

The Mental Health Status of Secondary School Teachers amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic in Batanes

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ABSTRACT

The well-being of teachers influences the well-being of the students in ways that influence the mental health trajectory of future generations. However, when the pandemic started, lockdowns and the closure of schools caused teachers to suffer stress because they needed to adapt policies to provide learning. Thus, the changes in work methods have caused mental health issues among teachers. The study aimed to describe the anxiety, stress, and depression among secondary school teachers in Batanes. By considering the level of these mental health issues teachers are experiencing, institutions might be in a better position to put in place the relevant support structures that may be needed. This study utilized a quantitative research approach and was conducted in all secondary schools in the province. The study was conducted among 73 secondary school teachers, 17 males and 56 females aged 23 to 59. A three-part survey questionnaire was used to gather data in the study – Consent Form, Demographic Profile, and Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21). Results show that they experience moderate anxiety and a normal level of depression and stress. Teachers were significantly affected by the occupational stress during the suspension of face-to-face classes and the impacts associated with the pandemic.

Keywords — Social Science, secondary school teachers, quantitative, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The mental health of teachers is an important factor that allows them to become holistic classroom managers and leaders. However, when the global and local transmission of COVID-19 was recorded, the government considered it a risk to national security (Nicomedes et al., 2020), thus, implementing Enhanced Community Quarantine to contain the spread of COVID-19. This health problem created public health emergencies that affected Filipinos nationwide due to prolonged social isolation. The psychological impact of social isolation can be intense, substantial, and long-lasting and usually includes a wide range of psychological symptoms such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Brooks et al., 2020).

The pandemic has affected not only the mental state of students but also of teachers since the beginning of the crisis. Lockdowns and the closure of schools caused teachers to suffer from stress because of their need to adapt the policies to provide learning. Teachers must cope daily with the workload, emotion management, and conflict mediation in the classroom (Schoeps et al., 2020). They are expected to provide academic instruction social-emotional support and build relationships with students and their families. Also, they are significantly less compensated than other occupations with similar education requirements (Allegretto & Mishel, 2019). This has led to stress, frustration, burnout, and teacher turnover. In addition to these, teachers also experience a great amount of stress during the pandemic, adapting to distance teaching and learning, reconciling personal and work responsibilities, fear about their future and their families, and the pandemic itself, making their emotional distress particularly severe.

The changes brought about by the pandemic led to the crafting of policies to secure that the adherence of stakeholders is continued, particularly directed to teachers and students. Such provisions included alternative delivery modes of education and quarantine requirements (Commission on Higher Education, 2020; Department of Education, 2020). However, teachers have yet to be trained for emergency online teaching. Thus, the suspensions of classes in schools coupled with social isolation and home quarantine have caused depression, anxiety, and stress to the teachers.

Many studies have suggested that teachers experience psychological symptoms during the pandemic. A recent Arab study has indicated that teachers suffered problems related to the pandemic, such as depression, anxiety, stress,

violence, and divorce, all of which hinder their teaching ability (Al Lily et al., 2020). In Germany, teachers experienced a medium-to-high amount of stress during the lockdown. In the United Kingdom (UK), teachers reported high levels of anxiety and in Chile, the pandemic negatively affected teachers' quality of life, especially among women and younger teachers. Previous studies have found that working from home using Information and Communication Technologies has created feelings of tension, stress, anxiety, and depression (Suárez et al., 2018,) and during a pandemic, these were the only available resources to teachers. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (2020) has already identified that depression, anxiety, and stress among teachers are among the adverse consequences of school closures due to the abrupt changes in the education system, uncertainty about the pandemic's duration, and a lack of familiarity with distance education. The long-term nature of the problem leads to exhaustion, thus, creating less confidence in the teachers' ability to perform their jobs and making it more difficult to manage student behavior (Burić & Kim, 2020).

Moreover, in China, anxiety among teachers was 13.67%, with women being more anxious than men and older ones being more symptomatic (Li et al., 2020). Similarly, teachers reported workloads in Spain that lead to psychosomatic problems and exhaustion (Prado-Gascó et al., 2020). A study conducted in Malaysia showed that a higher percentage of secondary school teachers reported psychological symptoms during the pandemic and felt at risk of poor mental health and well-being. There is also a higher rate of men versus women experiencing psychological symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression (Pau et al., 2022). On the other hand, a study in Thailand reported that 267 Thai teachers encountered mental health issues ranging from severe to extremely severe (Ratanasiripong et al., 2022).

In the Philippines, teacher stress has long been a major concern of teachers, even before the pandemic started, with teachers consistently experiencing some of the highest levels of occupational stress among most occupations (Markow et al., 2013). With the quick initial pivot to remote teaching, followed by uncertainty due to modifications of instructional policies, teachers have had high mental health issues during the pandemic (Bautista Jr. et al., 2020). The pandemic has resulted in unprecedented challenges in education (Oducado, 2020). Despite the aggressive interventions of the Philippine government to stop the further transmission of the disease, cases of those being infected continued to rise. Because of this, the closure of schools and isolation implemented globally threatened the mental health of teachers (Talidong & Toquero, 2020). Teachers

transitioned professionally and personally through an uncertain period (Allen et al., 2020). Aside from the threats to physical health, the pandemic has also posed a psychological impact that carries significant threats and dangers to mental health and well-being because of higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The uncertainty of the situation has exacerbated these.

Though school closures and protocols, such as wearing masks, social distancing, and remote learning, were necessary to slow down the spread of the virus, these, on the other hand, made it more difficult to deliver content and foster relationships in classrooms and schools. In a survey conducted by Diliberti et al. (2021), out of 1,000 teachers, 25% noted a lack of reliable high-speed internet at home, while 40% could not deliver remote instruction well. Aside from the stresses teachers face regarding the threat of COVID-19 to themselves and their families, they have to transition into the new normal in the educational system and undertake effective remedial education (Guillasper et al., 2020; Oducado, 2020). Not all teachers do not have the technologies, resources, competencies, and knowledge they need to engage and succeed using the new teaching modality.

By considering the level of depression, anxiety, and stress teachers are experiencing with the return to school during this pandemic; institutions might be in a better position to put in place the relevant support structures that may be needed. However, there is limited knowledge of the levels of mental health issues teachers are experiencing, which can be the cause of inadequate counseling services or support for them. The mental well-being of teachers is an area that needs to be discussed by both the educational community and society in general.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

On this premise, the researcher determined the level of mental health issues among secondary school teachers during this pandemic. Studies on the islands of Batanes have been conducted impacts of the pandemic, but their main focus is on the general population. To date, limited studies examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school teachers in the province. By their occupation, the teachers come in frequent contact during the students' developmental stages. Thus, the well-being of teachers influences the well-being of the students in ways that influence the mental health trajectory of future generations.

Therefore, the researcher was encouraged to conduct the study to identify the levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and challenges encountered by secondary school teachers. Hence, the results of this study can be used to create effective

interventions and approaches that will help address the mental health problems of the island teachers during this time of the pandemic.

FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on the Diathesis-Stress Model, known as the Vulnerability Stress Model, by Kendler (2020). The Diathesis-Stress model theory attempts to explain the occurrence of a disorder. This theory suggests that the combination of a pre-existing diathesis, such as a negative cognitive style and stress, can predict the development of any mental health disorder. This model proposes that persons who think of themselves more negatively are more likely to exhibit signs and symptoms of mental health problems when faced with significant life stress. People have differences in how they think about the world, making them susceptible to disorders. Because of this, there is now a difference in how people respond to similar stressful events. Negative views about the world, the future, and the self may contribute to developing any mental health problem. These views affect how information is processed, making individuals vulnerable to mental health problems when negative situations arise.

Moreover, according to the Diathesis-Stress Model, perception of the future self and the world can directly cause mental health issues. People with a positive future orientation can maintain optimism and hope for the future whenever a problem occurs, such as a pandemic. Thus, they are likely to have more adaptable and modifiable behaviors in stressful situations, making it easier to handle depression, anxiety, or stress (Pallini et al., 2018). On the other hand, those individuals with a negative future orientation hold a negative attitude toward the future. This is the reason why, when faced with a stressful situation, they tend to be depressive, anxious, or stressed.

As helplessness to psychosocial stressors varies, some individuals may be more affected by the adverse effect of the COVID-19 pandemic than others. Using the Diatheses-Stress Model, there is a complex interplay between pre-existing risk factors and current environmental stressors. As a result, environmental stressors may impact those with pre-existing problems.

Consistent with the Diathesis-Stress Model, one study found that increased stress during the pandemic can be associated with maladaptive coping strategies (Umucu & Lee, 2020). Another study by Liu et al. (2020) found that higher resilience or the ability to cope with stress effectively was associated with lower anxiety during the pandemic. Together, these findings suggest that perceived stress is an important process that modulates COVID-19 anxiety and safety behaviors.

Using the Diathesis-Stress Model in this study can help identify predictors of COVID-19 depression, anxiety, and stress responses. It is crucial in effectively addressing mental health issues during the pandemic among teachers. It can be a valuable framework for exploring how pre-existing traits interact with environmental influences in producing excessive, maladaptive responses during the pandemic. It can aid in identifying of how the teachers' vulnerability can affect or impact their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Self-perception during this crisis can also have an impact on teachers' adaptation. Individuals with high self-esteem can recognize their good qualities and strive to thrive in difficult situations. On the other hand, individuals with low self-esteem can have negative feelings about themselves, which makes it harder for them to cope during stressful situations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to describe the level of mental health difficulty in terms of anxiety, stress, and depression among secondary school teachers in Batanes.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative research approach. It used a descriptive research design to describe the respondents' level of mental health difficulty. According to Nassaji (2015), a descriptive research design aims to gather data to describe a phenomenon, situation, or population scientifically. This method enables the researchers to develop an in-depth understanding of the topic.

Research Site

The study was conducted in all secondary schools in the province of Batanes, namely, Batanes General Comprehensive High School (BGCHS), Mahatao National High School (MNHS), Ivana National High School (INHS), Rael Integrated School (RIS), Itbud Integrated School (IIS), Valugan Integrated School (VIS), Batanes National Science High School (BNSHS), Sabtang National School of Fisheries (SNSF), Itbayat National Agricultural High School (INAHS), and Saint Dominic College of Batanes, Inc. (SDCBI).

Respondents

The study was conducted among 73 secondary school teachers in the province of Batanes. The respondents comprised 17 males and 56 females aged 23 to 59 years old.

Data Gathering Tool

A two-part survey questionnaire was used to gather data in the study – Demographic Profile and Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21).

Demographic Profile. This was used to gather information from the respondents about their age, sex, school, civil status, educational attainment, and years of service.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21). According to Le et al. (2017), the DASS-21 is a shortened version of the original DASS, which Lovibond and Lovibond developed in 1995.

The DASS is comprised of three self-report scales designed to measure the emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress. Each of the three DASS-21 scales contains seven items, divided into subscales with similar content. The depression scale assesses dysphoria, hopelessness, devaluation of life, self-deprecation, lack of interest/involvement, anhedonia, and inertia. The anxiety scale assesses autonomic arousal, skeletal muscle effects, situational anxiety, and subjective experience of anxious affect. The stress scale is sensitive to levels of chronic non-specific arousal. It assesses difficulty relaxing, nervous arousal, being easily upset/agitated, irritable/over-reactive, and impatient.

The DASS-21's reliability is outstanding, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.81, 0.89, and 0.78 for the depression, anxiety, and stress subscales, respectively (Coker et al., 2018). It was also discovered to have excellent internal consistency and discriminative, concurrent, and convergent validities in the same analysis.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers submitted a letter of intent asking permission to conduct the study to the school's division superintendent. When the researchers were permitted to conduct the study, they administered the survey questionnaires to the respondents. The school head of the identified schools distributed the questionnaires to their secondary school teachers.

The researchers established a rapport by introducing themselves and letting them read the consent form. The consent form included a brief background of the researchers, the aims and objectives of their study, and the respondents' permission to participate in the study voluntarily before distributing the survey

questionnaires. The surveys were delivered to the respondents while giving them sufficient time to complete the questionnaires. The researchers provided specific instructions in the questionnaires, asked them for their honesty in answering the items, and assured them of the confidentiality of the data collected. Due to their busy schedules because of the school's commencement ceremonies, the researchers gathered the survey results a week after they were delivered. After collecting survey questionnaires, the researchers looked into the data to identify any useful for the study.

Ethical Considerations

To observe the proper protocols for conducting this study, prior written permissions were sought from the campus director. The questionnaire was attached to a consent form with a message asking for the active participation of the respondents at their option. It also stated that their anonymity, confidentiality, and neutrality would be kept. Proper citations were done for all the information and previous researches used in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To describe the respondents' level of mental health difficulty, mean analysis was conducted. Table 1 below summarizes the data on the respondents' level of mental health difficulty in terms of anxiety, depression, and stress.

Table 1. Respondents' Level of Mental Health Difficulty

Mental Health Difficulty	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Qualitative Interpretation
Anxiety	10.66	7.35	Moderate
Depression	8.66	6.48	Normal
Stress	11.53	6.21	Normal

$n = 73$

Table 1 shows that the respondents have a moderate level of anxiety, a normal level of depression, and a normal level of stress. In the case of anxiety, negative associations are related to changes in working conditions, social relations, general social support, and emotional support.

The changes in the mental health condition of secondary school teachers are possibly associated with changes in their working conditions. Data suggests that most secondary school teachers were not prepared to face the technological

changes that came with the crisis. The lack of preparedness and experience in digital competencies and remote learning methods are seen to be the causes of anxiety among teachers. The uncertainty about the impact of distance or remote education on academic progress has also contributed to this mental health issue. Moreover, the higher level of anxiety compared to depression and stress can be due to the new measures teachers had to adopt without support in the form of material and human resources. It can also be linked with uncertainty about the possibility of children becoming infected in schools. The return of students in the classrooms can also become a focus of uncertainty for teachers.

Through the years, various authors pointed out that teachers show a high risk of developing anxiety due to being exposed to varied work stressors in their daily activities (Gil-Monte, 2005; Menghi, 2015; Othman & Sivasubramaniam, 2019; Schaufeli, 2003).

Similarly, secondary school teachers experience a moderate level of anxiety because of the lack of knowledge and skills necessary for distance education and the time-consuming process, especially for older teachers (Joshi et al., 2020). Moreover, since the pandemic started, Argentinian teachers have seen many aspects of their work modified, making them even more prone to maladjustments (Glowacz & Schmits, 2020).

Results also show that infection-related anxiety tended to increase among secondary school teachers. This is similar to the study held in Japan, where teachers have one-hour face-to-face lessons for 30-40 minutes per class. Because of this, teachers have to interact with many students daily for a long period. This makes the risk of infection high, which may be responsible for the teachers' high level of anxiety, among other reasons. Similarly, a study by Hawes et al. (2021) showed that direct contact with students was significantly associated with higher anxiety symptoms in school staff.

In line with the results, there is also increasing evidence suggesting that pandemic has significantly impacted on the well-being of teachers and students. In China, it has been found that a school where teachers presented moderate symptoms of anxiety, whereas, in Germany, secondary teachers experience a medium to a high amount of anxiety. In the United Kingdom, a teacher reported high levels of anxiety, and in Chile, the global crisis has negatively affected the quality of life of teachers (Lizana et al., 2021).

In another study, the COVID-19 pandemic has indicated that work instability negatively impacts teachers' mental health due to financial uncertainty (Varma et al., 2021). Public school teachers also had a higher risk of anxiety than private school teachers because of the high workloads. The pre-pandemic

occupational health differences may have increased during the crisis, impacting the teachers' mental health (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021)

On the other hand, the respondents' level of depression and stress is normal. A study suggests that given seeking information about COVID-19, Filipino teachers search for news about cases of COVID-19 and check the information about COVID-19 if it comes from a trusted or reliable source. With many speculations on COVID-19 and its impact on people, teachers had to be vigilant and careful with news and information to believe (Aruta et al., 2022). This allows them to regulate their emotions.

To deal with depression and stress, Filipino teachers spend time on social media to communicate with friends, students, and colleagues and read news updates that can help heighten their awareness during a crisis (Casanova et al., 2022). Likewise, secondary school teachers spend more time online since they also practice virtual learning projects aside from communicating with colleagues through a professional online community. They have developed a way to find something purposeful due to the suspension of all school-related conferences and activities in the country (Department of Education, 2020).

Additionally, the level of depression and stress among secondary school teachers is normal because teachers' adaptation to distance education has happened relatively fast. This is why, after the initial exhaustion, there has been an increase in the effectiveness and sense of educational activities observed (Bubb & Jones, 2020).

CONCLUSION

The researchers determined the level of mental health problems, particularly depression, anxiety, and stress, among secondary school teachers in the province of Batanes. Among the three, they experience moderate anxiety and a normal level of depression and stress. It is possible to assert that a large portion of secondary school teachers in the province was significantly affected by the occupational stress during the suspension of face-to-face classes and the impacts associated with the pandemic. This has led to the appearance of different mental health issues.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

Despite its limitations, this study presents a snapshot of secondary teachers' mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic. These results will provide ideas for specific actions that can be done and promoted in all

education settings. It calls for attention to further exploring teachers' experiences concerning the pandemic and the importance of providing institutional support for the teachers' well-being. Such support includes interventions using ICTs to reduce psychological distress. Future studies can also gather information about these teachers' sociodemographic characteristics and explore individual, work, and family conditions associated with the experience of certain symptoms of discomfort and distress.

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