

Psychological Issues in Educators during COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Background: Lack of care and attention being paid to the Mental Health of educators during the recent Covid-19 Pandemic. Teachers were not acclimated to online teaching, which led to Anxiety and Stress. **Origin of the Problem:** The whole education system shifted to online mode in a matter of days. This shift proved to be a significant challenge for the students but an even bigger challenge for the educators. Not being technologically friendly during online classes was one of the main reasons teachers developed stress and anxiety. Teaching had already been stressful, but it became more stressful for the teachers with online education. Most children could not afford electrical items to connect with their classes online. Severe electricity issues impacted the children who could afford these items and lacked internet connectivity. It added up to the responsibilities of the teachers as they had to make sure that the students were present to attend the classes. **Purpose:** Present paper aims to critically evaluate the issues related to the shift in teaching mode during COVID 19, which leads to mental health issues in teachers, and suggests strategies for maintaining low-stress levels and mental peace. **Methodology:** This is a theory-based paper; many studies that have been done in 2019-22 have been studied and used to derive conclusions. **Results:** Findings revealed that Online Classes are challenging in many ways. Mental health is essential to be dealt with in big organizations, but it is also necessary to spread awareness among educational workers. It was seen in the research that as the academic levels went higher, the level of optimism in the teachers started to decrease. Many changes need to be made in this industry, like changing the leadership styles. The study also suggests that autonomy and supportive leadership is one of the most effective ways of leadership; it increases buoyancy and decreases the somatic burden on teachers.

Keywords: Mental health, educators, covid 19, work-life balance, effective strategies

On 31 December 2019, WHO's country office in the Republic of China picked up a media statement from the Wuhan health commission on their website on the increase in the cases of viral pneumonia in Wuhan. By March of 2020, WHO sent out an alert across the globe. The warning was displayed on almost all the platforms containing accurate information about the deadly nature of the virus.

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The first cases of Covid-19 in India were accounted for on 30 January 2020; three medical students were brought back to India from Wuhan. After this, the patients started actively increasing, the lockdown was announced in kerala on 23 March, and a nationwide lockdown was announced on 25 March.

On 16 March 2020, the union government instructed the closure of Schools, Universities, and colleges. States either postponed their exams or automatically promoted their students based on their previous performance. The whole education system shifted to online mode in a matter of days. This shift proved to be a significant challenge for the students but an even bigger challenge for the teachers as most did not have any prior experience in online teaching. Teaching had already been stressful, but it became more stressful for the teachers with online education.

Most children could not afford electrical items to connect with their classes online. Severe electricity issues impacted the children who could afford these items and lacked internet connectivity.

This added up to the responsibilities of the teachers as they had to make sure that the students were present to attend the classes. From 2020 to 2021, teachers have reported feeling Stressed, Depressed, and Anxious due to the unfavorable situation and the sudden shifts in the teaching pattern.

COVID-19

Covid-19 is a deadly global infection that caused nearly 25,000 deaths worldwide. This virus infected both humans and animals. The leading cause of concern for this virus was that it had symptoms very similar to that of the flu; a few of the symptoms are Fever, fatigue, dry cough, body aches, etc.

The more severe cases had severe respiratory issues and even pneumonia.

Covid 19 posed a severe threat to both old and infants as in both the age groups, the immunity is at its lowest. According to the data, those over 80 years old infected with the virus died from it compared to people in their 40-50.

Mental Health

Mental health refers to emotional, cognitive, and behavioral wellbeing. It is all about how people feel, think, and behave. People sometimes use the term “mental health” to signify the absence of a mental disorder. Poor mental health can affect daily living/tasks; it can also significantly affect a person’s relationships.

Taking care of a person’s mental health is as important as taking care of any physical ailment. Disorders like stress, depression, and anxiety can affect mental health and disrupt a person’s routine.

Everyone has some risk of developing a mental disorder when faced with a stressor, no matter their age, sex, income, or ethnicity. People usually suffer from more than one disorder at a time.

Stress

Stress is a feeling of emotional and physical tension. It can come from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or nervous.

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Stress can be viewed as positive such as it helps you avoid danger or help a person meet a deadline. And negative, it can hamper a person's daily activity. If negative stress lasts for an extended period, it may harm one's health.

Our body deals with stress by releasing hormones. These hormones make our brain more alert and conscious about a stressful situation. Our body uses stored resources to deal with the stressor, and if the stressor continues over a long period, then our immunity starts to break down, and our body moves towards burnout or exhaustion.

Symptoms of stress:

- Diarrhea or constipation
- Forgetfulness
- Headache
- Lack of energy or focus
- Sexual problems
- Stiff jaw or neck
- Tiredness

Another type of stress we have is perceived stress. It means how much pressure a person thinks they are in at a given time. They have a feeling of uncontrollability and unpredictability in one's life. It means their ability to deal with stress and how they perceive it.

Anxiety

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worrisome thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure. Some of the anxiety symptoms are pulse, sweating, and a sense of stress.

It's natural to have stress and feel tensed or anxious. Pressure can sometimes be positive if it helps or motivates people to complete their tasks, but it is called distress if the stress starts to hamper their daily tasks. When this last for more than six months or longer, it may be called generalized anxiety disorder. Many people do not even know they have it. Because of this, they generally ignore the symptoms and do not seek any treatment for them.

Causes of Anxiety:

There can be many reasons for anxiety: -

1. Genes can be passed down from generation to generation through genetic material.
2. Biochemical- chemical or hormonal changes can also be one of the factors or neurotransmitters too. A pair of amygdalae also seem to be involved in it.
3. Environmental factor- stressful situations may trigger excessive anxiety. For example, death in the family or finances may cause stress.

Depression

Depression is one of the most common and serious medical illnesses that affect many people. Depression can harm the lives of people. It can change people's thinking patterns, and depression can cause feelings of sadness and loss of interest in the activities that they once the person enjoyed.

Symptoms of depression

- Feeling sad or having a depressed
- Loss of interest
- Change in appetite (overeating or eating very little)
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue
- Increase in a purposeless activity like sitting still or pacing

Work-life balance

Work-life balance means how much priority an individual gives to their work-life and personal life.

What is the association between the three?

Work-life balance has always been controversial; there have been talks about an appropriate time for our professional duties and whether it is fair to bring our professional work into our home. Before, it was comparatively easier to maintain that balance as it was tough to get a job back home. Still, now with advancements in technology and COVID and total lockdown, the boundary that existed between professional life and personal life has been almost erased. With no physical work environment and the internet always connecting employees and their superiors, a ‘permanently’ being at work has been created.

The decline in mental health is a crucial feature of poor work-life balance. It can be the main reason for an increase in stress and anxiety.

This study aims to understand the effect of work-life balance on teachers’ mental health and how seriously it has been damaging the mental health of our educators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impact of covid 19 on the mental health of educators.

1. Stachteas, P., & Stachteas, S. (2020) in their research on "The psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school teachers." This study aims to first look into the psychological effects of the new COVID-19 pandemic on high school teachers, who, in addition to the general aggravation, take on the burden of forced sobriety from their regular work duties and the simultaneous need to adapt themselves to the unprecedented process of distance learning. This is a cross-sectional study of secondary school teachers and was done using random sampling at the beginning of the pandemic in Greece. 4% of teachers were anxious and very anxious during the pandemic, while only 8% of teachers exhibited severe depressive emotions. The female gender was found to correlate feelings of fear and depression and a negative correlation to optimism positively. Furthermore, a negative correlation was seen between the teachers' high educational level and their sense of optimism.
2. Etxebarria, N., Santxo, N., Mondragon, N., & Santamaría, M. (2021) "The Psychological State of Teachers During the COVID-19 Crisis: The Challenge of Returning to Face-to-Face Teaching". Teachers from Spain were used as test subjects for this study. Most schools and colleges in Spain returned to their original teaching methods in September 2020 and faced significant uncertainty due to this unique circumstance. Since the dawn of the pandemic, teachers have had psychological symptoms. They had to establish online teaching during the lockdown, and as

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schools reopen, they have expressed significant anxiety over the new, unprecedented teaching environment. The teachers were given an online questionnaire, the DASS-21 scale, to assess stress, anxiety, and depression. Many teachers had anxiety, sadness, and stress symptoms, according to the findings. Gender, age, employment stability, the degree of education they teach, and parental status all impact these symptoms.

3. Peele, H., Daniels, M., Saybe, M., Whalen, K., & Overstreet, S. (2021) The Experience of COVID-19 and Its Impact on Teachers' Mental Health, Coping, and Teaching, in this research The COVID-19 pandemic has placed high demands on teachers. It was seen that the teachers would experience at least seven stressors out of the 18 surveyed and four protective factors out of six surveyed. It was seen that the teachers who participated in more stress reported worse mental health and found it harder to cope with it and teach. Experiencing more protective factors were connected with finding it easier to manage and lead. Teachers experienced considerable stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic related to poorer mental health, coping, and teaching.
4. In their research, Roman, T., ETL (2020) " Supporting the mental health of preservice teachers in COVID-19 through Trauma-informed educational practices and adaptive formative assessment tools." Preliminary outcomes indicate that although preservice teachers effectively use instructional technology tools to articulate their health and well-being status, not all preservice teachers choose to engage in course activities, highlighting that the most at-risk preservice educators need additional support during COVID-19 teaching and learning.
5. Lizana, P., Fernandez, G., Bruton, Bárbara, A., Leyton and Lera, L. (2021) in their research on "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Teacher Quality of Life: A Longitudinal Study from before and during the Health Crisis Before the COVID-19 pandemic" explained that teachers were already describing a low quality of life perception, with a notable impact on mental & physical health due to various stress factors associated with work overload. QoL showed a significant decrease during the pandemic than the pre-pandemic measurement ($p < 0.01$). In each gender, there were notable differences between pre-pandemic and pandemic timeframes, with a more significant impact among women on their mental and physical component summary variables and seven of the eight QoL scales ($p < 0.01$). People under 45 presented notable differences ($p < 0.05$) between pre-pandemic and pandemic timeframes in summary dimensions and measurements.
6. Lizana and lera (2022), in their research "Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among Teachers during the Second COVID-19 Wave," used the DASS-21 test on 313 subjects which suggested that the second wave profoundly affected the mental health of teachers. There is an urgent need to aid the mental health of the teachers.

Personal life and its challenges

1. Jakubowski, t. & Dominik, M (2021) in their research "Teachers' mental health during Poland's first two waves COVID-19 pandemic". Teaching work is stressful; moreover, during the pandemic, teachers' stress might have been increased by online education and limited access to social support, which functions as a buffer in experiencing stress. The research results show that due to distance work, the distinction between professional work and family life might have been blurred, and as a consequence, teachers' well-being could have been worsened. The isolation put on to stop the spreading of the virus might have contributed to changes in social

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relations, in close ties in particular, and at the same time negatively influenced teachers' abilities to cope with the crises effectively.

2. Spadafora, N., Westoby, C., Pottruff, M. & Janus, M. (2022) in their research on "Family responsibilities and mental health of kindergarten educators during the first COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Ontario, Canada." The study was organized during the first wave of covid 19. there were 1790 participants, kindergarten educators. Results suggest that educators were more likely to Complaint about moderate depression if they had the responsibility of taking care of a child. The anxiety symptoms were also added with mild depression if they had to take care of an adult.
3. Dogra and Kaushal (2022), in their research "Underlying the triple burden effects on women educationists due to COVID-19," Covid 19 has increased the chances of becoming jobless and added the responsibilities on people resulting in psychological and emotional stress. The female teachers agreed that the pandemic had affected their daily life schedules. This leaves a substantial effect on their mental and psychological health as they pay a lot of attention to their kids, their job, and their family's elders.

Professional life and its challenges

1. Santos, G., ETL (2021), in their research " COVID-19: Emergency remote teaching and university professors' mental health," Discussed the experience of the teachers during remote teaching during a covid pandemic. Professors faced new demands that had repercussions on their work routine due to increased working hours. The pandemic brought new challenges to their teaching. It is essential to encourage the establishment of reflective processes around physical and mental balance in and outside the educational environment.
2. Kim et al. (2021), in their research "My brain feels like a browser with 100 tabs open": A longitudinal study of teachers' mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic," conducted extensive research during the covid- 19 pandemic and found out that the mental health of the educators had declined throughout the pandemic, especially primary school leaders. Six job demands were negative for the educators. They were as follows uncertainty, workload, negative perception of the profession, concern for others' well-being, health struggles, and multiple roles
3. Vasquez, C., Etl (2021), in their research " Mental health of teachers who have teleworked due to COVID- 19," The study aimed to explore the mental health of teachers who were forced to telework because of COVID- 19. and analyze the association with sociodemographic, teacher-related, and working conditions. These results suggest the need for actions to improve teachers' working conditions who telework to enhance their mental health and thus positively impact the entire educational community.
4. Rebecca J. Collie (2021) COVID-19 and Teachers' Somatic Burden, Stress, and Emotional Exhaustion: Examining the Role of Principal Leadership and Workplace Buoyancy. There are two types of leadership factors (autonomy-supportive and autonomy-thwarting leadership) and one personal resource (workplace buoyancy) as predictors of three teacher outcomes: somatic load, change-related stress, and emotional weariness. During the first wave of COVID-19, data was collected from 325 Australian teachers in May 2020. Many Australian children were educated remotely from home, while others attended school. The results revealed that autonomy-supportive leadership was linked to increased buoyancy and, as a result, lower somatic burden, change-related stress, and emotional tiredness. Autonomy-

thwarting administration had a positive correlation with emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, autonomy-supportive leadership was found to be indirectly linked to the outcomes. The findings reveal elements that could be used to help teachers cope with future waves of COVID-19 and other school disruptions.

5. Minihan et al. (2022), in their research “COVID-19 related occupational stress in teachers in Ireland,” Their study intended to examine the occupational stress during COVID-19. They took a sample of 245 teachers in Ireland and used Copenhagen’s burnout inventory. The result concluded that 82% of personal burnout and 79% reported work burnout. The results suggested immediate measures to be taken for the mental health of the educators and their wellbeing. Or else there will be a large number of teachers who will be turning over or taking early retirement, and everyone will have to suffer adverse effects on the quality of education relating to work burnout.

Interventions that can be used to deal with Mental health disorders

1. Matiz, A., Fabbro, F., ETL. (2020) in their research “ Positive Impact of mindfulness medication on the mental health of Female teachers during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Italy.” In this study, two groups were taken: high resilience with 26 members and low resilience with 32 members who received eight weeks of mindfulness-oriented meditation. A significant improvement was found in both groups in terms of anxiety, depression, affective empathy, emotional exhaustion, psychological well-being, etc.
2. Strategies During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Ecuador: A Mixed-Methods Study. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ecuadorian teachers who adopted online education were evaluated for psychological suffering, life satisfaction, and perceived stress. It also aimed to report qualitatively on the coping techniques to maintain their mental health and well-being. Three hundred ninety-four teachers responded to the survey, with 320 of them also responding to an open-ended question included in the study, which was optional. Moreover, half the participants said that alongside their jobs, they also looked after children under the age of 11 or elderly over 65. The majority of the participants were teaching in higher education at the study. All psychological factors were substantially linked with age, females had higher levels of perceived stress, and teachers with family duties had higher psychological discomfort and perceived stress. Teachers who had past training and experience with online teaching presented lower levels of distress, perceived stress, and higher levels of life satisfaction. Social support, exercising, and leisure activities were popular coping mechanisms.

METHODOLOGY

Aim: This study aims to understand the current situation of educators during the covid pandemic and be able to formulate techniques to help them out.

Method: this is a theoretical paper. The conclusions have been derived based on previous research.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The covid-19 pandemic has brought a tremendous toll upon all the education field workers. According to the research mentioned above, many teachers are suffering from symptoms of anxiety, stress, and other psychological problems. These problems were first seen booming in teachers during the first wave of COVID-19; they were asked to switch to an online mode of education.

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Online mode brought much burden on the teachers, as it required them to use much new technology with which they were unfamiliar. Most of the teachers were not adequately educated regarding using all the platforms for online classes. Teachers who received online training for educational purposes had higher life satisfaction, lower perceived stress, and lower distress. Lockdown played a part in worsening the mental health of education workers as the separation between professional life, and personal life didn't almost exist.

Due to teaching from home, teachers were given extra workload and shorter periods to complete those, which extended the working hours. Many teachers also suffered the stress of being laid off from work due to a shortage in funding. This uncertainty in the job also acted as a contributing factor to their increased stress levels.

It was seen that teachers who had children or older adults to take care of alongside their jobs were under more stress and pressure. They reported feeling that their professional and personal life were a blur. According to the research, females reported higher stress levels and anxiety issues than males.

Many researchers have suggested that if we do not take quicker actions toward the teacher's mental health, we might have to face severe repercussions in the form of high turnout in the field and teachers demanding early retirement due to the increased stress levels. The quality of education is also declining due to the decline in teachers' mental health and burnout.

It was also seen in the research that as the educational levels went higher, the level of optimism in the teachers started to decrease.

According to studies conducted in 2022, researchers have suggested that educators have reported higher levels of feeling sad, depressed, anxious, and stressed. The story of stress they perceive has also increased. The level of life satisfaction among the teachers has gone down surprisingly fast.

The state of education field workers has not been perfect during the pandemic, and most countries have not been taking much interest in creating awareness about it. Mental health is essential to be dealt with in big organizations, but it is also necessary to spread awareness among educational workers. Most educators are not aware of the symptoms of the most common disorders, due to which they end up neglecting them and not seeking help at the right time. Many changes need to be made in this industry, like changing the leadership styles. Studies suggest that Autonomy supportive leadership is one of the most effective ways of leadership; it increases the buoyancy and decreases the somatic burden on teachers.

Many studies suggest that indulging in activities like exercise and meditation can decrease the symptoms of exhaustion, depression, anxiety, Etc., and would increase the well-being of teachers. Schools should also keep in mind the professional and personal boundaries, i.e., they should only give teachers the amount of work that won't stress them out and give them a reasonable amount of time to complete that work. Schools should start focusing on or prioritizing the teachers' mental health as their mental health as they are the assesses because the schools are running and the students are being given proper education. If their mental health suffers, the impact will be felt in all the fields and students. We must start focusing on it on an urgent basis.

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Conflict of Interest

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