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Stress, Coping, and Well-being in Teachers and School Administrators

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This study explored educators' self-reported state of well-being, perceived stressors, and use of coping strategies. Data collection consisted of an online survey and semi-structured focus groups. In total, 115 educators completed the online survey and 18 educators participated in the focus groups. Educators reported overall experiences of poor well-being, low resilience, high levels of compassion fatigue, and high levels of emotional exhaustion. Participants identified ongoing stressors related to supporting student learning and well-being, overseeing classroom environments, navigating limited community-based resources and supports, and managing increasing administrative demands and functions. Implications of the findings for practice are discussed.

Cette étude a exploré l'état de bienêtre déclaré par les éducateurs, les facteurs de stress perçus et l'utilisation de stratégies d'adaptation. La collecte des données a consisté en une enquête en ligne et des groupes de discussion semi-structurés. Au total, 115 éducateurs ont répondu à l'enquête en ligne et 18 éducateurs ont participé aux groupes de discussion. Les éducateurs ont fait état d'expériences globales de malêtre, de faible résilience, de niveaux élevés d'usure de la compassion et de niveaux élevés d'épuisement émotionnel. Les participants ont identifié des facteurs de stress permanents liés au soutien de l'apprentissage et du bienêtre des élèves, à la supervision des environnements de classe, à la navigation dans les ressources et soutiens communautaires limités, et à la gestion des demandes et fonctions administratives croissantes. On discute des implications des résultats pour la pratique.

Well-being is considered to be a complex, multifaceted, and dynamic state where individuals utilize their physical, social, and psychological resources in ways that allow them to cope with daily challenges and stresses, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their communities (Dodge et al., 2012). From this perspective, too many perceived stressors or too few resources may result in a compromised sense of well-being.

Teaching is universally recognized as a stressful and emotionally intense profession that is often associated with challenges to individuals' well-being (Herman & Reinke, 2014; Prilleltensky et al., 2016). Teachers routinely report high levels of stress and above average physical and mental health problems (Herman et al., 2018; Kidger et al., 2016). Teacher stress and compromised sense of well-being are associated with decreased productivity, burnout, compromised performance, and low job satisfaction and contribute to high levels of professional turnover and attrition (Herman et al., 2018; von der Embse et al., 2016). Teachers frequently report stressors related to

complex and competing demands associated with supporting student learning; social-emotional development and well-being; managing classroom routines and student behaviours; and communicating with families (Burić et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2018; Reupert, 2020). Teachers also report stressors related to negative interactions with challenging colleagues and administrators (Danby & Hamilton, 2016; Graham et al., 2011; Reinke et al., 2011). Finally, many teachers report stressors associated with limited access to professional resources and/or community-based services that support student well-being (Woodcock & Reupert, 2016).

High levels of work-related stress are associated with burnout syndrome in educators (García-Carmona et al., 2019). Burnout syndrome is characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low levels of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Educators have been found to experience intermediate to high levels of emotional exhaustion and intermediate to high levels of depersonalisation (see García-Carmona et al., 2019 and Molero et al., 2019 for reviews). Burnout syndrome is also associated with a myriad of physical (e.g. headaches and muscle pain, sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal and cardiovascular disorders), psychological (e.g. irritability, difficulty moderating negative emotions, restlessness, feelings of isolation, and sense of incompetence), and behavioural (e.g. hyperactivity, mistrust, annoyance, relationship difficulties, impaired quality of life, substance use) challenges. These challenges frequently result in increased absenteeism and job rotation, as well as decreased job performance (García-Carmona et al., 2019; Molero et al., 2019).

Educators are also at risk for experiencing compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue refers to the emotional and behavioural reactions that follow from interacting with individuals who have experienced a traumatic event in combination with the stress induced by a desire to help the traumatized individuals (Pryce et al., 2007). Individuals who experience compassion fatigue often exhibit symptoms similar to posttraumatic stress disorder (Figley, 1999). Unlike burnout syndrome, however, which takes months or years to develop, compassion fatigue can occur after only one encounter. Educators exhibit intermediate to high levels of compassion fatigue, likely because many educators are exposed to children who have experienced some trauma (see Koenig et al., 2018).

Teachers who experience high levels of stress, burnout, or compassion fatigue in the workplace may negatively impact the well-being of their students. Educators' subjective experiences of well-being and social-emotional competence is predictive of students' sense of well-being and learning experiences (Klusmann et al., 2016; Reupert, 2020; Sisask et al., 2014). Specifically, educator stress, burnout, and depressed mood is negatively associated with student school grades, standardized achievement scores, school satisfaction, student-teacher relationships, and perceptions of teacher support and care (Arens & Morin, 2016; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Ramberg et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Dodge et al.'s (2012) balance-based see-saw theory of well-being and Lazarus and Folkman's transactional stress and coping model (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) were used to guide this research study. Both frameworks help to contextualize individuals' experiences of well-being in terms of their perceived stressors and use of coping strategies.

According to Dodge et al. (2012) individual states of well-being vary across time and circumstance and are reflective of the fluctuations between available supports and resources and perceived challenges. These supports and challenges may be diverse in nature and may include a

variety of psychological, social, and physical factors. Individuals are intrinsically driven to achieve, maintain, and return to states of equilibrium where they are able to navigate life experiences in order to promote satisfaction and diminish distress. Well-being is retained to the extent that individuals are able to return to these set-points when equilibrium is disrupted.

The transactional stress and coping model (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) posits a dynamic relationship between stress and coping. Stress is a relational experience between individuals and their environments, where individuals assess external and/or internal demands in relation to perceived personal and social supports and resources. Individuals continuously appraise situations for their potential impact on their well-being (i.e., irrelevant, positive, threatening) and, as a result, experience emotional reactions such as anxiety, fear, anger, shame, happiness, relief, love, and/or pride (Lazarus, 1991). In this way, individuals differ in their appraisals of any one situation and/or their subsequent stress responses.

Individuals use cognitive appraisals, coping resources, and coping strategies to assess, predict, and navigate stress-provoking experiences (Lazarus, 2000). When situations or events are perceived to be threatening, individuals engage in secondary appraisals of available coping resources and strategies. Coping resources and strategies differ in that the former reflect stable attributes of individuals and their social structures and environments, and the latter reflect individuals' ongoing and dynamic efforts to manage situations where external and/or internal demands are appraised as exceeding coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies may include diverse sets of behaviours and cognitions such as confronting, distancing, avoiding, help seeking, problem-solving, and positive reappraisal.

As educators are central to students' daily lives and learning experiences, it is imperative to monitor educators' perceived states of psychological and social-emotional well-being, especially as related to identified work-related stressors and challenges. At the same time, it is equally as important to explore educators' capacities to navigate these stressors as identified through their use of coping strategies and self-care practices. The purpose of this convergent parallel mixed-methods study was to explore educators' self-reported state of well-being, perceived stressors, and use of coping strategies within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The following questions served to further guide the research study: 1) What are educator self-reported levels of stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout? 2) What are educator self-reported coping mechanisms and levels of resilience? 3) What is the relationship between educator self-reported levels of well-being, coping, and resilience? 4) How do educators enact well-being in the workplace? and 5) What factors impact educator experiences of well-being?

Methodology and Methods

A convergent parallel mixed-methodology approach was used for this research study (Creswell, 2015). This design method was based on the belief that gathering multiple forms of data related to educator stress, resilience, and coping would provide a complex and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of educator well-being. Data collection methods involved use of an online survey and semi-structured focus groups.

Survey research is a self-report data collection method often used to assess participant thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Surveys can be especially helpful in identifying and understanding trends and assessing the current status or state of being of a target group. Online survey research is deemed as a cost-efficient, readily accessible, and versatile method of data collection, where participants may engage in research at a time and place of their convenience. In

general, the capacity to reach a larger number of target participants promotes generalization of survey findings (Creswell, 2015; Goodwin & Goodwin, 2013).

Online surveys, however, provide only limited opportunities for participants to deeply share and explore their experiences, beliefs, and opinions. To this end, educators were invited to participate in focus group sessions. Focus groups are a subtype of research interview that involves having a small number of participants who can be defined through their common positionings and/or experiences to participate in a group interview. Focus groups are especially helpful when soliciting both shared opinions and individual opinions. The interactive style of focus groups can be useful in overcoming any hesitancy among individual research participants and can be useful in situations where time is limited (Creswell, 2015).

Data Collection

After receiving ethics clearance from the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University and the Research Ethics Board at Brock University, all members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA) were provided with an email invitation to complete an anonymous on-line survey (December-January) and/or participate in a focus group session during the early winter of 2019/2020 (January-February). Data collection for this study occurred before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online Survey

The online survey consisted of demographic questions including gender, age, ethnicity, role (teacher, teaching and learning assistant, specialist, administrator), and workplace structure (e.g. classroom student numbers, work status) and seven self-report, Likert scale, standardized instruments. Standardized instruments consisted of two measures of well-being (*Teacher Well-Being Scale, WHO-5 Well-being Index*), three measures of stress and burnout (*Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators, Perceived Stress Scale 10, Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale*) and two measures of resilience and coping (*Brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale*). All instruments demonstrated sound psychometric properties and have been used with diverse populations of adults including educators (e.g. Collie et al., 2015; Hogan, A., 2019; Lee et al., 2016; Pogere et al., 2019; Topp et al., 2015).

General Well-being and Teacher Well-being

The *WHO-5 Well-being Index* (*WHO-5*; World Health Organization, 1998) is a 5-item measure used to assess subjective quality of life as assessed across mood, vitality, and general interest. The instrument consists of a 6-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicate greater well-being. The *Teacher Well-Being Scale* (*TWBS*; Collie, 2014) is a 16-item questionnaire that examines three factors of educator well-being including workload, organizational, and student interactions. Educators rate their well-being across a 7-point continuum where higher scores are associated with positive perceptions.

Perceived Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout

The *Perceived Stress Scale 10*, (*PSS*; Cohen et al., 1983) consists of 10-items where individuals

report perceived stress levels, sense of control, and event predictability over the last month. Total scores are normed for sex and age, and reflect one of four stress levels (i.e. relatively stress free, low stress, medium stress, high stress). The *Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale* (*STSS*; Bride et al., 2004) is a 17-item questionnaire that assesses the three primary symptoms of compassion fatigue: intrusion, arousal, and avoidance. Total scores reflect one of five levels (no compassion fatigue, mild, moderate, high, and severe compassion fatigue; Bride et al., 2004). The *Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey* (*MBI-ES*; Maslach et al., 1996) is a 22-item questionnaire that examines three aspects of educator burnout including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 1996). Responses are scored across a continuum of low, average, and high, with higher scores on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization items and lower scores on personal accomplishment items suggestive of burnout.

Coping and Resilience

The *Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale* (*CD-RISC*; Connor & Davidson, 2003) is a 25-item measure that evaluates five domains of resilience including: 1) personal competency, high standards, and tenacity; 2) trusting feelings, tolerance, effects of stress; 3) acceptance for change and secure relationships; 4) self and other control; and 5) spirituality. Responses are scored progressively across a 5-point scale with respondents indicating degrees (not true to true nearly all of the time). Higher scores are indicative of higher resilience.

The *Brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced* (*Brief COPE*; Carver, 1997) is a 28-item measure of dispositional and situational coping styles. Responses are scored progressively across a 4-point continuum, with higher scores indicative of greater engagement with coping strategy. There are 14 coping scales including: self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance use, emotional support, instrumental support, behaviour disengagement, venting, positive reframing, planning, humour, acceptance, religion, and self-blame. Carver (1997) categorized acceptance, emotional social support, humour, positive reframing, and religion as emotion focused coping strategies; active coping, instrumental support, and planning as problem-focused coping strategies; and behavioral disengagement, denial, self-distraction, self-blame, substance use and venting as dysfunctional coping strategies. Of these categories, emotion-focused and problem-focused are considered to be adaptive, with the remaining strategies considered to be maladaptive.

Focus Groups

Focus group participants were recruited through the online survey as well as through a separate recruitment poster, with a focus on eliciting rich and deep data through the personal experiences and opinions of varied participants. Five focus group sessions and one individual telephone interview were completed during the winter of 2020 (January 13–February 9). As the responses associated with the individual interview did not differ substantively from those emerging from the focus groups, reporting of the individual interview data was merged with the focus group themes.

Focus group sessions were held in private meeting areas (universities, colleges, hotels) across the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Sessions were facilitated by two of the researchers and one research assistant. Facilitators used semi-structured questions to probe participants about well-being, such as its definition, related factors, and critical

incidents, as well as self-care, including strategies, related factors, and supports. Sessions were audio recorded and transcribed for subsequent analyses (i.e., coding and thematizing).

Results

Consistent with convergent parallel mixed-methods, quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed independently and then interpreted collectively (Creswell, 2015).

Quantitative Analysis

In order to uphold the reliability and validity of the standardized instruments used here, only responses from participants who answered entire subscales were included in the data analyses. Quantitative data analyses consisted of descriptive and Pearson product-moment correlations. ANOVAs were completed to assess differences between participants.

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze focus group data. Thematic analysis consisted of the independent reading and rereading of the focus group transcripts by two of the researchers. Line-by-line analysis followed, allowing for the emergence of in-vivo codes as well as those corresponding to the research questions (Creswell, 2015). Two researchers then met to discuss their interpretations and to arrive at a shared understanding of the emergent themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2002).

Survey Participants

In total, 115 educators (90 self-identified females, 25 self-identified males) completed some or all portions of the online survey. Almost all survey participants held full-time positions (91.3%) as classroom teachers (20% elementary; 16.5% junior secondary school; 22.6% senior secondary school). The gendered representation of participants (73% self-identified females, 27% self-identified males) is consistent with annual province-wide teaching demographics where 75% of classroom teachers self-identified as female (Newfoundland Department of Education, 2021). Most participants reported being between 35–44 years of age (38.3%). Slightly over a third (31.3%) reported being between 45–54 years of age and just under a quarter (23.5%) reported being between 25–34 years of age. A small number of participants (7%) reported being between 55–64 years of age.

Approximately a quarter of the participants were either school-based specialists (23.5%), board-based specialists (2.6%), or teaching and learning assistants (1.7%). The remaining participants were administrators (13%). The proportion of administrators who self-identified as female (66%) is slightly higher than annual provincial demographics where 52% of administrators self-identified as female (Newfoundland Department of Education, 2021). Participants varied in their years of experience in the profession (M = 16, SD = 15.4 years), with about half (54.8%) reporting between 10 to 25 years. Approximately one third (30.4%) reported 10 or fewer years of experience and 13% reported more than 25 years of experience.

Most participants were situated in Newfoundland (88.7%), with the remainder situated in Labrador (9.6%). Of the participants who held positions within a single school (109 out of 115),

just over half were situated in rural locations (54.1%), with the remaining participants located in urban schools (45.9%). The majority of participants self-identified as Caucasian (93.9%) with English as their primary language of instruction (82.6%). The remaining participants identified as First Nations (2.6%), Inuk/Inuit (1.7%) or Métis (0.9%).

Focus Group Participants

Seventeen educators (12 self-identified females, 5 self-identified males) participated in one of five focus group sessions, with each session consisting of two to five participants. Two focus groups were conducted in the eastern part of the province, one in the central part, one in the western part and one in the northern part. One educator, a self-identified female, elected to complete a telephone interview, for a total of 18 focus-group participants. All focus group participants were full-time tenured educators. Over three-quarters (n = 14, 77.8%) were classroom educators with the remaining participants being administrators (n = 4, 22.2%). One participant worked at multiple locations, with the majority of participants (n= 16, 94%) allocated to a single school site. All focus groups were conducted in English.

Quantitative Findings

Table 1 lists mean scale and standard deviation scores for the standardized instruments used here. Statistical differences for gender are reported as relevant, with no statistical differences found for age, ethnicity, or position.

General Well-being and Teacher Well-being

Participants reported poor subjective well-being as measured by the *WHO-5*, with a total of 61% of all participants scoring in the poor category (40% males, 79% females). Male participants reporting significantly higher levels of subjective well-being than female participants, although the effect size was small: $F(1, 114) = 9.54$, $p<.003$, $\omega 2 = 0.10$.

Participants' mean total score on the *TWBS* was over one standard deviation lower than the total mean score of the national normative sample. Male participants reported experiencing significantly higher levels of teacher-specific well-being than their female colleagues: $F(1, 98) = 5.215$, $p<.025$, $\omega 2 = 0.10$. Again, however, this was a small effect. Participants reported that they did not hold positive evaluations of their work environment and that they are not functioning well in their schools compared to teachers at the national level. Responses on the *Organizational Well-Being* subscale were over one standard deviation lower than the normative sample, with participants holding more negative perceptions of school organizations, school and school board leadership, and the culture towards teachers and teaching. Participants scores did not differ significantly from national norms for the *Workload Well-being* and *Student Interaction Well-being* subscales.

Perceived Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout

Participants differed significantly with respect to their perceived stress as a function of gender although the effect was small: $F(1, 114) = 8.25$, $p<.005$, $\omega 2 = 0.10$. Female participants reported higher levels of perceived stress than male participants. Gender differences were also apparent

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Sample Size for Each Scale

Scale		M	SD	n
WHO-5 Well-Being Index		11.1	4.3	115
Teacher Well-Being Scale				
	Workload Well-Being	24.8	5.3	108
	Organizational Well-Being	23.6	6.1	106
	Student Interaction	16.3	4.1	103
	Total Score	64.4	14.3	99
Perceived Stress Scale		20.1	6.1	115
Brief COPE				
	Self-Distraction	4.6	1.5	114
	Active Coping	5.2	1.6	115
	Denial	2.6	1.2	113
	Substance Use	3.0	1.6	115
	Use of Emotional Support	4.9	1.7	114
	Use of Instrumental Support	4.6	1.8	113
	Behavioural Disengagement	2.8	1.1	113
	Venting	4.4	1.5	114
	Positive Reframing	4.8	1.6	114
	Planning	5.3	1.6	113
	Humor	4.2	1.8	114
	Acceptance	5.3	1.6	112
	Religion	3.3	1.8	114
	Self-Blame	4.3	1.7	113
Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale		45.2	12.5	113
Maslach Burnout Inventory				
	Emotional Exhaustion	34.6	12.2	114
	Depersonalization	7.3	5.9	113
	Personal Accomplishment	35.4	6.9	111
Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale		66.5	13.9	113

when participants' scores were descriptively compared with those of the general population. Male participants' mean score on the *PSS* did not differ significantly from the mean score of males in the normative sample of the general population. Female participants' mean scores on the *PSS*, were over one standard deviation higher than the mean score of the females in the normative sample.

Participants' mean score on the *STSS* fell within the high range on the measure, indicating that participants experienced a high level of compassion fatigue. There were no significant differences for compassion fatigue across gender: $F(1, 112) = 1.06$, $p = .305$.

Participants reported mixed responses on the *MBI-ES*. Participants reported feeling emotionally drained, overextended, and exhausted by their work, scoring over one standard deviation higher than the normative group on the *Emotional Exhaustion Scale*. Female

participants reported higher emotional exhaustion scores than did male participants although the effect size was small: $F(1, 113) = 5.806$, $p<.018$, $\omega 2 = 0.10$. Participants' scores for the *Depersonalization Scale* and the *Personal Accomplishment Scale* were within average ranges relative to the norming group, indicating that they did not perceive themselves to be unfeeling and/or impersonal when responding to their students. Participants perceived themselves to be competent and successful teachers.

Resilience and Coping

Participants scored in the lower quartile of the *CD-RISC*, indicating that they perceived themselves to be as resilient as only 25% or less of the general population. In other words, participants perceived they were less resilient than at least 75% of the general population.

Participants reported varying degrees of engagement in coping strategies as measured by the *Brief COPE* inventory. Participants reported using problem-focused strategies most often ($M = 5.03$), followed by the use of emotion-focused strategies ($M = 4.5$) and the use of dysfunctional strategies ($M = 3.61$). No statistically significant differences emerged in participants' use of coping strategies across demographic variables. Participants self-reported use of coping strategies was associated with reported experiences of subjective well-being, teacher-specific well-being, perceived stress, and burnout.

Reframing

There was a significant positive relationship between the use of positive reframing strategies (*Brief COPE*), and subjective well-being (*WHO-5* $r = .201$, $p<0.05$), and teacher specific well-being (*TWBS* $r = .203$, $p<0.01$). Participants who reported higher use of positive reframing also tended to report greater experiences of subjective well-being and teacher-specific well-being.

Behavioural Disengagement

There was a significant negative correlation relationship between the use of behavioural disengagement strategies and general subjective well-being (*WHO-5* $r =-.367$, $p<0.01$) and teacher specific well-being (*TWBS* $r = -.384$, $p<0.01$). Increased use of behavioural disengagement strategies was associated with lower levels of perceived subjective well-being and teacher-specific well-being. Increased use of behavioural disengagement strategies was significantly associated with increased reports of perceived stress (*PSS* $r = .436$, $p<0.01$) and emotional exhaustion (*MBI-ES Emotional Exhaustion* subscale $r = .361$, $p<0.01$).

Self-blame

Use of self-blame as a coping strategy was negatively correlated with scores on the *WHO-5* ($r = -.302$, $p<0.01$) and the *TWBS* ($r = -.301$, $p<0.01$). Participants who reported higher use of self-blame also tended to report lower levels of general well-being and teacher specific well-being. Conversely, use of self-blame was significantly associated with higher scores on the *PSS* ($r = .439$, $p<0.01$) and the *MBI-ES Emotional Exhaustion* subscale ($r = .331$, $p<0.01$).

Self-distraction, Denial, and Venting

Use of self-distraction ($r = .311$, $p<0.01$), denial ($r = .373$, $p<0.01$), and venting ($r = .308$, $p<0.01$) were associated with higher scores on the *PSS*. Self-distraction $r = .209$, $p<0.05$) and denial ($r = .310$, $p<0.01$) were significantly associated with higher scores on the *MBI-ES Emotional Exhaustion* subscale.

Substance Use

The use of substances as a coping strategy was significantly associated with lower scores on the *TWBS* ($r = -.225$, $p<0.01$), indicating that participants who reported higher use of substances also tended to report being less happy and less satisfied as teachers. Use of substances as a coping strategy was also associated with higher scores on the *PSS* ($r = .260$, $p<0.01$) and the *MBI-ES Emotional Exhaustion* subscale ($r = .236$, $p<0.01$).

Qualitative Findings

Four primary themes related to educator experiences of stressors, supports, and overall well-being emerged from the coding and analyses of the focus group data including: 1) care for self and others; 2) problematic behaviours (student, parent, and community); 3) fluctuating stressors and supports; and 4) shifting patterns and cycles impacting well-being.

Care for Self and Others

For many of the educators in this study, sense of well-being and purpose was closely connected to the perceived success of others, especially students in their charge. Participants recounted various positive and meaningful outcomes associated with working in schools and with students, with resulting feelings of accomplishment, enjoyment, and happiness, “You got a success story along the way” (Participant 3) and “You feel that you accomplished something; that you made a difference; that you helped somebody” (Participant 2). Participants 4 and 5 elaborated on intersections between their personal well-being and the perceived success of their students:

> I think things like optimal well-being, for most people who work in school, they care about the well-being of others, so that in turn impacts your own well-being. So, I think if other people around me are doing well, then I feel like I'm doing well. (Participant 4)

Contrarily, participants described a diminished sense of accomplishment and well-being when those around them struggled, with this being true for students and colleagues. At the same time, participants in this study identified the need to create distance between their professional and school lives as part of self-care. Participant 5 described tensions between their desires to assist their colleagues and their need to practice self-care:

> It's kind of getting me through and I see other teachers and I kind of feel bad because some of them are so strung out and stressed. I feel bad, I feel guilty almost, but I know I have to take care of myself and I can't feel guilty. I didn't even ask for this, I kind of fell into it, and I've paid my dues certainly, but it's hard to watch your co-workers suffer.

Participant 14 provided similar observations, reflecting how some educators do not hold boundaries across their professional and personal lives. This participant described a resulting sense of sadness associated with witnessing colleagues' struggle:

> I've seen so many colleagues taking stuff home with them, so, they're compounding their problem because … they're awake worrying about it until four o'clock in the morning, so they're coming in on three hours' sleep and then trying to cope through the next day … and I just find a terrible sense of sadness when I see that.

Educators identified self-awareness as critical for gaining work-life balance. Participant 3 described self-awareness as a process where they, "recognize that you have an awareness of your own emotions and how things can affect you and being able to do things for yourself." Participant 5 reiterated the importance of being able to separate school-based experiences from the home, "Being able to go home and kind of separate yourself and still feel happy and not have it weigh on you when you go home all evening" (Participant 5).

In sum, even when the school environment was stressful there were times when periods of enjoyment shone through into the teaching role. Such moments, however, appeared to be much more individualized and personal than school-wide and they occurred less frequently than stressful, disruptive happenings.

Student, Parent, and Community-based Problem Behaviours

Problem behaviour featured prominently as an area of concern for the participants in this study. Problem behaviours appeared to have a significant impact on educators' sense of well-being and daily functioning. Participant 1 identified student behaviour as the single most important factor to impact their sense of well-being: "I would say that the student behaviour [has] probably a 1000% impact on my well-being" and Participant 16 reflected on the disproportional time spent documenting violent incidents.

Participants also identified parental responses and problem behaviours as stressors. Participant 18 qualified that parental interactions could be more stressful than those with students, including parental denials of poor student behaviour and accusations of teacher classroom mismanagement. These stressors extended to the broader community, with some participants commenting on the harmful impacts of societal misperceptions and/or beliefs.

> And everybody is afraid … they're afraid of the parents, they're afraid of the media, they're afraid of what everyone else thinks, [everyone] who doesn't know what's really going on, like they don't see this. There are times when I think, I wish there was a camera in this class, or live TV because I don't think some people have any clue what is really going on in the classroom. (Participant 18)

Educators reported increased instances of behavioural and mental health concerns among their students and increased need to manage associated behaviours as part of their daily teaching activities compared to previous generations of students. Participants reported a large range of problem behaviours ranging from disregard for school rules to suicidality, extreme aggression, violence, and crime. They reflected that sometimes even very young children presented with these concerns and that problem behaviours were directed towards both peers and teachers. Educators reported experiencing threats and multiple types of physical violence (e.g. throwing, kicking,

hitting). They also reflected that their students appeared to have no fear of consequences. Participant 3 indicated that "we're seeing behaviours that are far more aggressive than we have in recent years."

Although the safety of educators and other school community members is clearly an issue, educators also recognized the reciprocal ways that student behaviours, especially negative ones, adversely impacted the well-being of other students. They struggled to balance their time and efforts in context of the large range of student needs and lamented about the lack of support services outside of the classroom. Participants speculated about the potential adverse effects including school failure and/or drop out.

> You have all these behaviours in there, that start to have to impede the others, and maybe it's just a few students, but they negatively impact so many other students and then maybe impact the teachers' well-being and the student well-being in the classroom because the supports are not there for them outside of the classroom. Some of these kids just need more one-on-one. (Participant 7)

Fluctuating Stressors and Supports

Focus group participants described multiple and multi-layered stressors and protective factors that assisted or impeded their day-to-day functioning and well-being as educators in schools. Participants discussed the differential impacts of their colleagues, staff, and administrators in promoting environments that supported their sense of well-being or diminished it. In several instances, situations were identified as either potential stressors or supports depending on context. For instance, several participants identified the staff room as a "toxic" environment:

> I've walked into staff rooms that were toxic and I will openly call them toxic because it's exactly what they were. You left feeling much worse than when you went in. (Participant 3)

> I think people don't want to go in the staff room and interact with their peers if it's hostile … you're not going to stress yourself out further by being [treated badly] by a co-worker. It's just not a place you want to be. (Participant 4)

At the same time, staff rooms were identified as important places for relationship building and staff cohesion, "Those times are important if you want to build cohesion among your staff and you want to be able to support each other, you need those moments to sit, that 15-minute recess" (Participant 3). In these ways, the staff rooms and other designated school areas appeared to act as protective factors for educators, "We had a fantastic work environment, and that helped out. That's the breather moment, that's that moment where you can stop and relax and get away from maybe whatever is going on." (Participant 3)

Educators also reported the importance of feeling appropriately supported by their school leaders and administrators. Participant 4 recalled how this type of administrative outlook could feel positive:

> They took care of [the situation], they respect me, like they take my word for things. And it's not like that all the time. I mean if they think I'm off [then] they'll call me on it: I don't mind that.

Other participants qualified that a perceived lack of support compromised their sense of well-being. Participant 5 recalled how it felt when such support was not easily obtained, "Sometimes

an administrator would look at you when you're asking for help, as if it's a sign of weakness … it seems like teachers are people's punching bags sometimes."

Administrators similarly reported their desire to support and protect the school community. Participant 3 elaborated on their efforts to keep communication open and promote staff safety, "You want to be able to have those open and honest conversations with your staff … making sure that everybody's safe and that you're not going to be attacked by anybody from the community." Supports for administrators however often appeared to be lacking, especially in rural communities. Participant 1 elaborated on how the lack of perceived support compromised their sense of well-being:

> When I took on an administrator role … it completely changed me as a person and as an educator. I started medications. I pretty much had a mental breakdown and had to go off on stress leave … it was probably the most thankless job I've ever been in in my entire life.

Participants identified the impact of the wider-school community including the school board, ministry, and union. Participants reflected on policies and procedures that were representative of this wider school culture and impacted their functioning in schools. External influences also included parents and student families, educator families, and the wider community. Similar to school-based supports, each of these influences could act to "help or hinder" educators' sense of well-being and affected participants differentially.

Shifting Patterns and Cycles

Participant 18 reflected that the ability to, "respond to everyday life stressors" without much disruption and with contentment is part of a balanced environment and represented a preferred way of being in context of day-to-day life. Educators acknowledged that their daily sense of well-being was relatively fragile and susceptible to the influence of external events. Participant 1, for example, explained how unexpected events within the classroom often negatively impacted their sense of well-being, "It's up and down from one minute to the next, depending on what's happening. Some stuff happens so quickly—you don't expect it." They described an incident in which a student's behaviour caught them off guard: "Here was a kid who blew out in class, and I can remember how I had no reason to, but I reacted, not to them, but after I was shaking and I was sweating and I was red."

Educators also identified school culture as dynamic and constantly shifting. In the same way, they identified home, family, and community as areas of flux and reflected on the mostly negative impacts of social media. Participants reported changing dynamics in teacher-student relationships, teacher-parent relationships, and in the general ways that the community perceived and responded to educators, especially in context of social media. Participant 5 elaborated on the ways that social media and society are quick to negatively critique educators without consideration to the increasing demands and responsibilities of the profession. They explained that although teachers are mandated to engage in lessons and conversations about weighty topics such as "global issues, social problems, [and] sexuality", perceived missteps are met with seemingly hasty and reactive responses in person, by email, and aired on social media in a "zero to ten" way (Participant 5).

Discussion

The findings of this study substantiate and confirm current understandings about status of educator well-being around the world including stressors and protective factors, coping strategies and self-care practices. The findings of this study suggest that educators perceive their well-being as a dynamic state that is consistently impacted by fluctuating and seemingly unpredictable factors and/or events. Collectively, these findings confirm the importance of prioritizing educator social-emotional health and provide insights about how to develop and sustain educator well-being.

Educators in this study reported overall experiences of poor well-being, low resilience, high levels of compassion fatigue, and high levels of emotional exhaustion. These findings are consistent with the results of other studies that have found low levels of teacher-specific well-being (Hascher & Waber, 2021) and resilience (Beltman, 2021), as well as high levels of compassion fatigue (Borntrager et al., 2012; Koenig et al., 2018) and emotional exhaustion (Iancu et al., 2018; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Wigford & Higgins, 2019). Participants also reported experiencing ongoing stressors related to supporting student learning and well-being, overseeing classroom environments, navigating limited community-based resources and supports, and managing increasing administrative demands and functions.

Educator experiences of compromised well-being was especially true for female participants, who reported higher levels of stress and emotional exhaustion relative to their male colleagues. Women's stress experiences often are exacerbated by their roles as primary care providers and the competing demands of navigating work and family responsibilities (Milkie et al., 2021; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Within the teaching profession, female educators are more likely to experience career insecurity and/or interruptions, hold part-time and/or contractual positions, and complete teaching-related activities in the home than are male educators (Conley & Jenkins, 2011). Participants in this study emphasized the importance of boundaries for well-being. Educators elaborated on the importance of separating their personal and professional lives, while at the same time acknowledging the interconnectivities and intersections across the two domains. Educators appeared particularly aware of how work-related stressors and demands threatened to negatively impact their personal and family lives, reflecting that educators need to be intentional and mindful in separating the two domains.

Educators in this study were especially cognizant of being directly, and in many cases, immediately impacted by students' in-the-moment learning, behavioural and social-emotional successes and challenges. In these ways, participants presented themselves as responsive and sensitive to their immediate environments including student psychological and social well-being experiences, consistent with previous international research indicating the direct impacts of student well-being on educator well-being (Klusmann et al., 2016; Reupert, 2020).

Participants in this study reiterated teaching as a relational profession (Hogan, S. L., 2019; Klassen et al., 2012). They described deriving a deep sense of fulfillment, purpose, and pleasure from positively working with students and their families. At the same time, they expressed distress related to problematic and confrontational interactions with these same individuals. Indeed, student and parent problem behaviours were identified as primary stressors, with some educators reporting concerns related to escalating instances of disrespect, violence, and aggression. These reports mirror those forwarded by teachers within the same province over fifteen years ago, with female educators reporting greater instances of victimization than their male colleagues (Younghusband, 2009). Globally, educators are increasingly subjected to acts of hostility,

intimidation, and harassment ranging from insults, name-calling, destruction of property, and threats of physical violence (Berlanda et al., 2019; Burns et al., 2020; Reddy et al., 2013). Within the profession, victimization is associated with increased stress and compromised sense of well-being, with educators reporting a range of resulting physical and social-emotional symptoms including fear, impaired professional and personal relationships, low self-efficacy, and burnout (Reddy et al., 2013).

Educators in this study were similarly impacted by the behaviours of their colleagues and administrators. Participants described interactions with colleagues and administrators as double-edged, sometimes providing support and encouragement while other times promoting a sense of discontentment, negativity, and even hostility. They described efforts to disengage and/or avoid interactions with their colleagues in the absence of a nurturing and supportive school culture. For instance, some participants spoke about consciously avoiding shared spaces, such as staff rooms, in an effort to avoid potential negative interactions with peers to sustain their well-being. In the same way, participants discussed the importance of having supportive administrators who affirmed their decisions and actions. Equally important, educators discussed the importance of being able to share their experiences and concerns with their school leaders without fear of negative appraisal and/or judgement. Administrators, in turn, emphasized the lack of resources and supports available to themselves and the resulting sense of isolation and stress. These experiences and behaviours mirror previous findings demonstrating that collaborative, respectful, and supportive collegial relationships are associated with lower educator stress and enhanced sense of well-being (Collie et al., 2016), whereas interpersonal conflict and factionalism are associated with elevated stress experiences (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014).

Finally, participants identified the role of community on their sense of well-being and reflected on stressors related to their community interactions and societal positionings. Educators were especially sensitive to negative critiques levied at their profession and/or individual teachers. Specifically, participants demonstrated heightened awareness of how their actions could be interpreted and represented, or more concerningly misinterpreted and misrepresented, by critical others including community members and the media. Increasingly educators are portrayed negatively in traditional and social media, with teachers being held accountable for poor student performance, decline in educational standards, and lack of educational reform with relatively little meaningful attention focused on the challenges and constraints associated with the profession (Alhamdan et al., 2014; Shine & O'Donoghue, 2013).

Educators in this study were not passive recipients to these stressors and reported using a variety of coping strategies. The majority of participants reporting use of either emotion-focused and/or problem-focused coping strategies most of the time. Participants who were able to positively reframe experiences and avoid self-blame and substance abuse reported higher levels of well-being. These findings substantiate previous international research that use of adaptive coping strategies promotes sense of well-being and resilience (Amponsah et al., 2020; Cancio et al., 2018; Martin & Marsh, 2008; Shen, 2009).

Although the reported use of maladaptive coping strategies such as behavioural disengagement, self-distraction, and venting was relatively low, increased use of these strategies was collectively associated with lower levels of well-being and increased stress, compassion fatigue, and emotional exhaustion. Participants who increasingly engaged in self-distraction and denial reported higher perceived stress levels and higher levels of compassion fatigue, with those reporting greater use of venting also reporting higher perceived stress levels. These reports support previous findings that educators use of maladaptive coping strategies is associated with

a poorer sense of well-being, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress (Harmsen et al., 2018; Stapleton, et al., 2020).

Limitations

The methodology used here has several limitations. Data collected was limited to self-reported measures, either as attained through online surveys or group-based discussions. Self-reporting may be associated with response bias resulting from either the erroneous interpretation of survey items or the intentional misrepresentation of self (social desirability). In addition, individual voices and views may be lost or difficult to attain within a focus-group format where select voices may dominate, and alternative or minority views be swayed by the majority viewpoint. Finally, focus groups may not allow participants with the opportunity to deeply deconstruct lived experiences to the same extent as individual interviews.

Participants were recruited from a single province at point in time where several extreme weather events resulted in major disruptions in individuals' professional and personal lives. Additionally, part of the data collection period extended over the winter break when educators typically take a break from school-related tasks. The timing of the survey and the poor weather conditions likely contributed to the participation rate. Participants who volunteered to engage in this study may have powerful experiences and/or strong beliefs and opinions related to their personal well-being and/or well-being with the profession, raising potential questions about representation. As a result, these findings should be interpreted with some caution.

Other limitations include the exclusion of moderating factors such as classroom size, student learning needs, teaching environment, and remuneration. Similarly, exploration of educator social-cultural backgrounds was not explored here. Social cultural factors, such as norms, values, language, techniques, and previous knowledge are increasing recognized as important to both students' and educators' lived experiences in schools (Dieumegard, et al., 2021) but this study did not examine these factors. Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings of this study align with previous global research and confirm teaching as a stressful profession and add to our understanding of individual, school-based, and community-based factors that enhance or impede educator sense of well-being.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study provide some encouraging implications for practice. As it was found that teachers and administrators who engaged more in problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies evidenced greater well-being, it may be worthwhile to provide orientation and professional development sessions that focus on knowledge-based or cognitive-behavioral interventions to teach educators how to cope effectively with stress. For example, providing programs that focus explicitly on encouraging adaptive coping strategies and discouraging maladaptive coping strategies may be effective in increasing teacher and administrator well-being (see von der Embse et al., 2019 for a review of intervention programs).

In the same way, the findings of this study support the provision of professional development opportunities for the prevention and management of emotional exhaustion and compassion fatigue. Koenig et al (2018) found that a two-hour workshop that focused on educator burnout, compassion fatigue, and self-care evidenced some short-term benefits for participants. Iancu and colleagues (2018) found that cognitive behavioural interventions that enhance employee stress

coping strategies and professional development activities that focus on mindfulness and relaxation techniques significantly reduce educator emotional exhaustion, with ongoing programs of one to three months being more efficacious than one-time workshops or activities.

The findings of this study also add further evidence to support the call from some researchers to integrate strategies designed to build resilience into teacher education programs (Mansfield et al., 2016; Spurgeon & Thompson, 2018). For example, both the *BRiTE* (Mansfield et al., 2016) and the *Rooted in Resilience* frameworks (Spurgeon & Thompson, 2018) advocated for the inclusion of specific courses, teaching and learning strategies, and experiential educational opportunities that focus on healthy relationships, teacher well-being, educator motivation, and social and emotional competence in teacher education.

This study also has implications for school board members and policy makers. This study contributes to a growing evidence base that highlights the pervasive nature of teacher and school administrator stress, the insufficient coping strategies employed by many educators in the schools, and the collective toll taken on teachers' and school administrators' well-being. Thus, although it may be possible to design and implement individual-level psychological intervention programs to help educators promote adaptive coping strategies, the results of this study also suggest that long-lasting structural changes may also be required. Consistent with previous research, participants highlighted various contextual factors that contributed to their increased stress and decreased well-being (e.g. school climate, administrative support, school locations; Borman & Dowling, 2008). The findings of this study suggest that school policies and structures be reviewed and modified to ensure teachers' need for relatedness (e.g. teacher and school administrator mentoring programs, peer-support networks), autonomy (e.g. providing greater flexibility regarding pedagogical and assessment methods employed) and support (e.g. teacher advocacy, education of the public on teacher roles, and meeting educators' psychological needs; Klassen et al., 2012) so as to reduce teacher stress, increase adaptive coping strategies, and increase well-being.

Conclusion

In sum, participants reported holding a repertoire of self-care and coping strategies including boundary-setting, avoiding stressful environments, finding helpful support systems, and using physical exercise to decrease stress and increase well-being. For participants here, well-being required attention to physically and psychological health, self-care, and care for others. Being well included positive interactions with others including colleagues, administrators, students, and families and deeply and authentically delighting in their work in schools and for schools.

At the same time, educators recognized that they are unable to avoid or change all stressors nor were they always able to access relevant assistance and/or resources. Participants recognized stressors as complex, interactive, and differentially impactful, influencing some educators and school environments more than others. They described these factors as "ripples" that move around and through educators, effect behaviour, and are often interpreted at an emotional level. These factors were perceived as dynamic versus static or stationary, capable of shifting, changing, and being changed.

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