

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND HEALTH AMONG TEACHERS: DIFFERENCES ACROSS EDUCATIONAL LEVELS

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Abstract

Recent studies have confirmed that teachers' well-being is an important determinant of both personal and professional functioning. In the modern education system, teachers working at various levels of education face different professional requirements, working conditions and psychosocial challenges; nevertheless, comparative evidence across different educational settings is still limited. Therefore, this study aimed to compare the subjective well-being and health indicators among teachers from higher education institutions, vocational education schools, and general education schools. Data from the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 11 were used for the analysis. The sample consisted of 1820 participants. Mean age - 55.04 (SD = 16.82); 73.3 percent were women. The ESS core questionnaire includes the two most common measures of subjective well-being: happiness and life satisfaction, as well as subjective general health, negative affect, and positive affect. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine differences among three groups of educators in subjective assessments of: (1) life satisfaction, (2) happiness, and (3) subjective general health, (4) negative affect and (5) positive affect were assessed. The results revealed that vocational education teachers are more satisfied with life and happier than school teachers, whereas university teachers evaluate their general health more positively than school teachers. Overall, the findings emphasise the need for context-specific approaches to supporting teachers' well-being across educational levels. Potential implications for policy and practice are discussed.

Keywords: *European Social Survey, teachers, life satisfaction, happiness, subjective general health.*

1. Introduction

Teacher well-being has gained increasing attention due to the inherently demanding and multifaceted nature of the teaching profession (Li et al., 2025). Recent studies suggested that teachers' well-being is an important determinant of both personal and professional functioning, including professional satisfaction, quality of work, commitment to work, and subjective health (Billaudeau et al., 2022; McInerney et al., 2018). Cervellione and colleagues' (2025) conducted a systematic review of psychological resources and interventions that affect teachers' emotional competence and well-being in the educational context, emphasising that teachers' well-being is related to both their emotional health and professional function, such as the ability to avoid burnout and maintain job satisfaction.

Subjective well-being (SWB), as conceptualized by Diener, comprises cognitive life evaluation and affective components, including positive and negative affect (Diener et al., 2012). The cognitive dimension reflects individuals' reflective judgments about their life as a whole, whereas the affective dimension captures the frequency and intensity of positive and negative emotional experiences. Together, these components provide a comprehensive assessment of individuals' overall well-being (Schimmack, 2006). Within the teaching profession, these dimensions are particularly relevant, given the high emotional demands and interpersonal nature of teachers' work. The cognitive evaluation of life satisfaction may reflect broader professional and personal fulfillment, whereas affective experiences are closely linked to daily classroom interactions, emotional labor, and stress regulation (Rafsanjani et al., 2019). Examining teachers' subjective well-being thus offers insight not only into their quality of life but also into processes that may influence educational functioning.

In the modern education system, teachers working at various levels of education face varying professional requirements, working conditions, and psychosocial challenges; nevertheless, comparative evidence across different educational levels remains limited. Teacher well-being has been studied in various contexts, but the teachers' well-being research is highly fragmented conceptually and methodologically,

and there is a lack of research that systematically compares different levels of education (e.g., school vs. higher education), so the need for such research is emphasised (Gómez-Genovart et al., 2025). This study addresses this critical issue and meaningful research gap. Using a solid dataset from the European Social Survey, this study aimed to compare the subjective well-being and health indicators among teachers from higher education institutions, vocational education schools, and general education schools.

2. Methods: sample, data collection and measures

Data from the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 11 were used for the analysis (ESS ERIC, 2025). The sample consisted of 1820 participants: 158 university and other higher education teachers, 87 vocational education teachers; 1575 primary and secondary education teachers, and others. Mean age - 55.04 (SD = 16.82); 73.3 percent were women. The European Social Survey is one of the biggest surveys conducted in Europe. Sampling and its key principles are guided by the requirements outlined in the official ESS webpage (<https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/methodology/sampling>).

The ESS core questionnaire includes the two most common measures of subjective well-being: happiness and life satisfaction. Life satisfaction was measured by the item: “All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays?” and asking participants to evaluate their satisfaction from 0 to 10 points on the Likert scale, where 0 - “Extremely dissatisfied” and 10 - “Extremely satisfied”. Happiness was also measured with single-item: “Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?” asking participants to evaluate their happiness on a 0–10 scale from “Extremely unhappy” to “Extremely happy”. While happiness is usually conceptualized in terms of people’s emotional responses and measures their current feelings, life satisfaction is conceptualized in terms of their cognitive or evaluative responses and measures how people evaluate their life as a whole (Clark and Senik, 2011). Subjective general health was measured using self-rated item: “How is your health in general?” asking respondents to provide response 5-point Likert scale from “Very good” to “Very bad”. A higher score indicates poorer subjective health. Negative affect was measured with 6 items ($\alpha = .77$; “During the past week, how often did you...” feel depressed, feel that everything you did was an effort, sleep restlessly, feel lonely, feel sad, or feel unable to get going) and positive affect – 2 items ($\alpha = .77$; “During the past week, how often did you...” feel happy and enjoy life).

3. Results

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine differences of subjective wellbeing and health among three groups of educators: higher education / university teachers, vocational education teachers and school teachers. Statistically significant differences between groups were identified in life satisfaction, happiness, subjective general health, negative affect, and positive affect ($p < .005$). The results are presented in Table 1. The ANOVA Effect sizes (Eta-squared) point estimate varies from .003 to .006.

Table 1. Results of One-Way ANOVA for subjective wellbeing and health across educator groups.

Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
How satisfied with life as a whole	Between Groups	42.932	2	21.466	6.097	.002
	Within Groups	6365.808	1808	3.521		
	Total	6408.740	1810			
How happy are you	Between Groups	17.828	2	8.914	3.870	.021
	Within Groups	4161.872	1807	2.303		
	Total	4179.700	1809			
Subjective general health	Between Groups	7.688	2	3.844	5.979	.003
	Within Groups	1163.743	1810	.643		
	Total	1171.431	1812			
Negative Affect	Between Groups	1.116	2	.558	2.862	.057
	Within Groups	351.659	1803	.195		
	Total	352.776	1805			
Positive Affect	Between Groups	2.755	2	1.377	2.800	.061
	Within Groups	885.466	1800	.492		
	Total	888.221	1802			

The results of Multiple comparisons revealed that vocational education teachers are more satisfied with life ($M = 8.02$, $SD = 1.521$) and happier ($M = 8.17$, $SD = 1.333$) than school teachers (respectively, $M = 7.33$, $SD = 1.880$ and $M = 7.71$, $SD = 1.515$), whereas university teachers evaluate their general health more positively ($M = 1.87$, $SD = .721$) than school teachers ($M = 2.08$, $SD = .804$).

4. Discussion and conclusions

The results of this study revealed differences in teachers' subjective well-being and health at various levels of education. Previous research highlights that teachers at various levels face different demands and challenges, but empirical evidence is lacking (Gómez-Genovart et al., 2025). This study fills this gap and provides a basis for further research in this area.

This study has several limitations including large discrepancies in group sizes across educational levels and self-report measurements. Future research should take this into account and aim to ensure more equivalent group sizes, as well as to include more objective measurement instruments when planning the study.

The study results offer useful comparative insights into teachers' well-being across educational levels. Differences identified between secondary, vocational, and higher education teachers emphasize the need for context-specific approaches to supporting teachers' well-being across educational levels.

The results of this study revealed that the subjectively perceived health of school teachers needs more attention compared with university teachers. This may indicate that universities have a more strategic approach to teachers' psychological well-being, the work is perceived as less emotionally demanding because (working with adults), etc. All this emphasizes the need to further analyse school-level teachers' psychological well-being and factors that enhance it. This also has implications for educational policy and institutional practice. Different educational levels have different needs, so well-being strategies must be level-specific. School teachers may benefit from participating in programs that enhance psychological well-being, such as consultations, mentoring systems, and professional support networks. Teachers in vocational education are recommended to maintain existing good practices and share good practices with other educational levels. University teachers are recommended to engage in emotional well-being development initiatives (e.g., workshops on work stress, collaboration, work-life balance).

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