

*The Effect of Pandemic on Teachers' Emotional State and on Their Attitudes to the Teaching Profession*

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**Abstract**

Education has been affected by the spread of COVID-19, and schools were closed for almost 2 years in the Czech Republic. During the pandemic, teacher stress has been intensified by distance education as well as by limited access to social support, which might function as a buffer in experiencing stress. The aim of our study was to analyze experience and attitudes of teachers to the online distant teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic and to confront them with the results of their discomfort level. The survey was realized in a group of 492 teachers who exercised their profession during the quarantine. Most teachers reported high level of stress during online teaching due to their effort to offer good performance. Teachers also stated their work involvement required serious and accurate preparation for classes which was time consuming. Results in a standardized inventory showed high level of teacher emotional exhaustion, but did not show higher level in depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

Keywords: Teachers, Emotions, Stress, COVID Pandemic

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## **1 Introduction**

People in constant, prolonged, intensive interaction with other people in an emotionally charged atmosphere are susceptible to the syndrome of burnout [6]. Since November 2019, population of the Czech Republic went through different quarantine phases, passing through border closures, social distancing, and the suspension of presential teaching activities overtaken by virtualization. Schools were closed for almost a year which was one of the longest breaks in the EU.

Well-being of most people including teachers was affected in many countries as it was reported by several studies [2,3,5]. In this regard, although efforts have been made to train teachers through online learning platforms, this modal change implied a series of challenges when developed in a hostile, complex and unprecedented context [6]. Experts in clinical psychology expect that it will be necessary to re-develop sustainable work environments and policies, which will provide well-being to teachers in different aspects (social, emotional, physical). This effort will have to be reflected not only in the improvement of their productivity—even in extreme situations, as is the case of job development during the COVID-19 pandemic, it will also help to prevent pathologies associated with the teaching function, such as burnout due to prolonged exposures of stress.

Online teaching transition during COVID-19 school lockdown elicited new situations and challenges for teachers and schools across the globe as remote teaching introduction brought new stressors for teachers. Our own experience inspired us to study feelings and attitudes of teachers towards distant online teaching and possible stressors connected with it (necessity to learn new methods and demands of preparation for distant teaching) and occurrence of the Burnout Syndrome and its specific features within the teacher community. The study was conducted in December 2020 and January 2021.

## **2 Objectives**

The aim of our research was to analyze experience and attitudes of teachers to the online distant teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic and to confront them with the results of their discomfort level as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory.

## **3 Methods**

We used quantitative research method: a questionnaire designed for this purpose was divided into 4 sections (personal data specification, teacher attitudes towards online teaching, teacher opinions on Burnout Syndrome formation and its diagnostics as measured by the standardized Maslach Burnout Inventory. The Maslach Burnout Inventory [4] is the most commonly used instrument for measuring burnout, it captures three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA).

## **4 Research Sample**

337 elementary school teachers (92 % female, 8 % male) and 155 secondary school teachers (83 % female, 17 % male) participated in our study. We used the teacher Facebook platform to address potential survey respondents. As seen on Table 1, the age of respondents covered the whole range of productive age, from very young ones (19 % at elementary schools and 8

% at secondary schools) to senior teachers over 60 years (2 % at elementary schools and 6 % at secondary schools).

Age of participants	Elementary school teachers	Secondary school teachers
less than 30 years	19%	8%
31 - 40 years	25%	33%
41 – 50 years	32%	28%
51 - 60 years	21%	25%
more than 60 years	2%	6%

**Table 1: Age of participants**

Variety in teaching experience can be observed in our research sample – from beginning teachers (23% at elementary schools, 14 % at secondary schools to senior teachers with teaching experience over 35 years (4% at elementary schools, 8% at secondary schools), see data on table 2.

Years of teaching experience	Elementary school teachers	Secondary school teachers
less than 5	23%	14%
6-10	18%	20%
11-15	13%	16%
16-25	24%	26%
26-35	18%	16%
35+	4%	8%

**Table 2: Length of teaching experience**

During quarantine and closures, schools in the Czech Republic had to switch to distant online teaching as an emergency measure within a very short period of time. Unfortunately, most teachers got very little training in this regard. Nevertheless, data of Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic confirmed most schools adopted online teaching despite obstacles. This is confirmed in our sample, (see tables 3 and 4).

Use of online teaching during pandemic	Elementary school teachers	Secondary school teachers
yes	94%	96%
partly	5%	4%
no	1%	0%

**Table 3: Use of online teaching during Pandemic**

<b>Use of online teaching during pandemic</b>	<b>Elementary school teachers</b>	<b>Secondary school teachers</b>
yes	5%	6%
partly	5%	12%
no	90%	82%

**Table 4: Previous experience with online teaching**

The swift switch from traditional classrooms to online classes in the wake of COVID-19 has given teachers very little or no time for planning and preparation. Next items of our questionnaire aimed at the teacher feelings about new methodology and demands preparation of distant online teaching put on them (tables 5 - 8). Just 9 % of elementary school teachers were going well with online teaching (13 % of secondary school teachers), most teachers were not happy about it, to a certain extent. Everyday teacher preparation for online teaching was longer than 2 hours in most cases and they were more tired during online teaching than during regular class.

<b>Going down well with online teaching</b>	<b>Elementary school teachers</b>	<b>Secondary school teachers</b>
yes	9%	13%
partly	72%	72%
no	18%	15%
no explicit opinion	1%	0%

**Table 5: Teacher feelings about online teaching**

<b>Time needed for preparation</b>	<b>Elementary school teachers</b>	<b>Secondary school teachers</b>
less than 30 minutes	1%	1%
30 minutes	1%	1%
1 hour	10%	7%
1,5 hours	9%	9%
2 hours	16%	14%
more than 2 hours	63%	68%

**Table 6: Time needed for preparation during pandemic**

<b>Was the preparation for online longer</b>	<b>Elementary school teachers</b>	<b>Secondary school teachers</b>
yes	83%	88%
partly	4%	9%
no	13%	3%

**Table 7: Was the preparation for online teaching longer than for regular class teaching?**

<b>More tired during online teaching</b>	<b>Elementary school teachers</b>	<b>Secondary school teachers</b>
yes	53%	45%
rather yes	26%	30%
rather no	17%	19%
no	4%	6%

**Table 8: Did you feel more tired during online teaching than during regular class?**

Next items of our questionnaire were focused on teacher feelings about risk of being threatened by the Burnout Syndrome. As seen from results of table 9, almost half of the teachers from both samples are afraid of this risk.

<b>Do you think you might get BS?</b>	<b>Elementary school teachers</b>	<b>Secondary school teachers</b>
yes	14%	13%
probably yes	32%	33%
probably no	38%	35%
no	16%	19%

**Table 9: Do you think you are in risk of being threatened by the BS?**

Teachers in our survey were then administered Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The development of the MBI was based on the need for an instrument to assess experienced burnout in a wide range of human service workers. Standardized method includes 22 items and respondents assess every item on a scale 0 – 7 (0-not at all to 7 quite strong) regarding their feelings of exhaustion. The Maslach Burnout Inventory captures three dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA). The three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment.

<b>Score in emotional exhaustion</b>	<b>Elementary school teachers</b>	<b>Secondary school teachers</b>
low	37%	45%
average	27%	20%
high	36%	35%

**Table 10: Teacher Burnout Syndrome – results:**

**a) Score in emotional exhaustion**

As seen from the table 10, 27 % of elementary school teachers performed an average score in the EE and 36 % high score. Their colleagues from secondary school showed similar results especially in high scores – this means more than one third of teachers is threatened by emotional exhaustion, measured by the Maslach BS Inventory.

Score in depersonalization	Elementary school teachers	Secondary school teachers
low	74%	71%
average	18%	22%
high	8%	7%

**Table 11: Teacher Burnout Syndrome – results:**

**b) Score in depersonalization**

Results in the second dimension are more positive than in the first dimension as 74 % of elementary school teachers and 71 % of secondary school teachers show low level of depersonalization.

Score in personal accomplishment	Elementary school teachers	Secondary school teachers
low	60%	61%
average	29%	23%
high	11%	16%

**Table 12: Teacher Burnout Syndrome – results:**

**c) Personal accomplishment**

Results in the third dimension are also more positive compared to the first dimension as 60 % of elementary school teachers and 61 % of secondary school teachers had high score in personal accomplishment.

**Research results – summary**

- 1) Distant online teaching: 95 % of elementary school teachers and 96 % of secondary school teachers introduced within a very short time full online classes, the rest of teachers combined online teaching with other methods. 90 % of elementary school teachers and 82 % of secondary school teachers had no previous experience with distant teaching.
- 2) Most teachers did not go down very well with online teaching, but 72 % of elementary school teachers and 78 % of secondary school teachers held the view that online teaching had both positive and negative aspects.
- 3) Most teachers needed lots of self-training to do online teaching well. They felt more exhausted as their preparation for online teaching was much more demanding and time-consuming compared with standard classes.
- 4) Burnout Syndrome was confirmed in the emotional exhaustion dimension (EE), of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (36 % of elementary school teachers, 35 % of secondary school teachers), but not in other two dimensions – depersonalization (DP), (8% of elementary school teachers and 7% of secondary school teachers) and personal accomplishment (PA), (11% of elementary school teachers and 16% of secondary school teachers).

## **Conclusion**

Members of the teaching profession experienced psychological discomfort at the beginning of the 2020–2021 school year. Faced with the situation of COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers were dealing with new measures, situations, sometimes with a lack of clear guidelines. Working from home, using ICT for online teaching created feelings of tension, anxiety and exhaustion of many teachers as proved by our results.

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