Australian Teachers' Experiences of Burnout during COVID-19

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The aim of the current study was to determine the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy, emotion regulation, and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, COVID-19 has caused unprecedented upheaval to teachers and schools. This upheaval was particularly acute during lockdowns, with teachers required to rapidly learn new pedagogies and modes of interaction to support home-based schooling. According to the Job Demands-Resources Model, excessive job demands of the kind created by the pandemic may cause stress, exhaustion, and burnout. Yet personal resources may buffer against these effects. Indeed, while research is limited, particular types of self-efficacy and emotion regulation have each separately been found to protect against burnout in everyday classroom contexts. Our study is the first to consider these protective factors together.

The study took place during the midst of the first COVID-19 wave, when 70% of Australian teachers were already engaged in remote teaching and 28% were currently transitioning to remote teaching (Flack et al., 2020). Participants included 210 Australian teachers (183 female, 27 male) with 1-58 years teaching experience (*M* = 13.9 years, *SD* = 11.00). Using an online survey, all participants completed the Teacher Self Efficacy Scale, the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory, and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. A specific prompt asked them to complete these scales according to their teaching experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also completed an open-ended question about their current experiences.

The findings were threefold. First, and consistent with the Job Demands-Resources Model, self-efficacy for instructional strategies predicted lower burnout during COVID-19. However, self-efficacy for student engagement was not related. This finding contrasts with findings in everyday classroom contexts, and suggests that different teaching contexts influence the relationship between self-efficacy and burnout. Second, while teaching experience predicted higher burnout during COVID-19, emotion regulation was not related. Given that challenging student behaviours are a key emotional stressor for teachers, emotion regulation may be less important when not teaching face-to-face. Alternatively, and notwithstanding the uncontrollable nature of the COVID-19 stressors, emotion regulation may simply have been less important in the presence of self-efficacy. Finally, in their qualitative responses, teachers reported a strong theme of missing their students. However, they also saw benefits of the lockdown for the development of their technological capacities. Future research should continue to monitor the changes to teachers' efficacy, coping, and burnout as the pandemic continues.