Determining post-pandemic organizational health in the education sector: A review of a school-based workshop programming intervention

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The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a post-pandemic, school-based workshop programming intervention developed by a national mental health organization, to support education sector employees as they navigate post-pandemic challenges. Using a qualitative approach, data were gathered through post-workshop interviews conducted during the 2022-23 school year, and analysed according to five key indicators of organizational health: connectedness, organizational commitment, well-being, recovery and resilience. Findings indicate that while some participants continued to report role strain in each of these areas, highlighting the need for improved worklife balance, the workshop intervention positively influenced employee well-being through enhanced awareness of mental health resources and increased capacity for supportive dialogue with colleagues. This was notable specifically, when participants were aware of their emotional resilience and able to manage it effectively. The study highlights the vital role of sensemaking in helping education sector employees interpret complex or challenging situations. The research demonstrates that understanding these nuances can better inform future programming aimed at reducing further stress, minimizing additional burnout and preventing potential staff turnover. Accordingly, practical insights are suggested to guide the development of initiatives that enhance employee well-being, strengthen individual resilience and reinforce organizational commitment within the sector, factors that ultimately contribute to more sustainable and supportive work environments in education.

Keywords: *Education, Interventions, Organizational health, Post-pandemic, Mental Health, Well-being.*

Highlights of this paper:
- This study assessed a school-based mental health workshop intervention created to assist education employees in overcoming post-pandemic challenges.
- The researchers analyzed workshop participant feedback through five organizational health indicators and found an increase in employees' awareness of resources and improved collegial support.
- Although some participants noted persistent job stress, further insights from the study highlighted the value of employees' interpretation of complex situations, suggesting that greater insight can shape initiatives to create more enduring and nurturing educational environments.

1. INTRODUCTION

As education systems globally emerge from the pandemic with teachers experiencing extensive "collateral problems" and "mental health issues" (Doucet, Netolicky, Timmers, & Tuscano, 2020; Gadermann et al., 2023) comprehensive data has underscored calls to action for recovery and renewal of the education sector workforce (Ozamiz-Etxebarria, Legorburu Fernnadez, Lipnicki, Idoiaga Mondragon, & Santabárbara, 2023; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2022). The pandemic has forced organizations to mitigate risks of further occupational stress by taking steps to assist employees in regulating their well-being and recovery (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). In an educational context, the implication remains that teacher well-being is vital and contingent to salient outcomes such as enhanced student academic achievement and motivation (Arens & Morin, 2016; Collie & Martin, 2017). Yet conceptualizations of well-being have also considered the assessment of school and organizational climates, including the presence of education colleagues, requirements of school and district administrators, legislative requirements and pressures arising from parents and community members (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014; Lester, Cefai, Cavioni, Barnes, & Cross, 2020; Yin, Huang, & Lv, 2018). Therefore, in order to accurately portray occupational stress impacting well-being and subsequent post-pandemic health in the education sector, it is necessary to address not only perspectives of classroom teachers, but also additional employee groups involved in the context of schools.

This research team's study on pandemic-related occupational stress in education began in April 2020, with a survey of approximately 2000 Canadian teachers (Sokal, Trudel, & Babb, 2020), followed by further qualitative and quantitative studies, expanding the dataset to include over 4000 educators. An initial nationwide survey uncovered elevated burnout rates among teachers in the researchers' province, compared to counterparts across Canada. Furthermore, the research identified five specific profiles of teachers' experiences during the pandemic, indicating a need for varied approaches towards regulating well-being within each group (Babb, Sokal, & Eblie, 2022; Eblie & Sokal, 2023). To address the gap in evidence-based responses with post-pandemic recovery and renewal as a focus (Morrison-Beedy, 2022) the current study aimed to respond to the following research question: What was the impact of the school-based intervention programming facilitated by a national mental health organization and designed for Canadian education sector employees (classroom teachers, school and district administrators, educational assistants, specialist and resource/support teachers, clinicians and librarians)?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the foundational research to gauge the status of teachers' mental health and well-being, the research team adopted a holistic approach rooted in the Job Demand-Resources [JD-R] Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2014) and a three-component model by Maslach and Jackson (1981) which delineated movement toward or away from burnout based on individuals' assessments of contextual demands and resources. The JD-R model outlines the need for both individuals and organizations to balance workplace demands with individual and environmental resources and has been used extensively to explain processes that influence occupational well-being (Bakker & Demerouti,

2007). Additionally, Demerouti and Bakker (2023) determined that JD-R theory was not only effective under typical organizational conditions but has met the threshold to rationalize occupational outcomes occurring during crises. Applied in this research team's studies over the course of the pandemic, the JD-R model proved valid in this context as well (Babb et al., 2022). Moreover, insights drawn from Maslach and Jackson (1981) model allowed the team to document teachers' subjective experiences of workplace conditions during this time, understanding that reductions of demands and increases in resources could restore well-being in scenarios when burnout was being experienced. The work of Bakker and De Vries (2021) further contributed to the approach by outlining strategies to promote self-regulation and adaptation, enabling individuals to sustain resilience despite of challenging circumstances. Importantly, the models adopted in this research team's framework portrayed burnout as a shared responsibility of both individuals and organizations, ultimately recognizing responses such as exhaustion, cynicism or depersonalization, and loss of accomplishment as consequences of inadequate management of stress within the work environment (World Health Organization, 2019).

2.1. Workshops to Promote Mental Health

As the pandemic progressed, this research team noted that the perceptions of job demands and resources were not only subjective but temporal in nature. Consequently, the data gathered at various points in time were a means to better understand teacher mental health and well-being in school environments. Teacher stressors during the pandemic included apprehension about student well-being, workload issues (caused by instructional pivots and additional time spent on application of safety protocols), challenges with gaps in student performance, difficulty balancing demands and managing supportive resources, tensions with school and division administration, and struggles in supporting colleagues (Eblie & Sokal, 2023). Keeping in mind the collective responsibility for managing workplace stress and recognizing the necessity of addressing the perspectives of all employee groups in the education sector, the research data provided the impetus for government funding and a subsequent the launch of workshop training opportunities and resource development by the national mental health organization.

Workshop training facilitated for employees in the education sector, as well as school and district administration, was intended to provide individual strategies to mitigate burnout, along with systemic interventions to restore healthy school environments. Pushparatnam and Del Toro Mijares (2022) advocated for similar, deliberate and high-quality professional learning opportunities to be prioritized during the pandemic recovery period, keeping in mind the necessity to balance additional requirements for education sector employees with a reduction in demands to prevent further progression toward burnout (Lovison & Mo, 2022; Lücker et al., 2022). Pushparatnam and Del Toro Mijares (2022) provided a reminder that although mental health workshops were successful in reducing pre-pandemic occupational stress in the short term, they were less successful than whole-school approaches. Consequently, the workshops in this study focused on indicators of healthy school environments.

2.2. Outcome Variables

The effectiveness of the workshops was assessed according to the following embedded school-based outcome variables: Connectedness, Commitment, Well-Being, Recovery and Resilience.

2.3. Connectedness

The variable of connectedness relates to the quality of relationships that both employees and administrators perceive within their workplaces (Jarzabkowski, 2003). This is exemplified by meaningful interactions that communicate respect, caring and encouragement both for and by colleagues (Retallick & Butt, 2004). Chan, Ho, Ip,

and Wong (2020) revealed a negative correlation between job connectedness and reduced role clarity, supporting the need for educational leaders to foster a sense of connection for sector employees through clarity of role descriptions, feedback on daily performance, and ensuring regular communication with staff at both school and district levels. Milam, Butler, and Vanderhaar (2022) added that connectedness and social-emotional well-being would result from a positive school culture, with positive school culture and favourable working conditions being correlated with reduced teacher burnout and increased retention of staff (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Edmondson (2019) argued that positive organizational culture must also include the aspect of psychological safety to ensure that individuals feel adequately secure in expressing ideas without fear of reprisal. Therefore, providing employees with occasions to contribute ideas and foster voice and autonomy is vital, in light of the identified absence of these factors during the pandemic (Sokal, Trudel, & Babb, 2020b). Examples of opportunities to enhance connectedness include collaboration in goal setting through continuous improvement planning processes, involvement in team building opportunities, and access to strategies for the reduction of workplace conflict.

2.4. Commitment

The variable of commitment relates to individuals' emotional connections to their work or workplaces and is a central factor in the decision about whether to stay or leave a particular job (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Employee engagement in a role can be enhanced by job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) a process which involves assisting employees to regulate thoughts and actions to enhance job meaning and reduce stress. According to Demerouti and Peeters (2018) and Tims, Bakker, and Derks (2012) this involves optimizing tasks, identifying supportive resources and aligning skillsets with specific job functions. Job crafting can also improve role efficacy and growth through enhanced opportunities for professional development and learning.

Bateman and Crant (1993) identified that individuals who take initiative to proactively handle demands in the workplace are more likely to respond successfully to stressful situations. Moreover, Maslach and Leiter (2016) highlighted that organizational commitment could be strengthened by opportunities for employee recognition. Elements such as informal appreciation events, routine role feedback, or regular formal performance reviews were noted as salient in terms of motivation and job satisfaction. A crucial factor related to organizational commitment involves the perception of civility and respect. Considerate and respectful interactions between colleagues in the education sector and with students' families and community members can be supported through policies for respectful working and learning environments, effective and regular communication practices, conflict resolution programs, and diversity training initiatives (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013). Lack of respect, as noted by Will (2022), could potentially lead to lower job satisfaction and increased teacher turnover, a factor that was echoed in this research teams' Manitoba study (Eblie & Sokal, 2023). Jochim, Diliberti, Schwartz, Destler, and Hill (2023) noted that controversies that began during the pandemic in the way of school closures, instructional pivots, and masking or vaccine requirements were now playing out as influences arising from community challenges involving race and ethnicity, gender identity, and related controversies over educational resources such as curriculum documents and library books. The researchers advised of the necessity to proactively address such concerns going forward, as a means to achieve sustained commitment of employees in the education sector.

2.5. Well-Being

The well-being variable encompasses social-emotional and mental health aspects crucial for the current and future strength of the education sector. Additional factors related to sustaining employee well-being include ensuring protection from harassment, bullying and violence, as well as securing physical safety (Mental Health Commission of

Canada, 2013). Accordingly, comprehensive approaches at individual, interpersonal and administrative levels in the education sector are most responsive to challenges in these identified areas (McCallum, Price, Graham, & Morrison, 2017). Moreover, neglecting organizational responsibilities to support employee well-being in favour of solely emphasizing individual accountability to balance demands and resources has been noted to perpetuate challenges around occupational well-being. Price et al. (2022) outlined holistic, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) to respond with universal promotional resources for all, targeted measures for a few, and intensive interventions for those requiring more concentrated levels of support. While this framework has been commonly used for instructional planning, it is also suggested to illustrate levels of support for education sector employees. The MTSS framework outlines the importance of awareness and access to universal resources for well-being. District personnel are encouraged to select targeted interventions to respond to emerging concerns and the MTSS framework outlines readily available resources for those in acute crises (Mattke et al., 2013; Steiner & Woo, 2021). Resources to support well-being might include access to employee or family assistance programs, professional learning sessions on topics such as community trauma postvention, and critical incident debriefing, as well as access to programming on Mental Health First Aid (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013).

2.6. Recovery

The variable of recovery entails a return to a person's overall state of well-being, therefore enabling the individual to reach their full potential (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013). A related factor involves the element of workload management or the ability to achieve work related tasks within a designated period of time. When this cannot be navigated, Maslach and Leiter (2016) described this challenge as work overload - a complication that can lead to employee burnout unless managed by maintaining sustainable workloads and investing in role refinement and supportive learning opportunities. Zhou, Shi, and Jiang (2011) as well as, Cai, Cai, Sun, and Ma (2018) included the importance of job fit when considering recovery. Suggestions such as additional course work, special certification status or increased levels of education, were noted to improve vertical fit (Harari, Manapragada, & Viswesvaran, 2017), whereas opportunities for employment assessments or career counselling were suggested to enhance individuals' perspectives on horizontal fit and role engagement (Moore & Rosenbloom, 2016). Recovery, in other words, could be enhanced through increased consideration of job fit or the provision of additional options to adapt or leave a particular role. Furthermore, Maslach and Leiter (2016) cautioned about the importance of work/life balance through facilitating the delicate interplay of work, family and personal life. The element of control was determined to be crucial in regulating this balance, as employees with perceived agency in decision-making were able to cope more effectively with role demands. Pearson and Moomaw (2005) indicated that teacher autonomy is pivotal when experiencing changes arising during stressful events, noting that constraints on autonomy increase anxiety, tension, and frustration. Pendola (2022) emphasized that aligning practices with the needs of students and allowing for flexibility could greatly enhance the role satisfaction in the education sector by addressing the dissonance between individual beliefs and organizational practices. Another critical factor in the recovery process involved the replenishment of resources depleted by work strain (Sonnentag & Natter, 2004). In order to achieve this restorative threshold the researchers recommended that sector leaders discourage multitasking, promote digital down time, and advocate for focused time blocks during the workday. As well, due to their regular contact with employees, Bakker and De Vries (2021) suggested that leaders are well-positioned to observe role-based stress and changes in coping levels. They added that superintendents and human resources personnel can propose recovery training plans and position themselves as guardrails between daily role demands and education sector staff.

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2.7. Resilience

Resilience, as a variable, involves the ability to adapt and recover from the demands of life, through behavioural, mental, or emotional flexibility (American Psychological Association, 2018). Key factors relating to resilience are growth and development (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013) emphasizing the need for personalized, supportive responses post-pandemic. Ungar (2021) suggested that organizations can assume essential roles in fostering resilience by addressing interactions between individuals and their environments. According to the American Psychological Association (2018) resilience is shaped by how individuals perceive the world. In this research team's Canadian study of over 2000 teachers throughout the pandemic (Babb et al., 2022) data illustrated that teachers demonstrated five categories of resilience, with some flourishing (engaged and involved), with others were feeling vulnerable (overextended), and some languishing (inefficacious and detached). In this study, the team advocated for the advantage of recognizing how these response patterns could provide valuable insights for teachers to self-regulate and cope effectively with life or work experiences (Helzer & Jayawickreme, 2015). Additionally, Agyapong, Obuobi-Donkor, Burback, and Wei (2022) affirmed that resilience is negatively correlated with burnout, underscoring the importance of programming and education to address contextual demands contributing to employee stress. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2022) concurred, suggesting that active participation in professional learning is a crucial policy driver toward resilience. These recommendations are particularly relevant in the face of rapid technological and post-pandemic societal changes which require expanded skillsets for everyone in education to adapt and respond effectively to school and community demands. Providing resources, time, and training for teachers and staff in the education sector will enable them to model self-regulation and resilience, factors known to promote student well-being and achievement (Arens & Morin, 2016; Collie & Martin, 2017; Klusmann, Richter, & Lüdtke, 2016).

2.8. Sensemaking

A final topic relevant to this discussion involves sensemaking, a process triggered by emotions, that helps to interpret and confront new, unanticipated, or confounding events (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Individuals and groups can engage in sensemaking in response to occurrences that have not only arisen in crisis situations (i.e., peri- and post-pandemic) but can also activate the process as part of strategic change initiatives and decision-making (Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012; Rerup & Feldman, 2011), in the course of procedures involving organizational safety and reliability (Blatt, Christianson, Sutcliffe, & Rosenthal, 2006) and during progressions relating to innovation and creativity (Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 1999). The collective research has confirmed that by reducing ambiguity, sensemaking creates latitude for individuals to make changes or choices and contribute to solutions for organizational dilemmas. In the case of this study, participants naturally engaged in sensemaking in both life and work circumstances during and after the pandemic, as well as after attending school-based workshops interventions.

3. METHODS

3.1. Background

Survey research conducted nationally during 2020-21 highlighted that teachers in the researchers' Canadian province were experiencing burnout at significantly higher rates compared to their peers across the country (Babb et al., 2022). Upon becoming aware of this context, the provincial government earmarked financial resources for a local division of a nationwide mental health organization. The goal was to use the funds to generate resources aimed at addressing burnout and fostering recovery within the education sector—not only for teachers but also other workers. The mental health organization developed a range of resources, including a series of school-based workshops.

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3.2. Interventions

Educators were introduced to this cadre of supports through the Care for All in Education (careforallineducaiton.com) website. Communication about this initiative was featured in education-related journals, newsletters sent to schools, and in material shared by professional associations. Developed by the national mental health organization, this website was established as a central repository for key contacts, providing resources for mental health and well-being, initiating access to key support personnel through phone or chat options, and displaying listings of professional development workshops for education sector staff. The workshops consisted of sessions highlighting psychological safety (see Appendix 1).

3.3. Data Collection

Throughout the academic year, from fall 2022 to spring 2023, the research team collected data to assess the impact of the school-based workshops on the mental health for individuals within the education sector. Although data collection included pre- and post-workshop quantitative surveys reported elsewhere (Sokal & Eblie, 2023) the focus of this analysis is on post-workshop interviews with participants, occurring immediately after the school-based workshops. Data collection in this study continued, with the additional responses of interview participants collected between September 2023 and June 2024.

The data consisted of responses to twelve questions generated during phone interviews of participants by senior research assistants. The questions explored perspectives of education sector participants regarding their roles and aspects that they loved about their work, workshops attended, other supports (in addition to the workshops) available for them, current status and changes expected as a result of attendance at workshop, perceptions of relationships related to the workplace, perspectives on commitment to the work and education in general, insights about challenges experienced, as well as supports and services needed to move forward.

In the first stage of qualitative analysis, the data were divided into individual coded sections. Charmaz (2001) referred to this coding process as the bridge between gathering data and the researchers' interpretations. Both researchers manually coded the data, and ongoing discussions led to adjustments and reorganization of the codes. Initially, the codes were simple - often single words used to summarize the data - but over time they were expanded into short phrases or patterns. In the final stage, these patterns were mapped to the five key areas of organizational health: connectedness, organizational commitment, well-being, recovery, and resilience (Saldaña, 2016). Table 1 provides an example of this process.

Table 1. Structural patterns of interview data according to variables of organizational health.

Variables of organizational health	Structural patterns of interview data
Connectedness	-Coping with strained workplace/School culture -Re-establishing relationships and connections
Organizational commitment	-Experiencing persistent elements of burnout (Including demoralization)
Well-being	-Navigating staff mental health concerns
Recovery	-Pulling back by setting personal priorities
Resilience	-Demonstrating compassion towards colleagues -Making changes in workplace practices

3.4. Participants

The qualitative dataset in this study was generated from thirteen individuals who participated in interviews done after in-person, school-based workshops. The interview participants represented a broad range of education sector workers including two classroom teachers, a resource teacher, a vocational teacher, a teacher librarian, an educational

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assistant, a school clinician (psychologist), a clinician supervisor, and five school principals. Most of the participants (with the exception of the teacher librarian) had more than five years of experience. Ten participants held graduate degrees (master level) with the remaining having a bachelor level degree. Eight participants worked in middle and senior years schools, with four identifying as employees in kindergarten to grade twelve schools and one at kindergarten to grade nine.

4. INTERVIEW FINDINGS OF EDUCATION SECTOR WORKERS

4.1. Connectedness

The variable of *connectedness* pertains to how employees perceive their relationships and sense of belonging in their work environments. With this in mind, the clinician supervisor and psychologist attended a school-based workshop hoping that the context and culture around mental health in their workplace would become destigmatized. They anticipated that individual educators would take agency in identifying where they fit according to the categories of resilience presented during the session (engaged, involved, overextended, detached or inefficacious) and recognize their ability to self-regulate with suggested resources and supports.

The clinician supervisor indicated:

> My expectations for a long-term benefit would be that we have changed culture around the way we see mental health as an aspect of health, not just the things that we say to kids but the practice that we have for adults and that destigmatization leads people to be open to take better care of themselves which means identifying the ways that they need to be taken care of in a work environment.

A classroom teacher, however, expressed that they felt disconnected at times from colleagues in the school environment. "I would say the segregation (during the pandemic) came with a lot of mandates and people's strong opinions definitely influenced peoples' opinions of each other and judgement." Another teacher expressed a similar sentiment.

> It's driven a bit of a wedge between some of the work relationships I've had. Some colleagues have been more open with how they're doing personally and how they're doing professionally – like some of the struggles with the day-to-day aspects of teaching post-pandemic. But some of them have declined. Their job has caused them to become more isolated. So as a result, they're not as collaborative. That has been difficult.

As a general trend, the school psychologist noted that educators have struggled to form and maintain positive relationships with colleagues.

> Over the last couple of years, people have carried more stress. That has meant that people are less likely to do things like attend a staff event or do something after hours. Very stressed-out people tend to go home right after work. So, I feel that it's more challenging to form relationships (and) to maintain relationships.

One of the school administrators concurred adding the notion of community.

> The relationships have been really strained between – well even the community-at-large and school-at-large, to be honest with you. I think it was such a polarizing tine with many different perspectives and opinions and we are putting a lot of time and energy to try and repair those relationships with the community and to regain that trust and move forward – but yeah, very challenging in (terms of) relations.

4.2. Commitment

Commitment involves individuals' emotional connections to their workplaces, a factor central to the decision whether or not to remain in particular roles or in the education profession in general. Participants reported a range of responses regarding organizational commitment and engagement in their roles. Some teachers reported that they continued to fulfil their obligations even though they felt discouraged. "My commitment I would say is the same. It's mildly discouraging, but you've got to keep at it to support your colleagues and all of that." Others reported that their commitment remained high, but that they were less likely to meet job demands due to, consciously prioritizing self-care or work/life balance, lack of time, or feeling undervalued. One principal reported:

> I've become differently committed, because the focus has changed a bit. Certainly, the job that I have has become more important than ever, more visible or more relevant to more people than ever. But along with the question of additional stress over the past two years, in an effort to stay afloat and to manage how much stress I carry, my commitment to work has to be tempered a bit because I'd probably need more self-care time. I need to set better boundaries.

Other educators' comments dovetailed with the variable of (losing) connectedness. A classroom teacher explained, "I think my commitment level has increased but my capacity (to carry it out) has decreased. I think as educators we're tired." Another school principal added:

> I haven't felt the same drive to show up at work. I don't know how to say this, but I haven't really felt my value. I don't feel that I'm making a difference quite like previously. So (I'm) second-guessing a few things from time to time – wondering if I have what it takes to even continue in the role. I didn't feel like I came into the school year with that same zest or the same drive or commitment level as in recent years.

4.3. Well-Being

The most common pattern that emerged from the data involved the importance of the workshops in opening the dialogue on *well-being* in the workplace. One of the teachers highlighted:

> It is reassuring to know that there are a lot of people who have had the same struggles you've had, and some much worse. It's just the understanding that there is a long-term plan and that mental health is being looked at seriously as something that can be debilitating. It's not just under the rug where it's like suck it up and get back to work.

A principal agreed:

> Hearing that others were in a similar boat could help me to take a step forward and realize that I'm not in this alone. There are others that have worked through it and I can get some support. The best support is talking with others and gaining confidence that I'm not an anomaly. This is more common than I realized.

Participants expressed feelings of reassurance that this topic was openly discussed, that stress and mental health discussions were normalized, and that they were not alone in their struggles. They perceived increased agency, a lighter burden and felt cared for as part of a community, while gaining resources to care for others. An educational assistant expressed gratitude:

> I appreciate the workshop we had because they really created an avenue to discuss these issues. Most people shy away from mental health – they don't discuss it, they try to isolate themselves and keep to themselves. But when you share things, then it's like you shed some weight off of the problems you are carrying.

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In summary the clinician supervisor reflected on the importance of adult (staff) well-being in the education sector:

> We had a model prior to the pandemic where adults expected that children were the ones who had a lot of stress. So, adults shouldered a lot of burden and put a lot on themselves. Over the pandemic that just wasn't possible. We had a lot of staff asking questions about how their organization could keep them well, because being not well was making it difficult to meet the needs of the students.

4.4. Recovery

In terms of *recovery*, participants described pulling back and reflecting on the impact of the pandemic on their lives. It became evident through the responses that education sector staff had begun prioritizing time for themselves or were noticing how others were responding and coping with the enduring stress. A principal related:

> Things got very different with the pandemic. Teachers and kids have all changed as a result of that. Everyone is a bit more burnt out, a little less willing to take things on. I do my best to continue to give a ton of effort, but I do see other people not (do that) as much, which affects me and what I have to do. I feel like I have to pick up some of the pieces, unfortunately.

Another principal agreed and shared the challenges involved in their role:

> It's just been draining. I'm all for the idea of pulling together to get a job done – I've put in many, many extra hours. The time poured in here didn't have any positive spin-offs. We were trying to get the building going, trying to keep giving our teachers what they needed in terms of support. Just fielding so many complaints and calls and different things – that sucked the life out of me.

Teachers noted feeling exhausted, lacking the capacity to continue their work beyond the typical workday. They reported pulling back to support a better work/life balance. One teacher described her approach to recovery. "I'm a very dedicated resource teacher, however, I would say that I've started putting myself and my family first." Another teacher observed the recovery responses of colleagues and resulting impact:

> I'm seeing a decline in the number of teachers that are prepared to given their time to extracurricular (activities) in our building. And so, in order for students to have that opportunity, I've had to step up more than I have in the past, otherwise the kids won't have that chance.

4.5. Resilience

In light of *resilience*, participants identified distinct changes that they had made to not only facilitate recovery but to adapt in a manner that would allow them to cope with ongoing and new demands in the workplace. One of the principals focused on disconnecting outside of work hours through a leisure activity. "I revisited a hobby I hadn't done in a while and I'm trying to implement the strategies (suggested in the workshop)." Another principal noted the benefits of reflection to gain perspective. "Taking the workshop and having our staff work through the content, helped us all to learn a bit more. The education piece was there to normalize the conversation around mental health. It allowed me to gain more empathy with others." The principal continued with this observation, "Things have waivered over the years and (it's) really good to take some time to slow down and reflect through this process." A teacher librarian focused on the importance of compassionately listening and supporting school colleagues to move through disorder and reorder their lives. "I'm remembering to really listen and to comfort." Nonetheless, there were several teacher participants who were actively advocating for changes (decreases) in work demands as they continued

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to struggle with devolving workload. One protested, "I calculated that I'm at 240 extracurricular hours since September. It's taking its toll on me for sure. I've already addressed it with (admin) basically saying that something has to be done." Another teacher considered the varied responses of colleagues in terms of on-going working conditions. "For some, it has improved but for others it has not – It has gotten a bit more difficult."

5. DISCUSSION

Given the interview responses of participants related to school-based, post-pandemic programming designed and delivered by a national mental health organization, the following findings can be confirmed according to the five variables of organizational health identified in the literature:

In terms of connectedness, there was an expectation by some participants that workshops would assist in decreasing the stigma around mental health and assist attendees in recognizing the importance of this topic in the workplace. There was also anticipation that after attending workshops, employees would be able identify their own level of resilience and correspondingly take action to self-regulate, based on suggested strategies and resources. It was noted, however, that many employees in the sector remained stressed-out and struggling, finding it challenging to form or maintain relationships with colleagues. This context would certainly compromise elements of collaboration and communication required to achieve the aspirations noted above.

Regarding commitment there was a range of responses reported by participants. While some participants felt discouraged yet remained committed, others noted prioritizing worklife balance over commitment. Still, others experienced decreased capacity for organizational commitment due to exhaustion or demoralization. Overall, organizational commitment appeared to be the variable that was most difficult to address after workshop attendance.

Well-being elements exhibited strong patterns in the data. Participants reported feelings of acknowledgement in terms of the importance of mental health and well-being in the workplace. Some participants also reported enhanced confidence relating to well-being and an increased awareness of the challenges that other colleagues were experiencing. There was recognition of the importance of staff mental health on the capacity to meet student needs.

In the context of recovery participants described activating the strategy of withdrawing from work as a mechanism to cope and achieve worklife balance. Participants also observed other colleagues who retreated from extracurricular activities, however this resulted in an increased workload for those who despite feeling similar, remained committed for the sake of the students. The results of workshop success for this variable was mixed.

Concerning resilience, participants adopted changes that would increase capacity for themselves and others to cope with workplace demands. Taking suggestions from workshop recommendations, participant responses ranged from increased engagement in leisure activities to retreat from workload along with reflection in order to gain better perspective. Another participant focused on listening to colleagues with empathy and compassion. Several participants noted that they were advocating for decreased work demands due to on-going, challenging work conditions. There were mixed results regarding resilience after participants attended the workshops.

6. CONCLUSION

What effect did the school-based intervention program, led by a national mental health organization, have on employees within the Canadian education sector? Prior to the school-based workshops, interview participants noted feeling divided, isolated and withdrawn. Once they attended workshops, however, several reported increased knowledge about the range of possible responses or resources that were available to support mental well-being, which rendered them more inclined to have open, honest and authentic dialogue on this topic with colleagues. Several participants also described new understandings they gained about their colleagues and learned that mental health

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concerns and withdrawal are not signs of weakness or avoidance. Hence, these participants reported being more responsive to both themselves and their colleagues. On the other hand, there were participants who maintained feelings of stress, discouragement, exhaustion, and ineffectiveness, reporting challenges in sustaining relationships with colleagues and community members. Accordingly, the latter group retreated from their roles to achieve improved worklife balance and advocated with their administrators for decreases in work role demands in order to cope. In summary, the school-based post-pandemic recovery programing workshops increased participants' awareness of mental health resources and improved openness and responsiveness among many employees in the sector, however, some continued to struggle with stress and exhaustions, leading them to seek better work-life balance.

7. LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this qualitative study are acknowledged to facilitate appropriate interpretation and conclusions. While the sample size is small which limits generalizability and the findings are subjective which impacts applicability, the rich and in-depth information obtained through the participant interviews provides valuable insights into the exploration of post-pandemic school-based workshop interventions on occupational health. Moreover, this study is accompanied by a larger pre-post, quantitative data set (Sokal & Eblie, 2023) which can support current findings. As well, with the on-going nature of the study, the research team will be able to further identify and confirm responses to particular workshop interventions, noting changes over time.

8. IMPLICATIONS

It would appear that participants were navigating inherent challenges and changes involved in post- pandemic worklife, attending workshops to assist them in that transition and attempting to assign meaning to both experiences through sensemaking. Maitlis (2005) proposed that during enduring crisis situations (of which the pandemic would be included), there is a greater need to assign meaning. It became evident that individuals were collaboratively constructing ways to understand their environments, a process that Kramer (2017) argued is necessary due to the unequivocal nature of human experience. He added that the decision to commit to a particular interpretation would inherently influence future practice as the process is not only retrospective, but prospective, action-oriented, communicative and iterative.

Sally Maitlis, Vogus, and Lawrence (2013) noted that sensemaking in response to life and work scenarios was likely to be "moderated by an individual's regulatory focus" (p. 228). Similar to previous studies by this research team which highlighted the need for understanding teachers' response patterns and ability to cope through self-regulation (Eblie, Sokal, & Babb, 2021) sensemaking could provide individuals with opportunities to create new contexts and effectively re-frame situations in both meaningful and action-oriented ways. As a result, findings confirmed that school-based, post-pandemic workshop programming could impact organizational health, with the caveat that the effect of workshop interventions on individuals would be moderated by the individuals' awareness of their current levels of emotional resilience and their capacity to regulate with the same. The findings validate the subjective nature of interpreting demands and resources as proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) and Bakker and Demerouti (2014) in that the workshops provided an opportunity for individuals to consider tools to change both their workplace realities as well as their experiences with them.

Maitlis, Vogus, and Lawrence Sally Maitlis et al. (2013) added that positive emotions would create more generative (creative and flexible) accounts of situations, whereas negative perspectives would lead to integrative (systematic and incremental) sensemaking. While one type of response would not necessarily be favourable to another,

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the key emphasis would be to understand the varied roles that emotional regulation plays in making sense of work and life experiences. Additionally, sensemaking processes tend to be social in nature when emotions such as guilt or pride are being processed and more solitary when dealing with feelings of shame or hubris. It is critical to take this into account when evaluating and considering recommendations for future post-pandemic programming to support recovery in the education sector. Afterall, more nuanced interpretations of employees' perspectives would assist in suggesting optimal mechanisms of support going forward – programming which may avert ongoing stress, as well as further burnout or attrition (Carver-Thomas, Leung, & Burns, 2021; Steiner & Woo, 2021).

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APPENDIX 1

Names of the workshops offered in the 2022-2023 school year:

Online:

Managing Stress.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with Mindfulness.

Introduction to Anxiety 1.

Introduction to Anxiety 2.

Looking at Depression.

Setting Boundaries.

Managing Boundaries.

Insights Seasonal Affective Disorder.

In Person:

Awakening Compassion in the Workplace.

Compassion and Self-compassion in the Workplace.

Mental Health Awareness Training for Administrators.

Mental Health Awareness Training for Teachers.

Mental Health Awareness Training for Educational Assistants.

Resilience.