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# LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CHALLENGED TEACHERS IN THE PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF BAGUIO CITY

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## Abstract

The study aims to explore the lived experiences of challenged teachers in the public elementary and secondary schools of Baguio City. Qualitative research design was employed particularly phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of challenged teachers in the public schools of Baguio City. Colaizzi's Model was used to analyze the data. The responses of the participants were transcribed in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content. For each transcript, extracts significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon were noted. Meanings were formulated from the significant statements. Member checking with the member participants was done to validate the findings. From the meanings formulated it was categorized then themes were formulated. Results show that the daily routines of participants are from home to school doing their main tasks, appended duties and even bringing home their unfinished tasks in the workplace. Some participants say that they want to give up but on the other hand, they are satisfied that they are able to do many things despite their limitations and that they just enjoy the work with their fellow teachers. Challenges are part of daily life of an individual, especially challenged teachers who are experiencing severe medical conditions or other related situations but teachers are coping with the situation because of the support and utmost understanding of their co-workers, school heads or administration. Challenged teachers need social support as they continue to do their job or tasks assigned to them effectively and efficiently.

**Keywords:** suicide, struggling teachers, personal distress, stressed teachers, coping mechanisms, social support

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## INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The COVID-19 greatly affected the world, particularly the field of education. It increased the economic costs; disrupted the lives of people; loss of jobs; closures of schools and institutions and other disruptive impacts.

There were so many challenges in the field of education. There was a drastic change in learning pedagogy affecting not only students but also teachers. The teachers need to use the distance learning modality delivery with the use of modular distance learning and online teaching and learning. They prepared learning resources appropriate in the implementation of distance learning delivery. The teachers were greatly affected by this COVID-19 pandemic.

There were also public-school teachers being reported in the media who are struggling and stressed. They even commit suicide because of some reasons not yet fully investigated. Personal distress of employees is depicted as influenced by multiple factors, ranging from qualities inherent in the social environment and the school setting, to the nature

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of the work itself, to the personal characteristics of teachers and students. This pattern is consistent with a model of organizational health (T. Cox and M. Leiter, 1992) that explains personal distress of employees in terms of enduring conflicts of organizational processes and structures with personal needs and aspirations. This articulation of teachers leads to a research program encompassing the quality and impact of the teaching relationship within the broad political and economic context of schools (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2019 as cited by Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (1999) . During this pandemic times it has been observed that teachers are loaded with so many tasks brought about by the drastic change in education specifically in teaching learning. The use of distance learning modality as the main learning mode of delivering teaching and learning instruction to learners is the major focus in education. Thus, it is the purpose of the study to explore the lived experiences of public-school teachers in Baguio City division who are suffering from health problems either physically, emotionally or mentally yet able to perform their duties and responsibilities especially this time of pandemic.

Existing research has failed to explore the lived experiences of struggling public school teachers of the Philippines, thus this study aims to explore the lived experiences by the public secondary school teachers in the Philippines particularly Baguio City.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Hundreds of teachers were being forced into begging a charity for financial help because they could no longer afford to pay housing and transport costs as their wages stalled. The number of teachers applying for help from the UK's main education support charity soared by 40 per cent in the past year, as it emerged that salaries for teaching staff in England were worth 12 percent less in 2015 than they were in 2005. The latest findings show that of 775 surveyed, 54 per cent reported poor mental health, with 52 percent of this

number saying their illness had been identified by a GP. Eight in 10 respondents (81 per cent) said poor mental health had a negative impact on the quality of their relationships with their pupils.

The same percentage said it affected their behavior management skills, with teachers citing “lower levels of tolerance” and being “quick to anger” (Bulman,2018).

In the study of Agebro (2007), most of the considerable variation in suicide risk across occupations is explained by socio-economic factors, except for doctors and nurses. Apart from in doctors, the risk of suicide has little association with occupation among people who suffer from a psychiatric illness. Restriction of access to lethal means is an important strategy in suicide prevention. Across the 55 occupations investigated, the risk of suicide ranged from 2.73 [95% confidence interval (CI) 1.77–4.22] among doctors to 0.44 (95% CI 0.27–0.72) among architects and engineers compared with primary school teachers. With the exception of doctors and nurses, most of the excess risk of suicide associated with particular occupations is explained by the social and economic characteristics of people in those occupations. Occupation has little association with suicide among people who suffer from a psychiatric illness, except for doctors, where the excess risk is 3.62 ( $p=0.007$ ).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Existing research has failed to explore the lived experiences of struggling public school teachers, thus this study aims to explore the lived experiences of challenged public secondary school teachers of Baguio City Division. Specifically, the study aims to find answers to the following questions: 1. How do participants describe challenged teachers? 2. What are the daily routines of participants? 3. What do the participants feel about their situation as of this moment? 4. What are the challenges encountered by the participants in doing their job as a teacher while taking care of themselves? 5. What are the measures they

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do to cope with the challenges they encounter? 6. What forms of social support are helpful to them in coping with the challenges they are encountering?

## SCOPE AND LIMITATION

The study was conducted in the public secondary and elementary schools in Baguio City S.Y. 2022-2023. In the identification of participants, key informant interviews were conducted to school heads to provide names of teachers who are experiencing physical or emotional problems and yet they are able to cope with the day-to-day activities in school. Personal knowledge and understanding of the researcher was also utilized in identifying participants particularly those teachers whom she was able to work or interact with in the past and at present that was validated by the school head.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### ***Research Design***

The researcher employed qualitative research design particularly phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of challenged teachers in the public schools of Baguio City.

A hermeneutic phenomenology approach was adopted to gain an in-depth account of participants' lived experiences and allowed the researcher to use her own subjectivity in the study. This is because many qualitative research experts believe that removing all the subjectivity in a qualitative study is almost impossible (Wa-Mbaleka, 2018).

### ***Sampling***

The researcher used purposive sampling. The participants were the teachers teaching in the public elementary and secondary teachers of Baguio City who are experiencing physical or emotional problems and yet they are able to cope with the day-to-day activities in school. The size range of participants was 6-15 until there was saturation of

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data. In order to recruit the participants, permission from the school heads was sought. Informed consent of the participants was also secured.

The selection of teacher-participants was based on a convenience sample in which respondents were chosen based on their convenience and availability.

### ***Data Collection***

The researcher collected data in the respective schools of participants. The researcher used interview guide questions to collect data.

The best time the data collected was during Mondays after class. This is the best time to collect data because the teachers are not yet preoccupied with the school work. The data was recorded using audio recording. The researcher also made use of online platforms using messenger, google meet and google forms to gather data from schools where there was difficulty in arranging face to face engagements.

### ***Data Analysis***

Colaizzi's Model was used to analyze the data. The responses of the participants were transcribed in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content. For each transcript, extracts significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon were noted. Meanings were formulated from the significant statements. Member checking with the member participants was done to refine the themes noted to ensure accuracy and validity of the findings. From the meanings formulated it was categorized then themes were formulated.

This model provided insights into experiences of challenged teachers in the public elementary and secondary schools in Baguio City particularly the participants in this study. This ensures the credibility and reliability of its results. This allowed the researcher to reveal emergent themes formulated.

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## **Ethical Issues**

### On Permission and Consent

The researcher followed the proper protocol and DepEd guidelines in conducting research. The researcher prepared written permission to conduct the study through the use of approval forms. She sought the approval of the school principals through the Schools Division Superintendent. Once the research proposal was approved, the researcher immediately conducted the study. While conducting the study, she did not neglect her primary duty as a supervisor. Likewise, before the conduct of the main procedures, she explained the study to the respondents and sought their consent and support.

### On Confidentiality and Anonymity

After the participants were informed about the study, the researcher gave assurance that the result of the respondent's answers will be treated confidentiality and be used only in the study. Furthermore, the participants were assigned first-name pseudonyms that are used as appropriate when referring to each participant. Likewise, all resources used were cited or acknowledged through proper citations and referencing. Corroboration to support this study was properly noted.

### Right of Withdrawal from the Study

The researcher expressed her right to withdraw from the conduct of the study the moment complaints arise from the respondents or any other individual/s who has/have adequate or valid reasons to claim.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Description of challenged teachers

Performing despite challenges, overcoming despite suffering and teachers with severe medical conditions were revealed in the responses of participants.

The participants described challenged teachers as: teachers who do their best to cope with the requirements and expectations of an efficient teacher despite their difficulties; one who has struggles; teachers who have weaknesses/difficulty in performing a certain task. Attitude problem that leads to low results performance or poor quality work; teachers who are burned with heavy challenges brought about by factors not related to teaching, but which has great impact on teachers' performance like serious illness, family problems, personal issues and the like; teachers in the field with conditions that make them hard or difficult to do or perform their duties and tasks; teachers who have physical illness but has to undergo daily activities related to work and family and with mental health issues; and persons with disabilities or impairment.

It is worth mentioning that there are a few additional studies that have shown a different impact of a few other diseases on teachers: an excessive rate of some major cancers, in particular breast and thyroid cancers and surprisingly enough, an association between school teaching and mortality from autoimmune diseases. Teaching profession differs from other occupations in its impact on workers' mental and physical health. Teachers do not seem to have poorer mental health. However, their physical condition is characterized by a higher prevalence of health problems and to a lesser extent, depending on the gender, to skin, eyes, legs and lower urinary tract ( Kovess-Masféty, V., Sevilla-Dedieu, C., Rios-Seidel, C. *et al.* 2006).



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## Daily routines of participants

The participants' daily routines are the following: 1. They teach in the classroom; assist fellow teachers, especially the newbies who have difficulties understanding their duties as advisers and/or other appended duties; listen, inspire, and give advice to students who come for emotional, physical, and social challenges and difficulties; and prepare worksheets and LAS related to topics being taught; 2. Home - school; 3. Prepare/plan on how to deliver the lessons effectively and end the day with less stress; 4. work on weekdays, 95% of the time is taken up by work, family time, laundry, house chores and others on weekends; 4. On a normal day, they usually wake up early to prepare for work., attend their classes, go for medical treatment, go back to school for paperwork, prepare for the next day and go home; 5. Drive myself and family members to school and workplace. I teach, do appended duties, attend meetings (if any). Drive back home with family members (students & colleagues), water my plants, dinner & work on paper brought home; and 5. Five minutes stretching and five to ten minutes walking.

The result is supported by Kinman (2014) that in order to build up emotional resilience, think of proactive ways to manage the stress in your life. Meet regularly with friends and family, spend time on hobbies you enjoy, read or watch things that make you laugh, and build into your daily routine proven stress-busting activities such as yoga, meditation or exercises that involve deep breathing. Rewarding yourself is also needed in through improving physical and psychological health that comes from prioritizing your well being. Building new relationships and connections is also key to our well being. Take the time to get to know the students, parents and staff members in your school community. This will all help overcome the challenges the teachers are facing while doing their daily routines.

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## Feelings of participants about their situation

Sometimes, they want to give up but on the other hand, they are satisfied that they are able to do many things despite their limitations. Some also say that they are not satisfied with their situation. Lastly, some say they feel good and just enjoy the work with their fellow teachers. Based on the findings gathered, despite the negative feelings of participants, they still manage to deliver the goods to the learners and that is teaching them and performing other functions assigned to them. They enjoy going to school everyday just like the other teachers who are not experiencing what they are facing being physically or emotionally challenged. Care understanding and consideration are evident from colleagues, superiors and administrators of the public schools. Activities such as concern for a cause, provision of voluntary contributions are evidently observed in the schools.

Participants feel loved, respected and understood by their colleagues and other people whom they are dealing with thus, despite challenges in their daily routines they manage to do their work timely and efficiently. This is supported by Graupp, et al. (2020) where we do take the time to listen to other's feelings and opinions and truly understand them without judgement or bias we jump in and insist on our own point of view. In other words, we respect the other person's standing regardless of their own position and situation. Respect starts with understanding people as individuals. Many of us unconsciously resist this, and we may hold the mistaken view that "understanding" implies "agreement". Empathy from family members and colleagues is also evident in the responses of participants. Empathy means we "feel" what other "feel". When we empathize with someone's actions or feelings. We respect the person's standing as a human being. Being able to understand the differences show respect for that individual. Respect for people leads to valuing their inherent worth and potential while working diligently to guide them toward bringing their unique contribution to the organization. When people feel respected, when

they feel “understood,” then they will be more ready and willing to give not only their hands but also their minds and their hearts to work, despite the situations they are in. More over, how we treat any one individual sends ripple effects throughout the organization as other people can see our behavior and anticipate how they, in turn, will be treated by the system.

### **Challenges encountered by the participants in doing their job while taking care of themselves**

The following are the challenges encountered by the participants in doing their job while taking care of themselves: 1.The greatest challenge I ever encountered was having an immediate boss who hated me for reasons I did not know. My everyday challenge is trying to survive the drastic changes in the system that I am in while I feel that my health and capacity to cope are waning;

2. Waking up early to go to work, especially during this cold season, is very hard; 3. The challenge sometimes I encounter in doing my Job is when I cannot finish my paper works;3. It is hard to focus when I am bothered with my health issues. My noise tolerance is too low as a result of the surgery. I often snap at Grade 10 learners who cannot behave as financially capable to provide for my child, during these times, it's hard to give your best teaching when you have worries. My leave credits are almost zero as I have to use these for medical reasons. I do have the solo parent leave that expires yearly but I cannot use it for my sick leaves; 4. Having a medical condition is very difficult for a teacher because it is not only physical but also mental agony. You want to give more to the learners but don't have enough strength and paper work demands are overlapping and it cannot be ignored. Medicines have to be taken on time. When going to the doctor, I have to be absent due to more restrictions in going out of the campus during class hours.er mindset. Your physical

capability is limited; 5. Accessing health services; 6. Sometimes daily life may not be easy due to stress, emotional, financial and sometimes physical.

### **Measures participants do to cope with the challenges encounter**

The following measures participants do to cope with the challenges encountered are:

1. Prayer is my best coping mechanism. I believe and I always pray God will make a way for me. Second, by faith, I try to do the things that are required and expected of me with precaution on the impact on my health. Thirdly, I watch people, read more, listen to others and learn from them. I find encouragement, hope, and lessons not only from the good but even from the bad experiences I run into. Lastly, I often write my experiences in literary forms like poems, essays and quotations; 2. Trying to cope through self talk that I can; 3. I usually take one step at a time and try to list the priority and less priority to finish before the deadline;. I don't have any choice left, I have to finish the fight, period, with being emotional in between. Crying is my way to release my worries. It is never gone but I would feel better for a short while, to pressure myself before it eats me up again; 4. I choose self-love. I take one day at a time. Do my best when I am able but slow down when I am weak. I adjust my classroom activities according to what I am capable and able to do and focus on the positive side of everything; 5. I list down all the tasks so I wouldn't be thinking about them and I ask help; and 6. Trying and applying a healthy lifestyle. Making healthy choices in preparing my healthy meals and exercise and walking.

It was interesting to note that the participants cope with the challenges they encounter. They cope by entrusting it to God as they still continue to do their calling as teachers. Individuals may cognitively restructure events in their minds in order to alter their emotion (e.g., think about a bad experience in a more positive light). The construct of optimism arose from a general self-regulatory framework in which positive expedencies lead to increased effort to attain desired outcomes or goals (De Guzman, A B. 2013).

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## Forms of social support helpful to participants in coping with the challenges

The following are forms of social support helpful to participants in coping with the challenges as revealed by the participants; 1. Emotional support from family and friends to become "someone". Self-esteem or affirmation support also helps me to give my best. Belonging support from friends and colleagues nourishes the emotional support provided by my family; 2. Support from co-workers; 3. Physical and practical assistance from co teachers specially the principal; 4. Talking to a few friends I never share it with my family unless I need their help. I don't want them to worry for me. I post encouraging quotes in social media, for my self encouragement. At the end of the day, it will just be yourself to fight all your issues, nobody else; 5. Support from my family, co-workers, friends, acquaintances and students and parents like material, emotional, spiritual and even financial support; 6. encouragement; 7. volunteering to do some tasks for me; understanding; 8. Emotional and physiological assistance and 9. Close relationships with my family, friends and church mates.

The result is supported by Day, Christopher & Gu, Qing (2010) who stated that teachers professional work and personal lives are connected. Creating a work-life balance turns out to be a critical factor in teachers' continuing to be resilient, despite difficult working conditions. Teachers need their professional lives to be individually motivated, relationally connected and organizationally supported.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

The participants were able to define challenge teachers based on their feelings and understanding as they are experiencing themselves. The daily routines of participants are from home to school doing their main tasks, appended duties and even bringing home their unfinished tasks in the workplace. Some participants say that they want to give up but on

the other hand, they are satisfied that they are able to do many things despite their limitations and that they just enjoy the work with their fellow teachers. Challenges are part of daily life of an individual, especially challenged teachers who are experiencing severe medical conditions or other related situations but teachers are coping with the situation because of the support and utmost understanding of their co-workers, school heads or administration. Challenged teachers need social support as they continue to do their job or tasks assigned to them effectively and efficiently.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the data gathered, the following recommendations are to be accomplished:

1. School heads must extend help, utmost care and consideration to challenged teachers or who are experiencing severe medical conditions while they are in the workplace.
2. School heads, administrators and colleagues should understand the daily routines and extend maximum tolerance to challenged teachers or who are experiencing severe medical conditions while they are in the workplace as long as their work output is not sacrificed.
3. The challenges encountered by the participants in doing their job as a teacher while taking care of themselves must be given consideration at all times.
4. Policy on not providing too many appended duties to challenged teachers or who are undergoing severe medical conditions upon submission of medical certificate.
5. Programs on teacher wellness must be institutionalized in the schools.

## DISSEMINATION AND ADVOCACY PLANS

The study will be disseminated during the division or regional research conference. If granted, it will also be published in the Baguio City Division Research Journal. Final copy of the research paper will also be given to the participants.

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## APPENDICES

### INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. How do you describe challenged teachers?
2. What are your daily routines
3. What do the participants feel about their situation as of this moment?
4. What are the challenges you encountered in doing your job as a teacher while taking care of yourself?
5. What are the measures you do to cope with the challenges you encounter?
6. What forms of social support are helpful to you in coping with the challenges you are encountering?