



Psychological Well-Being of Teachers Post Covid-19: Moving Towards A Sustainable Future

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Abstract

Higher education is a fundamental pillar for sustainable development, with teachers and educators playing a major role in its success. With the many threats and challenges faced by teachers during and post pandemic teaching, their mental health and well-being remains at risk. While more attention has been placed on students over the past three years, less research has been done on the impact of COVID-19 on teachers well-being and the possible strategies and measures that need to be taken to prevent depression, anxiety or mental health problems among teachers. This review takes a look at recent studies on mental well-being among teachers during and post pandemic to highlight the necessary strategies and positive psychological measures that need to be taken to prevent poor mental health during these challenging times and help teachers successfully overcome these obstacles and improve their psychological well-being.

Keywords: Mental Health; Positive Psychology; Post Pandemic; Psychological Well-Being; Teacher Well-Being

Introduction

The mental health and well being of teachers and educators across the globe has a significant and direct impact on stability in education and students' overall well-being and satisfaction. The consequences of COVID-19 on global mental health and the well being of teachers have been inevitable. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has been declared over by the World Health Organization, recent studies now suggest the existence of a psychological epidemic curve, indicating high stakes for a rise in mental health issues in the post-pandemic era [1-3]. This poses a threat for teachers and educators and warns for the urgent need to address the issue of teacher post-pandemic burnout, mental health crises, and unstable psychological status and prepare for current and future challenges in terms of creating a positive psychology for teachers at different levels of education.

Evidence from previous studies suggest that mental health issues may emerge in the education sector after the peak of a pandemic, mostly affecting the vulnerable population and high risk regions [4-6]. The growth in mental health issues may remain undiagnosed if unattended to in the educational sector, which can create serious issues and challenges for mental health services in schools and universities in the post-pandemic years ahead. It has specifically been a challenge for many teachers, while both teaching and caring for children during the pandemic, and its impact on their own mental-health and well-being should not be neglected and given greater attention at an international level.

In this short review of the recent literature, we will investigate the various positive psychology interventions taken to enhance teachers' psychological well-being during

and post COVID-19 in different regions of the globe and highlight the factors to be considered to reduce the threat that still lingers on teachers mental health and well-being. The current review aims to investigate various psychological interventions taken to enhance teachers' psychological well-being during post COVID-19 across different regions worldwide and to pinpoint the factors that should be considered in eliminating the threat that still lingers on teachers' mental health and well-being.

Method

Articles for inclusion in this mini-review were identified by searching the Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar databases for research articles dated from January 2020 to May 2023. The search terms were ("teacher well-being", OR "teacher psychological well-being" AND "positive psychology intervention" AND "post COVID-19").

The following inclusion criteria were used: empirical studies (those that included interventions) published in peer-reviewed journals were included. The period of the intervention studies had to be related to post-COVID to indicate the impact of the pandemic on teachers after they went back to teaching and to observe the various psychological interventions that took place.

Positive Psychology & Teachers' Well-Being

Teacher well-being is a complex construct that has been conceptualized as the absence of negative conditions such as demotivation, high work load, stress, teaching anxiety and even burnout [7]. Following a return to face-to-face teaching post COVID-19, teachers were faced with challenging and stressful situations, renewed instructional approaches, and new roles as educators. While it is well known by now that COVID-19 has impacted higher education worldwide, and many studies have examined the effects of the pandemic on students [8-12], few have investigated its impact on teachers and academic staff. Here we will delve into the literature of conditions during the pandemic, followed by the return to face-to-face teaching and hybrid forms of education, and examine different factors affecting teachers' wellbeing and specific interventions applied in different regions.

In a systematic review of the literature, Garcia-Alvarez et al. [13] identified studies to show the direct impact of positive psychology on teachers' well-being. These studies focused on the intervention of positive psychology, coping strategies in relation to well-being, stress and negative emotions in language teachers at different levels. As challenges to the quality of education will continue to exist, possible intervention should be considered to promote teachers'

well-being during these unprecedented times. Educational institutions should encourage and implement goals to empower teachers through training sessions that integrate wellness and positive psychology into their programs. It seems inevitable that interventions in the teaching and learning context will foster the skills necessary to enhance teachers' well-being in the classroom [13].

While the emergence of mental health problems during and post pandemic is a complex issue, Ransing et al. [1] put forth that little attention has been devoted to this topic from the standpoint of policymakers, stakeholders and researchers. As a response, psychiatrists from 16 countries throughout the WHO regions attempted to develop a conceptual framework to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of mental health interventions. Meanwhile, Guoyan et al. [6] examined the impact of teachers' self-efficacy and system quality on teachers' continuance commitment towards online teaching during the pandemic, with their well-being added as a moderating variable. It was emphasized that focusing on teachers' mental well-being is significantly linked to teachers' effectiveness and student performance, and that satisfaction with updated professional learning opportunities and personal experiences can contribute to the mental wellness of the teacher.

In a longitudinal study on teachers' mental health and well-being during the pandemic [14], the authors found that six job demands had negative effects on mental health and well-being, i.e., uncertainty, workload, negative perception of the profession, concern for others' well-being, health struggles, and having multiple roles. This was while three job resources contributed positively to their mental health well-being, i.e., social support, work autonomy, and coping strategies. These results have implications for current post-pandemic provisions, where policy makers and practitioners can support teachers by engaging in collaborative communication, providing greater sources of social support to cope with post-pandemic challenges and stress.

Herman et al. [15] investigated the individual and school predictors of teachers stress, coping and wellness during the pandemic and found that teacher confidence in their ability to manage student behavior was a consistent predictor of teacher well-being outcomes. It was observed that according to the 3C theory of teacher stress (Coping-Competence-Context), school contextual conditions, organizational factors and context (such as those closer to outbreak regions) can influence teacher stress and well-being. It is important to consider the quality of leadership at the institution and the sense of belonging that a teacher feels as important to guide future education policy regarding teachers' mental health and well-being.

In a case study on the mental wellbeing of university academics during the pandemic by Dinu et al. [5], it was surprisingly found that supportive departments and colleagues helped the transition to online teaching and also the strong sense of collegiality and team spirit created by the pandemic contributed positively to wellbeing. This was while weaker digital abilities of the older staff have a negative impact on mental health, which suggests that universities should tailor their programs to support such groups. Now that we have moved beyond the pandemic, it is important to build on this opportunity by creating more personalized training opportunities for staff in need. One positive result of this study was that strong academic identity is related to stronger digital abilities, and confidence is considered a protective factor for well-being. In addition, it was suggested that working from home had both positive and negative outcomes, i.e., it both increased productivity and access to research meetings and conferences, while making it difficult to fulfil certain tasks. The overall findings suggested that mental well-being among academics is multifaceted, and while strong social identity may be a protective factor, being away from campus and colleagues can have its negative toll on performance.

One empirical study that evaluated the effectiveness of an interventional program aimed to improve psychological well-being, optimism, self-efficacy and self-esteem among teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic showed promising results, indicating that interventions based on positive psychology improve teachers' well-being and reduce psychosocial risks [13].

In an intervention study conducted by Zadok-Gurman et al. [16], the effect of inquiry-based stress reduction was assessed on the well-being, resilience and burnout of teachers and it was found that it had significant impact on the subjective and psychological well-being of the teachers and can potentially benefit their well-being and ability to flourish.

Navarro-Espinosa et al. [17] investigated the influence of technology on the mental well-being of STEM teachers during COVID-19 and that anxiety caused by the use of technology in education during the pandemic increased the risk of developing mental disorders and thus emphasized the need to consider behavioral factors and training to reduce stress.

This is while Flores et al. [18] went forth to analyse the vital impact of COVID-19, spirituality, and the use of social-emotional strategies on teacher well-being. They found that teachers who used social-emotional strategies reported higher levels of spirituality and greater satisfaction with life.

These findings have implications for implementing positive psychology and the use of social-emotional strategies to enhance teachers well-being post COVID-19.

Chen et al. [19] evaluated the immediate and delayed effects of psychological need thwarting of online teaching on teachers' well-being in China. They highlight the potential role of psychological need thwarting (PNT) in terms of autonomy, competence and relatedness thwarting resulting from online teaching and the impact on willingness to continue online teaching. It was found that school leaders should provide flexible and sustained professional development and provide opportunities to master the development of community of practice during times of uncertainty.

Kita et al. [20] also believe that there is a lack of evidence on the mental health of faculty members, and go forth to examine mental well-being of Japanese faculty during the pandemic and found two significant factors to endanger faculty mental illness; when experiencing difficulty in using IT for online classes and when they were unsatisfied with admin support for online education. The findings suggest the importance of workplace support services, especially IT support, to prevent mental health deterioration among faculty members. Elsewhere in the literature Smith et al. [21] report on the well-being of teachers before and after lockdown through the well-being process model. They found that positive well-being was predicted by high scores for psychological capital, social support and positive coping, the outcome of which highlights the need to reduce the stress from isolation for long-term well-being of teachers.

Hargreaves [22] report of the new and lasting challenges for the teaching profession and give suggestions and recommendations for future policies. One of the most important is to improve the digital expertise of teachers, by including digital competence in all teacher preparation programs, a factor that ceases to exist in the global South. This would include knowledge of how to identify, reduce and manage the risks that often come with digitally based learning. An innovative idea in this study was to expand outdoor and nature-based teaching and learning opportunities to enhance the well-being of young people. Also, providing coaching support is essential for school leaders and teachers to help improve their capacities by managing their own stress, health, and well-being. Moreover, enhancing in-person and virtual professional networks seems to be a good initiative to promote innovation and circulate knowledge and expertise. His insight on the essence of sustainability is really impactful, where he states that managers and program administrators are to support everyone in the educational ecosystem so that they can all thrive together and leave behind a legacy of learning and well-being for generations to come.

As the future remains uncertain, and educators have to prepare themselves for the future of hybrid education, Foreman-Brown et al. [23] bring forth the idea of reimagining teacher identity after the pandemic and creating opportunities for teachers to become tech savvy, reflective in their practice, collaborative and relational. Deroncele-Acosta et al. [24] have recently gone forth to identify positive cores of faculty in their successful post-COVID performance through the Netnography method that complemented elements of positive psychology, appreciative inquiry and management of formative potentials. Their findings revealed two target categories, namely digital transformation and technological innovation to have direct associations with teachers' dynamization. This sheds light on the future of transforming society in a sustainable way, where training and promotion of socio-emotional well-being must be of priority and training agendas must include aspects related to soft-skills, resilience, psychological self-care and management of social relationships.

One proposal put forth to enhance teachers well-being and expand the knowledge oriented to the continuous development of teachers, both for their mental well-being and professional growth is the implementation of Professional Development Teacher Communities [25]. For this means, educational leadership should be developed, creating connections between specialists outside the school, getting guidance from psychologists and counsellors. This initiative can be beneficial for the improvement of pedagogical practices, re-evaluation of teaching competencies, increased recognition of teamwork and creating and organizing teams to work together to enhance professional growth.

Conclusion

Regardless of the fact that the COVID-19 crisis is well past us, the psychological impact caused by the pandemic still lingers and may continue to exist. Therefore, mental health issues of teachers and educators, as a high-risk and vulnerable profession following extreme transitions pre-, during and post-COVID-19 should not be neglected. Administrators and heads of departments around the world should take adequate measures to prevent and control a possible psychological crisis, and be aware of the preventive measures, integrating positive psychology into their programs, and adhere to socio-emotional strategies in dealing with the teachers and educators [26,27].

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