Teachers' Challenges and Coping Strategies in Conducting Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Activities

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ABSTRACT

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, or MHPSS, are significant in our wellbeing. During pre-pandemic, some professionals and practitioners were trained to conduct MHPSS. However, teachers are now recognized as providers because of the wide call for the integration of MHPSS in education. Thus, the researcher aimed to explore teachers' experiences conducting MHPSS for students. The study participants are classroom teachers with one to three years of experience in the Department of Education under a teacher induction program and assigned to a school with mental health practitioners like guidance counselors and school nurses. The data is analyzed using the case study model of Meriam and Tisdell. The study revealed the circumstances where students' support, activities conducted, challenges encountered, coping strategies, and responses of the recipients. The study served as an evaluation of the support and intervention in the school setting. Practitioners may use the result of this study to identify the areas where teachers need help the most. Future researchers may examine teachers' experiences assigned to schools without mental health professionals and practitioners to identify more challenges and coping strategies.

INTRODUCTION

A person's mental health and psychosocial wellbeing could be a fuel to thrive in this life. Thus, it is imperative to make a balance with everything to protect our mental health. Unfortunately, there will be times when our mental health and wellbeing will be challenged due to the inevitable happenings in our community. May it be in war, conflicts, diseases, loss of loved ones, pandemic, or natural calamities. For this reason, human beings genuinely need a support system. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support - MHPSS is not a new topic. It is widely known even before the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during conflict and disasters. Those afflicted by conflicts and disasters are supported to help them recover and survive. However, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world and became a hot topic. That is why MHPSS became a priority area of the UN and UNICEF. As people around the globe battled against the challenges brought by the pandemic, it was evident that the mental state and wellbeing of persons were affected. Thus, there is a need for MHPSS in the current situation.

The integration of MHPSS in education is highly encouraged. It is to promote mental health, make the system responsive to the needs of the learners, and protect the wellbeing of teachers, parents, and all the people involved in the education system. Thus, learners, teachers, parents, and community members must be involved in the decision-making in all stages of the MHPSS program (Nermiro et al., 2022). According to

Mental Health Act 2018 (Republic Act No. 11036) chapter V section 24, educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, universities, and technical schools, must create policies and programs for students, teachers, and other staff members to increase awareness of mental health issues. Identify and offer support and services to individuals at risk and provide facility access, including referral mechanisms for people with mental health conditions to get the treatment and social support they need. Mental health specialists must be present in all public and private educational institutions. To respond to the call for integration into the education system, the Department of Education held an orientation about the MHPSS for learners, teachers, and DepEd personnel. MHPSS must become a priority area in collaboration with the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management System (DRRMS) and the central office (DepEd Order No. 058, 2020). It is further supported by different activities for the mental health and wellbeing of teachers, non-teaching personnel, students, and parents. However, in examining the inter-organizational delivery of MHPSS, it was found that improving the systems and structures for MHPSS in the Philippines is necessary. The responsibilities and functions of the organizations concerned need to be made clear. It includes the role of local government, the Department of Health as the primary agency, and the criteria for who can provide such assistance (Teng-Calleja et al., 2019).

Furthermore, this study is made relevant as a response to the existing literature recommendations about evaluating MHPSS in school setting. It is timely to look into the experiences of teachers as providers. By looking into teachers' challenges and coping strategies, it could identify areas in MHPSS that need improvement. As a result, the following questions are the focus of this study.

1. What are the circumstances that students need MHPSS activities?
2. What MHPSS activities are conducted by the teachers?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in school?
4. How do teachers address their challenges in implementing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in school?
5. How do the teachers describe the responses of the recipients of the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support program in school?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mental health is affected by different factors, even digital addiction. In fact, in the bibliometric and science mapping analysis, the third period in the years 2018-2022 was steered by smartphones and social media addiction (Karakose et al., 2022). A study demonstrated that the immediate effects of flood-related property damage, fatalities, and physical injuries can contribute to common long-term mental health issues such posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and drug use disorders. (Mao et al., 2022). A study revealed that those who had not experienced abuse had the highest emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing compared to victims of bullying and combined victims (Villora et al., 2021). On the other hand, several studies found the negative impact of different forms of abuse on students' mental health and psychosocial wellbeing (Algahtani, 2020; De & Xueling, 2021; Kwan & Kwok, 2021). The specific problems students face that affect their mental health are family problems, academic-related problems, and behavioral and emotional problems. Further, several studies support that family and school environments significantly impact students' mental health (Escobar et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2010; Von et al., 2022). Several studies support that family and school environments significantly impact students' mental health (Escobar et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2010; Von et al., 2022). Numerous studies show that students during the COVID-19 pandemic experience a high level of stress, depression, and anxiety that affects their mental health and wellbeing (Essadek & Rabeyron, 2020; Phelps & Sperry, 2020; Akat & Karatas, 2020; Salimi et al., 2021; Alzueta et al., 2021; Alam et al., 2022).

Further, there are many supports and interventions used by practitioners for the mental health of a person. One of the activities conducted by practitioners is expressive art therapy. A study showed a link of art activities to recognizing and developing new qualities and abilities, understanding experiences, personal development, symptom relief, and communication (Rajalin et al., 2021). Physical activities were shown to positively impact college students' mental health (Powell et al., 2022).

In 2007, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) presented its emergency MHPSS guidelines. It was created recently to assist practitioners and policymakers in organizing and carrying out disaster mental health risk reduction efforts (Han et al., 2022). However, mental health is being neglected even though it is crucial to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Further, mental health is one of the most ignored global health issues (Guterres, 2018). For this reason, the importance of improving the framework and guidelines for MHPSS response was suggested. It is to clarify roles and accountabilities with the different organizations and institutions involved in providing MHPSS (Teng-Calleja et al., 2019). It is supported by several studies saying that most health staff need training and clear guidelines to properly improve the implementation of MHPSS (Turki et al., 2019). Thus, it was reiterated by the international humanitarian response's top decision-makers - the IASC Principals to decide to consider MHPSS a cross-cutting issue with relevance to health, education, and other fields (IASC, 2019). In connection, the United Nations and UNICEF make MHPSS a priority area. The 2018-2021 strategic plan of UNICEF recognized MHPSS as a priority area. The MHPSS strategy used by UNICEF encourages including individuals of various ages, genders, abilities, nationalities, and living circumstances. All sectors are advised to use MHPSS techniques to help children and families' mental health and wellbeing that focus on children and adolescents (UNICEF, 2019).

Unfortunately, COVID-19 came into being and affected many lives around the globe. After several assessments, COVID-19 has been declared a pandemic (Ghebreyesus, 2020). To address the ongoing problem, the World Health Organization issued a Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, which provides operational guidelines with high-level and practical actions that include the priority areas at the global, national, and regional levels. It includes maintaining the mental health and well-being of the population (WHO, 2021). Later, a global multisectoral operational framework of MHPSS came into being derived from the community-based MHPSS. The framework highlights the relevant sectors and areas like education, adolescent involvement and development, early childhood development, disability, nutrition, health, social welfare, and child protection (UNICEF, 2021).

Literature indicates that teachers play a significant role in promoting students' mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. In addition, the researcher believes that by examining teachers' experiences with providing MHPSS to students, significant insights can be gained. It may serve as an evaluation in the school setting in a teachers' perspective. Thus, this study aims to address the gaps in the recommendations of several studies on MHPSS. By looking into teachers' experiences as MHPSS providers working with the practitioners, it can identify the weak areas where improvement is highly needed. Moreover, the study is limited in exploring the experiences of teachers assigned to school where there are MHPSS practitioners.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the social support theory. It emphasizes the social resources that a person may use to address challenges and stressors in life (Thoits, 1995). These resources are commonly understood as providing social support. Cullen, Wright, and Chamlin (1999) defined social support as the transmission of human, cultural, material, and social capital between individuals or larger social entities such as communities, states, and their constituents. On the other hand, the middle-range paradigm of social support emphasizes interpersonal interactions and relationships in general. Researchers and practitioners from various social, behavioral, medical, and nursing fields have focused on the importance of social ties in promoting health and well-being (Warren, 2014). It means teachers, as newly recognized MHPSS providers applied for social support in conducting mental health and psychosocial support activities. Thus, the researcher would like to

look into teachers' experiences as they support learners. It is to know how the teachers are doing in their new role as MHPSS providers.

METHODS

The study used a qualitative research design, precisely a case study. This study explicitly uses the descriptive case study approach to research. Data was gathered at the municipality of Aloran province of Misamis Occidental. A large school with a guidance counselor, guidance advocate, and school nurse who gave support to the teachers in giving mental and psychosocial support who were considered practitioners of MHPSS. The study participants were chosen using the following criteria: 1. Secondary DepEd permanent teachers. 2. Teachers under Teachers Induction Program who are teaching one (1) to three (3) years in Department of Education. 3. Must be a classroom adviser for at least a year and more. 4. Teachers who conducted and gave mental and psychosocial support to students. The researcher used a self-made interview guide questionnaire to gather responses from the participants. To ensure the validity and alignment of the questions in the interview guides to the problems of the study, the researcher consulted three validators to check and furnish the questions. Furthermore, the researcher conducted observations, data mining, and document analysis to verify whether the school provided mental and psychosocial support to learners. Before collecting data, the researcher obtained permission and approval from the Schools Division Superintendent. Second, to the office of the school principal. Later, a consent form was provided as part of the research ethics. Lastly, the date of the interview was scheduled. The interview started after the researchers formally welcomed the participants and engaged them in casual discussions to get them ready. It confirmed that the participants were at ease during the interview. The participants were reminded of the nature and aim of the study and their ability to stop participating at any time if they so desired. Moreover, the data was analyzed using the method developed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). According to Merriam, analysis is the interpretation of data. Consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said as well as what the researcher has seen and read are all necessary steps in making meaning of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the chosen classroom teachers' experiences through in-depth interviews and data mining.

Table 1. the findings of the chosen classroom teachers' experiences

Category	Subcategory	Descriptor
Circumstances that Teachers Conducted MHPSS Activities	Calamities	*Experienced trauma because of the successive floods
	Abuses	*Experienced sexual abuse *Experienced physical abuse at home *Victims of bullying
	Problems	*Affected by family problems *Attempted committing suicide *Behavior problems such as always seeking attention *Experienced academic stress because of the loaded schedule and tasks *Psychological problems *Engaged into vices like smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages *Absenteeism of students *Cutting of classes because of peer pressure

Category	Subcategory	Descriptor
	Transition of Modular Learning to In-person Classes	*Some students lack confidence *There are gaps in terms of their knowledge and attitude *Difficulty in reading and comprehension *Lack collaboration *Students were emotionless
Activities Conducted by Teachers	Expressive Arts Therapy	*Drawing about future self *Scribble drawing storyline *Hand puppets *Drawing and storytelling about their experiences *Self-reflection *Dance contest *Debriefing after the successive flash floods
	One-on-one Conferences and Counseling	*Teachers tried their best to talk to students one by one, with or without problems
	Recreational Activities	*Students played games *Singing worship and famous songs *Gardening *Do Meditation and breathing exercises *Played Charades *Storytelling about their fears, worries, and frustrations
Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Giving Mental Health and Psychosocial Support	Difficulty in Handling Diversity of Students	*Teachers could not understand the behavior and attitude of students *Students had a different behavior at home and in school *Immaturity of Students *Students betrayed their teacher despite the goodness *Lack of respect for teachers *Poor academic attitude *Students have different genders *Mainstreaming students with disability to regular class *Conflict of religious beliefs in some activities *Difficulty in instructing because of poor reading and comprehension
	Teachers' Personal Struggles Mixed up in Conducting MHPSS activities	*Just like the students' teachers too experienced emotional breakdown *They are expected to give support to students even during their hard times *Difficulty in providing for the needs of students due to lack of money *Difficulty in communicating with parents with health problems *Struggle in choosing the appropriate words in giving advice
	Negative Effects of Social Media and Peer Pressure to the Behavior and Attitude of Students	*Influence of social media in having suicidal thoughts *Too dependent on cellphones *Mobile games addiction such as Mobile Legends

Category	Subcategory	Descriptor
		*Peer pressure among students *Overconfidence of students to do things whatever they want because of child protection policies. *Absence of disciplinary actions among students who misbehaved
	Lack of Support and Resources	*Parents lack support to their children *Hopelessness of parents to their children *Lack of time in conducting one-on-one interviews and making follow-ups *The administration Lacks support to teachers
Teachers' Ways of Addressing the Challenges Encountered	Giving Positive Reinforcement to	*Teachers spent money on giving rewards to students
	Minimize Problems Caused by Students' Diversity	*Teachers provided the basic needs of students, like food and shoes *Give technical support *Praised students to feel appreciated *Be friends with students to win their trust *Integration of values into daily lesson
	Maintaining a Positive Disposition in Life to avoid mixing up personal struggles in conducting MHPSS activities	*Do not ignore and learn to accept the situation for yourself *Pray to God *Have a sense of empathy *Being hopeful that students will still develop and become better *Remind yourself of why you choose to become a teacher *Love your work *Apply humor and do not take things too seriously *Do not mixed-up problems at home and in school *Family support *Food trip
*	Providing Close Monitoring of Students to Minimize Negative Impact of Social Media and Peer Pressure to The Attitude and Behavior of Students	*Individualize approach *Varying strategies *Sent special activities and online videos *Calling the attention of students who were not participating *Writing of promissory letter *Being mindful of the status of students on social media *Close observation *Established classroom rules *Anecdotal records *Conducted home visitations
	Collaborating With Other Stakeholders to address lack of support and resources	*Seeking help from the guidance office *Asking for advice from elders *Asking for help from a quack doctor *Sharing the challenges encountered to gain insights and release the heavy feeling from colleagues *Asking for cooperation and collaboration from parents *Conducting research *Reading research to gain more strategies

Category	Subcategory	Descriptor
		*Watching videos and documentaries related to the problems of students
Responses of the Recipients of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Activities as Described by Teachers	It Resulted in Positive Impact on Students	*Students were no longer very stubborn like before
	Behavior and Attitude	*Gained confidence *Increased number of daily attendance of students *Student Engagement was improved *Students were very appreciative *Students showed willingness to share their experiences *Teachers gained the trust of the students *Some students stopped smoking and drinking alcoholic beverages *They enjoyed the activities, especially the games *Students showed big smiles *Students felt relieved
	It Did Not Cause Any Change in Students' Behavior	*For them, it was just a game *Teachers believed that only students could change their behavior *Did not take the promissory letter seriously *some students have no interest despite the support of the parents and teachers *There were changes in the first few days, but they will still do it again *Some became more stubborn

Circumstances that Teachers Conducted Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Activities for Students

From the responses, there are three circumstances where students need mental health and psychosocial support as perceived by teachers. These are the calamities, abuses, problems, and transition of modular learning to in-person classes. Negative impact to wellbeing of a person was shown on several studies (Algahtani, 2020; De & Xueling, 2021; Kwan & Kwok, 2021; Mao et al., 2022; Meherali et al., 2021). Contrarily, it is made clear that those circumstances still affect students' mental health in the in-person classes.

Activities Conducted by Teachers

Teachers' activities in giving students mental health and psychosocial support include expressive arts therapy, one-on-one conferences and counseling, and recreational activities. The activities mentioned above adhere to numerous studies claiming that it positively impacts a person's mental health. (Powell et al., 2022; Rajalin et al., 2021; Sia et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2020; Nigg et al., 2023; Takiguchi, 2023). It means teachers use activities that are proven to positively impact a person's mental health. In relation, it is revealed that those activities mentioned earlier were still used as a support and intervention in promoting the wellbeing of students.

Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Giving Mental Health and Psychosocial Support to Students

Difficulty handling the diversity of students, teachers' struggles mixed up in conducting MHPSS activities, negative effects of social media and peer pressure on the behavior and attitude of students, and lack of support and resources. Among the five, managing negative student behavior and attitude has

emerged as the most significant challenge for teachers. Several studies share the same sentiments regarding the struggles faced in handling the behavior and attitude of students during the post-pandemic (Ottenheym et al., 2023; Akram et al., 2022). In contrast, technological progress is also advantageous for students (Alam, 2022). However, a study found a link between social media addiction to depression among students (Saputri & Yumarni, 2023). A study showed that the emergence of Facebook harmed students' mental health (Braghieri et al., 2022). Online game addiction has a direct and bad relationship with subjective happiness. It also has a suppressor role that worsens the relationship between flow and happiness (Hew, 2023).

Moreover, there needs to be more resources. These resources include time, money, professionals, and practitioners in mental health. A study found that their motivation will be enhanced when the community members support teachers (Christian & Sayed, 2023). However, a study discovered that without adequate support and consideration of teacher perspectives, job-related stress can lead to teacher shortages, deterioration of teacher mental health, and, ultimately, inferior student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2023). Thus, it implies that teachers call for support to do their tasks as well as mental health and psychosocial support providers.

Teachers' Ways of Addressing the Challenges Encountered

Teachers' strategies to cope with the challenges encountered are categorized into five (5) categories. These are giving positive reinforcement to minimize problems caused by students' diversity, maintaining a cheerful disposition in life to avoid mixing up personal struggles in conducting MHPSS activities, and providing close monitoring of students to minimize the negative impact of social media and peer pressure on the attitude and behavior of students and collaborating with other stakeholders to address lack of support and resources. Correspondingly, behavioral theorist adheres to the idea of giving reinforcement in shaping students' behavior (Saracho, 2023; Collins & Landrum, 2023). It implies that teachers applied varied strategies to address the difficulties encountered. It only proves that teachers are flexible.

The Responses of the Recipients of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programs in School as Described by Teachers

Students' responses as recipients of mental health and psychosocial support fall into two (2) categories. Initially, it had a positive effect on students. Similarly, a study was tested for three consecutive years about teacher support and parental monitoring, and its effect on students' performance showed that the relationship between teachers' support influenced the motivation and self-efficacy of students. The findings showed that parental monitoring influenced students' motivation (Affuso et al., 2023).

Second, it did not affect the students' behavior. It is the first category with the majority of responses. A similar study conducted by language teachers, which focuses on the behavior and emotions of learners, found that some teachers would adhere to the idea that changing learners' attitude is beyond their control. They were based on deeply held beliefs and fixed general attitudes rooted in early childhood, bad school experiences, or a lack of parental support (Mystkowska, 2022). Further, another study showed that training a classifier with 90.2% accuracy using over 20,000 recorded behaviors and identifying peer relationships as an important root cause directly affecting absenteeism is possible. An important finding shows empirical support for the fundamental idea that peer relationships are a significant absenteeism-influencing factor (Bowen, 2022). It means teachers cannot force students to change. It lies in the hands of the students whether or not they accept positively the support and intervention made by the teachers.

CONCLUSION

The study evaluated the implementation of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in the school setting. By looking into the experiences of teachers assigned to a school where practitioners are assisting them, it can be drawn out that they needed more support and resources despite the support received by the

teachers from the guidance counselor and school nurse. It is revealed that teachers still face challenges in giving support to students. However, it shows the success stories of teachers. Most of the interventions of teachers arrived with a positive impact on students. However, no matter how teachers try their best, the recovery of the students lies in their hands. Therefore, teachers cannot change students' mindsets, behavior, and attitude. They can only give support to help learners protect their mental health and wellbeing to the best of their ability.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher endorses the following recommendations based on the findings:

1. Practitioners may use the result of this study to identify the areas where teachers need help the most.
2. Future researchers may examine teachers' experiences assigned to schools without mental health professionals and practitioners to identify more challenges and coping strategies.

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