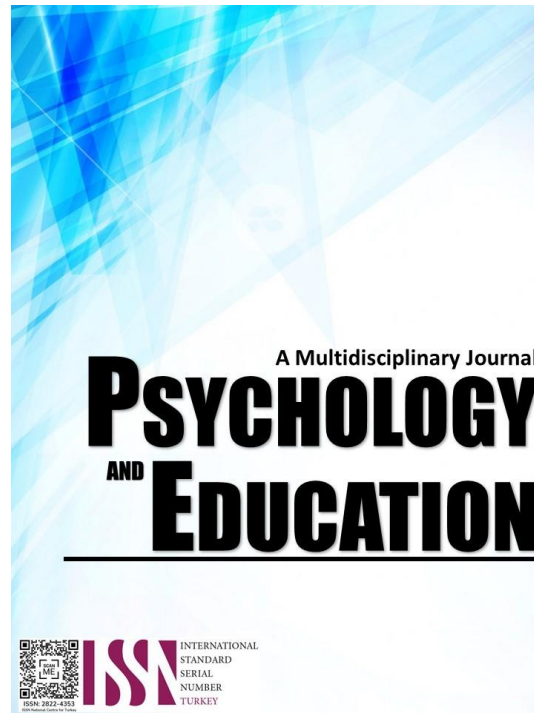


**“I AM PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY AND
MENTALLY STRESSED”: FROM THE VOICES
OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY
SCHOOL HEADS**



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“I Am Physically, Emotionally and Mentally Stressed”: From the Voices of the Elementary and Secondary School Heads

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Abstract

This study explored the phenomenon of the school heads handling stress. Specifically, it examined their lived experiences with their job, the common stressors, how they take the stress; and the best practices which were drawn from managing stress. This study was conducted using a face-to-face interview with the sixteen school heads with experience in handling stress. After careful data analysis using Colaizzi's method, findings revealed four major themes: *instructional leadership*, *administrative management*, *stressors*, and *coping mechanisms*, along with 14 core ideas and 183 significant statements. The CPs' encounter with stress and how they handle it provides some implications: noting that the major responsibility of a school head is to conduct instructional supervision through classroom observation where technical assistance is being provided; stress is normal, and it is already a part of everyone's life, their experiences vary and depends on their situation; novice school heads tend to struggle during their adjustment period; they still need to express their concerns about their job to their immediate superior and the superior's support should always be present and above all, faith in GOD should always be kept in everything anybody does.

Keywords: *lived experiences, school heads, handling stress, instructional leadership, administrative management, stressors, coping mechanisms*

Introduction

Successful people can manage stress despite all the adversities that they are facing. Stress is a part of our daily lives, and success lies in those who remain resilient against all odds. Increasingly placed under scrutiny, school administrators are under unprecedented pressure. They must work in dynamic, rapidly changing environments and are expected to adapt while remaining composed and cheerful. School administrators are expected to understand and work harmoniously with all stakeholders. According to Byrne-Jimenez and Orr (2012), school administrators must operate in multiple dimensions at once, moving from individual capacity to group empowerment to whole school improvement. Thus, many school administrators are exhausted from their job demands (Oplatka, 2017; Maxwell & Riley, 2016).

Both male and female secondary school heads in Pakistan were occupationally stressed by work overload, role conflict, strenuous working conditions, little political reasons pressure under participation, and unprofitability (Hussain, Jumani, & Suleman, 2018). Similarly, in Finland, a study result showed that the primary sources of stress were workload, interpersonal conflicts, a lack of resources, and internal pressures. Moreover, the results revealed the importance of social support and coping for principals' occupational well-being (Elomaa et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, stress is a normal part of the careers

of the school heads. Josep et al. (2020) found that school principals experience administrative stress due to their work and the demands of academic stakeholders. As a result, they performed their duties poorly, were at risk of ill health, and became demoralized. Their stress tolerance levels were currently low; thus, they needed to learn various stress-coping skills to improve their job performance.

In the Schools Division Office of Cotabato, there have been instances among school heads in Alamada who struggle in their call of duty due to the stress that they had experienced. Learned from casual interviews with them, they expressed that because of stress, their health and performance are being affected.

The thought of digging deeper into what causes the school heads' stress, their feelings, and how their instructional and administrative functions were affected motivated the researcher to conduct this phenomenological investigation.

Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of secondary school heads in handling stress. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the school heads concerning their job?
2. What are the common stressors experienced by school heads, and how do they handle stress?

3. What best practices of school heads can be drawn from how they handle stress?

Methodology

This chapter contains the methods used in this phenomenological study. Specifically, the following are included: research design, sampling design, the role of the researcher, conversational partners, data sources, instrumentation, data gathering procedure, face-to-face interview, data analysis, the trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design. This qualitative phenomenological research aimed to explore the lived experiences of the school heads in handling stress. In simple terms, phenomenology can be defined as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who experienced it (Teherani et al., 2015). The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how the actors in a situation perceive them. Therefore, this study explicitly focused on how the school heads handle stress.

Sampling Design

This study used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling that is selected based on the characteristics of a population and the study's objective (Crossman, 2020). This was the primary choice for the sampling design since the CPs are purposively selected by the researcher, and they are the school heads assigned in Alamada who have experienced stress and how they handle it. Other concerns by the CPs were excluded.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of the conversational partners. It is not an easy task, as it involves asking people to talk about things that may be very personal to them (Austin & Sutton, 2015). Additionally, in qualitative studies, the researcher is considered an instrument of the data collection

(Bahrami et al., 2015; Wa-Mbaleka, 2019; Roller, 2019; Xu & Storr, 2012). This means the data were mediated through this human instrument rather than inventories, questionnaires, or machines.

In my research, I played as a good listener, transcriber, encoder, translator, interpreter, analyzer of data, and provider of ideas. These came from the responses of the CPs, and I dug deep to get insights and relevant life lessons, particularly concerning the experiences of the school heads in handling stress. I also did the bracketing process wherein I set aside all my internal beliefs, ego, experiences, understanding, and assumptions. Moreover, I bracketed out all external suppositions by investigating the phenomenon in a pure and natural state.

Conversational Partners

There were 16 conversational partners for this qualitative study who were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) must be a school head; (b) school head assigned in Alamada North and West Districts; (c) at least 30 years of age, and; (d) have spent at least one year as school head. CPs with at least one year of experience as a school head can still provide more interesting views about stress. Also, the similarities and differences in their experiences in handling stress. Those who did not meet the criteria were excluded as CPs for the researcher to achieve the study's objectives relevantly.

Data Sources

The primary data source for the study was the researcher who did all the tasks in recording, transcribing, translating, and listening to all the responses from the CPs. Moreover, the answers of the CPs were the primary data that played a big part in the study. Furthermore, the observation of the researcher to the school heads was an essential source for this study since their gestures meant a lot and may provide valuable hints that might add to the results of this study. The secondary sources for this study were the data from the internet and other related literature. These secondary sources were the journals and articles related to these studies that were important to guide the researcher.

Instrumentation

When collecting in-depth interview data, the main data collection instrument was the researcher himself. The researcher observed, took notes, talked to people, and conducted interviews (ATLAS, 2020). I conducted an

in-depth interview and used a semi-structured interview guide that the experts validated. This list of questions asked to the CPs during the interview consisted of three main questions. The first and second main questions had five sub-questions, while the third main question had two with twelve questions asked to the CPs.

The last part was a wrap-up question should the CPs want to add anything or wish to share something about their experiences in handling stress in their job.

Data Gathering Procedure

Everything started with the approval of the graduate school dean to conduct the study. Next, permission was asked from the Schools Division Office of Cotabato, where the teacher-researcher is employed. A letter of permission to conduct the study was then handed to the public school district supervisor where the school heads are assigned.

To get important information for the study, minimum health protocols were strictly observed. I presented the informed consent form first and let the conversational partners freely sign the agreements. Further, the guide questions were given to the CPs a few minutes before the interview so that they could prepare their responses during the actual interview. Then, I asked permission from the CPs to record the interview. Lastly, the actual interview was conducted with some translations in the local language for the CPs to express their views sincerely and with follow-up questions to explain their views further.

To complete the transcription of the interviews, I incorporated some notes taken from the CP's body language, tone of voice, expressions, and gestures following a particular question. Moreover, to ensure that the transcription was correct, valid, and reliable, I met the CPs again so that they could verify the interview transcriptions. Furthermore, they were instructed that they had the freedom to delete or enhance something in the interview transcripts, and I also requested them to affix their signatures if they agreed with it.

Face-to-Face Interview

I informed the conversational partners about the face-to-face interview to provide in-depth responses to questions. Each interview did not take more than an hour to sustain the comfort and interest of the CPs. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the CPs. The CPs' most convenient time was followed for the interview. I reached each CP in their respective

place regarding the interview venue. Above all, minimum health protocols were observed.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness is one-way researchers can persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refined the concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability.

Credibility. The research credibility is determined when co-researchers or readers are confronted with the experience; they can recognize it. I ensured triangulation was done by asking the same questions from the various CPs at different times and analyzing data through theoretical frameworks. I also asked the CPs to review their transcribed responses by verifying statements, filling any gaps, and affixing their signatures for confirmation.

Transferability. Transferability is the ability of a study to be applied in other conditions and contexts. The researcher cannot know the sites that may wish to transfer the findings; however, the researcher is responsible for providing thick descriptions. Those who seek to disseminate the findings to their site can judge transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study considered and stored data according to future references to demonstrate transferability.

Dependability. When readers can examine the research process, they can better judge the dependability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For dependability, the research adviser, reader, and panelists examined the activities in data gathering, data analysis, and the study results.

Confirmability. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are achieved. To certify the confirmability of the study, the neutrality of the researcher was ensured.

Ethical Considerations

The protection of human subjects by applying appropriate ethical principles is vital in all research studies. In a qualitative study, ethical considerations have a particular resonance due to the in-depth nature of the study process (Arifin, 2018). To ensure ethical research, this study followed and respected the

principles of research ethics from the Belmont Report (2010). These principles include respect for a person's autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, informed consent, confidentiality and data protection, integrity, and conflict of interest.

Respect for a person's autonomy. I made sure that all the CPs are willing to participate in this study and were free from coercion.

Beneficence and non-maleficence. To ensure these to the CPs, the benefits of this study were maximized and the potential risk of harm was prioritized. This was done through anonymity and data protection.

Justice. Equal treatment for all CPs was observed. Thus, respect was always shown. The CPs were informed of their rights and the research purpose was comprehensively explained.

Informed Consent. This document was very important to be given to the CPs so that they would be well informed of what the study was about and that their decision was entirely free from coercion.

Confidentiality and data protection. I always protected the identities of the CPs. Confidentiality of their responses was also observed as stated in the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Instead of their names, they were given codes to keep their identity.

Integrity. This study was designed and reviewed to ensure its integrity. All of the responses of the CPs were reviewed and examined before they were used for the study. The data of the study employed bracketing and strictly assured its authenticity. All references from this study were also cited.

Conflict of interest. I assured that no conflict of interest occurred in making the study to ensure the independence of the research. I only committed myself to make this study worthy of the readers' interest.

Results

This chapter presents the outcome of the qualitative analysis taken from the answers to the research questions. The results are presented based on the emergent themes, sub- themes, core ideas, and categorization.

Profile of the Conversational Partners

Presented in Matrix 1 are the findings of the study

generated from the thematic analysis. Matrix 1 shows the profile of the conversational partners involved during the in- depth interview. There were 5 male and 11 female school heads. Their lengths of service were varied, ranging from one year in service as school head up to 21 years. In terms of their positions, 5 were Teacher In-charge, 3 were Head Teacher I, 5 were Head Teacher III, and 3 were Principal I.

The ideas expressed by the conversational partners were used to sort out the insights related to the salient results of their lived experiences as school heads with stress. To uphold confidentiality, code numbers were given to the respective conversational partners.

The first conversational partner is RBA-SH1, a courageous Head Teacher III, female with 15 years in service as school head. A significant experience she talked about was that she had mixed emotions when she was appointed as a school head, saying, *"I asked myself if I could be able to portray the role and functions of a school head."* She witnessed a parent-to-teacher conflict regarding stress at work when suddenly the parent appeared to confront the child who hurt his child. After emotions cooled down, she settled the dispute between the teacher and the parent and said that the teacher and the parent apologized and shook hands, then no conflict followed.

The second conversational partner is RBA-SH2, a knowledgeable Teacher In- Charge, and a novice school head. Since she is a novice school head, she is still in a period of adjustment. She shared her good and bad experiences as school head, saying, *"We are almost at the same age level, so we have a common understanding. The negative experience is since we are at almost the same age level and have a common understanding, they are trying that if you have this kind of decision, they would question you and instead, insist something they wanted."*

The third conversational partner is RBA-SH3, a cheerful Head Teacher III who is now in her 11th year as a school head. Her unforgettable experience was when she crawled into her office due to the war in her school's nearby barangay. She expressed, *"I got out of school and drove my motorcycle, and the bullet passed over my head. I kept on bowing my head. Along the way, a parent seemed pale and asked for help, so I rescued her and rode with me to escape the life-threatening danger we were into. All I did was to pray for our safety and salvation."*

Matrix 1. Profile of the Conversational Partners

Code Number	Age	Sex	Teaching Position	Length of Service
RBA-SH1	48	Female	Head Teacher III	15
RBA-SH2	38	Female	Teacher In-Charge	1
RBA-SH3	56	Female	Head Teacher III	11
RBA-SH4	41	Male	Principal I	18
RBA-SH5	57	Female	Head Teacher I	8
RBA-SH6	41	Male	Head Teacher I	12
RBA-SH7	56	Male	Head Teacher III	31
RBA-SH8	44	Female	Head Teacher I	4
RBA-SH9	46	Female	Head Teacher III	18
RBA-SH10	33	Male	Teacher In-Charge	1
RBA-SH11	58	Female	Head Teacher III	6
RBA-SH12	57	Female	Teacher In-Charge	12
RBA-SH13	33	Male	Teacher In-Charge	3
RBA-SH14	50	Male	Principal I	21
RBA-SH15	40	Female	Principal I	7
RBA-SH16	45	Female	Teacher In-Charge	1

The fourth conversational partner is RBA-SH4, a very supportive and dedicated Principal I who is now in his 18th year as school head. He wants the efforts of his teacher to be paid off. In his previous school, he was able to help the teachers be promoted up to the Teacher III position. He then added, *"It does not look good if you, as a school head, look at the teachers' profile and all your teachers are only in Teacher I position. It is one of the functions of the school heads to encourage the teachers to upgrade their profession through obtaining their Master's or doctorate."*

The fifth conversational partner is RBA-SH5, a very soft-spoken and religious Head Teacher I who is now in her 8th year as a school head. When she transferred to a new school, she was able to spend her money as much as ₱30,000 to make up for the backlogs of the school's previous school head. She further lamented, *"I even have delinquent teachers who do not follow my orders. But despite these unfortunate situations, I am trying to understand them."*

The sixth conversational partner is RBA-SH6, a kind

Head Teacher I and is in his 12th year as a school head. He has cooperative teachers but neglectful parents. He is pouring his hard work into school, but then people around trespass the school and steal flowers and teachers' property. They even destroy the walls to be able to penetrate the classrooms and steal. He bewailed, *"They use the school's toilet as the community's common toilet, and there are times that they do not flush it, so it is gross. I get a little bit discouraged with these bad experiences."*

The seventh conversational partner is RBA-SH7 is a jolly Head Teacher III and is in his 31st year as a school head. His school is far-flung and he needs to cross a river and through a narrow hanging bridge to reach the school. Regarding his experiences as a school head, he experienced confrontation with his teachers and he usually feels weak and has headaches when he is under stressful conditions. When talking about managing stressful situations, he added, *"I leave everything to GOD and always talk to my brother whenever I have problems in school."*

The eighth conversational partner is RBA-SH8, an active Head Teacher I and is in her 4th year as a school head and with. She had a tragic incident in her previous school. She had witnessed a tragic incident when an incident happened when the husband of one of her teachers was stabbed. It was very traumatic. This reason was enough for her to transfer to another school for safety reasons. Despite this miserable and stressful experience she had in her previous school, she was moving on to her new school, which according to her, *"I was praised by the stakeholders of the school since, in just a year after my appointment here as a school head, and they have seen the transformation."*

The ninth conversational partner is RBA-SH9, a joyful and dedicated Head Teacher III who is in her 18th year as a school head. She said that she focuses on teaching and classroom activities and emphasized that in their job as a school head, 70 percent belongs to instructional duties and 30 percent to administrative functions. Also, she expressed, *"I am proud that with my dedication and being punctual in submitting reports, especially the liquidation reports, our school received 60 percent PBB or the performance-based bonus while the rest of the schools in the district received 50 percent only of their salary as their PBB."*

The tenth conversational partner is RBA-SH10, a confident Teacher In-Charge who is in his 2nd year as school head. He is not an authoritarian. He does not

pressure his teachers about their job. His age level with his teachers is almost the same, so they have a common understanding. On the other hand, he has the negative side of his experience as a new school head and said, *"When I call for a meeting for the parents, only a few attend. It is a painful experience, but it is challenging for me to encourage the parents to participate in school. One thing more, the signal in school and in the community is very weak to none, so most parents receive our announcement delayed."*

The eleventh conversational partner is RBA-SH11, a motherly Head Teacher III and is in her 6th year as a school head. She is the immediate superior of the researcher. She addresses each problem immediately. Every concern is dealt with accordingly through organizing a meeting. She added, *"Stress is natural. It always comes. When you are under stressful times, just try to relax and then meditate. Ask help from other persons whom you know can help you much."*

The twelfth conversational partner was RBA-SH12 is a God-fearing Teacher In- Charge and she is in her 12th year as a school head. She is very positive in life and always prays to GOD all her worries. There was a point in her job as a school head when she had regrets because of the horrible road from home to school. She even had experience walking from school to house, and along the way, there were sharp stones. She arrived home at 8:00 in the evening. When asked what she did when she almost gave up on her job as a school head, she said, *"Talk to God through prayer. If you are mad, just pray. Just ask GOD for guidance and wisdom."*

The thirteenth conversational partner is RBA-SH13 is an optimistic Teacher In- Charge and is in his 3rd year as a school head. He enjoys working because of the active participation of the stakeholders in schools when he calls for a meeting or a clean and green activity; the stakeholders are always in school to help. On the wrong side, he thinks that he needs to work on his relationship with his teachers. He said, *"I am having a hard time developing a harmonious relationship with my teachers. Their treatment is sometimes unacceptable."*

The fourteenth conversational partner is RBA-SH14, an accommodating Principal I and he is in his 21st year as a school head. He is thankful for all the opportunities given to him. He was able to go places that he had never been to before. Aside from enjoying the trips, he learned a lot and believes that experience

is still the best teacher. He added, *"I do not even think of regretting because I know I am strong, and there are many opportunities given to me as a school head."*

The fifteenth conversational partner is RBA-SH15, an energetic Principal I and she is in her 7th year as a school head. She embraces her job wholeheartedly and is happy to become one because she wants to expand her scope of duties and not just be contented to work within the four corners of the classroom. Instead, she wants to help not just the teachers but also the school and the stakeholders. Despite her efforts, she added, *"In my new school, it is only now that I experience having a delinquent and dishonest teacher. She just comes to school whenever she wants and she has not reported for two months already, so we filed a complaint against her."*

Lastly, the sixteenth conversational partner is RBA-SH16, an amiable Teacher In- Charge and she is in her 1st year as a school head. She is still in an adjustment period, and with all the preparations of the school for the progressive face-to-face classes, she experienced burnout. To escape from burnout, she shared, *"I would sit down, relax and pray and share with my teacher the problems encountered in school so that we would solve them together."*

Categorization of Emergent Themes

After the in-depth interviews, the audio-recorded exchanges were transcribed, translated, and analyzed. A cross-analysis was used in comparing the core ideas to present information. This was adopted from the guide written by Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) entitled, *A Guide to Conducting Consensual Qualitative Research*, which used the three classifications of responses: general, typical, and variant.

The first classification is *General*, which means that the core idea applies to 50 percent and up of the cases. Next is *Typical*, suggesting the concept applies to 26 percent – 49 percent of the cases. Lastly, *Variant* means that it applies to less than 25 percent of the cases (cited by Goodrich & Luke, 2019).

In categorizing the information, the themes were presented. Each of the themes has core ideas elicited from the responses of the CPs. Another column was included in the matrix showing the frequency of the responses, which became the basis for the categorization.

Themes

There were 183 significant statements and 14 core ideas framed in a matrix. Matrix 2 shows 4 major themes and 14 core ideas that emerged from the subjective experiences of the conversational partners, specifically their lived experiences as school heads in handling stress. The core ideas and categorization were also presented.

Matrix 2. *Themes, Core Ideas, and Categorization of the Lived Experiences of School Heads in Handling Stress*

Themes	Core Ideas	Categorization
Instructional Leadership	Technical Assistance	General
	Classroom Observation	General
	Curriculum Development	Variant
Administrative Management	Personnel Management and Development	Typical
	Relationship with Stakeholders	Variant
	Implementation of Programs and Projects	General
Stressors	Heavy Workloads	Typical
	Conflict with Stakeholders	General
	Dealing with Scarce Resources	General
	Physical, Mental and Emotional Effects	General
	Recreational Activities	General
	Stress Management	Typical
Coping Mechanisms	Open Communication to Resolve Issues and Conflicts	General
	Strengthening faith Through prayer	General

The themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews are Instructional Leadership, Administrative Management, Stressors, and Coping Mechanisms.

Instructional Leadership

The first theme that emerged was instructional leadership. This has the core ideas including *Technical Assistance, Classroom Observation and Curriculum Development*. These were extracted from the CP's

responses to their lived experiences in instructional supervision.

Technical Assistance

This core idea was formulated from the significant statements expressed by the conversational partners.

The CPs are doing technical assistance. As mentioned by the conversational partners, they give technical assistance to the teachers to improve their teaching strategies and generate learning from the learners. The CPs accounts are as follows:

As a school head, my instructional function is first I give technical assistance to my teachers on their teaching skills and management in school. If I provide technical assistance, I do it constructively. I let them realize what needs to be improved in their teaching to be the ones to provide a remedy. (RBA-SH5)

The first thing to do is to give technical assistance to the teachers. You check the teachers' forms first if they are accomplishing it. (RBA-SH7)

When it comes to instructional functions, I give technical assistance to my teachers to improve the teaching and learning process and introduce new and innovative modes of instruction to achieve quality learning outcomes. (RBA-SH8)

As a school head or instructional leader, I provide support and guidance in establishing the best practices in teaching through technical assistance. (RBA-SH14)

First and foremost, I must give technical assistance. The teachers are open to corrections and new learning. (RBA-SH16).

The core idea of *Technical Assistance* is classified as *General* since 50 percent of the conversational partners articulated this answer.

Classroom Observation

Conducting instructional supervision through classroom observation is their major responsibility. This is done for the teachers to maintain their readiness in teaching and enhance their teaching strategies, which may result in the quality performance of the learners. The CPs' responses are as follows:

When it comes to instructional functions, I conduct classroom observations. I also introduce educational programs and projects for equitable opportunities for learners. (RBA-SH8)

During classroom observation, I focus on teaching and classroom activities. I observe how the teachers teach their pupils. I guide them and make sure that the activities they give to their pupils are aligned with the lesson's objectives. (RBA- SH9)

As a school head, instructional supervision is the priority. If I conduct classroom observation, I inform my teachers ahead of time so that their efforts will not be wasted. (RBA-SH10)

As a school head, you should support the implementation of high-quality standards through instructional supervision, resulting in a higher level of achievement from the learners. (RBA-SH14)

As the teacher-in-charge, I have to assist the teachers through classroom observation. I teach them and coach them so that they will always be ready to teach their pupils. (RBA-SH16)

The core idea of *classroom observation* is classified as *General* since 56 percent of the conversational partners articulated this answer.

Curriculum Development

Curriculum development and implementation are some of the school heads' functions that need to be fulfilled. Curriculum development and implementation improve instructional activities and practices to increase student engagement in learning and student achievement. The CPs stated the following:

We have to implement the school curriculum. We find a conducive environment for teaching. (RBA-SH2)

One of my instructional duties is to develop a standardized curriculum, assess teachers' teaching methods, and monitor pupils' achievements. (RBA-SH3)

The instructional functions of a school head include improving curriculum instruction and physical management. These are the major functions of a school head. (RBA-SH4)

The core idea of *curriculum development* is classified as *Variant* since only 19 percent conversational partners articulated this answer.

Administrative Management

The second theme that emerged was administrative management. This has the core ideas, including *Personnel Management and Development*,

Relationship with Stakeholders, and Implementation of Programs and Projects. These are extracted from the CP's responses on their lived experiences in managing the school's resources.

Personnel Management and Development

The core idea of *Personnel Management and Development* was formulated from the significant statements by the conversational partners. This means that managing the teachers is vital for attaining the school's vision, mission, and goals. The CPs verbalized:

As a school head, several teachers were promoted under my leadership. This is what I am hoping for when I am in school. It is the only thing I can give them in appreciation of their efforts in school. (RBA-SH4)

One good experience I have as a school head is how I manage my teachers. They are all cooperative. With this, I am giving them all their needs in school. They always have my support since I always have their cooperation. (RBA-SH6)

I have a good relationship with my teachers. I am not an authoritarian. I do not pressure them in their duties in school as we are almost at the same age level. (RBA-SH10)

In managing the school, the number one should be the personnel. I get the opportunity to know the attitude and skills of the teachers. It's nice to know them well to understand how to deal with them appropriately. (RBA-SH11)

In less than two years as a school head, I have had a good relationship with my teachers. We have a good connection though we are still adjusting to each other. It feels great if they are submissive and very supportive. (RBA-SH16)

The core idea of *Personnel Management and Development* is classified as *Typical* since 31 percent of the conversational partners articulated this answer.

Relationship with Stakeholders

The core idea of *Relationship with Stakeholders* was formulated on the significant statements expressed by the conversational partners. Behind the school's success lies the willingness and dedication of the stakeholders. The CPs' valuable answers are as follows:

So far, my best experience is having a good

relationship with the stakeholders. We have a harmonious relationship. I let them feel that we are a family. It is difficult to work when you have a gap with each other. (RBA-SH3)

It feels good to have the support of our parents in school. Every time we ask for their help, they are always there. It may not be 100 percent, but at least they give significant contributions to the school. (RBA-SH13)

As a school head, having a smooth relationship with the stakeholders will result in the attainment of the school goal, which is the learning outcome. (RBA-SH14)

The core idea *Relationship with Stakeholders* is classified as *Variant* since 19 percent of the conversational partners articulated this answer.

Implementation of Programs and Projects

Thirty percent of the job of a school head is to implement programs, activities, and projects stipulated in their school's SIP (school improvement plan) or the AIP (annual implementation plan). The CPs' salient points are as follows:

All programs, projects, and activities are implemented because we have the SIP, which serves as our guidebook. (RBA-SH1)

In the preparation of the schools for the progressive face-to-face classes, we still lack tarpaulins and signages. We really spend a lot now. We are connecting with BLGU and communicating with the PTA officers of every room so that they will be the ones to solicit or generate supplemental funds. (RBA-SH3)

The school's physical management, especially on how we spend the MOOE, is the one being monitored by the higher office. They assess and evaluate whether or not the programs, activities, and projects indicated in the SIP are implemented. (RBA-SH4)

In spending the MOOE funds, I am transparent with my teachers. I showed them how the money was spent and where it went. (RBA-SH5)

All projects in the school are implemented, and it is the pride of the school that our liquidation is constantly updated, and because of this, there was a time when we received 60 percent PBB (performance-based bonus) while the other schools received only 50 percent. (RBA-SH9)

In my school, it is hard to implement the projects

because it takes time for the materials to be delivered because of the distance and poor road conditions. When the materials arrive, it was already diminished because according to those who delivered the gravel and sand, they poured some on the road to be able for them to climb safely and somehow deliver the materials to the school." (RBA-SH12)

Due to the difficulty of delivering the materials for the construction of the school's projects, some could not be accomplished on time

In implementing the programs, activities, and projects of the school, the school head must provide equal opportunities to all teachers and stakeholders to build their capacity to participate. If responsibility and authority are shared, shared commitment and accountability also exist. (RBA-SH14)

My administrative functions as a school head are financial management, repair and maintenance, and public relations. Regarding implementing the school projects, everything was implemented last year. Then, this year's first quarter project is still ongoing. (RBA-SH15)

The core idea, *Implementation of Programs and Projects*, is classified as *General* since all conversational partners articulated this answer.

Stressors

The third theme that emerged was stressors. This has the core ideas, including

Heavy Workloads, Conflict with Stakeholders, Dealing with Scarce Resources, and Physical, Mental and Emotional Effects. These are extracted from the CP's responses with their lived experiences in their most common cause of stress in their job.

Heavy Workloads

The core idea, *Heavy Workloads*, was formulated from the significant statements expressed by the conversational partners. Having tasks piled up for the school heads to accomplish certainly gave them stress in their job. The CPs' noticeable answers are as follows:

The number one common problem in school is the urgent online reports where the school has no internet connection. We have to accomplish these reports as soon as possible. I usually ask our ICT coordinator to go to the town where the internet signal is better to

submit our online reports. (RBA-SH1)

I experience burnout due to the heavy workloads we need to comply with and accomplish. (RBA-SH7)

The most common problem in school is the poor internet connection. Stress strikes when there are urgent online reports. (RBA-SH8)

I have a hard time coping with the reports. For instance, the announcement was posted on Facebook in the morning. We needed to submit the said report at 12 noon. We could not submit reports on time due to the poor internet signal. Because of that, I tend to experience exhaustion. (RBA-SH9)

Submitting urgent online reports is our number one problem since the school has poor to no signal internet connection. I receive the announcement late in the afternoon. Because of this unfortunate situation, I am usually the last to submit the said urgent reports. (RBA-SH10)

Now that we are in a pandemic, we have to accomplish and comply with various reports. There are a lot of preparations. We have to finish a lot of paper works to be able to comply with the demands from the higher office. (RBA-SH16)

Heavy Workloads' core idea is classified as *Typical* since 31 percent of the conversational partners articulated this answer.

Conflict with Stakeholders

Having a harmonious relationship with stakeholders is vital to implementing various programs, activities, and projects in school. Their participation would mean they also let their children study in school. But this is not always the case, based on the experiences of some of the conversational partners. The CPs' striking statements are as follows:

I witnessed confrontations between my teacher and a parent, and the parent dared me that he would challenge me and would sue my teacher in court. I ask GOD how I would mediate in this confrontation because I should not take sides but mediate to solve the conflict. (RBA-SH3)

My number one problem is the teachers' attitude. It is challenging for a delinquent teacher if a bad attitude is innate. There is no perfect school. There would always be teachers with a negative attitude. (RBA-SH4)

In my new school, the teachers have their attitude. They assume that they are above anybody. I could not rush things up because they were not cooperating.

Despite this unfortunate situation that I am in, I am trying to understand them. (RBA-SH5)

I will never forget my experience in my previous school when my teacher's husband was suddenly stabbed in the back by a parent. We did not know why it happened but luckily, the husband survived the incident despite being stabbed in his back near his spinal cord. It was so tragic and scary that it was enough reason to transfer to another school. (RBA-SH8)

I now experience having a delinquent teacher in my new school. She comes to school whenever she wants, and now she has been absent for two months, so we have filed a complaint against her. (RBA-SH15)

The core idea of *Conflict with Stakeholders* is classified as *General* since 81 percent of the conversational partners articulated this answer.

Dealing with Scarce Resources

It has always been a burden for the school head to have scarce resources to implement the school's programs, activities, and projects. The delayed downloading of the school's MOOE or the maintenance and other operating expenditures is the root cause why they need to generate extra funds to sustain the implementation of such programs, activities, or projects. The CPs' remarkable responses are as follows:

The most common problem in school is the scarcity of funds. It is difficult to implement projects if we lack funds. In my new school, I used personal funds, as much as ₱30,000, to pay for the school's unpaid bills by the previous school head. (RBA-SH5)

Maybe, it is already a part of my job as a school head to spend personal funds to sustain the implementation of the school's projects and activities while waiting for the downloading of the delayed MOOE. (RBA-SH8)

The number one problem in school is the financial status since the public schools are having a difficult time implementing the projects. All the projects are planned. The problem is those unexpected activities. I could not avoid spending my money of as much as ₱10,000. I am not thinking of it too much because it is part of my job. (RBA-SH11)

My problem Sir is when I do not have personal money. The implementation of the project was carried out. Due to the scarcity of school funds, I have to spend my own money. (RBA-SH12)

When I see the beauty of a project that I am

implementing, I find ways for it to be finished even if it means spending personal funds. (RBA-SH15)

The core idea of *Dealing with Scarce Resources* is classified as *General* since 81 percent of the conversational partners articulated this answer.

Physical, Mental, and Emotional Effects of Stress

Depending on how the conversational perceive stress, they experience various physical, mental, and emotional effects of stress in their job as school heads. The CPs prominent replies are as follows:

The first thing that I feel is body pains, headache and I also have gas pains.

It is normal to be acidic when you are under stressful conditions. (RBA-SH1)

When we talk about stress, I am easily affected. I get nervous and restless. I do not let my teachers notice it. (RBA-SH3)

The number one that I feel is a headache when I have a lot of urgent paper works. I am confused about which one to prioritize since they are all urgent. (RBA-SH4)

I feel body pains and then fever. I could not rise from bed immediately. (RBA-SH5)

I feel so tired and weak, but I just let them pass. (RBA-SH6)

I feel uneasy, and I do not have peace of mind. I do not speak and mingle with my family. (RBA-SH8)

When I experience stress at work, sometimes I lose motivation to work. My headaches and I am too tired. (RBA-SH13)

I am tired when I am stressed. I have sleepless nights. Sometimes my decision is affected.. I cannot make a good decision. (RBA-SH14)

The core idea of *Physical, Mental, and Emotional Effects* is classified as *General* since all conversation partners articulated this answer.

Coping Mechanisms

The fourth and last theme that emerged was coping mechanisms. This has the core ideas including *Recreational Activities*, *Stress Management*, *Open Communication to*

Resolve Issues and Conflicts, and *Strengthening Faith Through Prayer*. These are extracted from the CP's

responses to their lived experiences of handling stress in their job.

Recreational Activities

Finding ways to relieve yourself from stress is significant for you to sustain your health and prevent disruption of your job. School heads have ways to relieve themselves from stress, and one way is to have recreational activities. The CPs' accounts are as follows:

I usually go on an adventure with my friends to unwind. (RBA-SH1)

I am an avid fan of Korean series, so I spend time watching them to divert my stressful work. When I am at work, I usually play music. (RBA-SH2)

I entertain myself by watching the television and sitting with my plants. (RBA-SH5)

I rest and play music. (RBA-SH6)

To be able to relax Sir, I sing loudly! (RBA-SH9)

I watch Tiktok videos to somehow relieve myself from stress so that I laugh for a while. (RBA-SH10)

I find ways like having exercise, eating healthy foods, and gardening. (RBA-SH14)

Travel. Unwind. Eat. (RBA-SH15)

Recreational Activities' core idea is classified as *General* since 50 percent of the conversational partners articulated this answer.

Stress Management

Stress is an automatic response to a challenging event. Managing stress can help you lead a more balanced and healthier life. The CPs' expressed the following:

One of our strong points is our bible study. We do it once a week, and there I am, not their head; we are the same. There we express our concerns. (RBA-SH2)

My style is I do not bring my work home. I leave my work in school. (RBA-SH4)

I delegate the job to my teachers. (RBA-SH6)

Self-discipline! It would be best if you did not let stress control you. Instead, you should be able to handle stress and manage your emotions. (RBA-SH9)

I laugh. I eat a lot. If there is coffee, I drink coffee. (RBA-SH12)

Stress management's core idea is classified as *Typical* since 44 percent of the conversational partners articulated the answer.

Open Communication to Resolve Issues and Conflicts

When under stressful conditions, it is better to open up your problems to people you can trust and relate to you. Indeed, no man is an island. The CPs' valuable statements are as follows:

When we talk about problems at work, I usually open up to my family and then my superior because she is the only one who can help me when I have problems in school. (RBA-SH1)

When we talk about school concerns, I speak to my mother first because she is my mentor, and she can relate to my problems encountered in my job as a school head. (RBA-SH2)

When I have problems in school, I turn to my family first, especially my husband. I am very thankful to have a supportive husband who always motivates and encourages me when I am in low morale. (RBA-SH3)

I always talk to my mother and mentor whenever I have problems in school. I am confident with my mentor because she is more experienced as she was a retired district supervisor. Next is my wife who is always there to comfort me. (RBA-SH4)

I share with my family my problems. I tell them all the happenings in school. (RBA-SH5)

If about school problems, I always talk to my master's teacher. Then if we have a district meeting, I refer my issues to my superior, my district supervisor. (RBA-SH6)

Of course, I talk to my brother. (RBA-SH7)

When I have problems, I keep quiet, and I meditate. Sometimes, I also talk to my husband to comfort me. I also have friends who are also teachers who can give me advice. (RBA-SH16)

The core idea of *Open Communication to Resolve Issues and Conflicts* is classified as *General* since all conversational partners articulated this answer.

Strengthening Faith Through Prayer

Let us not forget that we must leave all our worries to GOD. We must always seek divine intervention. Just like what the conversational partners do, they meditate. The CPs' accounts are as follows:

First and foremost, prayer is the key then diversion. (RBA-SH3)

Of all my worries and problems, I leave them all to GOD. (RBA-SH5)

Pray! We give and share everything with GOD. (RBA-SH7)

I usually pray to GOD that he will always guide me.

(RBA-SH11)

Pray! In everything, you really have to pray and leave everything to GOD. (RBA-SH12)

The most effective is prayer. Of course, if you feel down, you have no other choice but to pray. (RBA-SH13)

In everything, put GOD first. (RBA-SH15)

Never forget GOD in everything that you do. Why worry if we have GOD with us. (RBA-SH16)

The core idea of *Strengthening Through Prayer* is classified as *General* since 63 percent of the conversational partners articulated this answer.

Discussion

This chapter provides a discussion of the themes from the analyzed data. This phenomenological study aimed to explore the experiences, the stressors, coping mechanisms and the best practices of the school heads on how they handle stress.

The conversational partners of the study were 16 school heads of the Department of Education who spontaneously shared their experiences and described their stories. The narratives were analyzed and categorized into themes and core ideas. From the lived experiences of the conversational partners in handling stress, the essential theme of *Instructional Leadership* emerged.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is a model of school leadership in which the principal works alongside teachers to provide support and guidance in establishing best practices in teaching. Principals employing this model of leadership communicate with their staff and together set clear goals related to student achievement (Brolund, 2016).

Instructional Leadership is composed of the core ideas of *technical assistance*, *classroom observation*, and *curriculum development*. What is unique about instructional leadership is that it is closely connected to the work of improving learning for students. It has a consistently positive effect on learning outcomes for students across diverse contexts (The Education Hub, 2021). The reasons why all of the CPs have something to say about their experiences in handling stress support this study.

The conversational partners shared that they need to

provide technical assistance to their teachers to improve their teaching skills and increase learning outcomes. According to them, technical assistance is giving the teachers advice based on the findings of their instructional supervision conducted to the teachers. This means that technical assistance is given to the teachers in order to sustain quality teaching and learning which implies the importance of delivering quality education and the success of the school as a whole.

In relation to this, the responses support the statements of Magcanas's (2019) study about the technical assistance of school heads and the teachers' performance in public elementary schools. Their findings implied that technical assistance is deemed necessary to ensure effective program implementation and eventually achievement of higher or better learning outcomes. It can impact performance and, most of all, the general welfare of the people in the organization and of the organization itself. It is now known that technical assistance is essential not just for the teachers' performance but also for the entire organization like the Department of Education.

Moreover, the findings from technical assistance of the CPs to their teachers certified that when they are encouraged and guided by their school head in producing IMs that possess visibility, simplicity, attraction, and clarity, it will influence students' academic performance, as found in the study of Umaru (2011).

On the other hand, the old concept of technical assistance is supervising, monitoring, evaluating, directing, and instructing. However, the new paradigm focuses on coaching, guiding, and empowering. Teaching the subject matter was the focus of the conventional way of monitoring. Still, now, all the aspects of education management, highlighting the provision of access, quality, and relevance, and the provision and improvement of management services, are given importance. In a nutshell, technical assistance is provided to solve problems, improve performance and get results (Department of Education, 2016). Thus, these statements by the conversational partners about what technical assistance is all about are in line with those given by the DepEd.

Classroom Observation

The conversational partners shared that they conduct classroom observation. It comprises 70 percent of their function as school heads. Based on their responses, classroom observation happens when they witness the

performance of teachers in their respective classrooms.

Meaning, that classroom observations are done frequently to assess and evaluate the teachers' ability to perform competent teaching. This implies that the majority of the responsibilities of the school heads belong to this task. Thus, they should ensure that it should always be attained. In addition, as a school head, the sustenance of quality teaching is a priority since this could lead to the excellent performance by the learners.

The responses of the conversational partners are congruent with the purpose of classroom observation stated by Torsh (2019) who said that the fundamental purpose of classroom observation is to improve student outcomes through the instructional improvement of the teacher. In addition, another purpose is to provide information on current educational practices and to identify instructional problems.

Curriculum Development

Some of the conversational partners expressed that it is one of their duties to develop and implement the curriculum. As stated, they are committed to developing the standardized curriculum by assessing the teaching methods of the teachers and monitoring pupils' achievements. This means that the commitment of the teachers in implementing the curriculum is vital because it helps them cope with the trends in education; it makes them systematic in the delivery of their lessons, and it helps to make the curriculum relevant to the needs of the learners. Thus, curriculum implementation could create quality instruction leading to confident, competent, and excellent 21st-century learners.

In the case of the CPs, an effective curriculum provides teachers, students, administrators, and community stakeholders with a measurable plan and structure for delivering quality education. These experiences from the CPs are supportive of Glenn's (2018) study which stated that curriculum identifies the learning outcomes, standards, and core competencies that students must demonstrate before advancing to the next level. Teachers play a vital role in developing, implementing, assessing, and modifying the curriculum. An evidenced-based curriculum acts as a road map for teachers and students to follow on the path to academic success.

Administrative Management

Administrative management is something important to

discuss as part of the functions of a school head, whether or not they are efficient in the use of their resources. This section provides discourse of the conversational partners on how they manage their resources (human, financial) or in the programs, activities, and projects implementation.

Administrative management refers to running and maintaining a business or organization. The core objective of administrative management is to create a formal structure that facilitates success for a particular organization. In general, administrative managers oversee facilities to ensure the workplace is well-organized and safe for employees. By setting these goals, administrative managers can help their department become more efficient, which will increase the organization's overall efficacy (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021).

The theme Administrative Management includes the core ideas *Personnel Management and Development, Relationship with Stakeholders and Implementation of Programs and Projects*.

Personnel Management and Development

The majority of the CPs expressed their desire to have a good relationship with their teachers because some of them struggle in implementing the various programs, activities, and projects of the school because the teachers are not cooperative. Based on the responses of the conversational partners, this is needed to form a quality workforce necessary to meet the school's mission, vision, and goals.

As an implication, personnel management and development of the school heads must be born in mind because the teachers are their arms and legs who help them implement the various programs, activities, and projects. A good characteristic of a school head can balance and control the personnel since the teachers have their personalities. It is an additional task to manage them to win their trust and cooperation.

Regarding personnel management, the responses of the CPs back up the study made by Heathfield (2020) which stated that personnel management aims to recruit and retain the quality workforce necessary for an organization to meet its goals. Moreover, it is often viewed as the strategic and effective management of a company's people and understanding them to be the most valuable resource. As such, prioritizing their development and success is vital to the success of the company.

Relationship with Stakeholders

Those schools that have established a harmonious relationship with their stakeholders are fortunate. A school head's communication skills are put to the test to develop a good rapport with the stakeholders and are able to persuade them to sustain their support in school. The importance of their contribution would mean more convenient and faster implementation of the schools' projects.

Presently, some schools have already started the progressive face-to-face classes while some are still preparing. Its successful implementation would mean urging the stakeholders to cooperate in the orientation and eventually letting their children participate in the progressive face-to-face classes.

Indeed, when the school heads can gain the trust of the stakeholders, like what some of the conversational partners have achieved, they work together easily and effectively. They invest efforts in identifying and building stronger stakeholder relationships which increase confidence across the project environment, minimize uncertainty, and speed up problem-solving and decision-making.

Concerning the responses of the CPs, these contribute to what Business Mirror (2018) talked about stakeholders or individuals who have an interest or concern for the school. They include parents, school administrators, board members, local government officials, alumni, and socio-civic groups who contribute to the development of the school community. Thus, a healthy relationship between the teachers and stakeholders is vital, as this will enable everybody to work harmoniously together which will have a positive impact on the students.

Implementation of Programs and Projects

The implementation of the school's programs, activities, and projects is one of the challenging tasks of the conversational partners. The experiences of RBA-SH12 and RBA-SH13 prove that this task takes tons of effort and patience. The problems they encounter like poor road conditions leading to delayed delivery of the materials lead to delayed implementation of particular projects. It is an additional challenge if the school is situated in a high and far-flung area like those of RBA-SH12 and RBA-SH13. These CPs require sheer dedication and determination to overcome adversities in their job as school heads.

Most of the CPs have no problem implementing

projects in the school because things fall into place like having a good environment and good condition from home to school that led to timely implementation and accomplishment.

Thus, to be an effective implementer of programs, activities, and projects, the school heads must always refer to SIP, their guidebook. With their varied experiences as school heads, most of them effectively and efficiently implement the schools' programs, activities, and projects that led their respective schools to become organized.

The issuance of DepEd Order 44 s. 2015, *entitled Guidelines on the Enhanced School Improvement Planning (SIP) Process and School Report Card (SRC)* is in line with the statements of RBA-SH1 in which she said that "The SIP serves as our guidebook in implementing the school's programs, activities, and projects. This DepEd Order set the standards on how to conduct the planning process at the school level (Department of Education, 2015).

The CPs were consistent in stating the significance of implementing the various projects of their respective schools. It was stipulated in Republic Act 9155 – Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001 (Section 6.2.4) which states that the School Head shall have authority, accountability, and responsibility in "Developing the School Education Program and School Improvement Plan." School Improvement Plan is a 3-year roadmap of interventions undertaken with the help of the community and other stakeholders. It serves as a basis for the Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) and Annual Procurement Plan (APP) which were made based on evidence, results, and intended outcome for the learners (San Miguel, 2019).

Stressors

Based on the responses of the conversational partners, they have similar as well as different types of stressors or those things that cause them stress in their job. The following are the things that the conversational partners shared that serve as their common stressors: heavy workloads, conflict with stakeholders, scarcity of resources, and the effects of stress on their physical, mental and emotional health.

When one encounters stress, the body's stress response is triggered, and a series of physiological changes take place to allow the person to fight or run. If this sounds like stress when people talk about 'stress' in their life, they are really talking about stressors; stressors lead to the body's stress response and the experience of stress.

The important thing to remember, basically, is that stressors are the cause of stress (Scott, 2021).

Heavy Workloads

The school heads juggle from one task to another. They struggled as to which one to prioritize as everything is urgent. They feel the extreme pressure on their shoulders, especially during this pandemic where several needs arose which were not part of the plans stipulated in the SIP. They need to adjust their budget to give way to the needed supplies like bond papers, inks, and printers for module reproduction and distribution.

Their statements mean that the CPs should need to alleviate their burdens and their teachers. Thus, with this stressor, it is difficult to weigh things up, especially when everything is equally urgent. Aside from that, there are still other tasks to be accomplished by the school heads. This is the real situation of the school heads that is noteworthy by the higher officials.

As indicated in the Pickle Jar Theory by Jeremy Wright (2002), it states that one should prioritize the tasks and responsibilities in a specific order. Similarly, concerning the heavy workloads of the CPs, Hernando-Malipot (2021) described that the healthcare system is overwhelmed with the surge in coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases, and the country's education system is also "under siege" as signs of burnout among education frontliners threaten learning continuity.

Furthermore, the workload of principals continues to increase with new expectations for evaluation and supervision, changing legislative mandates, and mounting pressures for accountability (Wells, 2013). These are the lived experiences of the CPs. They are conquering numerous tasks which need to be accomplished as soon as possible.

Additionally, new principals experience a sense of "reality shock" as they assume roles that require near-constant attention. These and other legislative mandates have created new challenges to the already full list of directives with which principals must comply (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Those CPs who are considered novice school heads struggle in their adjustment period. They are overwhelmed with the bunch of work they have.

Despite the initial belief that principals were probably experiencing the highest levels of stress related to instructional demands for increased student achievement, professional task management issues,

such as student discipline or parent complaints, or handling conflict, Wells et al. (2011) learned that principals were most concerned with the loss of revenues, followed by personal issues associated with their response to the overwhelming nature of their work.

Conflict with Stakeholders

In unavoidable circumstances, the CPs encountered conflict with the stakeholders. From parent to teacher, teacher to teacher, school head to a teacher, and school head to parents. RBA-SH1 and RBA-SH3 witnessed a conflict between her teacher and a parent. This includes threats that the teacher is sued in court if the teacher would not be transferred to another school. RBA-SH5, RBA-SH7, RBA-SH12, RBA-SH13, RBA-SH14, and RBA-SH15

had problems with the attitude of their teachers and insubordination which resulted in confrontations. They admitted that if a teacher's negative attitude is innate, this is difficult to manage since only those particular teachers could reverse their negative attitude.

What they experience means that their work is affected whenever they encounter conflict with their stakeholders. They are supposed to be their partners in accomplishing the school's programs, activities, and projects. This implies that conflict is another challenge for them as to how they could manage various conflicts and how far their patience and resilience as school heads could go.

Just like the experience of the CPs, Karim (2015) said that managing conflict at school has been an age-old challenge for educators. Conflicts are a natural part of life and a natural part of school life. Learning to deal constructively with conflict is a life skill needed for educational leaders.

Dealing with Scarce Resources

From the responses of the CPs, findings revealed that scarcity of resources is part of their job and spending of personal funds on a temporary replacement as funds to sustain the implementation of various programs, activities, and projects while waiting for the MOOE to be downloaded. An additional burden comes if, personally, the CPs have no sufficient personal funds to supplement the MOOE. They find ways to push through with the implementation of the projects. RBA-SH5 spent as much as ₱30,000 to pay for the remaining balances of her new assignment. It was not her fault, but the previous school head's it. Because of this unfortunate situation, they have not received

MOOE for certain months due to the irresponsibility of the last school head. These experiences signify that it is challenging to start a project if you do not have the resources as the CPs experienced. These imply that they should be resourceful in maintaining the implementation of their respective projects even if they have to spend their own money.

In connection to this financial stressor of the CPs, American Psychological Association (2012) said that scarcity increases negative emotions, which affect our decisions. The ability to make decisions comes with a limited capacity. The scarcity state depletes this finite capacity of decision-making. The scarcity of money affects the decision to spend that money on urgent needs while ignoring the other necessary things which come with a burden of future costs.

Physical, Mental and Emotional Effects of Stress

The majority of the effects of stress on the conversational partners are physical such as headache, gas pain, migraine, nervousness, and weakness. Likewise, the emotional effects felt by the CPs are feeling overwhelmed due to the bunch of work that they need to do and feeling bad about themselves which led them to regret when they accepted the role as school heads. Lastly, when the CPs are under stressful situations, they are restless, lose concentration, could not sleep well, have no peace of mind, could not make good decisions, and are uneasy.

This means that stress is a part of school heads' lives. What matters most is they know how to handle it. Thus, this implies that the best thing they can do to prevent stress overload and the health consequences that come with it is to know the stress symptoms.

With regards to the effects of stress on the body, similar to those experienced by the CPs, Marks (2021) said that stress can affect all parts of life, including emotions, behaviors, thinking ability, and physical health. One may have any of the following symptoms of stress: physical effects like diarrhea, constipation, nausea, aches, pains, and tense muscles, chest pain and rapid heartbeat, insomnia, frequent colds and infections, nervousness and shaking, ringing in the ears, and cold or sweaty hands and feet, dry mouth and a hard time swallowing and lastly clenched jaw and grinding teeth. On the other hand, the other emotional effects of stress include becoming easily agitated, frustrated, moody, and feeling overwhelmed, as if one is losing control or need to take control, having a hard time relaxing and quieting your mind, feeling bad about self (low self-esteem), and feeling lonely,

worthless, depressed and avoiding others. The mental effects of stress are constant worrying, racing thoughts, forgetfulness and disorganization, inability to focus, poor judgment, and seeing only the negative side.

Similarly, the continuous and undermanaged stress encountered by some of the school heads may lead to chronic stress. In connection to this, Bhandari (2020) stated that ongoing and chronic stress could cause or worsen many serious health problems like depression, anxiety, high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, menstrual problems, impotence, acne, hair loss, and ulcer. If these symptoms persist, then a consultation with a doctor is recommended.

Coping Mechanisms

The pandemic presented challenges that not even the most prepared administrator could have anticipated. Each and every one of the CPs have their ways how to relieve themselves from stress. This is understood because what works for one person may not work for others. In connection, Carver (2013) said that coping is an effort to prevent or diminish the threat, harm, loss, or to reduce the stress associated with those experiences.

Recreational Activities

RBA-SH1, RBA-SH4, and RBA-SH14 admitted that their way of escaping from stress is to have an adventure with family and friends. They go out with them to unwind, eat and relax. They usually go to the beach to breathe fresh air and leave job stress for a while to give themselves a break.

This means that setting apart time to engage in leisure-time activities with family is one of the CPs' best ways to bring down stress and unwanted worries. There is a strong implication that spending quality time with the people you love builds stronger bonds in the family. The care, attention, and security that one gets within the family will help him or her decide how happy they are. This would add to overall health and well-being.

Just like Chris' (2013) study that reminds us sometimes, life makes one so busy that time for fun, leisure, and recreation were set apart. A person needs to understand the importance of balancing life with work and recreational activities. Engaging yourself in some recreational activity that excites a person is the best way to bring down unwanted worries, tensions, and stress, and a person feels happier and healthier.

Stress Management

CPs have their ways of handling stress. Meaning, that every individual is unique from the other. This implies that one's stress management may or may not work for everybody. The school heads deserve a break like anybody else because they expressed that their body is their only capital against stress. They need to take care of it. At the same time, they are aware that stress is normal. It comes and goes. There are just times that they are overwhelmed with their and those conversational partners who are determined enough to shrug stress away and march on.

RBA-SH2 watches Korean series and plays music to relieve herself from stress while RBA-SH9 sings loudly. RBA-SH12 and RBA-SH15 laugh at it. They eat, eat and eat while RBA-SH5 and RBA-SH14 go to their gardens and take care of their plants. If the conversational partners are overwhelmed with stress, they relax, calm down and sleep to give themselves a break.

Regarding the CPs' stress management, Mayo Clinic (2021) added that stress management offers a range of strategies to help one better deal with stress and difficulty (adversity) in one's life. Managing stress can help a person lead a more balanced, healthier life. Stress management approaches include learning skills such as problem-solving, prioritizing tasks, and time management; enhancing a person's ability to cope with adversity. For example, one may learn how to improve his or her emotional awareness and reactions, increase the sense of control, find greater meaning and purpose in life, and cultivate gratitude and optimism; by practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, yoga, meditation, tai chi, exercise and prayer and improving personal relationships.

Open Communication to Resolve Issues and Conflicts

The CPs are so blessed and thankful to have the most important people around them whom they can run to whenever they have problems with their job. This means that open communication is vital because the problems encountered in school should never be shouldered alone by the school heads. They should learn how to vent their emotions and find comfort in people they trust.

Thus, their responses suggest that open communication must exist to resolve issues, concerns, and conflicts. In addition, open communication is a crucial skill that leaders need to ensure success.

Without clear and consistent communication, employees lack direction, productivity suffers, employee engagement levels decrease, and conflict arises.

Regarding the conversational partners as to who they usually open up their problems at work, the majority of them turn to their family, friends, and immediate superior. They feel the need to express their problems with the people they trust to alleviate the heaviness they are feeling. They admitted that after opening up, they are relieved. They find comfort. They find peace of mind. They always refer all their problems to their fellow school heads and immediate superiors so that they would receive tips or advice on how to solve a particular problem they are facing.

This is not true in the case of RBA-SH14 since she considered her superior as a stressor, not a stress reliever because she does not feel any sincere support from her. Her immediate superior questions her plans to apply for a higher position. Instead of turning to her, she lost trust even in her fellow school heads. She feels more comfortable sharing her life with her family and her friends whom she trusts the most. These experiences of the CPs on open communication are consistent with the words of Sharma (2010) who described that open communication happens in a team when its members are empowered to share their thoughts without any fear of repercussions. It is not a one-off phenomenon. Open communication does not mean having more meetings or team-bonding activities. It is creating a culture where people can state their opinion without any fear.

Strengthening Faith through Prayer

The conversational partners believe in the power of prayer and that nobody else could best help them but GOD. They are aware that God knows everything they are going through at this very moment and everything they will go through in the future. He knows the best way to handle every situation to get the best possible outcome. They need to trust Him with that.

One notable practice that RBA-SH2 does in her school is to strengthen their faith in GOD. To resolve issues immediately, she has bible study weekly with her teachers. After bible study, they have an open forum to discuss their concerns and ask GOD for His divine intervention. This is somewhat a good practice that other schools might need to consider because sometimes if we are too busy with our respective jobs, we tend to forget Him.

The Bible teaches us that genuine faith is “more

precious than gold that perishes” (1 Peter 1:7). Indeed, such faith is going to be “tested by fire”. You can expect difficulties and persecutions in your life of faith, as well as blessings. Therefore, to encourage you to hold onto and develop your faith, we will consider some of the benefits of faith (Praise Philly, 2010).

Conclusion

This qualitative research inquiry provides an entirely new understanding of the journey of school heads in handling stress in their job. The findings and results of this study may provide additional value to the community, especially to the school heads, in defining the standards of how to manage stress in their job.

The findings encompass the different social strata as it cohesively benefits and involves self throughout the professional community of an individual. Based on the results and generated themes from this study, the following are the implications:

It is important to note that the main responsibility of a school head is to conduct instructional supervision through classroom observation where technical assistance is provided. Instructional supervision comprises 70 percent of their task as a school head, and 30 percent belongs to their administrative functions like managing the school's resources, the teachers, finances, supplies, and the implementation of programs, activities, and projects.

Stress is normal. It is already a part of everyone's life. As to the school heads, as revealed in the study, their experiences vary and depend on their situation. Novice school heads tend to struggle during their adjustment period. This means that they take time absorbing the job as a school head and developing a harmonious relationship with their teachers and stakeholders.

Although stress has already been a part of the lives of the school heads, they still need help; therefore, their immediate superior must be able to recognize this and must always lend a helping hand to or her subordinates. The immediate superior's presence must be felt and not wait for anything negative to happen before they do something. This denotes that school heads need to express their concerns about their job to their immediate superior, and the superior's support should always be present. Above all, we should always keep our faith in GOD in everything we do.

Everybody needs a break. The school heads must find time to rest and relax. They must not forget that their

body is the capital of their job. It is necessary to unwind after a hectic schedule like what they are doing now as they prepare to open the progressive face-to-face classes. At the same time, the other school heads monitor and evaluate the opening of classes. We should do what works best for us in handling stress. If we can manage stress, we are confident of sustaining our good performance at work.

The researcher recognized that the study needs further investigation. For future researchers, this study will guide them in exploring the lived experiences of the school heads in handling stress. From other perspectives, the findings and results of the study may be replicated.

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