



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation.

Exploring the Lived Experience of Sangguniang Kabataan Leaders on Their Mental Health Status

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 06

Issue: 04

July - August 2025

Received: 02-05-2025

Accepted: 03-06-2025

Published: 02-07-2025

Page No: 236-240

Abstract

The Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) serves as a crucial platform for nurturing the next generation of community leaders by engaging youth in local governance and development initiatives. This study explores the lived experiences of Sangguniang Kabataan officials in relation to their mental health, aiming to shed light on the challenges they face and the coping mechanisms they employ. Using a qualitative research design with a transcendental phenomenological approach, the study was conducted in Cabuyao City, Laguna, and involved ten purposely selected ten (10) Sangguniang Kabataan officials. Semi-structured interviews facilitated the gathering of rich, in-depth data, which were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The study identified several key themes: coping mechanisms, leadership challenges and strategies, fostering a collaborative environment, self-care and rest, managing anxiety and pressure, personal growth and leadership development, and communication and teamwork. Based on the findings, the study recommends regular leadership workshops on stress and time management, enhanced mental health programs supported by local government units (LGUs), and the reinstitution of guidance and counseling services within barangays. Furthermore, it encourages future research to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions and investigate the long-term impacts of leadership on the mental health of SK officials. These insights aim to foster resilient and mentally healthy youth leaders, ensuring their sustained effectiveness in public service.

Keywords: Mental Health, Young Leaders, Qualitative, Phenomenology

1. Introduction

In the Philippines, the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) is vital in forming the next generation of community leaders by involving youth in local government and community development. In order to support youth's involvement in public service, this Sangguniang Kabataan council was created to address their needs and goals. The Sangguniang Kabataan oversees a number of community youth initiatives, offering a structured setting for aspiring leaders to develop their abilities and leave a lasting impression.

Moreover, one of the significant contributions of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) is youth participation in formal politics. Young people are empowered to participate actively in community projects and governance through Sangguniang Kabataan's political engagement program. Vital leadership skills as well as a sense of civic responsibility and accountability are required from this early exposure to political responsibilities. A steady supply of capable and driven leaders can be ensured by using the experience obtained through Sangguniang Kabataan as a basis for upcoming leadership positions in politics and the community.

However, the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) is confronted with a number of obstacles that threaten its integrity and efficacy. According to Marang (2019), the reputation of the council has been tarnished by claims of corrupt behavior and incompetent leadership, including election malpractices like vote-buying and patronage politics. These problems make it harder for the council to fulfill its mission as a role model for youth participation.

Furthermore, the council's attempts to function efficiently and support the youth community are made more difficult by persistent threats of abolishment.

According to Panti (2022), the fact that the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) members are paid for their work in spite of these obstacles serves as both a source of inspiration and acknowledgment for their contributions. Pay is a recognition of the time and energy devoted to running youth programs and serving their peers' needs. It emphasizes their significance within the larger framework of community development and local government as well.

In relation, based on the Republic Act No. 10742, Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders, as young representatives of their barangays, encounter a variety of mental health issues as they carry out their duties. The burden of responsibilities and expectations put on them can cause significant stress and anxiety. Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders frequently juggle academic obligations, personal goals, and community responsibilities, putting them under enormous pressure to perform effectively in their roles.

Furthermore, the intrinsic difficulties of local governance, such as managing bureaucratic systems and resolving community issues, can increase stress and lead to feelings of overwhelm. In addition, the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders may elicit suspicion or lack of respect from older constituents, leading to feelings of inadequacy or imposter syndrome based on GMA News Online (2023).

Furthermore, the absence of proper support systems and resources for Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders to address their mental health issues worsens the difficulties. Without access to mental health resources or coping strategies, Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders may struggle to manage their emotional well-being properly. To address these mental health burdens, it is necessary not only to recognize the unique challenges that Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders face but also to implement support mechanisms that are tailored to their specific needs, such as mentorship programs, mental health education, and access to professional counseling services. This prompted the researchers to conduct the study that focuses on understanding the mental health status and lived experiences of the Sangguniang Kabataan leaders of City of Cabuyao, Laguna.

2. Methodology

A. Research Design

The researchers employed the qualitative data methodology with phenomenological approach which aims to explore experiences, thoughts, and attitudes of the participants. Therefore, this approach helped the researchers to have a deeper understanding of several shared lived experiences of a phenomenon of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials on their mental health.

The semi-structured interview method was also used in this study. The most common method for gathering qualitative data is in-depth interviews, which often involve a discussion between the participant and the researcher supported by an unstructured interview method and formulated by follow-up questions to elicit more information and responses.

B. Research Locale

The study was conducted within the City of Cabuyao, Laguna. The researchers interviewed the elected Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials specifically in the City of Cabuyao Laguna in Brgy. Butong, Brgy. Bigaa, Brgy.

Sala, Brgy. Uno, Brgy. Dos and Brgy. Tres, who meet the necessary criteria to be participants in the study.

C. Population and Sampling

The researchers employed purposeful sampling to select participants to ensure their relevance to the study.

The researchers set criteria for the participant selection: (1) aged between 18 – 24 years old, (2) elected Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leader, newly elected or seasoned (re-elected) Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leader, and; (3) male or female elected Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) chairpersons or councilors.

D. Research Participants

The study involves ten (10) Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders from the municipality of City of Cabuyao, Laguna. The researchers employed purposeful sampling to select participants to ensure their relevance to the study

E. Research Instrumentation

The semi-structured interview guide questions were aligned with research questions that need to be answered at the end of the research. This is a semi-structured interview guide, and the researchers' developed questions. It develops a set of questions for participants using the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2020). A semi-structured questionnaire was used to foster flexibility and spontaneity. The semi-structured interview guide questionnaire included open-ended questions designed to produce information about their lived experiences as Sangguniang Kabataan leaders of City of Cabuyao Laguna and the status of their mental health as young leaders. While the researcher prepared a few specific questions to help direct the interview toward the study's goals, other topics may arise as the interviews progress, according to Langkos (2019).

First, a draft of the semi-structured interview guide questions was created. The thesis adviser reviewed and revised this draft to incorporate new insights and modifications. Three research validators validated the instrument to ensure content validity. A qualitative data analyst validated the language used in the questions to ensure clarity and ease of understanding by participants, promoting the collection of accurate responses. The validation forms were in tabular design, with a checklist used to validate each question as accepted, revised, or rejected. There was an additional column for remarks, which was used for comments and suggestions.

The researchers approached the (10) ten Sangguniang Kabataan leaders in person or virtually and explained the scope of their investigation and the purpose of the interview. The researchers request their permission. Following the agreement, the researchers moved on to the one-on-one interview phase. The researchers chose to collect data from Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders using semi-structured interview guide questions to provide immediate narration of their lived experiences.

In-depth interviews with eight (8) interview questions served as the data collection strategy for this research investigation. The in-depth interview strategy embodies the research genre of personal experiences and relies on a single primary method to collect meaningful data. In addition to interviews, the research environment was observed using an observation method. The instrument questions consist of two questions relating to emotional factors, three questions relating to

psychological factors, and three questions relating to social factors.

The researchers applied the following interview questions:

1. How do you handle the stress of being a role model for your peers and community as a member of the Sangguniang Kabataan?
2. Can you share a time when you felt overwhelmed by the pressure to inspire your team or community? How did you deal with it?
3. What do you do to encourage creative thinking and innovation within your council, even with your limited experience?
4. How do you balance caring for your constituents' needs with taking care of your own mental health?
5. Have you ever felt anxious due to the pressure to meet high expectations? How did you manage it?
6. How has being part of the Sangguniang Kabataan affected your personal growth and mental health, both positively and negatively?
7. How do you make sure you meet your community's needs without sacrificing your own emotional well-being?
8. What support or resources do you think young leaders in the Sangguniang Kabataan need to maintain their mental health while leading effectively?

F. Data Gathering Procedure

To ensure accurate data gathering for the study, the researchers devised a series of steps to guide the process. The initial step involved sending a letter to barangays and seeking permission for upcoming interviews with Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders. Participants were briefed on the study's objectives, research methods, expected outcomes, the right to withdraw at any time, and confidentiality protection. The researchers formulated a clear and concise research question, focusing on the specific phenomenon, and craft open-ended questions to facilitate an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences. Targeting individuals with personal experience in the subject of interest, the study aimed to elicit extensive and detailed descriptions of their encounters. During interviews, participants were encouraged to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the event, with probing questions employed to extract more profound insights. The researchers transcribed interview recordings verbatim to form the raw data for analysis. Essential processes such as bracketing, coding, categorizing, and essence extraction were integral to the analytical phase. The researcher also implemented validation techniques, including member checking and peer debriefing to ensure the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

Recognizing the interpretive nature of qualitative research, the researchers acknowledged the potential influence of biases, beliefs, and assumptions on data analysis. Questions posed during the interviews will be designed to address this issue.

G. Ethical Consideration

The researchers were adhering to the ethical criteria that was outlined in the institution's Research Manual, and ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the entirety of this study. Each question was crafted with great care to ensure that it neither frustrates nor offends the participants in any way regarding their ability. There were no words that might be considered discriminatory, nor was there

any mention of any particular faith or organization that could be considered offensive. During the interviews, the participants were not forced in any way, and their participation in sharing their lived experiences was entirely voluntary. The researchers seek the consent of the participants by first providing them with an explanation of the importance, significance, and aims of the study, as well as the reason for conducting the interview.

The researchers followed Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (DPA), which seeks to protect personal data in government and private sector information and communication systems. Privacy refers to the participant's right to control access to personal information, whereas confidentiality refers to the researcher's duty to protect and prevent the unauthorized disclosure of this personal information. It was ensured that the data and information was kept in the strictest confidence when they were obtained.

3. Results and discussions

This chapter explains how the data from this study was analyzed and interpreted. What is the essence of the lived experience of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Officials with regard to their mental health status as young leaders?

Meanwhile, the corollary questions have been answered in the tables provided.

Research Question No. 1: How do the participants describe their lived experiences with regard to their mental health status as young leaders?

Interview Question No. 1: How do you handle the stress of being a role model for your peers and community as a member of the Sangguniang Kabataan?

Table 1: Superordinate themes and Constituent Subthemes

Superordinate Themes	Constituent Subthemes
Support System	Recreational activities Positive self-treatment
Openness to Team	Advice to mentors Feedback Seeking
Brainstorming, Collaboration, and Motivation	Brainstorming and feedback Collaboration and motivation
Resting	Support system Resting Gratitude journal Focusing on goal
Mind-setting	Journal writing Step-by-step accomplishing task
Professional and Personal Growth, Difficulty in Balancing Commitments	Gained confidence Setting boundaries Prioritizing self-confidence
Setting Boundaries and Time Management	Proper communication Task listing Goal reorientation Positive-thinking people
Mental Health Programs and Seminars	Stress management Guidance and counseling Training in time management Recognition

4. Discussion

Summary of Findings

This chapter represents the findings, reflections, and recommendations of the researcher based on the qualitative data derived from the semi-structured interviews with

Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) in a consolidated form. This chapter also contains the recommendations.

The study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Officials with regard to their mental health status as young leaders. Following the interviews, transcriptions, and data analysis, themes emerged in presenting the lived experiences of these Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Officials participants. Significant findings were as follows:

In the phenomenological study on the lived experiences of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Officials, eight (8) themes emerged. These were Support System; Openness to Team; Brainstorming, Collaboration, and Motivation; Resting; Mind-setting; Professional and Personal Growth and Difficulty in Balancing Commitments; Setting Boundaries and Time Management; and Mental Health Programs and Seminars.

The Support System theme highlighted the importance of recreational activities and positive self-treatment for Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders in managing the pressures of their role. SK leaders manage stress by engaging in activities such as biking, listening to music, or reflecting on small accomplishments. Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders create a supportive atmosphere and draw strength from their communities, helping them manage stress while also boosting their effectiveness and motivating others, in line with transformational leadership principles. They also turn to their support networks—family, friends, and fellow officers—for advice and encouragement. These coping strategies are consistent with transformational leadership theory, which highlights the value of personalized support and emotional resilience in effective leadership.

The Openness to Team theme emphasized the pressures Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders face in their roles and also seeking feedback and advice from mentors. Participants shared experiences of feeling overwhelmed by the need to inspire their team and community but found strength by focusing on the purpose of their initiatives and drawing inspiration from their vision of service. SK 3 and SK 10 sharing how discussing their challenges with co-leaders promoted support and teamwork which highlighted the importance of open communication within the team. Seeking mentorship and feedback was also seen as essential, as leaders like SK 4 and SK 5 mentioned how guidance helped them refine their strategies and accept their imperfections. These experiences of seeking guidance and adapting to challenges contributed to their leadership growth and enhanced their ability to engage and inspire their communities.

The Brainstorming, Collaboration, and Motivation theme highlighted participants emphasized fostering creative thinking and innovation within the council. Leaders like SK 1 and SK 7 encouraged team members to share bold ideas without judgment and explore new trends, even drawing inspiration from social media influencers. This approach helped them think creatively despite limited experience. Additionally, recognizing small wins and showing appreciation were key to maintaining motivation, as highlighted by SK 8, who believed that creativity thrives when the team feels motivated and valued.

Participants became more aware of the impact of their actions on their families and society, motivating them to embrace personal transformation and set meaningful goals for the future.

The Resting theme highlighted the importance of balancing their responsibilities to constituents with self-care to prevent burnout. It stresses the importance of paying attention to one's body and mental health by taking breaks when needed. At the same time, participants discussed relying on a support system of family, friends, and co-leaders for encouragement to rest and manage tasks and shared their practice of meditation to stay calm and focused, which helps them manage stress. Allowing leaders to take breaks is vital for supporting their mental health, especially during demanding academic periods, helping them balance both their leadership roles and educational commitments.

The Mind-setting theme highlighted the effective strategies Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders use to manage high expectations and alleviate anxiety, particularly in the face of their demanding roles. Participants emphasized the importance of breaking down large tasks and overwhelming tasks into smaller ones, which allows them to maintain focus and avoid feeling paralyzed by the enormity of their responsibilities. By dividing the tasks, with greater clarity and control, reducing the risk of burnout and fostering a sense of accomplishment as they make steady progress. These strategies align with transformational leadership theory, which underscores the importance of self-awareness, resilience, and strategic problem-solving for effective leadership. By applying these techniques, Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders not only manage stress but also model adaptability, helping to inspire and motivate their communities while maintaining their mental well-being.

The Professional and Personal Growth and Difficulty in Balancing Commitments theme reflects the challenges young leaders face in balancing their public responsibilities with their personal well-being. The realization of the importance of boundaries has been transformative for many participants, not just in managing stress but in fostering a deeper sense of self-awareness. Participants noted that having strong relationships with peers, mentors, and family members allowed them to navigate challenges more effectively. These social connections help SK leaders not only cope with the stresses of their role but also encourage a sense of community, which is vital for maintaining mental health. The more resilient SK leaders felt, the more they used a diverse set of coping strategies, such as seeking advice from others, practicing mindfulness, or simply taking breaks to recharge. These mechanisms significantly improved their ability to handle stress and contribute to better mental health outcomes. The Setting Boundaries and Time Management theme emphasized key strategies such as setting boundaries, practicing effective time management, prioritizing self-care, and being intentional about managing their responsibilities. It shows that participants are mindful of their time and set boundaries around work and personal life, they can meet their obligations to their communities without sacrificing their mental or physical health. For Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders, communication involves more than just addressing community needs—it requires actively listening to both personal well-being and community expectations, seeking regular feedback, and ensuring that support systems are in place when they need it. By maintaining open lines of communication, Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders can ensure that they remain in touch with their limits, which is essential for sustaining both their leadership roles and their mental health.

The Mental Health Programs and Seminars theme

highlighted the importance of mental health programs and seminars in supporting young leaders with emotional challenges while performing their duties. SK 2 stated the need for age-appropriate mental health resources, stating, "A lot of people expect us to just keep going, but we're human too." SK 10 expressed, "A safe space where we can be open about our struggles without judgment" to emphasize the importance of creating supportive environments. These programs not only normalize discussion about mental health but also encourage leaders to seek help when needed. Furthermore, training on time management, as SK 7 suggested that it can help young leaders balance responsibilities while making time for self-care. The implementation of such programs aligns with transformational leadership theory, which focuses on empowering individuals, fostering personal growth, and supporting emotional well-being. By addressing mental health, time management, and work-life balance, these initiatives help young leaders develop the skills they need to lead effectively and maintain their personal well-being.

5. Conclusion

The findings highlight the complex mental health challenges faced by Sangguniang Kabataan officials as they balance leadership roles with personal well-being. Effective leadership strategies, such as strong support systems, open communication, creative collaboration, and self-care, are essential in managing the pressures of their positions. Additionally, providing access to mental health programs, seminars, and time management training can significantly enhance their ability to cope with stress and improve both their professional growth and mental health. These insights contribute to the understanding of how Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders can sustain their well-being while fulfilling their leadership responsibilities, emphasizing the importance of emotional resilience, strategic problem-solving, and community support.

6. Recommendations

The researcher has the following suggestions based on the study's findings.

First, the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) may implement regular leadership workshops focused on stress management and time management to help Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials develop effective coping mechanisms for stress and learn to prioritize their responsibilities.

Second, the LGU may provide financial support for mental health programs tailored specifically to the needs of young leaders like the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials. This may include establishing a budget for regular access to mental health professionals, workshops, and initiatives that promote mental well-being, helping ensure that the youth leaders are supported in their roles without compromising their mental health.

Third, reinstitute or enhance guidance and counseling services within the barangays to offer continuous emotional support and advice for Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) leaders. These services can serve as a safe and confidential space for them to discuss challenges, receive mentoring, and foster resilience in the face of their responsibilities, thus reducing the emotional strain that can come with the role.

Fourth, researchers may conduct studies to assess the impact of stress management programs and mental health resources on the effectiveness of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK)

leadership. These findings may guide the development of targeted interventions and policies that support the emotional well-being of young leaders, ensuring that the strategies being implemented are evidence-based and effective.

Lastly, future researchers may explore the long-term effects of leadership on the mental health of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) officials, specifically focusing on how sustained engagement in public service impacts their personal well-being. This research may lead to the creation of more comprehensive programs and resources aimed at sustaining the emotional and mental health of youth leaders throughout their terms.

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