ACADEMIC PRESSURE AND MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS

by:
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The Filipino proverb “Aanhin pa ang damo, kung patay na ang kabayo” can be applied in many aspects of our life especially our mental health. Most of us chase after things to the point that we equate being mentally drained for a dream to being successful. It is therefore not surprising that the rate of suicide and self-harm among students continues to rise every year. On top of challenges that confront them every day such as social relationships, peer pressure, financial problems, abuse, violence, and bullying, suicide happen because of this common risk factor: the pressure of academics. According to World Health Organization, suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15-19-year-olds and approximately 800,000 people die due to suicide every year. The mental pressure that our competitive society has placed on the students might lead them to choose this path.

There is a remarkable quote from a well-known movie entitled “3 Idiots” which says, "And this is a college, not a pressure cooker! The lion in a circus learns that he needs to sit on the chair if his owner has a whip in his hand. But that lion is called well-trained, not well-educated." It is one thing to desire for the students to pass and have a successful career and it is another thing to pressure them into meeting the standard of education system. Grades and scores do not define a student for every person has different learning capabilities and progress. Some students do not understand a concept or lesson until presented in a completely different way.

In a TEDx Talk entitled “The fight against teens suicide begins in the classroom”, Brittni Darras, an English teacher at Rampart High School in Colorado Springs, said, “I believe it starts with teachers. But sometimes, teachers worry about crossing ethical line.
They’ve been told it’s better to be professional and maintain boundaries than react and respond to student emotions. So, they stick to the job description: teaching curriculum, grading homework, assigning the assignments and preparing for standardized tests. Academia revolves around criticism. We search for mistakes, write suggestions for improvement and hope that will lead to better test scores, better essays, and better students. But the problem is that these kids are not robots. They are human beings with human emotions and feelings.” She also mentioned that when she was asked about the students with poor academic performance, she replied that a student who is failing needs positive acknowledgement more than anybody else. Recognizing the students’ wonderful qualities create a positive culture and environment where they feel valued and heard; this would drive even those with poor grades to learn even when it takes them a bit longer. A school should not be a place where children feel isolated and worthless just because they failed a test. Can we normalize not having to be burned out in order to be an excellent student?

There is no better time to be aware of the mental health of the students than now. We should acknowledge that in this time of pandemic, there is a need to heighten mental health awareness and intensify counseling services and stress-reduction programs for learners. In addition to utilizing these mechanisms and interventions, students can develop skills to cope with stress and other mental health issues by building close personal relationships with their teachers and other learners. Teachers can greatly help prevent suicide and safeguard the mental health of the students by staying involved and committed, giving encouraging words, and talking to the student that shows signs and symptoms of depression. Students need to know that it is okay to ask for help and that support can be found in school. With the use of social media, it is easier to be on the lookout for and reach out to troubled students. Simply asking how they are can make a big difference; this may save a life.
Teaching should not be seen as mere source of income, it is for those who are called to help the students not just in academics but also in life; those who would be willing to do more than what their profession requires them to do. Educators should aim to nurture learners holistically and also consider that not all the students have high emotional quotient, which is why threatening them that they will not pass or graduate might do more harm than good. The influence that they have on students can also be of great use to educate the young generation on issues of bullying, substance abuse, and other related matters. If educators prioritize the mental wellness of their students over academic recognition, imagine its profound effects on our world and all generations.

Personally, the most unforgettable teachers I have ever met are those who offered me a helping hand and listening ears when things got rough. Realistically speaking, the most important thing a teacher can pass to his students is the formulas of life. Indeed, grades are important too but not when it costs a person’s life. Let us look forward to a day when we see students for who they are and not just for what their test scores are.

References:

www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide