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RESEARCH ARTICLE



A Systematic Literature Review on Factors of Stress, Burnout and Job Satisfaction of Secondary Grades Teachers at Time of Professional Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Internationally and in the United States, teachers are leaving the profession in an expedited rate resulting in a teacher shortage. This systematic literature review synthesizes empirical literature to identify current characteristics or factors related to stress, job satisfaction and burnout for secondary general education teachers. Four themes are developed from examination: stress factors, job satisfaction, teacher burnout, and teachers' intent to remain in the profession. Within the identified themes, four subthemes are also developed: administration effect or relationship on teacher burnout, policy on teachers, new teachers vs. veteran teachers, and leavers and stayers. The factors presented from this review could support future research in developing new approaches to prevent teacher turnover and promote instead teacher retention in schools.

KEYWORDS

Stress, burnout, job satisfaction, career, secondary education, teacher

Introduction

Internationally, about 20%-25% of teachers report experiencing high levels of stress in their profession (McCarthy 2019). In the United States, teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate with about 50% nationally considering about leaving (Poll 2019). Due to teacher turnover, boomer-generation retirements, stress of teachers from occupational burnout and low job satisfaction, there is a countrywide shortage of instructors (U.S. Department of Education and Office of Postsecondary Education 2015; Klassen and Chiu 2010). Job burnout happens when an individual becomes mentally and physically exhausted as a result of work pressure (Yu et al. 2015). In addition to current teachers experiencing high levels of stress, about 19-30% of new teachers entering the field leave the profession within the first 5 years (McCarthy 2019; Kraft and Papay 2014). Factors in the past associated new teachers' dissatisfaction in the profession as salary, student discipline issues, poor administrative support, and low student motivation (Ingersoll and Smith 2003). Previously, government policy and administration focused on recruiting teachers, not how

to keep teachers in the schools (Ingersoll and Smith 2003). Currently, there is not a common understanding of the major factors contributing to teacher stress specifically in secondary teachers. Most research conducted spotlights all teachers with additional non-teaching faculty of school personnel. Thus, to better understand this phenomenon and determine avenues for future research projects, we aim to answer the following research question: *What are the identified current characteristics or factors related to stress, job satisfaction and burnout for secondary education teachers?*

To supplement the current body of research, a systematic literature review methodology was utilized to gain knowledge on what research in the past 10 years informs on teacher stress, burnout, and teachers' intent to remain in the field. The field of teacher education benefits from this study with an attempt to focus on specific subjects and excluding non-core subject studies. The current study draws upon current research to identify what factors contribute the most to stress, burnout, and job satisfaction in math, science, english, and history. The research also seeks to address

what factors contribute to retention and contribute to a teacher's intent for remaining in the profession in contrast to why teachers have left the field. This research sought to determine the best ways to support teachers to stay in the profession in order to benefit students, schools, and the community.

Methods

For this study, we conducted a systematic literature review using a strategic process of obtaining articles from chosen databases by search terms which coincide with the research question.

Database selection and search keywords

The databases chosen for this synthesis were ERIC EBSCO, ProQuest, Web of Science and Scopus. To stay current in research, articles were chosen for the study only if published from the past ten years (January 2011-October 2021). Using limiters to exclude any articles not peer-reviewed or from prior to January 2011, ("stress" OR "burnout" OR "satisfaction") AND ("secondary education" OR "middle school" OR "high school") AND (factor* OR influen*) AND (teach*) were searched in the databases. The given terms were chosen specifically with respect to the research question.

Article screening based on inclusion criteria

This synchronized search yielded 262 articles from Scopus, 462 articles from Web of Science, 686 articles from ERIC, and 696 articles from ProQuest with a total of 2,106 articles. First, the results were downloaded into separate spreadsheets for each database given different formatting. The 2,106 titles and abstracts were first considered for deletion of studies that were focused solely on educator populations and subject disciplines outside of the research question of this study. We eliminated studies that focused on any subject outside of the general subjects of mathematics, science, English, social studies or history. Studies were eliminated that focused solely on the population of elementary or primary grades teachers, special education teachers, preservice teachers, or administrators.

After the initial title/abstract screening process for obvious deletions, 1,630 articles remained from Scopus (237), Web of Science (406), ERIC (465), and ProQuest (522) (see Figure 1). Following obvious initial eliminations, we began an inclusion process with Abstracts and Titles. The abstract or titles of articles remaining had an inclusion criterion of stress, satisfaction, burnout and career. Concluding the inclusion process yielded a remaining balance of 1,332 articles from

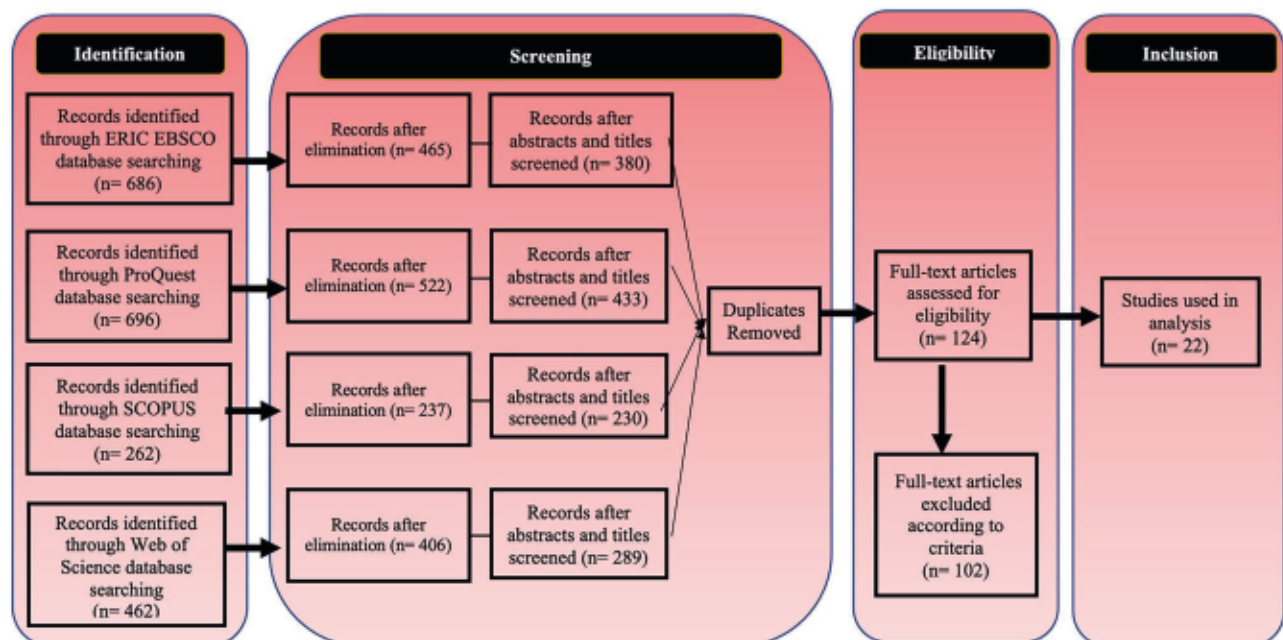


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of screening process.

Scopus (230), Web of Science (289), ERIC (380), and ProQuest (433).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for abstract/title and text analysis

Databases were combined into one spreadsheet at this point and duplicates were removed, leaving 993 unique articles. Abstracts and titles were individually read and screened based on these specific criteria related to the research question: (1) The participants were from the U.S., (2) the participants did not include students, (3) the article focused on stress factors, job satisfactions factors, or teachers' intent to remain factors and (4) participants were either all secondary teachers (e.g. instructional faculty) or if participants were specific to one of the four core academic subjects of mathematics, science, English, social studies or history. This process resulted in 124 articles to consider for full-text analyses. With the restriction of focusing on work from the past 10 years and using articles with U.S participants only, it's important to note the possibility of work contributing to the field being excluded from this systematic literature review. Articles were excluded from the final analysis that focused on survey validation, instead of utilizing surveys to extract factors associated with teacher attrition, satisfaction, and persistence. After completion of elimination, inclusion, abstract and titles reads, and full-text reads, 22 articles emerged as meeting all

criteria to answer the research question. A PRISMA diagram of the screening process can be found in Figure 1. Following the editing phase, a choice was made to incorporate the COVID-19 pandemic within the search criteria spanning from 2019 to 2023, from the original chosen databases. It is important to note that the same rigorous inclusion and exclusion measures, outlined previously, were upheld. The study was enriched with the addition of five journal articles that meet the aforementioned criteria. The findings from these articles will be presented as a subheading in the results section.

Results

Coding qualifying articles

To assist with our synthesis of the given work a coding process was performed. Articles were fully read and coded based on the specific criteria, with results as shown in Figure 2. Articles were coded for the subject focus, the instrument used to gather data, what lenses were used to cause stress, what was the focus of the study, what grade levels were studied and how large was the sample size of participants. Results from the coding process assisted in the development of headings and sub-headings to synthesize the literature.

Teachers' intent to remain in the field was the focus of 10 out of the 22 articles. Sub-headings were developed based off the main theme which

Coding Criteria Tables						
Core subject of the study?	Math= 0	Science= 2	STEM= 1	History= 0	English=0	Core Subjects=4
N/A= 15						
What instrument or mechanism was used to measure factors related to the study?	Interview=2					
Survey=18 Observations=1 Questionnaire= 4						
What caused the stress of teachers?	Technology= 1	Administration= 2	Policy/Curriculum= 2			
General= 17						
What was the focus of study?	Burnout= 4	Job Satisfaction= 7	Stress= 5			
Teacher's Intent to Remain Teaching= 10						
What was the grade level studied?						
What was the sample size of the participants?						

Figure 2. Frequency count based on coding criteria.

can be identified in the findings. Prior to a synthesis of the research article findings, contextual features of the literature were compiled and are presented in Tables 1–3. These tables assist the reader in developing a scope of the highlights of the last ten years of research, as well as implications of future research. Following contextual features, we expound on the remaining findings in literature with a discussion of limitations and inferences for future research.

Contextual features

The following tables assist with an understanding of which contextual features were emphasized in the studies. Tables 1–3 draw out notable components for consideration in the discussion. Table 1 reveals the majority of the articles (19 out of 22) used Likert type surveys, open-ended surveys/questionnaires, or a survey with mixed question types to gather data, report findings, and draw conclusions. The remaining methods of data

Table 1. Types of data collection used in studies.

Data Collection Method	Article Counts	
	N=	%
Surveys	19	86
Interviews	3	14
Observations	1	5

Note: N=22 Percentages exceed 100% due to studies overlapping methods of data collection methods.

Table 2. School subjects taught by participant secondary teachers.

Subject Teaching	Article Counts	
	N=	%
Mathematics	0	0
Science	2	9
STEM	1	5
Social Studies/History	0	0
English	0	0
Multiple Subjects	4	18
Not Stated	15	68

Note: N=22 studies.

Table 3. Types of grade bands included in studies.

Grade Band of Teachers Studied	Percentage of Articles	
	N=	%
Elementary/Middle Grades	1	5
Middle Grades	2	9
High School	2	9
Secondary Grades	6	27
K-12 Grades	2	9
Not Stated	9	41

Note: N=22 studies.

collection utilized observations and interviews. Table 2 reveals the statistical results of which subjects were used in research. Of the 22 articles, 68% (15/22) did not explicitly include the teachers' teaching disciplines in the studies. When the teaching subjects were presented, they included the core teaching subjects of mathematics, science, English, social studies or History in some combination. But there were no studies specifically addressing teachers of mathematics, history and English in isolation. Lastly, Table 3 centers on the grade levels of the teachers studied that included secondary grades in some fashion, but those studies that were not specified explicitly about grade level. The nine studies not explicit of their grade level utilized the national School and Staffing survey, which yielded results from 40,000+ elementary and secondary teachers. With this size of a sample, we decided to add these results to the overall analysis. Similar to the importance of subjects, grade levels were not the motivation for research due to 41% of the studies not mentioning grade level. Secondary grades (i.e., middle, high) were the highest studied grade level in the past 10 years with 45% (cumulative middle grades, high school, and secondary).

Job satisfaction

The review of literature reveals job satisfaction is associated with burnout and stress of teachers in the teaching profession. Job satisfaction is defined as the degree in which individuals feel positively or negatively toward their job, as well if their profession offers fulfillment of a personal need or want (Sunal, Sunal, and Yasin 2011). Song and Mustafa (2015) investigated the factors impacting science teachers. Their findings suggest teachers who worked in smaller schools were more satisfied in their career than teachers in larger schools. Their findings also suggest the importance of support for the enacted curriculum was directly related to a teacher's satisfaction (McConnell 2017). Teachers believed their impact in the classroom was maintained when given the appropriate autonomy in the curriculum.

Wang et al. (2020) found similar results when investigating teacher's job satisfaction. They discovered, when investigating teacher turnover,

teachers had higher levels of job satisfaction when working in small towns, compared to rural school. Rural teachers faced challenges such as transportation issues and community interaction. Rural schools were identified as cities with populations of 1,000 or less, while small towns deemed a population of 3,001-15,000 people. Their findings also suggest the highest indicators of job satisfaction are teacher's curricular autonomy, relationships with students, teacher self-efficacy, and classroom climate (Renbarger and Davis 2019; Wang et al. 2020). K-12 online teachers were also found to have an overall satisfaction with teaching in part to their overall belief in their school's mission, ideals, and institutional support, which correlated to less stress (Larkin, Brantley-Dias, and Lokey-Vega 2016). The following sub-themes were revealed when further investigating the analysis of teacher's job satisfaction.

Administrators' effect or relationship on teacher job satisfaction

Researchers infer a school's administration has direct effects on the job satisfaction of teachers. Shen et al. (2012) studied how principal's backgrounds relate to teacher job satisfaction, in addition the importance of school context features, such as location, student demographics, and resources relates to satisfaction. The findings imply an administration with previous experience as department heads lowered job satisfaction, while principals who were previously athletic directors resulted in higher job satisfaction which is a very interesting finding in itself discussed later. School influence, class control, positive student behavior, and administrative support all have a positive effect on teacher job satisfaction. Administrators had an impact on job satisfaction, but school characteristics had a greater effect overall, which may be viewed as an indirect effect of administration leadership.

Policy on teachers

Policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) enacted in 2001 mark the beginning of federal accountability in schools displayed with state-level standards and assessments (Coburn, Hill, and Spillane 2016). Wronowski and Urick (2018)

investigated teacher's perceptions of accountability and assessment policies and their influence on job satisfaction. Their findings state teachers' perception of policies lowered their influence and control over curriculum, de-professionalized teaching, as well as increased stress when focusing on test scores and student motivation that demoralized teaching performance. Their results suggest teacher's dissatisfaction in policies leads to an intent to leave their current teaching position. Teachers later in their careers factored such policies in their decision to change school systems or professions as compared to mid-career teachers.

Wright et al. (2018) also discusses the influence of policies to teacher's satisfaction. They call the education atmosphere post-NCLB as the *Race to the Top* era. From their research they discovered as minority teachers and students increased, pedagogical autonomy and job satisfaction decreased. They also stated how job satisfaction overall has decreased after the implementation of NCLB.

Teacher burnout

Teacher burnout has long been defined as the failing, wearing out, or exhaustion due to the excessive demands on energy or resources (Freudenberger, 1974). Researchers identify burnout as the leading cause of teacher turnover. Russell et al. (2020) studied secondary educators who taught AP classes and found years of experience as the leading factor related to burnout among teachers. O'Brennan, Pas, and Bradshaw (2017) also studied burnout among a group of teachers in Maryland and discovered burnout decreased when personal connectedness to their school, students and administration was higher. Burnout was low for staffers who reports efficacy in handling students and felt safe at their school (O'Brennan, Pas, and Bradshaw 2017). Burnout was higher in schools with high suspension rates, where teachers had issues handling students with disruptive behavior. The number of students, free-reduced meals, urbanicity, perceptions of school orderliness and positive behavioral interventions and support (PBIS) status were not significantly related to burnout. Bottiani et al. (2019) last found teacher sensitivity, checking on students' emotional needs, assist in higher levels of burnout in teachers.

New teachers vs. veteran teachers

Literature reveals the differencing relationship to burnout on novice and veteran teachers. Novice teachers are identified as having less than five years of experience, while veteran teachers are individuals with five years or more (Fisher 2011). In her research of secondary school teachers, Fisher found the causes of teachers' stress and burnout. Years of experience were found to significantly correlate with stress, but not to significantly correlate with burnout. Even while the study was unable to show a connection between years of experience and burnout, stress and burnout did have a substantial positive link. In contrast, O'Brennan, Pas, and Bradshaw (2017) discovered that levels of burnout were positively connected with years of experience. These two research studies suggest educators in the field four years or longer can have higher levels of burnout than their colleagues teaching three years or fewer.

Stress factors

Stress, burnout, and job satisfaction are intermingled throughout articles analyzed in this study. Additional findings from Fisher (2011) found factors of stress and burnout were significant indicators of job satisfaction. Years of experience, age, job satisfaction, self-acceptance (self-efficacy), and burnout all significantly correlated to stress. When studying urban schools, Bottaini et al. (2019) found stress in teachers increased when instructional dialogue, the exchange and engagement of students' higher order thinking through open-ended questions and building on student discourse, decreased.

When looking into urban school stress factors, Johnson (2011) found that lack of support from the administration, a school's student body size, the lack of support for classroom management training and discipline techniques, time management, and the teaching load as the main stress factors for teachers. According to Bottaini et al. (2019) findings, student disruptive behaviors were strongly connected with stress and burnout in urban middle schools. Teachers' stress levels decreased as classroom resources and self-efficacy rose.

Teachers' intent to remain in the profession

Numerous researchers have studied the effects of job satisfaction, teacher burnout and stress and its association with teacher's intent to remain in the profession. McConnell (2017) researched teachers' intentions to remain in STEM education. The findings suggest teacher's satisfaction with their salary as the highest impact on the decision to stay in teaching. Additional factors found in their study included teacher autonomy, years of experience, students' family socioeconomic status, and administration support. To remain in the field, administrative support and teacher autonomy were significant, but not as significant as the satisfaction of one's salary in teaching STEM disciplines.

Pogodzinski et al. (2012) analyzed teacher's intent to remain in the field with respect to teachers' administrative climate. From their research, new teachers are more willing to remain in teaching if given proper resources. In contrast, teachers are more likely to change schools when they deem the administrative climate as poor. However, teachers' perceptions of their administration climate are more significant in them remaining in the field than having adequate resources. You and Conley (2015) noted in their study of secondary teachers in different stages of their career, that mid-career teachers' intent to leave the profession is directly affected by their perception of administrative support.

Leavers and stayers

Researchers examined characteristics that contribute to instructors who have previously left the profession while investigating teachers' aspirations to continue in the field. Cuddapah et al. (2011) studied why persons who had previously held jobs abandoned teaching. They monitored 154 master's program graduates and published their findings. According to their findings, 27% of instructors wanted to continue teaching, but the primary reasons for quitting the field were pregnancy/childbearing and taking another post in education, both of which had a proportion of 32.5%. According to survey results, the most common reasons for quitting the profession

(20.8%) were to return to school to enhance education in teaching.

Another prominent study analyzed beginning teachers' decision to stay or leave the field (Hong and others 2012). The researcher conducted interviews on fourteen secondary science teachers. Half the teachers stayed in the profession while the other half left. Two out of seven left for family reasons, the remaining left because of difficulties and dissatisfaction of work as a teacher. Teachers who made a career change also associated emotional burnout as a main factor for their decision to leave. In contrast, Hong found teachers that continued in the field were able to draw an emotional line between the students and themselves. Stayers were also associated with strong administration support as previously found, which built self-efficacy as a factor for remaining. Cha & Cohen-Voyal (2011) studied why teachers quit the profession and found teachers who stayed had a higher base salary than ones who left.

COVID-19 pandemic's effect on teacher job satisfaction, stress, and burnout

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe, the impact on various sectors, including education, has been a topic of great concern since 2019. One significant area of study has been the effect of COVID-19 on teacher stress, job satisfaction, and burnout. Researcher Pressley (2021) studied the effects and influence the pandemic had on teacher burnout. From their study, they identified the highest factors for teacher burnout included COVID anxiety, current teaching anxiety, anxiety communicating with parents, and administrative support for teachers.

Additional studies such as Chang, Gaines, and Mosley (2022) aimed to investigate the effects of autonomy support and emotion regulation on teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main findings of this study suggest that both autonomy support and emotion regulation strategies are important factors in reducing teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed a significant relationship between autonomy support from school administrators and effective emotion regulation strategies with

reduced burnout among teachers. These findings emphasize the value of providing resources to help teachers handle their emotions and maintain control over their work, particularly during times of crisis. Herman et al. (2021) examined the relationship between instructional practices following the COVID-19 pandemic and teacher well-being measures. The study found that teachers who reported higher levels of stress related to online instruction also reported lower levels of well-being. However, teachers who reported higher levels of coping strategies related to online instruction also reported higher levels of well-being. These findings suggest that schools and districts need to provide supportive environments and instructional guidance to ease anxiety around instruction and to influence teacher efficacy.

Baker et al. (2021) used a sample of 454 urban public charter teachers in New Orleans to describe the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' mental health, coping, and ability to teach. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced various stressors related to their safety and that of their students and families. Nonetheless, they utilized different coping methods like seeking social support and engaging in self-care activities. Additionally, Black educators experienced more stressors compared to their White counterparts, which necessitates specialized support for them (Farinde and Fitchett 2018). Lastly, Kotowski, Davis, and Barratt (2022) discussed the stressors faced by teachers who returned to classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically COVID-19-related anxiety about teaching demands, administration support and teaching demands. The findings suggest that schools and districts need to provide emotional, instructional and technological support to teachers throughout the school year to limit burnout.

Additional findings

Other characteristics, such as gender, instructor demographics, and online instruction, were discovered in the literature but did not correspond with the previously described themes. Multiple studies revealed that white teachers were more prone to burnout than black teachers, yet white instructors were less likely to leave the profession.

Furthermore, females were more likely than males to feel burnout and stress (Bottiani et al. 2019; O'Brennan, Pas, and Bradshaw 2017). While men are less likely to experience burnout, they are more likely to change occupations or stop teaching altogether (You and Conley 2015).

When analyzing alternatively certified (ALT-C) teachers, Schonfeld and Feinman (2012) found ALT-C teachers are most likely to have difficulties with their administration. Their findings also suggest ALT-C teachers have higher classroom management issues and are more likely to work in federal defined high-needs schools. Lastly, while ALT-C teachers are more likely to be white, black teachers have overall fewer job-related issues than white or Asian teachers. Overall, there are many themes, common findings, and unique findings within our studies related to our research question.

Discussion

This review of research revealed multiple components to attribute to teacher stress, job satisfaction, and burnout. The main factors identified ranked (most to least) based on literature evidence were administration support, student behavior, teacher autonomy, and satisfaction of salary. Administration support had the highest correlation to burnout and job satisfaction, while student behavior and classroom management skills related to stress and eventually burnout. Administration support having the highest relationship on burnout and job satisfaction implicates the importance of the administration identifying mechanisms to support teachers and support teachers' classroom autonomy (Hong and others 2012; Johnson 2011; O'Brennan, Pas, and Bradshaw 2017; Pogodzinski et al. 2012; Pressley 2021; Schonfeld and Feinman 2012; You and Conley 2015).

Administration also had a relationship to teacher job satisfaction based on how they developed into their position (Shen et al. 2012). We surmise that subject department heads who moved into administration very well may do so to remain out of the classroom given poor experiences as a teacher. While it is possible that athletic directors who later moved into administration, like to lead but not overstep in curricular

decisions and provide more subject teaching autonomy to teachers. What can be concluded in the 22 studies we examined, school and district administrators ultimately make up the most predominant reason teachers leave the school or profession given that even curricular autonomy for teachers tended to be related to administration support (or not).

From our research on the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in teachers' job stress, burnout, and anxiety. Every study suggests the need for schools to provide emotional or instructional support to teachers (Baker et al. 2021; Chang, Gaines, and Mosley 2022; Herman et al. 2021; Kotowski, Davis, and Barratt 2022; Pressley 2021). Additional supported included technology, clear communication, and protocols to help teachers feel safe in schools. Also, telehealth options for anxiety, mental health days, and support for communication with parents. Providing teachers with autonomy support and resources to manage their emotions and maintain a sense of control over their work during times of crisis can reduce burnout. All of the authors also noted the need for further research to truly explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' job satisfaction, efficacy, and burnout.

Research further highlights demographical and career features that assist in satisfaction, burnout, or stress such as gender, certification, and years of experience. Females overall experience higher levels of stress, but males are more likely to leave the profession. This is not an unexpected finding as it directly relates to the historical development in K-12 of the teaching profession in the U.S. since females have long been the most prevalent gender in the profession. Additionally, alternatively certified teachers and new teachers are more likely to experience burnout quicker, resulting in them leaving the field which has been demonstrated by the 19-30% rate at which early career teachers leave the profession before five years of experience (McCarthy 2019; Kraft and Papay 2014). Our findings in the literature suggest a strong induction program for new and alternatively certified teachers is critical, yet that finding has long been known (Schonfeld and Feinman 2012).

This review exposes strong gaps in research which encourage an update on exploration of

stress, burnout, and job satisfaction of teachers. Contextual features mentioned in the beginning of the findings reveal a lack of focus as it relates to specific school teaching subjects. Another observation from contextual features exposes the overuse of secondhand survey research. For example, 9 out of the 22 articles utilized the School and Staffing Survey from 2007-08. While incorporating a survey with over 40,000+ participants is beneficial, the findings revealed may not be considered current over a decade later. Limitations such as using old records implicate a strong suggestion of gathering new data, with emphasis on studying Mathematics, Science, English or History teachers specifically to distinguish the differences in burnout, stress, and satisfaction.

With lawmakers and administrators attempting to identify solutions to the teacher shortage and turnover, it is important for researchers to examine factors that lead to teachers leaving the field and those staying in the field. With a teacher shortage as a focal point today and the addition of the pandemic related matters, there is a major call for strong research as necessary. This review emphasizes the current status of where research stands on stress, burnout, and job satisfaction of teachers while addressing the need for further research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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