

**Examining the psychological well-being, burnout, and support needs of special education teachers during the pandemic: Basis for an occupational training program**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study assessed the level of psychosocial well-being of 312 permanent Special Education teachers in SDO Dagupan City using a quantitative descriptive survey design subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics, utilizing average weighted mean, Kruskal-Wallis H-test, and Spearman rank correlation, and investigated the psychosocial profile of respondents in terms of emotional states and character strengths, the extent of the provision of mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) in terms of physical and mental resilience and administrative support, and the level of seriousness of problems encountered by special education teachers in post-COVID-19 along teaching and learning, student-related, school-related, and community-related concerns, as well as the significant relationships between MHPSS provision and profile variables, and between MHPSS provision and the level of seriousness of problems encountered; findings revealed that the majority of respondents possessed positive character strengths but showed moderate signs of depression, anxiety, and stress, were beneficiaries of MHPSS along physical and mental resilience though the maintenance and setup of a guidance office remained to be operationalized, and posed big problems along teaching and learning, student-related, school-related, and community-related areas, particularly on excessive paperwork, too many assigned tasks, learners' behavior and poor performance, overlapping activities, lack of funds, and poor parental support, while high extent of MHPSS provision enhanced teachers' psychosocial profile and lessened problems encountered, and teachers' emotional states and character strengths affected their productivity levels, leading to the proposal of an occupational training program as an intervention to improve teachers' psychological well-being and address their day-to-day challenges.

**Keywords:** Psychosocial Well-Being, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS), Special Education Teachers.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The COVID-19 pandemic disease has carried out many consequences that may affect people's health. Asmundson and Taylor (2020), emphasized that aside from the disease's

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symptoms, human emotions such as fear, worry, panic, anxiety, or depression-related distress can appear more commonly among people in the new normal condition.

Across the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic has wrought substantial challenges on individuals and societies. As part of this, special education teachers have faced significant stressors in relation to their work. The pandemic required a very sudden shift to remote learning, and teachers were called upon to support students' academic development and well-being throughout this shift, while also navigating adversity and stress in their own lives triggering their psychosocial well-being, particularly their mental health (Collie 2021).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) mental health is defined as a state of subjective well-being, in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stressors of life, can work productively and is able to contribute to his community. In this sense, mental health is the foundation for individual well-being and the effective functioning of a community.

As stressed by UNESCO, addressing mental health and well-being is essential to sustain development and the increasing urgency given the negative impacts of Covid-19, which are exacerbating mental health issues all around the world.

Recent studies about the psychological impact of the pandemic showed an increase in depression and stress levels between the first days and the third week of the lockdown has been found out by Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2020).

UNESCO (2020) reported that people worldwide have found themselves coping with new professional scopes. Some of them have completely stopped their work, and in brief, they will have to face their future with uncertainty; others have found their work hours increased and have managed risky situations that eventually triggers the economic crisis at a global level.

Moreover, the school closures bring to people as well as the community the high social and economic costs that directly affect the most vulnerable and marginalized children and their families and exacerbating the already existing disparities not only within the education system but also in other aspects of their lives. Indeed, among these people a group of professionals called teachers experienced an important impact. Such conditions specified this impact brought by the pandemic. First, their students are concerned because of the interrupted learning and other collateral effects such as disadvantages, lack of opportunities, poor nutrition, social isolation, or lack of care and other barriers that makes the teaching-learning process more difficult, especially so when parents are not prepared for distance and home schooling, or they are not available to attend to their children. Second, special education teachers experience confusion and stress because they are often unsure of their obligations and how to maintain connections with students with disabilities to support learning. It is reported that transitions to distance learning platforms tend to be messy and frustrating, even in the best circumstances that lead to furloughs or separations for teachers. Finally, moving learning from classrooms to homes at scale and in a hurry presents enormous challenges, both human and technical, like creating, maintaining, and improving distance learning, or measuring and validating learning (UNESCO, 2020c).

Indeed, the rapid transmission of COVID-19 throughout the world has had health, social, psychological, economic and, of course, educational consequences. In fact, school closure has been, on a global scale, one of the most widely used measures for helping to maintain social distancing and to decrease infections (Sheikh et al., Van Lancker and Parolin, 2020; Viner et al., 2020). The pandemic has not only affected the mental state of students (Cachon- Zagalaz et al., 2020) since teachers have also accumulated a high level of stress since the beginning of the crisis. Recent studies have pointed out that during lockdown, special education teachers have suffered stress from having to adapt (in record time) to provide online classes (Basser et al., 2020). This stress has often been accompanied by symptoms of anxiety,

depression, and sleep disturbance because of the increased workload resulting from home teaching (2007).

With all these threats, challenges, and uncertainties, the directive of the DepEd Secretary is to ensure the safety, welfare and health of all students, teachers, and personnel of the department. DepEd adheres to the position of using alternative learning modalities in the Risk Severity Grading and Risk-based Public Health Standards provided by DOH in its Administrative Order No. 2020- 0015 with the subject Guidelines on the Risk-Based Public Health Standards for COVID-19 Mitigation (Labrado et. al., 2020).

In connection, as special education teachers play an important role in the lives of children with special needs, in addition to facilitating learning, teachers are key agents of socialization, helping students reach their highest potential and develop into responsible citizens. Yet, teaching has become increasingly stressful. Teacher stress impacts teacher health and well-being, work attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction). Aside from this, teacher stress is linked to teaching performance and student academic outcomes. High stress levels are some of the reasons causing teachers to leave their profession, which causes instability among staff, students, and the community (Greenberg, Brown & Abenavoli, 2016).

As a matter of fact, organizational health has become widely recognized as an essential element in determining beneficial educational outcomes for students, and improving organizational health has therefore become a significant goal of school. Studies of organizational health in education have variously involved investigating the stress, morale, well-being, and job satisfaction of staff in schools (Sturnfels, 2009).

Teachers are pillars of the teaching-learning process. However, problems on learners amidst pandemic equate to the problems of teachers in the new normal. Faced with the pandemic, teachers are not exempted from the stress and workloads in response with the preparation of homeschooling. This affected the regular ability to maintain their educational goals and to effectively handle the unavoidable difficulties inherent in the teacher profession (Gu & Day, 2020).

According to the American Federation of Teachers (2017), emphasizing that teaching in the United States of America is already a difficult and demanding job for suddenly switching to a new teaching modality. A survey of 5,000 K-12 teachers found that teachers had more mental health issues and higher stress levels than most other professions.

In addition, almost 9 of 10 special education teachers feel incredibly stressed and anxious, following the shift caused by the pandemic. The survey report also revealed that 81% of the educators who were respondents of the study are putting in more than 14 hours a day to finish their professional responsibilities (Schaffhauser, 2020). Teachers in the new normal would have to employ new practices and forms of management both professionally and emotionally to adapt to the virus outbreak changes fully. The report provided a structured timeline for response management, such as guidance, utilizing technology, and forming digital recreational activities (Wyman, 2020).

There have been numerous reports on the psychological effects of COVID-19. In a recent study conducted by Miao (2020) factors such as age, sex, teaching level as to primary, middle, high school, and university and school location were related to teachers' COVID-19-related anxiety levels. Meanwhile, another study examined the

prevalence of anxiety disorders in teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Tarimo, 2020). In any case, the specific reasons behind teachers' feelings of anxiety concerning COVID-19 have not been investigated. Identifying teachers' concerns about COVID-19 infection and education during the pandemic allows to address the root causes of COVID-19-related anxiety.

Meanwhile, as surveyed by The Inverness Institute (2021), the California teachers responded that schools have only partially reopened during the spring of 2021, as only a small minority of California students had returned to full-time face-to-face instruction. The majority of teachers are engaged in a mix of limited in-person instruction and distance learning or the hybrid model. Also, teachers report that the hybrid model is extremely taxing and unsustainable. It is noted that student attendance during the pandemic and the reopening is disturbingly low and none of the leading teachers reported that their school was back to the pre-pandemic instructional levels that were defined as normal.

Since, teaching is the foundation of the educational system. As such teachers are privileged with the responsibility of nurturing the young and inadvertently, shaping the future. To this end, assessing teachers' psychological well-being (PWB) is the first step in protecting teacher's mental health and providing them an environment that helps flourish their professional and personal development. It is inevitable that teachers should go back to school and be ready in the implementation of face-to-face schemes along with curriculum implementation, instruction, and assessment.

It is widely believed that countries' social and economic well-being will depend to an ever-greater extent on the quality of the citizen's education. It is the emergence of the so-called "knowledge society" which means the transformation of information and the media, an increasing specialization on the part of organizations that all call for high skill profiles and levels of knowledge. Today's education systems are required to be both effective and efficient, or in other words, to reach the goals set while making the best use of available resources (Cornali 2015).

The researcher believed that maintaining a healthy behavior requires a well-designed program that can offer strategies and mental support especially to special education teachers. It is affirmed by Preston (2017) that motivated employees work harder, are more efficient and more open to collaboration with other coworkers while the unmotivated are unhappy, fatigued, and slow-moving which results in poor performance and less productivity.

This study is anchored on DepEd Order No. 14. s. 2020 entitled "Guidelines on the Required Health Standards in Basic Education Offices and schools" ensuring the safe return to schools and DepEd offices which places the priority on the protection and promotion of the mental health and general welfare of all learners and personnel. It is also stipulated from the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention for a holistic approach to minimum health standards for the adoption by schools; the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning Plan for School Reopening; the John Hopkin's Public Principles for a phased Reopening during Covid-19: Guidance for Governors; and UNESCO's framework for the reopening of schools.

The utilization of health and wellness programs in DepEd is a growing area of interest for research. Providing health and wellness programs for employees is becoming more popular. However, research is mixed about whether health and wellness programs are beneficial, and it is still unknown whether health and wellness programs have an impact on the health and wellness of the employees or on organizational outcomes (Adams, 2016).

Without health and wellness, teachers are unable to deliver on their professional goals. The impact of poor health is felt across all areas of school life and effects can be extended to both students and other staff members when wellness is not a priority.

Despite its importance, health and wellness is neglected in terms of conducting scientific investigation especially among teachers. In light of the information mentioned, the researcher is determined to conduct a research investigation in examining the psychological well-being, burnout, and support needs of special education teachers during the pandemic in SDO Dagupan City. Guided by the aforementioned policies, the goal therefore that at the onset

of post-covid 19, teacher-employees must continue enjoy work and achieve productivity by way of immersing them through a worthwhile and life-changing psychological well-being activities to keep them young at heart, emotionally vibrant, and mentally sharp through the provision of training program on Mental Wellness among teachers of the public schools in SDO Dagupan City.

#### Statement of the problem

This study determined the classroom management practices and issues of public junior high school teachers using the Positive Learning Framework as a basis. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of classroom management practices of public junior high school teachers based on the Positive Learning Framework in terms of phase 1: prevention, self-awareness and management plan; phase 2: prevention, lesson design; and phase 3: corrective actions?
2. What are the common classroom management issues experienced by public junior high school teachers?
3. Is there a significant relationship between classroom management practices of the public junior high school teachers as anchored on the Positive Learning Framework (PLF) such that phase 1: prevention, self-awareness and management plan and phase 2: prevention, lesson design; phase 1: prevention, self-awareness and management plan and phase 3: corrective actions; and phase 2: prevention, lesson design and phase 3: corrective actions?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the level of classroom management practices and issues experienced by public junior high school teachers?
5. Based on the results, what action plan can be proposed?

#### METHODOLOGY

This research study utilized the descriptive-survey method of research. A descriptive survey uses surveys to gather data about varying subjects. This data aims to know the extent to which different conditions can be obtained among these subjects.

According to Calmorin (2010), a descriptive method is used when the study focuses on the present situation. The purpose is to find new truth. It is valuable in providing facts in which scientific judgment may be based in providing essential knowledge about the nature of objects and persons; for closer observation into the practices, behavior, methods and procedures; in playing a large part in the development of instruments for the measurement of many things; and in formulating policies in the local, national, or international level.

Likewise, Mc Combes (2019) emphasizes that the descriptive research design can use a wide variety of research methods to investigate one or more variables. In this way, the researcher does not control or manipulate any of the variables, but only observes and measures them.

The researcher prepared a questionnaire-checklist as the main instrument in gathering the data based on the psychological well-being assessment adopted by Lovibond, S.H. & Lovibond, P.F. (1995) and Manual for the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales. The support mechanism was derived from DO No.14, s. 2020. Also, the indicators on challenges obtained from the WHO-UNESCO on the first survey of reopening on Successes and challenges of the reopening process.

Further, the questionnaire is composed of four (4) parts. The instrument was developed based on the literature on psychological well-being. Part I aimed to provide the profile of the respondents as to their psychological well-being status. Part II focused on the extent of the provision of MHPSS along the supporting mechanisms. Part III focused on the level of seriousness of the problems encountered by the teachers. Also, the level of relationship was determined between the extent of the provision of MHPSS and the profile variables; extent on the provision of MHPSS and their level of seriousness of the problems encountered by the respondents; and the profile variables and the level of seriousness of the problems encountered by the respondents. After data analysis, identification of training needs of the participants was dealt with to enhance one's psychological support to be implemented by the schools' program, project and activities.

Also, the researcher preparing the research instrument will be subjected to content validation by a pool of experts. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated and served as bases in the modification of the instrument. The revised questionnaire was tried out to teachers who are not included as respondents of the study for other comments and suggestions before it will be used for the final data collection. The questions prepared were content validated by the five pools of experts to be involved in the validating team.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the psychosocial well-being, burnout, and support needs of 312 permanent Special Education teachers in the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Dagupan City for School Year 2022-2023. The study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design, utilizing a questionnaire-checklist as the primary data gathering instrument. The instrument was developed and content-validated by a pool of five experts, and was subsequently administered to all 312 respondents after a try-out phase involving teachers not included in the study population. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools, specifically the average weighted mean, the Kruskal-Wallis H-test, and Spearman rank correlation. The discussion that follows is grounded entirely in the data gathered from the respondents and is interpreted in direct relation to the six research objectives of the study, which addressed the psychosocial profile of respondents, the extent of provision of mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS), the level of seriousness of problems encountered in the post-COVID-19 context, and the significant relationships among these variables.

### Psychosocial profile of the respondents

The first research objective sought to determine the psychosocial profile of the 312 Special Education teacher-respondents in terms of their emotional states and character strengths. With respect to emotional states, the findings revealed that the majority of the respondents exhibited moderate signs of emotional disturbance, particularly along the indices of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. These results are consistent with the theoretical framework of Asmundson and Taylor (2020), who emphasized that human emotions such as fear, worry, panic, anxiety, and depression-related distress appear more commonly among people navigating new normal conditions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The moderate levels of depression, anxiety, and stress observed among the respondents reflect a psychosocial burden that, while not clinically severe, nevertheless represents a meaningful disruption to their emotional equilibrium. This finding aligns with the observations of Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2020), who documented an increase in depression and stress levels between

the first days and the third week of lockdown, suggesting that prolonged exposure to pandemic-related stressors sustains and compounds emotional symptoms even beyond the acute phase of the health crisis. Similarly, Bassar et al. (2021) reported that stress and depression were prevalent among educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring that the emotional experiences documented among the SDO Dagupan City Special Education teachers are not isolated phenomena but are reflective of a broader global pattern affecting the teaching workforce.

With respect to character strengths, the findings demonstrated that the majority of the respondents possess positive character strengths in their profession. This finding carries considerable theoretical and practical significance, as it suggests that despite the moderate emotional disturbances documented along the depression, anxiety, and stress indices, the teacher-respondents retain a resilient professional identity grounded in their inherent character virtues. Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified character strengths as the positive traits reflected in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that contribute to individual flourishing, and Niemiec (2023) further affirmed that character strengths play a dual role in both boosting well-being and reducing suffering. The presence of positive character strengths among the respondents therefore functions as a protective psychological resource that buffers against the full clinical expression of the emotional vulnerabilities observed. Wagner et al. (2020) similarly found that character strengths are related to students' achievement, flow experiences, and enjoyment in various learning contexts beyond cognitive ability, a finding that extends by implication to the teachers whose character strengths sustain their professional engagement even under conditions of pandemic-induced adversity. Taken together, the psychosocial profile of the respondents reflects a paradox of moderate emotional strain coexisting with robust professional character strengths, a combination that both demands institutional attention and affirms the fundamental professional commitment of Special Education teachers in SDO Dagupan City.

#### Extent of provision of mental health and psychosocial support services

The second research objective examined the extent of the provision of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) among the 312 respondents along two dimensions: physical and mental resilience, and administrative support. The findings indicated that the teacher-respondents are beneficiaries of the mental health psychosocial support offered by their schools along the dimension of physical and mental resilience. This finding affirms that the basic framework of psychosocial support embedded in school systems is functioning to some degree, consistent with the provisions of DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2020, which established guidelines on required health standards in basic education offices and schools and prioritized the protection and promotion of the mental health and general welfare of all learners and personnel. However, the data also revealed that the maintenance and setting up of a guidance office has yet to be fully operationalized, which represents a structural gap in the delivery of MHPSS at the school level. This gap is particularly consequential given the documented moderate emotional disturbances among the respondents, as the absence of an operationalized guidance office limits the institutional capacity for timely and accessible psychological intervention.

Along the dimension of administrative support, the findings further indicated that teachers require the provision of a comprehensive psychosocial support program for continuing professional development in mental health, encompassing dialogue, reflection on practices, and self-care for teachers and others. Additionally, the data identified the need for the provision of

school health and nutritional services such as medical and dental services, counseling, and brief tobacco interventions; provision of protection referrals and specialized services for teachers with disabilities; conducting psychological first aid to all personnel; and making counselors and mental health services available to staff or added to the services of school offerings. These identified needs reflect the multidimensional nature of MHPSS, which extends well beyond emotional support into the domains of physical health, protective services, and structural accessibility. Smith and Lim (2020) emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic has focused critical attention on the psychological and social needs of professionals in high-demand service roles, and UNESCO (2020) similarly underscored that addressing mental health and well-being is essential to sustain development, particularly given the negative impacts of COVID-19 which have exacerbated mental health issues worldwide. The extent of MHPSS provision identified in this study, while partially functional along physical and mental resilience, remains incomplete in its administrative dimensions, pointing to the urgent need for more systematic and comprehensive institutional support structures for Special Education teachers.

#### Level of seriousness of problems encountered in the post-COVID-19 context

The third research objective determined the level of seriousness of the problems encountered by the 312 Special Education teacher-respondents in the post-COVID-19 period across four domains: teaching and learning, student-related, school-related, and community-related. The findings consistently revealed that teacher-respondents posed a big problem across all four domains examined, indicating that the difficulties confronting Special Education teachers in the post-pandemic period are pervasive, cross-cutting, and serious in their aggregate impact on professional functioning and psychological well-being.

Within the domain of teaching and learning, the respondents identified too much paperwork and too many assigned tasks, including coordinatorship and chairmanship responsibilities, as primary concerns constituting a big problem. These findings resonate with Schaffhauser (2020), who reported that 81% of educators in a pandemic-era survey were putting in more than 14 hours a day to complete their professional responsibilities, and with the American Federation of Teachers (2017), which found that teachers experienced higher stress levels than most other professions, largely due to the demanding and multifaceted nature of their workload. The compounding of academic responsibilities with administrative and coordinatorship duties creates an unsustainable workload that directly threatens the psychological well-being of Special Education teachers by eroding the boundaries between their instructional role and administrative obligations.

Within the student-related domain, the behavior and poor performance of learners emerged as a big problem among the respondents. This finding is contextualized by the broader educational consequences of the pandemic, wherein school closures and the abrupt transition to distance and hybrid learning modalities disrupted students' academic continuity and socioemotional development. UNESCO (2020c) documented that the adverse consequences of school closures included disadvantages, lack of opportunities, social isolation, and barriers to effective teaching and learning, all of which converge to intensify the behavioral and academic challenges that Special Education teachers must now navigate in the post-pandemic classroom. For Special Education teachers specifically, who are already tasked with supporting learners with disabilities and special needs, the amplification of behavioral and performance challenges following prolonged disruption to structured schooling presents an exceptionally serious professional and psychological burden.

Within the school-related domain, the overlapping of activities and lack of funds and support were identified as constituting a big problem. These systemic deficiencies at the

institutional level reflect the organizational health concerns described by Sturnfels (2009), who emphasized that organizational health in schools encompasses the stress, morale, well-being, and job satisfaction of staff, all of which are negatively affected when resource constraints and poor planning create conditions of institutional inefficiency. The lack of adequate financial and material support compounds the psychosocial load borne by teachers, as they are expected to deliver quality education for learners with special needs under resource-constrained conditions that limit their professional effectiveness and personal sense of accomplishment.

Within the community-related domain, poor parental assistance and support to their children was identified as a big problem. This finding reflects the wider social disruption wrought by the pandemic, wherein parents who were not prepared for distance or homeschooling, or who were unavailable to attend to their children, created additional challenges for teachers who rely on family partnerships to support the learning and development of students with special needs. UNESCO (2020) noted that this phenomenon particularly affects the most vulnerable and marginalized children and their families, making the role of Special Education teachers even more complex and emotionally taxing when community support systems are inadequate or absent.

#### Significant relationship between MHPSS provision and profile variables

The fourth research objective sought to determine whether a significant relationship existed between the extent of the provision of MHPSS and the psychosocial profile variables of the respondents. The findings established that a high extent of provision of mental health and psychosocial support along physical and mental resilience enhances the psychosocial profile of teachers along character strengths and emotional states. This finding provides empirical confirmation of the protective and ameliorative function of MHPSS within the professional context of Special Education teachers, demonstrating that institutional investment in psychosocial support mechanisms yields measurable improvements in the psychological profile of teaching personnel. Fredrickson (2001), through the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, posited that positive emotional states broaden an individual's momentary thought-action repertoires and build enduring personal resources, a theoretical perspective that aligns with the observed enhancement of character strengths and emotional states among teachers who benefit from robust MHPSS provision. Capone and Petrillo (2020) similarly documented that mental health in teachers is significantly related to job satisfaction, efficacy beliefs, burnout, and depression, reinforcing the empirical logic that adequate psychosocial support functionally improves the psychological profile of educators. The Spearman rank correlation results confirmed this significant relationship, establishing the directional and inferential basis for concluding that the extent of MHPSS provision is a meaningful predictor of teachers' psychosocial profile outcomes.

#### Significant relationship between MHPSS provision and level of seriousness of problems encountered

The fifth research objective examined whether a significant relationship existed between the extent of the provision of MHPSS and the level of seriousness of the problems encountered by the respondents. The findings indicated that high implementation of mental health psychosocial support programs for Special Education teachers lessens the problems encountered by teachers in school operations and its community. This finding carries important policy implications, as it establishes MHPSS not merely as a welfare initiative but as a substantive institutional mechanism that directly mitigates the professional and operational

challenges confronting Special Education teachers in the post-COVID-19 educational environment. Malinen (2020) demonstrated that strategies to enhance employee well-being in post-crisis environments improve both organizational performance and individual resilience, a conclusion that corresponds directly with the finding that higher MHPSS implementation is associated with reduced problem severity across teaching and learning, student-related, school-related, and community-related domains. The Spearman rank correlation analysis confirmed this significant inverse relationship, with the statistical evidence supporting the rejection of the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between MHPSS provision and problem seriousness. This finding therefore strengthens the empirical case for systematic and sustained investment in MHPSS as a strategic educational policy response to the post-pandemic challenges affecting Special Education teachers.

Significant relationship between profile variables and level of seriousness of problems encountered

The sixth research objective determined whether a significant relationship existed between the psychosocial profile variables of the respondents and their level of seriousness of the problems encountered. The findings confirmed that the psychosocial profile of teachers along emotional states and character strengths affects their productivity levels along the extent of seriousness of the problems they face in schools. This finding establishes a bidirectional psychosocial dynamic wherein the emotional and character profile of a teacher functions both as an outcome of institutional support and as a determinant of how seriously professional problems are experienced and managed. Kim and Buric (2019) demonstrated through an autoregressive cross-lagged panel model that teacher self-efficacy and burnout are reciprocally related, while Klusmann, Richter, and Ludtke (2016) provided large-scale assessment evidence that teachers' emotional exhaustion is negatively related to students' achievement, collectively affirming that the emotional and character dimensions of teachers' psychosocial profile have concrete and measurable consequences for professional functioning. The Kruskal-Wallis H-test results supported the statistical significance of these relationships, confirming that differences in psychosocial profile along emotional states and character strengths correspond to meaningful differences in how the level of seriousness of problems is experienced across the four domains investigated. Buric et al. (2020) further established that teachers' emotions and self-efficacy are reciprocally related, underscoring that a deteriorating psychosocial profile creates a self-reinforcing cycle wherein heightened problem seriousness further undermines emotional stability and character expression, ultimately reducing teachers' professional effectiveness and contributing to the systemic vulnerability of the Special Education workforce in SDO Dagupan City.

### Synthesis and implications

The findings of this study, taken collectively, present a coherent and empirically grounded portrait of the psychosocial condition of 312 permanent Special Education teachers in SDO Dagupan City during the post-COVID-19 period. The data reveal that these teachers simultaneously exhibit positive character strengths and moderate emotional disturbances, benefit partially from existing MHPSS provisions while confronting significant gaps in administrative support and guidance office operationalization, and face serious problems across all four domains of teaching and learning, student-related concerns, school-related challenges, and community-related difficulties. The inferential analyses conducted using the Kruskal-Wallis H-test and Spearman rank correlation consistently confirmed significant relationships

among these variables, establishing that higher MHPSS provision enhances teachers' psychosocial profile and reduces problem seriousness, and that the psychosocial profile itself shapes how teachers experience and manage professional challenges. These findings collectively affirm the interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature of psychosocial well-being, institutional support, and professional problem load among Special Education teachers, contributing empirically to the field of educational psychology and MHPSS policy in the Philippine basic education context. The results of this chapter directly address all six research objectives of the study and provide the empirical foundation upon which the succeeding chapter will present a proposed occupational training program designed to improve the psychological well-being of Special Education teachers and address the specific professional challenges they encounter in their day-to-day tasks within SDO Dagupan City.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the psychosocial profile of permanent public-school teachers in the Schools Division Office of Dagupan City, with particular attention to their emotional states and character strengths, the extent to which mental health and psychosocial support was provided to them, and the seriousness of problems they encountered in the post-COVID-19 context. Using a descriptive survey design involving 312 public school teachers, the study employed weighted means, the Kruskal-Wallis H-test, and Spearman rank correlation to analyze data across domains of concern spanning teaching and learning, student-related issues, school-related challenges, and community-related problems.

The findings revealed that Special Education teachers in the Schools Division of Dagupan City demonstrated positive character strengths in their professional practice while simultaneously exhibiting moderate signs of emotional distress, including indices of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. This combination of professional strength alongside emotional vulnerability underscores the complex psychosocial landscape within which public school teachers operate, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic. While teachers were found to be beneficiaries of existing mental health and psychosocial support programs offered by their schools along the dimensions of physical and mental resilience, critical gaps remained in the operationalization of guidance offices and in the availability of comprehensive psychosocial support services. Specific unmet needs identified include programs for continuing professional development in mental health such as dialogue sessions and reflective practice, self-care provisions, school health and nutritional services encompassing medical and dental care as well as counseling and tobacco cessation interventions, protection referrals and specialized services for teachers with disabilities, psychological first aid for all school personnel, and the integration of counseling and mental health services into the regular offerings of schools.

With respect to the problems encountered by teachers, the study confirmed that serious concerns persisted across all four domains examined. In the area of teaching and learning, teachers were burdened by excessive paperwork and an overload of assigned tasks such as coordinators and chairmanships. Student-related challenges centered on poor learner behavior and academic performance, while school-related problems included the overlapping of activities and inadequate financial support. Community-related difficulties were largely attributed to insufficient parental involvement and support for children's education. These findings collectively point to a systemic and multidimensional burden that significantly affects teachers' psychological well-being and professional functioning.

The inferential findings further demonstrated that a high extent of mental health and psychosocial support provision along the dimensions of physical and mental resilience was positively associated with the enhancement of teachers' psychosocial profiles, particularly in terms of character strengths and emotional states. Correspondingly, strong implementation of mental health and psychosocial support programs for Special Education teachers was found to reduce the severity of problems encountered in school operations and within the broader community. Moreover, the psychosocial profile of teachers in terms of both emotional states and character strengths was found to meaningfully affect their productivity levels and their capacity to manage the problems they face within the school setting. These relational findings affirm that investment in teacher well-being is not merely a welfare concern but a strategic educational priority with direct implications for school effectiveness and community outcomes.

In light of these conclusions, the study puts forward several recommendations aimed at strengthening the psychosocial well-being and professional capacity of public-school teachers. School heads and teachers should undergo upskilling on priority areas including socio-emotional competencies, 21st century skills, diverse learning approaches and modalities, and assessment and program management across curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular domains. It is further recommended that all school personnel be supported in becoming resilient, competent, and continuously developing professionals through the implementation and monitoring of NEAP-certified and PRC-accredited professional development plans, the enhancement of employee welfare and benefits, the recognition of outstanding DepEd personnel across teaching and non-teaching roles, and the systematic development and monitoring of learning and development plans alongside psychosocial support services. The physical and socio-emotional development of both teachers and learners should be actively promoted through capacity-building initiatives and the upskilling of sports coordinators, technical officials, and coaches at the division level.

Beyond the school setting, there is a pressing need to strengthen active collaboration with external stakeholders, particularly through the establishment of partnerships with local government units in support of schools' sports programs, psychosocial support activities, and gender and development initiatives. Finally, a proposed occupational training program for teachers, to be implemented at the school level through training-workshops, Learning Action Cell sessions, and lesson study approaches, is recommended as a mechanism for improving teachers' emotional states and character strengths as core components of their psychosocial profile. Such a program aims to boost teacher confidence and morale while enhancing self-efficacy and overall productivity, thereby contributing to a healthier, more resilient, and more effective teaching force in the Schools Division of Dagupan City.

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