

10-3-2024

The Impact of COVID-19 Response Measures on the Mental Health and Well-Being of Teachers at Predominately Black Schools

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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LLeweLLyn L. Cooper

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

The Impact of COVID-19 Response Measures on the Mental Health and Well-Being of

Teachers at Predominately Black Schools

by

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MS, Walden University, 2019

BA, University of Alabama-Birmingham, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

October 2024

Abstract

Teachers in predominately Black schools had limited access to mental health resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore how the response to COVID-19 affected the mental health and well-being (MHWB) of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. The study participants were eight teachers at various schools in the state of Alabama. The goal was to understand how teachers experienced MHWB support during the COVID-19 pandemic, how teachers' MHWB were affected when there were rapid adjustments to curricula changes, and how policies related to specific adaptations could be improved. The critical school mental health praxis framework was used in this study. Data collected from one-on-one, semistructured interviews underwent coding, mapping, and thematic analysis. The five themes discovered during data analysis were as follows: (a) teachers' health was negatively affected by the pandemic; (b) access to needed resources was seminal; (c) students were disconnected from learning; (d) school leadership experienced challenges adapting to pandemic-related changes; and (e) uncertainty affected teachers, students, and families. The findings reinforce the need for a more equitable and diverse educational system to promote teacher MHWB. Policymakers, administrators, and community stakeholders should develop contingency plans, which include mental wellness centers for teachers who work in communities with limited resources. Such efforts have the potential to positively change the systems and structures of the educational landscape as it relates to teachers' MHWB.

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Dedication

This research study is dedicated to my wife, Dr. Christalyn Cooper, and our children, Jeremy, Jerek, and Khrysten. I am so grateful that they were patient with me during the time I spent on my doctoral study.

I would also like to dedicate it to my late mother and father, Willie Nell, and John A. Cooper; although neither attended college, education was vitally important to them and to our community.

I would additionally like to dedicate this research to my late mother-in-law, Johnsey Bolling Erby. She had fierce diligence and would have made this a different work, much like her mini-me, Dr. Christalyn Cooper. Your work is done, rest well.

To my siblings through birth and through marriage—Linda, Selwyn (Dr. Ellen), Chris (Sherita), Felicia (Jerry), and Patrick (Chanta)—as well as my nieces and nephews, I could not have done it without y'all, and I mean that. Who is next up?

I also would like to dedicate this research to all of the teachers who persevered during the pandemic, teachers from past and present, and to future teachers. I would like to dedicate this research to my comrades in education.

Finally, I dedicate this work to (the late) Dr. Ada W. Long who irrevocably altered my trajectory and continued to guide me toward liberation 'til the day that she died. May you rest with the warrior ancestors.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my chair mentor, Dr. Gregory Hickman, for his patience, help, and guidance during the development of this dissertation. I would also like to thank Dr. Nicole Hamiton for the consistent notes to remedy maladies and for the second look as well as recommendations and quiet encouragement.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr Jennifer Ulie-Wells for her support with understanding and applying the critical school mental health praxis, a framework that did not exist when I started this process.

I am also grateful to my loving wife, Dr. Christalyn Cooper, for being a sounding board when I got overwhelmed. I would like to acknowledge my children, Jeremy, Jerek, and Khrysten, for helping me get back on track. I would also like to acknowledge my DissFam, all of whom helped me stay positive during this process. God bless my family, my Walden cohort, Walden University, and everyone associated with my academic success.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

After it was first identified at the end of 2019 in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China (Odriozola-González et al., 2020; Temsah et al., 2020), the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) became a universal threat (Shen et al., 2020). The spread of COVID-19 led the World Health Organization to declare a global pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Kapasias et al., 2020). Individuals' understanding of the world changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Smith & Lim, 2020). Furthermore, the rapid transmission of COVID-19 worldwide has had health, social, psychological, economic, and educational consequences. Measures taken to protect public safety, such as social distancing and lockdown, resulted in some people experiencing feelings of isolation and loneliness (Smith & Lim, 2020). Wang et al. (2020) reported that 28.8% of those surveyed indicated moderate to severe anxiety symptoms, and 16.5% reported mild to severe depression symptoms, due to pandemic-related safety measures.

Research shows that teachers accumulated elevated levels of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cachón-Zagalaz et al., 2020). On a global scale, school closure was one of the most widely used measures to maintain social distancing and decrease infections (Sheikh et al., 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020; Viner et al., 2020). According to Besser et al. (2020), teachers suffered stress during the lockdown from having to quickly adapt to provide online classes. In addition, teachers reported stress accompanied by symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbance because of the increased workload resulting from teaching at home (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021).

The social problem in this study is the inequitable response to the MH needs of teachers at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The effects of COVID-19 have been tremendous, far-reaching, and disproportionate in the Black community (Fortuna et al., 2020). Over the past 2-plus years, the discriminatory impact of COVID-19 has been noticeable (Truong et al., 2021; Wakabayashi et al., 2020). McCluskey et al. (2021) noted that the upheaval caused by the pandemic was uneven and that some minority groups were directly and negatively impacted by the pandemic. Gloster et al. (2020) found that about 10% of minority group members studied experienced low levels of mental health (MH) issues, and about half had only moderate MH such as stress and depression.

Blackman (2022) focused on the MH of teachers who taught at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Blackman also noted how the pandemic worldwide presented an unprecedented challenge for administrators and teachers as it relates to the equity-in-education agenda. In this generic qualitative study, I explored how COVID-19 responses affected teachers who worked in predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MH and well-being (MHWB). I collected data by conducting one-on-one interviews with teachers who taught at predominately Black schools during the pandemic. The findings from this study might help school leaders and administrators in collaborating with community MH center leaders to design policies related to MHWB. The study may also spur stakeholders to reconsider the importance and need for continued attention to the

MH needs of teachers at predominately Black schools. This chapter includes an overview of the study I conducted.

Background

Teaching and providing care for students during the COVID-19 pandemic were challenging for teachers worldwide (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Lizana et al. (2021) stated that teachers already reported low quality of life perception before the COVID-19 pandemic, including a significant impact on mental and physical health due to various stress factors associated with work overload. Therefore, the impact of the pandemic on teachers' MHWB should be of concern to not only teachers and administrators but also to community MH center leaders, policymakers, and future school founders (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Researchers referred to common experiences of the pandemic as a *syndemic*, which is when two or more health conditions co-occur in environments of aggravated adversity and interact synergistically to yield worse health outcomes than each problem would generate on its own (Bambra et al., 2020; Baybutt & Dooris, 2020; Herrick, 2020). The effects of the coronavirus exploited and exacerbated pre-existing patterns of inequality (McMahon, 2020). Using the critical school MH praxis (CrSMHP) framework, I explored how response to COVID-19 affected teachers at predominately Black schools in the United States during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB.

Most of the research on teachers' MH, during the pandemic, focused on teachers at predominately White institutions (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021; Kush et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2023). I sought to further this research by studying teachers who

specifically taught at predominately Black schools. According to Lomotey (2019), prior to COVID-19, there was continuous disenfranchisement of Black children in the U.S. schools. During the pandemic, teachers in predominately Black school districts reported that leaders failed to address inequities that were exacerbated by COVID-19 (Weiner et al., 2022; Wilson, 2020). Inequities such as race and ethnicity manifested in education systems around the world (Arnove, 2020). Weiner et al. (2022) conducted a study with participants who identified as Black female principals who were in districts that comprised of predominately Black students. The participants reported how district leaders engaged in antiracist training while continuing to uphold and sometimes fight to retain inequitable structures and systems. Arnove (2020) stated that during the COVID-19 pandemic there were disproportionate, tragic consequences for individuals, their communities, and entire societies that highlight institutionalized forms of discrimination rooted in race. Studying the experiences of Black teachers as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic while teaching at predominately Black U.S. schools may provide more insight on such inequities.

Problem Statement

The social problem that prompted me to search the literature was the inequitable response of school administrators to the MH needs of teachers at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Blackman (2022) focused on the MH of students at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and observed how the pandemic worldwide presented unprecedented challenges for administrators and teachers regarding the equity-in-education agenda. Weiner et al.'s (2022) findings concur

with Blackman's. In studying the experiences of Black female principals at predominately Black schools, they found woeful disparities between what was needed to support students and families and what was provided by administrators at the district level.

Blackman's (2022) and Weiner et al.'s (2022) studies regarding teachers and their MHWB are illuminating. Yet a gap exists in knowledge of MHWB impacts for teachers at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on my review of the literature. Given such, further research was warranted on the MHWB of Black teachers from their perspectives. Such research may address the documented problem of the inadequate response to the MHWB needs of teachers at predominately Black schools during COVID-19 (Blackman, 2022; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore how the response to COVID-19 affected the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. After carefully reviewing existing literature, I more carefully focused my research on teachers in a region close to the one in which I lived. The goal was to understand how teachers experienced MHWB support during the COVID-19 pandemic, how teachers' MHWB were impacted when there were rapid adjustments to curriculum, and how policies related to specific accommodations when dealing with stressors regarding such adjustments could improve.

Research Question

How did the response to COVID-19 affect the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that grounded this study was CrSMHP. Through CrSMHP, Ulie-Wells et al. (2020) challenged trauma-response models that put the onus on the victim to overcome traumatic circumstances. Teemant et al. (2021) discovered that teachers often disregard social determinants of MH and implicitly ask how they can get students in predominately Black people schools to act more like middle-class White students. Moore et al. (2023) suggested equity-focused MH screening to address the United States' legacy of racism and to respond to social determinants of mental health experiences and outcomes. CrSMHP targets the root cause of traumas, oppressive social systems, and their perpetuation in schools (Ulie-Wells et al., 2020). Cultural competence in CrSMHP focuses on dismantling oppressive systems through systematic critical reflection and practice (Moore et al., 2023; Ulie-Wells et al., 2020).

In proposing CrSMHP, researchers have suggested specific recommendations for professionals to improve the mental wellness of underserved and underrepresented populations that could potentially enhance economic development and social recovery post-crisis (Moore et al., 2023; Teemant et al., 2021; Ulie-Wells et al., 2020). Clinical researchers who developed CrSMHP incorporated the critical strategies of critical race theory (CRT), which has its focus dismantling oppressive systems, and the intervention strategies of relational cultural theory (RCT) to propose a new framework to understand

cultural competence at the intersection of racism and MH (Ulzie-Wells et al., 2020).

Moore et al. (2023) noted that CrSMHP's primary tenet is to promote equitable school MH, which means addressing root causes of ongoing systemic oppression; intensive professional and personal self-reflection to challenge stereotypes, biases, and expectations; and collaborative relationships to create a culturally conscious school climate.

I considered CRT and RCT but opted to use CrSMHP (Ulzie-Wells et al., 2020) because it fuses the two theories. Using the CrSMHP framework, I explored how the response to COVID-19 affected teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. My aim was to understand how MH is essential to education and economic development. Blackman (2022) stated that education and economic growth are both part of an ecosystem that feeds and is fed from schools.

Blackman (2022) stated that the Education for All (EFA) framework and Millennium Development Goals agenda failed to achieve inclusion. Researchers attempting to understand the impact of the crisis related to the global COVID-19 pandemic on education recognized that situations such as pandemics and natural disasters have the potential to harm a country's ability to recover postcrisis and can negatively affect education (Blackman, 2022). A crisis is a significant barrier to access to education, reversing progress implied by CrSMHP (Teemant et al., 2021). According to Moore et al. (2023), school leaders should avoid viewing members of minoritized groups as passive victims of prejudice and oppressive social conditions because this view is disempowering

and denies the complexity, strength, agency, and humanity of individuals in those groups. However, Blackman stated that an entire generation can be left traumatized, uneducated, and unprepared to contribute to economic development and social recovery due to a global pandemic. In Chapter 2, I provide a more thorough explanation of the theoretical framework.

Nature of Study

I selected a generic qualitative study design to explore how responses to COVID-19 affected teachers who worked in predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. Grant et al. (2019) noted that qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to pay attention to experiences that are more descriptive and somewhat limited in research rather than those that are explored by researchers with a phenomenological perspective. Quantitative researchers, in contrast, use closed-ended questions, which do not allow for as comprehensive responses as those provided by open-ended questions (Adedoyin, 2020). Qualitative researchers consider aspects of situations others might have missed but have significant implications for practice (Shaw, 2022).

The generic qualitative approach focuses on exploring how people interpret their experiences and the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Riffell & Chen, 2019). Percy et al. (2015) noted that generic qualitative design can be used in situations in which topics are unsuitable for or cannot be adapted to traditional qualitative designs such as case study, ethnography, grounded theory, or phenomenology. Riffell and Chen (2019)

used a generic qualitative approach to explore context, recurring themes, and unforeseen findings.

I also incorporated narrative study elements. Researchers can use narrative studies to aid in understanding stories told from participants' memories and personal perspectives to inform the research question (Lewis, 2015; Martin, 2016). A narrative researcher begins from a position of curiosity, not knowing the position, and focuses on questions that help the participant address cultural context; their embodied engagement in the events, their senses, feelings; thoughts, attitudes, and ideas; the significance of other people; and the choices and actions of the participant based on their values and beliefs (Etherington & Bridges, 2011). Phenomenology researchers seek to describe a phenomenon with emphasis on lived experiences, personal perspectives, opinions, and interpretations (van Manen, 2017; Yin, 2018). A phenomenological study was inappropriate for this study. I explored how teachers interpreted their experiences and the meaning they attributed to their experiences related to their MHWB in the context of descriptions the lived experiences of the participants, which are components of the generic qualitative approach.

I used purposive sampling. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling can be integrated into varying contexts if the sampling strategies align with the study in terms of trustworthiness and research methodology. Purposive sampling refers to strategies that involve the researcher exercising their judgment about who will provide the best perspective on the phenomenon of interest, and then choosing those specific perspectives into the study (L. S. Abrams, 2010). Purposive sampling is beneficial for

better matching the sample to the aims and objectives of the research as well as for improving the rigor of the study and the trustworthiness of the data and results (Campbell et al., 2020). The reason for selecting purposive sampling is to include participants who are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information (Campbell et al., 2020); by using a purposive sampling strategy, a researcher can make sure that specific participants are in the final sample (Campbell et al., 2020). Thomas (2022) suggested using purposive sampling as a tool to make informed choices in terms of research methods. The selection process for this study began with prospective participants answering a brief survey to ensure that they met the eligibility criteria.

According to Andrade (2021), purposive sampling requires participants to meet specific criteria to qualify for inclusion in the study, and purposive sampling is one whose characteristics are defined for a purpose that is relevant to the study. Criteria for inclusion in this study include that participants must have been a teacher or in an instruction-facing position at a predominately Black school during the COVID-19 pandemic, must speak English, must be at least 18 years or older, and must have at least 6 months to a year of experience as a teacher in a predominately Black school. The participants were from school districts located in Alabama where I had professional networks. I recruited participants by posting hard copy flyers in areas frequented by teachers as well as by posting digital flyers on social media sites.

To collect data collection, I conducted one-on-one interviews with the participants. Such interviews are a data collection technique in qualitative studies (Tomaszewski, 2020). I transferred the collected data into Microsoft Excel to use its

sorting tools to organize, code, and categorize. After the interview phase, I began analyzing the data I had collected. Data analysis included a coding and categorizing process, organizing, and developing meaning from the data collected (Jnananthapaswi, 2021).

Definitions

COVID-19 or *coronavirus*: A serious global infectious disease outbreak which is part of a family of viruses called corona viruses that infect both animals and people (Hasöksüz et al., 2020).

Mental health and well-being (MHWB): comprises the concepts of MH, physical health, and psychological well-being (Phan-le et al., 2022)

Teacher: As defined by the Birmingham Education Association, all professional personnel, including personnel on tenure, probation, and on per diem appointments, classroom teachers, guidance counselors, media specialists, school psychologists and social workers, speech and language pathologists, visiting teachers, advising or critic teachers, teachers of the homebound or hospitalized, employed or to be employed by the Board (whether or not assigned to a public school building); but excluding supervisory and executive personnel and office and clerical employees (Birmingham Board of Education, 2016).

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs that are necessary to conduct the research, but which cannot be proven (Nkwake, 2020). Of the many assumptions inherent in this study, the most salient was that participants would be willing to share their experiences with me and

that their recollections would be both honest and accurate. I assumed that the information gathered would be in alignment with the goals of this research. I assumed that the experiences of teachers at predominately Black schools were uniquely different from the experiences of teachers at schools with different demographics.

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this study was to how the response to COVID-19 affected the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic. I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. I sought participants for this study who were or had been teachers at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. I targeted participants who had worked or were working in a school during the COVID-19 pandemic for at least 6 months to a year and who could be contacted for an interview. Interviews were conducted using Zoom®, and recordings were transcribed.

Before selecting CrSMHP, I considered other theories such as CRT and RCT. CRT does not offer propositions for explaining current phenomena or predicting what will occur in certain situations but is a set of beliefs about how race operates in society, specifically in the United States (Ulie-Wells et al., 2020). I did not choose this theory because CrSMHP encompasses CRT. CrSMHP also incorporates RCT.

Akanle et al. (2020) defined delimitations as the characteristics that arise from limitations in the scope of the study which define the boundaries and by the exclusionary and inclusionary decisions made during the development of the study plan. Akanle also wrote that for the researcher to understand delimitation, it is necessary to understand

assumptions because assumptions are required to enable and conduct the study. For this research, teachers in predominately Black schools were selected as the focus because their perspectives have not been addressed in previous research, according to my review of the literature. The location that was selected was based on my professional connections and my access to teachers who taught at predominately Black schools.

I chose to conduct one-on-one interviews rather than focus groups with the intent to streamline the process of information gathering. Namey et al. (2017) found that individual interviews were more effective at generating conversations. According to Dua et al. (2020), interviewing experts in the field is essential when collecting rich and in-depth information. Finally, I chose teachers, rather than students or parents, to simplify the vetting process and to engage those who taught at predominately Black schools and who are considered knowledgeable about the phenomenon.

Limitations

There are three limitations to this study. One of the limitations for this study is the use of a conceptual framework, CrSMHP, that is not undergirded by extensive literature. As the researcher, I recognized the need for a new and unique framework to explore how the response to COVID-19 affected teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. The “praxis” in CrSMHP was valuable to this research because I was able to potentially use the concepts of the theory in various contexts. Similarly, Kenah et al., (2023) used a new framework to provide a foundation to explore personal and environmental factors associated with their phenomena of interest. I had a similar goal with this research—to

explore societal and structural factors associated with the MHWB of teachers in predominately Black schools.

The second limitation of this study was the use of the generic qualitative design. According to Hayes et al (2019), generic qualitative designs lack the scientific rigor of established methods such as the phenomenological design; furthermore, they do not conform to any specific, established method and can therefore be theoretically interpretively focus. I explored participants' experiences through their descriptions, stories, and narratives. I used these descriptions to explore organizational routines and policies, thus incorporating multiple methodologies and traditions. In addition, there is the limitation of the time-consuming nature of qualitative studies in general (Rahman, 2017). The time constraints encompass the time needed for interviews, coding of said interviews, data transcription, and associated data analysis, all of which will add to these limitations. I accommodated participants according to their availability and interview preference.

Junjie and Yingxin (2021) cautioned that in the process of collecting data, researchers should ensure that the study applies to the context of qualitative research. I used one-on-one interviews, audio recording technology, and a reflexive journal to aid in accuracy and credibility in this generic qualitative study. McGannon et al. (2021) suggested member checking as an additional step toward establishing researcher credibility. I recorded the interviews and transcribed the following day and additional meetings with each participant for member checking were scheduled.

Researcher bias is the third limitation in this study. Researcher bias is an error that occurs when the researcher influences the results of a study based on their own beliefs or expectations (Galdas, 2017). I worked to maintain impartiality during the data collection process as well as the process of analysis. In a qualitative study, errors can occur resulting from researcher bias and this can affect findings (Amin et al., 2020; Wa-Mbaleka, 2022). To mitigate researcher bias in this study, I attempted to recruit participants with whom I had little or no prior relationship, and I used a reflexive journal to record my thoughts, feelings, and revelations during the research process.

Significance of the Study

For this study, I built on previous research regarding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers who taught at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. The results of this study might be beneficial to community MH centers with ongoing relationships to schools, school boards, and school district leaders, as well as policymakers at the federal level. Local and regional organizations that might be interested or which might benefit include Teach for America-Alabama, the Birmingham Education Foundation, PTA Alabama Congress, Hoover City Schools Foundation, and several new state charter school leaders around the state of Alabama that seek to be innovative as well as to learn from the missteps of municipal public schools. The results might also be beneficial to new teachers as they consider accepting job offers in certain school districts.

The knowledge of how COVID-19 has affected teachers at predominately Black schools may bring about positive social change through the revelation of needed

innovations and changes or perhaps complete upheaval of an educational system that is nearly as old as the United States. Not only policymakers, but also community stakeholders, might realize their potential ability to change the systems and structures of the local educational landscape. Individual teachers might be more inclined to address self-care with as great a priority as those teachers give to the care of their students and classrooms.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I described the immense MHWB needs of teachers that were not addressed during the COVID-19 pandemic and particularly at schools with a predominately Black student population. I chose this population because Black people, not only in the United States but also around the world, faced disproportionate negative impacts inside and outside the classroom (Blackman, 2022). I explored how the response to COVID-19 affected the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. Chapter 2 encompasses a more detailed explanation of the theoretical framework and the literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The impact of COVID-19 on public education has been well documented in the literature (Dickinson et al., 2021; Singer & Rylko-Bauer, 2021). However, the impact of COVID-19 narrative often centers on students, families, and educational outcomes (Cachón-Zagalaz et al., 2020; Karp, 2022). There is scant research on the MHWB of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic (LaFave et al., 2022). Kim and Asbury (2020) found that six themes emerged in teachers' narratives about being on lockdown during the pandemic: uncertainty, finding a way, worry for the vulnerable importance of relationships, teacher identity, and reflections. Kim and Asbury reported that each of these themes played an important part in the mental and emotional health of the teachers who were surveyed. My research will expound on the literature as it relates to how the response to COVID-19 affected the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB.

Literature Search Strategy

For this literature review, I searched peer-reviewed journals, seminal books, and governmental reports. The academic databases utilized include ABI/INFORM Global, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest Central. The search keywords and terms included *COVID-19*, *COVID-19*, *coronavirus*, *predominately Black schools*, *communities*, *education*, *policy*, *mental health*, *teachers*, *administrators*, *global pandemic*, and *critical school mental health praxis*.

These searches generated hundreds of articles, and in an attempt to clearly focus on this research, further filters were utilized which included subtopics and geographic limiters. Searches were confined to articles that were peer-reviewed; aligned with the topic(s), timely and relevant. The search was guided overall by the following research question how response to COVID-19 affected the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic? This question was the focus of terms searched and will help to guide questions asked during interviews as well as the researcher's interpretation of the data collected.

Theoretical Foundation

CrSMHP is modeled to allow administrators to create policies related to the negative impacts and not those who experience the problem (Moore et al., 2023; Ulie-Wells 2020). According to Ulie-Wells et al. (2020), administrators, through CrSMHP, could dismantle the systematic barriers and create a new system that could potentially ease stressors related to abrupt changes/transitions due to the pandemic. Ulie-Wells noted that CRT and RCT together are formalized into the new CrSMHP framework and can guide future efforts toward the intersection of educational equity and school MH. CrSMHP encompasses CRT and RCT, which are components that are utilized to improve equity in school mental health care (Moore et al., 2023). While CrSMHP was initially developed to empower and liberate students (Ulie-Wells et al., 2020), the aim of this paper is to apply the CrSMHP framework for the empowerment of teachers.

RCT was considered as a potential theoretical perspective, but the necessary inclusion of race as a factor was missing from this important theory as a framework. RCT

explains the way in which power dynamics in the culture as well as the family affect people's well-being (Frey, 2013). The RCT approach is grounded in the idea that healing takes place in the context of mutually empathic and growth-fostering relationships (Lenz, 2016). RCT does not contain the guidance for creating sustainable practices or policies related to MHWB post pandemic/crisis.

I considered Education for All as a theoretical foundation for this research but opted against using it because it does not consider the impact of crises such as COVID-19 on education (Blackman, 2022). Education for All is an international education initiative launched in 1990 to bring the benefits of education to every citizen in every society (World Bank, 2014). Education for All is supported by World Bank (2014) to improve primary school access and equity, to improve educational quality and learning outcomes, to improve dropout and retention rates of girls, and to promote early childhood development. One of the challenges of Education for All is the struggle that many countries have with defining the meaning, purpose, and content of basic education in the context of moving forward and assessing learning outcomes and achievement post crisis (Blackman, 2022).

Critical Race Theory was also considered for this research, but the theory does not fully explain MH (Gillborn, 2006). CRT is grounded in a perspective of deconstructing racism in education and education reform (Ledesma, 2015). The theory is that racism is endemic in the culture of the US and racism is deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically (Ledesma, 2015). While CRT aligns with the perspective of several researchers as it pertains to MH disparities, it was the opinion of this researcher that an

additional component was required to account for the unique positions occupied by teachers during a pandemic. It was for this reason that CrSMHP was chosen as the primary theoretical perspective for this research.

Blackman (2022) stated that the Education for All framework and Millennium Development Goals agenda failed to achieve inclusion. Researchers attempting to understand the impact of the crisis related to the global pandemic on education recognized that crises such as pandemics and natural disasters have the potential to harm a country's ability to recover post-crisis and can negatively affect education (Blackman, 2022). A crisis is a major barrier to access to education reversing progress implied by CrSMHP (Blackman, 2022; Ulie-Wells et al., 2020). As stated by Blackman, an entire generation can be left traumatized, uneducated, and unprepared to contribute to economic development and social recovery as an effect of a global pandemic. There are some instances in this study in which I leaned more on one aspect of CrSMHP than the other; for instance, when addressing issues of structural racism or systemic racism faced by teachers or the students that they teach, CRT could better serve as the lens for understanding data (Blackman, 2022; Ulie-Wells et al., 2020). When dealing with relational issues between teachers and students or school administrators and teachers, RCT might prove more applicable than CRT (Purgason et al., 2022).

RCT began as a feminist theoretical approach that grew in use in the 1970s in response to growth models that emphasized growth through separation and individuation (Jordan, 2018; Purgason et al., 2022). RCT emphasizes that growth occurs through connection rather than isolation, and connection in RCT results in several positive

outcomes as well as a desire for greater connection (Jordan, 2010; Purgason et al., 2022). Technology can equally encourage and facilitate disconnection through the fact that there are fewer opportunities to gain information through nonverbal behavior as well as the inability to be in the presence of another individual (Rapanta et al., 2020). Chronic disconnections in children could lead to depression as well as the overall belief that their individual experiences were not important (Jordan, 2008). Research of Comstock et al. (2008) and Jordan (2010) referred to the possibility of chronic disconnections in groups, such as communities of color when structural issues such as racism and marginalization impact relationships. Such conditions were especially prevalent during the pandemic, both between and among marginalized racial groups (Blackman, 2022).

According to Purgason et al. (2022), RCT could be used following the transition from face-to-face to online learning to consider the impact of the larger socio-cultural context on student learning, thereby prioritizing fostering relational connections. Frey (2013) Jordan (2018) and Purgason et al. (2022) used RCT to show that increased relational quality results in decreased distress. Purgason et al. noted that, as a result, acknowledgement of students' and instructors' intersecting social and cultural identities was critical when entering the online environment during the context of the COVID-19-pandemic. Branco (2022) noted that a framework that emphasizes connection through relationships, while also considering cultural context, is relevant and applicable for school personnel, and particularly counselors.

What unites RCT and CRT is the critique of the White, male, heterosexual experience as the norm as well as the view of the experience of less dominant and more

marginalized groups as deviant (Jordan, 2018). Ticknor and Averett (2017) suggested that because relationships between teachers and students are deeply connected with building a safe learning environment, emotion and caretaking must be considered in any research about education. Quinn and Grumbach (2022) proposed that RCT was created to address limitations in intervening with women of color. One such limitation of RCT – according to Quinn and Grumbach—is the primary focus on connecting with others and a narrow address of diverse cultures; Thus, the need for the inclusion of CRT as an adjunct to RCT in CrSMHP.

CRT is rooted in legal scholarship where it developed as a radical alternative to dominant perspectives in which there was a notable silence on the issue of racism (Gillborn, 2006). According to Gillborn (2006), frustration with this silence on racism prompted CRT scholars to put race front and center in their research and make race a motivation for questioning not only the foci of the existing analyses, but methods and forms of argumentation that were considered legitimate. Gillborn noted that CRT is not so much a theory as it is a perspective- meaning that the theory does not posit a set of propositions to explain current situations, but it is a set of interrelated beliefs about the significance of racism and how it operates in current society and particularly in the United States. CRT is also a practice of interrogating the role of race and racism in society (George, 2021). Crawford (2019) stated that CRT researchers challenge the traditional claims of the education system and its institutions to objectivity, color and gender blindness and race and gender neutrality.

Thakur et al. (2020) utilized CRT to address structural and social determinants of racial/ethnic disparities in the US COVID-19 pandemic. Yearby and Mohapatra (2021) considered CRT in analyzing the US government's pandemic response as well as racial inequities in COVID-19. Quinn and Grumbach (2022) utilized CRT- among other theories- to consider social work as the next frontier of racial justice in the pandemic. Cokley et al. (2021) considered CRT as a means of addressing the COVID-19/racial injustice syndemic and its effect on the MH of Black Americans and discovered that perceived discrimination partially mediated the relationship between race-related concerns about COVID-19 and MH symptoms.

The CrSMHP will guide and drive my research. I will explore how response to COVID-19 affected the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. In addition, I will explore policies related to crisis and MH support. I will be guided by the research in attempting to understand how MH is important to education and economic development as both are a part of an ecosystem, which feeds and is fed from school systems. According to the researchers who developed CrSMHP, intensive professional and personal self-reflection is needed to challenge stereotypes, biases, and expectations that influence the ability to build connected relationships that create a culturally conscious school climate (Ulle-Wells et al., 2020). It is for this reason that I intend to reflect in writing as part of my research and writing process.

While there are several potentially useful frameworks, CrSMHP Theory is unique among frameworks utilized in school mental health care (Davis et al., 2021). The theory

can be used as a critical lens to challenge models of resiliency, which put the burden of overcoming circumstances on the victim of racism rather than addressing the root causes (Cohen et al., 2021; Malone et al., 2021; Pullmann et al., 2022). For this research, the theory will be used as a perspective lens to show how teachers can simultaneously be both purveyors and victims of oppression at various times during the pandemic. Through the use of CrSMHP, as a perspective lens, teachers can be both reflective and active in their endeavor to educate for the purpose of reaching praxis.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

The pandemic of COVID-19 disrupted the way the world socialized, did business, and educated children (Blackman, 2022; Tarkar, 2020). Due to the pandemic, all schools, colleges, and universities were closed under government mandates (Tarkar, 2020). By the end of March 2020, the pandemic had affected an estimated 1,540,000,000 children and youth through school and university closures (Schleicher, 2020). Teachers moved from their classrooms to online teaching (Blackman, 2022). Their abrupt move ultimately disrupted the entire education system, leading to increased levels of stress and a decrease in MHWB of students and teachers (Diana, 2022). Horsford et al. (2021) conducted a study on the perspectives of Black parents, teachers, students, education, and community leaders to better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic and systematic racism had impacted Black education. Bao et al. (2020) stated that the already existing worry about the pandemic was exacerbated by myths and misinformation as well as erroneous news reports. In addition, upon their return to the classroom in the fall of 2020, many teachers returned to different environments, instructional approaches and daily routines, and

teachers faced new requirements, new job expectations, and new classroom environments (Pressley, 2021). Pressley discovered that stressors were most proximal to burnout for teachers, which led to administrators trying to find ways to respond to teachers' concerns about COVID-19 and students' learning barriers.

For example, the move to online learning to ensure that students continued their studies during the pandemic was not an easy transition and the success of the endeavor depended on teachers having the knowledge, skills, and competencies to teach online (Winter et al., 2021). While online learning played a pivotal and crucial role during the pandemic, a lack of resources and proper training were liabilities to student learning (Kumar et al., 2021). Allen et al. (2020) discovered that lead teachers experienced large increases in anxiety and reported that they were more likely to leave the profession because of the experience. Allen et al. (2020) described private school teachers' anxiety as lower than among public teachers prior to lockdown for the pandemic. Due to this transformation in teaching methodology, teachers, students, and parents faced many problems associated with MH (Tarkar, 2020).

Administrators

During COVID-19, administrators were faced with many challenges in making policies related to the education system (Aytac, 2020; Karakose et al., 2021). Challenges included their own MH, job satisfaction and work–life conflicts; (Karakose et al., 2021) competently running schools and school systems during COVID-19–19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020); handling personnel and human-resource related issues (Bailey & Schurz, 2020); and protecting their physical health (Karakose et al.,

2021). Harris and Jones (2020) noted that school leaders were in the unfavorable position of being the pinch point in the system while at the same time relying on guidance about processes, responses, and procedures from above themselves in the chain of command. Aytac (2020) recorded several problems faced by school administrators during the pandemic including: low learning motivation of students, parents' inability to create a learning environment at home, and the lack of access to live broadcasts from television education portals. Aytac stated that the majority of school administrators studied, reported low morale on the part of their teachers as well as a lack of willingness to teach in live lectures. Half of the school administrators reported not having an emergency action plan regarding the pandemic protocol and thus having to follow the instructions given by their respective school board. Aytac's study involved 32 school administrators, 12 of whom were female. The findings indicated that low motivation of students to participate in the learning process was the problem area that they encountered the most.

The second most frequent problem that administrators faced was the inability of parents to provide sufficient support to their children at home in terms of creating a positive learning environment and motivating the students to participate (Harris & Jones, 2020). Cohen and Willemsen (2022) described a similar lament from teachers who noted that the ability, willingness, and motivation of students to log onto the learning management system and complete their assignments relied significantly on parental encouragement and guidance. Cohen and Willemsen indicated that many teachers relied on collaborative efforts to ultimately motivate students and parents to engage in the learning process.

Pressley (2021) perceived that a lack of administrative support was an important predictor of teacher burnout; but in a study of teacher experiences, Kim and Asbury (2020) did not mention administrators as a factor in any of the interviews or narratives. Cohen and Willemsen (2022) observed that while most elementary teachers are female, many administrators are male and citing Galman (2012), added that the feminization of teaching led to the undervaluing and deprofessionalization of teaching. It should not be surprising, then, that in Cohen and Willemsen's study, many teachers expressed frustration with the administration's lack of responsiveness or direction. This distinction in responses could be attributed to social-environmental factors associated with social desirability bias sometimes present in qualitative research (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). Cohen and Willemsen (2022) also shared how gender expectations might have affected policy-making decisions of the (all-male) administrators in their study using the example of the initial policy that teachers had to report to their school although teaching virtually; the male principal had a wife at home providing care for his children while not taking the childcare needs of teachers under his report into account.

Several teachers in Cohen and Willemsen's (2022) study reported that even attempts to practice self-care were thwarted by administrative action. Cohen and Willemsen compared the micro-management to Lynch et al.'s (2009) concept of "care commanders" issuing directives to "care foot soldiers" which harkens back to the feminization and subsequent devaluing and deprofessionalization of teaching by administrators. While Cohen and Willemsen (2022) claimed that while the gendered stereotypes of female nurturers working with children under the leadership of male

administrators reported by participants were not new, the findings revealed how the pandemic served to exacerbate those gendered dynamics. Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021) questioned whether such a feminized profession might be especially susceptible to the pandemic; and Dosil et al. (2020) proposed that some studies point out that the role of a professional or personal caregiver could increase the MH symptomatology present in many of the studies. Pressley (2021) listed that anxiety communicating with administrators during the 2020 school year as a factor contributing to teacher burnout during COVID-19.

There are some researchers who have suggested solutions for many of the problems experienced by administrators (Daks et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Extbarria et al., 2021). Corbin et al. (2019) suggested that administrators work to modify perceptions of teachers' relationship with students, and teachers work to build relational closeness with their students; teachers' perceptions of relational closeness with their students were associated with teachers' sense of personal accomplishment; and emotional exhaustion. Datu et al. (2022) reported that the increasing complexity of teachers' responsibilities amid the pandemic underscored the importance of well-being programs for teaching practitioners. Grissom and Condon (2021) argued in favor of a more consciously incorporating crisis management training into both preservice and in service preparation and support for education leaders as well as for opening new lines of inquiry into crisis leadership at the school and district levels. School administrators were encouraged to invest in school-based teacher training initiatives that focus on teachers' well-being to offset pandemic-related job stressors (Datu et al., 2022). Padmanabhanunni et al. (2022)

promoted strategies at both the individual and institutional level to support teachers in building resilience in the context of the COVID-19-pandemic. While we will discuss resilience later in the context of our theoretical conceptual framework, it would be useful here to consider administrative options in the context of past crises similar to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sutherland (2017) indicated that little to no research has been done to investigate how the conditions of schools relate to crisis for extended periods beyond the crisis event. Sutherland specified that while crises take many forms, they share four common characteristics: (a) a threat to the survival of a system, (b) time pressure, (c) an ill-structured situation, and (d) inadequate resources for a response. Sutherland identified that responses to crises involve decisions about resource allocations. In a study conducted during the re-building of the Orleans Parrish school system in New Orleans, following Katrina, Miron (2008) discovered three things (a) that school policies were being conflated between schools from different parts of the city and with different missions; (b) people perceived that many reconstituted and newly configured policies were designed to serve White, middle-class, or upper middle-class students with largely White staff; and (c) finally, that the broader struggle for quality schools in the region and across the nation were historically rooted in the struggle of African Americans and should be launched by and for African Americans.

Lee et al. (2008), like Sutherland –believed that few administrators had crisis management plans and of those that did, a substantial number did not include provisions for large-scale disasters. In Lee et al.’s study, the most frequently considered areas for

improvement included better communication channels for administration, staff and parents and the inability to operate independently for a sustained period in the wake of Hurricane's Katrina and Rita. A MH study by Jaycox et al. (2007) in the aftermath of Katrina and Rita noted that the time window for intervention was shorter than expected and the use of trauma-specific programs was uncommon. While the intervention in the Orleans Parrish did little to assuage the trauma, the education system in Rwanda was a factor in causing the trauma. Walker-Keleher (2006) noted that in Rwanda prior to the conflict and eventual genocide, the education system was inequitable and developed inequities as a result of serving the interests of Belgian and German colonizers, the church, and even Indigenous peoples.

Tarkar (2020) postulated that low-income schools often were not able to provide access to online learning and sometimes had to resort to complete closure. Khazanchi et al. (2020) reported that the fundamental causes of inequity associated with COVID-19 included systemically racist policies – including segregation in housing, education, transportation, economic opportunity, and other related factors. Given this disproportionate impact, Dickinson et al. (2021) suggested that scholars, practitioners, and policy makers focus on the ways in which structural racism drives disparate outcomes. If there is not a relief for teachers' psychological distress in a timely manner, their teaching, and well-being may be affected, with direct impact on students' MH (Zhou & Yao, 2020). Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021) proposed that the teacher's behavior and MHWB is a predictor of the emotional well-being and commitment of the students serves as a key factor in reducing the students' stress levels. Holmes et al. (2020)

anticipated that COVID-19 pandemic could have a long-lasting impact on teachers and teaching activities and, as a consequence, on the children and adolescents they teach. It might make sense that moving up the chain of school command, administrators' MHWB is a predictor of teacher well-being (Diana, 2022; Kim et al., 2022).

Teachers

Kim et al. (2020) distinguished the importance of understanding the lived experience of teachers during the pandemic and how the pandemic caused disruption of education. Allen et al. (2020) reported changes in teacher well-being during what they referred to as one of the most unusual periods the teaching profession is likely ever to face. Using longitudinal data, Allen et al. found that there were waves of anxiety, particularly for state (public) teachers based on the decisions of school leaders to close and/or reopen. Pressley (2021) found that there was no difference in teacher burnout stressed based on ethnicity, location, years of teaching experience or instruction type. Macintyre et al. (2020) revealed that some coping strategies were more effective than others in dealing with COVID-19-related stress and stressors, and also mentioned resilience as an aspect of well-being. The theoretical framework of CrSMHP directly addresses the concept of resilience, but a nuance of resilience not engaged by CrSMHP and mentioned by Macintyre et al. (2020) was psychological resilience, which is described as the ability to recover from psychological adversity. Macintyre et al. (2020) also noted differences in the level of teacher work-related anxiety based on factors such as whether the teacher was teaching from home or from school; changes in day-to-day

activities; and teacher views on how COVID-19 had affected them not only as to their physical well-being, but also in terms of stress.

Teachers had accumulated elevated levels of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic from adjusting to the stay-at-home ordinance issued by the government early on in the pandemic (Besser et al., 2020; Cachon-Zagalaz et al., 2020). Allen et al. (2020) discovered that even the immediate impact of the pandemic when lockdown was announced was noteworthy and differed drastically from teachers' responses in the prior academic year through March 2020. Some teachers' anxiety arose due to the failure of administrators to approach the COVID-19 pandemic with clear decisions and to provide teachers with resources to help them manage/cope with the stress (Rioja, 2020; Zafra, 2020). As a result of this failure, Francom et al. (2021) cautioned that many teachers were unprepared to transition to online/virtual learning and were challenged to provide quality instruction with little preparation. This lack of preparation might explain a peak in anxiety levels reported by Lavonen and Salmela-Aro (2022). Lavonen and Salmela-Aro found that in one of the most advanced educational provider-countries- Finland, most teachers felt that their workload was higher than in a normal situation and one-third of primary students estimated that they learned less than usual during the distance-learning period.

Guangul et al., (2020) discovered that some administrators lacked the technical expertise and infrastructure to conduct remote examinations, and many teachers were not aware of alternative modes of assessment. Babbar and Gupta (2022) addressed the issue that many teachers were not given any formal training to prepare for and conduct online

classes but were still expected to continue the learning process without interruption or disruption. According to Kim et al. (2021) teachers need the support of school policy leaders to feel autonomous, competent, and connected to their education communities and to experience benefit to their MHWB. In a confirmation of a study done in Italy, Kamal and Othman (2020) concluded through a literature review that COVID-19 had negatively impacted several MH outcomes including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, anger as well as feelings of social isolation and loneliness. The original Italy study showed a correlation between COVID-19 and negative psychological outcomes and built on results from a study done in India, which showed a significantly higher prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress among women as compared to men (Kamal & Othman, 2020). Kamal and Othman shared that their results conflicted with a study done in Iran with the results of men assessed showing higher anxiety than did that of women.

Alves et al. (2020) suggested *syndemic* effects in stating that changes in social structures and political systems affected the well-being of teachers, while Reimer and Schleicher (2020) proposed that those structures and systems along with numerous and continuous changes in teaching structures negatively affected the MHWB of teachers. In a pre-pandemic literature review, Sahito and Valsanen (2019) found that the culture, infrastructure, and environment in which teachers worked were important to teacher MHWB as well as to educational outcomes. When school system leaders acted quickly in response to the pandemic, students and teachers tended to benefit. Blackman (2022) noted that in one small nation, the immediate response to the announcement of school closures in March 2020 was to introduce a training-the-trainers model with a focus on

changing instructional design. What made this nation's efforts unique and beneficial—according to Blackman—was the ownership of the instructional process accorded to teachers, the free internet access provided to teachers, students and families and the adjustments made by school administration for the benefit of students, but which also benefited teachers. Still, systemic racism exacerbated already negative MHWB conditions for students and teachers.

Horsford et al. (2021) established significant consensus across participant experiences with COVID-19 and systematic racism as well as its impact on Black families and communities. According to Horsford et al., there were noticeable differences that surfaced during the pandemic, (a) COVID-19 and systemic racism had a disproportionate and traumatic impact on Black students, families, and communities, (b) increased racial trauma and MH issues will have major implications for teaching and learning post-pandemic, (c) schools were ill-equipped to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of Black students, and (d) education administrators and policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels must be held accountable for meeting the educational needs of Black students. These deficiencies were tied to negative educational outcomes.

Educational Outcomes

Students around the world suffered learning loss as a result of the pandemic, but it is possible that students on the margins in the United States suffered more (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2022). At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools closed their doors in 185 counties, and roughly 9 out of 10 children worldwide were out of school (UNESCO, 2022). This “break” soon

became the biggest, longest interruption in schooling since formal education began in the late 19th century (Kamentz, 2020). U.S. schools were closed longer than those in wealthy countries in Western Europe and East Asia (Kamentz, 2020). Additionally, a majority of Black, Hispanic, and Asian students stayed remote through early 2021. Researchers showed that with education in emergency status, experts predicted that it may take years for students to recover the learning they have lost (Blackman, 2022; Kamentz, 2020). Kamentz (2020) wrote that the education lost is unfavorably compared to the potential recovery with similar recoveries after Hurricane Katrina and the Rwandan genocide. This loss and need for recovery were most salient in urban areas in which many Black students live (Karp, 2022).

According to Karp (2022), there was massive learning loss in a large urban school district during the COVID-19 pandemic based on a study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Research conducted by Karp indicated that years of improvement in both reading and math scores in Chicago Public Schools were wiped away during the pandemic. The number of students below basic- the lowest level of achievement—grew in reading and math for fourth and eighth grades (Karp, 2022). Prior to the pandemic, the World Bank’s learning Poverty indicator-- which measures the percentage of children who cannot read and understand at age 10—was at 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries (Saavedra, 2020). This measure was reflected in the U.S. gaps between White and Black and White and Latino students and between middle-class and poor students (Karp, 2022). The gap widening could be partially attributed to access to

technology and space- whether in students' homes or in their potential return to learning spaces at schools (Saavedra, 2020).

Seventy percent of 9-year-olds who learned remotely during the 2020-2021 school year and scored at or above the 75th percentile had greater access to a desktop computer, laptop or tablet all the time; a quiet place to work available some of the time; and a teacher available to help them with mathematics or reading schoolwork every day or almost every day compared to those who scored below the 25th percentile (LaFave et al., 2022). According to U.S. Department of Education (2020), a majority of Asian, Black, and Hispanic fourth graders were learning entirely remotely during the height of the pandemic compared to 27% of White students. Conversely, nearly 50% of White fourth graders were learning full time in person, compared with just 15% of Asians, 28% of Black and 33% of Hispanic fourth graders (Department of Education, 2020). Students who were not able to access in-person or even hybrid instruction tended to experience adverse effects in their learning, but teachers also experienced adverse effects from missing the connection provided by in-person learning (LaFave et al., 2022).

Cuervo et al. (2018) revealed that working from home using information and communication technologies created feelings of tension, anxiety, exhaustion, and decreased jobs satisfaction. During the time of the pandemic, there were limited coping tools available for teachers who worked from home (Ozamiz-Etxebarria, 2021). The stress that teachers described in studies prior to the pandemic might have caused teachers increased instances of sick leave, absenteeism, and poor work performance during the

pandemic (Ozamiz-Etxebarria, 2021) Holmes et al. (2020) postulated that the COVID-19 pandemic could affect teachers and children for years to come.

Christakis et al. (2020) determined that evidence suggests that missing school has adverse effects on eventual educational attainment. In addition to loss of learning, other concerns included increased dropout rates, underserved/marginalized children missing the most important meals of their day-worsening already inequitable educational systems (Saavedra, 2020). Aligned with these findings, government, and municipal leaders as well as educational administrators, found policy change not only necessary, but critical (Saavedra, 2020). Policies in question included dealing with the circumstances of the pandemic and reopening during and after the pandemic, which includes the use of hybrid learning (Holmes et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria, 2021; Saavedra, 2020).

School Reopening Policy After COVID-19

The U.S. education system was not built to deal with extended shutdowns like those imposed by COVID-19 (Dorn et al., 2020). School and daycare closures forced parents out of the workforce and increased stress on them while also creating economic uncertainty for families (Karp, 2022). Viner et al. (2020) documented that 21% of Black families did not have access to reliable internet or had it only through a smartphone. Even more troubling was the potential of escalating disparities and compounding gaps that lead to an increase in dropouts (Dorn et al., 2020). Horsford et al. (2021) suggested as guidance for further research that the voices and perspectives of Black students, parents, educators, researchers, policymakers, and community members provided a blueprint for

advancing vision and strategy for educational equity and justice in school communities across the United States.

Viner et al. (2020) believed that every choice facing states, districts, and schools was being made against the backdrop of entrenched economic and social inequities that have exasperated impacts of COVID-19 on Black, LatinX, and Indigenous communities. The first and major decision to be made after schools were closed in March 2020 was when and whether to reopen them (Black et al., 2021; Cokley et al., 2022). According to Black et al. (2021), during the height of COVID-19 infections, while government officials were planning for the fall, the American Academy of Pediatrics released a statement supporting the return to traditional schooling as soon as possible in order to preserve education and socialization and to limit exacerbating existing educational disparities for high-risk populations. The considerations involved in deliberations about school reopening included weighing the public health risks associated with reopening against the educational and other risks of keeping school buildings closed (Black et al., 2021). National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Committee members expressed considerable concern for the learning of students in kindergarten through grade five and students with special needs who, the committee communicated, might best be served by in-person instruction (Frazier et al., 2021). The aim of this section is to explore policy issues and policy changes in schools, particularly those with a predominately Black student populace, since the beginning of COVID-19. Next, I will closely explore research on the effects of the pandemic on students.

Students

The effects of COVID-19 on the MH of students were significant across nearly all measures and affected (and was affected by) several factors. MH challenges have been found to have a negative impact on the level of attainment and progression of students (Hughes & Spanner, 2019; Thorley, 2017a). In terms of academic performance, one of the fundamental issues was online and hybrid learning as opposed to person-to-person traditional learning (Cokley et al., 2022). Abogye et al. (2020) concluded in their study that an approach that blends traditional and e-teaching must be available for learners. Few school systems were able to provide such learning and even were they able, other systems would have had to adapt to this innovative approach (Black et al., 2021).

Dorn et al. (2021) referred to the phenomenon of students who were not given the opportunity to complete all the learning they would have completed in a typical year as unfinished learning. Richards (2020) revealed that experts have coined the term “COVID-19 slide” for the similar phenomenon of student learning regression. Students at first were not prepared for the shift to online learning and they struggled to adjust while at the same time students also lacked coping resources such as access to social networks and therapy (Apker, 2022; Kaufmann et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020). Demaray et al. (2022) noted increased rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic symptoms among children and adolescents during COVID-19. Malta et al. (2021) investigated the link between distance education students’ MH, connectedness, and academic performance during COVID-19. Mushquash (2020) discovered that students who experienced more stress related to COVID-19 endorsed more symptoms of depression. Adherence to

disease prevention behaviors among students was associated with less stress, but more anxiety (Shanahan, 2024).

In a single-campus study, Meeks et al. (2021) found that approximately one-third of the campus respondents experienced symptoms consistent with severe or extremely severe depression, anxiety, and/or stress. In a self-report study involving college students, Ulrich (2020) reported that all participants reported worry about the pandemic while nearly half of the participants reported moderate to severe anxiety and 42% reported experiencing poor sleep quality. Findings also included that moderate or extreme worry about the pandemic was associated with poor sleep quality (Ulrich, 2020). In a cross-sectional study conducted by Wang, X et al. (2020) revealed that college students' MH statuses were affected by COVID-19. Frazier et al. (2021) found in a study of college students that depression and stress symptoms were higher in April 2020 than in 2017 and that perceived coping was lower during the pandemic. Next, I will closely explore research on the effects of the pandemic on parents and other adults.

Effects of COVID-19 on Parents and Adults

Several studies included information that the pandemic had adverse effects on adults that were comparative to children. Kamal et al. (2020) stated that among a sample of adults, depression, anxiety and stress, female sex was an independent significant factor for higher levels of depression. From a review of the literature that the pandemic negatively affected MH outcomes such as depression, anxiety stress, anger, social isolation, loneliness, and posttraumatic stress (Kamal et al., 2020). In a similar study, Ashtari et al. (2020) found that men had higher anxiety scores while women reported

higher depression scores. Panchal et al. (2021) reported that 4 in 10 adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder as opposed to the 1 in 10n who reported similar symptoms from January to June 2019. Croda and Crossbard (2021) indicated that in Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom, school closures led to more unhappiness and MH issues for women than for men, which could possibly be linked to increased burden of extra parental responsibilities due to school closures. Other discrepancies were documented, but no consistency was found across literature.

Rougeaux et al.'s (2022) research revealed unequal effects of the pandemic on different socio-economic groups, including the finding that households with young children suffered greater negative effects as a result of the pandemic. Rougeaux et al. (2022) discovered that much of the difference in effect could possibly be attributed to existing disparities in health as well as social determinants of health; these social determinants included poor housing, malnutrition, poor air quality, and discrimination. Breslau et al. (2020) revealed that an increase in psychological distress was more common among women compared with men and in those under 60 years of age compared with those over 60 years of age and with Hispanics compared with other racial/ethnic groups. Apperibai et al. (2020) specified differences between the perceptions of the pandemic of those who engaged in greater physical activity and those who engaged in less physical activity. Paluszek et al. (2021) examined the effects of COVID-19 stress using longitudinal survey data and the results helped to predict more severe COVID-19 stressed as assessed 1 year later. Hologue et al. (2020) found that most individuals in the United States have no history of MH condition but could be at risk for psychological

distress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Unpredictability was mentioned as a predictor of stress, anxiety, and depression in several studies (Kämpfen et al., 2020; Kibbey et al., 2021). In addition to unpredictability, the pandemic's effect on family group relations was also noted in COVID-19 research (Kibbey et al., 2021).

Wu et al. (2020) studied the effects of home quarantine during COVID-19 on parents of students and found that anxiety of college students' parents was lower than that of parents of students in pre-college schools. Wu et al. also found that marital satisfaction, social support, parenting style, and parents' history of mental illness influenced the parents' depression, anxiety, and perceived stress. Rougeaux et al. (2022) documented that 34% of mothers surveyed reported that their households were affected by the pandemic in terms of their ability to pay for food while 39% reported an impact on their household's ability to pay rent or mortgage payments, and 31% reported an impact on their household's ability to pay for essentials such as medicine or utilities. Wu et al. (2020) reported that the MH of parents with different parenting styles was different and that the anxiety, depression, and stress of parents with permissive parenting styles was significantly less than those of parents with more authoritative parenting styles. In a similar survey of parents with children under the age of 18, Patrick et al. (2020) found that 27% of parents reported worsening MH for themselves while 14% reported worsening behavioral health for their children. In addition, to worsening MH for themselves and worsening behavioral health for their children, nearly half of families surveyed reported loss of regular childcare, while 16% reported change in insurance status, and 11% reported worsening food insecurity (Patrick et al., 2020).

The MHWB of parents of children with illnesses and special needs were studied as well (Russell et al., 2020; Toseeb & Asbury, 2022; Yuan et al., 2020). In Chen et al.'s (2020) study, the MHWB of parents with special needs was assessed using an online survey including standardized questionnaires; findings included parents of children with autism spectrum disorder were more likely to have MH problems compared with parents of children with intellectual disability or a hearing or visual impairment. Chen et al. (2020) found that child behavioral problems were the main factors predicting MH among parents. Russell et al. (2020) discovered that the stresses of parenting during disasters might have amplified caregiver burden and MH symptoms, and potentially compromise parenting behavior enough to affect the parent-child relationship and impact children's outcomes during times of prolonged stress.

Toseeb and Asbury (2020) anticipated that autistic children as well as adolescents and their parents were likely to be disproportionately affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using questionnaires returned by over 500 caregivers, Toseeb and Asbury (2020) discovered that there were no differences in the MH of parents/caregivers of autistic children in the UK compared to those with other special educational needs as well as other disabilities. Gassman-Pines et al. (2020) acknowledged that in families that had experienced multiple hardships related to COVID-19, both parents' and children's MH were worsened. Gassman-Pines et al. recommended that pediatricians screen for MH while paying particular attention to families which were vulnerable to economic aspects of the crisis.

Several researchers also explored the MHWB of parents of children without special needs (Cheng et al., 2021; Frank et al., 2021; Mohler-Kuo et al., 2021). Whittle et al. (2020) studied 276 physician-parents and their MHWB as well as their parenting load during the pandemic and found that women were more likely to be responsible for childcare and schooling and household tasks during the pandemic and that women experienced greater work-to-family conflict. Perhaps as a result of the increased mental conflict, women also reported experiencing greater depressive and anxiety symptoms compared with their male counterparts (Frank et al., 2020). Additional adverse MHWB effects were noted for working parents throughout the spectrum of changes to their work schedules.

Cheng et al. (2020) noted that the deterioration of MH was worse for working parents and that MH deterioration was strongly aligned with increased financial insecurity and time spent on childcare and home schooling. Hegginess (2020) learned that mothers in states that chose to shut down earlier than others as a result of the pandemic were nearly 70% more likely to not have worked in the week prior to their interview than were working fathers or women without children. Hegginess determined that working mothers were also more likely to take temporary leave from work than were working fathers or women without young children. Many students and families looked for civic and governmental leadership for guidance during the pandemic (Rougeaux et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2020).

Leadership

One of the most significant needs during times of crisis, and specifically during the pandemic/syndemic, was for strong and visionary leadership (Forster et al., 2020). Stoller (2020) noted that certain leadership practices serve those in leadership positions best, and then listed those practices. Proactivity- or anticipating events with contingency plans—was found to be critical to positive responses to the coronavirus pandemic (Stoller, 2020). Stoller also suggested that leaders clarify governance for the crisis defined as assessing the adequacy of existing governance structures and the deployment of new and ad hoc roles if necessary. Leaders should also act quickly to implement policies during a crisis and be both realistic and optimistic (Stoller, 2020.) Several researchers proposed that leaders could have been more initiative-taking in addressing anxiety and potential depression during the pandemic by communicating more effectively as well as by focusing on mission, vision, and values (Rougeaux et al., 2022; Stoller, 2020).

Kaul et al. (2020) found that uncertainty produces anxiety during a crisis, and that leaders must manage anxiety as well as volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Kaul et al. (2020) also shared several leadership characteristics and practices embodied by effective leaders during the coronavirus pandemic/syndemic. Stoller (2020) wrote that communication—as well as planning—helps to assuage anxiety by providing clear direction. Kaul et al. (2020) noted that communication is essential during a crisis, and that the communication needs to be clear and consistent, but also adaptive. Leaders

should have a realistic view of the current state along with optimism for the future (Bolling Cooper, 2018; Kaul et al., 2020).

Researcher suggested characteristics and practices suggested such as focusing on mission and core values; making decisions in the setting of ambiguity; long and short-term planning, engaging with purpose and humility; flattening the leadership structure—defined as enabling others to lead when necessary; and looking outward— as opposed to withdrawing to and listening to only a small core of trusted leaders in an organization (Forster et al., 2020; Kaul et al., 2020). The idea of flattening the leadership structure—as well as the concepts of engaging with purpose and humility in addition to evaluating the adequacy of governance structures all align with the core concepts of CrSMHP (Moore et al., 2023). Additionally, CrSMHP is modeled to allow leaders to create policies related to the negative impacts on those most proximate to the problem, rather than the burden of response being on those most proximate to the problem (Ulje-Wells et al., 2020). In the next section, I will address policy ideas related to the pandemic whether enacted or considered.

Public Policy

During the preliminary stages, the pandemic was seen as a matter of public health but as contamination spread affected politics and policy, leaders began to issue travel bans and encourage social distancing measures to slow the velocity of COVID-19 infection (OECD, 2020). Because education was a daily activity globally of millions of students, parents, and teachers, it was affected to a great degree by social distancing measures, distance education and school closures (Ozer, 2020). Authorities and leaders in

school and MH policy have issued directives and suggestions since just after the pandemic started (Easter et al. 2021). One such call to action was issued from several University department leaders who suggested making the priorities of COVID-19 Health disparities as well as social justice in general (Sullivan et al. 2021). The United Nations (2020), in a policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on children, identified the need for gathering data on the scale and impact on children.

In its policy brief, the United Nations (2020) reported that while children were not the face of the pandemic, they risked being among the pandemic's biggest victims. The United Nations revealed that the harmful effects of the pandemic were not distributed equally and that the effects were expected to be most damaging to children in the poorest countries and in the poorest neighborhoods as well as for those who were already disadvantaged or in a vulnerable situation. Writers of the brief identified actions necessary for policymakers and governments to mitigate those effects, including: (a) expanding social protection programs to reach out to the most vulnerable children; (b) prioritizing the continuity of child-centered services with a focus on equity; (c) and providing practical support to caregivers including managing their own MH. Cheng et al. (2020) indicated that because working families suffered greater mental deterioration as a result of the pandemic, and because this mental deterioration was aligned with increased financial insecurity, that these inequalities should be considered when designing policy responses. Cardenas et al. (2022) identified educational policies implemented in previous decades as well as during the pandemic and attempted to identify potential effects of those policy implementations.

Cardenas et al. (2022) postulated that efforts to contain the pandemic would grow deep educational and economic gaps. The effects of these policy implementations intensified already existing disparities in education and economics and magnified the need for examining other factors involved in those disparities (Blackman, 2022; Cardenas et al., 2022; Cheng et al., 2020). Wang and Zhang (2021) documented that while more research is needed, personal variables such as job experience, teacher motivation and others should be considered prior to making major policy shifts. Lipscomb (2022) reported that teachers might benefit from treatment programs that include provisions to reduce teacher stress, helping teachers to enhance their self-efficacy might also prove beneficial. Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021) considered two policy factors: first, that it would be desirable to decrease the psychological impact on teachers and, second, that it would be beneficial for school systems to provide psychological support through telephone or face-to-face assistance specifically for those teachers that are most vulnerable to the negative impacts of the pandemic to help them better cope with the crisis and ultimately perform better in their role as teachers.

Teachers were challenged by specific policy changes that during the pandemic, which included the transition to distance education curriculum changes, online assessment, and policies affecting educational equity (Babbar& Gupta, 2022; Blackman, 2022; Costa et al., 2022). The transition to online learning presented many challenges for teachers, students, parents, and families (Francom et al., 2021). Teachers had challenges engaging students and parents, and in understanding and following district guidelines as well as addressing students and their own computer access issues, which –of course also

presented problems for students and parents. Part of the challenge was the increased need for to use technology, and another piece was the use of modern technology—such as Zoom-- for many teachers (Babbar& Gupta, 2022). Still another variable was the immediate transition without any time to learn the new system or adjust to its use (Cardenas et al., 2020). Francom et al. (2021) reported on suggestions proposed by Mackey for returning to continuity in terms of the phases of faculty activity following an earthquake in that region; these phases included (a) react, recover, and redesign; (b) restart; (c) reconsolidate; (d) review and reflect. In addition to the more gradual pace, Mackey’s recommendations allowed more time for teachers, students, and parents to adjust to what was going on around as well as inside them psychologically (Zhai & Du, 2020). The medical and infrastructural effects of the pandemic added to the sociopolitical- and specifically, racial effects combined to create what several researchers referred to as syndemic effects: these produced adverse effects in some communities more than others.

Syndemic Communities

The disproportionate and deleterious impact of the pandemic/syndemic on minority communities was presented in several articles. Horsford et al. (2021) reported that Black communities experienced widespread loss and devastation resulting from COVID-19 in areas such as disproportionate hospitalizations, dangerous working conditions, joblessness, housing and food insecurity, and the loss of family, friends, and community members. Singer and Rylko-Bauer (2021) were led to coin the associated

structural violence and its simultaneous occurrence along with the pandemic with the term *syndemic*.

Song and Rylko-Bauer wrote that the syndemic resulted in numerous complications and challenges in both the fields of education and school psychology around the world but specifically in Black communities. Horsford et al. (2021) revealed that the impact of racial violence on Black students, families, and communities had increased during the pandemic along with trauma and MH in general. Singer and Rylko-Bauer presented the importance of local conditions and demographics in mitigating the impacts of the syndemic in various communities. In larger states, such as California, teachers leaving the profession, at least indirectly due to the syndemic, were evident as there was a 26% increase in the number of teacher retirements in the second half of 2020 compared with the same period in 2019 (DeMarco, 2022). Of those teachers surveyed, more than half-cited challenges associated with the pandemic as their main reason for leaving (DeMarco, 2022). Many of these challenges involved race either directly or indirectly.

Hamel et al. (2020) reported that in a survey, 7 in 10 Black adults said that they had experienced serious incidents of discrimination in their lifetime and half felt that their lives were in danger because of their race or ethnicity. Hamel et al. also reported that 6 in 10 Black adults surveyed reported experiencing unfair treatment in various settings in the previous 12 months including 44% who experienced this treatment while engaging in activities considered enjoyable and 30% who experienced unfair treatment while interacting with the police. Horsford et al. (2021) noted the responses of survey

participants, the large majority of whom mentioned police violence as having had a disproportionate impact on Black communities.

In Atlanta, Georgia, systemic racism, and COVID-19 had a disproportionate and traumatic impact on Black students' families and communities (Parker & Lester, 2021). One outlier was the findings of Al Banna et al. (2022) which included the high-income respondents' experience of elevated levels of stress at higher rates than low-income respondents did. Conversely, Al Banna et al. (2022) specified that unemployed respondents experienced elevated levels of stress at higher rates than employed respondents did. Ueda et al. (2020) identified respondents who were unemployed, had been laid off or who were taking time off work were 1.764 times more likely to have moderate or severe forms of depression compared to those who were not in the labor force. Kamal and Othman (2020) found that higher levels of education were significantly associated with depression, anxiety, and stress. Gaps in wealth, employment, and access to health care between White persons and communities of color also worsened as a result of the pandemic (Journal of Higher Education Management, 2021; Tai et al., 2021). Other social factors contributed to disparity in MHWB presentation as well.

Social Factors

Social isolation was a major concern for MH specialists (World Health Organization, 2022). There was an unprecedented increase in stress caused by social isolation during COVID-19. The leading stressors were loneliness, fear of infection, suffering, and death of oneself and for loved ones, grief after bereavement and financial worries lead to anxiety and depression (World Health Organization, 2022). Students in a

survey conducted by Chakraborty et al. (2020) reported that online education was stressful for them and negatively affected both their health and social life. The students surveyed, nearly all were affected both socially and emotionally, and nearly all felt both the negative and positive effects of the pandemic at the same time (Alghambi, 2020).

Gloster et al. (2020) recognized that those whose MH was most negatively impacted by the pandemic were those who were without social support and those whose finances would worsen because of the lockdown. During the lockdown, acute stress reactions were reported to have impaired individuals' immune system, which led to negative effects on daily life and reduced well-being (Zhou & Yao, 2020). Kang et al. (2020) stated that the large-scale public health crisis resulted in reported increases in MH problems including stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, fear, denial, anger. In addition to being affected by other social problems, the pandemic also affected other social problems such as crime.

COVID-19 and Crime

For many criminologists and other professionals who study crime and its effects, the COVID-19 pandemic presented natural experiment conditions allowing for real-world theory tests (Miller & Blumstein, 2020). Ashby (2020) used police-recorded open crime data in the early part of the pandemic to understand how the frequency of common types of crime changed in large cities across the United States and found no significant changes in most of the cities with some minor exceptions. DS Abrams (2021) reported based on data from 25 large U.S. cities that there was a widespread immediate drop in both

criminal incidents and arrests particularly among drug crimes, theft, residential burglaries, and most violent crimes.

DS Abrams (2021) stated that there was no such decline in homicides and shootings, and, furthermore, that there was an increase in non-residential burglary and car theft in most cities, suggesting that there was a displacement of criminal activity to locations with fewer people. Calderon-Anyosa and Kaufman (2021) found that- based on data from the Peruvian “National Death Information System-- that all forms of external death presented a sudden drop after the initiation of lockdown. In the analysis-which was stratified by sex and time unit of every 15 days- all forms of deaths examined presented a sudden drop with the greatest drop being those associated with traffic accidents (Calderon-Anyosa & Kaufman, 2021). Boman and Gallupe (2020) maintained that lockdowns had sweeping impacts on life in ways which were not originally planned. Based on and measured by calls for service to law enforcement, Boman and Gallupe revealed that crime was down across the United States and notably in cities such large cities as Washington, DC; Chicago; and New York City.

Mitchell and Miller (2020) proposed that perhaps the most direct impact of the pandemic on the criminal justice system was a result of a concern over the contagion of COVID-19 among individuals in prisons and jails. Boman and Mowen (2021) used daily crime count data from police agencies to discover, that overall, crime decreased 37% worldwide after stay-at-home orders were issued by governments; property-based crimes decreased substantially, but homicide was relatively unchanged; and the extent to which stay-at-home orders impacted crime was largely dependent on location. Yet another

factor which affected and was affected by the MHWB effects of the pandemic was MH as mitigated by religion.

Mental Health and Religion

Zhang et al. (2021) indicated that religion and spirituality (R/S) appears to serve as a positive resource for helping those experiencing disasters make sense of and cope with natural and human-made disasters and specifically with the pandemic. Counted et al. (2022) suggested that negative religious coping was associated with other negative outcomes related to mental, physical, and spiritual aspects. While religious coping appears to have a clear effect on responding to crises such as the pandemic, the pandemic (as well as other crises) also has an effect on MHWB as it relates to religion/ spirituality (Zhang et al., 2021).

One of the most important sources of human character and identity is religion (Fardin, 2020). Some Christians saw the pandemic as not only extraordinary, but possibly apocalyptic (Dein et al. 2020). This belief was based in part on the fact that the pandemic had global impact and transformed “normal” social interaction and behaviors (Dein et al., 2020). Schnabel and Schieman (2022) explained that highly religious individuals and evangelicals suffered less distress in March 2020 and were less likely to see the coronavirus outbreak as a crisis and less likely to support public health restrictions to limit the spread of the virus. However, there are some Christians who claim that COVID-19 is evidence of the plagues in the book of Revelation and, specifically, the seven seals of Revelation in Chapters 6 through 8 (Dein et al., 2020).

In an editorial, Dein et al. (2020) asked what the implications of COVID-19 are for religion and MH. In a study of American Orthodox Jews, Pirutinsky et al. (2020) expounded that positive religious coping and trust in God were strongly correlated with lower stress as well as positive impact, while negative religious coping and mistrust in God correlated with the inverse. Pirutinsky stated that when measured across 13 life domains, concern with a possible COVID-19 infection was associated with negative impact in the majority of those domains. A similar pattern of correlations was observed through media, social media, and one-on-one interactions (Schnabel & Schieman, 2022). Hood et al. (2018) recognized that groups with strong religious identity and a sense of group belonging aligned with the correlation between less stress and increased positive impact. Ultimately, Pirutinsky et al. (2020) offered that positive religious coping; intrinsic religiosity and trust in God showed a strong correlation with less stress and increased positive impact.

According to Fardin (2020), an individual's sense of spirituality or religiosity appeared to have an effect on that individual's perspective on the pandemic as a crisis. Schnabel and Schieman (2021) revealed that while religion protected MH, highly religious individuals were less likely to see the coronavirus outbreak as a crisis and less likely to support restrictions to limit the spread of the virus. Dutra and Rocha (2021) found that face-to-face interactions with religious leaders and faith communities were essential to improving the immune response of believers and adherents during the initial stages of the corona virus pandemic. Relationships with religious leaders as well as with

family members proved to be a mitigating factor in how respondents perceived the pandemic.

Students who had good relationships with their parents and were more religious showed better MH than those who had poor relationships with their parents and were less religious (Sapurti & Yumami, 2021). Yildirim et al. (2021) learned that fear of COVID-19 was associated with depression, anxiety and stress and that negative religious coping was associated with depression, anxiety, and stress, but positive religious coping was only associated with depression and stress. However, Religious/ Spiritual (RS) struggles were positively associated with depression and that the relation between R/S struggles and depression was attenuated when positive religious coping was higher for both men and women (Captari et al., 2022) Disparities in health care also proved to be a strong mitigating factor in respondents' perception of MHWB (Sapurti & Yumami, 2021; Yildirim et al., 2021).

Health Care Disparities

Purnell et al. (2021) provided an explanation that it is critical to understanding the complex mechanisms by which the various aspects of racism influence racial disparities in health care; included in the various aspects of racism were structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized racism. Jones et al. (2022) identified facets of COVID-19-related discrimination across three racial/ethnic minority groups. COVID-19-related discrimination was not solely about infectious diseases but was also entrenched with persistent racism (Jones et al., 2022). Keptner and McCarthy (2020) anticipated that populations that were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic might

also see a disproportionate rise in MH issues. Thakur et al. (2020) noted that the disproportionate impact was partially the result of fractured access to health care prior to the event and partially because of the increased exposure to COVID-19.

Daily racial discrimination was also associated with an increased risk for depression (Dong, 2024). Yancey (2020) reported an irrefutable pattern of underrepresented minorities developing COVID-19 and dying disproportionately. Yancey also shared the definition of health care disparity as not simply a difference in health outcomes but a disproportionate difference that is attributable to factors other than access to care. Johnson-Agbakwu et al. (2020) provided historical context on how structural racism undergirds policies that contribute to racial health inequities.

Jones et al. (2022) presented evidence to support the claim that stigma and discrimination related to COVID-19 disproportionately impacted racial/ethnic minority groups and that such experience could worsen MH. Abrams and Szeffler (2020) postulated that pandemic disproportionately affected the poor and disadvantaged but also that what they referred to as “mitigating social determinants” reduced the impact of infectious diseases before the advent of medications. Black, Asian, and minority ethnicity students may also have been at a greater risk for poor MH due to poor COVID-19 clinical outcomes (Bennett et al., 2022; Phiri et al., 2021). Jones et al. (2022) established that this COVID-19-related stigma and discrimination were both associated with fears of contracting COVID-19 and aligned with reinforcing and perpetuating racist stereotypes against racial/ethnic groups implying greater risk for having and spreading COVID-19 because one’s perceived race /ethnicity alone. Jones et al. (2022) investigated three types

of self-reported experiences of COVID-19-related discrimination- everyday discrimination, major discrimination, and heightened vigilance due to anticipated discrimination- as well as the association of these with MH outcomes among racial/ethnic groups in the U.S. South.

Summary and Conclusions

There is research that shows a connection to problems teachers faced during the pandemic and anxieties for not being prepared (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020). Agbakwu et al. (2020) and Le et al. (2022) provided evidence for the influence of structural racism and for stigma and discrimination as influences in the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on physical and MH in Black communities. Teachers of students in those predominantly Black communities faced several challenges not faced by teachers in other communities (Babbar & Gupta, 2022; Blackman, 2022). The challenges included lack of access to technology needed to adapt to teaching during distance learning (Babbar & Gupta, 2022); being or feeling rushed back into face-to-face teaching (Cardenas et al., 2020); and being able to adjust to the mental and psychological state needed to teach, whether face-to-face or distance/virtually (Zhai & Du, 2020). More research needs to be done to explore how the response to COVID-19 affected the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this generic qualitative study is to explore the response to COVID-19 affected teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. I want to understand the effects of the pandemic and the experiences of those who were teaching at predominately Black schools during COVID-19 pandemic to understand if their feelings or thoughts about MHWB were addressed. I also want to learn if there are common themes among the population.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss the research design and rationale for this study. This chapter will elucidate the role of the researcher and discuss the methodology of the study in detail. The chapter will explain how research will be conducted with the participants in the study, how the study will be conducted step-by-step, and how the use of this methodology will answer the research question. I will describe how data will be collected and analyzed as well as the manner in which participants will enter, participate in, and leave the study. Chapter 3 will conclude with a section about researcher credibility, trustworthiness, as well as ethical considerations that will be taken into consideration within the study.

Research Design and Rationale

For this study, I will use a generic qualitative methodology with the purpose of exploring how the response to COVID-19 affects the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic. In the qualitative method, the researcher gathers rich data from participants' experiences to gain in-depth knowledge of

a phenomenon (Sykes et al., 2017). Busetto et al. (2020) stated that qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews with open-ended questions to find the answers to their research question. In a quantitative study, numerical data is examined to explore a relationship between independent and dependent variables and test hypotheses (Polona et al., 2018). Mixed method is suitable for a study in which the qualitative or quantitative methods alone are not adequate to understand the complexity rooted in the phenomenon (Alavi et al., 2018). The quantitative method does not apply to this study because understanding the phenomenon will not require me to collect numerical data, compare variables, or evaluate hypotheses. The mixed method is not suitable because I will not incorporate the quantitative component of the research method in the study inquiry.

Busetto et al. (2020) stated that research problems that can be explored using qualitative methods include reviewing complex multi-component interventions or systems of change, concentrating on questions beyond what works, towards “what works for whom when, how and why”, and focusing on intervention improvement. A qualitative method is appropriate when sources of information are limited (Billings et al., 2021). Regarding COVID-19’s effects and particularly regarding how teachers’ MHWB were affected by responses, the data were limited. The qualitative method is optimal for this study because the purpose is to explore a phenomenon by capturing participants' experiences through semistructured, open-ended questions and then to analyze the content to develop patterns and themes.

The generic qualitative approach is used when the topic is not appropriate for any of the traditional qualitative models (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). Jahja et al. (2021)

reported that generic qualitative research is concerned with how individuals perceive the reality around them. The aim of the generic qualitative approach is to draw out participants' ideas about things that are outside themselves. Rather than focus on participants' feelings, the research seeks to understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives of participants (Thompson Burdine et al., 2020). The research question I sought to answer was, how did the response to COVID-19 affect the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic?

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, researchers are the primary instrument (Amin et al., 2020). According to Wa-Mbaleka (2020), the qualitative researcher takes an active role in engaging with participants to seek comprehensive collection of relevant data. Qualitative researchers are allowed to provide an interpretation of observed experiences and actions of individuals and groups in different contexts (Amin et al., 2020). In qualitative case studies, a researcher who is the primary instrument adds value to the data collection process (Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). A qualitative interview is a data collection method where an interviewer asks questions to participants either face-to-face or at a distance (Wa-Mbaleka, 2020). One-on-one interviews with participants will allow me to collect in-depth information. I will use open-ended questions and semistructured interview techniques to develop an interactive interview with the participants.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need to explore other methods for data collection (Saarijarvi & Bratt, 2021). Face-to-face interviews are coordinated in time and space, which makes this method the optimal option (Saarijarvi & Bratt, 2021). Some

participants might prefer other interview methods due to fear of being exposed to COVID-19 and other restrictions; I will consider other interview methods. Saarijarvi and Bratt (2021) stated that telephone, and online chat interviews are synchronous communication in time, but asynchronous communication in space. I am willing to sacrifice the space synchronicity for the benefits of time and convenience for my participants and for myself. Since the interviews will be semistructured, interplay between the researcher and the participant should be freer flowing and allow the researcher to explore in-depth experiences of participants (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) that might prove more uncomfortable in a face-to-face interview environment. I allowed the participants to select the method they prefer. I was the primary interviewer, and I interviewed participants in a setting that was private and confidential. Interviews lasted for however long it was necessary to gain complete answers to interview questions which are included in the appendix, but each interview lasted somewhere between 30 and 45 min.

Methodology

I will use generic qualitative methodology for the purpose of exploring how the response to COVID-19 affects the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic. Grant et al. (2019) noted that qualitative researchers use open-ended questions to explore in-depth and rich experiences of human knowledge. Quantitative researchers, in contrast, use closed-ended questions, which do not allow for the comprehensiveness allowed as the result of using open-ended questions (Adedoyin,

2020). Qualitative researchers consider aspects of situations that others might have missed but have major implications for practice (Shaw, 2022).

The generic qualitative approach focuses on exploring how people interpret their experiences and the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Riffell & Chen, 2019). Bellamy et al. (2015) reported that generic qualitative research draws on the strengths of one or more qualitative approaches. The aim of the generic qualitative approach is to draw out participants' ideas about things that are 'outside themselves.' Percy et al. (2015) noted that generic qualitative design can be used in situations in which topics are unsuitable for or cannot be adapted to traditional qualitative designs such as case study, ethnography, grounded theory, or phenomenology. Rather than focus on participants' feelings, the research seeks to understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives of participants (Bellamy et al., 2015).

Participant Selection Logic

The sampling strategy for this study will be purposive sampling, which allows researchers to find respondents who participate in a topic of interest (Sibona et al., 2020). The criteria for inclusion in this study include participants must have been a teacher or in an instruction-facing position at a predominately Black school during the COVID-19 pandemic, must speak English, must be at least 19 years or older, and must have at least 6 months to a year experience as a teacher in a predominately Black school. Paraprofessionals and part-time instructors as well as student teachers may also participate. Johnson et al. (2020) noted that qualitative researchers recognize that certain participants are more likely to be "rich" with data or insight than others are and therefore

more useful in achieving the research purpose. I will make verbal inquiries via telecommunications devices to ensure that potential participants meet stated criteria for inclusion in this study.

Participants will be selected through professional networks, social media platforms, and word of mouth. Social media has increased as a viable tool in scholarly research and has helped to increase efficiency while decreasing time and energy required performing research and recruiting participants (Gorska et al., 2020). Social media was chosen as a means of finding participants because the risk of bias is less than that of using blogs, union websites, or listservs. The researcher's personal network was selected because, as a member of several national educational-affiliated organizations, the researcher has access to a diverse consortium of persons in education-related professions from several lifestyles as well as to an extended network of colleagues of colleagues. Word of mouth was chosen because it allows access to a difficult to reach population which might prove challenging to reach using other more conventional means. The goal is to obtain at least eight participants. Malmqvist et al. (2019) noted that a small number of participants could provide enough data to reach saturation.

Instrumentation

As the researcher for this study, I will be the key instrument for data collection. In qualitative research, the researcher can observe, conduct in-depth interviews, review documents, and reflect on the importance of observation and the interview data (Wambaleka, 2020). The plan is to use semistructured interviews as data collection techniques for this study. Semistructured interview technique is the optimal technique for

one-on-one interviews (Grant et al., 2019). I will use interview questions that follow a semistructured interview technique for the face-to-face interview participants. I will also review policies of the school to review the MHWB policy.

Procedures for Pilot Study

Per Walden University guidelines, student researchers can pilot their data collection tools or procedures with at least two participants prior to committee and Institutional Review Board approval, but they may not include the data they collect in their final capstone analyses. Malmqvist et al. (2019) noted that the pilot study has three aims: to gather data to provide guidance for a substantive study, to critically interrogate how researchers can most effectively conduct a study using the tools to be used in the study, and to use the theoretical model as a tool of analysis for studying the phenomena under study. Abd Gani et al. (2020) suggested using a pilot study to establish validity and reliability of a qualitative interview. Billups (2021) suggested that the researcher should carefully review his interview research protocols before evaluating it with a pilot participant. Billups also noted that a pilot test is used to ensure the collection of viable data and added that it is essential for the researcher to identify individuals who resemble the target populations.

However, I will not conduct a pilot study. Eldridge et al. (2016) stated that the use of a pilot study when the number of participants knowledgeable of the phenomenon is limited is counterproductive. In this qualitative study, I will explore the views of participants employed by one organization, which might result in a limited number of participants who met the criteria and possess information relevant to the study's

phenomenon. Although a small number of participants provide enough data to reach saturation, conducting a pilot study could diminish the availability of qualified individuals to participate in the study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Interviews began with the informed consent form. Informed consent is a commonly accepted legal, ethical, and regulatory requirement and an important aspect of research involving human subjects and is foundational in conducting ethical research (Pietrzykowski & Smilowska, 2021). Kompanje et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of obtaining informed consent because informed consent allows participants to accept or reject participation. Researchers must communicate to participants (a) their rights as human subjects, (b) the research question under investigation, (c) the study methodology, and (d) the potential harms and benefits (Nicol et al., 2020). After the forms were signed and returned by the participants, I answered any remaining questions that participants had. I gave a brief description of the interview process and affirmation of permission to audio record using iPhone® which is a registered trademark of Apple® Inc.

Each interview was less than an hour in length, although, because interviews were semi-structured, they could have lasted longer. Face-to-face interviews are an accepted method for data collection (Davies et al., 2020). According to Saarijärvi and Bratt (2021), the advantages of face-to-face interviews are (a) the researcher can clarify or paraphrase questions that the participant may not understand, (b) the researcher can observe the participants' behavior when responding to questions, and (c) the researcher can monitor the emotional tone and maintain control of the interview. Disadvantages of face-to-face

interviews are participants may feel pressured to answer while facing an interviewer and therefore might not answer honestly and face-to-face interviews require travel time for both the participants and researcher (Davies et al., 2020). In addition, some participants might prefer to wear a mask during the face-to face interviews, which could present difficulties with hearing the participants' responses. After each interview, I asked if participants wanted a copy of the transcription. I thanked the participants for their participation, let them know that a written synopsis of the conversation will be emailed to them, and informed them that they can send changes to me via email to clarify any misunderstanding.

I recorded the interviews using an electronic recording device. I played the audio recording from the interviews and typed each word I heard and understood, placed question marks next to those I had questions about. I stopped the recording when needed, rewound occasionally, and listened to the same section as I read along. I made sure that I typed each word correctly. If I did not understand something, I typed dashes to indicate that a word was missing, and I typed ellipses if a phrase was missing. I asked participants to clarify and review transcript via email and corrections were made and sent back to me.

Data Analysis Plan

I carefully read and annotated documents related to teacher MH from administrative bodies associated with the participants governing boards. According to Wang (2022), the advantages of document analysis are researchers have access to background information that otherwise may not be available from participants, researchers are able to track changes over a period of time, the cost for document analysis

is relatively low, and researchers have access to detailed information. The disadvantages of document analysis include information in documents may conflict with practices, information may be available for one period of time but not another, missing data which could cause coding difficulties, and documents may be viewed as too subjective (Tran, 2022; Moen & Bezuidenhout, 2021). Document analysis is a systematic, qualitative research method for thematically examining documents (Browne et al., 2019). I scheduled times to member check with each participant who participated in one-on-one interviews participants. Member checking the data collected from participants increases validity by allowing participants to review, clarify, and expand on data and increases trustworthiness of data collected by allowing participants the opportunity to correct errors and challenge what they perceive as incorrect interpretations (Candela, 2019).

Williams and Moser (2019) noted that coding in qualitative research is comprised of processes that enable data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted to provide a platform for constructing meaning. Bingham and Witowsky (2021) indicated using deductive analysis practices to sort data into organizational categories; organize data into categories to align with research questions; and apply theoretical frameworks to data organizational categories. Bingham and Witowsky also suggested using inductive analysis practices to make meaning from the data; develop codes, themes, and findings; identify representative data to support findings; and explain findings using theory and literature. Once I coded and categorized the data, I interpreted the data. I presented the overall theme that answers the research question as well as any discrepancies within the study.

Xu and Zammit (2020) reported that thematic analysis is widely used in health care and psychology and occasionally in education. Xu and Zammit recommended using inductive and deductive coding and theme development during the coding and categorizing process. Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach include the following six steps for thematic analysis:

1. Familiarize oneself with the data.
2. Generate initial codes.
3. Search for themes.
4. Review themes.
5. Define and name themes.
6. Produce the report.

I used these strategies to analyze the data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Researchers use member checking as a validation technique to explore the credibility of results (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Member checking is a strategy researchers use to return data to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Brear, 2019). Member checking process encompasses a range of activities including (a) returning the interview transcript to participants, (b) a member check interview using the interview transcript data or interpreted data, (c) a member check focus group, or (d) returning analyzed synthesized data (Amin et al., 2020; Brear, 2019). At the second one-on-one meeting, I will share my interpretation of each participant's answers to the interview questions with each participant to allow participants to verify

their answers. Through member checking, I gained more clarity from the data provided by the participants. I used member checking to confirm data dependability by comparing data captured during to data collected after the interviews. I received feedback and validation about the data collected from each participant. The participants were given opportunities to share additional information after they reviewed the transcripts.

In this generic qualitative study, I explored the views of participants who met the participant criteria and possessed knowledge relevant to the study's phenomenon. Data saturation could be obtained with a small number of participants (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Braun and Clark (2019) stated that data saturation for reflexive thematic analysis as semistructured interviews elicit distinct characteristics of participants because of individual differences in the words of the participants. Data saturation provides richness to the data analysis.

Credibility

Credibility depends on the richness of information gathered, rather than the amount of data collected and is the most important aspect in establishing trustworthiness (Gagani, 2019). The data must be based on natural world setting; it is important to determine the type of evidence the phenomenon requires (Gagani, 2019). For instance, the researcher must determine what data to collect in order to have credible evidence (Gagani, 2019). After the data has been collected, the researcher has to plan how to codify the data. The data needs to be organized and categorized (Gagani, 2019). For this research, I collected data from participants from one-on-one interviews. I recorded the interviews, transcribed the information, and compared policies, my journal and

observation notes. I highlighted commonalities in phrasing, descriptions, reactions, and common techniques using Microsoft Excel. According to Braun and Clark (2019), the researcher achieves data saturation when no new information emerges from the data collected. I obtained data saturation by spending adequate time collecting, reviewing, and organizing the data to recognize commonalities in the contextual data until no new data emerged.

Transferability

Transferability is the potential for a study's effectiveness to be duplicated in a new setting (Burchett et al., 2013). I ensured transferability in relation to the reader and future research by providing a valuable, rich, and distinct narrative of culture and context, selection, and specifics of participants, data collection, and process of analysis. The findings from this research might extend existing research from the perspective of creating education policies related to pandemics or crises.

Dependability

Janis (2022) described dependability as consistency. Dependability also includes participants evaluating findings, the interpretation, and recommendations of the study to make sure all are supported by data received from study participants (Janis, 2022). According to Rose and Johnson (2020) the researcher is accountable for describing changes that ensue in the setting and how these changes affect the way the researcher approached the study (Janis, 2022). I analyzed documents, observation notes, journal notes, and interview transcripts to ensure data collection was conducted correctly.

According to Dargatzis et al. (2020), the advantages of document analysis are researchers can understand policy content and processes across time and geographies; it is nearly impossible to conduct policy research without document analysis; and it can be used to inform new policies. The disadvantages of document analysis include it can be subject to concerns regarding validity, reliability, and authenticity; information in documents may conflict with practices, document analysis often must be supported with other evidence, such as interviews (Dargatzis et al. ,2020). Researchers use member checking as a validation technique to explore the credibility of results (Rose and Johnson, 2020). Kibisa (2019) outlined an 8-step planning process for document analysis as (a) create a list of texts to explore (e.g., population, samples, respondents, participants); (b) consider how to access texts with attention to linguistic or cultural barriers; (c) acknowledge and address biases; (d) develop applicable skills for research; (e) consider strategies for ensuring credibility; (6) know the data one is searching for; (f) consider ethical issues 51 (e.g., confidential documents); and (g) have a backup plan. I used the steps to detail the planning process to ensure reliable results.

Member checking is a strategy researchers use to return data to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Rose and Johnson, 2020). Member checking process encompasses a range of activities including (a) returning the interview transcript to participants, (b) a member check interview using the interview transcript data or interpreted data, or (c) returning analyzed synthesized data (Candela, 2019). I gave each participant a copy of my interpretation of each participant's answers to interview questions to allow participants to verify their answers. Member checking is also

the process in which participants have the opportunity to correct or challenge incorrect interpretations (Candela, 2019). Through member checking, I gained more clarity of data provided by the participants. I used member checking to confirm data dependability by comparing data captured during and after the interviews.

Confirmability

Nassaji (2020) noted that confirmability is a trustworthiness principle of qualitative research that is considered a parallel substitution for a similar principle of quantitative research. Nguyen et al. (2020) suggested a specific aspect of trustworthiness, which is confirmability to validate qualitative research. Reflexivity is a technique that is used in qualitative research to ensure confirmability (Nassaji, 2020). The concept is to allow the researcher to look at his or her own background and position to see how it might influence the research process (Nassaji, 2020). Reflexivity is achieved when the researcher maintains a reflexive journal (Nguyen et al., 2020). I kept a reflexive journal.

Reflexive journaling is defined as intentional self-awareness about the reciprocal influence of the researcher-participant relationship on the research process (Oliphant & Bennett, 2019). Reflexive journaling is especially valuable for novice researchers working alone on projects such as a dissertation (Meyer, 2019). Oliphant and Bennett (2019) noted that in the reflexivity process, the researcher's background, emotions, values and even biases are viewed as important contributions to the process of co-constructing knowledge and should not be ignored or neutralized. Meyer noted the benefits of using reflexive journaling to assist with answering questions generated while conducting qualitative interviews. Oliphant and Bennett used reflexive journaling to

highlight the similarities and differences between the researcher and participants. Shufinsky (2020) noted that the unit of measurement in qualitative inquiry is directly affected by social situations and relies heavily on the reflexive interpretation of the researcher. I highlighted similarities in my journal. I circled words related to MHWB. I crossed out differences and I underlined information that was not mentioned by the participants. I made notes about each policy mentioned. By reviewing policies, I obtained background information and data to support the reliability and validity of the study.

Ethical Procedures

This study focused on participants' experiences about closely held beliefs related to work, policies, race, and other interconnected issues, all of which could be considered sensitive issues. I was able to reward the trust placed in me by participants with a respectful and honest translation of their experiences and feelings shared with me by them. I assured that participants have both the opportunity and the information to consent to their answers being shared with a larger community. I provided participants with the ability to opt-out if they chose to not participate at any point in the process. The information gathered from participants who opted out was not used. I discarded the information.

All data collected throughout the study was collected in confidence and all participants were given a pseudonym to replace their names within transcription and analyses. Data was uploaded to the researcher's computer as well as all data analysis programs without any identifying information. All data is held in a password-protected file on a computer for up to 5 years to ensure that no other parties have access to that

data. All correspondence including emails, text messages and signed consent forms as well as other research-related materials were uploaded to a password-protected file on a computer. All hardcopy research –related materials were stored in a locked file cabinet and only the electronic form was saved as described above.

Summary

A generic qualitative study was conducted using eight participants over the age of 18 who taught kindergarten through Grade 12 students during the COVID-19 pandemic. One-on-one interviews took place via videoconferencing. I collected data from interviews and policies. I used a recording and transcription program as well as Microsoft Excel to organize, code, and categorize the data. I used thematic analysis to determine themes and meta-themes within the data. I ensured privacy and comfort of the participants by utilizing ethical considerations. Documentation including policies, interviews notes, transcriptions, consent forms were stored within a locked file on the researcher's computer.

The results of this study may inform the equity of policies and procedures of community MH centers particularly as those policies relate to public education and specifically to teachers at predominately Black schools. In the past, researchers have focused on the MH of students, and little has been done to address the MH needs of teachers. The focus of this research is the experiences of teachers at predominately Black schools through the use of a generic qualitative study. I conducted one-on-one interviews to focus on teacher-centered narratives. I gained an understanding of the experiences of those teachers from their perspective and with a concern for their MHWB rather than on

how those experiences affect their students' MHWB. I used the lens of the CrSMHP theory to explore how COVID-19 responses affected teachers who work in predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB.

Chapter 4: Results

In this generic qualitative study, I explored how COVID-19 responses affected teachers when working in predominately Black schools during the pandemic to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences regarding MHWB. I collected data by conducting one-on-one interviews with teachers who taught at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from this study might help school leaders and administrators collaborate with community MH center leaders to design policies related to MHWB and to reconsider the importance and need for continued attention to the MH needs of teachers –particularly those who work at predominately Black schools.

The social problem in this study is the inequitable response to the MH needs of teachers at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Blackman (2022) focused on the MH of teachers who taught at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Blackman also noted how the pandemic worldwide presented an unprecedented challenge for administrators and teachers as it relates to the equity-in-education agenda. This study was undertaken to explore the following research question: How did the response to COVID-19 affect the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic?

Chapter 4 includes data collected during the study and information regarding demographic information of the participants as well as how, when, and where the data were collected and analyzed. This chapter also includes any variations or deviations from the original plan in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, additional details regarding the transcription and analysis of the data into themes includes a discussion of how credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability were implemented into the study.

Finally, in Chapter 4 there is a presentation of the overall themes, which answers the research question and there are discrepancies or outliers within the study.

Demographics

The participants consisted of two men and six women. Seven participants were tenured teachers, teaching for over 5 years. One teacher was non-tenured with less than 5 years but with more than 1 year teaching experience; one of the requirements for this study was at least 6 months to a year of teaching experience. All participants were Black. All participants taught at various predominately Black schools in the state of Alabama. All participants preferred to be interviewed via Zoom. During the interview process, each participant was associated with a pseudonym which prevented the need to track interview results based on their name. Each participant was associated with the letter P for the participant and the ordered number, 1-8, of the interview. In the study, participants will be referenced as P1-P8. Table 1 includes participant demographics.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant	Gender identity	Tenured/nontenured	Specialty
P-1	Female	Tenured	Physical education
P-2	Female	Tenured	Elementary
P-3	Female	Tenured	Special ed
P-4	Male	Tenured	Secondary
P-5	Female	Tenured	Secondary
P-6	Female	Tenured	Elementary
P-7	Male	Tenured	Secondary
P-8	Female	Nontenured	Secondary

Setting

Participants had the option to have interviews either in person, via telephone, or videoconferencing. Each participant opted for videoconferencing via Zoom. I scheduled the interviews at the convenience of the participants. Each participant was sent a specific link that required a meeting code and password to enter the meeting. Once the participant logged in, I allowed them access into the videoconference, this precaution was taken to ensure that no one other than the participant entered the session during the interview period.

Once the participant was accepted into the meeting, I changed their screen name to a participant code. I started the interview by asking if they were in a private setting. If they responded no, I asked to reschedule the interview. If they answered yes, I restated that the meeting was private and confidential and that if they felt uncomfortable at any time during the interview that they could withdraw from the interview without consequences. Each participant joined their scheduled interviews and after obtaining verbal consent to audio record, the interview began. Each meeting was audio recorded, transcribed, and interpreted with few technical difficulties. There were no variations to the study that affected the interviews, the participant's experience during the interview, or the interpretation of the study.

Data Collection

I recruited eight individuals for this generic qualitative study. Participants were recruited via social media. I posted the flyer the day I received permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board. Facebook and Instagram were the social

media platforms used for recruiting. Some of my social media friends shared the flyer. I received requests to participate in the study through text messages, media messaging, and phone voicemail. I contacted each participant according to their preferences.

After the individuals were contacted, I asked them the qualifying questions. If they qualified, an interview was scheduled, and the consent form was sent to them via email. The participants returned the consent form via email prior to the start of the interview process. The interviews were conducted via Zoom. Each participant was selected to be interviewed via Zoom. I sent a link through both text and email. For all participants, interviews were conducted in a secluded location in my home. Prior to starting the interviews, I made sure that I had obtained the signed consent forms. All interviews were recorded using an audio-recorder via Zoom, no video was recorded. The interviews ranged from 30 to 55 min. Once the interviews were completed, I looked at the state public policies related to the themes that were mentioned by the participants. The public policies from 2020-2022 were reviewed. I documented relevant content such as COVID-19 protocol and guidance for opening schools during COVID-19. I also reviewed the content in my journal.

Data Analysis

When the interviews were completed, I used Zoom's ability to transcribe the interviews. I emailed the transcribed document to each participant after transferring the Zoom transcript into a Word document. Each participant responded via email stating that his or her transcript was accurate and that no changes were necessary. The first level of coding involves becoming familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I familiarized

myself with the data by reviewing each transcript and carefully reading what each participant had stated to check for emerging themes before coding and mapping in Microsoft Excel. Based on careful adherence to Braun and Clarke's direction for thematic analysis, I categorized and coded the data. I extracted each line of each interview into a row in Excel for each participant, and I was careful not to leave any additional spacing between rows or to place more than one sentence in each row. After careful extraction, I scanned each participant row by row to surmise a summary of each statement and placed that summary in the first available column. These summaries became my codes.

Second level coding was also done using Microsoft Excel. I generated initial codes from each summary which encapsulated the main thought of the statement in a few words (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Next, I color coded the codes per participant before next grouping the codes by color to map them to subthemes. I concluded with 15 subthemes and 117 codes total. Based on the approach of Braun and Clarke, I began to search for themes. The data analysis process included using mapping and coding through highlighting recurrent content in phrases, descriptions, reactions, and common words. Some of those recurring concepts included "relationships with students" and "stress due to the unknown" as well as "MH not a priority for administrators." I used mapping to help with analysis and interpretation of collected data to review and define themes before connecting themes to the conceptual framework and to the literature review, as described by Braun and Clark (2006). I ultimately arrived at five overarching themes, 15 subthemes, and 117 codes (see Table 2).

Table 2*Number of Codes per Theme and/or Subtheme*

Theme (subtheme)	No. of codes per theme
Theme 1: Teacher Health Was Negatively Affected by the Pandemic	
Subtheme 1: Physical and Special Ed Isolation	4
Subtheme 2: Virtual and Technology	11
Subtheme 3: Teacher Mental Health	30
Subtheme 4: Teacher Overall Health	4
Subtheme 5: Change and Mental Health	13
Theme 2: (Lack of) Access to Needed Resources Was Seminal.	
Subtheme 6: Access to resources	7
Subtheme 7: Mental Health Resources	20
Theme 3: Students Disconnected from Learning	11
Theme 4: School Leadership Challenges Adapting to Changes	
Subtheme 9: Benefits and Incentives	5
Subtheme 10: Timetable	4
Subtheme 11: Teacher Resilience and Self-Care	3
Theme 5: Uncertainty Affected Teachers, Students, and Families	11
Subtheme 13: Communication and Guidance	13
Subtheme 14: Unclear/Confusion	6
Subtheme 15: Autonomy/Agency	3
Total	117

At the third level of coding, I connected the codes to my theoretical framework. I mapped these codes to concepts in CrSMHP. These connecting phrases included direct quotes from the theoretical framework such as “CrSMHP contends that neutrality is dangerous and damaging to underrepresented students in an unjust system” (Ulie-Wells et al., 2020, p. 188), as well as more conceptual connections such as relational aspect from teacher is clearer here based on teacher/participant using language of being in a vacuum, which shows that participant craved human connection.

The fourth and final level of coding included developing and naming (Braun & Clarke, 2006) overarching themes which overlapped the subthemes and bound many together. Themes included those that were aligned with information included in the literature review and which arose in my reflexive journal prior to and during the study. They included teacher MH was overwhelmingly negatively affected by the pandemic and response to it; lack of clarity; (in)effective communication strategies; autonomy affected teachers, students, and families; and access to needed resources was seminal. Several themes emerged that were relevant to the research question. These themes will be discussed in the Results section, which aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2006) ultimate step of producing the report.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

During the research process, I carefully documented interactions with the participants, and I was careful to ensure that the study remained transparent without infringing on confidentiality. All documents were saved in participant folders on a secure hard drive purchased solely for this purpose. I was honest and transparent in my interactions with the participants as well as when reading and coding data from interviews. Following each interview, I sent a copy of the transcription of the interview to the participants to confirm that I had correctly transcribed their responses to my questions. Each participant individually agreed that I had correctly transcribed his or her words correctly and had not made any unnecessary alterations (some alterations were made for grammar and were approved by those participants). During the coding process,

I carefully considered the context of each word or phrase in order to be able to code it based on the participant's intention.

Richards et al. (2023) suggested reflective journaling as part of the research process and as a place in which researchers could document thoughts and memories related to their research focus or questions. I kept a journal to record my thoughts as well as answers and ideas presented by participants which were related to my research questions and my focus. In this journal, I shared what inspired critical thought, what I felt were notable quotes and concepts and ideas or phrases that I felt influenced by. I attempted to be transparent in my thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and biases throughout the process. I also tried to understand the context of participants' thoughts and descriptions of events to ensure that their intended meaning was not lost.

Transferability

I explored the experiences of teachers at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic to understand the effects on their MH. It has the potential to transfer to other teachers in other areas of the United States. The goals were to understand how teachers experienced MHWB support during the COVID-19 pandemic, how teachers' MHWB were impacted when there were rapid adjustments to curricula changes, and how policies related to specific accommodations when dealing with stressors regarding such adjustments could improve.

Dependability

Throughout the study, I kept a reflexive journal of my thoughts, feelings, biases, and preconceptions about what might happen during the research process. I wrote about

how participants' responses affected me and whether aligned with or did not align with my predictions about what they might say. I recorded in the journal after each interview and reflected on what was said as well as participants' body language and nonverbal cues as well as participants' verbal cadence and pauses. If pauses were noted, participants were asked if they needed a break or some time to think and if they wanted to continue the interview.

After journaling and interviewing, I examined my views concerning emerging themes and made notes in my research. I emailed transcripts of each interview to each of the participants for member checking. The member checking was done to ensure that I had transcribed the interviews correctly and without bias. All the transcripts were read and approved by the participants. No second interviews were requested.

Confirmability

A detailed description of how this study was conducted is available in the methods section contained in Chapter 3. There were some variations in study methodology; due to time considerations, the Walden participant pool was not utilized; no participants selected an in-person interview; and no participants requested a second interview. I created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to organize, map, and code participant data and to recognize themes. These procedures and tools have made it possible for the study to be duplicated.

Results

The research question for this study was, how did the response to COVID-19 affect the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic? The

results were divided into themes that emerged regarding the research question. Five themes were discovered during data analysis. Subthemes were discovered within each theme and may be taken into consideration for further research. The five themes discovered during data analysis were teachers' health was negatively affected by the pandemic; access to needed resources was seminal; students disconnected from learning; school leadership challenges adapting to changes; and uncertainty affected teachers, students, and families (see Table 3).

Table 3*Theme 1 Subthemes and Codes*

Subtheme	Subtheme description	No. of codes	Code (no. of coded references)
Physical and special education isolation	This subtheme corresponds with teachers feeling isolated.	4	Had to find ways to teach virtually (2) Few solutions with teaching students with special needs (2)
Change and mental health	This subtheme relates with teachers having to adapt to change affected participants.	13	In person versus virtual (4) Expectation about effectiveness of implementations (4) Inability to see progress in students (3) Lack of motivation (1) Lots of retirements (1)
Teachers' overall health	This subtheme corresponds to the need for counseling and how teachers had to cope with losing colleagues.	4	Stressful due to prevalence of disease (1)
Virtual and technology	This subtheme conveys how teacher health and performance were affected by use of and access to technology.	11	Virtual learning required extra work and provided more challenges. (6) Some technical platforms were helpful for mental health. (4) Mastered schedule. (1)

Theme 1: Teachers' Health Was Negatively Affected by the Pandemic

To a person, each participant utilized a negative MH descriptive to communicate their feelings and emotions during the pandemic experience. P1 noted that their

experience as a parent was greater than their stress as a teacher, but that neither was stress free. P2 reported working to ensure that decisions made by administrators and policy makers did not adversely affect that participant's MH. P3 communicated experiencing "weekly anxiety, and co-workers getting sick" as an additional cause of stress. P3 also reported that the overall pandemic experience was stressful and "it felt like no one cared." P4 reported feeling worried that teachers were "not equipped and we didn't have what we needed." P4 reported that being a special ed teacher added additional stress because "it was more challenging." "Mentally dealing with so many changes were challenging," P4 added. P5 reported feeling trauma and grief from COVID-19 and the effects of COVID-19. P6 expressed experiencing and hearing about others experiencing "daily, even hourly stress for teachers." P7 -- who reported having some MH training— noted that they were "unaware of my feelings initially, but eventually I realized that I was depressed and had shut down." P8 reported that the pandemic was a "hard strain on teachers" and reported that duties and communication from administrators added "lots of extra stress."

Several participants mentioned that adjusting their teaching style- including grading policies - during the pandemic was a major stressor, and all participants mentioned grading policies as a stressor. P7 recalled a conversation with administrators about grading and remembered the policy discussed as "bizarre" including pressure "not to fail" students, but also verbalized that "I think they came up with the best plan they could have under the circumstances." P2 suggested making changes to "improve the grading system for remote learning assignments." Several participants suggested greater

accountability for students as a means of easing the potential stress that was caused by grading policies during remote teaching and learning.

Subtheme 1: Physical and Special Education Isolation

Participants who taught physical education and special education felt abandoned. Keywords and phrases for the feelings of isolation code included "had to find ways to teach PE [physical education] virtually," "how to teach students in other locations," "challenges working virtually with deaf students," and "few solutions for students with special needs." P1 stated that physical education teachers had to find ways to teach physical education virtually without guidance from administrators. "My biggest thing was how am I going to teach these kids with them being in one place and me being in another place." P4 verbalized that there were challenges working with deaf children. P4, "the administrators moved quickly to virtual learning, but they failed to come up with solutions for children who had special needs."

Subtheme 2: Virtual/Technology and Connectivity Issues

Some participants discussed issues pertaining to technology and connectivity. Keywords and phrases that were coded under technology and connectivity issues included "virtual was a real challenge," "SEL [social-emotional learning] platform was helpful for MH," "helped to destress," "challenges accommodating virtual schedule versus in person," "technical difficulties," and "mastered schedule." The teachers were going to make sure that each student had what they needed to continue their education virtually. However, connectivity issues were one of the major problems with virtual learning. Some of the teachers' stressors was due to the time spent trying to make sure

each student was connected. When the connection failed, teachers had to get creative with getting students caught up. P2, "Teachers had to adapt to new challenges and find creative ways to connect with students. Lack of resources in underserved communities was a major issue.

Subtheme 3: Teacher Mental Health

Participants reported feeling underequipped, mentally exhausted, frustrated, and overwhelmed, and not wanting to teach anymore as the result of their experiences during the pandemic. Keywords and phrases that were coded under teacher MH included "MH severely impacted," "don't feel like MH was affected," "teachers no longer want to teach is sign of MH issues," "teachers self-reported to psychiatrists/MH professionals," "wouldn't change anything," "MH does not have start or stopping point," "mentally exhausting," and "needed breaks." One of the most commonly mentioned causes for negative effects on teacher MH was stress and anxiety from losing colleagues to COVID-19. Several participants reported dealing with the grief of losing beloved colleagues and some mentioned the fear that their own lives might be in danger. A few participants mentioned the infrastructural issues associated with the pandemic and health consequences.

While for many participants losing colleagues to COVID-19 meant colleagues dying as the result of exposure to the virus, for others it meant attrition from the secondary effects of COVID-19 such as quitting out of frustration or from physical exhaustion of taking care of oneself as well as family members. Each participant reported

stress and anxiety from losing colleagues to COVID-19 in one form or another. P6 recounted the last time seeing a colleague prior to that colleague's death:

He was separating his class trying to get home because he said he just didn't feel good. His eyes were bloodshot red. He was having a hard time breathing. And then the next time I heard anything about him was 2 or 3 days later, and that was that he was in the hospital, but he never made it out of, you know, next time I saw him was in his coffin.

P6 continued, "I felt like administrators were trying to keep teachers safe, but this is completely not; this feels like a war zone, and you are constantly in a situation that feels stressful." P3 said, "I had several coworkers during that time [of the pandemic] who developed 3- and 4-day workweeks and others retired early. Some took leave and just never came back. Several left the system due to frustration." P4 revealed that several fellow teachers left the system or left teaching altogether due to frustration with a lack of support. P8, "we had teachers that, you know, just said that, hey, I'm not coming back or, you know, I'm going to take a leave for 2 or 3 years." A major reason reported for the negative effects of the pandemic was the lack of access to needed resources for teachers.

Theme 2: (Lack of) Access to Needed Resources Was Seminal

Several participants reported not having what they needed or not having it when they needed it. Participants mentioned not having access to technology, communication, or guidance regarding the next steps or access to MH resources when needed. Some participants suggested that this lack of access may have contributed to the exodus of teachers and the current shortage of educational professionals. Several participants

reported having (and often expressing) a need for resources, but not having access to those needed resources (see Table 4).

Table 4

Theme 2 Subthemes and Codes

Subtheme	Subtheme description	No. of codes	Code (no. of coded references)
Access to resources	This subtheme depicts how teachers' mental health was affected by the lack of access to resources other than mental health.	7	Stress related to work (3) Severe mental health impact (4) Frustrated and overwhelmed (8) Little to no effect on mental health (5) Needed stress relief (5) Little access to mental health therapy (5)
Mental health resources	This subtheme depicts how teachers' mental health was affected by the lack of access to mental health resources.	20	In-person versus virtual (4) Expectations about the effectiveness of implementations (4) Inability to see progress in students (3) Lack of motivation Lots of retirements

P2 noted, "Initially, there were no resources for managing MH way down the line; once we had more technology resources, the PE coaches in my district facilitated yoga as a means to impact MH and mental wellness." P8 noted that teachers in predominately Black schools need more psychological care; P4 said several times during the interview that teachers had access to MH therapy and also stated that often, teachers had to seek out therapy on their own. P4 also reported that teachers might have time to talk with school

counselors- who have little to no MH education or training. P4 said teachers did not have “everything we needed to really sufficiently work with the kids” and later added that they were not sure at the time of the interview if the district was currently prepared. P4 also reported that students had trouble learning at least partially due to teachers not having needed resources – “Our scholars are so far behind because we didn't have the tools.” P6 reported having personal resources but not much more.

Subtheme 1: Limited Access to Resources

Additionally, participants reported not being aware of or not having access to MHWB resources. Keywords and phrases that were coded as limited access to MH resources included "resources not readily available," "not having tools led to learning loss," "more resources in under-resourced school helps to be prepared," "not equipped," and "more resources equal less burnout." P7 reported not being sure if resources were available during the height of the pandemic, and P7 also reported knowing that “the option was there” but not being clear of what MHWB resources were available and where or how to access those resources. P8 noted that the school parent-teacher association provided resources, including massages and gift cards; the participant did not know of any additional MHWB resources.

Subtheme 2: Limited Access to Mental Health Resources

Specifically, access to MH resources was a subtheme among participants. Keywords and phrases that fell under the code of limited access to MH resources included

- "no access to MHT, possible time with school counselor"

- "no additional MH resources"
- "help line counseling available"
- "COVID education resources available with stipends available"
- "personal resources but not much more"
- "not sure if MH resources were available"
- "did great job providing MH resources"
- "do not recall specific resources available"
- "later access to counseling services"
- "option was there, but not clear on structure of MH resources"
- "PTA [parent–teacher association] helped provide resources"
- "massage therapy available"

Although several participants mentioned having some access to formal professional MH support, only one, P3, mentioned actually accessing that support. “I found myself in therapy sessions at times just to make sense of it.” P7 vocalized that there was a lack of support and resources that focused on teacher well-being. P4 mentioned the need for additional MH support to aid in dealing with students’ who needed MH support- “We didn't have everything we needed. You know, to work with the kids really sufficiently. We weren’t prepared; the school district as a whole wasn't prepared for a quick shutdown.” P8 also stated that several teachers “saw psychiatrists or just different types of doctors just for the stress that they were put under” but that these visits were of the teachers’ own accord, not based on referral by the school system.

Theme 3: Students Disconnected from Learning

A rather odd theme was the concept of students being disconnected from learning- whether as the result of not being in an in-person classroom, not having access to technology, or just not being motivated to learn (see Table 5). The theme was mentioned in some form 11 times by several participants. P3 said, “I wasn’t really used to the level of disengagement,” P2 reported being concerned about students’ MH because “they’re seeing parents pass away day-by-day.” P7 reported missing the relationship with students and becoming frustrated with an entire class that would log into virtual school, “and they wouldn’t even share their screens.” P8 was frustrated that some students “would not log on to any platforms to do work- it was mentally straining. It put a lot of extra stress on us.”

Table 5

Theme 3 Codes

Description	Code (coded references)	(No. of coded references)
This theme corresponds to the impact of how students were disconnected from learning	Challenges teaching students who were not motivated: mentally straining	1
	Students did not put forth effort when virtual	2
	Much lower level of learning during virtual	2
	Young students didn’t understand distancing	1
	Students did not comply with rules when virtual	2
	Missed relationships with students	1
	Students did not comply with the dress code when virtual	2

Would like to assess students for
 data purposes
 Students were motivation for
 timeliness
 Students now have access to
 technology

Several participants reported negative perceptions of student performance, particularly during the virtual learning phase of the pandemic, and several potential reasons for this phenomenon were mentioned. P7 reported that students did not comply with conduct rules, put forth an effort, or comply with dress code rules during virtual learning. P5 reported a notably lower level of learning during virtual school and a desire to assess students “for data purposes.” P3 reported poor attendance and a lack of engagement by students- “I wasn’t really used to the level of disengagement.” P2 reported being concerned about student MH based on observations of students during virtual learning, noting “the children suffered the most” during the pandemic. “they’re seeing family members pass away in their day-to-day.” P4 reported that students had trouble learning, at least partially due to teachers not having the necessary resources: “Our scholars are so far behind because we didn’t have the tools.”

Theme 4: School Leadership and Challenges Adapting to Changes

Participants overwhelmingly supported administrators at the school and district levels with a few outliers. Four subthemes – the amount of time needed to respond to challenges, benefits and incentives offered, the expectation of teacher resilience and self-care, and the clarity of administrative decision-making—were included in this theme. Some participants noted the many factors involved with the decisions made and the

decision-making progress, and as a result, many participants encouraged grace for school leaders and administrators. Other participants appeared to be closer to the consequences of poor (or slow) administrative decision-making and decried both the process and the decisions made.

All of the participants vocalized that there were few external incentives for teachers to continue working during the pandemic (see Table 6). P8 communicated that there were what might be called, supports for MH- “such as gift cards and massages, but nothing else was given to us. They would honor the days that we were off, but that’s about it.” While several- in fact, nearly all participants reported being internally motivated to continue working during the pandemic, only a few mentioned actual external motivating incentives being provided or even offered during the pandemic. P6 mentioned that teachers could receive additional supplemental pay for completing professional development modules related to the COVID-19 pandemic. P3 and P4 spoke about how paid MH days and resources for better internet connectivity were beneficial but also acknowledged the need for improved incentivizing and support systems in future crises or pandemics. Several participants expressed that the lack of support incentives, particularly in predominately Black schools—was detrimental to their MH as well as that of their colleagues. P7 revealed that although new challenges, roles, or methods were introduced during the pandemic, no new incentives or support were provided, and teachers needed to care for themselves.

Table 6*Theme 4 Subthemes and Codes*

Subtheme	Subtheme description	No. of codes	Codes (no. of code references)
Benefits and Incentive	Incentives offered before, during and since height of pandemic to recruit/retain teachers	5	Need a raise in pay. Lost teacher after offering incentives. District motivated by limited number of sick days. Massages/gift cards Days off honored if teacher tested positive for COVID-19.
Timetable	The amount of time needed to respond to challenges presented by pandemic	4	Slow district response led to the loss of teachers. No shift in policy until school year (2) Response time was great.
Teacher Resilience and self-care	The need for teachers to provide for and care for themselves	3	Teachers supported each other. (3)
Admin decision-making	Participant thoughts about school and district admin during pandemic	20	Admin needs to know demographics. (3) Admin candid as possible under circumstances (4) Did best they could under circumstances. (5) Talk about addressing the issues but no changes were made. (6) Admin used rooms for teachers' selfcare. (2)

Subtheme 1: Limited Incentives for Teachers

Many participants, while expressing an understanding of and alliance with school administrators, noted a pervasive tendency of school leaders at many levels to adapt slowly to rapid changes during the pandemic. The code of limited incentives included keywords and phrases such as "need raise in pay," "district lacks teachers even with incentives," "district motivated by the limited number of sick days," "massages and gift cards," and "days off honored if teacher tested positive for COVID-19." P2 said,

Honestly, the school system wasn't prepared as no one was eventually. A lot of anxiety was just from being concerned about family members, concerned about students, and it was, you know, it's trying to figure out ways to get some sort of normalcy and adjust to the new normal.

Subtheme 2: Timetable

The amount of time it took administrators to respond was a concern for several participants. The timetable code was associated with the following keywords and phrases: "slow district response led to loss of teachers," "no shift in policy until the new school year," and "response time was great." P4 opined that the slow district response to teacher needs and requests led to the loss of several teachers- "what I do know[and] what I can tell you in this manner is that it caused a lot of teachers to retire." P3 noted that because of the delay in decision-making, "you don't have time to fully train" and therefore, the participant ended up "being thrust completely [into virtual teaching] without having the tools in place..."

Subtheme 3: Teacher Resilience and Self-Care

Several participants mentioned that self-care was essential for them and due to not having access to other resources, they took their MHWB into their own hands. "Teachers supported each other" was a phrase associated with the teacher resilience and self-care code. P1 said, "COVID-19 affected me because I was so worried about catching it. I'm type one diabetic." In addition to reacting, some participants practiced proactive self-care. P6 verbalized that although counseling services were "always available, the big push for counseling did not start until the next school year [after COVID-19 shut down schools]. They started sending out emails and flyers about getting counseling for teachers." P3 stated that using MH days was a proactive measure: "So I was making sure that I take at least an MH day a month, and I continued that thing all the way up until this year." P3 also mentioned contracting COVID-19 and having to provide self-care as a result. "I can't say that the teaching part became stressful, but just the COVID-19 because I caught it." Several participants communicated having contracted COVID-19 during the pandemic and the contraction adding stress to their lives. Another stressor for many participants was the necessity of caring for family and community members.

Subtheme 4: Admin Decision-Making

Almost to a person, participants decried the ability—and for some, the apparent lack of willingness—to adapt to changes brought on by the pandemic (see Table 7). Participants mentioned communication and a lack of clarity in the guidance given, in addition to the lack of autonomy for teachers, as challenges that arose due to the inability

or unwillingness to adapt. Participants noted the lack of adaptation as a source of stress and anxiety during the pandemic.

Table 7

Codes and Associated Keywords/Phrases for Admin Decision-Making

Code	Keywords/Phrases
Admin utilized available rooms for teacher self-care.	“Made a wellness room out of the free room.”
Good principal support	“Our principal did support us very well.”
District not prepared	“Were we prepared? No. Was the district prepared? No.”
Admin needs to study effects on different demographic	“I would want each administrator to look at the demographic.”
Little to no commitment to teacher mental health	“Little to no commitment to teacher mental health.”
No politics played with teacher health.	“No politics played with teacher health.”
Admin was as candid as possible under the circumstances.	“I think that they were as candid as they could be.”
Talk about addressing- no implementation (2)	“I remember...having a meeting about addressing that, but I don't remember it being implemented.” (2)
No changes in roles or duties	“Our principal didn't change our roles and duties.”

Theme 5: School Leadership Challenges Adapting to Changes

Communication and guidance were the subthemes most often mentioned by participants as challenges during the pandemic experience (see Table 8). P6 reported hearing “from the district” that “we are doing it (changes in school policy) for your safety.” Still, it appeared to question the statement based on the coexisting policy about days off with a positive COVID test result. P7 seemed to be equally unsure about policy as communicated when asked about where to get information about next steps during the pandemic: “I don't recall any, you know, maybe they said, you know, mentioned maybe a

phone line or something like that, but I don't recall anything in particular.” P8 reported not receiving any communique from school leadership – “everything pretty much came from the school board.” P4 recalled, “The communication part, in the beginning, was not good.” P4 recalled receiving communication from several sources, but “you'll get one thing from the district, then your principal will call you with something else.”

Table 8*Theme 5 Subthemes and Codes*

Subtheme	Subtheme description	No. of codes	Code (no. of coded references)
Communication and guidance	Effects of communication and types of communication during the pandemic	14	Information dispersed among several channels Communication from admin not good enough Info was contradictory. Communication with parents was a high priority. Need motivated teachers to learn technology. Had not heard of Zoom prior to pandemic. Received better direction after return to in person. All guidance came from the school board. Principal could give guidance.
Unclear/confusion	How not knowing things they needed to know affected teachers/participant	6	Change in teaching context had Negative impact on mental health. Lack of clear communication led to stress. Unknown led to stress. Not sure if prepared for COVID-19. Not having answers caused teachers to not want to continue. No politics played with teacher health.
Autonomy/agency	Freedom of participants to make and follow through with decisions during pandemic	4	Lost (and losing) teachers due to not being able to help students. Mass exodus due to feeling like they failed students. Beyond control, had to enforce change. The inability to help made me feel hindered.

Subtheme 1: Communication and Guidance

The lack of clarity came not only from communication but from actions and guidance as well. Keywords and phrases that were coded as communication and guidance included

- "admin utilized available rooms for teacher self-care"
- "good principal support"
- "district not prepared"
- "admin needs to study effects on different demographic"
- "little to no commitment to teacher MH"
- "no politics played with teacher health"
- "admin was as candid as possible under circumstances"
- "talk about addressing- no implementation"
- "no changes in roles or duties"

Participants noted that sometimes they were left entirely unaware of what to do without any direction in terms of the job description or protocol for what, for many was a new playing field. P4 reported that unknown information only added to the stress: "But your stress and anxiety come in is because you, we didn't know if we were carrying out what we should and if we were still being a good servant to the kids." As a result of not knowing, P4 said that participants were not sure if they were actually prepared to teach during the pandemic or even at the time of the interview – "Are we prepared now as a district? If we had to do a quick shutdown, are we prepared?" In answer to that question,

P4 said, "It caused a lot of teachers to not want to be in education anymore because we didn't have the answers."

Subtheme 2: Unclear/Confusion

It was not only the lack of answers that left a void in school leadership but also the lack of autonomy and the ability to fill that void that frustrated participants. The code unclear/confusion included the following keywords and phrases:

- "change in teaching context had a negative impact on MH"
- "lack of clear comm led to stress"
- "unknown led to stress"
- "not sure if prepared COVID-19"
- "not having answers caused teachers to not want to continue"
- "no politics played with teacher health"
- "change in teaching context had negative impact on MH"
- "lack of clear comm led to stress"
- "unknown led to stress"

P5 reported that "the inability to help students made me feel hindered." P4 noted that it was not just a few teachers who felt what P5 was feeling, as

I believe that was part of why so many hundreds of thousands of teachers retired and don't want to return to education; they don't want to feel they failed the students at any point.

P5 also noted that being able to work behind the impetus of protocol was

the thing I could say positively because you're, you're enforcing a change, you know, and it's, it's beyond our individual control. So, it's like, well, hey, I'm just only doing my job, you know, but you're, you're ensuring that we all are safe.

Subtheme 3: Autonomy/Agency

Many participants, while expressing an understanding of and alliance with school administrators, noted a pervasive tendency of school leaders at many levels to adapt slowly to rapid changes during the pandemic. The autonomy/agency code included the following keywords and phrases: "lost (and losing) teachers due to not being able to help students,"; "mass exodus due to feeling like they failed students,"; "beyond control, had to enforce change"; and "inability to help made me feel hindered." P2 said,

Honestly, I feel the school system wasn't prepared as no one was eventually. A lot of anxiety was just concerned about family members concerned about students.

And it was, you know, trying to figure out ways to get some sort of normalcy and adjust to the new normal.

P4 indicated that the slow district response to teacher needs and requests led to the loss of several teachers- "what I do know[and] what I can tell you in this manner is that it caused a lot of teachers to retire." P3 noted that because of the delay in decision-making, "you don't have time to fully train." Therefore, the participant was " thrust completely [into virtual teaching] without having the tools in place..."

In addition, the long wait for clarity and information also led to teacher loss, according to P4- "It caused a lot of teachers to not want to be in education anymore because we didn't have the answers." Ultimately, P4 noted, "I do believe that was a part

of the reason why so many hundreds of thousands of teachers retired and don't want to come back in education because they don't want to feel they failed the students at any point.” Several participants were understanding and graceful when it came to administrative decision-making; one example of this understanding was P3 who said “they [administrators] were flexible. They set expectations, but they were flexible with those.” Many participants were graceful with administrators and their decision-making and included the phrase “did the best they could,” including P6, who said, “I felt like those decisions were the best decisions that could be made in the given circumstances;” or P7: “I think they, came up with the best plan that they could, considering, you know, what we were having to deal with.” P3 noted several pandemic responses that district leaders made and concluded, “those kinds of things made me feel like, you know, they're, they're trying their best “

P1 was totally supportive of school administration: “ I totally agree with the principal that I had at the time, I agree with all the decisions that she made on our behalf,” but P1 reported that district leadership could have been better prepared: “I feel like every school district should have a plan for any type of situation because you never know what's going to come about.” The overall sense that participants communicated appears to be that the circumstances were the problem/ challenge more than the decisions made as a result, as summed up by P5, who said, “That [support of admin decision-making] is probably the thing I could say positively because you're, you're enforcing a change, you know, and it's, it's beyond our individual control.”

Summary

In Chapter 4, I discussed the data collection process, data analysis process and themes found during the study. The five themes were related to the research question. The first theme that emerged was how the lack of clarity and autonomy affected teachers, students, and families. The second theme was the negative effects of the pandemic on teacher MH. A third theme that emerged during the study was how the lack of access to resources was pivotal in affecting teacher MHWB. The fourth theme was how students were disconnected from learning. The final theme was school and district leadership's challenges in adapting to changes during the pandemic.

Overall, the response to COVID-19 appears to have negatively affected the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic. Teachers either were unaware of services available or services were not available to sufficiently address their MHWB needs; or if those services were available, teachers did not have the incentive, motivation, or time to access them. In a surprising theme, participants accepted administrators' shortcomings in addressing teachers' MHWB needs because administrators were doing the "best they could under the circumstances." Many teachers—pointing to the CrSMHP concept of resiliency—relied on themselves to provide what was needed for both them and their students during what many called the most trying time in their careers as teachers.

In Chapter 5, I reviewed the results of this study and compared them to findings in the literature to determine whether the results confirm or disconfirm previous research. I considered how this study will extend the knowledge of response to teacher MH,

particularly during a crisis. I addressed the study's results according to the topic and conceptual framework to ensure that the findings did not exceed the scope of the study. I discussed the limitations of this study and provided recommendations for future research. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discussed the opportunity for positive social change advances in the field of study due to this research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore how the response to COVID-19 affected the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic to understand their experiences. A generic qualitative study using open-ended semistructured questions to interview teachers was conducted to understand the experiences of teachers at predominately Black schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CrSMHP guided and circumscribed my research. As a fusion of CRT and RCT, CrSMHP proved sufficient to adequately understand the experiences of the participants as well as the phenomena under study. I used CrSMHP to give context and meaning to participants' experiences and their responses to their experiences.

Five themes were discovered using this methodology. These themes were developed from data collected -mainly participants' responses- and were based on CrSMHP in addition to research and a literature review (see Chapter 2), which further added credibility to the methodology and findings of this study. The five themes discovered consisted of the lack of clarity and autonomy and how it affected teachers, students, and families; negative effects of the pandemic on teacher MH; lack of access to resources was pivotal; students were disconnected from learning; and school and district leadership's challenges adapting to changes during the pandemic.

Interpretation of the Findings

The results of this study confirmed previous research regarding MHWB of teachers during COVID-19 and other crises. Although the research was scant in the field of MHWB of teachers in predominately Black schools, using CrSMHP, I found five areas

in which the findings of this study supported previous findings related to MHWB of teachers during COVID-19. The findings from this study confirm the effectiveness of utilizing CrSMHP as the framework to explain the experiences as described by participants.

Evidence From the Literature Review

One participant discussed the lack of resources in underserved communities as a significant issue, and the pandemic had a negative impact on student behavior, with increased cases of child abuse and teen suicide. Horsford et al. (2021) uncovered the impact of racial violence on Black students, families, and communities and reported an increase during the pandemic along with trauma and MH challenges in general. Black educators and those serving underserved communities faced particular challenges due to the lack of resources. Cokley et al. (2021) considered CRT as a means of addressing the COVID-19/racial injustice syndemic and its effect on the MH of Black Americans. They discovered that perceived discrimination partially mediated the relationship between race-related concerns about COVID-19 and MH symptoms.

Administrators were challenged to quickly develop policies related to competently running schools when the COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared in March 2020. Among the many challenges faced by administrators, not including their own MH and job satisfaction, was competently operating a school. Aytac (2020) noted that half of school administrators reported not having an emergency plan regarding pandemic protocol and, as a result, having to follow instructions given by their respective school boards. While the findings of the study corroborated the literature, outcomes for

participants included less stringent protocols or lack of protocols due to lack of guidance from respective school district administrators. The results of this study were interpreted from the perspective of CrSMHP. CrSMHP is used to challenge models that put the onus on the victim to overcome circumstances and instead challenge the root causes of traumas, which are oppressive social systems and their perpetuation in schools. The results of this study were based on participants' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and the responses provided by administrators. Nearly all participants stated that administrators did "the best that they could" under the circumstances, but only one participant questioned the (non-natural) circumstances.

Participants also discussed the efficacy of communication strategies during the pandemic, including using GroupMe, emails, and phone calls. Aytac (2020) documented several problems faced by school administrators during the pandemic, including low learning motivation among students, parents' inability to create a learning environment at home, and the lack of access to live broadcasts from education portals. Participants talked about resources for managing MH, such as self-care and counseling services provided by the school. Some participants mentioned feeling stress and anxiety as both a teacher and a parent during the pandemic. Each participant attested to a strong commitment to the well-being of teachers and students during the pandemic, which indicated a need for improving support systems for future pandemics in predominantly Black schools.

All participants expressed frustration, feeling overwhelmed, or experiencing depression. At first, one participant did not feel the need for MH resources but later realized that they were struggling with depression. Cachon-Zagalaz et al. (2020)

discovered that teachers accumulated elevated stress levels during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The transition to online teaching using platforms like Zoom was particularly challenging for the participants. The shift to remote or hybrid teaching caused stress and frustration, particularly navigating new methods and schedules. Besser et al. (2020) noted that teachers suffered stress during the lockdown from having to adapt to provide online classes quickly.

The communication strategies of the schools during the pandemic caused stress and uncertainty among each participant. There were few resources specifically focused on MH support, but some teachers mentioned the option of talking to someone if needed. The teachers had to navigate their emotional well-being during this time. The challenges of remote teaching during COVID-19 were discussed, including stress, frustration, and unresponsive students during Zoom classes. Some teachers felt their efforts to create a sense of normalcy were not appreciated by some students. The participants felt that the commitment to the teachers' MH at predominantly Black schools was lacking and focused more on meeting students' academic needs. Pressley (2021) advised that stressors were most proximal to burnout for teachers, which led to administrators trying to find ways to respond to teachers' concerns about COVID-19 and students' learning barriers. Participants expressed challenges with attendance and pressure to ensure students do not fail. Some teachers chose to pass students to avoid additional stress. Due to a global pandemic, Blackman (2022) postulated that an entire generation could be left traumatized, uneducated, and unprepared to contribute to economic development and social recovery.

Evidence From the Conceptual Framework

The use of CrSMHP in this context involves dividing these phenomena into three key areas: the need for a critical lens to address the root cause of ongoing systemic oppression, which is reproduced through the policies of institutions and the practices of individuals working in those institutions; the need for intensive professional and personal self-reflection which is needed to challenge stereotypes, biases, and expectations; and the need for collaborative relationships to help to create a culturally conscious school climate (Frey 2013; Moore et al., 2023; Ulie-Wells et al., 2020). The participants discussed the bearing of COVID-19 on the MH of teachers at predominantly Black schools, and some participants mentioned using the pandemic as an opportunity to assess students' knowledge and observe parent-child interactions.

According to Ulie-Wells et al. (2020), administrators, through CrSMHP, could create a new system that could potentially ease stressors related to abrupt changes/transitions due to the pandemic. While racism was not explicitly mentioned in participants' responses, those responses did include a lack of access to needed resources-- including information-- as the result of their schools' racial demographics; this lack of access is foundational to CrSMHP. CrSMHP applications are based on critical reflection on policies and practices dedicated to improving the mental wellness of underserved and underrepresented populations such as those included in demographics of each participants' school.

Theme 1: The Lack of Clarity and Autonomy and How It Affected Teachers, Students and Families

Participant 1 noted how much more autonomy they had as a result of stay-at-home orders. “It [stay-at-home orders] gave me an opportunity to really sit down and take care of me,” P1 reported. P1 reported that this new autonomy was beneficial for their MH and also caused them to question the previous lack of autonomy- “it also gave us more time to accommodate ourselves with our MH and self-care because we had more time since we were home versus in the school building.” P1 also reported that stay-at-home orders “gave us the opportunity to really see what our kids knew and what they did not know” in effect giving a clarity which P1 found challenging during the “normal” school year. Participant 6 also stated how much the shift to stay-at-home was beneficial in terms of autonomy: “honestly, it made me feel better. I became a master at scheduling and managing my time.”

Evidence From the Literature Review

The first theme that emerged was the lack of clarity and autonomy and how it affected teachers, students, and families. According to Pressley (2021) several stressors were most proximal to burnout for teachers, which led to administrators trying to find ways to respond to teachers’ concerns about COVID as well as to students’ learning barriers. Aytac (2020) stated that half of the school administrators reported not having an emergency action plan regarding the pandemic protocol and thus having to follow the instructions given by their respective school boards. Cohen and Willemsen (2022)

discovered that many teachers expressed frustration with administration's lack of responsiveness or direction.

Evidence From the Conceptual Framework

According to Ulie-Wells et al. (2020), administrators, through CrSMHP, could create a new system that could potentially ease stressors related to abrupt changes/transitions due to the pandemic. While racism was not explicitly mentioned in participants' responses, those responses did include a lack of access to needed resources-- including information-- as the result of their schools' racial demographics; this lack of access is foundational to CrSMHP. CrSMHP focuses on critical reflection on policies and practices dedicated to improving the mental wellness of underserved and underrepresented populations such as those included in demographics of each participants' school.

Theme 2: Negative Effects of The Pandemic on Teacher Mental Health

Participant 2 reported feeling stressed because "we didn't know if we were being held accountable for the learning loss that we knew would occur." Participant 3 stated bluntly: "teaching wasn't the problem; it was people getting sick." Participant 6 echoed P3 in stating: "it was real stressful for me because- the first time I got it [COVID-19], I don't know if I got it from my partner or if I gave it to my partner or if one of my kids brought it home; but my partner almost died from it." P6 also reported that "I had three co-workers to pass away during the time that we were transitioning from in-person to stay-at-home." While for many participants losing colleagues to COVID meant colleagues dying as the result of exposure to others with the virus, for some others it

meant attrition from the secondary effects of COVID such as quitting out of frustration or from physical exhaustion of taking care of oneself as well as family members. Each participant reported stress and anxiety from losing colleagues to COVID in one form or another. Several participants reported negative effects from secondary effects of the COVID-19 pandemic such as additional workload, family dynamics and other related issues.

Evidence From the Literature Review

Horsford et al. (2021) reported that Black communities experienced widespread loss and devastation resulting from COVID-19 in areas such as disproportionate hospitalizations, dangerous working conditions, joblessness, housing and food insecurity, and the loss of family, friends, and community members. Participants reported experiencing each of these either themselves or their colleagues, and they also reported the negative effect that these experiences had on their MHWB. Allen et al. (2020) reported finding waves of anxiety especially for public school teachers as the result of the decision to close and eventually reopen schools.

Evidence From the Conceptual Framework

Resilience has been defined as “an effective adaptation to, or a navigation (or management) of, significant sources of traumatic stress or adversity and the capacity to absorb disturbance to harness resources effectively” (Denckla et al., 2020, p.3). CrSMHP challenges models of resiliency which put the onus on the victim to overcome circumstances because the tone of most resiliency models suggests the responsibility is on the oppressed individual to overcome the situation. The focus of CrSMHP is on the

systemic issues present in policy, actions, and addresses those and how they might be addressed and, if necessary, changed.

Theme 3: Lack of Access to Resources Was Pivotal.

P2 noted that lack of resources played a big part in the eventual learning gap: “I guess being at a Black school, we just didn’t have the resources to sustain learning during that time.” P2 specified that “we didn’t have the devices that, you know, certain schools over the mountain have- like affluent, well-off schools have.” Access to MH resources was also important to participants: P2 stated, “I don’t think it [MH] was a priority for my district in the beginning.” When asked about MH resources, P4 responded, “ We didn't have any; the only thing that we had was you can have time with your school counselor.” While not viewing it as a negative, P5 replied that there were various numbers of teachers who could call for services or “we could always email our school counselors.” When asked about MH therapy options, P7 said, “I don't recall any, you know, maybe they mentioned a phone line or something like that, but I don't recall anything in particular.” P7 recalled later in the interview that they were suffering from depression but were not aware until later:

I didn't realize it until, you know, after it [stay-at-home] that, I was really depressed. I remember one day, I couldn't get out of the bed, you know, and I was talking to somebody, you know, maybe, some months later and shared that I just couldn't function.

Had P7 had access—or known of access—to an MH professional, their mental health issues could have been discovered or potentially even prevented.

Evidence From the Literature Review

Zhou and Yao (2020) found that if there is no relief for teachers' psychological distress in a timely manner, their teaching and well-being may be affected, directly impacting students' MH. As many of the participants were also parents, it is notable that Patrick et al. (2020) found that 27% of parents reported worsening MH for themselves during the pandemic. Additionally, the deterioration of MH was worse for working parents, and MH deterioration was strongly aligned with increased financial insecurity and time spent on childcare and homeschooling (Cheng et al., 2020). Gloster et al. (2020) reported that those without social support tended to be those whose MH was most negatively impacted by the pandemic. While there was no explicit mention of MH resources (or lack thereof), a clear need for such support was evident in the literature reviewed. Kumar et al. (2021) noted that a lack of resources and proper training were liabilities to student (online) learning, which played a pivotal and crucial role during the pandemic.

Evidence From the Conceptual Framework

CrSMHP incorporates a critical and self-reflective lens which would encourage participants to rely on relationship rather than administrators or MH providers to address MH concerns. Still, based on the equity-focus of CrSMHP, if anyone has access to professional MH, then all who have need should have access. It appears—based on the responses of several participants—that said access was either unavailable or information regarding such help was unavailable. As a result, participants had to rely on one another not only for resources, but for information as to the availability of resources and how to

access those resources. In building on Ulie Wells' CrSMHP, Teemant et al. (2021) noted that with the current mindset in schools, school administrators disregard social determinants of MH and try to get disadvantaged students to be or function like middle class, White students. Again, extending this theoretical framework to teachers as well as students, this mindset does not "facilitate identifying or critically reflecting on how systemic oppression creates and sustains MH distress and disparities within schools" (Teemant et al., 2021, p. 59).

Theme 4: Students Being Disconnected from Learning

P2 stated, "I think the people who suffered the most were the children because they're used to being- actually, we all are used to being social." P3 reported, "I wasn't used to the level of (student) disengagement." P4 repeatedly mentioned wondering if they were effective in teaching students during this transition: "The other thing that worked on your MH was [wondering] were you effective to the child." P6 had a similar concern: "I wish we had in place something that would allow us to test the students, as we had before [COVID-19] just for data purposes, to see." P4 generalized their thinking to state: "I believe that part of the reason why so many hundreds of thousands of teachers retired and don't want to come back into education is because they don't want to feel like they failed the students at some point."

Evidence From the Literature Review

There was a plethora of information in the literature about how remote teaching increased stress for both students and teachers. Blackman (2022) conveyed that when teachers moved from their classrooms to online teaching, the abrupt move ultimately

disrupted the entire education system. Diana (2022) stated that the abrupt move led to increased levels of stress and a decrease in MHWB of students and teachers. In addition, upon their return to the classroom in the fall of 2020, many teachers returned to different environments, instructional approaches, and daily routines, and they faced new requirements, new job expectations, and new classroom environments (Pressley, 2021). Galuppo et al. (2022) reported that absent presences can be both threatening and productive in distance learning. They can be threatening because these silent and invisible groups of students cause teachers and students to question their identities with respect to their opposite and productive because of the impossibility of giving meaning to those identities.

Evidence From the Conceptual Framework

Drawing upon RCT as part of the framework, CrSMHP is built on the premise that humans—and in this case, teachers and students—grow both through and toward connection, and that even when this connection is virtual, interruptions in connection damage not only the relationship, but the individuals involved as well (Frey 2013; Moore et al., 2023). This damage manifests in individuals as stress or anxiety that comes as the result of an inability to meet the desire for more connection, which is a core component of RCT. Oddly enough, the lack of connection needed by teachers and students was challenging to establish on a virtual platform—which in turn led to the need for a greater connection that was unavailable. This lack of a needed connection, in turn, led to an increase in stress and anxiety for teachers and students, which often prompted students to

no longer seek connection or to disconnect altogether. Ulie Wells (2020) proposed using CrSMHP to explore improving MH for all marginalized identities.

Theme 5: School and District Leadership’s Challenges Adapting to Changes During the Pandemic

P4 noted that the slow district response played a large part in the lack of teacher retention and the loss of teachers during the school year: “because they [school administrators] moved so slowly; we lost so many teachers.” P4 noted no one was prepared to adapt to changes in the educational landscape: “Were we prepared-no; was the district prepared- no; can it be better- yes it can.” P8—who was in a principal training program at the time of the interview after teaching for over 20 years-- claimed that administrative leadership was most needed and most lacking during the transition to hybrid teaching:

The shift to hybrid teaching. It was rough and, you know, alone with stress alone comes other problems and those other problems were again, just going above beyond our call of duty to do things that we didn't have to do if the kids were there with us [in the school building].

P3 reported that it took more than one teacher strike to coerce administrators of the need to adjust to teacher requests: “There was a point where teachers did go on a couple of strikes within our district anyway.” P3 reported that teachers were striking for “concurrent pay and more PPE [personal protective equipment].” In addition, P3 noted, when there wasn’t striking, “there was a lot of complaining, a lot of fussing and a lot of challenging to do more.”

Evidence From the Literature Review

Blackman (2022) observed how the pandemic worldwide presented unprecedented challenges for administrators (and teachers) at predominately Black schools during the pandemic and, particularly regarding the equity-in-education agenda. Additionally, administrators faced several challenges in making policies related to the education system (Aytac, 2020; Karakose et al., 2021). Many challenges were challenging because school leaders were caught between having to make on-the-spot and in-the-moment decisions while relying on guidance about processes, responses, and procedures from above themselves in the chain of command (Harris & Jones, 2020). According to Aytac (2020), half of the administrators questioned reported not having an emergency action plan for the pandemic protocol and, as a result, having to follow instructions given by their respective school boards.

Evidence From the Conceptual Framework

CrSMHP was developed with the concept of teachers as powerholders and students as objects rather than persons with autonomy (Ulie-Wells et al., 2020). CrSMHP was extended with the permission of one of the founders of CrSMHP- Dr. Ulie-Wells—to consider teachers as objects and administrators as powerholders. In the context of this extension, teachers can be viewed as those who are expected to be resilient rather than those who are allowed to identify and interrogate the systemic oppression created in schools.

Just as youth need new healthy relationships that allow for growth and empowerment in order to heal (Blackman, 2022), the same-when extended—applies to

teachers in the context of this study. In their attempt to expand efforts to improve equity, the Developers of CrSMHP made several recommendations. Ulie Wells et al. (2020) recommended overhauling school systems by reevaluating policies, procedures, curricula, and assessments for the benefit of students, families, and teachers. An additional recommendation is to gather input from students, families, and community members to spur and develop changes in these policies, procedures, curricula, and assessments.

Another relevant recommendation is to develop a system of accountability in order to support and require culturally responsive educational reform. Several participants suggested the need for administrators to “know the demographic” of teachers when making and changing policies, and this recommendation appears to be aligned with that suggestion. While Ulie Wells et al. (2020) assert a focus on students, their closing statement could be modified to read: we need to work harder and quicker to prepare our educational system to receive, accept, and empower teachers exactly as they are.

Limitations of the Study

This study was a generic qualitative study involving questions about meaning, experiences, and perspectives. When addressed using qualitative research methodologies, they are subjective and allow for interpretation to make sense of the data (Rose & Johnson, 2020)—limiting the study to these individuals. All participants were teachers who taught at predominately Black schools. The participants taught at various schools in the state of Alabama. As a former teacher in the state of Alabama who taught at a predominately Black school, I felt it necessary to closely monitor my interactions with

participants during the semi-structured interviews to ensure that they did not influence questions or answers so that those views did not enter this research project.

Additionally, I utilized reflexive journaling to address the need to justify qualitative analysis through a sense of objectivity. All participants experienced stress or anxiety during COVID-19 while working at a predominately Black school. There were few mentions of discrimination, inequities, or inequalities. However, there were mentions of limited access to Wi-Fi and challenges with connectivity, which exacerbated teacher stress levels. The study limitations were from the perspective of those teachers. Further analysis is needed using quantitative methodology and research involving new and tenured teachers who left the profession as a result of the response impact of COVID-19.

Recommendations

Although the results of this research refer to the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools during crises such as COVID-19, further recommendations are indicated for research related to teacher MHWB during noncrisis moments. Further research is needed for teachers who taught at predominately Black schools after officials declared the end of the pandemic to compare and contrast their experiences and attitudes. A variation in the time and tenure of the teachers studied would also be beneficial. Variations in the type of school- private, public, charter, and public charter- might also prove beneficial. Quantitative research involving teacher time on the task before, during, and since the pandemic and its relation to student standardized test scores might also benefit administrators, education policymakers, teachers, and local school leaders. Further research is recommended for teachers at primarily White institutions who instruct

Black students to compare effects across school contexts. Finally, further research is needed on the longitudinal effects of the syndemic on the MHWB of teachers and their students and families.

Implications

The results of this study may provide validation, comprehension and peace to teachers who felt isolated, frustrated, and depressed during the COVID-19 pandemic while trying to teach, care for their families-including their own children- as well as practice self-care. Hopefully, this study can provide school and system administrators with awareness of the implications of their attitudes and actions toward teachers regarding teacher MHWB. This study can bring about social change through teachers' taking the initiative about their MHWB in ways that affect individual, district, and perhaps state school policy and not only their actions. Teacher-focused MHWB policies and programs would revolutionize teachers' overall well-being, school culture, and student well-being and performance. Community MH centers, school counselors, and therapists can benefit from this research when attempting to gain funding and when crafting and developing programming for school well-being.

Many participants shared that their focus remained on the academic performance of their students even as their personal health and that of their children and families suffered. Understanding how the trauma, challenges, and MH challenges of living and working during such a trying chaotic, and confusing period affected teacher MHWB can be helpful to administrators, counselors, and teachers across contexts. Proponents of CrSMHP suggest noting social determinants of health as a major factor in trauma in

communities of color and other marginalized communities- and specifically in Black communities. In a synthesis of the literature on social determinants and MH outcomes, Margarita Alegría et al. (2018) found changes in the conceptualization of social determinants and how social determinants impact MH. Still, they could not definitively understand which social determinants should be addressed to improve MH. In a PubMed and Web Science literature search, Silva et al. (2016) found several studies that noted a predictive relationship between neighborhood deprivation and MH status, particularly on poorer individuals. Still, their search also found dissenting studies that revealed no such relationship.

In other studies, covered by the literature review, significant risk factors for hospitalization included unemployment, poverty, physician supply, and hospital bed supply, and two cross-sectional studies included in this review reported that living in a neighborhood with a higher percentage of residents of the same ethnicity was associated with depression. In their literature review, Mao and Agyapong (2021) found that individuals with low socioeconomic status face more obstacles to getting aid (following a natural disaster or similar occurrence like a pandemic) to fulfill their needs. Also, the stress associated with lacking these resources may create emotional or behavioral consequences. The literature Mao and Agyapong reviewed also indicates that people of lower socioeconomic status experience higher chances of psychological and physical problems compared with those with higher socioeconomic status. The aforementioned areas of potential or potential growth note a void and therefore the possibility of positive social change.

Several opportunities for positive social change exist in the area of teacher MHWB. One potential change is the possibility of mental wellness centers specifically for teachers in underserved communities. One example of an attempt to help teachers is the Happy Teacher Revolution. Happy Teacher Revolution practitioners provide training for teachers to initiate support groups in their school communities. Happy Teacher Revolution was launched in 328 schools, districts, and communities across the United States, Canada, Africa, and Latin America (Stark et al., 2022). This is obviously an idea that is gaining popularity; the concept is based on teachers recognizing “what is their professional responsibility and what needs to change at a systems level and is, therefore, beyond their roles” (Stark et al., 2022, p. 27), and aligns with the foundational ideas in CrSMHP in that it acknowledges that improving teachers’ MHWB starts outside the school building and involves oppressive policies at the root of the trauma that students and teachers face. Berkovich and (2020). suggested -among other changes- emotional reframing or interpersonal cognitive reappraisal in the principal relations to help develop a positive change in effect of both teacher and principal based on gaining a new perspective. Sadly, neither of these big changes focuses on the actual needed structural changes that will have to happen for teachers to appreciate that the educational system is adjusting to their clearly expressed needs.

Conclusion

During the pandemic, teachers expressed stress, anxieties, and concerns about their accountability for learning loss and the well-being of their students. Many predominately Black schools lacked the necessary resources for remote learning, and

communication with parents was mainly through email and phone calls was challenging. Initially, MH support was limited, but some administrators implemented some form of incentives to show appreciation, such as gift cards and massage therapy to decrease the stress levels of teachers. In addition to the limited MH resources, there was not any additional support given if a teacher contracted COVID-19.

The transition to online teaching was mentally exhausting and stressful for teachers and students. Teachers had to adapt to new challenges and find creative ways to connect with students. The shift to remote or hybrid teaching had challenges, but some teachers found it convenient, and some felt further burdened. Teachers frequently experienced anxiety and stress due to the challenges posed by the pandemic, which led to some considering leaving the profession. Decisions regarding COVID-19 at their school were made by their local school boards and communicated by the respective principals. The information was inconsistent from school to school, which had a negative impact on teachers' MH.

The school's communication strategies to protect teachers also caused stress and anxiety. However, counseling resources and virtual communication with other teachers provided comfort. The initiative was to make counseling resources known to staff through emails, flyers, and school visits. Administrators provided COVID-19 training modules, and teachers received stipends for participating. Those participants who preferred hybrid teaching felt more anxious when everyone returned to school. Although administrators did not have all the right tools, the participants stayed the course and were resilient throughout the pandemic. Overall, the participants of this study communicated

that they did their best given the circumstances and fostered empathy and patience among colleagues. These findings align with the tenets of CrSMHP; proponents of CrSMHP note that although systems need to change, those who operate under inequitable systems mirror the thinking involved in sustaining those systems, which encourages resilience and self-reliance rather than acknowledging the root cause of trauma. Proponents of the framework note the need of those working within the system of note -teachers and administrators in this case - to critically reflect on how policies and practices of institutions reproduce the systemic oppression which encourages- in fact, forces- those working to be resilient and self-reliant and applauds them for being so.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer



Did you teach during COVID-19?

A doctoral candidate from Walden University Department of Human and Social Services is looking for volunteers to participate in a research study related to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic at a predominately Black school.

If you are interested, please contact

[Redacted contact information]

[Redacted contact information]

About the study:

- Private and confidential.
- There will be a single interview followed by a member checking step done via email.

(Member checking involves checking with you - the participant- to ensure that I have correctly communicated your answers.) There will be no compensation.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Must be 18 years old or older.
- Must be a teacher for at least six months to a year prior to COVID-19.
- Must have taught for 6 months to a year during COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022).
- Must speak English.
- Must have worked at a predominately Black school during COVID-19 pandemic.

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Appendix B: Screening and Interview Questions

Qualifying Questions

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. Do you speak English?
3. Did you work as a teacher during COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022)?
4. Did you work at a predominately Black school?
5. What is the name of the school?

Semistructured Questions

1. How did the response to COVID-19 affect the mental health and wellbeing of teachers at predominately Black schools during the pandemic?
- 2a. How did the school's communication strategies during the pandemic impact your stress levels and feelings of security in your role as a teacher?
- 2b. What resource was helpful for managing your MHWB?
- 2c. How long did it take for the resources to become available?
3. How often did you experience feelings of anxiety or stress related to the challenges posed by COVID-19 in the educational setting?
4. How did the COVID-19 response influence your perceptions of the educational system's commitment to the MHWB of teachers at predominately Black schools?
5. How did the shift to remote or hybrid teaching during the pandemic affect your MHWB?
6. How do you feel about the decisions that were made at your school during COVID-19 regarding teachers' roles and duties?

7. How did those decisions affect your MHWB?
8. What MHWB resources were available to teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic?
9. How did you communicate your need for MHWB resources?
10. How can the support systems for teachers at predominately Black schools be improved for future pandemics or crises?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences and how the COVID-19 response impacted your MHWB as a teacher in a predominately Black school?