

# Understanding the Meanings of Mental Health through the Lived Experiences of Public School Teachers in the Philippines

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**Abstract:** The present study explored the meanings mental health by investigating the lived experiences of public school teachers in the Philippines. The participants were composed of 3 female public school teachers from Antipolo, Rizal. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, and were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as orienting theoretical lens. The results indicated 7 main themes: (1) What they think and feel about teachers' programs, policies, and benefits; (2) The challenges they face in carrying out their functions; (3) What kind of stresses they normally experience; (4) What they do to cope with challenges and stresses; (5) How they contribute to the society; (6) What makes them stay in the profession; and (7) Going the extra mile for the students. Theoretical and practical implications of the results were discussed.

**Keywords:** Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Lived Experiences, Mental Health, Public School Teachers, Stress, Coping.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which an individual (a) realizes his/her own ability, (b) can cope with normal stresses of life, (c) can work productively, (d) is able to make contributions to his/her community (WHO, 2005). While health is a dynamic concept and can have multiple meanings (Govind et al., 2014) WHO (2005) defined it as the extent to which a person's physical, mental and spiritual resources enable them to cope with the environment. Mental health is very much embedded in the concept of health (CMHA, 2005). Thus, there is no health without mental health (WHO, N.D.).

The issue of mental health is very much significant to workers or employees. Since people are the most important resource of an organization, it is imperative that they are healthy to be productive and effective (Hechanova et al., 2014). Furthermore, it can affect their performance and even productivity (Leliott et al., 2008).

Extant literatures suggest that teachers, generally, experience high level of stress at work (e.g., Papastylianou, et al., 2009), this is most especially for public school teachers in the Philippines. (e.g., Alontaga & Durban, 2013). Scholars agree that there is a link between stress and mental health (e.g., Griffin, 1999; Govind et al, 2014). On the same theoretical terrain, the researcher argues that one way of looking at mental health is through exploring their experiences stress. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as methodology, the researcher identified a theory to explicate this concept in the context of Filipino public school teachers.

This study contributes to the literature by shedding light to the in-depth experience of public school teachers' mental health by exploring stress as point of departure. Results of my study also contributes to the theorizing of mental health, contextualized in the lens of public school teachers. Lastly, Theoretical insights of my study can help inform policies and practices for mental health programs and advocacies.

## II. BODY OF ARTICLE

### **Stress and Mental Health of Public School Teachers:**

The work of teachers is considered as one of the highly stressful social professions because it involves close relationship with other people, requires speed in decision-making, and the decisions taken might have a serious economic, social or other impact on the lives of those involved (Guglielmi and Tatrow 1998; Kantas 1995; Kyriacou 2001 cited in Papastylionou, et al., 2009). A study by Govind and colleagues (2014) found a negative link between job stress and mental health of college teachers. Suggesting that stress could be one of the factors that could explain mental health. Moreover, Sabanci (2011) also found a negative correlation between teachers' stress level and organization's health. This connotes that teachers' health is also organization's health.

A local study by Alontaga & Durban (2013) indicates that there is a significant difference between private and public school elementary teachers in terms of stress— suggesting that public school teachers have higher stress level. This could mean that public school teachers are more at risk to mental health issues. Another recent local study done by Betonio (2015), she found out that there are five main stress factors for teachers— these are the following: work related, economic related, peer related, family related, and Schools' Policies related and Management Practices related stresses. What's interesting here is the schools' policies related factor which made the researcher think what's really the role of policies in addressing mental health-related issues of teachers.

Borelli et al. (2014) found a link between working conditions and mental health of teachers. Further concluding that the results show that teachers are at risk if there's an unfavourable work environment. In the Philippines, Pastrana (2014) described some of the salient conditions of public schools:

“...in Metro Manila 82 percent of the 764 public schools in the metropolis was congested, and were conducting classes in two shifts. The first shift starts as early as 6 a.m. and the second ends as late as six in the evening. There were reported to be as many as 80 students in each classroom. School authorities resorted to cutting classes in half and cramming the excess students into “science labs, libraries, corridors and even the principal's office.”

There is no doubt that one of the key areas that can affect mental health is the work environment (EU-OSHA, 2011). This is quite alarming, although work that is challenging and rewarding with appropriate social support can robust the wellbeing of workers, there is strong, prospective evidence that poor psychosocial working conditions diminish workers' mental health, and even worst can cause anxiety and depression (LaMontagne & Keegel, 2012; LaMontagne, Keegel, Louie & Ostry, 2010).

### **Coping with Stress:**

Rosenfield & Wilson (2009) suggest that there are two general strategies for teachers to cope with stress; Physical and psychological/behavioral approaches. Physical includes exercise and good diet. While examples of psychological/behavioral are taking a holiday, developing social support or even support from the organisation itself. However, Sabanci (2011) asserts that coping may have cultural considerations. Further suggesting that it can vary not just culturally but also individually. This emphasizes the idiosyncrasy of stress coping. On the other hand, according to Reese (N.D.) although teachers have unique personality there are two main effective strategies. First is social support (Griffith, et al., 1999; Punch and Tutteman, 1996, Schonfeld, 2001) which means having trusting relationships with colleagues. Second is controlling negative emotions (Roger & Hudson, 1995) that results to reduction of emotional rumination. This suggest that social relationships are equally important.

### **Policies and Programs About Mental Health:**

WHO (2002) asserts that research in the field of prevention and promotion in mental health has been reported during recent years, but most of this research came from 1st world countries with very little from developing countries. Furthermore, most of these programs cater to the culture of the western world and it's not clear whether these are applicable across different countries and culture.

In the Philippines, there were no mental health legislation for quite some time, but different stakeholders hard towards the passage of a mental health act (WHO, 2006). For instance, a senate bill was filed by Sen. Miriam Santiago, known as the

Healthy Workforce Act of 2009. This act asserts a tax credit to employers for the costs of implementing wellness programs (Modino, 2010). The result of the hard work of different stakeholders lead to the fruition of the Philippine Mental Health Act. However, it seems that mental healthcare remains an under-resourced and neglected aspect of healthcare in the Philippines (see full review of Lally, Samaniego, and Tully, 2019). This is quite alarming because Betonio (2015) found that one of the significant stressors for teachers in the Philippines are related to school policies and management practices. Further findings connote that it could affect teachers' performance if not addressed.

### **Family and the Filipino Worker:**

Sikolohiyang Pilipino is grounded on Filipino thought and experience as perceived in the Filipino perspective (Enriquez, 1975). It further asserts that western models and approaches in Psychology cannot encompass the dexterity of Asian cultures. In line with that, one of its ultimate aims is to contribute to "universal" psychology by understanding it in our culture and traditions. Thus, it attempts to understand universals (e.g. concepts, theories, and methods) by encouraging cross-indigenous perspectives. (PePua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000).

One of the most significant contributions of Sikolohiyang Pilipino is the concept of Kapwa (PePua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). In the Filipino Psyche this is strongly associated with the collective identity of the Filipino people (Selmer & De Leon, 2001). Jocano (2001) (as cited by Ylagan et al., 2014) suggested that one of the influential groups for a Filipino is the family. In fact, a study by Hechanova et al.(2005) found that one of the most important elements in the life of a Filipino worker is the family. The fact the Filipino workers spend more on their family than themselves show how important the family is (Yao et al., 2005).

Ortega and Hechanova (2010) found that home and work-related stress both predict work-family conflict. On the other hand, support from family and friends is positively linked with life and marital satisfaction. They concluded that developing and nurturing social support at work and at home by engaging families in organization endeavors may be robust to occupational health. Given these, I assert the need to also explore the role of family in the experience of mental health among public school teachers.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

In the foregoing literature, The researcher argues that there is a need to further examine how mental health is experienced in a specific context. To further unpack this concept, it is warranted to implore Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as an orienting lens. The main rationale for this is it "involves detailed examination of the participant's lived experience; it attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself" (Smith, 2008; p.53). Furthermore, this theoretical lens is particularly well suited in exploring topics related to health, social and clinical psychology where we try to understand how individuals perceive meaningful events in their lives (Smith & Eatough, 2007). It asserts a double hermeneutic orientation (researcher interprets the interpretation of the participant) and ideographic mode of inquiry wherein the analysis is at the individual level (Smith, 2008; Smith & Eatough, 2007).

A supplementary theory is also posited—the Open Systems Framework. Bertalanffy (1968) proposed the Open Systems Framework which asserts that an organism (such as a person) is a system, that is, a dynamic order of parts and processes standing in mutual interaction. One of its major assumptions is that we cannot view organisms independently but always interdependent on other systems.

Individuals import and export or in a continuous exchange with its environment. An open system exchanges feedback with its external environment. Thus, individuals (as a system) is in exchange with its external environment. Furthermore, Mcnamara (2005) contextualized Open Systems Framework in organization. The idea is the external environment includes a wide variety of needs and influences that can affect the organization, but which the organization cannot directly control. Influences can be political, economic, ecological, societal and technological in nature. In turn, the organization can also influence people, such as employees.

In sum, individuals can be viewed as system interacting with other systems (such as the environment) mental health can be understood by in light of those interactions. Furthermore, this suggests that the organization itself can affect mental health of workers. Building on this theory, the researcher surmises that other systems can influence mental health.. Hence,

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mental health of public school teachers can be viewed holistically by considering the influence of the organization and as well as the other systems in interaction.

This research argues to explore the concept of mental health qualitatively by exploring the lived experiences of public school teachers in the workplace. Other studies of mental health are mostly investigated in light of mental disorders, trauma, conflict, substance abuse, discrimination, and even violence (e.g. Mueller et al., 2011; Tsai & Thompson, 2013). Most studies have investigated quantitatively that indeed mental health is linked (whether causal and non-causal) to these variables (e.g. Alontaga & Durban, 2013). Most quantitative local studies (e.g. Roxas, C., 2009; Alontaga & Durban, 2013; Betonio, 2015) and even foreign studies (e.g. Shares et al., 2014) would recommend to make policies, trainings, and even programs that would address mental health issues. Given also the fact that the Philippines have no legislation yet regarding mental health, using the lens of open systems theory the researcher will look at policies, benefits, and even programs how it influence mental health. Literatures indicate that mental health is linked to working conditions, given the devastating state of our public schools today it is imperative to look at public school teachers' experience with it. Lastly, local literatures have established the importance of family to Filipino workers. Because of that, another aim of this study is to examine the role of family in their mental health.

In sum, using the lens of open systems theory the research will look at how these specific 'systems' (coping with occupational stress, organization policies, family, and other key social factors) interact to understand mental health in the context of public school teachers. Sikolohiyang Pilipino adheres to examine cross-indigenous perspective of of foreign concepts of psychology. This could mean that Filipinos could have a different experience of mental health in contrast to the west framed or defined it. This research argues to challenge WHO's definition of mental health by investigating it in the Philippine context vis-a-vis public school teachers' experience of it. Open Systems framework will help in attaining this research objectives by looking at the different 'systems' stated above in light of lived experiences— particularly of public school teachers. Thus, it is imperative to implore Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis since we are looking at experiences of peoples' personal and social world.

**Problem Statement:**

In particular, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of public school teachers vis-à-vis their professional and personal life?
2. How do these experiences inform their mental health?
3. What is the role of stress in their mental health?

**III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY****Research Design:**

Given the phenomenon that the researcher intended to explore, a qualitative approach was utilized. This involves collection and analysis of non-numerical data using a psychological lens in order to give rich descriptions and explanations of how people make sense of their world (e.g., Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Moreover, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was also implored as an orienting lens which involves exploring in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social world by looking at their lived experiences of a particular phenomenon (Smith, 2008).

**Participants:**

A total of 3 public school teachers were purposively recruited and interviewed. They were identified to be of best representative of the population (e.g., Zulueta, 2003). The sampling of data sources was based on the following inclusion criteria: Participant must be (a) currently teaching in a public school, particularly in the secondary level (grade 7-12), and he/she must be (b) at least teaching for 5 years in the same institution.

**Data Collection:**

The researcher used semi-structured interviews as a data gathering tool for it is deemed to be the best way to collect data in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (e.g., Smith, 2008). This is a method for collecting elicited data that appears

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to be more naturalistic— resembling everyday conversations. Moreover, the researchers appropriated the guidelines of Smith (2008) by using a set of researcher-made questions revolving around public school teachers experience of stress at school, their views and experience of school policies, how they cope with stress, and the role of their family in coping.

Strong adherence to ethical standards were employed to ascertain the rights of the participants were protected. An informed consent was given to the participants which explains their right to withdraw from the research they wish to, and also entitlement for confidentiality and anonymity. Along with that, the nature of the study was also explained. At the end of the interview, the researcher debriefed the participant about the study— this included explanation on the next steps to be done and what will happen to the data gathered (e.g. Analysis). Lastly, a token was given as a sign of appreciation for the participant.

### Data Analysis Procedures:

Data analytic procedure was based on the guidelines suggested by Smith (2008). This is composed of the following steps: (a) initial readings of the transcript, (b) identifying and labelling themes, (c) linking themes and identifying thematic clusters, and (d) producing a summary table of themes with illustrative quotations.

In ensuring validity and reliability the researcher adapted some of Henwood & Pidgeon's (1992) (as cited by Willig, 2008) guidelines for good qualitative practice to encourage rigor while acknowledging idiosyncrasy and creativity in the research process. This includes the following principles: (1) Importance of fit; which means that categories made by the researcher should reflect the data. (2) Integration of theory; units of analysis should be clearly explained vis-a-vis with integration at different levels of generality should be readily available. (3) Reflexivity; suggesting the role of the researcher is admitted in the documentation of the research. (4) Documentation; comprehensive account of the research process. (5) Transferability; means sensitivity to context within which the data were generated— contextual features may or may not have the applicability to another context.

## IV. RESULTS

Results of the present study generally indicate 7 general themes. Each has its own subsequent subthemes. Detailed explanation of each themes and subthemes are explained as follows:

### A. What They Think and Feel about Teachers' Programs, Benefits, and Policies

Generally, Public School Teachers in this study reported several benefits, programs, and policies that they experience as a teacher. The researcher found out what how they perceive such:

**1. General sense of dissatisfaction with salaries and Benefits-** Teachers in this study assert that since they are working as government employees, salaries and benefits are generally the same for everyone in the country whether you are in the province or in the city.

“Ah, when it comes to public school, it's the same for every region. For example, those teachers in Luzon receive the same amount for Mindanao and Visayas.”

However, they say that benefits are not sufficient and almost not felt:

“If, but if we base it on what it looks like. It seems small [the salary]. Can we have additional benefits? But it would be better if they add it to the basic salary because the benefits of the bonuses can be removed.”

The last part of the statement also connotes how unstable their benefits are. This means that there is no assurance if they are really going to receive it or not. In terms of salary, they feel like they don't get to experience much of its increase:

“There it was proven that the only increase was 2,000 pesos in four years. So every year, 2016,17,18,19, I have received 500 pesos. After four years, it is by then that you will receive and additional 2000 pesos to your 18000 pesos basic salary.”

Not surprisingly, the participants attribute all these to the government. They said that in other countries teachers are one of the highest paid professions (next to lawyers and doctors) but that is not the case in Philippines. Teacher 2 even concluded that it is because of the lack of attention from the government:

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“Compared to other countries, one of the highest paid professions are Teachers— next to Doctors and Lawyers. Here we are at the end of list, sometimes we not given attention.”

**2. Unnecessary works that they are required to do as teacher-** We cannot blame why teachers, in general, are dissatisfied to what they receive as professional. More than teaching, they also have other tasks that are mandatory. They indicate that these tasks are part of their job description. For example they have this policy wherein they required to do what they call “Home-visit”—— wherein it is statutory for them to visit at least 10 students per quarter who seems always absent in the class:

“As long as you can save the child we do it. So we are required to make a home visit— you're gonna go to their house. About two weeks ago, we went to the house of one of our students, it's Science high school, we had a problem, we went to the house, we don't know where the exact place is, I know it's close to URS. His adviser said no, because he was scared, so we went to the child's house with a service mate. Then we went home, we realized why the child was always absent, it was a bit of a family problem.”

Another task that is mandatory for public school teachers is to handle extra-curricular activities. Given all the preparations that they have to do, they have to facilitate other activities of the schools such as Clubs or organizations. What's interesting about the above-mentioned mandatories is they are part of the overall evaluation of teachers. Hence, it is ‘part’ of what they are expected to do.

**3. Programs that they find helpful-** Although teachers in this study are generally dissatisfied with policies and benefits they find some programs of the institution beneficial. For example Teacher 1 asserts that they have a committee for teachers where they can raise their concerns:

“We also have different committees. For example guidance committee, and other committees. If you have a concern that you want to bring up that related to school, you can also tell it to the association and then they will discuss it as well.”

Furthermore, they also have non-work-related programs for teachers that are meant for them to lay-off a bit from work and have fun. One example of these programs is Teachers' Day. They suggest that his activity is particularly helpful for them especially when they are facing a lot of pressures and stress from work.

### **B. Challenges They Face in Carrying Out Their Functions:**

Teaching is not an easy profession. Teacher 1 and 2 gave the researcher a picture of what a normal day looks like in a public as they do their duties. Given the environment that they are in, they also face challenges that they think is more typical to public school teachers in general. Here are the most salient ones:

**1. Student-related challenges-** One of the most prominent concerns of Teacher 1 and 2 is the population of students. They assert that the number of student in class is almost insane, given that there are numerous public schools already in the area:

“Right now, there are so many of us in secondary school. In every place, we have De Lapaz High School, there is San Roque, there is San Jose, there is Anex. Maximo Gatnabayan Anex used to be ANS, now he also has two Anex campuses. However, we are still overpopulated here. The population of children is roughly 10k.”

More than the number of student itself, what's more frustrating for Teacher 2 is that the huge number of students can sometimes result to not meeting classroom objectives:

“Because we have something called, ahh..., test result, after every quarter. After every periodical test, You will compute the child's correct response to each item so you can get the test result. MES is what we call it. They are checking if you have met the seventy-five percent or not, with the number of your students and the number of lessons that must be considered in MAPEH. In most cases, the seventy-five percent is not met”

Furthermore, the huge population of students ensues wide diversity of students. This means that every day they encounter wide variety of students making it more challenging for them to execute their tasks excellently:

“Students are really diverse. There are those who are well-behaved and some have behavioral problems”

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“It varies from one section to another. There are those who are really good, average, and some who perform poorly.”

Since they have to meet their objectives they are left with no choice but to continuously adjust to this diverse population of students and cater to their needs:

“If they can pick up the lesson on the module, that’s okay. If not, you need to adjust your approach. For example. There are those bright students who can learn the lessons quickly. But there are those are not as good. Therefore, you should have back-up activity for them.”

Teacher 1 and 2 believe that student-teacher relationship is two-way. They may do all the hard work to— all the quality education. However, they if the students are not motivated enough learning will be difficult to achieve. This is another challenge for them because they feel like some students are not driven enough to study. Teacher 1 attributes it to being ungrateful of the students— lack of awareness, that it is a privilege to be in school:

“School supplies and uniforms are free from the local government. Books also are free from the national government. All they have to do is study hard. Sometimes it's frustrating because there are also a lot of distractions. I hope that the children will not be picky, but just be grateful. They are very lucky.”

**2. Lack of resources-** Both participants are convinced that sufficient supplies for both teachers and students are essential to ensure good quality of education. Their situation suggests the other way around. Public schools are owned by the government, and because of that they should have sufficient resources. However, they experience the opposite. The idea gives them a sense of ambivalence;

“The first lesson was just introduction about stress, coping, death, dying, and then the mental disorders. We needed to do our own research because we still don't have a textbook.”

“That should come from DepEd [resources]... We only have for Quarter one and two. So Quarter three and four it's up to the teacher where to get references.”

**3. Teaching other subjects aside from one’s major-** One of the challenging tasks for Teacher 2 specifically is having to teach subjects that is beyond her expertise. Teacher 2 is a PE major but since in the secondary level such subject is condensed into MAPEH it is imperative for her to also teach subjects such as Music, Arts, and even Health. This is particularly difficulty for her in a sense that she has to prepare for each subject with extra effort:

“P.E. is really my major. Although when it comes to the teaching field, I should teach the subject is MAPEH [Music, Arts, Physical Education, Health], not just P.E.. So, Aside from P.E., we still teach music, arts, and health. Although, when we were in college our only major was P.E.; Music, arts, and Health is just part of the Humanity subject. That's the dilemma of MAPEH teachers when it comes to the field”

### C. What Kind of Stresses They Normally Experience:

Given all the workload and the environment that they are in, it is normal for them to experience stress. However, the researcher argues to look at these experiences of stress as unique for public school teachers. The experience of stress is categorized into three:

**1. Occupational stress-** In general, these are stresses that they get in doing their job. What is common among the participants is that they both find their administrative works exhausting. This is especially when they do administrative tasks such as computing for students’ grades and making exams:

“You really stay up late. One of the things that is really difficult in teaching at public schools are the paper works.”

“You will compute grades, you will prepare report cards, you will submit form 138, and you need to submit an attendance report. ”

It’s not only the task itself that can lead to stress. Teacher 2 asserts that sometimes it can be your colleagues. Maintaining smooth interpersonal relationship with colleagues is not an easy one especially if there is conflict of values. Teacher 2 believes that relationship with co-workers is important for they are the ones you are always with.

“They are still the ones with you [colleagues], so you really need to maintain smooth relationship with your co-teachers, if you want to last with your job.”

**2. Family-related stress-** Family is very much important to Filipinos. In fact, this is one of the reasons Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 work. Family problems are normal for Teacher 1, however it becomes wearisome and debilitating especially if it affects their work:

“When you are going through a big problem in the family, for example, then you work at the same time.”

“I just compartmentalize when I have problems to get my mind off of it. I am still able to teach because, like an actor, the show must go on. life won't stop even when you have problems.”

For Teacher 2, she is particularly concerned with budgeting one's income for the family. Again, this reflects how significant the family is for teachers. However, we can see here how it can also be seen as a stressful event especially given that they only get just enough in terms of their salary:

“My kids are only about two and five years old. Seven thousand for diapers, and there are other things that you need to pay right away. They still have vaccines every month, we still pay eight thousand for the house, and two thousand for electricity.”

**3. Personal Stress-** These are stresses that seem caused by the person itself. This is particularly seen in the experience of Teacher 2, wherein she has some general feelings of incompetency or inadequacy at work resulting to not meeting work objectives:

“There are so many reports that need to prepare, but I'm not good at it.”

#### **D. What They Do to Cope with Challenges and Stresses:**

The participants gave an account on how organizational policies, benefits, and programs. The researcher also identified the challenges that public school teachers face in carrying out their duties. Given all these, the participants share their accounts on how they cope with the challenges and stresses they normally face. On the next accounts the researcher will investigate the behaviors and identified key social actors of Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 on coping:

**1. Doing more work-** Teacher 1 asserts that being busy doing work sort of takes his mind away from thinking about problems. It can be seen as a form of defense mechanism whenever faced with challenges and anxiety. Interestingly, she also indicates that this leads her to more productivity:

“Working in school also helped a lot because it's like you're taking yourself away from the problems, I devote myself to work a lot. It makes me feel more functional, accomplished, and productive.”

“They thought I'm really hardworking since I always overtime at work. The truth is, it helps me forget the pains. This is really helpful for me. For example, since I stayed up late at school I was able to submit the requirements ahead of time.”

**2. Mind setting-** Interestingly, both teachers convey that one way of coping is by ‘situating’ the mind or compartmentalizing. They make sure that their personal life is separated from their professional life:

“I really don't want my work to be affected by what I do at home. The problem at home, stays at home; and the problem at school, stays at school. I Don't bring home any problems at school. I Don't bring any problems at home to school.”

Furthermore, Teacher 2 also indicates that in the midst of problems and stresses acceptance of the situation seem to be the key to coping;

“You will just embrace and love what [you] do. Of course that's part of your work. You need to embrace it wholeheartedly.”

**3. Get social support from colleagues-** Smooth interpersonal relationship or pakikisama has always been one of the values of Filipinos. This is also seen in the experiences of the participants. They shared how conflict of values contributes to their stress. Although this is true, co-workers are also seen as one of the key social actors for coping:



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“I talk to my chairman so she would be informed about some issues. I talk to her whenever I’m going through something.”

For Teacher 2, she makes sure that she does leisure activities with co-workers especially in times of distress. She seems to have established a close relationship with them. This might be because Teacher 2 has been teaching for 7 years in that same institution. More than having professional relationship with them, they sometimes do non-work-related activities together such as karaoke and ‘food trip’:

“Sometimes I would invite them; ‘let’s go out on weekend because we’re done encoding grades. Let’s go to this videoke [Karaoke], we don’t have to drink or what, nothing, just videoke [karaoke] really and a bunch of iced tea. Potato wedges and nachos are enough.”

**4. Get social support from family-** Family is very much dear to the hearts of both teachers. Although we saw how their family can be a source of stress, here we have taken into account how they are also positioned as a “coping mechanism” for our teachers:

“When I’m stressed here at school, I just talk about everything story to my husband. Yes, he’s the one who absorbs my stress. But after that I feel okay, like I’m relieved of the tension I’m experiencing. It also helps me whenever see my kids, it really relieves my stress.”

### E. How Their Profession Impacts the Society:

More than all the constraints and challenges that both teachers face they saw the beauty of their profession. Their experience as a teacher made them realize some of their contributions to the society:

**1. They cultivate young people’s mind-** Teacher 1 particularly believes that teachers help in educating they innocent mind of the young people. Her experience of teaching for 22 years might be a contributing factor. Interestingly, she further asserts that there are some things in life that only a teacher can teach to a child that parents cannot:

“Siyempre bilang mga guro, ah, katulong kami ng pamahalaan sa pag hubog ng mga murang isipan ng mga bata. Ah, may mga bagay na hindi kaya ng magulang na ipaunawa sa mga bata. Actually may mga bata nga na mas takot pa sa teachers kasa sa nanay nila. Sa nanay nila kahit nanay nila teacher diba. So ganun ka ano. Ganun ka laki yung impluwensya ng mga guro.”

“Of course as teachers, ah, we help the government in shaping the minds of children. Ah, there are things that a parent cannot make their children understand. Actually there are children who are more afraid of teachers than their mothers. So that’s what you are. That’s how big the influence of teachers is.”

**2. They serve as guide to students-** Aside from giving knowledge Teacher 1 in particular saw how crucial their jobs are in guiding the students for a better future. She explicated that teachers are more than the subjects that they teach but can also influence their students’ overall well-being. She also believes that teachers play an important role for students to be useful in the society in the future:

“My role is primarily to teach, to guide the students, ah, to give the young people the opportunity to be useful to society when the right time comes. So parents bring young people to school to teach them, to shape them, not only to learn various course subjects, but also their behavior. They are taught to be human. When you go to school to study you learn to be human.”

### F. What Makes Them Stay in the Profession:

Teacher 1 has been teaching for 22 years and Teacher 2 for 7 years. Given all their experiences at work, they highlighted some of their reasons for staying:

**1. Love for what you do-** Teaching can be difficult at times for both participants. But the job itself outweighs all its costs. They shared that one of the main reasons for staying is loving (more than liking) their job:

“I love it, it makes me happy to do it. So if you ask me if it’s hard, it’s not easy but you can do it because you’re happy while doing it.”

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“if this is the only profession you have chosen, no one really gets rich for it. But at least it gives you that happiness.”

"But because I love what I do, it's ok with me [the challenges], I'm happy with what I'm doing."

The third statement by Teacher 2 shows how loving one's work can lead to happiness while doing it. The researcher surmise that this sentiment might be something common for teachers, in general.

**2. Love for the students-** Both teachers indicate that students factors (e.g. lack of motivation, their diversity) can be one of the challenges that they face whenever they carry out their functions. However, Teacher 2, in particular, acknowledges the fact the they are also one of the motivating factors for staying in this field of profession:

“So I don't think about becoming a principal or supervisor someday because I'm happier facing my students. I'm happier that sometimes I make them laugh, sometimes I make them cry, and then just happy to have them in front of you.”

**3. Seeing the fruits of their labor-** One of the most rewarding feelings for Teacher 2 is seeing how students grow and become professionals. This is an accomplishment for her as a teacher. This motivates her more and more to do what she does best. Although teaching is never easy, her experience of seeing the fruits of her labor overtakes the stresses and challenges:

“I'm really happy when my students visit me. They say that somehow they share their accomplishments with me. Also, some of them say that the things I taught them can still be applied until college.”

“Some of them became teachers already. One of them became my colleague in this school.”

### G. Going the Extra Mile for the Students:

Both participants do things that are beyond what they are expected of— beyond their own job descriptions. As they share:

“I just talk to some of them, I give time especially to those who no one pays attention to. When they feel that someone has noticed them, you will notice a little change from them.”

The statement above by teacher 1 indicates how she spends extra time for students who need some attention. This is going beyond what's expected of them, this also shows genuine concern for the student more than just meeting some requirements.

“I make hard copies of my lessons, at my own expense, to distribute to my students.”

“If my shift is only in the morning, sometimes I would stay until afternoon to tutor some students who were not able to understand the lesson.”

It was stated above that one of the concerns of the participants is the lack of resources such as reference text books. Because of that, Teacher 2 ensures the learning of the her students by providing them hand-outs at her own expense. Although this is too much for her to give, her concern with the children's learning might be the reason behind such deed. Moreover, the third statement above also suggests that Teacher 2 also spends extra time for her students if needed. Again, this is more than meeting certain objectives but for the student itself.

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study generally investigated the lived experiences of selected public school teachers vis-à-vis mental health, by exploring stress as point of departure. The findings suggest that that they have a lot of reasons to leave the profession. These things are seen on their challenges they face in carrying out their functions such as the population of the students, lack of resources, and teaching other subjects that are not of your expertise. Their thoughts and feelings toward their organizational policies, benefits, and programs generally indicates dissatisfaction overall (although there were some that are helpful). We have also taken into account the different stresses that the participants experienced as a teacher from the personal level to the organizational level. Having said that, they also do things on their own to cope to the stresses such as acceptance of the situation and having work-life balance. Interestingly, they also cope ‘intrapersonally’ by seeking social support from colleagues and even family which indicates two things: (1) It reflects our collectivistic nature (as suggested by Hofstede) and (2) shows our value for family (Jocano 2001; as cited by Ylagan et al., 2014).

On the other hand, there are also a lot of reasons for public school teachers to stay. One of which is when they saw the values of being a teacher particularly by knowing how they impact the society in general through molding the young people's minds. The researcher speculate that such realization is a product of years of teaching experience. The findings also suggest that one of the challenges for teachers are students themselves (such as their lack of motivation). However, it was indicated they are as well one of the reasons teachers are still doing what they do best. Furthermore, although they find teaching to be sometimes distressful, the love for it also gave them the reason to remain in the course. This could also explain why they 'go the extra mile' for the students. More than meeting certain objectives, both teachers in the study 'do more' than what they are expected for the sake of the students. Sometimes this involves doing things at their own expense (e.g. printing out references out of their own pockets). Although this somehow counterintuitive, but for them it makes sense especially when they see the fruits of their labor. This is when students visit them and they see how their students become professionals and fulfill their dreams. In sum, it seems like their reasons to stay outweighs their reasons of leaving.

Insights from this study coincide with the idea that health is a dynamic concept with multiple meanings that is usually contingent on the context in which the term is used (Govind et al., 2014). People's definition of health will vary depending their age, experience, and knowledge (Keleher & Macdoughal, 2008). On the same theoretical terrain, the researcher argue for the fluidity of the meaning of mental health— these meanings may be contextualized embedded within a person's experience.

Sikolohiyang Pilipino also argues to look at 'universal' psychology concepts and theories by examining cross-indigenous perspectives (PePua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Results of this study demonstrated how family members played an important role especially in stress-coping. Furthermore, organizational policies, benefits, and programs were also taken into account.

WHO (2005) objectively defined mental health as state of well-being in which an individual (1) realizes his/her own abilities, (2), can cope with normal stresses of life, (3) Can work productively, and (4) is able to make contributions to his/her community (WHO, 2005). Findings generally coincide with the 4 criteria that WHO presented. For instance, results revealed how the participants cope with stresses via social support, and we have also taken into account how they perceive their impact as a teacher to the community. However, the researcher surmise that the theorizing of mental health indicated by WHO seems to be very individualistic. This is probably because the concept originally is a western concept. However, the results articulate a more collectivistic—and to some extent, idiosyncratic— meaning of mental health. Future researchers can explore more on the collectivistic and relational meanings of the mental health—challenging the prevailing existing conceptualizations of the concept that is highly westernized. The rationale for this is that results have identified key social actors of coping such as family and colleagues that depict a very relational orientation. Lastly, scholars can also shed more light to the socio-structural aspect of mental health (e.g., policies, laws, socio-economic status) and how it informs idiographic and relational meanings of health.

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