

Reconstructing the meaning of work to promote teachers' mental health

Rahmat Aziz¹, Retno Mangestuti¹, Yulia Sholichatun¹, Ali Ridho¹, Mukhibat²

¹Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, East Java, Indonesia

²Department of Islamic Education, Faculty of Education and Teachers Science, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Ponorogo, East Java, Indonesia

Aims - Teachers often encounter work-related challenges that can compromise their mental health. This article extends previous studies by applying a dual model approach to evaluate the relationship between the meaningfulness of work and teachers' mental health. Mental health is defined as a high level of psychological well-being and a low level of psychological distress.

Method - The qualitative study involved a survey completed by 261 elementary school teachers in East Java, Indonesia, and five teacher interviews. Data was collected through documentation, interviews, and a mental health scale while data analysis was performed through descriptive and thematic analysis.

Findings - The result shows that the high problems experienced by teachers in performing their duties and the inability of teachers to interpret their behavior have resulted in low levels of mental health.

Conclusion - The result contributes to a better understanding of teacher challenges that can impact overall mental health and provide useful strategies for improving teaching conditions.

Keyword: Dual model of mental health; Meaning of work; Mental health; Primary school teacher; Reconstruction

CITATION LINK

(1) COVID-19 and Teachers' ... (2) Teacher Procrastination, Emotions, and Stress... (3) Are foreign language... (4) Parent and Teacher Reports... (5) Teacher depression ... (6) Teacher's Physical Activity and Mental Health... (7) The meaning of work for people... (8) Unpacking the Meaning of Work ... (9) Pengaruh Kreativitas ... (10) The Benefit of Meaning ... (11) Doing meaning in work ... (12) The meaning of work in teachers' lives... (13) Meaningful Work as a Moderator ... (14) Investigating achievement and mental health ... (15) Prevalensi Depresi ... (16) The dual continua model ... (17) Happiness and well-being... (18) Psychoanalysis, Humanistic Psychology, and Positive Mental Health... (19) Health and wellbeing ... (20) Library anxiety ... (21) Mild Depression Detection ... (22) Coping with a natural disaster... (23) What Makes the Teacher Happy... (24) The meaning of work ... (25) Analisis faktor ... (26) Online Learning During ... (27) Sustainable development ... (28) The importance of principal ... (29) Understanding the Organizational ... (30) Insights on how to shape teacher ... (31) The secondary technical ... (32) The core aspects of teacher's book ... (33) Nurse competence ... (34) A Path to Teacher Happiness... (35) Teachers' well-being ... (36) Determinants of mental health ... (37) Entering professional teaching... (38) Dual-Factor Model ... (39) Measuring Meaningful Work...

Introduction

The complexity and severity of teachers' workload at various levels of education have increased psychological disorders. For example, several studies have shown a tendency for increased stress experienced by teachers in carrying out their profession [1,2]. Teachers also experience anxiety with the various demands of the work to be completed [3,4]. Data indicate a tendency of depression in teachers [5,6]. These conditions indicate the existence of psychological problems that require a serious resolution. The meaningfulness of work in teachers is one of the factors that are suspected to affect mental health [7,8].

Some studies of meaning in the context of teacher mental health can be grouped into two types of studies. The first focuses on the meaning of life in general. Research finds that the meaning of a teacher's life is influenced by creativity in teaching [9]. Other research has found that teachers' life meanings are influenced by performance [10]. The second type of study focuses on the meaning of work. Several experts have also carried out research that examines this theme [11,12]. The relationship between these two types of meanings has a close relationship as meaningfulness in work can be a moderator for achieving the meaning of life [13]. This article elaborates on the study of meaning in working for teachers, involving mental health as a factor influenced by the meaning of teacher work.

The article describes three research objectives related to the meaningfulness of work regarding the mental health of elementary school teachers. The first objective is to identify and describe teacher problems recorded online in the last three years. The second objective is to describe and analyze the perceptions of teachers toward their profession. The third objective is to describe and evaluate the impact of teacher problems on mental health. The theoretical framework for the study depicts mental health based on a dual model approach. This approach describes as a state of a high level of psychological well-being and a low level of psychological stress. Through these three objectives, the study is expected to add scientific benefits by providing alternative solutions to support teacher mental health by reconstructing the meaning of work as a teacher.

Mental health can be defined by two approaches: positive and negative. The first approach defines mental health as fulfilling positive aspects of a person's psychological state. The conditions in question include a sense of pleasure, experiencing the satisfaction in life, and the growth of constructive social relationships [14]. The second approach defines mental health as avoiding mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, and loss of behavioral control [15]. These two approaches became known as *dual theory models* in mental health [16]. Thus, individuals who have a healthy mentality, according to this approach, are those who have a high level of psychological well-being and a low level of psychological distress.

The positive approach explains that the characteristics of healthy individuals are those with three positive characteristics. First, they are individuals who had a pleasant experience in their life [17]. Second, they have a sense of love as an expression of a positive feeling in cultivating relationships [18]. Thirdly, they are individuals who have a high level of life satisfaction. This means they can enjoy the experiences in their lives accompanied by joy [19]. Thus, it can be concluded that according to the positive approach, the characteristics of mental health are those with pleasure, love, and satisfaction.

The negative approach explains that individuals considered healthy avoid feelings of anxiety, depression, and loss of control. Anxiety is a psychological condition representing characteristics of worry, heartache, or fear [20]. Depression is defined as a mood disorder characterized by deep feelings of sadness and a sense of indifference [21]. The loss of control is defined as a person's inability to control themselves consciously, so they produce behaviors that harm others [22]. Thus, according to the second approach, the absence of anxiety, depression, and loss of control are characteristic of mentally healthy individuals.

Furthermore, the relationship between work meaningfulness and mental health in teachers has been demonstrated in various studies. Research on the meaning of work in teachers has found that a teacher's positive view of their work correlates with the teacher's level of happiness [23]. Other studies have found that the meaning of work has a very important role in various aspects of life [24]. The research shows that the meaning of work can be used to predict teachers' high or low mental health. Some studies above show that mental health has been widely studied by linking to other variables, their status as free and bound variables, and using different approaches.

The article is built on the assumption that a mentally healthy teacher will positively impact his ability to perform tasks professionally and responsibly. In addition, they will also be able to educate and direct their students to become healthy individuals. Teachers' high level of mental health is influenced by the perception and behavior

of teachers in interpreting their work. In other words, the development of teachers' mental health development in meaningful work as a teacher.

Participant and method

Qualitative research was chosen to understand teachers' problems in interpreting their work related to mental health in teachers at the basic education level. The selection of themes about the meaning of work and teachers' mental health using a qualitative approach is based on three reasons. First, the mass media online revealed the need to elaborate on teacher problems over the past three years. Second, it is necessary to know the teacher's perception of work as a teacher, and finally, the need to know the level of mental health in carrying out his duties as a teacher. These three reasons make it possible to find solutions in solving teacher problems

Research data was obtained from basic education level teachers in several cities in East Java province. The mental health survey was completed by 261 teachers from fifteen primary schools (61 men; 200 women). Most subjects were married (67.5%), had honorary teacher status (83.5%), were uncertified (81.6%), were under 30 years old (55.5%), and had work experience under 5 years (42.1%). The subjects of the study for the interview perceptions of the teacher's profession were obtained from five teachers who had three criteria, namely 1) having a high level of psychological pressure, 2) having a low level of psychological well-being, and 3) being willing to be the subject of research. The method of determining the level of psychological well-being and psychological distress of the subjects was carried out through the analysis of mental health scales. The criteria for a subject having a high level of psychological well-being is when the subject's score is higher than the mean score, while the low criteria are obtained when the score is lower than the subject's mean score.

Three methods are used in collecting research data: documentation, interviews, and psychological scales. Documentation is carried out to obtain information about the problems of teachers in carrying out their profession. The documentation in question is in the form of documents in mass media that are online. The data obtained through the documentation are shown in Table 1. The interview method is used to obtain information about the teacher's opinion of his profession. Interviews are conducted only on selected subjects on a limited basis. The data obtained through the interview are shown in Table 2. A psychological scale, based on Aziz & Zamroni's health measuring instrument, is used to determine the teacher's mental health [25]. This tool is called the Brief Mental Health Scale (BMHS-12). This scale is able to reveal mental health from positive (positive emotions, positive social relationships, life satisfaction) and negative (anxiety, depression, and loss of control) aspects. The number of items in each aspect totals 12. The measuring instrument is a Likert scale with five alternative answers: Very often, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never. The scoring process for the psychological well-being aspect moves from 1 to 5, while for the psychological distress aspect, it moves from 5 to 1. Content validity testing showed an Alpha Cronbach value of 0.824. Construct validity testing is done through confirmatory factor analysis and shows that the goodness of fit of the model meets the specified requirements.

Descriptive and thematic analysis was used in this study according to the type of data obtained. A descriptive analysis was carried out to analyze the mental health profile of teachers, both in the form of psychological pressure and psychological well-being. Analysis was performed by grouping subjects into two categories: high and low. The high category is obtained when the subject has a higher score than the empirical mean, while the low category is obtained when the subject's score is equal to or lower than the empirical mean. The thematic analysis categorizes teachers' problems and perceptions of their work as teachers. The thematic analysis focused on aspects related to teachers' lack of rewards (both psychological and economic) and teachers' perceptions of unfairness. Both issues show the existence of teacher problems related to the meaning of the teaching profession.

Findings

This section describes three pieces of data related to the importance of reconstructing the meaning of work in teachers. The first data (Table 1) notes teacher problems obtained from online media. The second data (Table 2) presents results from teacher interviews regarding perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. The final data (Table 3) describes teacher mental health via a psychological measurement scale. The explanation of the three data is as follows:

Teacher work problems in online data

This section describes personal and professional teacher problems, which are recorded online. The presentation of the data focused on the problems recorded in the last three years. The full data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Teacher work problems in online data

No	Teacher work problems
1.	(Sindonews.com 2020). Teacher distress issues. https://edukasi.sindonews.com/read/98396/144/cerita-guru-mengajar-dari-rumah-tingkat-stres-tinggi-tekanan-darah-naik-1594541265
2.	(Kapol.id 2021). Teacher workload issues. https://kapol.id/kondisi-guru-di-kabupaten-tasikmalaya-mengkhawatirkan/
3.	(Liputan6.com 2022). Teacher financial issues. https://megapolitan.okezone.com/read/2022/06/15/338/2612251/10-juta-buruh-dan-guru-honorer-ancam-mogok-nasional-ini-lima-tuntutan-demo-di-dpr
4.	(Liputan6.com 2022). Teacher personality issues. https://surabaya.liputan6.com/read/4873396/guru-smp-di-surabaya-pukul-siswa-di-sekolah-begini-kejadiannya

Table 1 (a) reveals that teachers had psychological issues during the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the numerous administrative requirements, the (b) data demonstrates that teachers are under too much pressure and struggle with workplace issues. Data (c) highlights the financial struggles of teachers, and (d) data indicates that teachers lack professionalism in performing their jobs due to personality problems.

Teacher meaningfulness of work

This section outlines two important findings from interviews with five primary school teachers who were selected purposively. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Teacher perception of the meaningfulness of work

Subject	Statement	Coding
1	When I had intended to devote myself to religion and state, but a leader did not appreciate it. <i>(Ketika saya sudah berniat mengabdikan diri untuk agama dan negara tetapi seorang pemimpin tidak menghargainya).</i>	Feelings of being underappreciated by the leadership
2	Being a teacher in a private school is only sometimes economically guaranteed. Therefore, there are many things to sacrifice. Not to mention administrative obligations that I don't think are very important but are required by the government. <i>(Menjadi guru di sekolah swasta tidak selalu terjamin secara ekonomi. Karena itu ada banyak hal yang harus dikorbankan. Belum lagi kewajiban administratif yang menurut saya tidak terlalu penting, tapi diwajibkan oleh pemerintah).</i>	Lack of appreciation economically.
3	The teacher is a very noble job. It's a great devotion where there's an experience or something new we must do. Although the teacher does not guarantee to get rich. <i>(Guru adalah pekerjaan yang sangat mulia. Pengabdian yang luar biasa yang mana disitu terdapat pengalaman ataupun hal baru yang harus kita lakukan. Meskipun guru tidak menjamin untuk menjadi kaya).</i>	Lack of appreciation economically.
4	The teacher is a noble job. But his well-being is often overlooked. Lack of attention from the central government about the welfare of especially non-civil servant honorary teachers. <i>(Guru itu pekerjaan yg mulia. Tapi kesejahteraannya sering diabaikan. Kurang perhatian dari pemerintah pusat, tentang kesejahteraan terutama guru honorer non- pegawai negeri sipil).</i>	Feeling unfairly treated
5	When there are people who behave inconsistently with their goals but get an award that is not appropriate <i>(Ketika ada oknum yang berperilaku tidak sesuai dengan tupoksinya tapi mendapatkan penghargaan yang tidak sesuai).</i>	Feelings of underappreciated

Table 2 shows that there are two issues that indicate a tendency towards a lack of meaning in teaching. The first is the lack of rewards for teachers, both psychological and financial. The second is the unfair treatment of the teaching profession. The data show that teachers feel a lack of meaning in their work. Both issues show the existence of teacher problems related to the meaning of the teaching profession.

An Overview of the teacher's mental health

This section describes the teacher's mental health through the psychological measurement scale of mental health. The results of the data analysis of 261 teachers were categorized into high and low categories. The full results are in Table 3.

Table 3. Teacher's mental health

No	Teacher's mental health	High		Low		Total	
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
Psychological distress							
1.	Anxiety						
	a. Feeling confused about the current state	72	27.59	187	71.65	261	100
	b. Feeling helpless	95	36.40	166	63.60	261	100
2.	Depression						
	a. Feeling at its lowest point	73	27.97	188	72.03	261	100
	b. Enjoying the desperate atmosphere	43	16.48	218	83.52	261	100
3.	Loss of control						
	a. Loss of control of thoughts and behavior	55	21.07	206	78.93	261	100
	b. Despair in looking to the future	98	37.55	347	62.45	261	100
Psychological wellbeing							
1.	Positive emotion						
	a. Daily life is full of something interesting	207	79.31	54	20.69	261	100
	b. Enjoy what it does	49	18.77	212	81.23	261	100
2.	Positive social relationship						
	a. Feel comfortable communicating with friends	76	29.12	185	70.88	261	100
	b. Feeling valuable because of friends	51	19.54	210	80.46	261	100
3.	Satisfaction						
	a. Feeling happy in living life	231	88.51	30	11.49	261	100
	b. Enjoying what is happening in life	67	25.67	194	74.33	261	100

Table 3 explains that out of 261 teachers surveyed on mental health, it was found that there were teachers who experienced high psychological distress, both in the aspects of anxiety and depression and in the aspect of loss of control. Other data shows that some teachers have a low level of psychological well-being regarding positive emotions, satisfaction, and positive social relationships. This data also shows that teachers' mental health problems that require more attention are about teachers' psychological well-being compared to their psychological distress.

Discussion

These teacher issues demonstrate that there are still several fundamental issues that basic education teachers must deal with at least four issues to practice their profession. The four problems can be grouped into two categories: personal problems [2,5], and professional ones [26]. Several studies have shown that teachers' inability to solve their problems will result in various mental problems [7,8]. Thus, efforts from various parties' efforts are needed to solve in carrying out their profession.

This research reflects the importance of attention and development of teachers' knowledge and skills in their profession. Schools and policymakers in the field of education have a duty to address this issue [27]. The principal has to provide opportunities for teachers to develop professionalism through various training and education programs [28,29]. The education office is responsible for making policies that favor teachers for growth opportunities. The policy in question can be in the form of providing scholarships or the existence of rules that provide opportunities for teachers to develop professionally [30,31]. Both policies are expected to be able to overcome problems experienced by teachers in carrying out their professional duties.

Psychological and financial rewards and injustices felt by teachers are the main problems in carrying out their profession. These results align with several previous studies that found results that align with this study [32,33]. These results show that addressing both issues should be a priority for all parties. Several studies have shown that happy teachers can complete their duties and obligations satisfactorily [23,34]. In other words, the handling of psychological and financial problems of teachers must be a priority in formulating policies in educational programs.

Several studies have shown that teachers who have a low level of mental health, that is, those who have a low level of psychological well-being and have a high level of psychological stress, are less likely to be able to carry out their professional tasks satisfactorily, including their ability to perform learning in the classroom [5,6]. Neglect of these conditions will result in low academic performance of students, and a further impact will be the low quality of education [37]. This study lies in teacher mental health studies that examine the two positive and negative sides together in one study.

The study results provide a further understanding that the meaningfulness of teachers' work affects their level of mental health. In other words, teachers with a high level of work meaningfulness tend to have a high level of psychological well-being [13,35], and a low level of psychological pressure [8, 36]. These results provide an important understanding that teachers interpreting work can affect the high level of psychological distress and the low level of their psychological well-being.

The findings of this study demonstrate the importance of supporting teachers' mental health to be optimally developed. Based on the theory of dual mental health models, development can be carried out in two ways: optimization of aspects of psychological well-being and minimization of psychological distress [14,38]. Optimizing psychological well-being and minimizing teacher psychological pressure can be done by developing the teacher's meaningfulness towards his work [12,13]. In other words, the results of this study provide an understanding of the importance of meaningful work to develop teachers' mental health.

The development of mental health through the meaning of work as a teacher can be done through three strategies: developing motivation to work, seeking to have meaning, and contributing to meaning [39]. The first technique requires the principal to encourage teachers to work professionally. This encouragement can take the shape of both financial and psychological support. In the second approach, educators are given a chance to explain and contextualize each task. This tactic is used to help teachers get meaning out of each piece of work they produce. The final possible strategy is allowing the teacher to contribute to work that is considered significant for the teacher.

Conclusion

The findings of the study stated that the high problems experienced by teachers in performing their duties and the inability of teachers to interpret their behavior have resulted in low levels of mental health. They experience psychological distress in the form of anxiety, depression, and loss of control. In addition, they also have a low level of psychological well-being. The condition is characterized by a low level of positive emotions, disturbed social associations, and a low level of satisfaction with their living life. Teachers' high level of mental health can be overcome by the ability of teachers to reconstruct the meaning of work as teachers.

The results of this study reflect the importance of improving and developing the teaching profession to be carried out with various models. Leaders at the school and government levels, especially the education office, should follow up on the results of this research by providing opportunities for teachers to improve their insights and skills as professional teachers. Education and training are strategies that can be carried out for this purpose. In addition, the level of the economic welfare of teachers that is felt to be still unsatisfactory should receive attention from policyholders.

The research was conducted qualitatively to describe the condition of meaningfulness in work and teachers' mental health. Both concepts are only studied descriptively without statistical testing of the relationship between the two concepts. Therefore, subsequent studies can consider using a mix-method type of research in the form of sequential models to test the relationship between the two variables while proposing alternative models for mental health development through meaningfulness in working as teachers. Another area for improvement lies in taking research subjects that only involve teachers at the primary education level. Further research should involve teachers at all levels of education so the generalizations are getting wider.

DECLARATIONS

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Data Availability Statement The dataset obtained and analyzed during this study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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