

Global Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health of Teachers

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Abstract

Sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 in 2020 had a global impact and threw the world into panic. Schools were shut down and lockdowns were enforced to obey the pandemic guidelines for safety. Teachers were forced to think outside the box and find alternative ways to teach students remotely relying heavily on technology. Teachers, students, parents, and administrators had to endure significant changes while transitioning from in class to remote instruction. These abrupt changes took a toll on their mental health as they were trying to figure out how to navigate and adapt to the changes. Since the pandemic, several studies have been conducted to examine its impact on mental health of teachers around the world. However, very few have focused on the universal factors that contributed to mental stress of teachers around the world. This paper reviews studies from different countries and highlights the most common factors that led to the mental stress of teachers during the pandemic. After reviewing the literature, three major themes were formed: Increased Workload, Student Teacher Relationship, and Adjusting to New Normal. Suggestions on how to help teachers during future such emergencies are also included. The goal of this paper is to understand how the pandemic impacted the mental health of teachers globally and to provide school administrators, policymakers, and other education stakeholders with information that can support teachers in the event of future such emergencies.

Keywords: Covid-19, mental health, global, teachers, international, factors

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1. Introduction

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020 the world was altered significantly and education was no exception (Babbar & Gupta, 2022). As the pandemic spread across the globe, mandatory shutdowns and lockdowns were implemented for safety concerns. Teachers and students were required to shift from in class to remote and hybrid teaching and learning. However, not all teachers and students had the necessary skills and infrastructure including devices and stable internet connection for online teaching and learning (Chung et al., 2020; Oyedotun, 2020). The sudden switch created challenges to adapt to the changes causing a lot of stress and anxiety both for teachers and students. Psychological health is important and steps must be taken to understand the causes that led to mental stress so that decision makers can make informed decisions to support them accordingly (Hirshberg et al., 2023). This paper is a review of several articles examining the factors that led to mental stress of teachers. Suggestions to lessen stress in case of another similar emergency are also discussed. COVID-19 was a global pandemic and impacted the mental health of teachers around the globe. Hence, the articles reviewed in this paper are not just limited to the United States but other countries as well. This paper attempts to answer two questions: What factors led to the mental stress of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic? What are some suggestions that can help in the event of similar future emergencies?

2. Articles Reviewed

Alves et al. (2021) conducted a cross-sectional study to describe and analyze factors related to the professional well-being of 1479 Portuguese teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Billett et al. (2022) examined the relationships between Australian teachers' stress, teachers' self-efficacy, and teachers' well-being during the pandemic. They also studied the teachers' feeling of safety during the pandemic. Cheng and Lam (2021) studied the impact of COVID-19 on music teachers' mental health and well-being in Hong Kong. Cohen-Fraade and Donahue (2021) surveyed 455 full-time public school teachers in the United States to examine their mental health experiences during the Covid-19. Eşici et al. (2021) conducted a phenomenological study in Turkey to determine the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers, their professional practices, and career needs. The study was conducted in two stages using interviews and an online survey. Jakubowski and Sitko-Dominik (2021) investigated the mental health of 285 Polish primary and secondary school teachers during the first two waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. Kaden (2020) conducted a case study to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the instructional practices and workload of a secondary school teacher in

rural Alaska. Kim and Ashbury (2020) conducted a cross-sectional study to explore the experiences of 24 teachers in UK regarding their experiences about the abrupt changes in their teaching practices because of COVID-19. Klapproth et al. (2020) conducted a cross-sectional survey with 380 teachers from schools in Germany to assess their stress levels, coping strategies, and barriers to distance teaching. Kumawat (2020) surveyed 194 teachers across India to study the perceived stress and burnout during the pandemic. Kush et al. (2022) conducted a cross-sectional survey research to compare the mental health outcomes of teachers and other professionals such as office workers, health workers, and others. They further compared the mental health of in-person and remote teachers. Lynch (2021) investigated the impact of COVID-19 on 265 North Carolina educators using a cross-sectional survey research method. Mecham et al. (2021) conducted semi-formal interviews with 25 recent graduates of elementary education program in the year 2019-2020. Of the 25 participants, 19 were working as novice elementary school teachers. Nabe-Nielsen et al. (2022) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate the emotional reactions and mental health of teachers in Denmark during the three phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. Oducado et al. (2021) conducted a descriptive-correlational survey research to assess the perceived stress of COVID-19 among licensed professional teachers in the Philippines. Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021) conducted a study with 1633 teachers in Spain to analyze stress, depression, and anxiety that they experienced once schools reopened for face-to-face instruction. Pressley (2021) surveyed 359 K-12 teachers across the United States to learn more about factors contributing to teacher burnout and stress due to COVID-19. Sayman and Cornell (2021) conducted a qualitative narrative inquiry to explore COVID-19 related experiences of 12 special education teachers in a special education graduate program at a Midwestern university. Sokal et al. (2020) conducted a survey research of 1278 Canadian teachers focusing on whether the Job Demands-Resources model was a useful lens for examining teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. Vargas Rubilar and Oros (2021) conducted a cross-sectional study with teachers in Argentina to identify the perceived work situation threats and stress regarding remote teaching.

3. Method

Google Scholar and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) were used to search articles related to "COVID-19 and mental health of teachers". The search words used were COVID-19, mental health, impact and teachers. These search words were used in different combinations for best results. The articles that were published between 2020 and 2023 and were available for free download were included in the paper. The abstract for each article was first read to see how closely it was related to the search topic. Then the methods, findings, and the conclusions section were read to further decide whether the article met the search criteria. Judgement of including the articles was based on the article titles, abstracts, methods, findings, and conclusion sections. The articles that most closely matched the search topic were read and reread for inclusion. The articles that did not match the search topic were discarded. Finally, 24 articles that met the search criteria were used for the paper.

The participants and the research methods used for each article used for this review were placed under the heading "Articles Reviewed" as shown above. The findings from each article were paraphrased and put into paragraphs to identify common themes. The most common themes noted were Increased Workload, Student Teacher Relationship, and Adjusting to New Normal.

4. Findings

Teachers play a crucial role in educating students and understanding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their mental well-being must be a priority (Cohen-Fraade & Donahue, 2021). When the pandemic hit the world in 2020, teachers world-wide had to face numerous challenges. They had to adapt to new technologies and teaching platforms to switch from in-class to remote instruction, they missed interacting with students in person, and they also had the fear of catching the virus which all contributed to their mental stress. These sudden changes weighed heavily on their ability to seamlessly continue on with their daily teaching responsibilities while maintaining mental stability and adjusting to their new normal. Based on the articles reviewed, the following themes were most notable.

Increased Workload

The COVID-19 pandemic made teachers feel overwhelmed and uncertain because of the sudden changes in the instructional requirements, technology use, and other growing demands (Mecham et al., 2021; Pressley, 2021). Requirements to switch from in-person to remote teaching caused them to spend more time as they had to find ways to engage and assess students online (Kaden, 2020). Teachers who spent more time each day on remote teaching experienced more stress than teachers who spent less time (Klapproth et al., 2020; Kush et al., 2022). The increased workload and unsatisfactory working environment with minimal support led to more

professional burnout (Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Teachers were worried about keeping up with the changes in their teaching profession which had been transformed because of the pandemic (Cheng & Lam, 2021). The changes and demands in the teaching requirements during the COVID-19 made the stress levels even worse and teachers felt unsatisfied with their work which had a negative impact on their well-being (Billett, Turner, & Li, 2022; Kumawat, 2020).

Student Teacher Relationship

Teachers felt as if they were losing their identity as teachers especially regarding their relationship with students (Sayman & Cornell, 2021). They were very concerned about their students' well-being and feared the loss of the bond that they had with their students because of remote instruction (Kim & Ashbury, 2020). The pandemic also lowered their perception of well-being as teaching professionals and led to some concerns regarding their future (Alves et al., 2021). Teachers and schools are often considered as a safe place for students. During the pandemic, teachers were very concerned about the safety of their students because of isolation and felt helpless as they were unable to safeguard them (Kim & Ashbury, 2020). The isolation from students possibly had a negative effect on their ability to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021).

Adjusting to New Normal

Teachers had a tough time adjusting to the new normal which was teaching and engaging students online through virtual platforms. They also had difficulty balancing the demands and resources. They perceived that the shortage of resources hindered their achievements (Sokal et al., 2020). They were stressed about school closures and uncertainty of the pandemic consequences (Kim & Ashbury, 2020; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Teachers who were at a higher risk of COVID-19 had higher stress levels (Nabe-Nielson et al., 2022) and female teachers were more stressed than male teachers (Klapproth et al., 2020; Oducado et al., 2021; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Kush et al., 2022 reported that teachers had greater mental health concerns than professionals in other fields. Most commonly, teachers reported fatigue, rage, anxiety, fear, depression, and guilt in response to the pandemic (Cheng & Lam 2021; Lynch 2021; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021).

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the articles researched, it can be concluded that the sudden switch to online instruction, technology challenges, and lack of social interactions experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed heavily to the mental stress of teachers. They had to adapt to changes that they were neither comfortable with nor prepared or trained for. Their worries about their students' well-being emphasized the importance of student-teacher relationship not only during in-person but also remote teaching.

Based on the articles reviewed for this paper, it is clear that teachers must be trained on how to use instructional technology to provide the best instruction online to meet student needs and strengthen relationships with them. Teachers must be professionally trained to acquire digital skills (Klapproth et al., 2020) necessary for safe and productive online teaching and should be aware of the necessary technological resources that can support them. In addition to training the teachers, schools must also take into consideration the technology resources and digital skills of the students and parents (Eşici et al., 2021). It is necessary to make sure that they have reliable internet connection and devices to have access and be successful in an online environment. Although online teaching can support most students but it is important to consider digital inequalities (Kaden, 2020) for students who don't have access to the needed technology and reliable internet connection. For future such emergencies, schools must listen to teachers to provide effective support based on their experiences during the pandemic. Teachers must be encouraged to take part in different programs, trainings and workshops for their mental health and well-being. Supporting teachers with their psychological needs is not only necessary and might be a prerequisite for efforts to recover from the pandemic (Hirshberg et al., 2023). The better the teachers are with managing their stress level, the better they can perform in similar such situations.

6. Recommendation

This review is only limited to the global impact of COVID-19 on mental health of teachers. Future research on mental health of students, parents, and school administrators can aid in understanding their needs as well to support them in similar situations in the future. A comparative review of the global impact of COVID-19 on mental health of students, parents, and school administrators may also be beneficial.

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