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REVEALING THE STORIES OF SOLO-PARENT SCHOOL HEADS: A NARRATOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the stories of solo-parent school heads in the Divisions of Tagum City and Davao del Norte. Using a qualitative narratological approach, the research examined the balancing on personal and professional aspects faced by solo-parent school heads and how they navigated their dual roles. Four (4) solo-parent school heads from different public schools participated in this study, sharing their stories through in-depth interviews. Findings revealed that these school heads difficulty in managing work-life challenges, difficulty in prioritizing home-school activities, struggling with transition and managing complex school demands, having problems in balancing personal and professional life, and having problems in addressing conflicts while upholding mandates. Despite these experiences, they employed prioritization, time management, support systems, and self-care strategies to effectively balance their responsibilities as both school leaders and parents. Their stories have also shaped their leadership styles, fostering compassion, resilience, and innovation within their schools. Moreover, they found fulfillment in their work and aspire to leave a meaningful legacy through their leadership. This study emphasized the importance of balancing personal and professional responsibilities through a quality work life. The findings suggest that schools and educational institutions may strengthened government mandates that support solo-parent school heads, ensuring a more balanced and sustainable work-life experience.

KEYWORDS: *quality work life, solo-parent school heads, narratology, Tagum City, Davao del Norte.*

INTRODUCTION

The workload of a school head is challenging and complex as this was cited by (Creagh et. al., 2023) of which school heads perceive that they are working more, and that work is more complex that it used to be. These school heads are spending more time at work as they are handling larger scope of responsibilities as well as their high position provides the basic support of the family while relationship with the children are at stake, much more of becoming a solo-parent. Children needs parents in facilitating each step of their life and these stages of their life is basically a quality time that a solo-parent school head is unable to provide and perform because of extent in professional commitments. Added to this, (Aloro et. al., 2024) revealed that solo parents often struggle to find enough time for themselves and balance various responsibilities which makes them emotional and has increased level of stress in performing childcare duties while at work.

In Korea, due to the stigmatized perceptions of unwed mothers, they are required to conceal their status as solo parents (McDonald, 2017). School heads reportedly that their work load and job-related stress were heavier that they had anticipated before taking the job (Inegbedion et al., 2020) and if known as a solo parent, they would be criticized and discriminated which results to mental health problems (Kong et al., 2017) that resulted to social outcast which directly affects children (Babe, 2018).

Similarly, Japan stands out as an extreme case for solo parents are considered not reliable as they cannot work long hours because of childcare responsibilities (Semuels, 2017) and a solo parent handling leadership position is a juggling work with magnitude of challenges that a solo parent could deal with (Yoshikawa, 2018) which tends to psychological distress and cause work-family conflict (Kobayashi, et al., 2017).

In the Philippines, the stories of solo parent school heads are undervalued and results has been verified that there has been struggles in role conflict, loneliness, and guilt of being solo parent and a school head (Encila & Madrigal, 2021) and the cultural norms and behaviors have been observed to be persistently discriminatory and to support inequities to the daily lives of solo parents in the Philippines (Bain, 2020).The real-world experiences and work-life balance of solo parents who work as school heads are still poorly understood. The Philippine Statistics Authority Report (2020), detainment, a lawful or actual separation, nullity of marriage, adoption, or a child born outside of marriage as a result of insufficient education.

In the Schools Division of Tagum City, as I observed, the working hours of DepEd Employees are always beyond required by the government, overloaded paperwork, and overlapping extra-curricular, seminars and training activities affect the parental responsibilities of all the employees in the Department of Education, mentioning the solo-parent school heads who have multiple responsibilities. For them, there is no other way to sustain the needs of their family but to work in order to provide for the basic needs of their children, with this situation, solo parents intended time for their children at home is being sacrificed and this affects the total well-being of a child or children in the family. This has been concluded in the study of Clarion and Palarisan (2023) that in Davao de Oro, public

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school servants are experiencing mental health issues due to workloads, job demands, and personal life events.

In my literature reading, I have found out that there are very few research studies conducted venturing the lived experiences of solo-parent school heads. Cochran (2021) found out in her study "The Work-Life Balance of a Single Mother and Secondary School Principal*",* that single mothers are shown great perseverance in balancing two facets of life. The study of Parker (2015), entitled *"*Secondary Principals who are Mothers: Balancing Home and Career*",* purported that mothers who are female educational leaders show determination by persevering in their pursuit of a work-life balance. However, this research study includes both gender in solo parenting while leading a public school that reveals their quality work life. Thus, the approach of this study is urgent due to lack of research studies conducted in the Philippines in addressing the quality work life status of male or female solo parent school head.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this narratological study is to explore and understand the narratives of solo parent school heads in the Divisions of Tagum City and Davao del Norte.

At this stage in the research, the journey of solo-parent school heads would generally be defined as their tales considered as the primary needs and would reveal their coping mechanisms in having a quality work life.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Describe the stories of solo-parent school heads.

METHODS

However, this study used qualitative design employing a narratological approach to explore the stories of solo parent school heads. Narratology is utilized in this study that seeks to understand and encapsulate the human experience by using an in-depth interview to explore the meanings and associated to people's experiences (Delve et al, 2020). Also, Ntinda (2019) stated that narratological approach aimed to uncover important tales of people's lives as they are expressed in their own words and worlds.

The participants in this study were the four (4) solo parent school heads. The selected participants are connected to different public schools in the Divisions of Tagum City and Davao del Norte. Such, all of them undergone an in-depth interview (IDI) since the number of participants is enough as aligned in the concept of Nigar (2020), that when conducting a narratological research study, information is gathered mostly through in-depth interviews with more than one (1) person. The following inclusion criteria were met by the participants who were chosen for this study: (a) must be a school head in Basic Education; (b) must managed public schools within Tagum City and/or Division of Davao del Norte; and (c) must either be widowed, left solo due to spouse's criminal conviction or physical and mental incapacity, legally separated or annulled, abandonment, unmarried, and head of the family in the absence of parents.

Furthermore, thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves reviewing a data collection and looking for patterns in meaning throughout the data to extract themes.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Role of Solo-Parent School Heads

Being a solo-parent is a difficult job and being a solo-parent school head is much harder. This is in similar point with the study of Bustamante (2021) in which being a solo-parent is hard and being a solo-working parent has its own set of challenges and a lot of days that are downward hard. In light manner, another study of Sultana (2024) revealed that parenthood and leadership are fundamentally demanding and make decisions under pressure (Calbaza, 2024).

Solo-parent school administrators also reported having trouble with stress and tiredness, which frequently leads to burnout. As the stress persists, they start to lose interest in and motivation for doing a particular task (Smith et al., 2019). Otherwise, in the Philippines, many organizations have frequently urged DepEd to evaluate the workload after school heads stated that additional duties had exhausted them, caused them to produce too much paperwork, and prevented them from taking care of their families and themselves (Rappler, 2018). In a note, a person is more likely to have negative emotions the more stressed they are (Pasion, 2017).

Meanwhile, educational leaders have a significant impact on the culture, outlook, and reputation of their schools. They serve as the foundation for the growth and operation of learning communities (Lathan, 2022). A solo-parent school head will always be in leadership that always leads by example and will always be available to teachers, staff members, parents, students, and community members (Meador, 2019). Numerous national and international studies have recently been conducted in an effort to acknowledge this complexity. These studies have created and used methodologies that make it possible to take into account the various viewpoints and factors that successful solo-parent school leaders consider when undertaking their work (Day et al, 2020).

Experiences of Solo-Parent School Heads

The road of solo parenting is often rocky as it has mentioned in the study of Minna (2024) that solo-parent in leadership is often seen as a struggle but every individual has their own personal strengths (Tengesdal, 2024) and these solo-parent leaders, however, face unique challenges to their personal strengths.

Being a solo-parent leader is challenging and can occasionally result in anxiety and sadness. As solo-parents, they cannot escape the social expectations attached to parenthood because they are solo parents (Ebora & Calimutan, 2020). Moreover, due to their unstable financial condition, lack of social support, and additional duties brought on by providing for and raising their child alone, solo parents frequently experience extra stress. Such, people experience stress due to the demands of managing job and family obligations, such as scheduling childcare and work (Dor, 2021).

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People have recently faced higher levels of work demands and stress as a result of expanding job responsibilities. Extended work hours and increased job responsibilities are becoming more typical in the workplace (Chang et al., 2017). Yet, unplanned work, school budgets, official correspondence, and the amount of time allotted to resolving communication issues at school are some elements that raise the burden of principals in educational institutions (Oplatka, 2017).

Adaptive Strategies of Solo Parent School Heads

Many solo parents struggle to be leaders, but that does not make them any less of a leader (Adeboye, 2021). To prove that statement, Marticio (2021) published a story of a Filipino solo-parent that is now an entrepreneur and having a business expansion in Australia of which delivers a proof of leadership success that there are fewer opportunities and choices for solo-parents, however, there are still who live up to the challenge and become a catalyst of change and all things are able to turn an unfavorable situation into an arm of success. Similarly, Sahadi (2019) exposed in her article of an adventure story of a solo-parent who standout as a CEO of a Fortune 1000 Company which has a similar story of being a single parent.

Competent school leaders can make decisions while keeping all of their options open. As a result, the study underlines the high significance of the school heads' leadership approaches in terms of resiliency in stress management (Villar et al., 2021). However, despite all the challenges, working parents without partners have discovered ways to maximize their time, home and professional lives, and networks. Solo-parents have developed new strategies for moving forward and being the greatest parent-leaders, they can be in difficult situations by using their unique and innovative problem-solving abilities. (Lindholm, 2021).

With more solo-parents entering the workforce particularly in leadership, it has become increasingly important to understand how people manage a great work-life balance with their families (Karpaviciute, 2024). In the literature, it is debatable what it means to have a quality work-life balance, and people are interested in the methods that others use to attain it because they need to manage everything. Hence, every day, millions of solo-parents combine work and family obligations without a partner. Figuring up the work-family schedule is one of the most important factors to consider in QWL because it may be a difficult way of life from both the perspective of a parent and an employee (Burry, 2022).

In the Philippines, female solo-parents must possess a lot of strength and budgeting skills as they are most of the time financially-challenged (Dela Luna et. al., 2023). The amount of amazing change that occurs in one's life when they become a solo-parent might leave them feeling overtaken and even depressed. Knowing that other solo-parents have been in their shoes and that there is a wealth of knowledge available to draw from can help solo-parents find comfort and strength (Dalton, 2022).

Principal Grace's Narrative

Start of Transition to Leadership

When asked about how she started her journey as a solo-parent school head, she shared that her transition into leadership was not a significant struggle, as she had already been exposed to administrative tasks even before assuming the role. She had been handling reports and working in the office, which made her well-oriented with the responsibilities of a school head. Specifically, she shared:

Since I am in DepEd, I only have one teaching load with an advisory class, while the rest of my tasks are administrative. I was already exposed to the work, although at that time, I was not yet involved in decision-making. However, some parts of the tasks were familiar to me. So, I did not really struggle when I became the head. I did not have to adjust much because I was already well-oriented. Compared to the school I came from; this one was even easier to handle.

The story was aligned with the belief of Lee (2020) that for school leaders to move beyond operational management to true leadership, their managerial scope is thick and the horizon is wide in dealing with teachers, communication with stakeholders and school feedbacking.

Leading Through Delegation

When asked about how she manages her responsibilities as a solo-parent school head, she shared that delegation plays a big role in balancing her duties at home and in school. Since she has no house helper, she assigns tasks to her children to ensure everything is taken care of. She applies the same approach in school, believing that effective leadership means knowing how to delegate tasks. Specifically, she shared during the interview:

I delegate the work because, in our house, we have no helper. So, I really have to assign tasks to my children. They have their own responsibilities. I do the same thing at school—I delegate tasks because that is how leadership should be.

This aligned with the belief of Dor (2021) that because of the demands in managing job and family obligations such as schedule childcare and work, people experience stress. And with this, this has been emphasized by the claim of DeRoche (2018) that both roles required significant time commitments and has significant emotional intelligence (Cheng & Guo, 2018).

Difficulty in Managing Work-Life Challenges

When asked about the challenges of being a solo-parent school head, she shared that balancing work and home life is not easy. She tries to keep school and home separate by shifting her focus depending on where she is—thinking about school matters while at work and focusing on household responsibilities when at home. However, this is not always possible, as school tasks often follow her home. Specifically, she shared:

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I always remind myself that school is different from home. So, I need to shift my mindset—when I am at home, I focus on household matters, and when I am at school, I focus on work. But most of the time, school tasks still end up following me home.

This is in similar point with the study of Bustamante (2021) in which being a solo-parent is hard and being a solo-working parent has its own set of challenges and a lot of days that are downward hard. In light manner, another study of Sultana (2024) revealed that parenthood and leadership are fundamentally demanding and make decisions under pressure (Calbaza, 2024).

Difficulty in Prioritizing Home-School Activities

She also shared that the hardest part is being present for both her children and her school. On weekdays, when she has to stay late at school, her children sometimes question why she is not home when she has no classes to teach. There are also times when important school events, like parent-teacher conferences, happen at the same time as her children's activities, making it difficult to be present for both. Specifically, she shared:

Presence is the most challenging part. Whether at home or at school, there are always events and responsibilities that need me. When I stay late at school, my children ask why I am still there. And when there are school activities that overlap with my children's schedules, I struggle to balance my time.

This is aligned in the belief of De Castro (2023) that solo parents take on the roles of both mother and father, they encounter a special set of difficulties and as the need for leadership in organizations has grown a significance and frequency (Chia, 2018). In the same manner, this has been emphasized by Family Promise of MC (2021) that the workload can be excessive while being a parent without a spouse to share responsibilities with.

Balancing Responsibilities through Prioritization

The Principal Grace coped with the challenges of managing both her professional and personal duties by balancing responsibilities through prioritization. In her own words, she explained that prioritizing is crucial to balancing her responsibilities. She focused on identifying what needs attention first, especially in situations where both work and home demands are pressing. She emphasized the importance of recognizing urgency and determining which tasks require immediate action. She joyfully shared during the interview:

Of course, prioritization is essential. We really need to prioritize what should be done first and what is necessary in the moment. If you try to address everything at once, giving equal attention to all, it becomes overwhelming. That is why it is important to apply prioritization by assessing urgency and understanding the need for each task, determining when it should be acted upon. This is especially true in my work as a school head, where there are numerous demands and challenges. For me, the focus should be on what is urgent and what is a priority, and that is what needs to be addressed first. You balance things by identifying what is important and knowing how to prioritize.

In a similar study of Lindholm (2021) revealed that despite all the challenges, working parents without partners have discovered ways to maximize their time, home and professional lives, and networks. Solo parents have developed new strategies for moving forward and being the greatest parent-leaders, they can be in difficult situations by using their unique and innovative problem-solving abilities. Such, Abioro et. al. (2018) revealed that the amount of time spent working compared to the amount of time spent with family and engaging social activities has been described as the solo-parent's work-life balance.

Support System and Self-Care Strategies

In coping with the challenges of being a solo-parent school head, Principal Grace shared that she finds ways to rejuvenate her spirit through regular local travels. She emphasized that while international trips may be too expensive, she finds relief by visiting local parks, beaches, and mountains. Additionally, spending time eating with friends serves as a stress reliever, providing an opportunity to unwind and enjoy life outside of work. Despite the demands of her position, she clarified that her stress is generally light, especially in relation to her colleagues, and she ensures that she maintains a balanced approach to her work and personal life. She specifically shared:

I just go for regular travels, you know, nothing too fancy. I do not do international trips because they are too expensive. I stick to local destinations that help revive my spirit, like going to parks, beaches, or hiking in the mountains—something like that. Or sometimes, I eat with friends because, you know, food really helps relieve stress. I make it a point to regularly hang out with my friends to get away from the chaos. But actually, it is not that stressful with the teachers or at work. As a school head, the stress is light, and it is manageable.

Initially, this was believed on the study of Cherry (2022) asserted that solo parents can make self-time to avoid burnout. Thus, families with solo parents, seeking social support has been linked to increased family strength and confidence, and school administrators who have social support available to them are shielded from the psychological and physical impacts of a problem (Raising Children, 2022).

Nurturing Resilience

Principal Grace has learned to cope with the challenges of being a solo-parent school head by maintaining professionalism and emotional control. She shared that handling teachers on a personal level can be frustrating, so she chooses to approach situations in a professional manner to avoid unnecessary stress. Instead of letting difficulties overwhelm her, she looks for the right way to address challenges in school management. Even in moments of extreme pressure, she reminds herself to follow DepEd orders while also considering the human aspect of leadership. For her, balancing rules with compassion helps her traverse the demands of her role effectively. She specifically shared:

You should not take things personally. If you handle teachers in a highly personal manner, it will only lead to frustration. That

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is why it is essential to approach situations professionally to avoid unnecessary stress. Sometimes, we get overwhelmed, but in reality, it can be managed. Finding the right approach to address the challenges of school leadership is crucial. There are moments when situations become extremely challenging and emotionally draining, but I remind myself to refer to DepEd orders. Am I handling this matter correctly? At the same time, as a school head, I recognize the need for human consideration because, after all, we are dealing with people.

This was focused on the study of Harris et. al., (2018) that there is a strong connection between principal leadership and student learning. Furthermore, solo parents in leadership status is highlighted in the limelight because companies make a culture inclusivity (Cadesca, 2019). Similarly, Villar, et. al., (2021) stated that the high significance of the school heads' leadership approaches in terms of resiliency in stress management.

Building a Supportive Environment

As a solo-parent school head, she approached leadership much like she did parenting—by offering guidance, encouragement, and support. She believed in empowering both her children at home and her teachers at school to pursue their goals. Just as she encouraged her children to strive for their dreams, she also motivated her teachers to engage in professional development, whether by enrolling in postgraduate studies or seeking promotions. She made sure they felt supported, not only in their career growth but also in their everyday needs. Like how she provided for her children's school supplies, she ensured that teachers had the resources they required in their classrooms. For her, managing a school was about balancing structure and support, fostering both professional growth and personal well-being. She sincerely shared:

Well, at home, we encourage our children to pursue what they want, while also giving them the freedom to achieve their goals. It is the same in school, where we guide our teachers in their professional development. So, if they have the opportunity to enroll in postgraduate studies, we encourage them, and if there are vacancies for promotion, we also support them. This is my way of showing that I am here for them. Additionally, when they have requests, such as classroom needs and supplies just like how our children ask for school supplies at home, I make sure to take note of everything and ensure they get the support they need.

Having Work and Home Fulfillment

Principal Grace shared her insights on the rewarding aspects of being a solo-parent school head, emphasizing the fulfillment that comes from achieving set goals. One of her key reflections was the satisfaction of seeing the impact of her plans, especially when it resulted in measurable improvements in student learning. For example, when her goal was to reduce the number of non-readers in her school, she felt immense happiness as the number dropped from 20 to just 5. This sense of accomplishment was particularly meaningful, as it reflected both her leadership efforts and the positive change in her students' progress. She specifically shared:

Number one is when you set a target in your plan and you are able to achieve it. It is really fulfilling. Especially when it comes to the quality of the learners, like when you target an 80% NPS (National Proficiency Score) for the students, and they actually achieve it. You feel really happy, like when you set a target to reduce the number of non-readers from 20 to just 5. That is really something to be happy about.

Leaving a Legacy

Principal Grace shared her experience of going above and beyond to ensure the success of every activity, despite her many responsibilities as a solo-parent school head. She describes how she is willing to make personal sacrifices, even doing tasks like decorating or organizing, just to make sure everything looks perfect. Her dedication reflects her commitment to providing full support for her school's activities, ensuring that the goals are achieved. This willingness to give her all, even in small details, shows her passion for creating successful and meaningful experiences for both her students and staff. She honestly shared:

You really have to go the extra mile for everyone. Even here, I would go as far as decorating just to make our activity look good, something like that. It is all about ensuring the activity is successful, and you are willing to fully dedicate your support to achieve that goal.

Principal Serenity's Narrative

Early Experiences as a Solo Parent School Head

When asked about her journey as a solo-parent school head, she shared how she started in a small school with only seven or eight teachers. It was her first assignment as a school head, and after a year and a half, she was transferred to a remote school in the mountains, where she had to ride a dump truck just to get down. Despite the difficulty, she found joy in the experience. As she continued her career, she moved to a bigger school with 12 teachers, and eventually, she was assigned to a central school, where the challenges became even greater. Specifically, she shared:

I started in a small school with about seven or eight teachers. After a year and a half, I was transferred to a remote school in the mountains, where I had to ride a dump truck to get down, but I still enjoyed it. Then, I moved to a bigger school with 12 teachers, and later, I was assigned to a central school.

As highlighted in the study of Lathan (2022) that educational leaders have a significant impact on the culture, outlook and reputation of their school. They serve as the foundation for the growth and operation of learning communities. Similarly, Fouche (2019) revealed that regardless of the environment, solo parent school head's purpose never ceases to exist as becoming a solo-parent leader was unexpected, yet many strive to succeed in both career and leadership.

Adapting Leadership Style through Personal Experiences

When asked about her leadership style as a solo-parent school head, she shared that she does not follow just one specific approach. Instead, she remains flexible, adapting to different situations as needed. She believes that being a solo parent has

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greatly influenced the way she leads, especially in how she understands her teachers. Because she has faced many challenges and had to make difficult decisions on her own, she has developed a deeper sense of empathy and a broader perspective in handling school matters. Specifically, she shared:

My leadership style is not fixed. It is not just one approach because I have to be flexible. Being a solo parent has shaped how I lead, especially in understanding my teachers. I have been through many challenges and had to make decisions alone, which helped me become more understanding.

This story was anchored in the concept of Adeboye (2021) implicated that many solo-parent struggles to be leaders, but that does not make them any less of a leader.

Struggling with Transition and Managing Complex School Demands

When asked about the challenges she faced as a solo-parent school head, she shared that her biggest struggle was when she was assigned to a central school. Unlike her previous small school, where she handled fewer teachers and programs, the central school had 78 teachers and numerous school activities to manage. The workload was heavier, requiring her to oversee budgeting, teacher behavior, and resource allocation. She also found it difficult to meet the demands of school programs, especially when visitors arrived, and the budget was not enough to cover expenses. She conveyed:

When I was assigned to the central school, the challenges were overwhelming. There were so many programs to handle, and I had to manage 78 teachers. Budgeting was a struggle, and I had to find ways to make things work, especially when there were visitors and resources were limited.

Thus, this was asserted on the belief of Schulte (2021) in acknowledging the solo parent leaders' contributions and skills have greater opportunities for solo parents to have a better career and lead them to greater leadership position.

Leveraging Resilience to Overcome Leadership Hurdles

Principal Serenity shared that seeking support from others is very important. Whenever she faces difficult decisions or situations where she lacks knowledge, she reaches out to her PSDS, EPS, or colleagues for guidance. She believes that asking for help is not a weakness but a way to learn and improve. She also relies on group chats with fellow school heads, where they mentor and support each other in handling school concerns. She honestly shared:

Yes, when I struggle with a decision or feel unsure, I reach out to my PSDS, EPS, or colleagues for advice and support. We have group chats where we mentor and help each other, which makes challenges easier to handle.

This journey was in relation to the study of Chang et. al., (2017) asserted that solo parent school heads have recently faced higher levels of work demands and stress as a result of expanding job responsibilities. Similarly, Oplatka (2017) stated that unplanned work, school budgets, official correspondence, and the amount of time allotted to resolving communication issues at school are some elements that raise the burden of principals in educational institutions.

Fostering a Transparent and Respectful School Environment

When asked about how she gains the support of her teachers as a solo-parent school head, she shared that transparency and respect are key. She believes that open communication and treating teachers with fairness help build trust and cooperation. Coming from a background as a high school teacher before moving to elementary, she learned to separate personal problems from work. No matter what challenges she faces at home, she makes sure to leave them behind when she enters the school gates. This approach allows her to maintain professionalism and a positive working environment. Specifically, she shared:

I gained my teachers' support through transparency and respect. When I have personal problems, I leave them behind when I step into the school. I believe that no matter how tough things are at home, I should not bring that stress into my workplace.

This was proved by the concept added by Girisken (2021), that the notion of work-life balance among solo parents are having the capacity to fit in family time or social activities. Hence, Malik and Allam (2021) supported as it involves other people, especially their coworkers, their notion of work-life balance is relational in a sense.

Leadership through Faith and Support

Principal Serenity shared that it is never easy to manage both roles. The weight of responsibilities at home and at school can be overwhelming. However, she believes that having a clear direction and strong goals keeps her moving forward. For her, faith in God, support from family, and believing in herself make all the difference. No matter how tough things get, she reminds herself that she is capable and that she can overcome any challenge. Specifically, she shared:

Being a solo parent is not easy, and being a school head is even harder. But when you have direction, clear goals, faith in God, family support, and the belief that you can do it, you will find the strength to keep going.

This has been highlighted from Brooks and Brooks (2021) that the ways which religion and spiritual influence principal leadership practice, both in terms of how beliefs guide their job and in regards to how they manifest in the school and community.

Encouraging Compassion and Understanding

When asked about her insights as a solo-parent school head, Principal Serenity shared that her leadership style is like that of a mother. Just as she expresses love and appreciation to her children at home, she also believes in showing support and encouragement to her teachers. A simple pat on the shoulder, a "good job," or a "thank you" can make a big difference in

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motivating them. She also understands that teachers, like anyone else, have personal struggles. Instead of scolding them when they face challenges, she chooses to offer guidance and support, just as she would for her own children. Specifically, she shared:

I feel like a mother to them. A simple pat on the shoulder or a few kind words can uplift them. At home, I tell my children 'I love you,' and in school, I also make sure to appreciate my teachers. When they are struggling, I do not scold them—I support them.

This was proved by the concept added by Girisken (2021), that the notion of work-life balance among solo parents are having the capacity to fit in family time or social activities.

Principal Faith's Narrative
Embarking a Journey of Dual Roles
When asked about her stories as a solo-parent school head, Principal Faith shared that being a solo parent never became a problem in fulfilling her duties. She believes that her role as a school leader is separate from her personal challenges, and she never allowed single parenthood to affect her responsibilities. For her, leadership is about commitment, time management, and dedication—qualities that helped her balance both roles effectively. Specifically, she shared:

For me, there is no problem in carrying out my duties as a school head. Being a solo parent does not complicate my role or my ability to lead.

The road of solo parenting is often rocky as it has mentioned in the study of Minna (2024) that solo-parent in leadership is often seen as a struggle but every individual has their own personal strengths (Tengesdal, 2024) and these solo-parent leaders, however, face unique challenges to their personal strengths.

Living with Purpose and Fulfillment
Principal Faith shared that she is fully dedicated to her work and family. She chooses not to engage in nightlife or other distractions, as her priorities are clear—her job and her children. For her, maintaining balance means giving her full attention to whatever role she is in at the moment. When she is at school, she focuses on her duties as a leader, and when she is at home, she devotes her time to her family. Specifically, she shared:

I do not engage in nightlife activities. I spend my time on my family and my work. These are my priorities and my focus. When I am at work, I focus on my job. When I am with my family, I focus on them.

This entailed from Aviguetero (2021) implied that every teacher and administrator deserve to be happy, fulfilling life because doing so promotes well-being and a better work-life balance.

Having Problems in Balancing Personal and Professional Life
When asked about the challenges she faces as a solo-parent school head, Principal Faith shared that difficulties are a natural part of both her personal and professional life. At school, she constantly deals with concerns from parents, students, and teachers, all requiring her attention and decision-making. At home, she also faces struggles in managing her family's needs. Every day brings new challenges, but she remains focused on handling them as part of her duty as a school leader. Specifically, she shared:

Challenges cannot be avoided. In school, I deal with issues from parents, students, and teachers. At home, I have my own struggles. These challenges are part of my daily life, but they are more connected to my role as a school head.

Similarly, unexpected family expenses added pressure, forcing her to carefully manage her salary to cover both personal and school-related expenses. Moreover, Schulte and Pabst (2021) conceded that they have more demands than usual, limited time, and perhaps fewer resources. Indeed, this journey talked on the research of Espinosa (2019) revealed that financial planning, financial reports, and financial controls issues were caused by educational reforms in the educational field.

Balancing Responsibilities through Time Management
When asked about how she coped with the challenges of being a solo-parent school head, Principal Faith emphasized that balancing time is one of the biggest struggles. Managing a school while also taking care of her family requires careful planning and discipline. She believes that effective time management is essential, and she constantly applies strategies to ensure that both her work and family receive the attention they need. Without proper balance, it would be difficult to fulfill her responsibilities in both roles. Specifically, she shared:

There should be a balance of time. Time management is very important when you are both a school head and a solo parent. You need to apply and implement it daily.

Sahadi (2019) added to the idea that trough time management and determination, solo parent could stand out.

Having Systematic Planning
Principal Faith shared that prioritization is her key strategy. She carefully organizes her tasks, making sure that the most important needs come first. For her, setting priorities helps in managing both work and family life effectively. She also ensures that family bonding is not neglected by planning ahead, setting a budget, and scheduling time for her loved ones. By doing this, she maintains a balance between her responsibilities at school and her role as a mother. This idea was mentioned in this interview statement:

I prioritize my activities and needs. Once priorities are set, everything else follows. For example, I make sure to plan and budget for family bonding, so I can give time to my loved ones.

Added to this, Lindholm (2021) revealed that solo parent leaders developed new strategies for moving forward and being the greatest parent-leaders, they can be.

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Maintaining Positivity and Emotional Resilience

Principal Faith revealed that she never lets personal struggles affect her work. Even when she feels pressured or overwhelmed by problems at home, she makes sure to leave those worries behind when she steps into the school. She believes that as a leader, she must remain strong and composed, even if it means pretending to be fine at times. For her, maintaining a positive attitude is important in creating a good working environment for her teachers and students. This idea was mentioned in his interview statement:

If I have personal problems, I do not bring them to work. Even when I feel pressured, I have to act fine and stay professional in doing my job.

Sharing Wisdom for Aspiring Solo Leaders

When asked about her insights as a solo-parent school head, Principal Faith shared that success in both family and leadership comes from knowing one's priorities. She believes that setting clear personal goals and having a strong sense of purpose help in managing the demands of work and home. For her, being a school head and a solo parent is not just about responsibilities but also about having the right mindset and vision in life. She disclosed:

As a solo-parent school head, it is important to prioritize your personal plans, goals, and views in life. Knowing what truly matters helps in balancing both roles effectively.

This is anchored in the study of Dalton (2022) thereby stated that knowing solo parents have been in their shoes, and that there is a wealth of knowledge available to draw from can help solo parents find comfort and strength.

Principal Hope's Narrative

Having Problems in Balancing Personal and Professional Life

When asked about her journey as a solo-parent school head, Principal Hope shared that she worked hard to balance her responsibilities at home and in her career. While supporting her parents and younger sibling, she also pursued her master's degree to secure a promotion. She believed that further education would help her advance in her profession, allowing her to earn more and provide better for her family. Through determination and perseverance, she moved up from being a Teacher III to Head Teacher I and eventually to Head Teacher IV, proving that hard work and sacrifice can lead to success. Specifically, she shared:

While supporting my parents and sibling, I also pursued my master's degree to get promoted faster. I heard that having a master's degree helps with promotions. From Teacher III, I was promoted to Head Teacher I, then Head Teacher IV, because I wanted to increase my salary.

The road of solo parenting is often rocky as it has mentioned in the study of Minna (2024) that solo-parent in leadership is often seen as a struggle but every individual has their own personal strengths (Tengesdal, 2024) and these solo-parent leaders, however, face unique challenges to their personal strengths.

Stepping into Leadership Amidst Reluctance

Principal Hope shared that stepping into leadership was not part of her original plan. She had always loved teaching and never imagined herself in an administrative role. However, it was her principal who encouraged her to take the exam for school leadership. At first, she was unsure and not fully passionate about the responsibilities that came with being a school head, but this opportunity eventually led her to a new path in her career. This statement is affirmed by her as she shared:

My principal encouraged me to take the exam, even though I was not really interested in administrative tasks. I always wanted to focus on teaching.

This story was anchored in the concept of Adeboye (2021) implicated that many solo-parent struggles to be leaders, but that does not make them any less of a leader. With this, she confirmed that being a solo parent helped her developed a broader understanding of people, especially in dealing with the teachers.

Adapting Leadership Styles to Meet Diverse Needs

When asked about her leadership style as a solo-parent school head, Principal Hope shared that she follows a transformational approach, adjusting to different situations and the needs of her teachers. She believes that being a good leader means knowing when to be flexible and when to be firm. There are times when she leads democratically, allowing her teachers to share ideas and make decisions together. However, there are also times when she needs to be authoritative to ensure that school policies and goals are met. Specifically, she shared:

My leadership style is transformational—I adjust to situations and the needs of my teachers. Sometimes I am democratic, involving them in decision-making, but other times I need to be authoritative to keep things in order.

Creating a Supportive Environment Despite Struggles

When asked about how she supports her teachers as a solo-parent school head, Principal Hope shared that she prioritizes their needs to ensure a positive and productive work environment. She makes sure to provide what is necessary for her teachers to perform their duties well. To do this, she regularly consults them about what the school requires and aligns these needs with the school's Annual Improvement Plan. For her, leadership means listening, addressing concerns, and making sure that both teachers and students have the resources they need to succeed. She shared:

I always provide for my teachers' needs. I ask them what the school requires and make sure everything aligns with our Annual Improvement Plan.

This was evidenced by Republic Act No. 4670, known as 'Magna Carta for Public School teachers', wherein it envisioned to provide programs for the promotion and improvement of the well-being and economic status of public-school teachers.

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Having Problem in Addressing Conflict While Upholding Mandates

Another thing is that Principal Hope shared that one major difficulty was enforcing DepEd policies when she was assigned to a new school in North District. She discovered that some school practices did not follow DepEd mandates, particularly in managing the school canteen. Changing the system and ensuring compliance was not easy, as she had to correct long-standing practices and make sure that everyone followed the proper guidelines. Despite the resistance, she remained firm in implementing the rules to maintain order and accountability in the school. This statement is affirmed by her as she shared:

One challenge I faced when I arrived in my new station was that they had their own way of doing things. They were not following DepEd mandates, especially in managing the school canteen.

This was cited on Department Order 17, s. 1997, entitled 'Adopting A Policy of Empowering School Principals". Which firmly stated that all school principals shall henceforth be vested with instructional administrative and fiscal autonomy for a more effective and efficient delivery of quality basic education.

Building Emotional Resilience and Seeking Support

Principal Hope communicated that she never hesitates to seek help when needed. Whenever she faces difficulties, she reaches out to people she trusts—those she knows can offer guidance and support. By opening up about her problems, she receives valuable advice and suggestions that help her make better decisions. For her, asking for help is not a sign of weakness but a way to find solutions and stay strong in both her role as a school head and as a solo parent. Specifically, she shared:

When I am in difficult situations, I always ask for help—I call it my 'lifeline.' I open up about my problems to people I know can help me, and they give me advice and suggestions.

As a result, this study underlined the high significance of the school heads' leadership approaches in terms of resiliency and stress management (Villar et al., 2021).

Maintaining Positivity and Emotional Resilience

When asked about her insights as a solo-parent school head, Principal Hope shared that being a solo parent has helped her grow in many ways. She realized that it made her more resilient, allowing her to face challenges with strength and determination. At the same time, it also taught her to be resourceful, finding creative solutions to problems both at home and at work. For her, solo parenthood was not just a struggle but also an opportunity for personal growth and development. Specifically, she shared:

Being a solo parent has helped me become resilient. It also made me more resourceful, as I had to find ways to handle challenges on my own.

Finding Fulfillment in Leadership

Principal Hope took the most pride in transforming her school's culture. She believes that creating a positive environment for teachers, students, and staff is one of her most meaningful achievements. Through her leadership, she was able to foster a culture of encouragement, teamwork, and optimism, making the school a better place for everyone. For her, seeing this positive change is the most rewarding part of her journey. She shared:

I think my greatest fulfillment is being able to change the school's culture—a culture that is full of positivity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING PRACTICES

These discussions highlight the significant role of solo-parent school heads in shaping school culture, managing challenges, and fostering resilience. One key implication for teaching practice is the need for a supportive and collaborative school environment where teachers and administrators work together to ensure smooth school operations. Since solo-parent school heads balance both professional and personal responsibilities, teachers should actively engage in shared decision-making and leadership responsibilities to ease the administrative burden and promote a positive work atmosphere.

Additionally, the findings suggest that teachers should develop **emotional intelligence and adaptability,** as school heads who practice compassion and understanding to create a more inclusive and motivating school culture. Furthermore, knowledge on the benefits and privileges on solo parents among school heads should be strengthened, allowing experienced to share and enjoy benefits that local government offers.

Moreover, the findings suggest that solo parent should make advantage of the **national and local policies** for their benefits and privileges to better serve its purpose in performing well their duties and responsibilities. The national and local government and of the department policies are available to provide support and ensure the well-being of future solo parent for their children, particularly those who are responsible for balancing parenting and leadership roles.

In respect to the solo parents, findings suggest that teachers who assumed responsibility as head of the family, unmarried and taking care of the child and of covered to the Solo Parents Welfare Act of 2000 should evolve in response to ongoing **social, economic, and technological changes**. Government, organizations, and communities are increasingly recognizing the unique challenges faced by solo parents. As a result, new policies and support systems are being developed or improved to ensure their well-being and success.

Most importantly, time **management strategies and work-life balance** initiatives should be integrated into teaching practices. Schools should encourage educators to prioritize tasks effectively, ensuring both professional growth and personal well-being. With this, fostering a culture of shared leadership of the stakeholders, shared responsibilities among the faculty, students and Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) as major stakeholder, showcasing emotional support, and continuous learning, teachers can contribute to a more resilient and thriving school community under the leadership of solo-parent school heads. Indeed, granting the schools head's leadership

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implementation could be empowered and serve purposively to its highest form.

More to this finding, a **family support** should have a greater responsibility involving offering emotional, financial, and practical support to solo parents. In these ways, these aspects could promote a sense of belonging, allows solo parents to manage work, easily get along with the leadership responsibilities, direct assistance, and even fostering open communication where solo parents feel valued and supported. Thus, the role of having a family provides a reliable network of support to make the challenges more manageable less isolating.

In giving an abstract of, creating an **encouraging and nurturing organization within the Department of Education (DepEd)** specifically for solo parent employees could create a sense of community and advocate for the needs of solo parents who work within the education system. This could lead teachers represent their rights, needs, and concerns by pushing for policies and reforms that specifically addresses the challenges faced by solo parents in the workplace, such as flexible hours, parental, and childcare support. Thus, implementing rightful opportunities personally and professionally, the organization can work to influence policies that impact solo parent employees, ensuring that they receive equal opportunities and protection under the law, and that their unique needs are addressed in educational policies.

CONCLUSION

Conducting this research has been a meaningful journey filled with both learning and challenges. Through this study, I gained a deeper understanding of the tales of solo-parent school heads, particularly how they balance their leadership roles and personal responsibilities and how they can enjoy the benefits and privileges given and supported by the national government to solo parents. Their stories of resilience, adaptability, and dedication inspired me to see leadership from a broader perspective—one that requires not just skills but also emotional strength and purpose.

However, this research also came with meaningful experiences. Gathering data, ensuring ethical considerations, and analyzing narratives required patience and careful attention to detail. At times, I felt overwhelmed by the amount of information I needed to process, but I coped by staying organized, managing my time effectively, and seeking guidance from my mentors. Additionally, hearing the personal journey of solo-parent school heads made me more aware of the weight of their stories, which required me to approach the study with both sensitivity and objectivity.

Overall, this research has strengthened my appreciation for qualitative studies and the power of storytelling in education research. More importantly, it has reinforced my belief that strong leadership is built not just on expertise but also on perseverance and compassion. As I conclude this study, I carry with me a deeper sense of respect for solo-parent school heads and a commitment to further exploring ways to support educational leaders in challenging circumstances.

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