Covid 19: To Study, Emotional Labor Psychological Distress, Burnout & Resilience in Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The educational system has adapted (with varying levels of success) to 'the new normal' i.e. work-from-home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the closures of educational institutions, the classes are being held in online mode. Along with the education sector facing unprecedented challenges, the teachers across the country are also scrambling to find ways to continue motivating their students towards learning in a situation where a physical contact is no longer an option. However, during this process, the mental health of the educators has taken a toll. The current research was to study emotional labor (surface acting, deep acting, and natural emotions), psychological distress, burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment), and resilience among teachers. The study was conducted on 37 teachers, age range 25-40 years. Standardized measures of emotional labor, burnout, psychological distress and resilience were administered to the participants. Results indicated that psychological distress had a negative correlation with resilience, personal accomplishment, deep acting, and natural emotions. Resilience was found to be negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion but positively correlated with natural emotions. Results also indicated that surface acting was positively correlated with depersonalization, deep acting, and expression of natural emotions, however, surprisingly it was also seen that teachers who practiced surface acting were high on personal accomplishment and vice versa. Teachers who modified their emotions during their job resulted to be high on personal accomplishment and claimed to be expressing natural emotions. These findings indicate that there is a need for organizations to increase the education funding along with highly qualified and respected working conditions to help educators battle the negative consequences associated with emotional labor and burnout. Keeping the pandemic in mind, teachers must be provided with the necessary resources and training that they need to efficiently do their bit as educators.

Keywords - Emotional labor, Burnout, Psychological Distress, Resilience, Teachers

Introduction

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." — Leon C. Megginson

As Heraclitus rightly said that 'change is the only constant', one must always be prepared to adjust according to the inevitable changes that take place around us. Just like this came the uninvited coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic which has disrupted the functioning of day-to-day life. Many businesses closed and all actions got limited to only necessities like medical and food supplies. The pandemic has highlighted the persistent setbacks of many education systems and has had devastating repercussions for the marginalized sections. There has been a dramatic change in the functioning of the educational system. Schools and colleges were shut down and children were introduced to the concept of e-learning, offline classes have been suspended. First and foremost, there is a substantial threat of being infected by the virus. The stress rate is intensifying among the family and friends of the people. Furthermore, with the intent of curbing the spread of the virus, isolation measures have been adopted. Social distancing has been imposed through the lockdown and the teaching fraternity has been instructed to take the classes in the online mode (Choudhury et al., 2020). However, this concept was new for both teachers and students, the teachers now had to keep up the quality of education and teach the pupils, with the biggest challenge, that was an absence of physical one-on-one interaction. Many teachers were having a first-time experience in teaching online, they were using online teaching platforms for the first time (Herold, 2020). Zoom, Learning Management Systems, Google Meets, Google classrooms, Canvas, and See-Saw were some of the online platforms that were used to conduct online video lectures and to post assignments (Lieberman, 2020). In Indian schools, there is technological backwardness, and teachers are not trained, which serves as a major challenge (Rasheed, Kamsin& Abdullah, 2020). It is more difficult for the teachers to cope up with the online mode of teaching, who have been initially specialized in conventional teaching. Moreover, the teachers who are old-aged or are suffering from psychological disorders are more vulnerable to contamination, as a result, their frustration levels will be higher. The responsibility of online classes will further intensify the tension as they are being exposed to online resources and gadgets that are unfamiliar to them (Gautam& Sharma, 2020). The Indian academic profession has been badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019. Due to the lockdown measures and shutting down of universities and colleges aimed at isolating the people to curb the spread of the virus, there is a lot of mental pressure which is increasing the rate of stress, anxiety, and depression among them. (Charnsil&Chailangkarn, 2020). Besides, the teachers that are

residing in remote areas do not have access to proper internet connections and are not able to complete their tasks, as a result, they end up being more depressed and frustrated (Zhang, 2020).

According to a study, emotional labor, which includes behaviors like surface acting (to display an emotion that is not felt), deep acting (an action taken to feel a certain emotion that may be required out of the person), and to suppress one's emotion, is involved at a major level in the profession of a teacher. In other professions, high levels of burnout may also be related to this emotional labor (Näring, Briët, &Brouwers, 2006). Burnout levels in teachers are the highest when they experience emotional exhaustion, followed by lack of personal accomplishment (predicated by all aspects of emotional labor) and depersonalization. In terms of emotional labor, the least exhibited is surface acting, followed by deep acting and naturally felt emotions. The most important predictors of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are surface acting and naturally felt emotions, however, deep acting doesn't have any significant impact (Yılmaz, et al., 2015). The professional profile of teachers is so demanding that it can put them at risk for burnout; feelings of exhaustion, energy depletion, or negativism related to their job. However, the resilience factor is advocated to help individuals in facing difficult situations. A study was done by García, (2019) confirms that the self-perceived symptoms of chronic psychological distress and burnout syndrome can be prevented by the personal characteristics and resilience of an individual.

Emotional Labor

"The management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display." (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labor refers to the regulation of one's feelings and emotional displays as part of the work role (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labor occurs when the laborer deliberately attempts to direct his or her behaviour toward others in order to foster both certain social perceptions of himself or herself and a certain interpersonal climate (Ashforth& Humphrey, 1993). It is the ability of an individual to suppress or modify his or her emotions according to the need of the situation. For example, let's consider a receptionist who works at the school reception desk. The receptionist has to answer a huge number of calls, listen to the complaints and queries of people daily and is expected to respond to all of this with a calm and composed mind, while conveying respect to each and every person. Even if he/she becomes frustrated at some point of time with the work load, their job requires them to deal politely with everyone. This illustrates how the receptionist suppresses his/her unpleasant feelings related to the discomforts at the job, while performing emotional labor in order to fulfil the requirements of the job profile. Because, the educational institutions promote lucidity (Friedman, 1998), the topic of emotions may seem very illogical or its investigation may seem a waste of time. However, recent studies in the field of education have investigated and suggested that teaching is an emotional practice (Hargreaves, 1998) this gives furthermore reason to investigate the role of emotions in teaching. Studies show that emotional labor consists of three concepts; emotional display rules, surface acting, and deep acting. To have a thorough understanding of the concept of emotion work/labor, one must be well versed with the following,

Emotional display rules can be defined as cognitive representations of social conventions about the emotions that should be displayed in situations (Ekman, 1973; Matsumoto, 1990). Emotional display rules are the standards that are identified by the organizations within which the employees are supposed to express their emotions appropriately while at work, these are referred to as the goals of the organization. It is while adhering to these rules that the employees end up performing emotional labor. In the case of the receptionist, being polite, calm, and warm throughout the job despite the actual internal emotions, are the emotional display rules that are supposed to be maintained by him/her through emotional labor. The employee to meet the expectations and demands of the job are entitled to stay confined to the display rules. For example, teachers should hide their vulnerable emotions from the students and always portray to be strong-headed in front of them. Another example could be that teachers should speak politely to the parents when the parents take monthly reports of their child.

In addition to the well-defined emotional display rules, emotional labor consists of a second concept called surface acting. This is when the outer self of the person portrays certain emotions which are otherwise not felt by them internally. (Hochschild, 1983). The following example shows surface acting as a teacher; A teacher shows the same level of enthusiasm and motivation despite being having to teach the same mundane syllabus over and over again. Here, the teacher is bored of the curriculum but doesn't let that show on his/her face while teaching the pupils. In other words, the emotions portrayed are in contrast with the emotions felt internal.

The final of the three emotional labor concepts is deep acting, employee changes internally felt emotions to align with required emotional expressions of the organization (Morris & Feldman, 1996). In deep acting, the employee modifies an existing emotion to meet the demands of the job profile. This can be illustrated through an example: A receptionist, Olivia, becomes frustrated with the rude behavior of a child's parents. Olivia moves to the side of her desk and discusses the matter with her fellow receptionist. During this conversation, Olivia starts to understand that the parents are worried about their child. After all, the receptionist is supposed to listen to the parents' concerns and guide them towards the right person for solving their issues. After talking with her fellow, Olivia's frustration evaporates and she appreciates the parents for showing such concern towards the well-being of their child. This way, the receptionist regulates her emotions in the pursuit of her work, being of help to the parents. Adding on to this, recent theorists of emotional labor have suggested that there is a fourth construct of emotional labor, called natural emotions. However, not many studies have been conducted on the role of natural emotions in emotional labor. Showing natural emotions means expressing emotions that are naturally felt inconsistent with the emotional display rules; here no actual acting is required (Diefendorff et al., 2005). While expressing natural emotions the individual has to not go through the deliberating act of emotion work, but however, there has to be some sort of consistency with the display rules as well.

Burnout

The term 'burnout' was coined by the American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger in the 1970s. He used the term to explain the consequences of severe stress and high ideals in "helping" professions. For example, people like doctors and nurses, who give themselves up for others, would often end up being "burned out" – exhausted and unable to cope. However, in the present day, it can affect anyone who has a stressful job profile, e.g., teachers and overburdened homemakers. Burnout is a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. The three key dimensions of this response are overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Burnout represents a syndrome of affective and physiological responses to the

chronic emotional strain of service delivery to others in need (Maslach, 1999). Burnout is defined by 3 factors: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalisation, and reduced Personal Accomplishment (Byrne, 1999; Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

Emotional Exhaustion is basically when an individual gets psychologically drained due to constantly caring about others. This is the time when the teachers feel that they can no longer extend their hand to their students the way they did earlier. This psychological depletion could lead to fatigue, decreased resilience to stress, and psychological illness (Evers, Brouwers, &Tomic, 2002; Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Schwab &Iwaniki, 1982). Depersonalization is when the teacher may feel a negative detachment towards students and the individual needs of the students (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Personal Accomplishment, which is the third factor that indicates teacher burnout, is how the teacher self-evaluates her job performance and future goal achievements. According to a study done on antecedents (like work stressors and social support) and consequences of burnout, it was found that co-worker support played a vital role in predicting burnout and decreasing the level of depersonalization and increased sense of satisfaction with personal accomplishment in teachers (Greenglass, Burke &Konarski, 1997).

Brouwers and Tomic (1999) suggested that one dimension of burnout in teachers must be loaded with depersonalization and emotional exhaustion, which was called the 'core of burnout' and the third dimension is a personal accomplishment. The effect of student disruptive behavior on teacher burnout is mediated by perceived self-efficacy which was directly affected by the personal accomplishment of teachers. Nowadays, with the prevalence of the Covid-19 pandemic, things have become even more complicated for the teachers, as technology has stepped in and is playing a key role in their professional front. Not only for the teachers, uncertainties that bring in novel challenges, can make things challenging at the receivers' end as well, in this case, students and parents.

Psychological Distress

Chalfant et al., (1990) defined psychological distress as "a continuous feeling of irritability,unhappiness, nervousness, and problematic relationships." Psychological distress is largely defined as "a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of depression (e.g., lost interest; sadness; hopelessness) and anxiety (e.g., restlessness; feeling tense) (Mirowsky and Ross, 2002). These symptoms may be linked with somatic symptoms (e.g., insomnia; headaches; lack of energy) that may vary across cultures (Kleinman, 1991; Kirmayer, 1989). Furthermore, the factors that are tied with teachers' psychological distress are perceived lack of efficacy/success, insufficient access to proper facilities, lack of cooperative support, imprudent expectations of the society, lack of self-sufficiency/control, misconduct of the students, and lack of praise and recognition (Punch &Tuettemann, 1990). The experiences at work, confidence level, and enthusiasm of a teacher may also relate to psychological distress. A study conducted on Australian primary and secondary school teachers confirmed that the psychological distress and morale of the teachers operate on separate dimensions. Positive experiences at work were stronger determinants of morale than psychological distress, whereas negative work experiences strongly determined psychological distress than morale among teachers. However, neither can morale be enhanced by reducing negative experiences at work and nor can psychological distress be reduced by increasing the positive work experiences. And it's both psychological distress and morale that contribute to the teachers' overall quality of life (Hart, 1994).

Resilience

"Resilience is the capacity and vigorous process of adaptively overcoming stress adjustably overcoming stress and misfortune while maintaining normal psychological and physical functioning" (Russo et al., 2012; Rutter, 2012; Southwick and Charney, 2012). Resilience is our ability to bounce back from life's challenges and unforeseen difficulties, providing mental protection from emotional and mental disorders as defined by (Rutter, 1985).

The concept of resilience in teachers is an emotional practice that is multidimensional, constructed by society, and is comparative, dynamic, and progressive. The capacity of the teachers to manage the interaction between sense of self-efficacy, personal and professional identities, and how they manage the interactions between these and the professional, situated, and personal scenarios which they experience in their life, highly contribute to the solidity of their resilience (Gu& Day, 2007). In a teacher's profession, stress is inevitable, due to the demanding job profile, which expects them to put in their skill and knowledge in imparting education. In a study done on student teachers in Malaysia, it was found that emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and subjective well-being were accurate predictors of resilience but not for practicum stress (Ngui& Lay, 2020).

Purpose of the study

The purpose is to study emotional labor, burnout, psychological distress, and resilience among teachers during the lockdown. This exploration was done based on the perceptual experiences of the teachers while teaching students in the online mode where no direct contact with students as possible, to get a more refined understanding of how emotional labor is performed.

Hypotheses

1.   There will be a positive correlation between emotional labor and burnout in teachers.

2.   There will be a negative correlation among Psychological distress and resilience in teachers.

3.   There will be a negative correlation between burnout and resilience in teachers.

Method

Sample

A convenience sample of 37 teachers with an age range of 25-40 years, most of who were employed in schools and colleges. The sample was collected from Chandigarh. All the teachers who had access to smartphones and the internet could only be a part of the study.

Measures

The standardized tools used for the study were:

1. **The Maslach Burnout Inventory- Educator Survey (MBI-ES)** was developed by Maslach et al., (1996). This is a 22-item inventory using self-report along an ordinal seven-point rating scale anchored with a 0 – 6 rating scale. The inventory measures three burnout factors: a) Emotional Exhaustion (EE), (b) Depersonalisation (DP), c) Personal Achievement (PA).
2. **The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)** developed by Kessler et al., (2003) is a simple measure of psychological distress. The scale consists of 10-items about emotional states, each with a five-level response scale. This scale is used to measure the levels of distress. Each item is scored from one 'none of the time' to five 'all of the time'. Scores of all 10 items are then summed up, yielding a minimum score of 10 and a maximum score of 50.
3. **Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)** was developed by Smith et al., (2008). This is a simple 6 item scale used to measure resilience. The scale uses a five-point Likert rating scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The score range on the BRS is from 1 (low resilience) to 5 (high resilience).
4. **The Emotional Labor of Teaching Scale – TELTS** developed by Brotheridge& Lee (1998). This questionnaire was used to examine the level of emotional labor in the participants. This is an 11 – item scale and uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from never to always. The scale further has three sub-scales that measure the following: surface acting, deep acting, and natural emotions.

Procedure

Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants. The questionnaires were provided and filled by the participants through google forms. This google form was circulated among schools and colleges in Chandigarh. The consent of each participant was taken beforehand. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information provided by them to elicit their honest responses without any fear or reticence.

Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1 shows the N, Mean, and Standard deviation data of the variables being studied. Table 2 shows the correlation between psychological distress, resilience, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment, surface acting, deep acting, and natural expressions.

Table 1: Shows N, Mean and Standard Deviation

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Psychological distress	53	24.21	8.754
Resilience	53	3.16	0.576
Emotional Exhaustion	53	11.47	8.846
Depersonalization	53	5.83	4.906
Personal Accomplishment	53	35.81	10.605
Surface Acting	53	15.47	4.012
Deep Acting	53	9.77	3.117
Natural Expressions	53	11.34	3.044

Table 2: shows Correlation of all variables

	Psychological Distress	Resilience	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalisation	Personal Accomplishment	Surface Acting	Deep Acting	Natural Emotions
Psychological Distress	_							
Resilience	-0.472***	_						
Emotional Exhaustion	0.154	-0.352 **	_					
Depersonalisation	0.172	-0.170	0.018	_				
Personal Accomplishment	-0.331 *	0.201	0.097	0.014	_			
Surface Acting	-0.198	-0.045	0.052	0.503 ***	0.340 *	_		
Deep Acting	-0.451 ***	0.244	-0.085	0.044	0.416 **	0.468***	_	
Natural Emotions	-0.656 ***	0.556 ***	-0.231	-0.135	0.488 ***	0.273 *	0.620 ***	_

Note: * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001

Discussion of Results

The results found out that there is a negative correlation between resilience and psychological distress (r = -0.472, p<.001), between personal accomplishment and psychological distress (r = -0.331, p<.05), between deep acting and psychological distress (r = -0.451, p<.001), and in between natural emotions and psychological distress (r = -0.656, p<.001). Also, there was found to be a significant negative correlation between emotional exhaustion and resilience (r = -0.352, p<.01), and a highly significant positive correlation was found between natural emotions and resilience (r = 0.556, p<.001). Further, results revealed a highly significant positive correlation between surface acting and depersonalization (r = 0.503, p<.001). It was also found that there was a significant positive correlation between personal accomplishment and surface acting (r = 0.340, p<.05), between personal accomplishment and deep acting (r = 0.416, p<.01), and a highly significant positive correlation in between personal accomplishment and natural emotions (r = 0.488, p<.001). Surface acting and deep acting showed a highly significant positive correlation (r = 0.468, p<.001), along with this, surface acting was also significantly positively correlated with natural emotions (r = 0.273, p<.05). Natural emotions and deep acting also had a highly significant positive correlation (r = 0.620, p<.001).

Our current findings are in tandem with a study done by Aziz, Widis&Wuensch (2018) wherein, it was found that surface acting was positively correlated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and it was negatively correlated with personal accomplishment. Deep acting showed a positive correlation with personal accomplishment and depersonalization, however, it was negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion. Personal accomplishment mediates the correlation between emotional labor strategies and satisfaction in teachers (Nair, 2019). Different factors of emotional labor affect the burnout of an individual. It has also been found that when the organizations allow the employees to practice autonomy and adopt positive display rules (that expect the individuals to express positive emotions), then emotional labor can have favorable outcomes as it may improve leadership qualities (Humphrey et.al., 2015). Maladaptive coping strategies used by teachers may put them at risk of developing psychological distress and can decrease their life satisfaction and happiness (Stapleton, Garby& Sabot, 2020). A study was done by Brotheridge&Grandey (2002) on employees in Canada wherein it was found that there was no significant occupational difference between emotional labor and burnout. Emotional exhaustion was significantly correlated to display rules to high negative emotions and surface acting. And it was found that negative affectivity was the significant predictor of emotional exhaustion. Zhang & Zhu (2008) conducted a study on Chinese college English instructors and found that the instructors performed more deep acting as compared to surface acting and that both surface acting and deep acting were predictors of depersonalization. It has been found that both surface acting and deep acting are significantly related, however, teachers perform surface acting more than deep acting (Brown & Floyd, 2011). A Study done on teachers in span explored the influence of positive self-evaluation of the work by teachers on feelings of being burned. It was found that there was a low burnout index and a moderate level of resilience. Hence, it was concluded that the personal characteristics of the teachers and the resilience act as regulating variables against burnout syndrome. Hence, vulnerability to burnout is reduced by resilience (García&Gambarte, 2020).

Conclusion

The current research was done to study the relationship between emotional labor (surface acting and deep acting) psychological distress, burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization), and resilience among teachers. The study was conducted on 37 teachers, age range 25-40 years.

Standardized measures of emotional labor, burnout, psychological distress and resilience were administered to the participants. Results indicated that psychological distress had a negative correlation with resilience, personal accomplishment, deep acting, and natural emotions. Resilience was found to be negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion but positively correlated with natural emotions. Results also indicated that surface acting was positively correlated with depersonalization, deep acting, and expression of natural emotions, however, surprisingly it was also seen that teachers who practiced surface acting were high on personal accomplishment and vice versa. Teachers who modified their emotions during their job resulted to be high on personal accomplishment and claimed to be expressing natural emotions. The organizations need to invest more towards enhancing the working conditions of the teachers, providing them with necessary equipment and training so that they can come out stronger from these challenging and inevitable working conditions that the pandemic has put forth. Also, workplace interactions are highly important in meeting the basic psychological needs of individuals, with this they feel a sense of relatedness and enthusiasm as they progress towards accomplishing goals and achieve their full potential. This may further enrich their personal lives as well (Solat et al., 2020). There should not be any rigid emotional display expectations made by the organizations, more humanistic approach should be practiced with employees to generate a positive workforce.

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