SAFEGUARDING TEACHERS’ MENTAL HEALTH IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC CRISIS
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Teacher is a multi-faced profession and it requires them to be versatile when it comes to getting their responsibilities done. Often times, teachers are bombarded with school works, to the point that they are having overtime workload at school, and sometimes extended at home. The great expectations also bring them stress and sometimes, it is hard for them to cope because there is no outlet to turn to. Burnout also triggers their mental health and the sometimes the work environment they are into contributes to triggering factors. Due to pressure at work, teachers are vulnerable to mental health issues, but often times, this is being overlooked because of the rampant stigma in the country.

In fact, there were already reported cases in the past few years that teachers committed suicide due to workload pressure. Due to these alarming incidents, DepEd spearheads first National School Mental Health Forum on October 2018. It aims “to provide a venue to discuss recent researches, updates, initiatives, issues, and concerns related to mental health especially in the school context.” In addition, during the second week of October, DepEd observes the National Mental Health week which is stipulated in the Presidential Proclamation No. 452, s. 1994. The proclamation aims to provide activities for the stakeholders to raise awareness regarding mental health, which is made possible through DepEd Memorandum No. 148, s.2018.

During these times when we are in a pandemic crisis, many people struggle with mental health issues. Experts even say that mental health issue is possibly the next pandemic crisis brought by the anxiety because of COVID-19. In addition to this is the long-time isolation of people at home because they are not allowed to go outside to have leisure time because such activities are prohibited. These situations are also experienced by teachers, most especially that we are encountering the “new normal” setting. The new setting is requiring teachers to have a great adjustment with regards to teaching methodologies, as well as the demand to purchase equipment that will suit their needs in the “new normal.”

According to Fleming (2020), distant learning became a stressor to teachers because they are sitting in front of a computer all day, finishing modules and other requirements that
they have to accomplish. Also, they are struggling managing their work schedule because they are setting their work at home and at the same time managing parent communications. The tides of work brought by the “new normal” became exhausting for teachers because the absence of face-to-face interaction made them have a great adjustment.

The good thing is that DepEd continues to extend assistance to its constituents amid the COVID-19 situation as at least 600 personnel nationwide were able to learn more about Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services (MHPSS) and Psychological First Aid (PFA) after a three-day Webinar last April 16, 17, and 21, as stated in a DepEd press release posted on their official website. Further, through its Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Service (DRRMS) and Bureau of Learner Support Services (BLSS), the webinar focused on the Department’s advocacy on looking after one’s mental health during the current public health situation. However, it could be better if the webinar will be extended to all teachers, both public and private.

Teachers are also vulnerable with mental health issues during this pandemic crisis. Their work, most especially with the new setting, could be a triggering factor. Since the mental health issues could be widespread among teachers, school heads and administrators shall take an action in assuring that their teachers’ mental health is stable in order for them to successfully fulfill their duties and responsibilities. DepEd could also have a mandate to administer seminars for teachers and even for other school staff in order to help teachers cope with the crisis. Through those simple steps, teachers can be saved from possible mental health issues and their well-being will be prioritized as well. Mental struggles are real, and the only thing to combat them is to recognize that they are existing and be proactive so that such issues will be prevented before things get worst.

References:
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