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Kenya: Exploring Burnout among Schoolteachers and University Lecturers

Part 1 – Schoolteachers

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Together with the pressure from demographic growth and gains in educational attainment, teacher stress or burnout is one of the reasons why the teaching profession faces shortages in Africa. Teacher stress and burnout have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. One potential response to high burnout levels is to promote mental health and psychosocial support for teachers and teacher educators in Africa, as discussed in other briefs in this series of briefs. But to do so, a first step is to provide a basic diagnostic of teacher burnout levels.

This two-part brief provides results from an online survey conducted among schoolteachers (Part 1) and university lecturers (Part 2) in Kenya by UNESCO IICBA staff in collaboration with researchers based in Kenya. The survey aimed to answer the following questions: (i) How often do teachers and lecturers encounter selected work-related issues at their institution?; (ii) How much does burnout affect their professional output?; (iii) What mechanisms are available in schools or universities support teachers and lecturers deal with work-related burnout?; (iv) How do teachers and lecturers deal at a personal level with burnout?; and finally (v) How may burnout lead to various effects, including depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, emotional exhaustion, reduced job satisfaction, and workload? This brief focuses on results



Background: This brief is part of a series on teacher well-being and practices in Kenya. The work was conducted in part as a contribution to (i) the KIX Africa 19 Hub program of which Kenya is part, and (ii) a program of work at UNESCO IICBA on mental health and psychosocial support for teachers and university lecturers in Africa (that broader work program benefits from funding from UNESCO's O3 – Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future).

Key findings: This brief explores burnout levels and some of their potential effects among Kenyan schoolteachers based on data from an online survey.

- Burnout and its implications can be assessed through online surveys, albeit with limitations. For this brief, a survey of schoolteachers was conducted in June-July 2022, with a total of 169 respondents (99 men, 65 women, and 5 unidentified). Results from the survey are instructive but have limitation as the sample is not statistically representative of all teachers in public and private schools in Kenya.
- The shares of teachers reporting work-related issues are high. The most common issues are low remuneration and slow job progression. Results are similar in primary and secondary schools even if primary teachers fare slightly less well.
- The potential effects of burnout include (from the less to more common effects) feelings of reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization, lack of job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and a feeling of high workload. Burnout levels are similar between primary and secondary schools as well as by gender.
- Just over one in two respondents have at least one support mechanism at work, the most common being the ability to attend seminars, workshops, or retreats. However, most mechanisms identified in the survey are available to less than a third of respondents. At a personal level, when at risk of burnout, respondents use a range of mechanisms to seek support, including a healthy diet and reaching out to people close to them. Yet most respondents have not sought professional support and just over half have used at least one personal mechanism to avoid burnout.
- Encouragingly, analysis suggests that the availability of at least one support mechanism at the school or the use of least one coping mechanism at the personal level seem to be associated with lower burnout levels than otherwise.

for schoolteachers (see Hungi et al., 2023, for a detailed analysis; very similar findings are observed for university lecturers in a separate brief in this series).

Burnout and its implications can be assessed through online surveys, albeit with limitations

While different tools can be used to measure burnout and assess its potential implications, a low cost and rapid approach is to implement online surveys. For this brief, a survey of schoolteachers was conducted using an online Google form from November 2022 to January 2023. Email messages were sent to an initial group of teachers inviting them to participate in the survey and encouraging them to share it with colleagues who they thought might be interested in completing the survey. The sample for the analysis consists of 169 respondents who work as teachers in Kenya. The sample consists of 99 men, 65 women, and five respondents who did not disclose their sex. Two-thirds (66.3 percent) of teachers were teaching in secondary schools, with one third (33.7 percent) teaching in primary schools. A vast majority of the teachers were working in public schools (92.3 percent, versus only 7.7 percent in private schools). The survey did not collect any personal identifier data. The survey did not collect any personal identifier data. The survey questionnaire is provided in annex.

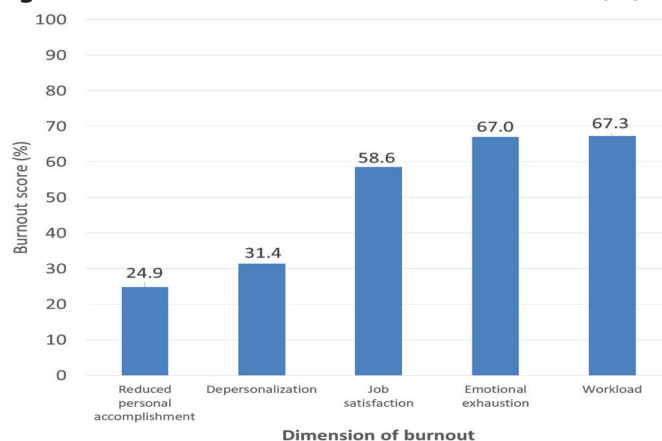
The online survey is a low-cost approach to exploring burnout levels, some of the factors that may lead to burnout, and its potential implications. At the same time, the approach also has limitations. Data collected through short online surveys are limited in terms of the information that they provide. Such surveys are most useful when repeated over time as one-time surveys only provide a snapshot at one point of time. In addition, there is self-selection in who responds to the surveys. For this survey especially, results should be interpreted with some caution since they are based on a sample of convenience which may not be statistically representative of burnout levels in Kenyan schools. For example, a larger share of respondents come from public schools than would be warranted by the share of teachers working in those schools. Nevertheless, the results are instructive, and should be of interest to school leaders in Kenya and other institutions interested in identifying mechanisms to support teachers deal with work-related burnout.

Burnout levels appear to be high, with implications for well-being and performance

Work-related issues: The shares of teachers reporting work-related issues most of the time or all the time are high. The most common issues reported are low remuneration and slow job progression. Despite a few differences (primary school teachers typically fare slightly less well), results are similar for primary and secondary school teachers and by gender.

Potential effects of burnout: The effect of burnout mentioned most often is a feeling of exhaustion (either physically or emotionally) followed by a sense of skepticism, but other effects such as insomnia, anger, depression, or anxiety as well as illness are also mentioned. Another way to assess the potential effects of burnout is to look at whether individuals are affected in five domains of their life. As shown in Figure 1, the share of those affected was at 24.9 percent for feelings of reduced accomplishment, 31.4 percent for depersonalization, 58.6 percent for lack of job satisfaction, 67.0 percent for emotional exhaustion, and 67.3 percent for high workload. In other words, two thirds of teachers were found to experience work-related burnout with regards to workload and emotional exhaustion. Differences by gender tend to be small. Encouragingly, the analysis suggests that the availability of at least one support mechanism at the school or the use of at least one coping mechanism at the personal level seem to be associated with lower burnout levels than otherwise.

Figure 1: Burnout Levels Across Five Dimensions (%)



Source: Authors' estimation.

Support mechanisms: Only slightly more than half of respondents (55.6 percent) have at least one support mechanism available to them, the most common being facilitation by the school to spend time away from the institution attending seminars, workshops, or retreats (40.2 percent of teachers). At a personal level, when at risk of burnout, respondents use a range of mechanisms to seek support, including a healthy diet or reaching out to people close to them. However, three in four teachers (74.6 percent) have never or rarely sought professional support. Overall, just over half (53.8 percent) said that they used at least one personal mechanism to avoid work-related burnout.

Takeaways

This brief relies on an online survey to explore burnout among schoolteachers in Kenya. Most teachers report work-related issues such as low remuneration and slow job progression. The potential effects of burnout include reduced personal accomplishment, depersonalization, lack of job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and a feeling of high workload. Burnout levels are broadly similar in

primary and secondary schools and by gender. While half of respondents have at least one support mechanism at work, most types of support mechanisms are not available. At a personal level, when at risk of burnout, respondents use various strategies to cope, including reaching out to people close to them, but few seek professional support. There is however evidence that individuals with support mechanisms at work or through their own connections tend to have lower levels of burnout than individuals without those resources. Improving resources available to teachers for mental health and psychosocial support could help reduce burnout levels as well as some of its potential negative effects.

References

Hungi, N., F. W. Kamonjo, W. Muriithi, and Q. Wodon. 2023. School Teachers in Kenya: Burnout, Potential Impacts, and Mitigation Strategies. UNESCO IICBA Discussion Paper. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO IICBA.

Appendix: Survey Instrument

BURNOUT KNOWLEDGE

Definition of work-related burnout: This section collects information about your knowledge about work-related burnout. In this survey, work-related burnout is defined as “a condition resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed”. Please note that work-related burnout is NOT stress that is caused by a condition that is not work-related NEITHER is it a one-off condition like feeling tired or exhausted after a hard day at work.

1. Work-related burnout is caused by many issues. How often do you encounter the following work-related issues as a schoolteacher? [Please select one option for each statement]. Potential responses: Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Most of the time; All the time. Modalities: Feeling of little control in the workplace; Lack of social support; Skills that are not in line with my role; Slow job progression or mobility/stagnation; Lack of recognition for my effort; Being unsure about my expectations; A poor working culture; A lack of work-life balance; Being over- engaged with my work; Poor/low remuneration.
2. What level of importance do you associate with the following burnout effects on your professional output as a schoolteacher? [Select one option for each statement]. Potential responses: Very low; Low; Medium; High; Very high. Modalities: A sense of skepticism and an overall consistent negative mood or numbness; Frequent headaches, stomach, or bowel problems; Feelings of insomnia (sleep disorder) and fatigue; Frequent feeling of illness; Feelings of anger; Depression and anxiety; Feelings of exhaustion, either physically or emotionally; Increased use/abuse of alcohol and other substances.

3. What support mechanisms are available in your institution to support teachers deal with work-related burnout? [Select all that are available]. Potential responses: Available; Not Available. Modalities: Presence of institutional support on identifying where the stressors stem from; Presence of a lounge/common room for relaxation and socialization; Requirement to proceed on annual leave as scheduled; Facilitation by the school to spend time away from the institution attending conferences, seminars, workshops, or retreats; Availability of free training on issues related to stress and work- related burnout.
4. On a personal level, how often do you apply the following mechanisms to avoid work-related burnout? [Please select one option for each statement]. Potential responses: Never; Rarely; Sometimes; Most of the time; All the time. Modalities: Taking leave or going on a vacation or extended period of time away from work; Making sure I am eating a healthy diet and staying hydrated; Seeking professional support to help untangle life challenges; Socializing with coworkers; Reaching out to people close to you especially family and friends; Making time to relax such as exercising, taking a walk, and meditation; Setting clear boundaries between work and non-work matters.

BURNOUT PROFILES

This section collects information about your work-related burnout profile

5. The following statements describe feelings and perceptions about the experience of being a teacher. Please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. [Please select one option for each statement]. Potential responses: Strongly agree; Somewhat agree; Agree; Somewhat disagree; Strongly disagree. Modalities: I have a negative attitude and detachment towards pupils/students; I feel a lack of personal concern for my superiors; I am insensitive towards my colleagues; I feel effective in solving the problems of my pupils/students; I feel my colleagues truly value my expertise and professionalism; I feel I make a positive contribution toward institutional goals; I am able to handle all my tasks in set timelines (e.g. scheme of work preparation, lesson preparation, teaching, marking); I feel I am working too hard at my workplace; I want to be active at work, but somehow, I am unable to manage; When I exert myself at work, I quickly get tired; After a day at work, I find it hard to recover my energy; When I get up in the morning, I lack the energy to start a new day at work; I am highly satisfied by my teaching job; Most hours in my working day are spent on work related issues; My compensation is highly rewarding; My employer offers many opportunities for career/professional development; I am satisfied with guidelines on promotion; Achievement

of set guidelines on promotion is difficult; I am satisfied with the current structure of leave entitlements; I am satisfied with current teacher delocalization policy; The requirement to integrate ICT in teaching and learning is difficult; The requirement to adhere to Teacher Performance Appraisal and Development (TPAD) guidelines is difficult; I am satisfied with the requirement by my employer for Continuous Professional Development (CPD); I feel capable of maintaining classroom control with the current class sizes; I am capable of motivating my students in their academic endeavors; My job allows me to easily meet all my physiological needs; The institution where I work is not exposed to any danger that may cause health problems; Teaching makes my life more meaningful; I have job security at the institution where I work; My institution adopts a democratic and participatory approach towards management and supervision; I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day at school; The normal teaching workload is a source of burnout due to long working hours; Requirements to teach additional classes (remedial) is a source of burnout; Requirements to take up additional responsibilities such as Timetabling/Games/Teacher on duty etc. are a source of burnout; Requirements to attend regular meetings is a source of burnout; Requirements to Supervise/Invigilate and Mark National Examinations are a source of burnout; Requirements to adhere to strict timelines for setting tests, marking and submission of marks is a source of burnout; COVID-19 has increased my work personal accomplishments; COVID-19 has increased my work emotional exhaustion; COVID-19 has increased my work engagements due to a compressed school calendar; COVID-19 has made me detached from my pupils/students; COVID-19 has made me detached from my colleagues.

SOME BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF

We need to collect some basic information about yourself so that we can link responses to your context such as gender, type of school, etc.

6. What is your sex? Potential responses: Male; Female; Prefer not to say.
7. What is your age in years? Potential responses: Under 20; 20-30; 31-40; 41-50; Above 50.
8. What is your marital status? Potential responses: Single; Married; Divorced/separated; Prefer not to say.
9. What is the highest level of professional teacher training you have completed? Potential responses: No teacher training (UT); Certificate; Diploma Degree (B.Ed.); Post graduate degree(PGD); Other.

10. What is your employment status? Potential responses: Temporary/Part-time/Intern or TP; Permanent.
11. In total, how many years of experience do you have teaching? Potential responses: Under 5; 5-10; 11-15; 16-20; Above 20.
12. Please indicate if your school is classified as a public or a private school. Potential responses: Public school; Private school.
13. What school level do you mainly teach? Potential responses: Primary; Secondary.
14. What system of curriculum is mainly taught in your school? Potential responses: Kenyan system (8-4-4 or CBC); International system.
15. In total, how many lessons per week are you currently teaching? Potential responses: Under 5 hours; 5-10 hours; 11-15 hours; 16-20 hours; 25-30 hours; Above 30 hours.
16. What additional responsibility do you hold in your school? Potential responses [Tick all that apply]: None; Class Teacher; Examination Officer; Senior Teacher; Dean of Studies; Senior Master; Co-curricular; Head of Department; National Examination Supervisor; National Examination Invigilator; Centre Manager during National Examinations; Deputy Head/Principal; Head teacher/Principal; Other.
17. What the average class size in your school? Potential responses: Below 25; 25-40; 41-55; Above 55.
18. About how far is your home from your school in kilometers? Potential responses: Below 10 km; 11-20 km; 21-30 km; 31-40 km; 41-50 km; Above 50 km.
19. On average, about how long (in minutes) does it take you to travel from your place of usual residence to your school during a working week? Potential responses: Less than 30 minutes; 30-60 minutes; 61-90 minutes; 91-120 minutes; Above 120 minutes.
20. If you would like us to share with you results of this survey, please provide your email contact below. Your email will not be shared with any third party and it will be used only to send you the results. (You can skip this question if you don't wish to share your email with us).

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