

# Padayon: Tele psychotherapy use of university students in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Abstract

University students in the Philippines are front liners in the defense of democracy in Asia amidst China's geopolitical intrusions in the Pacific at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, two out of five Filipino university students in Metro Manila were found to be at risk of severe anxiety and depression. Psychologists say that these mental health concerns are influenced by factors like academic pressures and environmental stressors like relationship problems during the COVID-19 outbreak. They are unable to seek proper treatment because of strict lockdown measures, societal stigma to mental health in the Philippines, and the lack of support for alternatives to face-to-face mental health diagnosis like tele psychotherapy. It is crucial for Filipino university students to improve their mental health help-seeking behaviors especially during crises to gauge the drastic changes and challenges in the socio-political environment of the Philippines. Against this backdrop, 440 Filipino university students were surveyed to predict the relationship between their attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavioral intentions to use tele psychotherapy. The study concluded that Filipino students' attitudes to tele psychotherapy use was the highest predictor of their mental health seeking behaviors with  $R = 0.586$ . Therefore, this recommends the improvement of infrastructures and informative strategies that encourage positive sentiments towards tele psychotherapy use in the country. Moreover, it highlights the importance of a more comprehensive analysis of perceived behavioral control as a moderating variable to tele psychotherapy use.

**Keywords:** Tele psychotherapy, COVID-19, Philippines, University students