

## Teachers' Well-Being: An Overlooked Aspect of Teacher Development

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### Abstract

Teachers are the most crucial factor in the education system and are responsible for students' achievement, satisfaction and well-being. Thus, teacher well-being has utmost importance for the success of education. This is the report of an exploratory study which draws on the experience of 50 secondary school teachers randomly selected from different schools of North India. Key questions include 1) what is well-being? 2) what are the various factors affecting teachers' well-being? and 3) how we can enhance teachers' well-being through professional learning activities?

The Well-being Index (WHO-5) was used to assess the level of well-being of teachers. It was found that 65 % (32) teachers scored low on this scale. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to find the factors affecting well-being of teachers. The study indicated that relevant factors are individual, relational and also external. Results revealed that both the institution and the teacher are important in maintaining and improving well-being. Teachers' well-being is not an individual's responsibility only but requires that schools, society and other stakeholders of education should work together to plan activities for improvement of teacher well-being at pre-service stage and professional learning programs. The study also showed that initiating a continuous focus on teachers' well-being might be the best way to provide fertile ground for teacher's personal and professional development.

**Keywords:** teachers' well-being, teacher development, teacher professional development.

## Благополучие учителей: упускаемый из виду фактор развития

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### Аннотация

Учитель играет огромную роль в системе образования и несет прямую ответственность за успеваемость учащихся, их уровень удовлетворенности и благополучия. В связи с этим благополучие самих учителей представляется ключевым фактором, определяющим эффективность системы образования. В данной работе представлены результаты исследования, кото-

рое должно было ответить на следующие вопросы: что такое благополучие? какие факторы влияют на благополучие учителей? каким образом мы можем способствовать благополучию учителей? В исследовании приняли участие 50 случайно выбранных учителей школ среднего звена Северной Индии. Для оценки уровня благополучия был использован Индекс благополучия (WHO-5). Было установлено, что 65% (32) учителей имеют низкий уровень благополучия. Затем, с целью выявить факторы, влияющие на благополучие учителей, были организованы полуструктурированные интервью. Результаты показывают, что наибольшее влияние на ощущение благополучия оказывают индивидуальные, реляционные и внешние факторы. Было также установлено, что поддержание и улучшение благополучия зависит как от образовательного учреждения, так и от самих учителей. Благополучие учителя нельзя рассматривать только как сферу индивидуальной ответственности – оно подразумевает целенаправленную работу школы и общества в целом. Исследование также показало, что создание продолжительного фокуса на благополучии учителей эффективно для их профессионального и личностного развития.

**Ключевые слова:** благополучие учителей, развитие учителей, профессиональное развитие учителей.

## Introduction

Well-being is a concept of much importance in modern society. It includes the subjective feeling of success satisfaction and happiness, with challenges of life and responsibility at work place, sense of accomplishment, utility, belongingness, no distress, discontentment or worry etc. The thought of well-being denotes good mental health, proficiency and contentment. It is the core and main concern of interpersonal enquiries, but also of intense scientific scrutiny. Actually, there are arguments about the concept of well-being and quality of life. Research in well-being has been growing in recent decades (e.g., Diener et al., 1999; Kahneman, 1999; Keyes, et al. 2002; Stratham & Chase, 2010; Seligman, 2011) yet the question of how it should be defined remains unanswered. Thomas (2009) also argued that well-being is intangible, difficult to define and even harder to measure. Thus, well-being is somewhat, a flexible concept, which is related with feelings of peoples about their everyday life activities; such feeling may range from negative mental status (anxiety, depression, unhappiness, dissatisfaction etc.) to a more positive outlook into a state that has been identified as positive mental state.

Well-being offers a way to understand what we have, what is needed and how best we can work together to improve our lives in a complex society. McCallum and Price (2016) stated that well-being includes individual, group and ecological variables, which persistently communicate throughout the life. It is both diverse & fluid, including beliefs of individual, family and community as well as context, culture and environment. A positive emotional state is an important component of well-being which can be obtained by harmonizing the personal desires and expectations with environment.

Success, growth and good mental health of children is at the centre and the main purpose of school education, and the success of school education is dependent on teacher's motivation, efforts, professional commitment and their well-being. CESE (2014), reported that the success of students and quality teacher' work is exceptionally associated with their well-being. It is accepted by almost all great educationists and philosophers that a teacher is responsible for the harmonious development of children. Thus, the concept of well-being of teacher is of utmost importance for all the stakeholders of education.

## Aims and objectives of the study

The study aimed at understanding the factors and impact of professional development activities on well-being of teachers.

Specifically, the study had the following goals:

- 1) To examine and describe the well-being.

- 2) To investigate the various factors affecting teachers' well-being.
- 3) To identify the impact of professional development programme on holistic development of teacher as a person.

## Literature Review

### *What is Teacher Well-being?*

Waddell & Burton (2006) expressed the view that the improvement in workplace health has the required potential and significant contribution to reduce diseases, illness and to improve success and economy and to increase the productivity of an organization.

There has been a gradual increase in awareness among managers and employees regarding their role in managing well-being at work and for conducting more research, including important factors like employee engagement and quality of the working environment for improvement of well-being at work place. Employers play key roles in protecting well-being and preventing mental health problems of their workers, by appropriately implementation of guidelines of government for public health.

An occupation that has recently began intriguing psychologists is teaching. Teaching has a long and proud tradition of service to young people, children and to society. Teachers are a 'learning community', increasingly reliant on creating knowledge, acquiring new skills and communication of information. It has now been realized, that the work and role of teachers in such a society is important. Society acknowledges that the work of teachers is not easy (Ramsey, 2000).

Teacher well-being is actually a sense of personal and professional satisfaction, purposefulness, fulfillment which develops in cooperation with peers and children (Acton and Glasgow, 2015).

### *Why is teacher well-being important?*

Literature often describes teacher well-being in negative terms like how low mental health of teacher increases teacher stress, frustrations and problems related to retention at work place and most of the studies on well-being of teacher have focused on negative aspects of stress, mental health and burnout. Teacher retention is one of the most challenging issues faced by educational institutions and while much time and money has been invested in solving this problem there is no clear solution. Teacher well-being index (2018) claimed that 67% of education professionals describe themselves as stressed, 31% teachers had mental health problems in past academic year, and more than 50% of all learning professionals wanted to leave the profession over the last two years because of mental health issues. Thus, the issue of well-being of teachers is of utmost importance in recent years. Numerous researches in recent years have claimed the importance of teacher well-being (Galton & McBeath, 2008; Lovewell, 2013). A study by Grenville-Cleave and Boniwell (2012) found that teachers rated their well-being to be significantly lower than that of other professionals.

Conventionally, teaching includes nurturing and developing student's potential. However, today, a teacher's work is a complex mix of numerous factors including teaching; learning new skills and information; updating with new knowledge and innovations and maintaining relationship with community, parents and of course with students. The supposed roles are demanding and there is growing need to take care of well-being of teachers. The work of a teacher today is multidimensional as it comprises not only teaching but also concerns associated with students and other stake holders of education. As Smylie (1999) noted, it is a difficult time for a teacher. There are lots of evolving challenges related to the tension of teaching profession include stress levels and attrition rates (van Horn et al., 2004). As reported by Moon (2007), there is a large number of teachers who

left the profession in their initial stage. He claimed that we are facing numerous challenges to attract our young ones in teaching and its effect is seen as 'greying' of the teaching force (Ross and Hutchings, 2003).

A study by Michigan State University (2017) claimed that there is a significant link between the level of burnout in a young teacher and the burnout level of his/her immediate colleagues and also the burnout level of the entire school. So, burn out could be contagious.

In research conducted on Indian teachers, Shukla & Trivedi, (2008) revealed that nearly half of teachers in India suffer from burnout. The status of teachers is also falling in other industrialized countries like Australia (Moon 2007). Teacher well-being is thus an area of critical relevance for the well-being and effectiveness of school environment and for students, and is also relevant for economic and financial considerations.

#### *Factors affecting Teachers' Well-being*

Research has shown that there are various factors which affect teacher well-being and these factors are positive as well as negative: some important factors include self-efficacy and resilience (Mehdinezhad, 2012; Harms et al, 2018), emotional and social intelligence (McCallum & Price 2016), job satisfaction (Dakduki, 2015)) burnout, fatigue, exhaustion and stress (Vazi et al., 2013; Brown, 2012; De Nobile, 2016; Kidger et al., 2016).

In 1979, Bronfenbrenner proposed an ecological model with five systems which can be referenced as a base to study the factors affecting well-being. These factors are categorised by him as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. Microsystem includes teacher himself and his relation with classroom environment. The teacher influences the interaction by his individual qualities such as his capacities, perceptions and methods used to deal with environmental problems. The mesosystem includes the societal climate which is important for teacher's well-being including family, friends and support network. The exosystem level includes societal, organisational system, cultural and environmental dimensions which interact with the teacher with varying effects. The macrosystem level includes values, societal beliefs and legislative influences that has more impact on well-being of teachers and chronosystem refers decisions and actions taken by teacher. All these systems affect the well-being of teacher. Based on the relevant literature review this research aims to discover the factors which affect an Indian teacher's well-being.

### **Methodology**

#### *Sample*

This study was conducted on 50 secondary school teachers randomly selected from government and private schools of North India. The age of participants ranges between 30-45 years. There are more of females than males (35 females and 15 males) in the sample.

#### *Data Collection*

Teachers responded to Five-item World Health Organization Well-being Index (WHO-5). The WHO-5 is a small scale consisting of 5 questions, which assess the subjective well-being of the participants. English version of WHO-5 Well-Being Index was used. It is a standard 6- option Likert scale with item range 0-5. A score of 0 represented the worst and 25 the best possible way of life. A total score of 13 or less represent poor well-being. Semi structured interview data was also collected from 12 (8 females and 4 male) teachers to find out the factors affecting the well-being of teachers and their experiences of professional development programmes, and its impact on their overall well-being. Each interview lasted 30 minutes and was recorded.

### *Data analysis*

The well-being scale was analyzed by computing means and standard deviations (SDs) to find out the level of well-being among these teachers. A t-test was also computed to find out the significant gender differences and differences between well-being of government and private school teachers. All interviews were analyzed qualitatively. The interviews were transcribed and before analysing the data, the transcripts were sent to the participants for review, and editing if required, to ensure accuracy and clarity of meaning (Soiferman, 2010; Thomas, 2006). They were told to add any further information that they felt was relevant at this time.

## **Results**

### *Quantitative findings*

The quantitative data helped to study the level of well-being among secondary school teachers of North India. Data showed that 10 participants (20%) scored at risk for poor well-being. More than two third (65%) of teachers scored low on variable of well-being compared to 35% who scored high. The mean of total sample is 17.2 with standard deviation of 4.24. No significant gender differences were found in well-being among teachers ( $t=0.21$ ). Teachers working in the private secondary school sector report low levels of well-being than those working in government sector ( $t=2.68$ ).

### *Qualitative findings*

The interview results show that the school teachers consider their lives to be generally happy. But there are some aspects that they don't find gratifying. Majority of them also felt that their life is not close to their ideal image. Their assessment of family environment revealed that they are satisfied with their family and their lives become better when family supports them.

Many teachers felt that teaching profession is a hard job with many responsibilities especially because of certification and professional development programs that sometimes makes them anxious and stressed. Most of the teachers feel that they have almost no leisure because of administrative work and professional learning activities. The positive effect of subjective well-being is often observed by the teacher when they achieve success both in their work as a teacher or in professional development activities, and it also motivates the teacher to be better in the future. The teachers also often feel stress and anxiety in their lives.

## **Discussion**

This research shows many important sources of stress which are responsible for low well-being of teachers, including high job demands, limited resources and professional autonomy, less salary and low social status and negative school environment. Intensified consideration of student achievement has also put pressure on teachers as their professional success is assessed mainly by student's success in various exams. Teachers are also expected to steer confronting behaviour of students and complex demands from parents and family. Most of the time teachers are required to achieve student success for an inclusive group of learners and to tackle a range of challenging circumstances with limited resources and support. Moreover, teachers are less supposed to report their opinions at work. In this report researchers categorised the factors affecting the well-being of teachers in three categories on the basis of research conducted by Acton and Glasgow (2015).

*i. Individual factors*

Teachers in this research have the opinion that self-efficacy, autonomy, authenticity, relations, social, emotional and spiritual intelligence, resilience and personal reaction to fatigue, exhaustion and stress were the important individual factors which affect the well-being of teachers. Teacher resilience, self-efficacy, stress and fatigue are also discovered in research conducted by Hills and Robinson (2010), and Kidger et al (2016).

*ii. Relational factors*

Relational factors such as student misbehaviour, problems with parents, lack of support from higher authorities, and challenging situations with colleagues affect their well-being. Previous research also emphasised the accountability of teachers towards the school (Ross et al., 2012). It was further reported that teachers experience a multitude of stressors ranging from factors that have an impact on teacher well-being including student discipline problems, long working days and no support from administration. All these problems are linked with their low mental health, frustration and stress. Schools often fail to provide the resources required by teachers such as time for preparation, assistant teachers, materials to teach and opportunities for professional growth. These are required not only to ease the stress and burnout of teachers but also to help students learn better.

*iii. External factors*

Many of the teachers interviewed revealed that people outside of the school life are not able to understand their role as teachers. “Unless you are part of this profession you cannot get it” (Teacher A). Almost all the teachers recorded that support from family had an important impact on their well-being. Some also mentioned that it was difficult at times for relatives and friends who were not in the teaching sector to really understand the problems within a school context as Teacher ‘B’ confirmed that when she was revealing about a difficult time in her career, “my spouse is not in teaching so he doesn’t have the same understanding about how difficult a situation can be and so he probably wasn’t as cooperative as he could’ve been” (Teacher B). The teachers’ interview showed that relationships with those who are part of teaching was valued as support network.

## **Strategies revealed in the study to enhance teachers’ well-being**

### *Teachers’ Initiatives*

Briner and Drewberry, (2007) asserted that happiness and confidence of students is directly related to the happiness and motivation level of teachers. Happy teachers are more enthusiastic about their teaching. Self-care is something that the teachers in this study were all aware of and it was often attended to in small ways such as having a yoga session, reading a book, having time with family and friends, or talking to someone. Exercise, meditation, yoga and spending some time alone was mentioned by all teachers. An interview with one teacher revealed how yoga and meditation helped her in managing her stress level. So good health practices like yoga, mindfulness techniques, participation in sport are very important and affordable for teachers. These practices help teachers in maintaining their well-being. Further strategies asserted by teachers in this study are training to manage stress level, management of emotions, building learning communities, critical thinking approaches to solve problems and celebrate achievements and success to feel valued.

### *Institutional Initiatives*

All of the teachers in this study spoke about streamlining planning and managing the pressures in teaching with the support of leaders and administrators. They emphasized



that the organisational strategies should improve over time and they feel that new entrants in the profession needed support to manage the workflow and pressures during their training and early career and to stay committed to the profession. Teachers identified that the institution should:

- Provide a supportive work culture
- Provide facilities to teachers to manage their own well-being and personal growth
- Develop problem solving culture at work place
- Facilitate development of teachers at vulnerable times
- Provide a means of sharing best practices across schools

These findings reveal that if we want to retain good teachers in the profession then we have to provide good and positive work culture to nurture their capabilities and to support their professional leaning. Some participants exhibited positive feelings with regard to their experiences of administrators' respect for professional judgment, autonomy, recognition of expertise, and felt that it would improve their well-being. This study is consistent with previous research by Cohen et al (2009) who found significant and positive relationship between teacher retention, well-being and school climate.

Previous research also show that if the administrator invests in the school work force then it not only promotes teacher well-being rather it also promotes student well-being and success. (Cenkseven-Onder and Sari 2009) recommended that professional development activities should emphasize the holistic development of teachers to enhance the well-being of schools.

#### *Professional Learning Activities*

Career development and professional learning activities, through professional collaboration enables professional growth and life satisfaction. Professional learning serves an extensive range of purposes, which includes both dimensions- performative and developmental. In performative focus, these activities are mandatory and an important part of teacher's accountability. But on the other hand, the development focus includes teachers' specific needs. If professional learning programmes provide more focus on teacher's holistic development, satisfaction, happiness and well-being, then we will be able to produce effective teachers. This is what Stoddard (1999) explained that education for greatness is. So, it is important to put emphasis on rounded growth of teachers so that they are capable of greater interest in the teaching learning process.

#### **Conclusion**

The recent research agenda has increased stress on teacher well-being among various stakeholders of education, administrators and policy makers. It is evident from research that in all over the world the stress on teacher increases as expectations from teachers are increasing. Teachers feel tired, exhausted, demotivated, frustrated and depressed. So, there is a dire need to take the initiative in managing the well-being of teachers. The focus of this research is to highlight the need to take well-being initiatives in individual, relational and external dimensions to improve quality of life and teaching. The findings suggest that there is no single way to achieve teacher well-being which is in line with the literature reviewed. McCallum and Price, (2012, as cited by McCallum et al (2017) explained that improvement and management of teacher well-being is not only the duty of teacher but it is a collective responsibility in which all the stakeholders of education work in collaboration to make well-being an important in all stages of teacher preparation and professional development. No gender differences are found in the results of the present study which is in line with the previous research by (Roothman et al, 2003). Both male and female participants in this study reported moderate level of well-being. Private

school teachers exhibited a lower level of well-being than government school teachers which may be because of more stress and accountability in private institutions. As the well-being of the teachers is closely related with the well-being of the learners, every possible attempt should be made to make them free from problems related to their mental health. Since teachers are considered to be valuable resources to educational institutions, administrators and policy makers must invest in the activities helpful in improving the well-being of teachers. So, if we want to retain our talented teachers, we must work together to make their mental health and well-being a priority.

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