Compassion Fatigue, Emotional Labour and Educator Burnout

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Astrid Kendrick, EdD, University of Calgary

The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Contents

Preface

The professional standards set out for classroom teachers, school leaders and system leaders require that the certificated teachers occupying these roles be able to foster effective relationships. Consequently, there is clear expectation that these teachers will build caring relationships with the students they serve, the parents of the school community and their colleagues at work. Indeed, understanding the highly relational nature of teachers' work with students, colleagues and others and reflecting this in professional practice are essential for teachers' success and satisfaction in their role. This does, however, come at a price.

This two-year study, led by researchers from the University of Calgary, examined the relatively unexplored phenomenon of emotional labour and its impact on Alberta educators. The study, which was planned in early 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic, was the the result of the partnership between the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP). Two previously released reports on this study covered a literature review and an explanation of the findings from the first two phases of the research project.

This third and final report pulls together the findings from individual interviews and three online surveys. The educators who participated in this study included teachers, school leaders, learning leaders and educational assistants, as well as school district staff and system leaders. The broad range of participants provides us with rich insights into the various ways that emotional labour is provided by educators and allows us to identify factors that create occupational hazards for mental health. The data also provided evidence for the creation of the HEARTcare plan, a holistic and multipronged approach to the collective and individual psychological well-being of all who work in the education system.

The combined efforts of the research advisory committee have helped to anchor this study and to provide critical guidance in the development of the research instruments. I wish to thank all members below for their participation and input:

- Carlyn Volume-Smith, PhD (cochair), strategic advisor, ASEBP
- Lisa Everitt, EdD (cochair), Executive Staff Officer, ATA
- Astrid Kendrick, EdD, principal researcher, University of Calgary
- Genevieve Blais, MEd, Executive Staff Officer, ATA
- Heather Collier, BScN, Manager, Clinical and Early Intervention Services, ASEBP
- James Gerun, BEd, Executive Staff Officer, ATA

6

Finally, I wish to recognize the 5,428 educators who participated in the online surveys, including those who volunteered to be interviewed for this important study. I appreciate that in many cases the questions you were asked to address touched upon sensitive matters and called upon you, as participants, to demonstrate personal courage and integrity. Your candid insights about the relational nature of education work contribute to a better understanding of the cost of caring for the adults who work in the education system. The Association, ASEBP, other education partners and your colleagues across the province benefit and, consequently, our colleagues across the province will now be better equipped to plan for psychological well-being at both individual and system levels.

Dennis Theobald
Executive Secretary, Alberta Teachers' Association

Introduction

The *Compassion Fatigue, Emotional Labour and Educator Burnout* research study was a two-year exploration of the lived experience of education workers in Alberta regarding the causes and extent of emotional and mental distress associated with working in the education field; it also attempted to identify the signs and symptoms of emotional and mental distress as well as potential interventions to promote positive occupational health. Specifically, this study aimed to understand and investigate the causes and impact of burnout and compassion fatigue experienced by education workers. The sponsoring organizations were the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP). The research study was designed and completed by a research team from the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary.

This research study had three defined purposes:

1. To explore the scope of the relatively unknown phenomena of compassion fatigue and burnout in Alberta's education workers and to understand the role that providing emotional labour might play in building or diminishing their occupational health

2. To uncover and explain the lived experience of education workers who are experiencing compassion fatigue and burnout

3. To determine possible ways to prevent these forms of occupational health distress or treat education workers who experience them

The main questions for research were as follows:

1. What is the scope of compassion fatigue and burnout in education workers?

2. What is the lived experience of education workers with compassion fatigue and burnout, and how does the provision of emotional labour influence this experience?

3. What can be done to assist education workers with a return to positive occupational health?

Study and Methodology Summary

The research team followed a mixed methods methodology to provide the best insights into the phenomena of educator compassion fatigue and burnout. Quantitative research methods, namely survey, were used to measure the scope of the phenomena in education workers, and qualitative interviews and open-ended survey questions were employed to understand the lived experience of education workers with the phenomena.

Quantitative data were gathered through the administration of three online surveys. These surveys were created using validated tools to ensure that the results were reliable. The ProQOL (Version 5) assessment tool was embedded into the survey to measure compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue at the population level of a group of people (Stamm 2010, 2012). The Maslach and Jackson assessment survey (1981) was modified to determine the main signs and symptoms of burnout in the respondent pool. In order to understand the emotional feeling rules (Hochschild 2012) of the education profession, a question regarding the acceptable and unacceptable expression of emotions was included as well.

The three surveys were administered separately using the Survey Alchemer platform to collect and store the anonymized data. The first survey was available online for three weeks in June 2020 and participants were recruited via the ATA and ASEBP social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook) and the home pages of the funding organizations' websites. The first survey was fully completed by 2,061 participants and partially completed by 749 participants.

In January 2021, an identical survey was released for data collection, but with two notable changes to the survey distribution and questions. The first adjustment was to the method used to recruit survey participants. As was done to recruit participants for the June 2020 survey, one link to the survey was made available online to anyone accessing the websites of the ATA or the ASEBP. This survey was fully completed by 1,105 participants and partially completed by 458 participants. A second survey link was sent to a random stratified sample of teachers and school administrators from the Alberta Teachers' Association database of volunteer participants. This survey was fully completed by 798 participants and partially completed by 257 participants. In sum, 5,428 participants either fully or partially completed the survey, with an average survey completion rate of 73 per cent across all three surveys (see Table 1). This robust response indicates that the survey findings were reliable and stable across different times in the school year and with responses from a large participant pool.

Table 1: Survey Demographic Information

	Aggregate Data	Complete	Partial	Total
Survey Completion Rate	73%	3,964	1,464	5,428*
*Totals of each section for demographics may not add up to 5,428 as both complete and partial responses are included and no demographic categories required a mandatory answer to proceed.				

Years of Service	Percentage of Respondents	Total Count
0–5	21.0	1,057
6–10	21.5	1,082
11–15	19.4	973
16–20	15.4	776
21+	22.6	1,137
Geographic Area		
Rural	25.1	1,258
Urban	74.9	3,757
Nearest Urban Centre		
Calgary	26.2	1,319
Edmonton	39.2	1,969
Red Deer	8.9	449
Lethbridge	7.5	378
Medicine Hat	5.2	261
Grande Prairie	4.8	242
Cold Lake	1.9	95
Fort McMurray	1.3	65
High Level	1.1	53
Jasper	0.5	25
Lloydminster	0.9	44
None listed	2.5	125
Gender Identity		
Male	13.7	686
Female	85.4	4,290
Transgender	0.1	4
Prefer Not to Answer	0.7	36
Not Listed	0.2	9

The second adjustment to the January 2021 surveys was the inclusion of three additional indicators of burnout in education workers that emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data. Specifically, the three indicators were related to the Maslach and Jackson indicator of depersonalization, which was not well understood when the June 2020 survey was created. The three additional indicators of burnout were as follows: a reduced desire to help students, a reduced desire to help colleagues or other staff, and apathy or lack of commitment to work. The reported data on these three indicators reflect only the second surveys (January 2021), or 2,618 respondents. No other changes were made to the survey questions to keep the results consistent, valid and reliable (Creswell 2015).

The intent of the survey data was to understand the scope of compassion fatigue and burnout in education workers, to validate the organizational feeling rules (Hochschild 2012) associated with emotional labour in educational settings (Kendrick 2018) and to gain knowledge about the interventions used by education workers to prevent or treat their mental and emotional health distress. The findings from the January 2021 surveys mirrored very closely the findings from the June 2020 survey, providing a trustworthy validation (Creswell 2015) of the findings from the *Phase One Report* (Alberta Teachers' Association [ATA] and Kendrick 2020).

Qualitative data were collected through 53 individual interviews held between June and September 2020. The interview participants were selected from a pool of 232 volunteers whose information was provided upon completion of the June 2020 survey. The volunteers were sorted by job role, and these lists were provided by the principal researcher to five research assistants. The research assistants each selected ten volunteers to contact for individual interviews. Upon the completion of the interviews, the research assistants used online software, Trint, to transcribe the interviews. Interview transcripts were anonymized, removing all references that might identify the participant, including details such as names and geographic location. Data were analyzed by the principal researcher using constant comparison thematic analysis (Creswell 2015; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña 2014) and the emergent codes and themes were validated through discussions with the research assistants and the research study advisory council.

The intent of the interviews was as follows: to discover the nature of crisis and trauma work provided by education workers; to understand the signs and symptoms of compassion stress, compassion fatigue and burnout in education workers; and to investigate ways to prevent or treat these forms of occupational health distress. The *Phase Two Report* (ATA and Kendrick 2021) details all the findings from the qualitative data.

Key Findings

The five key findings from this foundational two-year study emerged from the analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data.

Education workers provide emotional labour as a normal part of their work description, as they work to provide a safe and caring school and classroom environment for children and youth. Providing emotional labour forms the basis for building valued professional and pedagogical relationships with students, leaders and colleagues.

1. Education workers regularly do crisis work and trauma work when working with students, colleagues and staff, but they are given very limited training and are unprepared to deal with the emotional aftermath of providing assistance to students suffering through traumatic events.

2. The data revealed significant and concerning evidence of mental and emotional distress across all educational work roles, with the highest levels of stress and distress felt by education workers who work primarily with children and youth.

3. Analysis of the data formed the basis for the Conceptual Model for the Compassion Continuum in Educational Settings, a theoretical description of the experience of compassion in the education field.

4. A comprehensive intervention is required to help prevent mental and emotional distress among education workers who provide crisis and trauma work, and to treat them when it occurs. The data were used to develop a conceptual framework for HEARTcare planning, a comprehensive, holistic model for identifying the sources of occupational mental and emotional distress in education workers and the possible actions that can be taken to restore a state of occupational health.
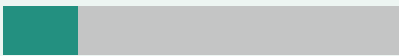
Because the data from the June 2020 survey and the individual interviews have been fully explicated in the *Phase One Report* (ATA and Kendrick 2020) and *Phase Two Report* (ATA and Kendrick 2021), the illustrative qualitative responses in this report came from the January 2021 survey data.

KEY FINDING #1: IMPACT OF PROVIDING EMOTIONAL LABOUR

Education workers provide emotional labour as a regular part of their daily work to develop and maintain a calm and safe classroom and school environment for students. *Emotional labour* is the act of constraining and expressing one's emotions to maintain a sense of care and calm while also adhering to the expected organizational feeling rules of the work environment (Hartley 2018; Hochschild 2012). It is demonstrating care when a person may not feel caring, or staying calm and neutral while inwardly fuming or feeling anguish or unappreciated (Ward and McMurray 2016).

The survey data demonstrated consistent organizational feeling rules for education workers. They felt that the emotions of joy, energy/excitement and empathy were expected at work and that sadness, anger and frustration should be repressed.
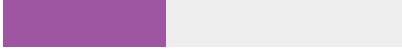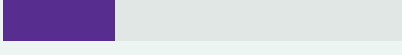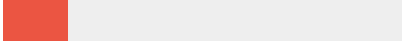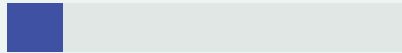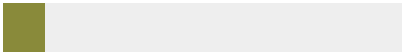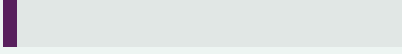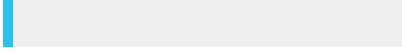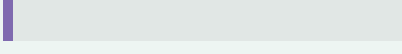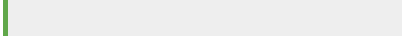
Figure 1. Aggregate Survey Data: Emotions to Express at Work*

Value		Per Cent	Responses
Happy, joy, cheerful		86.1	3,250
Energetic, excitement		27.8	1,050
Empathetic, empathy, concern, compassion		19.3	730
Frustrated		18.7	706
Calm, serious		13.0	492
Sad		8.8	332
Enthusiastic, enthusiasm, eager, engaged		8.7	327
Positive, optimistic		8.3	314
Content		4.6	174
Patient		4.1	155
Care, caring		3.5	134

Total: 3,375

*Respondents were asked to identify three emotions they felt confident expressing at work.

Figure 2. Aggregate Survey Data: Emotions to Repress at Work**

Value		Per Cent	Responses
Sadness, depression		53.8	1,452
Anger		52.3	1,411
Frustration		39.7	1,072
Anxiety, worry, hopelessness		28.0	757
Fear		16.2	438
Stress		13.8	372
Overwhelmed		10.2	276
Shame, guilt		2.6	69
Grief		2.4	64
Loneliness		1.9	51
Rage		1.1	29

Total: 2,699

**Respondents were asked to identify three emotions they hid from other people at work.

The qualitative responses provided further insight into the nature of the expression and repression of certain emotions at work. In many cases, the organizational feeling rules (Hochschild 2012) were linked to the respondents' description of the ideal education worker, described by a survey respondent as follows:

> Someone who comes to work to do their job and goes above and beyond to do that. Supports others, genuinely cares for all students, not just their assigned students. Helps collaborate and shares resources with colleagues. Supports students' needs in all areas, not just academic. (Survey response)

While providing emotional labour is foundational to working in the education field, only 53.3 per cent of the survey respondents had heard of the concept. Understanding both the positive and negative aspects of emotional labour can help individuals first to identify the emotional feeling rules at their workplace and then to express these emotions appropriately. Given that repressed emotions can find a way to leak or erupt out of a worker (Ward and McMurray 2016) or can harm relationships (Hartley 2018), education workers would benefit from learning about the phenomenon and how it impacts their daily work.

> I feel that the emotional labour I do for my students interferes with my emotional availability for my family/personal life. (Survey response)

KEY FINDING #2: CRISIS AND TRAUMA WORK IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Education workers provide both crisis and trauma work, with many examples listed in the *Phase Two Report* (ATA and Kendrick 2021). *Crisis work* refers to working through a traumatic event with students or colleagues as a part of one's work, and *trauma work* refers to counselling or listening to a student or colleague who recounts a traumatic event (Figley 1995; Valent 1995).

Education workers, apart from school counsellors or support staff with specific training, are rarely trained during their formal education about crisis or trauma work or how to recover emotionally and mentally after providing those types of work. The survey and interview data suggested that the majority of respondents and participants did not have preprofessional training or professional development to assist them with doing crisis and trauma work, yet all of the interview participants could identify times in their career when they performed either or both types of labour (ATA and Kendrick 2021). The survey respondents also reflected on the crisis and trauma work they provided.

> I often feel overwhelmed by the various emotional, behavioural and academic needs of my students, and I feel pressure to address them all, even with limited support. When I can't effectively address my students' needs, I feel guilt and shame that I've failed, and I feel angry at the system for expecting teachers to manage so much and do so much with

so little support. I feel conflicted when working with students who I know have or are experiencing trauma, as my instinct is to prioritize their mental health and well-being, but I also feel pressure from admin and the system to push academics when it feels like the focus should be on supporting the child's mental health. (Survey response)

Regrettably, most school settings have experienced a lack of supports and resources to assist students with achieving positive mental health (Mental Health Commission of Canada 2013). In the absence of other professionals, such as mental health assistants or school psychologists, education workers have reluctantly taken on the role of nurse, social worker, therapist or psychiatrist without having the adequate education to do this work properly. They provide key interventions for children and youth without adequate training and have very little access to the necessary supports or resources that they need to emotionally recover after doing this work. Several participants identified this lack of training and emotional recovery support as one reason for the high levels of compassion stress, burnout and compassion fatigue.

I feel as though I am supposed to be a beacon of light to these kids. The way we are spoken about is as if we are on a pedestal and I need to live up to that role. Most years I love helping kids through tough times, but this year I feel that I don't have the capacity to do much more than just teach. We all know teaching is a career where you're expected to wear many hats. This year I fear that I can only wear a few at a time in order to survive. I am burnt out and can't really deal with anything outside of the norm these days. (Survey response)

KEY FINDING #3: SIGNIFICANT EVIDENCE OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH DISTRESS

The aggregate data from the survey showed that 54.3 per cent of the respondents (Figure 3) fell into the compassion stress and compassion fatigue range, and that 90 per cent had experienced at least one symptom of burnout (Figure 4). These forms of mental health distress can have enormous and negative repercussions for the children, youth and other adults in the education system.

Figure 3. Aggregate Survey Results for Compassion Fatigue

45.7% Compassion Satisfaction

54.3% Compassion Fatigue
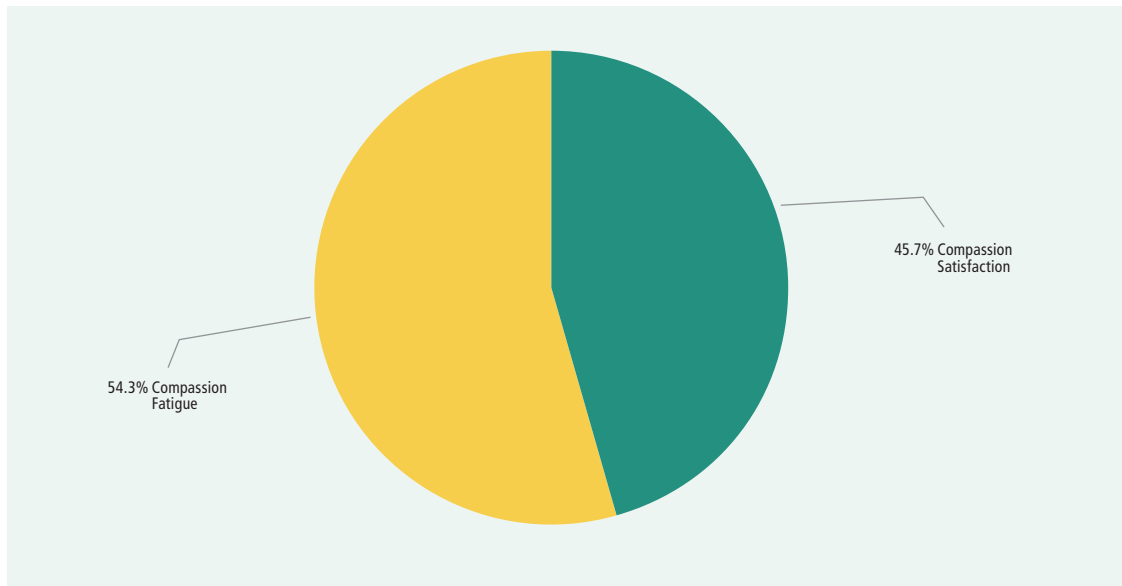
Value		Per Cent	Responses
Compassion Satisfaction		45.7	1,851
Compassion Fatigue		54.3	2,198

Total: 4,049

Figure 4. Aggregate Survey Results for Burnout

Emotions Comfortable to Express at Work
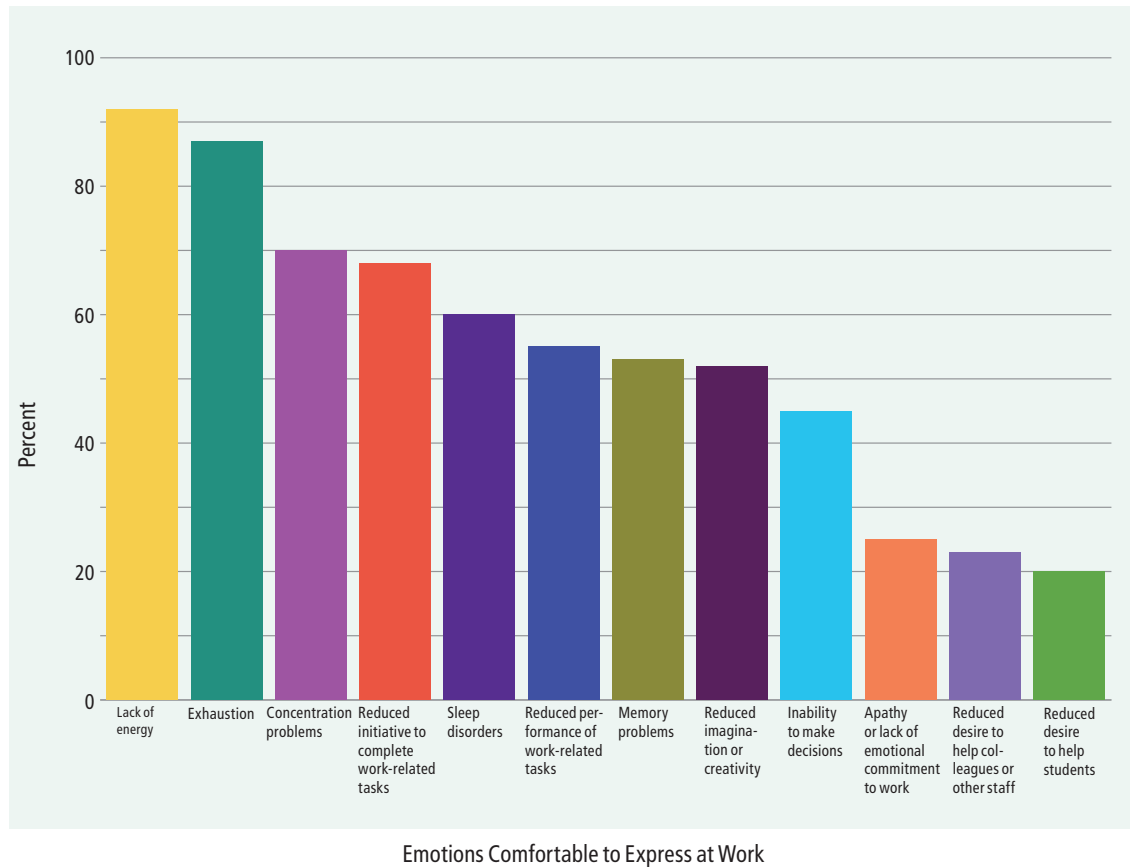
The aggregate survey and phase two interview (ATA and Kendrick 2021) participants identified the following symptoms as linked to their compassion fatigue: physical and mental fatigue, brain fog and other cognitive changes, an increasingly negative world view, and reduced interest in helping or caring for colleagues and students. Further, given the *Phase Two Report* finding that participants provided crisis and trauma work as a part of their regular job (ATA and Kendrick 2021), they had the defining risk factor for secondary traumatic stress or secondary traumatic stress disorder (Figley 1995), which is caring for individuals who have suffered from trauma. The COVID-19 pandemic was also identified by 23 per cent of survey respondents as a traumatic event and as intensifying the experience of compassion fatigue, suggesting that the levels of compassion stress and compassion fatigue may climb to higher levels during the postpandemic period, which will require further and ongoing research and monitoring.

> I have students in my class that I do not have the skills or training to deal with, but
> I am expected to help them with no other adults in my classroom and in addition
> teach the rest of the class who are also high needs. There is no time in the school
> day to plan or assess, or even go to the bathroom. (Survey response)

The main burnout symptoms identified by the research participants included physical and mental exhaustion; lack of acknowledgement that they were essential workers and valued by society; cognitive changes such as memory problems and reduced initiative to complete tasks; and a reduced desire to help colleagues and, to a somewhat lesser degree, students.

Figure 5. Symptoms of Burnout

Value		Per Cent	Responses
Lack of energy		91.2	3,552
Exhaustion		85.6	3,332
Concentration problems		68.7	2,674
Reduced initiative to complete work-related tasks		66.4	2,584
Sleep disorders		58.3	2,270
Reduced performance of work-related tasks		54.9	2,136
Memory problems		53.9	2,100
Reduced imagination or creativity		53.6	2,088
Inability to make decisions		41.6	1,619

Skipped: 101   **Total: 3,893**

> Trying to teach in a global pandemic is *hard*. I know students and families are suffering. Yet there is still a ton of work to make learning work for them, even if it isn't a priority. I worry about their mental health. My colleagues are working harder than they ever have. Yet the system keeps asking for more: more e-mails, more paperwork, more plans, more supports. Plus marking. Plus planning and backup planning in case you go into quarantine. The masks and sanitizers are becoming things we as teachers need to nag kids about. (Survey response)

Three additional indicators of burnout related to depersonalization (Maslach and Jackson 1981) were added to the January 2021 surveys. The interview data suggested that depersonalization manifested in education workers through a reduced interest in helping students, a reduced desire to help colleagues or other staff, and apathy or a lack of commitment to work. The aggregate data reflect percentages from respondents in the January 2021 surveys, representing only the 1,098 responses received from the random stratified and open online surveys. Even with the smaller sample, 25 per cent of respondents selecting feeling an apathy or lack of emotional commitment to work, 24 per cent feeling a reduced desire to help colleagues and 20 per cent feeling a reduced desire to help students (see Figure 6, page 20). More research is needed to determine the extent of depersonalization in education workers, as this symptom could have the most direct and negative effect on students, staff and the overall work culture.

In the qualitative responses, survey respondents explained the toll that overwork was taking on their mental and emotional health:

> I am so tired of fellow teachers taking advantage of me. I help students all day long and then my peers can't seem to do anything for themselves, so they complain and are rewarded with extra prep times, aid support and other supports. The better I do my job, the more I have to pick up the slack of others. I help people all day and then feel worn out and grumpy by 3:30. It's as if my day ends when work ends and I'm not able to do anything I enjoy in the evenings. (Survey response)

Ignoring the mental health problems of burnout and compassion fatigue in education workers could have longer-term consequences. In other caregiving professions, these occupational hazards have resulted in a decreased workforce (Farmer 2020; New Jersey State Nurses Association 2020), increasingly difficult recruitment as younger workers abandon the profession (HCPro 2021; Tepper and Palladino 2007) and, potentially, a negative impact on students' academic success (Arens and Morin 2016).

> I am currently an online teacher, and I feel even more so this year that it is difficult to maintain enthusiasm for my job and students. It is really hard to show up every day and talk to a blank screen. I feel like I am losing students, and no one seems concerned but me. Not my home school, or [school district] or even their parents. I lose sleep because I am overwhelmed with my job, and I worry about kids who don't show up. I feel to blame as well. I also feel isolated as most of my colleagues work with students face to face. I worry about how I will manage to finish the year. (Survey response)

Figure 6. Additional Burnout Symptoms (January 2021 only)

Random Stratified Sample

Value		Per Cent	Responses
Lack of energy		92.7	727
Exhaustion		88.9	697
Concentration problems		65.9	517
Reduced initiative to complete work-related tasks		64.2	503
Sleep disorders		60.8	477
Memory problems		54.0	423
Reduced performance of work-related tasks		53.4	419
Reduced imagination or creativity		52.8	414
Apathy or lack of emotional commitment to work		47.4	372
Inability to make decisions		40.3	316
Reduced desire to help colleagues or other staff		40.3	316
Reduced desire to help students		33.4	262

Open Online Survey

Value		Per Cent	Responses
Lack of energy		94.1	1,033
Exhaustion		91.6	1,066
Concentration problems		70.9	779
Reduced initiative to complete work-related tasks		69.1	759
Sleep disorders		63.8	701
Memory problems		60.6	665
Reduced performance of work-related tasks		60.5	664
Reduced imagination or creativity		58.0	637
Apathy or lack of emotional commitment to work		55.3	607
Reduced desire to help colleagues or other staff		49.9	548
Inability to make decisions		48.5	533
Reduced desire to help students		38.4	422

Skipped: 12   **Total: 1,098**

KEY FINDING #4: COMPASSION CONTINUUM: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING EDUCATION WORKERS' OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

The data collected from the quantitative and qualitative sources provided a conceptual model of the interrelationship between the three phenomena under study. A complete analysis is provided in the *Phase Two Report* (ATA and Kendrick 2021). Figure 7 is a visual representation of this model.

Figure 7. The Compassion Continuum

This model suggests that compassion satisfaction, or the pleasure an education caregiver feels from completing caring work, and compassion fatigue, the loss of empathy and willingness to provide educational care, exist on a continuum for education workers. Caregiving professionals can move between both ends of the compassion continuum, sometimes very quickly within a single school day. Teachers, for example, can feel a deep satisfaction while working with one group of students to immediately feeling distress when dealing with a different group of students minutes later. Understanding the flow of the continuum is an important part of rebuilding educators' occupational well-being, as they can experience moments throughout the day or school year that bring them joy and sustain them through the more difficult times (Schaefer 2021).

Without the occupational hazards related to crisis and trauma work or the buildup of burnout symptoms over time, education workers can experience a very high level of compassion satisfaction in their professional life.

> I enjoy my job and look forward to going to work. I feel like my students are happy to come to school and that they feel safe, cared for and respected in my class. I have created this atmosphere for them, and I am proud of what I do. (Survey response)

Making a difference in the lives of children and youth was often cited as a reason that education workers felt compassion satisfaction, and respondents were proud of their positive impact on civil society. Their comments focused on the strong and positive role they played in society, and respondents felt enormous reward from this good work.

> I find great satisfaction in working with at-risk youth. My days are very busy and very unpredictable. I love that. Every day, I meet new people, get to know "old" students more deeply, build caring and trusting relationships, help colleagues resolve conflicts with admin/students/ parents and connect families with community resources. I truly love my job. (Survey response)

Burnout can occur independently of compassion stress or compassion fatigue. It is the accumulated consequence of an increased workload and fewer financial supports and resources for effective school and classroom instruction. Education workers also felt the stress of caring for an increased number of students each year.

> I can't keep up no matter how hard I try. Mental health wishers advise me to take more breaks from work but then I'm even further behind. I'm so exhausted I am making mistakes, which causes student/parent/admin pressure and mistrust. (Survey response)

Three intensifiers of occupational health distress were identified in this study: toxic workplace, lack of training and occupational heartbreak (Kendrick 2018). Respondents defined a toxic educational workplace as one that lacked in responsive leadership, had collegial relationships that were strained or hostile, and lacked the necessary supports and resources to adequately educate students and staff. Participants suggested that leaving a toxic person or workplace diminished their symptoms of burnout or compassion fatigue.

> Three years ago, if I had answered this survey, my answers would be different. Have
> been severely compassion fatigued … Didn't know I was … thought I was crazy …
> Left that job, built a new one … Found my purpose again. (Survey response)

The study participants suggested that they felt untrained to deal effectively with the traumatic events their students or colleagues experienced and felt unprepared to deal with their own emotional reactions. Very few participants had formal training in crisis or trauma work during their educational programs, and some were even doing this work with no training at all.

> It seems like most students have experienced a traumatic event and often times, I can feel
> unequipped to help them navigate the challenges that come with that. It also feels like most
> students suffer from anxiety or depression and having lost two students to suicide last year,
> it is hard to determine the "worst case" or the ones closest to suicide. (Survey response)

Finally, occupational heartbreak—or when a person's job breaks their heart—occurs when professional and career-impacting decisions are made without attention being paid to the needs, skills or competencies of the individual worker (Kendrick 2018). The participants expressed feelings of ineffectiveness when expected to teach or assist students in nondesired subject areas, felt helpless when faced by unappreciative students or community members, and felt frustrated or hopeless when they were sidelined from important decisions by elected officials.

> Because no matter how much of myself I pour into my work, it is never enough. The
> system is broken at every turn, and it seems that the only way to make any noticeable
> difference for the truly vulnerable children is to literally do it yourself. Feed them, clothe
> them, show them love. Those of us in the schools must do it because there doesn't seem
> to be a way to get any action through higher/official channels. (Survey response)

KEY FINDING #5: POSSIBLE GLOBAL INTERVENTION FOR EDUCATION WORKERS IS HEARTCARE PLANNING

Education workers use limited interventions to relieve their mental and emotional distress aside from self-directed or individual interventions. The survey data revealed that 98 per cent of the interventions used by the participants were self-directed or individual, such as walking their dog or talking to a family member. Further, they perceived a stigma around requesting professional or expert intervention to ease their workplace distress.

Rather than being expected to discover and navigate the supports and resources that they can access during a period of mental or emotional distress, education workers might benefit from investigating the potential interventions to recover before they perform crisis or trauma work.

HEARTcare planning is a holistic and comprehensive framework to help education workers plan for the prevention or treatment of mental and emotional distress at the workplace, namely compassion stress, compassion fatigue or burnout. As a part of HEARTcare planning (www.heartcareeducators .ca), education workers investigate the many resources available to them and decide which ones are the most suited to building their occupational health. In addition to figuring out their individual health needs, they also find out more about the school, system, professional and educational work interventions available to them after providing crisis and trauma work (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Conceptualization of HEARTcare Planning

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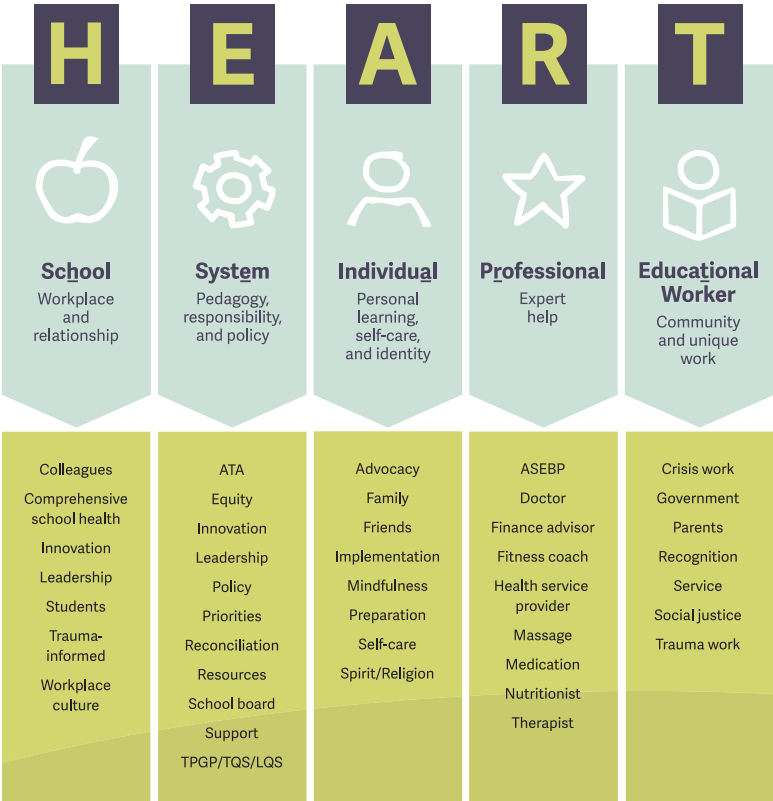
Optimally, HEARTcare planning occurs before an individual begins their professional work, so it would be a useful addition to preservice teacher and other education workers' education programs. By investigating the wide variety of resources and supports available to them, individuals can identify what they need to return to a state of positive mental health after a traumatic event. Further, HEARTcare planning takes an ecological approach to system change (Bronfenbrenner 1975), understanding that improving personal well-being needs to include addressing complex and systemic problems that impact the individual's work and social environment, such as increased class sizes and childhood poverty, that can lead to the traumatic experiences that create the conditions for burnout and compassion fatigue in education caregivers.

> The workload is truly unreasonable. Teachers are continually expected to do more with less. We do a ridiculous amount of unpaid work and endure a lot of disrespect. In order to reduce compassion fatigue, increase compassion satisfaction and improve teacher wellness, the systemic issues need to be addressed. "Self-care" is not enough. (Survey response)

All education workers, from bus drivers to superintendents, have a role to play to protect the collective heartwork of educators through conscious effort to develop a positive workplace for staff and students alike. Although individuals in different job roles—in particular, teachers and other student-facing workers—experience higher rates of compassion fatigue (see Appendix A), the education field needs to take an "all hands on deck" approach to building a stronger workplace for everyone.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Education, as an essential service in a civil society, is not the responsibility of individuals—it is the lifeblood of a community. As such, all citizens benefit when it is prioritized and education workers can create and maintain safe and caring schools for all students and adults in their care. The main takeaway from this two-year study is that education workers in Alberta are at a pivotal place in their professional wellness, and the work to create a healthier workforce through prioritizing collective well-being needs to begin immediately. The grim statistics outlined in the three phases of this study should be seen as a call to action to prioritize the well-being of the adults in educational workplaces as a foundation for building the health and wellness of the children and youth who learn and live with them every day.

In order to achieve these lofty goals and to honour the calls to action from the research participants, I make the following recommendations:

1. Preprofessional education and training for all types of education workers should include classwork or courses that teach education workers how to prevent these occupational well-being hazards.

2. Professional development in HEARTcare planning should be provided to current education workers.

3. The findings from this study should be communicated to the general public in a relatable and straightforward manner so that the community understands the essential role of a well-funded and respected education system.

4. Messaging to education workers and the general community should stress that the mental and emotional health of education workers has a noticeable impact on student academic success.

5. Further research should be completed on the compassion continuum model, the impact of implementing HEARTcare planning and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the occupational health of education workers.

The final survey question was as follows: Is there anything else you would like the research team to know? The survey and interview participants stressed the importance of this research and its findings being publicized to create a more emotionally and mentally healthy education workforce. The participants in this study expressed a deep concern for the well-being of their students, staff and colleagues, but they felt they were stifled by ever-increasing work expectations, overloaded with unmanageable numbers of students, and helpless to build the positive and sustaining relationships that their students and colleagues needed to find academic success.

The participants shared troubling stories of trauma from the education trenches, but what they desired was a positive workplace, a more reasonable workload, and respect from their elected officials and community. They worried about how burnout and compassion fatigue were impacting their effectiveness in educating children and youth, even more than how these occupational hazards were impacting their own well-being.

> Our jobs as educators are extremely complex at the best of times, and I feel that many of us have the type of personality that we strive to support our students and their families, often worrying about them. Teaching isn't just what we do, it is who we are.

> However, over the past 20 years of teaching, the changes to classroom composition, expectations for administrative duties, and rising mental health issues in families have really made our jobs much more challenging. With the challenges have also come smaller budgets for schools, with buildings that are run down and over capacity with large populations of students. This affects what supports and resources we get, which adds to the challenge, as there aren't many supports available.

> Honestly, going to therapy and meeting with friends and exercising is not going to change this. Teaching is just really, really hard right now, and until there are changes put in place to provide more support for teachers, we are going to lose teachers to burnout. (Survey response)

Compassion fatigue and burnout in education caregivers are a foreseeable response to providing emotional labour in working with vulnerable children and youth. Providing education workers with training, support, resources and acknowledgement is essential for maintaining a world-class education system in Alberta. Protecting the heartwork of the professionals in this system will ensure that burnout and compassion fatigue are not inevitable and that school system excellence will continue.

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Appendix A

TABLE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS BY JOB ROLE

Demographics

Job Role	Count	Percent of Total Participants (Aggregate Responses: 5,028)
Support Staff	395	7.9
Teacher	3,927	78.1
School Leader	398	7.9
System Leader	145	2.9
Other (Role Not Listed/Write-In)	163	3.2
Responses to Key Findings		
Support Staff	Total: 395	
	Nonteaching: 85	21.5
	Educational Assistant: 255	64.2
	Support Staff: 57	14.4
Geographic Location		
	Rural: 109	27.6
	Urban: 286	72.4
Gender		
Male	9	2.3
Female	384	96.7
Transgender	1	0.3
Prefer Not to Answer	3	0.8
Knowledge of Emotional Labour		
Yes	165	47.1
No	148	42.3
Not Sure	37	10.6
Clients		
Work Primarily with K–12 Students	236	68.2
Primarily with Adults	48	13.9
Leadership Capacity	11	3.2
Split Between Students and Adults	51	14.7

Emotional Feeling Rules		
Top Three Emotions Expressed	Happy, joy, cheerful	89.7
	Energetic, excitement	21.0
	Empathy, concern, compassion	19.0
Top Three Repressed	Anger	54.6
	Sadness, depression	54.1
	Frustration	42.3
"Good at your job"	Fosters effective relationships	74.8
Compassion Continuum		
Compassion Score	Compassion satisfaction	60.7
	Compassion fatigue	39.3
Reasons for Compassion Satisfaction	Positive feelings for students/clients	42.9
	Positive outcomes for doing helping work	35.3
	Positive feelings for colleagues	14.3
Reasons for Compassion Fatigue	Workplace culture not supportive/ unhealthy	54.1
	Work intensification	23.5
	COVID-19/response to change	17.3
	Direct exposure to trauma with clients/ students	16.3
Burnout		
Symptoms of Burnout	Lack of energy	87.5
	Exhaustion	76.1
	Concentration problems	60.3
Interventions		
Actions to Feel Better	Personal support network	81.8
	Massage, chiropractic, other similar services	76.2
Interventions	Self-directed strategies	98.2
Other Experiences/Comments with Phenomena		
	Plea for help/lack of support impacting efficacy	29.3
	Assistance for education professionals/ more resources	27.1
	Improve work/classroom conditions	25.0

Teaching Staff		
	Complete Survey: 3,112	79.2
	Partial Completion: 815	20.8
Geographic Location		
	Rural: 953	24.3
	Urban: 2,964	75.7
Gender		
Male	517	13.2
Female	3,370	85.9
Transgender	3	0.1
Prefer Not to Answer	27	0.2
Knowledge of Emotional Labour		
Yes	1,820	53.0
No	1,424	41.4
Not Sure	193	5.6
Clients		
Work Primarily with K–12 Students	3,301	96.0
Primarily with Adults	8	0.2
Leadership Capacity	4	0.1
Split Between Students and Adults	126	3.7
Emotional Feeling Rules		
Top Three Emotions Expressed	Happy, joy, cheerful	87.2
	Energetic, excitement	30.0
	Frustration*	18.6
Top Three Repressed	Sadness, depression	54.4
	Anger	52.1
	Frustration	40.1
"Good at your job"	Fosters effective relationships	62.6
	Demonstrates a professional body of knowledge	12.8
Compassion Continuum		
Compassion Score	Compassion satisfaction 1,341	42.2
	Compassion fatigue 1,836	57.8
Reasons for Compassion Satisfaction	Positive outcomes of doing helping work	35.5
	Positive feelings for clients/students	29.7
	Feeling of success with work; good at my job	17.9

Reasons for Compassion Fatigue	Workplace culture not supportive/ unhealthy	53.9
	Work intensification	43.5
	COVID-19/response to change	23.5
	Direct exposure to trauma with clients/ students	21.8
Burnout		
Symptoms of Burnout	Lack of energy	92.3
	Exhaustion	87.4
	Concentration problems	69.8
	Reduced initiative to complete work-related tasks	69.5
Interventions		
Actions to Feel Better	Personal support network	86.4
	Massage, chiropractic, other similar services	73.8
	Active support network	62.0
Interventions	Self-directed strategies	98.2
Other Experiences/Comments with Phenomena		
	Improve work/classroom conditions	36.5
	Plea for help/lack of support impacting efficacy	35.9
	Social judgment impacting efficacy and ability to be effective	26.0

School Leader		
	Complete: 314	78.9
	Partial: 84	21.1
Geographic Location		
	Rural: 107	27.0
	Urban: 289	73.0
Gender		
Male	110	27.6
Female	285	71.6
Transgender		0.0
Prefer Not to Answer	3	0.8
Knowledge of Emotional Labour		
Yes	192	56.5
No	136	40.0
Not Sure	12	3.5

Clients		
Work Primarily with K–12 Students	99	29.1
Primarily with Adults	9	2.6
Leadership Capacity	45	13.2
Split Between Students and Adults	187	55.0
Emotional Feeling Rules		
Top Three Emotions Expressed	Happy, joy, cheerful	80.3
	Empathy, concern, compassion	27.2
	Frustration*	19.7
Top Three Repressed	Anger	51.5
	Sadness, depression	45.1
	Frustration	37.7
"Good at your job"	Fosters effective relationships	63.4
	Demonstrates a professional body of knowledge	10.9
Compassion Continuum		
Compassion Score	Compassion satisfaction	57.8
	Compassion fatigue	42.2
Reasons for Compassion Satisfaction	Positive outcomes for doing helping work	40.7
	Positive feelings for students/clients	18.0
Reasons for Compassion Fatigue	Workplace culture not supportive/ unhealthy	52.8
	Work intensification	31.7
	Direct exposure to trauma with clients/ students	28.5
Burnout		
Symptoms of Burnout	Lack of energy	89.9
	Exhaustion	82.2
	Concentration problems	67.4
	Reduced initiative to complete work-related tasks	60.5
Interventions		
Actions to Feel Better	Personal support network	83.7
	Massage, chiropractic, other similar services	75.1
Interventions	Self-directed strategies	98.6

Other Experiences/Comments with Phenomena		
	Societal judgment impacting efficacy and ability to be effective	30.4
	Improve work/classroom conditions	28.6
	Plea for help/lack of support impacting efficacy	25.0

System Leader		
	Complete: 110	75.9
	Partial: 35	24.1
	K–12 System Administration: 109	75.2
	Elected School Leader: 3	2.1
	Leader in System-Level Environment: 33	22.8
Geographic Location		
	Rural: 44	30.3
	Urban: 101	69.7
Gender		
Male	26	17.9
Female	115	79.3
Not Listed	1	0.7
Prefer Not to Answer	3	2.1
Knowledge of Emotional Labour		
Yes	71	59.2
No	45	37.5
Not Sure	4	3.3
Clients		
Work Primarily with K–12 Students	10	8.3
Primarily with Adults	13	10.8
Leadership Capacity	56	46.7
Split Between Students and Adults	41	34.3
Emotional Feeling Rules		
Top Three Emotions Expressed	Happy, joy, cheerful	70.6
	Empathy, concern, compassion	26.6
	Frustration*	23.9
Top Three Repressed	Anger	48.6
	Sadness, depression	48.8
	Frustration	37.1

"Good at your job"	Fosters effective relationships	57.1
	Demonstrates a professional body of knowledge	28.6
Compassion Continuum		
Compassion Score	Compassion satisfaction	68.4
	Compassion fatigue	31.6
Reasons for Compassion Satisfaction	Positive outcomes for doing helping work	31.4
	Feelings of success with work/good at my job	21.4
	Positive feelings for colleagues	20.0
Reasons for Compassion Fatigue	Workplace culture not supportive/ unhealthy	51.9
	Work intensification	40.7
	Direct exposure to trauma with clients/ students	25.9
Burnout		
Symptoms of Burnout	Exhaustion	76.6
	Lack of energy	74.8
	Concentration problems	69.2
	Reduced initiative to complete work-related tasks	61.7
Interventions		
Actions to Feel Better	Personal support network	90.0
	Massage, chiropractic, other similar services	73.6
	Active support network	67.3
Interventions	Self-directed strategies	100.0
Other Experiences/Comments with Phenomena		
	Societal judgment impacting efficacy and ability to be effective	35.0
	Improve work/classroom conditions	26.7
	Plea for help/lack of support impacting efficacy	21.7

*Note: participants identified frustration as an emotion that was both expressed and repressed; some participants qualified their response by suggesting that it's acceptable to show frustration with subjects or topics and exams or policies, but not to direct frustration at students or colleagues.

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