

## **Stressors, coping strategies, support and job-satisfaction of special education teachers in the new normal set up**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the stressors, coping strategies, support systems, and job satisfaction of special education teachers in the new normal setup. Using a descriptive-correlational research design, data were collected through survey-questionnaires from 31 special education teachers in both public and private schools in the Philippines. Results revealed that the most common stressors were taking home school work, feeling tense at work, and being overworked. The top coping strategies employed included connecting with supportive administrators, getting proper rest and sleep, eating out, rebalancing work and home life, and managing time effectively. Respondents reported strong support from administrators, such as availability for help, encouragement for professional growth, constructive feedback, and a friendly working atmosphere. Consequently, job satisfaction was high, primarily due to the perceived importance and challenge of their position, adequate salary and benefits, manageable class sizes, and the availability of assistance in handling misbehaving students. The study concludes that while stress is prevalent among special education teachers, strong administrative support and effective coping mechanisms contribute significantly to maintaining high job satisfaction. Findings underscore the importance of institutional programs and policies that reduce stressors, strengthen support systems, and promote teacher well-being in the post-pandemic educational landscape.

**Keywords:** special education teachers, stressors, coping strategies, job satisfaction

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Special education teachers are often regarded as more resilient than their mainstream counterparts because of their constant exposure to and training in addressing the unique needs of

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students with disabilities. Unlike handling regular students, teaching children with special needs requires specialized training, strong institutional and emotional support, genuine passion, and innovative coping mechanisms to carry out teaching tasks effectively. These conditions highlight the importance of understanding the multifaceted experiences of special education teachers, particularly in the context of stressors, coping strategies, support systems, and overall job satisfaction. This study employed a descriptive-correlational design to examine these dynamics and provide a comprehensive picture of the lived realities of teachers in this field.

Preliminary findings reveal that special education teachers commonly take school-related tasks home, experience heightened tension, and often feel overworked. Despite these challenges, they employ a variety of coping strategies to maintain their well-being and effectiveness in the classroom. Among the top strategies identified were connecting with supportive administrators, getting adequate rest and sleep, eating out, rebalancing work and personal life, and managing time efficiently. These strategies reflect both individual and institutional responses to stress, underscoring the role of adaptive behaviors and systemic support in sustaining teacher performance.

The study further revealed that teachers received substantial support from their administrators, which significantly contributed to alleviating stress and fostering resilience. This support included the availability of help when needed, consistent encouragement, provision of technical assistance, constructive feedback, and the cultivation of a friendly atmosphere within the school environment. Such mechanisms not only helped teachers manage their stress but also reinforced their sense of belonging and value in the workplace.

As a result of both internal coping strategies and external support, special education teachers reported high levels of job satisfaction. They attributed this satisfaction to the importance and challenges of their positions, adequate salaries and benefits, reasonable classroom sizes, and supportive professional environments. With these positive systems in place, teachers demonstrated a strong sense of passion, commitment, and conscientiousness in performing their duties.

The central problem that this research sought to address was the identification of common stressors encountered by special education teachers, the coping strategies they employ, the support they receive, and the level of job satisfaction they experience. By exploring these dimensions, the study aimed to contribute valuable insights for designing programs that can effectively reduce work-related stress.

Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to present a clear understanding of the workplace realities of special education teachers in the new normal. Investigating stressors, support mechanisms, coping strategies, and job satisfaction not only fulfilled academic curiosity but also served as a foundation for promoting teacher well-being. This study provides a springboard for future initiatives aimed at fostering a healthier, more supportive, and stress-free educational environment that empowers teachers to thrive in their profession while delivering quality education to learners with special needs.

#### Statement of the problem

This study investigated teachers' realities under stressful situations in handling special education classes. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the common stressors faced by special education teachers?
2. What are the top five coping strategies employed by special education teachers?
3. What forms of support are provided to special education teachers by their supervisors, if any?
4. What is the level of job satisfaction of special education teachers despite the stress they experience?
5. Is there a correlation between administrative support and the job satisfaction of special education teachers in the new normal setup?

## METHODOLOGY

This study sought to describe the situation of special education teachers in terms of stressors, coping strategies, administrative support, and job satisfaction. The purpose was to generate knowledge that could serve as a springboard for programs aimed at reducing stress levels, improving job satisfaction, strengthening administrative support, and guiding professional development plans. To accomplish this, a descriptive-correlational research design was employed because it allowed for the exploration of relationships among the variables while also providing a detailed description of teachers' realities in the new normal educational setup.

Survey-questionnaires served as the main data-gathering tool and were administered through Google Forms to ensure accessibility for participants. The instrument was divided into four parts covering support systems, job satisfaction levels, passion for teaching, and coping strategies. It also included demographic information such as age, gender, class size, type of school, number of teachers within the classroom, and years of experience in handling students with special needs. These demographic variables provided the basis for analyzing differences in stressors, coping mechanisms, and satisfaction levels. Both public and private school teachers, from primary to senior high school levels, participated in the study. Due to the limited number of special education teachers in the Philippines, convenience sampling was used, which limited the generalizability of the findings but still offered valuable insights into this under-researched population.

The research framework guiding the study was anchored on Lazarus' Stress Theory and the Trait-Oriented Coping Theory. According to Khrono (2002), Lazarus emphasized that stress is mediated through two essential processes: cognitive assessment and coping. Stressful encounters are defined as interactions between the individual and the environment, influenced by external stressors and the person's interpretation of those stressors. Building on this, the transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1987) explains coping as both cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage internal and external demands that are appraised as exceeding available resources. Escultor et al. (2022) further highlighted how these processes shape an individual's ability to regulate emotions and behaviors in stressful contexts. In this study, the framework positioned stressors and coping mechanisms as inputs, supported by systematic processes such as literature review, instrument development, validation, implementation, and data analysis, with the ultimate output being an intervention plan designed to minimize stress experienced by special education teachers.

Participants were asked to share their experiences and perceptions through the Google Form survey, reflecting on their day-to-day realities in teaching students with special needs. Their responses provided data on the most prevalent stressors, including taking home school-related tasks, feeling tense at work, and experiencing overload. The survey also captured their coping strategies, which most frequently included connecting with supportive administrators (74.2%), getting proper rest and sleep (71.0%), eating out (64.5%), rebalancing work and personal life (61.3%), and managing time effectively (58.1%). Additionally, the survey documented the forms of support teachers received from their supervisors, which included availability of help when needed (100%), encouragement for professional growth (93.68%), constructive feedback (90.3%), direct support with work tasks (90.3%), and a friendly atmosphere (82.2%).

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality of responses was ensured to protect the identities of the teachers. The researcher, being a special education teacher herself, had firsthand insight into the challenges faced by her colleagues. While this positionality provided deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study, objectivity was maintained in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data.

Data analysis was performed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Percentile ranking was employed to identify the most common responses and determine the proportion of teachers endorsing particular stressors, coping mechanisms, or forms of support. Single-entry Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the significance of demographic variables in relation to job satisfaction levels, allowing the study to determine whether characteristics such as years of service, type of school, or class size had a measurable effect.

Through this methodological approach, the study systematically addressed each research question by generating empirical evidence about the stressors, coping strategies, support systems, and job satisfaction levels of special education teachers in the new normal. The findings not only illustrated the prevalence of stress among these educators but also highlighted their resilience, the value of administrative support, and the significance of balancing professional responsibilities with personal well-being. This methodology, therefore, provided a solid foundation for drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations to foster teacher welfare and sustain quality education for learners with special needs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study were drawn from the responses of 31 special education teachers from both public and private schools, as outlined in the methodology. These participants, representing primary through senior high levels, provided data through survey questionnaires that measured stressors, coping strategies, administrative support, and job satisfaction. The analysis employed percentile ranking to identify the most common responses and ANOVA to test for significant differences across demographic variables. This combination of methods enabled the study to capture a comprehensive view of the teachers' lived experiences in the new normal educational setup.

The findings on stressors revealed that three concerns emerged as the most prominent. A majority of respondents (58.41%) indicated that they often brought school-related problems

home with them, blurring the boundaries between professional and personal life. More than half (54.9%) admitted feeling tense at work, suggesting a heightened sense of pressure in performing their roles. Additionally, 48.71% reported feeling overworked due to the demands of their job. Other indicators such as frustration at work and perceiving their tasks as overly stressful did not register as strongly, although 48.4% and 48.62% of respondents, respectively, acknowledged experiencing these to some degree. These results suggest that while not all teachers experienced the same intensity of stress, common challenges such as role tension and excessive workload were prevalent and directly affected their well-being.

In terms of coping strategies, the data showed that teachers employed a variety of methods to manage their stress, with five practices emerging as the most frequently used. The majority (74.2%) sought connection with supportive administrators or superiors, underlining the value of interpersonal and institutional support. A significant proportion (71.0%) reported prioritizing rest and sleep as a means of maintaining balance, while 64.5% coped by eating out, suggesting that leisure activities also played a role in stress management. Rebalancing work and home responsibilities was selected by 61.3% of respondents, while 58.1% identified effective time management as a critical strategy. These findings underscore that, teachers combined practical, restorative, and social mechanisms to counteract stress, reflecting the interplay of personal habits and institutional support in sustaining their resilience.

The support provided by administrators was also a critical factor in shaping teachers' experiences. The data revealed that every respondent (100%) acknowledged the availability of help from their supervisors when needed, which stands out as the strongest support mechanism. Likewise, 93.68% confirmed that their administrators encouraged professional growth, while 90.3% indicated that their work was directly supported and that constructive feedback was consistently offered. A friendly working relationship with supervisors was affirmed by 82.2% of teachers, suggesting that collegiality also contributed to lowering stress levels. These results demonstrate that administrative support was not only present but also robust, covering both technical and interpersonal aspects, and played an integral role in reinforcing teachers' capacity to navigate professional challenges.

The data on job satisfaction further illustrated the positive impact of these supports and coping strategies. Teachers reported very high satisfaction with several aspects of their work. All respondents (100%) highlighted the importance of their position as a source of fulfillment, while nearly all (99.9%) regarded the challenge of their role as motivating. Salary and fringe benefits were also a significant contributor, with 96.8% of teachers expressing satisfaction in this regard. Class size was considered sufficient by 90.3% of respondents, reducing the strain of managing students with diverse needs. Additionally, 87.1% indicated satisfaction with the availability of help when managing misbehaving students, further underscoring the value of collaborative support. Collectively, these factors reveal that while stressors were present, the conditions under which teachers worked fostered a strong sense of professional contentment and pride.

The quantitative analysis provided deeper insight into the coping mechanisms utilized by the teachers. The survey confirmed that social support and self-care activities were the most commonly and effectively employed strategies. Seeking support from administrators was rated highly effective in reducing stress, with over 100% of cumulative responses recognizing its role in promoting well-being. Similarly, 93.68% of teachers acknowledged that professional

development opportunities, such as pursuing graduate studies, contributed to their ability to cope with stress. Meanwhile, mindfulness-based strategies, including relaxation and reflective practices, were less commonly employed, with only 64.5% of respondents reporting regular use. This highlights a reliance on external and interpersonal forms of coping over internally focused strategies.

Overall, the findings reveal a complex but optimistic picture of the experiences of special education teachers in the new normal. Stressors such as workload, tension, and the spillover of professional responsibilities into personal life remain significant. However, the combination of effective coping strategies, strong administrative support, and rewarding aspects of their roles contribute to high levels of job satisfaction. These outcomes emphasize the importance of institutional systems that promote supportive leadership, professional growth, and manageable working conditions, while also affirming the resilience and adaptability of special education teachers in navigating demanding circumstances.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study established that the stress experienced by special education teachers stems from an interplay of work-related, personal, and economic factors, all of which significantly affect their daily functioning. Work-related stressors were frequently linked to excessive paperwork, oversized classes, non-teaching duties, pursuing further studies, and dealing with incompetent superiors. Personal sources of stress included relationship difficulties, age-related transitions such as stages in life, and family circumstances, including the death of loved ones. Economic stressors were also prevalent, with many teachers citing insufficient salaries and the high cost of living as persistent burdens. These multiple stressors contributed to a relatively high level of stress and vulnerability among the teachers, as reflected in the quantitative findings. Specifically, 58.41% of respondents admitted to taking school work home, 54.9% reported feeling tense at work, and 48.71% described themselves as overworked. Although 48.4% acknowledged experiencing frustration in their roles and 48.62% reported that their work was stressful, these were not as commonly cited as the three leading stressors.

In response to these challenges, teachers employed a variety of coping strategies. The top five mechanisms were connecting with supportive administrators or higher-ups (74.2%), ensuring proper rest and sleep (71.0%), eating out (64.5%), rebalancing work and personal responsibilities (61.3%), and managing time effectively (58.1%). These strategies reveal a reliance on both interpersonal and personal resource management approaches to mitigate stress. However, many teachers also adopted more passive strategies such as watching television, going to the movies, or window shopping. While these activities offered temporary relief, they were largely sedentary and therefore limited in their ability to address the long-term implications of chronic stress.

The findings also demonstrated that administrative support played a critical role in alleviating stress and reinforcing coping strategies. All teacher-respondents (100%) reported that their supervisors were available to help when needed. Furthermore, 93.68% received encouragement to pursue professional growth, while 90.3% affirmed that their administrators supported their work and provided constructive feedback. A significant proportion, 82.2%, also described their administrators as friendly. Collectively, these forms of support highlighted the

central role of leadership in promoting teacher resilience, with administrative availability and encouragement emerging as some of the most valued supports.

In terms of job satisfaction, teachers reported high levels across several indicators. All respondents (100%) expressed satisfaction with the importance of their position, reflecting the sense of purpose they derived from their work. Nearly all (99.9%) were satisfied with the challenge their role entailed, which they considered motivating. Satisfaction with salary and fringe benefits was also high at 96.8%, while 90.3% were satisfied with the adequacy of classroom size. Additionally, 87.1% acknowledged that they were satisfied with the help available to them when dealing with misbehaving students. These results suggest that, despite the stressors they faced, teachers derived fulfillment from their professional roles and the support they received, contributing to an overall positive outlook on their work.

The implications of these findings for curriculum planning and teaching are considerable. Teachers should not routinely take school-related tasks home, as this practice exacerbates stress and diminishes opportunities for rest. A more balanced work-life approach should be encouraged. Reducing the number of learners per classroom would also ease workloads and enable teachers to focus more effectively on individualized instruction. Annual or bi-annual seminars on mental health management were recommended to provide teachers with practical tools and strategies for managing stress. Moreover, administrators are encouraged to design regular programs, create supportive facilities, and implement policies that foster positive relationships among teachers and between teachers and administrators. Such measures would not only reduce stress but also strengthen collaboration and workplace satisfaction.

Finally, the study highlighted directions for future research. It recommended exploring the relationship between stress levels and cultural backgrounds, as well as examining the impact of professional development programs that focus specifically on stress management. Future studies could expand the sample to provide broader generalizability and include other variables not covered in the present study, such as personality traits or institutional policies. Collaboration among researchers, teachers, administrators, and curriculum planners will be essential in designing comprehensive interventions that ensure high-quality education while safeguarding teacher welfare.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that special education teachers in the Philippines face significant stressors, yet they remain resilient due to effective coping mechanisms, strong administrative support, and the intrinsic rewards of their profession. Their job satisfaction was rooted in the importance and challenge of their positions, adequate compensation, manageable classroom sizes, and the availability of assistance. The findings underscore the necessity of addressing both structural and personal dimensions of stress through systemic reforms, supportive leadership, and proactive professional development. By prioritizing the welfare of teachers, schools and educational systems can foster a corps of highly competent, motivated, and resilient educators who are capable of delivering quality education to learners with special needs while serving as role models of dedication and perseverance.

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