

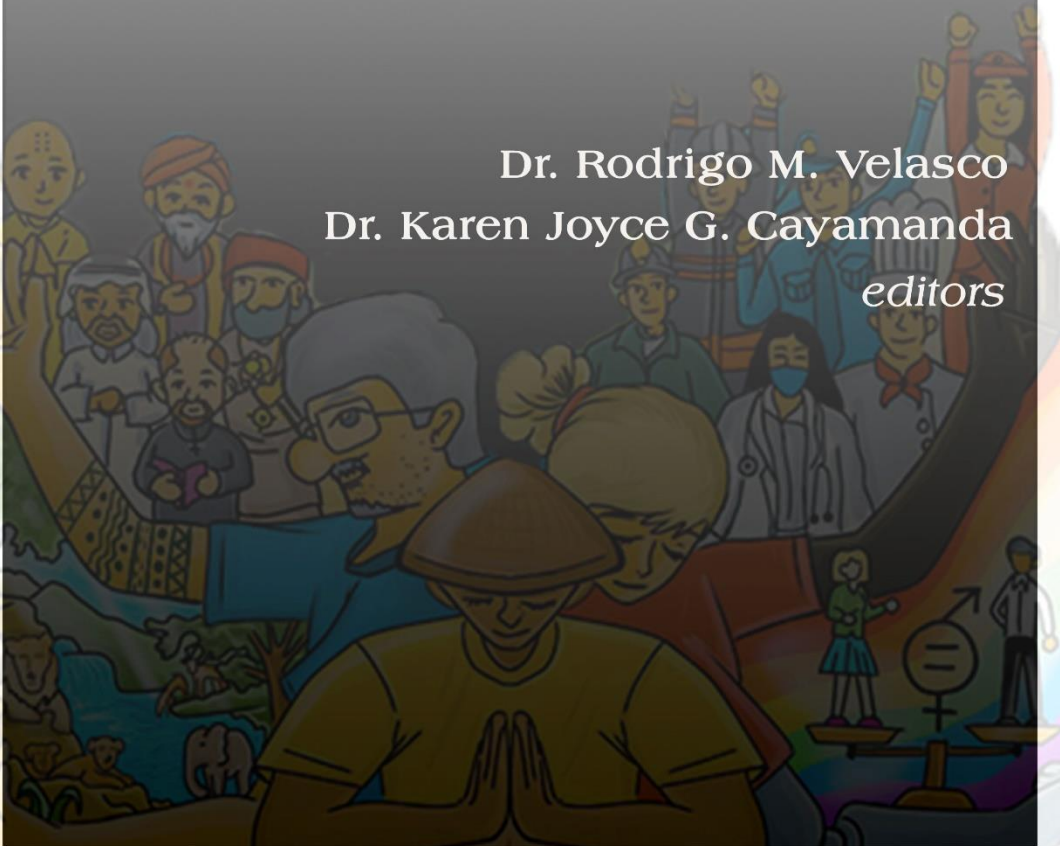
The WORLD

in Different PERSPECTIVES: Rebuilding Lessons after a Crisis

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editors



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Preface

The world is in chaos. The emergence of COVID-19 pandemic created the havoc that all parts of the globe had to deal with. In addition, there are still other personal and social crises that everyone endures.

Rebuilding Lessons after a Crisis attempts to present the whys, whats and hows of humanity's risk perception across the world as we embark on this challenging journey and help define the most appropriate and most effective risk-related behaviors for survival.

The current pandemic has brought about the abrupt shift in all sectors of the society in different parts of the world. It has resulted to immediate adjustments and development of coping mechanisms to transcend beyond the challenges of this pandemic. Like any other crisis, the current situation taught us to reflect and manage its overwhelming effects.

This book compiles articles that reflect the different perspectives in varied concerns such as health, economy, education, and social transformations. Its impact to the physical, emotional, psychological and financial conditions of humanity across the world are also presented.

Part I as the opening chapter attempts to describe the situation in terms of how a crisis has been evaluated in different lenses as to the risk perception and the risk related behaviors as to how various sectors have adapted to the situation.

Part II describes the varied effects of the pandemic and the adjustments and coping responses manifested by the different sectors.

Part III offers the strategic actions and coping mechanisms that can help recover and sustain ways of life in these challenging times.

About the editors

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Mental Health and the Teaching Profession

Marco R. Publico

Introduction

Among the Sustainable Development Goals outlined by the United Nations is the promotion of good health and well-being. This is because numerous diseases cause the spread of human suffering and destabilization of global economies, ultimately upending the lives of billions of people around the globe. Although much progress has been achieved to increase life expectancy, several strides have yet to be undertaken to address many different and emerging wellness issues; among them is mental health, which affects people of all ages, and from all walks of life (United Nations, n.d.). In light of this rationale, the United Nations General Assembly included mental health and substance abuse in the Sustainable Development Agenda in September 2015. For the first time, world leaders finally recognize the significance of promoting mental health and well-being as priority areas within the global development agenda.

Consequently, it has become commonplace to see people and groups advocating for mental health. In various social media platforms, posts and challenges that purportedly promote mental health abounds. Indeed, it is a positive thing that mental health is slowly becoming destigmatized and that mental health issues are finally being brought to light. The only concerning thing is that this sudden interest in mental health may be a fad, as with all things in social media. Once the hype is over, what happens then? The stark reality is that even with the passage of the mental health law, the Philippine Government has yet to create a concrete plan to address mental health. As a case in point, one of the sectors impacted mainly by the mental health crisis is the

academic community. Unfortunately, an article published in the Manila Bulletin cites that there is *no actual or concrete mental health program in Department of Education (DepEd) as mandated by Republic Act 11036, otherwise known as the Mental Health Act of 2018* (Hernando-Malipot, 2020). Making matters worse is that, much of the attention concerning mental health in schools is directed towards the welfare of the students while neglecting one crucial element of the educational system, which are the teachers. The irony here is that the role educators are expected to play evolved over the years in supporting the mental health needs of their students. Part of which is identifying students suffering from psychological issues and referring them to mental health practitioners (Publico, 2020). Nevertheless, how are teachers supposed to deal with the mental health concerns of their students when they are struggling with similar issues?

With this in mind, this research would like to focus on mental health as it relates to the teaching profession in the new normal. More importantly, this research would like to determine how the school personnel management can undertake concrete actions to foster positive mental health among teachers.

Discussion

Mental Health

The World Health Organization defines *mental health* as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her potential, can cope with the everyday stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her potential community. Further, the concept includes a person's emotional, psychological, and even social well-being. It affects how people feel, think, and act and determines how people handle stress, relate to others, and make choices (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). It also

discusses that mentally healthy people may occasionally have symptoms of emotional distress, but they are appropriate and in proportion to the situation. Mental health involves a wide range of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. With good mental health, people feel well and can tolerate reasonable amounts of pressure, adapt to changing circumstances, enjoy rewarding personal relationships and work according to their abilities. A person's mental health is affected by individual factors and experience, social interactions, the environment, and societal and cultural norms and expectations (World Health Organization, 2005).

Psychologists view mental health as the ability of people to adjust satisfactorily to the various strains that they encounter in life. They perceive mental health as a state of health by which man can find his abilities, defeat stress naturally brought about by life, work more effectively, and cooperate with different social groups (Najar, 2019). Researchers have come up with indicators to ascertain an individual's mental health: autonomy, adequate self-evaluation, spontaneity and emotionality, self-knowledge, balanced self-concept, realistic perception, and unifying philosophy of life (Taylor & Brown, 1988 as cited by Najar, 2019).

Work produces personal and health benefits, while the absence or loss of work can potentially damage a person's mental health (Huxley, 2001 as cited by WHO, 2005). It is worth noting that work affects a person's mental health, while in turn, an employee's mental health affects the workplace. The subsequent texts elucidate how the concept affects those in the teaching profession.

Mental Health and the Teaching Profession

The academic setting typically uses the term mental health to discuss students' mental health and well-being. However, the

term should also incorporate promoting well-being among educators, administrators, and even mental health workers themselves. The subsequent texts demonstrate the importance of maintaining teachers' mental health and highlight unique aspects of the teaching profession that should be taken into consideration when addressing the well-being of teachers and school-based staff. In a study entitled '*School Mental Health is not Just for Students: Why Teacher and School Staff Wellness Matters,*' the researchers pointed out that individuals who work in school settings are particularly vulnerable to work-related stress. Several pieces of research point to the fact that teachers report high levels of daily stress throughout the school year, with stress levels comparable to those of nurses and physicians. Additionally, teachers reported feeling physically and emotionally exhausted at the end of the day. The stress that educators experience affects their enthusiasm about the profession and longevity in the field, as illustrated by the high teacher turnover rates (Gallup, 2014 as cited by Lever et al., 2017).

Providing support to these claims are the findings of a study of Cezar-Vaz et al. (2015) about schoolteachers in Brazil. The researchers sought to identify the self-reported stressful working conditions of elementary teachers and the biopsychosocial consequences of such. Using both exploratory and descriptive methods, results indicate that stressful working conditions are related to inadequate salary, excessive activities, and having to take work home. Biopsychosocial consequences include anxiety, stress, and sleep disorders. Moreover, the study noted that the teaching profession requires a high level of professional competence, which can take a significant toll on the physical, intellectual, and mental resources. The fact is, teachers are constantly forced to adapt to rapidly changing working conditions, which can affect their physical and mental health.

Teachers' stressful conditions in their professional environment can disturb the balance between their professional performance and mental health (Cezar-Vaz, 2015 as cited by Korniseva et al, 2019). If left unattended, the accumulation of stress and tension can lead to professional burnout.

Thus, Korniseva et al. (2019) tried to investigate the relationship between low and high levels of professional burnout and the dimensions of mental health among Latvian teachers. Their study reveals that low and high levels of professional burnout in teachers correlate with mental health. Moreover, positive self-evaluation is an essential indicator of the prevention of professional burnout syndrome, which promotes a decrease in depersonalization and increases in personal accomplishments. Another research done by Borrelli and his colleagues attempted to investigate whether or not specific dimensions of working conditions are associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety among teachers in state schools in Italy. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey, the researchers tested the hypotheses that high job demand, low decision latitude, and low support are associated with anxiety and depression in teachers. Using a correlation matrix and hierarchical multiple regression models, the researchers were able to find out that about half of the teachers scored above the threshold for depression and -1 in 10 for anxiety on self-rating questionnaires. The researchers concluded that poor mental health in teachers is significantly associated with high job demand and low social support (Borrelli, I. et al., 2014). Based on the findings mentioned earlier, people might fall into the trap of concluding that stress affects teachers' mental health, but so long as they find effective ways of dealing with it, it should not be much of a problem.

However, one of the many reasons why teachers' mental health should be given due consideration is the finding that it affects not only the adult professionals, but also the students with whom these professionals interact. For instance, teacher burnout is predictive of student academic outcomes, correlated with lower effective student learning and lower motivation (Zhang & Sapp, 2008 as cited by Lever et al, 2017). Not only that, teacher burnout appears to affect the stress levels of the students they teach; a recent study found that teacher burnout level explained more than half of the variability in students' level of stress (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016 as cited by Lever et al., 2017). Najjar (2018) corroborates this finding, highlighting the role of mental health on the professional life of teachers and its impact on the teaching and learning process. Accordingly, teachers need to be mentally sound to create a positive classroom climate where students feel safe and comfortable. Further, the author posits that maintaining a positive, supportive, motivational, and intellectually stimulating environment for teaching and learning is the mentally healthy teacher's responsibility. Creating such conditions in school results in students having high levels of achievement and good grades on the one hand; and less absenteeism and discipline problems on the other.

Thus far, it has been established and corroborated that the teaching profession is highly stressful, and this affects the mental health of teachers and the students they are handling. Unfortunately, despite the strong evidence of work-related stress, only a handful of employers provide educators and other school personnel resources to manage such difficulty. Even if school employees throughout the United States are affected by work-related stress, they often lack the programs, resources, and tools needed to support their stress management and promote overall wellness (DHHS, 2015 as cited by Lever et al., 2017).

Very much related to mental health is the concept of wellness, which is defined as "an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence" (National Wellness Institute as cited by Lever et al., 2017). It should be noted that wellness is not the absence of illness. There is a general agreement among researchers and experts that wellness is an evolving and self-directed process in which an individual is working to achieve his/her fullest potential, including mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Additionally, wellness has multidimensional components, including medical, emotional, environmental, occupational, physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and financial components. Despite this multidimensional understanding of the concept, wellness programs in the workplace often focus on only the physical and medical dimensions (National Wellness Institute, as cited by Lever et al, 2017). Most administrators might perceive the addition of wellness programs as an added cost with little to no value. However, a meta-analysis conducted by Parks and Steelman (2008) found that participation in wellness programs is related to several positive outcomes, such as higher job satisfaction and lower absenteeism. Another employer survey conducted by RAND found that participation in wellness programs was related to more significant gains in weight loss, smoking cessation, and exercise (Mattke et al., 2013). The economic benefits are added to wellness programs' physical, social, emotional, and behavioral imputes. Additionally, research suggests that participation in a wellness program over five years leads to lower health care costs and decreasing health care use.

Mental Health of Teachers in the New Normal

As if the difficulties experienced by educators daily are not enough, the new normal as brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated teachers' already stressful working conditions. Without any warning, teachers saw their daily

routine, work arrangement, socialization, and educational settings drastically changed. Many teachers are currently working at home and engage in online learning (Dela Rosa, 2020). Over time, these changes bring anxiety to those who are directly affected. According to psychologists, the lockdown and the resultant limitations to socialization are sources of stress, and online interaction is an additional factor for increased anxiety levels. Further, engagements made in social media and other digital forms of communication may bring a feeling of shock and frustration (Dela Rosa, 2020).

Just how are teachers coping in these uncertain times? A representative of the Philippine Mental Health Association stated that educators have different ways of coping. However, what makes the ordeal worse for teachers is that they have to face their personal struggles at home on top of their problems at work. Accordingly, teachers do not have the chance to open up about their struggles and emotions because they are expected to be strong all the time because their students and the community depend on them.

One teacher was quoted to have said that "*One of my personal challenges is the pressure of resolving day-to-day concerns at work and many office meetings, sometimes resulting in body pains, just as the city deals with the pandemic and the extension of the enhanced community quarantine.*" Meanwhile, another teacher stated that "*many people may think that we are doing well and having the best days of our lives because of the work-from-home set-up, but we also have our own ... fears and anxieties. Aside from being classroom teachers, we are also wives, mothers, husbands who have roles and responsibilities in our families.*" (Ramos, 2020).

Implications in the Workplace

Substantial research has been provided to back the claim that being in the teaching profession predisposes a person to a variety of mental health concerns, which are all the more exacerbated by the current pandemic. At this juncture, this research would try to provide recommendations on how such mental health concerns can be properly addressed in the workplace.

In 2005, the World Health Organization released a module entitled: *Mental Health Policies and Programs in the Workplace*. Intended for employers, employees, human resources professionals, occupational health professionals, mental health professionals, trade unions, and other employee organizations, the module aims to develop and implement a mental health policy. It is intended as a resource to help employers protect and improve the workforce's mental health (WHO, 2005). According to the module, the first step towards addressing mental health problems in the workplace begins with developing a policy. *A mental health policy for the workplace helps define the vision for improving the workforce's mental health and establish a model for action. When well-formulated, such policy will also identify and facilitate the agreements needed among the different stakeholders in the workplace. Without policy direction, lack of coordination and fragmentation will reduce any workplace mental health strategy* (WHO, 2005).

Moreover, a mental health policy can be developed separately or as part of a broader health and safety policy. Putting the policy in place involves the following steps. The first of which is to analyze the mental health issues in the workplace. Key activities include making the case to employers about the importance of mental health, establishing a coordinating process, and assessing the needs to be addressed in the policy.

The second step is to develop the policy. This involves formulating a vision statement, identifying the values and principles that will underlie the policy, defining the objectives, and consulting with key stakeholders. The third step is to develop prevention and intervention strategies for the workplace. This involves reviewing strategies, finding resources to implement the strategies, and developing an implementation plan. The final step is to implement and evaluate the policy. It is necessary to generate support and collaboration; coordinate implementation, train key personnel; establish demonstration projects, and evaluate the outcomes (WHO, 2005).

Another tried and tested method is to increase the mental health literacy of teachers. Based on the study results entitled *Evaluating Mental Health Training for Teachers: Identifying and Supporting Students with Mental Health Challenges*. Here, the researcher evaluated a professional development workshop that was designed in response to teachers' requests for education about teaching children with anxiety and depression. Using a one-group pretest and post-test design, the researcher gauged the teachers' knowledge, perceived skills and abilities, self-efficacy, and attitudes on identifying and supporting the learning and development of students struggling with anxiety and depression. Results indicated that following participation in a two-hour workshop, the teachers' knowledge, perceived abilities and skills, attitudes and awareness, and efficacy towards educating, identifying, and supporting students with anxiety and depression improved, while their attitudes remained positive. As a result, the study's findings served as a springboard for the justification to provide teachers with mental health professional development.

Conclusion

Teachers are in a unique position in ensuring the positive mental health of their students. However, for them to successfully carry out this role, teachers must sustain their mental well-being first.

Through document analysis, this research was able to establish how challenging the teaching profession is to the mental health of teachers. Additionally, the research elucidated how the plight of teachers is made more difficult because of the changes in work setup brought about by the pandemic. Now more than ever, the next logical step for educational institutions is to come up with a concrete plan to take care of the mental health of their educators. To be able to do such, institutions are enjoined to create policies to secure the mental health of their personnel and increase the literacy of teachers on mental health.

As a future direction, the researcher recommends supplementing this research with a quantitative survey that would determine what challenges to mental health are being experienced by educators, especially in this pandemic. Such data can also serve as a springboard for creating the mental health policy of the school or university involved.

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