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## **Fighting the Silent Enemy: Evaluating Mental Health among Public Elementary Teachers in the Post Pandemic**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative-phenomenology research aims to provide data on the mental health of public elementary school teachers in the Municipality of Antipas. Using the interview guide questions, the informants were interviewed about their views on mental health after the pandemic and their sense of resiliency. Results showed that their mental health is a combination of positive and positive thinking. Some had their stable mind, while some had full of anxiety and depression. Their resiliency indicated that they had the feeling of calmness, managed their emotions, and believing to the Almighty God. They suggested that one be optimistic, seek mental health support, and connect with their family.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Mental health is one of the concerns even among the teachers in the Department of Education. Though, teachers are said to be flexible in handling all the responsibilities vested upon them, they are still facing the battle in making themselves healthy in the midst of all the aridity. They have to fulfill the duties beforehand and after that they could not complain when things go worst.

There were several cases of teachers in the Philippines who committed suicide because they could not handle the pressure (Reyes, 2020). Some do not have the choice but to continue the journey even though they could barely move to the next ladder of success. Taking into account, teachers do not only teach but are bombarded with a lot of tasks (Ancho & Bongco, 2019).

In the same vein, it can be pointed out that the educational system is getting worse. The standard is dwindling and students' performance are always at the bottom (Bernardo et al., 2022; Reynolds et al., 2022). Hence, one of the concerned reasons is the teachers' mental health since they could not feel anymore the sense of happiness and completeness of being in the teaching profession (Pekas et al., 2022). This is also the reason why many preferred to leave the country and serve foreign students (Uytico & Abadiano, 2020).

Generally, teachers had faced uncertainties, workload problems, negative perception of the profession, concern for others' well-being, health struggles, and multiple roles (Connor & Asbury, 2022; Kim et al., 2022). Nonetheless, they were able to overcome these through because they are resilient enough. This protected them in facing all the predicaments (Salinas-Falquez et al., 2022). Some researches mentioned about the present study, however, all of these were in the contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Flores et al., 2022; Hossain et al., 2022; Kush et al., 2022; Rodriguez et al., 2022). The aforesaid justifications set the gap of the present study.

Equally important, this study would like to look into mental health situation of public-school teachers especially in the elementary setting. Eventually, teachers can have the understanding of the detrimental effects of every crisis not only among themselves but to all. Thus, this motivates the researcher to conduct this endeavor using the qualitative-phenomenology.

### ***Research Questions***

This qualitative-phenomenology research aims to provide data on the mental health of public elementary school teachers in the Municipality of Antipas. Specifically, it answers the following research questions:

1. How do teachers view their mental health after the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. How do teachers show resiliency in uplifting their mental health;
3. What suggestions can teachers provide to make themselves mentally healthy; and
4. What policy brief and IEC material can be formulated out of the findings of the study?

### **Scope and Limitation of the Study**

This study was limited in determining the views of public elementary school teachers in the Municipality of Antipas on their views on their mental health after the pandemic. Their resiliency in strengthening their mental health as well as their suggestions to have a healthy well-being. Conversely, teachers from the secondary level will not be considered in this study. A separate study will be conducted by a future researcher.

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## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

This study applied the elements of qualitative-phenomenology in determining the views of teachers in the elementary level relative to their mental health after the pandemic. Qualitative is an approach in research wherein words and phrases give meaning to the interpretation of the phenomenon. It does not use any inferential statistics (Lester et al., 2020; Morse, 2020; Mey, 2022).

Conversely, phenomenology deals with the explanation of the occurrence of a phenomenon based on the experiences of humans. Interpretations will be based on their responses. Meanings will be drawn whereby it gives the in-depth analysis of the experiences (Fink, 2020; Stolz, 2020).

Thus, in this study the mental health status of teachers beyond the pandemic will be extracted through interviews. They will be allowed to share their experiences especially on their fight against the silent enemy which have an impact on their performance in school and in their personal lives. This paper is qualitative-phenomenology since themes will be drawn based on their stories.

### ***Locale of the Study***

I conducted this paper among the elementary teachers in the Municipality of Antipas, Province of Cotabato. This town is situated in the Arakan Valley Complex together with the towns of Magpet, Arakan, and Matalam. It is considered as the trading hub in the valley because of the availability of different business enterprise. Antipas is surrounded by Antipas on the north, President Roxas on the South, Magpet on the East, and Matalam on the west. There are 13 barangays and has a total population of 26, 817 according to the 2020 census. This is considered as the lowest in the whole Province of Cotabato. Below is the map of the locale of the study.



**Figure 1.** Map of the schools involved in the study.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AntipasMap.png>

### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument I used in this study was the interview guide questions (Majid et al., 2017). This was made up of series of questions which I asked to the informants. In addition, I used the consent-to-participate form and the recorder, and pen, and paper during the data gathering.

### **Sampling Procedure**

The selection of the informants was based on the contexts of purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020). They were divided into two groups. The first group was the Key Informants and the second group was the Focus Group. However, since it adhered to the criterion-based sampling it will provide the criteria to wit:

1. An elementary teacher;
2. At least 24 – 30 years old;
3. Have served during the pandemic; and

4. Married and have child/children.

### ***Data Gathering Procedure***

I was adhered to the following procedures in the gathering of the data. A letter was sent to the Schools Division Superintendent, District Supervisor, School Principals/Teachers-In Charge, and to the target informants and participants. The approval of the authorities played a crucial role for the continuity of the data gathering.

Meanwhile, I prepared the interview guide questions. This was sent to the experts for their comments and suggestions. It ensures that contents will follow the ethical norms in the conduct of the research. Also, the whole paper will go through a rigorous process especially by strictly following the ethical considerations.

Before the date and time of the interview, the informants and the participants were asked to read the consent-to-participate form. Contents was explained in order for them to have the profound understanding of their participation. For the smooth flow of the study, they will be briefed. As such, they were asked to affix their signature.

More importantly, they were provided with the tokens after the interview. The recorded data was transcribed and translated into English. Using the MAXQDA, themes was identified. Results was explained thoroughly. Member checked was done as well. This will promote fairness in the discussion and by checking the results in general. Findings will be returned to the informants for confirmation. Peer reviewer will do the final checking of the interpretation.

### ***Data Analysis***

Thematic analysis was done using the MAXQDA (Woolf & Silver, 2017). It is the go-to software for managing and analyzing the qualitative research. Developed by and for researchers, it offers a wide range of powerful tools for managing your research project, analyzing data and collaborating with team members.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

I observed the following ethical considerations in this study:

**Social Value.** The study will be able to present an instrument that is more precise in identifying the mental health condition of public elementary school teachers. By knowing it, an intervention was done in order to help them. This was also crucial since teachers need a helping hand so that they could fight this silent enemy within them.

**Informed Consent.** Through written consent, the researcher sought respondents/participants for their approval. They were fully informed about the study's goal and the reasons for their participation, allowing them to make an informed decision about whether or not to join. It was made clear that respondents/participants' participation in the study is optional, and they were not coerced to participate if they decline. Furthermore, the researcher take care to ensure that the participants' psychological well-being is not jeopardized.

**Vulnerability of Research Participants.** The participants in this study was not deemed vulnerable since, as professionals, they are fully capable of making their own decisions about whether or not to participate. They were safeguarded for possible identification of their responses as connected or can be traced to them as participants. In addition, the researcher ensured that the participants' identities are kept private and that they are safeguarded from being identified.

**Risks, Benefits, and Safety.** The researcher described the study's effect and significance for the participants' safety and psychological and social well-being. It was assumed that the study's findings will have a favorable impact on the participants. Time was also important in the study because the participants must divide their time between personal and professional obligations. Consequently, the researcher will make it certain that conducting the survey, IDI and FGD will be set at the participants' convenience. Another risk this study was the disclosure of experiences which may be considered unpleasant or undesirable, and for others disappointing or demoralizing. In such situations, the researcher was considerate and sincere in addressing their emotional state and acted accordingly.

**Privacy and Confidentiality.** In terms of the participants' right to privacy, the researcher was expected to keep all data private and is not permitted to share any material that could reveal the participants' individual identities. The researcher did not reveal the names of the participants when presenting the findings. The researcher was gladly allowed participants to withdraw their statements or their participation in the study if they so desired. The researcher asked thoughtful questions and used language that is both fair and non-biased. The researcher was also responsible for informing her research assistants, documenters, and transcribers on the study's privacy and confidentiality policies. To secure their identity, the participants ensured that the data cannot be traced back to them, who are the true providers of information, in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

**Justice.** In selecting volunteers for the study, the researcher was objective. Nobody was left out, and everyone who met the requirements were eligible to participate in the research. Regardless of whether they engaged in the survey, IDI, or FGD, all participants will be treated similarly. The researcher presented tokens of appreciation to all volunteers to compensate the time spent in collecting data.

Meanwhile, policymakers, school administrators, and instructors can use the study's findings, conversations, and findings. This study may be useful as a resource for school administrators who want to increase their school's productivity. Scholars and future researchers might also benefit from this research by getting suggestions for their own future research projects.

**Transparency.** The researcher ensured that the study's methodologies were properly implemented. The researcher provided all required documents that support data analysis and allow readers to view them in order to obtain a better grasp of the study's results and conclusions. Furthermore, the findings were thoroughly addressed, particularly material that may have an impact on the presentation of the results, in order to emphasize the importance of transparency. Finally, the researcher outlined the scope of his engagement as well as how he planned to preserve objectivity when evaluating data and presenting the study's findings.

**Qualification of the Researcher.** The researcher acknowledged her lack of experience in mixed methods research. As a result, she sought guidance and advice from her mentor and panelists, as well as peers who are familiar with the technique. Furthermore, she was advised by these professionals in properly implementing the procedure in order to get the data required for the intended goal. In addition, she was expected to demonstrate moral courage, societal awareness, culture, sensitivity, professionalism, and honesty throughout the study.

**Adequacy of Facilities.** In this study, the researcher ensured that all necessary facilities are available and accessible. Further readings and references can be found in library and internet resources to help deepen and reinforce the analysis and interpretation of the data acquired. Audio recorders, cameras, and other necessary equipment will be on hand. Finally, a panel of specialists established who provided useful input and suggestions to aid the researcher in performing the study and conveying the findings.

**Community Involvement.** The researcher was committed to treating the people in the community with dignity. The approval of the Schools Division Superintendent and School Administrators was required for any activities to be carried out. Through their perceptions on succession planning, as well as a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of leaders who will become influential and promote the common good within and outside their context, these stakeholders' participation in this study will help the researcher to generate information on how women were empowered by the leaders in their schools. For the purpose of knowledge and awareness, all school stakeholders were provided a research-based empowerment questionnaire designed exclusively for teachers.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Themes and Core Ideas on the Teachers' Mental health after the COVID

#### 19 pandemic

The first research question deals with the themes and core ideas on the teachers' mental health after the COVID-19 pandemic. Stable mental health and full of anxiety and depression are the two themes which came out from the responses of teachers. All of which indicate the negative and positive impact of the health crisis.

*Stable Mental Health.* It is noted that after the pandemic, teachers returned to the normal life. They attended their classes and continued in fulfilling the noblest profession in the world. In line with this, they tend to make themselves worry-free. Instead of looking into the negative side of it, they thought for the better possibilities that would make them grow as individuals. For them, life must go on and should not linger in the predicaments brought by the pandemic.

In line with this, an informant shared:

*"Pagkatapos ng pandemyang Covid-19, nararamdaman kong nabawasan ang aking pag-aalala, takot, at pagkabalisa. Ang aking kalusugan sa kaisipan ay unti-unting nagiging matatag."* (After Covid-19 pandemic I feel relieved. My worries, fear and anxiety were lessened. My mental health is becoming stable. (Informant 1)

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on global mental health, causing increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression for many individuals. However, it is important to recognize that people can achieve stable mental health even experiencing the challenges of the pandemic.

As stated by the informant:

*"Para sa akin, nakaramdam ako ng ginhawa mula sa stress sa pag-handle sa araw-araw na mga gawain ng aking mga estudyante, ngunit may ilang dagdag na tungkulin sa paaralan tulad ng paggawa ng mga module sa iba't ibang asignatura, pagsusuri ng mga module, at paggawa ng mga marka."* (For me, I was relieved from stress in handling my students' day by day but there are several charges in doing works in school like producing modules in different subjects, checking modules and making grades). (Informant 5)

This theme is in consonance with the findings that social connections are vital for mental health. One should have to stay in touch with friends, family, and loved ones through different activities. Likewise, there is a need to join support groups or engage in online communities that share the same interests. Above all, it is because of optimism that frees a person from the dungeon of death brought by the pandemic (Herbert et al., 2021).

*Full of anxiety and depression.* The impact of COVID-19 pandemic still endures in the lives of some teachers. As a matter of fact, they still feel the loneliness and isolation. This can be associated by the mere fact that the health crisis incarcerates people and curtailed their freedom of movements. Thus, even until today, this feeling is shackling them.

This sad reality transpired during the interview.

*"Bilang isang guro, para sa akin, ang aming kalusugan sa kaisipan matapos ang pandemyang covid-19 ay hindi maganda, ito ang sanhi ng pagkabalisa at depresyon para sa amin."* (As a teacher, for me I view our mental health after the covid-19 pandemic was not good, it caused of anxiety and depression for us). (Informant 3)

Undeniably, the fear that it may come back and turned the tide once again is the most depressing issue being faced by the teachers. They felt nervous because of the uncertainty. It can be remembered that the length of time that the pandemic had resulted to almost losing of faith that things would return to normal.

*"Ang mga guro na bumalik sa face-to-face na mga aralin ay nakaranas ng mataas na antas ng pagkabalisa, stress, at kahit ng depresyon."* (Teachers who have returned face to face lessons have experiences high level of anxiety, stress and even depression). (Informant 10)

And,

*"Ang stress at pagkabalisa ng mga guro ay umakyat at ang moral ay bumaba, isang pampalasang kombinasyon na maaaring magdulot sa kanila ng pagkaubos at magdulot ng pagod sa kanilang trabaho."* (Teacher's stress and anxiety have soared and moral has plummeted, a flammable combination that could burn them out and lead to feel exhausted in my job). (Informant 11)

More so, teachers were greatly disturbed that because of the pandemic the learning capabilities of their students were affected. Even in the midst of uncertainties teachers always thought of how their students struggled with the understanding the lessons. Because of this, after the series of lockdowns students showed different level of learning than before.

*"Noong panahon ng pandemya, bilang isang guro, nararamdaman ko ang stress at pagkabalisa dahil hindi ko magawa ang mga bagay na nagpapahusay sa pag-aaral ng aking mga mag-aaral. Hindi ko maipalagay kung paano sila makakapag-aral nang maayos nang wala ako. Ipinaglalatag ko sa isipan kung paano nila maiintindihan nang maayos ang mga module."* (During the pandemic me as a teacher, I feel stress and anxiety because I cannot do things that make my learners learned well. I cannot imagine how they can learn without my presence. It bothered my mind how they can understand well the modules). (Informant 12)

Similarly, teachers may have had concerns about their own mental health and safety, as well as the health and safety of their students and colleagues (Vaillancourt et al., 2021). They still have fears of contracting the virus and spreading it to loved once. While the pandemic may have subsided, the transition back to in-person teaching can still be stressful. Adjusting to new routines, safety protocols, and changes in the learning environment can trigger anxiety and apprehension.

Table 1. Themes and Core Ideas on the Teachers' Mental health after the COVID 19 pandemic

Themes	Core Ideas
Stable Mental Health	The teachers are mentally healthy and are worry free.
Full of anxiety and Depression	The teachers are still hunching into the negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic.
	There is still the feeling of loneliness and isolation.
	There is still the feeling of nervousness and uncertainty.
	There is the worry about the learning capabilities of the students.

### Themes and Core Ideas on the Resiliency of Teachers in uplifting Mental Health

The second research question provides answers on the themes and core ideas on the resiliency of teachers in uplifting mental health. They showed it by having the feeling of calming, managing emotions, and believing to Almighty God. All of these provide an overview of resiliency among teachers.

*Feeling of Calmness.* Indeed, teachers have shown incredible resilience and dedication in navigating the negative impacts of COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges they faced, many teachers have managed to adapt and continue their work to support students' education and well-

being. This implies that teacher learned to acknowledge that there are many aspects of the pandemic that are beyond their control. Instead, they focus on their energy and attention on things within their control which can help reduce stress and create a sense of calmness.

This is in consonance with the statement of the informant:

*“Nanatili akong mahinahon. Malaki ang naitutulong nito sa akin. Tumutulong ito sa akin na mag-isip nang mas epektibo upang makagawa ng mabuting desisyon at mapanatili ang kontrol sa aking mga emosyon.”* (I keep myself calm. It helps me a lot. It helps me to think more effectively to make sound decisions and to control my emotions even more). (Informant 1)

Calmness is vital despite uncertainties because it allows to navigate challenging situations more effectively and it helps in maintaining the overall well-being. By embodying calmness, one can actually positively influence those around them. When others can see it, it can inspire them to adopt similar attitudes and responses. Calmness can create a ripple effect, creating a more supportive community (Idoiga et al., 2021; Matiz et al., 2020).

*Managing Emotions.* Having the positive mindset can make a difference in the lives of the teachers. Even in the midst of difficult situation, teachers learned to manage their emotions. This is important in making themselves to keep going and move forward.

Conversely, by attending stress debriefing seminars teachers can learn how to value their worth. These sessions provide a platform for teachers to reflect on their experiences relative to COVID-19 pandemic, share their challenges, and receive support. Further, this implies that it creates a safe and supporting environment where teachers express their concerns and frustrations. Through active listening and empathy, they can feel validated and understood which may have to reinforce their worth and the significance of their work.

*“Ang mga guro ay nagpapakita ng pagiging matatag sa pagpapabuti ng kanilang kalusugan sa kaisipan sa pamamagitan ng pagdalo sa mga seminar o pagsasanay sa debriefing ng stress na nagpo-promote ng pagiging matatag kabilang ang pamamahala ng stress.”* (Teachers show resiliency in uplifting their mental health by attending stress debriefing seminars or trainings that promote resilience includes stress management). (Informant 3)

Furthermore, they strengthened their inner being by connecting with other people. This helps them to share their stories and their successes in overcoming the challenges in life. In this regard, teachers learned to manage their emotions because they did not allow the pain to overpower them.

*“Kausapin ang punong-guro at mga kasamahan sa paaralan tungkol sa balanse sa oras ng trabaho, tamang pagpapalaganap ng koordinasyon, at pamamahagi ng tungkulin sa pagpapatakbo ng learning action cell ng paaralan.”* (Talk to school head and colleague about work time balance, proper dissemination of coordinatorship and assignment conduct of school learning action cell). (Informant 8).

Lastly, they accepted the reality. Recognizing the pandemic happened for a reason eases the burdens. This helps them to rebuild their own selves and tried to look for the brighter future together with their family, colleagues, and learners. Above all, this has an ultimate contribution to their overall well-being.

*“Bilang isang guro, dapat kong itaguyod ang positibong, sosyal, at ekolohikal na pananaw sa mga mag-aaral, dahil alam ko na ang pagiging matatag ng guro ay isang proseso sa pamamagitan ng ilang mga pang-umangkop na salik.”* (As a teacher I should promote positive, social and ecological perspective to the learners, because I know that teacher’s resiliency is the process through which a number of protective factors). (Informant 9)

Recognizing that it is normal to experience a range of emotions as a transition out of the pandemic, one has to give themselves with the permission to feel and process the emotions without judgement. They have to allow time and space to reflect on the challenges and the challenges that they have faced. It can be noted that patience helps in the adaptation to the changes (Poulou & Denham, 2023; Robinson et al., 2023).

*Believing to Almighty God.* Asking for God’s guidance indicates the power of resiliency among teachers in uplifting their mental health. Filipinos in general believe in the intercession of the Holy Spirit to guide and protect them from all the odds. For teacher, anchoring their faith to God can provide comfort, strength, and guidance, especially during and after the challenging times brought by the pandemic.

*“Sa pamamagitan ng pagtiwala at panalangin sa ating Makapangyarihang Diyos para sa kaalaman sa kung paano haharapin ang kasalukuyang sitwasyon at lakas upang lampasan ang lahat ng mga hamon.”* (By trusting and praying unto our Almighty god for the knowledge on how to handle the present situation and the strength to surpass all the challenges). (Informant 10)

Cultivating a grateful heart can strengthen faith and nurture a positive outlook. Adding to this, life is filled with uncertainties, and by seeking God’s guidance can bring comfort and peace to hearts and minds. Having Him in life can alleviate anxiety, fears, and doubts, which allows everyone to experience inner peace and serenity (Obeng, 2022).

Table 2. Themes and Core Ideas on the Resiliency of Teachers in uplifting Mental

Health

Themes	Core Ideas
Feeling of calmness	Teachers make themselves still amidst the negative impacts of COVID-19 pandemic
Managing Emotions	Teachers maintain positive mindset in combatting the tests of times

	Teachers attend stress debriefing seminars
	Teachers tend to strengthen their inner being by connecting with other people
	Teachers learn to accept the reality of life.
Believing to Almighty God	Teachers ask for the guidance of God.

### Themes and Core Ideas on the Suggestions to become mentally healthy

Teachers suggested on how to become mentally healthy. They stated that one should be optimistic, seek mental health support, and connect with family. These integrate the importance of having the positive mindsets.

*Be Optimistic.* One has to look into the positive side of every situation. Though, it cannot be denied that there would be some worries in their hearts, but then, having this thinking can make a difference toward survivability. Optimistic individuals tend to have a more positive outlook which can lead to increased happiness, resilience, and a greater sense of hope.

*“Bukod sa pagiging mahinahon, makatutulong din ang pagpapakabusy sa iba pang kapaki-pakinabang na mga bagay. Maging optimistiko, hanapin ang isang taong maaaring mong pagkatiwalaan na makakasama sa pagbabahagi ng iyong mga pasanin.” (Aside from being calm, making yourself busy with other useful things will also help. Be optimistic, find someone whom you can share your burdens). (Informant 1)*

The same narrative has been shared by the informant.

*“Palakasin ang iyong emosyonal na pagiging matatag, isipin ang mga proaktibong paraan upang pamahalaan ang stress sa iyong buhay. Magtagpo nang regular sa mga kaibigan at pamilya, maglaan ng oras sa mga hilig mo, magbasa o manood ng mga bagay na nagpapatawa, at isama sa iyong araw-araw na gawain ang mga napatunayang paraan ng paglaban sa stress tulad ng pagsasanay sa pagmumeditasyon o ehersisyo na kasama ang malalim na paghinga at magpahingang maikli.” (Build up your emotional resilience, think of proactive ways to manage the stress in your life. Meet regularly with friends and family, spend time on hobbies you enjoy, read or watch things that make you laugh and build into your daily routine proven stress-busting activities such as meditation or exercise that involve deep breathing and take a short break). (Informant 4)*

Also, an informant verbalized that:

*“Pumili ng positibong pag-iisip. Makipag-usap o magbukas sa mga tiwala mong mga kaibigan at pamilya tuwing nararamdaman mong nalulungkot ka.” (Choose positive mindset. Talk or open up to trusted friends and family whenever you feel depressed). (Informant 8)*

Besides, teachers recognized the importance of strengthening spirituality. Belief in God can free a person from the bondage of agonies. Faith can move mountains and can conquer the importance of existence.

*“Para sa akin, ang pagiging mentally healthy ay magkaroon ng positibong pananaw sa buhay. Planuhin ang mga araw-araw na gawain at higit sa lahat manalangin na patnubayan tayo ng Diyos sa lahat ng ating mga ginagawa.” (For me to be mentally healthy is to have a positive perspective in life. Plan everyday activities and most of all pray that God will lead us in everything that we do). (Informant 5)*

Further, these is a need to recognize the strengths and weakness. This means that one should know his value as a person. Anent, this allows to leverage and enhance further by building upon strengths, and develop new skills, and excel in areas that one has naturally thrives. Understanding weaknesses, helps teachers in identifying their areas for improvement, enabling personal growth and development. In the same vein, by acknowledging and working on it can lead to progress to become more well-rounded individuals.

One of the aspects of optimism is to focus on things that heal the wound of time. Teachers need to adhere to activities that will lead them to embark to the new chapter of their lives. As much as possible, teachers need to be healthy in and out. This will help them in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. More so, they can be proactive in dealing with their students and colleagues (Castroverde & Alcalá, 2021).

*Seek Mental Health Support.* In the world of work, it is important to be with someone to trust with. These are the people who could understand the struggles and plights and life. Seeking it is a sign of strength and self-care. It is importance to prioritize mental health and reach out for help when needed.

*“Maglaan ng oras para magpahinga, magpabakuna, baguhin ang iyong mga asahan, mag-ehersisyo, at humingi ng suporta sa kalusugan ng kaisipan kung kinakailangan.” (Set aside time to unwind, get vaccinated, adjust your expectations, get your body moving and seek mental health support if needed). (Informant 2)*

Indeed, seeking mental health support breaks the barrier of stigmatizing mental health (Petrankova et al., 2023). By reaching out for help, it contributes to the normalization and its acceptance. Sharing the experiences and seeking for support can inspire others to do the same, thus, creating a more compassionate and understanding society.

*Connect with Family.* Family members can provide a strong support system during challenging times. They offer a sense of belonging, understanding, and empathy. Families can collaborate in problem-solving and offer different perspectives and insights. When facing challenges, family members can provide support, advice, and practical assistance. Engaging in open and honest communication with the family can help develop effective coping skills and strategies for managing stress and difficulties.



*“Pamilya at mga kaibigan dahil sila ang magbibigay sa iyo ng moral na suporta at pagmamahal.”* (Family and circle of friends because they are the one who will give you moral support and love). (Informant 8)

In concordance:

*“Suporta mula sa pamilya at suporta mula sa Diyos. Maglaan ng oras kasama ang aking pamilya o sa kalikasan. Makipag-ugnayan sa aking pamilya at mga kaibigan. Alagaan ang aking pisikal na kalusugan at higit sa lahat, magkaroon ng sapat na tulog. Sapagkat ang buhay ay maikli kaya’t samantalahin ang buhay sa buong-pusong kasiyahan.”* (Family support and support from God. Spend time with my family or in nature. Connect with my family and friends. Look after my physical health and most importantly have a good sleep. Because Life is short so enjoy Life to the fullest). (Informant 12)

Over and above that, family connections vary for each individual, and not everyone may have a supportive family. In such cases, seeking support from trusted friend, mentors, or support groups can also be beneficial. The secret is to connect with the relationships that provide understanding, support, and a sense of belongingness (Robinson et al, 2023).

Table 3. Themes and Core Ideas on the Suggestions to become mentally healthy

Themes	Core Ideas
Be Optimistic	Look into the positive side of every situation.
	Strengthen spiritual well-being
	Recognize strengths and weaknesses
	Focus on things that heal the wounds of time.
	Be healthy in all aspects of life
Seek Mental Health Support	Open the doors with colleagues and family
Connect with Family	Celebrate happy moments

## IMPLICATIONS

### *Implications for Practice*

This research is timely and has been an eye-opener for each teacher. Even after the wrath brought by COVID-19 pandemic, its effect still lingers into the lives of teachers. Though some have already coped with it, there are still those who have been living in the midst of quandary and fear. It cannot be denied that everyone has different ways of viewing their mental health.

The importance of having with the colleagues who can be the source of inspirations could make a huge difference. Eventually, they can share their problems in life and even in the contexts of their work. Teachers learned to overcome by being calmed and looked into the positive side of life.

More so, the presence of their loved ones enabled them to become resilient. This means that they fought the hard way in order for them to become strong because there are people who leaned on them. Correspondingly, this study confirms that Filipino teachers possessed the essence of resiliency. This shows that they are strong enough though time tested their capabilities.

Finally, as teachers they would like that their colleagues would have learned from their experiences. Their pieces of advice and words of encouragements can be potentially help teachers to follow their path to become the best version of themselves even in the tests of times. Indeed, teachers are not robots, they too have been through difficulties. Yet, they learned to overcome and continued with the noblest profession.

### *Implications for Future Research*

This study provides different perspectives in research. For future research, it is deemed necessary to look into the experiences of non-teaching personnel in the Department of Education including the school heads and the school principals. Through this, different experiences can be determined and that the Department of Education will be well informed about it.

With this, they could be able to design a plan that would help teachers to hurdle the problems that they are facing. Also, they can lessen the work and eventually strengthen their mental health. Of all the professions, teachers are the most bombarded one. Hence, for future researchers they can look into these predicaments that would be considered as the contributing factors that caused so much burden to them.

Alas, this study entails better opportunities for researchers. Its timeliness provides bits of information that widens the bodies of knowledge. These are not only limited to the aspects of teachers but to individuals as well who have the gargantuan contribution to teachers' lives. More importantly, this will bridge the gaps in this study.

### Concluding Remarks

The mental health of teachers has always been an important topic, and it continues to be a significant concern beyond the pandemic. While the pandemic has added new challenges and stressors to the profession, such as adapting to remote teaching and managing emotional needs of students, there are several factors that can impact mental health of teachers regardless of the circumstances.

Teachers often face heavy workloads, including lesson planning, grading, and administrative tasks. The pressure to meet curriculum standards and academic expectations can be overwhelming. Excessive workload and time pressure can contribute to stress and burnout.

To address these issues requires a multi-faceted approach involving educators, school administrators, policymakers, and the community. Providing ongoing professional development opportunities focused on mental health, classroom management, and self-care can empower teachers with the skills and resources they need to address challenges effectively.

Therefore, schools should prioritize mental health resources for teachers, including access to counseling services and mental health professionals who can provide support and guidance. Creating a positive and supportive work environment is crucial. Administrators should foster open communication, provide feedback and recognition, and address concerns raised by teachers.

Above all, schools can explore ways to alleviate excessive workload by providing necessary resources, streamlining administrative tasks, and encouraging collaboration among teachers to share the workload. By encouraging self-care practices and well-being initiatives among teachers is essential. School can promote mindfulness, stress reduction technique, physical exercise, and work-life balance to support their mental health.

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