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Exploring the Health Conditions and Practices of Public School Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract. The teachers' role in the teaching and learning process is vital. However, they can only be effective if they maintain their health and energy levels. Thus, this phenomenological inquiry intends to explore the health of public school teachers in Negros Occidental, Philippines. The data were gathered using an in-depth interview. Meanwhile, the recursive textual analysis guided by the three C's of Lichtman- Coding, Categorizing, and Conceptualizing was employed to analyse the data thematically. The findings show that teachers did not feel any pain nor weakness, slept well, had enough energy to do tasks, and were free from any diseases. Hence, health issues were managed accordingly. Likewise, teachers exemplified their practices in monitoring their weight, medical results, food intake, and feelings of oneself. Also, teachers shared that to be healthy is to think that you are healthy. Thus, eating healthy food, regular exercise, and enough fluid consumption are the most common health practices of teachers that helped alleviate their health status and self-confidence. In general, teachers emphasized considering one's physical conditions, focusing on things that make them healthy. Henceforth, individual assessment of health status differs. Nevertheless, regular practice of healthful behaviors can maintain or improve health.

Keywords. *Health, assessment, public school teachers, phenomenology, Philippines*

1. Introduction

Teacher's health is an essential factor that affects quality education since one of the main pillars for sustainable development in a knowledge-based economy is education [28]. For this reason, their health should be an utmost concern not only by themselves but also by the people surrounding them [29]. Having a health condition have a higher risk of experiencing depression, anxiety, and an increase in risky behavior participation [10].

In Scotland, the rest of Europe, and the UK, health and well-being issues became an increasing concern in the workplace. In the teaching profession, levels of ill-health and work-related sickness are a perennial concern. Teaching is one of the stressful jobs but has very little primary data were existing. Thus, there is a need for consistent and systematic support for teachers on a national basis because if not, teachers' morale will be affected [6].

Maintaining a certain level of health is not that easy. For teachers, there are many things they attend to. There is a high risk for occupational stress for teachers in China, such as frequent

changing regulatory framework, too many non-teaching tasks, overemphasis in competitions such as promotion, centralized control in teaching (e.g., not maximizing the academic freedom), and low socioeconomic status. Thus, it results from poor mental health status [28]. In Danding City, The rate of sub-health status for teachers was significantly higher. It includes social-psychological factors, an unbalanced diet, exercise deficiency, and others [29]. In addition, coping with the new normal education is difficult because of the nature of the work of teachers, mainly contact with people; therefore, teachers have a higher risk of having communicable diseases [15]. Hence, their health should be one of the top priorities.

Teachers are vulnerable to job stressors daily. In epidemiological research, teachers experience a high rate of mental disorders. Thus, in longitudinal research, teaching-related stressors lead to depressive and psychosomatic disorders, alcohol consumption, and burnout [23]. Since psychological distress, anxiety disorders, and physical ailments in teachers are significantly higher, and they are at risk of ailments or disorders due to their working conditions [13] and work demands [26]. Thus, the efficacy of workplace coping has been weak, according to research [23].

Teachers can only be effective if they maintain their health and energy levels. Because if not, they will not be confident in fully meeting the needs of students possible [19]. Nevertheless, only a few studies have been published on teacher's health [24]. Thus, it is crucial to pay attention to teachers' stress and take adequate measures to improve their health globally [28]. Therefore, it is unequivocal to ask the meaning of health for teachers and how they experience it. Thus, this paper explored the health conditions and practices of public school teachers.

2. Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to gather more information on teachers' health. It helped describe their in-depth experiences of the phenomenon [7] by drawing meaning out of the experiences [9]. It also focuses on the commonality of their experiences to arrive at a description of their health. This method aims to determine and describe the primal meanings or essence of the phenomenon experienced by the participants [16].

They were six (6) public school teachers, all in all. They were determined using the purposive sampling technique according to the pre-selected criteria such as they are male or female, newly hired teaching personnel, 0-5 years in the service, aging 20-35 years old, single in marital status, and do not have pre-existing medical conditions.

The data was collected using an in-depth interview that facilitated gathering detailed and valuable information to provide the context to the data [14].

It was administered using a face-to-face interview (guided by health protocols set by the department of health). It started with establishing rapport with every participant to ensure that both of us are at ease in the process. It was followed by the orientation on the purpose of the research, confidentiality of the participants, duration of the interview, its flow, and attending to the questions and clarifications of the participants before they signed the written consent conformity to proceed to the process. During the interview, they were asked to express their responses which is comfortable for them. Thus, probing of answers followed. While they expressed their experiences, the researcher also took note of the nonverbal languages, which would help the researcher understand the participants' contexts. The interview ended with a debriefing and thanking them for their cooperation in the research process.

The data were thematically analyzed using a recursive textual data analysis utilizing the three C's of Lichtman- coding, categorizing, and conceptualizing [16] an in-depth health experience as perceived by teachers.

Informed consent was given and understood by the participants. Coding was also employed to preserve their anonymity. The data gathered were safely kept until the results were obtained. Potential risks were also discussed. All the remaining data underwent manual shredding. Soft copies of the data were deleted after the analysis of it. Also, recycle bins were cleared so that no traces of the data could be retrieved.

3. Results

Health Conditions

Healthy. The participants were sure about their current state of health. They emphasized the physical conditions that made them realize that they are healthy. Thus, physical manifestations of disease or infirmity are one of the bases for personal health assessment. Despite claiming that the participants were consistently healthy, there were issues in health faced by some of them, but it was given a solution to overcome the dilemma. Hence, in battling health issues, we are an agent to alleviate health status. All participants verbalized this way:

"My state of health is good so far. I do not feel any pain. I do not experience body weakness. I can sleep well. I have enough energy to do daily tasks every day, especially in school".

"I am holistically healthy. I am free from any disease or physical pain. I am emotionally ill. I am still recovering from the death of my father. When I feel sad and remember my father, I pray for him. Sometimes I make myself busy doing some house chores or planting."

"All my medical results were negative."

"I am healthy. I rarely get sick and feel better every day. I have much energy. I am free from any illness."

"My health is good. I rarely get headaches and body pains. I sometimes get physically tired, but with the amount of rest, I get better."

"I am healthy. I am careful with what I eat. I find it boring and depressing to stay at home and do nothing. My lifestyle sometimes is not healthy. There are times that I would prefer to eat fast food because of being lazy to cook my food. As much as possible, I should cook now and eat more veggies and fruits (a challenge for me nowadays)."

Good shape. Teachers exemplify how they monitor their health. They demonstrated it by keeping an eye on their vital signs, medical results, food intake, and gaging to personal feelings. Accordingly, they need to have regular monitoring to ensure the status of their health. For example, some participants mentioned the following:

"I monitor my weight because it is an important marker in helping to determine my current health. I am also assessing my height, blood pressure, cholesterol, and my blood sugar."

"As an individual, it is important to know one's condition. The medical results that I had during the yearly medical checkup show that I can perform and function well w/o hindrance. Thus, I believe that I am a healthy individual."

"I monitor my food and make sure to do some exercises daily."

"I think the way I assess my health most of the time is by "feeling myself." I could feel that something 'off' or not well with me, and I try to gauge myself if it could be risky for my daily activities. When I know that it could be risky for me, id rather take the test or maybe sweat it out."

Normal. School teachers strongly emphasized that they are healthy because of their experiences that they confidently think are healthy. This enactment helps to maintain and improve their health status. Thus, being healthy notion differs for every individual. Some participants shared these:

"I can say that I am healthy because I eat when I am hungry, and I am full. I can do the tasks given to me every day, and I embrace my functions and falling asleep too quickly."

"I can perform and function well w/o hindrance. Thus, I believe that I am a healthy individual. Physically, I can do tasks w/o impediment and with lots of extra energy for other activities. Mentally, because I can carry myself in any situation that I may encounter. Socially, because I believe that I can adapt and cope with my fellows."

"I think I am healthy because I have never been admitted to hospital due to serious illness or fever, and of course, based on the laboratory results in my medical, the results are all normal."

Practices to Maintain Health

Physical Health Practices. The participants' routines and practices in healthful behavior contribute to alleviating their health status. Doing them regularly or most of the days helped in the maintenance of their health. Hence, health sustenance is achieved. As most of the participants expressed the following:

"My practices to maintain my current health status are eating healthy foods, exercising regularly, having a positive state of mind, drinking 8-10 glasses of water every day, and getting enough sleep."

"Practices that I often do to ensure my health status and sanity, given that we are facing the new normal due to covid are I consume healthy meals regularly, and I engage in physical activity."

"Drink more water at least eight times per day, avoid some food that is not good for our health. To keep fit, I engage myself in activities to maintain my health fit always, eat food that is good in our health and lastly is always drink more water."

"I work out. I always try to schedule three workout days in a week. I find it comfortable when I can go for a walk or do gardening."

Social, Mental, and Emotional Health Practices. The participants find ways to avoid social, mental, and emotional stress. Consequently, they make sure to divert their attention and used medium to cope with stressors. Allowing ourselves to reroute stressors to healthful activities helps to avoid social, mental, and emotional problems. For example, some participants mentioned these specific situations:

"I make sure that I have my 'me' time; I go out and talk with family and friends."

"I always talk to my mother or other members of our family."

"I make myself busy doing some house chores or planting some plants."

"Health does not talk only about physical aspect but also psychological as well. Days off are a time to clear my head. It clears my head for everything that I had been thinking deeply and removes (so far) the stress I accumulate from work."

Spiritual Health Practices. Continuing their devotion and praying every time they encounter stress help lessen tension or pressure. Identically, simple expression of faith reduces stress. Some of the participants shared these:

"I continue my devotion daily."

"When I feel sad or remember my father, I pray for him."

4. Discussions

Health conditions are a basis for a personal health assessment because people interpret being healthy in complex and diverse ways, reflecting their personal, social, and cultural experiences

and environments [2]. It was found out that teachers' high-fat blood, high blood sugar, high blood pressure, and others tend to increase. Thus, one way for prevention and health care is to interfere in the lifestyle, guiding them to change bad living habits and elevate healthy levels [3]. Also, making smart health choices and taking responsibility, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and introducing healthy habits [21]. These can also be a solution to overcome their health issues because we can maintain or improve our health status. Thus, to be healthy is to function normally. It can be determined by empirical facts and evaluative judgment [12]. Therefore, it is a call to individuals to take responsibility and make smart choices in diet, exercise, emotional wellness, and so on [21].

There are many ways to monitor our health. Examples are vital signs and medical results monitoring, food intake, and personal feelings. It was suggested that there were eight ways to stay healthy [21]. Do not smoke, avoid secondhand smoke, avoid weight gain, healthy diet, drink alcohol in moderation, stay connected with friends, family, and other survivors, and get screening tests and go for regular checkups [27]. These should be practiced since lifestyle-related diseases constitute a significant problem in the modern world, but they can be prevented and reversed with good nutrition [4]. In Australia, people are advised to manage their bodily practices in highly specific ways (healthy eating, alcohol consumption, exercise, and screen time). However, it suggests a gap between the guidelines and how people live their lives. Therefore, lifestyle change is a straightforward matter to put knowledge into practice. However, we inhabit a complex social world where alcohol and food are central to social life [17].

Experiences that we think are healthy make us healthy. For example, balancing food groups, consumption with exercise, and physical activity are also essential for a positive physical health outcome. Food components such as sugar, salt, and fat should be avoided in large quantities [1]. Likewise, quality food intake prevents metabolic disturbances poor human body function [11]. Also, social and emotional learning helps adults acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitude necessary to manage and understand emotions, achieve positive goals, empathize with others, maintain a positive relationship, and make responsible decisions [25]. Thus, building teacher's social-emotional competence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making) can improve their effectiveness and well-being. It helped them to respond to stressors of the teaching profession [5].

Health practices are essential for health sustenance because it is a predominant concern in the present times. Thus, physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual health practices contribute to the well-being of an individual that creates a healthy lifestyle [21]. As such, healthy eating is vital for mental and spiritual health. Too much focus on a diet is detrimental to mental health, and dietary choices should be good for the body and mind. It helps one feel good and avoid depression. Thus, physical outcomes such as immunity and digestive health are evident if the timing of eating and with regular meals will be emphasized [1]. Also, a high level of emotional intelligence (EI) can recognize and express emotions and manage and control them, which can help cope with stress and suffer less adverse health outcomes. These can be achieved by practicing emotional intelligence skills like empathy and impulse control to deal with the feelings more effectively, decreasing stress, and protecting health.

On the other hand, low EI was likely to engage in health-damaging behaviors [20]. This may happen since social, emotional, and behavioral risks vary depending on the screening options or measure used [18]. Lastly, Spiritual values (integrity, honesty, and humility) and practices help to be an effective leader (respecting others, fair treatment, expressing care and concern, listening, recognizing others' contributions, and engaging in reflective practice) [22]. Our spiritual health contributes to social and emotional health that motivates change in health behavior that determines physical and mental health [8].

5. Conclusion

Teachers have bases for their health assessment. It can be done in various ways. Hence, these assessments are ways for them to prevent and control their health. Therefore, individuals' evaluative judgments through facts from medical results and physical health practices are an essential tool for monitoring our health.

Guidelines for a healthy lifestyle should be practiced because of the trend in the modern world. We should not be fluid when it comes to lifestyle. Firmness to adopt healthy behavior regardless of social and environmental factors will maintain or improve our health status.

What we eat is what we are. The more we consume food on top of the food pyramid guide, the more we will be susceptible to diseases. Thus, if we think that we are not healthy, the more we indulge in unhealthy behaviors.

Being healthy is based on an individual's health practices. We can be healthy in some areas or aspects of health, but it is essential to be healthy holistically. If we do, we will complete our daily tasks daily, with reserved energy for leisure or recreation, and expect a longer life expectancy.

In general, health is a practice of healthful behaviors. Whether it is on the physical, mental, social, emotional, or spiritual aspects, one may categorize himself as healthy according to healthy practices. In doing such, it maintained or improved the health status of an individual. One should perform healthful practices in different areas to be appropriately addressed with these healthy practices. Thus, regular personal health assessments should be practiced.

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