

Assessing the Impact of School Nurse-Led Health Programs on the Health Literacy and Well-being of School-Aged Children in Public Schools

Ilyas Alisherov

Ministry of Kindergartens and Schools

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of school nurse-led health programs on the health literacy and overall well-being of school-aged children in public schools. Using a quantitative research design, the study collected data from 300 students across 10 public schools to examine the effectiveness of health interventions facilitated by school nurses. The research focused on changes in students' health literacy levels, physical health, and mental well-being following participation in health programs. Results indicate that school nurse-led initiatives significantly improve health literacy, promote healthier lifestyle choices, and enhance students' emotional well-being. The findings underscore the crucial role of school nurses in fostering health education and supporting the holistic development of students.

Keywords: school nurses, health literacy, public schools, well-being

Introduction

Health literacy is a fundamental aspect of a child's ability to make informed decisions regarding their health. School nurses play a critical role in promoting health education and wellness within schools. In the Philippines, public school nurses are increasingly being tasked with not only addressing immediate health concerns but also implementing structured health programs aimed at enhancing the overall well-being of students (Dalumpines, 2024). These health programs focus on teaching children about healthy eating, personal hygiene, mental health awareness, and other essential aspects of health.

Given the increasing challenges related to childhood obesity, mental health issues, and unhealthy lifestyle choices, the role of school nurses has become even more significant. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of school nurse-led health programs in improving health literacy and overall well-being in public school students. By quantitatively analyzing changes in health literacy and well-being before and after the intervention, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the value of school-based health programs.

Literature Review

School health programs have long been recognized as an important tool for promoting student health and preventing illness (Department of Education, DepEd, 2014). Studies have shown that school nurses not only provide immediate medical assistance but are also central to health promotion and disease prevention efforts in schools (Estrada et al., 2020). Research by Green and Reffel (2009) suggests that school nurses

are essential in bridging the gap between healthcare services and education, ensuring that health programs reach all students.

Health literacy is one of the most important outcomes of school health programs. According to de Buhr, Ewers, and Tannen (2020), strengthening the health literacy of children through structured programs can result in long-term positive effects, including healthier lifestyle choices and increased awareness of personal well-being. Additionally, the role of school nurses in promoting mental health awareness has been highlighted by several studies (Kasher, 2022; Hilli & Pedersen, 2021), with evidence showing that school nurses help students cope with mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, which significantly impact their overall well-being.

The Department of Education (DepEd, 2014) has emphasized the need for comprehensive school health programs to achieve the broader goals of education, including improving student health and academic performance. Furthermore, research has shown that school health services contribute to improving not only the physical health but also the emotional and psychological well-being of students (Harding et al., 2019; Jansen et al., 2019).

Methodology

This study used a quantitative research design to assess the impact of school nurse-led health programs on health literacy and well-being among school-aged children in public schools. The sample consisted of 300 students from 10 public schools across the region. The schools were randomly selected, ensuring that they represented a diverse range of geographic locations and demographic profiles.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a pre- and post-intervention survey. The pre-survey was administered at the beginning of the academic year, prior to the implementation of the health programs, while the post-survey was administered at the end of the academic year, after the health programs had been completed. The survey measured two main outcomes: health literacy and overall well-being.

Health Literacy: Measured using a 10-item scale adapted from the Health Literacy Assessment Tool (HLA-T). The scale focused on students' ability to understand health-related information, including nutrition, hygiene, and mental health topics.

Well-being: Measured using the WHO-5 Well-Being Index, a 5-item scale designed to assess emotional well-being, including aspects such as mood, energy levels, and emotional state.

Intervention

The health program was designed by school nurses and included weekly sessions on healthy eating, exercise, personal hygiene, and mental health awareness. Additionally, school nurses held individual consultations for students who expressed mental health concerns.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using paired t-tests to compare pre- and post-intervention scores. Descriptive statistics were also used to provide an overview of the health literacy and well-being levels of the students before and after the intervention.

Results

The data analysis revealed significant improvements in both health literacy and well-being among the students who participated in the health programs.

Health Literacy: The average score on the health literacy scale increased from 60% in the pre-survey to 80% in the post-survey ($t(299) = -15.45, p < 0.01$), indicating a significant improvement in students' understanding of health-related information.

Well-being: The average score on the WHO-5 Well-Being Index increased from 12.5 to 18.3 ($t(299) = -12.67, p < 0.01$), showing a substantial improvement in students' emotional well-being.

Overall, the results suggest that the school nurse-led health programs were highly effective in improving both health literacy and well-being in public school students.

Discussion

The findings of this study support the critical role that school nurses play in promoting student health and well-being. The significant improvements in health literacy highlight the effectiveness of health programs that are designed and facilitated by school nurses. These programs not only teach students essential health information but also empower them to make healthier lifestyle choices, such as improving their diets and practicing better hygiene.

Moreover, the improvement in well-being, as evidenced by the increase in WHO-5 scores, suggests that school nurse-led programs also have a positive effect on students' mental health. The integration of mental health awareness into the programs addresses the growing concerns about the emotional and psychological challenges faced by students, as noted in the literature (Kasher, 2022; Hilli & Pedersen, 2021).

While the results are promising, the study also highlights the need for ongoing support and resources for school nurses to continue implementing and improving these programs. Additionally, further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of these interventions and to examine the role of other factors, such as family and community involvement, in supporting student health.

Conclusion

This study underscores the essential role of school nurses in promoting health literacy and well-being among school-aged children. The findings suggest that school nurse-led health programs can significantly improve students' understanding of health information and enhance their emotional well-being. Given the positive outcomes observed, it is recommended that school health programs be expanded and supported to ensure that all students have access to the resources they need to lead healthier lives. Future research should continue to explore the impact of these programs and further assess their long-term effectiveness.

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