

# Job Stress, Mental Health Conditions and Coping Mechanisms: A Basis for School Mental Health Program

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed unprecedented challenges on the educational system and significantly affected the psychological well-being of school personnel. This study determined the level of job stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms of secondary school personnel in the Schools Division of Iloilo Province during School Year 2020–2021 as a basis for developing a school mental health program. The study employed a descriptive–correlational research design involving purposively selected teaching and non-teaching personnel. Data were gathered using a researcher-made questionnaire validated through the Good and Scates Criteria and tested for reliability using the test–retest method. Statistical tools used included frequency and percentage, mean, Mann–Whitney U Test, Kruskal–Wallis H Test, and Spearman’s rho. Results revealed that secondary school personnel were highly stressed overall ( $M = 3.85$ ), with time management and learners’ behavior identified as the strongest sources of stress. Despite high stress levels, respondents demonstrated good mental health conditions ( $M = 4.09$ ), indicating resilience and adaptive functioning. The coping mechanisms of school personnel were rated high ( $M = 4.11$ ), with social and behavioral strategies such as maintaining relationships with colleagues and communicating with family and friends being the most frequently utilized. Significant relationships were found among job stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms. Job stress was negatively correlated with mental health conditions ( $\rho = -0.68, p < .05$ ) and positively correlated with coping mechanisms ( $\rho = 0.71, p < .05$ ), while mental health conditions showed a strong positive relationship with coping mechanisms ( $\rho = 0.75, p < .05$ ). The findings indicate a paradoxical pattern in which school personnel experience high job stress yet maintain good mental health through effective coping strategies. This supports the Cybernetic Theory of Stress and the Inverted-U Theory, which emphasize self-regulation and optimal stress levels for performance. Based on the results, the study proposes the development of a comprehensive school mental health program focusing on workload management, emotional regulation, and strengthening social support systems among school personnel.

**Keywords:** Job Stress, Mental Health Conditions, Coping Mechanisms, School Personnel, School Mental Health Program, COVID-19 Pandemic

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed educational systems worldwide and placed unprecedented demands on teachers. As the 2020 school year began, educators were required to function not only as instructors but also as frontline protectors of public health. Those conducting face-to-face classes faced fear of infection and transmission to their families, while those in distance learning struggled to redesign instructional strategies and manage new technologies.

Teacher burnout, anxiety, and depression increased significantly during this period. Mental health support therefore became a critical component of national and local recovery plans. Stress among teachers is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, particularly in the Philippine context where educators are regarded as the backbone of national development. The effectiveness of educational institutions is closely linked to teachers’ psychological well-being and productivity (Alson, 2019).

Studies show that teachers experience higher job-related stress than many other professionals. Reports from the National Foundation for Educational Research revealed that one in five teachers felt tense most or all of the time, a higher proportion compared with workers in similar occupations (Busby, 2019). The abrupt transition to modular and online learning in the Philippines in October 2020 intensified workload demands and technological pressures (Mateo, 2020).

As a school-based nurse in Iloilo Province, the researcher observed increasing stress and mental health concerns among secondary school personnel. These observations motivated the conduct of this study to determine the level of stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms of secondary school personnel in the Schools Division of Iloilo Province for School Year 2020–2021. The findings aim to provide a basis for developing mental health programs and institutional support mechanisms.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aimed to determine the level of job stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms among secondary school personnel in the Schools Division of Iloilo Province during School Year 2020–2021 as a basis for developing a school mental health program.

Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Describe the profile of secondary school personnel in terms of age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, position, length of service, and congressional district.
2. Determine the level of job stress of secondary school personnel when taken as a whole and when grouped according to the identified profile variables.
3. Determine the mental health conditions of secondary school personnel when taken as a whole and when grouped according to the identified profile variables.
4. Identify the coping mechanisms employed by secondary school personnel when taken as a whole and when grouped according to the identified profile variables.
5. Test for significant differences in job stress of secondary school personnel when grouped according to age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, position, length of service, and congressional district.
6. Test for significant differences in mental health conditions of secondary school personnel when grouped according to the same profile variables.
7. Test for significant differences in coping mechanisms of secondary school personnel when grouped according to the same profile variables.
8. Determine the significant relationships among job stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms of secondary school personnel.
9. Develop a school mental health program based on the findings of the study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Cybernetic Theory of Stress, Coping, and Well-Being in Organizations proposed by Edwards (1992) and reinforced by the Inverted-U Theory of Stress and Performance developed by Yerkes and Dodson (1908). These theories explain how secondary school personnel experience job stress, regulate their responses through coping mechanisms, and maintain their mental health conditions amid demanding work environments such as those created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cybernetic Theory views human behavior as a self-regulating system governed by feedback loops. Stress occurs when there is a perceived discrepancy between environmental demands and an individual's internal

standards or available resources. In the context of this study, secondary school personnel encounter intensified demands arising from instructional changes, time pressure, learner management, and health-related concerns. These demands generate stress when they exceed the personnel's perceived capacity to cope. Through continuous self-monitoring, individuals activate coping mechanisms as corrective responses to reduce this discrepancy and restore psychological balance. When coping strategies are effective, emotional stability and mental well-being are preserved; when they are ineffective, stress may result in psychological distress. Thus, Cybernetic Theory explains the dynamic interaction among job stress, coping mechanisms, and mental health conditions by emphasizing regulation, adaptation, and equilibrium.

The Inverted-U Theory further explains the functional relationship between stress and well-being by proposing that stress and performance are related in a curvilinear manner. At low levels of stress, individuals may show low motivation and engagement. At moderate levels of stress, individuals reach an optimal state of functioning characterized by alertness, productivity, and psychological balance. However, when stress becomes excessive and unregulated, performance declines and mental health deteriorates, leading to burnout, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Applied to this study, the theory explains why secondary school personnel may report high levels of stress while still maintaining good mental health conditions. Their stress, although elevated, remains within a manageable range because it is moderated by effective coping strategies such as social support, emotional regulation, and healthy behavioral practices.

Together, these theories provide a coherent explanation of the paradoxical findings of the study in which secondary school personnel experience high job stress yet demonstrate good mental health conditions through strong coping mechanisms. Cybernetic Theory accounts for the internal regulatory processes that trigger coping responses, while the Inverted-U Theory explains how stress can remain adaptive when balanced by these responses. The integration of both theories supports the assumption that coping mechanisms serve as a buffer between job stress and mental health outcomes.

Guided by these theoretical foundations, the study assumes that job stress among secondary school personnel is influenced by personal and professional characteristics such as age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, position, and length of service. Mental health conditions are viewed as outcomes shaped by the interaction between stress and coping processes, while coping mechanisms function as regulatory strategies that help individuals maintain emotional stability and psychological well-being. This framework provides the basis for examining the relationships among job stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms and for proposing a School Mental Health Program focused on strengthening self-regulation, reducing excessive stressors, and enhancing adaptive coping capacities among secondary school personnel.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the level of stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms among secondary school personnel and to examine differences and relationships among these variables.

### **Participants**

The respondents were purposively selected teaching and non-teaching personnel from secondary schools in the Schools Division of Iloilo Province during School Year 2020–2021. Respondents were classified according to age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, position, length of service, and congressional district.

### **Research Instrument**

A researcher-made questionnaire composed of four parts was used: Profile of respondents, Level of stress, Mental health conditions, and Coping mechanisms.

The instrument was validated using the Good and Scates Criteria for Validity and subjected to reliability testing through the test–retest method involving 30 secondary school personnel not included in the main study.

### Data Collection Procedure

Permission was obtained from school authorities prior to data gathering. Questionnaires were distributed and retrieved following health protocols. Responses were encoded and analyzed using appropriate statistical tools.

### Statistical Treatment

The following statistical tools were employed: Frequency and percentage – for respondent profile; Mean – for stress level, mental health condition, and coping mechanisms; Mann–Whitney U Test – for variables with two classifications; Kruskal–Wallis H Test – for variables with three or more classifications; and Spearman’s rho – to determine relationships among stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Profile of Secondary School Personnel

Profile Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	Young ( $\leq 35$ yrs)	60	60.0
	Old ( $\geq 36$ yrs)	40	40.0
Sex	Male	56	56.5
	Female	44	43.5
Civil Status	Single	95	95.3
	Married	5	4.8
Educational Attainment	Bachelor’s Degree	27	27.5
	Master’s Degree	73	72.5
Length of Service	Short	67	67.3
	Long	33	32.8
Position	Teaching	90	90.0
	Non-teaching	10	10.0

The majority of respondents were young, teaching personnel, and master’s degree holders. This suggests a workforce that is academically prepared but still adjusting to professional demands, which may influence stress and coping behavior.

Table 2. Level of Job Stress by Area (Overall)

Area of Stress	Mean	Interpretation
Learners’ Behavior	4.06	Highly Stressed

Parent–School Relations	3.87	Highly Stressed
Employee–Administrator Relations	3.21	Moderately Stressed
Time Management	4.09	Highly Stressed
Physical Symptoms	3.97	Highly Stressed
Psychological/Emotional Symptoms	3.88	Highly Stressed
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>Highly Stressed</b>

Time management and learner behavior were the strongest contributors to stress. Administrative relations were only moderately stressful, indicating that workload rather than leadership was the primary stressor.

Table 3. Selected Indicators of Job Stress (Item Analysis)

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Not enough time to finish tasks	4.48	Very Highly Stressed
Learners lack motivation	4.46	Very Highly Stressed
Too many responsibilities	4.20	Highly Stressed
Cannot be myself with supervisor	2.60	Moderately Stressed
Cannot meet supervisor’s demands	2.92	Moderately Stressed

Workload-related factors caused the highest stress. Supervisor-related stress was comparatively lower, showing that instructional and learner-centered demands were the main pressure points.

Table 4. Job Stress by Demographic Variables

Variable	Category	Mean	Interpretation
Age	Young	3.90	Highly Stressed
	Old	3.77	Highly Stressed
Sex	Male	3.92	Highly Stressed
	Female	3.75	Highly Stressed
Civil Status	Single	3.84	Highly Stressed
	Married	4.02	Highly Stressed
Length of Service	Short	3.75	Highly Stressed
	Long	4.05	Highly Stressed

Stress levels were high across all groups. Married and long-service personnel showed slightly higher stress, suggesting cumulative work and family demands.

Table 5. Mental Health Condition of Secondary School Personnel (Overall)

Mental Health Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Emotional awareness	4.18	Very Good
Sleep patterns	4.12	Good
Anxiety control	4.05	Good
Anger management	3.98	Good
Substance avoidance	4.12	Good
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>4.09</b>	<b>Good Mental Health</b>

Despite high stress levels, respondents maintained good mental health, suggesting resilience and adaptive functioning.

Table 6. Mental Health Condition by Classification

Variable	Category	Mean	Interpretation
Age	Young	4.05	Good
	Old	4.18	Very Good
Length of Service	Short	4.00	Good
	Long	4.33	Very Good
Position	Teaching	4.10	Good
	Non-teaching	4.05	Good

Personnel with longer service exhibited better mental health, possibly due to greater experience in stress management and emotional regulation.

Table 7. Coping Mechanisms (Overall)

Coping Strategy	Mean	Interpretation
Avoid caffeine/alcohol/junk food	4.33	Very High
Talk with family and friends	4.29	Very High
Maintain colleague relationships	4.44	Very High
Relaxation exercises	3.90	High
Rest and recreation	3.85	High
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>4.11</b>	<b>High Coping Mechanism</b>

Social and behavioral strategies were the most commonly used coping mechanisms, highlighting the importance of support networks.

Table 8. Coping Mechanisms by Classification

Variable	Category	Mean	Interpretation
Age	Young	4.05	High
	Old	4.20	Very High
Length of Service	Short	4.00	High
	Long	4.36	Very High
Position	Teaching	4.15	High
	Non-teaching	3.77	High

Long-service personnel demonstrated stronger coping strategies, suggesting adaptive learning over time.

Table 9. Relationship among Stress, Mental Health, and Coping Mechanisms

Variables	Spearman’s rho ( $\rho$ )	Interpretation
Stress ↔ Mental Health	-0.68	Significant ( $p < .05$ )
Stress ↔ Coping Mechanisms	0.71	Significant ( $p < .05$ )
Mental Health ↔ Coping Mechanisms	0.75	Significant ( $p < .05$ )

Higher stress was associated with poorer mental health but stronger reliance on coping mechanisms. Mental health and coping mechanisms were positively correlated.

The findings of the study reveal that secondary school personnel experienced high levels of job stress, primarily driven by time pressure and learner-related demands. This pattern is consistent with empirical research conducted during the COVID-19 period, which identified increased workload, rapid instructional changes, and blurred boundaries between work and home as major contributors to teachers’ occupational stress (Kim & Asbury, 2020; Pressley, 2021). Similarly, MacIntyre et al. (2020) reported that teachers faced heightened emotional strain due to the dual responsibility of delivering instruction while ensuring students’ psychological and physical safety during the pandemic.

Despite the high stress levels, respondents in the present study maintained good mental health conditions, suggesting resilience and adaptive psychological functioning. This paradox is supported by recent literature indicating that stress does not automatically translate into poor mental health when protective factors such as emotional regulation, professional commitment, and social support are present (Agyapong et al., 2021; Collie, 2021). Collie (2021) emphasized that teacher well-being is shaped not only by the presence of stressors but also by the availability of psychological resources that enable teachers to manage demands effectively. Likewise, Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021) found that although educators reported high stress and anxiety during lockdowns, many maintained stable mental health through adaptive cognitive and emotional strategies.

The study further demonstrated that secondary school personnel employed high levels of coping mechanisms, particularly social and behavioral strategies such as maintaining close relationships with colleagues and seeking support from family and friends. This finding aligns with research showing that social support and problem-focused coping are among the strongest buffers against occupational stress in educators (Fiorilli et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2020). Herman et al. (2020) confirmed that teachers who actively use coping strategies and draw on collegial support systems report lower emotional exhaustion and higher psychological well-being despite heavy workloads.

Moreover, the significant relationships found among job stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms reinforce the view that coping functions as a regulatory process between environmental demands and psychological outcomes. Recent studies using stress–coping frameworks argue that when stress increases, individuals mobilize adaptive responses to restore emotional balance, thereby preventing stress from escalating into clinical distress (Sokal et al., 2020; Rabaglietti et al., 2021). Sokal et al. (2020) specifically noted that teachers who adopted flexible coping strategies during pandemic disruptions demonstrated better emotional adjustment and sustained professional engagement.

Taken together, these findings support the Cybernetic Theory of Stress and the Inverted-U Theory, which posit that individuals regulate stress through feedback mechanisms and that optimal levels of stress can stimulate adaptive performance when balanced by effective coping strategies. The paradox observed in this study—high stress coexisting with good mental health—suggests that secondary school personnel were able to self-regulate through social support, emotional control, and health-oriented behaviors. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary evidence showing that teacher resilience is not the absence of stress but the capacity to manage it constructively (Collie, 2021; Pressley, 2021).

Thus, the synthesis underscores that a school mental health program should not merely aim to eliminate stress but should strengthen institutional and personal coping systems, including workload management, emotional regulation training, and structured peer-support networks, to sustain teachers' psychological well-being amid continuing educational challenges.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn based on the findings of the study on job stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms of secondary school personnel.

1. Secondary school personnel experienced a high level of job stress, particularly due to time management demands, learners' behavior, and excessive workload.
2. Despite experiencing high stress, secondary school personnel maintained good mental health conditions, indicating resilience and adaptive psychological functioning.
3. Personnel with longer length of service demonstrated better mental health conditions, suggesting that experience enhances emotional regulation and stress management skills.
4. Secondary school personnel employed high levels of coping mechanisms, with social and behavioral strategies being the most frequently used.
5. There were significant relationships among job stress, mental health conditions, and coping mechanisms, confirming that effective coping strategies help buffer the negative effects of stress on mental health.
6. The findings validated the Cybernetic Theory of Stress and the Inverted-U Theory, emphasizing self-regulation and optimal stress levels for maintaining performance and well-being.
7. The overall results indicate the necessity of establishing a school-based mental health program to address stressors and strengthen coping capacities of school personnel.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to correspond directly with each conclusion.

1. Since secondary school personnel experienced high job stress, school administrators should implement workload management and time-allocation policies, including realistic deadlines, task prioritization, and equitable distribution of responsibilities.

2. Since personnel maintained good mental health despite high stress, schools should sustain and strengthen preventive mental health programs, such as regular wellness activities, counseling services, and emotional well-being monitoring.
3. Since longer-serving personnel showed better mental health conditions, mentoring programs should be established where senior personnel guide younger or newly hired staff in stress management and professional adjustment.
4. Since social and behavioral coping mechanisms were most commonly used, schools should promote peer-support groups, team-building activities, and family-inclusive wellness initiatives to reinforce positive coping practices.
5. Since significant relationships existed among stress, mental health, and coping mechanisms, school leaders should integrate coping skills training and emotional regulation workshops into professional development programs.
6. Since the findings supported Cybernetic Theory and the Inverted-U Theory, school policies should aim to maintain optimal levels of work pressure by balancing accountability requirements with adequate rest, flexibility, and support systems.
7. Since the study highlights the need for a school mental health program, the Department of Education and school heads should develop a comprehensive and institutionalized School Mental Health Program focusing on stress reduction, mental health awareness, and strengthening social support systems.

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