

# Mental Health Upon Return to Face-To-Face Classes: Burnout Syndrome in Basic Education Teachers

## Salud Mental al Retorno a las Clases Presenciales: Síndrome de Burnout en Docentes de Educación Básica

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### SUMMARY

**Introduction:** During the return to face-to-face classes, teachers are facing new challenges and demands because students were unable to learn adequately through the virtual modality implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, the increase in workload could affect their mental health and cause the appearance of burnout syndrome. **Objective:** Describe the level of burnout syndrome in basic education teachers upon return to face-to-face classes. **Methods:** The approach is quantitative, the design non-experimental and the descriptive type cross-sectional. The sample consisted of 170 teachers of whom applied the Maslach Burnout Inventory,

an instrument with adequate levels of validity and reliability. **Results:** It was determined that the teachers were characterized by presenting moderate levels of burnout syndrome. In the same way, they showed moderate levels of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. However, they presented low levels of depersonalization. On the other hand, it was found that burnout syndrome was significantly associated with some sociodemographic and work variables such as gender, age group, employment status, and family burden of teachers ( $p < 0.05$ ). **Conclusion:** Basic education teachers are characterized by having moderate levels of burnout syndrome during the post-pandemic context. For this reason, the Ministry of Education must design and execute policies that allow reevaluating of the work that teachers have been doing and promoting the implementation of preventive and corrective programs to improve their mental health.

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### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** Durante el retorno a las clases presenciales, los docentes están enfrentando nuevos desafíos y exigencias debido a que los estudiantes no lograron aprender de manera adecuada mediante la modalidad virtual implementada durante la pandemia por la COVID-19. Entonces, el incremento en la carga de trabajo podría afectar su salud mental y provocar la aparición del síndrome de burnout. **Objetivo:** Describir el nivel de síndrome de burnout

*en docentes de educación básica al retorno a las clases presenciales. **Métodos:** El enfoque fue cuantitativo, el diseño no experimental y el tipo descriptivo de corte transversal. La muestra fue conformada por 170 docentes a quienes se les administró el Inventario de Burnout de Maslach, instrumento con adecuados niveles de validez y confiabilidad. **Resultados:** Se determinó que los docentes presentaron niveles moderados de síndrome de burnout. Del mismo modo, mostraron niveles moderados de agotamiento emocional y realización personal, sin embargo, presentaron bajos niveles de despersonalización. Por otro lado, se halló que el síndrome de burnout se asociaba de manera significativa a algunas variables sociodemográficas y laborales como el sexo, el grupo etario, la condición laboral y la carga familiar de los docentes ( $p < 0.05$ ). **Conclusión:** Los docentes de educación básica se caracterizan por presentar niveles moderados de síndrome de burnout durante el contexto de la pospandemia. Por ello, es necesario que el Ministerio de Educación diseñe y ejecute políticas que permitan revalorizar el trabajo que los docentes vienen realizando y promover la implementación de programas preventivos y correctivos para mejorar su salud mental.*

**Palabras clave:** *Síndrome de burnout, salud mental, docentes, educación básica, pospandemia, clases presenciales.*

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a turning point in the history of humanity due to its repercussions in different areas of life. In the educational field, it provoked an unusual but necessary reform: the implementation of the virtual teaching-learning modality (1). However, in the first quarter of 2022, the number of infections and deaths caused by COVID-19 decreased significantly worldwide due to vaccination campaigns (2). In this sense, many activities that were previously carried out virtually returned in person. In Peru, the Ministry of Education established that from April 2022 classes in educational institutions return to face-to-face classes after complying with various biosafety protocols (3).

After the return to face-to-face classes, the work of teachers became more complex. Because the academic performance levels of the students

were not as desired, the learning achieved through virtual classes was insufficient. For this reason, teachers had to make a great effort, even providing more support to improve the academic performance of students. This led to an increase in their workload, and, in many cases, they carried out school reinforcement at times that were outside their working hours. Similarly, the anxiety, discouragement, and frustration of returning to on-site work drained their emotional resources while increasing their levels of mental and emotional stress and tension. In other words, a recurring phenomenon among teachers is becoming more critical: burnout syndrome (BS).

Currently, BS is the subject of much research due to its relevance and the impact it has on professionals (4). Within a historical framework, it had as its starting point the study by organizational psychologists between 1970 and 1985, with Freudenberg (5) and Maslach (6) being the main precursors of the study of this condition. It mainly affects professionals who provide services and have direct contact with other people, such as teachers, doctors, psychologists, nurses, and social workers, among others (7).

For Maslach (6), BS is a syndrome whose responses are characterized by emotional exhaustion, indifferent and unfavorable attitudes towards others, poor self-evaluation, and feelings of dissatisfaction with the work performed. Similarly, Acosta et al. (8) defined BS as a response to chronic job stress, which arises when the coping strategies that people regularly use to deal with situations that cause wear and tear in the exercise of their profession fail.

It is also argued that BS is a chronic adjustment disorder (9) and occurs when people are exposed to various stressors for a long time, whether emotional or interpersonal (10,11). Maslach and Jackson (12) established that BS is made up of three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to the drain on energy or emotional resources that causes fatigue in the person. Depersonalization is associated with the development of negative and indifferent feelings and attitudes toward other people. Personal accomplishment has to do with the cognitive self-assessment that professionals have about themselves and the work they do.

Among the main causes for a teacher to have BS are involvement in student problems, work overload, preparation of documentation and bureaucratic burden, low salary compensation, terrible working conditions, and little recognition, despite striving to improve their performance (13). However, teachers who suffer from this disease are characterized by providing poor service to students, they act with indifference and do not provide support in the tasks assigned to them. In fact, its prevalence significantly affects their performance when BS is not identified and treated on time (14).

In the context of the return to face-to-face classes, very little research has been carried out to evaluate BS in basic education teachers. Among them, in Colombian research, it was determined that the level of burnout in the sample of teachers oscillated between mild and moderate levels. The main causes were the educational lag of students and the pressure felt by teachers to fill the academic gaps generated by virtual education (15). Similarly, in Mexico, it was evaluated the impact on the mental and psychological health of teachers and students returning to face-to-face classes. They concluded that there were moderate levels of psychological discomfort, stress, and BS due to possible infections and readaptation to face-to-face (16).

This present research is relevant and original in the context of the return to face-to-face classes since it will allow the Ministry of Education and its decentralized instances to implement national, regional, and local policies to improve the working conditions in which teachers find themselves. On the other hand, the management teams of educational institutions will be able to manage and develop preventive and corrective programs to promote the mental health of teachers.

For these reasons, this research aimed to describe the level of BS in basic education teachers upon return to face-to-face classes.

## METHODS

A quantitative approach was used because the research was based on numerical measurement, as well as the use of statistics to determine the

behavior patterns of the participants. Regarding the design, it was non-experimental since the BS variable was not intentionally manipulated, it was only observed. Regarding the type, it was descriptive of a cross-section, since the analysis of the characteristics of the study variable was developed and because the data collection process was carried out in a single moment, respectively (17).

The population was made up of 305 basic education teachers who worked in the city of Cusco (Peru) and the sample consisted of 170 teachers, an amount determined by probabilistic sampling with a confidence level of 95 % and a significance level of 5 %. According to Table 1, 61.8 % of the participants were women, and 38.2 % were men. Regarding the age group, 52.4 % were from 21 to 40 years old, while 47.6 % were from 41 to 64 years old. Regarding labor conditions, 57.1 % had an open-ended contract, and 42.9 % had a temporary one. Regarding the specialty, 38.8 % were teachers at Elementary school, 35.9 % of High School, and 25.3 % of Early Childhood Education. Regarding family responsibilities, 72.4 % had family responsibilities and 27.6 % did not. Regarding the highest level of study achieved, 50.6 % only achieved a bachelor's degree, 38.8 % had master's studies and only 10.6 % had a doctorate.

For data collection, a survey was prepared, which was structured in two sections. In the first section, sociodemographic and employment information was requested from the teachers (gender, age group, labor condition, level of educational system, family responsibilities, and highest level of study completed).

In the second section, the Maslach Burnout Inventory was applied, which was prepared by Maslach and Jackson (12) and evaluates the prevalence of BS caused by work activities that workers usually carry out. It is drawn up of 22 items of Likert type (never, sometimes, and always) and measures 3 dimensions: emotional exhaustion (items 1 to 9), depersonalization (items 10 to 14), and personal accomplishment (items 15 to 22). Its psychometric properties were determined in a previous investigation carried out in Peru (18), where it was found that the inventory had an adequate level of validity based on content (Aiken's  $V=0.801$ ) and reliability ( $\alpha=0.823$ ).

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Table 1  
Sociodemographic and job characteristics of the sample

Variables	Sociodemographic and job characteristics	n= 170	%
Gender	Male	105	61.8
	Female	65	38.2
Age group	From 21 to 40 years old	89	52.4
	From 41 to 64 years old	81	47.6
Labor condition	Temporary contract	73	42.9
	Open-ended contract	97	57.1
Level of Educational System	Early Childhood Education	43	25.3
	Elementary	66	38.8
	High School	61	35.9
Family responsibilities	Yes	123	72.4
	No	47	27.6
Highest level of education completed	Bachelor	86	50.6
	Master	66	38.8
	Doctorate	18	10.6

The data collection process was carried out between November and December of the year 2022, dates in which all the Peruvian educational institutions of regular basic education were providing the educational service in person. For this, the respective authorization was requested from the Local Educational Management Unit of Cusco. Once the authorization was obtained, the permission of the management staff of each educational institution was gained and a coordination meeting with the teachers was requested to define the days of application of the data collection instruments.

For the statistical analysis, the SPSS software version 25 was used. The descriptive results were systematized in a figure and three tables, while the inferential results were obtained through the non-parametric Chi-Square ( $X^2$ ) test, a statistic that allowed knowing whether the BS variable was significantly associated with the proposed sociodemographic and occupational variables.

Regarding ethical considerations, this research was carried out in accordance with the ethical principles defined by the Declaration of Helsinki and had the endorsement of the institutional ethics committee. Likewise, it should be noted that the teachers were informed about the purpose and nature of the research and gave their informed consent, ensuring the confidential, anonymous, and voluntary nature of their participation.

**RESULTS**

Figure 1 shows that the level of BS of 39.4 % of teachers was moderate, 31.2 % was low, and 29.4 % was high. In relation to the emotional exhaustion dimension, 40.6 % presented a moderate level, 34.1 % a high level, and 25.3 % a low level. Regarding the depersonalization dimension, 36.5 % presented a low level, 32.9 % a moderate level, and 30.6 % a high level. Concerning the personal accomplishment dimension, 45.3 % presented a moderate level, 31.2 % a low level, and 23.5 % a high level. The exposed results indicate that there is a significant percentage of teachers who presented symptoms of BS, especially in the dimension of emotional exhaustion and to a lesser extent in depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

According to Table 2, the symptoms associated with emotional exhaustion most frequently reported by teachers were feeling exhausted at the end of their workday, feeling that they reached the limit of their possibilities due to the work they do, and feeling that their work was very hard. The information described specifies that teachers would be experiencing high levels of stress due to their work, which could negatively affect their well-being and work performance.

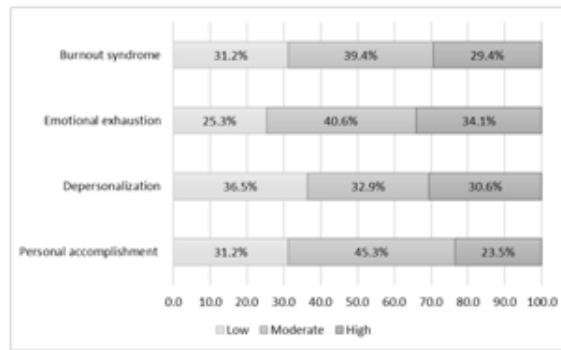


Figure 1. Descriptive results of the burnout syndrome variable and its dimensions.

Table 2  
Items associated with emotional exhaustion

Items	Never		Sometimes		Always	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
I feel emotionally exhausted because of my work.	37	21.8	77	45.3	56	32.9
I feel worn out at the end of a working day.	33	19.4	72	42.4	65	38.2
I feel tired as soon as I get up in the morning and see a new working day stretched out in front of me.	50	29.4	66	38.8	54	31.8
Working with students the whole day is stressful for me.	55	32.4	69	40.6	46	27.1
I feel burned out because of my work.	40	23.5	74	43.5	56	32.9
I feel frustrated by my work.	52	30.6	73	42.9	45	26.5
I get the feeling that I work too hard.	40	23.5	68	40.0	62	36.5
Being in direct contact with students at work is too stressful.	45	26.5	69	40.6	56	32.9
At work, I feel that I have reached the limit of my possibilities.	35	20.6	55	32.4	80	47.1

Regarding Table 3, the symptoms associated with depersonalization most frequently reported by teachers were worried that their work could be hardening them emotionally, considering that they treat some students with indifference, and feeling that they are blamed for some of their

problems. The above means that teachers would be experiencing a slight feeling of detachment from their students and the work they do, a situation that would have a negative impact on the quality of teaching and the relationship between teachers and students.

Table 3  
Items associated with depersonalization

Items	Never		Sometimes		Always	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
I think I treat some students with indifference.	60	35.3	55	32.4	55	32.4
I think I've been more insensitive to people since I've been doing this job.	68	40.0	62	36.5	40	23.5
I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally.	55	32.4	55	32.4	60	35.3
I really don't care what happens to some of the students I'm in charge of at the educational institution.	71	41.8	56	32.9	43	25.3
I feel like students blame me for some of their problems.	56	32.9	62	36.5	52	30.6

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In Table 4 we can see that the symptoms most frequently reported by teachers that would limit personal accomplishment were low vitality, having difficulty dealing with emotional problems at work, and creating a relaxed atmosphere

among their students. Therefore, resources and support must be provided to help them manage these symptoms and improve their emotional and mental well-being in the work environment.

Table 4

Items associated with personal accomplishment

Items	Never		Sometimes		Always	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
I can easily understand what my students think.	50	29.4	79	46.5	41	24.1
I deal very well with the problems that my students present to me.	39	22.9	85	50.0	46	27.1
I feel that I influence other people positively through my work.	46	27.1	73	42.9	51	30.0
I find myself with a lot of vitality.	74	43.5	79	46.5	17	10.0
I have the ability to create a relaxed atmosphere for my students.	56	32.9	79	46.5	35	20.6
I feel encouraged after working together with my students.	49	28.8	70	41.2	51	30.0
I have done many worthwhile things in this job.	43	25.3	62	36.5	65	38.2
I feel that I know how to adequately deal with emotional problems at work.	63	37.1	85	50.0	22	12.9

Table 5 shows that BS was significantly associated with some sociodemographic and work variables, such as gender, age group, labor conditions, and family responsibilities of teachers ( $p < 0.05$ ). In this sense, women, teachers who

were from 21 to 40 years old, those who had temporary contracts, and those who had family responsibilities presented slightly higher levels of BS compared to the other contrast groups.

Table 5

Association between burnout syndrome and sociodemographic and work-related variables

Sociodemographic and work-related variables		Burnout syndrome						p
		Low		Moderate		High		
		f	%	f	%	f	%	
Gender	Male	35	33.3	42	40.0	28	26.7	0.0001*
	Female	18	27.7	25	38.5	22	33.8	
Age group	From 21 to 40 years old	25	28.1	33	37.1	31	34.8	0.005*
	From 41 to 64 years old	28	34.6	34	42.0	19	23.5	
Labor condition	Temporary contract	22	30.1	26	35.6	25	34.2	0.001*
	Open-ended contract	31	32.0	41	42.3	25	25.8	
Level of Educational System	Early Childhood Education	14	32.6	16	37.2	13	30.2	0.055
	Elementary	19	28.8	28	42.4	19	28.8	
	High School	20	32.8	23	37.7	18	29.5	
Family responsibilities	Yes	37	30.1	46	37.4	40	32.5	0.002*
	No	16	34.0	21	44.7	10	21.3	
Highest level of education completed	Bachelor	26	30.2	34	39.5	26	30.2	0.062
	Master	21	31.8	26	39.4	19	28.8	
	Doctorate	6	33.3	7	38.9	5	27.8	

\*Statistically significant association ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Currently, BS is considered a mental health problem that affects workers all over the world. This syndrome is characterized by a feeling of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment at work. In the case of teachers, BS can affect their emotional well-being and their ability to carry out their work effectively, which in turn can have a negative impact on student learning. For this reason, the present research describes the level of BS in basic education teachers upon return to face-to-face classes.

Its first finding indicates that the teachers suffered from moderate levels of BS. In this sense, teachers experienced a decrease in their energy and emotional resources due to the presence of various stressors in the educational context, one of the main ones being the increment in workload. The main symptoms associated with BS reported by teachers were feeling exhausted at the end of their workday, worrying because they perceived that their work could be hardening them emotionally, and feeling that their vitality had decreased significantly. As previously mentioned, in the post-pandemic context, the workload of teachers increased, since they had to carry out additional school activities outside of their working hours to compensate for the learning that did not materialize during the pandemic through virtual classes.

The results are in line with the work of Villarreal (15), who determined that the level of burnout in the sample of teachers was between mild and moderate levels. Among the main causes were the educational lag of students and the pressure felt by teachers to fill the academic gaps generated by virtual education. On the other hand, the level of BS found was lower than that reported by Estrada and Gallegos (18), who found that teachers were characterized by high levels of BS (42.1 %), emotional exhaustion (40.3 %), and depersonalization (37.7 %). However, they presented low levels of personal accomplishment (39.6 %). These differences can be explained by sociodemographic aspects and the academic conditions from which the data were obtained.

In this regard, it should be noted that teaching is considered a high-risk profession for BS because it demands skills and commitment to carry out various activities inside and outside the educational institution, using time that should be dedicated to rest and personal and family activities of teachers (19). In addition, the demands of the current context request that teachers train competent and comprehensive students. In this sense, the pressure that exists in them to achieve greater learning and achieve educational objectives could harm their health, both physical and mental.

Another finding indicates that BS was significantly associated with gender. This means that women presented higher levels of BS than men. Similar results were obtained in some investigations that found that there was a higher prevalence in women (18,20-22). This could be explained by the fact that women express, more frequently than men, emotional and physiological manifestations in stressful contexts (23). On the other hand, in addition to their work responsibilities, women usually assume additional tasks at home, such as family responsibilities, childcare, and other domestic activities, a situation that could affect their mental health (24).

BS was also found to be significantly associated with age. In this sense, it was determined that teachers who were from 21 to 40 years old presented higher levels of BS than teachers older than 40 years old. This is because younger teachers do not have job security. On the other hand, they may also be experiencing important changes in their personal lives, such as the transition to adulthood and the formation of their own family. These changes can increase stress and anxiety, which in turn can increase the risk of developing BS. Similar results were reported in several studies (18,20,25).

It was also found that BS was significantly associated with the labor conditions of teachers. Accordingly, the teachers who have temporary contracts showed higher levels of BS than the teachers who have open-ended contracts, a situation that is because some teachers feel worried because they do not have job stability and may feel greater pressure to demonstrate

their effectiveness and justify their short-term contract, which can increase stress and anxiety. These results are in line with other studies reported previously (18,20,26).

Finally, it was found that BS was significantly associated with the family responsibilities of teachers. The above indicates that the teachers who were responsible for the care and attention of their families experienced greater stress since they needed to balance their work and family responsibilities, which can increase their level of stress and the risk of developing BS to a greater extent. Our results diverge from some studies that stated that single people (without family responsibilities) presented higher levels of BS (27,28).

Teaching is one of the main work activities in which professionals can develop symptoms related to stress and end up suffering from BS. Teaching work requires a significant amount of time and effort, both inside and outside the classroom, which can lead to neglecting other personal or family areas due to work overload (29). Additionally, it is a profession that faces constant stressful factors, since the terrible working conditions, the high number of students per classroom, behavior problems, and friction with educational authorities and parents, among others, generate more complex situations that can significantly affect the well-being and quality of life of those who carry out this work (30,31).

Even though the present study addressed a very relevant issue associated with the mental health of teachers and important findings were made, it is necessary to specify some limitations. First, the data obtained from the teachers, who detailed the symptoms associated with BS, were based on a self-report instrument. Therefore, the results could be overestimated or underestimated. Second, the sample size is relatively small and homogeneous, which implies that caution must be exercised when interpreting the results. Consequently, it is recommended that future research use data collection instruments that complement the questionnaire to give greater objectivity to the entire process. Similarly, the size of the sample should be increased, including teachers from rural contexts and different sociocultural characteristics.

## CONCLUSION

The BS in teachers is a problem that has become relevant in recent years due to its negative impact on the physical and emotional health of those who suffer from it, as well as on the quality of teaching provided to their students. It is characterized by a set of symptoms that include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decrease in personal accomplishment at work. These symptoms can be caused by various situations, such as work overload, job stress, and lack of support and recognition.

In the present study, the teachers were characterized by presenting moderate levels of BS. In the same way, they showed moderate levels of emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. However, they presented low levels of depersonalization. On the other hand, it was found that BS was significantly associated with some sociodemographic and work variables such as gender, age group, labor condition, and family responsibilities of teachers.

Therefore, the relevant educational authorities must establish national, regional, and local policies to improve the working conditions in which teachers work. On the other hand, the management teams of educational institutions must develop preventive and corrective programs to promote teacher well-being and consequently protect their quality of life.

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