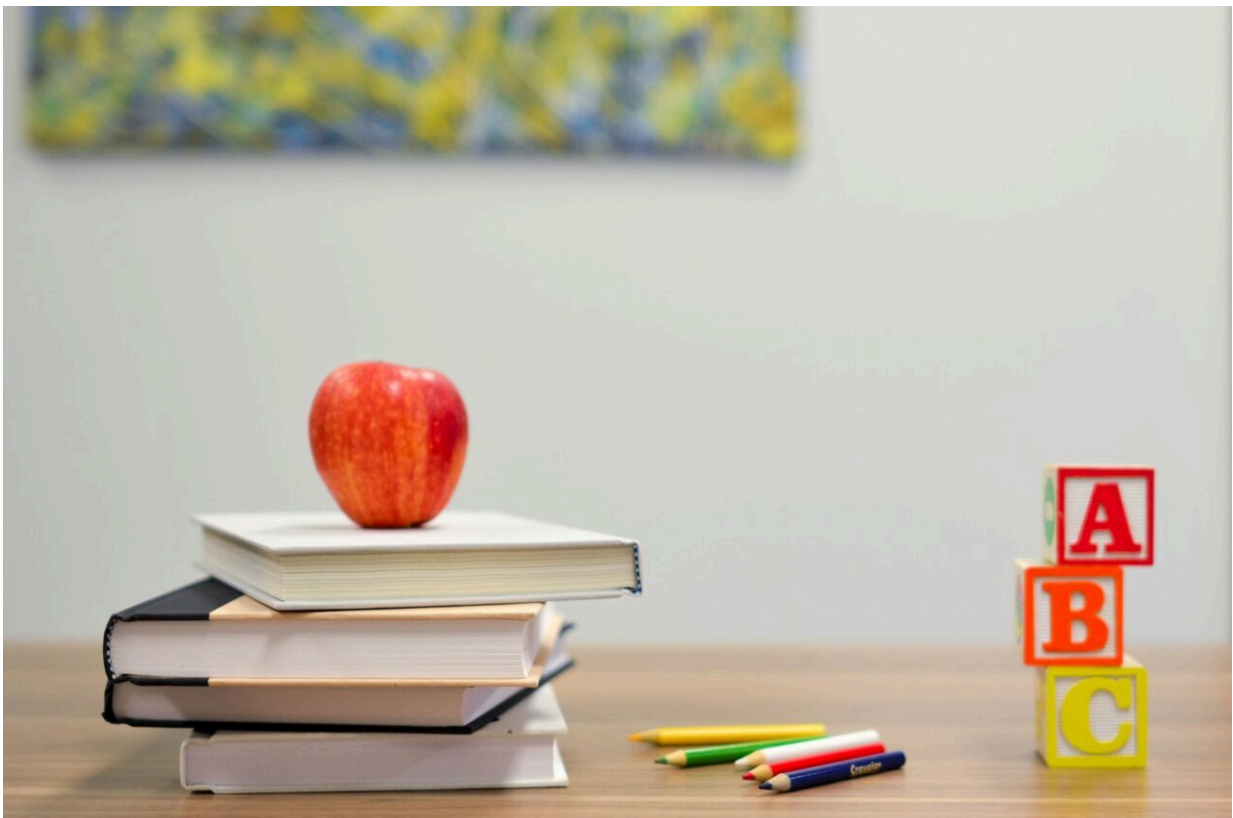


Proportion of headteachers highly anxious about work more than doubled at pandemic peak

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Headteachers experienced substantial increases in anxiety about work throughout the pandemic—with increases much greater than for more

junior teaching staff—and with potential consequences for future recruitment of senior leaders, according to a new study by UCL researchers.

Released today as an academic working paper, the study explores work-related anxiety of more than 13,000 classroom teachers and headteachers in England at 75 points between October 2019 and July 2022.

It reveals that prior to the pandemic, one in four (25%) headteachers were highly anxious about work—only slightly above the level of class teachers. However, during the pandemic, around 35% of headteachers reported that they regularly had high levels of anxiety about work during term time, which was consistently higher than for class teachers. This reached a peak in January 2021, when almost two-thirds (65%) of headteachers in England felt highly anxious about work, compared to 42% of class teachers.

With the study also revealing that the share of deputy and assistant heads who say they want to become a head teacher one day has fallen from 56% pre-pandemic to 48% post-pandemic, the authors have raised concerns around the declining levels of those seeking headship.

Study co-author Professor John Jerrim (UCL Social Research Institute based at IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society) said, "The COVID-19 pandemic led to one of the biggest shocks the world has ever seen—with schools closed and disruption to working patterns and conditions. Coupled with ever-changing government policy around schools, it's unsurprising that the pandemic had a major impact on staff across the sector.

"However, the differences in levels of anxiety are quite shocking, and the additional strain that was put on headteachers in particular is clear. It's vital that the government now reflect on guidance and support given

to school leaders during difficult periods, with greater attention paid on ensuring that schools can recruit and retain the best headteachers in future."

The study also highlights the substantial differences in working hours across the pandemic and between teacher roles. During the first lockdown in March 2020, class teachers worked about 25–30 hours per week, compared to a pre-lockdown norm of closer to 45 hours. Headteachers reported that they were regularly working around 20 hours more per week during the first lockdown than class teachers, and around 10 hours more per week during the rest of the pandemic.

The researchers found that during the first wave, delivering direct instruction on-site rather than at home, providing live lessons and working longer hours were all associated with higher levels of work-related anxiety.

However, the paper also highlighted that levels of anxiety were not uniform across different groups of teachers in the study, with differences seen across gender and parental status. Before the pandemic, male and female teachers with [young children](#) (under five) had reasonably similar levels of anxiety about work, with around one in five experiencing high levels of work-related anxiety. But, at the height of the pandemic in winter 2020, around a third of [female teachers](#) with a child under five felt highly anxious about work, compared to a fifth of males.

Study co-author Dr. Sam Sims (UCL Center for Education Policy & Equalizing Opportunities) said, "What's clear from this study is that the effects of the pandemic have been felt unevenly across the school workforce. Prior to the pandemic, women already had higher work-related anxiety than men. We found that amongst teachers with pre-school children, it was mainly women who became more anxious about

work."

Dr. Emily Tanner (Program Head at the Nuffield Foundation) said, "By tracking anxiety levels, this research provides an important new perspective on the immediate and longer-term impact of COVID on the school workforce. The heightened pressures faced by school leaders and the declining appetite for headship among deputy and assistant heads highlight the need for better support to shore up sustainable leadership."

To establish their findings, the researchers collected data using an app called "Teacher Tapp." Respondents were asked to rate their anxiety about work on a given day from 0 ("not at all anxious") to 10 ("completely anxious"), with ratings given at the same time and day each week.

Respondents were also asked questions about their work environments, such as the learning activities they had done that day, number of hours worked, and how often during the pandemic they were on site (at school).

The researchers then used statistical modeling to explore differences in average work-related anxiety scores before and during the [pandemic](#) between groups with different characteristics (gender, job role, parental status (and age of children), and [school](#) characteristics), as well as whether teachers were working from home or on site.

The researchers note the limitations of their study, highlighting that the Teacher Tapp panel is a self-selecting sample rather than a random draw from the [teacher](#) population. They also note that their analysis focuses specifically on the work-related [anxiety](#) of teachers and does not include other related aspects of mental health such as depression and stress, which may have been impacted in subtly different ways.

More information: How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the wellbeing of teachers at work? [johnjerrim.files.wordpress.com ... ndemic nov 22 v3.pdf](https://johnjerrim.files.wordpress.com/2022/11/ndemic_nov_22_v3.pdf)

Provided by University College London

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