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Teachers' Knowledge in Mitigating Suicide and Attitudes Toward Suicide: Basis for Intervention Plan

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the teachers' knowledge in mitigating suicide and the attitudes toward suicide of the Public Secondary School teachers of General Mamerto Natividad District, Division of Nueva Ecija during the school year 2024-2025.The study utilized descriptive-correlational research design utilizing a researcher-made instrument on socio-demographic profile and two (2) adapted instruments namely Literacy of Suicide Scale (LOSS) and Stigma of Suicide Scale (SOSS). The data gathered were tabulated and analyzed using Spearman's Rho to determine the strength and direction of association between variables. Results revealed that teachers possess a level of understanding about suicide mitigation that goes beyond foundational knowledge but lack comprehensive and detailed understanding of the matter. Female teachers showed higher level of knowledge on suicide mitigation compered to their counterparts. Teachers, especially those who are older, who are holding higher positions, and who spent more years in teaching, demonstrate a high degree of social stigma directed towards suicide which denotes that they hold strong negative and discriminatory attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward individuals who died by suicide as well as towards the topic of suicide itself. Hence, the Intervention Plan is proposed based on the result of the respondents' evaluation. The intervention plan can be useful to improve the teachers' knowledge in mitigating suicide and to lessen the stigma towards suicide, thus it is recommended by the researcher to use the intervention plan by teachers and school administrators as it will lead to enhanced and improved Guidance Services in school. The proposed intervention plan is further recommended to be adapted by the public secondary schools in General Mamerto Natividad to guide the school's Guidance Designate in conducting mental health activities in their respective schools.

Keywords: *knowledge, suicide, attitude, mitigation, intervention*

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1. Introduction

The Philippines' first mental health act, the Republic Act No. 11306, became law on June 21, 2018. This legislation provides fundamental mental health stipulations and establishes the framework for mental healthcare across the nation. It requires that patients' family members to receive psychosocial support, with consent, and be involved in treatment planning when needed. Beyond just acknowledging their importance, the Act protects mental health professionals' right to participate in mental health planning and service development. It also ensures their safety at work, provides opportunities for continued learning, and grants them independence in their practice. Significantly, the law also embeds mental health initiatives directly into the educational system through school and organizational programs.

In the educational system, suicide is one of the mental health concerns that the Philippines is facing nowadays. DepEd Assistant Secretary Dexter Galban (2023) cited that during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, 404 public school learners were recorded to have committed suicide. This situation affects not only the mega schools in the urban areas but also the small schools in the rural areas. In General Mamerto Natividad District, Division of Nueva Ecija, four (4) suicide incidents involving secondary students have been recorded. One (1) grade 8 learner tried to jump from the 4-storey building of the school. Another learner, a Senior High School, was reported to rush to the hospital because of pill overdose. Another Senior High School learner hanged himself inside his bedroom. Lately, another grade 7 learner was found hanging inside her bedroom. Among these incidents, two resulted to death.

To adhere to the Department of Education’s mission to provide safe and motivating environment for the learner, each school must establish an intervention program to address mental health concerns such as suicide. As protocol, only the registered guidance counselor can handle cases involving suicide. However, there is an increasing rate of students with suicidal behavior and the number of registered guidance counselor is scarce. In the district of General Natividad, Nueva Ecija, there is no registered guidance counselor. In today’s school setting, a number of guidance counselors, guidance designates, and guidance advocates are outnumbered by the number of teachers. Hence, the need to empower teachers in performing tasks that are related to suicide prevention and intervention.

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One of the roles of a teacher is being a counselor. According to research, aside from providing academic guidance, teachers can help students identify problems, adjust to new situations, provide support, develop healthy attitudes and values, and understand strengths and weaknesses. Teachers are essential part of the educational system that can be significant in addressing this concern. As students' second parents, teachers have daily contact with them and are often the first to notice changes in their behavior or communication. According to Whitlock et al (2014) and Marraccini et al (2017), when people feel connected, it significantly improves their academic performance and promotes healthy behaviors, while also reducing suicidal ideation and attempts. On the contrary, little is known about the teacher's perspectives regarding suicide. Research concluded that the teachers are the gatekeepers who are in the first line to detect students at risk for suicide. Since they spend more time with students than any other school personnel, their ability to identify students who are at risk, their approach and attitude whenever a student opened up about suicide, and their ability to refer the students to proper authority may positively affect the process of preventing suicide in schools.

In this study, the teachers' knowledge in mitigating suicide and attitudes toward suicide were determined and the results were used in developing intervention plan. In his study, Prof. Joel Navarez (2020) cited that an individual's knowledge, attitudes, competencies, and training regarding suicide can either help or hinder their ability to intervene, thus impacting suicide prevention efforts. Determining the teachers' knowledge and attitudes will provide information on how to formulate and design suicide mitigation intervention program.

This study determined the knowledge in mitigating suicide and attitudes toward suicide of the public secondary school teachers in the district of General Natividad, Nueva Ecija. As a Guidance Designate, the researcher used the information in developing Suicide Mitigation Intervention Plan that aims to benefit the whole school community.

2. Review of Related Literature and Studies

An Act Establishing a National Mental Health Policy known as the Republic Act No. 11036. This act provides the information that the state affirms the basic right of all Filipinos to mental health as well as the fundamental rights of people who require mental health services.

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According to this act, the state commits itself to promoting the well-being of people by ensuring that; mental health is valued, promoted and protected; mental health conditions are treated and prevented; timely, affordable, high quality, and culturally-appropriate mental health case is made available to the public; mental health service are free from coercion and accountable to the service users; and persons affected by mental health conditions are able to exercise the full range of human rights, and participate fully in society and at work free from stigmatization and discrimination.

Suicide as Mental Health Concern

Smith (2022) stated that student mental health can vary from a temporary transient disruption to wellbeing and distress to recognized symptoms of a defined mental health problem or where an individual has received a formal clinical diagnosis to serious self-harm and suicidal ideation. These mental health problems can detrimentally impact on short- and longer-term educational outcomes including academic performance, student retention, studies completion, labor market success, employment prospects, career success and there is economic impact for individuals and society when these are detrimentally affected (Kotera et al., 2023). Smith (2022) emphasizes that the mental health needs and concerns of students are broad. They can vary from stress related to the lack of accommodation, lack of time to access mental health appointments, a diagnosed mental health disorder requiring clinical intervention and ongoing support, and for a small number of individuals, an immediate emergency response to a suicidal crisis. Mental health, according to him, is influenced by a variety of personal, social, economic, and physical factors and certain groups may be disproportionately affected and at higher risk for mental health problems. This includes international students, LGBTQ, ethnic minorities, mature students, disadvantaged students, and individuals with previous trauma, self-harm and mental health difficulties.

Globally, suicide is a prevalent issue. A suicide is a devastating event that leaves enduring consequences for families, communities, and even whole countries. Suicide isn't confined to developed countries; it's a global concern present in every corner of the world. However, suicides can be prevented by prompt, proven, and often affordable interventions. In their paper “Correlates of Suicide Attempts in Filipino Youths: An Analysis Based on the 2015 Global

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School Based Student Health Survey", Lagman et al (2021), cited that there are various risk factors including psychosocial and biological factors related to suicide that have been identified. Those who have attempted suicide are at high risk for a later suicide completion especially during the following year of their first attempt. Treatment guideline has highlighted various risk factors including depression, family history of suicide attempts, exposure to violence, impulsivity, aggressive or disruptive behavior, access to firearms, bullying, feelings of hopelessness or helplessness, and acute loss or rejection. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Committee on Adolescence, as cited by Lagman et al, listed additional risk factors for suicide and suicide attempts which include history of adoption, male gender, parental mental health problems, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning sexual orientation, transgender identification, a history of physical or sexual abuse, pathologic internet use, and non-suicidal self-injurious behaviors. Agitation, intoxication, and recent stressful life events were considered as immediate risk factors while bullying, impaired parent-child relationship, living outside of the home, difficulties in school, and neither working nor attending school were social and environmental risk factors.

Quintos (2017) stated that suicide as a cause of death among young people is increasingly becoming a problem in the Philippines. Suicide has been observed to be the 9th leading cause of death among those aged 20-24 since 2003, and responsible for approximately one out of every three deaths among Filipinos aged 10-24. There are several factors that contribute to the Filipino youth's predisposition for suicide ideation. These elements include the value of a strong family relationship, the importance of regulating the youth's involvement in peer groups, the danger of deviant lifestyles, the importance of guidance counselors, and the danger of having suicidal peers. As a result of his study, Quintos recommends to increase the presence of guidance counselors in schools and, if possible, in the general community for they could serve as authority figures and source of sound advice for youth who are faced with problems at home.

The United States Suicide Prevention Resource Center highlights that by focusing on the emotional well-being of all students**,** teachers can play a significant role in suicide prevention, extending their support beyond high-risk individuals. Teachers are well positioned to promote a feeling of connectedness and belonging in the school community. Connectedness is an important

factor in improving academic achievement and healthy behaviors, and it is related to reductions in suicidal thoughts and attempts (Whitlock et al., 2014; Marraccini, et al., 2017).

Teachers as Suicide Prevention Gatekeepers

Schools are increasingly recognized as critical contexts to address suicide risk and engage in youth suicide prevention since children and youth spend much of their time in school (Kolves et al., 2017; Mo et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2017). Schools play a vital role in student well-being, impacting all facets of their lives by promoting and protecting their health. Mo (2018) mentioned that school-based suicide prevention and intervention programs are critical approach to address youth suicide and support student help-seeking behaviors. The early identification of students at risk for suicide is an essential aspect of delivering effective suicide interventions, and adults who spend a large portion of time with children and youth are well suited to identify suicide risk and intervene (Torok et al., 2019).

Professor Joel Navarez (2022) cited that a significant number of counselors aren't equipped with the knowledge and information needed to properly assess suicidal clients. This lack of screening is tragic, because screening for suicide risk is one of the most powerful suicide prevention strategies (Mann et al., 2005; Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2004). Counselors remain poorly trained and ill prepared for the aftermath of suicide (Dexter-Mazza, & Freeman, 2003). In a school setting, counselors are outnumbered by teachers. Teachers, if knowledgeable enough, can support the needs of the school in addressing concerns regarding suicide.

Teachers are crucial in reducing student suicide and are often at the forefront of prevention efforts. As gatekeepers, teachers are often the first adults to notice students' emotional or psychosocial concerns and are therefore in an inimitable position to intervene (Freedenthal & Breslin, 2010; Torok et al., 2019).

Haugen (2022) cited that according to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, individuals will avoid activities they believe are beyond their capabilities, but they will engage in activities they believe they are capable of performing. Understanding teacher's knowledge, skills, and attitudes in engaging to suicide prevention and intervention is therefore, important. Many teachers, unfortunately, seem to don't feel ready or comfortable talking to students about suicide. Teachers

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have reported several barriers in intervening with students at risk of suicide, such as limited education or training and concern that they will make the crisis situation worse (Hatton et al., 2017; Ross et al., 2017). As a result, there is a need to train teachers in suicide prevention and how to effectively respond to students in crisis (Freedenthal & Breslin, 2010; McConnellogue & Storey, 2017; Ross et al., 2017). For teachers to effectively contribute to school suicide prevention, it's essential they are trained to recognize students at risk, offer initial support, and connect them with appropriate mental health services. Mazzer (2014) cited that teachers are considered well placed to identify issues concerning students' mental health and well-being and can play a critical role in the helping process for their concerns. Despite acknowledging their role in supporting student mental health, many teachers feel inadequately prepared because of limited knowledge and skills. Providing them with advanced mental health training and clearly outlining their roles will enable them to deliver effective and appropriate mental health support to students. In their 2024 study, Nalipay et.al concluded that with the growing number of mental health concerns among young people in the Philippines, teachers can expect to have students facing these issues in their classrooms. According to their research, findings from the reflexive thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that teachers play an important role in detecting students' mental health issues. Teachers respond to students' mental health issues by talking with students and providing emotional support, consulting with or referring to the guidance counselor, connecting with other sources of support, and implementing teaching-related practices to support students' mental health. Furthermore, the study emphasized the need to support school mental health programs is encouraged to help teachers handle their students with mental health issues more effectively.

Given the amount of time students are in school, teachers have a crucial role in spotting issues early**,** connecting students with support when needed, and ultimately preventing suicide. Since a student's social, emotional, and mental health significantly influences their academic achievement**,** schools must prioritize mental well-being alongside traditional schooling. Teachers are pivotal in this effort; studies confirm their crucial role in identifying early signs of psychosis among junior and senior high school students. As students spend most of their time under teacher supervision, educators can be leveraged as a frontline resource for their mental health needs**.** The

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Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 14 s 2020 highlights the importance of providing mental health and psychosocial services to strengthen the mental resilience of learners and personnel. This was supplemented by DepEd Memorandum No. 74 s 2021 ordering the inclusion and promotion of mental health in all DepEd Events and Programs. Teachers' mental health literacy is very important in the implementation of these policies. Knowing that the association between depression and suicidal behaviors can be identified in the school setting emphasizes the critical role of educators, more specifically the secondary school teachers, in detecting youths at risk of depression and suicide. Their daily contact and interaction with the students allow them to observe behavioral changes and potentially recognize those who are at risk of depression and suicide. Early recognition of their signs and symptoms and knowledge of the referral system are essential in avoiding suicide ideations and attempts. However, in cases where there are already suicidal ideations and attempts, prompt recognition and management are essential to avoid the rise of deaths due to suicide. Teachers can assist students who are experiencing mental health disorders and participate in the intervention and management process

3. Methodology

In this study, the researcher used descriptive correlational research method. According to McGarth and Jelineck (2003), descriptive research provides a detailed account of what is, analyzing and interpreting the current aspects of a phenomenon. Meanwhile, a correlational study seeks to identify and measure the relationships between variables without manipulating them. Descriptive correlation design is used in research studies that aim to provide static pictures of situations as well as establish the relationship between different variables (McBurney and White, 2009).

This study utilized total sampling procedure since the respondents included all the 157 public secondary school teachers of General Mamerto Natividad District, Division of Nueva Ecija for the school year 2024-2025. To obtain the necessary data for this study, the researcher used questionnaires. The first questionnaire gathered information about the respondents' profile as to their age, gender, civil status, designation, highest educational attainment, number of years in service, and religion. The instrument that measured the level of the teacher's knowledge about suicide mitigation was the Literacy of Suicide Scale (LOSS). The instrument that measured the

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level of the teacher's attitudes towards suicide was the Stigma of Suicide Scale (SOSS). Both instruments were authored by Dr. Alison Calear and Dr. Phillip Batterham of Central for Mental Health Research of the Australian National University. Permission was obtained from the original authors to use and score their standardized instruments. The teachers' profile and their knowledge in mitigating suicide and attitudes toward suicide were then correlated if there is/are significant relationships. Their knowledge and attitudes were correlated as well for further study. The Spearman's rho was used to determine the relationship or association between the teacher's profile and their knowledge in mitigating suicide and their attitudes toward suicide.

4. Results and Discussion

Teachers Knowledge in Mitigating Suicide

Score	Accuracy Level	F	%	Verbal Description
1-2	0%-20%	6	3.82	With Very Low Level of Knowledge in Mitigating Suicide
3-4	21%-40%	54	34.39	With Low Level of Knowledge in Mitigating Suicide
5-7	41%-60%	71	45.22	With Moderately High Knowledge in Mitigating Suicide
8-9	61%-80%	20	12.74	With High Knowledge in Mitigating Suicide
10-12	81%-100%	6	3.82	With Very High Knowledge in Mitigating Suicide
Total		**157**	**100.00**	

The results showed that among the 157 respondents, 71 public secondary school teachers of General Mamerto Natividad district were with moderately high level. These teachers possess a level of understanding about suicide mitigation that goes beyond foundational knowledge but lack comprehensive and detailed understanding of the matter. The results also revealed that

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54(34.39%) respondents were with low level of knowledge in mitigating suicide who have basic familiarity and understanding on facts about suicide and its mitigation. Furthermore, it showed that 6(3.82%) respondents were with very low knowledge and have very little or almost no familiarity and understanding in mitigating suicide. On the other hand, results revealed that there were 6(3.82%) teachers with very high knowledge in mitigating suicide and 20(12.74%) teachers with high knowledge in mitigating suicide. These teachers have familiarity and understanding that can recognize in great details and have comprehensive understanding of the facts about suicide mitigation.

Teacher's Attitudes toward Suicide

Subscale ***People who die in suicide are…..***	**Weighted Mean**	**Verbal Description**
STIGMA		
Cowardly	3.66	With High Endorsement
an embarrassment	3.45	With Moderately High Endorsement
Immoral	3.59	With High Endorsement
Irresponsible	3.62	With High Endorsement
Weighted Average	3.58	With High Endorsement
ISOLATION/DEPRESSION		
Disconnected	4.01	With High Endorsement
Isolated	4.06	With High Endorsement
Lonely	4.18	With High Endorsement

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Lost	4.27	With Endorsement High
Weighted Average	4.13	With Endorsement High
NORMALISATION/GLORIFICATION		
Brave	1.90	With Low Endorsement
Dedicated	2.45	With Low Endorsement
Weighted Average	2.18	With Low Endorsement

Legend: 1.00-1.50 – With Extremely Low Endorsement; 1.51-2.50 – With Low Endorsement; 2.51-3.50 – With Moderately High Endorsement; 3.51-4.50 – With High Endorsement; 4.51-5.00 – With Extremely High Endorsemen

The results showed that the public secondary school teachers of General Mamerto Natividad district demonstrate a high degree of social stigma directed towards suicide. The teachers in the study hold strong negative and discriminatory attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward individuals who died by suicide as well as towards the topic of suicide itself. The teachers also agreed that people who died by suicide have experienced significant social and emotion distress characterized by lack of connection, isolation, loneliness, and a sense of being lost. They agree that people who died by suicide are lost and lack direction, purpose, and meaning in life. On the other hand, teachers in the study do not agree that people who died by suicide have done a courageous act nor they agree that people who died by suicide have done a purposeful and resolute decision.

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Significant relationship between teachers' profile and teachers' knowledge in mitigating suicide and attitudes toward suicide

				Attitude		
			Knowledge	**Stigma**	**Isolation / Depression**	**Normalisation/ Glorification**
Spearman's rho	Age	Correlation Coefficient	-.005	**.294****	.089	.081
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.948	.000	.269	.312
		N	157	157	157	157
	Gender	Correlation Coefficient	**.399****	.096	**.247****	-.126
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.231	.002	.115
		N	157	157	157	157
	Civil Status	Correlation Coefficient	.048	.121	-.001	.034
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.553	.131	.993	.668
		N	157	157	157	157
	Designation	Correlation Coefficient	.126	**.184***	.135	.063
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.116	.021	.091	.430
		N	157	157	157	157
	Highest Educational Attainment	Correlation Coefficient	.157	-.033	.100	-.054
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.050	.686	.212	.499
		N	157	157	157	157

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No of years in Service	Correlation Coefficient	-.090	**.167***	.046	.051
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.263	.037	.569	.524
	N	157	157	157	157
Religion	Correlation Coefficient	.151	.029	-.021	-.154
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.059	.720	.790	.054
	N	157	157	157	157

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The results revealed that gender is significantly related to teachers' knowledge in mitigating suicide. Female teachers have found to be generally better informed and equipped to understand concerns that are related to suicide and its mitigation. Gender is also significantly related to attitudes toward suicide. Female teachers have found to have notable inclination to identify feelings of isolation and depression as significant underlying factors that can contribute to suicidal thoughts and behaviors in individuals.

Age, designation, and number of years in service of respondents are significantly related with stigma. As teachers get older, get higher position, and get more years in service, the more they regard suicide as something that carries social shame, disapproval, and negative judgment

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusions:

1. Majority of the respondents are generally 25-45 years old, married, and who are in their 0-20th years in service. Most of these teachers are in the positions of Teacher I- Teacher III. Although almost all of these teachers are continuing their Post Graduate studies, there is a small percentage who already earned Doctorate Degree. Promoting continuous

professional growth is necessary since majority of the teachers seemed to stop studying once they earned units or once they earned complete academic requirements in Master's Degree.

2. A great need for comprehensive trainings and professional development for the public secondary school teachers of General Mamerto Natividad district is needed since they have limited understanding on matters involving suicide mitigation and they hold negative attribution towards suicide that resulted to stigma. Equipping teachers with improved knowledge of suicide mitigation and improved attitude towards suicide can be instrumental in saving the learners especially those who are at risk.

3. The General Mamerto Natividad district, with a majority of female educators who possess higher level of knowledge in suicide mitigation compared to their counterparts can significantly improve the provision of mental health services within the community.

The importance of tailoring destigmatization campaigns is of essence since the study has revealed that teachers of older age, higher position, and longer years in service hold a negative attribution towards suicide which might create hindrances to open discussions about mental health support within the organization.

4. In spite of having the knowledge to recognize signs, warnings, risk factors, and other relevant information about suicide, the teachers have negative perception on suicide. This shows disconnection between the teachers' level of knowledge in suicide and its mitigation and their attitudes toward suicide. These two factors need to be aligned to develop more effective project, programs, and activities to address concerns regarding suicide prevention and mitigation.

5. The proposed intervention program is suggested to enhance the teachers' knowledge in mitigating suicide and to improve the teachers' attitudes toward suicide by reducing the negative perception towards suicide and improving the understanding on mental health concerns such as depression that trigger suicide.

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Recommendations:

1. School officials should encourage the teachers to continue and finish their graduate studies in Master's Degree and Doctorate Degree and to seek mobility in their career through promotion.

2. The teachers should join mental health seminars, symposium, and trainings to uplift their knowledge in mitigating suicide and to improve their attitudes toward suicide by reducing the negative perception and stigma towards suicide and improving understanding on depression as precursor of suicide. In schools, this may be done through the conduct of Learning Action Cells (LAC) and other local seminars. Teachers may also attend online seminars and follow various platforms that give accurate information on how to address concerns regarding suicide and other mental health issues.

3. Mental health trainings should be conducted to enhance the teachers' literacy in suicide mitigation. This will eliminate the difference on the level of knowledge in mitigating suicide between female and male teachers. Trainings in reducing suicide stigma should also be conducted especially for the older teachers, for the teachers in higher positions, and for the teachers who spent more years in service. This will lessen the negative perception of the teachers toward suicide and will give way for better understanding and improving of interventions to develop in addressing this concern.

4. Trainings in improving teachers' attitudes toward suicide and other mental health issues should be conducted to have holistic understanding on the matter. By bridging the gap between what teachers know and how they feel about suicide, the district and the schools can facilitate the implementation of more effective intervention plans.

5. The proposed intervention plan may be adapted by the public secondary schools in General Mamerto Natividad to guide the school's Guidance Designate in conducting mental health activities in their respective schools.

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