Assessment of psychological distress among primary school teachers in Kedah, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Background: Teaching is a challenging profession, where the educators are constantly monitoring complex classroom situations to maximize the learning opportunities for their students. Majority of the teachers in Malaysia reported with an increasing prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress during the pandemic. Hence, the present study aimed to assess the psychological distress among primary school teachers in Kedah, Malaysia using the GHQ-12 questionnaire. Methods: This cross-sectional study involved 217 participants from four primary schools in the district of Kulim, Kedah. The respondents were selected through convenience sampling, and their psychological distress was measured by administering the GHQ-12 scale. Results: Descriptive statistics revealed that majority were female teachers (n=134, 61.8%), in comparison to males (n=83, 38.2%). The ethnic groups comprised of Chinese (39.2%), Malay (32.3%), and Indians (28.6%); most of them aged between 31-35 years (n=120, 55.2%), and from urban area (n=144, 66.3%). Reliability analysis showed 0.781, which suggests that the GHQ-12 scale employed in this study is highly reliable. Using a cut-off point of 12 and above, the study findings indicated that majority of the respondents (73.7%) have been experiencing psychological distress. Significant differences in psychological distress were observed between teachers from urban and rural area (27.64 and 24.78; p<0.001). Contrary to expectation, no significant gender (p=0.544) and ethnic (p=0.866) differences were found related to psychological distress. Conclusion: Since, teacher's mental health is a critical prerequisite to produce an effective learning environment for pupils, further investigation is strongly recommended to comprehend the phenomenon that could shed more light on the prevention and intervention strategies.