

Well-being during the pandemic: Kazakhstani school leaders' perspectives and experiences

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Introduction

- Pandemic put stakeholders under enormous pressure affecting their well-being
- Numerous challenges of online education raised stakeholders'
 - mental well-being as
 - irritation, anxiety, stress
 - physical health issues as
 - catching virus, negative effects of screen times including eye strain and back pain (George, 2020; Hosszu & Rughınış, 2020; Pollock, 2021; Trinidad, 2020; Wang et al., 2020).
- Well-being is linked to quality of education (Kwatubana & Molaodi, 2021).
- Teachers' well-being is directly linked to the students' well-being and academic achievement (Kein et al., 2022).
- Globally there is increasing awareness of psychosocial well-being, while the Kazakhstani context lacks it. It is significant to understand how a pandemic affects the well-being of the stakeholders to provide the required support.

Literature Review

- Tension between the well-being and workload during the pandemic
 - Physical and mental well-being needs to be before the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Netolicky, 2020).
 - Schools should organize measures concerning stakeholders' physical and mental health (Trinidad, 2020).
- School leaders awareness of supporting the well-being of teachers and students (Kwatubana & Molaodi, 2021; McLeod and Dulsky, 2021; Okilwa & Barnett, 2021).
- Compassionate leadership
 - Leaders' "compassion and grace attitudes over compliance" towards staff (McLeod & Dusky, 2021, p.7)
- Distributed leadership
 - Leaders supported teacher well-being by "engage in active listening without judging"
 - Mitigate teachers' stress of heavy workload, work-life balance, and social isolation (Kwatubana & Moladi, 2021, p.110).
- School leaders' own well-being
 - To help others first needs your own well-being (Harris & Jonas, 2020)
 - Consider school leaders' well-being as pandemic causes intense work (du Plessis, 2021; Pollock, 2021).

Methodology

- Purpose and Research design
 - Mixed method research design is used
 - To explore Kazakhstani school leaders' perspectives and experiences during the pandemic.

- Instrument and Procedure
 - Quantitative study
 - The online survey instrument was developed in Qualtrics. The survey link was sent to the 17 Regional Educational Departments of Kazakhstan who distributed it to school leaders. The survey from May to October of 2021.
 - Qualitative study
 - Semi-structured individual online interviews were conducted from 8 regions of Kazakhstan. The interviews held from January 2022 to August 2022.

Quantitative phase of the study: Socio-demographics

- School leaders from 14 regions and 3 major cities of Kazakhstan completed the survey. While the data is inclusive of all Kazakhstan oblasts, respondents were self-selecting.

Family status (N= 1298)	
Single/unmarried	10.09%
Married without children	13.33%
Nuclear family	40.91%
Single parent	9.32%
Extended family	23.88%
Other	2.47%
Having children (N = 1297)	
No children	10.87%
Yes	89.13%

Gender (N = 1299)	
Female	77.52%
Male	22.48%

Ethnicity (N = 1136)	
Kazakh	84.77%
Russian	7.57%
Ukrainian	1.23%
Uzbek	2.38%
Other	4.05%

Quantitative phase of the study: Socio-demographics

Medium of Instruction (N = 1262)	
Kazakh medium	54.36%
Russian medium	18.46%
Mixed (both Russian and Kazakh)	27.18%

School location (N = 1056)	
Urban	41%
Semi-urban (less than an hour drive from the city)	8.71%
Rural (more than an hour drive from the city)	50.28%

Qualitative phase of the study: Socio-demographics

- Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted online from 8 regions of Kazakhstan.

Regions (N= 22)	
Astana	3
Almaty	1
Kokshetau	3
Kostanay	3
Taraz	3
Turkistan	3
Shymkent	3
Uralsk	3

Gender (N = 22)	
Female	14
Male	8

Ethnicity (N = 22)	
Kazakh	19
Russian	1
Uzbek	2

Qualitative phase of the study: Socio-demographics

Family status (N= 22)	
Married	22
Having children (N = 22)	
Yes	22

School location (N = 22)	
Urban	7
Semi-urban (less than an hour drive from the city)	4
Rural (more than an hour drive from the city)	11

Medium of Instruction (N = 22)	
Kazakh medium	15
Mixed (both Russian and Kazakh)	5
Uzbek medium	2

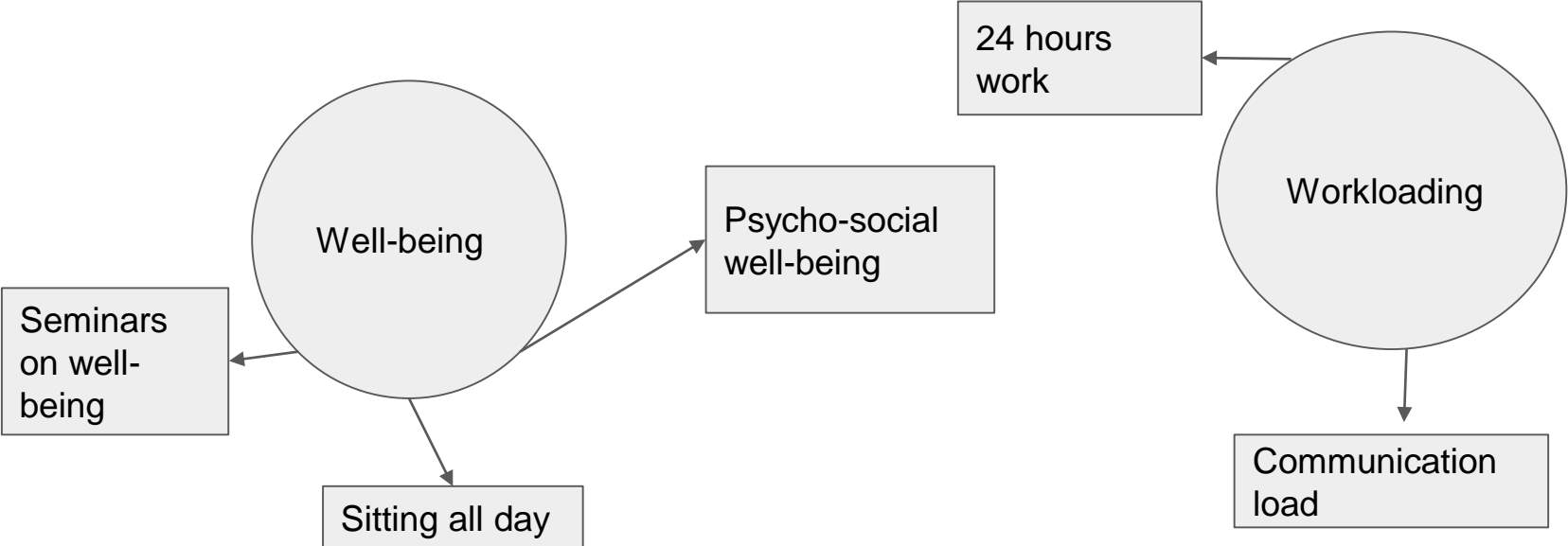
Findings - Quantitative

Survey data demonstrates that 40% of school leaders identified the transition to online education increased their workload and resulted in a stressful experience.

Strongly disagree -1 to Strongly Agree 4			
	Factor 1	Uniqueness	Mean
1.School closures have increased my workload - WLB	0.49	0.76	2.50
2. Ensuring my school complies with government regulations related to COVID-19 has been very stressful - WLB	0.63	0.61	2,50
3. Preparing teaching timetables simultaneously for online and offline lessons is challenging. - WLB	0.61	0.63	2,72
4. I get frequent headaches. - Physical	0.71	0.49	2,46
5. I have developed back problems because of sitting too much. Physical	0.76	0.43	2,60
6. Inactivity has worsened my pre-existing health condition (e.g. osteoarthritis, eye-sight - Physical	0.72	0.49	2,64
7. I feel on my own - Psychological	0.69	0.53	2,12
8. A lack of open and timely communication from the government on the pandemic regulations and COVID-19 situation makes me stressed – Psychological	0.68	0.54	2,42
9. I do not socialise outside my immediate household – Psychological	0.59	0.65	2,23
10. I have saved money, as I don't eat out, spend less on the commute, clothing etc - Fin	-0.44	0.81	2.59
11. My spouse/partner has lost their income, or their income has been reduced because of the pandemic - Fin	0.54	0.71	2.31
12. I have to constantly resolve arguments between my children over space and resources (please choose 'Not applicable' if you have no children) - Relationship	0.50	0.76	2.39
13. My relationship with my child/ children is under strain as I have to regulate the time they spend on playing or socialising virtually during school/study time (please choose 'Not applicable' if you have no children) - Relationship	0.61	0.63	2.25
Chronbach alpha (internal consistency reliability)	0.88		

Findings - Qualitative

Emergred themes through coding in NVivo software



Findings

F1. Psychosocial well-being as the core aspect of emotional health and overall well-being

F2. Global lockdown and social distance negatively affected the mental health of students, teachers, and leaders due to the absence of live communication, updated news about the spread of the Covid-19 infection, and the loss of their close relatives.

F3. Only a few schools organized online workshops on psychosocial well-being

F.4 Leading the school during the pandemics was the most stressful due to considerable communication load via mobile phones

F5. School leaders felt that they had to work 24 hours a day

F.6 Female school leaders who had to combine family and career, simultaneously doing the homeschooling and domestic chores during the working day, suffered emotionally from the absence of a stable working environment and constant family conflicts.

Discussion

- Findings 1,4,5 and survey findings are consistent with those of Netolicky (2020) and (Trinidad, 2020) that there is close interlink between workload and well-being.
- F2 that the school administrators considered the well-being of other school stakeholders is corroborated with previous research (Kwatubana & Molaodi, 2021; McLeod and Dulsky, 2021; Okilwa & Barnett, 2021).

Conclusion

Pandemic had the following effect on school leaders:

- Increasing 24/7 workload (especially, communication)
- Stressful experience
- Difficulties in balancing between family and career life for female leaders
- Juggling between instructions from the Ministry of Education, homeschooling with their own children, online work, and domestic chores (women leaders)
- Prioritizing and considering students' and teachers' well-being
- Practicing empathetic leadership
- Desire to quit or leave the leadership position

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