

Leading with Care: A Qualitative Study on Self-Care among Student Leaders Enrolled in Higher Education Institutions in Manila

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Abstract

Student leadership has been recognized as an essential part of higher education for an extended period, as it fosters personal growth, civic engagement, and social responsibility. Student leaders develop critical competencies, such as conflict resolution, communication, and decision-making, through their participation in campus initiatives, governance councils, and student organizations (Dugan & Komives, 2010). It embodies character and responsibilities that are fundamentally connected to their core values and identity. These competencies provide both benefits and challenges to student leaders. The researchers explored the self-care practices of student leaders and their influence on mental wellness. Student leaders often juggle academic, organizational, and personal responsibilities, making self-care critical to their mental health and leadership effectiveness. The researchers aim to investigate the experiences, assess the self-care practices, and understand the difficulties faced in maintaining mental well-being as a student and a leader. A descriptive quantitative research approach was used in gathering straightforward reports from (n=18) student leaders. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study reveal that student leaders engage in self-care practices through socialization, spiritual, and meaningful activities as a means of relaxation and fulfillment. The data showed that the student leaders were challenged by the pressure and sacrifices needed to sustain studies and leadership roles, which led to anxiety, self-doubt, frustration, and emotional disturbances. However, the student leaders did not let these challenges affect them; instead, they transformed these difficulties into motivation to improve their ability to handle their responsibilities. Henceforth, the researchers recommend that HEIs in the Philippines must actively assist student leaders by incorporating mental wellness education into leadership programs, conducting regular check-ups, ensuring that they have access to counseling services, and cultivating a culture that prioritizes the self-care of student leaders.

Keywords: self-care; leadership; student leaders; well-being; higher education, critical competencies



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INTRODUCTION

Student leadership in higher education is often associated with personal growth, responsibility, and service of an individual. Typically, they take the lead in all institutional activities. The student leaders work together with the faculty, administrators, and even the entire community. These students might be topped by their teachers because they are academically good or because the student body elected them. Ideally, the student joins the student council voluntarily to provide service, boost their

morale, and motivate the students to always be good; however, recent studies and journals show that there is a decline in the number of student leaders in educational institutions. Some journals have found that student leaders today often experience increased stress, burnout, and mental health challenges due to the demands of academic responsibilities, extracurricular activities, and leadership roles (Kouzes & Posner, 2017), which hinders their participation in organizations. This problem was also raised in a different university in Metro Manila. Some schools expressed difficulty in

gathering interested students to be part of the student council, which comprises the programs and activities offered by the Office of Student Affairs.

Pieces of literature show that the psychological and affective consequences of student leadership are reported extensively. Brown et al. (2014) emphasize that neglecting wellness can lead to exhaustion, tension, and compromised academic involvement from the combined strain of scholarship and leadership. The challenges of time management, emotional control, and work-life balance are consistently identified by student leaders. Poor performance as students and leaders can result from these stressors if they remain unresolved. A preventive and empowering initiative has been proposed in this regard: the integration of self-care and wellness into leadership development programs. Jones (2020) asserts that organizations that prioritize psychological safety and cultivate holistic well-being create the conditions for student leaders to thrive and develop sustainably.

Some students choose not to participate or volunteer for the student council due to motives such as the heavy workload, pressure, and the need to perform better in academics. It also needs to consider that many of the students prioritize self-care and mental well-being, as neglecting these imperatives can have a detrimental impact on their overall well-being, decision-making, and effectiveness (Jones, 2020). Overall well-being is important not only for student health but also for creating a positive atmosphere in their organizations. By practicing self-care and seeking assistance, student leaders can better manage their responsibilities and encourage their peers to do the same. Because of this, the researchers were interested in studying how student leadership and self-care practices can be utilized to advocate for and enhance the value of student leadership. This qualitative study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do one experience self-care while managing leadership responsibilities as a student leader?

2. What emotions and challenges do student leaders associate with balancing leadership and mental wellness?

3. How do values and beliefs shape one's self-care as a student leader enrolled in Manila?

By considering these questions, the researchers hope to contribute to the growing discourse on student leadership, self-care, and mental wellness, pointing out the importance of a balanced approach to leadership development in higher education (Stephens and Beatty, 2015). This study focuses on young adults aged 18 to 25 years who are currently enrolled in college programs at higher education institutions in Manila and have been members of student organizations for at least two years.

To explore this study, the researchers utilized the Wellbeing Theory developed by Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000) as the primary theoretical framework. This model conceptualized the physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of well-being, realizing that self-care is a dynamic and whole process rather than a one-time event. This study intends to underline the need for institutional assistance in promoting a culture of well-being and sustainable leadership by knowing the self-care techniques used by student leaders.

In this regard, self-care is not perceived as a one-time activity, but rather as an enduring practice that promotes personal development, resilience, and the ability to manage the rigors of life. The translation of this into the context of student leaders provides a comprehensive perspective on how they manage and maintain their well-being while addressing the demands of academic and leadership. The model facilitates the identification of the strategies that student leaders employ to care for themselves in various aspects of their lives, thereby preventing exhaustion and enhancing long-term performance.

By situating the experiences of student leaders within the framework of this theoretical model, the investigation contributes to the

comprehension of how well-being influences the efficacy and persistence of leadership. Empirical evidence is also provided to support the development of institutional policies and targeted interventions that promote the sustainability of leadership and the holistic development of students.

LITERATURES

Leadership in Higher Institutional Education.

Higher education leadership is not limited to institutional authority; it also includes the experiences of student leaders who influence campus life through peer interaction, advocacy, and organizational participation. These positions frequently necessitate the coordination of academic, social, and extracurricular responsibilities, which can result in unique psychosocial stressors (Soria & Johnson., 2017).

In the Philippine context, academically achieving students are often placed in leadership positions, thus making academic excellence equivalent to leadership competencies (David, San Pascual, & Torres, 2019; DepEd, 2019). Yet, this pattern fails to consider students who may be average academically but are equipped with core leadership qualities (Cruz, 2014). To support the holistic development of students, requiring students to join organizations or clubs has been implemented by some HEIs. This move allows them to evaluate students with their academic grades and extracurricular participation. Nevertheless, requiring students to participate in non-academic activities may bring pressure and stress to delivering quality academic work and performing well as a leader. Some students will comply to get higher grades, but others see it as a calling to help others. These different motivational goals may impact the student's level of involvement and satisfaction. Furthermore, juggling these obligations could cause burnout if students feel overburdened by the demands imposed upon them.

The Commission on Higher Education's (2012) Handbook on Student Affairs and Services mentions that student leaders at Higher

Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines are key players in fostering institutional growth by actively assisting the administrators in organizing various programs and projects. The literature on leadership is extensive and spans various disciplines (Skalicky et al., 2020). Much of the existing studies on leadership skills development has focused on college students, grounded in the belief that the development of student leadership competencies such as technical, conceptual, and interpersonal skills is both a primary responsibility (Al-Omari, Abu Tineh, & Khasawneh, 2008) and a significant outcome (Crawford, Lewis, Kelder, 2024) of higher education.

Given the nature of the duties of student leaders, they acquire skills that enable them to be more strategic and perceptive as they face academic and leadership problems (Yulk, 2013). The more they experience challenges and problems, the more they tend to be innovative in problem-solving. Leadership offers a platform for skill development and working together, enabling student leaders to be different from non-leaders (Komives et al., 2013). Participation in student organization programs and activities enhances leadership skills, thereby equipping student leaders with appropriate skills to maintain leadership positions (Shomotova & Ibrahim, 2024). According to Dunbar et al. (2018), this view of leadership experiences indeed influences the development of essential skills, enabling the employability of student leaders. Student leadership is at the root of higher education institutions (Skalicky et al., 2020; Shertzer & Schuh, 2004). Creating programs and events corresponding to overall development and generating capable graduates have been the priority (Wright et al., 2023; Al-Omari et al., 2008; Uaikhanova et al., 2022).

It is apparent that HEI offers developmental and structural processes that can serve as the foundation for institutions to establish intentional programs that promote leadership development among diverse student leaders, ensure their well-being, and achieve a balance between academic responsibilities and extracurricular activities. These initiatives will not only foster the development of effective

student leaders but also contribute to the production of competent, reflective, and service-oriented graduates.

Student Leadership. The student leadership has been an important part of higher education for many years, contributing to personal development, social awareness, and community involvement. In the process of engaging in student organizations, governance boards, and campus projects, student leaders gain critical skills including decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution (Dugan & Komives, 2010). These positions are experiential learning opportunities that prepare students for civic and professional life after college. Nonetheless, student leadership also poses challenges. Since student leaders are usually supposed to act with excellence and resilience, they meet heightened levels of stress due to academic demands, organizational responsibilities, and interpersonal expectations (Soria & Johnson, 2017).

Participation in leadership activities can create a feeling of engagement and purpose; excessive involvement without adequate boundaries can lead to overextension. Brown et al. (2014) point out the need for peer support systems to assist student leaders in managing their stress, citing that wellness must be integrated into leadership development practices. This was supported by the study of Jones (2020), arguing that institutions must adopt a care-based approach to the development of student leadership. In the long term, student leaders can achieve success by promoting emotional management, self-awareness, and mental well-being. This is particularly evident in urban learning contexts, such as Manila, where students are immersed in competitive and fast-paced education cultures. The research indicates that higher education leadership requires multiple leadership approaches that emphasize emotional assistance and purposeful organizational development instead of standard leadership skill training and student interaction methods. The academic research advises HEIs to move beyond traditional merit-based recognition systems by creating inclusive

environments that promote leadership practices centered on wellness sustainability, and accessibility for student leaders. Student leaders could enhance their future success and well-being by using a balanced system that provides better preparation for both their college experience and post-college life.

Mental Wellness. Mental health is a fundamental aspect of general well-being and is increasing in its acceptance as being central to the scholarly ability and leadership skills of higher education students. Mental health covers emotional, psychological, and social well-being and how individuals cope with stress, socialize with other individuals, and make decisions (World Health Organization, 2018). Studies point out that students who take up leadership positions have greater psychological distress than their counterparts who are not leaders. Brown et al. (2014) explain that such students tend to feel overwhelmed by expectations, deadlines, and social demands and therefore experience burnout and disengagement symptoms. Whereas leadership engagement is linked to higher self-efficacy and identity formation, it should be accompanied by strong coping skills and institutional support that deal with mental health. Researchers find that interventions such as peer mentoring, mindfulness, and access to counseling services can mitigate the negative effects of stress and promote resilience in student leaders.

In the Philippine context, Ballesteros et al. (2022) found that the issue of mental health is widespread among college students with leadership roles. Most of their study participants reported feeling anxious, experiencing sleep problems, and doubting themselves, especially during times of peak academic and organizational activities. The absence of steady institutional support and mental health programs only contributed to their woes. Despite these difficulties, the research discovered that the students who practiced individual self-care activities—i.e., journaling, prayer, and peer support—tended to exhibit more effective emotional control and a greater sense of equilibrium. This finding highlights the significance of culturally

informed wellness practices that respect the lived experiences of Filipino student leaders.

Self-Care. Self-care is generally recognized as an essential practice in the promotion of mental, emotional, and physical well-being. It is defined as intentional actions that individuals engage in to preserve personal well-being, reduce stress, and promote overall functioning (Myers & Sweeney, 2008). For student leaders in higher education, self-care becomes important due to the responsibilities that can take a toll on their ability to rest and recover. Behaviors like proper sleep, exercise, being present in the moment, and social engagement are found to cushion the adverse effects of stress, thus enhancing resilience and sustainable performance (Dorociak et al., 2017).

Literature indicates that those who practice self-care regularly have better emotional regulation, lower levels of anxiety, and greater life satisfaction. Self-care is a buffer against burnout and compassion fatigue, which are often outcomes of chronic exposure to organizational and academic stressors among student leaders (Reche et al., 2020). Yet, other research also suggests that student leaders often sacrifice self-care because of cultural norms, time pressures, and internalized assumptions that rest is useless. This disregard creates a self-destructive loop in which overcommitment results in a decline in wellness, leading to a compromise in the quality of leadership and the individual's health.

METHOD

Research Design. The study used a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the shared experiences of college student leaders at a higher education institution in Manila as they balance leadership responsibilities with mental wellness. Descriptive qualitative research focuses on giving a straightforward report of what participants go through, without getting into complex theories, deep analysis, or abstract ideas.

This design was the most appropriate approach for examining the personal experiences of

student leaders as they manage leadership responsibilities while maintaining mental wellness. It provides a framework for summarizing common self-care practices that the participants engaged in.

Instrument. The researchers employed a Google Form to collect the personal information of the discussants, the criteria for the study, informed consent, as well as their availability to participate in the online focus group discussion (FGD). The interview was conducted using Zoom Workplace as a platform. The researchers also utilized a focus group discussion guide to organize the information provided to the participants. The interview guide was primarily designed to evaluate the strategies of student leaders for balancing self-care with leadership responsibilities, as well as to identify their emotional and psychological challenges and the impact of personal values and cultural heritage on their wellness routines. It also outlined the purpose of the study, the fundamental principles that were to be followed during the discussion, and the flow of the conversation. Furthermore, the researchers used Microsoft Excel to record and generate the responses of the discussants.

Population and Sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select the research participants for this study. The method involves identifying specific criteria for participant selection to ensure that the sample meets the necessary characteristics. By doing so, the study aims to enhance the relevance of its findings to the target population (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). The study collected 18 qualified discussants, composed of 11 female and 7 male students, among 24 participants from the different higher educational institutions in Manila. These were students with an age range of 18-24 years old, enrolled as college students in any HEI in Manila, who have been a student leader for at least 2 years, active members of any recognized student organization, and student leaders with or without a mental health diagnosis.

During the gathering of data, 6 participants were not qualified to participate in the study due to the exclusion criteria: (1) a new student

leader with less than two years of experience; (2) who is not an active member of any recognized student organization; and, (3) a student leader who is not currently enrolled in any programs of their respective institution.

The researchers collected eighteen (18) participants, divided into six independent focus group discussions based on their availability. The researchers ensure that the participants selected possess the predetermined qualifications to guarantee the validity of the findings in terms of the phenomenon being investigated in the research.

Data Source. The researchers started recruiting participants through the Student Affairs Office of the South Manila Educational Consortium (SMEC). The officers provided a list of possible study volunteers based on the research criteria and sent an invitation letter to participate. After identifying the participants, they were given a Google Form that included questions about personal information, criteria for the study, and the dates for the focus group discussion. Each participant also received an informed consent form and had the opportunity to ask questions.

After reaching the target number of participants, the FGDs were conducted in six groups, each consisting of three discussants. An FGD is a more complex but beneficial method of data collection, for it provides both an avenue for participants to share their experiences and the opportunity for researchers to collect high-quality data (Tumen-Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021). This method allowed interaction among the research participants, either to influence others and be influenced by the members of the group. This offers the likelihood to deepen discussions and sharing among discussants, as they can either add, agree or confirm, and enhance the different experiences of the sharers.

Each FGD session lasts for approximately one (1) hour, ensuring that all participants have had the opportunity to speak and share their insights. Data collection started with a question designed to address the research problems, with a specific focus on understanding the

shared experiences of student leaders in managing their leadership roles while maintaining their mental well-being.

Data Analysis. The study utilized a thematic analysis (TA) in exploring the experiences of the student leaders in managing leadership responsibilities and practicing self-care for mental wellness. TA is a qualitative analysis method that aims to identify, describe, explain, substantiate, and connect various themes to generate meaningful insights (Kampira, 2021).

The process of this thematic analysis followed what Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 61-67) described. The six-phase approach, after the transcription of the voice-recorded group interview, included familiarizing oneself with the data. The first researcher read the transcriptions and generated codes based on personal comprehension, while the second researcher followed as well, creating another initial code. The third researcher executed the identical procedures but did so by collecting all of the initial codes generated by the first two researchers. The third researcher generated the initial codes and then searched for potential themes. The researchers discussed the themes because they needed to capture the essence of the student leaders' responses. The researchers finalized the themes by defining and naming them. After identifying the themes, the second researcher formulated the report. This process ensured that the analysis happened after the researchers were able to fully grasp the shared experiences of the discussants.

RESULTS

These are the dominant themes identified from the discussants' input, organized according to the research questions.

1. Experiences of self-care while managing leadership responsibilities as a student leader.

Theme 1:
Socialization and Connection as Self-Care. The theme highlights the essential role of creating

and maintaining social relationships between acquaintances and friends to practice self-care. According to the data, participants view spending time with trusted individuals as an important way to manage stress while feeling emotionally secure and improving their overall well-being beyond simple leisure activities.

FGD 1, Discussant 1: *I would like to go out more with friends and hang out with them, as I feel safer with them. That's my avenue to just being more relaxed, especially if I have a challenging week...*

FGD 2, Discussant 4: *I am always with my friends, like every week we go out, kwentuhan or food trip, because for me, self-care is also taking good care of the welfare of other people, especially my friends and co-officers in the organization.*

Theme 2:

Spiritual and Meaningful Activities. This theme describes how people practice self-care through activities that are meaningful to them or spiritually fulfilling. The data shows that participants experience purpose and relaxation through both their religious practices and their chosen activities, which match their values and interests.

FGD 3, Discussant 7: *... my self-care is the Sundays. I serve in our parishes and connect with my church friends. I feel more relaxed and productive every time I give back through service.*

FGD 3, Discussant 8: *... I love reading books and watching series on Netflix to feel relaxed and I think that's my self-care routine... I make sure I still read books even in a busy schedule, as EB (executive board) ...*

Theme 3:

Rest and Recovery. This theme underscores the significance of taking a break, replenishing, and allowing oneself the opportunity to process emotions and experiences as a form of self-care. The data indicate that participants intentionally choose to rest, whether through sleep, relaxation, or engaging in pastimes, as a

means of regaining mental clarity, managing tension, and preserving their well-being.

FGD 2, Discussant 5: *... whenever I feel overwhelmed with the happenings, I step back, take a moment to think what's going on, how I should react to it, and take some time to rest. Usually, I sleep so I think clearly... if I can't do it, then I'll just have it done the next day.*

FGD 4, Discussant 10: *...So for me it's more going back to your hobbies, taking some rest and enjoy the moment...*

2. Emotions and challenges student leaders associate with in balancing leadership and mental wellness.

Theme 1:

The Weight of Pressure and Sacrifice. The theme emphasizes the intense challenges that student leaders encounter, along with the requirement to give up personal time for their wide-ranging duties. The data shows an obvious shared sense of stress because students need to manage their personal lives alongside leadership tasks and academic work.

FGD 4, Discussant 12: *Leadership is pressure. From the start. Something you're really pressured to do is to choose your time because you're always going to sacrifice something. I think that's the trade-off now...*

FGD 1, Discussant 1: *...so, we have the pressure. We need to focus on our academics as our priority, but at the same time we need to deliver our services as a student leader. Sometimes we get pressured like president ka pa naman and the like...*

Theme 2:

Anxiety and Self-Doubt. The theme captures the emotional difficulties that student leaders face through the internal struggles and negative self-image that emerge from their responsibilities. The data shows that participants regularly experience anxiety, which stems from their need to balance multiple priorities and performance standards alongside decision-making tasks.

FGD 5, Discussant 15: *...yeah, there's always like something you have to choose, because I feel they find the trade of being in org is better than like spending time with your family, or going to class or studying more so that I guess I could also like correlate it to anxiety, because, of course, as reinforcing what the other says you have to do good... you feel restless and don't know how to what to do first, and have difficulty finishing tasks because you feel worthless...*

FGD 2, Discussant 4: *...I do believe that it is normal to have breakouts, especially when you feel so tired. But it doesn't mean that you're not doing well on your job. I mean, it's part of process, you feel anxious about decisions in general or even behaviors committed...*

Theme 3:

Frustration and Emotional Exhaustion. The theme reflects how leadership duties deeply affect emotions that produce exhaustion and self-blame, along with frustration when leaders face internal stress and external demands. The data shows student leaders face excessive expectations while also struggling with event outcomes, which leads them to frequently blame themselves for their frustration.

FGD 1, Discussant 2: *I agreed with the pressure and anxiety. But to build up on that, I think there's frustration as well. Given that you are pressured to do well... So if there is something you cannot fix, I usually get frustrated with myself...*

FGD 2, Discussant 5: *I feel being too harsh on myself. I pressured myself. although my factors na involve ang iba, which is stressful for me... I sometimes felt exhausted and didn't know how to handle them...*

Theme 4:

Struggle to Maintain Composure. This theme highlights how student leaders face emotional barriers to handling their anger and frustration when dealing with difficult interpersonal situations. According to the data, it seems that keeping emotions balanced becomes difficult, especially when coordination fails or cooperation gets rejected.

FGD 6, Discussant 18: *Sometimes anger. Based on my other experiences in other organizations, working with other people can sometimes be difficult, especially now when they're not cooperating.*

3. Values and beliefs that shape self-care as a student leader enrolled in Manila.

Theme 1:

Role of Discipline in Leadership and Self-Care.

The theme highlights how discipline functions as an essential tool that supports student leaders when they handle their duties while maintaining proper self-care practices. The data indicate that participants perceive discipline as a personal instrument for preserving balance and well-being, in addition to a leadership quality.

FGD 2, Discussant 6: *For me, going back to my goal and responsibility as a leader, I always check myself if this is what I signed up for, the discipline of creating balance between org life and academics...*

FGD 5, Discussant 13: *Valuing the time of others and my time... In college, I realized the importance of time. It becomes luxury.*

Theme 2:

Importance of Communication and Community Support.

This theme underlines the importance of strong interpersonal relationships and open communication in the context of personal well-being and effective leadership. The data demonstrates that student leaders acknowledge the importance of articulating themselves, fostering mutual understanding, and establishing supportive communities to effectively fulfill their responsibilities.

FGD 3, Discussant 7: *...expressing oneself is important in maintaining sanity and friends. However, knowing when to step in and step back will be more ideal; but more of communicating what should be cascaded to be more transparent and efficient as a leader...*

FGD, 4, Discussant 11: *... having a good relationship and having good communication*

with each other. I do believe that having this as a foundation, because having a good relationship and good communication with each other, everything will be fine. Everything can have a smooth process, and at the same time have a big impact on the community.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that student leaders often engage in socialization and connect with others as a means of maintaining their self-care while managing leadership responsibilities. Discussants usually cope with their friends by going out, chatting, and taking food trips. Some participants mentioned that their friends help them to feel secure and affirm their decisions and actions in life. The researchers also discovered that some student leaders choose to engage in spiritual and meaningful activities as a means of relaxation and fulfillment. 3 participants expressed the idea that the church feels like home for them. Furthermore, most of the discussants practice rest and recovery as their way of self-care. Some mentioned that quality sleep and time to rest are the best way to take proper care of themselves. These were supported by the study of Dorociak et al. (2017) that having adequate sleep, exercise, mindfulness, and social connection are known to buffer the negative impacts of stress, thereby promoting resilience and sustainable performance.

The discussants primarily expressed the negative emotions and challenges, such as experiencing anxiety, self-doubt, even frustrations and emotional exhaustion, and struggling to maintain composure when balancing leadership and mental wellness. The common sentiment was the weight of pressure and sacrifices as a student and a leader. The majority of the participants mentioned that being a student leader carries the idea of portraying good in all aspects of life, especially academics. This idea was supported by the study conducted by Soria & Johnson (2017), which found that the demand for balancing the academic, social, and extracurricular responsibilities may lead to unique psychosocial stressors. Based on this research,

the challenges of being a student leader also include anxiety, self-doubt, frustration, and emotional disturbances. Some mentioned experiencing a breakdown and the feeling of worthlessness. However, these challenges did not prevent them from resigning from their positions; instead, they transformed these difficulties into motivation to improve their ability to handle their responsibilities.

Additionally, the findings indicated that leadership and self-care discipline are essential for student leaders to effectively manage their dual roles as students and leaders. This theme was identified when the discussants were asked pertaining the benefits they receive as student leaders. The data suggest that participants regard discipline as a personal tool for maintaining balance and well-being, in addition to a leadership quality. Most of the participants highlighted the significance of discipline in making their responsibilities manageable. Effective time management, strong communication skills, and robust community support help alleviate the challenges of balancing leadership duties while maintaining personal well-being. Supported by the study of Brown et al. (2014) highlights the importance of peer support systems in helping student leaders manage stress, noting that wellness should be embedded in leadership development practices.

The complex relationship between leadership responsibilities and mental wellness among student leaders is highlighted in this study. Although leadership promotes personal development, resilience, and a sense of purpose, it also presents substantial challenges, including the necessity to maintain high performance, tension, and emotional exhaustion (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Some participants in this study reported that balancing their roles as both students and leaders was stressful because they had to sacrifice certain activities to meet their responsibilities. They also felt exhausted due to the multiple roles they needed to carry. On the other hand, student leaders also acknowledge the benefits and importance of having a role in an institution.

The study reveals that student leaders may implement various self-care strategies, such as time management, social support, and spiritual engagement, to preserve equilibrium. However, a significant number of students continue to encounter difficulties in prioritizing their well-being because of their excessive workloads, internal and external pressures, feelings of anxiety, and emotional exhaustion, which is consistent with prior research on student leader fatigue by Jones (2020); Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer (2000).

As a result, the researchers recommend that higher education institutions in the Philippines must actively assist student leaders by incorporating mental wellness education into leadership programs, conducting regular check-ups for both students and leaders, ensuring that they have access to counseling services, and cultivating a culture that prioritizes self-care in addition to service. The researchers suggest that institutions should place a high value on the overall wellness of the students, as it plays an essential role in the maintenance of a productive and efficient community. Consequently, student leaders can maintain their mental well-being and effectiveness by addressing these factors through institutional policies and peer support programs. These suggestions from the researchers are founded on the Wheel of Wellness Model, which was introduced by Myers et al. (2000). This model emphasizes the multifaceted nature of well-being, which is influenced by personal, social, and environmental factors. This model underscores the necessity of comprehensive approaches that take into account all facets of a student leader's life, such as their academic, interpersonal, spiritual, and emotional domains.

These recommendations could create a leadership environment where students thrive not just as leaders but as individuals committed to their holistic well-being. Moreover, future researchers may explore long-term interventions and their effectiveness in supporting student leaders across diverse academic settings.

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