

Experiences of Elementary Teachers with Mental Health Struggles

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Abstract— The primary purpose of this study was to explore the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of elementary teachers facing mental health struggles in the Sagbayan District of the Bohol Division, specifically at Sagbayan Central Elementary School, San Agustin Elementary School, and Ubojan Elementary School. This study utilized an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis research method and employed a self-constructed interview guide based on the Job Demand-Control Theory, Adult Attachment Theory, and Health Theory of Coping, all verified by a registered psychologist. The purposive sampling technique targeted a specific group of elementary teachers from the Sagbayan District. To acquire the 15 specific informants, a pre-survey was conducted on approximately 50 “Source Elementary Teachers”. The study revealed that teachers regard good mental health as crucial for the success of the teaching and learning process, while mental health struggles significantly hinder their professional effectiveness. The main challenges identified included heavy workload, students’ bad behavior, parental conflicts, and unsupportiveness, DepEd demands because of technology, and family problems, all contributing to stress, anxiety, and despair. Despite the negative experiences, they were able to identify their coping mechanisms namely; active coping, social and family support, and spiritual activities to handle mental health struggles. The findings of the study will form the basis for drawing recommendations. However, the study noted a lack of participants with severe mental health struggles, indicating the need for further research among elementary teachers from other schools to gather more comprehensive and relevant data.

Keywords— Experiences, Mental Health Struggles, Challenges, Coping Mechanisms.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is believed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that emotional, psychological, and social well-being all fall under the category of mental health. It influences our thoughts, feelings, and actions. It also influences how an individual interacts with people, manage stress and make good decisions in life.

In connection with this, and in the light of the fact that mental health is so important in contemporary society, workplace mental health has become a critical public health issue. According to Kinman (2011), teaching is a very stressful profession, and teachers experience a greater number of

psychological problems than those in other professions. This may cause educational mental health to deteriorate over time, which would be bad for students' health and academic success.

However, although the students will be very affected by teachers’ poor mental health, it is also a significant issue to consider as to what are the contributing reasons that affect their poor mental health.

There have been studies done on teachers' mental health. These studies produced a variety of findings and identified several factors that could take account for both their poor and good mental health. One of these is a report of a small number of teacher suicides in the Philippines which shows alarming results for the country's education system. The Department of Education is in mourning over the death of a teacher and determined that it was not work-related and that other factors may have contributed to the teacher's suicide (Mateo, 2018). However, the Teachers' Dignity Coalition (TDC) met with DepEd officials to discuss worries over the alleged workload, it stated that the heavy workload of paperwork was one of the causes of the said suicide case of 2018.

With this, those teachers who experienced mental health problems relied on coping mechanisms to overcome into such. Coping Mechanisms are emotions, thoughts, and behavior that help reduce the psychological stress of individuals according to Chowdhury (2019) on Positive Psychology. Particularly, teachers use various coping mechanisms that allow them to have resources for recovery, as stated in the study of Opperman V., Eeden, C., and Rothmann, S. (2021), entitled Perceived stress, coping and mental health of teachers: A latent profile analysis in Sedibeng East District in South Africa. In that study, they discovered that after having three different stress profiles, it varied greatly in terms of coping mechanisms and mental health.

Taking all of these into account, it is crucial to know the experiences of Elementary teachers, concerning their mental health, including the challenges that came on their way, and what coping mechanisms they have undergone to overcome with such. Thus, this study seeks to determine the Elementary teachers' mental health, the challenges they encountered, and their coping mechanisms.

Literature Review

Since the 1970s, mental health has been acknowledged as an essential subject for public health education in the middle of the 1900s. However, issues related to mental health have been growing an important subject in the last decade in society. Schools and communities have seen the expanding effects of mental health problems (Simmons, 2024).

In elementary and secondary schools, teacher mental health is still a worry. However, there is not enough research on how to improve teachers' wellness, especially when it comes to gender (Corrente, Ferguson & Bourgeault, (2022).

Stress in the Teaching Profession

According to Orlanda-Ventayen & Ventayen in 2021, since teaching is the foundation of all professions worldwide, it is the noblest career path. There wouldn't be any transmitted or imparted knowledge without teachers. Good teachers are essential to preserving a positive atmosphere in the classroom and to the ongoing improvement of the educational system. Consequently, one of the key areas for which a teacher should strive for success in the classroom is stress management. To enhance instructors' productivity, the academic workload needs to be controlled.

There is a considerable danger of burnout in teaching because it is seen as a very hard career with many pressures ((Friedman, 2003).

Workplace stresses like excessive workloads and conflicting demands. Among the difficulties teachers encounter are emotional labor and a lack of psychological protection. The definition of teacher stress is described as "unpleasant negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or despair that a teacher experiences as a result of something related to his teaching work (Corrente et al., 2022).

Furthermore, according to Ogus (2008), burnout and stress at work are strongly linked to poor psychological outcomes, low job satisfaction, absenteeism, and quitting intentions.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

This study was qualitative research, utilizing the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The study was brought out with the aid of an Individual Interview (IDI) and a Focused Group Discussion (FGD).

Participants

This study gathered the needed information from the participants. When identifying participants, this research study utilized purposive sampling, targeting a specific group of elementary teachers from the Sagbayan District in the Bohol Division, who were exhibiting mental health problems. To identify these teachers, a pre-survey was conducted on approximately 50 "Source Elementary Teachers." The second phase involved selecting the 15 teachers who scored the highest in the pre-survey. These participants were chosen regardless of their gender, age, or class size.

Environment

The locale of this study was the Sagbayan in the Bohol Division, specifically Sagbayan Central Elementary School, San Agustin Elementary School, and Ubojan Elementary School. These schools were purposively chosen due to the specific group of elementary teachers manifesting mental health struggles. Sagbayan, Bohol is a 4th class municipality in the province of Bohol.

Instrument

To gather information regarding the mental health, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms of elementary teachers in Sagbayan, Bohol, the researchers utilized a self-constructed Individual Interview (IDI). This guide was based on the theories employed in the study. There are three primary questions in the IDI guide. The first question and its indicators aimed to determine the views of the elementary teachers. The second question, along with its sub-questions, focused on the challenges encountered by the teachers concerning their mental health, based on Karasek's Job Demand-Control (Support) Theory from 1985. The third question and its sub-questions were based on the Adult Attachment Theory developed by Mikulincer and Shaver (2008) and the Health Theory of Coping established by Stallman (2020). Additionally, the IDI guide was validated by an expert psychologist.

Ethical Considerations and Data Management

This research study adhered to ethical considerations and was reviewed by an appropriate ethics committee. Furthermore, the data was completely anonymized, and all recorded data was destroyed to ensure confidentiality and address ethical concerns.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The diagram below shows the themes that emerged from the interview.

View of the Elementary Teachers on Mental Health Struggles Barrier in Teaching Effectively

The results revealed that all 15 participants believed that mental health struggles could prevent teachers from effectively teaching students, leading to subpar performance. They asserted that experiencing a mental health struggle visibly hindered their ability to function effectively as teachers.

Challenges Encountered by Elementary Teachers with Mental Health Crisis

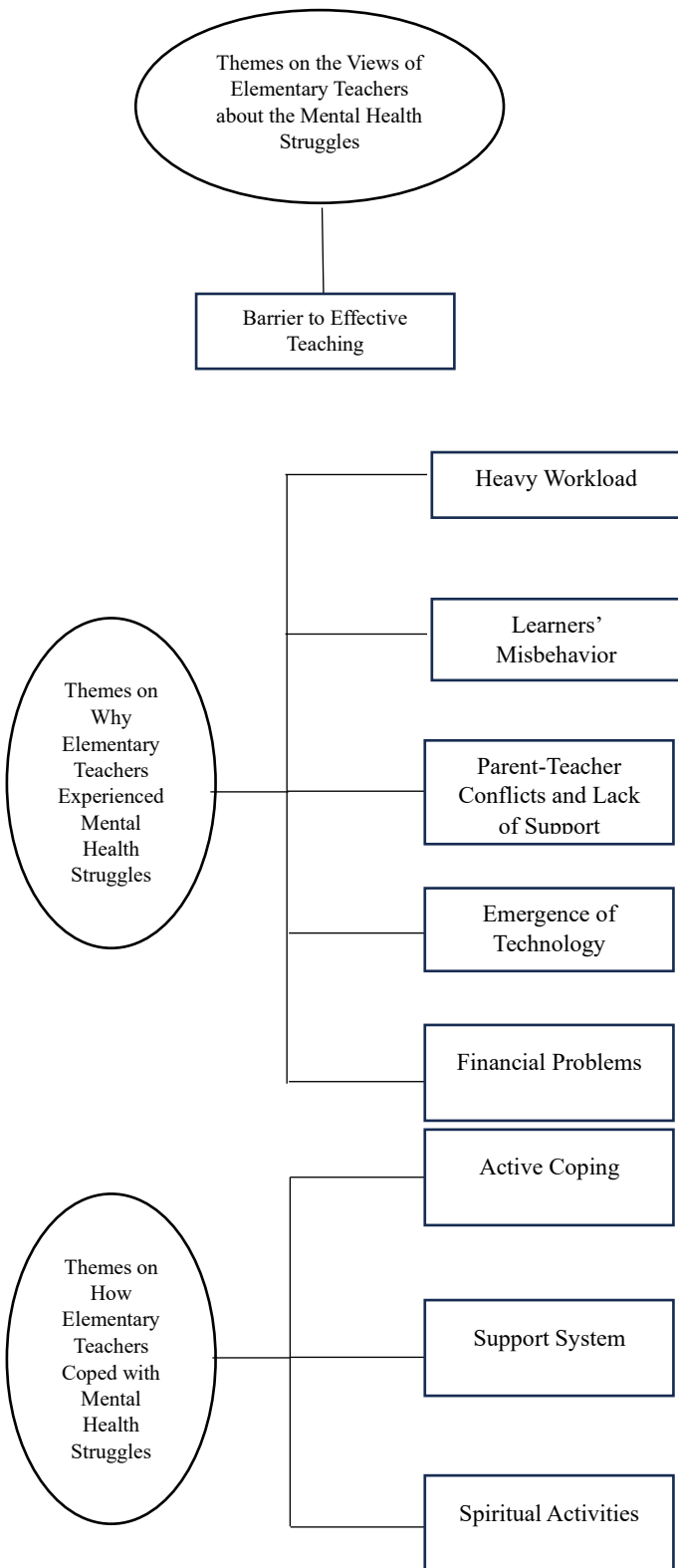
Heavy Workload

The study showed that an excessive workload was one of the significant challenges teachers faced throughout their careers. They were under immense stress due to extended working hours, often exceeding eight hours a day, as they worked late into the night to complete reports, CIs, and research projects mandated by DepEd with tight deadlines. Managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously led to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and despair among teachers.

Learners' Misbehavior

The results also revealed that one of the main issues elementary teachers faced was learners' misbehavior. Teachers found it difficult to manage the students' varying abilities, interests, and comprehension levels, which hindered their ability to provide effective education. They also faced

challenges due to the poor performance of some students, which caused the teachers to feel stressed and anxious about the situation.



Teacher-Parent Conflict and Lack of Support

The study showed that while the success of education primarily depended on the pupils, teachers felt that a major cause of their struggles was the lack of support from parents. They found that when parents do not support their children, it leads to low motivation to learn and increased absenteeism. This lack of parental support, coupled with conflicts between parents and teachers, contributed significantly to these issues. Specifically, pupils suffered from a lack of guidance and motivation when their parents were not supportive.

Emergence of Technology

The world has been overtaken by technology, leading the Department of Education to increase its demands on teachers. Teachers are now required to complete numerous reports, Continuous Improvement (CI) plans, and even research projects. The Department of Education expects these tasks to be completed promptly, posing a significant challenge for teachers and hindering their teaching careers.

Financial Problems

Family-related issues also created significant challenges for teachers. When they faced personal problems, especially financial difficulties, their performance suffered. The need to find additional sources of income to meet their responsibilities often distracted them from their teaching duties, resulting in subpar performance.

Coping Mechanisms of Elementary Teachers with Mental Health Crisis

Active Coping

Among the coping strategies teachers employed to handle difficult circumstances was active coping. Several highlighted the significance of effective time management, while others mentioned the importance of accepting and adjusting to situations to reduce tension. In essence, active coping strategies helped them navigate challenging situations throughout their careers. Additionally, many teachers shared that adapting to and accepting circumstances was key to managing their stress.

Support System

Elementary teachers relied on support systems as one of their key coping strategies. Many believed that the support from friends, family, and the broader community was instrumental in helping them overcome the challenges they faced in their teaching careers. This network of support provided them with the encouragement and assistance they needed to navigate their professional difficulties.

Spiritual Activities

Out of the fifteen participants, some felt that engaging in various spiritual practices helped them feel more comfortable despite the difficulties they faced due to mental health struggles. They believed that turning to their faith made them feel extremely secure and stress-free when confronted with challenging situations.

IV. CONCLUSION

In light of the results of the interviews among the participants, the researchers concluded that teachers are struggling with mental health struggles due to various challenges. Despite these difficulties, teachers have demonstrated resilience by utilizing active coping strategies, seeking social and family support, and engaging in spiritual

activities. These coping mechanisms have helped them navigate the multifaceted demands of their profession and realize their full potential during these trying times.

Recommendations

The following are suggestions or recommendations that can be given based on the result of the research study that has been carried out.

1. The Department of Education may provide comprehensive support programs to help teachers manage their excessive workloads, address student behavior concerns, resolve parent-child conflicts, and cope with family problems. These programs may include professional development in the areas of stress management, counseling, and mentorship.
2. The Department of Education may encourage teachers, administrators, parents, and community members to collaborate and communicate openly. This can help strengthen teacher support networks and reduce conflict.
3. Schools may explore developing initiatives to improve parental involvement and support for their children's educational ambitions. Inform parents on the importance of their involvement and provide resources to help them boost their children's behavior and academic achievement.
4. The Department of Education may prioritize teachers' well-being as a critical component of school leadership and culture. Implement efforts to encourage self-care, mental health support, and work-life balance.

5. Future researchers may conduct a similar study that will be done with a larger sample size consisting of participants from different elementary schools within and beyond Bohol.

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