

Association of Teachers and Lecturers
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**SELF-HARMING AND EATING DISORDERS ON INCREASE AMONG
STRESSED-OUT CHILDREN**

Self-harming, anorexia, aggression and bullying are the results of increasing childhood stress, according to teachers responding to an ATL survey.

Nearly three-quarters of teachers (73%) who answered the survey believe children are under more pressure now than 10 years ago, with testing and exams and family break-up causing the most distress.

While most children release the pressure by crying or becoming withdrawn, 46% of teachers reported that pupils self-harm. Some have developed eating disorders, with 18 secondary teachers and two primary teachers commenting there are increasing numbers of anorexia cases in their schools.

A secondary school teacher in Berkshire said: "Self-harm seems to be a growing problem. In my first 30 years of teaching I was aware of only one case. In the last eight years, there have been at least 10 cases. The youngest pupil I know is 14 years old.

"Pupils cut their arms and even their stomachs. It's not just girls, but boys too. Some say that if they hurt themselves in other ways, then they don't hurt so much from what's really causing the pain. I also know three or four cases of anorexia in the school brought on by stress."

Other manifestations of stress include: crying (reported by 76% of respondents); withdrawing (70%); aggression against other pupils (68%); verbal abuse (64%); bullying other pupils (53%); and fighting (48%).

Almost nine out of 10 teachers (89%) think stress comes from testing and exams, with family break-up (68%) and peer and family pressure to do well (51%) also the main causes of problems. The recent phenomenon of cyber-bullying as a cause of stress was highlighted by 38% of teachers, compared to physical or verbal bullying (26%).

When it comes to dealing with childhood stress, just 18% of teachers who responded to the survey believe local services to support children with emotional and behavioural problems were sufficiently joined up.

Within schools, however, nearly three-quarters of teachers (72%) reported their school has a policy to identify pupils with problems and 74% have a counsellor to provide support.

A secondary school teacher from Bristol said: "We repeatedly refer students for support but they have to wait between four and five months because the service is so busy.

"I am dealing with three pupils at the moment with mental health issues and many more face stress, mainly from family dysfunction and exam pressure, with pupils showing signs of withdrawal and inability to learn. I know an increasing number of students who

drop out for a year after AS level as they can't stand the pressure, and not all of them return to study."

Mary Bousted, General Secretary of ATL, said: "The recent shocking spate of teenage suicide has focused attention on children's mental health and wellbeing. Our survey also shows an increasing number of cases of self-harm and eating disorders brought on by stress.

"We believe that young people face intolerable strain from an education system which cannot stand failure. From an early age, children face the pressure to perform in tests to boost their schools' league tables. Then they take on parental demands to get into their choice of secondary school and later university. They are anxious to fit in with their peers, and then when they don't fit in, are bullied via text, email and social networking sites.

"Alarming, our survey shows local services to support distressed children are overburdened by demand, with some services still not sharing information on cases. As ever, teachers pick up the slack, taking responsibility where parents and local services let children down."

For further information please contact the ATL press office on 0207 782 1589 or visit our website www.atl.org.uk.

Note to editors:

1. 804 ATL members working as teachers in state and independent primary and secondary in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland were questioned between 22 February and 3 March 2008.

Key survey results:

Does your school have a policy/strategy to identify and help pupils suffering from emotional or behavioural problems?		
Overall	Yes No Don't know	71.5% 14.7% 13.8%
Primary	Yes No Don't know	69% 20.5% 10.5%
Secondary	Yes No Don't know	72.4% 12.2% 15.4%
Does your school have a counsellor or access to a counsellor for pupils?		
Overall	Yes No Don't know	70.5% 24.2% 5.3%
Primary	Yes No Don't know	48% 45% 7%
Secondary	Yes No Don't know	82% 12% 5.9%
Do you think services (social services, health services etc) needed to help pupils with emotional and behavioural problems are sufficiently joined up?		
Overall	Yes No Don't know Other	18.4% 51.2% 27.6% 2.7%
Why do you think pupils are under		

pressure? Mark all that apply		
Overall	Testing/exams Physical/verbal bullying Cyber-bullying Peer pressure Problems with friends Family pressure to do well Poverty Family break-up Religious/cultural expectations Relocation within UK Relocation to UK Alcohol Drugs Advertising Other	88.5% 25.7% 37.6% 51.2% 34.2% 50.7% 14.5% 67.9% 12.2% 6.3% 10.3% 31.3% 28.8% 25.6% 8%
Primary	Testing/exams Physical/verbal bullying Cyber-bullying Peer pressure Problems with friends Family pressure to do well Poverty Family break-up Religious/cultural expectations Relocation within UK Relocation to UK Alcohol Drugs Advertising Other	94.7% 24.5% 14.6% 49% 37.1% 58.3% 13.9% 70.2% 13.9% 8.6% 10.6% 6.6% 7.9% 19.2% 4.6%
Secondary	Testing/exams Physical/verbal bullying Cyber-bullying Peer pressure Problems with friends Family pressure to do well Poverty Family break-up Religious/cultural expectations Relocation within UK Relocation to UK Alcohol Drugs Advertising Other	87.7% 26.8% 45.2% 51.9% 32.6% 46.7% 15.7% 67.6% 11.5% 5.4% 10.7% 41.2% 37.4% 28.5% 9.2%
Do emotional problems/pressure result in pupils doing any of the following?		
Overall	Crying Fighting Bullying other pupils Becoming aggressive (short of fighting with other pupils) Becoming aggressive (short of fighting) with staff Verbally abusing other pupils Verbally abusing staff Truancy Becoming withdrawn Self-harming Other	75.6% 47.5% 53.3% 67.7% 44.9% 63.9% 51.1% 42.8% 70.1% 45.6% 7.3%
Primary	Crying Fighting Bullying other pupils Becoming aggressive (short of	88.4% 52.9% 41.9%

	fighting with other pupils)	71%
	Becoming aggressive (short of fighting) with staff	33.5%
	Verbally abusing other pupils	57.4%
	Verbally abusing staff	33.5%
	Truancing	9.7%
	Becoming withdrawn	72.3%
	Self-harming	11%
	Other	4.5%
Secondary	Crying	71.8%
	Fighting	46.1%
	Bullying other pupils	57.3%
	Becoming aggressive (short of fighting with other pupils)	66.5%
	Becoming aggressive (short of fighting) with staff	50.5%
	Verbally abusing other pupils	66.7%
	Verbally abusing staff	59%
	Truancing	55.4%
	Becoming withdrawn	70.3%
	Self-harming	58.1%
	Other	7.4%

2. The 2008 ATL annual conference is taking place between 17-20 March at the Riviera International Conference Centre (RICC), Torquay.
3. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, headteachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom.
4. ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice.
5. ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). The union is a member of the Social Partnership – working with the UK Government, employers and other unions on education issues. ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.