

The mental health state of teachers: Basis for Intervention Initiatives

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Abstract

This study investigated the state of mental health of elementary public-school teachers in Daet North District and presented intervention initiatives to improve their well-being. One hundred ninety-two teachers (192) from 14 schools in the district were chosen as the respondents of the study through Stratified Random Sampling to ensure that the whole teaching force was well-represented. The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) and a researcher-made questionnaire were used to gather data on the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, physical and health conditions, and demographics. For stress levels, 75.5% of the respondents have a normal level of stress and 0.5% claimed to be extremely severely stressed. Forty-four percent (44%) manifested a moderate level of anxiety and 7% experienced mild anxiety. Most of the respondents have a normal level of depression (44.8%) but it can be noted that teachers who declared experiencing a moderate level of depression follow at 33% and only 1% of the respondents claimed to be extremely severely depressed. The study also found that teachers have good emotional and physical health conditions. The mental health state of teachers in terms of stress, anxiety and depression were alarming. Moderate anxiety and depression can worsen if not addressed. These conditions in the teaching field of elementary teachers in Daet North District about mental health called for intervention initiatives that can support and guide them to feel informed that mental health issues are a reality and that there are ways to cope with them and improve their mental health status is possible.

Keywords: anxiety; depression; emotional health; mental health; stress; physical health

1. Introduction

In schools, the primary concern lies in the development of individual students and while the central focus of instruction is the learner, teachers' health and well-being are less widely considered. Foremost studies concerning mental health have revolved largely around students' experiences, and teachers' needs have been unlikely to be reckoned with (Lee, 2020). Gaining knowledge of the teaching staff's state of mental health is crucial in delivering education as its impact on the profession can lead to severe consequences.

According to Steiner et al. (2021) the teaching profession is one of the most stressful careers in the world brought upon by challenging working conditions augmented with personal duties and responsibilities which creates an alarming concern about mental and physical health conditions, and continuous deterioration of the quality of life due to burnout from work (Vega et al. 2021, Lizana et al. 2020).

Mazure (2020) as cited by MacMillan et al. (2022) explained stress as a physical response to a situation. She added that repeated experiences of stress can lead to physical problems such as headaches, insomnia,

chest pain, grinding teeth, constipation, and diarrhea. If not reduced, it can lead to abnormal blood pressure, heart illness, diabetes, obesity, and autoimmune diseases. Silva (2021), on the other hand, described anxiety as a normal reaction to a situation where people feel pressured and, to some degree, fearful because there's an unknown factor or a perceived danger. Anxiety turns out to be clinically concerning when the emotion stays even if there is no threat and when it starts to impede daily functioning and relationships. She added that severe cases of anxiety can be interlinked with depression, a disorder affecting the ability to enjoy life resulting in weight gain or loss, sleeping disorder, physical pain, difficulty in speech, inability to function at work and keeping relationships, constant feeling of sadness, hopelessness, and mental paralysis.

Depression, anxiety, and stress also greatly contribute to the vulnerability of teachers to physical and emotional health concerns. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, n. d.), mental health includes emotional health and links closely to physical health. Such depression raises the threat of various types of physical health complications including life-long diseases like stroke, diabetes, and heart problems; stress also triggers poor physical and emotional health.

Luci-Atienza (2021) reported that the Department of Education (DepEd) admitted that there is an increasing mental healthcare need among teachers and is committed to programs that will help them. Senator Villar as cited in the article of Abasola (2023) also pushes a senate bill to strengthen, promote, and establish mental health services for the welfare and general well-being of all educators. He emphasized that while Filipino teachers have long been recognized as heroes for their indispensable roles in the lives of the youth, they, too can suffer from trauma, psychological and mental fatigue brought upon by and heavy workload, long class schedules, and managing of big class sizes.

However, there is little knowledge about the current mental health state of education staff in the country. Limited literature is accessible and even fewer studies are published. The presence of challenges in mental health is significantly affecting schools and yet it is underrepresented. Thus, this study intends to close the gap between research by determining the mental health state of elementary school teachers and proposing intervention initiatives to help them cope with these situations.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Participants

The study was conducted in Daet North District with 14 elementary schools. The 192 respondents were selected by using Slovin's formula to determine the sample size. Stratified random sampling was also employed to ensure that all schools in the district were well-represented.

2.2 Measurement and Instrument

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale Test (DASS 21) was a well-established self-report instrument used to determine the level of stress, anxiety, and depression of teachers. This instrument is composed of 21 items divided into three scales, particularly, depression, anxiety, and stress with a 4-point scale used to indicate how much the statements applied to the respondents over the past weeks. The response options were 0 (Never, did not apply to me at all), 1 (Sometimes, applied to me to some degree, or some of the time), 2 (Often, applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time) and 3 (Almost Always, applied to me very much, or most of the time).

A researcher-made questionnaire was also used to determine the emotional and physical health conditions of the respondents. The emotional health condition survey instrument was composed of scenarios in classroom management, teaching and learning, and personal and professional development. Each of the three components has five statements that the respondents need to score as to how much the situations are affecting their emotional health with 1 (not at all), 2 (slightly), 3 (much), and 4 (extremely). For the physical health

condition of the respondents, the questionnaire consisted of six activities including sleep, nutrition, hydration, movement, prioritization, and medical awareness. The teacher-respondents rate these activities with 1 (never), 2 (sometimes), 3 (often) and 4 (always) to show how often they achieve physical health tasks with their daily schedule. The mean and weighted mean are computed to get both the emotional and physical health conditions of the respondents.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Respondents Demographic Profile

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to their generation age, sex, civil status and teaching level, position, salary range, and length of service.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Teachers

Demographic Profile		Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Generation Age	Baby Boomers	21	10.94
	Generation X	83	43.23
	Millennials	88	45.83
Total		192	100
Sex	Female	178	92.71
	Male	14	7.29
Total		192	100
Civil Status	Married	152	79.17
	Separated	5	2.60
	Single	23	11.98
	Widowed	12	6.25
Total		192	100
Teaching Level	Grade 1	35	18.22
	Grade 2	30	15.63
	Grade 3	26	13.54
	Grade 4	22	11.46
	Grade 5	30	15.63
	Grade 6	33	17.19
	Kinder	16	8.33
Total		192	100
Position	Teacher 1	68	35.42
	Teacher 2	16	8.33
	Teacher 3	90	46.88
	Master Teacher 1	12	6.25
	Master Teacher 2	6	3.12
Total		192	100
Salary Range	P11,000-16,000	6	3.12
	P23,000-28,000	79	41.15
	P29,000-34,000	90	46.88
	P41,000-46,000	6	3.12
	P47,000 - above	11	5.73
Total		192	100
Year of Service	1-5 years	26	13.54
	6-10 years	32	16.67
	11-15 years	43	22.40
	16-20 years	29	15.10
	21-25 years	23	11.98
	26-30 years	25	13.02
Total	31 years – above	14	7.29
		192	100

A total of 192 teachers completed the survey. Millennials, 27-45 years old, compose almost half of the population (45.83%). Most were female (93%) and about 79% were married. Grade 1 teachers made up the largest group of respondents with 18%. Most were in Teacher III positions (46.88%) and earning 29,000-P34,000 a month (47%). Almost a quarter (22%) have been in the teaching profession between 11 to 15 years.

In this study, the demographic profile gathered shows the background attributes and personalities of teachers in Daet North District. This shows that the whole teaching populace of the district is well-represented in the research. Moreso with this information, the description of the teachers in the district becomes clear and this becomes vital in designing a suitable intervention if the findings proved it necessary.

3.2 Levels of Depression, Anxiety and Stress

Table 2 shows the levels of depression, anxiety and stress level of Daet North District teachers using the cut-off scores from the DASS-21 to determine the severity levels.

Table 2. Mental Health State of Teachers

Mental Health State	Depression		Anxiety		Stress	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Normal	86	44.8	46	24.0	145	75.5
Mild	37	19.3	14	7.3	34	17.7
Moderate	64	33.3	85	44.3	9	4.7
Severe	3	1.6	27	14.1	3	1.6
Extremely Severe	2	1.0	20	10.4	1	0.5

The table shows that most of the respondents (75.5%) have a normal level of stress and only 0.5% claimed to be extremely severely stressed. Those with moderate levels of anxiety are at 44% and the least number who experience mild anxiety is at 7%. Lastly, the majority of the respondents have a normal level of depression (44.8%) However, it can also be noted that teachers who declared experiencing a moderate level of depression follow at 33%. And only 1% of the respondents claimed to be extremely severely depressed.

Teachers can deal with stressful situations they encounter every day in the delivery of instruction and in performing their duties. In the face of the new challenges in teaching and learning, they have assumed new schemes and approaches to teaching to continue fulfilling their roles. Their anxiety is also now manifested through bodily signs. They are suffering from symptoms such as dryness of the mouth, and the beating of one's heart even without physical effort. Despite experiencing all these physical symptoms, they continue to fulfil their duties as teachers delivering quality instruction to learners amid new changes in the curriculum and the shift of the educational arena. Moreover, Daet North District teachers experience depression at varying levels. They are facing negative feelings such as lacking the initiative to do things, unable to become enthusiastic about anything but they are still looking at their lives with meaning.

Bjorndal, et al. (2022) stated that teachers adopted mechanisms to cope with stress and among these were maintaining an open communication with family and friends, shielding and escape, searching for proven techniques to cope with stress and planning, organizing, and reducing ambitions. Also, Gustems-Carnicer, et al. (2019) emphasized that classroom-based teachers have coping strategies to relieve stress and function well in the academic arena.

These coping mechanisms help them a lot in relaxing their bodies and minds so that they can still perform the duties assigned to them during the challenging times of the pandemic.

Ginsburg, et al. (2021) found out that teachers manifested anxiety through physical arousal, behavioral escaping, and worried thoughts. Shen (2022) added that being worried and distressed was evident in teachers' physical reactions, and deconstructive feelings such as uncertainty affect their ability to teach. Go et al. (2020) emphasized that in the Philippine setting, the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers and the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers particularly directed educators to be competent technically and

professionally and uphold the dignity and reputation of Filipino teachers. The Asian Journal of University Education (2020) published the silent pressure for Filipino educators to continuously showcase their best abilities to keep up with the dignified image of the profession in society resulting to anxiety or depression.

Geronimo, et al. (2020) mentioned that autonomously motivated individuals would exercise the freedom to initiate a behavior because they perceive the work as interesting and very satisfying. However, the authors also acknowledged that teachers' increased workload and the lack of control over job pressure affect educators' self-determined motivation. The remote mode of teaching increased teachers' workload and they were forced to change their strategies in teaching and discover educational applications without proper and sufficient training (Espino-Díaz et al., 2020).

3.3 Emotional Health Conditions of Daet North District Teachers

Table 3 presents the emotional health conditions of Daet North District teachers. All the components of emotional health slightly affect teachers' emotions. These scenarios reveal that teachers' emotional health condition is in a good state.

Misbehavior, negligence, and inattention of pupils for classroom management ($x=1.93$), maintaining a positive and energetic attitude inside the classroom for teaching and learning ($x=2.20$) and dealing with multiple tasks and duties ($x=1.99$), and attending activities beyond working hours ($x=1.96$) are the top situations influencing teachers' emotional health.

Teachers have a set of established skills in dealing with scenarios that may affect their emotional health conditions and it displays a control over their reactions. Though some negative emotions surfaced while experiencing certain circumstances relating to classroom management, teaching and learning, and personal and professional development, these are initial normal reactions of teachers towards experiences that they find to be unfavorable, adverse, and opposed to what they expect while they fulfill their duties and responsibilities. However, these emotions are not lasting, and educators know how to process and keep their reactions on check to continue performing their obligations in school.

Table 3. Emotional Health Condition of Daet North District Teachers

Scenarios	Mean	Adjectival Rating
Classroom Management		
1. Misbehavior of pupils caused me restlessness that I cannot manage such misconduct easily.	1.93	Slightly affected
2. I feel irritated dealing with pupils' misunderstanding.	1.78	Slightly affected
3. There is difficulty in regaining my calm after setting some conflicts.	1.69	Slightly affected
4. Negligence and inattention of pupils affect my tolerance.	1.93	Slightly affected
5. Individual differences of pupils sometimes make me angry.	1.68	Slightly affected
Teaching and Learning		
1. Maintaining positive and energetic attitude inside the classroom affect my wellbeing.	2.20	Slightly affected
2. Adjusting to new teaching practices makes me feel stressed.	1.91	Slightly affected
3. Keeping the safety protocols inside the classroom sometimes make me feel having no control.	1.74	Slightly affected
4. I feel distracted when working too long on devices.	1.88	Slightly affected
5. It takes quite long to regain my focus once I got confused.	1.82	Slightly affected
Personal-Professional Development		
1. I feel upset about taking some classes when my fellow co-teacher is not around.	1.62	Slightly affected
2. I feel confused when dealing with multiple tasks and responsibilities.	1.99	Slightly affected
3. Attendance to activities during weekends or beyond working hours is annoying on my part.	1.96	Slightly affected
4. Perception of others about my job makes me feel disappointed.	1.71	Slightly affected
5. There is a feeling of frustration about career progressions.	1.73	Slightly affected
Weighted Mean	1.85	
Interpretation	Good emotional health	

Legend: 3.51-4.50- Extremely affected- Low emotional health;

2.51-3.50- Much affected- Fair emotional health;

1.51-2.50- Slightly affected- Good emotional health;

1.00-1.50- Not all affected- Excellent emotional health

Palmer, et al. (2019) related emotional intelligence to the ability of teachers to interact with others while processing and managing emotions. The skill to recognize emotion and the awareness of feelings influence the kind of behavior manifested toward oneself and others. Go, et al. (2020) also pointed out that every profession has its own unique emotional manifestations. They cited that like in a school setting governed by a set of social rules and norms, emotions must be on check always to maintain the good relationship with colleagues and pupils. A better understanding and control over emotions can lead to a productive life.

3.4 Physical Health Condition of Daet North District Teachers

Table 4 reveals the physical health status of teachers. It shows that teachers are in good physical health. Nutrition, hydration, and prioritization ranked almost the same. Teachers often manifest good eating habits and drink enough liquids every day. They, too, show the ability to set responsibilities according to the most pressing tasks. On the other hand, among the activities teachers do in their daily schedule to be physically healthy, medical awareness ranked last.

Teachers do not neglect their physical health, particularly through eating at regular intervals, drinking at least 8 glasses of water a day, and setting responsibilities according to their importance. Keeping their physical health in check improves their concentration and performance while doing their multifaceted roles. Though medical awareness is the least of the teachers' concerns when it comes to physical health, they still try to visit a clinic for consultation and avail health services.

Table 4. Physical Health Condition of Daet North District Teachers

Activities	Mean	Adjectival Rating
Sleep	2.70	Often
Nutrition	3.39	Often
Hydration	3.29	Often
Movement	2.89	Often
Prioritization	3.33	Often
Medical Awareness	2.61	Often
Weighted Mean	3.03	
Interpretation		Good physical health

Legend:

3.51-4.50- Always- Excellent physical health

2.51-3.50- Often- Good physical health

1.51-2.50- Sometimes- Fair physical health

1.00-1.50- Never- Low physical health

Grajek (2022) agreed that a balanced diet and good nutrition improve both physical and mental health conditions. Nallamuthu, et al. (2023) also emphasized that hydration is an important factor for teachers to have a quality life and good work performance. Voice is the teachers' primary tool of teaching and hydration is the best way to protect it against vocal problems. Rungreun, et al. (2022) stressed out that habitual health consultation is necessary to make individuals aware of the status of their general well-being. Though, they already have developed their own self-management coping skills for physical and mental health needs, health guidance and medical awareness are a must.

3.5 Intervention Initiatives

Intervention initiatives, both in print and non-materials, can alleviate teachers' state of mental health, and emotional and physical health conditions while keeping up with their busy schedule as they perform their roles in schools and at home.

These proposed intervention initiatives are necessary to help teachers cope with their current state. Such interventions include a set of resources including a guidebook about mental health which covers all the letters

of the alphabet and topics related to mental health, a Facebook page with posts, reels, infographics, quotes, and information about mental health and well-being. Lastly, a podcast that promotes awareness of mental health concerns and reinforces the individuals' ability to handle stress, difficulties, and challenges in life through varied coping mechanisms. These intervention initiatives assist educators to realize that mental health issues are not to be experienced alone.

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings above, the following conclusions were drawn.

1. The profile of the respondents in the study mirrored the wide range of characteristics of teachers in the district. They represented all educators who walk in all ages, genders, civil statuses, teaching positions and grade levels, amount of salary received, and length of service. They are striving to deal with stress, anxiety, and depression at varying levels within their personal and social scope while keeping up with their emotional and physical health.
2. The mental health state of teachers in terms of stress, anxiety and depression were alarming. Moderate anxiety and depression can worsen if not addressed. Though, teachers manifested a good emotional and physical health condition, boosting it excellently would be beneficial to them.
3. These conditions in the teaching field of elementary teachers in Daet North District about mental health called for intervention initiatives that can support and guide them to feel informed that mental health issues are a reality and that there are ways to cope with them and improve their mental health status is possible.

5. Recommendations

With the conclusions above, the result of this study is recommended to be shared with the education management team and officials, proper authorities, and school personnel so that they can provide fitting assistance to teachers who are facing mental health struggles.

1. The result of this study is recommended to be shared with the education management team and officials, proper authorities, and school personnel so that they can provide fitting assistance to teachers who are facing mental health struggles and possibly form a team of experts; psychologists, medical health practitioners and other clinical professionals, to further examine the status of teachers' mental health.
2. Further research is needed to know the factors causing the depression, anxiety and stress of teachers in a particular set of demographic profile. Moreover, as the emotional and physical health conditions of the teachers are also affected, identifying the reasons and specific events causing such circumstances can help crafting the best intervention program for them.
3. Creating an effective culture of open communication is suggested for each school where emphatic school leaders listen and are aware of the problems and frustrations encountered by teachers in performing their duties. This atmosphere of open dialogue limits misunderstandings which may be a contributory factor in the status of teachers' mental well-being.
4. DepEd needs to continue the endeavors of integrating mental health education in schools through seminars that open the reality of mental health in the country and the need to move away from the stigma associated with it. Schools need to strive hard to build a stronger culture of support for each teacher where teachers feel they have a safe place to share their burdens, unleash their emotional troubles, express their sentiments, and just get the load off their chest.
5. Team building activities conducted by the schools are also advised to continue to shape up this support system. The School Parents-Teachers' Association can help teachers in dealing with mental health issues not only through the celebration of Teachers' Day and preparation of activities for the

educators but also by being aware that they are partners in nurturing the children in schools. DOH also is suggested to sponsor a caravan that may include a schedule for consultation with a psychiatrist or psychologist and assistance and referral if there is a need for further clinical and medical treatment. In addition, professional organizations should also be concerned about assisting teachers regarding their mental health benefits.

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