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Despite the popular misconception that teaching is an easy profession, the reality could not be further from the truth. A teaching job requires an enormous amount of patience. Often, teachers need to set aside their own emotions to cater to students' needs in the classroom. The task of teaching becomes more daunting when students are at a tender age. Apart from that, the profession seldom finds reciprocation in monetary terms in our country.

Needless to say, the mental health of school teachers remains one of the most pressing yet less discussed issues in our society.

Afsana Zesmin Mitu, a Mathematics teacher at Glenrich International School, feels that her mental health is being affected by the pressure of balancing both academic and administrative tasks. She says, "I feel emotionally exhausted by my academic goals. Besides, juggling administrative work and classroom management only worsens my condition."

Sadly, this is a common reality in Bangladesh. Studies conducted on both government and non-government school teachers have found that they face intense emotional and psychological burnout. Expanding on this, Afsana Zesmin Mitu adds, "In our profession, we get very limited time between lesson planning, grading, and meetings. Most of us do not get adequate time to recharge ourselves, which deteriorates our mental health. Apart from that, the payment structure does not always match the emotional investment this profession demands. That might also be a source of stress for many within our community."

Regarding time constraints in school teachers' lives, Mim Das, an English teacher at Imperial International School Narayanganj, points out that teachers are often required to do extra work beyond their job description. In addition, there is a constant demand for perfection, which takes a toll on their mental health. She elaborates, "In school teaching, sometimes there is work even after school hours, which hampers my personal time and affects my mental health. Moreover, perfection is given so much priority in English medium schools that even a small mistake creates a lot of pressure and mental stress."

Apart from time constraints and the constant juggling of job-related tasks, students' classroom behaviour can also be a source of stress for teachers. Animesh Kumar Saha, a Biology teacher at St. Joseph Higher Secondary College, feels demotivated by his students' preference for social media over classroom activities. "Since the post-Covid

period, I have been noticing a sharp decline in my students' participation in classroom activities. As a teacher, this is not the easiest thing to witness. It makes me feel demotivated," he points out.

Additionally, he feels that teachers need to face intense scrutiny from the administration and parents, which makes him apprehensive. He explains, "Sometimes I find myself constantly wondering whether my words are being misconstrued in class. If anything, untoward happens, I end up carrying the emotional burden at home with me."

Demotivation in the job seems to be a consistent problem among National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) teachers, and it becomes more acute when they have to teach students from underprivileged backgrounds. Mahia Hasan*, an English teacher at a government school in Dhaka, works with students from economically marginalised backgrounds who are already far behind their grade level.

She explicates, "In the classroom, I am often aware that some of my students do not comprehend the lessons I deliver because of their knowledge gaps. I know for certain that some of them cannot even write their names in English. Yet, instead of addressing this, I am required to teach them grammar. It is mentally exhausting. Still, this is not representative of the entire class. I have also encountered students who are quite hard-working. However, my inability to support the students who are lagging behind is the most stressful part of my job."

In spite of all this job-related stress, there is seldom any institutional support system for teachers. As Mim Das explains, "No, admins are not concerned about teachers' mental health. Rather, teachers' mental health problems are often seen as a weakness. Most of the time, teachers suffer in silence from anxiety, stress, and burnout. Schools are mainly concerned with students' improvement and place less emphasis on teachers' development and training."

Talking about the same issue, Shaikh Kamal Hossain, a Mathematics instructor at Glenrich International School, observes that in the teaching sector, teachers are encouraged to carry the weight of stress by themselves instead of seeking support. He states, "There is a normalisation of tending to one's mental burdens by oneself in the teaching sector. Often, teachers feel discouraged from attending counselling or therapy sessions because of some negative notions surrounding it. Sometimes when a teacher seeks counselling or therapy, it leads to gossip related to their social life and character."

Sumaya Afrin Misti, a school psychologist and a co-

founder of BloomAid an online mental health services thinks that in Bangladeshi school culture, in spite of growing awareness of students' psychological well-being, teachers' mental health struggles still remain an issue of the periphery.

Drawing from her observation, she says, "Despite growing awareness of student mental health in Bangladesh, the emotional well-being of teachers remains critically overlooked. As a school psychologist, I've witnessed firsthand how educators face mounting stress, often without the institutional support they need to cope. While initiatives such as the integration of a 'Wellbeing' subject into the national curriculum and teacher training on student emotional support mark important progress, these efforts have yet to extend meaningfully to the educators themselves."

To mitigate this crisis, Sumaya Afrin Misti suggests that schools need to be more proactive in terms of dealing with teachers' mental health. She explains, "Schools must prioritise teacher mental health as a vital occupational concern. Providing confidential counselling, peer-support groups, and workload monitoring can be pertinent to prevent burnout of teachers while promoting resilience. Integrated training on self-care, combined with student-focused programmes, can equip educators with practical strategies."

The mental health of teachers is not a personal issue but rather a systemic one that demands urgent attention from all sections of society. Unless we begin to care for our educators' mental health with the same urgency as we care for students' academic results, our education system will continue to falter because teachers cannot deliver their best in the classroom. Supporting teachers can no longer be optional; it is an essential necessity for a healthy classroom.

*Name has been changed upon request

References:

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