The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many problems to the world, producing a ripple effect on the economy and its people. Indeed, this rippling effect didn't spare anyone as even the young students carry sacks of burden over their shoulders.

Nearly a hundred years ago, the world was rattled by the Spanish flu pandemic, the deadliest pandemic that lasted for two years. Influenza caused the markets and schools to close and forced people to wear masks to prevent the deadly flu. A century later, history repeated itself. In 2020, the rapid spreading of Coronavirus disease once again closed the schools, markets and injured the economy of countries worldwide. Because of this, people were asked to stay in their houses and follow strict protocols, and of course, students were not exempted from this rule. In the Philippines, an Enhanced Community Quarantine was imposed on March 2020 to tranquilize the increasing COVID cases. This memorandum suspended classes and, at the same time, the movement of those below 18 and above 65 years old.

But what we first thought of as something that would last for a few months turned out to be something that will stick with us through an extended period, thus placing students in a place of discomfort. Instead of just suspending the classes, schools were transformed to online classrooms or printed materials distributed to students to continue their schooling. This kind of set-up proved challenging as almost five million students did not enroll for 2020-2021. However, studying remotely isn't as easy as it sounds, as students still face challenges not just in their academic life but also in other aspects because of the pandemic.
Academically, distance learning posed a lot of difficulties to students. Issues of weak internet connection were constantly raised as the country's internet speed was always compared to a turtle. The Philippines ranks 110th out of 139 countries in terms of mobile data speed, according to Ookla's Speedtest Global Index. It cannot be denied that this hampers student's learning as it may interrupt calls or cause a lag and other failures in the online modality. Another problem is that education became an arduous task through the distance modality as this prevents immediate feedback from the teachers, thus preventing students' utmost learning. Also, since students are forced to study inside their homes, distractions are present everywhere. Not everyone has a conducive area to learn, and this online learning, because of the pandemic, removed the border between home and school. All of these contribute to the stress that the students face, which is why mental health is also a problem for today's students.

A study conducted by Tee et al. (2020) showed that 25% of the respondents suffered from moderate-to-severe anxiety during the early months of the pandemic in the country. Subsequently, the pandemic prevented going out, so it was harder for students to suffer isolation. While some are comfortable in solitude, others gain their energy and happiness by meeting other people, which is strictly prohibited during the nationwide lockdown. Therefore, social interactions are hindered, making the pandemic harder for our social and emotional health. Also, the news of the death of familiar people or the loss of income of families due to the economy's closing down could increase someone's anxiety and end up worrying about the disease and their future. Surveys showed severe signs of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among the respondents during the pandemic in different parts of the world. Meanwhile, a survey by Desire 2 Learns revealed that 43% of those who stopped schooling had issues with their mental health and wellbeing.

All these stressors and obstacles that the students face could lead to long-term effects on the youth's wellbeing. The Department of Education and Commission on
Higher Education should listen to the cry of the learners and assess the situation. We must also focus on making education available for everyone so that no student will be left behind amidst all these scenarios. We must start concentrating on programs that will help students in this time of crisis, such as mental health hotlines and mental health care available on the barangay level. We should start listening to their problems and be the comfort that they need.

In this pandemic-stricken world, everybody's carrying a weight on his shoulder. We may not be able to lift off other's problems fully, but we must try to ease these sacks of the burden by always being kind to one another, most especially to the future of our country, our youth.

References:


World Health Organization. Coronavirus. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1


