

# Teacher Flourishing

*Research Report*





The study was created at the initiative of the Happy Teachers for Romania Program and was carried out between March and May 2021, together with Dr. Gilda Scarfe, professor, lawyer, practitioner of positive psychology and founder of the Innovative Educational Consultancy Project at a global level - Positive Ed.

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## Abstract

School teachers are among those professionals with the highest levels of job stress and burnout across many countries. (Stoeber, J., & Rennert, D, 2008). Research shows that more than 50% of teachers who start teaching actually leave the profession within their first 5 years of their career. They find the process of teaching their students incredibly difficult.

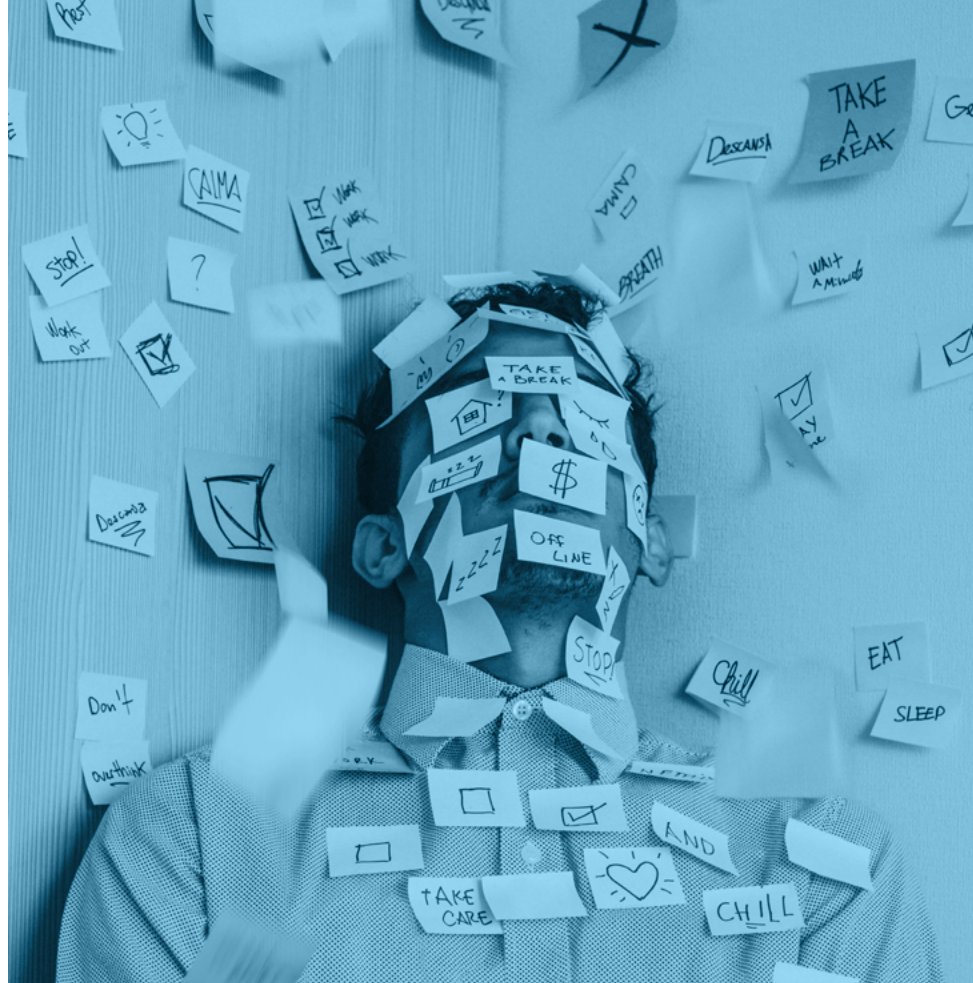
Our aim was to generate estimates of the prevalence of flourishers, languishers and the moderately mentally healthy.

## About the research

**Simona Baci**, founder of Transylvania College and Profesorii Fericiți in partnership with **Dr. Gilda Scarfe**, founder of Positive Ed, UK has evaluated and investigated the current level of teacher wellbeing at a national level in Romania through the Teacher Flourishing Evaluation from The Harvard Flourishing Center.

The programme has developed a measurement approach to human flourishing, based around five central domains:

1. happiness and life satisfaction
2. mental and physical health



3. meaning and purpose
4. character and virtue
5. close social relationships.

# Introduction

School teachers are among those professionals with the highest levels of job stress and burnout across many countries. (Stoeber, J., & Rennert, D, 2008). Research shows that more than 50% of teachers who start teaching actually leave the profession within their first 5 years of their career. They find the process of teaching their students incredibly difficult.

Frequently, the adversities of the profession sway highly effective teachers into social and emotional deficits, and this eventually leads to burnout (*Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997*). Not only does it lead to burnout, but emotional depletion and high attrition in teaching may be costly for the educational system – both financially and academically (*Klusmann, Richter, & Lütke, 2016*).

Few studies exist in Romanian society that examine the wellbeing of teachers and the effect of their wellbeing on teaching practices and student learning.



## What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is a multi-construct domain and is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “*the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy*”. However, it is important to realise that wellbeing is a much broader concept than moment-to-moment happiness. While it does include happiness, it also includes other things, such as how satisfied people are with their life as a whole, their sense of purpose, and how in control they feel. In this respect, the New Economics Foundation describes wellbeing as the following:

*“Wellbeing can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole.”*

Most people would agree that wellbeing is something they strive towards and the subjective measure of people's wellbeing is deemed so important that it is included alongside health and the economy in measures of national wellbeing. It includes mental and physical health, physical and emotional safety, and a feeling of belonging, sense of purpose, achievement and success.

Wellbeing is a broad concept and covers a range of psychological and



physical abilities. Five major types of well-being are said to be:

- **Emotional wellbeing** – the ability to be resilient, manage one's emotions and generate emotions that lead to good feelings
- **Physical wellbeing** – the ability to improve the functioning of one's body through healthy eating and good exercise habits
- **Social wellbeing** – the ability to communicate, develop meaningful relationships with others and create one's own emotional support network
- **Workplace wellbeing** – the ability to pursue one's own interests, beliefs and values in order to gain meaning and happiness in life and professional enrichment
- **Societal wellbeing** – the ability to participate in an active community or culture.

Overall well-being depends on all these types of functioning to an extent.

*“Having meaning and purpose is integral to people's sense of well-being. Well-being involves far more than happiness, and accomplishments go far beyond test success.”*

## Why is wellbeing important at school?

Good staff wellbeing is essential for cultivating a mentally healthy school, for retaining and motivating staff and for promoting pupil wellbeing



**Emotional**



**Physical**



**Social**



**Workplace**



**Societal**

and attainment. Wellbeing is important at school because schools have an essential role to play in supporting students to make healthy lifestyle choices and understand the effects of their choices on their health and wellbeing. Childhood and adolescence is a critical period in the development of long-term attitudes towards personal well-being and lifestyle choices. The social and emotional skills, knowledge and behaviours that young people learn in the classroom help them build resilience and set the pattern for how they will manage their physical and mental health throughout their lives.

Schools are able to provide students with reliable information and deepen their understanding of the choices they face. They are also able to provide students with the intellectual skills required to reflect critically on these choices and on the influences that society brings to bear on them, including through peer pressure, advertising, social media and family and cultural values.

There is a direct link between wellbeing and academic achievement and vice versa, i.e. well-being is a crucial prerequisite for achievement and achievement is essential for well-being. Physical activity is associated with improved learning and the ability to concentrate. Strong, supportive relationships provide students with the emotional resources to step out of their intellectual 'comfort zone' and explore new ideas and ways of thinking, which is fundamental to educational achievement.



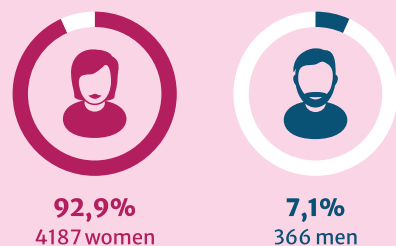
Wellbeing is also important for developing important democratic competences. Positive emotions are associated with the development of flexibility and adaptability, openness to other cultures and beliefs, self-efficacy and tolerance of ambiguity, all of which lie at the heart of the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture.

## Research Methodology

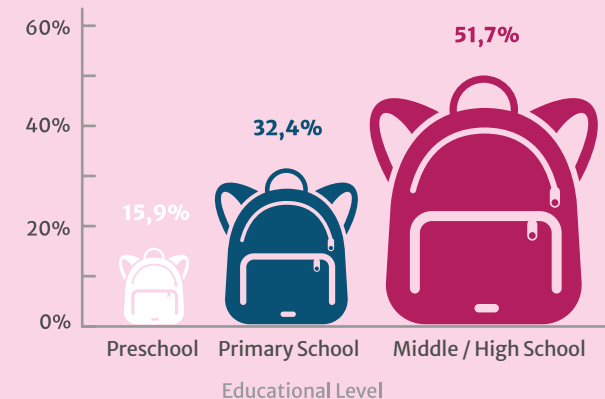
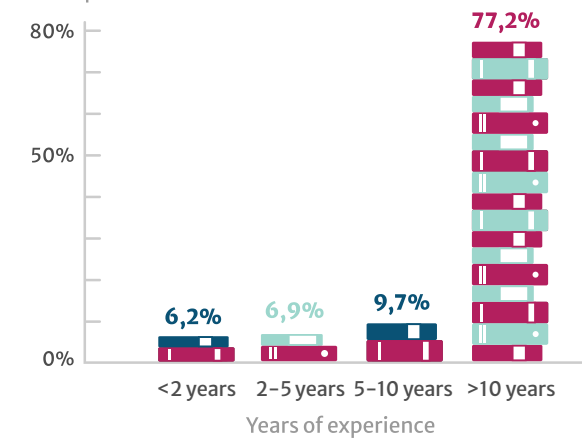
The research consists of quantitative and qualitative analysis of data collected during March-June 2020 through The Well-Being Assessment which was a joint collaboration between members of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's 100 Million Healthier Lives metrics team and The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard's Institute for Quantitative Social Science. This harmonized consolidation of wellbeing assessments incorporates both the Well-Being Assessment (Adult - 12 items) – 100 Million Healthier Lives (*Stiefel et al., 2020*) and the Flourishing Index (*VanderWeele, 2017*), along with additional items developed jointly. The entire 24-item assessment can be used without permission for noncommercial purposes, provided appropriate citation is given.

A total of **5227 teachers from primary and secondary education from Romania** (4817 Female and 366 male) took part in the study. The sample sizes for the rural district was 1691 (31%) and urban 3608 (69%).

## Participants' gender



## Participants' background

Educational level  
where the participants teachPercentage  
of respondentsParticipants' years of experience  
in teachingPercentage  
of respondents

## Stage 1

### The Survey Results:

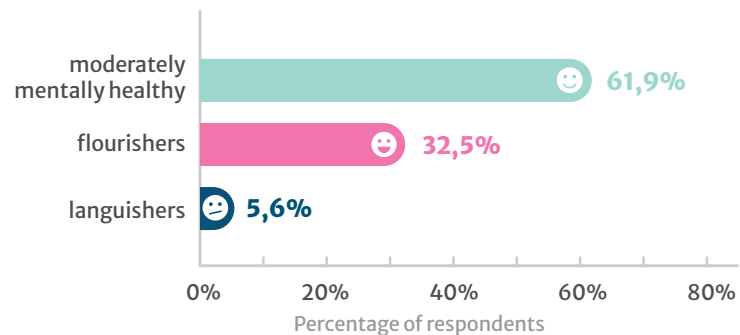
The results of the study were promising, with most of the participants feeling happy in their work. This was consistently true whatever the demographic setting, and for all ages. On average **83%** said that they are **satisfied with life in general**.

Our aim was to generate estimates of the prevalence of flourishers, languishers and the moderately mentally healthy. These estimates in the teachers showed that only **32.5% were flourishers**, **5.6% were languishing**, and the **majority had moderate mental health (61.9%)**.

### Perceived life satisfaction in participants

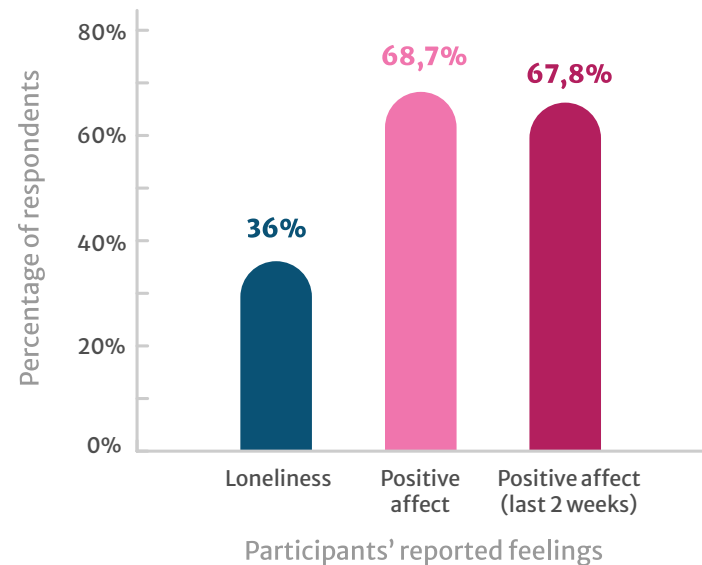


### Prevalence of flourishers, languishers and moderately mentally healthy among participants



We also found that despite most participants being satisfied with their work, **36% found themselves lonely**. In our sample, **68.7% felt that they experience positive affect** like happiness and joy but only 2 thirds have experience these affect in the past 2 weeks.

### Feelings of loneliness and positive affect in participants



## Stage 2

### Qualitative Data Results

We have also collected qualitative data through consultation with selected teachers as we felt that the hard data which we gathered seemed to be somewhat disconnected with the hard reality teachers are facing. We have interviewed several teachers from the cohort which took the survey and we have found that **over 80% of the teachers say that their work has no positive effect on their mental health and wellbeing.**

This is partly because of the **lack of autonomy** and support offered by the school leadership but also due to the **lack of understanding** of the importance of teacher wellbeing. This highlights the need to place the mental wellbeing of the whole school community, including staff, at the heart of the school's agenda, to encourage staff to come forward and speak about their concerns. Respondents emphasised the importance of feeling

listened to, appreciated and understood, and that recognition for good work goes a long way towards making staff feel valued. Likewise, teachers said that during particularly difficult times, acknowledgement that today must have been hard can be validating. The consultation highlighted the importance of positive relationships among colleagues, and particularly the value of building a sense of staff 'togetherness'. Respondents suggested various ways schools might work toward this.

Teachers draw on a range of resources when feeling stressed or worried at work. Friends and family were the source of support identified by the greatest number in our consultation. **Over 85%** would approach a colleague in a similar role, with fewer indicating that they would turn to their line manager or director (school leader). It is, perhaps, a cause for concern that **68% would not approach anyone with work-related stress and worry.**

Teachers said that open discussion of mental wellbeing is important in encouraging individuals to come forward if they are struggling.

A small minority would seek help from their doctor or a mental health professional if they felt worried or stressed at work but due to financial restraints they will only.

### Some other findings:

Most teachers agreed that a teacher's wellbeing affects their performance as an education professional, especially their ability to teach in the classroom.

Teachers' wellbeing is finely balanced; the difficulty is not necessarily increased workloads as commonly assumed, but it can often be a crisis in their personal life - especially relationship difficulties, family bereavement or illness and childcare issues - which tips them over the edge.

Teachers reported a number of work-related stress triggers including busy times of the year, such as assessment periods; the pressure of extracurricular activities; the unexpected; keeping up with the pace of change; and changes in school leadership.


Many teachers who experienced poor wellbeing professed wanting to stay in control and were striving to do everything to perfection all of the time; realizing this is not always possible appeared to be a large part of their recovery.

Many teachers would like to receive more support in how to manage their emotions and their responses.

Being organised and able to prioritise are two essential skills teachers need to learn to maintain good wellbeing.

As a result of this study, we suggest a framework for the implementation of teacher wellbeing education programs, which could include wellbeing accreditation standards, supporting domains, and





sample courses. Planting a seed of resilience within teacher professional development may allow educators to build foundational practices and pedagogies based on the science of human flourishing.

If teachers have strategies to support their wellbeing, they will be better able to manage everyday stressors of the job and not only survive but flourish. In doing so, they will become better role models and educators for our students.

Teachers themselves recognize that focusing on their own wellbeing is crucial in supporting student wellbeing (*Sue Roffey, Wellbeing Australia, 2012*)

The changing nature of society expects schools to address social justice, promote a sense of belonging, build resilience and keep abreast of mass media influences which fuels unrealistic expectations of teachers. (*Mccallum & Price, 2010*)

John Hattie has linked teacher motivation, or lack thereof, to student achievement;

*“When teachers become burned out, or worn out, their student’s achievement outcomes are likely to suffer because they are more concerned with their personal survival.” (Hattie, 2013)*

We hope that our research sparks conversations about the importance of prioritizing teacher wellbeing and resilience.

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As the need to reduce the level of stress is being emphasized more often, InIm Institute creates, experiments, tests and adopts teaching structures focused on the development of emotional intelligence, wisdom, solidarity and resilience. Through research and studies developed to date, we create programs and courses of training, in accordance with progressive educational, social changes and interdependence.

Our goal is to build a community, in a multidimensional space, where Good Teachers and their students feel they belong. Together, we expand the qualities of mind, soul, and heart that will allow personal and interpersonal development to progress.

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