

Psychological Safety among Public School Teachers and Its Implications on School Program Development

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Abstract

Filipino public school teachers face numerous workplace demands, such as teaching at least six classes daily, writing lessons, creating instructional materials, and dealing with student concerns. These stressors are worsened by office politics and unsupportive school heads that lead to a psychologically unsafe work environment resulting in anxiety, dissatisfaction at work, and reduced output. This research describes the level of psychological safety among public school teachers and explores how teachers feel psychologically unsafe at work.

The findings of the study show the mean psychological safety level of the research participants as average. Despite this, there are quite a number of participants who have low levels of psychological safety. There is a significant difference in psychological safety when grouped according to stress at work. The participants feel psychologically unsafe when they have unsupportive school heads, supervisors, and colleagues who bully them. The two dominant coping strategies when feeling psychologically unsafe are talking with peers and praying.

Psychological safety should be discussed among public school teachers. Seminars and workshops must be conducted to educate teachers about psychological safety and its importance. Supportive leadership is also needed. School heads, principals, and supervisors should create a safe and inclusive environment for the

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teachers. The provisions of the laws that promote psychological safety must be implemented and school heads should make sure of its full implementation.

Keywords: Public school teachers, psychological safety, work stressors, office politics, workplace stressors, school leadership, teacher mental health, Philippines

Introduction

There are numerous demands on Filipino public school teachers. Most teach six classes, with at least 50 students per class. They must write daily lesson plans, create instructional materials, accomplish paperwork, talk to students, manage the class, and address parent concerns. Given this, they are overwhelmed by the excessive workload and, for some, administrative tasks. These pose a risk to their physical and mental health. It is also recognized that school institutions worldwide increasingly require employees to contribute to the betterment of the institution. In the Philippines, the current curricular changes under the Department of Education's Matatag Curriculum have been implemented nationwide since School Year 2024-2025.

While the new Matatag Curriculum aims to improve the educational system, it can bring additional stress to public school teachers since it introduces new content and teaching methodologies that warrant adaptation, training, and preparation. As the curriculum is just being rolled out, teachers are tasked to create new lesson plans based mainly on their Matatag Curriculum training, which may be insufficient.

These difficulties in the work environment can exacerbate the ominous workload, which can take a toll on their physical and mental health. On top of all these concerns, office politics can add to their stressors (Sarabia & Collantes, 2020). Some teachers feel unsafe at work because they fear being rejected, isolated, or punished if they ask questions, take risks, or solicit feedback. They can even be isolated or fired if they disagree with their superiors.

More literature on psychological safety needs to be published. In the repository of Filipino journals, only two studies on psychological safety can be found, both of which were written by the same authors. Filipino authors Irineo and De Chavez (2019) examined psychological safety literature in the construction, maritime, healthcare and nursing, and textile industries globally. Their other study investigated the psychological safety among teaching staff in a private university. The results state that work group size and leader inclusiveness significantly affect psychological safety (Irineo & De Chavez, 2019 b). The lack of local publications on psychological safety creates a research gap.

This research discusses the levels of psychological safety among public school teachers and their implications on school program development. Specifically, this research addresses the following questions:

1. What is the level of psychological safety among public school teachers?
2. Are there significant differences in the levels of psychological safety when grouped according to the following: a) educational level, b) peer support, c) stress level, d) teamwork, e) years of service?
3. How do workplace stressors affect psychological safety and in what instances do teachers feel psychologically unsafe at work?
4. What coping strategies are undertaken when they feel psychologically unsafe?

Given the research questions, the following are the study's objectives:

1. To describe the levels of psychological safety among public school teachers and their implications for school program development;
2. To identify, if there are any, psychological safety differences across demographic variables;
3. To check on how workplace stressors affect psychological safety and describe instances when teachers feel psychologically unsafe at work; and
4. To examine coping strategies undertaken when they feel psychologically unsafe.

Organizations worldwide are increasingly requiring their employees to contribute to the betterment of their institutions by voicing new ideas, collaborating among the staff, and exploring new ways of performing tasks (Newman et al. 2017). All team members should believe that it is all right to take risks, express their ideas and concerns, speak up, ask questions, and admit mistakes without fear of negative consequences. However, the opposite happens in some schools (Sarabia& Collantes, 2020). This study, therefore, explores psychological safety among Filipino public school teachers in order to start the academic discussion on this relevant topic.

Significance of the Study

This study is deemed important for the following reasons:

First, it will help empower Filipino public school teachers by raising awareness on how to create a supportive and secure work environment. If public school teachers can speak up, take risks, and make mistakes without being reprimanded by their co-faculty members and superiors, there can be open communication and collaboration in public schools. Teachers can feel valued and respected. If this happens, they can be more productive in their work. Teacher burnout and attrition can be avoided. This can also lead to job satisfaction.

This study can benefit school administrators by enabling them to implement policies and programs better. They can also be conscious of fostering a psychologically safe environment for teachers by giving constructive feedback on output instead of making the teachers feel insecure. This can also make the school administrator conscious of how office relations are carried out to foster collaboration.

Students enrolled in the K to 12 programs can indirectly benefit from this study as their teachers are likely to be more creative and less stressed, allowing them to focus exclusively on their work without being preoccupied with work-related issues that impact psychological safety.

Scope and Delimitation

This research is on the psychological safety of public school teachers in Batangas and Pampanga. The teachers are participants in a psychological well-being online training session facilitated by the researcher. The teachers were oriented to psychological safety and research. They were given informed consent forms, and their participation was purely voluntary. Psychological safety was measured through the Edmondson Psychological Safety Scale (EPSS) encoded in Google Forms. Qualitative responses were obtained through a Google Form. The participants are limited to those who joined the online well-being training.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is defined as a perception of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks without being embarrassed or punished for speaking up in their respective organizations (Kolbe et al., 2020). It describes perceptions of the consequences of taking risks in an organizational context, such as voicing an idea or opinion (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Edmondson, 1999). Psychological safety is known to integrate three determinants of organizational learning, which are speaking up, collaboration, and experimentation. Through psychological safety, members of organizational work teams overcome interpersonal risks they face every day at work (Edmondson, 2002).

Relational coordination in the workplace brings forth shared goals and shared knowledge and fosters psychological safety (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009). Clark (2020) posits that there are four stages of psychological safety. The first stage is inclusion safety. This is related to the basic need to connect and belong to a group to feel safe. A person who is included is free to be himself, and the person's strengths and weaknesses are accepted in the group. The second stage is learner safety. In this stage, the employee can ask questions and give feedback to other co-employees without fear of being discriminated against, isolated, or reprimanded. This satisfies the employee's need to learn and grow. Employees who are in the learner safety stage can flourish and contribute to the institution where they work. The third stage is contributor safety. In this stage, the employee feels he is a valuable

part of the team, and other members want to see the individual's success. The whole team enables all the members to give their best. It recognizes that stronger projects and outputs are produced because of the contribution of each member. The fourth stage is challenger safety. Challenging the status quo is considered safe for each employee. The current work system, values, and aims can be challenged to determine if modifications must be made. In this stage, all team members consider the challenge as an avenue for growth and not anything derogatory or detrimental. Despite challenging the status quo, respect and camaraderie are still observed (Clark, 2020).

Importance of Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is said to improve organizational context (Zhang et al., 2023). Organizational context refers to the systems, organizational processes, and collective beliefs that build effective work behaviors and positive employee engagement in the institution (Tyler, 2006)

Employees who feel a higher level of psychological safety are more likely to speak up with their ideas and are more engaged in their work (Ge, 2020). Psychological safety enables employees to feel safe in an organization, grow, learn, significantly contribute, and be effective in performance (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). It is said to be positively related to small and medium-term enterprises' innovation performance and innovation capabilities (Anderson & Brett, 2020). It reduces interpersonal barriers and increases the possibility of acquiring better learning behaviors in the workplace (Newman et al., 2017). Teachers who have high levels of psychological safety display emotional stability (Bas & Tabancali, 2020). It plays an important role in enabling people to overcome challenges and thrive in interpersonally difficult work environments (Edmondson et al., 2016). The professional climate in the school setting affects the teachers' willingness to persevere in the institution despite high work demands (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Teachers look for a respectful, trusting, and collaborative work environment (Bryk et al., 2010). Oftentimes, teachers resign because of stressors, low salary, and office politics (Diliberti et al., 2021).

Organizations that do not prioritize psychological safety among their employees can suffer from lower levels of employee productivity and engagement (Cole et al., 2022). There are lower levels of employee satisfaction and morale as these workers can find their work only as a part of the daily grind. When there is a psychologically unsafe environment, there is less innovation and creativity (Patil et al., 2023). The employees tend to be more conventional and will not give their best for fear of being rejected (Edmondson, 2018). A psychologically unsafe environment can lead to low levels of employee attraction and retention and high levels of attrition (Subhakaran & Dyaram, 2018). All these factors can contribute to negative business output.

Laws Supporting Psychological Safety of Employees

The Philippine Labor Code (Presidential Decree No. 442, 1974) stipulates that there are “mandatory occupational safety and health standards to eliminate or reduce occupational safety and health hazards in all workplaces and institute new and update existing programs to ensure safe and healthful working conditions in all places of employment” (Chapter 2, Article 162, Philippine Labor Code).

Republic Act 4670 (1966), known as the Philippine Magna Carta for Public School Teachers, stipulates that teachers are entitled to health benefits. Article 4, Sections 22 to 23 states that they have the right to medical consultations and shall receive treatment for any health concern. The law further states that the “effects of physical and nervous strain on the teacher’s health shall be recognized as a compensable occupational disease.”

Republic Act 11058, An Act Strengthening Compliance with Occupational Safety and Health Standards and Providing Penalty for Violations Thereof, postulates that a safe and healthy workforce is integral to nation-building. It stipulates that every worker shall participate in ensuring compliance with OSH standards in the workplace (Republic Act No. 11058, 2018).

The Joint Memorandum on Occupational Safety and Health Standards of the Civil Service Commission, Department of Health, and the Department of Labor and Employment stipulates that there should be a Safety and

Health Committee in government agencies. This committee must plan and develop health-related training and seminars for the furtherance of promotion and accident prevention programs in the workplace. This committee is responsible for initiating and implementing improvements to working conditions that promote a safe and healthy working environment (Philippine Civil Service Commission, Department of Health & Department of Labor and Employment, 2020).

The literature defines psychological safety and its relevance to organizational and workplace outcomes. It can be seen that this construct is of global relevance when studying employee behavior. However, it can be observed that the research on psychological safety is foreign in nature. There is a lack of local publications on this subject matter, which makes this research relevant.

Research Design and Method of Data Analysis

This research follows an explanatory mixed methods design. The quantitative phase involved a non-experimental design wherein the Edmondson Psychological Safety Scale was administered to the research participants. Means and standard deviations were computed for the descriptive statistics. For the inferential statistics, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was utilized to identify significant differences.

For the qualitative portion, a thematic analysis was done. Themes were identified and presented. The participants filled in a Google Form that had open-ended questions. The participants were given the option to answer this portion.

Research Locale

This research was conducted during a Zoom online training in June 2023 attended by how many public school teachers from Batangas and Pampanga. The names of the schools were kept confidential as requested by the supervisors. Moreover, it is common practice not to give the names of the schools, divisions, etc., for purposes of confidentiality.

Research Participants

The following shows the demographic profile of the research participants:

Table 1. Profile of the Research Participants

Age	n	%
20 to 25 years old	22	15.1
26 to 30 years old	33	22.6
31 to 35 years old	27	18.5
36 to 40 years old	19	13.0
41 to 45 years old	20	13.7
46 to 50 years old	17	11.6
51 to 55 years old	8	5.5
Total	146	100.0

Education	n	%
Bachelor's Degree	45	30.8
Master's Units	76	52.1
Completed Master's Degree	21	14.4
Doctoral Units	4	2.7
Total	146	100.0

Years of Service as a Teacher	n	%
1 to 5 years	71	48.6
6 to 10 years	37	25.3
11 to 15 years	16	11.0
16 to 20 years	10	6.8
21 years and above	12	8.2
Total	146	100.00

Grade Taught	n	%
Preschool	14	9.6
Elementary	76	52.1
High School	45	30.8
Senior High School	11	7.5
Total	146	100.0

Table 1. (Continuation)

Sex at Birth	n	%
Male	15	10.3
Female	131	89.7
Total	146	100.0

Area	n	%
Batangas	99	67.8
Pampanga	47	32.2
Total	146	100.0

From the table, it can be seen that the majority of the research participants are 26 to 30 years old (n= 33, 22.6%), have master's units (n=76, 52.1%), have 1 to 5 years of service as a teacher (n= 71, 48.6%), teach elementary (n=76, 52.1%), are female (n=131, 89.7%), and teach in Batangas (n=99, 67.8%).

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this research was on a purely voluntary basis. In fact, not all training program participants joined the study. The research participants were given informed consent forms explaining the nature of the research and its benefits. There are no known potential risks for this research. The participants were informed that they could back out whenever they felt uncomfortable. They can also opt not to answer any item that they feel uncomfortable with.

Phases of Data Gathering and Data Collection Techniques

This research was done online in June 2023. First, the researcher obtained permission from the teacher participants in the study. All of the 200 participants were invited to join the study; however, only 146 joined.

The nature of the research was explained to them. By identifying what constitutes psychological safety among public school teachers, better

programs on teacher well-being can be implemented. The participants were informed that they could drop out anytime during the study.

Second, the researcher gave out the research instruments in a Google Form. No face-to-face data collection was done. The participants voluntarily answered the EPSS and the qualitative questions.

Third, the data obtained were processed through SPSS version 26.

Research Instruments

The EPSS is widely used to measure an organization's psychological safety level. It is a Likert-type scale. Validity-wise, item communalities were found to be between 0.66 and 0.81, and factor loadings ranged from 0.64 to 0.85, all of which are well above 0.50, the acceptable level (Park & Kim, 2021). Reliability-wise, Cronbach's alpha equals 0.84 (Ramalho & Porto, 2021). Pilot testing is not required since the research instrument is standardized, and it has established its validity and reliability. Further, the research participants are teachers who speak and understand English well. Based on an online readability calculator, worldcalc.com, the computed Flesch-Kincaid Readability Level is Grade 5.3 (Readability Calculator, 2024). Since the teachers are college graduates, they can understand reading materials that are at the elementary level.

Method of Data Analysis

This research follows an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. Quantitative data was obtained by analyzing the scores obtained in the EPSS through statistical procedures. The qualitative data obtained through follow-up questions in the Google Form were analyzed through thematic analysis. Qualitative questions serve as follow-up and clarification of the items in the EPSS to obtain triangulation of data.

Unit of Data Analysis. The unit of data analysis for this study includes the individual public school teachers' responses to the EPSS. The scores in this scale were analyzed by computing the mean, standard

deviation, and one-way analysis of variance. The individual responses to the questionnaire were analyzed via thematic analysis.

Mitigating Biases in Data Analysis. Mitigating biases in research is essential. The researcher used the EPSS, a valid and reliable instrument. This instrument has been widely used in many countries. The use of computer software and apps also helps reduce biases in research. Accurate data entry was also achieved by letting the participants encode the answers in the Google Form. Further, the results were analyzed through SPSS version 26. These automation processes minimize errors.

The analysis of results is limited to the sample, and it will not generalize the psychological safety of all public school teachers in the Philippines. Appropriate statistical techniques were utilized. The triangulation of the EPSS results was compared to the qualitative questions in the Google Form, where the answers in this section confirmed the answers to the EPSS.

Social desirability balance was minimized by not including the participants’ names and the schools where they taught. Participants were also given code names in their responses to qualitative questions to maintain anonymity.

Psychological Safety among Public School Teachers

The public school teachers in the study generally had an Average level of Psychological Safety (Mean=20.31, SD= 3.30). The findings support those of Baeva & Bordovskaia (2015), wherein Russian teachers also generally had an Average level of psychological safety. The following table shows the frequency distribution of the levels of psychological safety of the teachers in the sample:

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Levels of Psychological Safety

	n	%
High	50	34.24
Average	51	34.93
Low	45	30.83
	146	100.00

From the table, it can be seen that even though the mean score for psychological safety is Average, 30.83% of the participants have low levels. This means that there are likewise many participants who fear making mistakes. These participants can also have low collaboration and feel unsupported in their work. They can fear rejection and have a low level of job satisfaction.

To find out if there are significant differences in the levels of psychological safety among the research participants, a One-Way Analysis of Variance was run using SPSS version 26. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3. ANOVA Tables

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Educational Attainment	Between Groups	54.949	4	13.737	1.271	.284
	Within Groups	1524.531	141	10.812		
	Total	1579.479	145			
Peer Support	Between Groups	22.732	3	7.577	.691	.559
	Within Groups	1556.748	142	10.963		
	Total	1579.479	145			
Stress Level	Between Groups	132.857	4	33.214	3.237	.014
	Within Groups	1446.622	141	10.260		
	Total	1579.479	145			
Teamwork	Between Groups	43.457	3	14.486	1.339	.264
	Within Groups	1536.023	142	10.817		
	Total					
Years of Service	Between Groups	15.344	3	5.115	.464	.708
	Within Groups	1564.136	142	11.015		
	Total	15.344	3	5.115	.464	.708

Based on the table, there is a significant difference between groups determined by the One-way ANOVA ($F(4, 141) = F= 3.237, p=.014$) in the levels of psychological safety in terms of stress level. There are no significant differences between groups determined by One-way ANOVA in the levels of psychological safety in terms of Educational

Attainment ($F(4, 141) = F= 1.271, p=.284$); Peer Support ($F(3, 142) = F= .691, p=.559$); Teamwork ($F(3, 142) = F= 1.339, p=.264$) and Years of Service ($F(3, 142) = F= .463, p=.708$). This supports Hebles et al.'s (2022) study, noting that high levels of stress are related to low levels of psychological safety.

In order to describe the psychological safety scores of the research participants across stress levels, the mean and standard deviations were computed. Table 4 shows the data.

Table 4. Psychological Safety Descriptive Statistics Across Stress Levels

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
No Stress	6	22.8333	1.32916	.54263	21.4385	24.2282	21.00	25.00
Some Stress	24	21.9583	3.01416	.61526	20.6856	23.2311	16.00	28.00
Moderate Stress	54	19.8889	3.51636	.47852	18.9291	20.8487	13.00	28.00
High Stress	44	20.1591	3.29159	.49623	19.1584	21.1598	14.00	27.00
Very High Stress	18	19.2778	2.51596	.59302	18.0266	20.5289	15.00	24.00
Total	146	20.3562	3.30045	.27315	19.8163	20.8960	13.00	28.00

From the table, it can be seen that psychological safety is highest among those who do not have stress at work (Mean=22.833, SD=1.329) and is lowest among those with very high stress (Mean=19.2778, SD=2.5160).

The Least Significant Difference (LSD) post-hoc test was used to further analyze significant differences in psychological safety scores across stress levels. The following table presents the results.

Table 5. Least Significant Difference Post hoc Tests
for Psychological Safety across Stress Levels

(I) Stress	(J) Stress	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
No Stress	Some Stress	.87500	1.46200	.550	-2.0153	3.7653
	Moderate Stress	2.94444*	1.37839	.034	.2195	5.6694
	High Stress	2.67424	1.39396	.057	-.0815	5.4300
	Very High Stress	3.55556*	1.50995	.020	.5705	6.5406
Some Stress	No Stress	-.87500	1.46200	.550	-3.7653	2.0153
	Moderate Stress	2.06944*	.78580	.009	.5160	3.6229
	High Stress	1.79924*	.81281	.028	.1924	3.4061
	Very High Stress	2.68056*	.99874	.008	.7061	4.6550
Moderate Stress	No Stress	-2.94444*	1.37839	.034	-5.6694	-.2195
	Some Stress	-2.06944*	.78580	.009	-3.6229	-.5160
	High Stress	-.27020	.65052	.679	-1.5562	1.0158
	Very High Stress	.61111	.87177	.484	-1.1123	2.3345
High Stress	No Stress	-2.67424	1.39396	.057	-5.4300	.0815
	Some Stress	-1.79924*	.81281	.028	-3.4061	-.1924
	Moderate Stress	.27020	.65052	.679	-1.0158	1.5562
	Very High Stress	.88131	.89619	.327	-.8904	2.6530

Table 5. (Continuation)

(I) Stress	(J) Stress	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Very High Stress	No Stress	-3.55556*	1.50995	.020	-6.5406	-.5705
	Some Stress	-2.68056*	.99874	.008	-4.6550	-.7061
	Moderate Stress	-.61111	.87177	.484	-2.3345	1.1123
	High Stress	-.88131	.89619	.327	-2.6530	.8904

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The LSD post hoc test reveals that there is a significant difference in the level of psychological safety among those who experience no stress and moderate stress ($p=.034$), no stress and very high stress ($p=.020$), some stress and moderate stress ($p=.009$), and some stress and high stress ($p=.028$), some stress and very high stress ($p=.008$). The findings support those of Ko & Choi (2020).

Instances When Public School Teachers Feel Psychologically Unsafe at Work

The research participants identified issues with their superiors and colleagues that make them psychologically unsafe. Some teachers complain about unsupportive school heads and supervisors who give them plenty of paperwork, and the unbecoming behavior of colleagues, such as bullying, making them feel uncomfortable, and embarrassing them during meetings. These scenarios are inherent in the research locales and may not be in the mainstream literature.

Unsupportive school heads and supervisors. Teachers from preschool to senior high school see that unsupportive supervisors who give them piles of paperwork without giving them directions on what to do make them feel psychologically unsafe. They voiced out that their school heads would not give clear instructions on what to do. Their school heads or supervisors would also let them create school programs without giving them financial support.

I am given plenty of paperwork without direction and support. My school head wants me to do school programs, and I have to think of how to finance them.

Lita (pseudonym), female, pre-school teacher

I feel psychologically unsafe when my principal or supervisor demands that I do a lot of work in a short span of time. They think that I am a machine and do not need to rest.

Abby (pseudonym), female, elementary teacher

Employees trust their supervisors who can give them direction and support in their work endeavors (Maximo et al., 2019). Employers who are deemed as demanding and unsupportive create a psychologically unsafe environment for their employees (Appelbaum et al., 2022). Unfair treatment also leads to a psychologically unsafe environment (Mercado, 2022).

Bullying by Colleagues. Some research participants said that there are colleagues who bully them. They get embarrassed or shamed during meetings. Some colleagues can criticize them profusely during projects even if they did the entire share of work.

I feel psychologically unsafe if there are bullies among my co-teachers. Even if I do all the work, they criticize me and try to look for all of my shortcomings when they do not contribute to the task at all. They just look for my mistakes.

Manny (pseudonym), male, elementary teacher

When one of my co-workers puts me down by blaming me for something I've done unconsciously. I really hate it when she shames and embarrasses me during meetings with mistakes that I did not purposely commit. Worse, our principal listens to her.

Maria (pseudonym), female, senior high school teacher

Co-employees who ostracize and bully others create painful and aversive work environments, most especially among younger co-workers (Ayoko, 2022). Workplace bullying creates a hostile environment for employees who are victims (Orr & Seter, 2020). It

can also indicate poor management skills of the immediate supervisor (Quosai, 2022).

Coping Strategies When Feeling Psychologically Unsafe

Two dominant strategies are used by the research participants when they feel psychologically unsafe. These are talking to peers and praying.

Talking to Peers. The research participants seem to find comfort in their peers when they feel psychologically unsafe. They hang out or seek advice from peers who have gone through workplace bullying that made them feel psychologically unsafe. It was noticed that none of the participants sought professional help from a guidance counselor or a psychologist.

I take a break, pause and then go to my supportive friends. I seek advice from peers who have gone through bullying at work. They would advise me to focus on my goals and continue with my work.

Nick (pseudonym), Male, Elementary Teacher

I immediately seek help from peers. I talk to them. We hang out and temporarily forget our stresses, the bullies at work and the toxic school heads.

Wennah (pseudonym), Female, Elementary Teacher

Supportive colleagues who can talk and give sound advice help in reducing stress and preventing depression and anxiety among those who are bullied at work or are victims of office politics (Pauksztat et al., 2022). Seeking help from peers during the early stages when an employee feels psychologically unsafe helps mitigate stress and anxiety (Paull et al., 2020). Professionals in the academe also rely on peers whom they can trust when they are victimized by office politics (Goodboy et al., 2022).

Praying. Some participants resort to praying when they are feeling psychologically unsafe. Praying enables them to feel calm and focus on matters beyond their circumstances.

I pray, meditate and relax until I feel calm. I can focus on my life goals instead of the problem with my co-teachers.

Paulo (pseudonym), male, preschool teacher

I pray a lot when I have these problems at work. It helps me a lot and I feel calmer.

Tess (pseudonym), female, high school teacher

Praying can be used as a mindfulness activity (Yousaf et al., 2022). It can lead to emotional healing and spiritual growth (Timbers & Hollenberer, 2022). As a predominantly Christian country, Filipinos have been taught to pray when they have difficult situations to deal with.

Conclusions

The findings of the study show that the mean psychological safety level of the research participants is average. Despite this, there are quite several participants who have low levels of psychological safety. There is a significant difference in psychological safety when grouped according to stress at work ($F(4, 141) = F= 3.237, p=.014$). The participants feel psychologically unsafe when they have unsupportive heads, supervisors, and colleagues who bully them. The two dominant coping strategies when feeling psychologically unsafe are talking with peers and praying.

Recommendations

Given the findings of the study, the following are recommended:

Psychological safety should be discussed among public school teachers. Seminars and workshops must be conducted to educate teachers about the concept of psychological safety and its importance. Effective communication skills and assertiveness training can be given to address workplace bullying. A collaborative environment through teambuilding activities can be done periodically. Discussion groups on creating a psychologically safe workspace can be done during the school's learning action cell sessions.

Supportive leadership is also needed. School heads, principals, and supervisors should initiate creating a safe and inclusive environment for the teachers. They can have an open-door policy wherein they will listen to the concerns and suggestions of teachers. They should maintain an open mind when there are suggestions for improvement. The school heads, principals, and supervisors should also not feel threatened if teachers ask them or give their own ideas. They should encourage the sharing of ideas in order to have a better working environment.

It is important that the provisions of the laws that promote psychological safety be implemented in schools. The school heads should make sure of its full implementation. On the other hand, teachers must be assertive and stand up against office bullying.

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