



Stress, Anxiety, Depression Levels and Coping Mechanisms of Students and Teachers: A School-based Population Survey

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Abstract

This research looked into the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the mental health of educational stakeholders of a higher education community in the Cordillera for the school year 2020-2021. It specifically investigated the experience of stress, anxiety, and depression among 129 teachers and 919 students through a population-based online survey with open-ended questions. Findings revealed that teachers and students experienced more negative emotions during the first six months of the pandemic (31% of teachers; 47% of students), which decreased over the ensuing six months (21% of teachers; 40% of students). Health concerns (82%), dealing with students (78%), and designing the delivery of learning materials in the new normal (76%) emerged as the top stressors for teachers. Academic difficulties (89%), boredom and lack of routine (70%), and lack of finances (67%) are the top stressors for students. For anxiety symptoms, panic attacks (47% of teachers, 43% of students) and feelings of agitation (37% of teachers, 31% of students) were high. For depression symptoms, thoughts about death are high for teachers (64%) and students (59%). For their coping mechanism, 70% to 82% of teachers turned to their family and friends, while 55% to 72% of students turned to gadget use, internet surfing, and sleep. The new normal of doing things brought a source of stress for both teachers and students.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic swiftly disrupted the daily routine of people all over the world. In the education sector, teachers rushed to finish their modules while ensuring they had stable internet access for more accessible communication with their students. The students, on the other hand, have to learn their lessons independently. For an academic sector that is used to face-to-face classes, this sudden change necessitated many adjustments for teachers and students alike. Common to

both is the merging of work/learning and family space. Working and learning while doing household chores or staying home has become the new normal.

Meanwhile, news of an increase in suicide and sexual abuse cases in the locality trended in social media. In Baguio City, the number of child abuse cases, including rape complaints, reached 71 as of June 2021, while in 2020, 76 cases of abuse were reported. The City Police Chief said that many of the latest cases involved children who were often left with adult male relatives, like

grandparents or stepfathers, while their parents were at work. In Benguet province, cases of incest rape increased during the quarantine. The Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office reports that there have been 44 cases of sexual abuse of minors from January to July 2020. Twenty-one cases are incest, in which the suspect is either the victim's father, uncle, grandfather, brother, or cousin (Comanda, 2021).

Still, in Baguio City, City Social Welfare and Development Officer (CSWDO) disclosed that for the first semester (January-June) of 2021, there were already 19 documented suicide incidents compared to the 24 cases reported during the whole year of 2020. Sixteen of these cases were males, while three were females. The same office further reported that the majority of the cases were aged 20 to 30 years old and that the causes of the suicide cases, as per their investigation, were alleged stressful life events, mental health issues or disorders, family and financial problems, among others, that led to depression (See, 2021).

In the Municipality of La Trinidad, it was reported that two children aged 13 and 14 committed suicides over struggles with learning modules, aggravated by not being allowed to go out (Gregorio, 2021). In an interview with the project coordinator of Saint Louis University (SLU) Sunflower Child and Youth Wellness Center, she enumerated multiple factors that may explain suicidal cases. The quarantine could be one factor, mainly due to increased feelings of social isolation and a sense of helplessness, especially when strict rules in a locked-down area. She added that during uncertain times, individuals tend to ruminate a lot, leading to over-worrying or intense anxiety and depression, which are strongly linked with suicidal tendencies. She likewise identified other suicide-related factors, which include fear of being infected, which leads to panic attacks, especially in "hotbed" areas, and economic difficulties (e.g., loss of jobs, loss of income). Also at high risk for suicidal behavior are those with pre-existing psychiatric or psychological disorders (diagnosed or undiagnosed) and those living alone and with a limited support system, and those with physical symptoms that are COVID-19 or non-COVID-19 related (Catajan, 2020). It is important to note that many students of Benguet State University (BSU) are from Baguio City and Benguet; hence, this study hopes to gain insights into the

mental health status of BSU students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indeed, the pandemic and the imposed community quarantine have real consequences on people's mental health and overall well-being. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], (2020) reported that as of April 8, 2020, schools had been suspended nationwide in 188 countries. Over 90% of enrolled learners (1.5 billion young people) worldwide are now out of education. School routines are essential coping mechanisms for young people with mental health issues. When schools are closed, they lose an anchor in life, and their symptoms could relapse. In a study by Labrague and Ballad (2021) involving 243 college students from Central Philippines, college students reported moderate lockdown fatigue, with a mean score of 31.54 (out of 50). They reported physical exhaustion or tiredness, headaches and body pain, decreased motivation, and increased worry as the most pronounced manifestations of fatigue. The study also found that increased personal resilience and coping skills were associated with lower levels of lockdown fatigue. The situation is even more problematic for students with existing mental health issues. For many, school routines are critical coping mechanisms; hence, when schools are closed, they lose an anchor in life, and their symptoms could relapse (Lee, 2018). A cross-sectional study conducted by Baloran (2020) on the knowledge, attitudes, anxiety, and coping strategies of students in two private colleges in Davao del Sur showed that most of their respondents displayed anxiety during the entire lockdown period. Moreover, 62.64% of their respondents were worried about food and financial resources, and about 54% to 56% avoided social contact, large meetings, and gatherings. To cope with anxiety during the pandemic, their respondents followed strict personal protective measures (90.19%) and avoided going out in public places to reduce exposure to the virus (80%). Furthermore, a previous BSU study pre-pandemic showed that students are vulnerable to stress, and more than half of the one thousand students have engaged in self-harming behavior (Ngina et al., In Press).

Not only are the young learners affected but also the educators. Talidong and Tuquero (2020) stated that COVID-19 indeed changed the lives



of many people around the world. It created fear, trauma, depression, and anxiety in people, especially those who lost their loved ones due to the pandemic. In the context of the Philippines, Filipinos, particularly the teachers, are worried about the safety of their loved ones and even their lifestyles have been affected because of the fears due to the pandemic. Though Filipino teachers have shown a positive outlook in life amid the COVID-19 outbreak, they are still susceptible to anxiety since the pandemic is still ongoing worldwide.

Speck (2020) also enumerated the findings of his study on the impact of COVID-19 on teachers as follows: (1) 34% of teachers were currently stressed and anxious about their mental health and well-being as well as that of their families, (2) 43% of secondary teachers said “the exam process” was causing stress, compared with 5 percent in primary schools, (3) 31% of primary and 19% of secondary school teachers reported higher levels of stress and anxiety caused by supporting families who might need emotional and financial support and (4) 44% said they were stressed and anxious by the ongoing uncertainty about what may happen during the summer term and 46% were worried about what may happen in the new school year.

This study provides an opportunity to likewise check on the mental health status of BSU teachers. It is significant to explore the mental health issues experienced by Benguet State University students and teachers towards a more localized understanding of and a more context-specific response to the mental health consequences of the pandemic and the resulting community quarantine. In particular, this study: 1) identified the stressors of students and teachers during the first year of the pandemic and the community quarantine; 2) determined how often students and teachers experience the signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression; and 3) investigated the coping mechanisms of students and teachers in dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression.

Methodology

Mixed methods research design was used, incorporating a population-based online survey. Specifically, a concurrent triangulation design was used where qualitative and quantitative data

were gathered simultaneously. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling to gather data on mental health issues experienced by BSU teachers and students. Considering the new normal, a link to the self-constructed questionnaire was sent to students and faculty members of Benguet State University during the 2nd semester of the school year 2020-2021 through the researchers’ official class group chats and BSU faculty members’ official messenger accounts. Nine hundred nineteen students and 129 faculty members from the three campuses of Benguet State University (La Trinidad, Buguias, and Bokod) responded to the questionnaire, which consisted of both quantitative and qualitative questions. For students, almost half of the respondents belong to the 18-19 age group, and 42% belong to the 20s age group. Most students are enrolled in 20-32 units equivalent to around 7-10 subjects. For teachers, the majority belong to the 30s age group, and 23% belong to the 40s age group. The average faculty teaching load during the pandemic time was 22-28 units. In terms of locale, the majority of the respondents stayed in rural areas (provinces) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hard copies of the research questionnaire were also distributed to the colleges and institutes to cater to teachers who are not adept with technology.

For the experience of stress, the respondents were asked to identify their stressors as well as their coping mechanisms during the pandemic and the community quarantine. They were likewise asked to rate their stress level during the first six months and the second six months of the pandemic and the community quarantine using a scale of 1 (very stressed) to 5 (not at all stressed). For the experience of anxiety and depression, the respondents were provided a list of signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression based on prevailing literature, then were asked to determine whether they experienced the symptom always, frequently, sometimes, or never. Qualitative data were also enriched with public posts on social media regarding teachers’ and students’ take on mental health and the provision of higher education services.

Informed consent was integrated into the survey questionnaire with the instruction that once the respondent clicks continue, he/she consents to participate. The names of the respondents were not required; hence, privacy and confidentiality have been observed. Furthermore, responding to the questionnaire was not graded



nor made part of the student's class standing. During the data gathering, no incident required the referral of a respondent for psychological help.

Descriptive statistics were used in the study. For the qualitative data, a word cloud generator was used to help analyze the most used word in the responses, which were then validated by the textual responses of respondents. The study's objectives of the study also served as a guide in organizing and discussing the study's results.

Results and Discussion

Educational stakeholders are affected by the pandemic, especially mental health. Fears related to the vulnerability of the mortality caused by the pandemic have domino effects on teaching-learning as distance learning has become the new normal.

In Figure 1, the range of emotions of both teachers and students changed with a slight increase in positive emotions in the latter half of the year. Positive emotions increased by 10% for teachers and 7% for students. Students experienced more negative emotions compared to teachers. Nevertheless, there is a visual decrease in negative emotions among teachers and students. These emotions are further explored in

three aspects – stress, anxiety, and depression. Similar to the demographic data, frequencies and percentages were used.

The Experience of Stress Among BSU Students and Teach

Many BSU students and teachers revealed that the pandemic has negatively affected their mental health, supporting the growing literature on this matter. Both experienced stress as due to of the pandemic and the community quarantine, with teachers appearing to be more stressed at the beginning of the community quarantine. One example of a student response would be, "I think it is already too much to stress myself with unexplained lessons and many activities considering think that I have limited internet connection because of lack of budget." This response is validated by students' self-rating on stress levels, where stress ratings remained almost the same for the two rating periods – 1st 6 months of the pandemic and 2nd 6 months of the pandemic (Figure 2).

This result is consistent with several studies conducted in other schools, which also found an increased stress level among college students as a result of the pandemic and the quarantine. In a study conducted among students of Monkayo College of Arts, Sciences and Technology, Philippines, the results revealed that the level of

Figure 1

Range of Emotions in a Year of Pandemic Experience of Students and Teachers

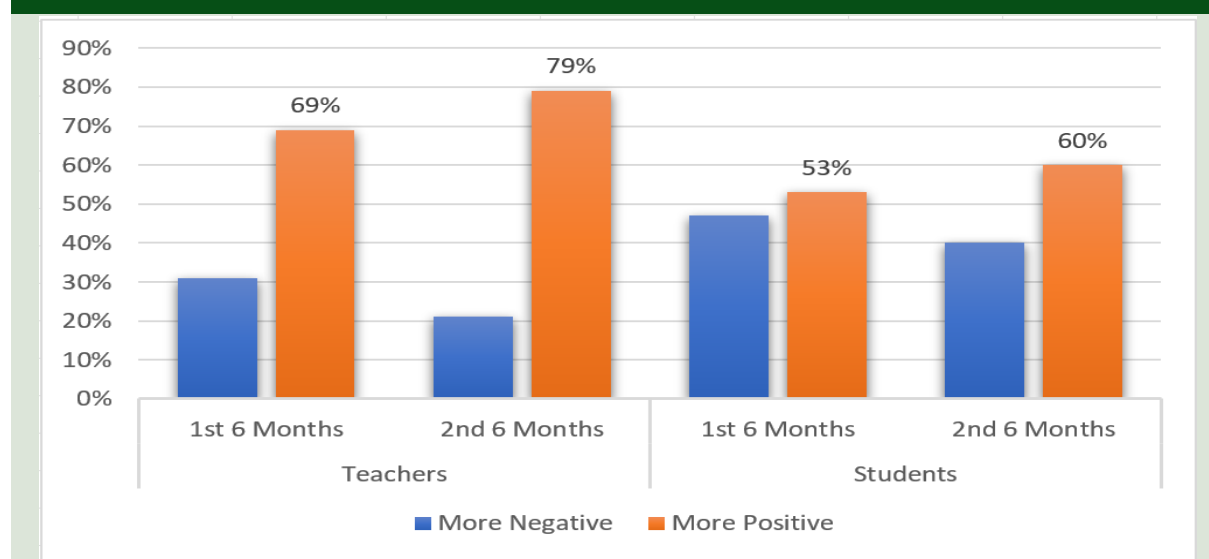
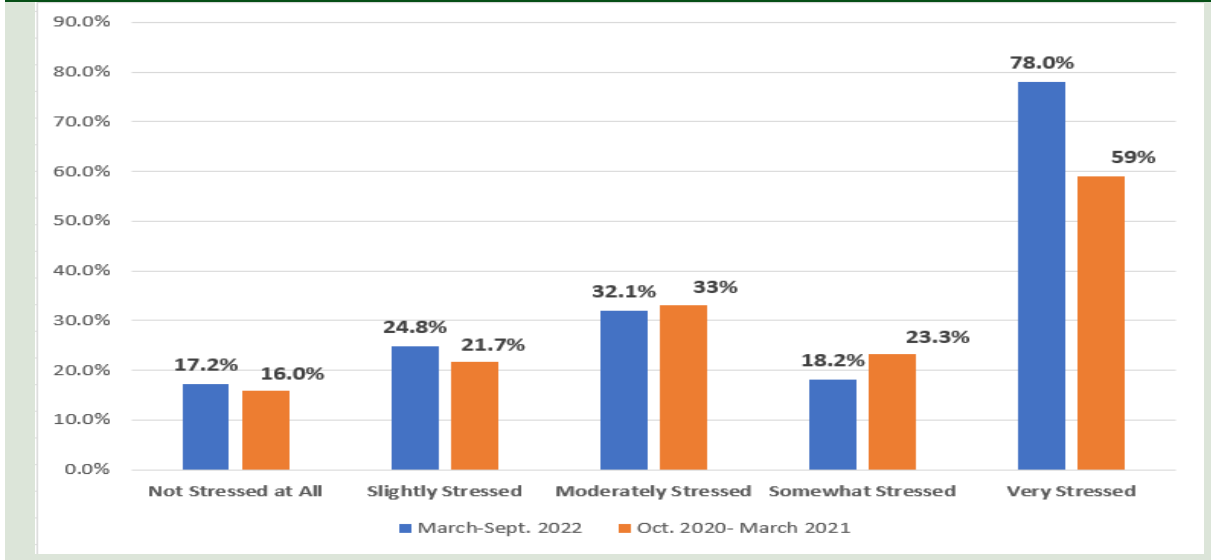


Figure 2

Students' Comparative Self-rating Stress Levels, Where Ratings Remained the Same for the Two Semesters Without Decreasing



academic stress during the COVID-19 pandemic is high (Licayan et al., 2021). Similarly, in a public university in the United States, a study found that 71% indicated increased stress and anxiety due to the COVID-19 outbreak (Son et al., 2020). The study likewise found multiple stressors that contributed to increased stress, anxiety, and depressive thoughts among students. These stressors included fear and worry about their health and of their loved ones, difficulty concentrating, disruptions to sleeping patterns, decreased social interactions due to physical distancing, and increased concerns about academic performance (Son et al., 2020). These stressors are consistent with those experienced by BSU students.

Most students identified academic difficulties as their most significant stressor, particularly in understanding their lessons and complying with all the requirements as seen in Figure 3. Other school-related concerns students raise include simultaneous uploading of modules, including the deadline for submission of activities, unclear instructions from teachers, many activities/requirements, and teachers who do not communicate with them for days or weeks. They also experienced academic pressure from their families, who expected them to have higher grades. One said that whenever he expresses to his family that he is having difficulty

understanding his lessons, his family becomes stressed because of him. These experiences are even made more problematic by their experience of overthinking and boredom resulting from a lack of daily routine.

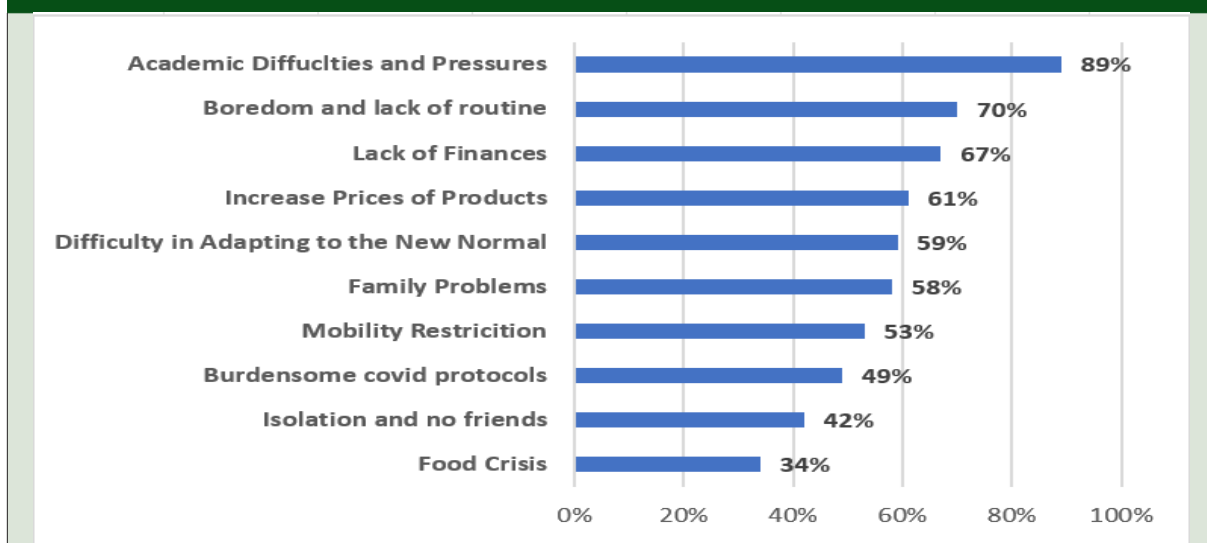
It should be noted that the respondents are first-year students in their late teens and early twenties, the period of life wherein a person becomes accustomed to the school's structured environment. Perhaps the pressure from academic requirements also reflects the kind of instruction or learning experience the students were most exposed to. Traditional learning environment capitalizes on the teacher's presence to facilitate, direct and enhance learning; hence, his/her sudden absence somehow rendered the students at a loss.

Moreover, many of the students claimed to have experienced financial concerns as prices of products continued to rise while the pandemic rendered their family's source of income unstable and caused some family members to lose their jobs. Internet connectivity and travel restrictions further burdened the students on complying with their academic requirements. Worse, many have to face family problems like parents quarreling over money, doing household chores, and enduring nagging while trying to understand their lessons and accomplish their school requirements.



Figure 3

Top Ten Stressors of BSU Students During this Pandemic (n=919)



Some students likewise mentioned helping their younger siblings do their modules. It is not surprising that some of the students claimed to have experienced a lack of sleep. One student revealed she almost had an overdose of sleeping pills.

Among the highly stressed students are those with multiple roles as family members, students, breadwinners, and others. Such cases of multiple burdens render them stressed, as seen in the narrative of one student respondent. A student respondent shares her insight - *"I am currently working in a business process outsourcing or call center agent. The reason why I need to work despite having a heavy workload is that my mom is a solo parent. They cannot afford to support me financially since my mom needs medication."*

A comparison of the students' self-rating on their stress levels at the beginning of the quarantine and for the last six months revealed a very slight improvement (Figure 2). A related article reiterated how the pandemic resulted in students having difficulties with their grades, time management, and sleep. It further pointed to finances and lack of time to relax and play as added stressors to students (Pope, 2021). Like most students during this pandemic, BSU students struggled to understand their lessons on their own while fulfilling their family obligations and facing the fear of being infected

with COVID-19. A multi-country study that looked into the effect of the lockdown on the mental health of young adults revealed that the Philippines had the highest mean score in stress, anxiety, and depression, followed by Egypt, Pakistan, India, and Ghana. The same study found that A history of close friends/family infected with COVID-19 was associated with students' stress scores (Shaikh, 2021).

Most students identified academic difficulties as their most significant stressor (89%, n=818) as seen in Figure 3. This is followed by boredom and lack of routine (70%, n=643) and lack of finances (67%, n=616).

Students expressed some physical and emotional manifestations of their experience of stress. Acne breakouts and headaches may be attributable to their experience of lack of sleep from overthinking and complying with academic requirements. Excessive use of gadgets for school work and games may also explain headaches. Some became irritable, while others displayed aggressive behavior. Some students claim they feel sad and cannot focus.

Figure 4 lists primary BSU teachers' stressors. Teachers are most stressed about their family's health. At the beginning of the pandemic, many expressed concerns about the possibility of bringing home the virus and infecting their



loved ones. A study conducted among teachers in Visayas, Philippines, demonstrated a positive correlation between the perceived risk of getting COVID-19 infection and COVID-19 stress (Oducado et al., 2022). Conversations on Facebook groups would reveal the fear among the teachers, especially when an officer in the university has a confirmed case; hence, the constant clamor for work-from-home arrangements. Adjusting to the new normal of teaching also caused much stress

among teachers, from designing the delivery of their lessons to communicating with their students on matters of academic requirements. The increased amount of time spent sitting down and using their laptops also triggered health concerns like migraines and body aches.

Like the students, weak and unstable internet connections also cause stress. Unlike the students, however, few teachers expressed

Figure 4

Lists of Primary BSU Teachers' Stressors

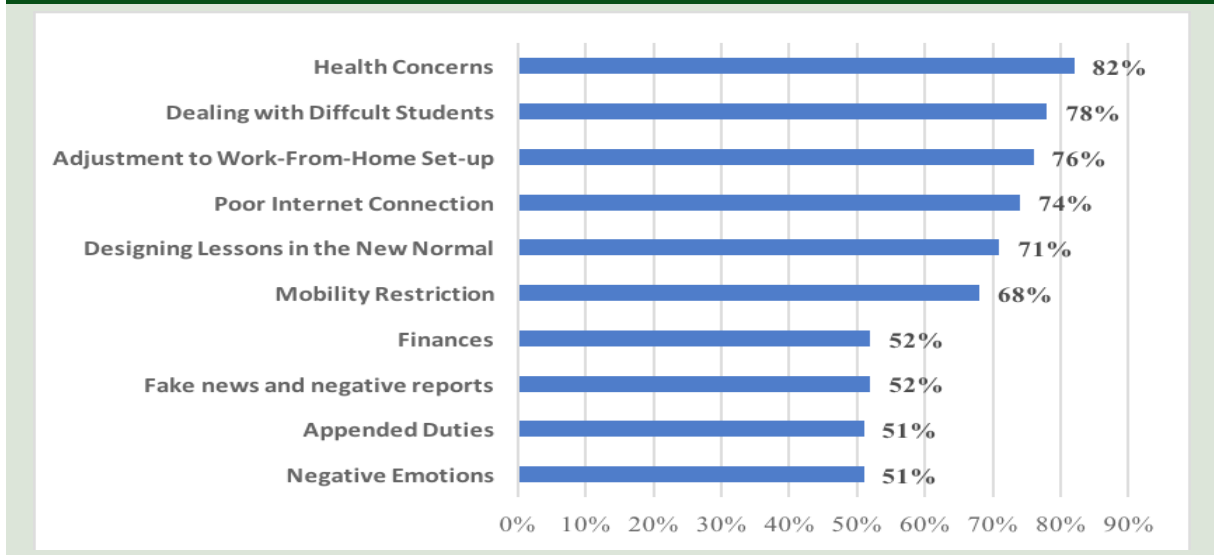
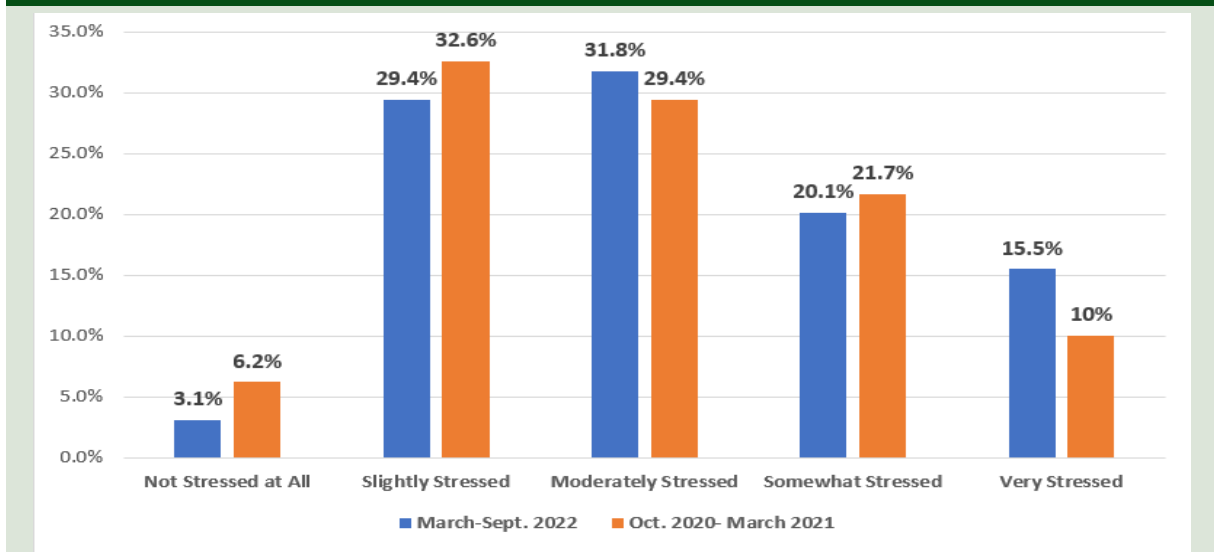


Figure 5

Teachers' Comparative Self-rating on Stress Levels During the Two Semesters of SY2020-2021



concern over financial and family problems and responsibilities. This may be because that many of the respondents are tenured. Hence, a stable source of income with or without the pandemic. This may help explain the slight difference in the self-rating of BSU faculty and students on the impact of the pandemic on their mental health.

Interestingly for the rating on stress levels, teachers who said they were always stressed decreased from 16% to 10%, and those who said they were never stressed increased from 3% to 6% (Figure 5). Although those who said they were usually stressed slightly increased from 20% to 22%. On the other hand, those who said they were stressed half as usual decreased from 32% to 29%. While those who said seldom increased from 29% to 33%.

This pattern shows a gradual decrease in stress levels during the latter six months of the pandemic. The finding that the pandemic and the quarantine contributed to the experience of stress among teachers is consistent with similar studies conducted in different countries. However, the stress level reported by BSU teachers is not as high as in these other studies. For instance, the results of a study among teachers in the Visayan region demonstrated that more than half of teachers experienced moderate COVID-19 stress and that females experienced significantly higher COVID-19 stress compared to males (Oducado et al., 2020). In Argentina, a study showed that more than 60% of educators reported high and moderately high levels of stress (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). A study among university professors in Israel also revealed higher levels of psychological stress during the transition to online synchronous teaching compared with previous periods of teaching (Besser et al., 2020). At BSU, most teachers shifted to modular and asynchronous teaching considering the uncertainty of internet connection, especially for students. Hence, the stress primarily resulted from the abrupt need to prepare modules. The decreased stress levels during the latter months of the pandemic may be accredited to pre-prepared modules. Nevertheless, the qualitative data highlights the stress experienced by teachers as they struggled to adapt to the new normal immediately.

Here are some qualitative responses of teachers on how workloads and coping with a different scenario have increased teachers' burdens and

adversely affected their physical health.

"Stress is tripled actually if not face-to-face plus maximum tolerance over students and net connection in the office. For some who are not in our sector, they might think that it's easier because we do not directly teach in the classroom. I noticed my mind processing has slowed down too. There are times that you would just be staring already at the screen, trying to figure out what you were trying to figure out in the first place." (Teacher Respondent)

"We have endless office work nowadays. Our work not only doubled but tripled. Our working hours/days are not enough to accomplish what we have to accomplish that's why others have to stay up late until midnight/dawn. In my case, my eyes could not handle the online/ offline work at night anymore. The willpower to do our work is strong, but our bodies and minds are not able to catch up. All we need is for people to be kind and understanding. We, teachers, are all working hard." (Teacher Respondent)

"Yong scenario na nag-che-check (or 'mark') ka ng activities/exercises ng students na dating nagagawa ng 1 to 2 hours per set, pero ngayon 1 to 2 weeks per set (di pa kumpleto kasi hahanapin mo pa kung saan yung iba naisend." (This is the scenario when checking of activities of students previously required 1 to 2 hours done per set but now requires 1 to 2 weeks to be checked per set, while it isn't complete because it requires one to find some of the submissions) (Teacher Respondent)

"In our case sinasabay pa sa accreditation na siguradong doble trabaho kasi kelangan mag-upload ng documents." (In our case, we also have accreditation which requires double work as we need to upload documents) (Teacher Respondent).

"Preparing for accreditation of three degree programs. Pilit naming kinakaya. Tas ISO audit pa." (Preparing for accreditation of three degree programs. We are trying our best to do it. In addition, we have ISO audit to accomplish.) (Teacher Respondent)

Figure 4 lists primary BSU teachers' primary stressors including health concerns, dealing with students in the new learning platforms, and



adjustment to home-based work as the top three stressors. The fourth and fifth stressors, poor internet connection (74%, n=95) and designing lessons in the new normal (71%, n=92), are related to the third stressor, which is an adjustment to home-based work arrangement (76%, n=98). In a study in Argentina, teachers also identified uncertainty about the consequences of the pandemic, work, overload and inadequate working environment as their predominant stressors (Rubilar & Oros, 2021). The sixth stressor is also related to going from home to work. It relates to mobility restrictions, especially during the first six months of the pandemic, wherein public transportation was difficult to obtain. The ninth stressor supports the different qualitative responses mentioned above. Problems with finance were listed as the seventh stressor, especially as there were talks that overload duties would not be paid, and teachers under a contract of service were paid months after their contract. This is consistent with a related study conducted in Spain which demonstrated that teachers with greater job instability show higher scores on depression, anxiety, and stress (Ozamis-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Interestingly, fake news and negative emotions were among the teachers' top ten stressors.

The top stressor is health concerns, where 82% of the teachers (n=106) identified this as a stressor. Below are some teachers' qualitative responses on how the new normal has affected their health.

"Been taking dolfenal for almost 2 weeks. On and off ti headache. Napanakon pay nagpamassage 3 times nu pimipiya kuma ngem apay madi pay lang", (I've been taking dolfenal for almost 2 weeks. My headaches are on and off. I went to have massage 3 times, hoping that I would feel better..until now I still don't feel well) (Teacher Respondent 1).

"Nu nakupsut matak idi ket mas lalo pay tatta. Grabe bannog ti mata nga super prolonged ngaminen ti screen time.. kumaru payen ti migraine...sakit ti likod..imbag ta adda ti maintenance isunga controlled ti BP... puyat met ngarud agbasa ken agbuya videos ti ubbing on dance...sapay 370 plus da", (My eyes were weak before but now it has become weaker...My fatigue has grown big due to the prolonged screen time...my migraine has become worse....even my

backache has worsened...It's good that I have maintenance that is why my BP is controlled...lack of sleep due to reading and watching videos for the kids about dance... moreover, i'm handling 370 students) (Teacher Respondent 2).

"Nerves, back, eyes, head, shoulders..lahat na po (all parts).. That feeling that your body has reached its limit but you still go on because you need to finish tasks, lessons and cater to students... plus other added paper works." (Teacher Respondent 3).

"...sumakit mata, ulo ken likod sunga itata lang napadas ko nga ag everyday b-complex vitamins", (my eyes, head and back aches so it is only now that I have experienced taking B-complex everyday) (Teacher Respondent 4).

"Hanakon makaturog ti 11 pm ta nasaney system ko maturog ti 12 MN or even until 2am ta masapol malpas learning packets," (I can't sleep at 11 pm because my system has already been accustomed with sleeping at 12 midnight or even until 2 am just to finish the learning packets) (Teacher Respondent 5)

"...one even forgets that he/she is married gapu ti bannog," (one even forgets that he/she is married because of tiredness) (Teacher respondent 6)

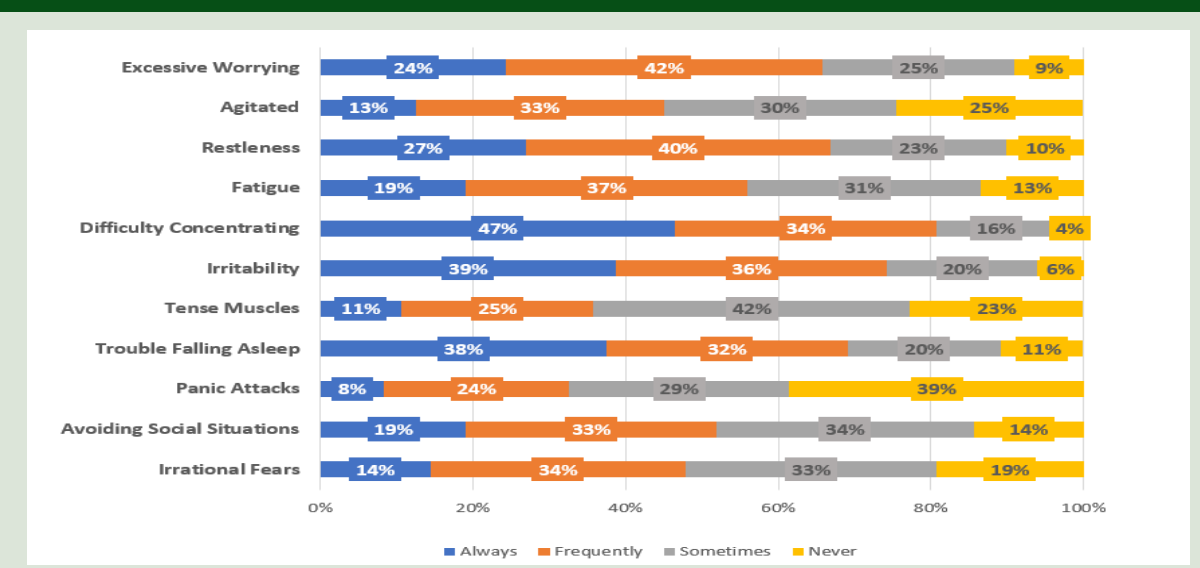
The Experience of Anxiety and Depression Among Students and Teachers

Alarmingly, Figure 6 shows that many students experience some signs and symptoms of anxiety, like difficulty concentrating, irritability, trouble falling or staying asleep, restlessness, and excessive worrying. This supports a qualitative study conducted in a Philippine Catholic university, which showed that anxiety and depression are severe effects of the pandemic on students (Cordero, 2022). Many talked about watching their parents worry about providing for the family needs. This is a recurrent response among the students, which may be essential in understanding their difficulty in focusing on their studies. One narrated how her single mother lost her only source of income, a school canteen. Another talked about his father, who lost his job and was the only breadwinner of their family. A single student mother narrated how, during the early



Figure 6

Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety as Experienced by BSU Students (n=919)



days of the pandemic, she would eat only once or twice a day so that her child could eat three times a day. Working students expressed sadness over losing income when shops were ordered to close. This result supports the findings of a study on the mental health of employees who suffered a job loss or income loss during the pandemic. According to the study, a situation of job loss or income loss might lead to perceived financial threat and stress, which have been found to be positively associated with depression, anxiety, mood disturbances, burnout, and suicidal ideation (de Miguel et al., 2022).

On the other hand, their experience of irritability seems to stem primarily from family members constantly asking them how they are doing with their school requirements. Some say they start feeling anxious when they cannot understand their lessons and are running out of time to comply with their requirements. One described his parents as suspicious, often asking him about what he was doing inside his room. Aside from financial insecurity and difficulty with their modules, most of them constantly worry about their family's health. The loss or decrease of family income, worries about possible COVID-19 infection, and growing tensions in family relationships played significant roles in the experience of anxiety among BSU students during the start of the pandemic. Indeed, the

World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by 25% during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The same report identified multiple factors, including loneliness, fear of infection, suffering and death for oneself and loved ones, grief after bereavement, and financial worries as stressors leading to anxiety and depression.

An example of a student's response is:

"This pandemic made me fear losing my loved ones. I was paranoid thinking that someone valuable to me might die. It made me stressed, school work and household chores add up to it. It was hard for me to follow their 'utos' (Instruction) specially when I was studying. 'Bat parang hirap na hirap kayo eh online na nga yan', 'dapat mataas ang grades mo kasi online na yan', 'bat di ka man lang naglilinis ng bahay?' (Your class is online so it is easier and your grades is high so you make time to clean the house). Those are samples of many lines like that which I needed to deal with" (Student Respondent).

Many students likewise experience signs and symptoms of depression, as shown in Figure 7. The feeling of sadness may be attributed to their lack of or limited opportunity to go out and



socialize with friends. One said learning is harder when you are not with your friends who make you laugh and stay happy. Another said she needs her friends and classmates to help her better understand her lessons. Their experience of boredom is not so much about having less or nothing to do, but more about not having the opportunity to go out and be with friends.

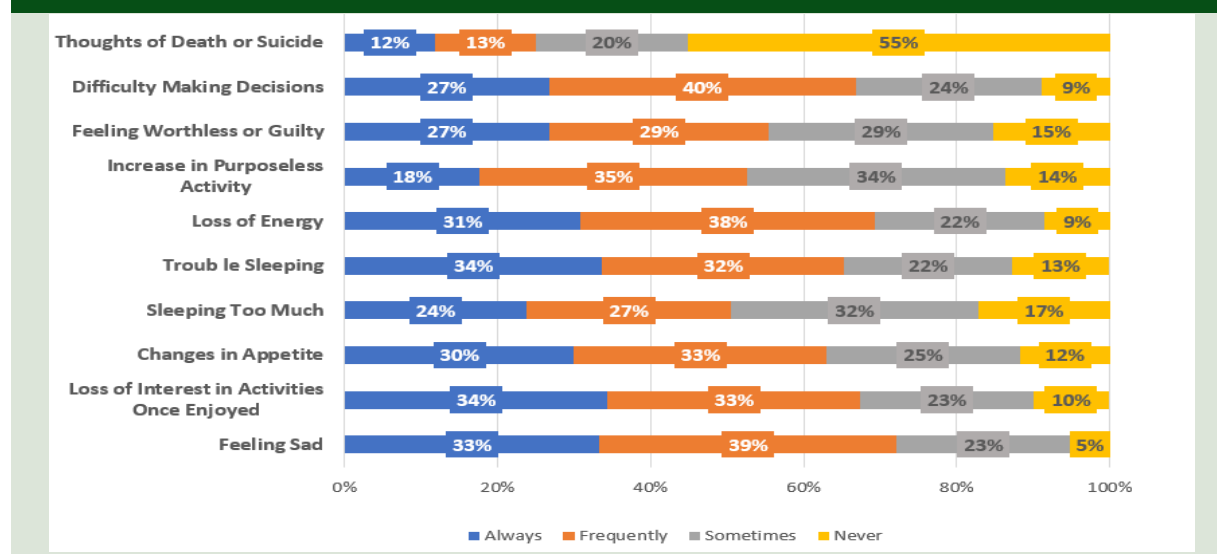
Moreover, some students living with relatives or alone in the city longed to be with their families. WHO reports that one primary explanation for the increase in anxiety and depression worldwide is the unprecedented stress caused by the social isolation resulting from the pandemic. In addition, the report further says were constraints on people's ability to work, seek support from loved ones and engage in their communities (WHO, 2022). On the other hand, a few revealed that during the pandemic, they preferred to be left alone or not be bothered. One talked about losing his confidence in interacting with others and that when opportunities came, he did not want to go out and spend time with family or friends. These are also experienced by some students who described themselves as outgoing or "happy-go-lucky" before the pandemic. Bedingfield, a writer in the United Kingdom, discussed how many people feel surprisingly different towards the reopening of society after months of lockdown. People were

expected to be ready to party. Instead, many valued solitary pursuits they accumulated during the lockdown. Many feel they have turned from extroverts to introverts (Bedingfield, 2021).

From students' self-ratings, it is alarming that around 59% of students have always thought of death or suicide. It must be noted though, that death may not necessarily mean taking one's life, it can be their own death or the death of loved ones due to COVID-19. In contrast, 18% and 19% of the student respondents felt guilty, worthless, and always slept too much (Figure 7). According to an article, guilt during the pandemic may stem from the fear of catching and transmitting the virus. The article further discusses how social media exposure may amplify feelings of guilt, citing a study in China that found frequent social media exposure is associated with a high prevalence of mental health problems during the COVID-19 break. The article cites a WHO report that points to social media as a source of misinformation overload that can amplify feelings of personal hyper-responsibility elicited by guilt during the quarantine period (Cavallera, 2020). Guilt and feelings of worthlessness may also be related to the students' claim that their parents lost their jobs or sources of income due to the pandemic. Furthermore, a multinational survey found that financial suffering was associated with all sleep and

Figure 7

Signs and Symptoms of Depression Experienced by BSU Students (n=919)



daytime problems, including nightmares and fatigue (Partinen et al., 2021).

Furthermore, some of the students claimed to have lost motivation and become lazy. Others said they lost interest in learning and thought of quitting or doubted their ability to finish their studies on time. Few talked about losing their confidence or developing low self-esteem. Worse, some students claimed to have thoughts of suicide. This loss of interest, self-doubts, and low self-esteem may be due to student experience of fatigue. A study involving Filipino college students revealed that, in addition to increased worry, tiredness or physical exhaustion, headaches, and body pain, decreased motivation, was also identified by the participants as manifestations of fatigue (Labrague & Ballard, 2021). This perceived laziness and lack of motivation may also be due to the difficulties they encounter in adapting to the new normal of learning. Another survey among Filipino students revealed that though the majority of them own computer devices and have access to the internet, they are not confident about the service integrity of their internet connection. Most respondents also expressed that virtual classes are less motivating due to the absence of physical connection to teachers and schoolmates, which could negatively impact the learning experience. They also voiced reservations about the conduciveness

of their home environment for online learning (Collado et al., 2022). Here are some of the statements of students:

“I feel like I want to hurt myself and I cry a lot without knowing the reason,” (Student respondent).

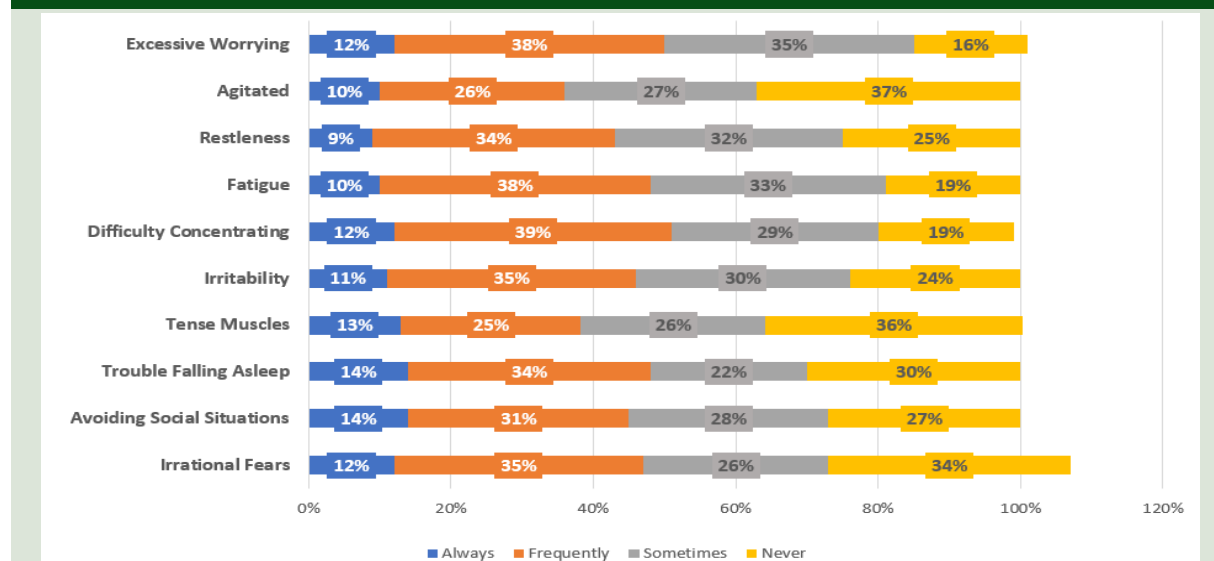
“Emotionally I feel hopeless and my heart is not at ease. I feel like I am stuck inside a dark room where I can't find the exit as my mind starts to overthink. I also find myself crying and wanting to release my frustration by wanting to hurt myself,” (Student respondent).

“The first semester was hard but I managed to get through it, but this second semester broke my heart and challenged me and even made a big negative impact on my mental health,” (Student Respondent).

On the other hand, BSU teachers displayed resiliency during this pandemic, as most of them sometimes and never experience the signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression (Figure 8). This result is consistent with a foreign study conducted among teachers, which used the Teaching Anxiety and Preparedness, Social Economical, Contamination, Xenophobia, and Total Sections and obtained a result of mild (Delagado-Gallegos et al., 2021). The same study learned that Teaching Anxiety and Preparedness results correlated with having an academic

Figure 8

Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety as Experienced by BSU Teachers (n=129)



degree, hence showing that having a higher degree (higher preparedness) could indicate less stress. Note that participants in this study are mostly MA/MS and Ph.D. holders. Nonetheless, many teachers claim to frequently and/or always experience some other signs and symptoms of anxiety (Figure 8).

Qualitative data points to work-related concerns and fear of getting infected with COVID-19. Avoiding social situations, for instance, is part of the new norm consistent with prevailing health protocols. Fears and worrying are likewise expected with the current pandemic. Some teachers talked about uncertainties resulting from this pandemic. Others claimed to get anxious whenever they browse their social media and read about rising cases of COVID-19. A similar study among public school teachers in Cebu identified the teacher’s awareness of the COVID-19 threat in the workplace as one of the challenges in the new normal of Philippine education (Jamon & Boholano, 2021). Many teachers likewise reported experiencing tensed muscles from prolonged sitting while attending their google classrooms, doing online classes, and joining online meetings and webinars.

Perhaps the most alarming, however, is that the following figure reveals that some teachers have thoughts of death or suicide as seen in Figure 9. Qualitative data, however, does not

yield a possible factor or cause. This result needs to be explored with a more in-depth approach. Similar to the students, the thoughts of death may be related to dying due to COVID-19 infection.

Depression symptoms among teachers are more serious for 7% to 12% of the teachers though 32%-40% of the teachers admitted to frequent feelings of sadness, loss of energy, increase in purposeless activities, and sleeping too much (Figure 9).

Coping During a Pandemic

Amidst the experience of stress, anxiety, and depression during this pandemic is the grit to survive. BSU faculty and students were able to find ways to ease and overcome the adverse effects of the pandemic on their mental health or sustain positive mental health. Figure 10 shows the coping mechanisms of students. Engaging in audio arts is the top coping mechanism, followed by sleep.

Gadgets and internet access became important aids for coping during this pandemic, from learning to working to entertainment. This observation is particularly true for BSU students. Most of them listen to music, binge-watch movies/television shows and surf social media, one student said.

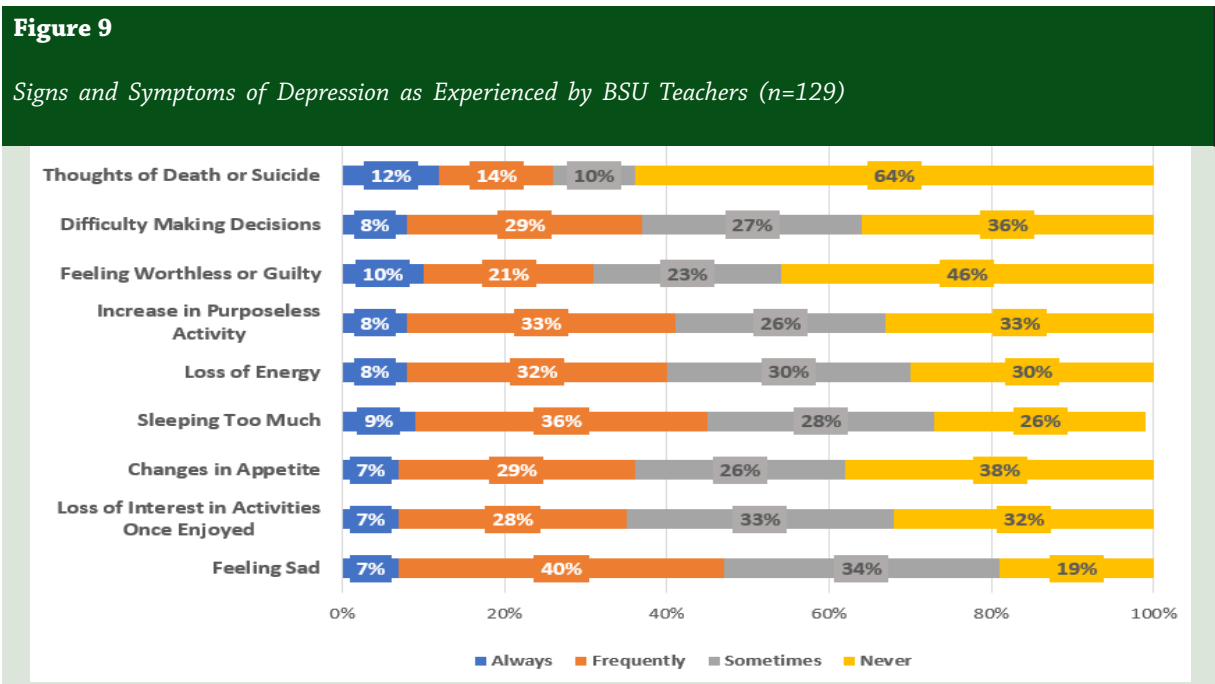
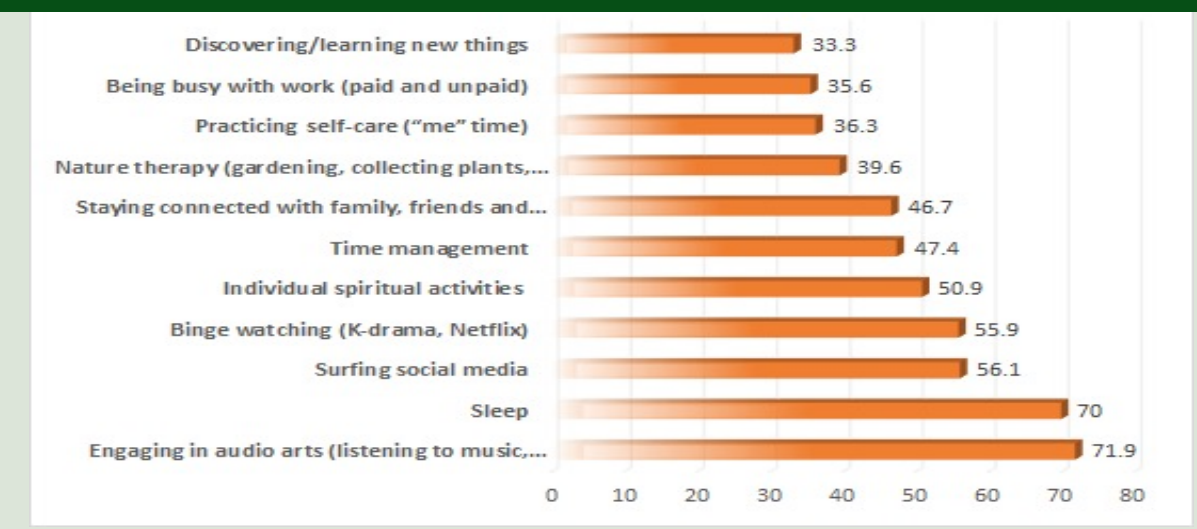


Figure 10*Top Coping Mechanisms of BSU Students During the Pandemic*

"Umiiyak po magisa sa gabi tapos masaya sa harap ng iba, minsan din po di ako nakakatulog tapos naghahyper po ako sa mga gawaing bahay. Ayoko pong tinatanong ako kung okay lang po ba ako kasi bigla na lang ako maiiyak na hindi ko alam kung bakit, pero hindi ko po sinasaktan yung sarili ko nanonood na lang ako ng mga motivational videos para maging okay po ako," (I cry alone at night but I am happy when I'm in front of others. Sometimes I cannot sleep at night and become hyper in doing house chores. I don't want others asking me if I'm alright because that makes me suddenly cry without knowing the reason behind my tears. I do not do self-harm and I watch motivational movies to help me become okay) (Student respondent).

Another student said,

"Pandemic challenged my mental health because I did not know that I can feel such sadness even when staying at home, which is my comfort zone. I like to stay home rather than spend time outside because it makes me feel free but at this time it triggered my mind because all the activities happening inside my head are eating me, not to mention the loads of activities the school is handling for us. It is a battle between me and myself." (student respondent)

This result calls attention to the clamor for a faster internet connection in our country. At the same time, the need to filter out fake news or false information, especially in social media, becomes even more urgent. Some students and teachers identified fake news as one of their stressors. A survey among adolescents on social media coping strategies and how it mediates anxiety and loneliness revealed that the use of social media among anxious participants is a way to actively seek a manner to adapt to the current situation and, to a lesser extent, to keep in touch with friends and family (Cauberghe, 2021). Also, the study found that participants who were feeling lonely were more inclined to use social media to cope with lacking social contact. However, social media use was not significantly related to their being happy. It is a constructive coping strategy for adolescents to deal with anxiety during the COVID-19 quarantine (Ibid). Another study suggests that the use of social media and the internet is a form of escapism. Adolescents from India, Malaysia, Mexico, and the UK who scored highly on gaming addiction, compulsive internet use, and social media use also reported high scores of depression, loneliness, escapism, poor sleep quality, and anxiety related to the pandemic (Fernandez et al., 2020). There are BSU students (n=166) who identified gaming as a form of coping.

Sleep was identified as a coping mechanism by a significant number of students. Sleeping may



be considered an avoidant form of coping. This coping mechanism is considered maladaptive since the stressor is not actually addressed but ignored. Fortunately, some students identified time management as a way of coping. This result may help explain why most BSU students can finish their subjects at the end of the semester despite the many stressors they experience during this pandemic.

It is worth noting that staying connected to family and friends is not the primary coping mechanism of students. This result may be a concern since several studies pointed to the close link between social support and mental health. Cevik and Yildiz (2017) found that adolescents receiving support from parents, teachers, and peers in problematic academic or social relationships significantly predict adolescents' positivity. Social support can help them have positive considerations of their lives and be optimistic about the future and solve their problems.

For BSU teachers, on the other hand, maintaining their relationship or connection with family and friends is an important coping mechanism (Figure 11). This result may explain why most of them were able to sustain resiliency despite the stresses/anxiety/depression brought about by the pandemic. According to Ozbay et al. (2007), high-quality positive social support enhances resilience to stress, helps protect against

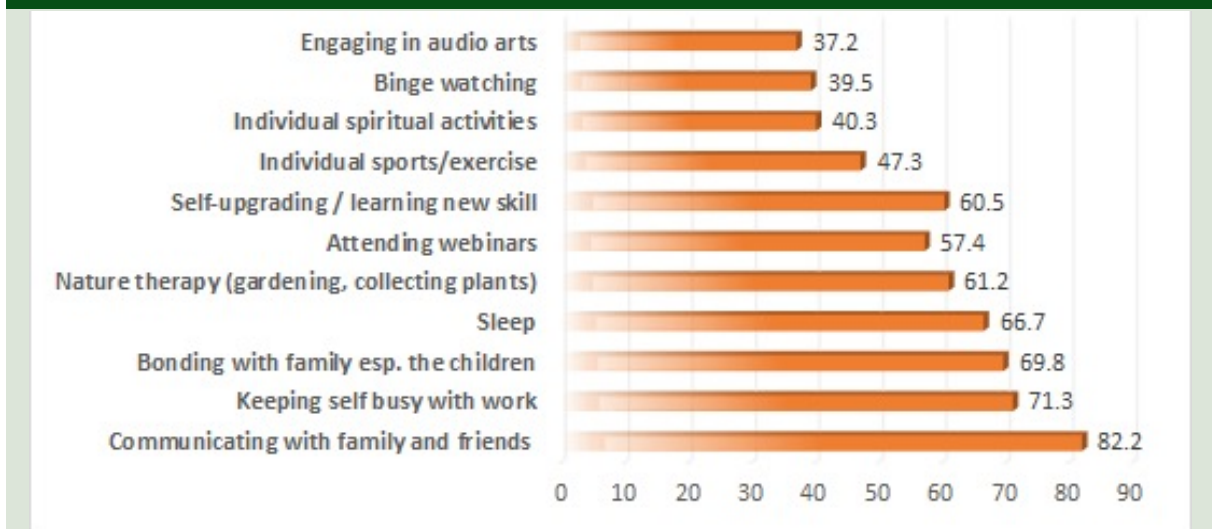
developing trauma-related psychopathology, decreases the functional consequences of trauma-induced disorders, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and reduces medical morbidity and mortality.

Interestingly, while factors directly related to their work as teachers have been identified as stressors, being busy with work also became their coping mechanism. These results are understandable since most respondents are in the stage of life when family and career are central to one's life. As with many others, gardening has become very helpful during this pandemic. Some respondents said that gardening is a very productive way to pass the time. Furthermore, they say it relieves their mind from the stresses of life and refreshes their focus when they return to their work.

Accordingly, the pandemic also brought positive impacts, not only negative impacts, on the health and well-being of the respondents. Among the positive impacts are: (1) having quality time with family, (2) deepened relationship with God, (3) self-reflection and self-care, (4) developed character strength, (5) learning new skills, (6) more time to exercise, (7) improved decision-making skills, (8) more time to rest and (9) more family time. The pandemic has redefined the usage of time and connection in this time of social distancing for all education stakeholders.

Figure 11

Top Coping Mechanisms of BSU Teachers During the Pandemic



Conclusions

Teachers and students both experienced some symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression as a result of the pandemic and the community quarantine. Teachers appeared to be more resilient as they improved in their experience of stress towards the latter part of the pandemic. They also seldom experienced the signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression. On the other hand, students showed no improvement when comparing their stress levels from the beginning of the community quarantine to the latter part of the quarantine covered by the study. Furthermore, they experienced many signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression. BSU students need a more sustained mental health program throughout the pandemic and into the new normal. The study further concludes that most students employ coping mechanisms that involve gadget use and internet surfing, which tend to discourage them from more interaction with their family relations. Teachers, on the other hand, resort to family and peer support.

Recommendations

From the analysis of the data, the study recommends the following: 1) sustain mental health breaks for both teachers and students; 2) strengthen internet connection within the university premises for use by both teachers and students who may opt to stay within the premises for internet access; 3) reinforce positive attitudes and thoughts in both teachers and students through wellness activities; 4) help students learn better coping mechanisms that will allow them to nurture themselves and their family relationships; and 5) orient parents on helping their children during the new normal. For future studies, the following are recommended: 1) inferential statistical techniques may be used to differentiate further the stressors of students and teachers as well as their coping strategies; and 2) underlying factors of coping strategies may be identified to develop a coping model in higher education institutions.

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