

# The effect of Covid-19 pandemic on work among comprehensive schoolteachers: how to support employee well-being?

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# Background

- Covid-19 pandemic has caused prominent disruption to schoolteachers' work.
- Job demands
  - such as heavy workload,
  - rapid adoption of online teaching,
  - and blurring boundaries between work and family domains,have characterized teachers' working conditions under Covid-19 (Kaden, 2020; Milliken et al., 2020).

# Aims of the study:

- I) to examine job demands that characterize teachers' working and teaching experiences under Covid-19. (qualitative data)
- II) to examine whether job demands (work-home conflict and ICT availability demands) are associated with burnout, and whether high-levels of organizational support can buffer the potential negative connection (quantitative data).

# Theoretical framework

- The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory argues that, especially in demanding work settings, organizational practices may play a crucial role by buffering the adverse impact of excessive job demands on employee well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).
- Job demands
  - ICT availability demands: urgency to respond immediately beyond regular working hours through various ICT channels (Day et al., 2012)
  - Work-home conflict: pressures stemming from work make it difficult to fulfill obligations related to family domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985)

- **Burnout** refers to a persistent work-related state of ill-being (Maslach & Leiter, 1997)
  - Emotional exhaustion: draining of emotional energy and feelings of fatigue
  - Cynicism: a negative attitude toward one's job
  - Sense of inadequacy: having a view of being no longer capable of fulfilling one's job responsibilities
- **We focus on three types of organizational support practices:**
  - Employer support: organizing safe working practices and providing information related to Covid-19
  - School support: providing guidance for carrying out teaching and ways of organizing work during Covid-19 (Lam, 2010)
  - Collegial support: sharing experiences of teaching with colleagues amidst Covid-19 (Lam, 2010)

# The data

- Comprehensive schoolteachers employed by City of Tampere (N=1300) were invited to take part in the survey via schools' communication channel Wilma. Online questionnaire was carried out between December 2020 - February 2021.
- A total of 361 responses were returned with a response rate of 28 %. We excluded 38 non-teachers (e.g. administrative personnel) from the analysis leading to a total of **323** respondents.
- We also used responses from one open-ended question that asked respondents to describe their experiences of working under Covid-19 (n=275).



# Analysis strategy

I) Qualitative content analysis was conducted to an open-ended question that asked teachers to describe their experiences of working during the Covid-19 (n=275).

II) Linear hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between job demands (ICT availability demands and work-family conflict), organizational practices, and burnout (n=323).

- Step 1: Job demands (ICT availability demands and work-family conflict)
- Step 2: Organizational practices: a) employer support, b) school support and c) collegial support.
- Step 3. Six interaction terms that were formed between each job demand and organizational practice

# I) Findings: characterizations of job demands under Covid-19 (qualitative)

- Increasing workload
  - Difficulties in simultaneously combining face-to-face and distance learning, continuous changes related to safety practices under Covid-19, feelings of inadequacy
- Spilling work to leisure time
  - Blurring boundaries between work and leisure time, difficulties in detaching oneself from work
- Being available outside working hours via digital channels
  - A need to be available through multiple digital channels and respond to requests from parents and colleagues
- Feelings of loneliness



# Hypothesis for quantitative analysis

- *Hypothesis 1:* The job demands, namely ICT availability demands and work-family conflict, are positively related to three components of burnout (emotional exhaustion, cynicism and sense of inadequacy)
- Hypothesis 2: Organizational practices (employer support, school support and collegial support) are negatively related to three components of burnout (emotional exhaustion, cynicism and sense of inadequacy)
- *Hypothesis 3:* Organizational practices (employer support, school support and collegial support) buffer against the negative effects of job demands (work-home conflict and ICT availability demands)

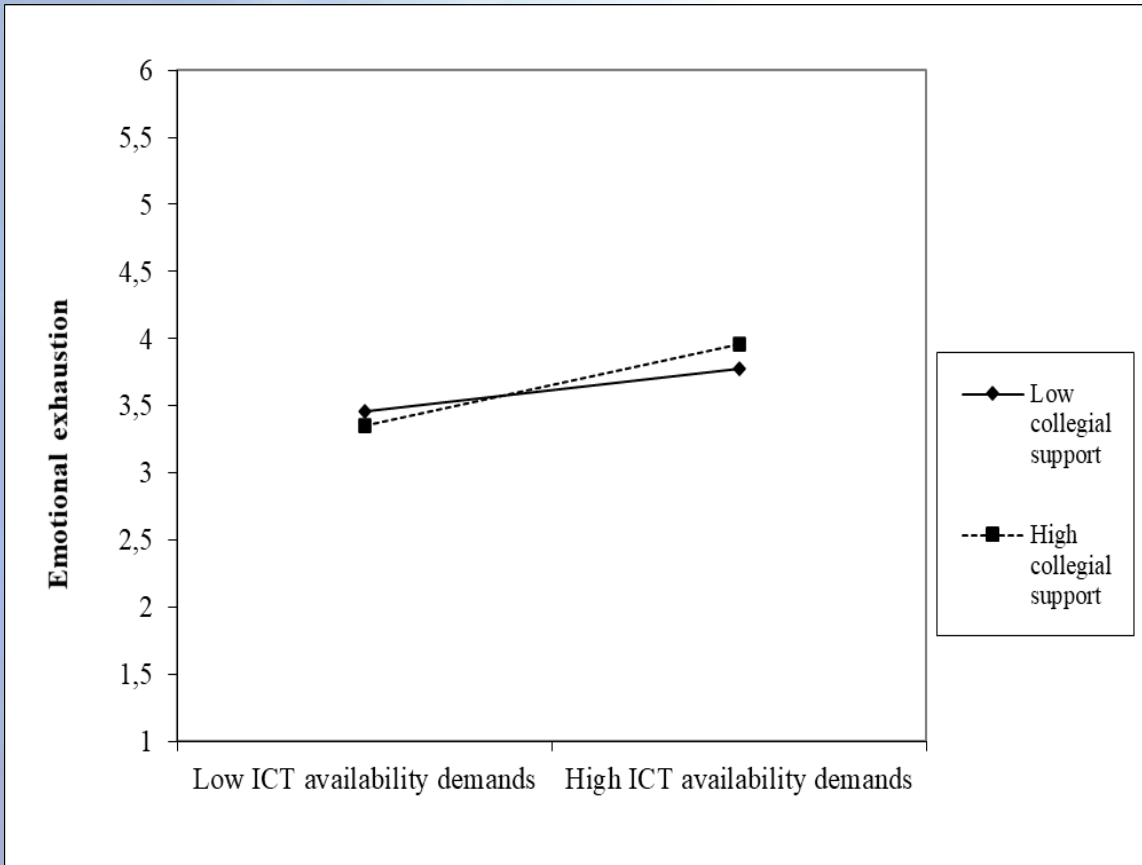
# Measures

- **Burnout (BBI-9) (Salmela-Aro et al., 2011)**
  - Emotional exhaustion, 3 items, e.g. I am snowed under with work,  $\alpha=0.75$
  - Cynicism, 3 items, e.g. "I feel dispirited at work and I think of leaving my job",  $\alpha=0.84$
  - Sense of inadequacy, 3 items, "Honestly I felt more appreciated at work before",  $\alpha=0.75$
- **ICT availability demands**, 4 items, e.g. "I am expected to be accessible at all times (e.g., through cell phone, instant messaging)"  $\alpha=0.88$  (Day ym., 2012)
- **Work-family conflict**, 3 items, e.g. " Do your friends or family tell you that you work too much?" ,  $\alpha=0.85$  (Pejtersen ym., 2010)
- **Organizational support practices**
  - Employer support, 5 items, e.g. " The employer has taken good measures to secure the working environment under Covid-19",  $\alpha=0.85$  (formed by Department of Psychology, NTNU.)
  - School support, 3 items, e.g., There was good coordination in my school during the Covid-19 so that I could complete my task smoothly,  $\alpha=0.77$  (adapted from Lam et al., 2010)
  - Collegial support, 2 items, e.g. "Many colleagues shared useful experiences with me" (adapted from Lam et al., 2010)

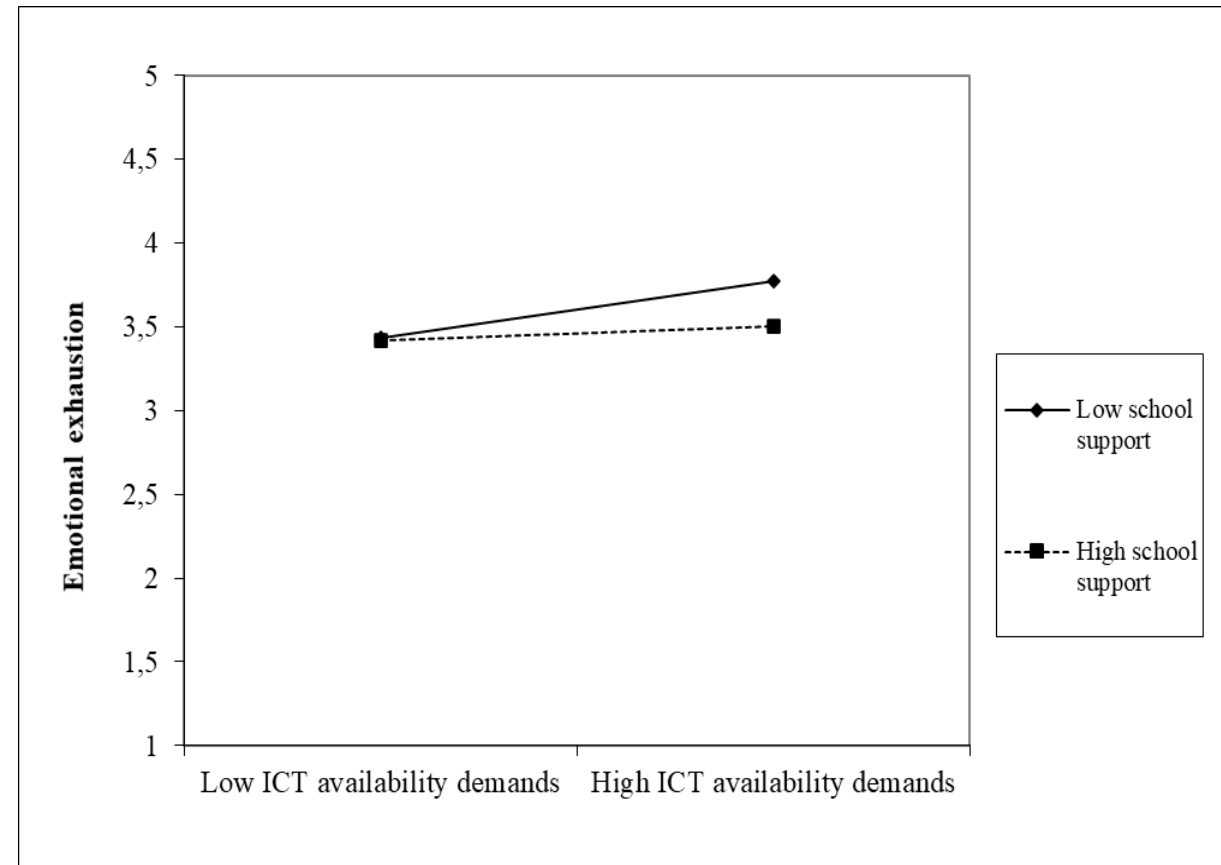
## 2) Findings: How job demands and organizational practices are related to burnout under Covid-19?

- **Emotional exhaustion (the model explains 60% of variance)**
  - Step 1: ICT availability demands ( $\beta=0.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and work-family conflict ( $\beta=0.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$ )
  - Step 2: no significant associations (organisational practices)
  - Step 3: ICT availability demands x collegial support ( $\beta=0.12$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), ICT availability demands x school support ( $\beta=-0.11$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )
- **Sense of inadequacy (the model explains 30%)**
  - Step 1: ICT availability demands ( $\beta=0.22$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and work-family conflict ( $\beta=0.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ )
  - Step 2 School support ( $\beta=-0.18$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and employer support ( $\beta=-0.20$ ,  $p < 0.01$ )
  - Step 3: work-family conflict x collegial support ( $\beta=-0.12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )

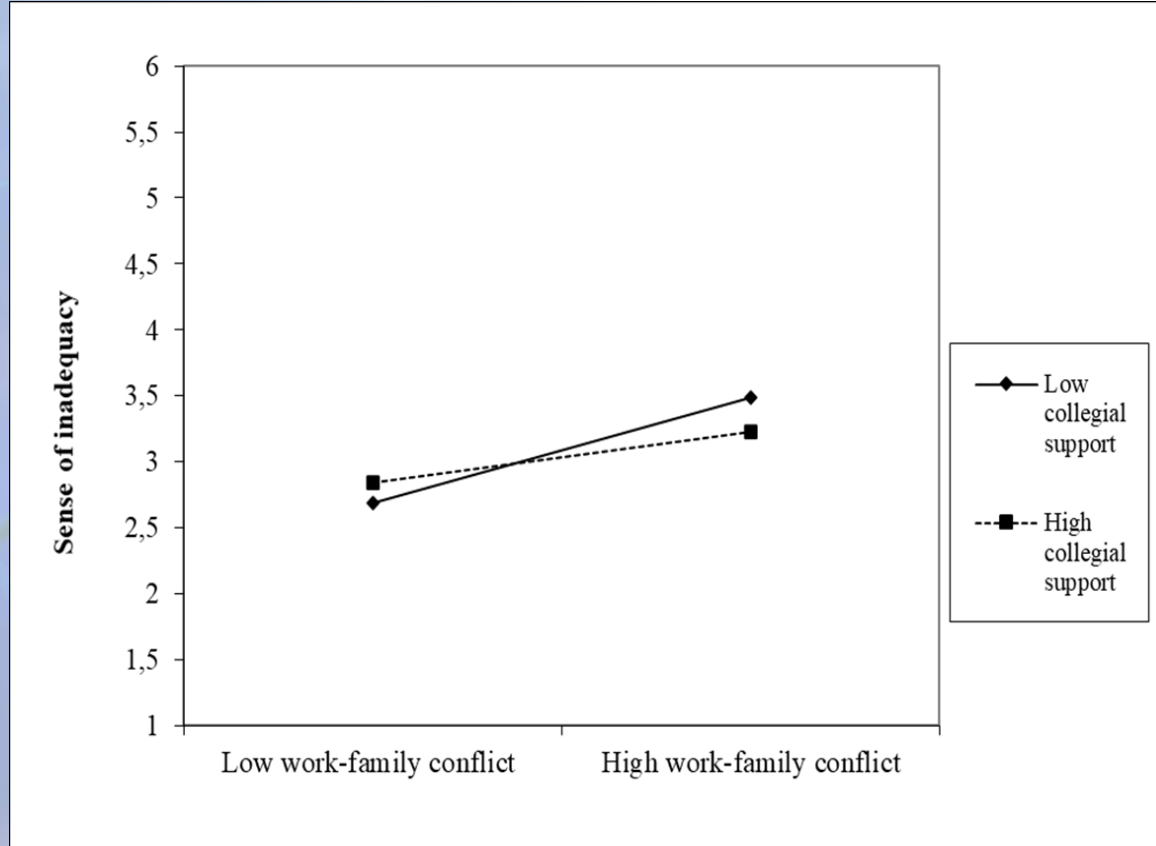
(Only statistically significant variables are mentioned for the sake of clarity)



Employees with high levels of collegial support reported more emotional exhaustion under high levels of ICT availability demands compared to employees with lower levels of collegial support.



Employees with low levels of school support reported more exhaustion under high level of ICT availability demands.



Employees with low level of collegial support reported more sense of inadequacy under high level of work-family conflict compared to employees with high collegial support.



# Discussion

- The results are in line with the assumptions of the JD-R model as both work-family conflict and ICT availability demands were associated with higher level of burnout.
- Creating varied organizational practices to support well-being of teachers could be useful in pandemic situation
  - Especially organizational practices related to ways of organizing work and supporting teachers at school level turned out to be beneficial regarding burnout.
- Although collegial support was not directly related to lower burnout, it was discovered to diminish the adverse effects of the work-family conflict that could ultimately lead to burnout.
- However, building shared practices at school level might be needed for preventing teachers' experiences of having to be available through multiple digital channels.



# Thank you very much for your attention!

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