

# Burnout has far-reaching consequences for teachers' physical health, shows study

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Burnout—a psychosocial syndrome—has long been linked with physical health problems across a range of occupations. For the first time, research from the University of York and York St John University has

shown that this is also the case for teachers.

The research is published in the *International Journal of Educational Research*.

In an educational context, [burnout](#) is defined by three symptoms: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy.

## **Voice disorders**

Researchers found that teacher burnout was related to more frequent somatic complaints such as headaches, physical illnesses and voice disorders. The researchers also found evidence for links with altered heart function and hormone responses.

Dr. Lisa Kim, Senior Lecturer in Psychology in Education at the University of York, said, "Our study adds to a growing body of research that suggests an individual's psychological experiences can manifest as physiological symptoms. It is important, therefore, to recognize that addressing teacher burnout is not only beneficial for mental health, but for physical well-being as well."

The study, the first systematic review of research examining teacher burnout and physical health consequences, looked at data from secondary and tertiary settings from a broad range of countries.

## **Stress responses**

Study participants included more than 5,000 teachers with an average age of 43 years old and with 14 years of teaching experience. Of those, 60% were female.

The study follows on from previous research by the team that identified burnout as one of the strongest predictors of teachers' intentions to leave the profession.

In their latest research, the team identified three main ways in which teachers' health is at risk from burnout; increased engagement in [unhealthy behaviors](#), blunted stress responses, and inhibited [immune function](#).

## Review needed

Dr. Daniel Madigan, Associate Professor and Research Lead for the School of Science, Technology and Health at York St John University said, "To help support our teachers, it is essential that schools and members of government take action to address burnout, and reviewing the many demands placed on teachers would be a good place to start."

The study also highlights the necessity for policy and government briefings to consider burnout as an important, concerning, and growing problem among [teachers](#).

**More information:** Daniel J. Madigan et al, Teacher burnout and physical health: A systematic review, *International Journal of Educational Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102173](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102173)

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