

Assessing the Mental Health Needs of Employees: A Foundation for Enhanced Workplace Wellness Programs in Publishing

Jocelyn C. Manansala, RPsy, RPsM

PhD in Industrial-Organizational Psychology Student, Graduate School Centro Escolar University 9
Mendiola Street, San Miguel, Manila, Philippines

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.909000653>

Received: 20 September 2025; Accepted: 29 September 2025; Published: 25 October 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examined how employees in a medium-sized publishing house in the Philippines perceive mental health and wellness initiatives, and whether these reflect their lived needs across job groups. Grounded in Person–Environment Fit Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and the Job Demands–Resources Model, the research explored employee receptivity, stressors, and culturally embedded understandings of care and support. A qualitative approach was used, drawing from employee climate surveys, seminar feedback, voluntary reflections, and organizational documents. Thematic analysis revealed three core findings: (1) job-specific and generational stressors shaped emotional fatigue and access to coping strategies, particularly among field and production teams; (2) emotional safety, relational leadership, and perceived program relevance influenced employee engagement and trust; and (3) Filipino values such as *malasakit* (compassionate concern) and *pakikipagkapwa* (shared humanity) shaped expectations around wellness, connection, and leadership presence. These insights highlight that effective wellness programs must be emotionally attuned, culturally responsive, and consistently woven into daily operations. Practical implications include inclusive leadership development, participatory program design, and clearer, stigma-free communication about psychological support. Suggested enhancements involve tiered wellness sessions tailored to diverse concerns, decentralized delivery formats, emotionally intelligent supervisor training, and structured check-ins that build relational trust. Improving visibility of support—especially for younger staff, field workers, and new hires—may help strengthen receptivity and reduce silent burnout. Future research could examine the long-term effects of wellness program engagement, expand coverage across sectors, and develop culturally grounded evaluation frameworks rooted in Filipino workplace realities.

Keywords: Workplace mental health; wellness programs; employee receptivity; Filipino cultural values; qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

The mental health and wellness of employees are important factors of organizational success, particularly in demanding work environments such as the publishing industry. Employees in this sector often face unique stressors, such as tight deadlines, complex editorial workflows, evolving client demands and a competitive market, which can significantly impact their overall well-being. These challenges are often compounded by limited support structures and the time-consuming nature of book production. Understanding the specific experiences of employees within this setting is essential to recognizing the mental health risks that may go unnoticed or unaddressed.

This study aims to explore the self-perceived mental health needs of employees in a medium-sized publishing house, serving as a foundation for enhancing its workplace wellness initiatives. By centering on employee experiences, the research hopes to inform the development of programs that are both relevant and responsive to their actual needs. The findings may help guide company decision-makers in crafting targeted approaches that reflect the day-to-day realities of staff, while also supporting national efforts under the Philippine Mental Health Act.

Following this exploratory assessment, the researcher intends to integrate employee feedback into the creation of a responsive and evidence-based mental health program tailored to the specific needs of the publishing workplace. This can help strengthen the company's existing health management strategies, ensuring that future wellness efforts are better aligned with what employees truly need.

A deeper understanding of employee mental health needs also offers a strategic advantage. It can help management tailor-fit approaches, allocate resources across employee groups, and identify gaps and opportunities in program delivery. Such insights can contribute to creating a workplace environment that supports long-term well-being and sustained productivity. Beyond organizational benefits, the findings may also support improvements in policy implementation aligned with the Philippine Mental Health Act, while guiding the development of relevant and sustainable programs within the publishing sector and similar industries. The development of these programs will be guided by a thematic analysis of employee feedback, ensuring that the interventions reflect actual experiences and workplace priorities.

Ultimately, the study hopes to contribute to local literature on mental health programs that are relatable and applicable to Filipino organizational contexts.

Background of the Study

The Philippine Mental Health Act of 2018 (Republic Act No. 11036) was signed into law on June 20, 2018 after 16 years of advocacy. It aims to strengthen mental illness prevention, promote mental health, protect the rights of service users and providers, and ensure access to appropriate services across sectors of society. One of its key objectives is the integration of mental health strategies in schools, workplaces, and communities. Each member of society has their own part to play in supporting the overall wellbeing of the Filipino people and the nation as a whole. Mental health is not only a government concern, but a shared responsibility among individuals, institutions, and communities alike.

In the workplace, this responsibility becomes even more critical, as mental health challenges are increasingly recognized as key factors affecting employee performance, engagement, and retention. In the Philippine setting, a 2024 study revealed that 87% of Filipino employees report experiencing at least one work-related mental health issue, such as stress, anxiety, or difficulty concentrating. This exceeds the global average of 76% (Inquirer.net, 2024) and reflects a growing concern that local organizations can no longer ignore. These findings emphasize the urgency for workplaces to proactively invest in programs that truly support employee well-being and promote long-term organizational resilience.

In the Philippines, approximately 65% of the population is active in the labor force, contributing to nearly 40% of the country's economic output. Yet, with the Philippine Mental Health Act still in its early years of implementation and with challenges such as limited resources, bureaucracy, and persistent mental health stigma, many organizations face difficulties in translating the law into meaningful action. This makes it all the more important for Philippine employers not only to comply with existing regulations, but to take the lead in developing their own mental health initiatives. Going beyond minimum requirements not only addresses the real needs of Filipino employees, but also creates the foundation for sustainable and people-centered workplaces.

Statement of the Problem

Mental health in the workplace remains a growing concern, yet employee experiences are often underrepresented in program development. Given the work demands in a medium-sized publishing house, there is a need to better understand how employees perceive their mental health challenges. By exploring these self-perceived concerns, this study seeks to surface issues that may otherwise remain unaddressed and to encourage a participatory approach in shaping wellness initiatives. Listening directly to employee voices can help management identify meaningful gaps, allocate resources more effectively, and respond in ways that reflect the realities of everyday work life.

Understanding employee perspectives is essential in creating health and wellness programs that reflect the actual needs of the workforce. By listening directly to employee voices, the study hopes to bring to the surface both

personal and collective concerns that may otherwise remain unaddressed. It also aims to offer management a clearer picture of existing gaps and opportunities, allowing them to allocate resources more effectively and design interventions that are grounded in employee feedback.

Main Research Problem

What are the self-perceived mental health needs and challenges faced by employees in a medium-sized publishing house?

To achieve this objective, this research will answer the following specific questions:

Specific Problems

1. What mental health challenges are experienced by employees across job group (editorial and production, sales, operations, staff, and officers)?
2. How do employees and management perceive the purpose and effectiveness of the company's health and wellness programs?
3. In what ways do employee and management perspectives on mental health and wellness differ?
4. What common mental health needs and concerns are shared across job groups and organizational levels?
5. What enhancements can be proposed to better align wellness programs with employee needs and lived experiences?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine employee perspectives on mental health needs and challenges within a medium-sized publishing company. By giving space for their opinions to be heard, the study aims to surface specific concerns, patterns, and areas where support may be lacking. These insights are intended to guide the enhancement of the company's health and wellness programs, ensuring that future interventions reflect actual employee experiences.

It also aims to equip management with a clearer understanding of how mental health concerns are experienced across different employee job groups, helping them make informed, employee-centered decisions. Through this, the organization may be able to create a more responsive mental health program that promotes well-being, shared accountability, and a more supportive workplace culture.

Significance of the Study

This study holds practical value for the selected organization, as it provides insight into how employees perceive their own mental health needs and challenges. By giving voice to these experiences, the research can be the basis of development or refinement of workplace wellness initiatives that are responsive to what employees actually need. The findings can also support management in designing more targeted and inclusive approaches, improving resource allocation, and reinforcing their commitment to employee well-being. Ultimately, these efforts should contribute to a healthier, more responsive, and sustainable work environment.

Beyond the scope of this particular organization, the study offers broader relevance for similar companies addressing mental health concerns in the Philippine workplace. It may help shape strategies aligned with the Philippine Mental Health Act and show how participatory approaches can bridge the gap between policy intent and everyday practice. In doing so, it contributes to the local literature on workplace mental health—particularly within publishing—by offering context-specific insights and proposing practical interventions that other Philippine businesses may consider.

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on the self-perceived mental health needs and challenges of employees in a medium-sized publishing company. It explores how employees understand their experiences, express their concerns, and view existing wellness programs within the organization. The research also includes the perspectives of management to provide a broader understanding of how mental health is addressed in the workplace. Findings from this study may serve as a framework for improving the company's health and wellness initiatives.

The scope is limited to one organization, and results may not be generalizable to other industries or settings. Data collection relies primarily on self-reports drawn from mental health seminar feedback of the employee participants and other qualitative sources, which may be shaped by personal bias, confidentiality concerns, and differing levels of openness. Time constraints and the small employee population may also restrict the diversity of participation and depth of insight.

Despite these limitations, the study gives valuable perspectives from those directly affected by workplace mental health concerns. Replication in sectors such as media, education, and non-profit organizations—and across varied contexts using both qualitative and quantitative approaches—may further illuminate key variables such as demographic profile, company culture, nature of work, perceived work-life balance, leadership practices, and specific risk factors. This research affirms the importance of employee-centered and organizationally responsive approaches to mental health. It highlights the need to co-construct wellness initiatives with employees, grounding policies and programs in both empirical evidence and lived realities specific to the Philippine publishing workplace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental health is increasingly recognized as a strategic concern in organizations, directly influencing employee well-being, performance, and organizational sustainability. Both personal and systemic factors shape employee mental health, requiring context-sensitive and evidence-based responses (Heron & Bharava, 2024; Thompson & Ortega, 2023). This study focuses on how employees in a medium-sized publishing house perceive their mental health needs and whether current wellness initiatives reflect those needs.

Employee Receptivity and Program Engagement

Recent literature emphasizes that the success of wellness programs is anchored not only on their availability but also on employee receptivity. Spence (2022) describes employee receptivity as involving trust, relevance, and psychological readiness. Low participation may reflect a misalignment between programs and employee needs, rather than a lack of interest. Blau's (1964) Social Exchange Theory (SET) supports this view, suggesting that perceived organizational support fosters reciprocal engagement. Trust, fairness, and fulfilled expectations play a vital role to this dynamic (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Aligning Organizational Initiatives with Employee Needs

Person–Environment (P–E) Fit Theory highlights the importance of compatibility between individual needs and workplace conditions (French et al., 1982). Misalignment, whether in work design or wellness programming, can lead to disengagement and stress (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). This study applies P–E Fit to examine how demographic factors, such as generational background and tenure, influence perceived needs and receptivity within a Philippine organizational context.

Job Demands, Resources, and Psychosocial Climate

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model frames mental health in terms of workload and available support (Demerouti et al., 2001). When demands exceed resources like peer support and autonomy, burnout is likely to happen. HERO (2020) similarly urges organizations to actively manage psychosocial risks by building inclusive and supportive environments.

Black and Munro (2023) propose a framework that integrates prevention, promotion, and recovery strategies, emphasizing leadership accountability and consistent implementation. This is especially relevant in high-pressure sectors like publishing.

Evaluation, Policy, and Local Practice

Effective wellness programs require proper evaluation. Heron and Bharava (2024) recommend combining self-report measures with organizational data to assess outcomes. In the Philippines, Cruz and Hernandez (2024) advocate for legislative efforts like Senate Bill No. 1817, which promotes mental health leave and education. However, cultural stigma, access barriers, and organizational misalignment remain persistent challenges. These can be addressed through participatory policy design and localized program development.

Study Contribution and Research Gaps

Despite growing global attention, Philippine organizational research on workplace mental health remains limited. Three gaps emerge: (1) wellness programs often lack employee-centered design, (2) mental health outcomes are rarely measured using consistent tools, and (3) participatory evaluation approaches are underutilized. This study addresses these gaps by capturing employee perspectives, assessing alignment between organizational initiatives and employee needs, and offering context-specific insights from the Philippine publishing industry.

Theoretical And Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a hybrid theoretical foundation, drawing on Person–Environment (P–E) Fit Theory, Social Exchange Theory (SET), and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional view of how employees perceive their mental health needs and how organizational wellness programs either align with or fall short of those needs.

Person–Environment Fit Theory

Essentially, P–E Fit Theory posits that psychological well-being improves when there is congruence between an individual's personal characteristics (e.g., needs, values, abilities) and the conditions of their work environment (French et al., 1982; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). Within this study, P–E Fit offers a plausible basis for exploring employee receptivity to wellness programs. When such programs reflect the lived experiences and specific work pressures encountered by the employees in a publishing workplace, these employees are more likely to engage meaningfully and benefit from the support provided. Differences in their nature of work may shape how employees experience stress and assess the relevance of wellness initiatives and exploring their different experiences helps clarify how well the company's programs match the needs of employees in specific job groups.

Social Exchange Theory

SET emphasizes the reciprocal nature of workplace dynamics, suggesting that employee attitudes and behaviors are influenced by their perceptions of how the organization treats them (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When organizations demonstrate genuine concern through transparent communication, accessible support systems, and culturally or locally responsive programs, employees are more likely to respond with trust, engagement, and participation.

Applied to this study, SET frames the relational dynamics between employees and management. Key constructs such as fairness, psychological safety, and perceived organizational support shape whether wellness efforts are seen as credible or superficial (Spence, 2022). When trust is absent or programs are viewed as token gestures, employees may disengage or remain silent about them.

Job Demands–Resources Model

The JD-R Model introduces a structural dimension to understanding mental health at work by categorizing job factors into demands (e.g., cognitive load, time pressure) and resources (e.g., supervisor support, access to care) (Demerouti et al., 2001). When resources are insufficient to meet prevailing demands, the risk of burnout increases; conversely, abundant resources can fuel resilience and sustained engagement.

This model guides the study's attention to day-to-day work stressors and evaluates whether existing wellness programs adequately address them. It also highlights the role of leadership in shaping the availability of resources for and ensuring sustainability of existing or proposed wellness programs.

These theories collectively provide a coherent foundation for the study's conceptual model. P–E Fit captures the importance of alignment between individual needs and organizational programs. SET offers insight into the trust-based nature of engagement, whereas JD-R puts well-being within structural conditions of work. This integrative approach guides the analysis of employee receptivity and supports the development of responsive, evidence-based wellness strategies grounded in the lived realities of the publishing company chosen for this study.

Conceptual Framework

This study is based on a conceptual framework that focuses on how well the selected book publishing company's mental health and wellness programs align with what the employees say they actually need. An important part of this framework is *employee receptivity*, which refers to how willing or able employees are to engage with these programs. Receptivity is shaped by several factors, such as their level of trust in management, whether they find the mental health and wellness programs relevant, and how safe or supported they feel in the workplace. On the other side, management perceptions play a role in shaping how programs are designed and implemented. The framework recognizes that if employee needs and management perspectives are not in sync, wellness programs may miss the mark. It is operationalized through a qualitative design, primarily from seminar feedback, employee climate survey, leave records, voluntary testimonials, mental health and wellness program description and relevant policies. These instruments provided insightful information and a clearer understanding of both employee experiences and management perspectives within the organizational context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore their employees' mental health needs and provide a nuanced understanding of employees' self-perceived challenges and opportunities for wellness program improvements.

Data Sources

This study draws on a range of organizational documents and employee-reported feedback. All data were anonymized and reviewed with ethical sensitivity to employee privacy and organizational context.

1. *Employee Feedback from Mental Health Seminars, Employee Climate Survey and Testimonials*

This includes open-ended responses and qualitative reflections from seminar participants, survey respondents, voluntary testimonials collected over the last twelve months. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring concerns, mental health risks, perceived needs, and suggested enhancements.

2. *Employee Profile*

Data obtained from the HR database helped contextualize feedback across job groups – including editorial and production, sales and operations, other staff, and officers.

3. Health Services Utilization Report

An anonymized report from the organization's health insurance provider or HMO was analyzed to identify healthcare usage trends, particularly in relation to mental health service utilization following its inclusion in the benefit package. This descriptive analysis highlighted support gaps and general patterns in employee well-being.

4. Incident Reports and Leave Records

Patterns related to absenteeism, burnout, or mental health-related leaves were triangulated with insurance and engagement survey responses to identify high-stress departments, roles or time periods.

5. Wellness Program Participation Logs

Attendance records from past seminars and wellness activities were reviewed to assess employee receptivity and participation trends across teams.

6. Mental Health Policies and Program

The organization's written policies and program description on mental health and wellness were reviewed to assess management's formal commitment to mental health. These documents were compared with employee feedback to evaluate alignment between policy intent and lived experience.

7. Management Perspectives

Brief interviews with senior management provided additional insight on organizational priorities, wellness strategies, and perceived barriers to supporting employee mental health.

8. Informal Observations and Anecdotal Feedback

This study considered informal observations and employee-generated comments submitted through feedback channels such as climate surveys, wellness activity reflections, and even internal testimonials. These anecdotal insights, though less structured, provided additional context on engagement, emotional well-being, and perceptions of organizational support.

These sources provide a fuller picture of how employees of the publishing company experience and respond to mental health and wellness programs. By looking at different types of data—formal reports, employee feedback, and management input—the study helps bring to the surface recurring issues and personal experiences. This approach supports a grounded understanding of what works, what needs adjustment, and how the company might improve its employee wellness efforts moving forward.

Data Analysis Procedures (Thematic Analysis)

Thematic analysis was used to interpret qualitative data from employee feedback, mental health service utilization report, exit interviews, incident reports, and other textual sources. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the analysis involved:

1. Familiarization with the data
 2. Generating initial codes
 3. Searching for themes
 4. Reviewing themes
 5. Defining and naming themes
 6. Producing the report
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Codes were developed inductively, which allowed themes to emerge from the data. Descriptive pattern analysis was also applied to HMO utilization and attendance logs to identify trends in leave availments that were relevant to mental health. Triangulation across multiple data sources supported the findings.

Ethical Considerations

The study used existing data of the company with permission from the company's management. Datasets were anonymized for analysis to protect employee identities. No direct participation or new data collection was involved. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the analysis, such that findings were reported in aggregate to avoid identifying individuals or departments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key themes that emerged from the analysis of various data sources. The findings are organized thematically and supported by excerpts from the data to illustrate employee perspectives and organizational patterns.

Theme 1: Mental Health Challenges Across Job Groups

Employees across departments described feeling emotionally and physically overwhelmed by the nature of their work and performance demands. Editorial staff expressed both passion for their creative roles and pressure from tight publishing deadlines, compounded by challenges in managing demanding authors. Production team members referred to daily physical fatigue, while field sales employees emphasized the unpredictability of client needs, limited book inventory, and financial expectations from family members.

Stress was not confined to job-specific concerns. Several participants mentioned personal obligations and health-related issues that intensified their daily workload. Among field staff, these stressors appeared more complex, shaped by Filipino family structures and extended caregiving responsibilities. This aligns with De Guzman's (2017) observation that Filipino workers often carry family-based obligations that add emotional weight to their work experience—pressures that are not always addressed by formal wellness initiatives.

Sales employees consistently reported stressors rooted in financial strain, workload intensity, and familial responsibilities. These concerns were evident across feedback forms and informal reflections during seminar activities. While editorial and operations staff may face different workflow demands, sales teams articulated distinct challenges tied to performance-based compensation and role expectations.

Common stressors cited include: (1) Financial-related strain (tuition fees, loans, bills, low income); (2) Work-related pressure (sales target demands, lack of new book titles, limited leave options); (3) Family-related concerns (caregiving responsibilities, illness in the family, emotional tension).

"Pressure at work, bills, educational expenses of my sister, and limited leave—all of these pile up."

"Sometimes what adds to the stress is not the quota, but the feeling that there's no time to reset."

These stressors often intersect, heightening emotional strain and vulnerability—particularly among field sales personnel. While coping strategies such as quality time, prayer, and rest were common, some participants also cited riskier behaviors like smoking, stress-eating, and overspending, signaling uneven access to healthy regulation options.

Patterns in employee leave records show many of these stressors and coping behaviors. Most leaves were taken for physical rest or scheduled around long holidays, often to spend time with family. Sick leaves typically addressed common illnesses or routine health check-ups. In some job groups, particularly editorial and production, and those in sales and distribution, leave was often availed immediately following high-stress deadlines or peak ordering seasons. Notably, across all documented leave reasons, only one employee explicitly cited "mental health break." This suggests that while emotional recovery is practiced informally, mental wellness

may still be approached indirectly, thus the need for more open, culturally sensitive dialogue around psychological support.

Nine out of ten stress-related comments came from Millennial employees across departments, indicating that emotional pressure is strongly felt among younger groups, regardless of tenure or rank. This pattern highlights the need for more attuned, age-responsive support strategies moving forward.

Recent Philippine data reinforces this concern. According to a Deloitte study cited by Mind You, 70% of Gen Z and 63% of Millennial employees in the Philippines report experiencing burnout due to workload demands. This is significantly higher than the global average of 45%. The AXA Mind Health Report (2024) similarly found that 48% of Gen Z and 42% of Millennials in the country are struggling with serious mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and burnout.

This phenomenon often presents as silent burnout—a state in which employees continue to perform but feel emotionally depleted, disengaged, and unable to recover (Chawla & Kaur, 2025). Silent burnout is difficult to detect and frequently goes unaddressed, especially in cultures like the Philippines, where mental health stigma persists and high performance is often equated with personal resilience. In many Filipino workplaces, there is also a deep cultural value placed on respect for authority and maintaining harmony. While this fosters discipline and cohesion, it can unintentionally discourage open expression of emotional strain. Voicing distress may be quietly perceived as defiance or disruption, leading employees to choose quiet endurance over visible help-seeking. This quiet perseverance although often admired as strength can mask serious exhaustion and delay timely support.

Consistent references to deadline pressure, client demands, and family responsibilities in employee feedback support Ganster and Rosen's (2013) Allostatic Load framework. This model explains how chronic exposure to psychosocial stressors, such as role ambiguity, performance pressure, and lack of recovery, can lead to long-term health consequences. In the Philippine context, where work and personal life often overlap and familial obligations intersect with professional responsibilities, these stressors may be further intensified.

These findings suggest that silent burnout among younger employees calls for thoughtful consideration of job design, clearer role expectations, and proactive mental health support.

Building on this, recent studies affirm that job stress significantly impacts well-being, job satisfaction, and turnover intention particularly in high-pressure roles (Lin et al., 2024). These stressors may also contribute to physical health risks. HMO utilization data revealed that the top five illness claims included hypertension, hyperlipidaemia, kidney stones, fatty liver disease, and gastroesophageal reflux (GERD). Hypertension alone accounted for nearly 20% of all claims and the highest total reimbursements, suggesting a link between chronic stress and cardiovascular strain. Metabolic conditions like hyperlipidaemia and fatty liver disease likely reflect lifestyle patterns shaped by work intensity, irregular schedules, and limited access to preventive care.

Taken together, these findings reinforce the idea that mental health support must go beyond generic solutions. Tailored strategies for role-specific stress and generational needs alongside culturally sensitive interventions can help ease emotional fatigue and strengthen resilience. In the Philippine context, this includes recognizing the role of *malasakit* (compassionate care) and *pakikipagkapwa* (shared humanity) in shaping wellness programs that truly resonate with employees' lived experiences.

Theme 2: Management and Employee Perceptions of Wellness Program Purpose and Effectiveness

Document analysis indicates that management has developed a comprehensive mental health program that is integrated into the organization's occupational safety and health protocols. Its provisions, which range from preventive measures and referral systems to non-discrimination policies and group wellness activities, reflect a formal commitment to employee well-being. The program is implemented through shared accountability between Human Resources and the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Committee, with avenues for training, confidential support, and workplace accommodations. Notably, the company's Health Maintenance

Organization (HMO) benefit package now includes up to five consultations with a mental health professional per year, subject to cost limits.

Over the past twelve months, management supported mental health seminars and wellness campaigns that covered legal frameworks, government-initiated benefits, and access to resources. These were complemented by team recreation and employee engagement activities. Employees largely affirmed the presence and relevance of these initiatives, particularly appreciating the availability of counseling, leave provisions, and group wellness activities such as Zumba, annual physical exams, and team-building events.

However, a few comments revealed areas for improvement. Some employees expressed uncertainty about how to access mental health services, suggesting that clearer communication and more visible program campaigns may be needed. The non-availment of external mental health services through the HMO program may also reflect lingering stigma, a barrier noted in Philippine workplace literature (Medina & Reyes, 2020). This indicates that culture-building efforts (e.g., informal peer sessions) may help reinforce program acceptance and reach.

Participation in weekly Zumba sessions averaged 8 to 15 attendees, with some employees opting out due to time constraints or the need to avoid late afternoon traffic. While this reflects logistical challenges, it also points to the importance of flexible scheduling.

A few comments, though limited in number, highlighted feelings of being driven by deadlines and underrecognized for their contributions. One employee shared, *"Sometimes it feels like we're just chasing numbers, not being seen for the effort we put in."* A department head also noted that some staff preferred venting frustrations on social media rather than engaging in dialogue with supervisors or using formal grievance channels. This suggests that, despite the organization's open-door policy and positive culture (as affirmed in employee testimonials) trust and engagement may still need strengthening among certain individuals. These dynamics may be shaped more by personality differences and relational histories than by structural gaps.

Seminar feedback reflects strong engagement when content resonates personally. The well-being seminar received the highest average score (4.76), with participants expressing a clear desire for deeper, more sustained discussions on mental health topics:

"Sana sa susunod na training mas habaan ang oras para sa ganitong mga discussion... Very interesting. Kudos kay facilitator."

"Hopefully next time, this kind of discussion gets more time in the training... Very interesting. Kudos to the facilitator."

"Mental health and retirement—these hit home. We rarely get to talk about these."

Participants emphasized the value of relevant, contextualized content that addresses both professional development and personal well-being. The request for extended sessions and more interactive formats suggests a gap between program intention and experiential depth. Thus, it is important to design wellness strategies that reflect employee realities.

Recent studies continue to affirm that chronic exposure to psychosocial stressors, such as performance pressure, role ambiguity, and lack of recovery, can lead to long-term health consequences, including cardiovascular and metabolic conditions (Shchaslyvyi et al., 2024; Piao et al., 2024). In this target organization, HMO utilization data revealed that essential hypertension, hyperlipidaemia, and fatty liver disease were among the top five illness claims by frequency and cost. These conditions may be linked to unmanaged stress, sedentary routines, and nutritional gaps, thus emphasizing the need for wellness programs that integrate both mental and physical health support. Wellness initiatives that are responsive to employees' lived experiences and health risks are assumed to be more relevant, empowering, impactful, and sustainable.

Theme 3: Divergence Between Management Intentions and Employee Experiences of Wellness Programs

Document analysis indicates that management has developed a comprehensive mental health program integrated into occupational safety and health policies. Its provisions, such as preventive measures, referral systems, non-discrimination safeguards, and group wellness activities, reflect a strategic commitment to employee well-being. Implementation is shared between Human Resources and the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Committee, with support mechanisms including confidential consultations, workplace accommodations, and mental health coverage through the company's Health Maintenance Organization (HMO).

Employee feedback largely affirms the presence and relevance of these initiatives. Staff expressed appreciation for counseling access, wellness leaves, mental health seminars, and activities such as Zumba, annual physical exams, and team-building events. Post-seminar ratings on in-house mental health topics were consistently "Above Average" to "Excellent," with sales teams reporting 100% participation and average overall scores ranging from 4.65 to 5.00/5.00.

"What a good initiative from our company to start breaking the stigma about mental health."

"More trainings like this."

"Hope to have follow-up talks on this."

However, some comments revealed that wellness efforts do not reach all employees equally. For instance, only 50 out of 120 targeted staff attended the initial seminar run, with editorial and production teams citing workload conflicts. A few respondents expressed uncertainty about how to access mental health services, while others declined wellness (Zumba) activities due to commuting constraints or time limitations. These barriers suggest that program visibility and accessibility may vary across roles and schedules.

A few isolated remarks also hinted at emotional disconnection. One employee noted feeling driven by deadlines and underrecognized for their contributions. Another observed that some staff vent frustrations online rather than engaging with supervisors or using formal grievance channels—suggesting that while open-door policies exist, they may not feel emotionally accessible to all.

These reflections highlight the different ways management and employees view and experience wellness. Management tends to frame mental health programs through structure, compliance, and policy integration. Employees, meanwhile, respond more to emotional tone, cultural relevance, and relational trust. This echoes findings from Hechanova and Caringal-Go (2018), who emphasize that Filipino workplace programs thrive when they are actively communicated, emotionally resonant, and led with empathy. Their CREATE framework—Communicate, Role Model, Engage, Align, Train, and Evaluate—offers a practical guide for bridging structural and emotional intentions.

Recent studies also affirm that employer-sponsored mental health programs are most effective when they combine clinical access with culturally attuned engagement strategies. For example, a U.S.-based cohort study found that workplace mental health programs reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety while offering positive return on investment (Wu et al., 2021). Not everyone used the program, especially younger employees or those who lacked time or did not feel comfortable with formal support systems.

In the selected organization, HMO data revealed that essential hypertension, hyperlipidaemia, and fatty liver disease were among the top five illness claims by frequency and cost. These conditions may be linked to unmanaged stress, sedentary routines, and nutritional gaps. This emphasizes the need for wellness programs that integrate both mental and physical health support (Piao et al., 2024).

The high turnout and feedback from department-led sessions show the value of contextual relevance. However, lower attendance in general seminars and limited use of mental health services may reflect lingering stigma, workload barriers, and unclear mental health access pathways. Alternatively, some employees may rely on personal coping strategies and resilience, minimizing the perceived need for formal interventions.

If the organization aims to normalize help-seeking and improve reach, it may need to strengthen internal communication strategies, personalize offerings at the team level, and continue building a culture of psychological safety. Small actions—such as department-led sessions, flexible formats, and visible follow-ups—could go a long way in improving program engagement and perceived care.

Theme 4: Shared Needs and Suggestions Across Levels

This subsection synthesizes common mental health needs and concerns shared across job groups and organizational levels, alongside recurring employee suggestions for improving wellness programs.

A consistent theme across feedback was the value of empathic leadership—particularly active listening, emotional responsiveness, and clear communication—in shaping employees’ mental health experiences at work. Participants described how these behaviors from supervisors helped reduce stress, increase their motivation, and foster psychological safety.

“The leader’s ability to actively listen to everyone’s concerns plays a significant role in enhancing the team’s productivity... [it] helps alleviate stress and fosters a sense of psychological safety.”

“My leader’s ability to listen to my concerns helps me easily handle and solve problems I encounter at work.”

“Kapag ang pinuno ay nakikinig ng mabuti, nagkakaroon ka ng pataas ng tiwala sa iyong sarili. Ang pagmamalasakit ay nakakabawas ng pagod at stress sa araw-araw na gawain.”

“When a leader listens well, you gain greater self-confidence. Genuine care eases fatigue and everyday stress.”

This sentiment not only shows the importance of empathetic leadership but also reaffirms the role of wellness efforts in strengthening morale and trust across teams. On the other hand, the absence of empathic leadership was associated with heightened stress and emotional strain:

“Since [genuine listening] is lacking, there’s no safe space to express my concerns, which adds to the stress and frustration. It affects my motivation and sometimes makes me feel like my contributions aren’t valued.”

These reflections suggest that leadership style is not only a matter of job satisfaction but a critical component of workplace mental health.

“Clear and honest leadership communication helps me understand priorities, reduce confusion, and build trust. It makes my work more efficient and less stressful, which directly improves my job satisfaction.”

These insights affirm the importance of integrating leadership development into mental health and wellness initiatives. Interestingly, empathic leadership, characterized by active listening, emotional support, and transparent communication, emerged as a protective factor that can buffer against stress and promote psychological well-being across job groups.

Notably, nine out of ten mentions of stress came from Millennial employees, including both tenured and newly hired staff. This suggests that younger employees may have stronger emotional expectations of their leaders or be more vulnerable to increasing work and personal life demands. Responses emphasized the importance of psychological safety and recognition, especially during high-pressure periods.

Recent studies support these observations. Muss et al. (2025) found that empathetic leaders positively influence employee well-being, motivation, and interpersonal trust, particularly in fast-paced or high-stress environments. Kaiser (2024) further observed that empathy has become increasingly important to leadership effectiveness since the COVID-19 pandemic, with stronger links to employee engagement and psychological safety.

While many participants viewed their supervisors positively, isolated comments reflected instances where emotional support was lacking, thus signifying a gap between leadership intention and perception. This mirrors

insights from Hechanova and Caringal-Go (2018), who emphasized that well-being in Filipino workplaces hinges on relational trust and systems that empower leaders to respond meaningfully to employee concerns.

Despite role differences, employees voiced recurring wellness needs: (1) Opportunities to talk openly about mental health without stigma; (2) Interactive activities that balance performance discussions with emotional check-ins; (3) Programs that recognize family-related stress as part of work-life wellness

“I wish we had spaces to share ideas—not just during training but in real life at work.”

“Mental health doesn’t start and stop at the seminar. It’s how we feel showing up each day.”

These shared sentiments reinforce the study’s argument for inclusive, ongoing wellness strategies that reflect lived realities. Leadership development that centers empathy and emotional intelligence may be key to sustaining these efforts across generations, roles, and departments.

Supporting Qualitative Insights

To complement the preceding thematic analysis, this subsection presents selected qualitative excerpts that illustrate how staff members experience workplace culture and its relationship to mental well-being. Reflections were drawn from internal feedback and voluntary testimonials across roles in editorial, sales, production, support, and digital services. These narratives enrich broader patterns by highlighting values, relationships, and practices that contribute to emotional resilience within the organization.

Theme 1: Supportive and Inclusive Workplace Culture

Across departments, employees described the workplace as warm, team-oriented, and emotionally supportive.

“This place feels like a family—people are ready to help each other when someone’s in need.”

“Everyone I’ve worked with has been patient, kind, and willing to guide new team members.”

“Inclusivity and respect really stand out. You feel valued here, not just as an employee but as a person.”

These reflections show the protective role of peer relationships and affirm the presence of psychological safety that are conditions for mental wellness and receptivity to wellness initiatives. Recent global findings support this link: strong interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging at work are among the most powerful predictors of mental well-being, even more than workload or flexibility factors (Thiagarajan & Newson, 2024).

Theme 2: Opportunities for Growth and Purpose

Employees also reflected on personal and professional growth enabled by organizational practices.

“I’ve had chances to develop leadership skills and take on more responsibility over time.”

“Even as a new hire, I’ve been included in planning meetings—that’s been incredibly affirming.”

“I get to combine my love for detail and planning with meaningful work that supports learning.”

This theme highlights how exposure to development opportunities and inclusive planning can foster engagement, self-efficacy, and motivation —factors that contribute positively to mental health. Khalid and Syed’s (2024) review affirms that growth-oriented environments and recognition of individual contributions are key facilitators of workplace well-being across sectors.

Theme 3: Alignment with Values and Workplace Identity

Across roles, employees expressed a strong connection to the organization’s mission and values. There was also emphasis on integrating these values into daily work and culture.

To deepen this alignment, a Values Integration initiative may be considered. This would involve assessing employee behaviors and challenges through a structured process, followed by scheduled consultations with experts based on individual assessment results. Such a program could support both personal growth and organizational cohesion.

“Working here lifts my morale—people respect the company and value the role it plays.”

“I’m proud to represent an organization that genuinely cares for its people and clients.”

“We celebrate even small wins—it makes work feel more connected and purposeful.”

These excerpts reflect employees’ sense of belonging and collective pride, reinforcing the idea that mental wellness is nurtured not only through programs but also through meaningful work and value alignment. Recent workplace studies emphasize that pride and purpose are among the strongest contributors to mental health outcomes, more so than family relationships in their impact (Sapien Labs, 2024).

Proposed Enhancements to Wellness Programs

Building on the preceding thematic insights, several employee-generated ideas and patterns suggest concrete ways to strengthen the organization’s wellness programs. These enhancements respond to the emotional, structural, and cultural dynamics described across job groups, particularly the need for relevance, accessibility, and sustained engagement.

1. Normalize Mental Health Leave and Support Visibility

As the study revealed, mental health breaks are rarely cited explicitly in leave requests, despite emotional strain across teams at certain periods of time. This could be suggestive of stigma and uncertainty around help-seeking behaviors. The company may strengthen internal messaging around wellness leave policies, clarify pathways to counseling and support, and reinforce trust-based communication through HR briefings. Visibility efforts aimed at newer employees, field staff, and younger cohorts may help wellness engagement as part of regular recovery and self-care.

2. Extend Wellness Sessions with Tiered Content

Employees appreciated wellness seminars, especially when topics were personally resonant and interactively delivered. However, post-session feedback called for expanded coverage and follow-up discussions. Offering tiered sessions, such as financial wellness, dealing with family-based tensions, work-related stressors, and relational support, would allow employees to engage with themes that resonate the most with their own realities.

3. Create Structured Sharing Opportunities During Work Hours

Themes on emotional safety showed that daily interactions play a major role in wellness receptivity. Having peer circles or emotional check-ins during work hours lets employees share challenges and wins freely. These simple practices strengthen relational trust, normalize emotional expression, and offer alternatives to riskier coping behaviors like stress eating or avoidance.

4. Integrate Wellness into Performance Conversations

Performance management often overlooks emotional workload. Integrating wellness prompts into coaching, feedback, and appraisal sessions allows managers to acknowledge psychological strain, offer guidance, and foster safer relational climates. This practice aligns with relational leadership strategies, and may be especially effective for Millennial employees who value recognition, emotional availability and team connectedness (Muss et al., 2025).

5. Decentralize Content Delivery by Role and Region

Participation trends showed uneven engagement across departments and locations, with some employees missing key wellness activities due to workload or logistics. Decentralizing wellness content through department-led sessions, flexible scheduling, or asynchronous formats can make programs more accessible.

Theoretical Integration

The findings of this study affirm the relevance of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that shaped its design. Employees consistently emphasized that wellness programs were only meaningful when they aligned with the realities of their workload, emotional needs, and team dynamics, which is representative of the Person–Environment Fit model. Their feedback also reinforced Social Exchange Theory: trust, fairness, and how support is extended influenced whether employees felt safe enough to engage with wellness efforts or simply opt out. The Job Demands–Resources framework helped explain how stress builds up when resources—whether time, program access, or emotional support—do not match the demands employees face in their roles.

Across job groups, it was evident that employee receptivity is shaped by everyday relationships, leadership behavior, and how credible or relevant wellness feels in their context. Overall, these results confirm that wellness programs work best when they are not just present, but trusted, culturally grounded, and designed to reflect employees' lived realities.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how employees across job groups experience stress and mental health challenges, how leadership influences their well-being, and how wellness programs are perceived and engaged with at multiple levels in the book publishing company. Through thematic analysis, findings revealed that while a formal mental health program exists, its relevance, accessibility, and emotional resonance vary across roles and teams.

Employees expressed appreciation for counseling services, wellness seminars, and group activities such as Zumba and team-building events. However, concerns emerged regarding program visibility, the relevance of activities to specific departmental needs, and unclear pathways for accessing support—suggesting a gap between structural intentions and lived experience. Leadership surfaced as an important factor, such that when supervisors practiced active listening and showed genuine concern, employees reported feeling more motivated, emotionally secure, and valued. In contrast, a lack of empathic communication correlated with diminished trust and heightened stress.

Across job functions and tenure levels, employees consistently voiced the need for psychological safety, emotional support, and recognition. Their suggestions—including mental health leave, confidential consultations, values integration activities, and continued learning sessions—signal a desire for holistic and responsive wellness strategies that honor both individual and their collective needs.

To align mental health efforts with emerging workplace expectations—particularly among Millennial and Gen Z employees—organizations may consider reviewing work arrangements, compensation models, and role clarity. Embedding mental wellness into daily operations, leadership development, and performance conversations can further reinforce a culture of care (“malasakit”). By combining personalized support with inclusive, future-ready practices, the organization has the opportunity to cultivate a healthy work environment.

In sum, while management has taken foundational steps toward mental health awareness, the findings emphasize that deeper, more adaptive efforts are needed to make wellness programs truly relevant, meaningful, and sustainable. A more personalized, context-sensitive approach can support employees in showing up not only as productive contributors but as whole individuals who feel seen, heard, and empowered.

Finally, these findings offer practical ways to bring the Philippine Mental Health Act (Republic Act No. 11036) to life inside organizations. They reflect the Act's emphasis on promoting workplace mental health, reducing stigma, and ensuring access to services. By putting on the forefront employee opinion, psychological safety, and leadership accountability, the study shows how policy can become real, lasting practice, particularly in emotionally demanding fields like publishing, whose employees have wide-ranging wellness needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After considering the employee reflections and thematic analysis, this section outlines practical enhancements to the organization's wellness programs. These proposed actions are grounded in observed patterns of stress, leadership influence, and program engagement across departments. With the study's limitations and research gaps, directions for future research are also noted.

Program Enhancements

1. *Expand wellness content through tiered sessions* that reflect employees' diverse needs, including mental health literacy, financial stress management, and relational well-being.
2. *Decentralize program formats* by enabling regional, department-led, and flexible delivery options to increase accessibility and relevance across varying work schedules and demands.
3. *Strengthen leadership development* by training supervisors in empathic communication, emotional attunement, and the integration of wellness into their team's regular routines and performance feedback.
4. *Embed wellness moments within daily operations* through structured emotional check-ins (e.g., peer circles, debriefs) that normalize help-seeking behavior and build trust.
5. *Improve internal visibility and communication* by reinforcing access pathways to counseling, wellness leaves, and mental health resources, especially for younger workers, new hires, and field-based staff.

Addressing Limitations and Improving Generalizability

1. *Broaden participant reach and role diversity* by actively involving underrepresented departments such as production, support services, and digital operations. Expanding beyond editorial and sales ensures that wellness program assessments reflect a wider range of experiences across functional and demographic segments.
2. *Acknowledge the constraints of a single-industry setting*, noting that findings are based on one organization belonging to the Philippine educational publishing sector. Future studies can explore cross-industry comparisons.
3. *Expand population size and categories* to test whether wellness engagement varies by demographic profile, location, tenure distribution, or local norms.
4. *Adopt longitudinal and multi-method designs* to track wellness engagement, help-seeking behaviors, and leadership influence over time. Complementing survey and feedback data with interviews, focus groups, or even ethnographic methods can enrich insights and surface deeper emotional and cultural nuances.
5. *Clarify cultural and systemic barriers* to help-seeking, including mental health stigma, logistical access constraints (e.g., commuting, schedules), and emotional disconnection. Doing so through targeted inquiry and trust-building efforts can help organizations foster psychological safety and normalize support-seeking across age groups and roles.

Directions for Future Research

1. *Explore how Filipino cultural values* (e.g., *pakikipagkapwa*, *malasakit*, *hiya*) shape attitudes toward mental health programs, emotional disclosure, and leadership dynamics.
2. *Examine generational differences in wellness expectations*, focusing on psychological safety, preferred communication styles, and trust in organizational systems.

3. *Evaluate the efficacy of empathy-centered leadership training in improving employee well-being, motivation, and retention across Philippine industries and regional contexts.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author sincerely thanks all participants for their valuable contributions to this research. Deep appreciation is also extended to the participating company, whose support was instrumental in completing the study. Gratitude is likewise offered to everyone who provided assistance in various ways throughout the process.

Data Availability

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest related to the conduct, analysis, or reporting of this study.

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