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Social Support, Psychological Distress, and Mental Health Literacy among Educators in Special Education

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Marylle Anne A. Monsod[1], ORCID No. 0009-0009-4270-6144
Kaye Lois S. Mirano[4], ORCID No. 0009-0008-1931-1585
Patricia Allen G. Ola[4], ORCID No. 0009-0004-2372-7875
Kyla Marie P. Oxiano[4], ORCID No. 0009-0004-5749-2816
Eleona Mae C. Yana[4], ORCID No. 0009-0002-4253-8514
Bryan A. Rebancos[1], ORCID No. 0009-0004-4919-6849
Joseph S. Callanta[2], ORCID No. 0000-0001-5807-0851
Hazelyn H. Dela Cruz[3], ORCID No. 0000-0003-1363-7417

[1]Faculty, Department of Arts and Sciences, Cavite State University-Silang Campus, Silang, Cavite, Philippines
[2]Chairperson, Department of Arts and Sciences, Cavite State University-Silang Campus, Silang, Cavite, Philippines
[3]Psychology Program Coordinator, Cavite State University-Silang Campus, Silang, Cavite, Philippines
[4]Student, Cavite State University-Silang Campus, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, Silang, Cavite, Philippines

Abstract

Special Education (SpEd) teachers are vital for providing education that meets the diverse needs of students with special needs thus, understanding them is crucial. This study aimed to determine the relationship between social support, psychological distress, and mental health literacy among SpEd teachers in Cavite. Employing a correlational design and purposive sampling, 138 SpEd teachers answered questionnaires that assessed social support, psychological distress and mental health literacy. Findings revealed that SpEd teachers reported high levels of social support, mild psychological distress, and a below average level of mental health literacy. Notably, a weak, negative significant relationship was identified between social support and psychological distress and a weak, positive relationship between social support and mental health literacy. Conversely, no significant relationship was found between psychological distress and mental health literacy. Despite the demands of their work, SpEd teachers reported a high level of social support. This extensive network proved helpful, giving them emotional, practical, and informational support when needed. Significant others, in particular, emerged as an important source of support for SpEd teachers. The result also indicated that the participants likely experienced mild distress, characterized by intermittent periods of emotional suffering that may significantly impact their overall quality of life. As a result, it is recommended to use findings for self-reflection, maintain strong social support, encourage communication for students with special needs, and suggest parents continue providing support. Furthermore, future researchers are advised to address limitations by exploring diverse settings and using qualitative designs. Psychosocial support and its relationship with psychological distress and mental health may also be investigated.

Keywords: social support, psychological distress, mental health literacy, special education, special education teachers

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INTRODUCTION

Special Education (SpEd) teachers are professionally trained individuals working with students with disabilities or special needs. They play an essential role in ensuring that students with special needs receive an education that fits their specific requirements. A study by Heary and Hennessy (2019) shows that SpEd teachers face particular pressures due to managing different needs, dealing with challenging behaviors, and coping with high job demands of their students. Providing quality education hinges on the mental wellbeing of a teacher, making it a focus area for its impact on both the lives and the quality of special education of the

teachers. In the Philippine context, a lot of factors affect the mental health of SpEd teachers such as physical and mental demands, excessive obligations, and barriers that prevent the self-fulfillment of SpEd teachers creating difficult and demanding circumstances (Cuadra, 2023). This backs up how difficult the experiences of SpEd teachers are in the Philippines. There is currently a shortage of SpEd teachers, resulting in a student-teacher ratio of 31:1. With approximately 12,342 teachers, Region IV-A CALABARZON has the highest number of SpEd Teachers (Office of the Undersecretary for Administration, 2020). Providing quality education hinges on the mental wellbeing of a teacher, making it a focus area for its impact on both the lives and the quality of special education of the teachers.

In the Philippines context, there is still an inadequacy in terms of studies focusing on teachers in special education leaving a significant gap in understanding their experiences, challenges, and needs, and coping strategies. Numerous studies are conducted about general or regular teachers, especially their mental health and support system. However, SpEd teachers, in the specific context, remain underexplored despite their vital role in the society, particularly in inclusive education. Social support, psychological distress and mental health literacy are key areas that require further investigation as these factors could be interrelated and greatly influence their well-being and even the quality of instruction they provide. Miña (2024) found that SpEd teachers experience numerous challenges in their profession but tend to overcome such due to the support they receive from the guardians, their fellow educators, and stakeholders which lead them to provide the academic and personal growth support their students need. This underscores the importance of social support in helping the SpEd teachers face the challenges and still perform their duties as educators effectively. On the other hand, Torollo et al. (2024) reported in a study conducted in various schools in Davao that SpEd teachers have high levels of distress and burnout due to the challenges they face in handling learners with special needs and these difficulties affect their capacity to deliver the quality education and the support and instruction the students require. In terms of the mental health literacy of SpEd teachers in the country, they are found to have limited knowledge about dyslexia, a learning disorder, which leads to insufficient interventions for the children with this condition (Cancio & Bakiao, 2025). Moreover, there is an existing issue regarding the lack of adequate training for Sped teachers and they often feel unprepared in handling the changing and multiple needs of their students in inclusive education (Kilag et al., 2024). This implies that without sufficient training and knowledge in terms of mental health and other cases of the students with disabilities, SpEd teachers may struggle not only in implementing appropriate instructional approaches but also in identifying and responding effectively to the complex and diverse learning and behavioral needs of their students.

Social support improves the physical and emotional health of people who are stressed by reducing stress. Li et al., (2021) mentioned that the likelihood of experiencing psychological distress increased with larger levels of perceived stress. Therefore, SpEd teachers with low social support tend to have higher levels of psychological stress. On the other hand, teachers with high overall social support scores can make full use of social resources under stressful conditions and have stronger mental health help-seeking, knowledge, understanding and helping intents (Jiang et al., 2020). SpEd teachers, as frontline educators, need to understand mental health in order to properly assist the socioemotional well-being of the students.

Social support has an influence on psychological distress levels among teachers. However, empirical studies on this relationship are scarce, and this relationship requires further investigation (Hussain, 2020). In addition, the findings by Li, Sheng and Jing (2022) indicate that the direct influence of social support on the mental health literacy of the teachers is not significant, which contradicts

recent findings by Kola-Palmer et al. (2020) that the mental health literacy of people can be enhanced by social support. Furthermore, this study aimed to provide additional information on the significance of the aforementioned variables to the performance of SpEd teachers. A study by Cotton et al. (2023) explained that mental health literacy can reduce distress through improved help-seeking behaviors. However, Moss et al. (2021) highlighted that it was not clear whether mental health literacy directly causes decreased psychological distress or vice versa. There was a possibility that teachers in distress are more motivated to learn about mental health, which in turn increases their mental health literacy. The challenges experienced by the SpEd teachers can exacerbate their feelings of stress and burnout, further emphasizing the need to understand mental health and enhanced support systems.

Conducting a study to discover the relationship between social support, psychological distress, and mental health literacy among SpEd teachers was needed to fill these gaps and provide a more comprehensive understanding. While studies have explored each area, research examining the significant relationships social support, psychological distress, and mental health literacy with each other is lacking. Specifically, inconsistent findings on the direction of the relationship between social support and mental health literacy call for further investigation.

Additionally, the limited research on the connection between psychological distress and social support demands more attention. Moreover, this paper aims to answer the following:

1. What is the level of social support of special education teachers in terms of:
   1.1 Family;
   1.2 Friends; and,
   1.3 Significant Other?

2. What is the level of psychological distress of special education teachers?

3. What is the level of mental health literacy of special education teachers?

4. Is there a significant relationship between social support and the psychological distress of special education teachers?

5. Is there a significant relationship between social support and mental health literacy of special education teachers?

6. Is there a significant relationship between psychological distress and mental health literacy of special education teachers?

This study hypothesizes that there are relationships among social support, psychological distress, and mental health literacy among educators in special education in the province of Cavite. Thus, this study mainly aims to determine the relationship among social support, psychological distress, and mental health literacy of special education teachers in Cavite.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As special education teachers provide service to students with special needs, they were always expected to be understanding considering the conditions of their students. There were also various ways of how they learn in different ways of teaching. The development of knowledge among teachers and teaching methods were typically the main focus of traditional teacher education programs, which tend to ignore the emotional components of teaching (Wang & Ye, 2021). The intellectual capacity of these teachers to instruct was more likely the priority of the institutions when it comes to having them to teach children who were physically or mentally challenged. As stated by Burić and Frenzel (2020), little focus has been placed on the predictive potential of personal factors of teachers. However, the overall capability of these teachers was often overlooked. Special education was a crucial component of the educational system and because students with disabilities have special needs, SpEd teachers needed to possess more

expertise than regular teachers but there were only few studies that had been conducted on their personal factors (Chen et., al, 2020), therefore, personal factors such as social support, psychological distress, and mental health literacy were necessary. These factors were vital to these teachers in order to deliver a more effective way of teaching towards their students and these also determined whether the SpEd teachers were capable of keeping themselves well physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

Social Support. Social support, the experience of being cherished, nourished, and respected by those closest to the individual (Maslach & Jackson, 2019). It can help people cope with stress and improve their ability to adapt to society. The greater the perceived amount of support from social networks, the more people reconsider their current tough conditions, the greater their confidence, and the lower the threat of emotional responses such as worry and dread, leading to suitable coping mechanisms (Sippel et al., 2020). It was also suggested that social support has beneficial effects on well-being, so special education schools should encourage their teachers to get involved in community or organizational activities both inside and outside of the classroom, or even to put their plans into practice through reward systems (Wu et al., 2020). Social support increased stress coping, societal adaptation, and overall well-being, resulting in enhanced confidence and decreased emotional reactivity. It will also be good for special education programs to be community-engaged and have a reward system that can encourage them. In the local context, it was found that SpEd teachers, despite the numerous difficulties in handling children with special needs together with instructional, personal, and institutional challenges, are still being reinforced by the social support they receive that help them get through (Diaz & Madrigal, 2025). This implies that social support helps these professionals survive the challenges they experience from managing their students.

The stress of teachers over a variety of their lives especially in their career and might feel great tension when the process of teaching occurs, an essential need for good, quick adjustment and stress coping was necessary as Desombre and colleagues (2021) stated that social support reduced sadness and physical distress, according to studies done in a variety of circumstances (professional, health, social networks). It helped to keep connections strong and healthy in order to care for others because it was what has kept humans thriving throughout time. The greater the social support instructors receive from family, friends, and significant other, the more likely they are to respond positively (Suryaratri, 2020). People who had strong support systems around them were less prone to weak mental health. Moreover, social support was essential for maintaining good mental health since it eased the suffering from common mental health conditions and with psychological resources, increasing mental health literacy, and lowering coping behaviors were all made possible through support systems of the teachers.

Furthermore, social support could be helpful in teachers by providing distraction from stress-related dissatisfaction or by assisting the student in reworking and shifting personal perceptions on what occurred and for schools to be effective institutions in fostering learning activities, educational stakeholders should make sure there is a social support environment that is suitable (Gonzales et al., 2020). Additionally, it seemed as though they were occasionally under stress due to expectations, relationships, roles, and changes. Special education teachers appeared to have strong problem-solving, cognitive restructuring, and social support coping mechanisms.

Psychological Distress. Psychological distress is a stimulus that triggers emotional reactions (Pearlin, 1989). Stress levels could range from mild to severe, and when they are severe. Psychological distress is harmful to the health of an individual.

Workers who were employed inside schools, like teachers, have experience dealing with different behaviors that could cause distress. They experienced higher job-related stress and exhibited signs of psychological health problems than the overall population (Stapleton et al., 2020). A study by Othman and Sivasubramaniam (2019) found that teachers with higher levels of psychological distress were associated with increased hostility and physical aggressiveness among teachers.

Psychological distress could also lead to a number of emotional and behavioral problems, such as anxiety, depression, anger, and irritability. It could also make it difficult for teachers to concentrate, make decisions, and effectively manage their classrooms. SpEd teachers were more likely to face job stress and psychological health difficulties, emphasizing the importance of prevention actions, initial detection, and support for enhancing well-being and relationships between students. As shown in the study by Pressley (2021) found that teachers with higher levels of psychological distress were more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression. In the Philippines, SpEd teachers are reported to be struggling in balancing their educational and psychological responsibilities and felt unsatisfactorily prepared to handle psychological duties they have with their students, which lead to high levels of distress.

The effects of psychological distress on the health of teachers could have a significant impact on their students. When teachers were stressed and distressed, they were less likely to be able to provide their students with the high-quality instruction that they need. They might also be more likely to engage in negative behaviors, such as yelling at students or making them feel bad about themselves. For instance, a study by Hargreaves and Boyle (2019) found that teachers with higher levels of psychological distress were more likely to report feeling dissatisfied with their job. The study also found that the psychological distress of the educators was associated with decreased student achievement. Therefore, it is indeed apparent that psychological distress leads to several negative consequences. However, Huelgas et al. (2025) found that as the SpEd teachers receive support and help from other people, their stress levels lower and even improves their job satisfaction.

Mental Health Literacy. Mental health literacy is the knowledge and attitudes regarding various aspects of mental illness and treatment (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Knowledge and being able to understand mental health is vital. Seeking mental health assistance was correlated with how much people comprehend the causes of mental disease, the efficacy of treatments, the recovery process of mental illness, and the availability of mental health services. SpEd teachers who think that mental health therapy was helpful and successful, for instance, were more likely to have positive attitudes toward asking for help or to use mental health services (Jung et al., 2019). It was essential for them to do so because they were one of the people students look up to and rely on in school.

Mental health is a popular yet sensitive topic that people should pay more attention to. Mental health literacy has several aspects that involve promoting awareness of psychological conditions and associated treatments, decreasing and/or eliminating stigma, developing and maintaining positive mental health, improving self-care and self-regulation, and increasing help-seeking behaviors and efficacies (Okan, 2020). It has been suggested by Johnson et al. (2023) that future research should concentrate on how well teachers comprehend as well as recognize disorders. Awareness on mental health is important, yet many teachers lack the necessary training, they may not be able to identify the warning signs and symptoms of mental illness for the purpose of making a referral or know the best ways to help the mental health needs of their students or their own (Baxter et al., 2022). Special education includes students who are intellectually or psychologically challenged. Therefore, it is crucial for the educators in the institution to have adequate knowledge about

mental health. Locally, it was noted in a study conducted by Abantas (2022) that SpEd teachers know least about mild intellectual disabilities and other physiological ones. They are also uncertain about the implications of the behavior of the children with special needs towards the other students. This implies that there is an existing inadequacy in the literacy of the SpEd teachers in terms of mental health and the special needs of the students they are handling and there is a need for further training programs for them.

METHODS

Design. This study utilized a quantitative-correlational design. Bhandari (2021) asserted that the correlational research design analyzes relationships between variables without allowing the researcher to control or manipulate any of them. In this study, the said design was used to determine the relationship that exists among social support, psychological distress, and mental health literacy of SpEd teachers in Cavite.

Population and Sampling. The population of the study was composed of 213 special education teachers from public and private schools and centers in Cavite. Using purposive sampling, 138 samples participated in the study regardless of their demographic profile and were all graduates with a degree in special education.

Instrumentation. A paper-based questionnaire was used to gather the data. There were two parts of the questionnaire. First is the profile of the participants which includes only their school's name, type of school, and municipality/city. The second part is a 7-point likert scale, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), developed by Zimet et al. (1988), to measure social support representing a different source of social support: the family, friends, and significant other with a Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.85 to 0.94 that indicated high reliability. This scale indicates that a mean score ranging from 1.0 to 2.9 could be considered low support, a score of 3 to 5 could be considered moderate support, and a score from 5.1 to 7 could be considered high support. Then, the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), a 5-point scale, was used to measure psychological distress developed by Kessler et al. (2002). Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the K10 ranged from 0.80 to 0.90 indicating high internal consistency. Scores on this scale are as follows: 10 to 19 is likely to be well, 20 to 24 is likely to have a mild disorder, 25 to 29 is likely to have a moderate disorder, and 30 - 50 is likely to have a severe disorder.

Lastly, the 35-item self-report questionnaire to measure mental health literacy developed by O'Connor and Casey (2015) with six dimensions namely: recognition of disorders, knowledge of risk factors and causes, knowledge of self-treatments, knowledge of professional help available, knowledge of how to seek mental health information, and attitudes that promote recognition and help-seeking, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.80 to 0.90. The interpretation of scores is categorized as follows: 35 to 110 is low mental health literacy, 111 to 118 is below average, 119 to 136 is average, 137 to 143 is above average, and 144 to 160 is high.

Data Source. The researchers utilized the combination of primary and secondary sources to come up with the necessary information in this study. The information regarding the schools that offer special education were gathered from the Department of Education school division office of each city and municipality in Cavite. The primary data were obtained directly from the special education teachers across the province. Meanwhile, the secondary ones were collected from various journals, articles, and other materials available online.

Data Analysis. The data gathered in this study were analyzed using the statistical software program, Jamovi. The level of social support, psychological distress, and mental health literacy of SpEd Teachers were assessed using mean and standard deviation. Relationships among the variables were tested using Pearson correlation coefficient.

RESULTS

Social Support. The result showed that the participants received high support from their family, friends, and significant others with an overall mean score of 5.89 (SD = 1.40). The social support of SpEd teachers is classified into three sub-variables: family, friends, and significant other. It is presented that the support the participants received from family is high, with a mean of 5.89 (SD = 1.53), whereas friends are also of high support, with a mean score of 5.81 (SD = 1.43). The support from significant other is high as well with a mean score of 5.98 (SD = 1.47). The overall level of social support of the participants is high, with a mean of 5.89 and a standard deviation of 1.40.

Table 1
Level of Social Support

Social Support	$\bar{X}$	SD	INTERPRETATION
Family	5.89	1.53	High Support
Friends	5.81	1.43	High Support
Significant Other	5.98	1.47	High Support
TOTAL	5.89	1.40	High Support

Legend: High support = 5.01 - 7.00; Moderate support = 3.00 - 5.00; Low support = 1.00 - 2.99

Psychological Distress. This showed the psychological distress of the participants where they appeared to have mild distress with a mean score of 21.37 (SD = 7.83). This implies that these teachers sometimes tend to experience emotional suffering that significantly affects their overall quality of life.

Table 2
Level of Psychological Distress

Psychological Distress	$\bar{X}$	SD	INTERPRETATION
	21.37	7.83	Mild distress

Legend: Likely to be well = 10 - 19; mild distress = 20 - 24; moderate distress = 25 - 29; severe distress = 30 – 50

Mental Health Literacy. The result showed a below average level of mental health literacy among SpEd teachers with a mean score of 114.39 and a standard deviation of 12.41. This level means that they tend to have limited knowledge and attitudes regarding many facets of mental illness and treatment.

Table 3
Level of Mental Health Literacy

Mental Health Literacy	$\bar{X}$	SD	DESCRIPTION
	114.39	12.41	Below Average

Legend: Low = 35 - 110; Below Average = 111 - 118; Average = 119 – 136; Above Average = 137 - 143; High = 144 – 160

Relationship between Social Support and Psychological Distress. The result showed that there was a significant relationship between social support and psychological distress, with a correlation coefficient of -0.25 and a computed p-value of 0.003. It indicated that participants who were SpEd teachers showed a weak, negative significant relationship between social support and psychological distress, explaining that there was an inverse relationship between the two variables where when the social support increases, the psychological distress would slightly decrease and vice versa. This indicates that SpEd teachers who receive high levels of social support from their family, friends, and significant other tend to experience mild psychological distress.

Table 4
Relationship between Social Support and Psychological Distress

Variables	r-value	Description	p-value	Interpretation
Social Support and Psychological Distress	-0.25	Weak and negative correlation	0.003*	Accept Ha Significant Relationship

**significant at p < p=.05*

Relationship between Social Support and Mental Health Literacy. This showed the relationship between social support and mental health literacy. Correlation coefficient of 0.20 and estimated p-value of 0.02 indicated that there was a significant but weak positive relationship between social support and mental health literacy. This revealed that a high level of social support network is associated with the slight increase of the mental health literacy of special education teachers.

Table 5
Correlation between Social Support and Mental Health Literacy

Variables	r-value	Description	p-value	Interpretation
Social Support and Mental Health Literacy	0.20	Weak and positive correlation	0.02*	Accept Ha Significant Relationship

**significant at p < p=.05*

Relationship between Psychological Distress and Mental Health Literacy. This showed the relationship between psychological distress and mental health literacy among the respondents. Using a calculated p-value of 0.44 and a correlation coefficient of -0.06, it was evident that there was no significant relationship between psychological distress and mental health literacy. This showed that having psychological distress does not affect the mental health literacy of SpEd teachers.

Table 6
Relationship between Psychological Distress and Mental Health Literacy

Variables	r-value	Description	p-value	Interpretation
Psychological Distress and Mental Health Literacy	-0.06	No correlation	0.44	Accept Ho No Significant Relationship

DISCUSSION

Special Education (SpEd) teachers face unique challenges on a daily basis and are often overlooked when research about teachers is being conducted. The social support they receive, the psychological distress they experience, and their mental health literacy vary. This study determined the relationship between social support, psychological distress, and mental health literacy of SpEd teachers.

The results show a high level of social support. The study of Wu, et al. (2020) has the same result, which stated that special education programs enhanced teachers leading to high social support. These programs help SpEd teachers collaborate and interact, resulting in a sense of belonging and a strong support network. These teachers with high total social support could make full use of social resources under stressful settings and have greater mental health help-seeking and helping intents. This means that social support connection, which had been recognized as one method to lessen the negative effects of work environment stresses, would affect the teaching performance of the teachers (Remedios, 2020). Moreover, strong family, friend and significant others support stands out, rooted in Filipino values like *bayanihan* (community cooperation and close-knit kinship ties. Ilagan (2024) affirmed this cultural resilience lowers anxiety and boosts coping, uniquely mitigating SpEd teachers' strains in the Philippines compared to individualistic contexts.

Despite this, findings indicated that they likely experienced mild distress, consistent with the study of Agyapong (2022) reporting 67% of slight distress from early studies of teacher stress. This showed a considerable lack of administrative support as one of the biggest factors increasing distress. Moreover, Magallanes et al. (2025) found that SpEd teachers are expected to produce a creative and productive learning environment for their students despite the obstacles they face, including the disruptive behaviors and emotional outbursts of the children with special needs such as tantrums and meltdowns, which often occur unexpectedly. The effects of mild distress are extensive and affect many facets of life. It can show up as reduced concentration, decreased performance, and increased absences in work environments, affecting both output and relationships with colleagues. Additionally, Sped teachers handle specialized tasks such as individualized education plans and diverse learner needs yet the Department of Education (DepEd) policies cap daily teaching at six hours plus preparation time, easing overload. This structure may contribute to only mild distress, as it prioritizes classroom focus over excessive admin, fostering better balance than in general education (DepEd, 2024).

While the SpEd teachers are known to handle students with special needs, they showed below average level of mental health literacy. In the

study of Barret et al. (2019), teachers showed that they were aware of only common mental health issues like depression and anxiety along with a moderate understanding of professional help, demonstrating their capacity to identify possible issues in their students. Low mental health literacy, also, means teachers may overlook early signs of stress or student issues which is alarming in high-needs SpEd settings where emotional demands are intense. Higher awareness through trainings could prevent escalation to burnout, especially with rising mental health challenges in Philippine schools (Ramakrishnan et al., 2026).

SpEd teachers frequently develop an insightful understanding of mental health issues through their regular interactions with students. Moreover, through the identification and management of mental health concerns in both instructors and students, educators may cultivate a more positive and encouraging educational atmosphere. Not only will this setting improve the well-being of an individual, but it will also enhance the entire educational experience and academic performance of the students. Furthermore, it was observed that the majority of these teachers deal with students with physiological disabilities rather than those that are psychologically challenged.

Upon determining the relationship of the variables, the study revealed a weak, significant negative relationship between social support and psychological distress, emphasizing the importance of support networks in preventing and alleviating distress. Kapeli, Manuela and Sibley (2024) supported this notion through examining the effects of social support on immunological response, cardiovascular health, and stress response—all of which can lead to improved general well-being and a decrease in psychological distress. This implied that the mental health of special education teachers is influenced by their social support system. When faced with common mental health issues like distress, teachers with poor mental health who receive social support from parents or friends may experience short-term pain reduction and significant discomfort relief, leading them to believe that they no longer require formal mental health services (Clark et al., 2020). However, as the strength of the correlation between the two is weak, it implies that social support is not enough of a factor to increase nor decrease the psychological distress of the SpEd teachers and vice versa.

Moreover, the study concluded that high social support significantly correlates with mental health literacy indicating a weak, positive relationship, suggesting that feeling supported slightly increases their knowledge and attitudes towards mental health facets. This suggests although the relationship is weak, this is unlikely due to chance, and that SpEd teachers with higher social support tend to have modestly increased mental health literacy.. Furthermore, the study by Chen et al. (2020) highlights the complex relationship between social support and mental health literacy, noting that the influence of social support varies depending on the stress levels of a particular occupation.

Conversely, it appeared that there is no significant relationship between psychological distress and mental health literacy. This indicates that whether the psychological distress of SpEd teachers increase or decrease, it is not associated with the level of their mental health literacy and vice versa. It could suggest that simply having awareness about mental health is not enough to alleviate the emotional burden associated with their profession. The study of Jeong et al. (2023), who stated that there is no correlation between mental health literacy and psychological distress supported this result. They also find mental health literacy can only affect psychological distress through other factors, specifically grit. Moreover, another study that has the same result, Reavley et al. (2019), conducted a study to examine the effects of a mental health literacy intervention on psychological distress of an individual. The intervention had no effect on psychological distress, according to their findings which implied that, while education and awareness can influence knowledge and mental health, intensive and personalized interventions are

needed to effect changes in psychological distress.

In summary, the participants were found to have a high level of social support implying that teachers had a network of people providing emotional, practical, and informational support. Furthermore, the participants showed that they had a mild level of psychological distress, indicating that their overall quality of life was sometimes significantly affected by emotional suffering. Mild psychological distress among teachers can negatively influence both their personal and professional well-being. The participants were found to have a below average level of mental health literacy. SpEd teachers were capable of identifying potential mental health issues, particularly focusing on depression and anxiety, along with a below average understanding of professional help, exhibiting their capacity to recognize possible issues in their students. Moreover, it was found that there was a weak and negative relationship between social support and psychological distress among SpEd teachers. Higher levels of social support were associated with slightly lower levels of psychological distress, suggesting a buffering effect of social connections against stress-inducing factors. Social support and mental health literacy were also weakly but positively correlated, indicating that it is beneficial to have the presence of strong social support networks in order for special education teachers to, somehow, pursue knowledge and understanding of mental health. Psychological distress and mental health literacy were not significantly correlated. While educational and awareness-based approaches could positively impact mental health knowledge and attitudes, they were not sufficiently potent to induce changes in psychological distress. Although it was found that social support is associated with psychological distress and mental health literacy, the relationships are weak which indicate that social support alone is not sufficient to alleviate the psychological distress nor improve the literacy of the SpEd teachers in terms of mental health. It is, therefore, concluded that SpEd teachers require further support from other sectors like proper compensation, promotion, training, and more.

Recommendations. The research concluded the significance of social support in managing stress and maintaining mental health for SpEd teachers and its influence in understanding of mental health or eliminating the possibility of mild distress. Even though SpEd teachers have strong social support systems that can lessen their psychological distress, these networks are insufficient to completely address their mental health challenges or greatly improve their mental health literacy. This study provides valuable recommendations for various individuals, including special education teachers, school administrators and co-teachers, psychology field, and future researchers. The emphasis lay on recognizing the importance of maintaining strong social bonds and actively pursuing the growth of mental health literacy. Special education teachers are encouraged to strengthen the strong network with their family, friends, and workmates that serve as sources of social support to balance their psychological distress. The SpEd teachers can benefit from using the research findings as a tool for self-reflection and as motivation to pursue mental health literacy. It also implies that the participants need more information before they could apply it, so they may join seminars or trainings to improve.

On the other hand, as the result showed that social support has weak relationship with psychological distress and mental health literacy, consider determining whether the psychosocial support of the SpEd teachers has a correlation with the two. Moreover, it was observed that the majority of these SpEd teachers were handling students with physiological disabilities. Therefore, these teachers do not have enough knowledge about mental health required in handling students with mental illness or developmental delay. It is, then, recommended to focus on special education teachers who are handling students with these specific cases and consider the training acquired by the SpEd teachers.

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Data availability statement. All data supporting the findings of this study are included within the manuscript and its supplementary materials.

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