

“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?



England Context

- One in ten children and young people has a mental health need
- Most problems start before the age of 14
- If untreated the problems may continue unto adult life
- Risk factors – **social deprivation, poverty, parental conflict, abuse and neglect, attachment disorders**
- SCHOOL FACTORS: **Exam stress / lack of curriculum choice**

Unless we take care of our own mental health we cannot support young people's mental health

Marshlands

- **Social deprivation**
- **High SEN**
- **Autism unit**
- **Small school**





Private Schools

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)

2018 Survey – Education Support Partnership

- **67%** of education professionals describe themselves as stressed (80% of senior leaders)
- **29%** of all teachers **work more than 51 hours a week** on average
- **74%** of education professionals consider the inability to switch off and relax to be the major contributing factor to a negative work/life balance
- **45%** of education professionals consider **family/friends to be the main source of support** by those who have experienced mental health issues



2018 Survey – Education Support Partnership

- **31%** have experienced a mental health issue in the past academic year
- **76%** of education professionals have experienced **behavioural, psychological or physical symptoms** due to their work, compared with 60% of UK employees
- **43%** of education professionals attribute work symptoms **to student behavioural issues**
- **57%** of all education professionals have **considered leaving** the sector over the past two years as a result of health pressures.
- **65%** of education professionals **would not feel confident in disclosing mental health problems** or unmanageable stress to their employer



- The largest increase in the signs of depression was from **senior leaders**, which rose from 25% in 2017 to 40% in 2018.
- Excessive workload emerged as the **top cause of poor mental health**, with more than two-thirds (69%) of education professionals reporting this.
- As a result of health pressures, more than half of all education professionals (57%) in 2018 have considered leaving the profession in the last two years (compared to 56% in 2017).
- Senior leaders were more likely than those in teaching or other roles to have considered leaving – 63%.
- Those professionals working 60+ hours per week were more likely to consider leaving than those who did not.
- Staff new to teaching experienced more stress.

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)

Methodology and methods

- Survey - 780 teachers
- Individual semi-structured interviews

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)

Thank you

