

NEW NORMAL WORK-RELATED STRESSORS AND COPING MECHANISMS OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the new normal work-related stressors and coping mechanisms of public elementary school teachers in the San Marcelino District, Schools Division of Zambales, for the School Year 2021–2022. Utilizing a quantitative descriptive research method, data were gathered from 113 teachers through a structured survey. Results revealed that most respondents were female, aged 30–39, held the position of Teacher I, had 6–10 years of teaching experience, and possessed MA units. Teachers found their work moderately stressful, particularly in areas such as school head management practices, colleagues' work attitudes, parent partnerships, and monitoring learners' progress. They considered active coping, positive reframing, and emotional support as helpful, while substance use was least preferred. There were no significant differences in stress levels or coping mechanisms across demographic profiles, except for substance use, which varied by teaching experience. A very low but significant correlation existed between specific stressors and certain coping strategies. The findings emphasize the need for an action plan to help teachers effectively manage stress and strengthen adaptive coping mechanisms in the new normal education setting.

Keywords: new normal, work-related stressors, coping mechanisms, public elementary school teachers

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a nearly universal human experience, so every person can benefit from learning about the condition. By understanding just how widespread and harmful stress is, a person begins to act against its effects (Patterson, 2021). Stress is a natural feeling of not being able to cope with specific demands and events. However, stress can become a chronic condition if a person does not take steps to manage it (Felman, 2020). It affects all systems of the body including the musculoskeletal, respiratory, cardiovascular, endocrine, gastrointestinal, nervous, and reproductive systems. The body is well-equipped to handle stress in small doses, but when the stress becomes long-term or chronic, it can have serious effects on the body (Shaw, et. al., 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered the Philippine education system, shifting it from traditional face-to-face instruction to various forms of distance learning. As a result, public school teachers were faced with a host of new work-related stressors that significantly affected their professional and personal lives. The Department of Education (DepEd) launched the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) to ensure educational delivery, but its implementation brought about increased workloads, heightened expectations, and emotional strain for teachers (DepEd, 2020). Many were compelled to quickly adapt to modular, online, or blended learning modalities—often with limited training and insufficient resources. It was now in this premise that a study on new normal work-related stressors and coping mechanisms of public elementary school teachers in San Marcelino District, Schools Division of Zambales for School Year 2021-2022 was conducted for the purpose of providing management of new normal work-related stressors and coping mechanisms of the public elementary teachers. It was of a great advantage if they knew how to cope with their new normal work-related stressors. Nationally, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) and other stakeholders have raised concerns over the mental health and well-being of teachers, citing issues such as extended working hours, lack of digital competence, poor internet access, and limited administrative support. These challenges have exacerbated stress levels and impacted job performance (ACT, 2021). The Philippine Mental Health Association (PMHA) has also highlighted the urgent need for workplace mental health interventions in schools, particularly in the public sector. (Barrot, Llenares, and del Rosario, 2021) found that Filipino teachers experienced moderate to high stress during the pandemic due to the shift to distance learning. Similarly, (Delos Santos, 2021) revealed that many public school teachers lacked coping resources and support systems, making them more vulnerable to burnout and anxiety. (Geronimo & Olegario, 2020) explored how teachers perceive their workload (both teaching and non-teaching tasks) and how this relates to their stress

appraisal and motivation. They found that negative perceptions tend to predict higher stress appraisal and less positive attitudes toward work.

A study on the new normal work-related stressors and coping mechanisms of public elementary school teachers in San Marcelino District, Schools Division of Zambales for School Year 2021-2022 was valuable and beneficial to educational planners, school administrators, teachers, parents, learners, and future researchers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study determined the new normal work-related stressors and coping mechanisms of public elementary school teachers in San Marcelino District, Schools Division of Zambales for School Year 2021-2022.

Specifically, it aimed to answer these questions:

1. How may the profile of the respondents be described in terms of:
 - 1.1. age;
 - 1.2. sex;
 - 1.3. teaching position;
 - 1.4. teaching experience; and
 - 1.5. highest educational attainment?
2. How may the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents be described in terms of:
 - 2.1. management practices of school heads;
 - 2.2. work attitudes of colleagues;
 - 2.3. partnership with the parents; and
 - 2.4. learning progress monitor of learners?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized the quantitative descriptive method of research. It was quantitative descriptive because it quantified and described the profile of the respondents, their new normal work-related stressors, and their coping mechanisms.

Respondents and Location

The respondents of the study were the 113 public elementary school teachers in San Marcelino District, Schools Division of Zambales for School Year 2021-2022.

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents by school. There were 113 public elementary school teachers representing 100% of the teachers who came from seven (7) schools in San Marcelino District, Schools Division of Zambales for School Year 2021-2022. These schools included Laoag Integrated School, Linasin Elementary School, Nagbunga Elementary School, Rabanes Elementary School, San Guillermo Elementary School, San Marcelino Elementary School, and San Rafael Elementary School. These public elementary school teachers were involved in this study as respondents. The public elementary school teachers are in their midlife of their career. During this period, they are characterized as being adaptive to the changes. They can easily adjust themselves with the changes that are happening around (Guillen-Gamez, et. al., 2019). They are mature enough in addressing every concern in their life. They have wider perspectives with the things that are happening in the performance of their work. They also know the value of teamwork wherein they work well with their colleagues (Evans,et. al., 2018). This is a sign that teachers can easily adjust themselves to the demands of time. They are willing to learn new ideas coming from their superiors and colleagues. They know the importance of acquiring the needed knowledge and skills for them to successfully perform their assigned work (Margot & Kettler, 2019).

This study was conducted in San Marcelino District, Schools Division of Zambales. The district is under the management of a coordinating principal. The seven (7) schools namely Laoag Integrated School, Linasin Elementary School, Nagbunga Elementary School, Rabanes Elementary School, San Guillermo Elementary School, San Marcelino Elementary School, and San Rafael Elementary School are managed by school heads with different administrative positions.

School	Frequency	Percentage
Laoag Integrated School	14	12.39
Linasin Elementary School	14	12.39
Nagbunga Elementary School	10	8.85
Rabanes Elementary School	10	8.85
San Guillermo Elementary School	15	13.27
San Marcelino Elementary School	37	32.74
San Rafael Elementary School	13	11.50
Total	113	100.00

INSTRUMENTS

The researcher-made questionnaire underwent a validation process to test its validity and reliability. Validation of a survey instrument is an important activity in the research process. Face validity and content validity are essential steps in validating how far the survey instrument can measure what it is intended for (Elangovah & Sundaravel, 2021). Validity lies in the extent to which a proposed interpretation and use of test scores is justified, the evidence for which is dependent on both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Hawkins, et. al., 2019). Expert judges evaluate each of the items to determine whether these represent the domain of interest. They are highly knowledgeable about the domain of interest and or scale development (Boateng, et. al., 2018).

Having validated the questionnaire, a pilot test was carried out using 20 public elementary school teachers of San Felipe District, Schools Division of Zambales. This was done to see how the public elementary school teachers reacted to the questionnaire, whether the items were clear enough and easy to understand, whether there was a need to include more items in certain areas or whether there were some items to which they did not like to respond, and to determine the workability of the proposed method of data analyses of this study.

DATA COLLECTION

The researcher sought permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of DepEd-Zambales, Coordinating Principal, and school heads in public elementary schools in San Marcelino District, Schools Division of Zambales. After permissions were granted, the researcher sought the help and assistance of the school ICT coordinators in sending the link of the questionnaire.

Prior to the sending of the link of the questionnaire, informed consent was provided to the respondents. This was given by the researcher to the respondents in their respective schools. When the target respondents affixed their signatures, this served as the signal to the researcher to send the link of the questionnaire.

In sending the link of the questionnaire, the researcher coordinated with the school heads and school ICT coordinators. The link to the questionnaire was sent to them. They passed this link of questionnaire to their respective group chats with the instruction of requesting them to accomplish. This was done to ensure the health and safety of everyone amidst COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, this was the easiest way to gather the responses of the respondents wherever they were.

After all target respondents submitted their answers, the researcher generated the excel format of their responses and sent the file to the resident statistician who processed the data. The interpretations of

results were done thereafter with the guidance and assistance of her thesis adviser and the resident statistician.

DATA ANALYSIS

The statistical tools utilized in the interpretations of the data and testing of the hypotheses included Frequency Count and Percentage Distribution, Mean, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test and Shapiro-Wilk Test, Chi-Square Test, and Spearman’s Rho Correlation Test.

Frequency Count and Percentage Distribution were used to categorize the respondents’ responses according to their profile. The new normal work-related stressors and coping mechanisms of the respondents were categorized. The frequency showed the actual responses of the respondents to the items in the questionnaire. Mean was used to present the responses of the respondents on the different statements stipulated in the questionnaire like their new normal work-related stressors and coping mechanisms. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test and Shapiro-Wilk Test, tests of normality were utilized in determining whether parametric or non-parametric test was utilized in this study. Chi-Square Test was used to determine the significant difference in the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents and their profile, and the coping mechanisms and their profile, too. Spearman’s Rho was used to determine if there was significant correlation between the new normal work-related stressors and coping mechanisms of the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Correlation between the New Normal Work-Related Stressors of the Respondents and their Coping Mechanisms

Correlation between the New Normal Work-Related Stressors of the Respondents and their Coping Mechanisms in terms of Active Coping

New Normal Work-Related Stressors	Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Management Practices of School Heads	.021	Positive Very Low Correlation	.753	Accept H ₀ Not Significant
Work Attitudes of Colleagues	.025	Positive Very Low Correlation	.715	Accept H ₀ Not Significant
Partnership with the Parents	.031	Positive Very Low Correlation	.652	Accept H ₀ Not Significant
Learning Progress Monitor of Learners	.018	Positive Very Low Correlation	.796	Accept H ₀ Not Significant

There was positively very low non-significant correlation between the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents in terms of management practices of school heads, work attitudes of colleagues, partnership with the parents, and learning progress monitor of learners with their coping mechanisms in terms of active coping. The computed significant values were not significant at 5% level; thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. This implied that as the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents were felt, the more they needed to use active coping to cope with their situations.

In times when teachers feel the stress in their work, it is proper to use active coping to cope with their situations. Coping has been defined as a special category of adaptation elicited in normal individuals by unusually taxing circumstances. The process of coping was defined as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts which are undertaken by an individual to deal with demands which are especially challenging and are probably exceeding individual capacities and or resources (Garcia, et. al., 2018). Coping is defined as the thoughts and behaviors mobilized to manage internal and external stressful situations. It is a term used distinctively for conscious and voluntary mobilization of acts, different from defense mechanisms that are subconscious or unconscious adaptive response, both of which aim to reduce or tolerate stress (Algorani & Gupta, 2022). It is important to note that there is really a need to manage the new normal work-related stressors of the teachers for them to become productive in the execution of their assigned tasks. Through taking a pause or break from work, one can be refreshed and feel brand new in dealing with the various intricacies of life. Relaxing can help individuals to keep healthy, in both body and mind, helping them to recover from the everyday stresses that life throws at them (Cirino, 2019).

Table 3

Correlation between the New Normal Work-Related Stressors of the Respondents and their Coping Mechanisms in terms of Positive Reframing

New Normal Work-Related Stressors	Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Management Practices of School Heads	.059	Positive Very Low Correlation	.385	Accept H ₀ Not Significant
Work Attitudes of Colleagues	.122	Positive Very Low Correlation	.073	Accept H ₀ Not Significant
Partnership with the Parents	.143	Positive Very Low Correlation	.037	Rejected H ₀ Significant

Learning Progress Monitor of Learners	.125	Positive Very Low Correlation	.068	Accept H ₀ Not Significant
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There was positively very low non-significant correlation between the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents in terms of management practices of school heads, work attitudes of colleagues, and learning progress monitor of learners with their coping mechanisms in terms of positive reframing. The computed significant values were not significant at 5% level; thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. However, there was positively very low significant correlation between the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents in terms of partnership with the parents with their coping mechanisms in terms of positive reframing. The computed significant value was significant at 5% level; thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that as the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents were felt, the more they need to apply positive reframing to cope with their situations. Teachers cannot escape from experiencing new normal work-related stress that is why there is a need to apply positive reframing to cope with their stressful situations. Positive reframing was defined as the process of perceiving something that was previously viewed as negative in a positive light (Robbins, et. al., 2019). Having a positive outlook in life – a general optimistic expectation that good things will happen – may help people live longer. It suggests that individuals should make efforts to boost optimism, which has been shown to be associated with healthier behaviors and healthier ways of coping with life challenges (DeVries, 2018). The mindset matters every day, and individuals are the controllers of their own. People with a higher positive-thought ratio have fewer fatigue symptoms, better health, increased productivity and increased creative thinking. When they are positive, they are much more engaged and are better problem solvers because they are choosing to see the world differently (Smith, 2018).

Table 4

Correlation between the New Normal Work-Related Stressors of the Respondents and their Coping Mechanisms in terms of Using Other Substances

New Normal Work-Related Stressors	Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Management Practices of School Heads	.099	Positive Very Low Correlation	.140	Accept H ₀ Not Significant
Work Attitudes of Colleagues	.125	Positive Very Low Correlation	.063	Accept H ₀ Not Significant

Partnership with the Parents	.082	Positive Very Low Correlation	.229	Accept H ₀ Not Significant
Learning Progress Monitor of Learners	.071	Positive Very Low Correlation	.296	Accept H ₀ Not Significant

There was positively very low non-significant correlation between the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents in terms of management practices of school heads, work attitudes of colleagues, partnership with the parents, and learning progress monitor of learners with their coping mechanisms in terms of using other substances. The computed significant values were not significant at 5% level; thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. This implied that as the new normal work related stressors of the respondents were felt, the more they needed to use other substances to cope with their situations. There are individuals who are using other substances as their ways to cope with the new normal work-related stressors that they encounter along their way. They find dependency in using these stimulants to feel relief. Stimulant use was associated with elevated mortality, increased incidence of HIV and hepatitis C infection, poor mental health, and increased risk of cardiovascular events (Farrell, et. al., 2019). The harmful effects of using stimulants must be made known to all individuals for them to become aware. It is important that they are properly educated on this matter to maintain their healthy lifestyle. Healthy habits make a big difference. People who met criteria for all five habits – healthy diet, healthy physical activity level, healthy body weight, never having smoked, and moderate alcohol intake - enjoyed significantly longer lives than those who had none (Tello, 2020). Study after study reminds individuals that as challenging as it can be, sticking with healthy habits – eating right, exercising regularly not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, and controlling how much alcohol to take –can help to live longer. But tacking on extra years is not so appealing if some or most of them are riddled with heart disease, diabetes, or cancer (Park, 2020).

Table 5

Correlation between the New Normal Work-Related Stressors of the Respondents and their Coping Mechanisms in terms of Finding Emotional Support

New Normal Work-Related Stressors	Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Management Practices of School Heads	.046	Positive Very Low Correlation	.502	Accept H ₀ Not Significant
Work Attitudes of Colleagues	.067	Positive Very Low Correlation	.324	Accept H ₀ Not Significant

Partnership with the Parents	.106	Positive Very Low Correlation	.121	Rejected H ₀ Significant
Learning Progress Monitor of Learners	.124	Positive Very Low Correlation	.071	Rejected H ₀ Significant

There was positively very low non-significant correlation between the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents in terms of management practices of school heads and work attitudes of colleagues with their coping mechanisms in terms of positive reframing. The computed significant values were not significant at 5% level; thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. However, there was positively very low significant correlation between the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents in terms of learning progress monitor of learners and partnership with the parents with their coping mechanisms in terms of positive reframing. The computed significant values were significant at 5% level; thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that as the new normal work-related stressors of the respondents were felt, the more they needed to find emotional support to cope with their situations. Individuals are frequently choosing to find emotional support when they are during stressful situations. They tend to be with their most trusted individuals who have time to listen to all their sentiments in life. At the end, they are the ones who give a heartfelt advice for them to feel at ease. Giving advice is a privilege, and it should never be taken for granted (Denning, 2018). Strugglers who gave advice, compared with those who received expert advice, were more motivated to save money, control their tempers, lose weight, and seek employment. People erroneously are less motivated by giving advice than receiving. Giving advice motivated givers by raising their confidence – a reality that predictors fail to anticipate (Eskreis-Winkler, et. al., 2018). Advice is something many people love to share, yet some have a hard time accepting from others, even when it is sound. It is in nature as human beings to resist being told what to do by others. Advice does not have to be a command; it can be a compassionate suggestion imparted by someone with deep knowledge, wisdom, and experience. Advice is a gift, and the ability to accept advice is an important key to success (Cyprus, 2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study reveals that most of the public elementary school teachers are female, aged 30–39 years old, holding the position of Teacher I, with six to ten years of service, and pursuing units in a Master’s degree program. Findings further show that teachers consider their work quite stressful, particularly in relation to the management practices of school heads, the work attitudes of colleagues, their partnership with parents, and their efforts in monitoring the progress of learners. In coping with these stressors, teachers perceive active coping, positive reframing, and finding emotional support as

quite helpful, while the use of other substances is regarded as less effective. Results also indicate that there is no significant difference in the stress levels of teachers when grouped according to profile variables, although teaching experience shows a significant link with coping mechanisms involving the use of other substances. Correlation analysis reveals very low but positive relationships between stressors and coping strategies. Based on these findings, an action plan is proposed to help teachers manage work-related stress and strengthen their coping mechanisms in the new normal of education.

Public elementary school teachers are encouraged to complete their master's degree and prepare the necessary documents for their Equivalent Rating Form (ERF) to enhance their professional growth. They must also learn to properly manage their new normal work-related stressors to carry out their assigned tasks more effectively. Strengthening coping mechanisms such as active coping, positive reframing, and seeking emotional support is recommended so that they can adjust more easily to the challenges of the teaching profession. Teachers must also be made aware that regardless of differences in age, sex, teaching position, teaching experience, and highest educational attainment, they encounter the same work-related stressors. At the same time, they must recognize that differences in teaching experience can influence their coping strategies, particularly the use of other substances. The proposed action plan for managing work-related stressors and improving coping mechanisms should be implemented to provide structured support. Furthermore, future studies are recommended to examine contributory factors affecting stress management, as well as other variables that may strengthen teachers' coping strategies in the new normal of education.

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