



HEALING THE HEART OF EDUCATION: TEACHERS MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

This paper examines the crucial role of mental health in the teaching profession, highlighting that mental well-being is integral to overall health and has a significant impact on teacher's effectiveness, job satisfaction, and student outcomes. The paper highlights that teaching is a highly stressful occupation, with factors such as heavy workloads, inadequate institutional support, student behavior challenges, and pressure from parents contributing to elevated risks of anxiety, depression, and burnout among teachers. These mental health challenges not only affect teacher's personal well-being but also negatively influence their teaching self-efficacy and student's academic performance. Study underscores the importance of supportive school environments and targeted mental health interventions to enhance teacher's resilience and professional happiness. It discusses the National Education Policy 2020, which aims to create nurturing educational settings that support teacher's mental health through ongoing professional development and reduced stress. The paper also identifies stigma, lack of resources, and insufficient emotional support as barriers to addressing teacher's mental health needs effectively. The purpose of the paper to improve teacher's mental health by providing various strategies, including personal growth opportunities, peer support systems, creative expression outlets, community service, mental fitness challenges, and access to inspirational content, relaxation zones, and physical well-being programs. The researcher suggests activities that promote emotional regulation and resilience, thereby benefiting teachers by fostering a healthier and more productive educational environment.

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Introduction

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables one to cope with problems in life, realize one's potential, acquire and thrive, and make a positive contribution to society. It is relevant to all aspects of life, from coping with stress and problem-solving to managing relations and personal aspirations. Teacher well-being extends past stress and burnout, it impacts the act of teaching. The classroom climate, the student-teacher relationships, and even the enthusiasm with which lessons are taught are all affected by the teacher's emotional well-being. Teachers who are emotionally validated, heard, and feel valued exhibit positivity, which encourages students and builds trust. But sustained emotional stress suppresses empathy and creativity, turning teaching into drudgery. A commitment to developing the future through emotionally healthy teachers is what investing in teacher's mental health require.

Meaning of Mental Health

Mental health is an emotional, psychological, and social state of well-being. It determines the way people feel, think, act, they cope with stress, get along with others, and make decisions. The researcher emphasized that mental health is not an isolated or secondary issue, but rather an important and integral aspect to overall health. (Prince et al., 2007).

Being well mentally is feeling good inside, thinking well, and being capable of handling good and bad times. It is not just a question of not being mentally ill, it is a question of feeling good mentally and emotionally. According to Boorse, mental health should be described in terms of proper functioning in relation to the design of a species, much like physical health (Boorse C., 1976). As per the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is a mental state of well-being that allows a person to manage the challenges of life, realize their potential, and learn to work effectively, thus becoming an effective member of their society. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), mental health is a state of being in which an individual is emotionally well, has good behavioral adjustment, has a relative absence of disabling symptoms, and can form constructive relationships and cope with the routine stresses and demands of life.

Key Aspect of Mental Health

Mental well-being

Mental health is a state where a person possesses a good feeling of being well, makes sound judgments, and copes well with the challenges of life. It involves the ability to handle stress, develop healthy relationships, and make sound decisions. For example, a student who is meticulous about his or her psychological well-being may cope with exam stress by scheduling a study schedule, resting, seeking advice from friends for motivation, and remaining optimistic without becoming anxious. Such behaviors show emotional regulation, problem-solving and adaptive coping and all the predictors of outstanding mental health.

Psychological well-being

Warr (1978) studied psychological well-being by identifying important factors that influence mental health in addition to the absence of illness. He underlined that the concept of well-being is multifaceted and includes elements like life satisfaction, pleasant affect, and the lack of worry or sadness. Resilience, adaptive cognitive models, self-esteem, and coping with life's challenges.

It requires having a well-defined concept of oneself and goals.

Social welfare

Social welfare in mental health refers to the systematic support offered by governments and organizations to protect individual's psychological well-being, particularly for those in weak or poor situations. It includes inexpensive mental health care, financial help, housing, job placement assistance, and community outreach activities.

Cognitive functioning

Cognitive functioning in mental health refers to the ability of the brain to comprehend information, think clearly, remember, concentrate, and make decisions. It influences how individuals view the world, solve problems, and do daily chores. Like, remembering a phone number, solving a math problem, focusing during a lecture, or making a shopping list, all involve cognitive functioning.

Resilience

The ability to bounce back from setbacks, adjust to change, and carry on with daily activities in the face of hardship is known as resilience in mental health. It involves experiencing strong emotions, using constructive coping mechanisms, and being able to develop and learn from trying situations. Such as a student who fails an important test could feel let down at first, but they might show resilience by asking for help, changing their study strategies, and trying again with fresh zeal.

Self-care and lifestyle balance

Self-care and life balance are important for maintaining mental health. It includes getting enough sleep, eating well, exercising, relaxing, enjoying hobbies, and setting limits at work and in personal relationships. Having purpose and goals in life is important for several reasons. It helps with motivation, happiness, and mental health issues. For example, a school teacher spends her day with students and handles class tasks. After school, she walks in the park, reads while drinking tea. These small self-care habits keep her energized, prevent burnout, and help her return to work with a fresh outlook each day.

Mental Health and Teacher

Mental health plays a powerful role in the lives of teachers, shaping not only how they feel, but how they teach, lead, and connect. Teaching is an emotionally challenging profession that can result in stress, worry, and burnout, especially when teachers feel underappreciated or do not receive enough support. (Gholamitooranposhti M., 2012). Teaching is far more than delivering lessons; it is a high-energy, emotionally demanding profession that requires juggling multiple tasks at once: managing classrooms, designing engaging lessons, meeting individual student needs, and directing endless paperwork. The teachers are at serious risk for mental illness like depression, anxiety, an emotional exhaustion, varying according to the level of teaching, primary-school-teachers for instance, tend to face greater emotional stress. The factors include inadequate institutional support, classroom management difficulties, and workload. The authors highlight the demand for specific mental health interventions and policy approaches. (Kovess-Masfety et al., 2007)

Teaching is a highly stressful occupation and teachers suffer from more mental health problems than other professions. (Kinman et al., 2011) on the offhand side, when teachers enjoy strong mental well-being, they are more focused, patient, and resilient. They bring positive energy

into the classroom, build stronger relationships with students, and create an environment where learning thrives. Teacher stress may relate to student mental health promotion through the relationship between perceived competence, perceived responsibility and negative emotions (Ekornes., 2016). Teacher's mental health problems have negative effects on teaching self-efficacy and student achievement (Yang et al., 2012). Mentally healthy teachers are also more likely to love what they do and stick with it for the long haul. But when mental health suffers, it can ripple through the classroom affecting student performance, classroom behavior, and the overall school atmosphere. That is why caring for teacher's mental health is not just a personal issue, it is a foundation of a healthy, effective education system.

The Society for Health Education and Promotion Specialists (SHEPS 1997) states that mental health involves experiencing happiness, joy, and love, along with having positive feelings about oneself and others. Like mental illness, mental wellness can be influenced by biological, social, psychological, and environmental factors. The National Institute of Mental Health describes mental health as feeling good about yourself, making the most of life's opportunities, and managing challenges. Mental health is a fundamental aspect of the human experience, affecting everyone. It influences how we think, feel, and behave, impacting everything from personal relationships to productivity at work or school, regardless of age, background, or occupation. In educational settings, mental health plays a crucial role, in affecting student engagement, academic performance, and the overall school climate. While society has become increasingly attentive to student's mental health, the well-being of instructors is an equally critical concern that must not be overlooked. The creation of supportive school climates and interventions focused on increasing teacher's professional happiness and resilience, which not only help teacher's mental health but also indirectly benefit student outcomes through more engaged and effective teaching. (Capone V et al., 2020).

As individuals closely connected to students, teachers profoundly influence their student's mental health. Teachers often understand how important mental health is to student's behaviors, social interactions, and academic achievement. (Roeser et al., 1997). Yet, due to the high-pressure nature of the profession, teachers themselves face a considerable risk of developing psychological challenges. Although teachers have long been celebrated for their dedication and passion for education, growing demands and heightened expectations have taken a toll on their mental well-being.

Teachers often juggle various roles, such as educator, counselor, mentor, and caregiver. They dedicate their time and energy to their students' well-being, often at the expense of their own. The teachers experience high levels of mental health problems, especially depression and anxiety symptoms, which are significantly correlated with high job demands and low social support at work. (Borelle I et al., 2014). This self-neglect, combined with ongoing stress, emotional exhaustion, and a lack of work-life balance, can result in feelings of being overwhelmed, frustrated, and even losing passion for their profession. Statistics support this, with over 270,000 teachers leaving the profession annually since 2016, and this trend is expected to persist until 2026 (Bureau of Labor Statistics.)

The significance of teachers' mental health is also emphasized by the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), which outlines its aim for comprehensive educational reform in India. The objective is to establish a nurturing atmosphere where educators can consistently enhance their abilities and expertise. The NEP 2020 policy focuses on competency-based learning, technology

integration, multidisciplinary education, and ongoing professional development, which has increased the workload and duties of teachers, frequently without providing them with the necessary emotional or physical support. (Pandey S.) A nice, courteous, and stress-free work environment is what NEP 2020 seeks to give teachers since it understands how important their mental health is for a successful educational system. Many educators lack the tools and training needed to properly address the mental health needs of their students. Teachers' roles are being redefined by the National Education Policy 2020 to include facilitating trans disciplinary and holistic learning rather than merely imparting knowledge. (Dar et al., 2023).

The stigma associated with mental health sometimes prevents open discussions and timely interventions. Heavy workloads and structural difficulties further restrict teachers' capacity to give mental health care top priority. Teachers themselves could also experience mental health problems, but getting professional assistance can be difficult. The crucial need of proactive and systemic assistance for teacher's mental health in educational settings and reveals important stresses for teachers, such as high workloads, a lack of autonomy, administrative pressure, and insufficient emotional support. (White J., 2020).

A teacher's stress can have a wide-ranging impact on students and the school environment as a whole. Stressed teachers may struggle to sleep, have memory issues, and find it difficult to organize classes properly. According to the research, achieves are directly linked to lower work-related stress, better coping skills, and supportive school environments. Participants in stress-reduction programs and therapies, such as training in mindfulness, time management, and emotional regulation, also saw major advantages. (Braeunig M et al., 2018)

Mental health is deeply connected to the well-being, performance, and effectiveness of teachers. Here's how:

1. Stress and Burnout

Heavy teacher workloads, emotional pressure, and lack of support are among the most frequent causes of stress and burnout among teachers, which lead to fatigue and reduced effectiveness. It is harmful to their health as well as to the quality of teaching and learning. Burnout, arising from chronic stress, can have physical and mental health implications. Poor mental health among teachers can leave them feeling burnt out, disengaged, or ineffective.

2. Emotional Stability and Classroom Management

Teachers are burnt out and stressed because of too much work, emotional stress, and lack of support. This exhausts them and makes them less productive in their work. It damages their quality of teaching and learning. Burnout is the result of prolonged stress and can cause physical as well as mental harm. Teachers in poor mental health will likely be burnt out, disengaged, or ineffective at work.

3. Impact on Student Learning

The mental health of teacher is vital to student's learning because they foster classroom that are encouraging, supportive, and well-run, which improves student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement. Teachers who are stressed, anxious, or burned out, may find it difficult to focus, be patient, or control their emotions. This can result in poor classroom

interactions, lower-quality education, and a detrimental effect on the academic and emotional development of students.

4. Job Satisfaction and Retention

Teachers are more likely to remain in the field when they feel appreciated, supported, and paid properly. Job satisfaction and retention are strongly related with. A teacher who works in a collaborative setting, gets regular praise, and has access to training programs, for example, is more likely to stay dedicated to their position, which lowers turnover and improves student learning results. High stress and poor mental health are major reasons why teachers leave the profession.

5. Role Modeling

The behavior, attitudes, and values of teachers are greatly influenced by the role models they set. Students are more likely to emulate teachers who exhibit virtues like accountability, empathy, discipline, and honesty. The teacher who treats every student with dignity, and resolves problems peacefully deals a strong model for students to follow in both their personal and academic lives.

6. Support Systems

Support networks are crucial for teachers to manage work-related stressors and preserve their well-being. These consist of peer cooperation, professional development opportunities, administrative assistance, mentorship, and counseling. A rookie teacher is more likely to feel secure, experience less stress, and perform well in the classroom if she/he receives help from a senior mentor, regular feedback from school administrators, and emotional support from their peers.

Reasons for Teacher's Declining Mental Health

Heavy Workload

Teachers have a lot to do planning lessons, marking homework, going to meetings, and doing paperwork. It often becomes too much and stresses them out.

Pressure from Exams

Teachers are judged by how well their students do on tests. It puts a lot of pressure on them and causes long-term stress.

Lack of Support from School Leaders

When school principal or managers don't support teachers properly, teachers feel alone and uncared for.

Difficult Student Behavior

Handling rude, noisy, or even aggressive students every day can make teachers feel tired and upset.

Low Salary and Money Problems

Many teachers feel they are not paid enough for the hard work they do. It can relate teachers from frustration and money worries.

Not Enough Resources and Big Classes

Sometimes teachers don't have enough materials or helpers. Teaching large groups of students without enough support is very tough.

Pressure and Criticism from Parents

Some parents blame teachers for their children not doing well. They deal with angry or demanding parents, which increases stress for the teachers.

No Time for Personal Life

Many teachers have to work in the evenings and on weekends. The situation may leave them with very little time for family, friends, or rest.

Emotional Burden from Student's Problems

Teachers often help students who are going through tough times like poverty or abuse. These stories also hurt teachers too.

Feeling Undervalued

Teachers sometimes feel that society does not respect or appreciate them enough. It can relate them inferior with their pleasure and self-confidence.

Effective Ways for Enhancing Teacher's Mental Health:

1. Personal Growth Opportunities

Teacher's personal growth opportunities like attending workshops, pursuing further studies, or joining educational seminars, boost their skills and motivation. For example, a teacher who joins a digital teaching course feels more confident using technology in class, making lessons engaging and effective. Help teachers rediscover hobbies they love, this boosts happiness outside school life.

2. Teacher Buddy Systems

Teacher Buddy Systems pair educators to exchange ideas, experiences, and support, fostering a collaborative atmosphere. This approach comforts the problems of the job, enhances teaching methods, and fosters trust. For example, pairing a new teacher with a helpful colleague allows them to share lesson plans, talk about ways to deal with student's conduct, and work through school procedures together, which makes teaching more fun and less lonely. Pair up teachers (senior + junior or across departments) as well-being buddies who check in on each other weekly. It is build trust, support, and shared responsibility for mental health.

3. Creative Expression Outlets

Creative expression outlets allow teachers to explore their passions, relieve stress, and infuse their teaching with renewed enthusiasm. Engaging in activities like painting, music, writing, or drama not only supports their personal well-being but also enhances classroom creativity. For example, a teacher who loves music might start a school choir, giving both themselves and students a joyful space to express and connect through shared creativity.

4. Community Service Days

Let teachers take part in volunteering activities (like tree planting, teaching street kids, helping at animal shelters). Giving back to society boosts purpose and emotional satisfaction. Teacher's involvement in Community Service Days builds stronger community ties and sets a positive example for students also. Activities like park clean-ups or health camps show students the value of social responsibility and inspire them to contribute as well.

5. Mental Fitness Challenges

Organize Mental Wellness Weeks where daily activities are assigned (gratitude journaling, meditation, team games). Gamify it with small rewards like coffee vouchers, certificates, or free periods.

6. Access to Inspirational Content

Teachers may stay inspired, get new ideas, and improve their instruction by having access to inspirational content. Reading inspirational tales or attending informative lectures, for example, might revive their enthusiasm and raise student participation in class.

7. Relaxation Zones at School

There must be a quiet room with cushions, plants, soft lighting, and no screens where teachers can relax during breaks. Even a corner with relaxing music and aromatherapy (lavender, mint) can refresh minds of the teachers; it can help to reduce stress and anxiety among teachers.

8. Physical Well-being Support

Teachers may maintain their physical well-being and be more productive in the classroom by having access to fitness programs, health examinations, and safe working environments. Offer teachers group fitness activities like Zumba, yoga, or walking clubs after school. Negotiate discounts at local gyms or wellness centers for teachers.

9. Empower Teachers in Decision-Making

Empowering teachers in decision-making boosts their confidence, ownership, and commitment to school goals. When teachers are involved in planning curricula, setting policies, or choosing teaching methods, they feel valued and more motivated. For instance, a school that includes teachers in academic planning meetings often sees better teamwork, innovative ideas, and stronger student outcomes.

10. Introduce “No-Meeting Days”

There will be a one day in a week where there are no meetings, no workshops, just pure teaching and free planning time. Reduces mental overload in teachers and give them breathing space.

Conclusion:

A healthy and productive learning environment depends on giving teacher's mental health top priority. We can enable teachers to flourish by encouraging self-care behaviors, lobbying for structural improvements, establishing strong social support networks, and supporting work-life

balance. The authors concluded that mindfulness, physical exercise, and stress management programs improve teacher's emotional resilience and reduce burnout. (Hofmann et al., 2022).

A teacher in good mental health is better able to encourage, inspire, and mentor students, which eventually improves academic performance and makes learning more enjoyable for everyone. The authors propose for early preventive measures, workplace health promotion, and systematic treatments adapted to teacher's unique occupational problems. (Scheuch et al., 2015). Psychological therapies emphasize stress management techniques such as mindfulness and meditation to better control emotions and reduce anxiety.

Creating strong social support systems through mentorship programs or peer groups fosters a sense of community while reducing feelings of loneliness. The authors believe that teacher's psychological well-being has a direct impact on their capacity to establish inclusive classrooms and maintain strong connections with students, hence improving learning results. (Gray et al., 2017). Promoting open communication about mental health issues normalizes seeking help and reduces the stigma associated with doing so. By prioritizing these methods, we can create a more supportive environment for teachers, improving their emotional well-being and promoting student accomplishment.

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