

Don't Dismiss the Teachers: The Increased Demand for Teacher Mental Health Services Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background and Significance:

Much discussion has surrounded how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted youth mental health, but less has been done to determine its impact on teachers. Youth First, Inc. of Evansville, IN places masters-level social workers in K-12 schools, providing critical support for Indiana youth. A common report among Youth First social workers has been the increase in personal consultations the teachers request. The objective of this study is to analyze the quantity and nature of teacher consultations across the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods:

Youth First collects data on services and compiles it on an internal server. For this study, access was given to data regarding teacher consultations. The data was then analyzed to determine trends. To better understand the nationwide teacher shortage, a literature review was conducted.

Results:

The data shows that in AY 2019-2020, there were 957 personal mental health consultations between teachers and social workers, accounting for 4.7% of total teacher consultations. Data from AY 2020-2021 shows an increase to 1,816 personal consultations, accounting for 5.6% of total consultations. While this jump does correspond to an increase in number of schools served, it also corresponds to the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. AY 2021-2022 had 1,567 personal teacher consultations, accounting for 4.5% of the total number of consultations.

Conclusion and Future Implications:

According to the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, 44% of U.S. public schools currently report teaching vacancies. Of these schools, 61% "identified the pandemic as a cause of increased teaching vacancies". According to a 2022 study by Indiana State University, nearly 97% of Indiana schools are reporting a teacher shortage. It is my hope that this data can be shared with Indiana school systems to address mental health needs of teachers, which may potentially improve the state-wide teacher shortage over time.