MENTAL HEALTH STATUS OF STUDENT LEADERS: BASIS FOR AN ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM
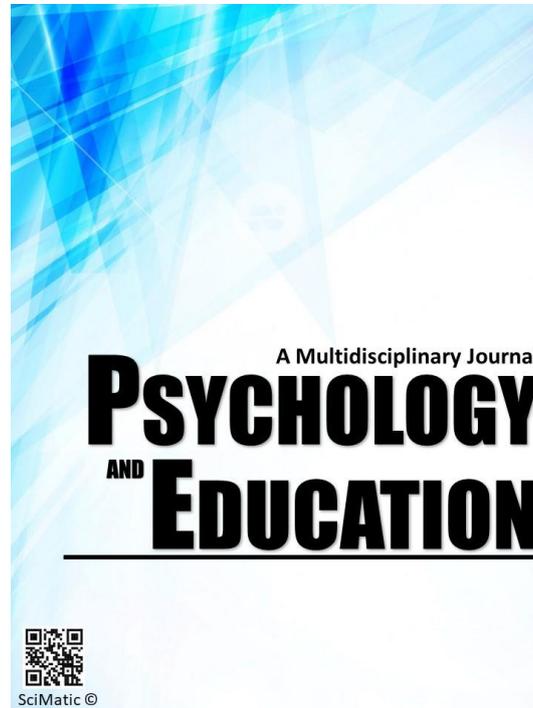

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Mental Health Status of Student Leaders: Basis for an Enhancement Program

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic stimulated the appreciation of the importance of Mental Health in the Philippines, which urged the researchers to conduct this study. This research aims to measure the mental health status of student leaders from two (2) universities in the country and to design an intervention program based on the findings. Twenty-one (21) Psychology student leaders from Emilio Aguinaldo College-Manila, and National University-Laguna participated in this study. The Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF) was used as the instrument for assessing the mental health status of the respondents. The result shows that the participants are flourishing in Emotional Well-being (M=4.45), and Psychological Well-being (M=4.56), while Moderately Mentally Healthy in Social well-being (M=4.36). The researchers also found that 9.5% of the participants have languishing mental health, 19% are moderately mentally healthy, and 71.4% have flourishing mental health. The findings also revealed that there is no significant relationship (r-value 0.003, p-value 0.99) and no significant difference (t-value 1.302, p-value 0.234) between the mental health status of the participants from the two universities, implying that regardless of their university affiliation their mental health status is indistinguishable and similar. Based on the results, the enhancement program entitled "Mental Health and Leadership During Pandemic" was designed and implemented virtually.

Keywords: Mental Health, Leadership, Student Leader, and Enhancement Program

Introduction

There are a lot of concerns and issues about mental health and it is now at its peak. Regardless of the demographic background, people are affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Sarfaraz, 2020. Nevertheless, it becomes increasing difficult to openly discussing mental issues in the Philippines because of the country's reputation for resiliency and humor even in stressful times. However, efforts have been made to recognize that physical and mental health are equally important. This issue has made Filipino youth struggle with mental health issues for many years. Despite cultural knowledge claiming that Filipinos are tough and versatile in coping with any adversity, news reports of young adults attempting and committing suicide have made mental health a global public problem (Tuliao, 2014).

Managing mental health is a very important aspect of having an overall health and well-being. Mental health and well-being have results beneficial to individuals and the many different aspects of society. Mental health as one dimension of health and well-being is stressed in World Health Organization's definition of health as stated in its constitution "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This encapsulates the essence of mental health because it impacts all elements of people's lives, including decision-making, stress management, interpersonal relationships, and personal care (World Health Organization, 2017).

In the Philippines, the Mental Health Act of 2017 affirms "the basic right of all Filipinos to mental health as well as the fundamental rights of people who require mental health services" (Legarda, et al., 2017). With the aim of providing primary care for people with mental health problems as well as advocating awareness regarding the prevalence of mental illnesses, Senate Bill No. 1354, has been submitted for the session and later approved by the Senate.

Talking about the mental health status of an individual, Keyes (2005, 2013) proposed a two continua model of mental health which holds that mental illness and mental health are related dimensions, despite their known distinction. The mental health continuum consists of three levels of positive mental health such as flourishing, moderate, and languishing. Individuals with *flourishing* mental health are described to be high in hedonic and positive functioning. Moreover, they were found to have superior physical, psychological, and psychosocial functioning (Keyes, 2005).

By contrast, languishing mental health is related to having poor emotional health, limiting daily activities and functioning, and missing days of work. As such, individuals with *languishing* mental health report both low hedonic and positive functioning. They feel empty, are stuck in life, and lack interest and engagement. In short, languishing is the absence of

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mental health (Keyes, 2002). Nevertheless, individuals who are neither flourishing nor languishing are considered to have moderate mental health.

Leadership is a very challenging role, much more, student-leadership. Student leaders have to deal with what is expected of them as students, and the demands of their roles as leaders. It is important for student leaders to be mentally healthy to ensure that they render relevant and appropriate services to their organization while keeping themselves fit and adjusted to their multiple tasks. This is one area of concern for the Emilio Aguinaldo College Psychology Society and the NU Laguna Psychology Society. As both the EAC PsychSoc and NU Laguna PsychSoc Officers commit themselves to serving the Psychology students of their respective institutions, they also need to keep themselves mentally ready and able to do so.

Research Questions

The main objective of the study was to determine the mental health status of the Psychology student leaders of Emilio Aguinaldo College-Manila and NU Laguna. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the mental health status of the respondents in terms of the following:
    1. Emotional Well-Being
    2. Social Well-Being
    3. Psychological Well-Being
2. What is the overall mental health status of the respondents?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the mental health status of the respondents from Emilio Aguinaldo College - Manila and National University - Laguna?
4. Is there a significant difference between the mental health status of the respondents from Emilio Aguinaldo College - Manila and NU Laguna?
5. What enhancement program may be implemented to address the mental health status of the respondents?

Literature Review

This section encapsulates literature and studies related to the current research. These related literature and studies are adherent to the facets of mental health status among student leaders which are (1) Emotional wellbeing; (2) Social Wellbeing and (3) Psychological Wellbeing.

Emotional Wellbeing of Student Leaders

Several researches show that student leaders in higher education report an alarmingly high prevalence rate of mental health issues. For instance, one study proves that during most events and organized activities for the campus, more than half of all student leaders were suffering from a diagnosable mental health issue (Zhu, 2021). While it is already assumed since 73% students enrolled in college will experience some type of mental health crises at some point (Reis et al., 2022), student leaders in higher education have higher tendency to experience problems in their emotional wellbeing. Moreover, during the pandemic, emotional wellbeing of student leaders was dramatically influenced as many are involved in outreach activities for fellow students and communities (Stirling & Emery, 2016). Another study perceives the relationship between mental health and ability to exercise leadership, and prove that student leaders' experience is also significantly hampered by stress and pressure. They reported that they were coping "slightly well" or "not well at all" with the COVID-19 disruptions, and their reported stress levels were significantly above the scale mid-point of 2.5 (M = 3.39, SD = 0.77, t (286) = 19.46, p 0.01, d = 1.16 (Stirling & Emery, 2016). In addition, student leaders' emotional well-being was negatively impacted by the fact that their emotional health and self-reported levels of stress were simultaneously caused by juggling school activities, demands from their organizations, and expectation from the school's management.

Social Wellbeing of Student Leaders

According to the World Health Organization, a person's feeling of social well-being, in addition to their physical and mental well-being, is a crucial component of a person's overall health (Galderisi et al., 2015). While emotional wellbeing in leadership is often disregarded, this dimension is vital in the condition of student leaders as it is the evidence of their detachment from socialization caused by their rigid schedule and lack of time to communicate with others (Noble et al., 2008). For instance, Harper & Quaye (2007) found out that the level satisfaction of the student leaders which they derive from their relationships with their peers was low. Student leaders' interaction with their families, peers, and teachers, as well as their feelings about their social lives inside and outside of the classroom were also found to exacerbate during periods of events at school (Knox et al., 2020).

On the other hand, some studies show conflicting

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results. One finding showed that leadership in school cause positive impact on the student leaders' social wellbeing and mental health (Bingham & Bubb, 2021). According to the same research, leadership has the capability to exert an effect on the nature of social skills that is connected to probable causes of eliminating boundaries and improving affiliations and networks. In line with this, another finding shows that student leaders who had greater levels of commitment at school reported better social well-being as they regarded themselves to be healthier when they were integrated into their communities and cared about the areas in which they lived (Shek & Leung, 2015). Thus, another research shows that these programs help student leaders acquire skills like dispute resolution, clear communication, and behavior and emotion regulation which are all attributed to social wellbeing (Lin & Shek. 2019).

Psychological Wellbeing of Student Leaders

Psychological wellbeing has dichotomic results among studies about student leadership. In one recent survey, they found that there is a growing worry regarding the mental health of college student leaders as there is a positive relationship between the level of psychological distress and organizational achievement (Alaaddin, 2020). The most common presenting worry among college student leaders is anxiety, which accounts for 41.6% of all cases (Feiss et al., 2019). More so, it was found that college student leaders report symptoms of anxiety, and showed signs of depression, albeit moderate symptoms (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2020). In fact, student leaders of the same study were honest about their experiences of depression because of conflicting academic and family demands.

On a positive note, another study documented a positive relationship between leadership psychological well-being, which implies that it is useful in efforts to develop a high quality of satisfaction in the academe (Wisner, 2011). The results show that "leadership and psychological well-being have a significantly positive relationship as 79% of students believe that the role of leadership affects the mental health" at their school because there is a direct and positive correlation between the application of skills, the authority to make decisions, the social support from classmates and teachers, and recognition (Arnold & Connelly, 2013).

Enhancement Program

In resolving and addressing the mental health concerns of student leaders and the whole studentry numerous

programs were proposed in various studies. For example, under social welbeing, the participation of student in health teams, as well as in school self-evaluations is focalized (Travia et al., 2022). Proposals for student leaders to have the opportunity to discuss with their classmates various strategies that might be used at school to improve student leaders' health and well-being is also considered (Pinekenstein et al., 2020), alongside putting student leaders to network with and help their classmates who are in different year levels (for example, through mentoring programs for young figureheads, peer, buddy, or house groupings) (Ziegelstein, 2018). These systems help student leaders to network with as well as support their classmates as they have access to a wide variety of socialization opportunities.

Regarding emotional wellbeing, providing student leaders with the self-help resources and counseling support they need in order to effectively take charge of school events is necessary (van der Meer et al., 2019). This also includes privileges from the counseling office to keep track of the various experiences and emotional turmoil that student leaders face and to guarantee that every student leader has access to at least one point person in talking about their problems.

Moreover, for better psychological wellbeing, implementing a school-wide emphasis on addressing mental health issues while solving strategies to educate student leaders about reaching out for help is another focus. This also includes suggestions and planning of integrated or health-related subjects to give student leaders the opportunity to construct health promotion queries that will improve their academic life.

Methodology

A quantitative descriptive design was used in this research. Participants and procedures, research instruments, and statistical methods were identified and discussed in this section.

Participants and Procedures

The respondents of this study are the twenty-one (21) student officers from two organizations, namely, the Emilio Aguinaldo College and NU Laguna Psychology Societies. EAC Psychology Society is composed of thirteen (13) college student leaders including the President, Vice President (Internal and External), Secretary, Treasurer, Auditor, PRO, Chief Layout Artist, Junior Layout Artist, and Batch Representatives

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(From First Year to Fourth Year). The NU Laguna Psychology Society is composed of eight (8) college student leaders including the President, Vice President (Internal and External), Secretary, Treasurer, Auditor, and PRO. The student leaders were born in the year 1999 to 2003, with an age range of 18-22 years old. EAC PsychSoc has nine (9) female and four (4) male officers and NU Laguna PsychSoc has seven (7) female and one (1) male officers. Through complete enumeration, all the officers of both organizations were the respondents to this study.

The instrument was converted into Google Forms and the published link was distributed through electronic mail and social media (Facebook) for safety considerations during this time of COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was distributed last September 18, 2021, and was retrieved on the same day.

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Profile	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18	5	23.8
19	2	9.5
20	8	38.1
21	6	28.6
Total:	**21**	**100**
Sex		
Male	4	19
Female	16	76.2
Prefer not to say	1	4.8
Total:	**21**	**100**
Name of School		
NU-Laguna	8	38.1
EAC-Manila	13	61.9
Total:	**21**	**100**
Year Level		
1st Year	3	14.3
2nd Year	3	14.3
3rd Year	13	61.9
4th Year	2	9.5
Total:	**21**	**100**
Name of Organization		
NU-Laguna PsychSoc	8	38.1
EAC-Manila PsychSoc	13	61.9
Total:	**21**	**100**

Research Instrument

The mental health status of the respondents was assessed using the Mental Health Continuum – Short Form. The said research instrument has 14 items and uses a 6-point Likert scale to measure individuals' emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Said tool is derived from the long-form (MHC-LF) which has seven items measuring emotional well-being, six 3-item scales (or 18 items total) that measure the dimensions of Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being, and five 3-item scales (or 15 items total) that measure the five dimensions of Keyes' (1998) model of social well-being. Nevertheless, being a derivative of the MHC-LF, the MHC short form still yielded high estimates ($\alpha > .80$) of internal consistency and reliability for each of the three sets of measures – the emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

Statistical Methods

The results gathered were consolidated, analyzed, and interpreted through the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). It employed descriptive statistics specifically mean scores and weighted means to provide relevant data on the respondents' mental health on clusters of emotional, social, and psychological well-being. The Pearson's R was employed to test the relationship between the mental health status of the two participating schools. Subsequently, a paired-sample t-test was used to compare and validate the difference between the mental health status of the respondents from EAC-Manila and NU Laguna.

Results and Discussion

Mental Health Status of the Student Leaders in Different Clusters

Table 2. *Emotional Well-Being*

Particulars During the past month, how often did you feel;	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Emotional Well-Being		
1. Happy	4.67	Flourishing
2. Interested in life	4.52	Flourishing
3. Satisfied with life	4.29	Moderately Mentally Healthy
CLUSTER MEAN	4.49	Flourishing

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Table 2, 3, and 4, consolidates the respondents' mental health status specifying the particulars for each cluster which comprises emotional well-being, social well-being, and psychological well-being. It can be deduced that the respondents are flourishing in terms of their emotional well-being with a cluster mean of 4.49. Specifying this cluster would reveal that during the past month, the majority of the respondents were feeling happy (mean = 4.67). Table 3 results imply that the student leaders have positive emotional well-being during the past month prior to the assessment.

Emotional well-being is shown by individuals' sense of happiness and their life satisfaction. The result supports resiliency for which Filipinos are known for (Puyat, 2005) and the concept of positivity among Filipino young adolescents despite experiences of socioeconomic disadvantages (Lapena, Tarroja, Tirazona, & Fernando, 2009). A study by Disiye & Mulambula (2015) elaborates that emotional well-being results from people's perception and interpretation of their environment, which implies that emotional well-being is greatly affected by social and environmental conditions. Parallel to what Lapena et al. (2009) postulated, our positive emotional well-being is primarily attributed to and established by our relationships with parents, teachers, and close friends.

Moreover, in terms of Table 3, social well-being, the respondents have a moderate mental health status with a cluster mean of 4.36**.** It shows that the respondents assessed themselves as belonging to a community like a social group, or neighborhood (mean = 4.71). This result implies that the respondents have a moderately positive attitude toward their personal contribution and belongingness in society as well as the perception of the goodness of humans and society.

These phenomena can be explained by considering the state of young adults in Erikson's psychosocial developmental process, developing social belongingness and relationship is crucial as these young adults are often expected to acquire skills and behavior that is often seen as adult responsibilities while still in the process of transitioning from adolescence to adulthood (Feist & Feist, 2008).

Table 3. *Social Well-Being*

Particulars During the past month, how often did you feel;	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Social Well-Being		
4. That you had something important to contribute to society	4.38	Moderately Mentally Healthy
5. That you belonged to a community (like a social group, or your neighborhood)	4.71	Flourishing
6. That our society is a good place or is becoming a better place, for all people.	4.14	Moderately Mentally Healthy
7. That people are basically good	4.38	Moderately Mentally Healthy
8. That the way our society works makes sense to you	4.19	Moderately Mentally Healthy
CLUSTER MEAN	4.36	*Moderately Mentally Healthy*

Being a social aspect of our overall well-being, McLeod (2018) highlighted the importance of social support from parents, teachers, peers, and other groups that we interact with in order to develop a sound sense of belongingness and social engagement, these interactions will further strengthen and improve social skills and outlook necessary for the social well-being of such age group.

In conclusion, the current research producing a result on young adults' social well-being having said to be moderately mentally healthy aligns with the basic theoretical assumption of human development. This result strengthens the assumption that adolescents are in the process of developing their social well-being which builds up their mental health holistically.

Lastly, Table 5 shows that the respondents are also

flourishing in terms of their psychological well-being with a cluster mean of 4.77. Specifically, during the past month, the majority of the respondents had experiences that challenged them to grow and become better people (mean = 5.05). This implies that the respondents are flourishing in terms of their psychological well-being. Aligned to this result is a related study conducted by Mavroveli, Pertides, Rieffe, and Bakker (2007), wherein adolescents and young adults were found to report fewer symptoms of depression and physical pain when they are in touch with their emotions as well as maintain relationships with others through self-expression. Further data shows that self-awareness and attending to and maintaining one's psychological needs are determinants of good leadership skills (Roche, Haar, and Luthans, 2014)

Table 4. *Psychological Well-Being*

Particulars During the past month, how often did you feel;	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Psychological Well-Being		
9. That you liked most parts of your personality.	4.57	Flourishing
10. Good at managing responsibilities of your daily life.	4.62	Flourishing
11. That you had a warm and trusting relationship with others.	4.86	Flourishing
12. That you had experiences that challenged you to grow and become a better person.	5.05	Flourishing
13. Confidence to think or express your own ideas and opinions.	4.81	Flourishing
14. That your life has a sense of direction or meaning to it.	4.71	Flourishing
CLUSTER MEAN	4.77	Flourishing
GRAND MEAN	4.56	Flourishing

Overall, the mental health status of the respondents is flourishing with a mean of 4.56. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the many challenges that are presented, the respondents have healthier and more productive ways of coping which make them to become more hopeful and resilient in these challenging situations.

This can be further explained by the study of Estacio et al.(2020) which reveals that during this COVID-19 pandemic, individuals who were quarantined at home resorted to activities to make them more physically, mentally, and psychologically fit. Other have resorted to online activities, learned new hobbies, and spent more quality time with their loved ones as they way of coping with their situation.

Overall Mental Health Status of the Student Leaders

Table 5. *Overall Mental Health Status of Student Leaders*

Mental Health Status	Frequency	Percent
Languishing	2	9.5
Moderately Mentally Healthy	4	19.0
Flourishing	15	71.4
Total	21	100

Table 5 presents the mental health status of the respondents. It can be gleaned that the majority of the respondents are under the Flourishing category of mental health with a frequency count of 15 or 71.4 percent. This signifies that they are high in manifesting positive emotions, life satisfaction, and establishing good quality relationships. Moreover, 19.5 percent or 4 respondents fell under the moderately mentally healthy status. On the other hand, 2 among them, or 9.5 percent were languishing in mental health status. They were characterized as being stuck in life, feeling empty, and lacking interest and engagement by Keyes (2002). They miss more days of work, frequently experience limitations with daily living, and have poor emotional health.

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Relationship Between the Mental Health Status of the Student Leaders

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Table 6. *Relationship between the mental health status of student leaders from Emilio Aguinaldo College- Manila and National University-Laguna*

	r-value	p-value
EAC-Manila Mental Health Status & NU-Laguna Mental Health Status	0.003^{ns}	0.99

The Table 6 above presents the relationship between the mental health status of the respondents from the two participating universities. It can be gleaned that there is no significant relationship between their mental health status with a Pearson correlation value of 0.03 at a 0.99 significance value. This result suggests that the mental health status of the respondents is congruently implying that there is no positive nor negative relationship between the yielded values indicating the mental health status of the respondents of EAC-Manila and NU-Laguna.

Differences Between the Mental Health Status of the Student Leaders

Table 7. *Difference between the mental health status of student leaders from Emilio Aguinaldo College-Manila and National University-Laguna*

	t-value	p-value
EAC-Manila Mental Health Status & NU-Laguna Mental Health Status	-1.302^{ns}	0.234

Further validating this result, a test of the difference as presented between the mental health status from the two participating universities were tested. As presented in table 8, with a t-value of -1.302 at 0.234 p-value, it can be deduced that there is no significant difference between the mental health status of the student leaders from the two participating schools. This result implies that regardless of their school affiliation, the student's mental health status in terms of social, emotional, and psychological well-being does not differ.

Enhancement Program

Based on the above results, the Enhancement Program was designed and created by the researchers. The enhancement program entitled "Mental Health and Leadership During Pandemic" was implemented last September 25, 2021, via the Zoom platform. The two-hour webinar is designed to discuss the Mental Health Status of the student leaders. Target participants are respondents of this study which are the selected psychology student leaders in the country who are the partners of faculty and school administrators in assisting, guiding, and developing students. The researcher targets to equip attendees with self-care techniques and effective leadership skills in this challenging situation. The Evaluation Form was utilized online using the google form. Webinar Evaluation Report was presented in both schools, which includes both quantitative and qualitative data.

Conclusion

Heeding the call of leadership while juggling academic tasks pose great challenges to our student-leaders. Student-leaders assume these roles during this time when everybody is faced with the uncertainty of the pandemic resulting in various adjustments, particularly in academic activities. These experiences of our student-leaders have affected their mental health and, eventually, their leadership performance. This research aimed to look into the mental health status of the student leaders of Emilio Aguinaldo College Psychology Society and the NU Laguna Psychology Society. Results served as the basis for an enhancement program to further equip them for leadership.

Despite the flourishing mental health status of the majority of the respondents in terms of their emotional and psychological well-being, and moderate mental health status in their social well-being, it is still noteworthy to consider the certain percentage who, in the past month before the survey, experienced languishing mental health in all three areas - emotional, social, and psychological well-being. These individuals who equally represent both participating schools support the need for an enhancement program.

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Based on these results, it could be concluded that student leaders, despite being expected to manifest utmost resilience in these challenging times, also have some unmanaged life difficulties. If this happens to the least percentage of the respondents, it could also happen to the rest of the student-leaders. Hence, it is necessary to address this concern as early as now and provide them input on managing their difficulties and coping with their stresses.

Moreover, an enhancement program is recommended. It will help the student leaders be aware of their mental health and apply the strategies and coping mechanisms that will be tackled in the enhancement program. It is also recommended to have an online "kumustahan session" and to initiate more social and fun learning activities that can be done even online to build better interpersonal connections among the students considering that the respondents are moderately healthy in terms of social well-being, compared with other emotional and psychological wellbeing which are flourishing.

Another recommendation is to give them time to unwind and a break or rest when it comes to their organizational responsibilities, especially before the major examinations. Even though they are leaders, they are still students who need to focus on their studies.

It is also suggested to continue monitoring the mental health of student leaders by conducting a mental health survey because even if they are good at serving and helping their fellow psychology family, there are times that they need help too.

Lastly, it is also recommended to design targeted early intervention programs, and mental health education campaigns that will cover the knowledge, attitude, and behavior related to mental health and leadership programs. This will help in creating an environment that promotes mental and emotional well-being and positive social interactions.

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