

# Contributing Factors of Job Burnout among School Teachers in Kelantan

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## Abstract

This research explores job burnout among secondary school teachers in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. It aims to understand the contributing factors and dimensions of burnout. Using qualitative methods like interviews and observation, data was gathered from ten teachers. Findings reveal multifaceted burnout factors. Excessive workload, including counseling and administrative tasks, is a major contributor. Limited social support from administrators and colleagues leads to emotional exhaustion and detachment from students. Inadequate school environments and facilities also contribute to stress and fatigue. In conclusion, addressing these issues is vital to alleviate burnout. Enhancing support, fostering a positive work environment, and offering professional development can improve teacher well-being and education quality. Addressing these factors is crucial for sustainable teacher well-being and effective education in secondary schools.

## Introduction

### *Background of The Study*

The importance of the education system as a catalyst for a knowledgeable and ethical society cannot be denied. To realize a well-rounded society, the aspect of education must be prioritized. Following that, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has introduced the Malaysia Education Development Plan (2020-2025) which emphasizes the need for students to master various cognitive skills in addition to focusing on multiple intelligences (D'Amico, et al., 2022). Teaching career is especially important, and it is a professional career that plays a role in producing a bright, victorious and honorable next generation (Lortie, 2020). However, there is no denying that a teaching career is also a field that often faces pressure. As we know, the duties and responsibilities of a teacher are not only teaching, educating, and guiding but even more than that. They have the biggest role in supervising discipline and controlling the moral balance of students. In addition to teaching, teachers must carry out various other tasks that have become routine in their work, such as working as a clerk in handling side matters such

as student textbooks, student welfare affairs, student associations and club accounts, student sports and cooperatives (Higton, et al., 2017).

### **Problem Statement**

Individuals who always deal with human beings as their customers, such as teachers, are more likely to face stress (Ozamiz-Extebarria, et al., 2021). Studies have shown that the teaching profession ranks fourth in high-stress careers after police, prison officers and nurses while the military profession ranks fifth. Today, teachers are faced with multiple and complex demands that can be burdensome and stressful for teachers. According to Maajida Aafreen, et al. (2018), excessive stress can negatively affect human psychology, physiology, and behavior. Workplace wellbeing is related to teachers' moods or emotions.

Stress involves subjective feelings which in the initial stages are well accepted within oneself and over time become triggers for various mental illnesses and result in environmental changes and interactions. Work-related stress refers to the tasks that teachers need to perform that can cause job stress such as preparing for teaching, checking student training, responsibility for students, lessons, and administration and so on (Zafarullah & Pertti, 2017). Stress in the field of education can be defined as an unpleasant experience for a teacher in terms of emotions, such as anxiety, stress, depression, anger, and everything related to aspects of work as a teacher. Harmsen, et al. (2018) defines teacher work stress as an experience that teachers have in relation to unpleasant emotions. In conclusion, teacher job stress can be defined as the physical and mental state of teachers caused by disrupting events or conditions in their work environment (Haydon, et al., 2018).

Psychological well-being is multidimensional and defined in many different ways (Marsh, et al., 2020). Although in general, there is no single definition, there is general agreement among scholars that a psychologically wellbeing individual should have positive moods and emotions (Di Renzo, et al., 2020; Guerra-Bustamante, et al., 2019). According to Burges and Foncesca (2020), psychological well-being can be defined as an individual's ability to cope with stress, avoid conflict, and promote calmness. According to the Fourth Edition of the Chamber Dictionary, well-being means security, pleasure in life, happiness, and peace. While psychology means a person's mindset and behavior

### **Research Objective**

This study is intended to find out the answer for "What are the contributing factors to job burnout among teachers in a secondary school in Kota Bharu, Kelantan?"

### **Literature Review**

#### *Psychological Well-Being Among Teachers*

Camacho, et al. (2018) defines teacher stress as the experience of teachers in dealing with unpleasant negative emotions such as anger, frustration, anxiety, depression, and fear caused by some aspects of their work. Liu and Hallinger (2018) asserted that teachers are not only responsible for teaching a large number of students and reviewing students' written work, making workshop work, and developing test questions and examinations, but teachers also need sufficient time to conduct research and work related to administrative management.

Lin, et al. (2020) conducted a study to examine stress in 203 elementary school teachers in Taiwan. Their results revealed that 26 per cent of the respondents were depressed or highly stressed. Frequent changes in education policy by the government and heavy workloads have been identified as major sources of stress. According to Avanzi, et al (2018), he has studied

the effects of stress management, social support, and ways of coping with stress on 24 teachers in Hiroshima and found that social support is important to help teachers overcome stress problems. In 2000, 0.24 per cent of teachers in Japan had to stop their work as teachers due to mental illness. Among the problems teachers face are the school environment, diversity of student behaviour, interpersonal relationships, time pressure, relationships with parents and overwork.

Van der Spoel, et al. (2020) in her paper has stated that the increasing difficulty and complexity of teaching related to students (such as teaching students with varying abilities), workload and irrelevant teacher expectations (such as curriculum changes and expectations) and lack of time, resources, support and respect were identified as causes of high stress among 644 secondary and elementary school teachers in British Columbia. According to Van der Spoel, et al. (2020), the respondents of this study were overburdened with too many tasks and most experienced elevated levels of stress. The issue of job stress among schoolteachers has not only received attention from overseas researchers, but the issue is now a hot topic of discussion among local researchers (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019).

#### *Job Stress Among School Teachers*

A study conducted by Bahaman and Aripin in 2018 among secondary school teachers who were away from their families discovered that these teachers experienced higher levels of job stress as compared to local teachers. The research findings also showed that teachers who are far away from their family exhibited lower levels of job satisfaction as compared to local teachers. Chinese national and national-type schools were surveyed by Kin et al. (2019) for their management's approaches to reducing teachers' job stress. The findings showed that 50 per cent of the respondents were in the non-depressed category and the other 50 per cent were in the depressed condition.

According to Kongcharoen, et al. (2019), research conducted on primary school teachers found that teacher stress is related to interpersonal relationships. The fragility of this interpersonal relationship will eventually cause a teacher to tend to feel frustrated, angry and be in a longer stress phase. Meanwhile, research by Mahipalan and Sheena in 2019 found that more than 50 per cent of schoolteachers had low levels of psychological well-being. The main factor that can be identified is due to excessive workload. This workload dumping has a negative impact because teachers have quit their jobs and are unable to bear the increasing workload.

#### *Job Burnout Among School Teachers*

Huseyin (2018) says that the problem of burnout is especially important in working life because burnout has a negative influence on performance, service quality, increased absenteeism, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and is also related to health problems, namely stress. In addition, Berry Jaeker and Tucker (2017) also adds that saturation is extremely high, can cause a decrease in work productivity and company performance. Workers who have burnout will show signs of dissatisfaction and result in a cynical attitude, difficulty working and bring up arrogant behavior.

Job burnout is a profoundly severe problem, and this situation can interfere with the successful service of the service institution. Maslach (2018) states that there are four reasons why burnout is particularly important to be given attention. First, job saturation affects the morale and psychological well-being of workers. Second, job burnout affects the quality of service and care provided to clients. Third, job saturation has a strong influence on the

functioning of the institution where the worker works. High stages and burnout will result in the failure of the program being run. Fourth, the burnout experienced by service workers is rarely given attention, because they are always expected to be able and alert to provide help to overcome client problems and improve the psychological well-being of clients.

There are many factors that cause the emergence of burnout among teachers. Quoting Maslach (2018), who divides the causes of burnout into two factors, namely work environment factors and personal factors consisting of demographic and personality factors. Furthermore, the research also quoted the opinions of Bakker and Sanz-Vergel (2020) which explain in general that personality and work environment are factors that cause burnout. In addition, Maslach (2018) argues that the causes of burnout when viewed from work environment factors include work overload, organizational policies, lack of social support, lack of appreciation for work, role conflict, role ambiguity, inadequate positive feedback, lack of control, and stress originating from the work environment.

## **Research Methodology**

### *Research Design*

This study uses qualitative research methods. This is because research problems are holistic, complex, and dynamic so that data in tricky situations cannot be collected through quantitative methods such as questionnaires or tests (Yardley & Bishop, 2017). This research will take place in a secondary school, situated at Kota Bharu, Kelantan. Data sources in this study will be selected purposively. Data collection techniques used for this research are focus group interviews, observation and documentation.

### *Research Instrument*

A focus group interview is conducted by gathering a small group of people to answer a set of questions in a moderated setting. The group is chosen based on the predefined criteria that has been designed and decided by the researcher. A set semi-structured interview questions will be created by the researcher and these questions will be asked to the respective respondents. The respondents are then free to discuss their views and thoughts regarding the issue opposed. The questions designed for this focus group interview are aimed to help the researcher to shed light on what are some significant factors that contribute to job burnout among teachers in secondary school. Besides, observation will also be carried out throughout the focus group interview session. Observation is necessary in conducting this study because by observing the participants, the researcher will be able to achieve a higher accuracy of the collected data since the researcher is directly interacting with the participants involved.

### *The Respondents*

The respondents of this study are ten teachers from a secondary school situated in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. The respondents of this study are selected based on the following criteria to ensure the accuracy of the data:

- i. They are currently teaching/ active teachers in the selected school.
- ii. They have been teaching for more than five years in the same school.
- iii. They are willing to cooperate in providing real data for the purpose of this study.

All of the respondents are requested to read and fill up an informed consent form (Appendix A) and all their personal information will be kept private and confidential.

*Data Collection and Data Analysis*

The focus group interview session is recorded and all of the data obtained will then be transcribed for purpose of data analysis. The results obtained will be descriptively and narratively analysed in a thematic format.

*Semi-Structured Interview Protocols*

A semi-structured interview protocols is created for the purpose of data collection for this study. According to Patton (2015), an interview protocol is an instrument of asking questions with to obtain specific information from the respondents related to the aims of a study. A set of semi-structure interview questions is set up for this research. A semi-structured interview is more appropriate for this study because it welcomes more discussion than a straightforward question-and-answer format. There is no certain answer for a semi-structured interview, the respondents will not strictly follow a formalized list of questions, instead more open-ended questions like “why” and “how” will be asked to encourage more in-depth discussions about the topic discussed. This will certainly provide a very rich data to the researcher. The interview protocols of this study are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1.0

<b>Demographic Questions</b>	Name, Age, Gender, Position, Name of the school, Years of Teaching in current school, Teaching subject(s)
<b>Interview Questions</b>	<p>[ANCHOR]</p> <p>How do you feel being a teacher in this school for more than 5 years? Please explain.</p> <p>[POSSIBLE FOLLOW UP]</p> <p>Why did you have such feelings? Please explain.</p> <p>[ANCHOR]</p> <p>Does your current position in the school cause any job burnout to you as a teacher?</p> <p>[POSSIBLE FOLLOW UP]</p> <p>What are some significant issues in the sense of job burnout that you are experiencing from your school? Please tell us more.</p> <p>[ANCHOR]</p> <p>What are the contributing factors of job burnout that you are currently experiencing from your school? Please explain.</p> <p>[POSSIBLE FOLLOW UP]</p> <p>How do you cope with the issue of job burnout as a teacher?</p>

**Qualitative Data Analysis***Emotional Exhaustion*

One of the dimensions of burnout found among the respondents is that teachers experience emotional exhaustion. In performing their duties as teachers, they experience emotional pressures. Teachers are faced with students who are reluctant to be regulated, do not have good ethics in behavior, and excessive workloads such as foster students who exceed standards. Conducting work with a prominent level of complexity that sometimes requires teachers to work overtime and double positions. Sometimes there is a desire to retire soon,

and if there is a chance or opportunity to work elsewhere, the teacher will move. Teachers said:

*"We like our job as teachers, but if there are other opportunities or retirement, we would like to retire. The thing is the students now are vastly different from in the past. Currently the students we face have strange behavior, are disorganized, go to school as they please, have no respect for teachers like a moral crisis. We even feel tired, if we bomb three people a day, it feels very tired and exhausted. And frequently we think about the problem until we get home, why make the children dizzy now".*

This shows that these teachers are fatigue, both physically and emotionally. During the interviews with these teachers, the researchers have found out that the teachers are actually in some dilemmas especially when they share their sensitive personal problems that will affect school's honor. For example, sexuality, violation of rules, family problems, and racism issues and religion issues. The teacher stated:

*"Students who share their stories with us are proud of us because we are the people they trust. They tell us a lot about their dating cases, they fight with their friends, and some of them tell us that they have had an illicit relationship with their girlfriends. This is a dilemma, right? Because as teachers we must be neutral, but on the other hand there are rules that must be followed to expel students who violate the code of ethics. If we tell the principal, the student will be expelled but if we tell the student, the student will not believe us and will hate us, and of course if the student is expelled the student has no future. This certainly makes us feel depressed and confused about what to do. You know, we often face this".*

This condition can be seen that teachers experience emotional pressure, which makes them stressed. The condition of emotional pressure that continues to occur will make teachers experience emotional exhaustion. This fatigue is shown by the teachers' expression that they feel drained of energy or exhausted if they oversee more than three children's problems a day. In addition, teachers sometimes carry students' problems in their minds so that teachers have difficulty sleeping. Another condition faced by teachers is the negative behavior of students such as lack of discipline, skipping classes and smoking in the school environment. Managing this behavior is the teacher's job. The success of the teacher in overseeing this problem is a source of pride for the counselling teacher, but if there is a failure, the counselling teacher will be blamed by the school. This adds to the psychological burden on teachers.

The complexity of the tasks that teachers have makes counseling teachers feel bored at work. The task that teachers also conduct is Home Visit. Where this task requires teachers to come to students' homes with the aim of helping students solve their problems and getting an overview of the student's background, as well as establishing good relations between schools, families, and communities. When a student is having a problem, the teacher will go to the student's home and provide understanding to the parents so that they are willing to cooperate. This certainly puts a burden on teachers because they must deal with parents of students with divergent backgrounds. Frequently teachers face parents who do not accept input and do not care about the condition of their children. Parents only believe that they have entrusted and paid the school to educate their children so if the teacher fails, then they will be angry. This increases the level of emotional exhaustion experienced by teachers and will have an impact on the burnout that occurs.



### *Depersonalization*

The complex work that teachers conduct, makes them develop feelings of not caring about the conditions experienced by students. Teachers sometimes ignore the condition of problematic students and the school's judgement of them. This neglect occurs with students who are undisciplined, do not have good ethics, skip class, smoke, and fight teachers. The teachers argue that these students are exceedingly difficult to change, because they come from different upbringings and residential backgrounds, they bring their own colors to themselves. The teacher in the interview said:

*"Students who go to school here come from various backgrounds of residence and parental education, so they form different behaviors. The behavior of students nowadays is unruly, they do not want to follow the rules, they like to skip classes and go against what the teacher says. Sometimes this makes us furious to see students. But what else, that is how they are, so it is impossible to change, if they do not want to change, whatever. For students who want to change, we change, for those who do not, we just let them go, especially since their parents do not care either".*

This attitude shown by the teacher is a description of the dimensions of burnout experienced by the teacher, namely losing concern for students, tending to treat students indifferently, being cynical and often blaming students if they are guilty, and experiencing symptoms of frustration that they will not be able to change the student's condition. Most teachers who experience burnout show impatient behavior with students, such as being impatient in dealing with problem students, students who have difficulty in learning. Another behavior of burnout experienced by teachers is that they tend to blame other people, such as students who are problematic because of their living conditions and wrong parenting from their parents. Teachers also show teacher burnout not being on time and leaving early during school hours, a desire to retire early and move to another job. Some teachers said:

*"We as counselling teachers have done a lot for our students. We provide guidance every day for one hour in class, but if the student cannot change, what can we do. Students bring their own colors from their families, so it is difficult for us to change them. Plus, nowadays, students are influenced by the internet, so it is difficult for us to change them, so we just give up sometimes".*

Teachers who do not care are caused by physical and emotional exhaustion. Continuous fatigue results in indifferent behavior towards students. The teacher also causes this indifference not having a solution to the problems experienced by students. Even because there are so many problems faced by teachers, so teachers try to avoid these students' problems.

### *Decreased Achievement*

Teachers in the profession experience boredom and burnout at work which is seen in the decline of personal achievement. Based on the focus group interview done with the teachers, it was found that teachers have a low desire to improve their performance. They are not eager to participate in knowledge development training related to guidance of students. As the teacher coordinator said:

*"We are not interested in attending trainings to develop our knowledge or continuing our education, because it is useless. We are willing to attend training if it is aimed at increasing our salary or promotion, because if the benefits are not clear, we are also lazy".*

Teachers are reluctant to participate in self-development education. Some teachers do not have the enthusiasm to pursue higher education, especially those who do not have educational qualifications. For them, continuing education is useless because it will not be recognized by the education office because it is not linear in the field of education, while for those teachers with a teacher education background, continuing education will make it difficult for them, they are afraid that they will not be able to attend lectures again, learning again is difficult for them, and it is difficult to leave their families because the place to study is far from where they live. They said:

*"We want to study again, but it will be useless. Plus, we are not linear in our major. In the past, I could be a teacher from any major, there were no rules like now, but now it is more difficult. Even if we go to university, we will not be able to be appointed as teachers because it does not match our majors, we do not want to study the same major, we can't anymore, we don't remember the lecture materials anymore, we haven't repeated them for a long time. It is hard for us to do that, so we just go along with it, if we still use the school, we still work, if not, what else can we do".*

This statement shows that teachers have no desire to improve their competence, either from formal or non-formal education. This boredom is caused by work situations that are not supportive and unable to fulfil the expectations of teachers. Teachers feel that they are unable to pursue further education and feel that there will be no benefits for themselves and the school where they work. This indicates a decline in achievement among teachers at schools in Kelantan.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### *Contributing Factors of Job Burnout Among Secondary School Teachers*

Burnout experienced by secondary school teachers are caused by several factors. Based on the results of the focus group interview, the researchers have identified several significant factors that cause job burnout among the selected respondents. The factors are as follows:

#### *Workload*

Burnout that occurs in teachers is caused by workloads that are considered excessive by teachers. All teachers have more than the standard number of students, for example, some have 250 to 300 students. Teachers have the task of helping to solve student problems, replacing subject teachers in class if the teacher cannot go to class, uncertain working hours can even work 24 hours because they have to provide student services outside of school hours, there are teachers who have concurrent positions, teachers must help other teachers to overcome student learning problems and guarantee students to follow all the rules at school. As a result of the interview, the teacher stated:

*"As teachers, we have a lot of tasks, but sometimes people still say we have nothing to do. We go to class every day to provide group guidance to students. We have a lot of foster children because the number of teachers is limited, of course we have a lot of foster students. Sometimes we also provide services to students outside the classroom, we must be ready to call students at night".*



The many works demands teachers have can lead to physical, emotional, and even mental exhaustion. Teachers' work focuses on human services, and they often experience feelings of physical and psychological exhaustion. This is due to the substantial number of students to be served, the work of having to prepare time when students need help, working hours that exceed the set working time and not being able to avoid the work given, especially solving student problems. In addition, teachers must be ready to conduct monitoring and consultation at home. The teacher stated:

*"We face many students with problems that really make us stressed. Sometimes I think, how these children will be in the future, and what about my own biological children. The worst is the problem of students with the other sex, madam. Sometimes we hear their stories, sad, furious, angry, and even sad. But we must still provide the same service. Students fight with their friends just because of their girlfriends. This makes us confused and stressed, sometimes they call and cry because of their problems".*

These excessive work demands can increase anxiety and stress for teachers. This anxiety and stress are a manifestation of the teacher's fear of not being able to do their best in helping students' problems and making them better. This anxiety is also caused by pressure from leaders or a negative stigma towards teachers. Stressful conditions occur in high intensity in teachers, resulting in teachers experiencing physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. This condition makes teachers experience burnout.

#### *Lack of Social Supports*

Social insensitivity from the administrators is a cause of burnout in teachers. Based on the results of the interview, teachers experience stress and burnout due to student delinquency, undisciplined classes such as students bullying their friends, hurting themselves, saying harsh words, attacking friends and so on. This condition makes teachers often complain about this behavior to administrative parties such as leaders, colleagues, and school management including parents, but the administrative parties do not care and do not support teachers in dealing with this. The lack of attention from leaders and co-workers in dealing with students' problems has led teachers to experience emotional exhaustion:

*"In our work we really need the support of the leadership, to strengthen our role in guiding students. If the leadership does not care, it will make it difficult for us. For example, leaders find it difficult to provide proper facilities for us to provide services to students, not to mention colleagues who think we do not have a job. Social support from leaders and colleagues is closely related to burnout and work stress experienced by teachers."*

The interview results show that teachers do not get a proper room, their needs are not met. Teachers are considered to have no job and are not allowed by subject teachers to get a special room. In dealing with students, teachers are also faced with high work demands where teachers are required to be able to complete all work, understand the condition of students wholeheartedly and it is not uncommon for teachers to work by involving their emotions excessively. This condition certainly requires social support from others. The teacher said:

*"Our condition is working a lot, guiding a lot of students, not to mention always being blamed by other teachers and leaders, for example if we cannot handle children's problems, we will be the target of blame by the leadership. Even though the leadership does not care about the activities we do, for example, we are not given a proper room, like this, the room is narrow, so*

*if there are students who confide in themselves it is difficult. Sometimes other teachers still consider us as not working."*

The presence of colleagues who provide support in the form of attention and care when teachers feel angry, bored, and stressed can reduce Burnout experienced by teachers. The absence of social support makes teachers feel unappreciated and will make teachers feel they are not important at school. Teachers do not get support from colleagues, leaders, and parents. Leaders do not provide complete facilities, co-workers who do not consider the existence of teachers important, co-workers consider teachers have no work, so they can be asked to replace subject teachers when they cannot enter the classroom, parents do not want to cooperate in changing the negative behavior of children, parents just let the condition of children who behave negatively. In carrying out their duties, teachers do not work alone, they need to involve the principal, class teachers and parents. In carrying out their duties, it is not uncommon for teachers to experience conflicts with principals, class teachers and parents, until they finally find an agreement. For example, the case of a student who violates school rules and must be expelled, this is a big conflict for the teacher, where the student has trusted the teacher to tell his problem, but instead betrayed by getting involved in expelling him from school. Meanwhile, the school demands the counselling teacher to decide to expel the student. This condition of misunderstanding will lead to teacher fatigue. The disagreement between the class teacher, principal, parents, and students will cause tension and trigger the emergence of Burnout.

#### *Unconducive School Environment and Facilities*

Work stress experienced by teachers is strongly influenced by the condition of the work environment and available work facilities. From the results of interviews and observations conducted by researchers, it was found that the work environment provided by the school for the teachers in working is not conducive. The teacher said:

*"Our job is not easy and must be able to make students comfortable in the service process. Of course, we need a good and decent room for students to be comfortable in telling all their problems. In addition, we also need a comfortable place so that we can concentrate in carrying out our duties and finding solutions for students".*

The work of teachers in serving students requires great concentration, energy and thought. The teachers in this study has a large number of students, even exceeding the standard of more than 250 students. This means that the teacher provides many services to students so that the more services provided, the more energy, calmness and concentration are needed in providing guidance. However, teachers are unable to concentrate and calm down in carrying out their duties, because they work in an unconducive environment and poor facilities, especially places and rooms that are packed, hot, and not comfortable. These conditions experienced by the teachers, play a significant role in causing physical, mental, and emotional fatigue among the schoolteachers.

#### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The conditions of stress and lack of motivation experienced by the teachers is not entirely unconscious. They mentioned many things that made them feel stress and lose motivations to carry out their duty as teachers, but the teachers also realize that they have to work out for the solutions to overcome all the issues they experienced. In fulfilling their responsibilities

and obligations as schoolteachers, they make every effort to avoid job burnout. Additionally, they attempt to establish a personal relationship with the school's administration so that all activities that are carried out by the teachers may be facilitated by the administration.

In overcoming the job burnout issue as schoolteachers, teachers do try their best in developing coping skills especially in terms of their spirituality. Teachers do activities that are religious in nature so that they can reduce the risk of experiencing burnout. With the belief that work is worship, it can alleviate the physical, cognitive, and emotional boredom experienced by teachers. Spirituality as an underlying aspect of human life always plays a role in life. Most teachers believe that every problem faced with patience and sincerity, then it feels light, then the counseling teacher also believes that work is an act of worship.

Teachers from the secondary school experience burnout at work, which is reflected in indifferent behavior towards unmanageable student problems, physical and emotional exhaustion, and low interest in developing personal achievement. This burnout will have an impact on the job and the school where the teacher works. This burnout is caused by many factors. These include workload, minimal social support, and uncondusive school environment and facilities.

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