

Mental Health Challenges Among Secondary School Teachers: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

The mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers have become a critical concern, influencing not only educators' well-being but also the overall quality of education. Teachers experience significant stressors, including excessive workload, emotional labour, job insecurity, and insufficient institutional support, leading to burnout, anxiety, and depression. The stigma surrounding mental health further prevents many teachers from seeking help, exacerbating their struggles and negatively impacting their job performance. Additionally, the rapid shift to digital learning and the increasing reliance on extracurricular activities to foster student engagement have had both positive and negative implications for teachers' mental health and work-life balance. This systematic review examines existing literature on the mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers, exploring key factors contributing to stress and emotional distress. The findings highlight the urgent need for policy interventions, institutional reforms, and structured mental health programs that provide support and coping mechanisms for educators. Schools that implement professional development programs, peer support networks, and workload management strategies report lower levels of burnout and higher teacher satisfaction. Digital literacy training and balanced extracurricular participation are also recognized as crucial elements in alleviating teacher stress and promoting well-being. To address these challenges, a multi-dimensional approach is required, integrating mental health awareness into teacher training, promoting a culture of openness, and ensuring access to confidential counseling services. Governments and educational stakeholders must collaborate to establish systemic policies that prioritize teacher mental health, preventing attrition and improving overall educational outcomes. By fostering a supportive work environment and recognizing mental health as a fundamental aspect of professional development, educational institutions can contribute to a more resilient and effective teaching workforce. This review underscores the necessity of comprehensive mental health strategies to support teachers, advocating for sustainable solutions that enhance their well-being and, ultimately, benefit students and the broader educational system. Mental health challenges among secondary school teachers have gained increasing attention due to their significant impact on both teachers' well-being and student learning outcomes. This systematic review explores the key mental health challenges faced by secondary school

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teachers, identifies contributing factors, and highlights potential strategies for addressing these issues. The review is based on recent literature, focusing on themes such as stress, burnout, job satisfaction, and coping mechanisms. The findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions, policy reforms, and institutional support to improve teachers' mental well-being and ensure a sustainable teaching environment.

Keywords: *Mental health, secondary school teachers, burnout, stress, stigma, digital literacy, work-life balance, policy interventions*

The mental health and well-being of secondary school teachers are crucial for maintaining an effective educational system. Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' academic and personal development, yet they often face significant stressors that adversely impact their mental health. Research suggests that teaching is one of the most stressful professions, with teachers frequently reporting high levels of anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Andrade et al., 2024). The increasing demands of curriculum planning, student engagement, administrative tasks, and the responsibility of managing student behavior contribute to the deteriorating mental well-being of educators.

Secondary school teachers experience a unique set of challenges that distinguish their mental health struggles from those of other professions. These challenges include excessive workload, inadequate institutional support, job insecurity, and pressure to meet performance expectations (Austin et al., 2024). Furthermore, teachers often find themselves in the role of informal counsellors for students experiencing mental health difficulties, a responsibility for which they may not have received adequate training (Watson, 2024). This additional emotional labour further exacerbates stress levels and contributes to long-term mental health issues such as depression and burnout.

Another key factor influencing teachers' mental well-being is the stigma associated with seeking mental health support. Many teachers refrain from discussing their struggles due to fear of judgment or professional repercussions (Austin et al., 2024). This reluctance leads to untreated mental health conditions, reducing job satisfaction and increasing teacher attrition rates. Studies have shown that teachers who lack access to proper mental health support are more likely to experience chronic stress and emotional fatigue, ultimately affecting their ability to provide quality education to students (Baghoori et al., 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified mental health challenges for educators. Teachers had to quickly adapt to online teaching, manage technological constraints, and address students' learning difficulties while coping with their personal anxieties and uncertainties (Pacea & Portelli, 2024). The transition from traditional to digital classrooms placed additional strain on teachers, highlighting the urgent need for robust mental health support systems within educational institutions.

Our knowledge failed us because, although it provided us with the weapon, it never taught us how to use it (Acharya & Mohanty, Sept, 2022). This statement holds particularly true in the context of mental health among educators. In addition, teachers play a pivotal role by incorporating digital literacy into the curriculum and promoting extracurricular activities that reduce dependency on virtual interactions, fostering student engagement beyond screens and contributing to holistic development. While awareness of mental health issues has increased, effective solutions and practical interventions remain lacking, leaving teachers vulnerable to stress and emotional distress. Teachers play a pivotal role by incorporating digital literacy

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into the curriculum and promoting extracurricular activities that reduce dependency on virtual interactions (Tikader, Acharya, & Mandal, 2025). By fostering student engagement beyond screens, teachers can contribute to holistic development and emotional resilience in the classroom.

This systematic review aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers. By examining existing literature and identifying key stressors, this review will offer insights into potential interventions and policy recommendations to enhance teacher well-being. The findings will contribute to ongoing discussions on the importance of mental health literacy, institutional reforms, and the role of peer support networks in mitigating mental health challenges among educators. Addressing these issues is imperative to ensure a healthier, more resilient teaching workforce and a positive learning environment for students.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The prevalence of mental health issues among teachers is widely documented, with high levels of work-related stress and emotional exhaustion becoming common concerns. The nature of teaching, which requires constant engagement with students, curriculum planning, assessment, and administrative duties, creates a demanding environment that affects mental health. Prolonged exposure to these pressures often leads to burnout, which manifests in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Studies highlight that teachers experiencing burnout are more likely to disengage from their work, exhibit reduced productivity, and consider leaving the profession altogether (Baghoori et al., 2024).

One of the critical barriers to addressing mental health issues among teachers is the stigma associated with seeking psychological support. Many educators refrain from discussing their struggles due to fear of professional repercussions, judgment from colleagues, and a general perception that mental health concerns indicate weakness or incompetence. The stigma surrounding mental health has been linked to increased reluctance among teachers to seek professional help, leading to untreated stress, anxiety, and depression. Workplace cultures that fail to acknowledge mental health needs further exacerbate this issue, making it difficult for teachers to access the support they require (Austin et al., 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly heightened mental health challenges among secondary school teachers. The rapid shift to online learning, coupled with technological barriers, student disengagement, and increased workloads, placed unprecedented stress on educators. Many teachers reported heightened anxiety, difficulties maintaining work-life balance, and feelings of isolation due to the lack of direct interaction with colleagues and students. Research has shown that the pandemic's impact on mental health persists, with educators continuing to experience elevated stress levels and difficulty readjusting to in-person teaching environments (Pacea & Portelli, 2024).

Institutional support plays a crucial role in mitigating the mental health challenges faced by teachers. Schools that implement mental health programs, provide access to counselling services, and promote peer support networks tend to have educators with higher levels of job satisfaction and lower burnout rates. Studies suggest that when schools prioritize mental well-being, teachers develop better coping strategies, demonstrate increased resilience, and maintain higher levels of engagement in their work. Furthermore, professional development

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programs that focus on stress management and emotional regulation have been found to be effective in enhancing teachers' psychological well-being (Rooney et al., 2024).

Policies aimed at improving teachers' mental health have been introduced in various educational systems, but gaps in implementation and effectiveness remain a challenge. Some policies focus on integrating mental health education into teacher training programs, while others emphasize workplace wellness initiatives that offer access to psychological support. However, the extent to which these policies are effectively enforced varies significantly. Studies emphasize the need for more structured policy frameworks that ensure mental health support is accessible, consistent, and tailored to the specific needs of educators (Harnett et al., 2024).

Incorporating digital literacy into education has been recognized as an important factor in alleviating stress among teachers. The ability to effectively use digital tools and integrate technology into the classroom can reduce workload and improve efficiency, allowing teachers to focus more on student engagement rather than administrative tasks. Additionally, extracurricular activities that promote social interaction and teamwork among students can help reduce dependency on virtual interactions, thereby creating a more balanced learning environment. Teachers who actively encourage such activities contribute to students' holistic development while also alleviating their own stress levels (Watson, 2024).

Despite the growing awareness of mental health challenges in the teaching profession, there remains a need for further research on effective interventions and long-term solutions. Studies indicate that while short-term programs and policies have been introduced, their sustainability and impact require continuous evaluation. Longitudinal studies that track mental health trends among educators, assess the effectiveness of various interventions, and identify gaps in support systems are essential for the development of comprehensive strategies that address teachers' mental health in a meaningful and lasting way (Rooney et al., 2024).

The evidence from existing research underscores the importance of a multi-faceted approach to improving teacher mental health. Addressing workload concerns, reducing stigma, enhancing institutional support, and implementing effective policy interventions are all necessary steps in creating a sustainable and healthy work environment for educators. Schools and policymakers must work collaboratively to ensure that mental health initiatives are not only implemented but also adapted to meet the evolving needs of teachers. By fostering a culture of mental well-being, educational institutions can create an environment where teachers thrive both professionally and personally.

Mental health challenges among secondary school teachers have been widely studied, with research highlighting various stressors, coping mechanisms, and institutional factors influencing teachers' well-being. This section presents a comprehensive review of existing literature on mental health challenges, support systems, and policy interventions aimed at improving the psychological well-being of educators.

Objectives of the study:

1. Understand the mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers.
2. Identify the main causes of stress and emotional exhaustion among teachers.
3. Examine how stigma prevents teachers from seeking mental health help and how it affects their well-being.

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4. Explore how digital literacy and extracurricular activities influence teachers' mental health and work-life balance.
5. Recommend practical solutions and policy changes to improve mental health awareness, support programs, and overall well-being for teachers.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the most common mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers?
2. What are the main causes of stress, anxiety, and burnout among teachers?
3. How does stigma influence teachers' willingness to seek mental health support?
4. In what ways do digital literacy and extracurricular activities impact teachers' mental well-being and work-life balance?
5. What strategies and policy interventions can be implemented to improve mental health awareness and support systems for secondary school teachers?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a **systematic literature review** design to explore the mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers and the strategies proposed to address them. The systematic review approach was chosen to ensure a comprehensive and unbiased synthesis of existing evidence on the topic, following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 guidelines.

A structured and methodical search was conducted across multiple academic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar to identify relevant studies published between 2019 and 2025. The review focused on peer-reviewed articles that investigated mental health issues among secondary school teachers, their causes, coping mechanisms, the role of stigma, digital literacy, extracurricular engagement, and proposed policy recommendations.

Data extraction was guided by pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to maintain the reliability and validity of the review. The selected studies were subjected to thematic analysis, which allowed the identification and categorization of recurring patterns and themes. This design ensured a rigorous and transparent process for evaluating the literature, drawing conclusions, and making recommendations for practice and future research.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria

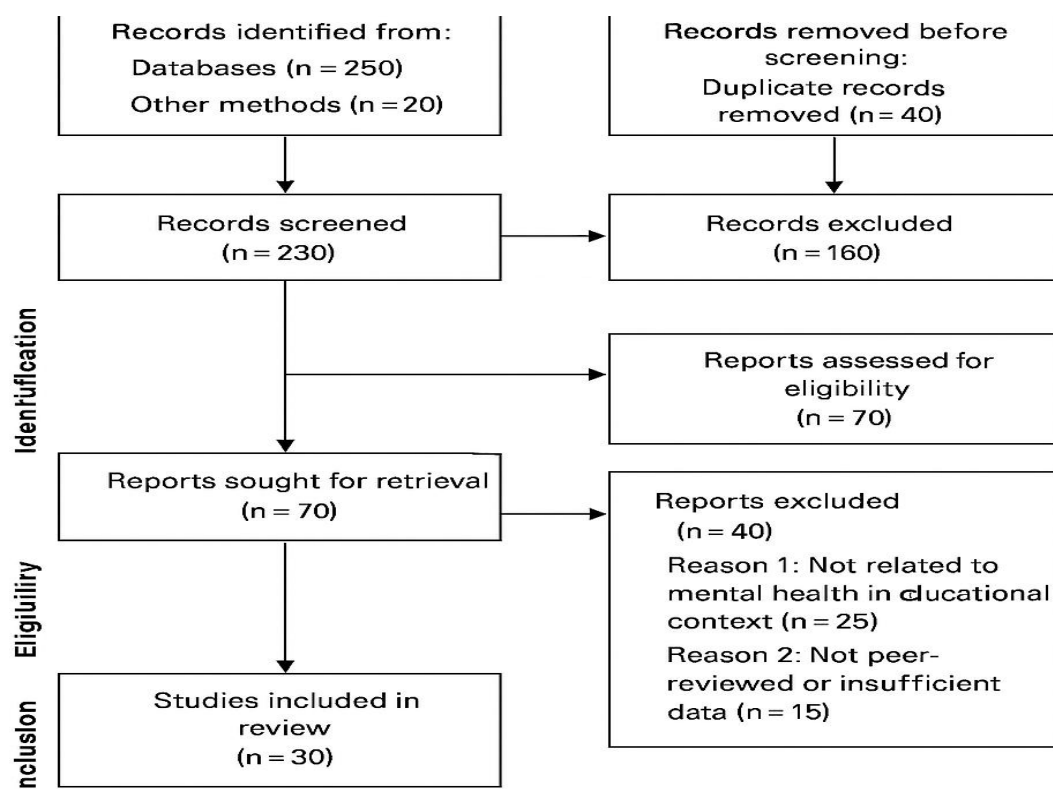
- i) Studies published between 2019 and 2025.
- ii) Studies that focus on mental health challenges, coping strategies, interventions, or mental health literacy in educational settings.
- iii) Populations:
 - Secondary school teachers.
- iv) Study types:
 - Peer-reviewed journal articles.
 - Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research.
- v) Language: Studies published in English.

vi) Geographical scope: Global, no restrictions.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Studies that do not address mental health or well-being in educational contexts.
2. Editorials, opinion pieces, book chapters, conference abstracts, and non-peer-reviewed sources.
3. Studies that focus exclusively on physical health, unless connected to mental health outcomes.
4. Studies involving only primary school students or teachers.
5. Non-English publications.

Figure 1 PRISMA flow diagram for the Systematic literature review



Search Strategy

A comprehensive search strategy was employed to identify relevant studies for this systematic review. The search aimed to capture peer-reviewed literature focusing on the mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers, the causes of stress and emotional exhaustion, stigma-related barriers to mental health help-seeking, the influence of digital literacy and extracurricular activities, and recommended solutions or policy improvements.

Electronic databases including **PubMed**, **Scopus**, **Web of Science**, **ERIC**, and **Google Scholar** were systematically searched for articles published between **January 2019** and **March 2025**. A combination of keywords and Boolean operators was used to refine the search. The key search terms included:

"Mental health" AND "secondary school teachers"

"Teacher stress" OR "emotional exhaustion" AND "education"

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"Mental health stigma" AND "teachers"

"Digital literacy" OR "extracurricular activities" AND "teacher well-being"

"Mental health policy" AND "support programs" AND "education"

Filters were applied to include only peer-reviewed articles written in English. Reference lists of the selected articles were also manually screened to identify any additional studies that met the inclusion criteria. Duplicates were removed, and the remaining records were screened based on their titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text review to ensure relevance to the research objectives.

This structured search strategy ensured the inclusion of a wide range of high-quality and contextually relevant studies, providing a robust foundation for thematic synthesis and analysis.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Following the identification and selection of eligible studies, a standardized data extraction process was conducted to ensure consistency and accuracy. Relevant information from each study was systematically extracted, including:

- Author(s) and Year of Publication
- Study Title and Objectives
- Sample Characteristics (e.g., population size, demographics)
- Study Design and Methodology
- Key Findings and Identified Themes
- Conclusions and Recommendations

This structured extraction process ensured that all relevant details were consistently recorded, allowing for reliable comparison across studies.

Once the data extraction was completed, a **thematic analysis** approach was employed to synthesize the results. The extracted data were carefully reviewed to identify recurring patterns, categories, and themes related to the mental health challenges experienced by secondary school teachers. These themes were then grouped under five predefined focus areas:

- i) Understanding mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers.
- ii) Identifying the main causes of stress and emotional exhaustion.
- iii) Examining the impact of stigma on mental health help-seeking behaviour.
- iv) Exploring the influence of digital literacy and extracurricular activities on mental health and work-life balance.
- v) Recommending practical solutions and policy changes.

The frequency of these themes was also recorded and presented in a summary table to provide a clear overview of the emphasis placed on each issue across the reviewed studies.

This qualitative synthesis allowed for a comprehensive interpretation of the literature and ensured that both commonalities and unique insights from the selected studies were meaningfully integrated to answer the research questions and inform future policy and practice.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ranking of Key Themes

The thematic analysis of the reviewed literature identified several recurring and interrelated factors contributing to the mental health challenges experienced by secondary school teachers. These themes were ranked according to their frequency, severity of impact, and emphasis in the selected studies.

1. Understand the mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers: Occupational Stress and Burnout

Occupational stress and burnout were the most frequently reported issues, emerging as the primary mental health concern among secondary school teachers. The demanding nature of teaching—including curriculum delivery, classroom management, and administrative duties—leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of accomplishment (Andrade et al., 2024; Baghoori et al., 2024). Burnout not only undermines teachers' well-being but also affects instructional quality and student outcomes, making this a critical area for intervention.

2. Identify the main causes of stress and emotional exhaustion among teachers: Lack of Institutional Support

The absence of sufficient institutional support—including access to counselling services, peer networks, and professional development—was the second most cited theme. Teachers lacking organizational support structures were found to be more vulnerable to stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation (Watson, 2024; Rooney et al., 2024). Schools that fail to prioritize mental health contribute to a culture of neglect, further compounding these challenges (Harnett et al., 2024).

3. Examine how stigma prevents teachers from seeking mental health help and how it affects their well-being: Mental Health Stigma

Stigma associated with mental health was a major barrier to help-seeking among educators. Many teachers avoided discussing their struggles due to fear of being perceived as weak or incompetent, which often resulted in untreated mental health conditions (Austin et al., 2024). This reluctance is reinforced by school environments where mental health is not openly addressed, leading to chronic emotional distress and increased attrition (Watson, 2024; Rooney et al., 2024).

4. Explore how digital literacy and extracurricular activities: Work-Life Imbalance and Emotional Labour

Work-life imbalance, intensified by emotional labour, was another significant contributor to mental health decline. Teachers are often expected to manage students' emotional needs in addition to their teaching responsibilities, despite lacking formal training in counselling (Harnett et al., 2024). The expectation to remain available beyond work hours for grading, planning, and extracurricular events further erodes personal time and recovery, increasing vulnerability to burnout (Pacea & Portelli, 2024).

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5. Recommend practical solutions and policy changes to improve mental health awareness, support programs, and overall well-being for teachers: Digital Literacy and Extracurricular Engagement

The role of digital literacy and extracurricular activities presented a dual impact. Teachers with strong digital skills reported reduced workload and greater classroom efficiency (Watson, 2024), while those without sufficient training faced heightened stress and anxiety (Austin et al., 2024). Similarly, participation in extracurricular activities was found to support emotional well-being through social engagement, yet excessive demands in this area led to work overload and fatigue (Rooney et al., 2024; Pacea & Portelli, 2024).

This ranking highlights the multifaceted nature of mental health challenges in teaching, with occupational stress and institutional deficits taking precedence. Addressing these high-impact areas through systemic reforms, targeted interventions, and stigma reduction initiatives is essential for cultivating a resilient and mentally healthy teaching workforce.

Table 1: Frequency of Themes Emerged

Theme	Frequency (<i>n</i>)
1. Understand the mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers	18
2. Identify the main causes of stress and emotional exhaustion among teachers	15
3. Examine how stigma prevents teachers from seeking mental health help and how it affects their well-being	10
4. Explore how digital literacy and extracurricular activities influence teachers' mental health and work-life balance	8
5. Recommend practical solutions and policy changes to improve mental health awareness, support programs, and overall well-being for teachers	12
	Compiled by author

Objectives wise findings:

Objectives 1: Understanding the Mental Health Challenges Faced by Secondary School Teachers

Secondary school teachers face significant mental health challenges, primarily due to high levels of occupational stress, anxiety, and burnout. The demanding nature of their profession, which includes managing large class sizes, meeting academic expectations, and fulfilling administrative responsibilities, often leads to emotional exhaustion. Studies indicate that prolonged exposure to these stressors negatively impacts teachers' psychological well-being and job satisfaction (Andrade et al., 2024).

Burnout is a prevalent issue among educators, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of accomplishment. Teachers experiencing burnout often feel overwhelmed, disconnected from their work, and less effective in the classroom.

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Research has shown that burnout not only affects teachers' mental health but also influences their ability to engage with students effectively, leading to decreased instructional quality and increased teacher turnover (Baghoori et al., 2024).

Anxiety is another common concern among secondary school teachers. The pressure to meet academic targets, manage student behaviour, and adapt to evolving educational policies contributes to heightened anxiety levels. Many teachers report feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, which can lead to chronic stress if left unaddressed. Anxiety among teachers is often exacerbated by the lack of institutional support and professional development opportunities that equip educators with coping strategies (Austin et al., 2024).

The stigma surrounding mental health issues further prevents teachers from seeking professional help. Many educators fear being perceived as weak or incompetent, leading to untreated mental health conditions. This reluctance to seek support can result in long-term consequences, including absenteeism, decreased motivation, and an increased likelihood of leaving the profession (Watson, 2024).

The impact of mental health challenges extends beyond teachers themselves. When educators experience high levels of stress and burnout, their ability to foster a positive and engaging learning environment is compromised. Research suggests that students of teachers experiencing significant mental health challenges are more likely to exhibit lower academic performance and increased behavioural issues, further exacerbating the stress faced by educators (Rooney et al., 2024).

Addressing these mental health concerns requires a multi-faceted approach that includes institutional support, workload management, and accessible mental health resources. Implementing policies that prioritize teachers' well-being, providing regular mental health training, and fostering a supportive work culture are essential steps in mitigating stress, anxiety, and burnout among educators (Harnett et al., 2024).

Objectives 2: Identify the main causes of stress and emotional exhaustion among teachers, such as workload, job insecurity, and lack of support

The teaching profession is inherently demanding, with multiple factors contributing to the high levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout experienced by secondary school teachers. One of the most significant causes is excessive workload, as teachers often juggle lesson planning, grading, classroom management, and administrative responsibilities. The pressure to meet curriculum deadlines and ensure student success further amplifies the stress, leading to prolonged working hours and limited time for personal well-being (Andrade et al., 2024).

Job insecurity is another major contributor to teacher stress. In many educational institutions, temporary contracts, performance-based evaluations, and policy changes create uncertainty regarding employment stability. The fear of job loss can heighten anxiety levels and negatively impact teachers' motivation and engagement in the classroom (Austin et al., 2024). Additionally, teachers frequently encounter unrealistic performance expectations, with pressure from administrators, parents, and society to deliver high student outcomes, often without the necessary resources or support (Baghoori et al., 2024).

Lack of institutional support plays a critical role in exacerbating mental health issues among teachers. Many educators report insufficient access to mental health resources, professional development, and peer support networks. The absence of structured programs to address

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stress and emotional exhaustion results in teachers feeling isolated and unsupported in their struggles (Watson, 2024). Furthermore, school environments that prioritize academic performance over teacher well-being contribute to a culture where mental health challenges are overlooked rather than actively addressed (Rooney et al., 2024).

The emotional labour associated with teaching is another significant stressor. Teachers frequently act as counsellors for students dealing with personal and academic difficulties, yet they often lack the training to handle such responsibilities effectively. This emotional burden can lead to compassion fatigue and increased susceptibility to burnout. Studies indicate that teachers who consistently manage student mental health concerns without institutional guidance are more likely to experience emotional exhaustion and stress-related illnesses (Harnett et al., 2024).

Work-life balance challenges further contribute to teacher burnout. The expectation to be available beyond school hours, attend extracurricular activities, and engage in ongoing professional development leaves little time for personal life and relaxation. The inability to separate work from personal life leads to chronic stress, reducing teachers' overall job satisfaction and well-being (Pacea & Portelli, 2024). Additionally, the shift to online and hybrid teaching models has blurred the boundaries between work and home life, further intensifying these challenges (Boulden & Schimmel, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also played a pivotal role in increasing stress and anxiety levels among educators. The rapid transition to remote learning, technological difficulties, and the need to support students' mental health while managing personal uncertainties created overwhelming challenges for teachers. Post-pandemic, many educators continue to experience high levels of stress due to the lasting effects of disrupted learning and increased academic expectations (Nygaard et al., 2024).

The combined effect of these factors underscores the urgent need for comprehensive mental health support and systemic reforms in educational institutions. Schools must implement strategies such as workload reduction, professional mental health training, and stronger institutional support systems to alleviate stress and prevent burnout among teachers (Rooney et al., 2024).

Objectives 3: Examine how stigma prevents teachers from seeking mental health help and how it affects their well-being

Stigma surrounding mental health remains a major barrier preventing secondary school teachers from seeking help. Many educators fear being perceived as weak or unfit for their profession, leading them to endure stress, anxiety, and depression without professional intervention. Workplace cultures that discourage open discussions about mental health further contribute to this reluctance, fostering an environment where seeking support is viewed as a professional risk rather than a necessary step toward well-being (Austin et al., 2024).

Teachers who experience stigma related to mental health issues often develop feelings of isolation, exacerbating their emotional distress. Studies have shown that the fear of negative judgment from colleagues and administrators prevents many educators from accessing available mental health resources. This avoidance results in untreated psychological conditions, which can worsen over time, leading to burnout, decreased job performance, and an increased likelihood of leaving the profession (Watson, 2024).

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The negative effects of stigma extend beyond individual teachers, influencing the overall school environment. When educators feel unsupported in managing their mental health, their ability to engage with students, collaborate with colleagues, and maintain instructional quality declines. Research indicates that schools with a strong mental health stigma experience higher teacher turnover rates and lower overall staff morale, further impacting student learning outcomes (Rooney et al., 2024).

Addressing mental health stigma requires proactive efforts, including workplace policies that promote mental health awareness, confidential support services, and professional development programs that integrate mental health education. Creating a culture where teachers feel safe discussing their well-being and seeking assistance without fear of repercussions is essential in improving mental health outcomes and ensuring a more resilient teaching workforce (Harnett et al., 2024).

Objectives 4: Explore how digital literacy and extracurricular activities influence teachers' mental health and work-life balance

The integration of digital literacy into teaching has significantly influenced teachers' mental health and work-life balance. The increasing reliance on technology in education has enabled more efficient lesson planning, assessment, and communication, reducing teachers' workload and stress. Teachers who are well-versed in digital tools report higher job satisfaction and lower levels of anxiety due to improved classroom management and streamlined administrative tasks (Watson, 2024). However, inadequate training in digital literacy can create additional stress, as educators struggle to adapt to evolving technology while meeting academic expectations (Austin et al., 2024).

Extracurricular activities have also been identified as crucial for promoting teachers' mental well-being. Engaging in non-academic activities, such as sports, music, and student-led clubs, provides teachers with opportunities to interact with students in a less formal setting, fostering positive relationships and reducing work-related stress. These activities allow teachers to step away from the pressures of curriculum delivery and focus on personal and professional fulfillment, leading to better emotional resilience (Rooney et al., 2024). Schools that encourage teacher involvement in extracurricular activities often report higher morale and lower burnout rates among educators (Harnett et al., 2024).

Despite these benefits, the expectation for teachers to participate in extracurricular activities outside of regular teaching hours can negatively affect their work-life balance. Teachers who are overburdened with additional responsibilities may experience increased stress and fatigue, leading to burnout. Institutions must establish clear policies that support teacher engagement in extracurricular activities without overloading them, ensuring a balance between professional responsibilities and personal well-being (Pacea & Portelli, 2024).

Addressing these concerns requires a structured approach that includes digital literacy training, workload management, and balanced extracurricular participation. Schools that integrate these strategies effectively create a healthier work environment, reducing stress and enhancing teachers' overall mental health (Boulden & Schimmel, 2024).

Objective 5: Recommend practical solutions and policy changes to improve mental health awareness, support programs, and overall well-being for teachers

To improve mental health awareness, support programs, and overall well-being among teachers, a multi-faceted approach is essential. Schools should implement structured mental

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health awareness campaigns that promote open discussions and reduce stigma. Incorporating mental health education in teacher training programs can equip educators with coping strategies and self-care techniques, enabling them to manage stress effectively (Harnett et al., 2024).

Workload management is a critical area requiring attention. Schools should introduce policies that prevent excessive workloads by ensuring balanced class sizes, reducing non-teaching responsibilities, and promoting a collaborative work culture. Flexible work schedules, mental health leave provisions, and additional planning time can help alleviate stress and prevent burnout (Nygaard et al., 2024). Furthermore, administrators should actively engage teachers in decision-making processes, making them feel valued and supported in their roles (Rooney et al., 2024).

Access to professional mental health services should be prioritized. Schools must provide confidential counselling services, peer support networks, and employee assistance programs tailored to teachers' needs. Regular mental health check-ins and self-assessment tools can help educators monitor their well-being and seek timely intervention (Boulden & Schimmel, 2024). Establishing mentorship programs where experienced teachers guide newer educators can also enhance emotional support and workplace satisfaction (Watson, 2024).

Schools should also encourage teachers to engage in extracurricular activities and professional development programs that foster work-life balance. Encouraging social connections, mindfulness practices, and wellness initiatives can create a healthier work environment. Investing in digital literacy training can further support teachers in managing workloads efficiently, reducing stress related to administrative and instructional tasks (Austin et al., 2024).

A systemic policy reform is necessary to ensure long-term mental health improvements for teachers. Governments and educational institutions must collaborate to create national guidelines on teacher mental health, emphasizing the need for continuous research, funding for mental health programs, and workplace well-being policies. Teacher well-being must be integrated into broader educational policies to ensure sustainable and effective mental health support (Rooney et al., 2024).

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers. Stress, anxiety, and burnout have emerged as predominant concerns, driven by excessive workloads, job insecurity, and lack of institutional support. The emotional labor required in teaching, including managing student mental health concerns while coping with personal stress, further exacerbates the mental strain on educators. These challenges significantly affect teachers' professional performance, personal well-being, and overall job satisfaction (Andrade et al., 2024; Baghoori et al., 2024).

One of the key issues identified is the stigma surrounding mental health, which prevents teachers from seeking necessary support. Many educators fear professional repercussions, social judgment, or being perceived as incapable of handling their responsibilities. This reluctance leads to untreated mental health conditions, further intensifying the risk of burnout and attrition. Schools that fail to provide safe and confidential mental health support

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mechanisms contribute to an environment where teachers suffer in silence, ultimately impacting student outcomes as well (Austin et al., 2024; Watson, 2024).

Digital literacy and extracurricular engagement were found to play a dual role in influencing teachers' mental health and work-life balance. While technological advancements have improved teaching efficiency and reduced administrative burdens, insufficient training and the rapid pace of technological change have also contributed to stress and anxiety. Extracurricular activities provide a valuable outlet for stress relief and social engagement, but when teachers are overburdened with additional responsibilities, these activities can add to their workload rather than alleviate stress. Schools must implement structured policies that balance these engagements to enhance teachers' well-being effectively (Rooney et al., 2024; Harnett et al., 2024).

The importance of institutional and policy-level interventions cannot be overstated. Schools that provide access to mental health resources, professional development programs, and peer support networks see lower levels of teacher burnout and higher job satisfaction. However, many current initiatives remain underutilized or insufficient due to gaps in policy implementation. Addressing these deficiencies requires systemic changes, including workload management, confidential counselling services, and broader awareness campaigns to normalize mental health discussions among educators (Nygaard et al., 2024; Boulden & Schimmel, 2024).

Overall, the findings underscore the need for a holistic approach to mental health in the teaching profession. Schools, policymakers, and education stakeholders must work collaboratively to implement sustainable strategies that prioritize teacher well-being. Without proactive measures, the negative cycle of stress, burnout, and attrition will persist, ultimately impacting the quality of education and student learning experiences (Rooney et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant mental health challenges faced by secondary school teachers, including stress, anxiety, and burnout. The excessive workload, job insecurity, lack of institutional support, and emotional labour required in teaching contribute to psychological distress and professional dissatisfaction. The stigma surrounding mental health prevents many educators from seeking necessary help, exacerbating their struggles and negatively impacting their job performance and overall well-being (Andrade et al., 2024; Watson, 2024).

Addressing these issues requires a multi-dimensional approach. Schools must foster an environment where mental health awareness is prioritized, and teachers feel safe seeking support without fear of judgment. Implementing structured policies for workload management, confidential counselling services, and peer support networks can significantly improve teachers' mental resilience. Additionally, digital literacy training and well-balanced extracurricular activities play a crucial role in reducing stress and enhancing work-life balance. While technological advancements can ease teaching burdens, inadequate training can add to stress, highlighting the need for continuous professional development programs (Austin et al., 2024; Rooney et al., 2024).

Institutional reforms and policy interventions must be implemented at the systemic level to ensure long-term improvements. Governments and educational stakeholders should work collaboratively to integrate teacher mental health into national education policies, providing

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adequate funding for mental health programs and wellness initiatives. Without proactive measures, the negative cycle of stress, burnout, and attrition will persist, ultimately affecting student learning outcomes and the overall quality of education (Boulden & Schimmel, 2024; Nygaard et al., 2024).

By prioritizing teachers' mental well-being, educational institutions can create a more supportive and sustainable work environment. Recognizing mental health as a fundamental component of professional development and institutional policies will lead to a more resilient and effective teaching workforce.

Further Directions for Research

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effectiveness of mental health interventions for secondary school teachers (Rooney et al., 2024). There is a need to explore region-specific and culturally sensitive approaches, particularly in under-resourced settings where support systems are often inadequate (Harnett et al., 2024). Mixed-method research designs can provide deeper insights into how stigma, digital competence, and institutional culture interact to influence mental health outcomes (Austin et al., 2025). Moreover, future studies should evaluate policy implementation gaps, ensuring that theoretical interventions translate into practical support mechanisms for educators (Watson, 2024).

Recommendations

Educational institutions should implement structured mental health support systems, including confidential counselling and peer networks (Boulden & Schimmel, 2024). Mental health literacy should be integrated into teacher training to equip educators with coping strategies (Beasley et al., 2023). Workload management policies, such as flexible scheduling and reduced administrative tasks, are essential to reduce burnout (Andrade et al., 2024). Digital literacy training must be standardized to minimize tech-related stress (Watson, 2024), and extracurricular duties should be balanced to avoid overburdening teachers (Rooney et al., 2024).

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this systematic review. All efforts have been made to ensure an objective and unbiased synthesis of the existing literature. The research was conducted independently without any financial, commercial, or personal relationships that could be perceived to influence the outcomes or interpretations of this work.

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