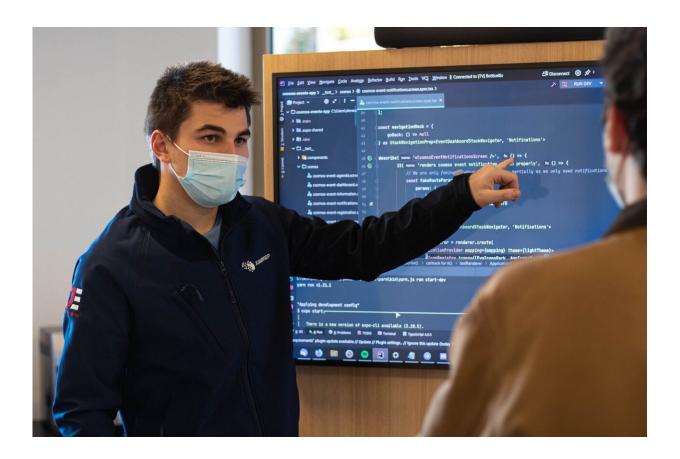# Exploring the mental health impacts of COVID on Australian teachers

August 15 2022

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La Trobe University research has revealed the mental health impacts of COVID on Australian teachers. The survey findings have been published in the journal *Psychology in the Schools*.

The landmark study, led by Dr. Paulina Billett from La Trobe University's Department of Social Inquiry, surveyed 532 teachers nationally in June and July 2020.

It found that—at the height of COVID in mid-2020—more than 90% of teachers felt stressed because of increased workload; 40% reported feeling angry most of the time teaching; 47% felt lonely; only one third felt that they were achieving their teaching goals and almost all felt unsafe in the classroom because of social distancing issues.

Dr. Billett said the study found that while more than three quarters of those surveyed reported they didn't feel anxious in their teaching role, they did report experiencing high levels of stress and low levels of positive feelings such as joy, positivity and contentment in their work during the pandemic.

"For many teachers, due to the pandemic, the move to an online format required a quick adaptation of their regular teaching practices, adding to an already stressful environment," Dr. Billett said.

"In addition, teachers often had to support their students' psychological well-being and assist families as they became more involved in their child's education during the pandemic."

Participants of the anonymous survey—which involved a collaboration with Dr. Kristina Turner from Swinburne University of Technology and Dr. Xia Li from La Trobe University—all self-identified as qualified teachers or principals currently teaching in Australian schools, teaching across the sectors of government, independent, and catholic schools and teaching students from ages five to 18 years.

Of the participants in the survey:

- One-third did not feel joyful in their teaching role
- 41% indicated that most of the time they felt angry in their teaching role
- Almost 47% felt lonely in their daily work life
- 62% reported that most of the time they felt excited and interested in teaching
- Most teachers were satisfied with their professional relationships, with over half indicating that most of the time they received help and support from others when they needed it
- 65.5% reported finding purpose and meaning at work
- Almost 60% felt able to handle their teaching responsibilities
- Almost 72% believed that teaching is valuable and worthwhile

In the context of safety the survey found that, when teaching face to face:

- More than 95% felt unsafe in respect to social distancing
- Almost 96% indicated that they felt "unsafe" in the classroom
- 73% felt "unsafe" in the playground

The survey found that more than 91% of surveyed teachers experienced increased stress at this time resulting from increased pressures in workload, due to the shift to online learning.

"Problematically, our findings also suggest that this may be driving some teachers to reconsider their continued engagement in the profession," the authors warned.