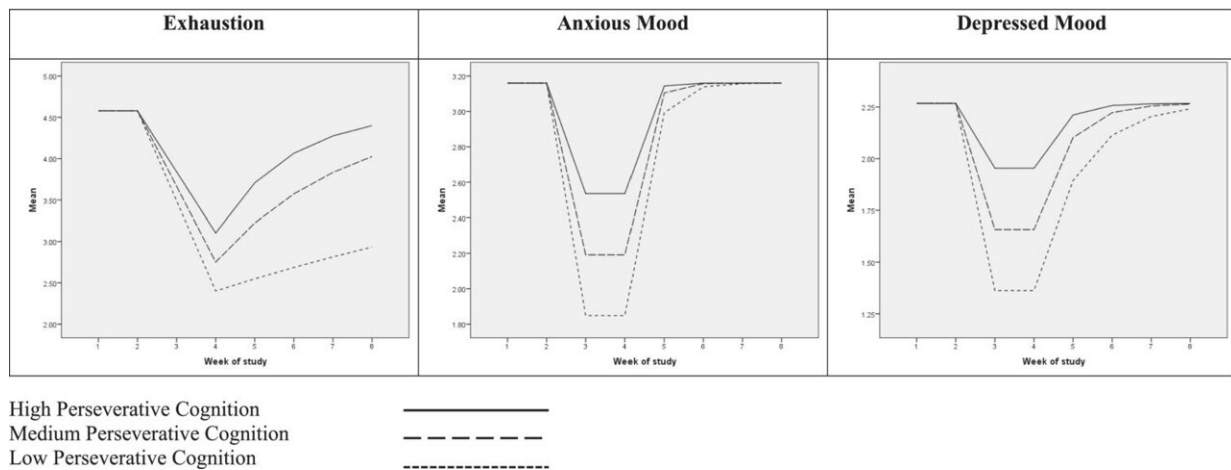


Teachers' well-being doesn't fully recover over the Christmas break, study finds

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Predicted levels of emotional exhaustion and negative mood states conditional on levels of work-related perseverative cognition during the vacation (low = mean-1SD; medium = mean; high = mean + 1SD). Neuroticism and time spent on supplemental work activities during the vacation were held constant at the respective sample means. Credit: *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* (2022). DOI: 10.1111/joop.12410

Primary and secondary school teachers experiencing high levels of exhaustion when term ends are typically still recovering by the time school starts again, a research project into teachers' mental health over Christmas breaks has found.

The paper is published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational*

Psychology. The study, which was conducted by researchers at the University of Sheffield and City, University of London, looked at primary and [secondary school teachers'](#) levels of anxious mood, [depressed mood](#), and exhaustion over the course of seven weeks, before, during, and after the Christmas holidays.

These levels were measured each week, along with their extent of worrying about work, and the hours spent on work during the holiday.

The researchers found that symptoms of anxious mood, depressed [mood](#), and exhaustion all tend to drop significantly over the holiday period. However, recovery from exhaustion was slower than that of anxious and depressive moods, and tends to be incomplete by the time [school](#) begins again. Likewise, teachers' levels of anxiety appear to rise rapidly compared to depressed moods or exhaustion when the new term gets underway.

The vast majority of teachers, 85%, reported carrying out some work tasks during their break. 30% said that they worked for more than five hours, while 16% worked for more than ten hours.

Despite this, it seems that worrying about work—as opposed to doing it—was a bigger factor in teachers struggling to recover from negative moods and exhaustion, and led to a faster increase in these symptoms returning when they went back to work.

The effects of actually performing work tasks during the holiday were more complex—they were shown to limit recovery from exhaustion, but could also reduce a rise in anxiety when the new school term gets underway. This is likely due to the fact that the build-up of tasks on returning to work was reduced.

As a result, the findings suggest that although reducing hours spent

working could improve well-being, it may be more important to find ways to reduce levels of persistent thinking about work.

Dr. Chris Stride, co-author of the study from the University of Sheffield's Institute of Work Psychology, said, "It is extremely concerning that so many teachers reported still feeling exhausted after having time off. This could lead to a [vicious cycle](#) resulting in burnout—schools need to put measures in place to prevent this from happening and protect the well-being of their staff."

Dr. Paul Flaxman, corresponding author from City University of London, said, "Schools could consider ways of preventing teachers becoming overly exhausted because they are completing unfinished job tasks during vacations. They could also seek staff training programs that help teachers disentangle themselves from excessive worrying about work issues during their [leisure time](#)."

The research is based on findings recorded from 90 primary and secondary school teachers over the 2013 Christmas break. It is widely expected that feelings of exhaustion have continued to worsen, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to burnout and an increased number of teachers leaving the profession.

More information: Paul E. Flaxman et al, Patterns and predictors of change in energy and mood around a vacation from the workplace: Distinguishing the effects of supplemental work activity and work-related perseverative cognition, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/joop.12410](https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12410)

Provided by University of Sheffield

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