

Christmas break vital to teacher's psychological wellbeing, says study

15 December 2015, by George Wigmore



Christmas holidays play a critical role in preventing teacher burnout and exhaustion, according to a new study by academics at City University London.

The research confirms the vital importance of having such breaks in the school calendar to allow teachers' emotional energy resources and psychological health to be restored. The research was led by Dr. Paul Flaxman and Sonja Carmichael at City University, and conducted in close collaboration with the Education Support Partnership (formerly the Teacher Support Network).

They asked a group of 90 school teachers from schools across the UK to complete brief surveys at the end of eight consecutive weeks, capturing the period before, during, and after the two week Christmas break in 2013. The study was also replicated with a group of teachers in Quebec, Canada.

The study showed that teachers who continued worrying and ruminating about work during the Christmas break were less likely to recover fully from the demands of the teaching term.

The research team also found that teachers who were able to satisfy three 'basic psychological needs' - namely a sense of competence, autonomy and feeling close and connected to other people -

during the Christmas break had much higher levels of psychological health. The effects of basic psychological need fulfilment were seen not only during the Christmas break itself, but also in the first few weeks of the new term in January.

The study suggests some useful recommendations that may help teachers to enhance the benefits obtained from the forthcoming Christmas break. The research highlights the potential benefits that can be gained from even small actions during our leisure time that give us a sense of autonomy, effectiveness, and connectedness to our loved ones. The research team also highlight the benefits of mindfulness training, which can be particularly useful for improving psychological health because it helps people 'disentangle' themselves from worry and rumination.

Speaking about the study, Dr Paul Flaxman, Senior Lecturer in Organisational Psychology at City University London, said: "Our work shows that breaks for teachers, especially at times like half-term and Christmas, are incredibly important for their [psychological health](#). Ensuring that [teachers](#) have regular opportunities to recover from the considerable demands of the job will help to prevent burnout. In my opinion, it is vital that these regular breaks in the school calendar are conserved.

"If you are someone who tends to worry or ruminate about things, we would recommend mindfulness training. This type of training helps to ensure we do not get too 'caught up' in unhelpful cycles of negative thinking, and thereby improves our well-being and quality of life. The mental health foundation's website is a good place to find local mindfulness groups, or to experience an on-line version of a typical mindfulness-based training programme (bemindful.co.uk/)."

Provided by City University London

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