

Original Article

The Unspoken Realism of Hurdles among School Teachers — The Aftermath of COVID Lockdown in Western Maharashtra

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Abstract

Background : The COVID-19 epidemic has profoundly impacted the educational system not just in India but also across the World. The outbreak has placed teachers in an unanticipated predicament where the lockdown situation led to the closure of educational institutions and expedited the transition from conventional to online learning strategies, which could have had implications on the school teachers' physical, social, and mental well-being.

Aims and Objectives : • To explore the various health related, psychosocial, and financial challenges faced by school teachers during the COVID lockdown. • To provide recommendations based on the study findings.

Materials and Methods : A cross sectional study on teachers working in schools of Western Maharashtra was carried out and evaluated using pretested self-developed questionnaire. Data was entered in Microsoft Excel and analysed using MedCalc software version 3.1. Frequency, percentage was also calculated.

Results : Out of the total study population of 100 teachers, main findings showed that exacerbation of health problems (14.0%), stress from Authorities (35.0%), Episodes of feeling low (24.0%), Domestic violence (11.0%) and Financial difficulties (37.0%) were faced by school teachers during lockdown period.

Key words : Challenges, School Teachers, Stress, Lockdown, COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic began with the breakout of SARS-CoV-2 in Wuhan at the end of 2019, and its fast Worldwide spread¹¹. Governments all throughout the world have imposed stringent isolation measures in order to reduce the number of illnesses and fatalities caused by a lack of suitable treatments. Schools were closed under this unprecedented scenario and millions of students were denied access to education, exacerbating social disparities¹.

The COVID-19 epidemic had serious repercussions for the working environment of frontline personnel⁸. Frontline personnel are job groups that interact with consumers, clients, patients, students, and so on, and they frequently perform critical duties that cannot be performed from home (The Lancet Editorial 2020)². It had a significant effect on teachers as well.

Due to the everyday stress of managing work overload, emotions, and resolving conflicts in the classroom, teaching is an incredibly challenging profession¹. Firstly,

Editor's Comment :

- The study underlines the necessity of protecting the wellbeing of teachers to boost teaching quality and indirectly the health of students.
- There is a need to consider various issues that impact educators' ability to work effectively and adopt measures to solve these problems, with the aid of Government, parents, institutions, and educationists.

the teaching-learning process is complicated by detours in learning and other negative implications including lack of access to facilities, improper infrastructure, inadequate nutrition, absenteeism, social issues especially when parents are also insufficiently prepared for homeschooling or distance learning or are otherwise unavailable to take care of their children³. Secondly, educators are frequently perplexed and stressed because they are unaware of their responsibilities and how to establish connections with students to assist learning³. Even in the most ideal of circumstances, transitions to remote learning systems are messy and frustrating. In many instances, school closures culminate in teacher sequestration or disruptions. Thirdly, establishing, sustaining and strengthening online education, as well as assessing and validating learning, are substantial technological and human challenges that must be overcome in order to efficiently and widely deliver learning from classrooms to homes⁴.

Because of the extra responsibility entailed with home teaching, recent research had found that teachers experience stress during lockdown, which is frequently accompanied by symptoms of Anxiety, Depression and Sleep Disturbance⁵. Another point to consider is that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only caused a health

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catastrophe, but also a huge Worldwide economic slump, the impacts of which have been especially hard because teacher job insecurity was already a concern before to the pandemic and COVID-19 has only contributed to intensify this problem with increased redundancies and instability causing a significant adverse psychological impact on them as well^{2,9,10}.

The majority of previous study has been on the effects of school closures on children's mental health and learning, as well as the necessity of preparing teachers for upcoming changes in online teaching practises. Few studies have examined teachers' psychological challenges in the backdrop of COVID-19 confinement, despite the likelihood that their mental health may have a direct bearing on the emotional wellbeing of their children¹.

In the current scenario, when health is seen holistically, relatively few research has taken that component into consideration in benefit of the educators. Therefore, the purpose of our study is to assess the various challenges experienced by school teachers during COVID lockdown period including physical, mental, social, and financial aspects, since comprehending about the pandemic's consequences is vital not just for teachers, but also for children, parents, and educational administrators, who are directly or indirectly influenced by the welfare of educators¹.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This was a cross-sectional study conducted in selected schools of Western Maharashtra for a study period of 6 months (July, 2022- December, 2022). A total of 100 school teachers from classes 1 to 12 in the selected Private and Government schools were included in the study. Besides attaining prior approval from the Institutional Ethical Committee before the start of the study, informed written consent from the teachers were also taken along with permission from the respective school authorities as a part of the study. Exclusion criteria included teachers who were suffering from illnesses, non-cooperative students, and absentees.

The Sample size was calculated using WinPepi VI 1.65 software in reference to the article "Teachers' Response to Stress, Anxiety and Depression During COVID-19 Lockdown: What Have We Learned from the Pandemic?", with prevalence of stress being 46.6% and acceptable difference of 10% within 95% CI. Though the minimum sample calculated was 96, 100 teachers were enrolled for the study.

Stratified random sampling was carried out - initially the field area was divided into a list of equal number of government and private schools followed by random selection of equal proportion of school teachers from each group. The sample selection process was as described in flow chart (Fig 1).

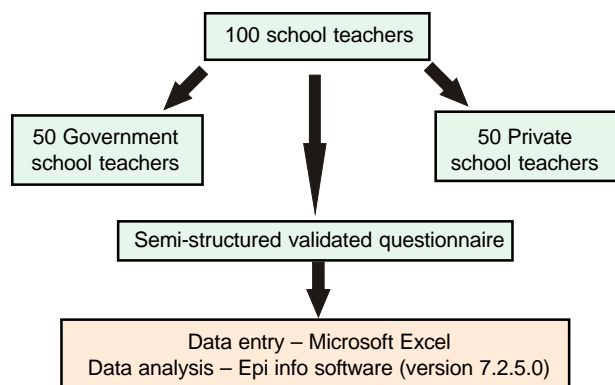


Fig 1 — Showing Flow Chart

A semi- structured validated questionnaire was used for data collection. A total of thirty-nine questions encompassing various sections namely Socio-demographic details, health problems, mental issues, social and financial difficulties was developed to gain insight into the way teachers perceived the pandemic and the challenges they encountered. All data was presented in the form of numbers and percentages. Data was entered in Microsoft Excel and analysed using MedCalc software (version 3. I). Frequency, percentage was calculated for the nominal variables and descriptive statistics was calculated for the quantitative variables.

OBSERVATIONS

Socio-demographic Variables :

In 100 School teachers (84% female and 16 male) participated in the study with majority of them belonging to age group 40-50(41%, 95%CI: 31.26%- 51.29%), nuclear family (58%, 95%CI: 47.71%- 67.80%) and having children (84%, 95%CI: 75.32% -90.57%).

Under the physical aspect, 40% (95%CI:30.33% -50.28%) of the population experienced new health issues, with Hypertension (20.5%), hair and skin issues (20.5%) and Diabetes Mellitus (15.9%), making up the majority in addition to 14.0% (95%CI: 7.87%- 22.37%) showing exacerbation of existing health problems during the lockdown period. Besides, 9.52% (95% CI: 3.52% - 15.56%) also reported new menstrual problems including polymenorrhoea followed by oligomenorrhoea.

The psychological aspect revealed that 76% (95% CI: 16.02% - 33.57%) teachers had new episodes of feeling low out of which only 20.83% (95% CI: 7.13% - 42.15%) sought treatment. Besides household activities and daily gatherings was perceived as depressing by 53% and 7% of the population respectively.

When social aspect was considered, it was found that teachers had experienced increased stress from an array of sources including School Authorities (35%, 95% CI: 25.73% -45.18%), Parents (21%, 95% CI: 13.49% -

30.29%), Students (19%, 95% CI: 11.84% - 28.07%) and Own Children (25%, 95% CI: 16.19% -35.64%). Eleven percentage (95% CI: 5.62% - 18.83%) of them additionally mentioned increase in physical abuse as well. Few positive findings were also noted which included 61% using their time for innovative ideas like new hobbies (83.61%), extra income source (8.20%), knowledge gain (4.92%) and others (3.28%).

Financial aspect showed a substantial financial strain being experienced by 37% teachers (95% CI: 27.56% - 47.24%) mostly due to loss of job (24.32%), reduced family income (8.11%). This had an effect mainly on daily needs (54.05%), recreational activities (32.43%) and fee payment (13.51%).

DISCUSSION

Globally, the schooling system has been seriously impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 210 economies, there have been complete or partial school closures, with 84 economies experiencing more than 40 weeks of closure (a full school year), according to UNESCO (2021b)¹⁵.

Physical Aspect :

The current study identified a considerable rise in new health conditions, including Diabetes Mellitus, Hypertension, Hair and Skin Disorders, and others, as well as an aggravation of already existing illnesses. These results are in line with those of previous research that have noted similar findings. This includes the studies carried out by Idris F, *et al* (2021) and Kozubal A, *et al* (2022), who stated, among other findings, back discomfort, eyesight loss, sleep disturbance, gastrointestinal issues, and the worsening of existing conditions as major health problems faced during lockdown^{12,13}. Research conducted in India by Kumari A (2020) additionally evaluates the prevalence of physical illness on a scale of increasing severity underlying related issues⁶. Even if the major health concerns were somewhat distinct from those in other studies, it's crucial to remain cognizant that they all point to an upsurge in health issues during the same period.

Psychosocial Aspect :

Despite the fact that the assessing methodologies used were not precisely comparable, various studies conducted all over the World corroborated our results of elevated stress and poor mental health among teachers during the COVID lockdown period. While a few studies (Nielsen K, *et al* 2021; Lacomba-Trejo L, *et al* 2021; Jakubowski TD, *et al* 2021) highlighted a spike in Stress, Anxiety and Depression during the pandemic, other studies (Idris F, *et al* 2021; Ozamiz-Etxebarria N, *et al* 2021; Aperribai L, *et al* 2020) identified a number of elements that may have

played a role, including increased workloads, impending deadlines, concerns about one's own well-being and those of family members, job instability, and parenthood^{1-5,12,14}. In line with our presumption that Stress was a key factor in the present situation, we observed that the teachers endured a substantial level of stress from not just the school authorities but also from parents, students, their own children, and family. Furthermore, we investigated into the domestic violence component and observed that 11.0% of them had been subjected to it which is extremely concerning given that it may merely be the tip of the iceberg given the taboo tied to it.

Economic Aspect :

According to UNESCO (2021c), closing schools has a detrimental effect on people's economic and social stability all over the World⁴. In 2020, according to a UNICEF estimate, approximately 8 million children were not enrolled in school and the unemployment rate had dramatically grown (UNICEF, 2020). Very few studies have been done specifically emphasising on the teachers, especially the financial aspect, in spite of the fact that numerous researchers contributed to the study of the Socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and its influence on the education sector as a whole during this pandemic. Therefore, in order to shed some light on the financial situation of teachers in schools during the COVID-19, we conducted further research and observed that, in accordance with the UNICEF report, more than one-third of the teachers faced financial hardship, primarily in the form of job loss and pay reduction¹⁰. Our findings were backed up by research conducted in Nepal by Devkota N that assessed the economic situation of school teachers and found a significant decline in employment as well as a significant decrease in monthly income and savings⁷.

CONCLUSION

The study underlines the necessity of protecting the wellbeing of teachers to boost teaching quality and indirectly the health of students and to consider various issues that impact educators' ability to work effectively and adopt measures to solve these problems, with the aid of Government, Parents, Institutions and Educationists.

Following are the recommendations : -

- Workshops for new teaching techniques and coping skills
- Health check ups
- Counselling sessions
- Interdisciplinary approach involving teachers, school authorities, parents and students

- An improvement in the legislative process and policy making aimed at enhancing the working conditions for teachers.

Limitations of the study :

- This is a short-term study with a small sample size; so future research should be done on long term basis.
- Research on the long-term circumstances of educators during and after the pandemic is required, employing qualitative techniques like in-depth interviews, focus group discussion

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Conflicts of Interest : There are no conflicts of interest.

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DISCLAIMER

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