

Teachers' Well-Being During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Northern Palawan

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Date received: June 22, 2025

Date revised: July 19, 2025

Date accepted: August 8, 2025

Originality: 90%

Grammarly Score: 99%

Similarity: 10%

Recommended citation:

Gaviana, R. (2025). Teachers' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Palawan. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 3(9), 177-190. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2025.528>

Abstract. The study's main objective is to investigate teachers' experiences affecting their well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Palawan, focusing on their psychological, emotional, social, and economic experiences. Employing a phenomenological qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine (9) purposively qualified teachers who participated in the guided interviews to capture the educators' lived experiences and understand teachers' perspectives amidst the health crisis. The study reveals impacts on educators' mental health, instructional efficacy, and systemic inequalities. Seven (7) significant challenges were pointed out namely: 1) health anxiety- dominated teachers' experiences, with fear of infection exacerbating stress, absenteeism, and burnout 2) module preparation- became a crisis due to delayed MOOE funds forcing teachers to self-funding printing, worsening workloads, and leaving 67% of students without 1:1 materials until quarter four, 3) struggling learners regressed academically, with 67% of teachers reporting Grade two pupils unable to read and write, compounded by parental support, 4) ICT challenges- older and rural educators struggling with zoom and online tools, widening the digital divide, 5) co-teachers conflicts- less frequent (33%) strained collaboration and required administrative mediation, 6) heavy workloads- this study pointed out that overloading tasks topped the challenges encountered by teachers followed by family-related concerns, 7) financial issues. On the other hand, building a strong relationship with peers and immediate family members became an enabling strategy in dealing with the enumerated challenges. The results reveal significant emotional and psychological stressors linked to family concerns, health risks, and work demands. However, teachers demonstrated notable resilience, bolstered by personal faith, family support, and collegial relationships. Coping strategies included a sense of purpose, maintaining social connections, and dedication to their students. The findings underscore the critical role of emotional support and adaptive strategy in fostering teacher resilience, with implications for future support programs. This study emphasizes the urgent need to prioritize teacher well-being and systemic preparedness to build a crisis-resilient education system.

Keywords: COVID-19; Pandemic; Teachers' mental health; Teachers' well-being.

1.0 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected teachers in Northern Palawan, impacting their psychological, emotional, social, and economic well-being. Many teachers reported that the pandemic influenced how they performed their duties, interacted with others, and managed their thoughts and emotions. The shift in the learning modality mandated by the Department of Education added further stress, especially for those unfamiliar with technology and distance learning methods. This change influenced the teachers' mental states and their students' ability to adjust and learn effectively. As noted by Kraft et al. (2020), sudden changes in the work environment, combined with family duties, contributed to mental health challenges. Vasquez (2021) also highlighted that even

technologically capable teachers faced difficulties due to limited resources and rising stress levels.

Globally, the pandemic has triggered increased mental health concerns, particularly among professionals like healthcare workers and educators (Holmes et al., 2020). In the context of teaching, one of the most stressful professions (McIntyre & Francis, 2017), these pressures were intensified. Baker (2021) emphasized that pandemic-related stress can affect teachers and learners, creating a ripple effect in the education sector. In response, the Department of Education has prioritized promoting mental health and well-being among teachers and learners, recognizing educators as key figures in maintaining quality education during the crisis. Given these realities, this study aims to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the mental health and well-being of teachers in Northern Palawan, focusing on their psychological, emotional, social, and economic experiences. The findings provide valuable insights that could inform future support strategies for educators facing similar challenges.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) manifests in persistent and excessive worry about various aspects of life, including health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. For teachers in Northern Palawan, the combined stress of pandemic-related anxieties and job-related uncertainties has led to significant emotional and psychological challenges. The sudden shift to remote teaching, concerns about health safety, and economic instability have intensified these struggles, highlighting the need for mental health support in the education sector.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

In this study, the phenomenological approach—a type of qualitative research focused on understanding the essence of lived experiences—was applied to explore how teachers were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Phenomenology aims to uncover the core meanings behind individuals' experiences, particularly how a group perceives and responds to a shared phenomenon. Qualitative research, which involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data like text, video, or audio, helps uncover complex insights or generate new research ideas (Bhandari, 2022). Commonly used in education and scholarship, this approach was chosen to evaluate teachers' stressors during the pandemic and how these impacted their psychological, social, emotional, and economic well-being. It also sheds light on their coping mechanisms in response to these challenges.

2.2 Research Participants

The participants of the study consisted of nine (9) classroom teachers who met specific criteria: they held positions from Teacher I to Teacher III with more than five years of teaching experience; represented different school sizes including Small, Medium, and Big Schools; were married with children; served as coordinators in areas such as ICT, Brigada Eskwela, SBM, or subject coordination; and were responsible for managing school programs and projects.

2.3 Research Instruments

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, and online surveys using Google Forms were used to gather data from teachers in El Nido del Sur, El Nido del Norte, and Taytay District 3.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The principals approved the study, involving nine (9) respondents from district schools who met the selection criteria. To ensure no important questions were missed, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews by visiting nine schools, each lasting about 30 minutes. The invited participants were interviewed face-to-face to clarify issues that were not adequately addressed during the online interview. These interviews were conducted in Filipino, recorded, transcribed, and analyzed into themes, with each respondent representing a specific school category (Small, Medium, or Large Schools). The same questions were distributed via an online Google Form to the same group of respondents. To validate the consistency of the data collected from both methods, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with selected participants, guided by a moderator who met the study's selection criteria.

2.5 Data Analysis

The analysis in this study follows Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, which includes: Step 1 – Familiarizing yourself with the data, Step 2 – Generating initial codes, Step 3 – Searching for themes, Step 4 – Reviewing themes, Step 5 – Defining and naming themes, and Step 6 – Producing the report. This method is considered highly flexible,

especially given the diverse tasks involved in teaching and learning. The goal of thematic analysis is not merely to summarize the data, but to identify meaningful or enjoyable patterns that can be used to answer the research question or highlight key issues (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained approval from the School District Supervisors and School Heads before conducting interviews and distributing the survey questionnaire for this study. Respondents were asked about their willingness to participate throughout the entire duration of the research. Given the sensitive nature of the topic and the importance of thoroughly investigating issues related to mental health, the researcher consulted a qualified guidance counselor to address and explain matters concerning psychological problems and concerns.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Challenges Encountered by Teachers during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The thematic analysis resulted in seven (7) significant themes, namely: health anxiety, module preparation, struggling learners, heavy workload, finances, computer literacy, and co-teachers.

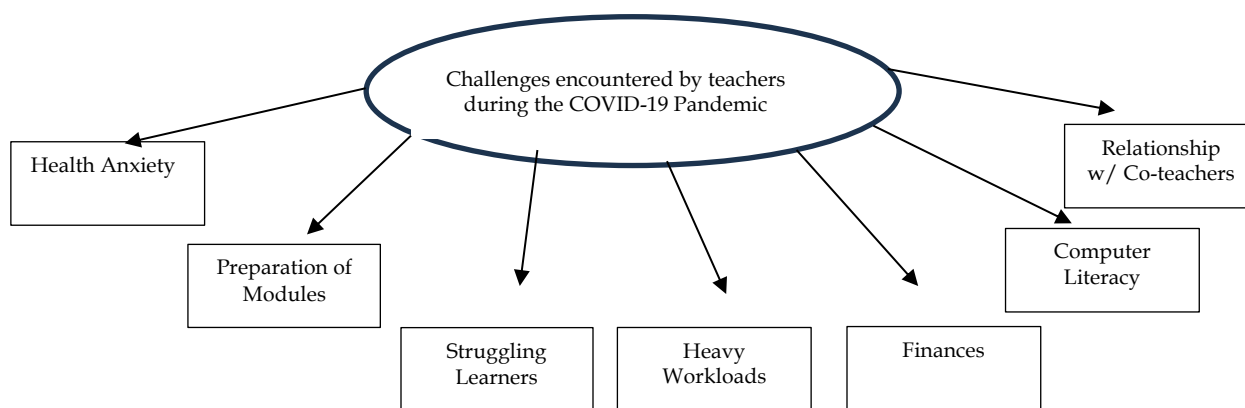


Figure 1. Thematic Presentation of the Challenges Encountered by Teachers

Health Anxiety

According to the result, health anxiety was the most prominent stressor among educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher respondents reported feelings of loneliness, burdensomeness, isolation, stress, uselessness, pessimism, and weariness. These emotions significantly affected their emotional stability and overall well-being. It was believed that such negative emotions directly impacted teachers' working conditions. The stress brought about by lockdowns and the presence of the virus greatly influenced their mental health and well-being while fulfilling their professional duties.

"Nakakatakot ma'am, hindi ka na makikita ng pamilya mo pagnagkasakit ka. [It's so terrified Ma'am, you cannot be with your family when you get sick]." P1

"I overcame the stress brought about by the Pandemic by watching television, listening to the words of God, performing Zumba dancing, using herbal and traditional methods, "suob-suob," and most importantly, worshipping God." P8

Despite the crisis, teachers remained highly optimistic and engaged in various activities to cope with stress, such as watching stress management programs, playing worship songs, praying with family, dancing, jogging, using natural remedies, staying calm, taking breaks, watching inspiring movies, going to the beach, visiting friends, and maintaining their faith in God—ultimately leading them to value life more deeply. Their adaptive strategies during the pandemic proved effective in managing stress and building resilience. These findings align with Mercer and Talbot (2019), who emphasized that teachers' use of coping responses to stressors is a key factor in their psychological adjustment and well-being.

Impact on Education. The high levels of health anxiety among teachers had direct consequences on the educational system: 1) decreased teaching efficacy- stress, isolation, and emotional exhaustion likely reduced

teachers' ability to engage students effectively, especially in remote learning settings. 2) Workplace absenteeism-fear of infection may have led to an increase in absences, disrupting continuity in instruction. 3) Lower morale and burnout-prolonged stress without proper support could contribute to long-term burnout, affecting teacher retention and quality of education. 4) shift in priorities-teacher had to balance survival instincts (avoiding illness) with professional duties, which may have compromised instructional focus.

Mental health and well-being. The emotional toll described loneliness, pessimism, and weariness, suggesting deeper mental health concerns: 1) chronic stress and anxiety- the fear of infecting loved ones, as expressed by P1, created existential dread, worsening anxiety. 2) emotional instability-prolonged distress could lead to depression, insomnia, or psychological disorder if unaddressed. 3) Coping mechanisms as survival tools -while adaptive strategies (e.g., faith, exercise, social support) helped, reliance on them highlights a lack of institutional mental health support.

The findings support Mercer & Talbot's (2019) assertion that coping strategies are vital for psychological adjustment. However, the study also reveals that individual resilience alone is insufficient- systematic support (counseling, hazard pay, safer work conditions) is necessary. Traditional and spiritual coping mechanisms are undervalued in mainstream mental health discourse, but have proved essential for Filipino educators.

The pandemic exacerbated health anxiety among teachers, impacting education delivery, mental health, and professional sustainability. While personal coping strategies provided relief, long-term solutions must include: institutional mental health programs, accessible stress management resources, recognition of cultural coping practices, and policy reforms to ensure teacher well-being. This study highlights the urgent need to prioritize educators' mental health to sustain a resilient education system in future crises.

Preparations of Modules

The problem with module preparation began with soliciting donations for printing supplies and continued until all students received their copies. Teachers often sought help from friends, family, and politicians, working overtime to print and sort modules in addition to their regular teaching duties. Even after hours, they continued printing and organizing materials to meet release schedules, which became particularly challenging during lockdowns when module distribution was disrupted. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of respondents said that preparing learning materials is one of the most exhausting tasks assigned by the DepEd outside of their mandate. They frequently relied on donations due to the late release and insufficiency of Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) funds, and the mismatch in the required 1:1 module-to-student ratio persisted until the fourth quarter of the school year.

"Grabeng pagod magprint ng mga modules. [It's very tiring when printing modules]." P4

"Production of learning materials lies on our shoulders as an additional responsibility." P6

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were mandated to find ways and means to continue education despite budget constraints. A study conducted by Prado-Gasco et al. (2020) confirms that teachers' workloads caused stress, including emotional and physical exhaustion and psychosomatic problems.

According to 67% of respondents, issues related to struggling learners—such as non-readers, reading and writing difficulties, and assessing learning—were significant concerns during the pandemic. Despite working from home, teachers maintained their usual responsibilities, including monitoring each student's progress, which raised concerns about evaluation outcomes. A teacher's positive attitude was seen as vital to a child's learning, prompting home visits to inform parents about their child's participation and performance and to provide guidance on time management. Learners are central to the educational system, and the presence of struggling students highlights the need for further evaluation on effectively addressing their needs. This was particularly challenging under the strict health restrictions imposed by the Department of Health (DOH) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Hindi namin alam kung may natutunan ang mga anak namin o wala, bigay lang kami nang bigay ng modules. Yong mga parents tamad rin magturo; hindi raw nakikinig sa kanila mga anak nila. [We just gave the modules to our students,

unknowingly whether they have learnings or none at all. Their parents are also lazy to attend to their children's needs].” P1

“Grade-2 na po sila hindi pa marunong bumasa at sumulat, kahit pangalan hirap pa. [They were already in Grade two, but still they do not know how to read and even write their names].” P9

According to the testimonies above, struggling learners' academic performance deteriorated during the lockdown. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of respondents reported that their students had writing, reading, and comprehension difficulties. Teachers expressed concern about their pupils' academic progress. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the respondents revealed difficulties with their struggling learners, citing students' attitudes toward educational tasks as contributing to their reading challenges. According to the study's findings, *“Teachers are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward allowing students to struggle when students are learning,”* which Ruso et al. (2021) refer to as *“productive struggle.”*

Struggling Learners

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The pandemic forced teachers into exhausting, underfunded module production, worsening workloads, and burnout. Delayed MOOE funds led to personal spending and donations, while the 1:1 module ratio failed initially, leaving students underserved. Struggling learners (non-readers, writing difficulties) regressed further due to weak parental support and ineffective modular learning. The study found three issues: 1) teachers overworked-printing and distribution tasks drained energy from actual teaching. 2) systemic neglect- DepEd's late funds and lack of logistics support shifted burdens to teachers, 3) learning loss escalated- many Grade-two students still could not read/write, with modules unable to replace classroom instruction.

Urgent reforms are needed. DepEd must ensure timely MOOE funds and centralized module production, targeted literacy programs for left-behind students, and provide parent training to improve home learning support. Without systemic fixes, future crises will repeat these failures.

Heavy Workload

According to the findings of this study, additional workloads on top of regular classroom teaching duties were already a burden for 67% of respondents. They accepted these tasks because the assignments were communicated through official memoranda. Heavy workloads were physically demanding to complete. Administrative tasks, typically handled by the school principal and not part of a classroom teacher's core responsibilities, were assigned to teachers due to time constraints. As a result, they were required to prepare and submit reports while students either waited or engaged in other activities.

Most teachers experienced significant workload challenges, which contributed to stress and burnout. They reported an increased workload that left them physically exhausted, often working beyond the hours expected for classroom teaching. In addition to their teaching responsibilities, many also served as ICT Coordinator, LIS Coordinator, Canteen Teacher, Officer-in-Charge in the absence of a full-fledged School Head, SBM Coordinator,

Brigada Eskwela Coordinator, among others. These demanding roles hindered teachers from spending quality time with their families.

"Sa pagcollect ng mga data mag-aadjust ka talaga nang todo lalo na kung magsusubmit ka nalang biglang nawala ang network connectivity. [There is a need to adjust yourself to a very challenging, poor network connectivity, especially during submission of reports]." P4

"Siyempre ma'am kasi mahirap yon doble na ang trabaho ko eh... magpiprint ako ng module at kapag mayroong call up report. kung syempre mga kasamahan kong teachers busy din sila sa printing nila, so instead na mag-utos pa sa kanila ako nalang gumagawa noong iba. [It is not easy on my part because of my dual functions (as classroom teacher and school in-charge), considering my colleagues who are also busy doing their tasks, I did the printing of modules and submission of reports.]" P2

Similarly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Austrian elementary teachers faced significant professional challenges. Woltran et al. (2021) found that many elementary school teachers experienced an increased workload when implementing emergency distance learning. This rise in workload was further intensified by the merging of living and working spaces, with teacher-parents reporting a double burden as they had to fulfill their professional duties while also managing parental responsibilities.

Finances

It should be noted that all the study participants were female. During the interviews, most teachers reported that their husbands had lost their jobs, leading to significant financial difficulties. As a result, they lost a substantial portion of their household income, struggled to pay bills, faced challenges in sending their children to school, and were often forced to rely on emergency loans or food banks to meet basic needs.

The teachers faced numerous day-to-day challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included staying in the hospital for a week, conducting home visits for at-risk students as part of intervention efforts, losing jobs due to business closures, and dealing with temporary suspensions of employment in the tourism sector. Financial hardship was a persistent issue—having no money, they said, felt like “walking in the dark.” They expressed frustration and helplessness, explaining that they could not strategize how to transfer patients from one hospital to another or provide the necessary medicines and care that their loved ones required.

"Nahirapan talaga kami sa financial dahil sa COVID-19, tatlong barangay ang sakop ng school namin, mahal ang pamasahe kaya mahirap puntahan isa- isa. [We have financial constraints during COVID-19, I need to spend a significant amount of money for fare to reach the three barangays covered by our school]." P1

"Kami ay bagong lipat lang, nangangapa pa ako, tapos bumili kami ng lupa then dumating ang Pandemic nauubos ang lahat ng sweldo ko kaya nahirapan din kami. Nagsara ang tindahan sa Lio dahil sa COVID lockdown. [Because we are new in the area, we bought a parcel of land from my salary then, here comes the COVID-19 lockdown, our sari-sari store in Lio was closed, I don't know what to do that time]." P9

According to the study's findings, financial difficulties were one of the significant issues faced by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 44% of respondents reporting such struggles. Despite being employed by the government, many teachers experienced financial hardship due to their spouses' reliance on the tourism industry, which was severely affected by lockdowns, leading to business and resort closures and reduced economic activity. Teachers also had to cover work-related expenses out of pocket, including materials like bond paper and ink, as well as transportation costs for home visits. Additionally, to protect themselves from the virus, they spent significantly on health-related supplies such as face masks, sanitizers, alcohol, face shields, and vitamins, which further strained their budgets.

Supporting this, Adegbeye et al. (2021) found a strong connection between financial stress and parental mental health issues, which in turn impacted children's mental health, suggesting that the pandemic intensified existing mental health problems in families. Similarly, a study by the Philippine Institute for Developmental Studies (PIDS) revealed that public school teachers are 50% more likely than other government employees to borrow money, indicating that financial challenges were present even before the pandemic. Swigonski et al. (2021) also reported that 33% of early childhood educators in Indiana frequently worried about their finances throughout the month,

highlighting the widespread financial stress among educators during the pandemic.

Computer Literacy

Even though computer literacy is beneficial in today's educational system—making tasks easier to complete and saving time—this remained a challenge for teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic due to cultural differences, shifting priorities, varying levels of involvement, unequal opportunities, and differing levels of engagement. During the pandemic, computers became essential tools for communication and reporting. However, according to Cuervo et al. (2018), working from home using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can lead to tension, anxiety, exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction.

"Nahirapan po talaga ako sa computer kasi di naman ako marunong kahit magprint, nagpapaturo pa ako. [I find it difficult to use computer in printing because I really don't know how to use it by that time]." P6

"Pag nag-online teaching kami, nahihirapan ako sa paggamit ng Zoom, pina practice –practice ko gamitin ang mga icons. [When we had our online teaching, I had difficulty attending Zoom meetings. What I did to familiarize myself with the gadget was spend time practicing and identifying the different icons.] P1

Thirty-three percent (33%) of those polled reported having difficulty using a computer. During the pandemic, teachers employed modular distance learning and online teaching modalities, both of which became sources of perceived stress. In addition to their regular responsibilities as classroom teachers, they had to exert significant effort to adapt to the 21st-century skills required by the Department of Education (DepEd). Internet access and technological proficiency were essential for participating in training sessions, meetings, and virtual seminars. While only a few reported difficulties connecting with colleagues, challenges included joining Zoom meetings, conducting online classes, and accessing the internet during virtual training. The issue of computer literacy was eventually addressed through regular practice of computer skills and attendance in virtual computer training. This finding is supported by research conducted by Hamilton et al. (2020), which revealed that teachers in rural areas frequently encountered technological limitations. Teachers with low computer literacy struggled to deliver online lessons, widening gaps between tech-savvy educators and those left behind. Rural and older teachers faced greater challenges due to limited prior exposure to ICT tools. Forced adaptation to 21st-century skills under pandemic pressures led to anxiety and exhaustion.

Relationship with Co-teachers

Conflicts with co-teachers are a common aspect of organizational challenges that can significantly affect mental health. The severity and nature of these conflicts vary depending on category, level, and influencing factors. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted teachers' lives, substantially affecting their professional responsibilities. Tensions and problems among co-workers can become sources of stress and should not be overlooked by anyone within the organization. Such stressors have a direct impact on each member's mental well-being and can eventually influence their social and emotional health as well.

"May misunderstanding sa katrabaho, there is no perfect organization naman. [I believe there is no such perfect organization, we even experience misunderstandings with our colleagues]." P8

"Pagna stress ako sa kasama ko, pinaubaya ko na kay School head. [When I feel that I am already feeling stressed, I tend to give it to my school head to settle the issue]." P4

The impact of conflicts with co-teachers on the educational system: 1) reduced collaboration and teamwork- conflicts among co-teachers hinder effective lesson planning, coordination, and peer support, leading to inconsistent teaching quality. Strained relationships weaken school-wide initiatives. 2) increased stress and burnout- workplace tensions contribute to emotional exhaustion, lowering morale and job satisfaction. 3) negative classroom environment-unresolved conflicts spill over into student interactions, modeling poor conflict resolution, and students sense tension can affect students' safety and focus. 4) administrative burden- school leaders spend excessive time mediating disputes instead of improving instruction.

Conflict is inevitable but manageable, as P8, no organization is perfect; disagreements are normal but require structured resolution. Some teachers (like P4) defer to authority rather than resolving issues directly, which can

prolong tensions. Remote work added responsibilities, and health anxieties strained professional relationships – finally, chronic stress correlates with higher stress, anxiety, and even depression among educators.

Only 33% of respondents reported having issues with their colleagues, indicating that while peer-related conflict was a stressor during the COVID-19 pandemic, most interactions with co-workers were generally positive and attributed stress primarily to crisis pressure. One respondent even shared a personal story of reconciliation, stating that she forgave a colleague and changed her behavior toward peers after a conflict episode. The pandemic's impact on co-teacher relationships was thus seen as both positive and negative. Supporting this, Rice and Zigmond (2000) noted that most respondents believed that professional and personal compatibility among co-teaching partners was essential for success."

3.2 Related Challenges Encountered during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The themes based on the challenges encountered during COVID-19 were classified into the following categories: health-related, which include isolation, loneliness, boredom, and deprivation; work-related, which cover the preparation of modules, issues with struggling learners, heavy workload, computer-related difficulties, online submission of reports, and the attitude of children; family-related, which involve financial concerns and issues with family members; and peer-relationship-related, which include conflicts with co-teachers and school heads.

Health-related

Addressing health-related issues must be given priority before anything else. Teachers' health was typically monitored during annual check-ups before the COVID-19 outbreak, but not during the pandemic. To adapt, nursing staff from each district collaborated with health professionals from the rural health units to regularly monitor teachers' health through virtual and non-face-to-face strategies.

"Nakaka paranoid, di mo alam kung may gamot ba o wala ang COVID-19", araw-araw akong naghihintay kung ano ang mangyayari, gagaling ba o lalala pa ang sakit. [I have waited every day for what will happen next while suffering from this pain from COVID-19, we are almost paranoid because we do not even know if there is a possibility to be cured or not]." P1

The primary issue highlighted in this study concerns teachers' mental health and well-being, particularly their experience during isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, where they reported feelings of loneliness, boredom, and detachment from loved ones. Despite this, the findings indicate that health-related concerns had no significant long-term impact on teachers' psychological wellness, as many adapted by learning to manage their health both in isolation and at home. Supporting this, Mac Intyre et al. (2020) found that stress over family health outweighed concern for personal health among teachers, suggesting that educators often feel "sandwiched" between caring for older and younger family members, with a stronger fear for others' health due to the higher risk COVID-19 posed to older individuals.

Work-related

During the COVID-19 pandemic, public school teachers faced significant work-related challenges, including module preparation, managing struggling learners, and handling a heavy workload, issues that ranked just below health concerns. Despite the risks posed by the virus and limited financial resources, teachers were expected to complete student modules. Addressing the needs of struggling learners became a critical concern, as teachers remained committed to the belief that education must continue. Additionally, 89% of teachers reported engaging in paperwork and administrative tasks, which added to their responsibilities and significantly contributed to their stress.

"Siyempre ma'am mahirap na doble na ang trabaho, teacher na ako may admin task pa ako, kasi ako ang Teacher in-Charge. Ang mga kasamahan ko busy rin sa printing, nararamdaman ko rin nararamdaman nila so instead na iutos ko, ako na lang gumagawa. [It's very difficult on my part because of my dual functions (as classroom teacher and school in-charge), considering my colleagues who are also busy doing their tasks, I did the printing of modules and submission of reports]." P2

Work-related issues were identified as the second most difficult challenge faced by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, significantly affecting learner outcomes, teacher relationships, and family dynamics (Gonzales et al., 2022). The pressure of managing multiple tasks beyond the core teaching-learning process was a significant

concern. Teachers had to demonstrate patience and effective time management while balancing uncertainties brought by the pandemic with mounting work responsibilities. The stress and anxiety from these responsibilities were intensified by strict deadlines, with the cumulative load impacting their mental health and well-being.

Additionally, the heavy workload encroached on teachers' family and social commitments, as they sacrificed personal time to meet Department of Education (DepEd) requirements. Many teachers worked beyond standard hours without extra compensation—arriving early, leaving late, and, in many cases, working over 14 hours daily (Robosa, 2021). Ventayen et al. (2021) warned that if such trends persist, stress and depression may negatively affect the learning environment. Despite these challenges, teachers maintained optimism. Adaptive strategies—such as time management, flexibility, reliance on peer support, and balancing childcare—proved effective in handling work-related pressures, especially in managing class hours and the distribution of learning modules.

Family-related

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the lives of teachers, particularly in the economic sphere. Many teachers bore the burden of supporting their families financially, covering not only daily necessities like food and education but also the added costs associated with medical emergencies during the pandemic. Filipino cultural values emphasize familial support, compelling teachers to assist regardless of their limited income. Even after the lockdowns were lifted, the expectation to help persisted, often forcing teachers to seek loans from friends and colleagues to meet their obligations. In this study, 44% of respondents shared that they extended moral and financial support to their families, highlighting their commitment to familial responsibility despite the strain on their finances.

This deeply rooted cultural expectation to support family members contributed to the stress and emotional toll experienced by teachers. While some respondents admitted feeling overwhelmed by these responsibilities, they still could not turn away from family members in need. Browne et. al.'s (2021) findings suggest that understanding children's mental health difficulties during COVID-19 requires a family system lens due to the multiple ways these consequences pervade across the family unit.

The literature emphasizes the lived experiences of families, noting that the pandemic's health, social, and financial repercussions were not uniform. In the United States, for instance, the Centers for Disease Control (2020) documented how racial and ethnic minority groups experienced disproportionate rates of illness and death, reinforcing the reality that family challenges during COVID-19 were widespread but varied in intensity and outcome.

"Pinagamot ko ang nanay ko nagkaroon sya ng depression sa pagkamatay ng tatay ko. [My mother suffered from depression due to my father's death, so I attended her healing journey to recover]." P2

"Kaming mag-asawa nabaon din sa loan, pagka government employee tayo, di tayo makaka project kung hindi maglo-loan. If you are a government employee, you cannot have your project if you do not borrow money. My husband and I suffered from borrowing money anywhere." P8

Despite the hardships imposed by the pandemic, this study demonstrates the resilience of teachers, even as they supported extended families who relied on them. They used their limited resources to provide for the entire household. During these trying times, teachers learned to remain calm, manage their resources wisely, and establish self-reliance by gardening, raising animals, and engaging in other productive activities that kept them busy while attending to the needs of their loved ones.

Peer relationship-related

Maintaining positive peer relationships is essential to achieving an organization's goals, especially during times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. The value of peer camaraderie was emphasized, with only 35% of respondents reporting misunderstandings with colleagues or school principals. Despite these conflicts, most teachers upheld professional decorum shaped by their personal and institutional value systems. These minor disagreements eventually led to stronger, more cohesive group dynamics. Teachers recognized that it is normal to feel discomfort during such unprecedented events and made efforts to restore peer relationships. Peers played crucial roles in supporting one another emotionally and professionally, sharing common attitudes and values that

kept them connected even when those bonds were tested.

To preserve positive peer dynamics, teachers adopted various adaptive strategies. Effective communication was vital, as it helped shift focus from the hardships of the pandemic to more optimistic perspectives. Open communication fostered emotional connection, allowing for the exchange of uplifting thoughts and ideas that eased the emotional burden. Teachers also turned to the media for comfort and reassurance, such as televised talks and motivational programs. These external sources reinforced the value of peer relationships and encouraged emotional resilience. Additionally, teachers realized the importance of patience and acceptance, ultimately understanding that no organization is perfect. These realizations helped them maintain harmony and adapt constructively within their professional environments.

"Kailangan talaga sila pakisamahan para tulungan ka, may time na di kami nagkakaunawaan, so syempre as head kailangan mo makibagay, sinusunod naman nila. [As school head, I need to build a good relationship with my co-teachers to make things work, but there are times when we had some misunderstandings, but then at the end of the day, they respected me and followed me.] P2

"School head naming lagi syang tumatawag, nangungumusta. [Our school head is so concerned about us, she kept on asking and calling us]." P8

Following family, peers, or coworkers emerged as the second most significant source of support for teachers during the COVID-19 crisis. While some misunderstandings among peers were attributed to the pandemic's stressful circumstances, these were generally temporary and underscored the importance of collaboration. The adaptive strategies employed by teachers highlighted their resilience and ability to foster peace and harmony within their institutions. Additionally, intangible support from school heads or supervisors—such as words of comfort, expressions of care, respect, love, and concern—played a crucial role in maintaining teacher well-being, proving that emotional and moral support, though unseen, had a profound impact during the crisis.

3.3 Effect of Stress and COVID-19 Anxiety on Teachers' Mental Health

The figures explain the positive and negative impact of COVID-19 anxiety on teachers, affecting their psychological, social, emotional, and economic well-being.

Effect on Psychological Well-being

Teachers' psychological challenges have taught them to overcome adversity, become stronger, confront reality, learn new skills, and appreciate the value of life. The positive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic helped teachers grow, become more resilient, and prepare to face future hardships of a similar nature. The study found that while teachers' anxiety about the pandemic did not significantly affect their overall mental health and well-being, interviews revealed some detrimental impacts. A few psychological disturbances contributed to negative emotions such as fear and anxiety, which also influenced students' performance. There were instances when teachers experienced sleepless nights due to overwhelming workloads and strained relationships with colleagues. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience. This finding aligns with the study of Carreon et al. (2020) in General Santos City, which revealed that teachers had a high level of fear of COVID-19 but only a moderate level of burnout from remote teaching. The passion for teaching remained intact, though the pandemic significantly contributed to the stress and anxiety affecting their health and well-being.

"Baka mamaya ako na ang kasunod, kasi dalawang Co-teachers na ang namatay. [I'm afraid that I might be the next victim of COVID-19 because our co-teachers already passed away]." P2

"I become very anxious about the pupils' performance when the situation worsens." P6

According to Baker (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic brought significant stress to teachers, negatively impacting their mental wellness, coping mechanisms, and teaching practices. As cited by A. Mendez-Lopez, D. Stuckler, and M. McKee (2022), the World Health Organization has viewed the mental health of older adults as a particular concern in the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those who are isolated or experience cognitive decline. Psychological distress was not limited to adults; children also experienced fear of infection, anxiety, frustration, and the effects of limited social interaction, as noted by Akat & Karatas (2020). These emotional challenges

highlighted the widespread psychological burden of the pandemic across all age groups.

Cheng (2021) emphasized that the abrupt transition from face-to-face instruction to modular distance learning (MDL) led to psychological distress and physical exhaustion among teachers. Despite these difficulties, Winter et al. (2021) found a positive outcome—many respondents reported enhanced technological skills due to pandemic-induced educational changes. The pressures brought by COVID-19 pushed teachers to reflect on life's value, prioritize what truly matters, and focus on survival, especially for the sake of their dependent families.

Effect on Social Well-being

Teachers' social well-being was significantly affected during the COVID-19 pandemic, as 44% reported being infected by the virus, leading to feelings of loneliness and anxiety due to isolation from their families while in quarantine. Social distancing measures, along with the use of face masks and sanitizers, were strictly followed to prevent the spread of the virus. However, the lockdown negatively impacted their social interactions, even among uninfected people who complied with government protocols. The uncertainty of the crisis fostered negative emotions and strained relationships with those around them.

"Naging aloof ako sa mga tao sa takot kong mahawa. [I kept my distance from other people to ensure that I would not be another victim of COVID-19]." P6

"Naging mahigpit ako sa mga anak ko hindi ko sila pinalalabas ng bahay. [I strictly prohibited my children to go outside to ensure that they are safe]." P1

This study found that teachers' social well-being significantly influenced their work-related tasks and family responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially while adhering to health protocols. The lack of social interaction with family members and colleagues, heightened risk perception, and strict health measures negatively affected their relationships with parents, students, and coworkers (Porru et al., 2022). Similarly, Brooke et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of physical social interaction in preventing feelings of isolation, highlighting that this was facilitated through spontaneous opportunities for in-person contact. These pandemic-related stressors and emotional burdens pushed individuals to seek coping strategies such as maintaining a positive outlook, engaging in hobbies and physical activities, and seeking social and emotional support (Porru et al., 2022).

Effect on Emotional Well-being

Negative feelings—such as feeling useless, lonely, unproductive, stressed, bored, and stagnant—are manifestations of emotions indicating that teachers were already in their comfort zone. The COVID-19 virus disrupted teachers' emotional well-being. The lockdown situation posed a significant threat to their emotional well-being, which in turn greatly affected their performance.

"I cannot concentrate on work, kasi wala dito ang pamilya ko na biktima rin ng Covid-19. [I cannot concentrate on work because my family is not around, who is also suffering from COVID-19]." P3

"Nakakatakot parang ako na ang susunod. [I'm afraid that I might be the next]." P8

The adverse effects of COVID-19 significantly impacted teachers' mental and emotional well-being, with 56% of respondents acknowledging that the pandemic deeply affected their daily roles as educators, family members, and community participants. Isolation led to feelings of loneliness, which deteriorated emotional health and posed a threat to overall mental stability. Ronnie et al. (2022) noted that lockdown limitations contributed to this emotional strain. Porru (2022) emphasized that teachers' professional and personal identities are often intertwined, making emotional well-being critical for effective teaching. Additionally, Ronnie et al. (2022) identified frustration, fatigue, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion—driven by home duties, social context, and workplace stress—as key emotional burdens experienced by teachers during the pandemic.

Effect on Economic Well-being

The economic activity during the COVID-19 pandemic was severely impacted by lockdowns and restrictions, leading to the temporary shutdown of businesses, the tourism sector, sari-sari stores, and hotels. As a result, family budgets were strained due to the high costs of essential emergency supplies like vitamins, face masks, alcohol,

and testing kits. Additionally, the surge in demand caused the prices of basic commodities to rise. In some cases, even with money, goods were unavailable, demonstrating how the basic principle of supply and demand again played a significant role during the crisis.

“Kinakapos talaga kami sa pang-araw-araw, sabi ko sa Mister ko kahit magconstruction job ka muna habang wala ka pang mapagkakakitaan. [In order to meet our daily needs, I told my husband that he must apply for a construction work while waiting for other means of living].” P1

“Our sari-sari store at Lio was closed, nobody was allowed to go out due to restrictions, noong wala pang COVID-19 malakas kinikita ng tindahan namin doon. [Before COVID-19, our sari-sari store in Lio was earning quite well, but when no one was allowed to go out because of the pandemic, we were forced to close it.] P9

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted teachers’ lives in terms of economic stability. Before the crisis, teachers’ family income was more than enough to cover expenses for food, clothing, and other basic needs. However, with the advent of COVID-19, lifestyles changed; basic commodities and medicines became the top priority. Shek (2021) noted that health expenses incurred during COVID-19 posed an additional burden for individuals already experiencing economic disadvantage. Another issue was access to treatment, where patients suffered due to insufficient budgets and the stress brought about by the crisis.

3.4 Lessons Learned from Experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The teachers’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic brought valuable lessons that helped them become more resilient. These lessons revolve around valuing life, building relationships, and managing time effectively.

Valuing Life

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of systemic reforms and accessible social support in reducing the effects of secondary stressors. These stressors stem not only from the crisis itself but also from pre-disaster life circumstances (e.g., health status), structural vulnerabilities (e.g., unstable employment, bureaucratic inefficiencies), and inadequate response measures (e.g., insufficient government assistance) (Ntontis et al., 2023). The respondents in this study unanimously emphasized the importance of valuing life, highlighting lessons such as positivity, self-love, prioritizing health, extending patience, and financial preparedness. These values emerged from their lived experiences as teachers during the pandemic, with the pressure and uncertainty of COVID-19 being among the most intense challenges they faced.

“Iniisip ko kung ano na ang nangyayari sa tatay ko, kasi maysakit na agad sya dinapuan pa ng Covid virus, tapos nagkaroon pa ng depression si Nanay, ang lola ko itinago namin, hindi naming pina isolate sa takot na mapabayaang lang sa isolation room. [I am really worried about my father, he is already sick, then the COVID -19 hit him again, in addition to that, my mother suffered from depression. Adding to this burden, we have to decide whether our grandmother be isolated or be brought to the facility where no one is taking care of her].” P2

“I was also a victim of COVID-19, but I chose to be strong to protect my life, my family, and find a solution to the existing problem during the Pandemic.” P8

Life during COVID-19 served as a wake-up call for teachers, reminding them how fortunate they were to survive the pandemic and continue receiving benefits and their salaries. Maintaining a positive attitude during the crisis, along with the support from groups such as family, friends, colleagues, and peers, helped lessen the adverse effects of COVID-19.

Building Relationships

Relationships of all types were affected and strained during the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals were faced with the option to either remain positive or be negatively impacted. Despite the challenges and difficulties, some found productive ways to stay resilient and made the most of their time by helping one another and maintaining strong, connected relationships.

“We learned to pray together; it has never happened before.” P1

“Yong material things were not so important during those times, what is important yong pakikipagkaibigan, kung may ginawa kang maganda dadalhin at aalalahanin yon ng tao. [Material things are not so important during those times; what is important is the good deeds and relationships built and shared with your fellowmen].” P6

Finding emotional support during the COVID-19 crisis was crucial for teachers, with family, friends, and peers serving as key sources of comfort amid the pain and challenges of the pandemic. The crisis altered relationships, yet it also created opportunities for stronger bonds through shared familial activities, enriched values, and deepened love, proving that even in hardship, relationships can be nurtured and strengthened. As Newman (2021) stated, a crisis can either bring people together or drive them apart; in this study, family remained the strongest pillar of support in helping teachers cope with the difficulties brought about by the pandemic.

Importance of Time Management

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers’ time management was reflected in their ability to accomplish tasks such as preparing learning modules and attending online training while simultaneously maintaining family connections through platforms like Messenger or Zoom. Over the two-year crisis, teachers adapted by using their time more efficiently, and the challenges they faced led them to become more focused, goal-oriented, and conscious of their lifestyle.

“Yong paggawa ng module kailangan tapusin mo kung hindi wala kang maibibigay sa mga bata. Mag aadjust ka talaga nang todo sa time lalo na kung due na ng submission. [You need to finish the printing of modules otherwise you have nothing to distribute to your pupils. You need to adjust your time especially when the report is already due].” P4

Teachers learned three valuable lessons from their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic: how to weigh priorities and focus on what truly matters, the significance of their profession and how it differs from others, and the importance of dedicating more time to pupils, particularly in providing interventions. Vargas (2021) emphasized that explicit or implicit demands create pressure to act in specific ways. When these demands clash with personal goals, beliefs, or expectations, they become significant sources of stress, a view supported by Obbarius et. al. (2021).

4.0 Conclusion

Findings from the present study indicate that teachers’ mental health and well-being were moderately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the stress caused by the crisis, teachers overcame challenges by applying adaptive strategies rooted in resilience. The pandemic’s impact was primarily emotional and psychological, with the most significant stressors related to working under pressure, particularly concerns about family, health, and work. Teachers consistently prioritized family, which influenced their mental state and decision-making. Their adaptation centered on a strong faith in God, believing that every challenge has a purpose and solution, and relationships with family, colleagues, and friends further supported their resilience. The study concludes that teacher resilience during the pandemic was high, with no respondents giving up or displaying signs of psychological breakdown. Effective coping strategies, motivation to return to face-to-face teaching, increased attentiveness to students’ concerns, and strong familial support were key contributors to their resilience and optimism.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed systemic vulnerabilities in Northern Palawan’s education system, particularly in teacher well-being. By implementing these policy recommendations—ranging from mental health support to digital upskilling and financial reforms—local education stakeholders can build a more resilient teaching workforce. Prioritizing teacher welfare is not just a post-pandemic measure but a long-term investment in educational quality and crisis preparedness.

Given the study’s findings on the psychological, emotional, social, and economic challenges faced by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the following policy recommendations are proposed to enhance teacher resilience, improve systemic support, and ensure crisis preparedness in Northern Palawan’s education sector:

1) Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Programs, 2) Financial and Logistical Support for Teaching Materials, 3) Digital Literacy and Infrastructure Development, 4) Workload Management and Fair Labor Policies, 5) Strengthening Learning Recovery Programs, 6) Conflict Resolution and Professional Collaboration, 7) Crisis Preparedness and Policy Institutionalization.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

Author 1: conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis, proposal writing, and finalization. This paper was solely prepared and written by the author.

6.0 Funding

Author's resources

7.0 Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

8.0 Acknowledgment

I want to express my praises and honor to God Almighty for keeping me safe, away from harm. He never ceases to guide and love me throughout my journey in writing this Thesis. My salute to my adviser, Dr. Teresita D. Tajolosa, for the encouragement, patience, and wisdom shared with me while on my journey fulfilling this noble deed. She used to be my friend, my confidant, my teacher, and most of all, my mentor, whose kindness is indeed remarkable. My respect and thanks to the panel of the Graduate School, Dr. Marjorie A. Espanola, Dr. Daisy Grace C. Antonio, and Dr. Maria Chona A. Rizada, OIC, Dean of the Graduate School, and the Chairperson of the Graduate School. To my husband Ramil B. Gaviana for giving me the motivation to push through this endeavor, and my children Ella, JB, and Ej for the inspiration and love showered upon me. My gratitude and thanks to my nine (9) teacher respondents of three (3) Northern Palawan Districts who participated and unselfishly shared their experiences and made this research possible. Special thanks to my friends who extended their unselfish hands whenever I needed their assistance.

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