INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING OF LECTURERS IN RURAL CAMPUSES OF SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to explore the influence of COVID-19 pandemic on psychosocial wellbeing of rural university lecturers in South Africa. The study adopted a qualitative phenomenological design utilising snowball sampling technique to select 25 lecturers across five campuses of three different types of universities. Purposive sampling was adopted to choose the three faculties of the five rural campuses from the three participating higher education institutions (HEIs). Findings were classified under three themes namely emotional alienation, degenerating physical wellness and waning socioeconomic wellbeing. It emerged that lecturers were going through different psychological, emotional and social dilemmas that negatively affected their mental and physical wellbeing. These include mental strain due to e-resource under-provision, minimised teaching and learning efficacy as well as tech-related burnout. Ill-health due to lack of basic amenities, increased personal underdevelopment and increasing pressure from social adjustment demands also emerged among the psychosocial influences of the pandemic. The paper concludes that lecturers in both private and public HEIs are faced with a myriad of challenges amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and that lecturer stress impacts levels of lecturer efficacy on student learning. Recommendations made include the need by HEIs to set up dedicated counselling services for employees where there could vent and get help. Also, the onset of this pandemic should lead to rethinking of how lecturing should be envisaged going forward. The study is germane to provide a picture of some of the concerns regarding the wellbeing of lecturers upon which policy ought to be holistically entangled so as to promote socioeconomic development.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, wellbeing, remote learning, university lecturer, rurality

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 across the globe wreaked havoc and left many people shaken and filled with uncertainty of the future. According to the Worldmeter (2021), the Coronavirus also known as COVID-19 had affected 219 countries and territories at the time of writing this paper (13 February 2021). Literature has it that this pandemic impacted negatively on the economy, education, health and social relationships (Manyane, 2020) more than any other pandemic that was experienced before. The World Health Organisation (WHO) warned the nations to brace up for this novel disease which WHO declared a worldwide pandemic. According to Mail & Guardian (2020), the pandemic was spreading like veld fire pushing infections and deaths to soar daily in exponential numbers. People were left numb, and most businesses and activities came to a standstill. Schools and

universities in South Africa and across the globe were closed unceremoniously and it left teachers, lecturers, learners and students mesmerised and confused. South Africa, like other countries, was put under Level 5 lockdown by President Cyril Ramaphosa on 26 March 2020. Such a lockdown was characterised by the strictest regulations and restrictions and that had implications on the existence of teaching and learning across the education system. Given such a reality, it is crucial to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the lecturers' wellbeing.

Ayile, Mekonen and Mekuria (2020) are of the view that the prevalent eruption of COVID-19 has brought both the threat of death and also major psychological pressure. It is argued that teacher and lecturer stress is on the rise given the global pandemics, natural disasters, curricula change, learner behaviour and adoption of information and communication technology into teaching and learning. This position implies that teacher wellness is compromised and has been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. As universities were completely shut down, intervention strategies had to be and were employed in order to save the academic year. Lecturers and students were mandated to shift to remote and online teaching and learning using different technological gadgets and e-learning platforms. Despite the call that was made by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), some universities were not ready for such an abrupt transition (Dube, 2020). In line with that, Fataar (2020) opines that online platforms were favourable to urban and well-established universities than to some rural universities that were historically disadvantaged. From Dube and Fataar's perceptions that some universities especially the historically disadvantaged were not ready, what came to our mind was, 'what implications did this have on the lecturers' psychosocial wellbeing?' Xiao (2020)'s view is in line with Ayile et al. (2020), that the COVID-19 pandemic did not only bring the risk of death but also psychological stress for people across the globe. The participating campuses are located in the remote parts of South Africa and are bounded by communities that depend mostly on the government grant. For such communities, owing to their rural location, it is difficult to suddenly transit from face-to-face contact to online mode of learning (Mbodila, Bassey, Kikunga & Masehele, 2016), and are not developed and are characterised by few economic activities (Langa, 2015).

We ascribe to the view that education is a key that unlocks closed doors in one's life and that it makes citizens of any nation to participate in building their respective economies. This positions a lecturer as a centripetal force in the creation of the mainstream economy, hence it is critical to look at their wellbeing. Elsewhere in the literature (De Nobile, 2017; Split et al., 2011) it is reported that teacher wellbeing has an impact on work satisfaction, throughput and student attainment. As key stakeholders in economic construction and revitalisation, lecturers' wellbeing needs to be investigated as they are also exposed to COVID-19 virus which has exacerbated the people's stress levels. So many studies have been carried out since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic but very few studies if any have focused on the psychosocial wellbeing of the lecturers in rural universities in South Africa. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the manner COVID-19 pandemic influenced the psychosocial wellbeing of lecturers in rural campuses of selected South African universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lecturer psychosocial wellbeing is a topic that needs to be discussed on the public platforms given the increase in stress-related issues and pandemics that can impact negatively on the lecturer's wellbeing. Olivier and Venter (2015) opine that stress is currently a phenomenon that must be recognized and addressed in various professions and the teaching profession is no exception. The report released by The Graide Network (2020) states that about one third of all new teachers leave education within the first five years of their career, and "the rate at which teachers leave the profession is significantly higher than the departure rate in other professions" (The Graide Network, 2020, p.9). As such, it is evident that the teaching profession is not immune to stress. As Carr (2020) argues, more than half of the teachers reported that their mental health had deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Carr (2020) further argues that mental health decline was also perpetuated by most governments who could not provide guidance timeously.

Duraku and Hoxha (2020) perceive that methods to curb the COVID-19 pandemic such as a shift to online learning affected higher education worldwide. On the other hand, Masters et al. (2020) opine that the outbreak of COVID-19 and economic decline were a recipe for inequality, marginalisation, abrasion, disconnection, and stress across the education profession. The pressure on lecturers to adopt online teaching was seen as a blow that exacerbated lecturers' stress, anxiety, fears and uncertainty because even before the outbreak of the COVID-19, lecturers were experiencing too much pressure that impacted negatively on their work performance (Marongwe, Chiphambo & Kasumba 2020). Concurringly, Dabrowski (2020) states that people should recall that long before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted schools, teachers were already at risk of burnout.

A greater part of the world population used to view university teaching as a stress-free profession (Ficsher, 1994) but given the rapid change and a demanding lifestyle, higher education institutions are now perceived as stressful environments. Marongwe et al. (2020) penned that presently, universities were faced with myriad challenges, among them was lecturers' "well-being" and that lecturers' "anxiety" was rife these days though not enough attention was paid to it since people assumed that academicians could cope with life's stresses. Ficsher (1994) observed that during the last decades, things had changed in higher education institutions, predominantly in developing countries, that led to higher competition and weakened organizational climate in most of the public and private sector universities. This, according to Ficsher, provoked lecturers' tension to increase. Dabrowski (2020) posits that the COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated the stresses facing teachers as countries continue to navigate periods of remote education. Hence undertaking studies on lecturers' psychological wellbeing during and after the COVID-19 pandemic should be upheld. Such studies would provide measures or strategies that institutions of higher learning can adopt and adapt in trying to intervene and support lecturers.

The announcement that was made by the Minister of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, that South African universities (rural and urban), were to migrate to remote online teaching and learning, made lecturers to convert their private homes into offices and classes (DHET, 2020). This move had its own challenges such as increased workload, delicate work-life balance, lack of privacy, disruptions from family members (Carr, 2020) and so forth. Additionally, Kumar and Somani (2020) state that there were also challenges of fearing to contract the COVID-19 virus, feeling helpless and

high negative stigma. Fear and uncertainty can lead to stress (Marongwe et al., 2020). Stress is perceived as a certain connection between a person and his/her setting that one considers to be beyond his/her resources, putting his/her wellbeing in jeopardy (Lazarus et al., 1987). Sibal (2018) is of the opinion that uncertainty and fears of risk either of yourself or a beloved one can fuel anxiety. Different studies agree that anxiety can cause people to experience symptoms like rapid breathing, weak and painful body and that anxiety can cause one to lose focus, concentration, memory and impaired vision (Wang, Mann, Lloyd-Evans, Ma & Johnson 2018; Levin, Albers, Mitchener et al., 2019; Kelemu, Kahsay & Ahmed, 2020).

Dabrowski (2020) states that many teachers were told to shift to online classes in a short space of time which was received with mixed reactions because most were not ready, and it increased the stress levels of some teachers. Additionally, Ferdig et al. (2020) view the COVID-19 epidemic as propelling a rapid movement to remote schooling and that could worsen the challenges already being experienced by teachers. Similarly, Dabrowski (2020) states that even though the teaching profession previously had unique challenges and pressure from students, families, and a constantly changing system, the COVID-19 pandemic will likely lead to further anxiety and weariness within the profession. When reporting about the university teachers in Jordan, Sahu (2020) argues that university teachers at higher education institutions could be impacted psychologically by the consequences of the current pandemic and its precautionary mitigation rules including online remote teaching. Literature has it that university students and lecturers are among the most vulnerable clusters who could be stricken by numerous degrees of psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cao, Fang, Hou, Han, Xu, Dong & Zheng, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research approach. Phenomenological method best suited this study since the focus was on understanding the influence of COVID-19 pandemic on lecturers' wellbeing from the participants' own perceptions of their lived experiences. It is advantageous to use the phenomenological approach because it explores what people experienced and focuses on their experiences of a phenomenon under study. Welman and Kruger (1999, p. 189) state, "the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved". What it means is that the researchers get information from the horses' mouths. According to Giorgi as cited in Groenewald (2004), the researcher's aim is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon and remaining true to the facts as given by the participants and without a pre-given framework. This study maintained the same stance.

Participants

The research participants were 25 lecturers drawn from five rural campuses of three South African universities being one private and two public universities. The two public universities were such that one was a traditional university while the other was a comprehensive one. Institutional diversity facilitated getting a cross-pollination of views since COVID-19 did not

spare any institution of higher learning. The five rural campuses that participated in the study were purposively chosen. This sampling technique regulated the desired pool since our intention was to collect data from lecturers in rural institutions of higher learning in South Africa. Snowball sampling technique was used to select five participants per each campus from three faculties that participated in the study, which were education, commerce and engineering. Snowball technique was deemed suitable for this study because we did not know the lecturers in those faculties, so, we just got hold of one lecturer and that lecturer referred us to another until we got our desired number. The three faculties were purposively chosen since they are commonly offered in both public and private institutions of higher learning. The study did not consider the number of female vs male participants since with snowball technique you are just directed to any relevant and rich information participant without really considering the issue of gender and age.

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to gather data. The participants were interviewed telephonically since the interviews were conducted during lockdown Level 4 restrictions that were propelled by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, though the study was penned during lockdown Level 3. The study was conducted when the universities' on-campus classes were shut down, thus, as a follow-up on the telephonic interviews, WhatsApp messages, e-mails and further telephonic engagements were used to clarify issues. Both authors were involved in data collection. Appointments to schedule the telephonic interviews were made by the authors. It took two weeks to interview the 25 participants. On average, it took approximately 25 minutes to interview each of the participants. The collected data were analysed using thematic frames following a phenomenological analysis, namely phenomenal reduction, eidetic reduction, and transcendental reduction. Doing away with redundancy was upheld to ensure that only relevant data were analysed. Participants' verbatim quotations were used without altering the responses and thick descriptions were used to analyse the data.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought from the three universities under study through the faculties that participated in the study and was granted. Additionally, consent forms were not signed manually as the norm before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, instead the consent was done orally and recorded for all the participants who were first taken through what the study entailed. Permission to audio record was also sought from the participants who were assured of their privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation. We used codes to protect the identity of the universities and the participants. Since, the phenomenon under study was sensitive and most participants were going through a difficult time due to the pandemic, participants were informed to withdraw freely at any time they might have felt suitable not continue with the interview.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The presentation of findings and discussion were done concurrently. Results are presented thematically. Participants were 11 male and 14 female lecturers most of whom were between 36 and 50 years of age. While most participants had between 6- and 15-years lecturing experiences, there was nearly a balance between holders of masters and doctoral degrees/PhDs. Among the doctoral degree/PhD holders, most had acquired their doctoral degrees/PhDs within the last 5 years. Lecturers from private universities were identified as LPV while those from the public universities as respectively LPBT and LPBC for traditional and comprehensive type of universities. As such, LPV1 represented first lecturer participant from the private institution, while LPBT5 represented fifth participant from a traditional university. Findings were presented under three themes that emerged namely emotional alienation, degenerating physical wellness and waning socioeconomic wellbeing; for which each theme had sub-themes as reflected in the ensuing section.

Emotional Alienation

i) Mental strain due to e-resource under-provision and under-preparedness

It emerged that ill-preparedness for electronic resources (e-resources) provision which was rife both at institutional and individual levels mentally affected lecturers' emotional wellbeing. Institutionally, the pace at which e-resources in terms of laptops and data cards for students were to be acquired was very slow. Furthermore, besides the need for lecturers to be trained for different online teaching platforms in order to proceed with lessons, a number of lecturers were generally technologically incompetent. It was said, *"the university was ill-prepared to provide necessary gadgets on time to facilitate online classes"* (LPV4; LPBT6). Moreso, it emerged that most universities had the wrong impression that students are competent to use technological equipment. Yet in reality, *"Most students and lecturers are not at all technologically competent so using these virtual platforms is a challenge and is just by lack of choice. Besides being ill-resourced, students' getting required [electronic] tools late, was a big blow"* (LPBC7; LPBC9; LPBT2). It was also said, *"Despite that the students may have better attitude towards technology than lecturers, it is a fact that most do not know how to navigate when it comes to real learning"* (LPV5; LPBT10). A similar sentiment was shared by LPBT8 who expressed, "*My biggest challenge was getting used to zoom lecturing. We were not trained to do this. Now we were supposed to be recorded lecturing in real action without any confidence. Worse still, the lectures were also on YouTube and/or on e-learning platforms. I felt like we were crucified by the institution. We were emotionally drained to the extent of affecting our health; we were always stressed and afraid of making mistakes. We are used to our traditional way of lecturing and assessing students. I felt lost in the jungle"*. Such findings are consistent with Carr (2020)'s argument that, more than half of the teachers reported that their mental health had deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Carr (2020) further argues that mental health decline was also perpetuated by most governments who could not provide guidance timeously.

ii) Compromised teaching and learning efficacy

The study established that the existence of technological limitations in relation to teaching and learning effectiveness had some toll on lecturers' psychology. There was a trend that lecturers were concerned about the limitations of virtual interaction mainly for situations when illustrations and demonstrations were to be utilised. The inefficacy was dominant disproportionately among lecturers from public universities. LPBC8 responded saying, *"My [mathematics] module involves a lot of demonstrations for which I cannot do now as I don't have all the required tools. The university seems not to see this as an urgent issue for now as they are still distributing computers and data resources to students and some lecturers."* It was also reiterated that online platforms did not promote massive student participation in learning activities. For instance, they reduced student demonstrating or actively illustrating their thoughts, as LPBT4 complained bitterly, *"It is very frustrating most times because of lack of interaction with my students for such long hours. At the end of the lesson, I would not be even sure whether I have achieved my objectives as student participation is always overwhelmingly limited. As they say we have understood, I am worried because I cannot physically assess that; What about if they fear not to say they didn't?"* LPBC9 said, *"Our students do not have enough data so we use audios not videos, so I cannot illustrate anything. This also means they mostly may not even know me, and I also don't know them, so I fear learning cannot be more effective."* When reporting about the university teachers in Jordan, Sahu (2020) argues that university teachers at higher education institutions could be impacted psychologically by the consequences of the current pandemic and its precautionary mitigation rules including online remote teaching.

iii) Dilemma due to poor lecture attendance

Participants shared a common view that lecture attendance was largely compromised as some students did not join virtual lectures and subsequently failed to do online assessments. The issue of some students' failure to attend virtual classes impacted negatively on the lecturers' psychological wellness. LPBC4 responded, *"There are very few times when I had a full class. Worse you cannot even ask these students why they are not attending as some never attend and you don't know them."* LPBT3 supported this view saying, *"I have several instances when I call out the name of a student to respond but without any response. You cannot be sure whether the student is even there as they may just join and leave or attend to other things, which means it's easy to talk to myself. Surprisingly, everyone wants to pass. Such experiences have an emotional toll on me."* In reality, lecturers had pressure of making plan B to ensure that such students were catered for and not left behind as was emphasised by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Blade Nzimande that, 'no student must be left out'. By the same token the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Buthi Manamela reiterated that, 'historically disadvantaged students should not be left out as if they were the cause of COVID-19'. Such calls tore the hearts of some lecturers who were teaching in those rural communities. To them everything was a struggle. Additionally, lecturers were frustrated at times because of lack of interaction with students for long hours of work. Students who could join virtual classes could do so for a very short time sometimes because of network breaking up, interruptions, and having limited data. So, lecturers found it very difficult to attend to students' needs effectively and students who were

struggling with their studies struggled more to the extent of lecturers having to give continuous tasks/assessments until they passed. That means more work on the part of the lecturers. Thus, LPBC10 acknowledged, "*My colleagues and I were frustrated because we did not have ample time to help our students online because some students did not receive data and [for] those who received it, was not adequate [as] they only received 10GB to use during day for all the modules and only 20GB for night. This was not enough at all*". Psychologically, lecturers get satisfaction when their students are performing well and see them through the system without too many hassles (Sibal, 2018). When they look back and reflect and see some graduating successfully as medical doctors, teachers, auditors, lawyers, nurses, IT specialists and so forth they feel so good and beat their chests but if it is the opposite, they fall sick (Kyriacou, 2001 cited in Sibal, 2018). A student's failure is a lecturer's failure, so they become emotionally and physically drained.

Degenerating Physical Wellness

i) Tech-related burnout

It emerged that there were tech-related influences of COVID-19 in higher education institutions (HEIs). This was mainly due to the abrupt manner in which lecturers were required to switch from the traditional way to remote teaching and learning. Participants responded, "*I faced too much pressure while trying to navigate my computer on new platforms of teaching and learning in order to successfully facilitate remote teaching.*" (LPBT1). "*There were untold difficulties in adjusting to changing technology and methodology*" (LPV4; LPBC3; LPBT2). LPBT5, LPBC4 and LPV1 complained of "*lack of skills to deal with Zoom, Microsoft Teams and other virtual learning platforms.*" From the above extracts, it was apparent that both private and public institutions of learning in rural areas of South Africa had the majority of their academic employees subjected to stressful experiences of technological adaptations due to the circumstances that they found themselves in. The abrupt migration to virtual lecturing was a problem as lecturers were not ready and had no skills since they were not prepared for the catastrophic pandemic which suddenly hit South Africa and the globe. The use of Zoom, Microsoft Teams and other e-learning platforms that were adopted by some rural universities was foreign to some lecturers. Lecturers felt lost, depressed and strange since they were used to the 'talk' and 'chalk' methods of lecturing confined to the 'brick' and 'wall' (Chisango & Marongwe, 2021). To put in her own words, LPBT6 says, "*. I felt like we were crucified by the institution*". From a psychological point of view, such feelings can lead to anxiety, depression, fear, lack of self-confidence, reduced self-esteem, demotivation, demoralised that can take a toll on one's health (Sibal, 2018). This further corroborates Ayile, Mekonen and Mekuria (2020) who established that there was a higher prevalence of anxiety, depression and stress among the university students and lecturers in Ethiopia. Ayile et al. (2020) also indicate that the eruption of the COVID-19 epidemic had brought the risk of major psychological pressure that can have a lasting effect on people's wellbeing. Adjustment to changing technology and methodology gave some lecturers a hard time.

ii) Ill-health due to lack of basic amenities

The COVID-19 exposed how some rural institutions of higher learning in South Africa were ill-resourced which caused them to lag behind. Participants bemoaned the deficient tools of trade, power and water cuts, poor/slow or no internet connectivity in some cases and other related challenges that physically affected the lecturers in execution of their duties. Some of the participants' raised that students complained that they could not get connected because of poor network coverage, power cuts, delayed data and so forth; thus lecturers were frustrated together with their students. Narrations relating to challenges of the provision of some basic amenities as a central issue that affected success of rural university teaching and learning were raised by LPV1, LPBC6 and LPBT4 who were of the view that, *"poor network connectivity or no connectivity at all was faced by most lecturers and students. Sometimes I (LPBC3) had to delay, stop or postpone the class when some of my students lost connectivity."* LPBT7 indicated, *"I was complaining of continuous headaches every day and reason being I was overwhelmed by student complains and I did not have a solution to some of their problems. We were told to go an extra mile and upload all the stuff on the e-learning platform and told again to prepare manual packages that were supposed to be delivered to students who could not connect virtually. I was physically sick because of this; it was a torture".* Contrary to such experiences, Fataar (2020) argues that the well-resourced and established universities had long been conducting online classes even before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and their lecturers well trained so when the COVID-19 regulations knocked at their doors, to them it was not really a big problem and the online teaching favoured them.

In the same vein, LPBC4 and LPBT3 who were from different universities but in poverty stricken rural provinces shared similar experiences that frustrated them and got into their veins as they were suffocated by the events. LPBC4 highlighted, *"The government had announced that people were not going to experience power and water cuts during the lockdown period, but guess what, in our area power and water cuts were our daily bread. Tell me, how then do you teach online? Online needs power for connectivity and charging of electronic gadgets. Isn't this frustrating, it drives me crazy?"* LPBT3 echoed that, *"Our municipality does not care for us that is why even the communities were protesting during lockdown regulations because they felt undermined as if they were not part of South Africa. No water, no power, no internet boosters, no nothing. Our area was never developed since 1994 so online does not work for us, it works for universities that are strategically located. The situation is dire and so disheartening".* This was a cause for concern for these lecturers and all this had a toll on their physical wellness since they had no control over what was happening. Instead, they appeared as if they were incompetent as compared to their counterparts in well-established universities. The fact that one is operating in an environment that is not supportive enough in terms of development sucks to the nails. Literature has it that university students and lecturers are among the most vulnerable clusters who could be stricken by numerous degrees of psychological distress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cao et al., 2020).

iii) Poor work-life balance due to flexible but long working hours

Another emerging issue that weighed down on participating lecturers was increased workload and extended working hours during the COVID-19 pandemic due to regulations that were put in place. Lecturers complained that it appeared as if people had lost the essence of time, and as if COVID-19 had extended the workings hours to 24 hours, no day; no night. According to the participants, they were meetings after meetings even after 6pm. Participants unanimously confirmed that there was a surge of information communicated as there were countless calls per day, several e-mails, circulars, SMSs, while sometimes getting information that was contradictory and confusing. Most of the participants admitted that they were overwhelmed by the communication which did cause some physical and mental exhaustion. Others indicated that they ended up ignoring some communication while others teased that they were some line managers who had developed a tendency of just forwarding e-mails without first checking the content of the message. This was experienced by lecturers from both private and public HEIs. Sometimes this led to some confidential information landing in wrong people's inboxes. LPBT3 with a deep sigh said, *"Apart from the lecturing which was a challenge on its own due to the new norm, we were overwhelmed by emails from both the admin and the students every day. I felt like working for a private institution was a curse"*. Likewise, LPBC9 voiced, "*I felt like the institution had adopted a military mode in dealing with us. Changes were just pushed down our throats. We were never consulted. It was communique after communique and everything was being demanded and was to be treated as urgent all the time, everything was being pushed to the lecturer"*. Furthermore, LPV3 added that, *"There was no more family time but only work time. We struggled to balance and navigate the lockdown, COVID-19 and the remote teaching, it wasn't easy. It needed super beings to do that and survive. I was sitting for long hours in front of a computer, had terrible headaches and backaches and swollen legs. My blood pressure was always high which stressed me too much"*. Such experiences increased the anxiety in lecturers because they were not coping. In line with that, Sibal (2018) observes that lecturers/teachers experience stress when the demands of the situation exceed their ability to cope with those demands.

Waning Socioeconomic Wellbeing

i) Propelled economic inequality

The participants indicated that they faced a myriad of challenges in their work during the lockdown period impelled by the COVID-19 pandemic. LPV1 thus indicated, *"In my view the biggest challenge that affected my wellness was moving to virtual lecturing. We were not allowed on campus, yet we were supposed to do lecturing on Zoom. We were not supplied with any data, yet the virtual lecturing was very data intensive. I felt like we suffered a loss in that regard. That took a great toll on my colleagues and I"*. Contrary to LPV1's experience, LPBC7 pointed out that they were given data, but it was not enough and sometimes could not receive it on time. The participant expressed, *"We received data from the institution, but it was not adequate and sometimes you could go for weeks without receiving it while teaching was supposed to continue, so I ended up buying while I had to wait for the next allocation in the next month. The management forgot that virtual learning consumes a lot of data"*. It is evident that in as much as both private and public institutions wanted to save the academic

year, they were not prepared for the challenge and that had a negative impact on the actual implementers who are the lecturers in this case since they felt the pinch. Masters et al. (2020) opine that the outbreak of COVID-19 and economic decline were a recipe for inequality, marginalisation, abrasion, disconnection, and stress across the education profession. The pressure on lecturers to adopt online teaching was seen as a blow that exacerbated lecturers' stress, anxiety, fears and uncertainty because even before the outbreak of the COVID-19, lecturers were experiencing too much pressure that impacted negatively on their work performance (Marongwe, Chiphambo & Kasumba, 2020).

ii) Increased unemployment prompted personal underdevelopment

Unemployment issues affected participants psychologically, socially and economically. It emerged that this occurred mostly directly for private institutions and largely indirectly for public university lecturers. As such, some lecturers from private HEIs experienced a peculiar phenomenon that was not experienced by lecturers in public HEIs. It stemmed from the study that when private colleges were doing risky business management, they decided to downsize their colleges and cut down on the number of employees. Some employees were employed as contract workers and their working hours were reduced and this translated into reduction of income which had a bearing on their lifestyle. LPV5 reiterated, *"We were shocked when we received a communication that was informing us that some of us were going to be terminated and others were going to have their hours reduced. The management said it was a difficult decision taken but had to be done to rescue the college from collapsing as the COVID-19 pandemic was soaring. Some students were not paying fees, others had deregistered their programmes and the college was grappling to maintain all the academic employees. Indeed, the decision was implemented and for me I thank God because I was spared".* LPV2 also said, *"Some of my colleagues are now unemployed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are not sure when our private colleges will stabilise if not more and more will see themselves without a job. How would my family survive?"* It can be drawn from the above verbatim statements that some lecturers from the private HEIs suffered a double blow and those who were spared had their life filled with uncertainty of whether they were going to retain their jobs or not. On the one hand, as COVID-19 was spreading, it was infecting and killing people while lecturers experienced online teaching pressures. Unemployment issues, however, had indirect effects from the perspective of a public university lecturer, LPBT7 who echoed, *"While I retained my job, I suffered indirectly as my relatives were off laid or had reduced working hours, so unemployment [of friends and relatives] increased responsibilities on my tight budget.* Indirect effects of unemployment seemed to have really affected all participants. As such, lecturers were subjected to deteriorating socioeconomic conditions by the circumstances surrounding them.

iii) Increasing pressure from social adjustment demands

It also occurred that the 'new norm' was abnormal and drained participants spiritually, physically and socially. Participants shared painful experiences of deaths of their loved ones and some students getting infected with the virus. The new norm of not grieving and lack of support of family members, friends, colleagues and church mates during bereavement was a psychosocial blow to many families. The lockdown restrictions drove people crazy, and this

had ripple effects on participants' execution of duties as some lecturers could not contain the pain. Some could not login to conduct online classes because of the pressure. LPBT2 shared that, *"I was so cross with my students for nothing, I later realised that I had anger that I did not know where it had come from only to realise later that it was because of my loss. I had lost my mother, my wife, three colleagues and I was infected and did not know whether I was going to survive or not. By then, there were no counselling services that were put in place and we were in our silos. I said to my students, 'do you know that my mother was battling with COVID-19 and she succumbed to it as if it was not enough, my wife needed care because she was sick, and I had to take care of her and I lost her. I lost 3 colleagues and I am sick. So, if you don't submit your work then you will know where to submit it".* His experience was not unique as some participants shared similar touching stories. Taking it on students was a sign of emotional pain and physical loss that triggered the anger inside which he could not contain anymore. So, left, right and centre the lecturers were depressed. In line with this finding, Ayile, Mekonen and Mekuria (2020) indicated that there was a wide range of literature that shows that social isolation, loneliness and grief are associated with poor mental health. They further reported that most people had negative mental health effects resulting from worry or stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Kumar and Somani (2020) state that there were also challenges of fearing to contract the COVID-19 virus, feeling helpless and high negative stigma. Fear and uncertainty can lead to stress (Marongwe et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that lecturers in both private and public institutions of higher learning are faced with a myriad of challenges amid the COVID-19 pandemic which impacted negatively on their psychosocial wellbeing. It is concluded that the COVID-19 took an unexpected toll on lecturers' lifestyle in different and sometimes threatening ways. It is also clear that if no intervention strategies are taken, then the current online teaching and learning quality will be compromised and universities would likely produce graduates that do not meet the standard job market requirements. In addition to that, lecturer wellbeing needs to be addressed since they are a key stakeholder in the creation and development of the economy in South Africa. As it has been widely researched and proved that psychosocial imbalance affects lecturer efficacy hence student learning, this study makes the same conclusion based on current findings. Finally, while the findings of the current study may not be generalised across all South Africa's HEIs, it is germane to provide a picture of some of the concerns raised about the wellbeing of lecturers upon which policy ought to be holistically entangled in an effort to address debilitating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic so as to promote socioeconomic development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of what emerged from the study, the paper recommends that, institutions of higher learning should set up dedicated counselling services for employees where they could vent and get help. The university management should have a helpdesk that helps lecturers with stress management, isolation techniques and ways of adjusting to different methods of work.

Lecturers should be given time to relax with family without distraction as compared to working for long hours sometimes as late as into the night. The university management is also encouraged to consult employees on their needs than entirely using the top-down method since the employees are the implementers of the decisions taken by the highest authority. Channels of communication should be a two-way traffic rather than just imposing what should be done.

The onset of this pandemic should lead to rethinking of how lecturing should be envisaged going forward. As such, all lecturers should be trained on how to operate in a totally virtual environment in preparation for the future while considering the complexity of the current pandemic. Lastly, based on the dictates of the current pandemic, government should perhaps revisit its funding models to both private and public HEIs in order to ensure that, like the Minister of Higher Education emphasised, "no student should be left behind".

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