Colonialism's Impact on Philippine Mental Healthcare Infrastructure

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Research Question

How has colonialism shaped mental health and healthcare infrastructure in the Philippines?

Overview

Mental health has become such a growing field in recent decades. Mental illness currently affects about 14% of the world's global disease burden while the majority (about 75%) are in low-middle income countries. There has been some progress on improving access to services as shown in the World Health Organization's (WHO) Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP)[1]. Although, it is still under-resourced in terms of mental health services and interventions within low and middle countries (LMICs) such as the Philippines. This may be due to the long extensive history of colonialism in Philippine history, the development of colonial mentality and multiple beliefs stigmatizing mental health. There are observations on the current Philippine healthcare system in response to natural disasters and mental health towards the general population. Thus, there is a call to action for more mental health policies and resources because "no health without mental health"[2].

Findings

Cultural Context

Colonial Mentality[4]
- Negative perceptions of the self and one's race
- Perceives colonizer's race is more superior
- Example: Belief that Eurocentric features are more superior (e.g. fair skin and pointy nose)

Stigmatized Beliefs Against Mental Health[5]
- Family over the Self
- "God's punishment"
- Taint in Blood
- Individual's self-centeredness and weakness

Barriers
- Doctor-Population ration: 1:33,000
- Only 500 psychiatrists in a population of 107 million
- Limited resources (e.g. healthcare budget, not many doctors specializing in psychiatry)

Economic Impacts

- 16.6% of Filipinos live in poverty as of 2018[6]
- PHL is among the top 100 poorest countries in the world
- Poor health = cause/consequence of poverty
- PHL has been under the colonial control of the Spain, United States, and Japan
- Natural disasters such as typhoons, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes
- Examples of recent natural disasters
  - Typhoon Haiyan (2013)
  - Taal Volcano eruption (2020)
- Results of natural disasters:
  - High costs of damage
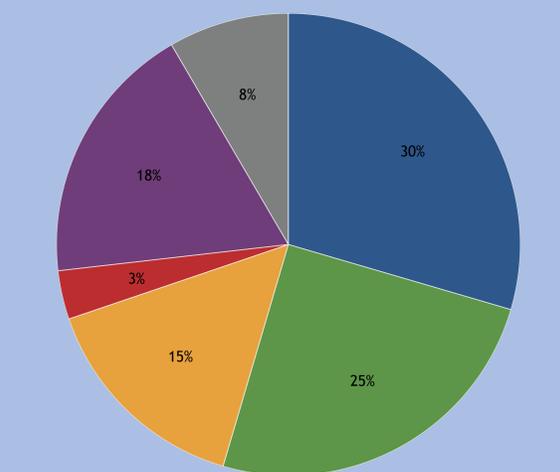 - High rates of PTSD among survivors

Healthcare Infrastructure
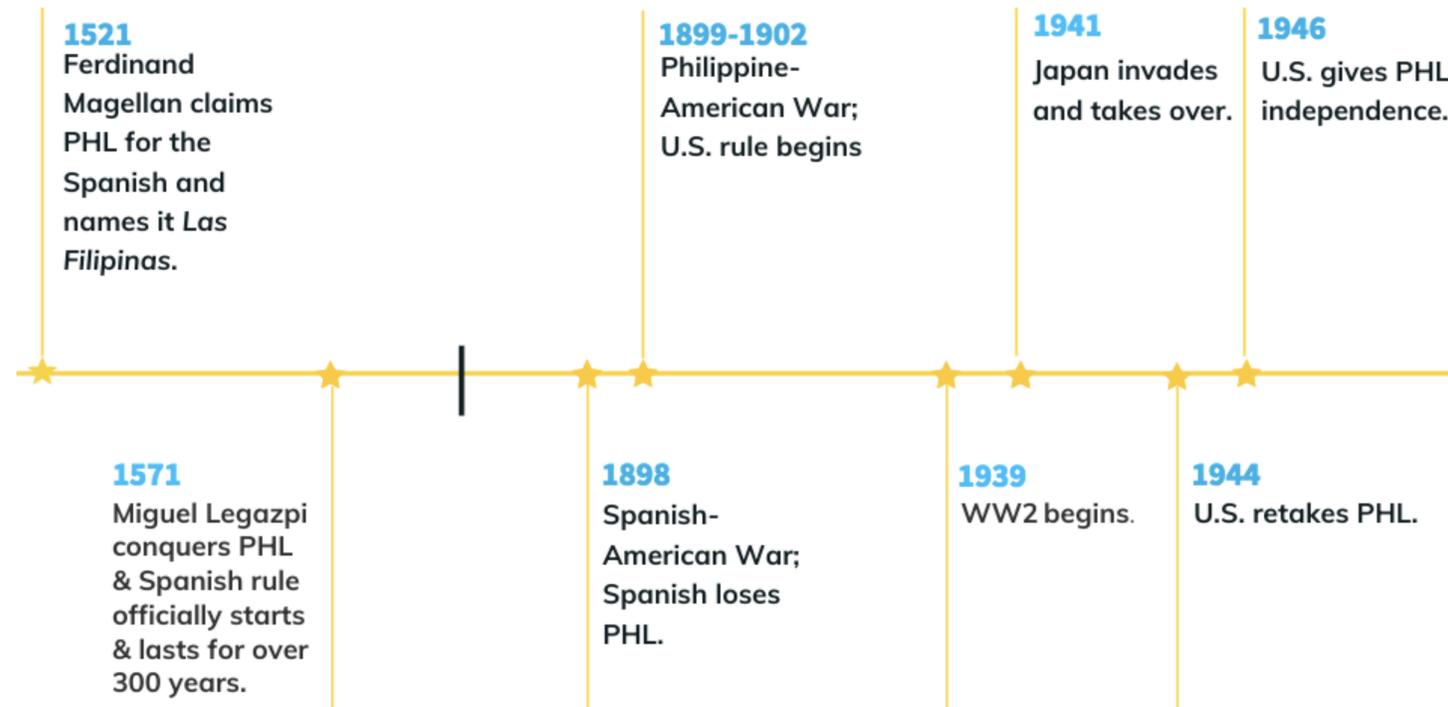
PHL Healthcare

Govt. Funded | Private Sector

PHL Healthcare Budget (2020)[7]

Total: $81B (PHP 4.1T)

- 30%
- 25%
- 18%
- 15%
- 8%
- 3%

- Philippine Health Insurance Corp.
- Public Health Services
- Health Facilities Program
- Hospital Services
- National Immunization Program
- Various Government Health Facilities

Background - Colonial History[3]

1521 Ferdinand Magellan claims PHL for the Spanish and names it *Las Filipinas*.

1571 Miguel Legazpi conquers PHL & Spanish rule officially starts & lasts for over 300 years.

1898 Spanish-American War; Spanish loses PHL.

1899-1902 Philippine-American War; U.S. rule begins

1939 WW2 begins.

1941 Japan invades and takes over.

1944 U.S. retakes PHL.

1946 U.S. gives PHL independence.

Significance

- Proves there is a need for better mental health resources
- Effective Mental health resources from other countries
  - CBT - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (U.S.)
  - Prescription medication (U.S.)
  - Life Skills Education Program (India)[8]
- Proposed model of intervention
  - Consists of a short-term CBT program in combination to a Life Skills Program
  - This model could help adolscents/young adults (target group) unpack the colonial mentality
  - Target group is most vulnerable to developing unhealthy life skills if not taught early on
  - Promote pre-colonial Filipino culture and how to tie together with modern day lifestyles/influences

Key Terms

- PHL - Philippines
- CM - Colonial Mentality
- Mental Health
- Colonialism
- PHP - Philippine Pesos

Conclusion

Mental Health is becoming a more recognized field as there becomes a greater need for it over time. Although the Philippine government is making the amends to increase access to care for mental health, there is still a need to break down the barrier of the colonial mentality, as well as recover from the after-effects of colonialism. One potential intervention is to promote the education and awareness of the self in high schools to further promote well-being and better emotional regulation skills, in combination with short-term CBT. The Philippines is still making substantial progress in further improving themselves culturally and economically and by doing so they can help improve the state of healthcare.

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