

Teacher Wellbeing During COVID-19 School Closures

Sonal Chabra

Assistant Professor, Rawal College of Education, Faridabad

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the government across the globe to close down the school to control the spread of the virus. This led to shifting of the teaching-learning process in an online mode. The transition from face to face to online mode was new to all— teachers and students alike. Most of the teachers were new to using technology in such an extensive manner and also working from home. Managing work life balance when working from home was also unprecedented. Amidst these changing circumstances, teachers may have found themselves in situations where there might have been an emotional toll of isolation due to the social distancing norms and uncertainty about health. Teachers would have reacted differently to these circumstances. This reaction to the individual and collective physical, environmental, and social events that shape how educators respond to their students and colleagues is termed as teachers wellbeing (Graham, A., & Truscott, J. 2019). The present research has been carried on a sample of 94 teachers working in schools at different levels and attempted to assess their wellbeing during this COVID-19 phase through a specifically designed tool.

Keywords: *teachers, wellbeing, COVID-19*

Introduction

The onset of pandemic has brought changes in lives of people across all age-groups, different professions crossing the boundaries of the cities, states and nations. The world is witnessing one of those situations which has rampantly affected all of us in different manners. The schools have been physically shut since March in most parts of India but the learning has not stopped. The current pandemic has changed our ways of teaching and learning like never before. The teaching-learning shifted from face-to-face mode to remote/ online mode. These educational disruptions have brought a change to the way schools operate. Schools cannot be just accorded as the learning centres for children, but they hold an important place in the economy. Schools are indeed complex institutions where many people come together to achieve outcomes of education, not just limited to learning. Teachers play a very important and influential role in the teaching-learning process and in ensuring the wellbeing of children. The current situation has reinforced the belief in the teacher's role in supporting students' learning and wellbeing. Teachers are well equipped and experienced to adapt to new and sometimes uncertain situations and events. However, the demands of the pandemic have raised complex and unexpected challenges to the teachers in terms of adaptability to navigate the demands of their professional life. This is

because of unexplored drastic changes in the teaching-learning process coupled with the multi-tasking that they have to do so as to adjust to their personal and professional life on the same plane. In our country, the teaching profession is largely dominated by females, especially in schools and the household work is also generally their responsibility. Further, teachers are supporting their students, while managing their own physical health, stress, anxiety, and supporting their family's needs.

The discussion above clearly accentuates the need of ensuring wellbeing of teachers during this phase. The researcher made a modest attempt to understand the wellbeing of teachers during the school closures owing to pandemic.

Methodology

The prevailing conditions allowed only electronic reach to the teachers. The wellbeing of teachers was assessed through specifically designed questionnaires consisting of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was administered using a google form on the sample. The sample was identified through snow-ball technique and the link was shared with the teachers using WhatsApp or email. A total of 94 teachers had filled in the tool.

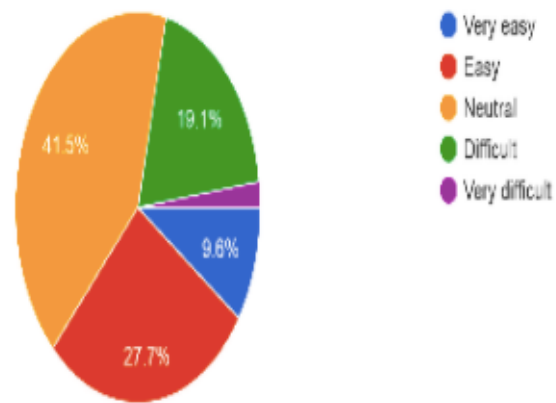
Since the objective of the study was to understand the status of wellbeing of teachers,

data collected was analysed using statistical analysis.

Results and findings

The main findings of the study have been encapsulated under the following headings for better comprehensibility of the readers.

- **Demographic profile of the sample** – Teachers in the study were in the age range of 22-55 years with an average of 33.07 years. The range shows that teachers were distributed across the different age pattern of lifespan. A majority (84%) of the teachers were female while only 16% were male, which clearly indicates that that school teaching is seemingly dominated by females. Teachers were teaching multiple classes (primary and secondary both, or secondary and senior secondary both) – however, a larger percentage of 46.8% was teaching primary classes. 89.4% primarily taught in schools but there were others who were teaching in coaching centres or taking private tuitions. From those who were working in schools– 88.3% worked in private schools and rest in government schools. 55.3% teachers have been engaged in teaching for more than 5 years. There were teachers from different streams– language, science, commerce, mathematics, commerce, and art & craft among others. The variety in age, subjects taught, and classes taught would cover a larger population.
- **Online teaching-learning during COVID-19 school closures**– 97.9% teachers had adapted to online teaching during the school closures imposed due to COVID-19 pandemic. Out of these only 12.8% had done some form of online teaching before the current times. These numbers indicate the quick navigation of the teachers to the new mode of teaching-learning. However, teachers did mention they had felt changes in their relations with the students such as the loss of emotional connect and bonding with students because of lack of physical contact. There were few who mentioned there was no change in their relationship with their students but largely teachers expressed this concern.
- **Adaptability to online teaching-learning process** – When teachers were asked about adaptation to online teaching-learning, teachers had mixed responses as clear from the following graph.

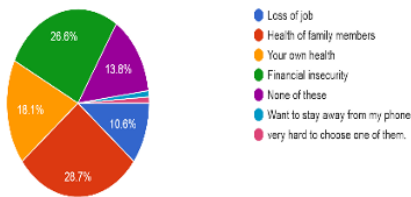


This adaptability needs to be seen in light of the fact that whether they got any kind of training for the same or not. 45.7% mentioned that they were not given any kind of training for the same. On the other hand, 33% said that they got some training and there was another 24.5% who acknowledged that they got infrastructural support also from the school. There were others who mentioned that need based training was given or they learnt on their own form YouTube videos. Further 47.9% highlighted that they did not feel any kind of fear in adapting to new technologies while a significant 30.9% accepted that they were afraid of adapting to new technologies. These numbers are still encouraging that teachers had well adapted to the new technologies and that too within a short span of time and without much dedicated / guided training.

- **Workload changes** – When asked to mark on a linear scale of 1 to 5 (one being lowest), about the workload changes during the phase, 36.2% teachers marked 5 and the average of the responses was 3.96 which indicates that teachers felt a considerable increase in their workload in adapting to the changed mode of teaching-learning process. Further, teachers with school-age children reported having to juggle with school teaching and home schooling their own children, as well as other regular household routines (Beng et. al., 2020)
- **Work-life balance**– 44.7% teachers expressed that they are struggling in managing their home with work life because generally there is no external house help available. Further 76.6% teachers mentioned that they have family support in managing work-life balance. This is an encouraging sign in our generally stereotype role bound society whereby the household work is assumed to be the responsibility of the lady of the house.

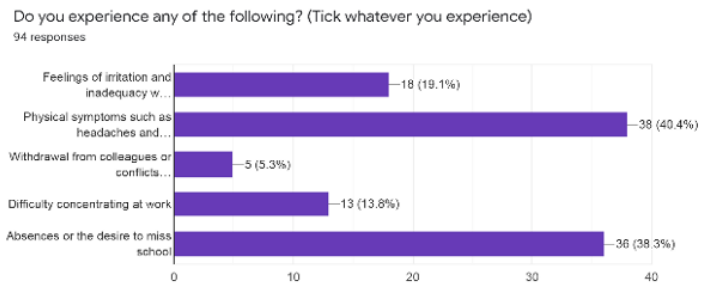
Majority (55.3%) of teachers asserted that this work-life (im)balance was not affecting their ability to teach, but a significant 28.7% do mentioned that it is affecting. So, this number was feeling the pressure.

- **Emotions felt**– Teachers are feeling a mixed bag of emotions during the day from tired, stressed, bored, exhausted, depressed, anxious to positive, satisfied, learning new things. Teachers felt that this cannot go on for long and going to school and teaching there is easier because it rewards you with more satisfaction, interaction with students and colleagues and you have friends in colleagues. There were many who felt that there is no end to working from home and want to return to schools soon.



- A significant 28.7 % were worried about the health of family members, 26.6% were worried about financial security and there were several participants who gave more than one reason for their worries. Financial insecurity or worries is very natural because a large majority of 75.5% had experienced pay cuts in their salaries.
- **Emotional support from school**– When asked about if they were getting any kind of emotional support from the school- an equal number 46.8% were affirmative and another 46.8% said no support from the school.
- **Symptoms experienced**– When teachers were asked to mark on what they experience from a list of options, their answers have been tabulated in the following graph. This very well indicates that they are experiencing a large number of negative symptoms like-

40.4% mentioned that they experience physical symptoms such as headaches etc. Then there were others who are having feelings of inadequacy and withdrawal from friends among others.



Conclusion

Juggling a teaching job and role of primary caregiver in the family is a challenging task for most of our teachers. This is in light of the fact that women disproportionately dominate teaching profession, especially at school levels. They are supposed to take care of the learning and wellbeing of their students and care for the educational and health needs of their children also along with other household responsibilities. This can be quite a daunting task and may affect the health (both physical and mental), and general well-being of the teachers. It is important for the concerned to realise the importance of the health and wellbeing of the teachers and take appropriate steps accordingly. There is no doubt to the fact that the academic success of the students is also affected by the mental health and wellbeing of the teachers. So, this makes it more imperative to take appropriate steps to care for the teachers. There have been some promising steps in this direction, like a school in the city of Faridabad has arranged for yoga classes for their teachers in evening through video conferencing mode. Such steps are welcoming and give ideas to others also to provide for such arrangements for their teachers to share their concerns and have a vent out of the daily routine life of teachers during this phase of home bound, physical distancing and very limited outdoor experiences for most of the teachers.

References

See, Beng & Wardle, Lindsey & Collie, Philip. (2020). Teachers’ wellbeing and workload during Covid-19 lockdown. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342439172_Teachers'_wellbeing_and_workload_during_Covid-19_lockdown