

Teachers' turnover intentions, burnout and poor work climate are interlinked

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The risk of burnout and poor experienced teacher-working environment fit is increased among teachers with persistent turnover intentions. However, positive experiences in the workplace seem to protect against cynicism and exhaustion, according to a new study published in *Research*

Papers in Education.

Teachers' turnover intentions, burnout symptoms and poor experienced teacher-working [environment](#) fit are interlinked, and therefore also likely to occur simultaneously. If a teacher experiences one of the above, the risk of experiencing others increases, too.

The researchers explored experienced burnout and teacher-working environment fit and compared teacher cohorts with or without persistent turnover intentions. The data included 1,064 Finnish basic education teachers (working in grades 1–9, teaching pupils aged 7–16), of whom 344 (32%) reported persistent turnover intentions in a five-year follow-up.

The tendency to experience work-related exhaustion, cynicism and feelings of inadequacy in the teaching profession proved rather permanent. According to the researchers, it seems that more [work experience](#) does not protect against the risk of burnout; instead, teachers experience their workload relatively similarly regardless of how long their career is.

"Some teachers seem to feel that they have very little opportunity to influence their workload, and they are mainly just trying to cope with the factors contributing to it. Workload management skills can therefore play an important role in promoting teachers' coping," says Doctoral Researcher, lead author Katariina Räsänen of the University of Eastern Finland.

Burnout symptoms are associated with having few positive experiences

Support provided by the professional community is an important factor

in preventing the development of burnout.

"Positive experiences in the workplace, received recognition and a constructive and enabling work climate seem to protect against [cynicism](#) towards, and alienation from, the professional community," says Räsänen, who herself also works as a lecturer.

According to Räsänen, getting professional recognition is, rather surprisingly, more likely in the early stages of the teaching career.

"Opportunities to get professional encouragement, support and recognition, which are needed by everyone, mostly seem to coincide with the early stages of the teaching career."

Influencing one's own work plays an important role

The teacher-working environment fit is affected by several individual and work-related factors. The study indicates that school size plays a role in teachers' perceived well-being at work.

"Smaller schools often have a constructive and enabling work climate that also provides support for the teacher-working environment fit," Räsänen says.

According to the results, teachers with leadership tasks had a lower risk of burnout than teachers who did not have an opportunity to influence their work through such tasks. Teachers with leadership tasks also experienced less feelings of inadequacy and had a better experienced teacher-work environment fit. The difference may be explained by better possibilities to influence one's own work.

"This interesting observation shows how teachers' autonomy, or a lack thereof, is also associated with the development of [burnout](#). It seems that

fostering [teachers'](#) autonomy continues to be a key factor in promoting their well-being at work."

More information: Katariina Räsänen et al, Experienced burnout and teacher–working environment fit: a comparison of teacher cohorts with or without persistent turnover intentions, *Research Papers in Education* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/02671522.2022.2125054](https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2022.2125054)

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