

Association of Teachers and Lecturers

Press Release



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ATL Annual Conference, Manchester 14-16 April 2014

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Pressures on teachers causing rise in mental health issues – ATL

Education staff report a rise in mental health problems among colleagues over the past two years, according to a survey by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL).

ATL surveyed more than 900 education staff about their mental health and the reasons for any problems, ahead of a debate at the unions annual conference. The survey found:

- **More than a third (38%) of school and college staff have noticed a rise in mental health problems among colleagues in the past two years.**
- **More than half (55%) of those working in education feel their job has had a negative impact on their mental health.**
- **Nearly seven in 10 (68%) school and college staff hide mental health issues from employers, while over six in 10 (63%) report physical problems.**
- **Almost half (45%) didn't disclose hidden health issues because of worry about managers' reactions.**
- **ATL calls for more to be done to ease the stigma surrounding mental health.**

The most common factors affecting the mental health of education staff were pressures to meet targets (63%) and inspections (59%), followed by pressure from leaders (55%).

More than half (55%) say their job has a negative impact on their mental health. Of those who say their job affects their health, 80% state stress is a factor. Almost 70% say their work results in them being exhausted and 66% believe it disturbs their sleep pattern.

The stigma attached to mental health issues means those working in education are still afraid to tell their employers; two thirds (68%) of education staff who suffer with a mental health issue choose to hide it from their employers.

The survey found schools and colleges should do more to look after their staff, with 49% of respondents stating that their employer is not doing enough to meet its duty of care for their mental and emotional well-being, and 38% saying not enough is done for their physical health.

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary at the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), said: "I am shocked that so many education staff are reporting a rise in mental health problems. But teachers, lecturers, support staff and heads are now so over-worked that it comes as no surprise that so many in the education profession suffer from stress, depression and other mental health issues.

"Education professionals do more unpaid overtime than any other group and are put under constant intense pressure to meet targets, with excessive observation, changes in the curriculum and Ofsted inspections.

"Those working in education need to be supported better, with schools and colleges making adjustments to their jobs and working conditions where necessary.

"ATL calls for more to be done to ease the stigma surrounding mental health problems."

Quotes from members:

A head of a department in Newport said: "The constant pressure, with unrealistic targets given at short notice has had an adverse effect on my health. If you complain or discuss it, your job will be at risk."

A head of department in a school in St Helens said: "Stress exacerbates my medical condition, but, as teaching is highly stressful, this seems unlikely to change."

A head of department in a secondary school in Kent said: "It is no good telling the management about your hidden disabilities because they will consider you as a weak link."

A lecturer in a college in Manchester said: "The pressure of working in education continues to increase. Work eats into every aspect of a teacher's life. Difficult working conditions, pressures from management and Ofsted and very little spare time all contribute to an individual's well-being. Teachers are over-worked, stressed and unhappy. The profession is full of ill-health and tiredness."

A teacher in a Kent primary school said: "I have decided to leave teaching because of work-related stress. I have been expected to work up to 90 hours per week and this has had a terrible impact on my family life and my health. I am also frustrated I have had to leave teaching several years early because of the pressure of work."

ENDS

Note to editors:

- The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) conducted this survey of 925 education staff in March ahead of its 2014 annual conference at Manchester Central. Those surveyed ranged from state and independent schools, academies, free schools, sixth form and FE colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The conference will take place between 14-16 April and ATL members will debate a range of motions. On Monday 14 April members will debate and vote on tackling mental health and hidden disabilities within the workplace.
- ATL is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 170,000 teachers, headteachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom.
- ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice.

- 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). ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

If you suffer/suffered from a hidden health issue, did you disclose this to your school/college?			
Answer Options	Yes %	No %	
Mental health issue	31.7	68.3	526
Physical health issue	62.5	37.5	520
<i>answered question</i>			684

If you didn't disclose a hidden health issue, why was this?		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Worried about reaction from colleagues at work	23.1%	93
Worried about reaction from managers at work	45.3%	182
It's personal	42.0%	169
It doesn't affect doing my job	39.6%	159
There's no point because they aren't interested	23.6%	95
Other (please specify)		58
<i>answered question</i>		402

While working in education, has your job had an adverse impact on your...			
Answer Options	Yes %	No %	Don't know %
Mental health	55.0	27.1	8.7
Physical health	54.2	31.6	5.7
Family relationships	47.9	37.0	3.9
Social life	63.0	26.1	3.2
<i>answered question</i>			893

If your job has had an adverse impact on your health, please mark all that apply		
Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Headaches	47.8%	352
Disturbed sleep patterns	66.2%	487
Exhaustion	69.2%	509
Anxiety	57.2%	421
Depression	33.7%	248
Stress	80.2%	590
Affected your mood	55.2%	406
Affected your appetite	27.7%	204
<i>answered question</i>		736

Do you feel your employer does enough to meet its duty of care with regards to the following:

Answer Options	Yes %	No %	Not sure %	N/A %
Mental and emotional well-being	22.8	48.4	26.0	2.4
Social well-being	21.8	41.5	27.8	6.4
Physical well-being	32.4	36.9	25.4	3.0
Any further comments				
<i>answered question</i>				891

Have you noticed an increase in the number of colleagues experiencing mental health concerns:

Answer Options	Response %	Response Count
Yes, there has been an increase in the last 2 years	37.60%	343
Yes, there has been an increase in the last 5 years	23.60%	215
Yes, there has been an increase in the last 10 years	7.00%	64
No, I have not noticed any increase	13.90%	127
Don't know	17.90%	163
<i>answered question</i>		912

If your job has had an adverse impact on your physical or mental health, why do you think this is? Please mark all that apply

Answer Options	Physical health %	Mental health %
Bullying by colleagues	8.1	28.4
Bullying by pupils	3.4	10.9
Exam pressure	11.6	22
Pressure from targets	29.6	62.7
Pressure from colleagues	11.8	31.9
Pressure from inspections	31.6	59.1
Poor pupil behaviour	19.5	40.3
Staff appraisals	14.2	36.4
Pressure from deadlines	26.1	48.4
Pressure from leadership	28.4	55.1
<i>answered question</i>		740