

Authors

John Jerrim is Professor of Education and Social Statistics at the UCL Institute of Education, London, UK. John's research interests include the economics of education, access to higher education, intergenerational mobility, cross-national comparisons and educational inequalities.

Sam Sims is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities at the UCL Institute of Education, London, UK. Sam's research interests include teacher professional development, the role of pay and working conditions in teacher retention and the relationship between pupil disadvantage and academic achievement.

Hannah Taylor is a Research Fellow at the UCL Institute of Education, London, UK. Hannah's research interests include longitudinal analysis of health outcomes data, in particular cardiovascular risk. Hannah is a qualified science teacher.

Rebecca Allen is Professor of Education at the University of Brighton, Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Oxford and co-founder and Chief Analyst at Teacher Tapp. Rebecca's research interests include teacher careers and the impact of government policy on school behaviours.

Implications

Reports are widespread in international media about the stresses and strains of working as a teacher, with particular pressure stemming from the long term-time working hours and due to the scrutiny teachers are placed under from high-stakes testing and school accountability. Several previous academic papers and research reports have also suggested that mental health and wellbeing outcomes may indeed be worse amongst teachers than other professional groups. At the same time, a handful of other studies have questioned whether this is really the case, presenting alternative empirical evidence to suggest that teachers have similar (and sometimes even better) wellbeing outcomes than professional employees in general.

Given the conflicts in the existing evidence base, we conducted the largest and most comprehensive analysis to date of the mental health and wellbeing of teachers in comparison to other professional groups. Drawing evidence from across 11 separate datasets, which together cover a wide array of mental health and wellbeing measures, we present new evidence on this important policy issue. Our headline conclusion is that teachers actually seem to have very similar mental health and wellbeing outcomes to other professionals. There

is little evidence to suggest that, on the whole, teachers are particularly anxious, depressed, have lower-levels of life-satisfaction or have poorer wellbeing outcomes than similar individuals in other jobs. One important exception to this is special educational needs teachers, who tend to have somewhat lower levels of mental wellbeing.

What then are the key directions for future work in this area? Policymakers should look to address the issues with wellbeing among special educational needs teachers as a matter of urgency. For the teaching profession more broadly, however, the evidence presented here makes it very hard to sustain the position that wellbeing and mental health outcomes of teachers are worse than for other occupational groups. For researchers in this area, the focus should now shift to better understanding the drivers of poor mental health outcomes amongst teachers, including whether these are indeed mainly work-related, or are influenced by their personal life. Relatedly, we need better evidence on what system and school leaders can do to support their staff. There are, after all, a non-trivial number of school staff facing mental health issues, some of which may be caused or aggravated by their work. Understanding what can be done to help these individuals through this difficult period is key to teaching becoming a happier and healthier profession.

Author recommends

- Asthana, A., & Boycott-Owen, M. (2018). 'Epidemic of stress blamed for 3,750 teachers on long-term sick leave.' *The Guardian* 11th January 2018. Accessed 06/12/2019 from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/jan/11/epidemic-of-stress-blamed-for-3750-teachers-on-longterm-sick-leave>
- Johnson, S., Cooper, C., Cartwright, S., Doland, I., Taylor, P., & Millet, C. (2005). The experience of work-related stress across occupations. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 20(2), 178-187.
- Perryman, J., & Calvert, G. (2019). What motivates people to teach, and why do they leave? Accountability, performativity and teacher retention *British Journal of Educational Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/00071005.2019.1589417
- Travers, C. & Cooper, C. (1993). Mental health, job satisfaction and occupational stress among UK teachers. *Work & Stress* 7(3), 203-219.
- Worth, J., & Van den Brande, J. (2019). *Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report 2019*. Slough: NFER.