

Extinguishing the Fire: Occupational Stress-Coping Mechanisms of High School Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The challenging reality that teachers and school personnel face is emerging and demands acknowledgment. High occupational stress exacerbates teacher burnout, loss of engagement, job dissatisfaction, poor performance, and even one of the worst turnover rates in human history, impacting teacher health and well-being. Teachers must address stress promptly to prevent its adverse effects on their work. This illustrative retrospective single-case study design explored and understood the occupational stress-coping mechanisms of private high school teachers. The researcher employed a semi-structured interview guide to collect data about five private high school teachers who teach at a PAASCU Accredited School. The result revealed three themes: Problem-Focused, Self-recreation, and Social-Support Mechanism. Teachers who handle occupational stress well can perform better, creating a positive learning environment for students due to the interconnectedness of stress mechanisms. This study concludes on the premise that being stressed at work affects the overall performance of teachers. Therefore, the ability to cope with occupational stress contributes to teachers, and teachers who feel equipped to handle the demands of their jobs are more likely to find fulfillment in their careers.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Coping Mechanisms, Problem-Focused, Self-recreation, Social-support

Introduction

Stress is a necessary but inescapable component of daily living. Despite the common misconception that stress from everyday life only hurts one's physical and mental health, stress inspires people to lead active, fulfilling lives. Stress is a typical human response, and our bodies are designed to cope with and respond to it, both physically and mentally, when faced with changes or difficulties. Any change introduces stress to a person's body, mind, and soul. The body responds to tasks requiring concentration or action with stress. Life's regular pressures, such as work, family, and evolving relationships, contribute to varying stress levels for individuals. How people deal with stress is unique and significantly impacts their overall well-being. Thus, managing stress for a healthy and balanced life is crucial.

In connection with that, education is an essential tool applied in the world, for it lightens the challenges faced in life. The concepts, experiences, and knowledge acquired through education enable individuals to develop and utilize their talents and skills. It opens opportunities for them to achieve better possibilities and potential in their career. Through education, they enhance their lives to live dignified lives in society. In addition, as the focal point of knowledge dissemination, the teacher must have good motivation, health, and satisfaction with his or her job to achieve quality education for sustainable growth.

Teaching is one of the most essential and well-known professions, and as days go by, it becomes more challenging to pursue. Schools are just as significant as any other type of institution. Being a teacher in these times is difficult (Meador, 2019).

Teaching is recognized as a profession with considerable stress, but teaching experiences elevated levels of burnout, leading to increased turnover and substantial financial implications for educational institutions. The consequences of teacher burnout and attrition extend to the detriment of school climate, effectiveness, and, ultimately, the well-being and competencies of students (Ford et al., 2019; Maslach et al., 2001).

Moreover, teachers play a crucial role in any nation's education system because they educate the nation's most valuable resource: its students. As a result, the success of educational institutions depends heavily on their ability to do so. For this reason, all educational institutions are primarily concerned with the performance of their faculty members. Several things stress out teachers and affect their performance, like having too much work and insufficient time, dealing with student issues and behaviors, having limited resources, feeling unrecognized or unsupported, and facing personal problems. These challenges, whether inside or outside of school, can make teachers less effective and reduce their productivity and the school's. (Agyapong, Donkor, & Burbach, 2022).

According to Atashpanjeh et al. (2020), various elements influence the quality of teaching and learning, resulting in teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction. Minimizing these factors to alleviate their negative consequences appears more beneficial, thereby empowering teachers to carry out their duties more effectively. In addition, in the study of Nyakeko et al. (2023), it was found that results from the nature of the work environment and the coworkers, physical environment, aspects that are personal, societal, and organizational person's capacities, needs, and intellectual and emotional characteristics leads to the occupational stress of teachers.

According to Jimenez (2021), significant concerns about teachers' stress levels and mental well-being are, among other things, encouraging students to become efficient managers and leaders in the classroom. Teachers are on the front lines regarding delivering the curriculum, services, and skill mastery of the Department of Education (DepEd) to the students. Additionally, there is an ongoing challenge to maintain uniformity in teachers following the same curriculum and pace. To assist students in catching up to their grade level, the importance of differentiation has become more pronounced than ever. Teachers frequently must exclude the differentiation that might benefit their challenging pupils when their district gives them a scripted curriculum and a short time frame. Teachers express concern about not leaving any student behind, driven by their commitment to supporting the academic progress of every child. The self-imposed demands to cater to the needs of all students can also lead to stress.

Similarly, one of the main issues teachers face is occupational stress, which hurts institutional and entrepreneurial productivity and lowers institutional quality and profitability. According to (Dhaliwal & Mann, 2022), it was found that stressed-out female teachers cannot work effectively. Their motivation and job satisfaction are lower, and they exhibit undesirable behaviors like aggressiveness, tardiness, and blunders at work. Additionally, they report more physical and mental health issues. They cannot give the pupils quality instruction because their students' satisfaction and motivation have also declined. (Shahid & Nauman, 2019)

According to Bhui et al. (2016), many schools needed to manage employees' stress, resulting in subpar teaching adequately. The study found that management-related stressors, such as coercive leadership, heavy workloads, unrealistic deadlines, lack of recognition for good performance, limited involvement in decision-making, and accountability for students' outcomes, adversely affect teachers' performance in public secondary schools.

Furthermore, according to Ventayen and Ventayen (2021), workplace stress and depression must be adequately addressed if fruitful teaching is to remain the noblest profession. Unmanaged stress and despair can majorly affect the classroom's cheerful environment. To become successful, one critical condition that teachers must aim for is managing stress and preventing depression at work.

In the same study by Ventayen and Ventayen (2021), more time is needed to finish the assignments teachers in Alaminos Pangasinan must accomplish. In the Philippines, teachers' workload is high, and they need a more extended period to complete their tasks. Given the impact of authoritarian and democratic leadership styles on job satisfaction, most teachers concur that their work as educators is ongoing and do not use their authority over their work. They also note that a lack of acknowledgment and appreciation is a concern. As observed in other institutions, most teachers are stressed at work. In addition to the challenges of daily tasks, handling students, and dealing with extensive paperwork, teachers must exhibit positive work habits and uphold high teaching standards.

Moreover, the researcher observed that many teachers are easily burnt out, not because of teaching their students but because of administrative tasks. The signs of teacher burnout manifest in reduced productivity, delayed completion of administrative tasks, and diminished motivation to teach students. Environmental, personal, social, and many more factors brought about this condition. One of these factors is the poor support from their superiors and even the need for more appreciation by the coordinators. Another factor is the need for proper communication regarding administrative tasks and the short notice of deadlines. It is pretty exciting or maybe quite unfair on the part of teachers because, for some reason, the stress at work is most often brought home and results in irritation or even unwanted interaction with their family or loved ones, while the stress at home or in their personal life cannot be brought at school, since they do not want this to affect their job performance at school.

With these scenarios, the researcher embarked on this study to determine the stress-coping mechanisms of high school teachers. This paper argues that it is essential to understand how teachers' coping mechanisms with occupational

stress can ease feelings of burnout. Hence, this illustrative case study aimed to explore and understand how teachers cope with their occupational stress.

Methodology

Selection of the participant

The participants of this study were five (5) teachers with pseudonyms: Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, and Teacher E. The researcher purposefully chose the participants in this study because of their number of years in teaching, experiences in work, and the school where they are working. They have at least four years of teaching experience and are proficient in handling administrative tasks over the past three years. Teachers A, B, C, D, and E might still be considered beginners by seasoned teachers, but they have already accomplished great things.

Moreover, three take an academic break for one week, and two serve as Faculty Wellness Officers, with coordinators assigning them specific administrative tasks beyond their job responsibilities. The participants are not only subject teachers. Teacher B and Teacher C are also class advisers. At the same time, Teacher A is also a club adviser, and Teacher D and Teacher E are also class advisers and Faculty Wellness Officers. Given these many responsibilities, they could still deal with occupational stress. Teachers A, B, C, D, and E are juggling the academic aspects of their role and the crucial task of fostering a positive and supportive learning environment. They experienced being burnt out and had many breakdowns because of the different occupational stress they encountered, but they were still in school. Despite their challenges and beyond imparting knowledge, they serve as mentors, counselors, and role models to their students and the school's faculty. They helped other teachers cope with their occupational stress by talking to them, advising them, and being there for their colleagues. As such, Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, and Teacher E had detailed knowledge of how teachers coped with occupational stress, and through their unwavering dedication, they exemplify the art of managing many work responsibilities, coping occupational stress, and ensuring a holistic educational experience for their colleagues and students. The participants were given a consent letter before the interview, and the procedure and scope of the study were also discussed with the participants. All data collected, including responses, interview transcripts, and any identifiable information, were stored securely on password-protected electronic devices, and any dissemination of findings was presented in an aggregated and anonymized form. These ethical considerations have been carefully integrated into the research design to safeguard the rights and well-being of participants. Additionally, this study has received ethical approval from Dr. Constantino Narciso V. Sanchez, and any potential ethical concerns were promptly addressed following the guidelines throughout the research process.

Setting

This study was conducted in a PAASCU-accredited private school during the Second Quarter of the First Semester of the School Year 2022-2023. The school, which has the pseudonym Star School, is one of the big private schools with many faculty members because of the number of students.

The school at which Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, and Teacher E teach can be found in a particular municipality. It is in the northern part of the town proper and near other big private and public schools. Also, Star School is a centralized school, and management must deal with every announcement and action before the employees. With the situation of Star School, it is tough on the part of the teachers, especially when there is short notice and a short time to complete the administrative tasks before the deadline.

Design of the Study

This study used a qualitative approach utilizing an illustrative retrospective single-case study design. According to Epler (2019), an illustrative case study serves as a descriptive exploration, providing a detailed portrayal of one or more instances of an event to elucidate the situation. In this context, it is utilized to investigate familiar cases, aiding others in comprehending them. Examining the stress coping mechanisms of teachers involves depicting instances that help explain and analyze occupational stress in the workplace. This approach facilitates the researcher in discerning how high school teachers cope with occupational stress, ultimately enhancing our understanding of their coping mechanisms.

This study also employed a retrospective design. In a retrospective analysis, exposures to potential risk or protective factors related to a predetermined outcome at the investigation's outset are assessed in hindsight. A retrospective study involves collecting data after an event, with participants recalling significant points from memory (George, 2023). Interview questions were used in the study to encourage participants to look back and reflect, as well as identify and describe the issues the school faced during the pandemic and how they dealt with these challenges.

Moreover, the research adopted a single case study method, a research approach employed to gain a comprehensive and holistic understanding of a complex subject in real-life situations. Widely recognized and extensively utilized in various academic disciplines, particularly the social sciences, the single case study is a well-established research technique (Hunziker & Blakinagel, 2021). As applied in the study, the researcher gathered the data through interviews, which allowed the participants to look back, reflect, and identify and describe the challenges they encountered in dealing with occupational stress. This methodology was employed in the study, and an in-depth

investigation was made on the challenges and coping mechanisms of the school participants during the second quarter of the School Year 2022-2023, especially in October and November.

Data Sources

As the first step in data gathering, the researcher constructed a letter to interview five (5) study participants, which the principal signed. The participants also signed a consent form. This study made use of a researcher-made interview guide using A priori code. The use of A priori coding ensured the researcher that the variables of this study were covered. The interview questions included open-ended questions on the challenges of teachers in dealing with stress and how teachers cope with occupational stress.

The interview guide has three main questions covering teachers' stress-coping mechanisms in dealing with occupational stress. Probing questions were also used that helped the participants elaborate their answers and gave the researcher more significant insights regarding the students' experiences.

The researcher conducted a face-to-face, one-on-one interview with the participants during the available and most convenient time for the participants. The participants were given a consent letter before the interview, and the procedure and scope of the study were also discussed with the participants. Also, the researcher asked the permission of the participants to record the meeting, which allowed the researcher to go over their responses when needed. The interview was recorded using a mobile phone and iPad with the participants' consent. The salient points of the interview were also jotted down, and any questions for clarification were also asked.

Following the interview process, each interviewee was asked if they wanted to contribute any additional information or ideas to the questions during the final part of the session. After that, the interviewer expressed her gratitude to the interviewees by saying "Thank you" with a smile and letting them know that they were essential parts of this study and that their efforts and time meant a lot. The interview transcripts were organized and translated. An intelligent verbatim transcription was utilized to understand teachers' stress-coping mechanisms in dealing with stress. The study also used a repertory grid to organize and analyze collected transcripts. Following this, the researcher utilized thematic analysis to identify common themes.

Data Analysis

The researcher extracted essential ideas from the participant's responses to analyze the gathered data. The researcher utilized thematic analysis to analyze gathered data and generate meaning and themes based on the aim of the study. According to Crosley (2021), thematic analysis is a method used in qualitative research that involves analyzing and interpreting patterns and themes within the data set to identify the underlying meaning. The research aims and questions focus on the critical aspects of the research questions.

The researcher employed an inductive thematic analysis approach to analyze the gathered data. This method involves extracting meaning and themes from the data without making prior assumptions. The researcher approached the data analysis without preconceived notions about the codes and themes, allowing them to emerge from the data naturally. (Nel, 2020).

The data acquired during the interview was compiled and structured using transcription and data reduction. The researcher transcribed an exact transcript by carefully listening to the recorded interview with the participant. Data reduction was used to provide a more thorough data collection following transcribing. The researcher placed summary transcribed data in a repertory grid for a more ordered data analysis.

The researcher then used to highlight areas of the transcribed material. The highlighted data areas were utilized to construct codes representing the data set's content and meaning. Codes were thoroughly studied and interpreted to create a sub-theme representing the most critical concepts developed. The sub-themes were analyzed to determine their linkages and then classified to generate the most relevant common themes. Themes are used to group common meanings and patterns in a data set.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research signifies that the findings and themes that emerged from the investigation are valid and reliable. This study made use of member check/ peer debriefing as a method to build the trustworthiness of the paper. The analyzed data was presented to the research participant and a peer researcher to establish the credibility of the study's results. The researcher ensured trustworthiness through several measures. Firstly, concepts provided by participants during interviews were summarized. Secondly, transcripts were returned to participants for review, allowing them to verify the accuracy of their claims. This process may offer therapeutic benefits, especially in normalizing the discussed phenomenon. Even without direct interaction, participants could find solace in having their emotions acknowledged and realizing they are not alone.

Results and Discussion

Occupational stress is a widespread problem affecting workers in various sectors, including educators notably teachers. The teaching profession often subjects educators to elevated stress levels arising from the challenging nature of their

work, societal expectations, and institutional requirements. Paperwork, administrative activities, various student needs, behaviors, academic ability, poor access to teaching materials, and even severe pressure to fulfill high academic standards all contribute to teachers' considerable workload. These factors can contribute to elevated stress levels and mental health issues among teachers, including burnout, anxiety, and depression. As a result, their capacity to deliver effective and supportive learning environments suffers. In such ways, they develop their ability to survive the threats of their occupational stressors and become resilient amidst its challenges. High School teachers cope with the challenges through problem-focused, self-recreation, and social-support coping mechanisms.

Problem-Focused Mechanisms

The initial theme identified in the data analysis is the problem-focused mechanism. This theme revolves around how individuals directly confront issues or stressors to alleviate or eliminate them. It involves addressing stress by taking decisive action to tackle the root cause. Confronting and overcoming challenges enhances resilience, as the ability to surmount obstacles, learn from difficulties, and derive benefit from mistakes lays a robust foundation for future success. Therefore, this stress-coping mechanism not only helps the teachers improve their teaching performance but also fosters self-regulated learning, improves their ability to monitor their health, evaluate the outcome, and use their knowledge to guide future occupational stress that they might be facing. The participants consider the problem-focused mechanism as an essential and helpful technique in dealing with occupational stress to eliminate the stressors successfully and perform their responsibilities as teachers. When people tackle problems and engage in problem-solving, it is easier for them to deal with stress. This mechanism is shown in the answers of Teacher A and Teacher C, presented in this order:

"I deal with my problem first. In dealing with problems/stress, I can already see the source of the stress itself, and with that, I can already plan and execute the plan to address this stress. In this way, I think of the solution rather than the problem. I can do more administrative tasks when I do this."; "The greatest growth in life and the most important lessons will be learned when people face and deal with their challenges/ problems or even stress that they are facing. Thus, as a teacher, I face this stress to move forward and accomplish bigger things. Regardless of the result, value the experience and personal growth".

According to Lewis and Webster (2021), a crucial element for success involves identifying the problem to manage stress effectively. Although it may be complex and challenging, having a well-thought-out plan, even in unpredictable situations, allows the brain to regain control and reduce tension. In addition, according to Robinson and Smith (2023), it was found that effective coping strategies vary from person to person. Therefore, individuals must recognize the specific stressors contributing to their occupational stress. Only then can they identify, create, and implement the most suitable approach to alleviate their stress, assess additional tools and resources, and consider ongoing skill development for the future.

According to the participants, the problem-focused technique enhances mental clarity, fostering more profound learning and generating specific ideas. Individuals need to build a toolkit of coping skills tailored to their needs, and they might need to experiment with various coping tactics to determine the most effective ones for their situation. One should strive to pinpoint the origin of stress, isolate specific stressors like fatigue, and systematically devise solutions for each identified problem (Attia et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the problem-focused mechanism presents a more profound approach to addressing occupational stress. Through this mechanism, teachers can reduce their stress and complete necessary administrative tasks on time by prioritizing tasks that require immediate attention. This approach is exemplified in the responses of Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher D as follows:

"All of us experience occupational stress. We have numerous responsibilities, but it is crucial to identify our priorities. As a teacher, I must distinguish between low-value and high-value tasks. When dealing with occupational stress, I try to identify and prioritize tasks that must be completed first."; "I focus on completing tasks that have deadlines before addressing other responsibilities. This way, I can maintain productivity even when under stress."; and "I create a to-do list and consistently refer back to it. This list reminds me of tasks that must be completed or announced to my classes. While I acknowledge the need to juggle multiple priorities, I ensure that stress does not compromise my work. Consequently, I prioritize tasks that must be completed before moving on to other activities. This approach reduces my stress as I no longer dwell on pending tasks."

It is implied, therefore, that a "clearing the decks" strategy must be employed for essential tasks, wherein dedicating a specific task for the entire day is sufficient. According to Pogere et al. (2019), doing tasks must also be done by considering their level of importance for an employee not to be reprimanded or delayed in his or her work to lessen the occupational stress he or she is feeling.

Moreover, the problem-focused mechanism is also applied better when teachers can voice their points of view without disregarding other people's rights. This is evident in the responses of Teacher B and Teacher C, as follows:

"I respect the rights of others, but sometimes they cannot respect mine. Because of unclear and abrupt announcements involving administrative tasks that need to be passed immediately, given short notice, I am becoming more open and assertive in communication. I believe voicing my point of view concerning the matters announced lessens my stress."; "I realize I have choices in my life, and I consider my options. Sometimes, their announcements are abrupt, and you need to pass the work immediately the day after they announce the tasks to be passed; employees are not robots, and we also need to rest. Thus, sometimes, for me to be able to address this stress, I tell my coordinators about my point of view of their announcements. Moreover, I hope they will not be offended since I am talking for the betterment of everybody because sometimes, they cannot see that what they are suggesting or thinking is not applicable in the classroom setting."

According to Sandmeier et al. (2022), extensive working hours entirely nullified the impact of labor strain on fatigue. This problem affects individuals and educational institutions, as fatigued instructors deliver less effective instruction than their healthier counterparts. In addition, according to Paterson (2022), teachers who articulate their concerns play a role in minimizing stress as they safeguard their rights and express their opinions. Effectively explaining oneself and assertively defending one's position can reduce stress, especially when done with respect for the rights and beliefs of others. By avoiding forcefulness, an individual can enhance their self-esteem and earn the respect of others, contributing to stress relief. This approach is precious for individuals who find it challenging to decline tasks and often shoulder excessive responsibilities.

Self-Recreation Mechanisms

Another coping mechanism that aided high school teachers in coping with their occupational stress is self-recreation mechanisms. Self-recreation is an activity done by a person for him/her to undergo the pursuit of truth and self-understanding. Thus, a teacher can deal with his/her occupational stress through the self-recreation mechanism. Teachers do self-creation by consistently exercising self-compassion, and this can be gleaned from the answers of Teacher A and Teacher B in this order:

"To work productively, I just need to give time for myself first. I must disconnect from my social media accounts, work, or even loved ones. I need to find for myself, for my worth, and even for the things I need to do." "To lessen the stress I am feeling, I need to find myself and reflect at all costs to address the stress."

These findings mean that teachers need to rest. They need to disconnect first from things that might cause them stress. They must always be compassionate to themselves because nobody will always do that for them. When unfortunate circumstances occur, those with prominent levels of self-compassion treat themselves with consideration and tenderness. Although self-compassionate people frequently use positive cognitive restructuring, they do not differ from those who lack self-compassion in how much they rely on problem-solving and diversion to get by. Being kind to oneself might take the form of outward behaviors like taking time off to give oneself a mental or emotional break or inner behaviors like talking to oneself in a supportive, encouraging, and forgiving way. Through these, teachers can cope with stress.

According to (Fancourt et al., 2021), self-compassion involves treating oneself with warmth and understanding in times of adversity. Individuals with a high level of self-compassion respond to failures or significant mistakes with care and compassion, contrasting with those with a lower level of this quality. Additionally, self-compassion entails comforting oneself rather than assigning blame when facing challenges. This practice enhances happiness and resilience to stress and trauma and is linked to positive habits such as increased physical activity and reduced substance use. Furthermore, it contributes to heightened motivation, confidence, and personal responsibility, fostering pro-social and supportive interpersonal behaviors.

There is continuous room for improvement when it comes to enhancing self-recreation coping skills. Teachers can effectively address occupational stress by prioritizing their well-being and shifting their focus from content-centric teaching to fostering critical thinking. Coping with occupational stress can also be lessened through self-recreation activities, especially physical activities or exercise. This can be gleaned from the responses of Teacher C and Teacher E in this order:

"Stress can be reduced when I play basketball or go to the gymnasium.", "I was able to reduce stress at work when I find time to do my hobbies and play team sports."

This implies that participating in physical activities or exercise aids in reducing fatigue, enhancing alertness and focus, and boosting overall cognitive performance. This is particularly beneficial when stress has depleted your energy or impaired your ability to concentrate (Pascoe et al., 2020).

Allocating time for self-care communicates to others that one's needs are significant. Maintaining a healthy body fosters a positive self-perception and conveys self-appreciation. Engaging in daily enjoyable activities can alleviate the impact of stressors, helping individuals feel less overwhelmed. This, in turn, enables a shift in attitude towards

lifestyle stressors, reducing reactivity to stress when encountered. This can be gleaned from the responses of Teachers A, B, and D in this order:

"Dealing with stress is manageable sometimes, but due to some factors, it gives many people difficulty handling it. Thus, to lessen the occupational stress I am feeling, I go out of town and buy the things I deserve for fighting it all through." "Eating the foods I like is the best way to pamper myself. Aside from that, I also go to and buy the things that I want to visit, especially when I am drained." "One way of pampering or rewarding myself is by buying things I want and a thing that I need. I also enjoy a massage and buying new gadgets."

This implies that doing joyrides, buying things they deserve, and any self-care they need is one of the many ways to reduce occupational stress. Even one enjoyable or soothing activity each day can lift someone's spirits, ease anxiety and sadness, and aid in coping. Getting up and engaging in the fun activities we used to like might hasten feeling better and forging new connections with previously delightful activities. Even one enjoyable or soothing daily activity can lift your spirits, ease anxiety and sadness, and aid in coping. Trying to get up and engage in the fun activities you used to like might hasten feeling better and forging new connections with previously delightful activities (Ortan et al., 2021).

Social-Support Coping Mechanisms

Another theme from the participants' responses is the Social Support Coping Mechanism. The social support coping mechanism is the process that significantly contributes to the mental health of the participants. It is a great coping mechanism in which a person asks others to help or assist him/her, especially on tasks he/she does not know about. This can be gleaned from the responses of Teacher D and Teacher E in this order:

"One way for me to lessen my stress is by talking to someone or voicing out my problems or concerns to someone, and this someone is a person whom I trust the most, the one I know who can understand me and is ready to listen to my rants in life.", "Talking to someone is like facing your problems and then letting it out. This is one of my practices in dealing with stress, and it helps a lot for me."

Engaging in conversation brings about catharsis, providing a sense of relief as the intense emotions become less overwhelming. While the external circumstances causing sorrow may remain unchanged, discussing the situation helps alleviate some emotional distress. Thus, when facing challenging moments, talking to someone is one of the most valuable and effective means of finding solace and feeling better.

Anent according to the study by Molek-Winiarska and Kawka (2022), acknowledging someone's emotions diminishes the activation of the amygdala, the brain's alarm system responsible for triggering the fight-or-flight response. Verbally expressing feelings stimulates the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex, which oversees language and meaning, enabling individuals to detach from limbic reactions. This heightened awareness results in a reduced reactivity to stress.

Moreover, getting involved in a worthy cause is one of the best ways indicated in the social-support coping mechanism. This is a way where the problem is sorted through, and the situations become more apparent. It is another way of looking at the problem differently. This can be gleaned from the participants' responses, namely, Teacher A and Teacher C, in this order:

"As the one dealing with that occupational stress, I must take responsibility. I should face and get involved with it for a worthy cause. Worthy cause wherein I can surpass and remove this occupational stress." "I deal with occupational stress by having the support of my colleagues. When they were with me and could relate to my situation, I felt motivated to deal with and surpass the stress."

This implies that when educators experience peer support, it becomes easier for them to accomplish tasks and navigate occupational stress. Both employees and organizations stand to gain numerous advantages from social assistance. Such support fosters higher-quality relationships, positive emotional responses, and enhanced individual performance and serves as a buffer against the adverse effects of stressful demands. (Jolly et al., 2021).

Consequently, according to Dahl, Wilson-Mendenhall, and Davidson (2020), everyone must continue to have emotionally supportive relationships to manage their work-related stress properly. Every physical being must exercise emotional restraint or be able to communicate painful emotions in the workplace. It is crucial because, even if someone declines a task, it will help create the capacity for close friends to relax and have fun together. Healthy emotional connections with others can point out ideas or solutions they had not previously considered. Even though the effectiveness of talking as a means of de-stressing varies from person to person, it was found that talking about one's worries, concerns, or stressors with a supportive listener, such as a friend or a family member, can have significant benefits. However, the impact of talking on occupational stress reduction is subjective and depends on factors like the individual's willingness to share, the quality of the listener's support, and the nature of the stressors being discussed. Nevertheless, engaging in conversations can contribute to relief, promote emotional well-being, and help individuals process and cope with stressors more effectively.

Conclusion and Implications

This case study revealed the lived experiences, particularly the stress-coping mechanisms of teachers in dealing with stress. These coping mechanisms include problem-focused, self-recreational, and social support mechanisms, which help private high school teachers deal with the occupational stress that they are facing. Based on the study's findings, these mechanisms are grounded in the fundamental rationale for teachers to maintain good health: facilitating student learning by imparting knowledge and establishing an environment conducive to efficient learning. Consequently, it is imperative to interconnect and deploy these mechanisms collaboratively to guarantee effective teaching and optimal learning outcomes.

In addition, the findings revealed that prioritizing mental self-care, accepting and facing stress, and finding time to reward oneself is a must for the participants. Therefore, the connection between the three mechanisms will only be successful if all the institution members collaborate. For these reasons, this further implies that faculties' work productivity can further be improved if the management is willing to hear the voices and screams of its faculties, have initiatives on workload management, give clear communication channels and professional development opportunities, and acknowledge that teachers' contributions play pivotal roles in mitigating stress. It is evident that a proactive and supportive management approach significantly influences teachers' occupational stress levels. Moreover, implementing comprehensive mental health support programs within the school setting can contribute to a healthier, more resilient teaching staff.

Furthermore, administrative tasks, coordinators' abrupt deadlines, inadequate salary, overwhelming workloads, limited professional growth opportunities, insufficient social support from coordinators and colleagues, lack of control over job-related decisions, and conflicting or unclear performance expectations significantly impacted teachers' job performance. This implies that the coordinators must be able to clarify things first before gathering their respective departments for a faculty meeting. This may lead to confusion among the teachers if the coordinators have different understandings and interpretations.

This study presented teachers' challenges in dealing with occupational stress, as presented in the different research studies. However, it also highlighted that, through these challenges, teachers were able to develop occupational stress-coping mechanisms that can contribute to their professional and healthy well-being. Thus, school leaders aiming for success should focus on creating a positive work environment where teamwork and teachers' well-being are a priority, and a balanced approach to school management and caring for teachers is essential for overall educational success.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study should have utilized the triangulation method to establish the credibility of the study's results, which limited the researcher to further enrich the data gathered from the study participants. Also, time constraints limit the researcher to consider and gather data from other qualified participants in the study. The study was conducted with the participation of five high school teachers in an institution.

Future researchers may undertake a comparable study on public high school teachers and a comparative study to enhance the data on how high school teachers, both public and private, deal with their occupational stress. Moreover, the same study can also be conducted, having the academic support personnel in the high school department of private schools as the respondents.

Contributions of Authors

The authors confirm the equal contribution in each part of this work. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of this work.

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Conflict of Interests

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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