

***“I’m petrified of being found to be lacking”:***  
**Exploring the issues of teacher mental health**

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# Key questions

- My research questions
- My methodological approach
- My findings

# Research questions

- What factors influence teacher mental health?
- How does teacher mental health impact on pupils and teachers?
- What solutions are effective in addressing the issues of teacher mental health?

# Methodology and methods

- Survey - 780 teachers
- Individual semi-structured interviews

# Setting the research in context

- Teacher stress is pervasive. **Across countries and grade levels**, teachers have universally reported high levels of job stress (Gray et al, 2017)
- There has been a shift to move beyond only examining contributors to teacher stress to also explore characteristics of **resilient teachers** (Beltman et al., 2011)

# Setting the research in context

- 75% of **1,250 school and college staff and leaders** surveyed said they had experienced psychological, physical or behavioural symptoms because of work
- 19% said they had experienced **panic attacks**
- 56% had suffered from **insomnia**
- 41% had experienced difficulty **concentrating**

(Education Support Partnership, 2017)

- 47% said their **personal relationships** had suffered
- 28% said they had been forced to **take time off** work
- 52% had been off for more than a month during the academic year
- 45% felt they don't achieve the **right work-life balance**

(Education Support Partnership, 2017)

# Literature

## Teachers experience

- high levels of **anxiety** and **stress-related health problems** (Jeffcoat & Hayes, 2012)
- **burnout** and **retention** issues (Watson, 2014)



# What influences teacher wellbeing?

- Socioeconomic status / financial security
- Agency – able to shape their role / having control
- A sense of connectedness – feel that they belong
- Beliefs about their own competence

(Dodge et al., 2012)

# Factors that influence teacher wellbeing

- **Demands** – such as workload and work environment
- **Control** – a person's own influence over how their job is carried out
- **Support** – from colleagues, line-manager and organisation
- **Relationships** – to reduce conflict and deal with unacceptable behaviour
- **Role** – understanding of the job content and expectations
- **Change** – how change is managed in the organisation

(Education Support Partnership, 2017)

# Factors that influence teacher wellbeing

- **Student behaviour** influences teacher burnout (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011)
- **Work overload** and **low salaries** (Schonfeld, 2001)
- **School climate** often leads to high levels of staff absenteeism, early retirement, and turnover in the profession (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008)

# Definitions

*Mental health is defined as a state of **well-being** in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.*

World Health Organisation

# Inter-related aspects of well-being

- **Physical well-being**
- **Social well-being**
- **Mental well-being**

**(WHO)**

# Key themes

- Teacher mental health impacts on the quality of teaching, pupils' learning and relationships
- It is not just about workload – which is a dominant discourse
- Panoptic styles of surveillance (Foucault) operate in schools
- Power is not just hierarchical
- Teachers' poor mental health transfers to pupils

# Data collection

782 responses

- 56% declared that they had poor mental health
- Most cases had been diagnosed by a GP
- 76% agreed or strongly agreed that their poor mental health impacted negatively on their pupils
  
- 68 semi-structured interviews

# Motivation

- *I use pre-planned schemes or lessons rather than think of things myself as I struggle to think about what will work well. I doubt myself and my teaching ability.*
- *I am often tired and don't spend as much time on lesson planning. Medication affects this.*
- *I have less energy to plan so do so simply and less creatively.*
- *It takes me much longer because I am desperately trying to plan for perfect lessons. I deliberate over minor details and often end up over planning, spending hours and hours only to realise that it didn't have an impact on how successful the lesson was anyway.*



# Relationships

- *I'm reluctant to engage in staff room jokes and chat as I am thinking "how can everyone be so happy and not stressed like me". This makes me reluctant to stay in the staff room.*
- *I have a strong network of friends who are colleagues and we support each other through bad times.*
- *Tendency to isolate, withdraw and feel not part of the team or arguing due to discontentment with the job.*
- *I am much shorter tempered and less tolerant. I can be snappy and unapproachable.*
- *You view them suspiciously and develop a fear that you are doing everything wrong.*

# Losing control

- *I snap more and that's not fair on the children*
- *Losing control verbally i.e. Shouting rather than remaining calm*
- *I will be irritable with little patience which can lead to me raising my voice rather than dealing with situations in a calm manner*

# Botheredness

- *Wouldn't be bothered or as strict.*
- *Children mirror the energy levels of their teacher. If I am eager and excited, they are. If I am grumpy and low, they are. Some days I can't be bothered to make my lessons good because I am so tired.*
- *Less patience and less empathy – can't be bothered some days.*
- *I am ok when with the children – I have an important job to do!*

# Emotional intelligence

- *I can separate my learners' progress from my own feelings.*
- *I feel inadequate supporting learners holistic wellbeing when I cannot maintain my own.*
- *I'm less emotionally intelligent during difficult times and may not pick up on their difficulties if I am experiencing difficulties of my own.*

# Student progress

- *If I'm struggling to plan and communicate concepts, and I can't concentrate long enough to write coherent feedback I believe - over time- it can detrimentally affect students progress.*
- *Stressed or depressed teachers are less likely to have clarity of thought in their planning and daily teaching. Lack of sleep and anxiety can lead to poor performance.*
- *I was able to help my students and move them forward during lessons but being behind in my paperwork, marking and analysing my observations and assessment means I was not doing the best I could for my students.*

# Points for discussion arising out of the data

- Panoptic styles of surveillance
- Surveillance culture
- Learning walks, lesson observations, book scrutiny,
- Surveillance is not just hierarchical - teachers police each other
- Not feeling trusted

# Improving teacher mental health: institutional issues

- Workload is only part of the problem
- Lack of trust
- Lack of agency
- Sense of belonging
- It is to do with the cultures within our schools

# Improving teacher mental health: structural issues

- Curriculum changes
- Assessment changes

**Leading to instability**



# Factors that support teacher well-being

- Leaders who support employees and see where they fit into the bigger organisational picture
- Effective line managers who **respect, develop** and **reward** their staff
- Consultation that values the **voice of employees** and listens to their views
- Concerns and relationships based on **trust** and shared values

# Factors that support teacher well-being

- **Trust and openness** within **collegiate relationships** (Paterson & Grantham, 2016)
- 'A problem shared is a problem halved' (Paterson & Grantham, 2016)
- Having their **strengths recognised** by the leadership team (Roffey, 2012)
- Happy teachers produce happy pupils (Roffey, 2012)
- Video Enhanced Reflective Practice has been highlighted as a tool for providing positive feedback and developing skills that increase self-esteem and confidence (Strathie et al., 2011)

# Student Mental Health

A growing body of evidence, mainly from high-income countries, has shown that there is a strong socioeconomic gradient in mental health, with **people of lower socioeconomic status having a higher likelihood of developing and experiencing mental health problems**. In other words, social inequalities in society are strongly linked to mental health inequalities.

(Mental Health Foundation, 2016: 57)

# Whole school approach



Public Health England. Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing: A whole school and collage approach. Public Health England. 2015.

# School Mental Health Award – Leeds Beckett University

- [Carnegie Centre of Excellence for Mental Health in Schools](#)

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Thank you