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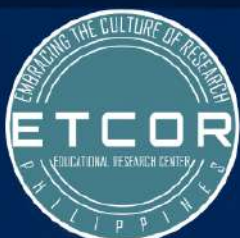
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Psychological well-being of Learners At-Risk: Basis for proposed mental health program

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Abstract

Aim: This interdisciplinary study aimed to determine the psychological well-being (PWB) of learners at-risk in relation to their demographic profiles as a basis for developing a targeted school-based mental health program that integrates educational management and psychological interventions.

Methodology: The study utilized a quantitative descriptive research design involving 223 learners at-risk from Grades 7 to 10 enrolled in Cluster IV public secondary schools in Las Piñas City. Respondents were selected through stratified random sampling. Data were gathered using the adopted Psychological Well-Being Scale of Ryff (1989) and analyzed using percentages, means, the Mann-Whitney U test, the Kruskal-Wallis H test, and Dunn's post hoc test.

Result: The findings revealed that the respondents fall within the statistical category of High Well-Being while demonstrating a developing level of psychological functioning, with personal growth obtaining the highest mean score and environmental mastery the lowest. Significant differences were observed according to sex, with female learners exhibiting significantly higher autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and positive relations than male learners. Additionally, students with five or more siblings showed significantly higher autonomy. No significant differences were found according to grade level, religion, family structure, or economic status.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that although learners at-risk fall within the statistical category of High Well-Being while demonstrating a developing level of psychological functioning, many experience difficulty managing their external environments, particularly male Grade 7 learners from economically challenged backgrounds. The study highlights the need for profile-sensitive, gender-responsive, and evidence-based school mental health interventions. By integrating principles from educational management and psychology, this research provides empirical support for designing localized mental health programs that strengthen learner well-being, guide school administrators and guidance personnel in intervention planning, and contribute to strengthening educational support systems and student development.

Keywords: *Psychological Well-Being, Learners At-Risk, Mental Health Program, Educational Management, School-Based Intervention*

INTRODUCTION

Learner well-being is a key determinant of educational success, anchoring the entire teaching-learning process. Healthy psychological well-being (PWB) enables individuals to demonstrate positive functioning, build meaningful relationships, and achieve self-actualization. In modern classrooms, educational administrators and teachers frequently encounter students who are physically present but mentally absent, burdened by heavy psychological baggage. At the center of this crisis are learners at risk (LARs) or vulnerable individuals experiencing poverty, systemic inequality, family dysfunction, abuse, neglect, or conflict with the law. These intersecting factors culminate in severe emotional vulnerabilities, chronic absenteeism, and high dropout rates, creating a complex, interdisciplinary problem where education, psychology, and socioeconomics intersect.

Globally, educational systems address this crisis through various initiatives such as the World Health Organization Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2030, which aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by embedding mental health support directly into schools (WHO, 2021). Despite these initiatives, recent



global data show an alarming increase in learner vulnerability. The World Health Organization (2025) reported suicide as the third leading cause of death among adolescents globally, while United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021) reported that over 13% of adolescents in Southeast Asia suffer from mental health conditions, with two-thirds left untreated due to stigma, poverty, and limited access to services.

In the Philippines, the situation mirrors global trends. Despite the enactment of the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act (Republic Act No. 12080, 2024)—which mandates the Department of Education (DepEd), Department of Health (DOH), and National Center for Mental Health (NCMH) to collaborate on school-based referral networks—severe challenges persist. Ramos (2023) reported over 400 student deaths by suicide alongside thousands of attempts, coupled with a drop of 2 million enrolled learners for the 2025–2026 school year, according to DepEd. Furthermore, implementation remains weak due to scarce human resources, leaving only 1,096 licensed guidance counselors to serve over 20 million learners nationwide. This failure also manifests within the local context of the Department of Education (Schools Division Office of Las Piñas). While the division implements event-based interventions, these activities function merely as temporary measures for the general student population. They lack the profile-sensitive programming necessary to address the specific vulnerabilities of LARs. Currently, the Schools Division Office of Las Piñas operates with zero licensed psychologists.

While existing literature establishes general PWB frameworks and broad policies (like Republic Act No. 12080), a critical interdisciplinary research gap remains in turning literature into profile-specific, localized interventions. Current local interventions rely on one-size-fits-all strategies, lacking data-driven, structured programs tailored to the specific demographic and psychological profiles of highly vulnerable LARs within the local division. Investigating this problem requires an interdisciplinary perspective that bridges educational administration and psychology. Furthermore, incorporating technology-assisted school mental health initiatives—such as digital screening tools and hybrid wellness applications—expands this interdisciplinary breadth. By bridging educational management, psychology, and information technology, digital modalities may enhance service delivery efficiency and overcome severe shortages in human guidance resources. Relying on a single discipline is inadequate; psychology identifies internal vulnerabilities, whereas educational management structures the implementation of interventions. Integrating these areas allows the study to utilize Carol Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-Being to determine which dimensions of PWB are most fragile among the demographic profiles of LARs. Ultimately, this study translates basic literature into applied interventions, providing the empirical data needed to design a targeted, structured School-Based Mental Health Program within the SDO of Las Piñas. This ensures alignment with UN SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and 4 (Quality Education) to move vulnerable learners from mere survival to active flourishing.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

This section integrates insights from psychology and educational policy to examine the multi-dimensional nature of psychological well-being (PWB) among vulnerable student populations.

Psychological Well-being of Learners At-Risk

Psychological well-being represents an individual's overall subjective experience of mental health and the capacity to flourish in the face of adversity. For vulnerable learners, this foundation is regularly compromised. Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 18, s. 2015, defines a Child At-Risk (CAR) as a child who is vulnerable to learning discontinuity due to harm, exploitation, or conflict with the law resulting from personal, family, or social circumstances—including poverty, abuse, family dysfunction, or street exposure. Recent longitudinal research highlights the severity of this crisis. The Longitudinal Cohort Study on the Filipino Child reveals that sociodemographic vulnerabilities severely threaten the PWB and education of Filipino adolescents, leaving nearly one in four teens behind due to poverty, malnutrition, and child labor ("1 in 4 Filipino Teens," 2026). Similarly, Malolos et al. (2021) pointed out that at-risk Filipino students bear a significant share of this mental health burden. These systemic inequities are further underscored by Puyat et al. (2025), who found that moderate to severe depressive symptoms (MSDS) among Filipino youth more than doubled from 9.6% to 20.9%, specifically concentrating within marginalized communities. Correspondingly, a study by Lee et al. (2021) delineates the risk factors for poor mental health. Low scores in core domains, such as emotional health, a sense of purpose, and social connectedness, signify a deficiency in psychological resources that leaves an individual vulnerable to mental crises. For the learner, this vulnerability often manifests as reduced engagement, relationship difficulties, and a diminished sense of personal growth. To address these challenges, Carol Ryff's model of PWB highlights six core dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth.



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The Foundations of Psychological Well-being: Hedonic and Eudaimonic Models

Literature conceptualizes PWB through two main lenses: the hedonic model, which focuses on subjective well-being—centering on happiness, pleasure attainment, pain avoidance, and life satisfaction; and the eudaimonic model, championed by Carol Ryff, which argues that true well-being involves living in accordance with one's values, self-actualization, and human flourishing. Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model encompasses six core dimensions. Moreover, Lee et al. (2022) adopted the concept of flourishing as a state of complete well-being that reflects a dynamic state of functioning and requires positive outcomes across mental, social, and economic spheres, including emotional health, purpose, social connectedness, and financial security. This multidimensional construct is essential for measuring positive mental health outcomes beyond the mere absence of illness. For LARs, the eudaimonic model is critically important as their challenges are often influenced by and linked to intersecting internal and external factors.

Psychological Well-Being Across Demographics

Psychological well-being is not experienced in isolation; it is deeply embedded within demographic intersections. In terms of sex and gender norms, Shamsuddin et al. (2025) found no significant difference in overall PWB scores between male and female students. Although male learners may report higher autonomy, they are significantly less likely than their female peers to translate that awareness into actual help-seeking behavior due to traditional masculine norms (Ishikawa et al., 2022; Magier & Hamilton, 2026). Conversely, Li and Lee (2025) emphasize that incoming students encounter severe socio-emotional and academic challenges that are negatively related to their ability to adjust to a new environment, thereby highlighting the entry period as a moment of psychological vulnerability rather than immediate thriving. Moreover, spiritual involvement serves as a crucial protective shield. Tajonera and Madrigal (2022) found that active participation in church activities significantly correlates with better PWB among junior high school students. Similarly, stable family structures minimize exposure to psychological distress, whereas non-traditional or dysfunctional family units are associated with higher rates of psychological vulnerability (Monterozo, 2023). Consequently, Downey and Cao (2024) highlight the resource-dilution theory, showing a consistent link between higher numbers of siblings and poorer youth mental health outcomes due to the division of parental attention, time, and finances. Parreño (2023) further emphasized that economic hardship and inflation force at-risk youth to prioritize child labor over schooling, leading to high dropout rates and reduced access to psychological services.

Interventions and Mental Health Programs

School-based mental health programs are crucial for promoting PWB, yet local implementation remains challenging. Evidence shows that addressing psychological functioning within the school setting equips students to manage academic stress, where direct mental health interventions support lifelong well-being and academic outcomes (Lee et al., 2024). In fact, schools serve as support platforms capable of delivering psychological interventions that enhance both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being by providing cognitive-behavioral techniques, mindfulness, and resilience-building strategies to vulnerable students regardless of their socioeconomic status (Hikmat et al., 2025). Furthermore, Joseph et al. (2024) advocate for targeted social group work, including life skills and socio-emotional mentoring, to support underprivileged adolescents. An effective program must synthesize universal prevention with profile-sensitive care.

Synthesis and Justification for the Study

The collective literature underscores that adolescent PWB is a multifaceted construct shaped by internal and external factors. Existing research exhibits three critical gaps: studies typically focus in isolation on analyzing psychological dimensions (Ryff's model), demographic profiles, or educational policies (Republic Act No. 12080, DepEd mandates). There is a notable lack of interdisciplinary research that synthesizes how these fields interact to shape a learner's reality. Most PWB research targets general student populations, leaving the highly specific, high-risk group of learners at-risk (LARs) underrepresented and underanalyzed. While national policies exist, there is a clear disconnect between theoretical PWB and localized, practical application. Studies rarely analyze how specific demographic profiles map onto specific dimensions of Ryff's six PWB scales to guide targeted interventions. The present study directly addresses this interdisciplinary gap. By utilizing Carol Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-Being, this study investigates how local demographic realities and systemic resource limitations intersect with the psychological profiles of learners at-risk within Cluster IV public secondary schools in the Schools Division Office of Las Piñas. Ultimately, this research bridges the gap between basic literature and applied interventions, providing the data necessary to transition these vulnerable students from mere survival to active flourishing.



Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in Carol Ryff's (1989) Theory of Psychological Well-Being to investigate whether significant differences exist in the psychological well-being (PWB) of learners at-risk across varying demographic profiles. Ryff (1989) conceptualized psychological well-being as a multidimensional construct of positive functioning composed of six core dimensions: (1) Self-Acceptance, which focuses on having a positive attitude, feeling good about oneself, and embracing one's strengths and weaknesses; (2) Positive Relations with Others, which posits having meaningful, strong, and healthy connections—being able to trust, love, and support others and receiving the same in return; (3) Autonomy, which anchors on being independent and able to think and make decisions for oneself even if others disagree; (4) Environmental Mastery, which involves shaping one's environment to fit one's needs and managing daily life, responsibilities, and surroundings; (5) Purpose in Life, which means having goals and a sense of direction; and (6) Personal Growth, which emphasizes the continuous love of learning, self-improvement, and striving to be a better version of oneself over time by viewing trials as opportunities to develop. Ryff's theory posits that individual differences within these dimensions are shaped by personal characteristics (such as sex and grade level) and environmental factors (such as religion, family structure, number of siblings, and economic status). These profile variables can either foster or constrain an at-risk learner's capacity to achieve optimal psychological functioning.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework consists of three primary components. The first component outlines the demographic profile of the learners at-risk. The second component details the assessment of respondents' psychological well-being across Ryff's six dimensions. The final component represents the study's proposed intervention: a targeted, profile-sensitive, and structured School-Based Mental Health Program based on the data collection, survey distribution, questionnaire retrieval, and statistical analysis.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*



Statement of the Problem

The psychological well-being of learners is a fundamental determinant of academic success and holistic development. However, learners at-risk (LARs) frequently experience emotional, social, and environmental challenges that increase their vulnerability to learning discontinuity and poor educational outcomes. Although the Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act (Republic Act No. 12080, 2024) and existing school mental health initiatives provide policy direction, many schools continue to face limited access to licensed guidance counselors and lack profile-sensitive, evidence-based, and data-driven intervention programs tailored to the diverse needs of learners at-risk. Consequently, there remains an important interdisciplinary gap in integrating educational management and psychology to understand how demographic characteristics influence the psychological well-being of vulnerable learners and to develop localized school-based mental health interventions. Addressing this gap is essential for designing effective, targeted, and sustainable programs that support learner well-being and strengthen educational practice and policy.

Research Objectives

To determine the psychological well-being of learners at-risk in relation to their demographic profiles as the basis for developing a targeted, profile-sensitive school-based mental health program.



1. To identify the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - sex;
 - grade level;
 - religion;
 - family structure;
 - number of siblings; and
 - economic status.
2. To assess the psychological well-being of the respondents across the dimensions of:
 - autonomy;
 - environmental mastery;
 - personal growth;
 - positive relations with others;
 - purpose in life; and
 - self-acceptance.
3. To determine whether there are significant differences in the respondents' psychological well-being when grouped according to their demographic profiles.
4. To develop a targeted, profile-sensitive school-based mental health program based on the findings of the study.

Research Questions

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
 - sex;
 - grade level;
 - religion;
 - family structure;
 - number of siblings; and
 - economic status?
2. What is the psychological well-being of the respondents in terms of:
 - autonomy;
 - environmental mastery;
 - personal growth;
 - positive relations with others;
 - purpose in life; and
 - self-acceptance?
3. Are there significant differences in the psychological well-being of the respondents when grouped according to their demographic profiles?
4. Based on the findings of the study, what targeted, profile-sensitive school-based mental health program may be proposed?

Hypothesis

H₀ There are no significant differences in the psychological well-being of learners at-risk when grouped according to their demographic profiles.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive research design to measure, record, and interpret the existing dimensions of psychological well-being among the respondents without manipulating their active environment. This approach enabled an objective, statistical determination of variances and significant differences across various profile indicators. A quantitative descriptive design was selected because it delivers the precise, generalizable baseline data needed to address urgent institutional policy and resource allocation needs—a depth of subgroup mapping that correlational and mixed-methods approaches could not immediately provide. Crucially, this design supports an



interdisciplinary investigation by serving as the operational bridge between psychological assessment and educational management.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of Grade 7 to 10 children at-risk (CAR) officially enrolled in Cluster IV public secondary schools in Las Piñas City for the School Year 2025–2026, comprising a total population of 526 individuals. To select a representative sample, the researcher employed stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation of learners across different schools and grade levels. Using Cochran's formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the required sample size was determined to be 223 participants. This sample was proportionally distributed across the participating schools, resulting in 101 respondents from Las Piñas National High School - Almanza, 100 from Talon Village National High School, 9 from Equitable Village National High School, and 13 from Las Piñas Technical-Vocational High School.

Research Instrument

The primary tool for data collection was an adopted survey instrument used with official permission and certification from Dr. Carol Ryff. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: Part I gathered profile indicators including sex, grade level, religion, family structure, number of siblings, and economic status; Part II consisted of the standardized 42-item Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB). This scale measures six distinct dimensions: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance, with items evenly distributed and rated on a 6-point Likert scale. Twenty-one negative or reverse-phrased items were reverse-scored during data processing. The instrument was not subjected to local re-validation or structural modifications, as it is a standardized, globally validated inventory with robust, previously established psychometric properties. Because the instrument was adopted, local reliability testing was not conducted; instead, internal consistency is supported by the published reliability coefficients from the original validation study by Ryff and Essex (1992). For the 42-item version of the Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale (7 items per subscale), internal consistency reliability across the six dimensions ranges from Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$ to $.86$. Specifically, internal consistency values reported for each subscale include Autonomy ($\alpha = .71$), Environmental Mastery ($\alpha = .78$), Personal Growth ($\alpha = .80$), Positive Relations with Others ($\alpha = .72$), Purpose in Life ($\alpha = .80$), and Self-Acceptance ($\alpha = .82$) (Ryff & Essex, 1992).

Integrating standardized psychological assessments like the PWB into educational management equips school leaders with data to replace one-size-fits-all initiatives with profile-sensitive interventions. By identifying specific psychological vulnerabilities across student demographics, administrators can strategically allocate guidance resources, design targeted life-skills and homeroom programs, and continuously evaluate the operational efficacy of school-based mental health policies.

Data Collection Procedure

The respondents of this study were selected learners at-risk from junior high schools in Las Piñas City, Cluster IV, for the school year 2025–2026. Prior to data collection, formal approval was obtained from the Dean of the Open University, the Department of Education (Schools Division Office of Las Piñas City), and the respective school heads. Coordination with guidance advocates—who support students' well-being—and class advisers was conducted to identify learners at-risk based on existing school guidance records and profiling based on DepEd Order (DO) No. 18, s. 2015, which states the Guidelines and Procedures on the Management of Children-at-Risk (CAR). Before administering the research instrument, respondents were informed of the title, purpose, and scope of the study through an orientation and written consent form. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure fair representation across grade levels. Data were gathered using a standardized self-report questionnaire, consisting of two parts: (1) a demographic profile and (2) the adopted Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Written informed consent was obtained from both the respondents and their parents or legal guardians prior to participation. To ensure data privacy and anonymity, the questionnaire did not require names, student numbers, addresses, or any personally identifiable information. Data were collected from March to April 2026. Following administration, completed questionnaires were collected, tallied, and subjected to statistical treatment. Through these procedures, the study ensured ethical data collection, protection of respondents' rights, and reliability of the data gathered for examining the relationship between learners' psychological well-being and demographic profiles.



Treatment of Data

The data gathered from the respondents through survey questionnaires were tallied, organized, analyzed, and interpreted with respect to the research objectives of this study. Non-parametric measures were specifically utilized due to the ordinal nature of Likert-scale data and non-normal distributional characteristics across demographic profiles. To guarantee proper presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data, specific quantitative and non-parametric statistical tests were applied as outlined below:

Table 1

Statistical Treatment of Data

Research Objectives	Statistical Tests
Objective 1: To identify the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of sex, grade level, religion, family structure, number of siblings, and economic status.	Frequency Distribution and Percentage
Objective 2: To assess the psychological well-being of the respondents across the dimensions of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.	Weighted Mean
Objective 3: To determine whether there are significant differences in the respondents' psychological well-being when grouped according to their demographic profiles.	Mann-Whitney U Test (<i>for 2 independent groups: Sex</i>) Kruskal-Wallis H Test (<i>for 3+ independent groups: Grade Level, Religion, Family Structure, Number of Siblings, Economic Status</i>) Dunn's post hoc test (<i>applied following a significant Kruskal-Wallis test result</i>)
Objective 4: To develop a targeted, profile-sensitive school-based mental health program based on the findings of the study.	Data-Driven Program Matrix (<i>Synthesis of empirical findings into an actionable intervention</i>)

Ethics in Research

To safeguard the rights of the vulnerable student population, the study strictly complied with ethical research protocols. Written informed consent was secured from both the student respondents and their parents or legal guardians prior to the survey, ensuring that participation was entirely voluntary and that respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without facing any academic or disciplinary consequences.

Complete anonymity was maintained by omitting names, student numbers, and any other identifying markers, with each participant assigned a unique code. Physical copies of the questionnaires were locked in secure cabinets, electronic files were password-protected, and all research data were retained in accordance with institutional policy and will be disposed of following the prescribed retention period in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). Finally, official permissions were acquired from the Dean of the Open University, the Department of Education (Schools Division Office of Las Piñas City), and the principals of the participating schools, with formal ethical clearance obtained from the Research Ethics Committee.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Profile Variables	Profile Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	151	67.7
	Female	72	32.3
Grade Level	Grade 7	64	28.7
	Grade 8	50	22.4
	Grade 9	49	22.0
	Grade 10	60	26.9
	Grade 11	60	26.9
Religion	Roman Catholic	172	77.1
	Born-Again Christian	33	14.8
	Islam / Others	18	8.10
Family Structure	Blended family	6	2.7
	Extended family	72	32.3
	Living with relatives	24	10.8
	Nuclear family	101	45.3
	Single-parent family	20	9.0
Number of Siblings	None	20	9.0
	1–2 siblings	70	31.4
	3–4 siblings	71	31.8
	5 or more siblings	62	27.8
Economic Status	Poor	65	29.15
	Low-income	92	41.26
	Lower-middle Income	50	22.42
	Middle Income	11	4.93

The demographic profile revealed a high concentration of male respondents (67.7%) and Grade 7 students (28.7%) among identified learners at-risk (LARs). This indicates that younger male students transitioning into junior high school experience heightened socio-emotional vulnerability. This finding aligns with Li and Lee (2025), who emphasize that incoming students encounter severe socio-emotional and academic challenges during entry periods, marking transition stages as moments of psychological vulnerability rather than immediate thriving. Furthermore, while 45.3% of respondents belonged to nuclear households, a combined majority of 54.70% belonged to non-traditional family structures (extended, living with relatives, single-parent, and blended families). This reflects the observations of Monterozo (2023), who noted that non-traditional or dysfunctional family units are frequently associated with higher rates of psychological vulnerability due to divided domestic support systems. Socioeconomically, 70.41% of respondents lived below the poor and low-income brackets, indicating that economic difficulties remain a primary driver of risk among public school LARs. This finding directly supports Parreño (2023) who emphasized that economic hardship and inflation force at-risk youth to face severe external stressors, severely threatening their educational continuity and overall PWB.

Table 3

Psychological Well-Being of the Respondents

PWB Dimension	Mean Score	Verbal Interpretation
Personal Growth	4.21	High / Positive
Purpose in Life	4.13	High / Moderate
Positive Relations	4.11	High / Moderate
Self-Acceptance	3.88	High / Moderate
Autonomy	3.68	High / Moderate
Environmental Mastery	3.55 (lowest)	High / Moderate



Note. Scale mean scores are interpreted using the following range categories: 1.00–2.24 = Very Low Well-Being; 2.25–3.49 = Low Well-Being; 3.50–4.74 = High Well-Being; 4.75–6.00 = Very High Well-Being.

The assessment of respondents across all six dimensions resulted in an overall interpretation of High Well-Being while demonstrating a developing level of psychological functioning. Within the study's scoring scale—where Very High Well-Being (4.75–6.00) is the highest tier, Very Low Well-Being (1.00–2.24) is the lowest—an overall result of High Well-Being (3.50–4.74) represents a mid-level interpretation. This indicates that while learners at-risk (LARs) possess a solid, positive psychological foundation despite their vulnerable status, their well-being remains actively developing rather than fully realized. Interpreted through the eudaimonic model of PWB (Ryff, 1989) and the framework of flourishing (Lee et al., 2022), these findings demonstrate that LARs retain a baseline capacity for positive functioning while continuing to navigate systemic adversities.

Learners at-risk perceived their PWB in terms of personal growth with the highest overall mean ($\bar{x} = 4.21$, High Well-Being). This indicates a strong desire for learning, self-improvement, and optimal human flourishing despite their vulnerable circumstances, directly echoing Ryff's (1989) assertion that personal growth reflects an individual's continued realization of potential. Similarly, purpose in life achieved an overall mean of 4.13 (High Well-Being), with the highest individual indicator rating reflecting strong goals and a sense of direction. This aligns with Lee et al. (2021), who highlighted that a sense of purpose and emotional drive are essential psychological resources that shield individuals from severe mental crises during adverse conditions. In terms of positive relations ($\bar{x} = 4.11$, High Well-Being), LARs highly rated having trusting relationships with peers ($\bar{x} = 4.64$) and enjoying mutual conversations with family and friends. This supports the findings of Lee et al. (2021) regarding the vital role of social connectedness in fostering mental resilience. However, maintaining deep, close relationships was simultaneously perceived as difficult and frustrating, yielding one of the lowest indicator scores and highlighting an area of ongoing developmental growth. Furthermore, self-acceptance ($\bar{x} = 3.88$, High Well-Being) showed that respondents maintained self-confidence and positive self-view ($\bar{x} = 4.55$), reinforcing Hikmat et al. (2025), who noted that vulnerable adolescents often preserve internal cognitive resilience even within low-resource environments.

Finally, Autonomy garnered a mean of 3.68 (High Well-Being), implying moderate self-determination and independence. Conversely, Environmental Mastery received the lowest mean among all dimensions ($\bar{x} = 3.55$, High Well-Being). While students showed moderate capability in managing daily situations, they struggled with a sense of belonging ($\bar{x} = 3.81$) and personal satisfaction in their environment ($\bar{x} = 3.47$). This lowest-scoring dimension underscores the severe impact of external constraints; as Puyat et al. (2025) highlighted, marginalized and at-risk Filipino youth face heightened environmental stressors—such as poverty and community-level inequities—that directly constrain their ability to shape or master their surrounding environment.

Table 4

Summary of Significant Differences in PWB Dimensions by Demographics

Profile Variables	Test Used	Significant Dimensions	Findings / Interpretation
Sex	Mann-Whitney U	Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations	Females scored significantly higher than males ($p < 0.05$) across these four dimensions.
Grade Level	Kruskal-Wallis H	None	No significant differences across all dimensions ($p > 0.05$).
Religion	Kruskal-Wallis H	None	No significant differences ($p > 0.05$).
Family Structure	Kruskal-Wallis H	None	No significant differences ($p > 0.05$).
Number of Siblings	Kruskal-Wallis H	Autonomy	Dunn Post Hoc revealed that students with 5 or more siblings had significantly higher autonomy than those with 0–2 siblings ($p < 0.05$).
Economic Status	Kruskal-Wallis H	None	No significant differences ($p > 0.05$).

Note. If $p \leq .05$, reject H_0 ; otherwise, fail to reject H_0 .



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These findings revealed whether there were significant differences in psychological well-being (PWB) when the respondents were grouped according to their profile, utilizing the Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis H, and Dunn's post hoc tests to compare well-being levels across demographic variables. Specifically, the data concerning grade level indicated that most dimensions showed no significant difference. While there was an initial variance in positive relations between Grade 7 and Grade 10, this difference became statistically insignificant after applying the strict Bonferroni correction. This altogether suggests a gradual, continuous evolution of social dynamics as students progress through secondary school, consistent with the adjustment patterns outlined by Li and Lee (2025).

In contrast, the findings indicated a significant difference according to sex, with female respondents scoring higher than their male counterparts, specifically in autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and positive relations. Because these dimensions all yielded p -values below the standard significance threshold ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that the respondents' sex significantly affects these specific areas of their psychological well-being. While Shamsuddin et al. (2025) found no overall significant difference in general PWB scores between sexes, the lower scores among males in this study reflect the findings of Ishikawa et al. (2022) and Magier and Hamilton (2026). They observed that male learners often struggle to translate self-awareness into adaptive psychological functioning or help-seeking behaviors due to traditional masculine norms, leaving them more psychologically vulnerable in school settings.

Regarding family size, the results indicated that a statistically significant difference was found exclusively in autonomy, with students having more siblings showing higher levels of independence. In particular, respondents with 5 or more siblings demonstrated significantly higher autonomy than those with 1–2 siblings. Interestingly, this nuanced result provides an alternative perspective to Downey and Cao's (2024) resource-dilution theory. While resource dilution posits that larger sibling counts divide parental resources and negatively affect youth outcomes, the current findings suggest that in high-risk public school environments, larger family sizes force the development of self-reliance, adaptation, and personal independence out of necessity.

Lastly, it was determined that there was no significant difference in PWB when the respondents were grouped in terms of religion, family structure, and economic status. The lack of significant variation across religious groups contrasts slightly with Tajonera and Madrigal (2022), who noted that active spiritual participation enhances PWB. However, the overall uniformity across economic and family backgrounds suggests that within a designated at-risk population, systemic hardship acts as a universal baseline. As supported by Malolos et al. (2021) and Hikmat et al. (2025), at-risk learners rely on shared coping mechanisms and internal eudaimonic strengths, maintaining comparable levels of psychological functioning regardless of specific religious affiliation, household structures, or financial variations.

Table 5

Mental Health Program Profile

Title of the Program	Mental Health Program for Learners at-Risk
Rationale	This mental health program was developed to address significant findings from the psychological well-being assessment of learners at-risk (LARs). a. Context of Assessment: A Psychological Well-Being Assessment was conducted across target grade levels during the previous school year using a standardized tool. b. Significant Results: Demographic profiling revealed a high volume of at-risk learners: a significant majority (67.7%) of LARs are male students, who scored lower in autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and positive relations compared to female peers. Additionally, Grade 7 contains the largest number of at-risk students, driven by challenges when transitioning to a new high school environment. Overall well-being profiles indicate that respondents fall within the statistical category of High Well-Being while demonstrating a developing level of psychological functioning, with noticeable areas for growth in environmental mastery and autonomy. c. Legal Bases: Anchored on RA 12080 (Basic Education Mental Health and Well-Being Promotion Act) mandating school-based mental health programs, DepEd Orders on Child Protection, and guidelines for integrating inclusive, non-discriminatory psychosocial support. d. Literature Validation: Evidence confirms that peer-mentoring and structured,



Program Description

gender-sensitive support groups reduce transition-related isolation, mitigate behavioral and academic risk, and build environment-specific coping mechanisms.

Goal: To help learners at-risk improve their well-being by strengthening their environmental mastery and autonomy.

This school-based mental health program rolls out six targeted, non-discriminatory tracks specifically configured to bridge psychological gaps among LARs. It establishes 'Bro-Zone' circles for gender-responsive male emotional support, pairs older student mentors with Grade 7 'Little Sibs' in the 'Big Sibs' program to curb transition stress and introduces school-wide 'Pantay na Suporta' awareness activities. To mitigate core baseline deficits, 'Project LEAD' provides student-driven autonomy modules while 'Mastering My World' delivers a structured 'Lifehacks' series covering time management and stress management. Gender variances are reconciled through inclusive 'Project EQUALI-TEAM' assemblies, ensuring no group is left unsupported.

Program Objectives

Results Objective:

To help the learners at-risk improve their well-being by strengthening their environmental mastery and autonomy. Specifically, this aims to achieve a decrease in behavioral and academic risk referrals among the target groups.

Application Objective:

Back in their daily routines, participants will be able to confidently express opinions, make independent decisions, effectively manage their schedules, use school resources smoothly, utilize voluntary counseling services, and develop a strong sense of belonging.

Terminal Objective:

By the end of the intervention timeline, the learners at-risk will be able to demonstrate an enhanced ability to be independent, manage school and home environments, handle environmental stressors, and practice healthy help-seeking behaviors.

Enabling Objectives:

1. (Bro-Zone): Support male students' emotional expression, foster safe spaces, and increase voluntary help-seeking behaviors.
2. (Big Sibs): Strengthen positive relations among Grade 7 students and reduce isolation during school transitions.
3. (Pantay na Suporta): Improve overall psychological well-being, coping skills, and guarantee fair, inclusive mental health access.
4. (Project LEAD): Develop independence, confidence, and self-determination skills.
5. (Mastering My World): Enhance daily schedule management, community resource usage, and environmental stress adaptation.
6. (Project EQUALI-TEAM): Bridge the gap in well-being scores between sexes and improve shared emotional expressions.

Target Standard / Dimension Core Alignment

Target Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being (PWB):

1. Autonomy: Elevating self-reliance, independence, and resistance to peer pressure.
2. Environmental Mastery: Enhancing ability to manage everyday responsibilities and adapt to surroundings.
3. Positive Relations: Reducing isolation and establishing strong peer relationships.
4. Personal Growth: Enhancing continuous individual and emotional development.

Target Participants

Learners at-Risk (LARs) identified via PWB assessment and profiling based on DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2015.

Total Number of Target Participants

All identified Learners at-Risk within the school campus.



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Number of Track Groups	Divided into tailored intervention tracks (e.g., Male Wellness Circles, Transition Mentoring Pairs, Universal Skill Groups).
Number of implementations / Rollouts	Strategic, timed rollout throughout the academic school year.
Participants per Implementation Track	Customized by track size (e.g., small groups for Bro-Zone, 1-on-1 pairs for Big Sibs, school-wide for Pantay na Suporta).
Delivery Platform	School-based safe spaces, dedicated guidance rooms, peer circles, homeroom guidance sessions, and parent assemblies.
Indicative Dates of Implementation	Continuous implementation starting from the first week of school year across the academic year.

Table 6

Proposed Mental Health Program: Project Design Matrix

Project Title	Target Group/ Scope	Target Dimensions & Objectives	Action Plan / Strategy	Persons Involved	Outputs / Deliverables	Success Indicators
Bro-Zone: The Male Wellness Circle	Male learners at-risk (67.7% of LARs)	Support emotional expression; foster help-seeking behaviors; provide gender-responsive care.	Conduct gender-sensitive group sessions; incorporate creative tech workshops integrating mental health check-ins.	Teachers, Peers, Guidance Focal Person/ Advocates	Male support group logbooks; action-oriented activity guides.	Increased emotional expression; higher voluntary counseling consultations among males.
The 'Big Sibs' Mentoring	Grade 7 (transition cluster) & Grade 10 leaders	Strengthen Positive Relations; reduce isolation; stabilize entry-level school transitions.	Pair older student leaders (Grade 10) with at-risk Grade 7 'Little Sibs' for consistent wellness coaching starting the first week of school.	Guidance Focal Person / Advocates, Classroom Teachers	Peer matching matrix; mentoring log tracking sheets.	Decrease in behavioral or academic risk referrals among the Grade 7 transition group.
Pantay na Suporta: Mental Health Project	All learners at-risk (Universal scope)	Improve overall well-being and coping skills; guarantee fair, non-discriminatory, and equal access to care.	Launch school-wide awareness campaigns, seminars, and stress management workshops to normalize mental health without singling out students.	Guidance Focal Person / Advocates, Teachers, School Head	Campaign documentation; seminar materials; regular counseling registry.	Improved coping skills; noticeable decrease in stress-related concerns; equal participation.
Project LEAD (Life Empowerment & Autonomy Development)	All learners at-risk (Low Autonomy focus)	Develop independence, self-reliance, confidence, decision-	Conduct targeted leadership training, student-led activities, and decision-making	Guidance Focal Person / Advocates,	Student-led activity profiles; decision-making	Students confidently expressing opinions; increased



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		making, and self-determination.	workshops; encourage active classroom discussion roles.	Classroom Teachers	exercise packets.	participation in leadership roles and choices.
Mastering My World Life Skills Series	All learners at-risk (Environmental Mastery focus)	Address low environmental mastery; enhance daily schedule management and resource utilization; build belongingness.	Implement interactive 'Lifhacks' sessions (time management, organization, and community resources); deploy homeroom guidance and buddy systems.	Teachers, Peer Facilitator/s, Guidance Focal persons / Advocates	Lifhacks toolkit templates; homeroom tracking sheets.	Significant improvement in handling environmental stressors; reduced isolation; enhanced sense of belonging.
Project EQUALI-TEAM	Male & Female learners at-risk (Sex-based variations)	Bridge the gap in well-being scores; address lower male scoring across four core dimensions.	Execute gender-sensitive sessions and emotional expression activities; schedule parent-inclusive sessions during regular parent assemblies.	Learners, Parents / Guardians, Guidance Advocates, Class Advisers	Parent assembly feedback forms; gender-sensitive module outlines.	Improved emotional expression across sex lines; high parental attendance at mental health assemblies.

Table 5 and 6 outline the matrix of the proposed mental health program based on the study's significant findings. To ensure proper implementation, the initiative must be headed by a Program Management Team. Administrative oversight is led by the School Principal as Program Manager, supported by the Guidance Focal Person as Implementation Manager, classroom advisers and subject teachers as program facilitators, the school monitoring and evaluation (M&E) focal person as M&E coordinator, and assigned teacher documenters. Additional operational support is provided by guidance volunteers and student peer leaders functioning as the support group, school nurses and Child Protection Committee members acting as welfare and safety officers, property custodians serving as logistics officers, and school administrative officers managing financial requirements. Furthermore, program efficacy and outcomes will be evaluated using a 4-Level Kirkpatrick Tracking Model, which measures participant reaction, acquired learning, classroom and workplace behavior, and long-term psychological well-being results.

Conclusion

The demographic profile revealed that the majority of learners at-risk were male, mostly in Grade 7, Roman Catholics, from non-traditional families, raised with 1–2 or 3–4 siblings, and belonging to poor or low-income status. Female learners demonstrated significantly higher scores in several psychological well-being dimensions than male learners, thereby highlighting a critical need to promote gender-responsive mental health activities specifically tailored for Grade 7 learners at-risk from economically challenged and non-traditional families.

Regarding mental health status, respondents fell within the statistical category of High Well-Being while demonstrating a developing level of psychological functioning across all dimensions. Among the six dimensions, personal growth ranked the highest, showing that students still believed in improving themselves and maintained a strong desire to grow toward their future goals despite their at-risk status. Conversely, environmental mastery ranked the lowest, indicating that students struggled to feel in control of their external environments or to achieve deep personal satisfaction in their living conditions, while autonomy, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance were present but still developing. This pattern suggests that while these learners are successfully coping and developing—which is developmentally normal for their age—they still require targeted guidance and support to fully strengthen their psychological well-being.



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Finally, the results showed that there was a significant difference in the psychological well-being of the respondents when grouped according to sex and number of siblings. Specifically, female students demonstrated higher levels of well-being in autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and positive relations than males, indicating better emotional and social functioning. Furthermore, students with five or more siblings demonstrated higher autonomy, which findings may suggest that larger family sizes may foster increased self-reliance and independence due to shared responsibilities within a large household. In contrast, grade level, religion, family structure, and economic status did not significantly alter well-being; the lack of significant differences across these profiles suggests that learners at-risk tend to experience similar levels of well-being regardless of these background factors. This indicates that other external influences—such as peer relationships, personal coping skills, and supportive interventions—might have effectively mitigated the negative impacts of their challenging circumstances. Overall, this study contributes to educational management by providing a data-driven program for resource allocation, strengthens school-based mental health program through targeted interventions, and enriches psychology by contextualizing Ryff's multidimensional model among vulnerable adolescent demographics.

Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusions, the researcher proposes several evidence-based recommendations to enhance the psychological well-being of learners at-risk. First, school administrators and guidance focal persons or advocates may move away from one-size-fits-all mental health programs. Instead, they may develop targeted interventions, orientation, and transition or adjustment activities specifically designed for Grade 7 learners. These initiatives will help students adjust to their new environment and navigate the psychological challenges of transitioning from elementary to secondary education. To complement this, mentoring programs or male-led support groups may be organized specifically for male learners at-risk to assist them in expressing their emotions and seeking help.

Second, school guidance advocates and focal persons may implement targeted activities to address specific areas of vulnerability, particularly Environmental Mastery and Autonomy, which emerged as the lowest-scoring dimensions. This can be achieved by strengthening programs that teach practical life-management skills, fostering a deeper sense of belonging, and transitioning students from surviving to thriving within their school community. In addition, schools may offer leadership training, establish supportive student organizations, host decision-making workshops, and create safe spaces that empower students to feel in control of their external circumstances. Guidance personnel may simultaneously leverage peer-to-peer mentoring—utilizing Positive Relations as a core strength—to bolster the well-being of those struggling with self-acceptance or autonomy.

Third, concerning the significant differences identified across demographic profiles, gender-responsive counseling may be established in schools. Because female students demonstrated significantly higher well-being in multiple dimensions, guidance advocates may study these existing coping mechanisms to teach similar emotional literacy and relationship-building skills to male students. Additionally, since students from larger families with five or more siblings demonstrated higher independence, schools may leverage this natural autonomy by actively involving them in leadership training and peer-teaching initiatives to motivate peers from smaller or more dependent family structures.

Fourth, guidance focal persons and advocates may utilize the proposed mental health program to systematically operationalize these interventions. This framework is structured around three core areas: the Mental Health Program Profile, the Mental Health Intervention and Project Design Matrix, and the Mental Health Program Management Team alongside a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan. To guarantee the implementation of this proposed program, the researcher may coordinate closely with the administration of the participating schools to conduct orientation sessions for school heads and guidance advocates upon the distribution of the program copies. This collaborative step ensures that school leaders fully comprehend the program's design, the specific needs of learners at-risk, and the proper execution of the program framework. Meanwhile, a designated focal person may be tasked to monitor the rollout and systematically assess its impact on the beneficiaries.

Lastly, for further studies, future researchers may adopt a mixed-methods approach to enhance methodological rigor. Furthermore, future investigations may explore other underlying factors affecting psychological well-being, such as academic pressure and social influences, and analyze the direct relationship between psychological well-being and academic success. Finally, researchers may develop a step-by-step plan or post-study evaluative framework to facilitate the practical implementation of the proposed mental health program.



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