

Teachers' Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Shrreya Renjini Sajith

Research Scholars Program, Harvard Student Agencies, In collaboration with Learn with Leaders

ABSTRACT

Though the COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on many people's mental health and contributed to an increase in depression rates, it also paved way for many challenges that came with this new lifestyle. I wanted to focus on the people I thought were most overlooked throughout the pandemic, which in my opinion, were the teachers. Teachers were challenged by having to ensure their students learned and absorbed concepts over e-meetings. My research paper examined the pressure the teachers faced during the pandemic. A qualitative questionnaire-based survey was conducted to evaluate the reality of their new lifestyle during the pandemic and their mental health. The results showed a damaging impact on their usual routine, lifestyle, and also their mindset.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' well-being was severely overlooked during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially considering the stress and pressure they were under. As interactive beings, we were forced to isolate ourselves during the pandemic, making it difficult for us to visit our loved ones, which slowly weakened everyone's mental endurance. People reacted to these circumstances in different ways. Some liked the new change; others wished it would end. As a result of the Coronavirus, uncertainty and changes in lifestyle caused a lot of hardships in existing life. This led to and caused not only an increase in stress, sadness, and anxiety but also a lot of other mental disorders. Not only this, but many people lost their jobs because of the critical conditions of the world, which included economic and social disruption, further worsening the suicide rate and ill health among the population.

This research article focuses on the people that were greatly overlooked and affected - the teachers - as many of them were put in a difficult situation due to the pandemic. They were in charge of all their students' education, having to make sure they were learning over their online classes and conducting tests and exams, all while balancing their personal life. It was demanding as it directly and indirectly impacted and affected their mental health and those around them.

Even before COVID-19, teaching was a stressful job. Teaching requires a high level of dedication. One is constantly pressured to meet school deadlines and obligations, all while finding a balance between work and personal life. The pandemic made everything much more demanding. The shift to online learning was challenging for many teachers since they had to become familiar with something they were alien to. It was particularly difficult for elder teachers to become familiar with how things worked. Additionally, teachers had to ensure that their students understood concepts and weren't struggling in silence. As they were not face-to-face, they had to pay close attention to how their students responded. They put a great deal of pressure on themselves to make sure their students performed well, which often led to burnout and stress among the teachers.

A survey was conducted where 55% of educators revealed that they thought about leaving their occupation much earlier than intended after the pandemic started. 86% say that they have also seen more teachers quitting after the pandemic (Walker, 2022).

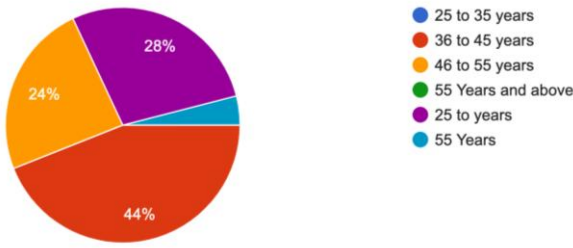
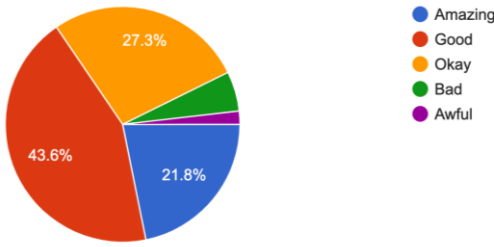
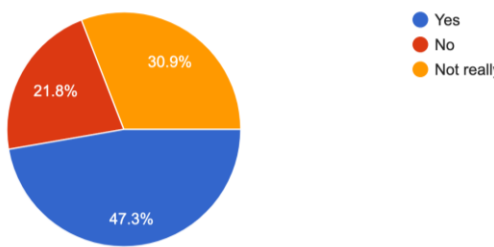
After just a few weeks of the new change, many reports stated that educators felt overwhelmed by the change to online lessons. A study was conducted in which 9,058 Argentine teachers participated in a survey. The study aimed to *"Identify the work situations that education professionals perceived as threats under the modality of non-face-to-face teaching, and to describe the level of perceived stress and its possible effect on psychophysical symptoms"*. The results showed that over 60% of teachers felt high-stress levels due to factors like work overload and poor working environments (Chang et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGY

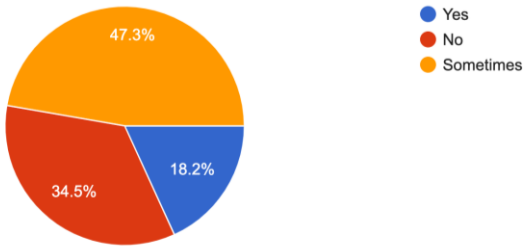
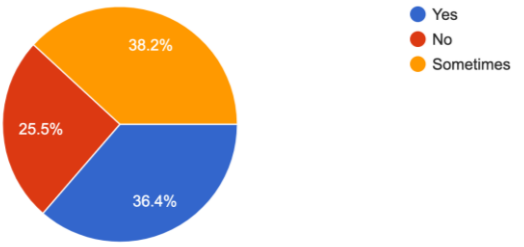
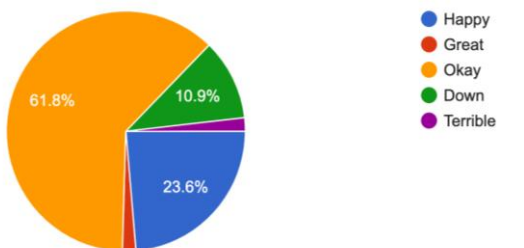
The shift to online learning was extremely difficult on the teachers. Meredith Salmon, a biology teacher at the Peddie School in New Jersey said that moving from classes in real life to classes online was very difficult. As stated, “*Transitioning to online in such a short period of time is really tricky... one day we were in school, and the next day, the whole world was kind of flipped upside down*”. This is how a lot of the teachers felt. Teachers had to think of solutions to allow them to teach effectively through a screen. (Jorey, 2019).

This is why I decided I wanted to conduct a qualitative analysis by undergoing a survey at my school (Trivandrum International School) from the 9th -17th of January 2022, where 55 teachers participated. It was sent out as a google form, and I asked them questions ranging from how their day was, to their stress levels after the pandemic started. I also added an open-ended question, where the teachers could add their personal opinions about how they felt and how the new change influenced their lifestyle. The names and other contact details of the teachers were kept anonymous and no names or email addresses were collected in the process, and the study was approved by the school ethics committee.

THE SURVEY

QUESTION	RESULTS
<p>1. How old are you?</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 25 to 35 years ● 36 to 45 years ● 46 to 55 years ● 55 Years and above ● 25 to years ● 55 Years
<p>2. How do you feel today?</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Amazing ● Good ● Okay ● Bad ● Awful
<p>3. Ever since the lockdown started, have you been more stressed out?</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes ● No ● Not really

<p>4. When was the last time you felt relaxed / treated yourself?</p>	<p>Legend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recently (50.9%) Maybe a month ago (23.6%) Months ago (12.7%) A year ago (9.1%) Before the pandemic started (9.1%) 																		
<p>5. Ever since the pandemic, how would you describe your daily schedule?</p>	<p>Legend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calming (16.7%) Productive (16.7%) Stressful (31.5%) Chaotic (20.4%) mixed - sometimes productive, sometimes stressful (9.1%) Some hours of the day felt stressful but others were calm (9.1%) a mix of calming and chaotic (9.1%) Mixed: productive and sometimes stressful (9.1%) 																		
<p>6. How would you describe your eating habits ever since the pandemic started?</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Description</th> <th>Count</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Scheduled</td> <td>10</td> <td>18.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not scheduled</td> <td>7</td> <td>12.7%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A mix of both</td> <td>35</td> <td>63.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Unhealthy</td> <td>8</td> <td>14.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Healthy</td> <td>8</td> <td>14.5%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Description	Count	Percentage	Scheduled	10	18.2%	Not scheduled	7	12.7%	A mix of both	35	63.6%	Unhealthy	8	14.5%	Healthy	8	14.5%
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<p>7. How would you describe your sleep schedule ever since the pandemic started?</p>	<p>Legend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I sleep a healthy amount (8-10 hours) (25.5%) I sleep for a short amount of time (1-7 hours) (58.2%) I have disturbed sleep (16.4%) 																		
<p>8. Have you had increased headaches?</p>	<p>Legend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes (40.7%) No (59.3%) 																		

<p>9. Do you find it hard to enjoy the things you used to do?</p>	
<p>10. Do you get tired easily?</p>	
<p>11. Describe your mood lately</p>	

RESULTS

The findings show that the majority of the teachers were aged 36-45 years old. They show that it has been a challenging time for the teachers, some more than others. In question 3, they were asked if they had felt more stressed after the pandemic came into play, where 47.3% said they have felt more stressed.

47.3% felt stressed out, while only 21.8% felt it was not. 25.5% of teachers reportedly said that they had not felt relaxed / treated themselves for months or up before the pandemic started, and 52% thought their lifestyle was chaotic or stressful. 14.5% had an unhealthy diet, and 12.7% of meals were unscheduled. Of many teachers, 58.2% had poor sleep (1-7 hours), and 16.4% had a disturbed sleep schedule.

DISCUSSIONS

To add, according to Frontiers, they recruited a sample of 1633 teachers and gave them each an online questionnaire that measured levels of stress, depression, and anxiety. The results showed a significant amount of anxiety, stress, and depression symptoms. Furthermore, factors like gender, age, job stability, and level of education at which they taught, were all influential factors in the survey conducted (Jones & Kessler, 2020).

A study conducted on Brazilian public school teachers showed that 33.7% of them were disappointed with their work, and in many countries (NSSE et al., 2021), dropout rates have gone from under 1% to over 35% (Moscoviz, 2022). This shows us that because one community got affected by COVID-19, in this case, the teachers, they couldn't produce their best work because of the circumstances. This directly affected other groups such as students and parents. The pandemic directly affected teacher and student careers.

In the open-ended question, some teachers mentioned that teaching now feels like a 24/7 job, as they are expected to work past their work hours, while some learnt how to manage and balance their personal and work life. Others talked about how being unable to visit their family and friends drained them.

There were many others, like how most of the teachers said that they could not / was difficult to enjoy the things that they used to like doing, and most of them said that they get tired more easily. These are just some factors that indicate poor mental well-being and possibly even depression.

CONCLUSION

Teachers faced many obstacles because of the pandemic, which all happened without much recognition. Many stressors were put on them, like not having the same connection with students as they would in real life, work overloads, and being on an almost 24-hour schedule. The pressure they were being put under by schools to finish and teach the syllabus in an almost impossible setting led to burnout, anxiety, depression, and even leaving their jobs. Teachers were frontline workers during the pandemic. They had to take on large class sizes with limited resources, and the pandemic only burdened them with more responsibilities and hindered morale. Governments and schools need to start advocating for teachers by promising a lighter workload and more focus on their mental well-being.

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