

RESEARCH ARTICLE: Teachers' mental health status in new normal among public secondary schools in Jolo, Sulu

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ABSTRACT. This study analyzed the mental health status of the public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu, Philippines. This study was a descriptive research that described the emotional well-being, support perception, stress level, anxiety level, depression, as well as resilience and coping mechanisms of the public teachers. Three public secondary schools were selected in this study. There were one hundred twenty (n=120) public school teachers who participated in the study—forty in each institution. This study adapted Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), Teachers Mental Health Check-in Survey, Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21), Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10), and Carver Brief COPE Inventory as the research questionnaire. The teachers demonstrated positive emotional state, low levels of anxiety, stress, and depression, and high resilience, all indicative of their effective management of mental health challenges in the new normal. Specifically, they reported having the feeling of optimism, love, being supported, relaxed, and mental fortitude. They were also able to respond to the challenges they face by getting advice, seeking emotional support, self-reflection, and find comfort from their religion or spiritual beliefs. However, this study did not evidently describe the interactions between support systems and anxiety, stress, and depression levels. Hence, it is essential for further research to explore the specific types of support and coping strategies that most effectively promote these positive emotional states and resilience among teachers.

KEYWORDS: *anxiety; coping mechanisms; depression; emotional well-being; mental health; stress; resilience*

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Introduction

There has been a growing focus on the effects of COVID-19 on the mental health and well-being of teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably exerted a significant influence on the lives of teachers, both within and beyond the confines of the classroom, despite the occurrence of crises within the teaching profession (Alves et al., 2021; Baker et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

A longitudinal study observed that the mental health of teachers experienced a gradual decline as the pandemic advanced. Furthermore, it has been observed that teachers who are part of COVID-19 risk groups have exhibited the most significant decline in their mental well-being

(Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2022). The emotional state and overall satisfaction of teachers have a significant impact on their classroom practices and, in turn, have a crucial influence on the learning outcomes and overall well-being of their students (Falecki & Mann, 2021; Harding et al., 2019).

In line with the global concerns, this study analyzed the mental health of public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu, Philippines. This aimed to assess their emotional states, levels of anxiety, stress, and depression, and to evaluate their resilience and support systems amidst the challenges posed by the new normal.

The teaching profession can be exceedingly demanding (Chavez, 2023), and this stress may result in diminished job satisfaction, exhaustion, and low work productivity. Stress is a typical reaction to distressing or worrisome situations and becomes pathological when it persists over a long period of time (Seo et al., 2017). Chronic stress can have a significant impact on daily functioning and emotional well-being, increasing the likelihood of developing various psychiatric conditions like anxiety and depression (Hussenoeder et al., 2022, Hussenoeder et al., 2024; Kwarteng et al., 2022). Increased teacher stress has been found to have a negative impact on job satisfaction and causing them to leave the teaching profession. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), withdrawal behavior, including both physical and psychological departure from the work environment can be caused by stress (UNESCO, 2021).

The pandemic has raised widespread concern and presented unprecedented challenges for educational institutions (Oducado, 2020). Apart from the obvious risks to physical health, the psychological impact of COVID-19 also carries significant threats and dangers to mental health and well-being as higher levels of anxiety and stress are further exacerbated by the uncertainty of the situation (Pressley et al., 2022; Rabacal et al., 2020; Santiago et al., 2023). In the advent of the pandemic, there was a significant decline in the mental health and well-being of teachers due to various additional demands present in their work environment. These demands include an increased workload, assuming multiple roles, such as covering colleagues' classes, and experiencing a sense of uncertainty (Hossain et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2022). Teachers faced a lack of resources at their workplace, including social support, work autonomy, and coping skills (Kim et al., 2022; Pressley et al., 2022).

Amidst the uncertainty of post-pandemic education setting, resilience is an essential aspect to manage challenges and educational limitations. Teacher resilience reflects the capacity of educators to effectively adjust to diverse environments and enhance their skills in surmounting challenges (Bobek, 2002; Liu & Han, 2022; Mansfield et al., 2016). Resilient teachers consistently exhibit various characteristics such as agency, moral purpose, strong support groups, a sense of achievement, and enthusiasm (Heng & Chu, 2023). Resilience is influenced by psychological, biochemical, and environmental-contextual factors, as well as individual characteristics, familial interactions, and the social milieu (Kostoulas & Lämmerer, 2018). It manifests when individuals effectively harness their personal and contextual assets and employ efficacious strategies to surmount challenges and safeguard their overall welfare (Liu et al., 2021; Zhang, 2021).

The findings of a study conducted by Hjemdal et al. (2011) indicate a positive correlation between stress and symptoms of depression and anxiety, while a negative correlation was observed between stress and resilience. García-León et al. (2019) observed that individuals with low resilience exhibited high levels of perceived stress. Additionally, it has been discovered that resilience plays a significant role in various aspects of an individual's well-being *i.e.*, perceived stress levels, the frequency of current life events, the seriousness of stressful events, chronic stress, compulsions and obsession, interpersonal sensitivity, phobic anxiety, and depression.

Although several studies were conducted regarding the state of mental health among teachers, there was a need to evaluate the mental health of teachers in the province of Jolo, Sulu. This necessity arose due to the unique socio-cultural and economic conditions in this region, which may influence the mental health and well-being of educators differently compared to other areas. Consequently, this study stands out as the only research conducted within this locality, providing crucial insights and filling a substantial gap in the existing literature.

Research Questions

This study aimed to assess the status of mental health of teachers in the new normal among the public secondary schools in Jolo, Sulu. Below were the specific questions sought to be answered in this study.

1. What were the socio-demographic profile of the teachers?
2. What was the status of teachers' mental health in new normal among public secondary schools in Jolo, Sulu?
 - 2.1. Emotional Well-being and Support
 - 2.2. Anxiety and Stress level
 - 2.3. Depression Assessment
 - 2.4. Resilience and Coping mechanism

Literature Review

Mental Health of Teachers

The global issue of teachers' health has gained significant attention in recent years, primarily due to the elevated prevalence of occupational stress among teachers and education personnel (Kyriacou, 2001). The health problems reported by teachers suggest that teaching is an occupation that induces significant stress (Bauer et al., 2007; Borrelli et al., 2014; Kovess-Masféty et al., 2007). When examining the factors contributing to teacher stress, it has been observed that specific work-related stressors, such as role ambiguity and role conflict, consistently exhibit negative correlations with job performance, job dissatisfaction, and mental well-being (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Schmidt et al., 2014).

Esici et al. (2021) found out that teachers require psychological support and ongoing training to effectively adapt to new teaching situations, particularly in relation to students' access to education. In a parallel vein, a scholarly investigation conducted by Sugianto and Ulfah (2020) revealed that the global pandemic precipitated a notable surge in teacher insecurity, anxiety, and stress levels. The observed increase in student performance can be attributed to a potential deficiency in addressing students' educational requirements and their inability to attain academic objectives. In a study conducted by Pressley et al. (2021), it was observed that most teachers did not perceive any additional burden during the initial phase of the pandemic. However, after a span of two months, teachers started to experience heightened levels of anxiety, including stress. Notably, teachers who were utilizing virtual instruction exhibited the most significant increase in anxiety levels.

Anxiety, Stress, and Depression among Teachers

In recent years, teachers reported significant levels of stress in addition to anxiety, depression, domestic abuse, and divorce, all of which had an influence on their ability to teach effectively (Al Lily et al., 2020; Lizana & Lera, 2022). It has been reported that female teachers feel more anxious compared to male teachers (Li et al., 2020). Additionally, Chinese observers noted that 9.1% of

instructors reported having stress symptoms, emphasizing the need for psychological care for them (Zhou & Yao, 2020). In a research conducted at the start of Spain's health crisis, educators also mentioned experiencing burnout, psychosomatic issues, and work overload (Prado-Gascó et al., 2020).

After the pandemic, teachers experienced psychological distress when they returned to teaching in person (Estrada-Araoz et al., 2023; Hutchison et al., 2022). Teachers exhibiting elevated levels of psychological distress were found to exhibit a correspondingly elevated prevalence of burnout syndrome; In contrast, teachers displaying lower levels of psychological distress were observed to exhibit lower levels of burnout syndrome (Ozoemena et al., 2021).

Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

Resilience in education is recognized as the capacity to manage challenges and difficult circumstances that arise in various aspects of our lives, including work, personal relationships, social interactions, and family dynamics (Chavez et al., 2023ab; Chavez et al., 2024; de Vera García & Gambarte, 2019; Moreno-Lucas & Morales-Rodríguez, 2023). The relationship between resilience and burnout is evident, as individuals with higher levels of resilience tend to be less susceptible to burnout (Cruz & Puentes Suárez, 2017; Stratta et al., 2013). This finding supports the notion that resilience plays a crucial role in enhancing professional performance (Merino Tejedor & Lucas Mangas, 2016). Specifically, teachers who possess the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate their emotions are more likely to exhibit greater effectiveness when confronted with the challenges encountered in the classroom daily (Mansfield, 2020). Emotion regulation skills holds significant potential as valuable factors in preventing any sort of mental ill-health (Extremera & Rey, 2015; Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2016; Martins et al., 2010).

Research Methodology

This was a descriptive study (Chavez, 2020; Chavez, 2021; Chavez & Lamorinas, 2023) that analyzed the status of mental health of public secondary school teachers in Jolo, Sulu, Philippines in the new normal. Specifically, this study analyzed their mental health based on (i) emotional well-being and support, (ii) anxiety and stress level, (iii) depression assessment, and (iv) resilience and coping strategies. A descriptive-comparative study is a type of research that aims to describe the characteristics of a particular group or phenomenon and compare these characteristics between different groups or under different conditions.

Descriptive analysis was carried out to represent the mental health status of the public secondary school teachers in Jolo, Sulu, Philippines. This type of analysis involved summarizing and interpreting data to provide assessment of the teachers' mental health based on responses collected through an adapted scale. The scale, a tool in survey research, allowed the teachers to express their level of agreement or disagreement with various statements related to their mental health, emotional well-being, anxiety and stress levels, depression, and resilience.

1. Population and Sampling Design

Quota sampling was used to select the participants of the study. Quota sampling is a non-probability sampling technique used in research to ensure that specific subgroups of a population are represented in the sample in proportions (Yang & Banamah, 2014). These schools were chosen to represent the broader population of public secondary schools in the area. Once the schools were identified, quotas were established for each school, specifying the number of teachers to be included in the survey from each institution. This study identified three public secondary schools

in Jolo, Sulu, Philippines to be surveyed. Each of the schools had a quota (n=40) of teachers to be surveyed.

2. Instruments

This study adapted several questionnaires to elicit the status of mental health of public secondary teachers in terms of (i) emotional well-being and support, (ii) anxiety and stress level, (iii) depression assessment, and (iv) resilience and coping strategies.

The emotional well-being which consisted of 14 items was adapted from the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) by Tennant et al., (2007). For support, which compose of 7 items, was adapted from Teachers Mental Health Check-in Survey by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2020).

For the Anxiety, Stress Level, and Depression Assessment, which constitute of 21 items, was adapted from Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995).

While the Resilience, which consisted of 10 items, was adapted from the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10) scale by Campbell-Sill & Stein (2007). Coping Strategies consisted of 25 items was adapted from the Carver Brief COPE Inventory by Carver (1997).

3. Data Gathering procedure

In the collection of data, the researcher secured a valid and reliable research instrument and submitted it to the expert for checking the relevance and consistency of the questionnaire. Afterwards, the researcher forwarded an approval letter and permit to administer the research questionnaire from the dean of the School of Graduate Studies of Sulu State College. The letter was also addressed to the respective school heads of the participating public secondary schools to establish approval to conduct the study.

Upon approval, the researcher asked an assistance from the school principal to set a schedule and meet the qualified teachers as respondents based on the inclusion criteria. The researcher discussed and explained the purpose of the study. Respondents showing an interest to participate in the study were given a consent form to be signed. The retrieval of the questionnaire was done after one week from administration.

4. Data Analysis

The questionnaire was structured to translate responses coded by items into numerical values for analysis. In this study, a quantitative analysis was employed to describe the mental health status of public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu.

Weighted mean and standard deviation calculations were carried. The weighted mean (denoted as \bar{x}) was utilized to analyze the (i) emotional well-being and support, (ii) anxiety and stress level, (iii) depression assessment, and (iv) resilience and coping strategies. Meanwhile, standard deviation (σ) was employed to assess the extent to which individual responses deviated from the mean.

In terms of interpreting the means, descriptors were used to provide insights into specific contexts of the responses. Criteria for computing mean scores were established to categorize responses effectively. **Table 1** below presents the descriptors used in this study.

Table 1. Descriptors for mean scores

| <i>Emotional Well-Being</i> | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------|
| Rating Scale | Scale Value | Description | Interpretation |
| 5 | 4.50-5.00 | All of the time | Very high extend of emotional well-being |
| 4 | 3.50-4.49 | Often | High extent of emotional well-being |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | 2.50–3.49 | Some of the time | Moderate extend of emotional well-being |
| 2 | 1.50–2.49 | Rarely | Low extend of emotional well-being |
| 1 | 1.00–1.49 | None of the time | Very low extend of emotional well-being |
| Support | | | |
| Rating Scale | Scale Value | Description | Interpretation |
| 5 | 4.50–5.00 | Extremely Supported | Very high extent of support |
| 4 | 3.50–4.49 | Very Supported | High extent of support. |
| 3 | 2.50–3.49 | Somewhat Supported | Moderate extent of support |
| 2 | 1.50–2.49 | Barely Supported | Low extent of support |
| 1 | 1.00–1.49 | Not Supported | Very low extent of support |
| Anxiety, Stress Level and Depression Assessment | | | |
| Rating Scale | Scale Value | Description | Interpretation |
| 3 | 2.50–3.00 | Almost Always | High extent of anxiety, stress and depression |
| 2 | 1.50–2.49 | Often | Moderate extent of anxiety, stress and depression |
| 1 | 1.00–1.49 | Sometimes | Low extent of anxiety, stress and depression |
| 0 | 0–.99 | Never | Very low extent of anxiety, stress and depression |
| Resilience | | | |
| Rating Scale | Scale Value | Description | Interpretation |
| 4 | 3.50–4.00 | True nearly all the time | Very high extent of resiliency |
| 3 | 2.50–3.49 | Often true | High extent of resiliency |
| 2 | 1.50–2.49 | Sometimes true | Moderate extent of resiliency |
| 1 | 1.00–1.49 | Rarely true | Low extent of resiliency |
| 0 | 0–.99 | Not true at all | Very low extent of resiliency |
| Coping Strategies | | | |
| Rating Scale | Scale Value | Description | Interpretation |
| 4 | 3.50–4.00 | I've been doing this a lot | Very high extent of coping strategies |
| 3 | 2.50–3.49 | A medium Amount | High extent of coping strategies |
| 2 | 1.50–2.49 | A little bit | Moderate extent of coping strategies |
| 1 | 1:00–149 | I haven't been doing this at all | Low extent of coping strategies |

Results

Question 1. What were the socio-demographic profile of the teachers?

In **Table 2**, findings of this study revealed that among the 120 teachers surveyed, majority of them (35.0%) were 30 years old or younger. There were 33 teachers (27.5%) from ages 41 to 50 years old and 25 teachers (20.0%) of ages 31 to 40. Only 16.7% teachers were 51 years old or older.

In terms of sex, majority of the teachers were female (65.8%) and only 34.2% were male. For their marital status, most of them (58.3%) were married and 40.85 were single. Only one (0.8%) was widowed.

Most of the teachers (44.2%) had ≤5 years of teaching experience. Some (36.7%) had been in teaching from 6 to 20 years. Only 19.2% worked more that 20 years.

Table 2. Demographic profiles of the teachers

| Demographics | Frequency (N=120) | Percent |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------|
| <i>Age</i> | | |
| 30 years old & below | 42 | 35.0% |
| 31-40 years old | 25 | 20.0% |
| 41-50 years old | 33 | 27.5% |
| 51 years old & above | 20 | 16.7% |
| <i>Sex</i> | | |
| Male | 41 | 34.2% |
| Female | 79 | 65.8% |
| <i>Marital Status</i> | | |
| Single | 49 | 40.8% |
| Married | 70 | 58.3% |
| Widowed | 1 | 0.8% |
| <i>Length of Service</i> | | |
| 5 years & below | 53 | 44.2% |
| 6-20 years | 44 | 36.7% |
| 21-40 years | 23 | 19.2% |
| <i>Educational Attainment</i> | | |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----|-------|
| Bachelor's degree | 45 | 37.5% |
| Some units in master's program | 40 | 33.3% |
| Master's degree | 26 | 21.7% |
| Some units in doctoral program | 5 | 4.2% |
| Doctorate degree | 4 | 3.3% |

Question 2. What was the status of teachers' mental health status in new normal among public secondary schools in Jolo, Sulu?

This study used descriptive analysis to describe the mental health status of the public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu. Mean scores provided an average measure of the teachers' overall emotional well-being, describing their anxiety level, stress level, depression assessment, resilience, and coping strategies.

Table 3. Status of mental health based on emotional well-being

| | Emotional Well-being | Mean | S.D. | Rating |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. | I've been feeling optimistic about the future | 4.18 | 0.806 | Often |
| 2. | I've been feeling useful | 4.17 | 0.813 | Often |
| 3. | I've been feeling relaxed | 3.77 | 0.774 | Often |
| 4. | I've been feeling interested in other people | 3.52 | 0.978 | Often |
| 5. | I've had energy to spare | 3.77 | 0.893 | Often |
| 6. | I've been dealing with problems well | 3.93 | 0.764 | Often |
| 7. | I've been thinking clearly | 4.16 | 0.721 | Often |
| 8. | I've been feeling good about myself | 4.19 | 0.725 | Often |
| 9. | I've been feeling close to other people | 3.85 | 0.875 | Often |
| 10. | I've been feeling confident | 4.01 | 0.804 | Often |
| 11. | I've been able to make up my own mind about things | 4.15 | 0.763 | Often |
| 12. | I've been feeling loved | 4.23 | 0.774 | Often |
| 13. | I've been interested in new things | 4.22 | 0.842 | Often |
| 14. | I've been feeling cheerful | 4.09 | 0.809 | Often |
| Composite | | 4.017 | 0.562 | Often |

Legend: (5) 4.50-5.00=All of the Time; (4) 3.50-4.49=Often; (3) 2.50-3.49=Some of the Time; (2) 1.50-2.49=Rarely; (1) 1.00-1.49=None of the Time

In **Table 3**, findings indicated that the public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu often felt positive ($\bar{x}=4.017$; $s.d.=0.562$) in the new normal. They reported that they have the feeling of being "loved" ($\bar{x}=4.23$; $s.d.=0.774$), "interested in new things" ($\bar{x}=4.22$; $s.d.=0.842$), "good about myself" ($\bar{x}=4.19$; $s.d.=0.725$), "optimistic about the future" ($\bar{x}=4.18$; $s.d.=0.806$), and "being useful" ($\bar{x}=4.17$; $s.d.=0.813$). The consistently high mean scores suggest that the teachers maintain a generally positive emotional state despite the challenges posed by the new normal. This could be a positive sign, indicating that they are coping well with the changes and pressures brought about by the pandemic and its aftermath.

Table 4. Status of mental health based on support

| | Support | Mean | S.D. | Rating |
|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | Students' Parents/Guardians | 3.96 | 0.863 | Very Supported |
| 2. | Administrators | 4.20 | 0.762 | Very Supported |
| 3. | Colleagues | 4.14 | 0.584 | Very Supported |
| 4. | School Board | 4.00 | 0.767 | Very Supported |
| 5. | Ministry of Education | 3.82 | 0.857 | Very Supported |
| 6. | Professional Association/Union | 3.68 | 1.004 | Very Supported |
| 7. | Family/Friends | 4.58 | 0.573 | Extremely Supported |
| Composite | | 4.056 | 0.595 | Very Supported |

Legend: (5) 4.50-5.00= Extremely Supported; (4) 3.50-4.49=Very Supported; (3) 2.50-3.49=Somewhat Supported; (2) 1.50-2.49=Barely Supported; (1) 1.00-1.49=Not Supported

In **Table 4**, findings of this study revealed that the public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu felt being very supported in the new normal. They reported that they feel very supported by the school administrators ($\bar{x}=4.20$; $s.d.=0.762$), their colleagues ($\bar{x}=4.14$; $s.d.=0.584$), the school board,

(\bar{x} =4.00; s.d.=0.767), and the student’s parents/guardians (\bar{x} =3.96; s.d.=0.863). However, they feel extremely supported by their family/friends (\bar{x} =4.58; s.d.=0.572). This indicated that teachers rely heavily on their personal relationships for emotional and practical support, which likely contributes to their overall well-being and resilience in coping with the challenges of the new normal.

Table 5. Status of mental health based on anxiety level

| | Anxiety Level | Mean | S.D. | Rating |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. | I was aware of dryness of my mouth | 1.67 | 0.832 | Sometimes |
| 2. | I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g., excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion) | 0.88 | 0.832 | Never |
| 3. | I experienced trembling (e.g., in the hands) | 0.88 | 0.769 | Never |
| 4. | I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself | 0.89 | 0.776 | Never |
| 5. | I felt I was close to panic | 0.74 | 0.750 | Never |
| 6. | I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g., sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat) | 0.98 | 0.767 | Never |
| 7. | I felt scared without any good reason | 0.70 | 0.740 | Never |
| Composite | | 0.957 | 0.590 | Never |

Legend: (3) 2.50–3.00=Almost Always; (2) 1.50–2.49=Often; (1) 1.00–1.49=Sometimes; (0) 0-0.99=Never

Analyzing the status of mental health of public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu, **Table 5** revealed that they never felt (\bar{x} =0.957; s.d.=0. 0.590) any signs of anxiousness during the pandemic. They never experienced “*being scared without any good reason*” (\bar{x} =0.70; s.d.=0. 0.740), “*feeling close to panic*” (\bar{x} =0.74; s.d.=0. 0.750), “*trembling*” (\bar{x} =0.88; s.d.=0. 0.769), and “*difficulty of breathing*” (\bar{x} =0.88; s.d.=0. 0.832). However, they sometimes feel “*dryness in their mouth*” (\bar{x} =1.67; s.d.=0. 0.832). The overall low mean scores for anxiety and its specific symptoms indicated that the teachers in Jolo, Sulu, maintained relatively low levels of anxiety during the pandemic. Despite the widespread disruptions caused by the pandemic, the teachers were able to manage their stress and anxiety effectively.

Table 6. Status of mental health based on stress level

| | Stress Level | Mean | S.D. | Rating |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. | I found it hard to wind down | 1.34 | 0.704 | Sometimes |
| 2. | I tended to over-react to situations | 0.96 | 0.718 | Never |
| 3. | I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy | 0.95 | 0.765 | Never |
| 4. | I found myself getting agitated | 0.84 | 0.745 | Never |
| 5. | I found it difficult to relax | 0.90 | 0.803 | Never |
| 6. | I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing | 0.88 | 0.758 | Never |
| 7. | I felt that I was rather touchy | 0.75 | 0.781 | Never |
| Composite | | 0.946 | 0.609 | Never |

Legend: (3) 2.50–3.00=Almost Always; (2) 1.50–2.49=Often; (1) 1.00–1.49=Sometimes; (0) 0-0.99=Never

In terms of stress level, **Table 6** revealed that the public secondary teachers never felt stressed (\bar{x} =0.946; s.d.=0. 0.609) in the new normal. They never feel “*overreacting to situations*” (\bar{x} =0.96; s.d.=0. 0.718), “*using a lot of nervous energy*” (\bar{x} =0.95; s.d.=0. 0.765), “*difficulty of relaxing*” (\bar{x} =0.90; s.d.=0. 0.803), “*intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing*” (\bar{x} =0.88; s.d.=0. 0.758). The overall low mean scores for stress and related behaviors suggested that the teachers experienced minimal stress in their professional and personal lives during the new normal. Consequently, the transition to new ways of working and living has not significantly impacted their stress levels, pointing to effective adaptation strategies.

Table 7. Status of mental health based on depression assessment

| | Depression Assessment | Mean | S.D. | Rating |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|-----------|
| 1. | I couldn’t seem to experience any positive feeling at all | 1.04 | 0.793 | Sometimes |

| | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 2. | I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things | 1.16 | 0.778 | Sometimes |
| 3. | I felt that I had nothing to look forward to | 0.77 | 0.878 | Never |
| 4. | I felt downhearted and blue | 0.82 | 0.733 | Never |
| 5. | I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything | 0.78 | 0.700 | Never |
| 6. | I felt I wasn't worth much as a person | 0.61 | 0.863 | Never |
| 7. | I felt that life was meaningless | 0.45 | 0.776 | Never |
| Composite | | 0.804 | 0.628 | Never |

Legend: (3) 2.50–3.00=Almost Always; (2) 1.50–2.49=Often; (1) 1.00–1.49=Sometimes; (0) 0-0.99=Never

Depression assessment revealed that the public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu never felt being depressed (\bar{x} =0.804; s.d.=0. 0.628) in the new normal. **Table 7** presented that the teachers never felt “*life is meaningless*” (\bar{x} =0.45; s.d.=0.776), “*downhearted and blue*” (\bar{x} =0.82; s.d.=0. 0.733), and “*nothing to look forward to*” (\bar{x} =0.77; s.d.=0.878). However, they sometimes felt “*difficult to work up the initiative to do things*” (\bar{x} =1.16; s.d.=0.778) and “*couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all*” (\bar{x} =1.04; s.d.=0.793). The low mean score for depression and minimal occurrence of specific depressive feelings indicated that the teachers in Jolo, Sulu, generally maintain good mental health and resilience despite the challenges of the new normal.

Table 8. Status of mental health based on resilience

| | Resilience | Mean | S.D. | Rating |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
| 1. | I am able to adapt when changes occur. | 2.96 | 0.792 | Often True |
| 2. | I can deal with whatever comes my way. | 3.04 | 0.803 | Often True |
| 3. | I try to see the humorous side of things when I am faced with problems | 2.87 | 0.855 | Often True |
| 4. | Having to cope with stress can make me stronger. | 3.04 | 0.823 | Often True |
| 5. | I tend to bounce back after illness, injury or other hardships | 2.90 | 0.920 | Often True |
| 6. | I believe I can achieve my goals, even if there are obstacles. | 3.31 | 0.775 | Often True |
| 7. | Under pressure, I stay focused and think clearly. | 3.05 | 0.887 | Often True |
| 8. | I am not easily discouraged by failure. | 3.04 | 0.956 | Often True |
| 9. | I think of myself as a strong person when dealing with life's challenges and difficulties. | 3.17 | 0.940 | Often True |
| 10. | I am able to handle unpleasant or painful feelings like sadness, fear, and anger. | 3.11 | 0.871 | Often True |
| Composite | | 3.05 | 0.689 | Often True |

Legend: (4) 3.50-4.00=Nearly True all the Time; (3) 2.50–3.49=Often True; (2) 1.50–2.49=Sometimes True; (1) 1.00–1.49=Rarely True; (0) 0-.99=Not True at all

In resilience, **Table 8** indicated that the public secondary teachers were very resilient (\bar{x} =3.05; s.d.=0. 0.689) in the new normal. Specifically, they “*consider themselves as strong person when dealing with life's challenges and difficulties*” (\bar{x} =3.17; s.d.=0.940), “*believe they can achieve their goals, even if there are obstacles*” (\bar{x} =3.31; s.d.=0.775), and “*able to handle unpleasant or painful feelings like sadness, fear, and anger*” (\bar{x} =3.11; s.d.=0.871). The high mean score for resilience and the specific resilient characteristics observed indicated that the teachers in Jolo, Sulu, possessed strong adaptive capacities and coping mechanisms.

Table 9. Status of mental health based on coping mechanisms

| | Coping Strategies | Mean | S.D. | Rating |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. | I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things. | 2.97 | 0.798 | A little bit |
| 2. | I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in. | 3.26 | 0.804 | A little bit |
| 3. | I've been saying to myself "this isn't real". | 2.45 | 0.933 | A little bit |
| 4. | I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better. | 1.32 | 0.722 | Haven't doing |
| 5. | I've been getting emotional support from others. | 2.61 | 0.900 | A little bit |
| 6. | I've been giving up trying to deal with it. | 2.04 | 0.911 | Medium amount |
| 7. | I've been taking action to try to make the situation better. | 3.32 | 0.799 | A little bit |

| | | | | |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 8. | I've been refusing to believe that it has happened. | 2.22 | 0.801 | Medium amount |
| 9. | I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape. | 2.25 | 0.832 | Medium amount |
| 10. | I've been getting help and advice from other people | 2.99 | 0.855 | A little bit |
| 11. | I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it. | 1.35 | 0.763 | Haven't doing |
| 12. | I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive. | 2.98 | 0.864 | A little bit |
| 13. | I've been criticizing myself. | 2.08 | 0.945 | Medium amount |
| 14. | I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do. | 3.23 | 0.753 | A little bit |
| 15. | I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone. | 3.02 | 0.793 | A little bit |
| 16. | I've been giving up the attempt to cope. | 1.98 | 0.874 | A medium amount |
| 17. | I've been looking for something good in what is happening. | 3.22 | 0.801 | A little bit |
| 18. | I've been making jokes about it. | 2.53 | 0.721 | A little bit |
| 19. | I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping. | 2.72 | 0.832 | A little bit |
| 20. | I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened. | 3.23 | 0.707 | A little bit |
| 21. | I've been expressing my negative feelings. | 2.47 | 0.721 | A little bit |
| 22. | I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs. | 3.53 | 0.673 | Been doing this |
| 23. | I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do. | 3.09 | 0.789 | A little bit |
| 24. | I've been learning to live with it. | 3.12 | 0.780 | A little bit |
| 25. | I've been thinking hard about what steps to take. | 2.88 | 0.811 | A little bit |
| 26. | I've been blaming myself for things that happened. | 1.87 | 0.840 | A medium amount |
| 27. | I've been praying or meditating | 3.43 | 0.764 | A little bit |
| 28. | I've been making fun of the situation. | 2.14 | 0.901 | A medium amount |
| Composite | | 2.653 | 0.398 | A little bit |

Legend: (4) 3.50-4.00=I've Been Doing This a Lot; (3) 2.50-3.49= A Medium Amount; (2) 1.50-2.49= A Little Bit; (1) 1.00-1.49=I Haven't Been Doing This at All

In terms of coping mechanisms, **Table 9** revealed that the public secondary teachers were somehow active in applying coping strategies (\bar{x} =2.653; s.d.=0.398) in the new normal. Specifically, the teachers were “*taking action to try to make the situation better*” (\bar{x} =3.32; s.d.=0.799), “*praying or meditating*” (\bar{x} =3.43; s.d.=0.764), “*trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs*” (\bar{x} =3.53; s.d.=0.673), “*concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in*” (\bar{x} =3.26; s.d.=0.804), and “*learning to live with it*” (\bar{x} =3.12; s.d.=0.780). The observed somehow high average scores in coping strategies, such as proactive measures to enhance the circumstances, engaging in prayer or meditation, and seeking peace in religious or spiritual beliefs, suggest that educators heavily depend on positive coping mechanisms to successfully deal with challenging circumstances. These strategies have the potential to offer individuals emotional support, a sense of comfort, and a feeling of control in the face of uncertainty.

Discussion

Emotions and feelings currently have a substantial impact on education, and specifically on the process of teaching and classroom management (Mercer, 2020; Sikma, 2021). Effective recognition and control of these emotions significantly influence academic success and productivity of a person (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2021; Zhao, 2021). The shift in attention towards emotions originated from the field of positive psychology. Although it acknowledges negative emotions, positive psychology focuses on the positive aspects of life and asserts that positive emotions have the capacity to address and overcome negativity and challenges (Seligman, 2011; Wang et al., 2021; Zhang & Zhang, 2020; Zhao, 2021).

The analysis of various aspects of the mental health and coping mechanisms among public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu, revealed several key findings. For instance, the teachers consistently reported positive emotional states, indicating a general sense of well-being and resilience despite the challenges posed by the new normal. They also felt very supported, particularly by their personal relationships, which likely contributes to their overall well-being and ability to cope effectively.

In this study, the public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu, Philippines manifested positive level of emotional well-being and support perception. Previous studies indicated a significant association between teacher emotion and work engagement (Noughabi et al., 2020). Emotional engagement, specifically referring to the positive emotional reactions of instructors towards their profession, is a crucial aspect of work engagement (Perera et al., 2018). Furthermore, social interaction with students and peers is inherently emotional due to the boundless emotional aspect of human interactions (Yin & Lee, 2012). This positive perception can be associated with support a person receives. For instance, the support from cooperating teachers, administrators, university supervisors, and peers involves working together to address the difficulties faced by teachers promotes the process of reflecting on learning outcomes (An et al., 2022; Kaihoi et al., 2022; Richter et al., 2022). Participation in the Pre-Service Teacher Support System (PTSS) was found to be associated with higher levels of self-assessment, a motivation to enhance teaching skills, and a reinforced sense of identity as aspiring educators (Manowaluilou & Reeve, 2022). Social interactions with students and peers are inherently emotional, further highlighting the importance of supportive relationships in promoting positive perceptions among teachers. The collaborative efforts of various stakeholders to address teachers' difficulties may contribute to the process of reflecting on learning outcomes and fostering a supportive environment, positive emotional well-being, and positive support perception.

In contrast, the teachers exhibited low levels of anxiety, stress, and depression, suggesting that they have successfully managed these mental health challenges amidst the pandemic. The prevalence of stress among teachers has been significantly linked to symptoms of anxiety (Cheng & Lam, 2021; Pressley, 2021; Truzoli et al., 2021) and depression (Amaral-Prado et al., 2021; Truzoli et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2021). Reported stress-related symptoms include demotivation (Zapata-Garibay et al., 2021), technostress (Abilleira et al., 2021; Estrada-Muñoz et al., 2021), vocal strain (Besser et al., 2022), somatic issues (Collie, 2021; Prado-Gascó et al., 2020), emotional exhaustion (Collie, 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2022), job insecurity (Prado-Gascó et al., 2020), negative affect (Anderson et al., 2021), and burnout (Kumawat, 2020; Miguel et al., 2021; Prado-Gascó et al., 2020). This study believed that the positive emotional well-being and feeling of being supported can also influence the stress, anxiety, and depression levels of the public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu.

Furthermore, the public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu demonstrated high levels of resilience, possessing strong adaptive capacities and coping mechanisms. Teacher resilience has a crucial role in mitigating teacher burnout (Polat & İskender, 2018). Resilience refers to the capacity to adjust and manage demanding circumstances, such as excessive workloads, challenging peers, and unfavorable educational environments (Mansfield et al., 2016). Teachers who possess resilience are more adept at recovering from failures and sustaining their enthusiasm and energy levels. Studies have demonstrated that teachers who possess resilience are more inclined to have a favorable outlook towards their profession, encounter reduced levels of stress, and attain higher levels of job satisfaction compared to teachers who lack resilience (Daniilidou et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2022). Teachers who demonstrate resilience also tend to achieve better student results,

including enhanced academic performance and reduced behavior problems. Teacher resilience can be influenced by various factors, including social support from colleagues and administrators, positive teacher-student connections, and effective coping methods (Beltman et al., 2011; Liu & Chu, 2022). Factors contributing to this resilience likely include robust social support from colleagues and administrators, positive relationships with colleagues, and effective coping strategies.

Further research should thoroughly investigate the impact of emotional well-being and support networks on promoting resilience and mitigating mental health difficulties among teachers. It is worthwhile to investigate different kinds of support and coping strategies that have the most impact on the positive emotional states and high levels of support reported by public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu.

Conclusion

The analysis of mental health and coping mechanism revealed that the public secondary teachers in Jolo, Sulu manifested positive emotional state and high levels of resilience, indicating well-being and strong adaptive capacities despite the challenges of the new normal. This positive emotional state can be attributed to the support from personal relationships and professional networks, which enhance their ability to cope effectively and maintain emotional engagement in their profession.

The teachers exhibited low levels of anxiety, stress, and depression, suggesting effective management of these mental health challenges. The study found that positive emotional well-being and strong support systems are crucial in mitigating stress-related symptoms such as demotivation, technostress, vocal strain, somatic issues, emotional exhaustion, job insecurity, negative affect, and burnout. The collaborative efforts of stakeholders, including cooperating teachers, administrators, university supervisors, and peers, were essential in addressing teachers' difficulties and promoting a supportive environment.

Future research should focus on the specific types of support and coping strategies that most effectively enhance positive emotional states and resilience among teachers. Investigating the impact of different support networks on teachers' mental health and job satisfaction could provide valuable insights for developing interventions to further promote teacher well-being and effectiveness in educational settings.

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