With just over a year until the next major IAAP event, we look forward to bringing together our divisions for a long-awaited opportunity of sharing, connection, and growth. In preparation, Division 16 has launched a survey to explore the status of counseling across our member countries.

We present here the first contributions from the survey, highlighting developments from Singapore, the Philippines, and Italy. We sincerely thank our colleagues for their efforts in contributing these perspectives and hope these insights inspire further discussion and collaboration.

Zhi-Jin Hou (President)
Lea Ferrari (President-Elect)

Singapore

A New Era of Accessibility: The Rise of Technology-Driven Counseling

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Introduction

Singapore, a nation known for its progressive approach to healthcare, is experiencing a transformative shift in the landscape of mental health services. The past year has seen a burgeoning focus on integrating technology into counseling practices, creating a new era of accessibility and innovation. This trend, driven by the rising demand for mental health support and the limitations of traditional models, promises to reshape the way mental health services are delivered and accessed in Singapore. This essay will explore this pivotal development, highlighting its significance, key initiatives, and potential for future growth.
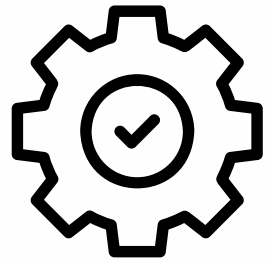
Singapore

The Context: A Growing Need and a Need for Innovation

Singapore, like many developed nations, is grappling with a growing mental health burden. Anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns are increasingly prevalent, demanding innovative and effective solutions (National University of Singapore, 2023). Traditional models of mental health care, often centered around one-on-one therapy sessions, face limitations in meeting this increasing demand. Long wait times, geographical barriers, and the stigma surrounding mental health can deter individuals from seeking help, highlighting the need for more accessible and convenient approaches.

The Emergence of Technology-Driven Solutions

This need has fueled the rise of technology-driven counseling, a paradigm shift in mental health services. Technology-based interventions, encompassing digital platforms, apps, and telehealth services, are becoming increasingly prevalent, offering several advantages:

- **Increased Accessibility**: Technology-driven solutions remove geographical barriers, enabling individuals to access support from anywhere with internet connectivity. This is particularly important in Singapore, a nation with a diverse population spread across various districts.

- **Enhanced Convenience**: Technology facilitates flexible scheduling and on-demand access to support, eliminating the need for rigid appointment structures and accommodating busy lifestyles.

- **Reduced Stigma**: Online platforms can reduce stigma associated with seeking mental health help, allowing individuals to access support in a more discreet and comfortable setting.

- **Personalized Approaches**: Technology can enable personalized interventions tailored to individual needs and preferences, utilizing data analytics to deliver targeted interventions and track progress.

Singapore

Key Initiatives Shaping the Future of Counseling

Several significant initiatives are underway in Singapore, demonstrating the commitment to integrating technology into mental health services:

- The Singapore Mental Health Institute (IMH) has launched the "IMH Minds" platform, a comprehensive digital resource offering evidence-based information, self-assessment tools, and connections to relevant support services. This platform aims to empower individuals with self-care strategies and facilitate early intervention (IMH, 2022).

- The National University of Singapore (NUS) Psychology Department has been at the forefront of research into the effectiveness of online cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), demonstrating its efficacy in treating anxiety and depression (Wong et al., 2022).

- The Ministry of Health (MOH) has been actively promoting telehealth services, including video consultations and online therapy sessions, to expand access to mental health professionals and reduce wait times (MOH, 2021).

- Startups in Singapore like "MindMate" and "Talkitt" are developing AI-powered mental health apps that offer personalized interventions and support, leveraging the power of artificial intelligence to enhance accessibility and engagement (Tech in Asia, 2023).
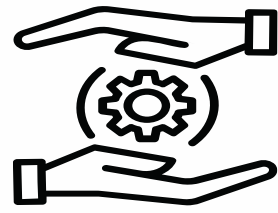
Singapore

Growth Prospects in the Coming Year

The trend towards technology-driven counseling in Singapore is expected to continue its growth in the coming year. This is fueled by several key factors:

- **Increasing Adoption**: More individuals and healthcare professionals are likely to adopt these solutions due to their growing accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and effectiveness in treating a wide range of mental health concerns.

- **Focus on Equity and Inclusion**: The focus will shift towards ensuring that technology-based interventions are accessible to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic background or language barriers.

- **Innovation in Technologies**: New technologies, including virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), are anticipated to be integrated into mental health interventions, creating more engaging and immersive experiences (Lee et al., 2022).

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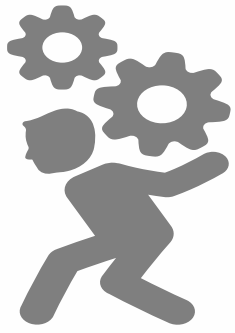
Challenges and Considerations

While technology holds immense promise for enhancing mental health services, it's crucial to acknowledge potential challenges:

- **Data Privacy and Security**: Safeguarding sensitive user data is paramount. Robust data security measures and adherence to privacy regulations are essential to build trust in these platforms.

- **Ethical Considerations**: The use of AI in mental health raises ethical concerns regarding bias, transparency, and the potential for human interaction to be replaced by algorithms.

- **Digital Divide**: Ensuring accessibility for all individuals, particularly those with limited digital literacy or access, is critical.

Singapore

A Bright Future for Mental Health in Singapore

The integration of technology into counseling practices in Singapore holds immense promise for transforming the mental health landscape. By increasing access, reducing stigma, and leveraging technological advancements, these innovations can pave the way for a more equitable, convenient, and effective mental health care system.

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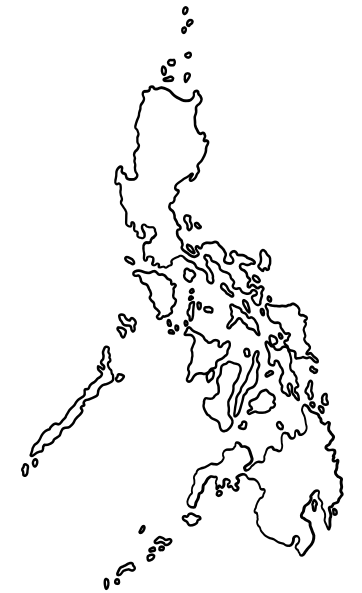
The Philippines

Understanding Ethnic Identity Among Indigenous Filipino Youth: Contexts of Natural Settlement and Internal Displacement

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Introduction

The ethnic identity of indigenous peoples is intricately tied to their ancestral lands, cultural traditions, and communal life. These elements are fundamental to the sense of self and belonging that defines the experience of indigenous youth (Terol, 2022). However, environmental degradation, climate change, and displacement present significant disruptions to these ties, leaving indigenous communities—particularly their youth—struggling with a shifting sense of identity. Among Filipino indigenous groups such as the Ayta and Agta, young people are especially vulnerable as they navigate these challenges during their formative years.

This study delves into the ways in which indigenous Filipino youth, aged 15 to 25, understand and experience their ethnic identity, focusing on the distinct contexts of natural settlement within their ancestral domains and displacement caused by external factors. Ethnic identity is defined by Phinney (1992) as "a sense of belonging to an ethnic group," which includes cultural practices, shared heritage, and emotional ties. For indigenous youth, a secure ethnic identity is crucial not only for personal well-being but also for mental health, self-esteem, and positive relationships. Displacement, however, which can result from natural disasters, government development projects, or climate-induced changes, undermines their sense of belonging. This displacement introduces additional layers of cultural and emotional disconnection, compounded by the physical and economic challenges that these communities already face.

The Philippines

Study Aims

This research aims to deepen the understanding of how ethnic identity is formed among indigenous Filipino youth in two distinct contexts: natural settlement in ancestral domains and displacement due to external forces. The study explores how indigenous youth perceive their ethnic identity, their aspirations as members of their cultural groups, and how a secure ethnic identity can be fostered among both settled and displaced youth.

The study poses several key questions:
- How do indigenous youth perceive and navigate their ethnic identity within their communities?
- What are their aspirations as indigenous individuals?
- And, most crucially, how can a secure ethnic identity be promoted for both displaced and naturally settled youth?

Method

A qualitative research approach was employed for this study, using focus group discussions (FGDs) as the primary method for data collection. The study involved 48 indigenous youth, aged 15 to 25, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in experiences. The participants were grouped into three categories: Ayta youth living within their ancestral domains, Agta youth displaced by government development projects, and Ayta youth displaced by natural disasters. Narrative analysis was utilized to explore key themes such as ethnic identity, displacement, resilience, and aspirations. This method allowed for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of the participants, shedding light on how their ethnic identity is shaped by the contexts in which they live.

The Philippines

Findings

One of the most prominent findings of this study was the **experience of discrimination among displaced Ayta and Agta youth**. In resettlement areas, these youth often found themselves treated as outsiders, marginalized within predominantly non-indigenous communities. This sense of being "othered" heightened their awareness of their ethnicity, which in turn created a profound feeling of alienation. The displacement not only severed their connection to their ancestral lands—one of the core components of their ethnic identity—but also left them grappling with a disjointed cultural identity that they struggled to reconcile with their new environments.

In addition to discrimination, **displacement exacerbated basic needs challenges**. Issues like food insecurity, inadequate access to traditional medicine, and limited educational opportunities weighed heavily on the displaced youth. These struggles affected not only their physical well-being but also their emotional and psychological health. Many participants expressed a deep longing to return to their ancestral lands, where their cultural practices were embedded in sustainable living and where they felt a sense of stability and belonging that had been disrupted by displacement.

Despite these challenges**, indigenous youth demonstrated remarkable resilience**. Many participants articulated a strong commitment to preserving their cultural heritage, with some expressing aspirations to contribute to the betterment of their communities. For those in natural settlement, their connection to ancestral lands was both a source of pride and a sense of responsibility. They viewed themselves as stewards of their environment, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding their lands for future generations. Displaced youth, while facing profound hardships, similarly expressed a desire to rebuild their cultural identity, even in the face of resettlement in areas where traditional practices were often disrupted.

For youth living in their ancestral domains**, active participation in cultural rituals, communal farming, and other traditional practices played a critical role in reinforcing their ethnic identity.** These activities enabled them to engage with their heritage, strengthening both individual and collective identities and fostering a sense of community. On the other hand, displaced youth faced significant barriers to maintaining these practices. Resettlement areas often lacked the resources, social infrastructure, and support networks necessary to sustain cultural traditions. This disparity further contributed to their sense of cultural dislocation and underscored the need for support systems sensitive to the cultural needs of displaced indigenous communities.

The Philippines

Implications

The implications of these findings are far-reaching, particularly in terms of policy and practice. The study suggests that **culturally sensitive interventions are essential for addressing the challenges faced by displaced indigenous youth**. Such interventions should integrate traditional healing practices and community-based mental health approaches, helping to mitigate the psychological effects of displacement while reinforcing cultural ties. Furthermore, policies aimed at protecting ancestral domains and preventing forced displacement are crucial for preserving the cultural heritage and well-being of indigenous communities. Land is not simply a resource for indigenous peoples; it is an integral component of their identity and way of life.

Additionally**, incorporating indigenous knowledge into environmental conservation efforts and educational curricula is vital for empowering indigenous youth and enriching sustainability initiatives**. By recognizing and valuing traditional ecological knowledge, society can not only acknowledge the contributions of indigenous communities but also foster a sense of pride and identity among young people. Strengthening community-based support networks is also essential, particularly in resettlement areas, where displaced youth often struggle to maintain their cultural identity. Programs that facilitate intergenerational learning and cultural exchange are crucial in helping youth connect with their heritage, even in the face of displacement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex relationship between ethnic identity, displacement, and resilience among indigenous Filipino youth. For those living in their ancestral domains, a stable ethnic identity is reinforced through daily engagement with cultural practices and a deep connection to the land. In contrast, displaced youth face compounded challenges that disrupt their sense of self and exacerbate feelings of marginalization. The findings emphasize the critical need for policies and interventions that prioritize the voices, needs, and aspirations of indigenous youth. Supporting their journey toward a secure ethnic identity is essential not only for the preservation of cultural heritage but also for promoting social justice and inclusivity. In a world that is rapidly changing, ensuring that the voices of indigenous communities are heard and respected is crucial for building a more equitable and harmonious society.

The Philippines

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Italy

The Challenges of Decent Work and a Sustainable Career for All

## Paola Magnano, Kore University of Enna

Introduction

A large body of literature has recently grown to develop frameworks and research paths on sustainability. Sustainability issues beyond the ecological and socioeconomic aspects need approaches that include a psychological perspective (Di Fabio, 2017), focusing on the sustainable development of well-being in individuals and organisations.

The psychology of sustainability and sustainable development (Di Fabio, 2018) focuses on understanding how to live meaningful lives and get meaningful work despite the uncertainty, challenges, and transitions characterising today's career paths. The workers of the 21st century have to deal with frequent uncertainty and insecure working conditions that require developing psychosocial resources. Survival in the current career environment necessitates that workers manage change within themselves and their contexts. Effectively dealing with instability requires workers to actively construct their professional projects rather than passively adapt to their circumstances (Magnano et al., 2019).

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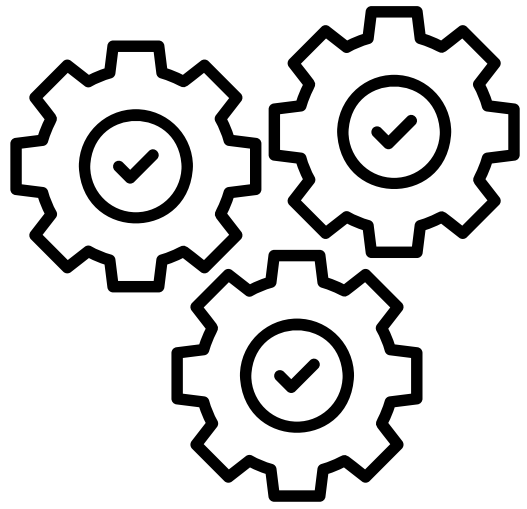
Decent Work

Moreover, sustainable development must address the challenge of ensuring decent work for all (SDG 8) and promoting good health and well-being (SDG 3). Decent work goes beyond mere employment, encompassing essential standards for a fulfilling life, including fair compensation, workplace security, and social protection, while fostering personal development and social integration (Russo et al., 2024). The real challenge for researchers and practitioners in career development is encompassing the values of social justice and equity in career development, contributing to creating decent work for all.

Role of Career Counselling

As recently stated (Magnano & Lodi, 2023), the emerging and existent vulnerabilities necessarily call to mind the social and inclusive dimension of career guidance as a device to reduce inequalities, broaden the range of opportunities for the benefit of all people, deconstruct stereotypes and stigmatisation that tend to relegate specific social categories to ghettoising job niches, to provide the opportunity for people to give voice to their distinctiveness and diversity. Career counselling is called to take responsibility for the aims of sustainable development, specifically the ones related to the reduction of inequalities, the rise of basic standards of living, and the fostering of equitable social development and inclusion; it is a device to promote social justice (Hooley & Sultana, 2016).

Italy

Challenges for People in Conditions of Vulnerability

People in conditions of vulnerability, such as those with migration backgrounds or imprisonment experience, have to face multiple challenges related to career construction. The first challenge is identity development: for immigrants, this challenge is due to the cultural transitions and the related barriers, such as language and unrecognised credentials; for persons with imprisonment experience, it is related to social stigma and self-stigmatisation. This imposes new identities and social roles that often act as labels on the persons (Sgaramella et al., 2024; Magnano & Lodi, 2023). The second challenge comes from the labour market. Immigrants' career opportunities often fall short of their aspirations, leading to underemployment, undignified or illegal work, impacting negatively on the adaptation to the host context and increasing the risk of social exclusion.

Similarly, persons with imprisonment experience are more likely to experience unemployment (Apel & Sweeten, 2010) due to the impact of former incarceration on the evaluation of individuals by employers (Goger, Harding, & Henderson, 2021); some common attitudes assume that persons with imprisonment experience are dangerous, dishonest, lazy, or unintelligent (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). Finally, Donaldson and Viera (2021) have highlighted the detrimental effects of the obligation to disclose conviction histories on job applications.

Italy

Career Support Interventions Promote Social Inclusion

For these vulnerable clients, career support interventions aim to promote social inclusion, not only to offer any employment opportunity but to guide them to take on an active role, addressing their career aspirations and future construction.

Quality career guidance will provide them with support to move towards self-sufficiency, better well-being, transitional readjustment, access to new opportunities and meaningful work and life.

Italy

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Italy

The analysis of survey responses has provided a comprehensive overview of the current state of counseling in IAAP Division 16 member countries, with a particular focus on Singapore, the Philippines, and Italy. The findings highlight significant differences in regulatory models, professional training, and opportunities for professional development, reflecting the cultural and institutional contexts of each country.

Several strengths have emerged, including the integration of counseling into key sectors and the growing recognition of its role in promoting individual and collective well-being. Regardless of the specific field, attentiveness to alterities and the promotion of positive attitudes characterized by deep respect and valorization emerge as key pillars of counseling's transformative role. Important challenges remain, including the need for greater regulation, the strengthening of professional competencies, and the promotion of public awareness regarding the role of counselors.

This survey serves as a starting point for a broader and more in-depth discussion, which we hope will continue at the upcoming IAAP event. By exchanging experiences and best practices across countries, we can foster collective growth and further strengthen counseling on a global scale. We therefore encourage all members of the professional community to continue this dialogue to build a stronger future for the discipline together.

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