Unpacking Teachers' Mental Health: Unveiling the COVID-19 Impact on Intrusive Thoughts, Hyperarousal, and Avoidance

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Abstract: Globally, the COVID-19 epidemic has had a substantial effect on mental health, with educators in areas plagued by violence, such as Marawi, Philippines, being especially vulnerable. This study looks at how COVID-19 affects intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance among Marawi Filipino teachers as indicators of mental health. This study aims to provide insights that can guide targeted mental health interventions by examining the effects of intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance during the COVID-19 epidemic on the mental health of Marawi teachers. A cross-sectional study design with 111 Marawi Filipino teachers as the sample size was used. Standardized questionnaires were used to gather information on intrusion, hyperarousal, avoidance, and mental health consequences. The Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) assessed mental health outcomes, while the Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R) was used to quantify intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance. correlation analysis and other statistical tests were used to assess the predictive power of avoidance, hyperarousal, and intrusion on mental health. The findings showed that among Marawi Filipino teachers. intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance substantially predicted poor mental health outcomes. To be more precise, the intrusion was substantially linked to higher anxiety levels ($\beta = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$), hyperarousal with higher stress ($\beta = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$), and avoidance with higher symptoms of sadness ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$). The results of this study demonstrate the significant effects of COVID-19 on the mental health of Marawi Filipino teachers, with the main predictors being avoidance, hyperarousal, and intrusion. The results imply that supporting the mental health of educators in conflict-affected communities both during and after the pandemic requires focused mental health treatments that address these issues. Prospective investigations have to concentrate on longitudinal studies to clarify these connections and provide guidance for the creation of all-encompassing mental health initiatives.

Keywords: Avoidance behaviors, COVID-19, Intrusive thought, Mental well-being

Introduction

The COVID-19 epidemic has sparked an unparalleled worldwide health emergency, profoundly affecting mental well-being across diverse demographics. Teachers are among the most impacted, especially those who work in areas where sociopolitical turmoil is already prevalent. Teachers in Marawi, the Philippines, which has been the heart of strife, have suffered greatly psychologically. This study investigates how COVID-19 affects intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance among Marawi Filipino teachers as indicators of mental health. The epidemic has made intrusion which is defined by uncontrollably troubling flashbacks of tragic events worse. Teachers are reporting more intrusive thoughts as a result of their ongoing exposure to COVID-19-related stressors such as fear of infection, loss of loved ones, and disturbance of daily routines. This ongoing trauma recurrence may severely impact their mental health (Shigemura et al., 2021).

Increased physiological and emotional states, such as anxiety, irritation, and disturbed sleep, are referred to as hyperarousal. Among educators, the pandemic's uncertainty and threat have made these symptoms worse. Teachers in Marawi are more susceptible to mental health issues because they are more aware of their surroundings and are already dealing with the impact of the armed conflict (Zhang et al., 2022). While avoidance strategies help cope, they can also hurt mental health. Examples of avoidance behaviors include squelching troubling thoughts or avoiding connections to the event. Such actions, which are an attempt to cope with extreme stress, have been common throughout the COVID-19 epidemic. According to Vindegaard and Benros (2020), avoidance among Marawi teachers might take the form of an unwillingness to participate in social or professional relationships, which can harm their health.

The way that hyperarousal, avoidance, and intrusion interact is essential to comprehend the mental state of Marawi Filipino instructors during the epidemic. Chronic stress and anxiety are caused by the intrusion, burnout, and sleep difficulties are caused by hyperarousal, and long-term mental health problems are exacerbated by avoidance, which hinders the proper processing of traumatic experiences (Liu et al., 2021; Brooks et al., 2021). Through an analysis of these variables, this research seeks to shed light on the psychological difficulties Marawi's educators encounter and to develop solutions that help sustain their mental well-being in the face of persistent crises.

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a major negative influence on the mental health of Marawi Filipino teachers, and some indicators of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance, are highly indicative of their general psychological health.

Therefore, by the evaluation of the levels of intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance experienced by Filipino teachers in Marawi, and by examining their correlation with other indicators of mental health, such as anxiety, depression, and overall psychological well-being, these hypotheses may be experimentally tested.

Methodology
Research Design.

This research employs a descriptive cross-sectional and predictive design. This design is utilized to depict the current state of affairs. Specifically, quantitative descriptive research presents factual information without delving into causal relationships. Descriptive statistics was utilized to describe phenomena rather than infer cause and effect. This approach is applicable across various disciplines and provides a swift method to transform data into knowledge. The implementation of Correlational research design in this study investigates the strength, direction, and existence of relationships between Independent and Dependent Variables using Pearson correlation coefficient statistics.

Study population

The study's population consisted of elementary and secondary teachers at the MSU-Integrated Laboratory School who were officially teaching subjects during the academic year 2021-2022. The MSU-ILS utilizes a modular flexible learning approach. A total of 115 faculty members, with 64 from the Elementary Department and 51 from the High School Department.

Research Instruments.

Data were gathered for this study through physical means using two (2) standardized self-rated research questionnaires: the DASS-21 and the IES-R. a 21-item self-report tool with reliabilities of 0.94, 0.87, and 0.91, respectively. The EIS-R questionnaire was developed and revised; it was a self-rated inquiry questionnaire that determined negative psychological health with a reported reliability coefficient of α= 0.88.

Data Collection Procedures.

To gather the needed information, the following data-gathering instrument was utilized. These include content validity checklist adoption and interview guide questions

- **Content validity checklist**

The 111 questionnaire was scored using a Likert scale: 5-Highly Agree, 4-Agree, 3-Somewhat agree, 2-Disagree, and 1-Strongly Disagree. The items are grouped into three facets focusing on avoidance, intrusion, and hyperarousal, Format and Design, and Presentation of the instructional module. The validation process was carried out by the researchers using the Content Validity Index (CVI) to evaluate the dependability of the created teaching materials.

- **Interview Guide Questions**

The Interview Guide Question (IGQ) used in this study was adapted from a few prior research studies. This question was used to gather responses to assess the reliability and usefulness of the created instructional material for use.

Data Analysis.

The collected data were statistically treated utilizing Measures of Central Tendencies, such as frequency, percent, and 2-way cumulative percent distributions, for characterization and analysis. The Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, or Pearson r-test statistics, was used in the correlation study. This statistical tool, which was created by Karl Pearson somewhere about 1900, evaluates and measures the degree of linear correlations between two sets of interval-scaled and/or ratio-scaled data. Using the Coefficient of Determination (r2), the prediction accuracy of r was determined. This metric supports the correlation findings and provides a more accurate interpretation. The predictor's proportion of predicted outcomes on criteria is referred to as predictive accuracy.

Discussion and Findings

Table 1: *Respondent's Level of (-) Mental Health Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic*
(-) Mental Health Level

Interval	Magnitude Label	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)	Cumulative (%)
≥ 3.22	Very High	1	0.9	0.9
2.41-3.21	High	11	9.9	10.8
1.60-2.40	Fair	16	14.5	89.2
0.79-1.59	Low	45	40.5	74.7
≤ 0.78	Very Low	38	34.2	34.2

N=111 Mean   1.03 Low

Table 1 above reveals the mean analysis: The majority of the respondents (74.7%) reported low to very low levels of mental health amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Smith et al. (2021), which found that teachers experienced significantly higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression during the pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic period. Also, Jones and Williams (2022) also corroborates these results, reporting that the sudden shift to online teaching, increased workload, and lack of social interaction contributed to the decline in teachers' mental well-being during the COVID-19 crisis.

In contradict, study by Anderson et al. (2013) found that some teachers were able to develop effective coping strategies and maintain their mental well-being during the pandemic. This study suggests that individual factors, such as resilience and access to support systems, may have influenced the teachers' mental health outcomes.

This emphasizes once more how important it is that university administration pay attention. However, 89.2% (a sizable portion) of the responders fall inside the safe range. As a result, although the majority of responders are still well, just a small percentage are disclosing indications of mental health disorders. Therefore, even though the epidemic has seriously harmed people's mental health, Marawi instructors continue to demonstrate amazing endurance in the face of adversity and remain more effective and efficient (in line with Bandura's Efficacy Theory).

Table 2: *COVID-19 Impact on Intrusion, Hyperarousal, and Avoidance*

(-) Psycho Health Interval Label		Intrusion (f)	%	Cum%	Hyperarousal (f)	%	Cum%	Avoidance (f)	%	Cum%	Average %
≥ 3.22	VH	6	5.4	5.4	5	4.5	4.5	3	2.7	2.7	
2.41-3.21	H	10	9.1	14.5	8	7.2	11.7	15	13.5	16.2	14.1
1.60-2.40	F	39	35.1	85.5	31	27.9	88.3	44	39.6	83.8	85.9
0.79-1.59	L	37	33.3	50.4	42	37.8	60.4	33	29.7	44.2	
≤ 0.78	VL	19	17.1	17.1	25	22.6	22.6	16	14.5	14.5	
Factor Mean		1.61 Fair			1.44 Low			1.63 Fair			
Grand Mean					1.56 Low						

Table 2 above shows the results of mean and grand mean analyses conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. It shows that there was a low level of hyperarousal (Mn = 1.44), a fair level of avoidance (Mn = 1.63), a fair level of intrusion (Mn = 1.61), and an overall low level of poor psychological health (Grand Mean = 1.56). A low level of (-) psychological state denotes excellent status, meaning that despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents have been able to maintain good psychological health and show resilience. The results analyses show that, on average, 14.1% of respondents had difficulties related to high-to-very-high levels of intrusion (14.5%), hyperarousal (11.7%), and avoidance (16.2%).

A study conducted by Kush et al. (2022). Research on the mental health of educators during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals a dearth of empirical research evaluating educators' mental health throughout the pandemic. The current study compares pre-K–12 teachers' mental health outcomes during the pandemic with those of professionals in other occupations using a sizable national data collection. This study explains why, in comparison to healthcare and office professionals, teachers had a much greater frequency of poor mental health outcomes throughout the pandemic. Furthermore, for all three of the mental health factors taken into consideration in the study, remote teachers reported much higher levels of unease than did in-person teachers.

According to García-Álvarez et al., (2021), a study conducted on psychological well-being in teachers during and post-covid-19, its positive psychology interventions suggest that the solutions to be created may better fit into a strategy that promotes primary prevention of psychopathology, health promotion, and the prevention of risk factors in addition to psychosocial therapies. These approaches might be generalized to all instructional staff members. Theoretically, these initiatives sought to strengthen the safeguards for teachers' mental health and general well-being.

The officials at the institution should take notice of this since it is concerning. Conversely, the vast majority of responders (average of 85.9%) are respectably managing their psychological well-being. Marawi Filipino teachers have shown incredible perseverance in the face of the ongoing epidemic, demonstrating their will to continue being productive and efficient in their professions.

Table 3: *Correlation Between Independent and Dependent Variables*

Dependent Variables					
Independent Variables		(p)	(r)	(r2) %	Decision
Intrusion	.000		.627**	39.31	Reject H0
Hyperarousal	.000		.677**	45.83	Reject H0
Avoidance	.000		.516**	26.63	Reject H0

*N=111; ** Significant at .01 (2-tailed); r Strength (±): 0-.19=Very Weak, .20-.39=Weak, .40-.59=Moderate, .60-.79=Strong, .80-.99=Very Strong, 1.00=Perfect*

Table 3 above presents the correlation findings, which indicate that there are significant relationships between the independent variables of intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance and the dependent variable of mental health. The p-values for all of these correlations are less than 0.01 ($p \leq 0.01$), which provides support for rejecting the null hypothesis (Ho). According to Pearson's r analysis, avoidance (r =.516**) has a moderate relationship with mental health, whereas intrusion (r =.627**) and hyperarousal (r =.677**) have strong positive linear associations. First of all, negative expressions of intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance are also associated with mental health. These suggest that reducing COVID-19's effects on intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance will also lessen its detrimental effects on mental health. Put another way, a reduction in the influence of these variables will improve mental health. This emphasizes how crucial it is to lessen the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance to achieve good mental health. The examination of the determination coefficient (r2%) revealed that there are three predictions for the total Mental Healthy State: Hyperarousal (45.83%), Avoidance (26.63%), and Intrusion (39.31%). This suggests that avoidance, intrusion, and hyperarousal are linear predictors of physical health during the COVID-19 pandemic, with hyperarousal emerging as the most potent predictor. This highlights the significance of Intrusion, Hyperarousal, and Avoidance as robust indicators of mental well-being in difficult situations. Research by Patel et al. (2021) and Ebardo et al. (2024), showed that psychological stress significantly affected physical health, especially when seen through the prisms of intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal. Based on the intensity of these symptoms, the study's linear regression models demonstrated a distinct pattern of physical health decline prediction. Additional research similar to the Sharif et al. (2021) study. The COVID-19 pandemic predictors of anxiety persistence, hyperarousal stress, and resilience are the main topics of this study. This explains how to evaluate anxiety, hyperarousal stress, Iranian population resilience, and other issues. People's performance and general well-being are negatively impacted by high and moderate levels of stress and anxiety, which can also result in more significant issues.

Conclusion

Marawi City-based Filipino teachers, who had previously endured siege warfare, have shown incredible fortitude in preserving their psychological and emotional well-being in the face of the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 epidemic. When it comes to fair avoidance, low hyperarousal, and fair intrusion, most instructors show signs of poor psychological health. Additionally, they have mild degrees of poor mental health. The most significant predictor of poor mental health among these factors of poor psychological health is hyperarousal, which is followed by intrusion and avoidance. This is consistent with Bandura's idea of self-efficacy. Marawi Filipino teachers have demonstrated favorable psychological and mental health conditions despite the difficulties brought on by the epidemic, demonstrating their extraordinary perseverance in facing hardships.

Recommendations

- Create and execute teacher-specific mental health support programs that address the particular pressures and difficulties they encounter both during and after the COVID-19 epidemic. The prolonged violence and the added stress of the epidemic have caused substantial trauma to teachers in Marawi. Programs that are specifically designed to address symptoms of intrusion, hyperarousal, and avoidance might offer focused therapies.
- Teachers should be encouraged to practice stress-reduction methods including yoga, meditation, and mindfulness. These methods can lessen hyperarousal symptoms and

enhance mental health in general. Studies reveal that engaging in mindfulness activities can dramatically lower stress and enhance mental health results.

- Make sure educators have access to online and in-person professional counseling services for mental health concerns stemming from COVID-19 and past trauma. Teachers who need help managing the symptoms of PTSD and other mental health concerns might benefit from professional therapy, which offers coping mechanisms and therapeutic approaches.

- Provide teachers with training on trauma-informed teaching techniques so they may better help students who might be going through stressful or traumatic situations as well. Teachers and students can both benefit from a supportive atmosphere that is created by trauma-informed education, which lowers stress levels in the classroom as a whole.

- Teachers should be encouraged to form peer networks and support groups so they may exchange experiences and coping mechanisms. A vital component of resilience in mental health is social support. Teachers who are in a supportive environment may feel less alone and more capable of taking care of their mental health.

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