

Investigating the Factors Affecting Mental Health of Public School Teachers in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Andkhoy District

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the mental health status of public school teachers in Andkhoy District, Faryab Province, Afghanistan, and to identify the factors influencing their psychological well-being. Using a quantitative survey design, data were collected from 210 teachers selected through stratified proportional random sampling. The GHQ-28 questionnaire was employed to measure four dimensions of mental health: physical symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and depression. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS version 26. The findings reveal that teachers' overall mental health is at a moderate or borderline level, indicating the presence of considerable psychological stress. Among the dimensions, depression shows the highest mean score, suggesting a greater vulnerability to emotional distress. However, inferential analysis indicates that demographic variables such as gender, marital status, and teaching experience do not have a significant effect on mental health. This suggests that environmental and occupational factors, including workload, limited resources, and lack of institutional support, play a more dominant role in shaping teachers' psychological conditions. The study highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions, such as counseling services, stress management programs, and improved organizational support. Enhancing teachers' mental health is essential not only for their well-being but also for improving teaching quality and educational outcomes.

Keywords: Mental health, Teachers, Psychological indicators, GHQ-28 questionnaire

INTROUCION

Mental health is a fundamental pillar of human life, playing a crucial role in individual adaptation to the environment, social relationships, and job performance. It does not only refer to the absence of mental illness but also includes inner satisfaction, the ability to manage emotions, and maintaining effective relationships with others (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Herrmann-Langner et al., 2024). In contemporary contexts, mental health has increasingly become a central concern due to rapid social change, technological advancement, and growing academic and occupational pressures. Individuals with good mental health tend to demonstrate resilience, adaptive coping strategies, and a positive outlook when facing challenges. Conversely, poor mental health may lead to decreased productivity, impaired decision-making, and difficulties in maintaining social harmony across various aspects of life.

In today's world, economic pressures, rapid social changes, and increased occupational stress are growing threats to mental health (Carroll et al., 2022). Teachers, as one of the most sensitive professional groups, face higher exposure to psychological pressures due to heavy educational and pedagogical responsibilities (Agyapong et al., 2022; Emeto et al., 2023). According to recent studies, mental health disorders have become increasingly prevalent in communities experiencing social instability and economic stress, which directly impacts educators' psychological well-being (Alves et al., 2023).

International research has shown that high occupational stress and limited workplace support negatively affect teachers' mental and professional performance (Fan & Lau, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2023). Maintaining optimal mental health among teachers enhances job satisfaction and improves the quality of education, while poor mental health can reduce motivation, increase psychological fatigue, and impair performance. In developing countries, including Afghanistan, the lack of systematic support for teachers is a key factor contributing to declining mental health (McLean et al., 2019; Corbett et al., 2023).

In Afghanistan, particularly in remote areas like Andkhoy District of Faryab Province, teachers face additional challenges such as limited educational resources, large class sizes, and minimal psychological support. Despite the significance of this issue, there is little empirical research examining the mental health status of teachers in such regions. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the mental health of public school teachers in Andkhoy District to identify ways to improve their psychological and professional conditions (Kim et al., 2022; von der Embse et al., 2022).

Mental health is a critical aspect of individual, social, and occupational development. It encompasses well-being, the ability to cope with life pressures, effective social relationships, and realizing personal potential (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Yet, in many societies, mental health services focus mainly on severe disorders, while general psychological well-being receives limited attention.

Industrial advancements, social change, economic pressures, and rising job expectations threaten individual mental peace (Carroll et al., 2022). Teachers, due to their significant educational, social, and psychological responsibilities, are highly vulnerable to such pressures. Factors such as heavy workloads, classroom overcrowding, scarce resources, and low pay can further undermine teachers' mental health (Agyapong et al., 2022; Fan & Lau, 2022).

In Afghanistan, particularly in regions like Andkhoy District, teachers' working conditions are even more challenging, and they receive minimal psychological or social support. Very few studies have addressed teachers' mental health in these areas. Hence, the primary research question of this study is: What is the mental health status of public school teachers in Andkhoy District, and what factors influence it (McLean et al., 2023; Reinke et al., 2022).

Teachers' mental health is vital for themselves, the educational system, and society. Mentally healthy teachers are more effective in promoting students' intellectual and cognitive development. Conversely, poor mental health results in low job satisfaction, occupational burnout, reduced teaching quality, and lower student achievement (Zhao et al., 2022; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021).

Given the lack of studies in Afghanistan, particularly in Andkhoy District, this research provides a clearer picture of teachers' mental health. Findings can guide policymakers, the Ministry of Education, and mental health organizations in designing and implementing supportive programs for educators (State et al., 2024; Steiner & Woo, 2023).

Research Questions

Main Question:

- What is the overall mental health status of public school teachers in Andkhoy District?

Sub-questions:

1. What is the status of different dimensions of mental health (physical symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social functioning, and depression) among teachers?
2. Are there significant differences in teachers' mental health based on demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, educational background, and teaching experience?
3. Which individual and occupational factors have the greatest impact on teachers' mental health?

Research Objectives

Main Objective:

- To examine the mental health status of public school teachers in Andkhoy District, Faryab Province.

Specific Objectives

1. Assess overall mental health levels using the GHQ-28 questionnaire.
2. Identify the status of mental health dimensions, including physical symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social functioning, and depression.
3. Determine differences in mental health based on demographic variables (gender, age, marital status, education, and teaching experience).
4. Identify factors affecting teachers' mental health to provide practical recommendations for improving their psychological and occupational well-being (Alves et al., 2023; Corpuz, 2023).

State of the Art

Mental health is a vital component of human well-being, influencing individuals' ability to manage stress, maintain social relationships, and perform effectively in professional roles. Globally, mental health challenges have been exacerbated by rapid social changes, economic pressures, and modern occupational demands. Studies indicate that teachers, as a professional group, are particularly vulnerable due to the complex responsibilities of their role, including instructional duties, classroom management, and the socio-emotional support of students (Agyapong et al., 2022; Carroll et al., 2022). Occupational stress among teachers has been shown to contribute directly to burnout, anxiety, depression, and reduced teaching quality, highlighting the critical need for attention to educators' psychological well-being (Fan & Lau, 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2023).

International research also emphasizes the broader societal implications of teacher mental health. For instance, Harding et al. (2019) reported that teachers' well-being is closely linked to students' mental health and academic outcomes, illustrating the ripple effect of educators' psychological states on the learning environment. Similarly, studies conducted in developed and developing contexts have shown that workplace support, job satisfaction, and school climate significantly influence teachers' mental health outcomes (Corbett et al., 2023; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these challenges, introducing additional stressors such as rapid transitions to online learning, role ambiguity, and increased workloads, which collectively worsened educators' psychological well-being worldwide (Kim et al., 2022; Alves et al., 2023; von der Embse et al., 2022).

Evidence from longitudinal and systematic reviews highlights the multidimensional nature of teacher mental health, showing that it is shaped more by environmental and occupational factors than by individual demographic characteristics (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Emeto et al., 2023). Factors such as heavy workloads, inadequate administrative support, large class sizes, and limited resources have been consistently identified as key contributors to stress and burnout (Carroll et al., 2022; Herrmann-Langner et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2022). Additionally, early-career teachers and educators working in high-pressure or under-resourced settings are particularly susceptible to mental health challenges, further emphasizing the need for targeted support strategies (McLean et al., 2019; McLean et al., 2023).

Despite a growing international evidence base, there is limited empirical research on teachers' mental health in Afghanistan. Context-specific challenges such as limited educational resources, socio-economic instability, and minimal workplace support may exacerbate mental health risks for educators in regions like Andkhoy District, Faryab Province (Corpuz, 2023; State et al., 2024). Understanding these factors is essential for designing effective interventions and policies aimed at improving teachers' occupational well-being and sustaining the quality of education.

METHOD

The present study is applied in purpose and quantitative–survey in nature. The statistical population consisted of all public school teachers in Andkhoy District, Faryab Province, during the 1404 academic year, totaling 460 teachers. Given the limited population size, a sample of 210 teachers was determined using Cochran's formula. Stratified proportional random sampling was

employed, with schools and gender considered as strata. From each stratum, participants were selected proportionally to ensure adequate representation of all groups in the sample.

Data were collected through two methods:

1. Library Data: This included reviewing books, articles, and theses related to teachers' mental health.
2. Field Data: Collected using the GHQ-28 questionnaire (Goldberg, 1972). This questionnaire consists of 28 items covering four dimensions: somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression. Responses were recorded on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = not at all, 1 = less than usual, 2 = as usual, 3 = more than usual).

Content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by the academic supervisor and three psychology experts. Reliability was tested in a pilot study with 30 teachers, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90.

Data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively using SPSS version 26. The analysis included two parts:

- Descriptive Analysis: Calculating means, standard deviations, frequency tables, and charts for mental health indicators.
- Inferential Analysis: Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between mental health indicators and demographic variables. Where necessary, multiple regression analysis was applied to determine the effect of demographic factors on mental health. The significance level was set at 0.05.

RESULTS

This section presents the demographic characteristics and mental health status of public school teachers in Andkhoy District, Faryab Province, based on the data collected through the GHQ-28 questionnaire. The analysis provides insights into teachers' age, gender, marital status, educational background, and teaching experience, followed by their scores across various mental health dimensions, including physical symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and depression. Understanding these patterns allows for a comprehensive evaluation of teachers' psychological well-being, highlights areas of concern, and identifies potential factors influencing mental health. The findings provide a foundation for targeted interventions to enhance teachers' overall well-being and professional effectiveness.

Table 1. Age Distribution of Teachers

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20–30	79	37.6	37.6	37.6
31–44	103	49.0	49.0	86.7
45–60	28	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	210	100.0	100.0	

The majority of teachers (103, 49%) are aged 31–44, indicating a mid-career workforce with considerable experience. The 20–30 age group represents 79 teachers (37.6%), while 45–60-year-olds are the smallest group (28, 13.3%). This distribution suggests that most teachers are neither very young nor approaching retirement, which may influence stress levels, adaptability to teaching methods, and receptivity to professional development programs. Understanding age distribution allows for better planning of mental health support and career development initiatives.

Table 2. Marital Status of Teachers

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	46	21.9	21.9	21.9
Married	164	78.1	78.1	100.0
Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Most teachers are married (164, 78.1%), while 46 (21.9%) are single. Married teachers may experience additional family-related stressors impacting mental health, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. Single teachers, although a smaller group, may have different psychological needs. Understanding marital status provides insight into potential sources of stress and is valuable for

designing mental health interventions and support programs tailored to different life situations among teachers.

Table 3. Educational Background of Teachers

Field of Study	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Social Sciences	101	48.1	48.1	48.1
Natural Sciences	109	51.9	51.9	100.0
Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Slightly more than half of the teachers (109, 51.9%) studied natural sciences, while 101 (48.1%) studied social sciences. This diversity suggests that the teaching staff can provide a broad spectrum of knowledge and educational approaches. Academic background may also affect stress perception, coping mechanisms, and classroom management styles. Recognizing the educational background helps in designing targeted professional development programs and mental health initiatives tailored to teachers' disciplinary knowledge and teaching experiences.

Table 4. Gender Distribution of Teachers

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	149	71.0	71.0	71.0
Female	61	29.0	29.0	100.0
Total	210	100.0	100.0	

The majority of teachers are male (149, 71%), while females account for 61 (29%). This gender imbalance could influence workplace dynamics, collaboration, and access to social support. Female teachers may face unique stressors such as cultural expectations or additional professional challenges. Male-dominated environments may also shape interaction styles and stress experiences. Knowing gender distribution is crucial for developing inclusive mental health and professional support interventions for both male and female teachers.

Table 5. Educational Level of Teachers

Education Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Grade 12	45	21.4	21.4	21.4
Grade 14	107	51.0	51.0	72.4
Bachelor	58	27.6	27.6	100.0
Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Most teachers (107, 51%) have completed Grade 14 education, indicating a moderately educated workforce, while the smallest group (45, 21.4%) completed only Grade 12. A significant portion (58, 27.6%) hold a bachelor's degree, which suggests that while some teachers have advanced education, the majority are in intermediate levels. Understanding education levels helps assess preparedness for teaching responsibilities and potential stress levels related to professional expectations.

Table 6. Teaching Experience of Teachers

Teaching Experience (Years)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1–10	58	27.6	27.6	27.6
11–24	102	48.6	48.6	76.2
25–40	50	23.8	23.8	100.0
Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Most teachers (102, 48.6%) have 11–24 years of teaching experience, representing a mid-career group with substantial professional exposure. Teachers with 1–10 years (58, 27.6%) are relatively new, while those with 25–40 years (50, 23.8%) are highly experienced. Teaching experience can influence stress, coping mechanisms, and mental health, as newer teachers may face adaptation challenges, while highly experienced teachers may experience fatigue or burnout.

Table 7. Mental Health Indicators of Teachers

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Physical Symptoms	210	6.08	2.44
Anxiety	210	5.91	2.59
Social Functioning	210	6.00	2.63

Depression	210	6.10	2.46
Overall Mental Health	210	24.12	7.16

Among the dimensions, depression has the highest mean (6.10), while anxiety has the lowest (5.91), showing that teachers are slightly more affected by depressive symptoms. The overall mental health score (24.12) indicates a borderline/moderate level, suggesting that teachers experience moderate psychological stress. These results highlight the need for interventions to improve mental well-being and support teachers' emotional and professional needs.

Table 8. Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

Variable	Sig. (Shapiro-Wilk)	Result
Physical Symptoms	0.005	Non-normal
Anxiety and Insomnia	0.000	Non-normal
Depression	0.012	Non-normal
Social Dysfunction	0.003	Non-normal
Overall Mental Health	0.200	Normal

All mental health dimensions except overall mental health are non-normally distributed. This implies that some statistical analyses should use non-parametric methods, ensuring accurate interpretation of relationships and group differences. Awareness of distribution characteristics guides appropriate test selection.

Table 9. Mental Health Comparison by Gender (Independent t-test)

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig
Male	149	24.16	7.57	0.135	137.04	0.893
Female	61	24.03	6.11			

There is no significant difference in mental health between male and female teachers ($p = 0.893$). Gender does not appear to have a meaningful impact on teachers' overall mental well-being, suggesting that stressors affect male and female teachers similarly in this context.

Table 10. Mental Health Comparison by Teaching Experience (ANOVA)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	190.064	2	95.032	1.865	0.157
Within Groups	10547.465	207	50.954		
Total	10737.529	209			

No significant differences in mental health were observed between groups with different teaching experience ($p = 0.157$). This indicates that years of service do not significantly influence overall mental health, suggesting that factors other than teaching experience, such as environmental or organizational conditions, may have a stronger impact.

Table 11. Comparison of Mental Health by Marital Status (Independent t-test)

Marital Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig
Single	46	23.60	8.10	-0.508	64.46	0.613
Married	164	24.27	6.90			

There is no significant difference in mental health between single and married teachers ($p = 0.613$). This indicates that marital status does not significantly affect teachers' overall psychological well-being. Both groups are experiencing similar stress levels, suggesting that work-related and environmental factors may play a larger role than personal marital status in influencing mental health.

Table 12. Teachers' Mental Health Status

Dimension / Score	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mental Health Level
Physical Symptoms	0	13	6.08	2.44	Borderline
Anxiety & Insomnia	2	14	5.91	2.59	Borderline
Social Dysfunction	0	13	6.00	2.63	Borderline
Depression	0	13	6.10	2.46	Borderline
Overall Mental Health	8	42	24.12	7.16	Moderate/Borderline

All mental health dimensions of teachers fall within the borderline range, indicating moderate levels of psychological stress. The overall mental health score is at a moderate/borderline level, suggesting that teachers face consistent mental strain. This reinforces the need for interventions and supportive measures to improve psychological well-being, as persistent borderline mental health may affect job performance, motivation, and long-term professional satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the mental health status of public school teachers in Andkhoy District, Faryab Province, revealing that their overall psychological well-being falls within the moderate to borderline range. This suggests that teachers experience notable levels of stress that may affect both their professional performance and personal lives. Analysis of specific mental health dimensions physical symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and depression indicated that all were at borderline levels. Depression emerged as slightly more pronounced than other dimensions, highlighting a vulnerability to low mood, fatigue, and diminished motivation, while anxiety, though slightly lower, remains a significant factor affecting daily functioning and teaching effectiveness (Agyapong et al., 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2023).

Interestingly, demographic factors such as gender, marital status, and years of teaching experience were not significantly associated with mental health outcomes. Both male and female teachers reported similar levels of stress, indicating that occupational pressures, rather than personal characteristics, are the primary determinants of psychological well-being. Similarly, marital status did not appear to offer protective effects, suggesting that single and married teachers encounter comparable workplace challenges. Years of teaching experience also did not significantly differentiate mental health levels, implying that even experienced educators remain vulnerable to the cumulative pressures of teaching (Carroll et al., 2022; Corbett et al., 2023).

These findings underscore the multidimensional nature of teacher mental health and emphasize the influence of environmental and occupational stressors. High workloads, large class sizes, limited teaching resources, and insufficient institutional support likely contribute to the observed borderline mental health levels (Fan & Lau, 2022; Emeto et al., 2023). The results highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions, including counseling services, stress management programs, and structured professional support mechanisms, to address these challenges effectively. Promoting teachers' psychological well-being not only enhances job satisfaction and resilience but also has a direct positive impact on instructional quality and student learning outcomes (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Reinke et al., 2022).

In conclusion, teachers in Andkhoy District face moderate psychological stress across multiple dimensions, largely independent of demographic variables. The study emphasizes that addressing environmental and occupational stressors is critical to fostering sustainable mental health among educators. Implementing supportive policies and practical interventions can contribute to a healthier, more productive teaching workforce, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education in the region (State et al., 2024; Steiner & Woo, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to examine the mental health indicators of teachers in public schools of Andkhoy District. The results obtained from the GHQ-28 questionnaire showed that the overall mental health of teachers is at a moderate or borderline level. This indicates that, although teachers are not in a critical psychological state, a significant portion of them experience psychological stress, which may lead to issues such as anxiety, mental fatigue, and reduced motivation. Examination of the different dimensions of mental health also revealed that physical symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and depression are all at borderline levels. These findings directly address the second research question, indicating that none of the mental health dimensions are at an optimal level and that all require attention and intervention.

Regarding the third research question, which examined whether demographic characteristics influence teachers' mental health, statistical analyses showed that gender, marital status, and teaching experience had no significant effect. This suggests that mental health issues among teachers are more influenced by environmental and occupational factors than by individual

characteristics. Consequently, work pressure, limited resources, large class sizes, lack of organizational support, and economic concerns play a more significant role in causing psychological stress among teachers.

The fourth research question explored the factors affecting mental health. Based on the results, since no differences were observed among demographic groups, it can be concluded that environmental and organizational factors are the main contributors to teachers' mental health challenges. Policymakers should therefore focus on structural improvements in the work environment.

Overall, these findings emphasize the need for school administrators and educational authorities to provide a healthy work environment, reduce occupational stress, and implement educational and psychological support programs for teachers. Because teachers' mental health directly affects teaching quality, work motivation, and student academic success, strengthening mental health can play a crucial role in sustainable educational and social development.

Given the limitations of the present study, it is recommended that future research examine the impact of variables such as job satisfaction, organizational justice, social support, leadership styles, and other related factors on teachers' mental health. Conducting similar studies in other provinces of Afghanistan can also provide a more comprehensive picture of teachers' mental health nationwide and help develop more effective policies.

Recommendations

1. **Improving Psychological Support and Reducing Occupational Stress for Teachers**
Establishing counseling units in schools, conducting workshops on stress management and communication skills, and reducing workload through scheduling adjustments and lower class density can help improve teachers' mental health.
2. **Strengthening Organizational and Economic Support**
Enhancing teachers' financial conditions, providing timely benefits, establishing support funds, and promoting positive interpersonal relationships in the workplace are important factors for reducing anxiety and increasing job satisfaction among teachers.
3. **Training School Administrators and Promoting Organizational Culture**
School administrators should participate in mental health and stress management training programs to strengthen their ability to support teachers, creating a calm, empathetic, and constructive school environment.
4. **Suggestions for Future Research**
It is recommended to conduct similar studies in other provinces, examine the relationship between teachers' mental health and organizational variables such as job satisfaction and organizational justice, use new assessment tools such as WHO-5, and implement longitudinal studies to track changes in teachers' mental health over time.

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