

A Qualitative study: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Teacher Burnout and its Impact on Mental Health at Primary Level in Swat

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the lived experiences of burnout among primary school teachers and how it affects their mental health. In-depth interviews with primary school teachers were carried out using a phenomenological method in order to comprehend their challenges, coping strategies, and burnout perceptions. Phenomenological research design was used in this study and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Ten participants were selected through purposive sampling with varied subject background from different secondary Schools. The data obtained were transcribed for themes with Thematic Analysis technique. Key themes identified by thematic analysis included psychological anguish, work-life imbalance, emotional weariness, and a lack of institutional assistance. In order to reduce teacher burnout, the study emphasizes the critical need for systemic support and mental health interventions.

Keywords: Teachers, Burnout, Lived Experiences, Mental Health, Primary Level.

INTRODUCTION

With the speed of the progress of the education reform, the demands on primary school teachers are becoming higher, which makes the pressure on teachers' work greater, which may cause a range of mental health issues. It has been long recognized that burnout occurs in all professions, and among them, teaching is one of the professions. This is the idea that Freudenberg presented for the first time in 1974. Burnout is technically described and subjectively experienced as a condition of physical, emotional, and mental fatigue caused by prolonged participation in emotionally demanding situations (Pines and Aronson, 1988). "Burnout" and "stress" are usually synonymous, and this is a misconception regarding the real nature of burnout (Iwanicki, 1983).

The physical, mental, and interpersonal demands of teaching employment often cause education professionals to show signs of emotional exhaustion. The excessive number of pupils in the classrooms, the excess of assignments, the short-term stress and workload, the lack of support teachers, this group's emotional tiredness is linked to incomplete schedules, excessive bureaucracy and the paperwork it produces, etc. (Longas, Chamarro, Riera, & Cladellas, 2012; Llull, Cerdà, & Brage, 2015; Rodríguez, Sola, & Fernández, 2017; Carlotto & Câmara, 2017).

These components continue to be the subject of recent literature. For instance, Turner and Garvis's 2023 scoping assessment highlights that emotional weariness, depersonalization, and a decline in personal success are the main causes of teacher burnout, which has significant ramifications for both educators and the system of education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Maslach & Jackson (1981), burnout is a psychological illness that can affect anyone who interacts with others in any capacity. It is characterized by emotional tiredness, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal success. Burned-out teachers would feel exhausted, detached from students, and ineffective in their classroom. As Farber (1991) defines it, teacher burnout is a crisis in self-efficacy where teachers no longer feel effective or think that they are making a difference. The effect of teacher burnout on education is paramount—teacher burnout results in other problems like exiting the teaching force, teacher absenteeism, and decreased students' achievement (Hastings & Bham, 2003). Chronic negative stress has also been linked with bad behaviors like alcoholism, drug dependency, obesity, divorce, and interpersonal life conflicts. Teacher burnout was initially identified in the early 1970s as a condition related to stress (Gold, 2001). Herbert Freudenberger is commonly credited with initially using the term "burnout" in 1974 while in New York conducting research (Wood & McCarthy, 2002). Burnout can be defined in several different ways, and frequently the term is utilized interchangeably with "stress."

Stress leads to burnout. Yet, extreme stress does not always result in burnout. Burnout is most likely to happen when stressors are present and coping mechanisms are lacking. Burnout is presumed by experts to be a product of continuous and repetitive failed efforts to cope with stressful circumstances (Gold, 2001). Teacher burnout is a real issue and forms in physical and psychological ways. It shouldn't be surprising that teachers become stressed; however, burnout is a much more complicated and more severe condition with dire consequences (Iwanicki, 1983). Burnout symptoms involve feelings and symptoms most typically associated with depression: sadness, helplessness, and hopelessness (Gold, 2001). Freudenberger (1981, as cited in Gold, 2001) did, however, identify that the difference between depression and burnout was that aware anger sensations were more closely associated with burnout. Burnout teachers can also find that they are: drained emotionally, cannot form close relationships with their students, and are low in confidence in their ability to meet their goals. These are the three symptoms which are widely used to diagnose burnout (Hastings & Bham, 2003). Chronic and repeated stress has also been reported to be linked with physical symptoms such as headaches, allergies, insomnia, hypertension, and in extreme cases, diseases such as diabetes or ulcers (Iwanicki, 1983).

Primary school teachers usually have more emotional demands caused by the needs of young learners. Teachers' burnout is an issue on the rise, especially at the primary level, with educators subjected to work overload, emotional demands, and administrative pressure. It is the main mission to advocate the psychological well-being of primary school teachers through the examination of teachers' stress and proposition of reasonable counter measures. According to Kyriacou (1987), teacher burnout is a state of emotional exhaustion, stemming from prolonged job-related stress, particularly when teachers feel they

cannot meet the constant demands of the profession. This study aims to explore how burnout affects teachers' mental health and well-being through their lived experiences.

Burnout is correlated with anxiety, depression, and emotional distress among teachers. Mentally, whereas definitions may differ, the general agreement in recent research points to the emphasis of mitigating stress, workload, and support systems as part of promoting well-being among teachers. Taylor's 2022 article explores ways of supporting teacher well-being and preventing burnout, highlighting the necessity of systemic interventions and supports.

School teachers are an at-risk workforce. Teachers frequently suffer burnout, psychological distress, anxiety, sadness, exhaustion, low self-esteem, and strained personal relationships, according to global data (GarcíaCarmona et al., 2019; Thomson & Hillman, 2020). Student learning and achievement, teacher effectiveness, and staff retention are all adversely affected by poor mental health, burnout, and wellbeing (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020; Travers, 2017). According to Thompson and Hillman (2020), teachers who report high levels of work-related stress are less engaged and satisfied with their jobs, are less able to support their students academically and emotionally, and are more likely to say they intend to leave the field within five years (Travers, 2017). Given the frequency and negative consequences of these factors, it is critical to find ways to improve teachers' mental health, burnout, and general well-being in order to preserve and protect the profession.

Previous studies on school instructors have typically focused on either mental illness or wellbeing in a vacuum, ignoring the well-established idea that every component is essential to mental health and proper functioning. The current study outlines and assesses the effects of programs for classroom instructors along the mental health and wellbeing dimensions in an effort to address this deficiency. To address the mental health, professional burnout, and/or wellness of teachers, a variety of initiatives have been implemented. Psycho-education, mindfulness, cognitive-behavioral skills, acceptance-based skills, behavioral stress management (e.g., relaxation), and other socio-emotional/interpersonal skills are among the psychological programs that are frequently offered to teachers.

Additionally, other external factors that arise from the teacher's private and social life, family circumstances, or general and specific personality traits interact with personal resources and can result in a decrease in their labour activity, both mentally and physically, leading to disorders like burnout (Justo 2010; López & Extremera, 2017; Burgos, Paris, Salcedo, & Arriagada, 2018).

Teacher burnout has a number of causes. Many studies have been done on the causes of burnout (Bryne, 1988; Friedman & Farber, 1992; Herrington-Smith, 1998; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). Ann found that differences in class size have an effect on the burnout of educators. Teachers will experience less burnout if the class size is limited (Ann, 1992). Furthermore, Chou (1990) proposed that 10% of variations in teacher burnout might be explained by individual personality traits as gender, age, and marital status. Additionally, it was determined that a significant portion of the burnout was caused by the teacher's year of service. Since teachers work many years, their burnout rate is higher (Bryne, 1998). 1. Societal Stress: Teachers face growing stress due to declining public support for education and diminished respect for the profession. Public demands have increased, especially with pressure to produce high test scores. Charter schools, promoted by initiatives like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, rely heavily on test-based performance, often leading to teacher burnout and high turnover (Sawchuk, 2015). 2. Organizational Pressures: Teacher burnout is frequently exacerbated by rigid school hierarchies that reduce classroom autonomy. Teachers are coerced into increasing test scores without the resources and support needed, creating feelings of isolation and frustration (Iwanicki, 1983). 3. Role-Related Distress:

Additionally, stress occurs when teachers are faced with classroom settings they did not train for—i.e., under-resourced schools or difficult student populations. Other factors are discipline problems, curriculum difficulties, and dysfunctional relationships with colleagues. Adding responsibilities such as coaching or mentoring can also enhance burnout if poorly managed (Iwanicki, 1983; Brown & Roloff, 2011).

Early teacher burnout models described lost idealism and decreased interest in teaching (Wood & McCarthy, 2002). The definition was later expanded to encompass three central symptoms: depersonalization, devaluing one's work, and emotional exhaustion (Wood & McCarthy, 2002; Akbaba, 2014). Depersonalization is emotional disconnection from students, peers, or parents. Devaluing happens when teachers view their work as meaningless, while emotional exhaustion, coupled with physical symptoms, can perpetuate stress and form a destructive cycle.

Teachers tend to deal with the effects of students' individual turmoil, particularly in at-risk communities where violence, drug abuse, and poverty prevail. These problems may result in consistent misbehavior and lack of academic success. Research indicates a direct connection between teacher burnout and student misbehavior (Hastings & Bham, 2003) and that research indicates that low self-efficacy for classroom organization is linked to depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and reduced accomplishment symptoms of burnout (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014). Without administrative or parental support, the situation can be even more entrenched so that even a single challenging student feels insurmountable and contributes to disillusionment and burnout.

Many studies support that resilience lessens the exposure to burnout (Stratta et al., 2013; Efiliti, 2019), the capacity to face stressors being one of the secrets of resilience. Therefore, the syndrome is prevented by using constructive coping methods that are targeted at the issue (e.g., seeking instrumental social support, positive reinterpretation, and acceptance) (Medrano, 2017). However, its appearance is made possible by the activation of passive coping mechanisms that target emotions, such as denial, alleviation, and seeking emotional social support (Félix, García, & Mercado, 2018). Coping strategies that are more emotionally and avoidance-based lead to burnout. Accordingly, resilient people are in charge of their job and maintain their stability in the face of conflict. They are dedicated to the task at hand and see obstacles as challenges that can be conquered with more work without experiencing burnout (Cruz & Puentes, 2017; Serrano, 2018; Vicente de Vera & Gabari, 2019).

Additionally, happy emotions counteract the physiological effects of negative emotions, according to certain research. Among other things, they highlight the importance of positive emotions like optimism, assertiveness, and self-esteem in creating a resilient process (McKergow, 2009; Knowlden, Hackman, & Sharma, 2016; Díaz & Barra, 2017). Self-care techniques, mindfulness, and workplace assistance have all been proposed as potential remedies.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the deeply personal and often overlooked challenges faced by primary school teachers in Swat who experience burnout and its associated mental health consequences. By exploring the lived experiences of these educators, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the emotional, psychological, and professional toll that prolonged stress and systemic pressures can have on individuals working at the foundational level of education. In a region like Swat, where educational resources may be limited and socio-political factors further complicate teaching environments, understanding teacher burnout becomes even more critical. This study can inform policymakers, school administrators, and mental health professionals about the specific stressors and support needs of primary teachers, ultimately contributing to the development of targeted interventions, improved working conditions, and mental health support systems. Furthermore, it

highlights the direct connection between teacher well-being and educational quality, emphasizing the importance of sustaining a healthy teaching workforce for long-term educational success and student development in the region.

Objectives of the study

1. To investigate teachers experiences of burnout in their professional roles.
2. To know how burnout affect the mental health and overall well-being of primary school teachers in swat.
3. To know how the primary school teachers manage their burnout in their daily lives.
4. To find out the strategies that can overcome the teacher's burnout and protect mental health.

Research Questions

1. How do primary school teachers describe their experiences of burnout in their professional roles?
2. In what ways does burnout affect the mental health and overall well-being of primary school teachers in swat?
3. How do primary school teachers cope with or manage burnout in their daily lives?
4. What support systems or changes do primary school teachers believe are necessary to reduce burnout and protect mental health?

METHODOLOGY

Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, this study examines the real-life experiences of teacher burnout, its effects on mental health, and the difficulties experienced by primary school teachers. Using techniques like text analysis, observations, and interviews to gather data, qualitative research attempts to delve deeper into the meanings of human experience by enabling researchers to observe events from several perspectives (Muktaf, 2016). Qualitative research examines events from a subjective point of view, focusing on how they are interpreted and understood, paying particular attention to the participants and the study's setting.

Phenomenology is a kind of qualitative study that seeks to understand the personal interpretations people make of certain experiences. It focuses on how people feel and understand a situation rather than trying to come up with general theories or explanations. To comprehend the fundamental human experience in a given setting, in-depth interviews and reflections are employed (Tumangkeng & Maramis, 2022). Teachers in this study provided detailed, in-depth personal reflections on their lived experiences with burnout in the educational setting.

Data Collection Tool

The semi-structured interviews were applied to acquire data regarding the real experiences of burnout among the instructors and the challenges faced by them in teaching. The applicability of the semi structured interview for data collection is a known fact. The participants were audio recorded upon interview. In order to acquire as much information as possible from the participants, they were properly informed about the nature of the topic. It enables the researcher to pose questions that require contextual explanation and detail information for delving deeper into the phenomenon of study. Semi structured interviews assist in creating a conversation between the researcher and the participants thereby leading to the retrieval of maximum information.

Research Participants

Through purposive sampling, ten participants from different primary schools in Swat were chosen to ensure diversity in the lived experiences of teachers dealing with burnout during the teaching and learning process. These participants had a range of professional and educational backgrounds. Participants' interviews were conducted with ethical factors in mind. Complete information regarding the nature and goal of the research project and interview was provided to the students. It is crucial for researchers to protect participant confidentiality, as supported by Surmiak (2018), who states that "researchers take responsibility for ensuring confidentiality to their participants."

Data Analysis and Interpretation Process

In qualitative research, gathering and analyzing data is challenging since there are no clear themes in the data. Sorting the themes from the qualitative data such that they make sense is the researcher's responsibility. Coding, transcription, and categorization of the data were done to obtain useful information. The framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) is used for thematic analysis. Using thematic analysis, the most significant themes in the gathered data were identified. The data was transcribed, coded, and categorized to obtain the useful details. Codes for the teachers ranged from T1 to T10. Following the transcription of the interview material, thematic analysis was used to identify key themes. Among the main themes that emerged from the interviews are:

Theme 1: Teachers Emotional Exhaustion

The majority of teachers expressed persistent exhaustion, anxiety, and a decline in motivation. Constant multitasking, handling a variety of student demands, administrative responsibilities, and a lack of proper support can leave instructors feeling exhausted, demotivated, and alienated, according to them. This fatigue eventually impairs their general well-being and reduces their efficacy in the classroom, which results in burnout and a drop in job satisfaction.

According to participant T1: *"Teaching is a lifelong learning process and I really enjoyed it but it's extremely traumatic. There are many reasons for making me feel burnout such as student's behavior, lack of parental involvement in students' progress, lack of administration support and the lack of main resources in building (no boundary wall, no clean drinking water etc). The main reason of my burnout is that our school is very far in the hilly mountains and daily I walk 2 hours in forests to reach the main road through which I feel insecure in that area and also physically, emotionally and mentally exhausted"*

This quotation captures the extreme emotional and physical hardship of a hardworking teacher who, in love with teaching and committed to ongoing learning, suffers intensely from burnout as a result of various stressors. The teacher identifies major causative factors for their burnout as disruptive behavior by students, parental apathy, inadequate administrative back-up, and adverse infrastructure (e.g., no boundary wall and clean drinking water). The greatest responsibility, nonetheless, comes from being the teacher's solitary position in the mountainous area, requiring a perilous and tiring everyday two-hour trek through woodlands. Not only does this pose a risk to their own lives but also brings about severe physical, emotional, and psychological exhaustion. The saying highlights the adverse realities rural teachers endure and the pressing necessity for structural assistance and safer workplaces.

According to participant T2: *“Teaching is a learning journey, but often stressful. Yes I really feel emotional exhausted, especially when I’m left alone with large groups. Poor planning and unclear roles are the factors that feel me burnout.”*

The instructor believes that teaching is a continuous process of learning and development, but it is also emotionally draining, as this quotation illustrates. Managing large groups without assistance leaves the participant feeling particularly worn out. Poor planning and ambiguous roles exacerbate the stress and worsen burnout symptoms.

T7: *“It has become more challenging with time—less respect, more pressure. Absolutely I feel emotionally and physically exhausted because of heavy workload, overcrowded classes and administrative pressure, unrealistic parent expectations and lack of appreciation.”*

This quotation demonstrates how teaching has gotten harder and harder over the years. Large class sizes, administrative obligations, a high workload, parents' irrational expectations, and a lack of acknowledgement all contribute to the teacher's physical and mental exhaustion.

Another participant T10 shared same views: *“Teaching is rewarding, but it's also incredibly demanding. I love my students, but the workload and lack of resources can be overwhelming. Yes, I've felt burnt out several times. One experience that stands out was when I had to manage a particularly challenging class while dealing with personal issues. I felt exhausted, both physically and emotionally.”*

This claim indicates that although teaching is a rewarding profession, it is also extremely taxing. The speaker's burnout is caused by handling demanding assignments, challenging student conduct, and a lack of support, particularly during stressful times. The job becomes emotionally and physically taxing due to the lack of resources.

Theme 2: Teachers Struggle and Work-Life Imbalance

Extended work hours and an excessive workload had an impact on relationships and personal life. Teachers frequently experience work-life imbalance as a result of their heavy workloads, long hours, and pressure to fulfill administrative and academic obligations. Lesson planning and grading are among the many tasks that many people bring home, leaving little time for relaxation, family, or personal health. Their health and academic performance may suffer as a result of this imbalance, which can also cause stress, burnout, and decreased job satisfaction.

T1: *“After a long walk from the duty my energy level is too much low and from extreme tiredness I am not able to join my family for a while and from this daily activities I have no time for relaxation and my routine is imbalance and I have not much energy to focus on my health and my personal life is too much suffered”.*

This quotation shows the price professional duties and physical fatigue exact on the life and health of the teacher. The poet speaks of a hectic schedule, whereby extensive walking to and from office leaves him thoroughly exhausted, with minimum or no energy remaining for interaction with family and for oneself. The absence of leisure time for sleeping and leisure has bred an unbalanced way of life, wherein health and personal life are compromised. This demonstrates the way the physical demands of the work, particularly in demanding settings, can generate burnout, impacting both body and mind, and ultimately damaging work-life balance.

T5: "My day starts at 7 AM and ends at 5 PM, often leaving me too tired and stress because of my low energy my routine is imbalance and I can't focus to engage in my personal life."

This remark illustrates how the speaker's work-life balance is disrupted by long workdays and ongoing exhaustion, which leaves them with little energy or concentration for their personal lives and well-being.

T10: A typical day is chaotic. I'm constantly juggling lesson plans, grading, and classroom management. Long hours with no real breaks—constant supervision is exhausting. By the end of the day, I'm drained.

This statement highlights the overwhelming aspect of a teacher's workday. Managing lesson planning, grading, and student behaviour all at once creates a hectic environment that leaves the teacher fatigued at the end of the day, both emotionally and physically. It draws attention to how high responsibilities and little downtime can lead to burnout.

Theme 3: Lack of Institutional Support in Teachers Burnout

Many teachers experienced emotions of loneliness as a result of administrators' lack of support. One of the biggest problems teachers confront is a lack of institutional support, which greatly increases stress and burnout. When educational organizations fail to provide enough resources, professional development, or emotional support, teachers are forced to manage heavy obligations on their own. Their performance and general well-being may suffer as a result of this lack of support since it can cause them to feel alone, underappreciated, and frustrated. A responsive structure and supportive leadership are essential for preserving teacher morale and guaranteeing a safe, productive learning environment.

T1: "There are many rules made for the effective teaching learning process but in actual no rules are applied and most of the schools are opened just to fulfill a formality. There is no support from administration, no proper resources are provided to run a school. I am forced to manage the heavy duty load by my own. There is no emotional support by which I feel alone and day by day my mental health is being destroyed."

This quotation calls attention to the discrepancy between policy and practice within the education system. The teacher indicates frustration with the absence of enforcement of regulations that are supposed to facilitate effective teaching and learning. The schools, in the opinion of the speaker, tend to be only formalistic, without real commitment or operational support. A lack of administrative support, finance, and emotional support compels the teacher to carry a large workload single-handedly. This neglect and isolation are having a devastating impact on their mental health, with feelings of burnout, helplessness, and emotional degrading. The statement highlights the necessity of urgent systemic reform, hands-on assistance, and acknowledgment of teachers' emotional health.

T4: "In teaching profession all the employees got minimal support from administration and some from fellow teachers. There is no access to proper mental health programs."

This statement demonstrates the teacher's sense of lack of support, particularly from the school administration. Although coworkers can offer some assistance, their suffering is exacerbated by the dearth of mental health resources.

T6: "Peers help each other but administration doesn't."

According to this remark, teachers feel a great sense of support and bonding among their peers, but they also perceive a lack of support or help from the school administration. It draws attention to a gap between frontline teachers and the leadership, which could cause them to feel neglected or frustrated.

T10: *"My school provides too much limited support. We have occasional staff meetings but I wish there were more opportunities for professional development and support."*

This quotation suggests that the instructor believes the school provides little assistance, with staff meetings occurring infrequently and little opportunity for professional development. This indicates a wish for more regular and significant professional growth and assistance from the educational institution.

Theme 4: Impact of Burnout on Teachers Mental Health and Psychological Distress

Participants talked about their experiences with anxiety and depression; some turned to self-care techniques, while others battled without any assistance.

T4: *"Because of continuous multitasking, student's behavioral issues, overcrowded classrooms, grading, administration tasks, no room to breathe etc are the factors of which I am really facing mental health issues."*

This statement captures the teacher's sense of overload due to persistent multitasking and behavioral issues with the students. They have little time to rest or recuperate since they are juggling teaching, grading, and administrative responsibilities, which exacerbates stress and burnout.

T10: *"Workload, student behavior, and lack of administrative support are the main factors. We're often expected to do more with less resource."*

This quotation demonstrates the teacher's dissatisfaction with the demanding workload, difficult student conduct, and lack of administrative support. It emphasizes the feeling that teachers are overworked and under resourced, with increasing demands placed on them without the necessary resources or assistance.

Theme 5: Possible Burnout Coping Mechanism

In the teaching profession, burnout is a major problem that frequently arises from extended stress, a severe workload, and emotional depletion. Teachers can use a variety of coping strategies that support their mental and emotional health. Teachers are further equipped to handle the demands of their jobs through professional development on stress management and access to counseling services.

T1: *"I feel extreme tiredness and health issues by which I am not able to find any way to overcome my stress and anxiety. My suggestion is to focus on the problem highlighted by the hilly and harsh areas schools because the hilly areas duties are too much difficult from plane areas schools. My humble request is to provide the legal solutions and ways to prevent the teacher's burnout and support them to secure their mental health because they are humans not robots."*

This statement is a sincere appeal from an instructor in a mountainous, rural area, where the challenging geography plays a major role in physical fatigue, stress, and deteriorating health. The teacher believes that he or she is overwhelmed and cannot handle the persistent stress and fatigue resulting from his or her difficult situation. They focus on the importance of understanding the special challenges that teachers in hilly regions would have over their counterparts in plains and demand special attention and corrective measures. Asserting "they are humans not robots," the educator emphasizes the necessity of accepting

their physical and emotional capacity limitations and demands that authorities introduce legal safeguards and mental health counseling to avoid burnout and maintain the health of teachers.

T3: *"I perform regular exercise and spending time with family to manage my stress and prevent burnout. My suggestion is to provide proper counseling facilities to teachers."*

According to this remark, the educator manages stress and prevents burnout by using personal coping mechanisms like family time and exercise. To assist teachers in managing their well-being, they do, however, think that schools should also provide official support, such as appropriate counseling services.

T8: *"I pray, talk to friends, and try to get enough rest. My opinion to overcome the ratio of burnout in the teaching field is that the number of classes as per teacher may be reduced."*

This quotation makes clear that the teacher uses social support, prayer, and relaxation to cope with stress. They recommend cutting back on the amount of classes each teacher is given in order to lessen teacher burnout.

T9: *"I focus on Art therapy and listening music to prevent my burnout and stress. I suggest shorter school hours for early childhood teachers."*

This quotation demonstrates how the instructor manages stress and prevents burnout through artistic activities like music and art therapy. For early childhood educators in particular, they suggest shortened school days in order to lessen burden and enhance well-being.

T10: *"I try to prioritize self-care, exercise regularly, and set boundaries between work and personal life. Meditation and mindfulness also help. I wish we had more autonomy in our teaching practices and more resources to support our students' diverse needs."*

The statement highlights the teacher's attempts to handle stress by practicing self-care, getting regular exercise, keeping a clear work-life balance, and practicing mindfulness and meditation. In order to better meet the diverse needs of their pupils, they also say they would need more resources and more latitude in their teaching.

DISCUSSION

Teacher burnout is one of the most viral issues faced by teachers in teaching profession at primary level. These burnouts had negative impact on teacher's mental health and made the teaching learning process more difficult for both teachers and students. According to Jennett, Harris & Mesibov (2003), chronic emotional and interpersonal pressures at work, which are frequently worsened when working with students who have special needs or in demanding work environments, are the main causes of teacher burnout. The phenomena of burnout in the teaching profession, especially in demanding and under-resourced educational environments, is better understood by these observations.

One of the most salient themes that were found was teachers' emotional exhaustion, for which the participants sustained claims of long-term fatigue, anxiety, and lack of motivation. The accounts imply that prolonged multitasking, huge class sizes, and administrative tasks, accompanied by little support, cause an extreme depletion of emotional and physical reserves. As a number of participants noted their enthusiasm for teaching runs counter to the everyday reality of the work, creating frustration and burnout. This aligns with research that associates emotional exhaustion with lower teacher participation and higher turnover.

Another essential problem emphasized was the difficulty of achieving work-life balance. Participants explained abnormally long working hours that penetrate into personal time, making them mentally and physically exhausted. Lack of boundaries between personal and professional life not only damages their health but also undermines their capacity to maintain personal relationships and self-care patterns. This result resonates with existing research that showed work-life boundary erosion to be the leading cause of chronic stress and job dissatisfaction for teachers.

Inadequate institutional support was a prevalent theme that contributed to burnout as a major factor. Teachers routinely reported a lack of being supported by school officials, with many commenting on the absence of resources, support, professional development opportunities, mental health services, and effective leadership. Peer support was recognized but not enough to offset administrative inadequacies. The results indicate that without institutional reforms, such as providing sufficient resources and professional autonomy, burnout will be an endemic phenomenon.

In addition, the information shed light on burnout-associated psychological distress, as teachers exhibited symptoms that ranged from anxiety to depression and chronic stress. Participants explained how ongoing multitasking, hilly and harsh areas, behavioral issues, and limited resources left them drained emotionally. The participants highlight the mental health consequences of laboring under perpetual pressure without any institutional support. This concurs with earlier studies that make links between instructor-related stress and mental illness disorders, presenting issues on psychological long-term impacts on teachers.

In spite of all these difficulties, teachers showed resilience by adapting different coping strategies. Efforts including physical exertion, mindfulness, social support, and use of creative media such as music and art were highlighted as stress management. One useful technique is maintaining a robust support group through collaborating with peers and direct communication with peers, which reduces loneliness. Mindfulness strategies, including meditation and breathing exercises, can also be used to manage stress and maintain emotional stability. Time management and establishing realistic goals are also essential in avoiding burnout and a healthy work-life balance. By including these mechanisms, schools can develop a more conducive environment that fosters resilience and minimizes burnout among teachers. Members suggested systemic remedies, including lightening class loads, shorter school days, and greater access to counseling.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this qualitative study, the following are recommended measures to overcome teacher burnout and its effects on primary-level teachers' mental health in Swat: The Department of Education (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) must develop and implement policies aimed at supporting mental health care, managing workloads, and promoting healthy school environments. Set policies for optimal class sizes and equitable distribution of workloads to avoid overloading individual teachers. Establish systems for regular evaluation of teacher well-being and burnout, employing both quantitative and qualitative instruments.

Schools must provide mental health services, such as peer support groups, counseling, and teacher-only stress management classes. Promote flexible work arrangements wherever feasible, and provide time for personal and professional growth. Promote collaboration, minimize workplace isolation, and celebrate teacher success to increase morale and minimize burnout potential.

Conduct regular training for teachers on stress management, emotional regulation, and self-care techniques. Train school heads and administrators to identify burnout symptoms and assist teachers

accordingly. Educate parents about the difficulties teachers endure, promoting parent-teacher collaboration to build an environment of support that facilitates learning. Work in collaboration with local health experts and NGOs to provide mental health workshops and support structures in the community.

Future studies must make a harmonization of qualitative and quantitative methods to give a richer understanding of teacher burnout. Make longitudinal studies to understand changes in burnout and mental health over time, and the efficacy of interventions. Investigate the experiences of burnout from various regions (urban vs. rural) and educational levels to determine context-specific needs and interventions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research identifies teacher burnout as an entrenched phenomenon that is motivated by emotional, structural, and psychological pressures. Primary school teachers' work-related stress can both directly predict and indirectly impact their mental health through social support. Although personal coping strategies bring some respite, systemic reform is required to develop a durable and nurturing school environment. Policymakers in the education sector and school administrators need to make mental well-being a priority, provide sufficient means, and enforce work-life balance to reduce burnout and enhance general well-being among teachers. Future studies may consider examining the effectiveness of targeted interventions and policy reforms in the reduction of burnout in various learning environments.

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