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Occupational stress and coping mechanisms of MAPEH teachers

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Abstract: Teaching is widely recognized as one of the most demanding professions, often exposing educators to high levels of occupational stress. This study explored the occupational stress and coping mechanisms of MAPEH teachers in the Second District of Capiz. Specifically, it assessed the level of stress experienced by teachers in relation to workload and time pressure, student behavior and classroom management, curriculum and instructional support, emotional and psychological stressand external factors after class hours. It also examined the coping mechanisms employed by theteachers, focusing on active coping, emotional coping, social support and avoidance coping. Additionally, the study examined the relationship between stress levels and coping mechanisms. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, using a survey to collect quantitative data from 147 MAPEH teachers. Data were gathered using a researcher-made Occupational Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey (OSCMS) and analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean and Pearson's r for correlation. Findings revealed that MAPEH teachers experienced high levels of occupational stress, particularly in workload, emotional stress, and lack of support. Despite these challenges, teachers exhibited a high level of coping mechanisms, demonstrating resilience by actively employing a variety of coping strategies, with emotional regulation and active coping being the most frequently used. A significant positive correlation was found between occupational stress levels andcoping mechanisms, indicating that increased stress was associated with greater use of coping strategies.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Coping Mechanisms, MAPEH Teachers, Workload, Emotional Stress, Active Coping, Emotional Regulation, Avoidance Coping, Stress Management

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching is widely regarded as a noble profession that plays a vital role in shaping future generations. It contributes significantly to individual success and societal development by nurturing intellectual, emotional, moral, and social growth. Despite its importance, teaching has become increasingly stressful due to the growing demands placed upon educators (Cathrine et al., 2017). Teachers today are expected to be flexible, highly competent, and capable of managing diverse student behaviors, performing administrative tasks, and delivering quality instruction, all while maintaining high standards of performance and job satisfaction.

Occupational stress in the teaching profession has become a global and national concern. According to the American Psychological Association (2023), occupational stress is defined as "a physiological and psychological response to events or conditions in the workplace that is detrimental to health and well-being." In the Philippine context, this issue is magnified by challenges such as long teaching hours, heavy workloads, multi-faceted responsibilities, and classroom management issues (Skaalvik&Skaalvik, 2017).

Among the various teaching areas, educators handling MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Education, and Health) subjects face unique challenges that intensify occupational stress. The multidisciplinary nature of MAPEH requires a wide range of skills and preparation across four

different domains. According to Gupta and Kumar (2019), this complexity, combined with insufficient resources and time constraints, significantly increases stress levels among MAPEH teachers. Anayasan (2015) notes that they frequently encounter unmotivated learners and a high number of classes per week, making it difficult to sustain student engagement and instructional quality.

Another concern is the assignment of teachers to MAPEH classes without formal specialization in the subject. Many MAPEH teachers in the Second District of DepEd Capiz, particularly those in integrated schools and national high schools, are teaching outside their area of academic preparation. This mismatch between qualification and teaching assignment contributes to instructional difficulties, lower confidence, and greater stress. Hershock (2023) underscores that effective teaching requires content mastery and pedagogical experience, while Campbell et al. (2021) affirm that subject competence correlates directly with student success. Educators lacking this specialization often face increased pressure and diminished teaching satisfaction (Condie et al., 2019).

The Department of Education (DepEd) has recognized the critical role of teacher well-being in delivering quality education. DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 (National Adoption and Implementation of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers) emphasizes the need to enhance teacher quality through professional support and well-being. Likewise, DepEd Order No. 11, s. 2019 (Implementation of the NEAP Professional Development Program) promotes responsive professional development systems, including wellness and mental health interventions to support teachers facing workplace stressors. These policy directives affirm the timeliness and relevance of examining occupational stress and coping mechanisms among educators, particularly in high-stakes, interdisciplinary areas like MAPEH.

Recognizing this context, the study aimed to investigate the occupational stress experienced by MAPEH teachers and the coping mechanisms they employ to manage it.

According to Ellovido and Quirap (2024), coping mechanisms are cognitive, emotional, or behavioral strategies used to manage stress and reduce its adverse effects. These are categorized into active coping, emotional regulation, social support and avoidance coping. This research was also personally motivated by the researcher's professional experience as a MAPEH teacher. Having witnessed and experienced firsthand the growing pressures, role overload and challenges faced by MAPEH educators, especially those required to teach outside their filed of expertise, the researcher was compelled to explore the area of concern more deeply. The intention was to bring attention to the realities of MAPEH teachers and provide a data-informed basis for improvements in institutional support and teacher well-being.

Furthermore, this studysupports Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, which identifies teacher support and development as a foundation of educational quality (United Nations, 2015). The findings will not only address the needs of MAPEH teachers but also informed stakeholders in the Department of Education about effective ways to enhance teaching conditions and institutional support systems. Ultimately, the goal was to cultivate healthy, well-supported educators who can deliver transformative learning to students in the public school system.

Problem statement

This study aimed to explore the occupational stress and coping mechanisms of secondary schools MAPEH teachers in the Second District of Capiz. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of occupational stress experienced by MAPEH teacher in general and in terms of workload and time pressure, student behavior and classroommanagement, curriculum and instructional support, emotional and psychological stress, external factors after class hours?

2. What is the level of coping mechanisms of MAPEH teachers ingeneral and in terms of active coping, emotional regulation, social support and avoidance coping?

3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of occupational stress, and coping mechanisms employed by MAPEH teachers?

Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), which theorizes that human behavior is the result of dynamic and reciprocal interactions among personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior itself, a principle known as triadic reciprocal determinism (Schiavo et al., 2019). This theory is especially relevant in examining how teachers perceive stress and apply coping mechanisms in response to their work environment.

Key constructs within Social Cognitive Theory, such as self-efficacy, observational learning, behavioral capability, reinforcement and expectations, provide a solid basis forunderstanding how MAPEH teachers in the Second District of DepEd Capiz adapt to workplace stressors. Among these, coping self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to handle stressful situations, is central to this study. Teachers with high coping self-efficacy are more likely to believe in their capability to manage occupational demands and apply effective coping strategies, thereby mitigating stress and improving job performance (Marcionetti& Castelli, 2022).

To strengthen the theoretical foundation, this study also drawed on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984). This model views stress as a result of the interaction between a person and their environment, emphasizing cognitive appraisal (how individuals evaluate a stressful situation) and coping (how they respond). Coping is divided into two major types: problem-focused coping, which involves efforts to change the stressor, and emotion-focused coping, which involves efforts to manage emotional distress. This model aligns well with the coping mechanisms examined in this study and highlights the importance of subjective perception in stress response.

Additionally, the Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) Model by Demerouti et al. (2001) provides further insight into occupational stress in educational settings. According to this model, every occupation has specific job demands (e.g., workload, time pressure, emotional demands) and job resources (e.g., support, autonomy, recognition). When job demands exceed available resources, it leads to burnout and stress. Conversely, adequate resources can buffer the effects of stress and enhance work engagement. This model supports the study's investigation into factors such as workload, recognition, professional development opportunities, and access to teaching resources.

Together, these three theories, Social Cognitive Theory, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, and the Job Demand-Resources Model, provide a comprehensive framework to understand the complex interactions between personal characteristics, environmental conditions, and coping behaviors among MAPEH teachers.

These theoretical underpinnings support the study's conceptual framework, which explores how various independent variables: occupational stress such as workload and time pressure, student behavior and classroom management, curriculum and instructional support and

classroom management, curriculum and instructional support, emotional and psychological stress and external factors after class hours influence the dependent variables: coping mechanismssuch as active coping, emotional regulation, social support or avoidance. The expectation is that coping mechanisms play a significant role in mediating the effects of occupational stress among teachers.

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on examining the levels of occupational stress and coping mechanisms among MAPEH teachers in the Second District of Capiz. It investigated the relationship between the stress experienced by teachers and the coping strategies they employed. The study specifically covered MAPEH teachers from junior high schools, senior high schools, and integrated public secondary schools in the said district. While a similar study was previously conducted by Sir Jefferson S. Cabag in the First District of Capiz, this study was intentionally concentrated on the Second District of Capiz to provide a comparative perspective and address the lack of localized data in this area.

The research employed a descriptive-correlational design and utilized a researcher-made instrument titled the Occupational Stress and Coping Mechanisms Survey (OSCMS) to gather data from 147 out of 236 MAPEH teachers in the Second District of Capiz. The study aimed to assess occupational stress in terms of workload and time pressure, student behavior and classroom management, curriculum and instructional support, emotional and psychological stress, and external factors after class hours. It also explored the coping mechanisms utilized by the teachers, including active coping, emotional regulation, social support, and avoidance coping strategies. To analyze the data, the study used descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, as well as inferential statistics like Pearson’s r to determine the correlation between variables.

This study was conducted during the academic year 2024–2025 and was confined to the educational and administrative context of public secondary schools in the Second District of Capiz. It did not include private school teachers or MAPEH teachers from other districts, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the study also meant that it captured stress and coping patterns within a single academic year, and did not consider long-term changes or trends.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Occupational stress experienced by MAPEH teachers

The findings revealed that all components recorded “high” levels of stress, with the overall mean stress level at 4.12, interpreted as "High". The components that showed the highest stress levels were Workload and Time Pressure and Emotional and Psychological Stress, both with a mean of 4.18, closely followed by Student Behavior and Classroom Management (M = 4.12), Curriculum and Instructional Support (M = 4.09), and External Factors After Class Hours (M = 4.05).

These results suggested that MAPEH teachers in the second district of Capiz face substantial stress across multiple domains of their profession. The consistently high ratings indicated that stress was not isolated to a single area but is experienced holistically across the teaching workload, emotional labor, student interactions, and even after school responsibilities.

The “high” rating of Workload and Time Pressure implied that the respondents, in terms of workload and time pressure were somehow stressed and experience challenges. MAPEH teachers often feel overwhelmed by the volume and intensity of their responsibilities. This may be due to the need to prepare and execute physically engaging lessons, manage school-wide events, and fulfill numerous administrative requirements within limited timeframes. Sharma and Yadava (2017) emphasized that teachers in specialized fields like MAPEH carry heavier workloads due to the need for activity-based teaching and coordination of extracurricular programs. Similarly, Garcia-Carmona et al. (2019) found that workload and time pressure are among the most significant predictors of teacher burnout, contributing to job dissatisfaction and emotional fatigue.

The “high” level of Emotional and Psychological Stress indicated that teachers may be struggling to manage the emotional demands of the job, especially when teaching diverse learners in dynamic classroom settings. This type of stress may stem from constant multitasking, pressure to maintain a positive attitude, and the challenge of addressing students' individual needs while coping with their own fatigue. Harfitt (2015) pointed out that teachers working in demanding environments are particularly vulnerable to emotional exhaustion, especially when institutional support systems are insufficient to meet the growing needs of both students and educators.

Student Behavior and Classroom Management also rated “high” which reflects the difficulties teachers face in maintaining discipline and order, particularly in the context of MAPEH subjects that often require movement, group activities, and open spaces. These challenges may lead to stress when classroom control becomes a constant concern. Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2016) found that student misbehavior was a strong contributor to teacher stress, especially in subjects that involve active learning environments where maintaining authority can be more challenging.

Although slightly lower than the other components, the stress level associated with Curriculum and Instructional Support is still “high”. This would mean that many MAPEH teachers feel inadequately guided or resourced in implementing curriculum standards. This may include limited access to instructional materials, lack of clear guidelines, or insufficient training to meet new educational demands. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) reported that inadequate curriculum support and a lack of necessary teaching resources contribute significantly to occupational stress, especially when teachers are expected to innovate or adapt without sufficient institutional backing. Finally, the high rating for External Factors After Class Hours implied that MAPEH teachers are burdened by work-related obligations that extend beyond their official teaching duties. These may include preparing lesson materials, attending meetings, participating in school activities, or complying with documentation requirements, all of which reduce time for rest and personal life. Pressley (2021) highlighted that tasks beyond class hours negatively affect teachers' work-life balance, which in turn heightens stress and reduces overall well-being.

Coping mechanisms of MAPEH teachers

The coping mechanisms employed by MAPEH teachers in the Second District of Capiz, to manage occupational stress, categorized into four types: Active Coping, Emotional Regulation, Social Support and Avoidance Coping. The overall mean score of 4.28 was interpreted as "Very High," indicating that MAPEH teachers actively utilized various coping strategies to deal with the stressors associated with their roles. Among the four, Emotional Regulation had the highest

mean (4.42), followed closely by Active Coping (M = 4.36), while Social Support (M = 4.18) and Avoidance Coping (M = 4.17) received "High" ratings.

The "very high" rating for Emotional Regulation suggested that MAPEH teachers frequently engaged in strategies aimed at managing their emotional responses to stress, such as reframing negative thoughts, maintaining a calm demeanor, or engaging in self-care. This indicated an adaptive response to occupational stress, allowing teachers to stay emotionally balanced despite the demands of their role. Cutuli (2015) emphasized the importance of emotion-focused coping in high-stress environments like teaching, noting that teachers who practice emotional regulation are more resilient and less likely to experience burnout. Similarly, Gross and Thompson (2017) found that effective emotion regulation helped educators maintain classroom control and psychological well-being.

The "high" level of Active Coping strategies, such as planning, problem-solving, and taking direct action to reduce stress, implied that MAPEH teachers were proactive in managing their challenges rather than avoiding them. This approach promoted long-term stress reduction and contributed to a sense of control and competence. According to Santos et al. (2015), teachers who apply problem-focused coping tend to perform better and report higher job satisfaction. Moreover, Kaur et al. (2019) observed that active coping leads to more effective stress resolution and improved classroom performance among secondary school teachers.The "high" mean for Social Support indicated that MAPEH teachers moderately rely on colleagues, friends, and family members to help them cope with stressful situations. This emphasized the role of interpersonal relationships in stress management, although the slightly lower rating compared to other mechanisms suggests possible limitations in available support systems or a preference for more personal coping styles. Tomas et al. (2020) emphasized that social support acts as a buffer against occupational stress, especially when institutional support from school leaders or peers is present. However, the level of reliance may also depend on school culture and individual openness to seeking help.

The "high" mean score for Avoidance Coping, reflected that while teachers predominantly use positive coping methods, some still resorted to less effective strategies when stress becomes overwhelming. Although not inherently negative, frequent use of avoidance can hinder long-term problem-solving. Shin et al. (2020) noted that while avoidance coping may provide short-term relief, it is linked with increased stress and emotional exhaustion over time. This finding underscored the need for continuous training on adaptive coping mechanisms.

Relationship between occupational stress and coping mechanisms

This study further delved into the relationship between occupational stress and the coping mechanisms employed by MAPEH teachers in the Second District of Capiz. The Pearson correlation coefficient is r = .446 with a p-value of .000, indicating a moderate positive correlation that is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This result suggested that as occupational stress increases, the use of coping mechanisms also increases.

This finding implied that MAPEH teachers who experience higher levels of occupational stress were more likely to engage in coping strategies, whether active coping, emotional regulation or avoidance-based, to manage their stress. This aligned with Biggs, Brough, and Drummond (2017) reaffirmed the model's relevance, highlighting how cognitive appraisal continues to play a central role in determining whether individuals engage in problem-focused or emotion-focused coping.

Similarly, Fiorilli et al. (2017) observed that teachers experiencing high levels of stress tend to adopt a combination of proactive (problem-focused) and reactive (emotion-focused or avoidance) coping strategies, depending on how much control they perceived they have over the situation. The moderate correlation found in this study supported the notion that stress and coping are interconnected psychological processes that dynamically influence each other.

Moreover, coping efforts tend to intensified as stress increases, particularly among professionals like teachers who work in emotionally demanding environments. This was especially relevant for MAPEH educators, who manage multiple discipline and often face logistical and resource challenges unique to their subject area. A recent study by Montgomery and Rupp (2020) also found that teachers in high-stress contexts were more likely to adopt a range of coping strategies to maintain effectiveness and emotional stability.

These results confirmed that coping behaviors are significantly associated with the stress levels of MAPEH teachers, emphasizing the importance of strengthening their coping resources and institutional support systems to promote well-being and resilience in the teaching profession. Thus, with the result, the null hypothesis was rejected.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the important conclusions were drawn: the occupational stress among MAPEH teachers in the Second District of Capiz was notably high, with specific domains such as emotional challenges, time pressure, curriculum demands, and a lack of support systems being particularly burdensome.

Despite the high stress levels, teachers were resilient and demonstrate high levels of adaptive coping, especially by employing diverse coping mechanisms, particularly those that were active coping and emotional regulation.

The presence of a positive correlation between stress and coping supports the theoretical premise of Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, suggesting that coping was a dynamic response to perceived stressors. Institutional and systemic support appears to be a critical factor in mitigating stress, as areas with weak administrative and curriculum support contributed to higher stress levels.

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