



Mental Health and Employment of Vietnam Preschool Teachers in Covid-19: A Research in Hanoi, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

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The Covid-19 pandemic has been having a very strong impact on the entire education system in Vietnam. In our education system, it can be said that preschool education is completely "frozen". Unlike other grades where teaching is still carried out online, preschool education with its own characteristics has completely stopped all activities for quite a long time. Therefore, there have not seen any signs of reopening for preschools. This article presents some of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on preschool teachers - one of the subjects who are suffering the most severely from the consequences of the pandemic, in terms of (1) mental health and (2) jobs.

Keywords:

The Covid-19 pandemic, preschool teachers in Hanoi, mental health.

INTRODUCTION

Since being discovered and declared a pandemic so far, the Covid-19 epidemic has really caused great devastation to most countries around the world. Vietnam is not an exception, although there have been successes in disease control at the beginning, but before the prolongation of the epidemic and the danger of the new strain (Delta strain), we have severely affected in recent years. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of social life, in which education is one of the most affected sectors, especially for preschool education (Lien, 2021).

From the very beginning of the pandemic, Vietnam was forced to halt face-to-face teaching and shift its focus to forms of distance education (mostly online). However, given the peculiarities of child care and raising activities, it is difficult to organize preschool education activities in the online form (Van, 2021). During the pandemic, the early childhood education industry has faced many difficulties, and since the start of the fourth wave of covid-19, all preschools have had to suspend all activities for nearly a year. The results of the review and assessment of the current situation by the Ministry of Education and Training showed that 95.2% of private preschool education institutions had no revenue for many months; 81.6% of establishments could not pay teachers' salaries (Lien, 2021).

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In this context, it is extremely necessary to study the impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on the early childhood education industry in general and preschool teachers in particular because it will be an important practical basis for building educational programs. policies to support these subjects. For the same purpose, this study investigates the mental health and employment status of preschool teachers in Hanoi under the impact of the Covid epidemic.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in the study is a qualitative and quantitative (mix) method (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative tools were used to collect data on several demographic characteristics, mental health status and employment of preschool teachers. Interviews were conducted with a number of teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the situation and its causes.

Online surveys (05 surveys) were conducted during the period from June to October 2021 corresponding to the time of the 4th wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the beginning of each month (April 4 or 5), survey respondents will receive a mental health survey within the last 1 month based on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS - Perceived Stress Scale) was built and developed by Cohen et al. (Cohen et al, 1983). By October, in addition to the PSS, the respondents will answer an additional questionnaire that includes a questionnaire to find out the teacher's self-assessment of their mental health status compared to the previous year. before the outbreak and some questions about their employment status.

In-depth interviews (by phone, social networks...) with 5 teachers took place in October after the results of processing quantitative survey data were available.

Participants

Invitations to the survey were sent to 200 random preschool teachers working in preschools in Hanoi city and the response rate was 142 people (71%). All teachers participating in the survey are female; in which 41.5% are working at public

preschools and 58.5% are working in non-public schools. More than two thirds of teachers are migrant workers (74.6%); only 28.9% have stable housing. By the time the last survey was answered, 47.2% of teachers had left Hanoi.

Table 1. Some characteristics of sample (N = 142)

	Frequency	%
Age		
Under 25 years old	43	30.3
From 25 to 30	59	41.5
Over 30 years old	40	28.2
School type		
Public	59	41.5
Non-public	83	58.5
Permanent Resident Status		
Have a household registration in Hanoi	36	25.4
No household registration in Hanoi	106	74.6
Marital status		
Married	82	57.7
Single	60	42.3
Housing Status		
Rent a house or stay	101	71.1
Own house/in the house of husband and wife	41	28.9
Currently living in		
Hanoi	75	52.8
Outside of Hanoi	67	47.2

RESEARCH DESIGN

The PSS 10 scale is used to assess the mental health status of teachers with 10 rating items on a 5-point Likert scale (Never = 0, Almost never = 1, Sometimes = 2, Quite often = 3, Very often = 4). To calculate a PSS 10 score, responses to four positive items (items 4, 5, 7 and 8) need to be reversed first (i.e. 0 => 4; 1 => 3; 2 => 2; 3 => 1 ; 4 => 0). A score below 14 is considered No Stress or Mild Stress, a score between 14 and 26 is considered Moderately Stressed, and a score above 26 is High Stress and may have a tendency to pathological direction. In 5 times of measurement, the Alpha's Cronbach reliability of the PSS 10 scale responded well ($\alpha = 0.85 - 0.89$). In addition, the question with 5 levels is much Poorer; Slightly worse; There is no difference; Little Better and Much Better is designed to understand teachers' self-assessments of

their mental health in the present compared to pre-Covid-19 times.

The preschool teacher employment questionnaire includes some information about current employment status and career plans in the coming year.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Mental health of preschool teachers

In the last survey in early October, teachers were asked to self-assess the change in their mental health status now compared to pre-Covid 19. Table 2 shows that the majority of teachers said they felt their mental health was slightly or much worse than it was before the epidemic (74.7%). As one teacher shared, *"This is probably the most difficult time ever. I used to find it difficult to teach but not as stressful as now..."*.

Table 2. Change in mental health status

Your mental health now compared to before Covid 19		
	Frequency	%
Much worse	59	41.6
A little less	47	33.1
Undifferentiated	32	22.5

A little better	3	2.1
Much better	1	0.7

This result is much higher than the Canadian study in January 2021 when only about 40.5% of respondents said that they felt their mental health was slightly or much worse (Jenkin et al, 2021). Although there are many differences in sample size, economic - cultural - social characteristics... but this result can be considered as the basis for conducting studies on this issue on a larger sample, and in more diverse target audience.

During the period from June to October the participating teachers performed 5 times of their own stress assessment on the PSS 10 scale. This is also the same time period as the preschools in Hanoi began to stop working because of the epidemic (according to Official Dispatch 1142/SGDĐT-CTTT dated May 3, 2021 of the Hanoi Department of Education and Training on the temporary suspension of school attendance to prevent and control the Covid epidemic).

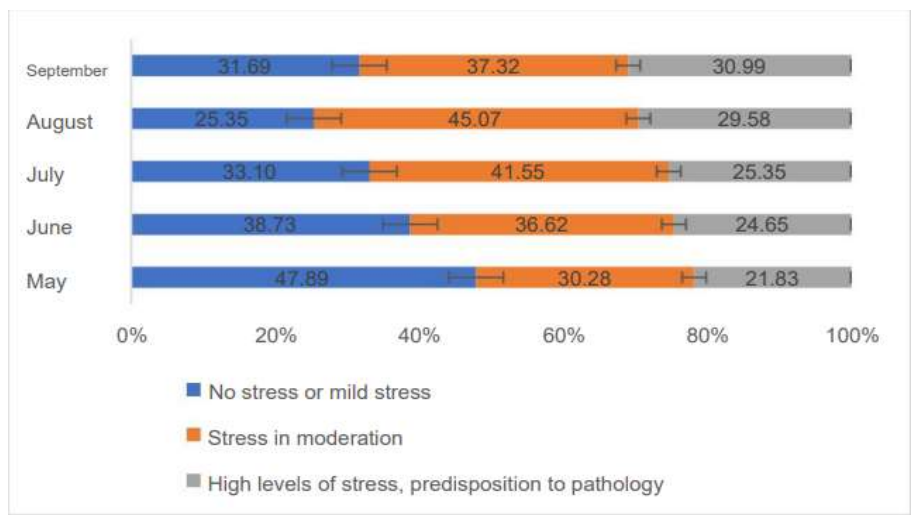


Figure 1. Results of teachers' stress assessment in 5 months of 2021 (5-9)

The results of the longitudinal study reflect the sharp change in the mental health of teachers during the fourth wave of the covid-19 epidemic. In May, the percentage of teachers with no stress or only mild stress reached 47.89%; moderate stress level accounts for 30.28%; while the number of teachers with high stress levels is only 21.83% (Figure 1). In the following months, the assessment results had noticeable changes, specifically: The percentage of teachers with high stress levels increased continuously, until September it increased by 9.16% and increased sharply in the following months. June-August; the number of teachers with moderate stress increased rapidly during the months of June-August and decreased significantly in September; in contrast, the percentage of teachers with no or mild stress decreased deeply from May to August (down 22.54%) and increased again in September (6.34%). These fluctuations are quite consistent with epidemic developments with the number of infections increasing rapidly in June, July and August while the rate of vaccination coverage is expected to be reached in mid-September; However, it is not possible to conclude a cause-and-effect relationship here.

This result can be seen as contrary to the research results of preschool teachers in Ho Chi Minh City in 2016 when the percentage of preschool teachers without stress and mild stress was 83.5% and only 3.4% of teachers have high and very high stress (Trinh Viet Then, 2016). This partly shows the great impact of the epidemic on the mental health of preschool teachers.

Also in this study, the causes of stress mainly come from factors related to work pressure, related to children; Meanwhile, the causes of stress among preschool teachers during the epidemic period are economic problems: *"In the beginning, there was still money to save, so it was still comfortable, but after a few months, it also dried up. , spending everything must be calculated, and then have to manage everything to make money, so it's a headache ..."*, or the problem of family conflict: *"...all day going in and out of the house, no matter what. touching, conflict ..."* and coming from the epidemic *"when the Vin Mart supermarket system was infected, my husband went to buy goods here. full of people..."*, *"My inn is a few dozen meters from the blockade area, I still feel scared when I think about it..."*.

Table 3. Stress level of preschool teachers in Hanoi (September 2021)

	Study in Hanoi September 2021 (N = 142)		Study in HCM City 2016 (N=635) ¹
	Frequency	%	%
No or mild stress	45	31.7	83.5
Moderate stress	53	37.3	13.1
High level of stress	44	31.0	3.4

¹Trinh Viet Then, 2016.

Impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on the employment of preschool teachers

The reality shows that the Covid-19 epidemic and the economic shocks it brings will have a strong impact on

unemployment and underemployment (ILO, 2020). Preschool teachers are those who are forced out of their jobs temporarily and find it difficult to find work in the formal sector.

Table 4. Employment status of preschool teachers

			Public	Non-public
	Frequency	%	%	%
Temporarily laid off, no salary ²	55	38.7	0.0	100.0
Take a break, still have a salary ²	87	61.3	95.4	4.6
Working on something else ³	64	45.1	45.3	54.7

²Taking a break from work here is understood as taking a break from teaching at kindergarten

³Other work is understood as jobs other than teaching preschool and earning income

Table 4 shows that up to 38.7% of teachers are currently on unpaid leave and these are all teachers in non-public preschools. Among teachers who are temporarily out of work but still have a salary, only a very small number are non-public teachers (4.6%), however the interview results show that the actual "salary" that teachers receive Non-public employees receive not the salary they normally receive. A teacher at a non-public school said, "My school has eighteen teachers, the principal gives each teacher five hundred thousand per month. As usual, my salary is nearly five million ..."

Schools closed, resulting in all teachers being furloughed, and many teachers during this time tried to look for other job opportunities. The survey results also showed that 45.1% of teachers did some work to earn income, including teachers in public schools (45.3%). For public teachers, even though they still receive a salary, "in my spare time, I often go online and see people selling food, so I also import things for my family to use while taking advantage of selling to neighbors, people, etc. used to earn more...". The main jobs that teachers often do during this time are informal jobs such as selling goods

online, or taking care of children at home "some parents who stay close to my home are so busy sometimes, so they brought their children over to me, I also took care of them. I think that by doing so, I can help those parents and at the same time can have more money to support my daily demand...". However, the survey results also reflect that a large number of teachers, especially non-public teachers, who are mostly unpaid, are underemployed. The epidemic has forced them to stop their official jobs and also deprived them of the opportunity to find other jobs. "After the school closed, I also went to work at a food store but only for a while, I had to take a break because of the distance ...", "I also really want to work to earn extra income, but partly Because of the fear of the epidemic, partly because I don't have the capital, so it's difficult to do business online..."

Not only leading to underemployment, the effects of the Covid-19 epidemic also seriously reduced the income of preschool teachers. These income losses will lead to reduced spending and the risk of becoming poor labor for teachers whose incomes are close to the poverty line. The results of the survey on teachers' income are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Preschool teacher's income

	Frequency	%	Public	Non-public
			%	%
No income	20	14.1	0.0	100.0
Under 3 million/month	26	18.3	0.0	100.0
From 3 to 5 million/month	81	57.0	66.7	33.3
Over 5 million/month	15	10.6	53.3	46.7

If calculated according to the average income per capita/month in Hanoi announced by the General Statistics Office of 5.98 million/person/month (Hong Son, 2021), at present, most preschool teachers are have below average income and only 10.6% of teachers have income close to or above this level. Preschool teachers, who have low income, are now more precarious under the impact of the epidemic, especially non-public preschool teachers. The subjects with no income or with low income close to the poverty line shown in the survey results are these teachers. However, most teachers in non-public preschool educational institutions are not eligible for support under Decision No. 23/2021/QĐ-TT dated 7/7/2021, regulating the implementation of a number of policies to support employees and employers who face difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic, because they have not participated in compulsory social insurance (Lien, 2021).

Another aspect of the impact of the epidemic on preschool teachers is the impact on their career intentions in the near future. Teachers were asked to say whether the Covid-19 epidemic would cause them to give up their career as preschool teachers in the future. The majority of teachers said that they certainly did not give up their teaching job (47.2%) however with other degrees, the selection rate did not differ too much. It is noteworthy that 13.4% of teachers said they might give up their teaching job and 12% said they would definitely give up their teaching job (Table 6). This will be a problem in the future for the early childhood education industry and specifically in Hanoi when preschool institutions can reopen. In addition to responding to possible overcrowding (since many non-public preschool institutions may not be able to continue operating), how to attract preschool teachers back? with work is also a problem for managers.

Table 6. Preschool teachers' career intentions

Does the Covid-19 pandemic make you more likely to give up your teaching job?

	Frequency	%
I will definitely give up this job	17	12.0
I might give up this job	19	13.4
Wondering	18	12.7
I will probably continue to do this work	21	14.8
I will definitely continue to do this work	67	47.2

There is an association between the change in mental health status, teachers' stress level and their income level and career intentions when considering the correlation between these variables. An inverse correlation was found between

change in mental health status, stress level and income; while a positive correlation appeared between income level and change in mental health status as well as stress level of teachers (Table 7).

Table 7. Correlations between change in mental health status, stress level and income and career intentions of preschool teachers

	Income	Career Plans
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Change in mental health status	-0.23**	0.25**
Stress level	-0.31**	0.27**

** Correlation is significant at the level 0.01

CONCLUSION

The research results presented in the article are the most general outline of some of the impacts of the Covid-19 epidemic on teachers working at preschool education institutions in Hanoi city in different areas. aspects of mental health and employment. Research results show that the majority of teachers feel their mental health status is worse than before the epidemic, and stress levels during the period of the fourth wave. of the Covid-19 epidemic is quite high. All teachers were laid off during this period and the majority of those who remained paid while on leave were teachers working in public preschools. More than half of teachers are underemployed and have no chance to find other jobs. The epidemic has also reduced the income of teachers and caused some of them to plan to give up their teaching jobs.

Most of the results presented are descriptive, with the limitation that a small random sample may not be representative of all preschool teachers working in Hanoi. However, the findings in this study may be suggestions for further studies, as well as a useful basis for managers, policy makers and stakeholders in the develop supportive policies for the preschool education sector in general and preschool teachers in particular in the post-Covid-19 epidemic period.

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