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Online teaching during covid-19 pandemic lock down period and teacher's health

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Abstract

Sudden spread of Covid-19 nationwide lockdown and social distancing imposed and viewing the loss in studies and also to indulge children in healthy engagement, government took decision to start online teaching. Teachers of school, colleges and other academic institutions were entrusted the work of online teaching without having any prior exposure and technical knowhow, digital skills, virtual learning resources and cyber safety protocols, Teachers were supposed to make power point presentation, record video lectures, take online classes through different apps without a clear instruction as to how it should be done. They are engaging classes for three to four hours and then prepare study material and videos for next day disturbing their sleep time. Teacher were doing the same irrespective of their own stresses and anxieties. After going through all odds, they are facing salary cut. One cannot deny that these stressors have an impact on teacher mental health. The purpose of this study was to know the effect of online teaching during covid-19 lockdown period on mental and physical health of secondary school teachers. Total one hundred twelve secondary school teachers of both genders, equal in number, were selected and compared for their mental and physical health. The mean age of sample was 37.5 yrs. A special health schedule was prepared to collect health information and feedback was taken from individual teachers about the timing of emergence of their health problems. Results revealed that mental and physical health of teachers have been affected due to online teaching and other academic activities during covid-19 pandemic lockdown period. Difference have been found in types and severity of mental and physical health problems suffered by different teachers and gender difference was apparently clear in the results. Male teachers feel irritation and stressed whereas female teachers are anxious and more stressed even loss of sleep which resulted in different types of physical difficulties. High percentage of female teachers experienced physical health problem than their counterpart.

Keywords: Online teaching, covid-19 pandemic lock down period, teacher's health

Introduction

The world changed overnight due to spread of corona virus. Nationwide lockdown was imposed to enforce social distancing which was considered the best way to prevent the spread of Covid-19 pandemic in the absence of a vaccination. Educational institutions, offices, factories and all most all government and private establishments were closed to limit the virus infection in public. Thus, the students were liberated from schools and forced to remain confined to their homes, and parents had to grapple with keeping children engaged and productive at home. Disruption in education due to lockdown was felt widely and Ministry of Human Resource Development came out with a plan of online teaching while making several platforms available to aid and exercise. The National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT) has also developed a curriculum to suit the online education pattern. In the enthusiasm of acclamation for online teaching, no one paid attention towards often neglected group-teacher who were also in the stress of lockdown, hand washing and tracking the global spread of the virus.

The lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic has led to closing of educational institutes like schools, colleges and coaching institutions. Suddenly teachers of schools, colleges and coaching institutions were entrusted to opt online teaching method. Pitted against all the odds such as lack of technical knowhow, digital skills, virtual learning resources and cyber safety protocols, the teachers emerged victorious when they managed to proudly sit before a laptop to teach their remote learner in the online class. A large number of teachers, mainly teachers of primary, middle and secondary school levels had no internet exposure.

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They were unaware of the techniques of teaching online or best online teaching platforms or also online teaching tools. Majority of teachers do not have household computer and internet connection. They started online teaching through mobile phones with the help of Zoom and WhatsApp. Few minutes video call is possible through mobile and Zoom but to continue a 40-minute class is difficult.

India has 300 million kids and 1.4 million schools. More than 630 million subscribers, the second largest user base but connectivity is still an issue since mobile data rather than fixed line internet is the main source, the signal is often uneven, making it hard to stream videos smoothly and electricity supply is erratic which means device often run out of charge. Some school teachers complained that they themselves were struggling to get a hang of the technology (The Print, 2020). Teachers were supposed to make power point presentation, record video lectures, take online classes through different apps without a clear instruction as to how it should be done.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) have reported that in present situation teachers are facing a lot of occupational stress and burnout due to socio-economic disparity in availability and accessibility of technology. New work from home culture has blurred the difference between professional work and domestic engagements which has become a source of distress and anxiety for many professionals. Parents and students call at odd hours as if teachers should remain always available online, even things are informed at odd hours in late night and at short notice by the authorities. Teachers have to take added burden of care giver and related chores and spare more time for it without having physical workplace conducive to attend video calls or recording videos which is a pressing issue for them. Uncertainty about the resumption of school normal functioning is creating a sense of panic among teachers specially where thrive of learning is through classroom engagement with technology used merely as an assistive modality. One cannot deny that these stressors have an impact on teacher mental health are environmental and structural and have origin from a system that is further draining teachers' sense of autonomy and empowerment. After going through all odds, they are facing salary cut as parents are not willing to pay fees because of lockdown even though classes are going as usual and it requires more efforts than in regular classroom teaching.

Teachers are under constant watch of learners as remote spectators and parents as unwanted intruders. Several times, teachers have to face unwarranted comments on their pronunciation and even about their appearances which is shocking and disgraceful too. Challenges other than "quality teaching" online, the teachers have to face other problems like, to engage learners gainfully, getting them to respond and collaborate during lessons, assessing the learning outcomes, keeping them all safe in cyber space which they are striving hard to manage by learning continually to improve their digital competencies and skills.

While teaching online during Covid-19, Teachers are performing the role of counsellor also. They have to take care of their learner's mental wellbeing who are struggling under the impact of social distancing, lack of routine, absence of friends, dejected, distracted and disinterested. The students prefer to connect with teacher socially, emotionally and share their feelings rather than learn from

textbook. Teachers are doing the same irrespective of their own stresses and anxieties.

One ugly incident of emotional violence the teachers have to confront is zoom bombing which is usually in the form of sexually explicit languages and images. This ultimately leave teachers totally shattered and shaken. They have to rescue themselves with courage and presence of mind and come out confidently. This all happens in presence of students who are watching and observing them. This type of incidences can be nerve-wrecking and immensely effect one's mental health.

Online presence for long hours impacts physical health of teachers specifically sleep habits because they have to work on line for long hours for preparing lessons, video-recording and doing other necessary works sacrificing proper sleep at night. Sleep deprivation causes deficits in the prefrontal cortex, which normally keeps our amygdala, the emotional and impulse region of the brain, in check. Decreased light in the night helps fall asleep through nocturnal induction but exposure to blue light from computer screens may suppress nocturnal melatonin secretion and change circadian rhythms causing difficulties in falling asleep, waking up and day time fatigue.

Many studies (Chan, 1998.; Abel, 1999.; Tang, 2001.; Pervez, 2003.)^[2, 1, 10, 7] showed that teachers who had to bear heavy occupational stress had adverse effect on their mental health status.

All teachers do not possess a right and comfortable space in their homes for computer operation and conducting video conferencing or video recording. Teachers are managing these activities at their homes anyhow but it creates lots of physical problems, such as extreme pain on their backs, shoulders, and neck muscles because of slouching or straining for long periods of time. Remaining on screen for long hours is another source of physical and mental discomfort.

Considering the mental and physical problems being confronted and struggled by the teachers conducting classes and other academic activities during Covid-19 lockdown period, the present study proceeded to test and measure teachers' actual health consequences.

Objectives

The objectives of present study were to explore and ascertain the mental and physical health problems suffered by secondary public-school teachers after their online academic engagement during Covid-19 lockdown period.

Hypotheses

1. The health condition of secondary school teachers will differ before and after online academic activities during covid-19 lockdown period.
2. There would be gender difference in the health condition of secondary school teachers before and after online academic activities during covid-19 lockdown period.

Method Sample

The sample was selected among secondary public-school teachers of Muzaffarpur district of North Bihar. The non-probability purposive sampling method was used for selecting the samples. Consent for participation in this study

was taken from the teachers. Total number of samples was one hundred twelve which included 50% male teachers and 50% female teachers. The samples were taken from fourteen schools scattered in the jurisdiction of Muzaffarpur district. The average age of samples was mean 37.5 yrs. (30 yrs. to 45yrs.).

Instrument used

A special health information schedule was developed to collect accurate desired health information because available health measurements were not fit for this purpose. Based on the focus of this study, the health information schedule developed contained inquiries about teachers' mental and physical health symptoms emerged after their online academic involvement during covid-19 lockdown period. The health information schedule included inquiries about teachers mental and physical health problems. The health information schedule consisted twenty-five questions related with mental health and fifteen questions regarding physical health. To answer the health schedule, there were two options, Yes/ No and subjects had to choose any of them.

In the health information schedule, the questions related with mental health were like do they feel low in energy, listless, disinterested in all that happening around him/her, facing sleeping problems, difficulty in awakening and feeling tired in the morning, sleeplessness because thoughts coming for next day planning, feeling dragged throughout the daily routine, fed up with navigating through everyday challenges, enthusiastic about the idea of going away to a far-off place, stressed of the idea of coping with students demands, throughout the day remain anxious about next day's planning and preparation, feeling bored with repetitive daily routine, need a break from all this situation etc. The physical health section of the schedule collected information about physical health problems related with headache, pain on the backs, shoulders, and neck muscles because of slouching or straining for long periods of time, pain in knees and legs due to long hours of sitting on chairs, eyes ache or other types of eye problems due to staying on screen for long hours.

Only four or five teachers from one school were selected on random basis with the consent of those particular teachers. The health information schedule was given to fill up to all teachers selected in one school at a time. After all subjects finished the filling of health information schedule, feedback on the responses on health schedule was taken from every teacher one by one separately. Feedback was taken to ascertain that the health problems which teachers are narrating have emerged only after they started working on electronic device during lockdown period and they feel that these problems started only due to their on line working and engagements.

Findings and Interpretation

The results of this study reveal that since the teachers have started online academic functions during covid-19, their engagement and complexity of work have increased which generated different types of mental health problems in large number of teacher's sample. Whereas only 65% teachers complained about physical health problems. Health problems felt by all teachers are not the same in form and severity. 85% teachers sample feel their daily routine boring and monotonous and desire a break to relax at least for some days but 30% teachers do not agree for leaving their present

place. 80% teachers find coping with the demand of online teaching takes too much time and find it strenuous. Firstly, teachers engage classes and then prepare power point presentation of course materials and videos for next day online classes. This procedure double teachers' work load and take too much time. Teachers get anxious and stressed in maintaining their schedule properly. It has been also found that 80% male teachers are suffering with problems like, irritation, stress, and monotony. These problems reflect their compulsion to remain in wired situation. Generally, males are habituated of excursion while working from home and maintaining social distance make them bored and stressed. 83% female teachers showed symptoms of different types of mental illness but their symptoms are more severe than the male counterpart. They are conducting online classes from home, preparing for next day schedule, taking care of children and household affairs. All at the same time have ill affected their mental and physical health. Stress with helplessness and anxiety are the prominent mental symptoms in female teachers. 64% female sample reported disturbed sleep in night and feel laziness in day time.

Physical health problems are present in 40% female teachers and 15% male teachers. While male teachers complained of stretching in shoulders and pain on neck muscles, their female counterpart experienced pain on the neck muscles, back, shoulders, knees, legs, headache and ache in eyes. Thus, both hypotheses formulated are verified.

Conclusion

On the basis of results of this research work, it is being concluded that mental and physical health of teachers have been affected due to online teaching and involvement in other academic activities during covid-19 pandemic lockdown period. Difference have been found in types and severity of mental and physical health problems suffered by different teachers and gender difference is apparently clear in the results. Male teachers feel irritation and stressed whereas female teachers are anxious and more stressed even loss of sleep which resulted in different types of physical difficulties. Male teachers also experienced physical health problem but their percentage is very low (15%) whereas 40% female teachers had developed physical health problems.

Limitation

The results of the present study could not be generalized since the sample is not representative of all teachers online teaching during Covid-19 lockdown period of Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

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