

Teachers' coping strategies in mitigating remote learning-related distress during Covid-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The sudden shift to remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has brought much distress to teachers. Since the teachers are considered as the major force that facilitates the learning process, their well-being should be given importance. The study used a survey research design to determine the level of distress among private school teachers in San Pablo City, Philippines, using the Covid-19 Peritraumatic Distress Index (CPDI). It also analyzed the sources of distress and examined the different coping strategies the teachers are using to mitigate the distress related to remote learning. Results show that the majority of the respondents are experiencing distress, with most having mild-moderate distress, followed by severe distress. Preparation of learning materials, internet connectivity problems, limited teacher-student interaction, assessment of student's learning, tracking student's progress, inconducive working environment, and inadequate technical skills were identified as sources of distress. Most respondents prefer coping strategies that would promote their overall wellness and those activities that avoid the source of distress. These findings have implications for school owners and administrators, policymakers, and curriculum developers in addressing the needs of teachers by providing programs that would help them cope with the distress related to remote learning.

Keywords: coping strategies; Covid-19 pandemic; distress; remote learning; teacher

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Introduction

The mental health and well-being of every person is always a concern since it reflects one's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Mental health affects how a person thinks, feels, and acts in coping with the stresses of life. Practicing mental health offers the potential to facilitate positive emotions and to build positive resources that are relevant to building positive outcomes at work and in life (Hobfoll, 1989).

Teaching is considered one of the most important jobs in the community. The teachers are the front liners in delivering the curriculum and developing mastery skills among their students. According to Rabago-Mingoa (2017), teachers have been a central force in the facilitation of learning, playing a vital role in the education and care of students who are to become leaders in the future. With these tasks comes great responsibility, which is the reason why teaching is considered one of the most stressful professions (Adams, 2001).

Morgan (2019) stated in her article that an educator work-life survey of teachers across the US found that 1.86 million describe their mental health as “not good” and that they are managing high levels of stress. Also, in the Philippines, a study by Rabago-Mingoa (2017) concluded that the teacher's stress level vulnerability is high due to work-related, personal, and economic factors.



Thus, it is essential to consider the welfare of teachers, that they are both physically and mentally capable of performing their duties.

The mental health and stress levels of teachers are important so that they become holistic classroom managers and leaders (Jimenez, 2021). Yager (2011) further emphasized the importance of teachers being physically and mentally well in nurturing their students and developing their potential. The personal health attitudes and behaviors of teachers are important to ensure that they can contribute positive impacts on their students in terms of learning and well-being (Yager, 2011).

In the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, which was declared a world pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, 213 countries were affected (World Health Organization, 2020). Control efforts were implemented worldwide, including in the Philippines, by imposing travel bans, restrictions on access to most services, and home quarantines. Businesses and schools were closed (Yap & Jiao, 2020).

The way of life in the Philippines changed, including the education system. Face-to-face classes were replaced suddenly by different remote learning modalities, which are new to both teachers and students. The sudden transition to remote learning revealed a lot of challenges and barriers to the learning process. Remote learning refers to teacher-delivered instruction that uses the internet. It is a form of distance education in which a course or program is intentionally designed in advance to be delivered fully online (Singh & Thurman, 2019).

In the Philippines, prior to the pandemic, most classes were held in schools using a face-to-face modality. The sudden transition to remote learning became a must as a response to the pandemic. Although public and private schools are not yet ready to implement remote learning, the learning process must continue.

The pandemic has exposed the need to provide teachers and students with the skills needed to adapt to a digital environment (Rios, 2020). That has brought additional psychological and physical distress to the teachers who are already struggling to balance their professional and personal roles. Teaching staff of all backgrounds and ages have to prepare and deliver their classes from home, with all the practical and technical challenges this entails, and often without proper technical support (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020).

Studies showed that during lockdown, teachers suffered from stress in having to adapt in order to provide for online classes (Besser, Lotem, & Zeigler-Hill, 2022). This stress has often been accompanied by symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbance as a consequence of increased workload resulting from home teaching (Besser et al., 2022).

Another significant challenge for teachers has been their lack of pedagogical content knowledge needed for teaching online (Ching, Hsu, & Baldwin, 2018). Such pedagogical content knowledge includes technical and administrative aspects of teaching online (e.g., respectively, using different platforms and tools and organizing the workflow of lessons). More significantly, it includes knowledge of principles needed to design and facilitate meaningful and effective online learning experiences (Ramoso & Ortega-Dela Cruz, 2024).

In addition to a long list of practical stressors, educators are also contending with the strains of the pandemic itself, from health concerns for themselves and their families, changes brought on by working from home, threats to the current jobs and future careers, and often being confined to their homes (MacIntyre, Gregersen, & Mercer, 2020).

Since the "new normal", there have been several studies that were conducted about the pandemic's impact on education. To contribute to the growing literature on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on teachers, the researchers this study do not only focus on determining the level of psychological and physical distress of teachers but also identify the challenges and stressors these teachers are experiencing related to the conduct of remote learning. Also, the study aimed to identify the different coping strategies that teachers use to manage their stress levels.

With all these variables in consideration, this study will add valuable information to help develop future interventions that would promote the well-being and mental health of teachers.

Hence, the study sought an answer to the question, what coping strategies are the teachers at a private school in San Pablo City, Philippines, doing to mitigate their distress in relation to remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic? Specifically, the study (i) determined the level of distress of the respondents during the Covid-19 pandemic, (ii) examined the respondents' sources of distress related to remote learning, and (iii) analyzed the different coping strategies being practiced by the teachers to address the distress related to remote learning.

Methods

This study employed a survey research design with a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of gathering information. Survey research is a method of gathering information from a sample population through their responses to questions (Check & Schutt, 2012). It makes use of quantitative research strategies that use questionnaires with numerically rated items, and qualitative research strategies that use open-ended questions or a combination of both strategies, called mixed-methods study (Ponto, 2015). This method is often used in social and psychological research and is appropriate for this study.

The respondents of the study were elementary, high school and college teachers at a private school in San Pablo City, Philippines. All the elementary and high school teachers were all of the full-time teachers. The College Department, on the other hand, has full-time and part-time teachers. Purposeful sampling was employed in the study to include only all the full-time teachers of the elementary, high school and college departments of said school. That was done to ensure that every year level is represented in the study and that the sources of distress related to remote learning will purely come from their jobs as teachers at the private school under study. The Elementary Department has six teachers, the High School Department has 25 teachers, and the College Department has 14 full-time teachers for a total of 45 teacher-respondents.

All information was gathered using a prepared questionnaire in an online survey through Google Forms, which was sent personally to the respondents through email and messenger. The distress of the respondents during the Covid-19 pandemic was assessed using the Covid-19 Peritraumatic Distress Index (CPDI). This adopted questionnaire from the study conducted by Qiu et al. (2020) showed an internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha of 0.95. CPDI is a 24-item questionnaire that assesses the respondents for anxiety, depression, specific phobias, cognitive change, avoidance, compulsive behavior, and even physical symptoms. Respondents answered each question based on a Likert scale, which included the following choices: Not at All (0), Mild (1), Moderate (2), Strong (3), and Extreme (4). Scores with a range between 0 to 100 were interpreted as follows: scores ranging from 0 to 27 mean no distress, 28 to 51 mean mild to moderate distress, and scores ranging from 52-100 mean severe distress (Jimenez, 2021).

The sources of distress related to remote learning were assessed using a prepared set of selections in a separate section that included all the possible sources of distress experienced by the teachers based on previous studies. At the end of the selection, the respondents were asked to indicate the other sources of distress that they experienced which were not indicated on the list.

Lastly, qualitative information about the coping strategies being used by the respondents was also identified. That was done through a single open-ended question in the last part of the questionnaire that required teachers to write about the behaviors or strategies that they had used to cope with and maintain their well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A focus group discussion was conducted with eight respondents after the online survey. The participants in this group discussion were preselected based on the year level taught: two elementary teachers, four high school teachers, and two college instructors. Other considerations used were their age, civil status, availability, and willingness to participate in the group

discussion. That helped the researcher to get an actual feel for the context or situation and the experiences of the respondents.

The level of psychological and physical distress was analyzed according to the CPDI Scale: (0) Not at All, (1) Mild, (2) Moderate, (3) Strong, and (4) Extreme. The total score computed for each respondent was interpreted using the CPDI Scale. The total score is 100. Total scores within the range of 28-51 were considered to have mild-to-moderate distress, and a score which is greater than or equal to 52 stands for severe distress. The mean percentage for the scores was calculated. The prevalence of CPDI by some sociodemographic variables such as age, sex, civil status, and year level taught were summarized using frequencies and mean percentages. The sources of distress were tallied based on the responses. The frequencies and mean percentages for each variable were obtained and used to identify the sources of distress related to remote learning.

Finally, the different coping strategies used by the respondents were collected and explored using deductive content analysis. All responses were considered. These responses were categorized into specific themes. Frequencies and mean percentages were computed for each theme to determine the behaviors and coping strategies commonly practiced by the respondents to maintain their emotional well-being.

Results and Discussion

Teacher's level of distress during the Covid-19 pandemic

The number of female respondents (66%) is greater than that of males (34%). Most of the respondents have an age within the range of 21-30 years (58%), followed by 41-50(20%), 31-40 (10%), and with respondents also with an age range of 51-60 (12%). The majority of the respondents were Single (71%), had a BS degree (68%), and were high school teachers (61%), mostly taught Values Education, Science, Filipino, and Math Subjects.

The CPDI results showed that the scores had a mean of 44, with a minimum score of 20 and a maximum score of 74 (Table 1). Of the three categories, the category with the highest value of 56 % is MILD-MODERATE distress, with 23 out of 41 respondents, followed by SEVERE distress, 34%, with 14 out of 41 respondents, while only 10% showed NO DISTRESS at all. These results indicated that most of the respondents are experiencing mild-moderate levels of distress and severe distress (90%) during the implementation of remote learning in the time of the pandemic.

Table 1.
Teacher's level of distress during the Covid-19 pandemic

Level of Distress (n=41)	f	%
No Distress (CPDI below 28)	4	10
Mild – Moderate (CPDI 28-51)	23	56
Severe (CPDI above 52)	14	34

Prior to the pandemic, there were studies already about Filipino teachers' stress levels. Mentioning the study by Rabago-Mingoa (2017) about Filipino teachers' stress levels and coping strategies, the study concluded that the stress levels and vulnerability to stress were relatively high due to factors such as too much paperwork, oversized classes, and insufficient salary (Ortega-Dela Cruz, 2016).

In a similar study in Sri Lanka by Jenitta and Mangaleswaran (2016), stress is also prevalent among the teachers of the Trincomalee district, which is attributed to the following factors: heavy workload, working conditions, and personal problems. Other pre-pandemic studies on teacher's distress also reported high levels of distress mainly due to the following factors: student behavior, long working hours, work overload, personal competency and achievement, and lack of administrative support (Ozoemena et al., 2021; Stapleton, Garby, & Sabot, 2020; Tuettemann & Punch, 1992).

In the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, several studies emerged about distress not only among teachers but the global population itself. Considering the results of the studies prior to the pandemic, the stress levels were further magnified by impacts brought about by the pandemic: the lockdown, health issues, and the new learning modality, remote learning (Besser et al., 2022). The result of this study conforms to most studies that investigated the levels of distress among teachers in the Philippines and worldwide. Mild to severe levels of distress were reported in the studies conducted by Ozamiz-Etxebarria, Santxo, Mondragon, and Santamaría (2021), with 50 % prevalence among the teacher respondents both from the public and private schools of the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain, Klapproth et al. (2020), with 56 % of the teacher respondents in Germany and Akour et al. (2020), with 70 % rate among university teacher respondents in Jordan.

Sources of distress by teachers related to remote learning

Table 2 presents the teacher’s sources of distress, which were categorized into themes, and additionally, the other identified sources of distress by the respondents.

Table 2.
Teacher’s stressors related to remote learning

Stressors Related to Remote Learning	f	%
Preparation of Learning Materials	33	81
Internet connectivity/ Electricity Problems	31	76
Limited Teacher-Student Interaction	31	76
Assessment of Student’s learning	26	63
Tracking Student’s Progress	24	59
Working Environment	16	39
Lack of technical/Software skills	11	27
Others:		
Unsupportive School Leaders/Administration	9	29
Uncooperative Parents	8	20

Preparation of learning materials

Results showed that preparation of lessons and modules is the highest source of distress (81%). It means that this identified major challenge by the teachers is the same source of their distress. The need to ensure that they are employing the appropriate strategy to meet the competencies required is a great concern because it would reflect the effectiveness of the remote learning process. As noted by Martin, Ritzhaupt, Kumar, and Budhrani (2019), effective remote learning relies on the ability of a teacher to use proper teaching strategies and to plan and prepare appropriate learning materials.

The respondents mentioned that the major contributing factor to why they considered this as a stressor is the time limit of its preparation, considering that they must plan the appropriate strategies, activities, and assessments that were aligned with the lesson objectives. That was also mentioned in the study by Izhar, Al-dheleai, and Kew (2021) and Ramoso and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2024) that the preparation of online lessons is time-consuming. One respondent even mentioned spending two to three extra hour per day to prepare the lesson for the next day.

Two teachers from the high school department shared their concerns about how the preparation of learning materials is stressful to them. As FGD participant 3 has shared:

“I am spending a lot of time preparing for my lessons, I have to plan it in a way that they would be engaging to the students by adding pictures, animations, etc. I also have to plan it in a way that the contents are simple, yet students can learn the required competencies. And since I am handling three different subjects, I must prepare three lessons. Because of this, I always end up sleeping very late at night.”

Teachers consider the preparation of learning materials as stressful because they need more time to accomplish them compared to face-to-face classes. Since they have to deliver a lesson that would maximize student engagement and participation, they have to prepare the lesson carefully, which oftentimes would result in fewer hours of sleep and anxiety because even weekends are being used also for the same purpose. A teacher (FGD participant 5) has shared her experience about thinking of activities for the MAPEH subject:

“It is stressful to think of activities in MAPEH, especially in PE, where students can do it at the premise of their homes correctly and safely.”

Subjects such as Science and MAPEH are activity-oriented subjects. For science, laboratory exercises and for MAPEH, outdoor and physical activities. Considering remote learning, these activities are hard and stressful to administer. However, their importance should not be disregarded as they are of great help in the learning process of students.

Poor internet connectivity and electricity failure

The second causes of distress identified in the study were poor internet connectivity and limited teacher-student interaction, with both 31 number of observations (76%). For a smooth implementation of online classes, both teachers and students should have a stable internet connection. Lagging internet connectivity is stressful to them particularly during examinations and when they have prepared to deliver their lessons with video presentations and other applications that require stable internet connection. As stated by Gurung (2021), Izhar et al. (2021), and Torres and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2022) in their study, problems with electricity and internet activity are one of the most important stressors faced by teachers in online learning. One of the teachers (FGD participant 7) noted that:

“It was stressful to both teachers and students if the internet connection was suddenly cut-off during online examinations and quizzes. The same is experienced if there are occasional brownouts. Brownout also means no internet.”

That implies that sudden loss of internet connection and brownouts were considered as a source of distress to teachers. They have to cut off the exams and reschedule them for another time. Sometimes, it will even add further burden to the teachers if they have to prepare for another set of exams.

Limited teacher-student interaction

Equally considered as the stressor to the participants is the Limited Teacher-Student Interaction (76%). It was considered stressful according to the respondents because of the limited guidance that they can provide for the students. It was mentioned earlier those barriers to teacher-student communication are a major inconvenience faced by faculty members because of their inability to interact with the learners appropriately as compared to face-to-face classes (Akram, Aslam, Saleem, & Parveen, 2021).

In the private school where the respondents are teaching, there were only 2 hours of online classes per week per subject, compared to the usual 5 hours per week prior to the pandemic. Such limited time is being maximized for use in delivering the lesson. However, the teachers were aware that different learners have different capacities and abilities to learn, and the current set-up prevented them from getting individual feedback from their students and identifying if the learning was properly achieved. According to Yang (2017), limited teacher-student interaction will result in a communication gap, which stimulates a lack of motivation among students. Two high school

teachers have shared their stressful experiences regarding limited teacher-student interaction. As FGD participant 4 shared:

“It is quite stressful to know that after several explanations on how the students will do the task, they would still end up submitting erroneous outputs.”

When giving instructions and explanations about a certain task for a subject, teachers should always clarify if the students did understand them. However, even if this is being ensured by the teachers, a lot of students fail to understand, resulting in wrong outputs, which is stressful for the teachers. Wrong outputs are also indications that the students did not understand the lesson. FGD participant 3 has shared her disappointments when students are texting even late at night to ask questions:

“After giving their tasks or assignment during the time of their online class or simply giving them some announcements, I always asked them if they have questions and the students would say, “None”, only to find out that even late at night you will receive a lot of text messages from the students, asking questions about the assignment.”

That is one common experience of teachers when students text them late at night and during weekends when it is already considered as resting/relaxation time. Teachers also need time for themselves and for their families. Thus, this students' practice can contribute more to the stress of teaches.

Assessment of student's learning

Assessment of student's learning is the fourth source of distress among teachers (63%). The respondents worry about the validity of the assessment. That conforms to the study of Akour et al. (2020) in that teachers worry and are concerned about the high chances of cheating among students during online examinations. One strategy that was suggested was to provide varied types of assessment; however, according to the respondents, having a lot of assessments would further increase their workloads. Designing different assessments and fair assignments is a possible source of stress for teachers because they would spend more time in preparing them (Akour et al., 2020). De Villa and Manalo (2020), in their study mentioned that the validity and trustworthiness of students' responses is an issue as distance learning cannot provide real-time guidance for the teacher when giving examinations and making outputs. As FGD 1 participant shared:

“Sometimes, I prefer giving oral exams instead of written online exams because it only invites incidences of copying and cheating among students and it is hard to monitor that especially if you have quite a number of students, however, oral exams are very time consuming.”

Meanwhile, FGD participant 8 stated the following about administering essay exams compared to the objective type of exams:

“Exams with essays are better compared to multiple choice and identification questions. What is so stressful about essay questions is the part where you have to check them already.”

As mentioned earlier, the validity of the assessment is an issue that teachers should address. Even if there are varied strategies that can be used to do the assessment of learning, the process is stressful for them because not all strategies are appropriate for the remote learning setup particularly if time is limited. Doing oral exams, for example, can prevent copying but it is time-

consuming, and if teachers have quite several students, is considered stressful. Also, essay exams also can be considered stressful because it would require time and effort to check student outputs.

Tracking student's progress

According to the respondents, tracking students' progress is a stressor because it is hard to ensure maximum student engagement during remote learning particularly having many students. Talking to the students individually to determine learning gaps is not possible, and with the limited time offered by remote learning and the mode of communication that the teachers can use with their students, it is quite impossible to address these learning gaps all-in-all. Sari and Nayir (2020), in their study about the challenges of remote learning, also identified this difficulty among their respondents that teachers fail to follow students' development during online classes because of their failure to also ensure that students are listening to the lessons. As mentioned by Gurung (2021), to provide maximum opportunities for learning, the teacher must take time to recognize the problems of students with the learning design. That has been noted by a teacher (FGD participant 2) in the following statement:

“It is hard to monitor student's engagement and progress during online classes. Considering their submitted outputs are not reliable because I am not sure if the students are really the ones who are working on those tasks or was it their parents or brothers and sisters.”

That implies that tracking student progress is a stressor for teachers. It was easier to address these problems during face-to-face classes because teachers directly observe the students' performance. Activities about the lesson are given primarily to enrich and supplement the students' learning, however, if parents and older brothers and sisters will be answering them, the objective of the learning process will not be achieved.

There were also cases in which students already lost their interest in studying when they did not know what to do with the activities or tasks because they failed to understand the previous lessons. That can be addressed properly if there is a face-to-face set-up.

Working environment

During the lockdown, teachers were required to conduct their classes at home. Some teachers would consider such a working environment as stressful because of the situation in their homes. Zhang, Wang, Yang, and Wang (2020) found in their study that distractions at home, like house chores and kids can be a significant source of stress when doing online classes. Teachers who are also parents themselves and whether they like it or not, should attend to the needs of their children, a reason to affect the focus of teachers on online classes (Zhang et al., 2020). As stated by a married teacher (FGD participant 8) with two children who are both in grade school about her experience when working at home:

“I have to first clean the house and prepare the meals of my children before I can sit down and work. My children would approach me also when they need help about their lessons while I am on my online classes.”

That means that working from home set up is a stressor also to some teachers because their workload is being multiplied by the additional chores that they have to do at home. Furthermore, having school children at the same time even increases their stress levels because they have to guide them during their own remote learning.

Another source of stress is domestic noise from their working environment. Human intrusion is like a family member talking and walking around, barking dogs, and vehicle noises (Sharma & Sharma, 2021). As one teacher (FGD participant 1) has shared about his experience with domestic noise:

“I have to pause sometimes when doing online classes because of the noise from our neighbor particularly their barking dogs and their loud voices.”

Since classes are held at home, such a working environment is not free from other distractions. It is hard to focus on teaching if the environment is noisy. The students would have a hard time focusing also, because they too can be distracted by such noise. That would greatly affect how one teacher can successfully deliver his or her lesson particularly if online classes are held for a short period only.

Lack of technical/software skills

Not all teachers are well-versed in the use of ICT, even during these modern times. Older teachers who were not accustomed to using this during face-to-face classes are prone to this type of stressor. Lack of digital competence can also lead to under confidence in performing and coming out being their best as teachers. In this study, results showed that most of the respondents who considered this as stressful were those from 40 years of age or older. That conforms to the study of Samifanni and Gumanit (2021) about the elderly teachers' perspective on the use of technology.

The respondents of the study mentioned that the school management should have provided training on software skills during remote learning. However, to address this need to be able to meet the requirements of the new normal mode of learning, they need to find a quick and sound solution to this. FGD participant 8 shared her experience while she was learning the use of the school's learning management system:

“I was at first worrying with the learning management system that the school will be using, however, since I am confident with my software skills, I was able to adopt quickly. Lucky for me, but the old teachers are finding it hard to cope because even the basic software apps like making PowerPoint presentations, is new to them.”

That specifically is the case for teachers who have experience in using technology. That they can adapt easily to the new system because they were oriented on this during their college years. However, if the school is not that technologically equipped, the teachers who were with them for several years would be technologically incapable of adjusting to the system easily. If the use of technology had been practiced in the school and there were provisions to do that, then it may have been easier for everybody to adjust to the remote system of learning.

At the end of the suggested selections for sources of distress, the participants were asked to identify another source of distress that was not mentioned in the list. Some have mentioned the problem of unsupportive leaders or administration and uncooperative parents.

Unsupportive school leaders or administration

According to the respondents, the school leaders/administrators also do not consider the needs and the welfare of teachers: 1) providing the resources they need for online classes – the use of computer units and internet connection provided by the school is limited only to the conduct of lesson delivery but not for other teacher works such as in checking student works and for lesson preparations; thus, teachers have to buy and bring their laptops to school. Those teachers working from home have to provide their own internet connection at their own expense. The following teachers have noted their experiences. According to FGD participant 5:

“I have to bring my laptop every day, there were computer units provided but we are sharing it with other teachers, too. Since I am not comfortable as it can be a source of Covid transmission, I preferred to use my own laptop.”

FGD participant 3 also shared her experience when she was still working from home:

“Since I am working from home, I am paying for my internet subscription. At first, we were told that we will be receiving an allowance for that, but it did not materialize.”

That implies that providing the needs to teachers, particularly those that are required for them to conduct online classes, is very essential. Private schools like the school from which these teachers are teaching are imposing tuition fees on students, and part of this should be used in providing the necessary materials and equipment to be used in the conduct of classes. Although nowadays, laptops, cellphones and other gadgets are already a “must have” for teachers so that they can continue to work at home, for remote learning processes held at school, the school should provide the necessary materials.

Another is 2) there were no provisions for webinars or programs that would cater mental health and better develop methods of ensuring efficiency of remote learning. As stated by FGD participant 2 about the provisions of the webinar:

“We were told to look for free webinars on the internet which cater health issues and to attend to them if we have time.”

Additionally, FGD participant 1 also mentioned about the need to provide them with programs that would cater to mental health:

“If students can be stressed with the current modality of learning, so as we teachers, the management should also consider providing us with programs to cater our mental health. With the situation that we have here, we feel like robots, the routine of “school, work, home” seems to be tiring already.”

Providing mental health awareness to teachers is very important. Even prior to the pandemic, there have been programs already for mental health promotion. Considering that the teaching is a stressful profession, the school administration should have a regular or yearly provision of webinars or other activities that would promote mental health. Moreover lastly, 3) teachers are bombarded with more responsibilities and paperwork. Teachers have mentioned that they have more paperwork compared to the face-to-face classes.

According to Rahman and Subiyantoro (2021), school leaders should optimize learning and deliberations with teachers, provide education and training on online learning platforms, provide appreciation to teachers and conduct coordination and communication among stakeholders. This was also noted by Bower (2001), that administrators need to be change agents, enticing faculty participation in remote learning by providing appropriate incentives for faculty involvement and instructional support to make the teachers comfortable in the transition to a new learning modality.

Uncooperative parents

It has been established since the beginning of the new learning modality that parents will play a big role in the learning process of their children (Pimentel-Tibon, 2020). Parents should collaborate with the teachers in monitoring their performance every day for both synchronous and asynchronous remote learning since the children are at home (Ancheta & Ancheta, 2020). In this study, uncooperative parents were considered by the respondents as the source of stress for them. That conforms to the study by Francom, Lee, and Pinkney (2021), who found that a lack of parental involvement, like motivation and support for their children, decreases student

engagement. Three teachers have shared their experiences with uncooperative parents. As one of them (FGD participant 5) has specifically mentioned:

“Some parents don’t care with their children. We have messaged them a lot of times to report their student’s frequent absences and low performance, but there were no responses from them.”

That implies that parents are not supportive of their children. Even during face-to-face classes, parents should be aware of the performance of their children, the reason why every quarter, parents were invited to school to get the student’s report cards and to talk about the problems of students, particularly in those subjects that they have low grades. Since the transition to remote learning, parent meetings have also been conducted online. There have been group chats also, specifically of parents, for easy communication. Thus, having all of these, parents should cooperate to provide their children with the best guidance that they need to be able to adapt to the process.

These identified stressors in this study have affected the respondent’s ability to deliver their services as effectively as they have during the face-to-face classes prior to the pandemic. Moreover, during the focus group discussion, somebody mentioned about having fears also of losing their jobs due to a considerable decrease in enrolment. According to the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory by Dr. Stevan Hofball, stress occurs in any of the three contexts: when people experience loss of resources, when resources are threatened, or when people invest their resources without subsequent gain (Krohne, 2002). Loss of resources applies to the loss of the ability of the respondents to deliver services effectively because of the pandemic to the education system and threatened resources apply to the fear of losing their jobs due to the decrease in enrolment.

Teachers’ coping strategies

Selye’s theory states that when the body experiences stress, it undergoes three stages: alarm reaction stage, resistance stage and exhaustion stage (Krohne, 2002). During the resistance stage, the body should be able to adapt to the stressor or else it would progress to the exhaustion stage where the body can no longer fight the stress. That is why one should find ways of coping with the stress to prevent the exhaustion stage.

Table 3.
Coping strategies of private school teachers

Category	Description	f	%
Healthy living	Activities that promote maintenance or improvement of physical health	18	44
Recreational Activities and Hobbies	Activities that intend to add fun, pleasure, and satisfaction	17	42
Social interaction	Activities that promote interaction and maintaining relationships with family, friends, co-teachers and other relatives	15	37
Religious and Spiritual Activities	Activities that are related to religion	13	32
Mental health promotion	Activities that encourage healthy behaviors and promote emotional, psychological and social well-being	11	27
Gaining new knowledge and developing new skills and abilities	Activities that promote learning and development of new skills and abilities, which may be work-related or not.	10	24
Avoidance strategies	Activities that redirect attention by keeping themselves busy or being indulged with other things.	6	15

The respondents were asked to list down all the coping strategies that they were using to cope with their stress. Results showed that the respondents indulged themselves in a variety of coping strategies to maintain their psychological, emotional, and physical wellness during the time of pandemic. Some respondents have provided three or more strategies. Their responses were categorized according to the following themes: healthy living, recreational activities and hobbies, social interaction, religious and spiritual activities, mental health promotion, developing new skills and abilities and avoidance mechanisms.

Table 3 presents the different categories, which were arranged from the category with the highest coded frequencies to the category with the least coded frequencies. Findings showed that the top three coping strategies being practiced by the teachers were healthy living, recreational activities and hobbies and social interaction. In a study conducted by Hidalgo-Andrade, Hermosa-Bosano, and Paz (2021), the most frequently reported strategies were social support, physical activity and leisure activities, which is somewhat parallel to the results of this study.

Healthy living

In this study, most respondents chose activities that would promote a healthy way of living, like exercise, eating and preparing healthy food for the family and getting enough sleep (44%). Healthy living or having good physical health has been considered in most studies about coping as one of the common ways the respondents are turning into when they have stress. Smith and Pergola (1991) stated that healthy living helps someone resist the negative effects of stress. In the article written by Scott (2020), entitled "Healthy Lifestyle Habits for Stress Relief", she noted the importance of having a healthy lifestyle in combatting stress. Scott (2020) stated that "healthy lifestyle habits can help better manage the stress response, enabling one to avoid or even reverse the negative effects of chronic stress." This conforms to the studies on coping by Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021) among teachers in Ecuador, Melnyk et al. (2023) among college teachers and non-teaching staff in a Mid-West university, Rawat and Choudhary (2020) among teachers in India and De Villa and Manalo (2020) among public secondary teachers in San Pablo City, Philippines. As a high school teacher shared:

"I do exercise every morning, some sit-ups and jumping rope. It keeps me to be physically fit and I know that being healthy would improve my immune system, thereby protection from getting the Covid disease."

Exercise keeps one's body healthy and at the same time to relieve stress. During the pandemic, work-from-home setups decreased mobility among teachers. Conducting online classes, the whole day, means a whole day of sitting also in front of the computer. Another teacher mentioned another important activity that promotes mental wellness. She stated that:

"I tried cooking vegan diet recipes from the internet, the taste is not so good at first, but I have learned to love it already."

In addition to having a healthy body by eating healthy foods, cooking dishes for the first time, as viewed from social media, is considered as an additional skill or hobby that one has acquired, thereby can be the best solution also to relieve stress.

Recreational activities and hobbies

The second most frequently mentioned strategy is doing recreational activities and hobbies (42%). This category pertains to activities that intend to add fun, pleasure, and satisfaction. Included in this category are activities such as painting, biking, playing online games, being a "*plantito*" or "*plantita*" (planting/gardening), and watching movies on Netflix. According to Zawadzki, Smyth, and Costigan (2015), engagement in leisure or different recreational activities has a wide range of beneficial effects that can provide immediate stress relief for anybody. Teachers who are engaged

in a variety of recreational activities and hobbies tend to have lower stress levels, better moods, a lower heart rate and more psychological engagement (Zawadzki et al., 2015). The following recreational activities are being practiced by the teachers: watching television, painting, knitting, and watching movies (Akour et al., 2020; Bravo et al., 2021; Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021). In the Philippines, there has been an increase in the hobby of planting different types of ornamental plants, not only among teachers but the general population as well. It even paved the way for the introduction of the terms “plantito” and “plantita”. To mention some of the recreational activities and hobbies performed by the teacher, the statements below were from three teachers: A, B and C. Teacher A mentioned about gardening and her collection of plants:

“I am spending my free time in our little garden where I keep and took care my collections of different cactus species and other ornamental plants. Simply, watching on them relaxes my mind and body.”

On the other hand, Teacher B mentioned about watching movies:

“I did subscribe in Netflix, so I can watch a lot of movies.”

Lastly, Teacher C talked about painting:

“I tried my daughter’s hobby, ‘painting by numbers’, and to my surprise, I enjoyed it, so I am doing it during my free time.”

These hobbies and recreational activities are proven effective ways of relieving stress. There were people, not only teachers, who became plant lovers, as evidenced by many sellers also who turned to selling plants. New hobbies like painting, singing in KTV and doing cross-stitch are also some practices that can be effective stress relievers.

Social interaction

The third category with the highest frequency is social interaction (37%). Within this category are family bonding and connecting with friends and relatives through text, Facebook messenger, and video meetings. Respondents agreed that social interactions helped them to be still connected with friends and colleagues during the time of lockdown, especially those who were isolated because of the disease. These people are the ones a person can run to get help and comfort easily. According to (Cherry, 2020), “it is social interaction or social support that builds people up during times of stress and often gives them strength to carry on and even thrive.” In the study of Banal and Ortega-Dela Cruz (2022) conversation with a trusted friend helps alleviate work and create fun in times of pandemic. Most studies on coping strategies revealed that people, including teachers, involve themselves more with social interaction because of social media (Chaturvedi, Vishwakarma, & Singh, 2021; Klapproth, Federkeil, Heinschke, & Jungmann, 2020; Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). People can interact easily through different social media platforms, making it easy for everybody to communicate with their loved ones. Teacher A shared how she managed to prevent stress by communicating with friends and relatives through social media:

“I connect with my friends, relative and co-workers through Messenger, Facebook, Zoom Meetings and Google Meet. It was a big help for me particularly during lockdowns and with high level of restrictions.”

Meanwhile, Teacher B mentioned how the pandemic has brought their families closer:

“One thing positive about the work from home set up is that our family became closer. We used to be bonding with each other only during weekends but because of Covid, we were always together.”

Humans are social beings, and in addition to this, being raised in an Eastern culture that values family and social relationships is to Filipino advantage because we do not face the problems alone, the pandemic alone. With the help of our family, the stress brought about by the effects of the pandemic can be easily addressed.

Religious and spiritual activities

Thirty-two percent (32%) of the respondents used religious and spiritual activities as coping strategies. Religious activities included activities such as praying, attending mass online and on television, reading the Scripture and studying God's Word with friends and relatives. Spiritual activities, on the other hand, pertain to one's relationship with nature and the world, like enjoying being with nature. In this study, the religious activities that were mentioned were: attending mass online, Bible study with friends online while praying for spiritual, going to the farm to enjoy the peaceful environment and scenery and visiting natural parks. The use of this coping strategy conforms to the studies conducted by Talidong and Toquero (2020), which stated that praying was one of the common strategies employed by teachers. That was also mentioned in the studies of Akour et al. (2020) and Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021). One of the teachers, who is a Catholic by religion, shared how her strong faith in God had helped her to manage her stress levels:

“I regularly attend mass online, in Facebook and on television. I believe that being connected with God will help us get through the problems we are facing, particularly during the pandemic.”

Mental health promotion

Mental health promotion includes activities that encourage healthy behaviors and promote emotional, psychological, and social well-being. This category includes responses such as thinking positively, attending webinars on mental and emotional wellness, listening to calming music and spending time with pets like dogs and cats. Even before the pandemic, there have been several studies that noted the necessary need to promote teacher wellness. That was previously accomplished by holding mental health workshops and webinars (Weist et al., 2017). With the onset of the pandemic, efforts to renew or much better to improve mental health should be provided to the teachers. One teacher has shared about attending a webinar on mental health:

“I was able to attend a webinar on mental health sponsored by a university. It gave me a lot of insight on how to address my mental health issues due to pandemic.”

Since the onset of the pandemic, many webinars have been offered online for free. These webinars include topics about developing teacher pedagogies, and there were also some that cater to mental health. Mental health webinars are very useful because the webinar specifically addresses teacher mental health wellness during the time of the pandemic. Another interesting coping strategy that was mentioned is about adopting a pet dog. A teacher suffering from anxiety attacks mentioned how her distress was prevented by this activity:

“I had anxiety attacks during the pandemic, and this has even prevented me from conducting classes online for a week. My psychologist friend advised me to adopt a pet dog to help me manage my psychological distress. It worked!”

Having pets like dogs, cats, and other animals has long been useful in managing stress and improving physical health. Thus, this coping activity is very useful in addressing stress and anxiety also among teachers.

Gaining new knowledge and skills

Gaining new knowledge and developing new skills and abilities were described as easy coping strategies (Finlay et al., 2021). Knowledge and skills may be work or non-work related. Within this category are the following strategies: attending webinars related to the conduct of remote learning, learning how to use different computer applications in lesson preparation, baking, and driving. Engaging oneself in learning something new, which may be work or non-work related, helps someone to keep both mind and body occupied while at the same time benefiting from the accomplishment and progress it may bring. This coping strategy was also noted as being practiced by the teachers in the studies of Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021) and Finlay et al. (2021). A teacher mentioned how attending different webinars had helped him address his problems in remote learning:

“During the time of initial stages of the implementation of the remote learning, there were a lot of free webinars online that teachers can attend to better understand the new normal learning process. I have attended a lot of webinars in relation to remote learning.”

Attending webinars to learn the required skills for online learning is a good coping strategy for the distress caused by remote learning. There were quite numerous webinars offered for free about different skills and pedagogies for the remote learning process. Learning these skills would help the teacher to address their distress on the conduct of remote learning. Meanwhile, a teacher mentioned about learning other skills like cooking:

“I learned how to cook a lot of dishes by simply watching videos in YouTube. It helps me to get busy and at the same time enjoy what I am doing.”

Cooking new dishes and learning new skills and hobbies that are non-work-related help teachers to be still productive while forgetting about their distress. These activities help the teacher to prevent burnout, which is one reason why teachers get distressed.

Avoidance strategies

Finally, avoidance mechanisms include activities which redirect attention by keeping themselves busy or being indulged in other things. Responses for this category include being busy with other things, doing household chores to keep them occupied, not watching news about Covid-19 on TV, and avoiding thinking about the pandemic. Hidalgo-Andrade et al. (2021) pointed out in their study that online sites and other social media platforms, where most people are indulged into, may be a good source of information. However, they can also be a source of stress because of news about Covid-19 and even fake news. That was one of the probable reasons why some would prefer not to watch news on TV. According to a teacher, keeping herself busy by doing household chores is very helpful for her to prevent herself from thinking about the pandemic. As stated by the teacher:

“I keep myself busy doing household chores like cleaning the house and washing our clothes.”

Sometimes, keeping oneself busy really helps. Doing other things that would distract attention to things that may cause distress is an accepted solution. The pandemic has caused much distress to people: teachers, students, and the general population, and since we cannot do something about

the pandemic, activities and actions that would redirect our attention can be considered a better solution.

Both the Repression-Sensitization Theory by Byrne and the Monitoring and Blunting Theory by Miller (1980) talk about coping with stressors using a bipolar approach: 1) facing and doing something about the stressor to decrease its impact or 2) redirecting attention by doing other things not directly involved in addressing the stressor and avoidance mechanisms. The first approach is best done when the situations or stressors can be controlled, while the second approach is when the situations and source of stress are uncontrollable.

Based on the coping strategies that the respondents mentioned, most preferred the second approach, that is, indulging themselves in activities that do not directly address the cause of stress, activities that would distract them and avoiding the different stressors. Though some have mentioned attending webinars to learn more and to be adaptive to the challenges of remote learning, most have mentioned activities that would promote and maintain their overall wellness. A possible reason for this is that some of the recognized stressors are pandemic related. These are things that they cannot control and as stipulated by the coping theories, blunting or repression is the best approach if the cause of stress is uncontrollable (Krohne, 2002). Figure 1 summarizes the different coping strategies that are being practiced by the respondents.

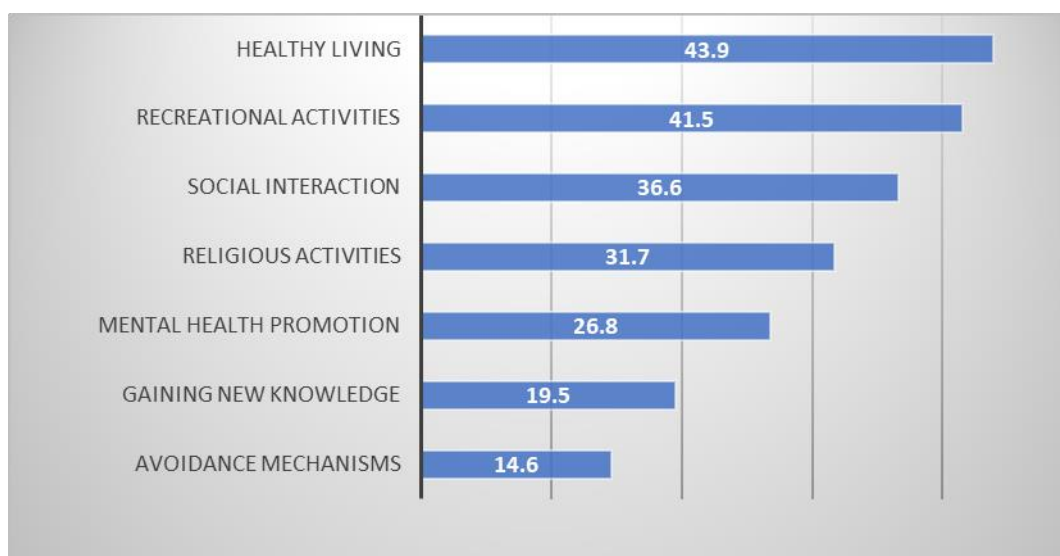


Figure 1.

Summary of the coping strategies performed by the teachers

Conclusion

This study discusses the level of distress of private school teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic. It also examined the respondents' sources of distress in relation to remote learning as well as the different coping strategies by the respondents to mitigate distress related to the conduct of remote learning. To determine the level of distress of the respondents during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Covid-19 Peritraumatic Distress Scale was used. Results showed that most of the respondent's population is experiencing distress, with most respondents having mild-moderate distress followed by severe distress.

Among the top sources of distress to teachers were (i) preparation of learning materials, (ii) poor internet connectivity, (iii) limited teacher-student interaction, (iv) assessment of student's learning, (v) tracking student's progress, (vi) inconducive working environment, and (vii) inadequate technical skills. In addition to these, some respondents added that unsupportive school leaders/administration and uncooperative parents were also considered sources of distress. Some of the coping strategies being practiced by teachers were healthy living, recreational activities and

hobbies, social interactions, religious and spiritual activities, mental health promotion, gaining new knowledge and skills, and avoidance mechanisms.

The identified coping strategies among teachers were strategies that promote overall wellness and avoid the sources of distress. To be able to address the actual source of distress, teachers may consider other alternatives to search for means that would enable them to meet the demands of remote learning. They should develop better plans and develop different strategies appropriate for the new normal learning modality. They should develop a positive mindset about the situation, learn to accept the changes and explore different means to address their problems regarding the new learning modality.

Teachers need to be equipped with the necessary pedagogical skills and the tools required for effective remote learning. The school owners and administrators must address these needs of the teachers. They should cooperate and work with the teachers to address the different challenges that they experience in relation to the new system of learning: provide them with the different training that they need and provide them with programs that would cater not only to their mental health but overall wellness as well.

The government leaders and policy makers may work with the school leaders and administrators in addressing the challenges and stressors faced by the teachers. They should look after the welfare of teachers by extending their help in schools by providing funds, programs, aids, and training to teachers.

Teachers should be equipped with the necessary skills to conduct remote learning. Thus, curriculum developers should incorporate programs in teacher education that would develop the necessary pedagogical skills for remote learning modality. They should continuously develop quality, accessible, contextualized, and timely learning resources based on the latest trends in education.

To better come up with effective practices that can help teachers cope with their stress, future researchers should further investigate and recommend other best practices done by teachers during remote learning. In addition to these, since many schools have been reopening for limited face-to-face classes, researchers can also consider the psychological impact of returning to face-to-face teaching.

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