Towards understanding the effect of work on teacher's mental health: a mixed method study

Rahmat Aziz[1], Irwan Abdullah[2], Iin Tri Rahayu[1], Elok Halimatus Sa'diyah[1], Fuad Nashori[3]

[1]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Malang, Indonesia
[2]Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Humanity and Culture, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
[3]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Socio-Cultural Science, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Working as a teacher significantly impacts mental health, both psychological well-being and psychological distress. This study examines the effect of working as a teacher on mental health. A mixed-method sequential explanatory design was chosen because it aims to test theories and provide detailed explanations for the results. Quantitative data were collected from 153 primary school teachers in East Java, and qualitative data were collected from 12 teachers who were purposively selected as interview subjects. The data were collected through interviews and four psychological scales (work commitment, engagement, job satisfaction, and mental health). Statistical inferential analysis and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data. The analyses showed that teachers' jobs affected their mental health in terms of psychological well-being and psychological distress. Work commitment effected on mental health $R=.653$, $R2=.426$ $p<.001$; work engagements effected on mental health $R=.479$, $R2=.230$ $p<.001$; and job satisfaction effected on mental health $R=.668$, $R2=.446$ $p<.001$. The findings suggest that teachers' mental health can be strengthened through their attitudes and behaviours towards work.

Corresponding Author:

Rahmat Aziz
Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang
Gajayana street 50, Malang 65144, East Java, Indonesia
Email: azira@uin-malang.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers' jobs have a significant impact on their mental health. The high workload of various responsibilities, such as lesson preparation, classroom management, and student evaluation and supervision, often leads to severe mental and emotional exhaustion [1], [2]. In addition, interactions with students experiencing behavioural or learning problems can increase distress or frustration when addressing such issues. Not only that, but the disproportionate demands of the job can also lead to ongoing burnout, affecting their life balance and leading to mental health issues [3], [4]. Therefore, teachers must maintain balance and care for their mental health. By caring for their mental health, teachers can continue to provide quality teaching and achieve satisfaction in their work.

Three main trends have emerged in research on the relationship between work and teacher mental health. First, research has focused on the adverse effects of high workloads and excessive demands on teachers' psychological distress. Teachers who face demanding tasks tend to experience burnout associated with mental health problems [5], [6]. Secondly, research has focussed on how teachers' work as teachers can develop their psychological well-being. Social support and recognition in the workplace are critical to teachers' mental health. Teachers who feel supported and recognised by colleagues, principals, and the

education system have better psychological well-being [7], [8]. Third, studies that focus on both aspects of mental health simultaneously. This research model examines psychological well-being and distress in one study [9], [10]. This article elaborates on the third research trend, as psychological well-being and psychological distress are examined as factors influenced by teacher employment.

From a dual model theory perspective, mental health involves two main interacting dimensions: positive and negative. This theory emphasises that mental health includes not only the absence of negative psychological symptoms but also the presence of positive psychological symptoms. Positive dimensions include beneficial emotions, rewarding social relationships, and facing challenges with an affirmative mindset. On the other hand, the negative extent involves symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and loss of control. This dimension reflects mental imbalance or unhealthiness [11], [12]. The theory of the dual model explains that mental health is a continuum between these two dimensions, where individuals can fall on different spectrums. This concept expands the view that mental health focuses on negative symptoms and maintains positive aspects of psychological well-being [13]. By understanding and paying attention to these two dimensions, understanding and efforts to improve mental health in teachers can be done optimally.

Teacher employment has a significant influence on the positive aspects of mental health. High job commitment, where teachers have a strong dedication and attachment to their profession, can provide a deep sense of meaning and purpose. Teachers who are highly committed to their work will contribute to the positive aspects of their mental health [14]. In addition, high work engagement, whether emotional, cognitive, or behavioural engagement in work, can increase teachers' life satisfaction and happiness. Teachers who are actively involved in teaching, plan engaging lessons, and give their full attention to students tend to feel joy and happiness in their work [15]. High job satisfaction also plays an essential role in the positive aspects of mental health, where teachers who are satisfied with their jobs have better psychological well-being [16]. These studies confirm that teachers' activities at work will contribute to their ability to develop psychological well-being.

In contrast to the positive aspects of mental health in the teaching profession, some demands can negatively impact mental health. High workloads can lead to stress and burnout, including administrative tasks, lesson preparation and curriculum demands. Teachers dealing with pupils with behavioural problems or learning difficulties may also experience anxiety and pressure [17]. Lack of social support and recognition in the work environment can also negatively affect teachers' mental health. When teachers feel unsupported or unappreciated, they can experience disillusionment and a decline in psychological well-being [18]. The influence of work on the negative aspects of mental health can also be reflected in emotional strain [19]. These studies confirm that Teachers' inability to perform their duties affects their psychological distress.

This study examines work's influence on teachers' mental health. The specific objective of this study was to investigate the effect of three essential factors at work: work commitment, work engagement, and job satisfaction on their mental health. The study uses a mixed methods explanatory model approach; it can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how work variables contribute to teachers' mental health, thus providing a solid basis for developing strategies and interventions to improve their mental health. Through quantitative analysis, this study was able to statistically examine the relationship between teachers' level of work commitment, work engagement, job satisfaction, and mental health. Meanwhile, this research explores teachers' experiences, perceptions, and understandings of the relationships between variables through a qualitative approach.

2. METHOD

An explanatory mixed-method research model was chosen to test and understand the influence of work on teachers' mental health at the primary education level. The teachers' employment and mental health theme was selected using this approach for three reasons. Firstly, teachers' jobs allow them to experience psychological problems or psychological well-being. Second, teachers' jobs can be revealed through various aspects such as commitment, engagement and satisfaction. Finally, it is necessary to know the influence of these three aspects on teachers' mental health levels. These three reasons make it possible to solve the problems of working as a teacher concerning their mental health.

Quantitative data were obtained from 153 teachers, while qualitative data were obtained from 12 teachers. The research subjects were taken from primary-level teachers in East Java province. The research process was conducted in three stages. The first stage examined the relationship between work commitment and mental health. The number of subjects studied to obtain quantitative data was 44 teachers, while qualitative data were obtained from two teachers. The second stage examined work engagement with mental health. The number of subjects was 48 for quantitative data and two teachers for qualitative data. The third stage looked at job satisfaction with mental health. In the last study, quantitative data was obtained from 61

subjects, while qualitative data was obtained from four teachers. Thus, the number of issues for quantitative data was 153 teachers, while qualitative data was obtained from six teachers.

Table 1 explains that the research subjects are primarily women with honorary teachers who have not been certified. They are under 30 years old, and their working life is under five years. Their marital status was mostly unmarried, except in study 3, where the subjects were mostly married.

Table 1. Research stage on teachers' mental health

Stage	Factors	Teacher survey	Teacher interview
1	Work commitment	44	4
2	Work engagement	48	4
3	Job satisfaction	61	4
Total		153	12

Interviews and psychological scales were used in data collection. Interviews were conducted with 12 selected informants on a limited basis. In the first stage, four teachers were chosen to explain the relationship between work commitment and mental health. Four teachers decided on the second stage to answer about work engagement and mental health. Finally, four teachers who explained job satisfaction concerning mental health were selected. Questions focused on explaining the relationship between the topics studied and mental health. They were then followed by questions about their strategies for developing mental health. In conclusion, the number of informants in each case is four teachers, totalling 12 teachers.

Four psychological scales were used to obtain quantitative data. Firstly, the work commitment scale contains six items that measure the affective aspects of work commitment. Allen, Meyer, and other researchers originally developed this scale. This scale has an Alpha Cronbach value of 0.88 [20]. Secondly, Kanungo developed the work engagement scale used in this study. This scale comprises ten items that can reveal employees' feelings towards their work. This scale has an Alpha Cronbach value of 0.81 [21]. Third, the job satisfaction scale consists of 5 items with an Alpha Cronbach value of 0.90 [22]. Finally, the mental health scale consists of 12 items that reveal aspects of psychological well-being and psychological distress. The validity of this scale is indicated by a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.88 [23]. The four scales were chosen because they follow the needs of the data under study and have a high level of validity.

Inferential and thematic statistical analyses were used in this study according to the data type obtained. Inferential statistical analysis examined the influence of work commitment, work engagement, and job satisfaction on mental health, both psychological well-being and psychological distress. Data analysis techniques were carried out using regression analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted on interview data about teachers' perceptions and strategies in their work profession as teachers.

The research project has been officially granted ethical approval by the faculty of psychology at the State Islamic University of Malang, as indicated by the clearance number 220/FPSI.1/KP/00.1/02/2023. This authorization, issued on February 8, 2023, ensures that the study adheres to established ethical guidelines and standards, reflecting the institution's commitment to responsible and ethical research practices within the academic community.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents three data types relating to the relationship between teachers' work and mental health. The first data relates to the relationship between work commitment and mental health. The second is about work engagement and mental health. Finally, the third data addresses job satisfaction and mental health.

3.1. Demographics of the research subject

In this section, we delve into the detailed demographic and professional makeup of the 153 individuals who participated in the study. Key attributes such as gender, current employment status, professional certifications held, length of time in their respective fields, and age range are comprehensively outlined and can be reviewed in Table 2.

3.2. Work commitment and mental health

The regression analysis results showed the value of R=.653, R2=.426 p<.001. These results mean that work commitment significantly affects teachers' mental health as R=.653. In other words, mental health is influenced by work commitment by 42.6%. The results of further analysis of work commitment on teachers' psychological well-being and psychological distress are shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Demographics of the subjects (N=153)

Research subject	Study 1 (N=44) Work commitment		Study 2 (N=48) Job involvement		Study 3 (N=61) Job satisfaction	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender						
Male	4	9.1	10	20.8	14	23
Female	40	90.1	38	79.2	47	77
Civil servant						
Yes	7	15.9	0	0	26	42.6
No	37	84.1	48	100	35	57.4
Certified						
Yes	6	13.6	7	14.5	21	34.4
No	38	86.4	41	85.4	40	65.6
Marriage						
Not yet	26	59.1	29	54.2	15	24.6
Marriage	18	40.9	19	45.8	46	75.4
Period of work						
Less than five years	29	65.9	26	54.2	29	47.5
Five to ten years	12	38.6	20	41.7	17	27.9
More than ten years	3	6.9	2	4.2	15	24.6
Aged						
Less than 30 years	29	65.9	24	50	27	44.2
31 to 45 years	14	31.8	20	41.6	25	41
More than 45 years	1	2.3	4	8.4	9	14.8

Table 3. Effect of work commitment on psychological well-being and psychological distress

Analysis of work commitment	R	R square	F	Sig.
Psychological well-being	.581	.337	2.224	.049*
Psychological distress	-.659	.434	3.356	.006*

level of significance **=.001, *=.005, ns=no significant

Table 3 shows that work commitment affects mental health, both in high psychological well-being and low psychological distress. The analysis shows that work commitment has more effect on common psychological distress than increased psychological well-being. Further explanation of these results can be confirmed with qualitative data obtained from two informants. The first informant stated that she is committed to being a positive example for her students, while the second informant stated that she is committed to innovative learning.

Informant 1. As a teacher, I will endeavour to be a role model for the children and have an open mind to the times so that learning in the classroom is not constant and tends to be boring. Being a teacher is a noble job because, besides transferring knowledge to students, teachers can also find fun in every lesson.

Informant 2. My commitment as a teacher is the ability to constantly innovate in creating creative and fun learning. For example, attending training improves the quality of knowledge that is good and fun for students.

Informant 3. In performing the profession as a teacher, I will commit to always consulting with more experienced people, attending training to improve self-power, and striving to manage time better.

Informant 4. In carrying out my duties as a teacher, I will strive to remain "istiqomah" in terms of goodness because, with the proper process, it will increase self-power in performing our work as a teacher.

Four informants stated that working as a teacher requires high commitment. This opinion was expressed through the statement of informant 1, who said "*Being a teacher is a noble job because, besides transferring knowledge to students, teachers can also find fun in every lesson.* A similar opinion was expressed by informant 2, who stated "*ability to always innovate in creating creative and fun learning*". Likewise, informant 3 stated: "*I will commit to always consult with more experienced people*". The last statement was revealed by informant four who stated*:" I will process to remain "istiqomah" in terms of goodness*".

This study shows that work commitment affects teachers' mental health. Teachers with high work commitment tend to have high levels of psychological well-being and low levels of psychological distress. Job commitment reflects an individual's level of attachment, dedication and identification with their work. When teachers feel emotionally connected and meaningful to their work, they are likelier to experience job satisfaction and a high sense of achievement, which can improve their psychological well-being [1]. In addition, teachers with high work commitment tend to be motivated to overcome challenges and difficulties in their work. They are better able to manage stress and pressure effectively, which in turn reduces the risk of psychological overstress [24].

The study results have implications for the importance of commitment to work in developing high psychological well-being and low psychological distress. In other words, this research suggests the importance of developing teachers' potential in the context of work commitment. Teachers' potential development should focus on strengthening and maintaining their work commitment. Teachers with a strong identity as educators tend to be highly committed to their work. It can be achieved through training, leadership development, and peer collaboration to strengthen a sense of ownership and appreciation for their profession. Therefore, the strategy to develop teachers' professionalism can be maintaining their identity as teachers [25]. Potential development programs should equip teachers with stress management skills and self-recovery strategies. So, another method for developing teachers' professionalism is reducing their distress [26]. By teaching effective coping techniques, teachers can better deal with psychological distress that may arise in their work.

3.3. Work engagement and mental health

The regression analysis results showed the value of R=.479, R^2=.230 p<.005. These results mean that work engagement significantly affects teachers' mental health on R=.479. In other words, mental health is influenced by work engagement by 23%. The results of further analysis of work engagement on teachers' psychological well-being and psychological distress are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Effect of work engagement on psychological well-being and distress

Analysis of work engagement	R	R Square	F	Sig.
Psychological well-being	.725	.526	4.099	.001[*]
Psychological distress	.101	.010	.475	.494 [ns]

level of significance **=.001, *=.005, ns=no significant

Table 3 shows that work engagement generally does not affect mental health. However, further analysis shows that work engagement significantly affects psychological well-being but does not affect psychological distress. The statements of four informants explained these results. The first informant stated that work engagement as a teacher is evidenced by his pleasure in teaching in the classroom. In contrast, the second informant noted that teaching is fun because it can help students and colleagues.

Informant 5. I am happy to be able to share knowledge with students, learn together with other teachers, and always use the experience as a benchmark to do better the next day.

Informant 6. As an educator, I enjoy and am happy with this profession because I can help students to learn. In addition, I can also help my friends if they have difficulties related to work at school.

Informant 7. As a teacher, I continually adjust to the demands of work at school by continuing to learn and being sincere in my daily work.

Informant 8. As proof that I am engaged in my work, I will continue to learn to manage myself, manage time and emotions and learn how to educate and understand students. In addition, I also had to practice how to interact socially with other teachers.

Involvement in work is an essential factor in teacher mental health development efforts. Four informants stated that they were constantly engaged in his career. This opinion was expressed through informant 5's statement, *"I am happy to be able to share knowledge with students and learn with other teachers"*. A similar opinion was expressed by six informants who stated: *"I enjoy and am happy with this profession because I can help students to learn"*. Likewise, informant 7 said: *"I always try to adjust to the demands of work at school"*. The last statement was revealed by informant 8, who stated: *"I am engaged in my work"*.

Research shows that work engagement significantly influences teachers' mental health, particularly their psychological well-being. Teachers with high levels of work engagement tend to deliver higher levels of psychological well-being [1], [27]. Work engagement reflects teachers' interest, attachment, and love for their work. Teachers who feel emotionally engaged and meaningful in their work tend to have higher job satisfaction and strong intrinsic motivation. It positively impacts their psychological well-being, including happiness, life satisfaction and increased self-esteem. While high work engagement does not directly translate into low levels of psychological distress, firmly engaged teachers may have better psychological resources and practical stress management skills [2]. Therefore, encouraging high work engagement in teachers can be essential in improving their psychological well-being.

The implication for teacher mental health development is the need to focus on developing high work engagement in development programs. Such programs should encourage teachers to feel emotionally engaged and meaningful. It can be achieved by providing opportunities for professional growth, recognising their contributions, and facilitating involvement in decisions affecting their work [28]. It is also essential to pay attention to developing stress management skills and psychological support for teachers with high psychological distress levels. Mental health development programs should provide training and resources to help teachers manage stress, increase resilience and develop self-recovery strategies [29]. By integrating a focus on work engagement and stress management, teachers' mental health development can improve their psychological well-being, strengthen intrinsic motivation, and create a positive and productive work environment for teachers.

3.4. Job satisfaction and mental health

The regression analysis results showed the value of R=.668, R2=.446 p<.001. These results mean that job satisfaction significantly affects teachers' mental health as R=.668. In other words, mental health is influenced by job satisfaction by 44.6%. The results of further analysis of job satisfaction on teachers' psychological well-being and psychological distress are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Effect of work engagement on psychological well-being and distress

Analysis of Job satisfaction	R	R Square	F	Sig.
Psychological well-being	.739	.547	6.030	.000**
Psychological distress	.567	.321	2.336	.022*

level of significance **=.001, *=.005, ns=no significant

Table 4 shows that job satisfaction affects mental health, both in high psychological well-being and low psychological distress. The analysis shows that job satisfaction has more effect on common psychological distress than increased psychological well-being. Further explanation of these results can be confirmed with qualitative data obtained from two informants. Evidence that teachers are satisfied with their profession is shown by informants who stated that teaching is a dynamic job. In contrast, other informants said that being a teacher is a learning process that requires patience and diligence.

Informant 9. *Teaching is a challenging job that allows you to develop your personality and knowledge. I have taught for nine years but still feel stupid and ignorant. I meet children with unique characters and student guardians with various mindsets and backgrounds every year. Teaching is not a static job but a dynamic one that must be undertaken with an open heart and mind.*

Informant 10. *I enjoy every moment of being a teacher. Being a teacher is a learning process that will never stop. I am satisfied to be a teacher because I can learn a lot about patience and diligence, especially when teaching primary school children who require much attention from the teacher. I often notice their extraordinary characters.*

Informant 11. *I enjoy all activities as a teacher with much gratitude and consider that all activities are worship.*

Informant 12. *I am grateful and satisfied working as a teacher, so I make classroom learning fun so students become interested. In addition, I also think that teaching is part of worship to God.*

Working as a teacher can create job satisfaction. The four informants put forward various reasons. The first reasoning was expressed through informant 9's statement, *"Teaching is not a static job but a dynamic one that must be undertaken with an open heart and mind."*. The second opinion was expressed by informant 10: *"I enjoy every moment of being a teacher"*. Likewise, informant 11 stated: *I enjoy all activities as a teacher with much gratitude"*. The last statement was revealed by informant 12, who declared *I am grateful and satisfied working as a teacher"*.

The results of this study explain that teachers who are satisfied with their jobs tend to have higher levels of psychological well-being and lower levels of psychological distress. Job satisfaction reflects how teachers are satisfied with the work environment, relationships with colleagues, recognition of achievements, and career development opportunities. When teachers are satisfied with these elements, they are more likely to have a positive attitude, high energy and intrinsic motivation in performing their duties. It directly impacts their psychological well-being, including happiness, life satisfaction, and reduced stress levels [6], [30]. In addition, high job satisfaction also acts as a protective factor against psychological distress that may arise in teachers' jobs. Therefore, paying attention to and improving the aspects contributing to teachers' job satisfaction is necessary, as it can promote their overall mental health.

The implication for teacher mental health development is integrating job satisfaction in development programs. A supportive work environment, robust professional development, work-life balance, open communication, and teacher participation in decision-making are essential factors to consider. Through this comprehensive approach, educational institutions can create a supportive environment and promote teachers' psychological well-being [31]. By paying attention to job satisfaction as part of a mental health development strategy, teachers will have better support, continuous professional development, a healthy balance between work and personal life, and involvement in decision-making processes that affect their work. It will contribute to improving teachers' overall well-being and mental health.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study confirm that work influences mental health. Commitment, engagement, and satisfaction are three essential factors influencing teachers' mental health. It means this finding states that a teacher's job can develop psychological well-being and reduce teachers' psychological distress in performing their work. Thus, it can be concluded that the development of mental health cannot be separated from the development of teachers' professionalism at work. In other words, the study results recommend the importance of teachers' professional development in maintaining their mental health.

The limitations of this study lie in the limited number of subjects, involving only 153 teachers, as well as the focus on primary-level teachers. It is recommended that the number of issues be expanded by involving more teachers from different levels of education. It is also essential to expand the scope of the study by considering contextual factors such as geographical location, school type and socioeconomic conditions. Adopting a qualitative approach to understand teachers' experiences better is also recommended. By combining these approaches, the research will provide a completer and more accurate picture of teachers' challenges and needs in different contexts. Thus, these recommendations can increase the validity and relevance of the research in supporting efforts to improve teachers' working conditions and overall welfare.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

Rahmat Aziz ⓘ 🔠 ᴾ ♻ is an associate professor of educational psychology at the Faculty of Psychology, State Islamic University of Malang. He teaches educational psychology, cognitive psychology, and research methodology. He focuses on character education, online learning, creativity, well-being, and mental health in the educational setting. He can be contacted at email: azira@uin-malang.ac.id.

Irwan Abdullah ⓘ 🔠 ᴾ ♻ is an Anthropology Faculty of Cultural Sciences professor at Gadjah Mada University. He earned a PhD degree in Anthropology from Universiteit van Amsterdam in 1994. One of the several researches that have been performed are *Society,* Inter-religious Studies, and Socio-cultural Anthropology. He is also known as the founder of Irwan Abdullah Foundation in Yogyakarta. He can be contacted at email: irwan.fib@ugm.ac.id.

Iin Tri Rahayu ⓘ 🔠 ᴾ ♻ is an associate professor of clinical psychology at the Faculty of Psychology, State Islamic University of Malang. She teaches clinical psychology, mental health, and psychotherapy. She obtained a doctorate in clinical psychology from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. She focuses her study on well-being, mental health and positive psychology. She can be contacted at email: iin_tr@psi.uin-malang.ac.id.
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Elok Halimatus Sa'diyah ⓘ 🔠 ᴾ ♻ is a lecturer of developmental psychology at the Faculty of Psychology, State Islamic University of Malang. She teaches developmental psychology, Emotional and social development in early childhood and gifted Psychology. She focuses on self-esteem, and adolescent health behaviour in the developmental setting. She can be contacted at email: elok@psi.uin-malang.ac.id.

Fuad Nashori ⓘ 🔠 ᴾ ♻ is an associate professor of Islamic and social psychology at the Faculty of Psychology and Socio-Cultural Sciences, Universitas Islam Indonesia. He teaches Islamic, social, community, and forgiveness psychology. He studies well-being, forgiveness, materialism, prejudice, and aggression. He can be contacted at email: fuadnashori@uii.ac.id.