence-based practice.

Given that financial support emerged as a primary institutional need, sustained and strategic budget allocation should be prioritized to enhance program implementation, professional development, assessment capability, and referral systems. The preparation of an annual work and financial plan by the GCO Head may facilitate transparency, accountability, and coordinated communication with academic leaders, thereby reinforcing

institutional commitment. Moreover, visible administrative backing is critical in legitimizing RGC-led initiatives, fostering interdepartmental collaboration, and embedding mental health advocacy within institutional policy frameworks. Structured programs, such as awareness campaigns, information dissemination initiatives, thematic seminars, and specialized training workshops, should complement regular counseling services to cultivate a culture of psychological safety and well-being. Overall, the study concluded that while foundational counseling structures were in place, sustained investment, strategic planning, and strengthened partnerships were necessary to optimize the impact and long-term sustainability of guidance and counseling services at CNSC.

To make RGC services sustainable, it is equally important to align them with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). Anchoring guidance and counseling initiatives within these global frameworks ensures that mental health promotion, preventive interventions, and student support systems contribute to broader international standards for health and inclusive education. By adopting the SDGs as guiding benchmarks, RGC services can be designed to address diverse and multicultural populations while promoting accessibility, equity, and evidence-based practice. Such alignment strengthens institutional accountability and situates counseling services within a global agenda that prioritizes holistic development. Integrating the SDGs into guidance and counseling programs enhances their sustainability, relevance, and capacity to improve clients' mental health and overall well-being.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers ensured that all participants provided voluntary and informed consent prior to their involvement in the study. Each participant received detailed information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, possible risks, and benefits, and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing consequences. Additionally, strict measures were implemented to maintain the confidentiality of participant information. Data collected were either anonymized or de-identified to safeguard the privacy of participants. Confidentiality was maintained throughout all stages of the research, including data storage, analysis, and dissemination.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest related to the publication of this research. No financial, personal, or professional relationships have influenced the study's design, conduct, analysis, or reporting. All affiliations and funding sources have been properly disclosed.

Data Availability

The data supporting this study are available upon request. However, certain information will be anonymized to ensure the confidentiality and security of the respondents.

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