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## Valuing self-love: lived experiences in work-life balance of special education teachers

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**Abstract.** Sustaining work life-balance of special education teachers is not easy, for there are factors that hinder such, particularly if the question of self-love is to be maintained. This qualitative phenomenological study determined the dimensions of the lived experience of special education teachers as to what factors affect their sustaining work balance and how they faced such. Fifteen (15) purposely selected participants comprised the sample for this study. They were chosen through the following criteria namely: licensed special education teachers; with no less than three years of working experience in a special education schools situated in Muntinlupa City; married or unmarried; and have expressed sentiments regarding stress that they are experiencing connected with their work, family, social life and health aspects. Nine (9) recurring themes emerged from the verbatim interviews center on prayer, salary, sense of humor, relationship with parents of students, training, health, support system, stress management, setting boundaries between personal and professional self. These resulted in creating innovative teaching practice in order to sustain work and life balance.

**Keywords.** lived experience, self-love, work-life balance, special education teachers

### Introduction

Self-love is an important aspect of human life particularly if the quest is to have balance in work, family, personal and relationship. It is self-love a state of appreciation for oneself that grows from actions that support physical, psychological and spiritual growth; having high regard for well-being and happiness; and, not settling for less than what one deserves (Borenstein, 2020 and Celbree, 2020); while Jaya and Nisha (2020) connect self-love with self-esteem or how people feel about themselves either positive regard about self or with shame and self-doubt. The same negative outcome of wrong concept of self-love could manifested in lack of compassion for others would bring self-harm like anxiety and depression (Sandouiu, 2018); hence it is just fitting that stressors be identified and appropriate or applicable coping mechanisms be used as weapon for controlling ill-effects of stress in order to maintain work-life balance (Kamaldeep, 2018; Yildirim and Arslan, 2020; Brooks et al.2021; Saleem et al., 2021); and adopt effective coping strategies for a healthy concept of self-love (Leslie et al., 2019; Thripati, 2018, Mayya, Martis, and Ahouk 2020).

Special education teachers face challenges that lead to increased level of stress and distortion of balance in work and life. Some identified stressors are lack of application of

appropriate teaching strategy, failure to handle individual needs of students, lack of motivation and values of acceptance and patience (Martin, 2020) ; lack of knowledge and skills in handling special needs children (Byrd and Alexander, 2020) and higher demands for students' outcome (Adigun et al., 2021 and Cancio et al., 2018). Mulyani et al., (2021) argued that it is not possible to maintain high quality working conditions if there is no professional improvement for special education teachers; and this need for upgrade in qualification was also acknowledge by the Department of Education hence, teachers, administrators, and supervisors of SPED should be trained (Wulandari & Djoehaeni, 2019; Randam et.al; RA 3562 and RA 5250).

The purpose of this study is to explore the lenses and experiences of special education teachers in the city of Muntinlupa, Philippines about valuing self-love in relation to their work-life balance as they face the challenges and stresses of working as special educator and as well as dealing with non-work factors life family, health, personal and relational aspects.

### **Literature Review**

Work and life balance is crucial; aforementioned is one important attribute if not the most crucial is how individuals value themselves as manifestations of self-love, such as self-confidence, self-acceptance, participation in self-care activities, physical recovery, challenging negative self-concepts (Kravel-Tovi, 2019; Sinko et al. 2019; Tokwe and Naidoo, 2020).

Work and non-work factors are crucial in maintain work and life balance; factors contributing to non-work and life balance are workplace stress and state of depression contributed by both work and personal pressures; work and life balance could be attained through information seeking, preventive measures and other coping mechanisms (Gragnano et al. 2020; Mensah, and Adjel, 2020 Orlanda-Ventayanen. and Ventayanen, 2021; Talindong and Toquero.,2020; Leite et al., 2020)

There are work related stressors threats that hamper or impede the performance of special education teachers (Abdellal, 2020) as heavy workload, conflicts with other colleagues, lack of job control, job insecurity, lack of reward, poor working environment and management support; and the application of technology in virtual teaching and learning (Yim et al., 2018; Ren et al., 2018; Johari F,2021; Robosa et al, 2021; Kah et al ,2021). These causes stress of burnout causing emotional, physical exhaustion and ill-health, could result to poor performance; hence support is needed (Canico 2018; Epel et al., 2018; Eastwood,2021; Toquero,2021; Abdellal, 2020; Potter ,2021; Eddy et al. 2019; Becker,2018; Al-Houb, 2018).

In order to cope with the threats of stresses, individuals need to apply mechanisms. Resilience research suggests that those who have greater access to psychological and/or socio economical resources may be better placed to respond to and cope with the risks presented by the current situation; personal techniques for self-preservation, support group, family support and maintaining positive outlook are also important ((Masten, 2014; Ungar & Theron, 2020; Vergar et.al, 2021; Agayon, Agayon, and Pentang,, 2022; Yazon, Ang-Manaig, 2022) Prevention is likewise indicated like training of teachers in stress management (Kebbi, 2018).

### **Methods**

This research applied qualitative phenomenological research approach through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion (Creswell and Poth, 2018; emphasis is on understanding and interpreting the lived experience of special education teachers. The participants were fifteen (15) special education teachers from Muntinlupa City, Metro Manila, selected based on the following inclusion criteria: 1) licensed special education teachers 2)

with three years or more teaching, 3) married or unmarried and 4) have experienced stress connected with their work, family, social life and health aspects.

### **Results and discussion**

This study determined the lived experience of the Special education teachers regarding valuing self-love in their work-life balance; and how they face the challenges connected with these. Nine (9) themes were culled from the verbatim interviews.

**The need for prayers** - Leading a prayerful life helps the teachers cope with stress and problems of living. Prayer helps regain self-love which contributes to have the capacity for a balanced life Bjorndal and Janella (2021). As one participant said: *"It is only from God whom we could connect and be recharged."*

**Low salary**- Money and the lack of it, proved to be the greatest disappointment for teachers. As one participant said: "I need to save money first for me to afford to travel." Low salary is number one as crucial inhibiting factor to maintaining balance life; (Orlanda-Ventayanen, and Ventayanen, 2021; Business Mirror, 2018; Mateo, 2018 and Reyes 2018).

**Maintaining sense of humor**- Laughing it out with friends is the most reiterated coping mechanism identified by the interviewee. As Participant 11 *"Problems is not a laughing matter, but surely laughter helps relieve us from some pent-up emotions,"* Laughter is an important adaptation for social communication; and sure sign of having a positive outlook in life (Michael, 2017; (Yazon, A. and Ang-Manaig, 2022).

**Difficulty in dealing parents**- Most of them want to see noticeable change in the children and when they couldn't see change, they complain of teachers' incompetency. As expressed by one teacher, *"There are parents who wants change in their children, they couldn't see our effort"*. General education teachers and special education teachers similarly experience stress involving relationship with parents (Hroub; 2018).

**Lack of training**- The need to grow professionally through training was revealed in this study. This is particularly connected with stress management. Kebbi, (2018) recommends the hiring of special education experts in implementing plan to help teachers in terms of overcoming stress.

**Health is wealth**- One of the most reiterated value is health, whether physical or mental. As interviewee 5 said *"I need to take care of myself by eating healthy food, rest and sleep,"* However some of them do not have the time to have adequate rest or sleep due to the demands of work and home during this pandemic. The emergence of COVID 19 affected majority of the people globally, in particular teachers who experienced social isolation, loneliness, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Talindong, and Toquero, 2020 cited Leite et al., 2020; WHO, 2020).

**Government support**- The government is first and foremost the one to give support to special education teachers. Participant 9: *"Lack of moral support from the institution and support by the government through laws are signs of neglect for teachers' welfare."* These contribute to stressful working condition and could lead to teachers leaving the profession (Robinson and Valido, 2022).

**Stress-management**- Participant 10 said *"teachers spend their rest period on doing school works"* Teachers inability to rest actually contribute to stress filled living; life balance could be attained through information seeking, preventive measures and other coping mechanisms (Gagnano et al 2020; Mensah, and Adjel, 2020 Orlanda-Ventayanen. and Ventayanen, 2021).

**Personal and professional self-** There is a need to set boundaries between personal and professional life. This means that work related to work should be done during work time; whereas problems concerning home-life should be left at home. Work and life balance could be attained through information seeking, preventive measures and other coping mechanisms (Gragnano et al., 2020; Mensah, and Adjel, 2020; Orlanda-Ventayanen. and Ventayanen, 2021; Business Mirror, 2018)

### Conclusions

In order to maintain work and life balance teachers need to do these three things. First and foremost is to have strong faith in God; for this would sustain them in the most trying times in their lives. Second is to practice healthy living since when their body becomes weak, their capacity to teach will be greatly affected and, lastly maintain a positive disposition because looking at the brighter side of life keeps them going and will maintain their happiness. While it is true that for most teachers, teaching is not so rewarding in terms of salary; however they can aspire to give the best for their families through having extra work or engaging in other income generating activities. Moreover, teachers need the continuous support of the school and other governmental institution for upgrading their professional competencies. In addition to this, school administration should provide stress management program as well as enhance the relationship between teachers and parents in order to build understanding on how the students could be helped by both. Finally, setting boundaries between personal and profession self are also fundamental to emphasizing self-love in the context of work-life balance.

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