



CHALLENGES AND COPING MECHANISMS OF CHILDLESS TEACHERS: THEIR IMPLICATIONS TO THE TEACHING PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT

The qualitative study aimed to know the challenges and coping mechanisms of childless teachers and their implications to the teaching profession. The research method utilized in the study was qualitative using in-depth interview and the design was phenomenology. Majority of the participants were middle and old age, have long years as married couple, and their husbands work away from home. The challenges faced by childless teachers were pressured to have a child, less confident and inspired, unscheduled absences, parenthood feeling, feeling embarrassed and insulted, feeling of incompleteness and loneliness, and feeling unsecured. The childless teachers coping mechanisms were being contented and satisfied, loving children of others, accepting the reality, adopting a child, spending more time and attention to learners, spending quality time with husband, making self busy, praying, and taking care of pets. A culture of acceptance, understanding, and support within the teaching profession ensures that childless teachers thrive both personally and professionally.

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Keywords: *Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, Childless Teachers, and Teaching Profession*

INTRODUCTION

Childlessness encompasses a range of complex emotional, social, and cultural dimensions. For individuals and couples facing challenges in conceiving or choosing not to have children, societal expectations, and norms can amplify the complexity of this issue. The emotional toll, stigmatization, and pressure from the family and peers are significant aspects of being childless. By delving into the shared experiences of those affected, we can understand the challenges, choices, and societal dynamics.

The issue of childlessness has attracted attention from sociologists and demographers globally (Koppen, Mazuy & Toulemon, 2017). While it is prevalent in developed countries (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2013), it gradually becoming more noticeable in developing nations like the Philippines.

In the Philippines, there is a widespread belief that children are Divine gifts and there is societal pressure for married individuals to become parents.

The cultural expectation is so ingrained that not having a child is viewed as an unfortunate state for married couples (Medina, 2001). The cultural expectation persists with newly married couple frequently facing inquiries like, "Do you have a baby already?" This underscores the challenging situation experienced by childless Filipinos, as emphasized by Tudy and Tudy (2020).

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Rich et al. (2011) argue that childlessness is frequently misunderstood, with the term itself carrying a negative connotation, particularly for women who opt not to have children (voluntary childlessness).

On the other hand, involuntary childlessness is linked to fertility issues or medical conditions that hinder conception. This may involve conditions affecting both men and women, ranging from hormonal imbalances to structural abnormalities (Gifford, 2022).

Childlessness caused by external circumstances can lead to various types of difficult emotions (Lola & Lykke, 2022) including sadness, grief, frustration, and sense of loss. Individuals and couples may experience stress, anxiety, and even depression. Societal expectations around family and procreation can contribute to feelings of inadequacy or social stigma. There are external pressures, from family and friends, adding to the emotional burden.

In the case of married couple who are in the teaching profession, the pressure is real, knowing that their job requires them to cater the children. Hence, having no child is a question on their capacity to nurture the children entrusted to them.

Individuals and couples who are dealing with involuntary childlessness often develop various coping mechanisms. These may include seeking psychological, social and emotional support through counseling or support groups, exploring alternative paths to parenthood, support

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from family, friends, and colleagues, or focusing on personal and professional pursuits (Pasztor et al., 2019).

The strain of involuntary childlessness among teachers can impact relationships, including marriages or partnerships. Communication and mutual support become crucial as couples navigate the emotional complexities of unmet reproductive desires.

Understanding involuntary childlessness involves recognizing it as a complex and multifaceted experience that goes beyond the biological aspect. It encompasses psychological, social, and economic dimensions, requiring sensitivity and support from both healthcare professionals and society at large.

Due to these observations, the researcher would like to know the challenges and coping mechanisms of childless teachers and their implications to the teaching profession in the Schools Division of Guimaras for the school year 2022-2023.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

The chapter outlines the research design, research method, study participants, sampling design, data gathering procedures, research instrument, and data analysis employed in the study.

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Research Method

The research employed qualitative research through in-depth interview. Qualitative research entails inquiring about participants' experiences with events in their lives (Austin, 2014).

During the in-depth interview, the interviewer and the interviewee were allowed to sit together at a distance and engaged in a thoughtful discussion about specific issues.

The objective was to capture the essential perspectives of the participants on the issue within a social context through their responses to the questions (B2B International, 2023).

Research Design

The study utilized a phenomenological research design, considering phenomenology as a philosophical approach to qualitative research. Phenomenology aims to comprehend how individuals perceive the world, focusing on subjective interpretations of their experiences that may differ from commonly held views. Phenomenology involves interviewing subjects to understand their impressions and is frequently applied in the fields like psychology, sociology, and social work.

According to Smith (2013), phenomenology is the exploration of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view, emphasizing the intentionality of an experience directed toward an object through its content or meaning and appropriate enabling conditions.

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Participants of the Study

Fifteen childless teachers from various schools within the Schools Division of Guimaras for the school year 2022-2023 were purposely selected as participants of the study. The participants represented a demographic of teachers in their middle age and old age who had dedicated many years to their profession. Additionally, their marriages had endured for an extended period, with the majority whose spouses were employed outside their area of residence. The inclusion of the participants suggested an exploration into the unique experiences and challenges faced by childless teachers in this specific context and shed light on the intersection of professional commitment, age, and marital circumstances.

Sampling Design

This study employed a purposive sampling approach, where a non-probability sample was chosen based on both population characteristics and the study's objectives. Purposive sampling, also recognized as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, involves the researcher's judgment in identifying and selecting individuals, cases, or events that offer the most pertinent information to accomplish the study's goals (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

Research Instrument

In this study, a research-made interview schedule served as the research instrument.

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The interview schedule included three questions that specifically addressed the study's purpose.

Data gathering and documentation were conducted using voice and video recorders, contingent on participants' consent.

Validity of the Research Instrument

Before assessing the validity of the researcher-made interview schedule, the researcher asked for validation from the adviser, Graduate School Dean, and a panel of jurors selected for their expertise in research, testing, assessment, and English. Each question was subjected to their review and potential modification.

Validity pertains to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, correctness, and usefulness of the inferences drawn by a researcher. Regarding content-related evidence of validity, it is crucial that the content and format align with the definitions of variables and the sample of subjects to be measured. This alignment is instrumental in validating the items within the questionnaire (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2007).

Comment, corrections, and suggestions provided by the panel of validators for the interview schedule were taken into account and followed the suitable guidelines of Good and Scates (Appendix D).

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Data Gathering Procedures

Approval was secured from the adviser, Graduate School Dean, School Head, and individual participants to enable the researcher to carry out the study. The researcher visited schools, communities, or other convenient locations for participants to conduct interview in person.

The researcher conducted an interview to the participants but prior to this, the researcher encouraged the participants to sign a waiver or permission relative to the conduct of the study. Strict adherence to minimum health protocols mandated by the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), Department of Health (DOH) guidelines amidst the pandemic, DepEd Orders on health protocols, and the health protocols of Local Government Units and Barangays was maintained throughout the study amidst the pandemic.

Using the in-depth interview, the researcher equipped the participants with voice and video recorder to comprehensively capture their responses depending on their approval. Following a series of interviews, the researcher consolidated all the collected data.

Data Analyses

The collected information underwent analysis through a thematic approach.

Thematic analysis involves the identification of patterns or themes within qualitative data. As described by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), the goal of thematic analysis is to recognize

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significant or intriguing themes and utilize them to address research questions or contribute insights to an issue. In essence, it involves summarizing, analyzing, interpreting, and making sense of the gathered data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was conducted to know the challenges and coping mechanisms of childless teachers and their implications to the teaching profession in the Schools Division of Guimaras for the school year 2022-2023.

A qualitative research approach, specifically phenomenology, was employed for this study, utilizing an in-depth interview as primary method of data collection.

Fifteen childless teachers from various schools within the Schools Division of Guimaras were purposely selected as participants for the study.

A research-made interview schedule was used as an instrument to gather data, and depending on participant permissions, voice and video recorders were utilized for documentation.

To ensure the validity of the interview questions, a content validation process was conducted by a Panel of Experts, applying the Criteria for Content Validation by Good and Scates. The researcher considered and incorporated feedback to enhance the tool's validity. Once validated, permits were secured to initiate the in-depth interview.

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Approval was secured from the adviser, Graduate School Dean, School Head, and individual participants to enable the researcher to carry out the study. The researcher visited schools and communities, or other convenient locations for participants to conduct interview in person.

After conducting series of interviews, the researcher consolidated and analyzed the collected data and employed a thematic approach for interpretation.

The following are the findings of the study:

Majority of the childless teachers are already in their middle and old age. They have been in the service as teachers and being married in quite long years. Majority of their husbands are not staying a long period of time with them since mostly are working abroad and outside their place of residence.

Based on the results of the in-depth interview with the participants, it was found out that the challenges of childless teachers were being pressured to have a child, less confident and less inspired, unscheduled absences, parenthood feeling, feeling embarrassed and insulted, feeling incomplete and lonely, and feeling unsecured.

It was also found out that the coping mechanisms of childless teachers were being contented and satisfied, loving children of others, accepting the reality, adopting a child, spending more time and attention to learners, spending quality time with husband, making self busy, praying, and taking care of pets.

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Moreover, fostering a culture of acceptance, understanding, and support within the teaching profession ensures that childless teachers, regardless of their family situation, can thrive both personally and professionally.

Based on the findings, the following insights were drawn:

The childless teachers were usually beyond their reproduction stage with husband working away from their residence.

The challenges encountered by childless teachers were conforming to the societal norm as married couple, reduction of enthusiasm, irregular attendance, and anxiousness of having a complete family.

Likewise, they also met obstacles of being humiliated, absence of attachment, and inability to gain acceptance.

The coping mechanisms adopted by childless teachers revealed a spectrum of resilience strategies. They were able to overcome the challenges by having inner peace, acted as supplemental parents, and foster positivity.

Furthermore, they open doors to children in need of caring, compassionate to their learners to be a better human being, and based their lives on common values.

Moreover, the childless teachers maximize the use of their time, reduce anxiety through prayers, and playful to alleviate tension.

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The diverse coping mechanisms underscored the adaptability and resourcefulness of childless teachers in handling varied challenges met and in navigating the complexities of their lives.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the findings and insights arrived in this study, the following recommendations were forwarded:

Ethical practices should be observed among colleagues of childless teachers to avoid stigmatization and create a more inclusive environment.

Encouraged acceptance and understanding among colleagues and communities by improving awareness about the societal pressures faced by childless teachers.

School heads should develop support programs within educational institutions to provide resources and emotional support for childless teachers who are facing similar challenges.

School heads should regulate workload and initiate a flexible work arrangements and counselling services for the childless teachers to better support their welfare and professional development.

Futhermore, a special leave privilege for childless teachers could be implemented of five (5) days per semester with pay to give them ample time with their husbands.

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A similar study is also encouraged to be conducted in the future, including other variables not used in the study, and in wider scope.



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