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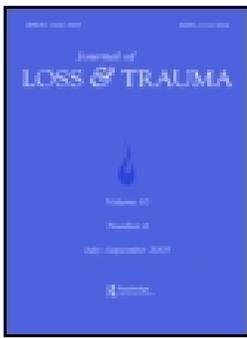
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Philippine Teachers' Practices to Deal with Anxiety amid COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

School closures, home quarantine, and social distancing implemented worldwide can cause a sudden anxiety even among teachers. A designed online survey collected data from Filipino teachers' practices on how they deal with anxiety due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The practices include information seeking, preventive measures, and other coping mechanisms to deal with anxiety during the quarantine period. Results revealed that teachers practice virtual learning, communicate with the professional community, adhere to quarantine requirements, and find purposeful activities to deal with anxiety due to the suspension of national school-related activities in the country brought by the pandemic.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19; home quarantine; teachers; Facebook; anxiety

Introduction

When the Chinese government first announced the novel coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, it was only days when it has been named as COVID-19 and eventually considered as a massive international concern. Such concern led the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) to declare COVID-19 as a pandemic. In the Philippine context, when the imported and localized transmission of COVID-19 was recorded, the government considered it as a risk to national security (Nicomedes et al., 2020) (Nicomedes, Avila, & Arpia, 2020). Consequently, the Philippine government implemented the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) to contain the spread of COVID-19 on March 16, 2020. However, due to the increase of the COVID-19 cases in the Philippines, the ECQ was extended until April 30, 2020. This health problem created public health emergencies that Filipinos are also affected nationwide due to prolonged social isolation that creates loneliness, anxiety, depression, and can even lead to a post-traumatic stress disorder (Leite et al., 2020 cited American Psychological Society, 2020; WHO, 2020). The way of life in the Philippines has changed its course, although,

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Filipinos are not the only ones whose life changed, considering that COVID-19 is already a global problem, everybody's lifestyle changed (Pan, 2020).

Considering the increase of COVID-19 cases in the Philippines, the researchers decided to find out the possible impact of COVID-19 outbreak to the people, particularly to the teachers on how they deal with the quarantine period. The Department of Education (DEPED) would have ended the school year for the basic level institutions in late March 2020, but due to COVID-19, the classes were shortened in the middle of the month. In case of an extension of the suspension of face to face education on the school year 2020–2021 due to the pandemic, the Department of Education launched the DEPED Commons Project to serve as an online platform for virtual lessons that teachers and even students nationwide can use as an alternative, but this is still on its trial stage and is not compulsory. Likewise, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) also suspended the classes on the same month, but advised to deploy available distance learning and alternative modes, but which is not yet realized as of this moment since virtual learning is still new to the educational system in the Philippines.

Policies were created to secure the continuity of adherence of the stakeholders, particularly directed to the teachers and the students to the educational and preventive policies such as the provision of alternative delivery modes of education and quarantine requirements (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2020; Department of Education [DEPED], 2020). These new normal can posit worries to the teachers since they have not been trained for emergency online teaching. In addition, the suspension of classes even in higher education coupled with social isolation and home quarantine can cause anxieties to the teachers. Hence, both researchers decided to focus on an online survey about the experiences, attitudes, and practices of the teachers to deal with anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

Twenty-five questions were designed for an online survey about the practices, perceptions, and experiences of Filipino teachers on the COVID-19 outbreak. The respondents mostly came from Mindanao, Region XII, specifically in General Santos City, Sultan Kudarat Province, and South Cotabato Province. Teachers were chosen regardless of years of experience and institution level whether private or public employees. The teachers were asked for their voluntary participation in the study prior to the online administration of the instrument. The survey included seeking

information, preventive measures, attitudes, psychological stress or anxiety, and practices to cope with their anxiety during the quarantine period. The online survey was disseminated from April 13 to April 16, 2020. After a week, 218 questionnaires were retrieved from the teachers. Data were analyzed using frequency and mean percentage a descriptive statistical treatment to interpret the teachers' responses.

Results and discussion

The teachers are not immune to the vulnerabilities due to COVID-19 since they had to discontinue teaching immediately after lockdown. However, they looked for ways to still communicate to families, colleagues, and a few of their students who are accessible online. Hereafter are the results of the teachers' practices to combat the effects of COVID-19.

In view of seeking information about COVID-19, 84.9% of Filipino teachers always search for news about the cases of COVID-19 per day and only 15.1% did not. On the other hand, 95.4% check the information about COVID-19 if it comes from a trusted or reliable source and a small portion of 4.6% do not care if what they are reading is reliable or not. With many speculations on COVID-19 and its negative impact on people, it is very important to be vigilant and careful with the news and information to believe. This is further reinforced by the WHO (2020) to seek information about COVID-19 once or twice a day, but they should be practical and only get information from trusted sources to plan and protect themselves and their loved ones.

In terms of the most important preventive measures to combat COVID-19, 44% of Filipino teachers consider avoiding crowded places, 6.4% of teachers suggest wearing face masks, 16.5% suggest washing hands, 20.2% observe proper hygiene, 2.7% take vitamins, 7.8% do exercise, stay at home at 1.4%, and there are two responses on following the government guidelines 0.9%. Moreover, 98.2% of Filipino teachers observe social distancing which is the highest percentage concerning the preventive measures to combat COVID-19. Part of the memorandum 019 of DEPED (2020) is to adopt information dissemination strategies and launch awareness campaigns about COVID-19 to prevent, control, and promote positive health behaviors and address fear and anxiety among the stakeholders. Likewise, Wilder-Smith and Freedman (2020) implied that social distancing helps to reduce the transmission of the virus. Social distancing is necessary for avoiding transmission of COVID-19, although it triggers a feeling of sadness and anxiety among people. The authors (Roy et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020) suggest that it is important for people to be aware of the preventive measures to avoid transmission of COVID-19 through observing personal

hygiene, using sanitizers, washing hands, and wearing masks. This also includes self-isolating, practicing social distancing, and drinking plenty of water (Roy et al., 2020).

Furthermore, 89% regularly check themselves for early symptoms of COVID-19, only 73.9% of Filipino teachers do not want to talk to some acquaintances without a mask, while 89% prefer to bring disinfectant alcohol with them when they go out. Likewise, there are 85.3% of teachers who disinfect their things before entering their house, 61% do not look forward to visiting public places like parks, and 57.8% do not look forward to spending some time with their friends like watching movies at malls.

Concerning the attitudes of the Filipino teachers during the quarantine period, 56% do not feel bored staying at home during quarantine, and only 44% feel otherwise. On the positive side, 93.1% feel positive spending time with their family during the quarantine. Given the activity that they always do during the quarantine period, 25.6% of Filipino teachers prefer watching television. Moreover, 23.8% of teachers prefer cooking and spending their time with other activities such as doing exercise (11.9%), sleeping (8.7%), playing mobile games (5.9%), writing (4.1%), gardening (5.9%), cleaning the house (3.2%), surfing the internet/Facebook (3.6%), praying (1.4%), reading (2.3%), and working with DepEd forms for checking (0.9%). Considering the results on the attitudes of the Filipino teachers during the quarantine period, teachers feel positive spending time with their families during the quarantine. This is a good preference among Filipinos as they give importance to their families. It has been in a Filipino culture that problems can be overcome having a family around. Likewise, it is necessary for the teachers to learn daily routines such as physical activities to reduce boredom and find ways to strengthen positive experiences to others. Keeping regular contact with loved ones through phone, social media, social networks, and creating new hobbies, and thinking positively can help alleviate anxiety amid the global crisis (WHO, 2020).

Because of the anxiety or psychological stress brought by COVID-19, 92.7% of Filipino teachers are not confident to go to crowded places, 91.3% do not feel secure with using public transportation, 89.9% are conscious in touching any surfaces at public areas, 79.3% are conscious to touch their faces without washing their hands, 81.7% have doubts in eating in a restaurant, 91.7% of Filipino teachers' lifestyle change because of the COVID-19, and 92.7% are afraid that their family members might be infected with COVID-19. The findings of this study show a positive outlook among Filipino teachers amid the COVID-19 pandemic, yet, psychological stress or anxiety is apparent in their lives. This is due to the fact that they are not able to do the things that they once used to do as their lifestyle changed during the pandemic (Pan, 2020).

For the ways to deal with anxiety during Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), 74.8% of the Filipino teachers spend more time in social media, and, 78.8% discovered a new hobby while on quarantine. In addition, for the best way to cope with anxiety during COVID-19 outbreak, 53% of Filipino teachers prefer spending time with family, 30.2% seek spiritual guidance, 8.3% talk with friends online, and, 4.1% talk with their special someone online, while interestingly, a small portion of teachers, 1.8% talk to themselves. Finally, given the question, if their life will be back to normal when COVID-19 is over, 81.7% answered positively. As to the anxiety brought by COVID-19, Filipino teachers are hesitant to go to crowded places which are also supported by the perceived preventive measures for COVID-19 such as avoiding crowded places and social distancing. This statement supports the result of the study on the anxiety felt by the teachers amid the COVID-19 outbreak. To deal with anxiety, Filipino teachers have discovered a new hobby while on quarantine since most of them are also spending time with social media to communicate with friends, students, and colleagues and read news updates regarding COVID-19 since it can heighten their awareness during a crisis (Hocke-Mirzashvili et al., 2015). Likewise, teachers spend more time online since they also practice the virtual learning project aside from communicating through a professional online community with colleagues. They also developed ways to find something purposeful due to the suspension of all national and regional school-related conferences and activities in the country (CHED, 2020; DEPED, 2020).

Conclusion and implications

COVID-19 indeed changed the lives of many people around the world. It created fear, trauma, depression, and anxiety to people, especially those who lost their loved ones due to the pandemic. In the context of the Philippines, Filipinos, particularly the teachers are worried about the safety of their loved ones and even their lifestyles have been affected because of the fears due to the pandemic. Though the Filipino teachers have shown a positive outlook in life amid the COVID-19 outbreak, they are still susceptible to the anxieties since the pandemic is still ongoing worldwide. These teachers though are well aware of what to do to cope with their educational, social, and personal anxieties. Therefore, this article points out that there is ample evidence that the Filipino teachers practice measures to deal with anxiety since they adhere to the preventive and educational policies of DEPED and CHED in the fight against COVID-19. However, this study has its limitations such that it cannot be generalized to the entire teachers in the Philippines due to the limited number of teachers who answered the

online survey, and this study mainly relied on self-reported experiences of the teachers. Nonetheless, the study presents social implications and novel value. The social implication of this study is grounded on the teachers' capability to communicate and follow the guidelines of the government for social distancing and other preventive measures as offered through social media. Likewise, this work has proven its originality since no studies are done prior to this that focus on the teachers' home quarantine experiences amid COVID-19. Further studies should be conducted that focus on the effectiveness of social media for communication purposes amid the health crisis and an in-depth investigation should be made that examines the effects of the pandemic to the emotional and mental well-being of the Filipino teachers including the population of the student community.

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