

Stressors in The Workplace: A Baseline Study for Continuous Improvement of School-Based Management Policies In Schools Division of Zambales

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Introduction

“We must ensure a nurturing and safe school environment not only for our children but for educators as well.”

This is the statement of Senator Sonny Angara as he expressed his alarm over the reported suicide of several teachers allegedly due to depression brought about by their heavy workload (Araneta, 2018).

Last July, a newly-hired teacher named Emmylou Malate from La Paz Leyte hanged herself because of an alleged heavy burden of paperwork, as proved by the teacher's friends and co-workers. After a month, another teacher named Shannen Espino from Bacoor City hanged herself inside her room still wearing her school uniform. Again, according to her colleagues, Espino complained about her workloads and class observations days before she committed suicide.

Meanwhile, at least two teachers groups, The Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) Philippines and the Teachers' Dignity Coalition (TDC) have expressed concern on the deaths of their colleagues and called on the Department of Education to address the problems of stress in their workplace (Malipot, 2018). The Department of Education, in response, has called the teachers to “manage stress by maximizing the use of technology” (Meniano, 2018). Education Secretary Leonor Briones said the agency felt “very badly” for the loss of the teachers but stressed that deaths should not be attributed to their supposedly heavy workloads (Yee, 2018).

On the other hand, DepEd Regional Director Diosdado San Antonio of Region IV-A responded by issuing Regional Memorandum 550, s. 2018 entitled Measures to Enhance Teachers' Welfare in Calabarzon Public Schools last September 20, 2018. The said memo discussed, among others, the 6-Hour teaching policy, additional ancillary load, class observations, and annual medical examination. The memo also encouraged providing sessions on stress and financial management during in-service trainings, seminars and orientations; strengthening work-life balance for teachers and school officials; utilizing school funds to cover beautification, renovation, or provision of school materials and classroom; preparing IPCRF in digital format instead of hard copies; and encouraging teachers to use the DLL exemplars available with appropriate revisions instead of preparing new lesson plans.

Therefore, the researcher's desire to conduct this study to the Schools Division of Zambales (SDO) to provide baseline data of the various stressors of teachers in the workplace.

But what exactly is stress, and what are the different factors that contribute to this?

The word stress is derived from the Latin word 'strictus', which literally means taut (stretched or pulled tight). According to Merriam Webster, stress is defined as a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation.

The teaching profession is considered to be a highly stressful profession (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Teachers from many countries report high levels of stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). In fact, teachers are actually tied with nurses, with 46 percent of both groups reporting high daily stress (Ansley, 2018).

Smith (2017) cited factors that contribute to teacher stress. These are intrinsic factors (workload, time pressure, classroom management, class size, pace of educational change and reform, decision-making power, physical working conditions, professional autonomy, and career path), workplace relationship (colleagues, parents, superiors), and organizational culture (general feeling of the workplace and management style).

Harmsen (2018), in her study entitled, "The relationship between beginning teachers' stress causes, stress responses, teaching behavior and attrition", experiencing a high level stress may have negative effects on the teachers' well-being. This also seems to influence the teachers to leave the professions and seek work outside the profession. Therefore, it is of great importance to identify the root cause of this problem so that an immediate solution may be proposed.

Therefore, this research aims to determine the stressors in the workplace as identified by the SDO Zambales' teachers to be used as a baseline for the continuous improvement of policies.

Specifically, the research will seek to answer to the following questions:

(1) How may the participants' profile be described in terms of age, gender, highest educational qualification, position, monthly net income, and number of years in service; (2) What are the manifestations of stress being experienced by the participants; (3) How may the level of stress experienced by the participants be categorized in terms of DepEd policies, salary, personal conflict among co-workers, class size, workload, immediate superior's behavior, lack of support from peers, and lack of professional growth; (4) What are the other sources of stress being experienced by the participants; (5) What present policies in the department do the participants aspire to change or improve and; (6) What is the implication of this study in the continuous improvement of policies in the Schools Division of Zambales?

The scope of this study focused on identifying the stressors in the workplace as identified by the SDO Zambales' teachers. The result was limited to the group where the study has been conducted. The respondents were asked to fill out a survey questionnaire. After which, 10 participants were chosen to focus group discussion. The respondents were thoroughly oriented about the purpose of the research, potential risks and benefits, and were assured that their participation in this study is purely voluntary.

This study is anchored to the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory by Hobfoll. According to this theory, individuals accumulate resources they can apply to accommodate, withstand, or overcome threats. These resources might be in the form of (a) personal resources, such as self esteem and optimize, (b) material resources, such as money, (c) condition resources, such as status, and social support. However, these resources might be consumed by stressful or traumatic events, thereby adding to their sensitivity to subsequent stressors (Moss, 2016).

Methodology

The present research employed a mixed method of research, particularly the explanatory sequential design. According to Creswell (2003), explanatory sequential design is characterized by collecting and analyzing quantitative data followed by a collection and analysis of qualitative data. Its purpose is to use qualitative results to explain and interpret the findings of a quantitative study.

The study used probability sampling, particularly random sampling to identify respondents for the quantitative data. From the identified respondents, a non-probability sampling specifically purposive sampling was used for the qualitative data.

The study was conducted at the SDO Zambales during the School Year 2018 – 2019. The respondents of this research were the 338 teaching personnel from the division who were chosen randomly. For the quantitative data, a survey instrument was utilized. After identifying respondents, ten (10) participants were chosen for a focus group discussion (FGD).

The draft of the research was subjected to editing in both technical and content aspects, with the Senior Education Program Specialist in Planning and Research, and two (2) other colleagues who are knowledgeable in research that checked and gave suggestions to improve the proposal. After this, the respondents were informed through a written consent about the conduct of the said study. After securing the permission of the respondents, the researcher then set an appointment for a focus group discussion for each of the respondents.

Focus group discussion lasted between 45-60 minutes in an enclosed space to create consistency in the data collection method. These interviews were recorded through the permission of the respondents. To facilitate the interview process, the researcher utilized an interview guide.

The researcher undertook the principle of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality to ensure the non-disclosure of the identity and the data gathered of and those participating in the study. Research protocol was also followed as the researcher sought the permission of the schools division superintendent where the study will be conducted.

To describe the sources of stress among public school teachers in the SDO Zambales, average weighted means were computed for the quantitative data.

For the qualitative data, the researcher utilized the traditional method of data analysis, which includes index cards and manual analysis, instead of using qualitative data analysis software

packages. Open coding includes labeling concepts, defining and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions (Give, 2008).

After undergoing all the stages needed, final themes and categories produced were transferred into a data table. Under each major theme, sub-themes were also identified. To organize the results and present the discussions, a data display was prepared. After the coding procedure, the researcher submitted the final results to an expert for a review to ensure validity.

Results and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents

The age ranging from 26 – 30 recorded the highest number with 31% or 106 respondents, followed by 31-35 bracket with 19% or 64 respondents, and 36-40 age bracket with 17% or 56 respondents. On the other hand, the lowest recorded respondents are in the age brackets of 51-55 and 56-60 with both 1.5% or a total of 5 respondents each. Therefore, the mean age of the respondents is 34 years old.

Female respondents recorded the highest number with 221 or 65%, followed by Male respondents with 23% or 77. LGBTQ respondents (19 respondents) and respondents who did not specify their gender (21 respondents) are tied in the last spot with 6%.

Bachelor's Degree holders dominated the total number of respondents with 129 teachers or a total of 38%. It is followed by respondents with complete academic requirements for master's degree with a total number of 71 or 21%. Third is Master's Degree with 61 or 18% of the total respondents. Complete academic requirements for doctoral degree ranked last with 4 respondents (1%). Teacher I dominated the total number of participants with 177 teachers or a total of 52%. Teacher II follows it with a total number of 77 or 23%. Third is Teacher III with 43 or 13% of the total participants. Master Teacher III ranked last with 0 respondents (0%).

The researcher noticed that the sequence of the number of respondents is also the same with the order of classification of positions with Teacher I with the highest number of participants and Master Teacher III with the lowest.

21,000-25,000 recorded the highest number of respondents with 118 or 35%, followed by 16,000-20,000 with 27% or 90 respondents. Third in rank is 6,000-10,000 with 50 respondents or 15%. Teachers with monthly net income of 31,000-35,000 rank last with 5 respondents (1%).

21-25 years recorded the highest number with 35% or 118 respondents, followed by 16-20 years with 27% or 90 respondents, and 6-10 years with 15% or 50 respondents. On the other hand, the lowest recorded respondents are in the 31-35 years with 1% or 5 respondents.

Manifestations of Stress Experienced by the Respondents

A. Physical Manifestations

Six out of 10 respondents said that they experience constant tiredness due to stress, while 5 out of 10 experience sleep problems. A study conducted by Maia in 2015 entitled, "Evaluation of Fatigue at Work in Teachers using Modern Resources in the Classrooms", states that 71% of the respondents experienced fatigue in teaching, with 29% specifically mentioned tiredness as a symptom. Meanwhile, sleep problems can be an obvious variable to teachers' stress. Kottwitz, et. al (2017) found that there is increasing evidence that adverse social job characteristics challenge sleep quality.

On the other hand, weight problems, pain of any kind, and problems in blood pressure, although included in the top 5, did not register a significant number.

B. Emotional and Mental Manifestations

Moodiness, irritability or anger topped the list with 63.5%. This means that 6 out of 10 respondents claim that they experience this symptom. Others that got into the top 5, however, did not register a significant number. 3 out of 10 respondents claimed they experience anxiety, while 2 out of 10 experienced depression or general unhappiness, feeling overwhelmed and loneliness and isolation.

Recently, mental health has been raised as an important factor among teachers after a series of isolated cases of suicide was reported all throughout the country.

C. Behavioral Manifestations

Under behavioral manifestations, 7 out of 10 respondents admitted that they suffer from eating more or less due to stress, while 5 out of 10 claims that they experience sleeping too much or too little. Other manifestations of stress, on the other hand, registered an insignificant number.

Levels of Stress Experienced by Teachers

Among the researcher's different potential sources of stress, workload registered the highest with a weighted mean of 3.50 or above average. This is consistent with the supposed reasons of the two cases of suicides that happened last year, Emmylou Malate and Shannen Espino, who were reportedly complaining about their workloads and class observations days before they committed suicide. The second highest stressor was identified as DepEd policies with a mean average of 3.44, described as above average. These specific policies were also mentioned in this study in the succeeding pages.

Meanwhile, the much talked about salary of teachers only registered as average, with a mean of 3.30, while class size got 3.23 with the same description. Proposals in the 18th congress are now in motion, which includes the increase of public school teachers' salaries to Salary Grade 19 level for entry-level teachers, which is 8 levels higher from the present Salary Grade 11. Meanwhile, the immediate supervisor's behavior and lack of professional growth also got an average rating of 3.00 and 2.66 weighted mean. However, both co-worker factors, lack of support and conflict among them, showed the lowest rating of below average with 2.64 and 2.40. This means that most of the respondents who answered the survey experience a low level of stress because of their co-teachers.

Other Sources of Stress

The themes that emerged came from the 338 respondents who answered the survey questionnaire and 10 participants who answered through the focus group discussions. Four themes were identified with a total of 17 sub-themes. The percentages were shown was computed based on the number of times a particular subtheme has been mentioned.

The first theme, actual work, comprised the 34% of the teachers' sources of stress. This is the 2nd highest among all identified stressors, with paperwork getting more than half with 23.33%, followed by workload with 7.73%. Teacher-participants complained of paperwork as a hindrance for them to focus on teaching, especially with so many reports that must be submitted immediately. Some of these reports are not even from DepEd, but rather from other government agencies such as the Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Among all the subthemes identified under the theme actual work, more than half of it identified paperwork work as their main source of stress with 68%.

Other stakeholders like students, parents, higher authorities in school, and co-teachers, ranked 1st among the sources of stress of teachers with 36%.

The teacher - respondents complained about students' behavior inside the class, higher authorities in school who are unfair, unappreciative, and like to pass on their work to teachers, uncooperative parents, and bossy, judgmental, and uncooperative co-teachers.

Students' behavior got 57% of the percentage under the second theme followed by attitude of co-teachers with 20%.

The third theme got 15%, with finances, distance, lack of training, and personal problems. Finances topped this theme with 46% as teacher-respondents complain about low salary and loans, followed by distance from home to school with 30%.

As of today, the Schools Division of Zambales continues to support localization, with a number of successful teachers being transferred to their hometown.

The fourth theme ranked 3rd alongside the theme 'self' with 15%. The subthemes mentioned were class size, lack of resources, workplace, and not enough workspace. Lack of resources got more than half of this theme with 56%, followed by class size with 20%.

Present Policies that Need Revisions/Improvement

Child Protection Policy (CPP)

As early as 2006, the Department of Education already had its implementing rules and regulations regarding child protection. DepEd Memo 97, s. 2006 otherwise known as 'Prohibition against acts constituting violations of R.A. 7610 and the Family Code', talks about the classifications of child abuse, and that Batas Pambansa Blog. 232 and DECS Service Manual 2000 must be followed in the treatment of pupils/students. In 2012, a new issuance was released in the form of DepEd Order 40, s. 2012, most known as the DepEd Child Protection Policy. According to the result of the survey, teachers find it difficult to discipline the students since they feel that the CPP restricts them. Because of this, they feel that students' behavior becomes worse, and that the CPP is tolerating it.

Paperwork

Although there have been efforts in the past to lessen the burden of teachers with paperwork, it is still the highest source of stress among teachers. Through DepEd Order 58, s. 2017, school forms were reduced from 36 to 10 official school forms, including forms for Senior High School. This order helped streamline processes by lessening duplication and redundancy of data, thus lessening teachers' time in filling up these forms. Aside from this, the department also ensures that teachers will have ample time to finish these forms, guided by Civil Service Commission (CSC) Resolution No. 080096 issued in 2008, DepEd Memorandum 291, s. 2008, and DepEd Order 16, s. 2009, which all talks about teachers being required to render six hours of actual classroom teaching per day within the school premises, while the remaining two hours may be utilized to doing paperwork within or outside the school premises. But aside from doing the school forms given by the department, respondents also made mention of other paperwork teachers must accomplish coming from other government agencies such as the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). These are just some of the tasks that the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS) found out in a study they conducted. They revealed that teachers have "several additional administrative or student support roles" aside from their regular teaching loads.

Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS)

This system is being implemented following the Civil Service Commission's (CSC) Strategic Performance Management System (SPMS) CSC Memorandum Circular No. 6, s. 2012. It aims to ensure that DepEd personnel will focus work efforts toward achieving the Department's vision, mission, values, and strategic priorities. As stipulated in DepEd Order No. 2, s. 2015 (Guidelines on the Establishment and Implementation of RPMS in DepEd), RPMS is a systemic mechanism to manage, monitor and measure performance, and identify human resource and

organizational development needs to enable continuous work improvement and individual growth (DepEd, 2018). However, due to the means of verification needed to verify the rating given to personnel, teachers see this as another source of burden for them.

Mass Promotion

Actually, there is no official DepEd issuance about this policy. However, a study conducted by PIDS noted that the unofficial "mass promotion" was a product of the teachers' attempt to achieve zero dropout rates, which has always been the department's advocacy. The study further discovered "even students who failed exams or skipped half of the year's school days can get promoted." Because of this, elementary students can actually graduate and enroll as Grade 7 without knowing how to read or read with comprehension.

Implications of the Study

The profile of the respondents may have an effect to the overall result of the study. But if used as a basis, there is a need to continuously improve DepEd policies like the Child Protection Policy, the issuances connected to paperwork, the RPMs, and learners' retention.

However, the researcher also sees teachers' lack of knowledge and training regarding the unofficial policy of mass promotion, the positive ways of disciplining a child, and time management to handle the paperwork. School heads must also be equipped with proper knowledge and skills to not need to pass on certain tasks to their teachers.

Parents' involvement must also be encouraged, and community linkages must be strengthened to help support the school in ensuring quality education to students through providing needed resources to schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concluded that the teachers sources of stress are other stakeholders, actual work, self, problems in proportion, and DepEd policies. Manifestations of stress are eating more or less, sleeping too much or too little, constant tiredness, sleep problems, and moodiness, irritability, or anger. The study results could be disseminated to the higher officials in the Schools Division of Zambales for possible revisiting of existing policies and training given to teachers. It is also recommended to conduct other researches relevant to this study to further confirm its result.

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