Special Education Teachers' Work-related Stress: Nature and Management through the Pandemic

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Abstract:

This global pandemic caused by COVID19 is unlike anything we have ever experienced before. It has caused a lot of changes, including in our education systems. The world will never be the same when we raise from these difficult times. Teaching during the pandemic has made education more complex. Many of our teachers have endured work-related trauma caused by a rapidly escalating viral crisis that our education system must adapt to a new curriculum to address our students' needs. Some degree of pessimism and self-doubt comes with this challenge. This study purposefully seeks to identify special education teachers' coping strategies for managing work-related stress during the pandemic and their perceived relationship between how they cope and their profession. With a quantitative design, the study used the Teacher Stress Inventory to determine which work-related stressors highly affect our teachers, physical and emotional manifestations of work-related stress, and coping styles commonly used. The findings show that special education teachers generally used a common coping strategy, such as taking advantage of different Entertainment made available by different platforms. Most special education teachers reported that their most noticeable work-related stressor has too much work to do with much less time. The flexible instructional modalities to address the educational needs of the students depend effectively and efficiently on the severity of the fluctuating circumstances brought by this health crisis. It reveals that most special education teachers manifest emotional stresses than physical stresses. The results will be the keystone for implementing a wellness program aligned to the predominant coping strategies of the special education teachers that will encourage and improve their abilities to cope with adversities brought by the uncertainties of this pandemic.

Keywords: work-related stress, emotional and physical manifestation, coping strategies, Teacher Stress

Introduction:

During the new coronavirus illness 2019 (COVID-19) lockdown period, the whole educational system, from essential to tertiary level, collapsed worldwide (Mishra et a., 2020). The global pandemic has made many changes in our lives in myriad ways. Learning from home and in person has been one of the most significant changes for many families. Students, parents, and teachers have constantly been crying for help to balance school, mental health, and their daily lives throughout the pandemic. Lederman (2020) clearly stated that, because of the COVID-19 crisis, both teachers and students felt constrained to embrace the digital academic experience as the summum

bonum of the online teaching-learning process.

While many kids have returned to in-person learning, others may have a hybrid schedule alternating between home and school in the other parts of the world. Faced with COVID-19, the education system's shared vision acknowledged that throughout the outbreak, teachers and students are encouraged to adapt online teaching-learning platforms to meet contemporary educational demands (Mishra et a, 2020).

The Philippines, on the other hand, has been struggling immensely but is trying its best to put students alternatingly back in and out of the classroom due to a potential exposure or shifting school schedules. These efforts are primarily aimed at giving a more efficient learning experience for the students and assisting struggling parents in accommodating the academic demands of their children since it has been some time since distance learning has been tested and conducted. In research from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2022), students benefit from in-person learning, and safely returning to in-person instruction continues to be a priority. It is a widespread belief among teachers that no pedagogical approach can completely replace formal education since it gives clear teacher-taught contact (Mishra et al., 2020). In the Philippines, there are several children with special needs.

Transitioning to hybrid learning education is still on the edge of social concern. The realities of the last year have at
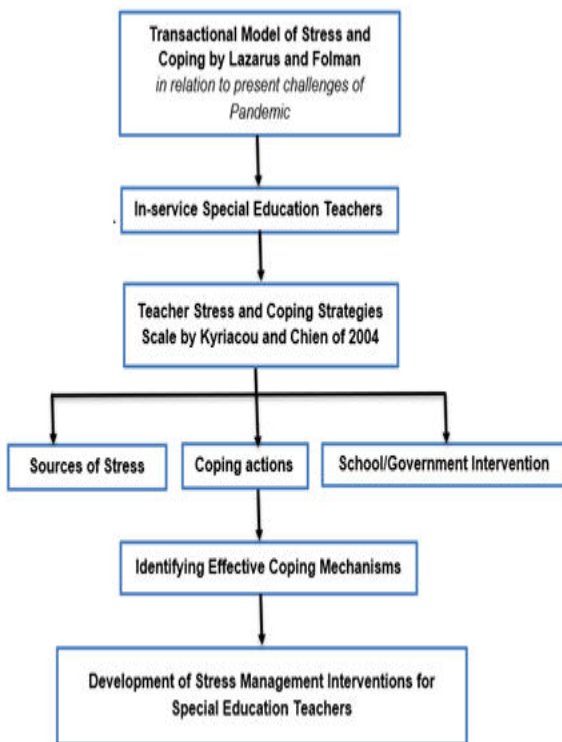
times made it difficult for special education to know how and when to give the right interventions to their student's learning experiences, given less to no contact time due to strict protocols. Some publications focus on experiences, innovations, and strategies to deal with remote teaching and descriptions of how institutions and stakeholders adapted to the new scenario created by the COVID-19 pandemic (Moorhouse 2020; Zhang et al. 2020; Bao 2020, as cited by Assunção et al., 2020).

Experiencing a wide range of emotions is already expected of being a teacher during this time. Teachers' narrative experiences reveal that low participation in online classrooms might occur because of a lack of parental supervision, internet access, and teacher resources and expertise not (McKenzie, 2020, as cited by Kalloo et al., 2020). It is prevalent among teachers to feel ashamed if they experience sadness, anger, frustration, or any other feeling that can sometimes be painful to fail in addressing the needs of their children.

Teachers must undertake multiple tasks, including education, rehabilitation, and training, which could increase their stress and cause mental health problems. Education leaders are called to better partner with all the stakeholders and help students with special needs thrive in a distant learning modality. These recommendations emphasize the importance of the expectation that all students are capable of acquiring knowledge and making academic development in these challenging times.

They have the power to motivate action that is coordinated, creative, and informed by frequent communication with teachers, helping them to provide the needed services and accommodations their students with special learning needs must have to succeed. By insisting on collaboration between IEP teams and families, equipping teachers with the tools they need to manage their students' distance learning, and carefully preparing for students' return to school buildings, education leaders can help ensure our nation's seven million students with disabilities receive the support they deserve throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conceptual Framework

TheoreticalBackground

The teaching profession is well-known for providing high levels of job satisfaction even while presenting significant challenges (Beck &Garguilo, 1983; Billingsley, 2004; Chaplain, 2008; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Näring, Briët& Brouwers, 2006; Schwarzer &Hallum, 2008; Sharplin, O'Neill & Chapman, 2011; Skinner & Beers, 2016). Educational studies have found that high teacher stress is associated with significant distress throughout the last ten years, which various coping mechanisms and personality traits can mediate. (Chan, 1998, as cited by Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

Teacher stress is characterized as unpleasant negative feelings experienced by teachers because of certain aspects of their employment, such as anger, frustration, anxiety, despair, and anxiousness (Kyriacou, 2001). Teaching is undoubtedly a difficult and stressful career, and educators manifest stress when the demands of the circumstance surpass them to reevaluate their capabilities. Some studies have even linked high teacher attrition rates in some parts of the world to high rates of job-related stress that educators face and fail to address (Chaplain, 2008; Kyriacou&Kunc, 2007). A few major sources are teaching uninspired children, maintaining classroom discipline, a demanding workload, being exposed to frequent changes, assessing others, having challenging relationships with coworkers and administrators, and terrible working circumstances (Kyricacou, 2001, as cited by Alhija, 2015). Poor active coping abilities or an over-reliance on passive coping strategies may lead to negative emotional responses and teacher burnout. (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

The primary factors of teacher stress are arisen from instructing unmotivated kids; keeping discipline in the classroom; dealing with time constraints and workload expectations; being assessed; being exposed to much change, having terrible or problematic interactions with colleagues, and being exposed to generally poor administration or management working conditions (Kyriacou, 2001, as cited by Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). In contrast, Lazarus (1966); Lazarus and Folkman (1984) mentioned that transactional explanations of stress highlight the cognitive-perceptual processes that enable people to give meaning to their surroundings, emphasizing the transaction's relational, dynamic aspect (Brigss, Brough, & Drummond 2017).

Transactional explanations of stress highlight the cognitive-perceptual processes that enable people to give meaning to their surroundings, emphasizing the transaction's relational, dynamic aspect. In consonance with Lazarus and Folkman's (1987) transactional model of stress and coping, when presented with a specific incident, the individual engages in two sequential processes of evaluation, which focus on how difficult situations cause stressful experiences. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping described the relationship between the two concepts. According to the theory, the coping process aids in the mediation of stressful person-environment relations. Stress is described as a relational term, including a transaction between an individual and their environment, and

coping is defined as the behavioral and cognitive attempts made to cope with the stressful conditions that the individual is presented with.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to identify the prevalent stressors of in-service Special education teachers and their coping mechanisms in the pandemic transitioning to hybrid learning.

The study will answer the following questions:

1. What did in-service special education teachers in Cebu schools report as the most noticeable

stressors they experienced in their teaching positions in time of the pandemic?

2. What did in-service special education teachers in Cebu schools identify as the emotional and

physical manifestations of work-related stress they experienced?

3. What did in-service special education teachers in Cebu schools identify as strategies they

utilized to cope with work-related stressors?

Research Methodology

The purpose of the study was to recognize the most common work-related stressors, the physical and emotional manifestations of these work-related stressors, and coping strategies used to reduce stress among Special Education Teachers in private and public schools in Cebu. The quantitative study data were collected using a 21-

question online survey (Teacher Stress Inventory) distributed to in-service Special Education teachers. There were 22 teacher responses to the survey.

The Teacher Stress Inventory was developed initially for public school teachers who taught regular and special needs students. The Teacher Stress inventory is exclusively utilized with public-school teachers teaching regular or special education students in grades 1 through 12.

Review of Related Literature

The rapid emergence of COVID-19 prompted schools in the Philippines to transition to online learning. The rapid emergence of COVID-19 prompted schools in the Philippines to transition to online learning. The abrupt shift to online learning resulted in the many challenges that impacted the students' and the teachers' social and emotional learning, which was crucial to educational productivity. The pandemic has caused many challenges, such as economic, health, educational, and emotional ones. Teachers are expected to contribute to solving the challenges posed by the crisis (Givigi et al., 2022). However, many have neglected the fact that teachers, as humans, may have been affected as well by the distress caused by this worldwide dilemma.

Stress as an environmental stimulation; stress as a response; stress as an interaction; and stress as associated with the environmental transaction, as mentioned in the book authored by Brigss, Brough, & Drummond (2017). First is a primary assessment, for which the experience is evaluated as stressful or pleasant given the circumstances and the individual. The individual will next participate in a subsequent evaluation process in which they will analyze her or his personal and environmental resources to cope with the stressful experience. Both cognitive processes and the two sequential assessment processes primarily depend on the assessing individual. Moreover, Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model strongly believes that individuals utilize a variety of coping mechanisms (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) to cope with stress.

As schools closed, teachers had to adapt to remote teaching, and families had to bear the structure and support for homeschooling (Mustafa, 2020, as cited in Givigi et al., 2022). Givigi et al. (2022) state that face-to-face classes were suspended in virtually all states, and one of the alternatives were small classes. Children started to study online, and traditional face-to-face classes were shifted to the virtual environment. Moreover, a survey conducted with 1,113 Special Education teachers in Brazil in the situation of Special Education in Brazil during the pandemic reveals that 96.6% were performing activities at home. Of these, 85.7% had no experience in online classes, and almost 50% classified their use of digital technology as regular. In this survey, 84.6% of teachers said they had technological equipment available at home, but 55.7% said they needed to share it with others. Of the Special Education teachers, 83.6% said that emote classes increased their working hours. The results indicate that

the content was not adequately implemented, and 72.5 % conferred that subject content will have to be taught again because they have not learned it well enough (Torres & Borges, 2020, as cited by Givigi et al., 2022).

It is noteworthy that the Specialized Educational Service, which is the biggest pedagogical support tool for students with disabilities in Brazil in most states, has encountered many difficulties in becoming effective during remote education activities (Givigi et al., 2022). Teachers reported missing group discussions. They have expressed the increased stress they are experiencing at work. When the students experienced learning issues or needed additional educational services, they were concerned (McDonald & Hill, 2020, as cited in Givigi et al., 2022). Teachers qualified to work in Special Education have been prepared for individualized classrooms, which improves teachers' performance (Fontenelle Tereshchuk, 2021, as cited by Givigi et al., 2022). Before 2013, teachers in Alberta used technology for learning (Alberta, 2013), but they were not prepared for the scope of technology use ultimately required during the pandemic.

To address stressful events and to alleviate feelings of distress, teachers use means of coping that include cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies of comforting and adaptation to the stressful situation (Admiraal, Korthagen, &Wubbles, 2000; Kyriacou, 2001, as cited in Abu Alhija, 2015). Montgomery and Rubb (2005) proposed a model of critical factors related to teacher stress and coping and their relationships. Their model suggests that teachers are involved in intra-individual processes that constitute the personal experience and assessments of external stressful events from different aspects of teachers' professional lives, such as students, administration, colleagues, workload demands, and school environment features. Moreover, teachers' personal life, such as relationships with a significant other or financial problem, may also affect their emotional, cognitive and behavioral states, thus affecting work performance.

Teachers use active or passive coping tactics, or both, after assessing the stressful experience. Cognitive, behavioral, and emotional strategies are all examples of active strategies. This strategy can also be seen in people's physical reactions or health posture (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Passive coping techniques, on the other hand, such as resignation, wishful thinking, and avoidance, are marked by a lack of direct contact with the stressful event on the way to resolution. Personality traits, also known as personality mediators (i.e., attitude, posture, motivated behavior), play a role in the size of the interactions illustrated in Montgomery and Rubb's (2005) core model.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 contains the respondents' perceived detectable stress levels for each of the eight work-related stress factors using a 5-point Likert scale. The choices were: (1) not noticeable, (2) barely noticeable, (3)

moderately noticeable, (4) very noticeable, (5) and highly noticeable.

The data were reported in descending order by mean scores.

Table 1.Recognized Level of Noticeable Work-related Stress

Work-Related Stressors	Frequencies Percentage							
	NN	BN	MN	VN	EN	Total	M	SD
There is little time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities.	1 / 4.5	4 / 18.2	7 / 31.8	5 / 22.7	5 / 22.7	22 / 100.0	4.7	0.9
Student behaviors negatively impact my ability to perform my job.	5 / 22.7	8 / 36.4	4 / 18.2	2 / 9.1	3 / 13.6	22 / 100.0	3.6	0.9
My class is too big.	5 / 22.7	4 / 18.2	4 / 18.2	6 / 27.3	3 / 13.6	22 / 100.0	3.4	1.6
My personal priorities are being shortchanged due to time demand at work.	1 / 4.5	4 / 18.2	5 / 22.7	2 / 9.1	10 / 45.5	22 / 100.0	3	1.6
There is too much work to do.	2 / 9.1	2 / 9.1	2 / 9.1	8 / 36.4	8 / 36.4	22 / 100.0	3	0.8
There is a general lack of support for my job responsibilities.	3 / 13.6	2 / 9.1	5 / 22.7	6 / 27.3	6 / 27.4	22 / 100.0	2.7	1.2
There is too much paperwork in my job.	1 / 4.5	2 / 9.1	1 / 4.5	8 / 36.4	10 / 45.5	22 / 100.0	2.6	1.4
The pace of the school day is too fast.	1 / 4.5	0 / 0	4 / 18.2	9 / 40.9	8 / 36.4	22 / 100.0	2.5	1.2

Table 1 data reveals that the most significant number of participants' responses in the category of highly noticeable work-related stressors are my priorities are being shortchanged due to time demand at work, and there is too much paperwork which is 45.5% (n = 20). The remaining five extremely noticeable work-related stressors identified by respondents were between both 13.6% (n = 6) for students' behaviors negatively impact my ability to perform my job, my class is too big, and 36.4% (n = 8) said there is too much work to do and pace of the school day is too fast.

In the category of very noticeable work-related stressors, the most significant number of responses reported is that the pace of the school day is too fast, which is 40.9% (n=9), followed by too much work to do. There is too much paperwork in my job, which is 36.4% respectively (n = 8), the class is too big, and there is too much paperwork at 27.3% (n = 12). The remaining three very noticeable work-related stressors identified by study participants were 22. 7% (n =5), there is little time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities, and 9.1% (n = 2) for student behaviors negatively impacting my ability to perform my job, and priorities are being shortchanged due to time demands at work.

In the category of moderately noticeable work-related stressors reported by study respondents, there is 31.8 % (n = 7) of the work-related stressors, which is there is little time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities. Two 22.7 % (n = 10) of my personal priorities were shortchanged due to time demand at work, and there is a general lack of support for my job responsibilities. The remaining five work-related stressors in the moderately noticeable category reported by study respondents were between 18.2% (n = 12) for three work-related stressors, student behaviors negatively impact my ability to perform my job, my class is too big, and the pace of the school day is too fast, and 4.5% (n=1) there is too much paperwork in my job.

For the category of barely noticeable, the most significant number of responses was for the work-related stressor. Students' behaviors negatively impact my performance ability, with 36.4% (n = 8) of respondents who selected that stress level.

Study respondents reported the remaining seven work-related stressors in the category of barely noticeable between 18.1% (n = 8) for three work-related stressors, there is little time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities, my class is too big, and my personal priorities are being shortchanged due to time demand at work, and 9.1% (n=2) for three work-related stressors, there is too much work to do, there is a general lack of support for my job responsibilities, and there is too much paperwork in my job. No respondents voted that the pace of the school day is too fast.

The most significant number of responses in non-noticeable work-related stressors was for two work-related stressors. Students' behaviors negatively impact my performance ability, and my class is too big, 22.7% (n = 5). Study respondents reported the remaining five work-related stressors in the category of non-noticeable between 13.6% (n = 3) for there is a general lack of support for my job responsibilities and 4.5% (n = 1) respectively for there is little time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities, my personal priorities are being shortchanged due to time demand at work, there is too much paperwork in my job, and the pace of the school day is too fast.

Table 2 offers data from 22 respondents who reported their perceived emotional and physical manifestations of work-related stress using a 5-point Likert scale. The Likert scale choices were as follows (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, and (5) always.

The data were reported in descending order by mean scores.

Table 2. Emotional and Physical Manifestations of Work-related Stress of the Special Education Teachers

Emotional and Physical Manifestations of Work-Related Stress	Frequencies Percentage						M	SD
	N	R	S	O	A	Total		
I respond to stress by feeling anxious.	3 / 13.6	5 / 22.7	4 / 18.2	6 / 27.3	4 / 18.2	22 / 100.0	4.4	1.4
I respond to stress by feeling vulnerable.	3 / 13.6	7 / 31.8	3 / 13.6	7 / 31.8	2 / 9.1	22 / 100.0	3.7	1.3
I respond to stress by feeling unable to cope.	6 / 27.3	6 / 27.3	4 / 18.2	4 / 18.3	2 / 9.1	22 / 100.0	3.5	1.2
I respond to stress by procrastinating.	3 / 13.6	2 / 9.1	4 / 18.2	5 / 22.7	8 / 36.4	22 / 100.0	3.5	1.5
I respond to stress by feeling insecure.	8 / 36.4	7 / 31.8	3 / 13.6	2 / 9.1	2 / 9.2	22 / 100.0	3.5	1.1
I respond to stress by experiencing more illnesses (e.g. colds, fever, cough, etc.)	1 / 4.5	2 / 9.1	1 / 4.5	8 / 36.4	10 / 45.5	22 / 100.0	3.5	0.8
I respond to stress by feeling depressed	6 / 27.3	6 / 27.4	3 / 13.6	5 / 22.7	2 / 9.1	22 / 100.0	3.3	1.3
I respond to stress by feeling angry.	3 / 13.6	6 / 27.3	4 / 18.2	7 / 31.8	2 / 9.1	22 / 100.0	3.3	0.5
I respond stress by feeling sleeping.	2 / 9.1	4 / 18.2	2 / 9.1	6 / 27.3	8 / 36.4	22 / 100.0	3.3	1.5
I respond to stress with physical weakness.	5 / 22.7	4 / 18.2	4 / 18.2	7 / 31.8	2 / 9.1	22 / 100.0	2.8	1.1
I respond to stress by becoming fatigues in a very short time.	2 / 9.1	5 / 22.7	7 / 31.8	5 / 22.7	3 / 13.6	22 / 100.0	2.7	1.7
I respond to stress with physical exhaustion.	3 / 13.6	4 / 18.2	3 / 13.6	8 / 36.4	4 / 18.2	22 / 100.0	2.0	0.8
There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work.	1 / 4.5	4 / 18.2	3 / 13.6	11 / 50	3 / 13.6	22 / 100.0	1.9	1.2

Table 2 data shows the percentages and frequencies of study respondents' emotional and physical manifestations of stress. The most significant percentage of respondents, 81.9% (n=18), said they were experiencing illnesses (such as cold, cough, fever, etc.) that would be considered a physical manifestation of stress. 63.7% (n = 14) responded to stress by feeling sleepy and tired before going to work. 59.1% (n=13) of the respondents reported they responded to stress by procrastinating, and 54.6% (n=12) reported they responded to stress with physical exhaustion, all three of which are also considered physical manifestations of stress.

Table 2 data reveal the percentage and frequencies of study respondents who selected never or rarely for responses to stress: 68.2% (n = 15) responded to stress by feeling insecure; 54.7% (n = 12) responded to stress by feeling unable to cope and depressed; 45.4% (n = 10) identified that they responded to stress by feeling vulnerable. All these first three reported responses to stress's emotional and physical manifestations would be considered emotional manifestations.

Table 2 data, as reported by study participants, illustrate that mean scores for responses to emotional and physical manifestations of work-related stress who felt anxious (M = 4.4) followed by those feeling vulnerable (M = 3.7). There were four manifestations identified (M = 3.5): responding to stress by feeling unable to cope, procrastinating, feeling insecure, and by experiencing illnesses (such as colds, cough, fever, etc.).

The researcher considered mean scores at or above 3.0 indicators of higher emotional and physical manifestations than mean scores below 3.0 based on a discernable difference between the mean scores. The lowest mean score, 1.9 was for the selection; there were days when I felt tired before arriving at work.

In summary, 45.5% of the manifestations of stress identified by respondents were emotional manifestations (feeling anxious); the physical manifestations of stress (they were experiencing illnesses (such as cold, cough,

fever, etc.) were reported by 81.9% of respondents.

The questions considered emotional manifestations of stress; 40.9% (n = 9) of study respondents reported they responded to stress by feeling vulnerable and angry. For the remaining four emotional manifestations of stress, the range of responses was as low as 18.3% (n = 4) for I respond to stress by feeling insecure, to a high of 31.8% (n = 7) for I respond to stress by feeling depressed.

Table 2 data reveal that the standard deviations (SD), which measured the spread of responses within each work-related stressor, were between 1.00 and 1.14 standard deviations from the mean, indicating that most of the responses were very close to average

Table 3. Reported Number 1 and 10 Coping Strategy Utilized for Work-related Stress

Coping Strategy	Total Number of Respondents	Frequency of #1 Ranking	Percent	Frequency of #10 Ranking	Percent
Counseling	22	1	4.5	2	9.1
Personal and Family Relationships	22	3	13.6	0	0.0
Medication	22	2	9.1	1	4.5
Food	22	2	9.1	1	4.5
Entertainment	22	7	31.8	4	18.2
Alcohol	22	3	13.6	7	31.8
Vacation	22	3	13.6	4	18.2
Meditation/Mindfulness	22	1	4.5	1	4.5
Physical Activity	22	0	0.0	1	4.5
Administrator/Collegial Suppoprt	22	0	0.0	1	4.5

Table 3 data reveals percentages and frequencies of the total number of study respondents who reported strategies utilized to cope with work-related stress.

Entertainment was identified as the coping strategy used mainly for work-related stress, 7 of 22 study respondents or 31.8 %. The least strategy identified to cope with work-related utilized among the respondents was drinking alcohol, where 7 of 22 chose it or 31.8%.

As for the remaining coping strategies, the percentages of respondents who chose to answer the questions were all under 18.2%. In summary, Entertainment, such as browsing over different social media platforms, was reported as the coping strategy utilized more often than the other eight strategies listed as options to cope with work-related stress.

Table 4. Range of Years of Teaching Experience

Years of Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percentage
1 - 5 years of teaching experience	14	63.7
6 - 10 years of teaching experience	3	13.6
11 - 15 years of teaching experience	3	13.6
16+ years of teaching experience	2	9.1
Total	22	100

Table 4 data revealed that 13.36% (n = 3) of the teachers reported 11-15 years of teaching experience, and 9.1% (n = 2) of the teacher respondents reported 16+ years of teaching experience. 22.7% (n = 5) of the respondents who responded to the request to complete the survey had 11 or more years of teaching experience. 77.3% (n = 17) of survey respondents reported 1-10 years of teaching experience. In conclusion, over half of the survey respondents reported having 1 - 10 years of teaching experience.

Summary of Finding, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Special Education teachers working in this pandemic reported the most noticeable work-related stressors as there is little time to prepare for my lessons/responsibilities (M = 4.7), student behaviors negatively impact their ability to perform their job (M = 3.6), their class is too big (M = 3.4), and my priorities are being shortchanged due to time demands at work, and there is too much work to do (M = 3). Due to increased duties and rigorous deadlines, teaching is increasingly a stressful career (Demjaha et al., 2015; Minarik et al., 2003, as cited in Obryan, 2019). Teachers are much more likely to experience reduced work-related stress when provided with enough academic assistance to guarantee excellent teaching quality and student engagement and emotional support to evaluate students' long-term success (Wong et al., 2017). Brunsting, Sreckovic, and Lane (2014) found that limited teacher experience, student disability, role conflict, role ambiguity, and limited administrative support contributed to special education teacher burnout.

The most noticeable work-related stressors experienced by special education teacher respondents were highest for those who felt anxious (M = 4.4), which is considered an emotional manifestation of stress. Physical manifestations of stress reported by the study respondents included: responding to stress by procrastinating and

responding to stress by experiencing illnesses (M = 3.5), responding to stress by feeling sleepy (M = 3.3), and responding to stress with physical weakness (M = 2.8). The adversities faced by teaching special needs students result in high stress and significant adverse consequences for the teaching profession and special needs teachers, and teachers' incapability to cope with pressure and stress should be identified (Kiel et al. 2016).

The selected special education teachers identified Entertainment at 31.8% (n = 13), personal and family relationships, drinking alcohol, and taking vacations at 17.1% (n = 3) respectively as the coping strategies most used to cope with work-related stressors. They can engage in recreational activities such as dancing and get social-emotional support from family, friends, and colleagues (Parker & Martin, 2009).

In conclusion, most of those who responded to the survey reported having 1 or 10 years of teaching experience. Of those, 63.7% of teachers reported 1-10 years of teaching experience, and 13.6.3% reported having 6 – 10 years of teaching experience. More research is needed on novice special education teachers. They appeared to be more at risk of leaving the field than veteran teachers (Bettini et al., 2017; Castro et al., 2010; Anderson & Olsen, 2006, cited by Cancio et al., 2018). In the retention of special education teachers, teacher stress has had a significant impact (Albrecht et al., 2009; Billingsley, 2004; Brunsting et al., 2014; Cancio et al., 2013).

Conclusion

In this trying time, it is essential to show support to our teachers' frontliners of education. This research is significant for special education teachers who wish to reduce stress and stay in their professions for long. Challenges have heightened amidst the health crisis. Therefore, special education teachers and their school district administrators would benefit from learning stress-reduction strategies to maintain a healthy work environment.

Special educators who believe that they are stress-free are more likely to engage in successful classroom practices, have higher work satisfaction, increase their instructional ability, and have a more positive outlook on life. More importantly, they can influence student achievement favorably. To address the trend of teachers leaving the profession, school leaders and administrators who want to maintain competent special education teachers should proactively look for ways to reduce and eliminate pressures early on and encourage teachers to engage in such activities.

Recommendation

Recognizing the findings and conclusion of the study, the following may be recommended.

1. Challenges of the special education teachers will be addressed immediately with the help,

guidance and interventions of the administrators through carrying out programs tailored for

stress management amidst the pandemic.

2. Conduct a series of webinars that covers the construct of work-related stress and what effective and efficient ways to cope.

3. Needs not addressed through the webinars may be supplemented by the Guidance office by

offering the different guidance services, including follow-up counseling sessions to the

Special education teachers.

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