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COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact on the Mental Health of Teachers

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Teachers experienced mental health problems during and after the coronavirus pandemic. Some teachers left the profession both before, during, and after the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced a high level of stress and burnout, depression, and anxiety, which had an adverse impact on teaching quality, patience with others, ability to focus, physical and mental health status, and the ability to separate work and family. In addition, stress, burnout, and other mental health issues negatively affected the teaching-learning process, resulting in teacher turnover, decreased teacher retention, and decreased student learning outcomes.

This paper is a brief literature review of COVID-19's impact on teachers' mental health. The research literature was obtained from databases including PubMed, ProQuest, Research Gate, and Google Scholar. The research journals focused on teachers' mental health during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.

A healthy work environment was important for teachers' coping during the trauma of the pandemic. A multifaceted approach is necessary to address the mental health issues of teachers in education. Individual interventions were provided, but they do not address the problem from a holistic perspective, including the educational system's culture, norms, and values. Organizational development (OD) can be a useful strategy in dealing with many mental health issues of teachers after the COVID-19 pandemic. OD consists of long-range efforts and programs aimed at improving an organization's ability to survive by changing its problem-solving and renewal process. Therefore, to address teachers' challenges, the entire educational system needs to be assessed from a holistic perspective at different levels of the organizational chart from the top down.

Key Words: Teacher; mental health; stress; burnout; anxiety; depression; coronavirus; pandemic; COVID-19; Interventions; Organizational development, educational system.

Introduction

Coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, also known as COVID-19, was declared a global pandemic in March 2020 (Kennedy, 2021; Kennedy, 2022; Schuchat, 2020). COVID-19 is a respiratory illness caused by infection with the coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2). During the pandemic, mass trauma (collective trauma), the same events or series of events traumatize a large number of people within some shared time span (Kennedy, 2021; Kennedy, 2022; Prideaux, 2021). Enduring emotional distress and fear created by COVID-19 causes trauma in children, adults, and the community at large. The mental health and psychosocial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic may be particularly serious for groups of people. The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for the U.S. education system and teachers (Herman et al., 2021). It brought on numerous challenges in the daily lives of teachers. These challenges resulted in increased stress and mental health problems.

Teachers experienced numerous stressors during the pandemic (Fontana et al., 2022; Pressley, 2021). Some teachers left the profession both before and during the pandemic. They experience fear of the infection because of the uncertainty about the infectious virus and the death of colleagues. The pandemic brought on new alternative teaching approaches (Pressley, 2021). Therefore, teachers experienced challenges in teaching virtual or hybrid and in-class teaching. Teachers were given the responsibility of first resources for parents using instructional technology.

Teachers experienced increased stressors during the initial onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Cavallari, 2024). Many educators returned to in-person instruction in the 2021-2022 school year, and they faced changing job demands and stressors, which have important implications for educator well-being.

Before the pandemic, teachers were leaving the profession at a rate of 19% and 30% due to teacher burnout (Pressley, 2021). Teacher burnout and staff shortage affect students' learning and motivation. Pressley (2021) proposed that, as teachers return to the classroom, they will experience new challenges, such as burnout, due to COVID-19 infection. The research reported that the cause of the burnout is due to (a) teaching anxiety, (b) communicating with parents, and (c) administrative support.

Teachers have continued to deal with the aftermath of COVID-19 over the past few years (Kotowski et al., 2022). The demands of the change include the requirement to teach remotely and manage hybrid (both in-person and online). This change affected the mental and physical health of teachers.

Methods

Teachers experienced mental health problems during and after the coronavirus pandemic. This paper is a brief literature review of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the mental health of teachers. The research literature was obtained from databases including PubMed, ProQuest, Research Gate, and Google Scholar. The research journal articles focused on the mental health of teachers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.

Research on Teachers, Covid-19 Pandemic, and Mental Health, Stress, Depression, Anxiety, and Emotional Exhaustion

During COVID-19, teachers experienced depression, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion (Cormier et al., 2021). Cormier et al. (2021) conducted a study on the COVID-19 pandemic in special education. This study consists of 468 surveys across the United States; 38.4% met clinical criteria for generalized anxiety disorder, a rate 12.4 times greater than the U.S. population, and 37.6% for major depressive disorder, a rate 5.6 times greater than the population. Race/ethnicity, gender, or school funding was not related to mental health. The impact of the pandemic was moderate to extreme on stress (91%), depression (58%), anxiety (76%), and emotional exhaustion (83%).

Stress Related to Poorer Mental Health, Coping, and Teaching

During COVID-19, supporting teachers' well-being is critical to prevent significant adverse consequences for teachers, their students, and the education system as a whole (Baker et al. 2021). Baker et al. (2021) conducted a study using needs assessment data gathered from 454 New Orleans charter school teachers (81% women; 55% Black; 73% regular education) during the first months of the pandemic. On average, teachers experienced seven stressors (out of 18 surveyed) and four protective factors (out of six surveyed). Teachers who experienced more stressors reported worse mental health and found it harder to cope and teach. Experiencing more protective factors was associated with finding

it easier to cope and teach. In comparison to White teachers, Black teachers reported better mental health, more protective factors, less of a negative impact of stressors, and more of a positive impact of protective factors. Lack of connection and online teaching challenges were the most difficult aspects of teaching during the pandemic; support from coworkers and administrators was the most helpful. Results of the findings reported that Teachers experienced considerable stress as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was related to poorer mental health, coping, and teaching. At the same time, teachers reported resiliencies, which were related to better coping and teaching.

High Level of Stress: Challenges for Attracting and Retaining Qualified Teachers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the high levels of stress created challenges for attracting and retaining qualified teachers (Fontana et al. 2022). Fontana et al. (2022) investigate the association between physical activity, sleep quality, and perceived psychological stress among teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. An online survey measuring physical activity, sleep quality, and perceived psychological stress was distributed across 47 U.S. states between September and October of 2020. Data provided by 635 teachers (mean age: 42 ± 18 years, 74.6% female) were included in the present analysis. Results suggested a negative association between physical activity and perceived psychological stress. Mediation analyses indicated that teachers engaging in high levels of physical activity were more likely to have good-quality sleep and, in turn, were less likely to report high levels of perceived stress. Physical activity and sleep-

related interventions could help curtail the rise. Teachers, especially young females, reported high levels of stress. The high levels of stress created challenges for attracting and retaining qualified teachers.

Stress: Physical Health and Health Behaviors, Psychological Health, Relationships, and Social Well-being

The post-pandemic era continues to impact the well-being of educators (Cavallarie et al., 2024). Cavallari et al. (2024) sought to understand the stressors and health impacts faced by U.S. educators in the 2021-2022 school year, two years following the acute phase of the pandemic. Thirty-four certified educators (N=34) based in Connecticut, USA, participated in four virtual focus groups in February 2022. A semi-structured focus group script, designed by the research team and guided by the job demands-resources model, was administered to understand stressors and stress impacts. Data were transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method to identify themes and sub-themes. Themes were summarized based on how many participants mentioned them. Analysis of the qualitative data yielded three themes concerning the well-being impacts of stress: physical health and health behaviors, psychological health, relationships, and social well-being behaviors. Results indicated that the well-being of educators continued to be impacted in the post-pandemic era. Interventions are needed to reduce school and district-related demands to address stress-related educator well-being.

High Level of Stress and Burnout and Adverse Effect on Teaching Quality

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced a high level of stress and burnout, which had adverse effects on teaching quality and their ability to focus (Kotowski et al., 2022). In a study by Kotowski et al. (2022), 5300 teachers were surveyed in public and private schools, and 703 completed the survey. The study aimed to determine whether COVID-19 continued to impact teacher stress, burnout, and well-being a year into the pandemic. Research findings reported that a high level of stress and burnout continues to be high for teachers. Approximately 72% of teachers reported feeling very stressed, and 57% felt very burned out. Also, teachers were less able to balance work and family and manage their stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers also reported that the conditions during COVID-19 had an adverse impact on teaching quality, patience with others, ability to focus, physical and mental health status, and the ability to separate work and family.

Impact on Physical and Mental Health: High Level of Psychiatric Symptoms

Teachers experienced an impact on physical and mental health and a high level of psychiatric symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic (Carlson et al., 2024). According to Carlson et al. (2024), the coronavirus pandemic dexterously impacted physical and mental health. In a study by Carlson et al. (2024), a survey was conducted via Qualtrics that assessed internalizing symptoms, psychological flexibility, and occupational characteristics. Psychological flexibility accounted for 33% of the variance in depressive symptoms and 24% of the variance in social anxiety symptoms. Results indicated high levels of

psychiatric symptoms among educators during COVID-19, and psychological flexibility was associated with lower symptoms.

Job-related Stress, Teacher Shortage, Mental Health Problems, Poor Student Outcomes

In the 2020 to 2021 academic year, the COVID-19 pandemic brought numerous challenges to teachers across the country as they worked to educate students (Robinson et al., 2023). Robinson et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study of current secondary data analysis using qualitative responses collected as part of a teacher survey to evaluate a social-emotional learning curriculum implemented during the 2020 to 2021 academic year. The lived experiences of teachers ($N=52$) across 11 elementary schools in the Great Plains region were captured through open-ended questions as the teachers transitioned from in-person to remote learning. A phenomenological approach was utilized to analyze the challenges expressed by teachers as they faced instability and additional professional demands. Results reported that without adequate support and inclusion of teacher perspectives, job-related stress may lead to teacher shortages, deterioration of teacher mental health, and ultimately worse student outcomes.

Increased Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced increased symptoms of anxiety and depression (Cohen-Fraade & Donahue, 2022). Cohen-Fraade and Donahue (2022) administered an online survey to full-time teachers in public schools who were simultaneously enrolled in a master's degree program in

education. Teachers (N=455) who were sent the survey, 96 completed it, resulting in a 21.1% survey completion rate. The survey was composed of both quantitative and qualitative items, which assessed teachers' self-perceptions about their mental health before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their use of mental health resources. Most questions were drawn from the Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4), which focused primarily on symptoms of depression and anxiety. The results of the findings indicated that teachers felt an increase in symptoms of anxiety and depression. Some participants reported seeking mental health support.

Decline in Mental Health, Morale, and Work-life Balance

In 2020, teachers experienced a variety of challenges since the onset of COVID-19, including a range of modalities and COVID-19 protocols (Marshall et al., 2020). The challenges associated with teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic have led to increased burnout and stress, as well as diminishing well-being and mental health in teachers. Marshall et al. (2020) conducted a study to explore teacher burnout and subjective mental health from the start of the pandemic to the end of the 2020–21 school year. To better understand teachers' experiences during this time, the researcher conducted a nationwide survey ($n = 302$) with teachers between May and June 2021, including four focus groups and four one-on-one interviews in the fall of 2021. Results of the findings suggest that teachers' subjective mental health, morale, and work-life balance have significantly declined since the beginning of the pandemic. Teachers

reported feeling anxious and burned out from teaching due to greater workloads and decreased support from administrators and parents.

Lower Levels of Work-related Stress During the Pandemic Compared to Pre-pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for the U.S. education system and teachers (Herman et al., 2021). Herman et al. (2021) examined correlates and predictors of teacher well-being in the immediate aftermath of school closures related to the pandemic. Data were collected as part of a larger group-randomized trial. In this study, N=699 teachers completed surveys about their stress, coping, health, job satisfaction, and internalizing symptoms in Fall 2019, before the pandemic, and May 2020, during the pandemic. Teachers also provided ratings during COVID-19 of their teaching, student attendance, engagement, and concern about students and families. Teachers reported lower levels of work-related stress after the pandemic's onset compared to their pre-pandemic levels. Findings suggest the importance of teacher competence and perceived efficacy in managing student behavior and engaging them in learning to help them adapt to the stressors of a pandemic. In addition, aspects of organizational health and climate may also help facilitate or hinder teacher adjustment.

Moderate Stress, Increased Mental Problems and Symptoms, and Poor Quality of Sleep

Moderate stress increased mental problems and symptoms, and poor quality of sleep were reported as evidence in teachers during the COVID-19

pandemic (Harding et al., 2023). Harding et al. (2023) aimed to measure the associations between specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and stress levels in Minnesota educators. A survey was administered to teachers and staff members (N=296) from eight middle schools online between May and July of 2020. The average stress score was moderate, with an increase in mental health problems and symptoms. The teacher had a hard time making the transition to working from home, and an increase in sleep problems or poor quality. Research findings indicated potential areas for intervention to reduce employee stress in the event of future disruptions to in-person teaching or other major transitions during dynamic times.

Summary of Research Studies

During COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced depression (Cormier et al., 2021), anxiety (Cohen-Fraade & Donahue, 2022; Cormier et al., 2021), and stress (Baker et al., 2021; Cavallarie et al., 2024; Cohen-Fraade & Donahue, 2022; Cormier et al., 2021; Fontana et al., 2022; Harding et al., 2023; Herman et al., 2021; Kotowski et al., 2023; Robinson et al., 2023). Teachers experienced a high level of stress and burnout (Baker et al., 2021; Kotowski et al., 2022; Marshall et al., 2020). The stress and burnout of teachers had an adverse effect on teaching quality and an inability to focus (Kotowski et al., 2022). Also, those who experienced more stressors reported worse mental health and found it harder to cope and teach (Baker et al., 2021). Teachers, especially young females, reported high levels of stress (Fontana et al., 2022). The high levels of stress created challenges for attracting and retaining qualified teachers.

Teachers experienced an impact on physical and mental health and a high level of psychiatric symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic (Carlson et al., 2024). During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced increased symptoms of anxiety and depression (Cohen-Fraade & Donahue, 2022). Moderate stress increased mental problems and symptoms, and poor quality of sleep were reported as evidence in teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Harding et al., 2023).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced a high level of stress and burnout, which had an adverse impact on teaching quality, patience with others, ability to focus, physical and mental health status, and the ability to separate work and family (Kotowski et al., 2022). A healthy work environment was important for teachers coping during the trauma of the pandemic (Herman et al., 2021). In one study, teachers reported a lower level of work-related stress after the pandemic's onset compared to their pre-pandemic levels. Findings suggest the importance of teacher competence and perceived efficacy in managing student behavior and engaging them in learning to help them adapt to the stressors of a pandemic. In addition, aspects of organizational health and climate may also help facilitate or hinder teacher adjustment. Research suggested that without adequate support and inclusion of teacher perspectives, job-related stress may lead to teacher shortages, deterioration of teacher mental health, and ultimately worse student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2023).

Strategies for Improvement

Organizational development (OD) can be a useful strategy in dealing with many mental health issues of teachers after the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Brown, 2011; Bushe, 2021; Kennedy, 2020a; Kennedy, 2020b; Kennedy & Wider, 2020). OD consists of long-range efforts and programs aimed at improving an organization's ability to survive by changing its problem-solving and renewal process (Alhmeidiyeen, 2019; Brown, 2011; Hamlin, 2019; Hussain et al., 2018; Kennedy, 2020b; Kennedy & Wider, 2020; Marshak & Bushe, 2018; Martin, 2016; Nwobia & Aljohani, 2017). The solving of problems usually involves the introduction of change. When improving the effectiveness of an organization, the introduction of change must occur. For example, OD is not just a single technique, such as teaching assertiveness or conflict resolution for a specific problem. OD will use a variety of techniques to promote a healthy organizational culture. An external consultant will be useful in assisting the organization in improving its effectiveness (Brown, 2011; Bushe, 2021; Kennedy, 2020a; Kennedy, 2020b; Kennedy & Wider, 2020).

Kotowski et al. (2022) propose the development of organizational and individual-organizational interface (IOI) interventions to reduce the source of teacher stress as opposed to individual-level interventions. Whereas organizational interventions have been designed primarily to improve workplace support and climate. In addition, the cognitive-behavioral approach is useful when focusing on specific, manual-based treatment protocols and promoting general health and well-being for employees (Hayes et al., 2004; Kotowski et al,

2022; Riley et al., 2017). This approach is useful for workplace wellness programs. Another approach is mindfulness meditation used as a useful tool in reducing negative behavior (Flook et al., 2013; Kotowski et al., 2022; von der Embse et al., 2019; Zadok-Gurman et al., 2021). This intervention may not have the stigma associated with help-seeking for mental health. Also, it has been a useful tool for effective stress recovery for teachers. For example, organizational interventions, including cognitive-behavioral approaches and mindfulness meditation, are used for teachers' stress and burnout. These interventions do not address the problem from a holistic perspective, including the culture, norms, and values of the educational systems. Therefore, to address the challenges of teachers, the entire educational system needs to be assessed from a holistic perspective at different levels of the organizational chart from top down.

A multifaceted approach is necessary to address mental health issues (e.g., stress and burnout) in education (Kennedy, 2020b; Kennedy & Wider, 2020). To address the mental health needs of teachers, a multifaceted, multidisciplinary approach in education is needed (Kennedy, 2020b; Kennedy & Wider, 2020; Phillips, 2016). An unhealthy organization will promote an unsafe work environment and an unhealthy work-life balance for employees (Kennedy, 2020a; Kennedy, 2020b). An organization whose core values promote an abusive work environment may cause ineffective managers and employees to be fearful, distrustful, dissatisfied, and unproductive. A healthy organization needs to address the mental health needs of teachers. In addition, the teaching-learning process is negatively affected by stress, burnout, and other mental health issues,

resulting in teacher turnover, decreased teacher retention, and decreased learning outcomes for students. A healthy work environment was important for teachers coping during the trauma of the pandemic (Herman et al., 2021). In one study, teachers reported a lower level of work-related stress after the pandemic's onset compared to their pre-pandemic levels. Findings suggest the importance of teacher competence and perceived efficacy in managing student behavior and engaging them in learning to help them adapt to the stressors of a pandemic. In addition, a supportive climate was important.

Conclusion

When using OD in the workplace, it may take time to improve organizational effectiveness (Brown, 2011; Kennedy, 2020b; Kennedy & Wider, 2020). Many organizations utilized education on workplace violence, individual empowerment, assertiveness training, and conflict resolution in handling the problem. These strategies are effective in handling specific problems in the organization. However, these strategies fail to deal with the culture, social rules, and norms within the organization, impacting teachers' mental health (e.g., stress, burnout, mental health problems), resulting in teacher turnover, decreased teacher retention, and decreased learning outcomes for students. However, these strategies are used as interventions for an OD program. An external consultant will be useful in using a multifaceted approach to assist the organization in improving its effectiveness over time (Brown, 2011; Bushe, 2021; Kennedy, 2020a; Kennedy, 2020b; Kennedy & Wider, 2020).

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