

# Teachers' Mental Health Amidst Covid-19 Outrage

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## Abstract

The impact of the Covid-19 and subsequent public health measures lead to significant mental health problems in everyone's life. Particularly in India the school closures and the implementation of virtual teaching had placed severe demand on teachers' working condition. This study was started with an objective to find out the psychological distress among the school teachers and their perception regarding pandemic. This is a mixed-method study conducted among the school teachers in Chennai, with the sample size of 211 participants, in which 175 were female and 36 were male. The Snow-ball sampling technique was used to collect the data using General Health Questionnaire -28 (GHQ-28) developed by Goldberg and Hillier (1979) on the Google forms portal. The researchers also collected data through the semi-structured questions. The descriptive analyses, t-test, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation were done using the SPSS software and the content analysis was also done for the semi-structured questions. As the results of this study, it was so clear that the pandemic had significantly affected the mental health of teachers with the psychological disorders such as psycho-somatic symptoms, anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction and severe depression. The qualitative analysis of the study had identified the positive and negative coping strategies of teachers. Furthermore, the findings of the study had indicated that more than 50% of teachers having moderate level of severe depression and it was shocking to discover the fact that 84 % of the teachers were ignorant about the awareness of the mental health helpline number. The outcome of our study had suggested a specific quality psychological training programme for all the school teachers conducted by the management on facing challenges in mere future for a better management of their mental health.

**Key terms:** Mental health, Psychological distress, Covid-19, School teachers

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had altered our perspective of the world. The extreme measures of social distance and lockdown that were implemented since the start of the pandemic have resulted in a paradigm shift in social interactions, which generated feelings of isolation and loneliness for many people (Smith & Lim, 2020). One of the most significant consequences of COVID-19 in educational settings was the shift from onsite training to emergency online teaching in order to preserve quality standards in teaching and learning. (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2020). Studies had shown a marked increase in stress and burnout in school teachers (Pellerone, 2021). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as on

the end of March 2020, school closures due to COVID-19 affected 1.574,989,812 students (90 percent of those enrolled) worldwide. Eight months later, as the 2020–2021 academic year began, there were still 851,870,246 students (48.7 percent of those enrolled) affected by school closures worldwide.

The pandemic not only affected the mental state of students (Cachón-Zagalaz et al., 2020); since the beginning of the crisis, teachers also accumulated a significant level of stress. According to recent studies, teachers experienced stress during lockdown as a result of needing to adjust (in record time) in order to conduct online classes (Besser et al., 2020). As a result of the increased effort caused by teaching from home, this stress is frequently accompanied by symptoms of anxiety, depression, and insomnia (Chi Kwok, 2007).

There were few researches completed during the pandemic to evaluate the symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression among teachers. These researches conducted showed that they experienced psychological symptoms, reinforcing the significance of reopening schools and colleges. According to the recent Arab research on this crisis reported that instructors experienced difficulties that are commonly associated with a pandemic condition, such as anxiety, despair, marital violence, and divorce, all of which limit their effective teaching (Al Lily et al., 2020). The psychologist from three cities of China investigated the prevalence of anxiety among teachers and reported a prevalence of 13.67 percent, with women being more anxious than males and the elderly being more symptomatic (Li et al., 2020).

Another study, conducted in March in China, discovered that 9.1 percent of teachers had stress symptoms, and there was no one to provide them with psychological support during that critical situation (Zhou & Yao, 2020). A study done in Spain during the beginning of the pandemic, reported heavy workloads, psychosomatic issues, and exhaustion. (Prado-Gascó et al., 2020). Furthermore, previous studies reveal that working from home using information and communication technologies (ICT) can result in emotions of tension, anxiety, fatigue, and decreased job satisfaction (Cuervo et al., 2018), yet during a pandemic, these were the only tools accessible to teachers.

Indeed, research was also done on psychological symptomatology in both elementary and secondary educators as well as university professors. Although secondary school teachers had greater psychological symptomatology than primary school teachers, other factors such as remuneration, interactions with students, and relationships with peers were also essential (Prieto and Bermejo, 2006). This stress might impact on teachers' health and, as a result, may lead to an increase in sick leave, absenteeism, and poor job performance.

Additionally, the importance and awareness of the teachers' mental health was once again reiterated by a recent study by De la Fuente et al., (2020) demonstrated, teacher–student relationships were also stressors for

students, and the teacher's behaviour predicted the students' emotional well-being and commitment, although both were important factors in reducing their stress levels. Moreover, according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory in 1979, teachers, parents play an important role in the development of the child; the role of unhealthy teachers eventually affects the child's mental health, which may also prevent future progress in society.

### Goals of the study

- To investigate the psychological distress among the school teachers and to study perception of them regarding pandemic

Accordingly, the following research questions guided our study

- Do school teachers have psychological distress and the symptoms of psychopathological conditions such as somatic symptoms, social dysfunction, anxiety/insomnia, severe depression?
- Do teachers possess knowledge regarding mental health professionals?
- Whether a mental health support system is available for teachers like students in school?
- What are all the stress management techniques they use to manage their stress during pandemic?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design & sampling process

Mixed-method was used as the research design (Quantitative and Qualitative semi-structured questions)

Snow-ball sampling technique was used to collect the sample online.

**Target population** – School teachers in Chennai district

### Sample distribution

Total 211 participants have taken part in this study, in which 175 were female and 36 were male.

## MEASURES

- **General Health Questionnaire -28 (GHQ-28)** - developed by Goldberg and

Hillier (1979) The GHQ-28 was an internally consistent measure. Cronbach's alpha, split-half coefficients and test-retest reliability were 0.9, 0.89 and 0.58 respectively.

This tool consists of psychopathological symptoms such somatic symptom (pain, weakness or shortness of breath), Anxiety/insomnia (panic attacks, hot and cold flushes, racing heart, tightening of the chest, etc) social dysfunction (inability to socialize or lack of following social norms) severe depression.

Goldberg and Hillier's study in 1979 suggested researchers modify the cut-off according to the country's scenario, hence based on mean and standard deviation, norms have been formulated.

#### • Semi Structured Questionnaire

This contains questions on teachers' perceptions of the pandemic, their preferred class method, Stress management techniques that they used, the psychological services available in their

schools for teachers, and awareness of community mental health services.

#### Procedure

In the current study First, a pilot study was conducted which was retrospective. The researchers examined the participants' understanding of GHQ-28 and the items of semi-structured questionnaires.

Secondly, the main study was conducted in which the researcher collected data from several schools in Chennai district and the data was collected online.

#### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

- The statistical analysis such as descriptive analysis, t-test, and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used in the study.
- The content analysis was done for the semi-structured questionnaire.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

##### Quantitative analysis

**Table 1 - Levels of Psychological distress, Psycho-somatic symptoms, Anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction and Severe depression in Percentage (%)**

Sl. No.	Variables	Size (N)	Low	Moderate	High
1	Psychological distress	211	6%	75%	19%
2	Psycho-somatic symptoms		27%	53%	20%
3	Anxiety/insomnia		22%	54%	24%
4	Social dysfunction		11%	70%	18%
5	Severe depression		32%	52%	16%

The above-mentioned findings confirmed the previous research results on the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic that had made a widespread mental-health crisis, as well as a significant emotional impact (Zakeri et al., 2021). It affected not only health care workers but also teachers, employees and small enterprises. This study examined the psychological distress among teachers in particular, because they are the prominent people who have an impact on students' mental health. The study revealed that the mental health care of teachers are neglected in most of the schools in Chennai. According to the findings, three-quarters of the individuals were

on the verge of experiencing distress, exhibiting psychopathological symptoms.

Teachers from the schools selected for the study had reported that they were very anxious about their work and it also affected their sleeping hours. 54% of the them were having anxiety/insomnia. They too had psychosomatic symptoms such as physical pain, breathlessness, fatigue, indigestion, etc. All these psychological problems had affected their teaching efficiency, understanding the students and overall interpersonal relationships. It was clearly found that teachers were having such social dysfunctions because of the effects of pandemic situation.

**Table 2 – Internal Correlation of Psycho-somatic symptoms, Anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction and Severe depression**

Variables	Somatic symptom	Anxiety/insomnia	Social dysfunction	Severe depression
Somatic symptom	-	0.791**	0.492**	0.558**
Anxiety/insomnia	0.791**	-	0.542**	0.636**
Social dysfunction	0.492**	0.542**	-	0.547**
Severe depression	0.558**	0.636**	0.547**	-

\*\* p=>0.05 level of significance

The results of the table-2 confirmed the previous study that teachers who were going through psychopathological symptoms such as physical pain, breathlessness, fatigue, indigestion were also seriously affected from anxiety/insomnia (Chi Kwok, 2007). A constant mental health support would reduce these symptoms and will strengthen their

mental health. But the present study indicated that very few teachers were aware and seek the psychological support. This ensures a unhealthy system of education, because it was already stated by many researchers that only efficient teachers can bring out the best from the students (De la Fuente et al., 2020), (Prieto and Bermejo, 2006).

**Table 3- Differences between Perception of Scenario and Psycho-somatic symptoms, Anxiety/insomnia, Social dysfunction, Severe depression**

Variables	Perception of Scenario	N	Mean	SD	t
Somatic symptom	New normal life	69	3.36	3.07	4.016**
	Stressful and Anxious	142	5.86	4.70	
Anxiety/insomnia	New normal life	69	3.46	3.77	3.949**
	Stressful and Anxious	142	6.41	5.60	
Social dysfunction	New normal life	69	6.38	3.46	2.659
	Stressful and Anxious	142	7.77	3.61	
Severe depression	New normal life	69	2.75	4.14	2.204**
	Stressful and Anxious	142	4.23	4.76	

\*\* p=>0.05 level of significance

The above table-3 indicates that there was a significant difference between the teachers who perceived the scenario of pandemic restrictions as new normal life and stressful/anxious. All the teachers who accepted the pandemic situation as a new normal life found to be with low level of somatic symptom, anxiety/insomnia, social dysfunction and severe depression. The mindset for the teachers would directly or indirectly affect the growth of students and therefore the teachers who are the mentors of the students should possess the emotional maturity to handle any situation, especially the pandemic situation and the like.

### Qualitative analysis

The teachers were asked to answer the following semi-structured questions for the qualitative analysis of the study, in order have a better understanding of their feelings and understanding about the pandemic situation.

- How do you feel about the Covid-19 Scenario?
- What mode of class you prefer?
- Whom to approach for mental health support?
- How do you manage your stress?
- Do your school provide any kind of psychological services for teachers?

- Would you like to have psychological services for teachers in your school?

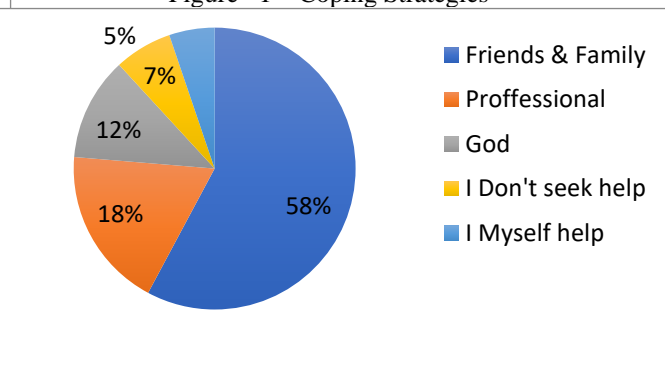
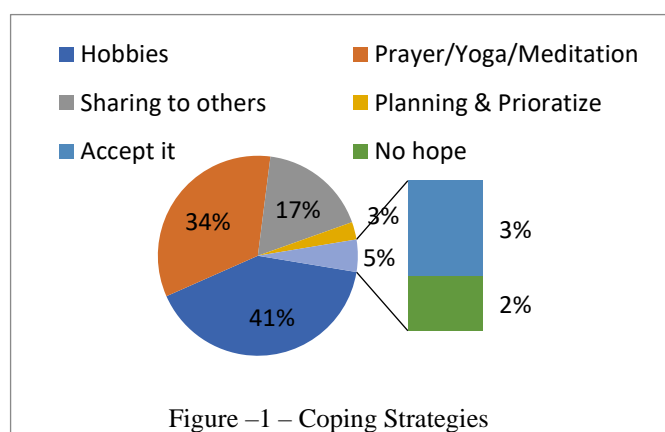
The descriptive analysis was done on the responses given by the teachers and following were the percentage of their responses for each question. It was interesting to note that the quantitative and the qualitative responses are in line with each other. It was ensuring the genuineness and clarity of data received from the teachers. 67% of the teachers responded to have stress and anxious to work during pandemic and 33% of them reported as new normal life. The figure-1 describes that most of the teachers preferred onsite classes rather than online and 20% of them preferred blended classes.

In the figure-1, pie diagram denotes that 41% of teachers reported that they engaged into hobbies to manage their stress, 34 % of them reported Prayer/Yoga/Meditation helped them to manage their stress, 18 % reported that they shared their problems to others in terms of managing their stress. 3% of teachers reported they plan, prioritized things and act which helped them in managing their stress, 3% of teachers accepted the stress and move on whereas 2% of them showed no hope.

In figure-2 illustrates that more than 50% of the teachers approached friends and family, 19 % of the teachers reported to approach professionals, 12% of the teachers reported to seek God's help, 7% of them reported to seek nobody's help and 6% of them tended to spend with themselves. 64% of them reported no whereas 36% of the teachers only reported that they have psychological services in their schools for teachers. Although 70% of the schools have psychological services for students only 36% were given services for the teachers. 53% of them reported yes and 48 % reported no, around 182 participants reported that they don't have any mental health professionals and it was shocking to discover the fact that 84 % of the teachers reported their ignorance about the awareness of the mental health helpline number.

The qualitative research had helped to examine the protective and risk elements in the individual's life. The state of stress and anxiety was found very high on every seven out of ten teachers during pandemic. The teacher's

perception of the pandemic scenario might have also affected the neurological system, causing anxiety( Eysenck W. 1992). A major number of participants desired onsite classes because they lacked social interaction, indicating that teachers were longing for social contact. They wanted to interact with students and being valued by students which was their real reinforcement to work enthusiastically. Furthermore, it might be a primary cause of social dysfunction, which could be a significant contributor to the worsening of psychiatric symptoms. The related studies supports that school closures and the shift to distant learning resulted in greater workloads and challenges in the transition to working from home (Sokal&EblieTrudel, 2020).



Most of the teachers were not familiar to online teaching techniques and thus they were hampered by a lack of expertise as well as the persistent pressure of creative methods of teaching which was demanded from them. The management too wanted the teachers to contact student's parents, documenting their work, and frequent staff meetings made them feel fish out of water. Many teachers were also burdened with preparing students and their caregivers to participate in online learning or to keep pupils studying even when the necessary

gadgets were unavailable. These increasing occupational expectations had a detrimental influence on the well-being of some teachers, including feelings of inadequacy. These increasing occupational expectations also made it more difficult for teachers who had family or caregiver duties (Cipriano & Brackett, 2020). Disturbance of individual structures reduced control of the individual and the predictability of the flow of life (Rubin & Wesseley, 2020).

When the study comes to notice the lack of awareness of mental health for teachers was alarming and it was also reported that teachers would approach mental health practitioners when it requires. In general there are stereotypes about mental health aids that only abnormal persons frequent the Mental Health Hospitals (MHPs). That shows the scarcity of community-based intervention in the society. A large number of participants reported that they will approach their friends and family when they are stressed. Pandemic led to social disconnection physically between individuals, although they managed to connect with others through online.

Many family conflicts, including marriage issues and domestic abuse, were also reported to be prevalent during the outbreak. This might be a crucial element influencing the teacher's mental health (Al Lily et al., 2020). If the emotion dumping was not vented out, due to the pandemic restrictions, it will lead to any form of psychiatric disorder, and this could be the major reason for the instructors to be on the verge of psychiatric illness.

The teacher's knowledge on mental health support was very poor. It was just under a fifth of participants said that they would approach a mental health practitioner. It reflected their lack of knowledge and the importance about the mental health. Even educated teachers believed the same stereotypical idea that approaching the MHPs indicates they are abnormal. So, community-based awareness program is still required in our society to expand people's understanding regarding mental health support. A considerable number of participants said that when they are stressed, they will contact their friends and family. The pandemic had resulted in social isolation amongst individuals; it landed on the lack of prevention of stress

alleviation. Though some of them managed to connect on online yet it can never substitute a direct counselling.

The different perceptions of the teachers on their psychological distress were found related to the previous studies. The teachers who reported to look at the scenario as anxious and stressful had high psychological distress than the teachers who saw it as new normal life. The results highlighted that the individuals' cognition had influenced on the psychological symptoms. Negative thought leads to Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal axis (HPA) dysregulation and the risk of developing psychiatric disease. For instance, adverse or excessive responses to stressful experiences are built into the diagnostic criteria for several psychiatric disorders (Renior et. al., 2013). This serves to inform mental health practitioners who work with teachers for the necessity of recognizing the cognitive process of the teachers as well.

The research had reflected on the great need for psychological support in every school. More than a half of the teachers said they want to have psychological support in their school to guide when they face confusions. It was also found that through this study that only students based psychological services were provided in most of the schools. The educational system cannot think of developing students, who is the future of the nation, by ignoring the teachers' well being, who are the shapers of their future.

### **Implications for research and practice**

- Vacancies for psychologists/counsellors ought to be increased in schools in order to provide equal and better psychological services.
- Policies in the Education Department which emphasize teachers' mental health are also essential.
- Mental health check-up needs to be done every Trimester and Mental health awareness about mental health support needs to be raised.
- Stress management and coping strategies needs to be educated to teachers,
- Educating Metacognitive techniques will be useful to achieve healthy way of perceiving things which may result in minimizing the psychological distress.

- A psycho-social intervention module that helps in managing stress and psychopathological symptoms need to be developed and tested by the researchers.

### The Limitations and suggestions for the future study

- One of the major limitations of the study was the gender distribution. The Female sample representatives were greater than male samples resulted in inadequacy of sample distribution.
- The current study is limited to the Chennai district; cross-sectional studies are recommended. Therefore the results cannot be generalized without further extensive study on this subject.
- As the current study focused only on mental health, future research can investigate on related psychological variables such as resilience, self-esteem, personality, interpersonal relationships, and so on.

### CONCLUSION

The current study discovered psychological distress among the school teachers and they demonstrated psychopathological symptoms such as somatic symptoms, severe depression, social dysfunction, and anxiety/insomnia. It was also revealed that each factor of psychopathological symptoms was highly influencing the other factors. It was found that the individual's perception influenced their psychological distress and psychological symptoms. This suggests that the education board, school counsellors, and psychologists in society must address and work on teacher mental health in order to provide healthy society at large.

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