

# Perceived Psychosocial Work Exposures, Workplace Resources and Occupational Wellbeing Among Secondary-School Teachers in Selected Areas of Sierra Leone: A Descriptive Cross-Sectional Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Teachers are an important occupational group whose wellbeing may be influenced by psychosocial demands, organisational conditions and workplace resources. In Sierra Leone, evidence describing teachers' workplace experiences from an occupational-health perspective remains limited. This study assessed perceived psychosocial work exposures, workplace resources and occupational wellbeing among secondary-school teachers in selected areas of Sierra Leone.

**Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 400 teachers from Grade A government and government-assisted senior secondary schools in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Makeni, Port Loko and Moyamba. Participants were recruited using a stratified multistage approach, with convenience recruitment of eligible teachers within geographic strata. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered electronically through KoboToolbox and analysed using IBM SPSS Version 27.0. Frequencies, percentages and percentage-point differences were used for descriptive analysis.

**Results:** Salary dissatisfaction relative to living costs was the most frequently reported adverse workplace exposure (61.3%), followed by inadequate planning and grading time (38.7%), workload dissatisfaction (36.3%), poor/very poor working conditions (32.6%) and perceived workplace insecurity (23.7%). Constructive feedback was reported by 96.1% of teachers, professional recognition by 77.4% and perceived adequacy of social-security benefits by 68.9%; however, only 26.0% reported administrative encouragement for further education or training. Overall, 47.5% were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs, while 76.8% intended to remain in teaching for the next five years.

**Conclusion:** Participating teachers experienced a mixed occupational-health profile characterised by substantial salary-related dissatisfaction and other workplace demands alongside strong perceived interpersonal resources. The marked difference between job satisfaction and retention intention warrants further investigation. Strengthening work organisation, protected planning time, working conditions and professional-development support, while sustaining recognition and constructive feedback, may help improve teachers' occupational wellbeing. Representative analytical and longitudinal studies are needed to identify determinants of wellbeing and actual teacher retention in Sierra Leone.

**Keywords:** occupational health; psychosocial work exposures; teacher wellbeing; workplace resources; job satisfaction; teacher retention; Sierra Leone.

## INTRODUCTION

Occupational health is a core component of public health because the conditions under which people work can protect or adversely affect physical, psychological and social wellbeing. Employment provides income, identity, social interaction and economic security, yet poorly organised work may expose workers to excessive demands, time pressure, unsafe environments, inadequate remuneration and weak organisational support. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) identifies excessive workload, understaffing, limited

control, unsafe environments, discrimination, poor organisational culture and inadequate support as important psychosocial risks to mental health at work.

Contemporary occupational-health practice therefore extends beyond prevention of physical injury and exposure to chemical or biological hazards. Increasing attention is directed to the design, management and social organisation of work because prolonged adverse psychosocial conditions may contribute to distress, reduced wellbeing, sickness absence and impaired work participation (WHO, 2024; International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2025).

Teaching is an occupation characterised by multiple and sometimes competing demands. In addition to classroom instruction, teachers prepare lessons, mark assignments, assess students, maintain records, supervise extracurricular activities and interact with administrators, colleagues, parents and students. Systematic reviews have identified workload, school climate, professional relationships, resource availability and organisational support as recurrent influences on teachers' occupational wellbeing (Nwoko et al., 2023; Sohail et al., 2023).

The public-health relevance of teacher wellbeing extends beyond individual workers. Teachers are central to the daily functioning of schools and have sustained contact with children and adolescents. Adverse occupational experiences may be associated with absenteeism, reduced engagement, weaker professional commitment and intentions to leave the profession, with potential consequences for educational-system stability (Dreer, 2023; UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024).

Evidence from African settings also points to the importance of occupational stress and psychosocial job demands among teachers. Studies in Ethiopia have reported considerable occupational stress and associations between psychosocial work factors and burnout-related outcomes (Tesfaye et al., 2023; Belay et al., 2023). Such findings underline the need for context-specific evidence from resource-constrained education systems.

Economic and organisational conditions may be especially relevant. Income is a social determinant of health because it shapes access to food, housing, transport and healthcare. Perceived salary inadequacy relative to living costs may therefore represent an important workplace-related stressor. Conversely, workplace resources such as recognition, supportive supervision, constructive feedback, social protection and professional-development opportunities may strengthen professional identity and workers' capacity to manage job demands (Zhou et al., 2024; Granziera & Evans, 2026).

The present study adopts a job-demand-resources-informed organising framework. Perceived workplace insecurity, workload dissatisfaction, inadequate planning and grading time, poor working conditions and salary dissatisfaction are treated as potential adverse work exposures. Perceived social-security adequacy, recognition, administrative support for further education and constructive feedback are treated as potential workplace resources. Overall job satisfaction and intention to remain in teaching are treated as indicators of occupational wellbeing. These classifications are conceptual and descriptive; the present analysis does not establish that the identified exposures cause poor wellbeing or that the identified resources are protective.

In Sierra Leone, education is central to human-capital development, yet evidence specifically characterising teachers' workplace experiences from an occupational-health perspective remains limited. The present study therefore aimed to describe perceived psychosocial work exposures, workplace resources and occupational wellbeing among secondary-school teachers in selected areas of Sierra Leone.

## Study Objectives

- To describe major perceived psychosocial and occupational-health exposures among participating secondary-school teachers, including workplace insecurity, workload dissatisfaction, inadequate planning and grading time, poor working conditions and salary dissatisfaction relative to living costs.
- To describe selected workplace resources, including perceived social-security adequacy, administrative encouragement for further education, professional recognition and constructive feedback.

- To describe occupational wellbeing using overall job satisfaction and five-year intention to remain in the teaching profession.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Design

The study used a descriptive cross-sectional design. Data on workplace experiences and occupational-wellbeing indicators were collected from a defined group of secondary-school teachers at a single point in time. The design was appropriate for describing the distribution of self-reported workplace conditions and resources (Belay et al., 2023), but it does not establish temporal or causal relationships.

### Study Area

The study was conducted in the principal urban centres of the selected administrative areas: Bo City (Bo District), Makeni (Bombali District), Kenema City (Kenema District), Port Loko (Port Loko District), Moyamba town (Moyamba District), and Western Area Urban (Freetown). Restricting recruitment to the district capitals provided a clearly defined urban sampling frame and facilitated comparable selection of senior secondary schools across the study locations. Within each location, eligibility was restricted to Grade A government and government-assisted senior secondary schools.

### Study Population, Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The study population comprised senior secondary-school teachers working in Grade A government and government-assisted senior secondary schools located within the capitals of the selected districts and in Western Area Urban. Specifically, the accessible population consisted of teachers in eligible schools in Freetown, Bo City, Kenema City, Makeni, Port Loko and Moyamba town.

The minimum sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for estimating a single population proportion:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 p (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

### Cochran's sample-size formula

A 95% confidence level was used ( $Z = 1.96$ ), with a 5% margin of error ( $e = 0.05$ ) (Belay et al., 2023). In the absence of a reliable prior estimate for the principal workplace-health proportions,  $p$  was set at 0.50, the conservative value that maximises the required sample size.

Thus,  $n_0 = (1.96^2 \times 0.50 \times 0.50) / (0.05^2) = 384.16$ , giving a minimum sample of 384 teachers.

To accommodate anticipated non-response, incomplete questionnaires and possible unusable responses, the minimum sample of 384 was increased to an operational target of 400. The addition of 16 participants represented a 4.2% increase above the Cochran minimum. This modest upward adjustment was intended to protect the achieved sample against limited non-response while maintaining a practical field target. All completed and eligible questionnaires were retained for analysis.

A stratified multistage sampling approach was used to organise participant recruitment across the six geographic study locations. In the first stage, Western Area Urban (Freetown), Bo City, Kenema City, Makeni, Port Loko and Moyamba town constituted the geographic strata. In the second stage, senior secondary schools within each stratum were screened according to school grade and ownership. Eligibility was restricted to Grade A government and government-assisted senior secondary schools located within the selected urban centres. Private schools, schools below Grade A and schools outside the selected urban centres were excluded.

Stratification by geographic location ensured representation of all six study areas. The operational target of 400 teachers was distributed across the strata as follows: Western Area Urban (Freetown), 120 (30.0%); Bo City, 70 (17.5%); Kenema City, 65 (16.25%); Makeni, 55 (13.75%); Port Loko, 50 (12.5%); and Moyamba town, 40 (10.0%). The allocation represented predetermined field targets intended to reflect the greater concentration of eligible Grade A senior secondary-school teachers in the larger urban centres while maintaining representation from each study location.

Within each geographic stratum, eligible teachers from qualifying schools were recruited using convenience sampling until the predetermined stratum target was attained. Consequently, although geographic stratification ensured representation across the six study locations, participant selection within strata was non-probability based. The allocation should therefore be interpreted as a stratified field-target allocation rather than strict proportionate probability sampling. This distinction was considered in interpreting the findings and limits generalisation beyond teachers working in settings comparable to those included in the study.

The distribution of the operational sample target across the six geographic strata is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Stratified allocation of the study sample by location (n = 400)**

| Geographic stratum            | Suggested target n | Share (%) |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Western Area Urban (Freetown) | 120                | 30.0      |
| Bo City                       | 70                 | 17.5      |
| Kenema City                   | 65                 | 16.2      |
| Makeni (Bombali)              | 55                 | 13.8      |
| Port Loko                     | 50                 | 12.5      |
| Moyamba town                  | 40                 | 10.0      |
| Total                         | 400                | 100.0     |

Source: Study sampling framework, 2026.

### Data Collection Instrument and Measures

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on respondents' sociodemographic and professional characteristics and their experiences of the workplace environment. The instrument covered perceived workplace safety, workload, adequacy of time for lesson planning and grading, general working conditions, salary adequacy relative to prevailing living costs, professional-development opportunities, administrative support for further education and training, perceived adequacy of NASSIT/social-security benefits, workplace recognition, constructive feedback, overall job satisfaction, and intention to remain in the teaching profession.

The questionnaire was developed and organised around the objectives of the study and informed by relevant literature on psychosocial working conditions, occupational health, workplace resources and teacher wellbeing (Nwoko et al., 2023; Sohail et al., 2023). Attention was given to ensuring that the items reflected workplace experiences relevant to the Sierra Leonean secondary-school context. The instrument was structured primarily using closed-ended questions and ordered response categories to facilitate standardised administration and quantitative analysis.

To strengthen content and face validity, the questionnaire was reviewed for relevance, clarity, appropriateness of wording, comprehensiveness and consistency with the study objectives. Attention was given to whether individual items adequately represented the occupational domains being investigated and whether the terminology could be readily understood by secondary-school teachers within the study setting. Ambiguous, repetitive or potentially misleading items were refined before field administration.

Prior to the main survey, the questionnaire was pre-tested among 10 teachers in Kabala town Koinadugu District Northern Sierra Leone with characteristics broadly comparable to those of the intended study population, but who were not included in the final sample. The pre-testing process was used to assess clarity of instructions and questions, interpretation of response options, logical sequencing, approximate completion time and practical feasibility of questionnaire administration. Observations arising from the pre-test informed further refinement and review of the instrument by the researcher before the commencement of the main data collection.

The questionnaire was intended to characterise teachers' self-reported workplace experiences rather than diagnose psychiatric or clinical conditions. Consequently, measures such as perceived workload, workplace safety, salary adequacy, recognition, feedback, job satisfaction and retention intention were interpreted as occupational and organisational indicators. The study did not diagnose depression, anxiety, burnout or other mental-health disorders, as these would require appropriately validated diagnostic or psychometric instruments. This distinction was maintained throughout the analysis and interpretation to avoid extending conclusions beyond the measurement capacity of the study instrument.

Quality assurance was further supported through standardised administration of the questionnaire, checking completed instruments for completeness and internal consistency, and systematic coding and cleaning of the data before analysis. These procedures were intended to minimise measurement and data-entry errors and improve the consistency and credibility of the study findings.

### **Enumerator Training and Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection was undertaken by a team of 24 trained enumerators. Prior to field deployment, the enumerators received training on the objectives of the study, study procedures, participant eligibility, ethical conduct, informed consent, confidentiality, questionnaire administration, interpretation of individual questionnaire items, and procedures for ensuring completeness and consistency of responses. Emphasis was placed on maintaining neutrality during interviews and avoiding leading, prompting or otherwise influencing participants' responses.

The training also addressed the administration and interpretation of the questionnaire in English and Krio. English served as the principal language of the questionnaire, while Krio was used where clarification or interpretation was necessary to facilitate respondents' understanding. Enumerators were trained to communicate the intended meaning of questions consistently rather than introducing personal interpretations. This bilingual approach was intended to minimise misunderstanding while maintaining consistency in questionnaire administration across the study locations.

Following training, the enumerators were deployed to the selected study locations for seven consecutive days of field data collection. Four enumerators were assigned to each location covered by a field team. Deployment was organised to facilitate timely coverage of the eligible Grade A government and government-assisted senior secondary schools included in the sampling framework.

Data were collected electronically using KoboToolbox. The structured questionnaire was programmed into the electronic data-collection platform and administered using compatible digital devices. Electronic data capture reduced dependence on paper questionnaires and facilitated systematic recording, secure transmission and centralised management of completed responses.

Quality-control measures were incorporated into the field procedures. Enumerators reviewed responses for completeness before final submission, while the electronic questionnaire was structured to promote consistent data entry and minimise avoidable recording errors. Field implementation was supervised to

address questions arising during questionnaire administration and to promote adherence to the study protocol across locations. Submitted data were subsequently reviewed for completeness and consistency before cleaning, coding and statistical analysis.

The combination of enumerator training, bilingual questionnaire administration, standardised electronic data capture and field supervision was intended to reduce interviewer-related variation and data-entry errors and to enhance the overall quality and consistency of the study data.

### **Study Variables and Operational Interpretation**

For descriptive presentation, the variables were organised into three domains. Potential adverse work exposures included not feeling safe at work, workload dissatisfaction, dissatisfaction with planning and grading time, poor/very poor working conditions and dissatisfaction with salary relative to living costs. Potential workplace resources included perceived adequacy of NASSIT/social-security benefits, administrative encouragement for further education, professional recognition and constructive feedback. Occupational wellbeing indicators comprised overall job satisfaction and five-year intention to remain in teaching.

The terms 'potential exposure' and 'potential workplace resource' are used deliberately because the descriptive cross-sectional analysis does not demonstrate causal risk or protective effects.

### **Data Management and Statistical Analysis**

Data collected electronically using KoboToolbox were reviewed for completeness and consistency before being exported, coded and analysed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 27.0. Data cleaning involved checking for incomplete records, duplicate submissions, out-of-range values and inconsistencies in variable coding. Descriptive statistics were generated to characterise respondents and examine the distribution of the principal study variables. Categorical variables were summarised using frequencies and percentages, while continuous variables, where applicable, were summarised using appropriate measures of central tendency and dispersion.

The statistical analysis was structured around three domains: psychosocial and occupational work exposures, potential protective workplace resources, and occupational wellbeing. Adverse workplace indicators comprised perceived workplace insecurity, workload dissatisfaction, inadequate time for lesson planning and grading, poor working conditions and dissatisfaction with salary relative to living costs. Potential workplace resources comprised perceived adequacy of NASSIT/social-security benefits, administrative encouragement for further education or training, professional recognition and constructive feedback. Occupational wellbeing was assessed using overall job satisfaction and five-year intention to remain in teaching. Original response categories were examined initially and, where conceptually justified, adjacent categories were combined to produce interpretable favourable and unfavourable response groups.

A comparative descriptive approach was additionally used to examine the relative magnitude of workplace exposures and resources. Adverse indicators were ranked according to the proportion of teachers reporting each condition, while workplace resources were similarly compared according to positive-response proportions. Percentage-point differences were used to describe the magnitude of contrasts between selected indicators. Attention was also given to descriptive patterns across reported job demands, workplace resources, overall job satisfaction and retention intention.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Njala University Research and Ethics Committee, and the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Formal letters requesting permission to conduct the study were submitted to the authorities of all eligible Grade A government and government-assisted senior secondary schools in the selected locations. Data collection was undertaken only in schools that granted permission. Institutional permission, however, did not replace

individual consent; eligible teachers were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and informed consent was obtained before questionnaire administration. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were free to decline participation, omit questions they did not wish to answer, or withdraw without penalty.

Throughout data collection, participants' autonomy, privacy and confidentiality were protected. Trained enumerators administered the questionnaire objectively and without coercion or undue influence. Data collected electronically using KoboToolbox were securely managed and used solely for research purposes, with access restricted to authorised research personnel. Findings were analysed and reported in aggregate form to minimise identification of individual teachers or participating schools. The study therefore maintained the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, privacy and confidentiality throughout recruitment, data collection, analysis and reporting.

## RESULTS

The results describe the experiences of the 400 participating teachers and should not be interpreted as population prevalence estimates for all secondary-school teachers in Sierra Leone.

### Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents

**Table 2. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 400)**

| Characteristic   | Category          | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Age (years)      | 20–29             | 72            | 18.0           |
|                  | 30–39             | 142           | 35.5           |
|                  | 40–49             | 108           | 27.0           |
|                  | 50–59             | 62            | 15.5           |
|                  | ≥60               | 16            | 4.0            |
|                  | <b>Total</b>      | <b>400</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |
| Sex              | Male              | 236           | 59.0           |
|                  | Female            | 164           | 41.0           |
|                  | <b>Total</b>      | <b>400</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |
| Years of service | <5 years          | 96            | 24.0           |
|                  | 5–9 years         | 112           | 28.0           |
|                  | 10–14 years       | 82            | 20.5           |
|                  | 15–19 years       | 58            | 14.5           |
|                  | ≥20 years         | 52            | 13.0           |
|                  | <b>Total</b>      | <b>400</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |
| Designation      | Principal         | 24            | 6.0            |
|                  | Senior Teacher    | 84            | 21.0           |
|                  | Class Master      | 116           | 29.0           |
|                  | Assistant Teacher | 176           | 44.0           |
|                  | <b>Total</b>      | <b>400</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |

|                |                    |            |              |
|----------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|
| Marital status | Single             | 126        | 31.5         |
|                | Married            | 238        | 59.5         |
|                | Divorced/Separated | 24         | 6.0          |
|                | Widowed            | 12         | 3.0          |
|                | <b>Total</b>       | <b>400</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

### Field Survey Data 2026.

Table 2 distribution depicts a predominantly working-age teaching population, with the largest proportion aged 30-39 years (35.5%), followed by those aged 40-49 years (27.0%). Teachers aged 60 years and above constitute only 4.0%. Males account for 59.0% and females 41.0%, suggesting moderate male predominance without an extreme gender imbalance.

Regarding professional experience, slightly more than half of respondents (52.0%) had fewer than ten years of teaching service, while 27.5% had served for 15 years or more. Assistant Teachers constituted the largest designation category (44.0%), followed by Class Masters (29.0%), Senior Teachers (21.0%) and Principals (6.0%). The distribution indicates that the sample comprised teachers across different levels of professional experience and responsibility, with classroom-level positions accounting for the largest proportion of respondents. Regarding marital status, the majority are married (59.5%), followed by single respondents (31.5%), while relatively small proportions are divorced/separated (6.0%) or widowed (3.0%).

### Perceived Adverse Work Exposures

**Table 3. Perceived Adverse Work Exposure**

| Potential adverse work exposure                 | Participants reporting adverse response (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Salary dissatisfaction relative to living costs | 61.3                                        |
| Dissatisfaction with planning and grading time  | 38.7                                        |
| Workload dissatisfaction                        | 36.3                                        |
| Poor/very poor working conditions               | 32.6                                        |
| Did not feel safe at work                       | 23.7                                        |

### Field Survey Data 2026.

According to table 3, salary dissatisfaction relative to living costs was the most frequently reported adverse workplace experience (61.3%). Dissatisfaction with time for planning and grading was reported by 38.7%, workload dissatisfaction by 36.3%, poor or very poor working conditions by 32.6%, and not feeling safe at work by 23.7%. These findings identify the most commonly reported adverse experiences within the participating sample; they do not establish that these conditions caused poor occupational wellbeing.

### Potential Workplace Resources

**Table 4. Distribution of Potential Workplace Resources**

| Potential workplace resource                        | Positive response (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Received constructive feedback frequently/sometimes | 96.1                  |

|                                                                      |      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Felt professionally recognised                                       | 77.4 |
| Perceived NASSIT/social-security benefits as adequate                | 68.9 |
| Reported administrative encouragement for further education/training | 26.0 |

### Field Survey Data 2026.

Table 4 shows the potential workplace resources. Constructive feedback received frequently or sometimes was reported by 96.1% of participants. Professional recognition was reported by 77.4%, and 68.9% perceived NASSIT/social-security benefits as adequate. In contrast, only 26.0% reported administrative encouragement to pursue further education or professional training. The latter finding suggests a marked difference between reported interpersonal workplace support and formal support for professional development.

### Occupational Wellbeing Indicators

**Table 5. Occupational Wellbeing and Five-Year Retention Intention among Secondary-School Teachers (n = 400)**

| Occupational wellbeing indicator                               | Response category              | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Overall job satisfaction</b>                                | Satisfied/Very satisfied       | 190           | 47.5           |
|                                                                | Neutral                        | 100           | 25.0           |
|                                                                | Dissatisfied/Very dissatisfied | 110           | 27.5           |
|                                                                | <b>Total</b>                   | <b>400</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |
| <b>Intention to remain in teaching for the next five years</b> | Yes                            | 307           | 76.8           |
|                                                                | No                             | 93            | 23.3           |
|                                                                | <b>Total</b>                   | <b>400</b>    | <b>100.0</b>   |

**Source:** Field Survey Data.

Table 5 presents overall job satisfaction and five-year intention to remain in the teaching profession. Job satisfaction showed a mixed pattern. Of the 400 participating teachers, 190 (47.5%) reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs, 110 (27.5%) were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, while 100 (25.0%) expressed a neutral position. Thus, although satisfied or very satisfied respondents constituted the largest individual response category, slightly more than half of participants (52.5%) were either neutral or dissatisfied.

In contrast, intention to remain in the teaching profession was relatively high. A total of 307 teachers (76.8%) indicated that they intended to remain in teaching for the next five years, compared with 93 (23.3%) who did not. The descriptive difference between positive job satisfaction (47.5%) and intention to remain (76.8%) was 29.3 percentage points. This contrast suggests that intention to remain in teaching may not necessarily correspond directly with current job satisfaction. However, because the comparison is based on aggregate descriptive proportions rather than individual-level cross-tabulation, it does not demonstrate a statistical association between job satisfaction and retention intention. Furthermore, stated intention to remain should not be interpreted as evidence of actual future retention.

## Comparative Pattern of Occupational Exposures, Workplace Resources and Wellbeing

**Table 6. Comparative Descriptive Analysis of Psychosocial Work Exposures, Workplace Resources and Occupational Wellbeing among Teachers (n = 400)**

| Domain                        | Indicator                                                   | Response (%) | Reference indicator       | Percentage-point difference |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Adverse workplace exposures   | Salary dissatisfaction relative to living costs             | 61.3         | Highest adverse indicator | —                           |
| Adverse workplace exposures   | Inadequate planning and grading time                        | 38.7         | Salary dissatisfaction    | 22.6                        |
| Adverse workplace exposures   | Workload dissatisfaction                                    | 36.3         | Salary dissatisfaction    | 25.0                        |
| Adverse workplace exposures   | Poor/very poor working conditions                           | 32.6         | Salary dissatisfaction    | 28.7                        |
| Adverse workplace exposures   | Did not feel safe at work                                   | 23.7         | Salary dissatisfaction    | 37.6                        |
| Potential workplace resources | Constructive feedback frequently/sometimes                  | 96.1         | Highest positive resource | —                           |
| Potential workplace resources | Professional recognition                                    | 77.4         | Constructive feedback     | 18.7                        |
| Potential workplace resources | Perceived adequacy of NASSIT/social-security benefits       | 68.9         | Constructive feedback     | 27.2                        |
| Potential workplace resources | Administrative encouragement for further education/training | 26.0         | Constructive feedback     | 70.1                        |
| Occupational wellbeing        | Satisfied/very satisfied with job                           | <b>47.5</b>  | Retention intention       | 29.3                        |
| Occupational wellbeing        | Dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with job                     | <b>27.5</b>  | —                         | —                           |
| Occupational wellbeing        | Neutral job satisfaction                                    | 25.0         | —                         | —                           |
| Occupational wellbeing        | Intention to remain in teaching for five years              | 76.8         | Positive job satisfaction | 29.3                        |

**Source: Field Survey Data, 2026.**

Note: Percentage-point differences represent descriptive contrasts between aggregate proportions and are not tests of statistical association. Because individual-level cross-tabulations were unavailable, no chi-square statistics, odds ratios, confidence intervals or p-values were calculated.

Table 6 demonstrates a clear hierarchy among the adverse workplace experiences reported by participating teachers. Salary dissatisfaction relative to living costs was the dominant adverse indicator at 61.3%, exceeding inadequate planning and grading time by 22.6 percentage points, workload dissatisfaction by 25.0 points, poor working conditions by 28.7 points and perceived workplace insecurity by 37.6 points. The pattern suggests that economic concerns were particularly prominent within the occupational experiences of the surveyed teachers, although the aggregate data cannot establish whether salary dissatisfaction was statistically associated with poorer occupational wellbeing.

A contrasting pattern was observed for workplace resources. Constructive feedback was reported by 96.1%, followed by professional recognition (77.4%) and perceived adequacy of NASSIT/social-security benefits (68.9%). However, only 26.0% reported administrative encouragement for further education or professional training. The resulting 70.1-percentage-point gap between constructive feedback and professional-development encouragement suggests that positive interpersonal or supervisory support was considerably more common than formal institutional investment in teachers' professional advancement.

The occupational wellbeing indicators reveal an especially noteworthy pattern. Although only 47.5% of teachers were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs, 76.8% intended to remain in teaching for the next five years, representing a 29.3-percentage-point gap. This suggests that anticipated retention may involve considerations beyond current job satisfaction. Possible explanations could include professional commitment, employment security, perceived social protection or limited alternative employment opportunities; however, these explanations were not directly tested and should therefore be treated as hypotheses for future research rather than demonstrated determinants.

## DISCUSSION

### Principal Findings

This study describes a mixed occupational-health profile among participating secondary-school teachers. Salary dissatisfaction relative to living costs was the most prominent adverse experience, while substantial minorities also reported inadequate planning and grading time, workload dissatisfaction, poor working conditions and workplace insecurity. At the same time, many participants reported constructive feedback, professional recognition and adequate social-security benefits, whereas formal administrative encouragement for further education was comparatively uncommon.

The coexistence of adverse job demands and favourable workplace resources is consistent with a job-demand-resources-informed interpretation of occupational wellbeing. However, because the present analysis is descriptive, it cannot determine whether any reported demand reduced wellbeing or whether any workplace resource buffered adverse effects.

### Workload, Time Pressure and Working Conditions

More than one-third of participants reported dissatisfaction with workload and with the time available for lesson planning and grading. Teaching routinely extends beyond classroom contact through preparation, marking, assessment and reporting. International reviews have similarly identified workload, organisational environment and professional relationships as recurrent correlates of teacher wellbeing (Nwoko et al., 2023; Sohail et al., 2023), while Morris et al. (2025) emphasised the relevance of job demands to teacher mental health over time. The present findings are compatible with that broader literature, but they should not be interpreted as demonstrating equivalent causal relationships in Sierra Leone.

Nearly one-third of participants rated their working conditions as poor or very poor, and almost one-quarter reported not feeling safe at work. These responses warrant attention because occupational safety encompasses both physical and psychosocial dimensions. Nevertheless, the questionnaire reported here do not identify the specific sources of perceived insecurity or poor conditions; further research should distinguish between infrastructure, violence or harassment, staffing, resource constraints and organisational factors.

## **Salary Dissatisfaction and Economic Pressure**

Salary dissatisfaction relative to living costs was reported by 61.3% of participants, making it the most common adverse workplace response. Income is an important social determinant of health because it affects access to essential needs, and inadequate or insecure employment conditions may increase psychosocial vulnerability (WHO, 2024). The present measure, however, reflects perceived salary adequacy rather than an objective assessment of household income, expenditure, debt or financial hardship. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as substantial salary-related dissatisfaction rather than a quantified measure of financial strain.

## **Workplace Resources and Professional Development**

High proportions of participants reported constructive feedback and professional recognition, suggesting that many teachers perceived positive interpersonal features within their workplaces. Contemporary research identifies supportive relationships and organisational resources as relevant to teacher wellbeing (Zhou et al., 2024; Granziera & Evans, 2026). The current study cannot establish a protective effect, but these resources may represent useful targets for future analytical investigation.

The comparatively low proportion reporting administrative encouragement for further education or training is notable. It suggests that favourable perceptions of recognition and feedback do not necessarily translate into formal institutional investment in professional development. Because professional-development opportunities may contribute to competence, career progression and professional identity, this area deserves further examination (Gámez-Genovart et al., 2025).

## **Job Satisfaction and Retention Intention**

The contrast between overall job satisfaction and intention to remain in teaching is one of the more noteworthy descriptive findings. Fewer than half of participants were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs, yet more than three-quarters intended to remain in teaching over the next five years. This difference may reflect factors not measured or not analysed in the present study, including professional commitment, employment security, social protection or availability of alternative employment. These explanations remain hypotheses and should not be treated as demonstrated mechanisms.

Retention intention is also distinct from actual workforce retention. Martinsone et al. (2024) reported that intention to leave teaching can be associated with multiple occupational experiences, but longitudinal follow-up is required to determine whether stated intentions translate into subsequent exit.

## **Public-Health and Policy Implications**

The findings suggest that teacher occupational health should be considered alongside broader school-health and workforce-development priorities. Workplace responses may need to address job organisation, protected planning time, physical and organisational working conditions, professional development support and perceived salary adequacy while sustaining positive practices such as recognition and constructive feedback. Because the study is not nationally representative, these findings are best used to identify issues for further assessment and targeted workplace review rather than as definitive national estimates.

## **Strengths and Limitations**

This study has several important strengths. It provides context-specific empirical evidence on the occupational wellbeing of secondary-school teachers in Sierra Leone, an area where published occupational-health evidence remains limited. Its multidimensional approach simultaneously examined adverse workplace experiences, potential workplace resources and occupational-wellbeing indicators, thereby providing a balanced picture of both workplace challenges and supportive organisational features. The inclusion of 400 teachers across six geographically distinct urban locations also generated a substantial multisite descriptive dataset, while the restriction to Grade A government and government-assisted senior secondary schools

provided a clearly defined study population operating within broadly comparable institutional and employment structures.

Methodological procedures further strengthened the quality of the study. The questionnaire underwent content and face-validity review and was pre-tested among teachers outside the final sample. Data collection involved 24 trained enumerators, standardised administration, bilingual clarification where necessary and electronic data capture using KoboToolbox, followed by systematic data cleaning and analysis in SPSS. Importantly, the analytical approach remained consistent with the descriptive cross-sectional design: frequencies, percentages and descriptive percentage-point differences were used without interpreting aggregate contrasts as statistical associations or causal relationships. The study also appropriately distinguished perceived workplace resources from proven protective factors and retention intention from actual workforce retention.

These strengths should be considered alongside several limitations. The cross-sectional design precludes causal or temporal conclusions, while restriction to selected urban Grade A government and government-assisted schools limits generalisability to rural, private and lower-graded schools. Although geographic stratification ensured representation across the six selected locations, convenience recruitment within strata introduced a non-probability component and potential selection bias.

Self-reported measures may also be affected by recall, perception and social-desirability bias, and the study did not use validated diagnostic instruments for clinical mental-health outcomes. Nevertheless, these limitations primarily define the boundaries within which the findings should be interpreted and do not diminish the study's contribution as a substantial multisite descriptive assessment that provides a useful empirical foundation for future probability-based, analytical and longitudinal research on teacher occupational health in Sierra Leone.

## CONCLUSION

Among the 400 participating secondary-school teachers from six selected areas of Sierra Leone, salary dissatisfaction relative to living costs was the most frequently reported adverse workplace experience, alongside notable concerns about planning time, workload, working conditions and workplace safety. At the same time, many participants reported constructive feedback, professional recognition and perceived adequacy of social-security benefits, although administrative encouragement for further education was uncommon.

Occupational wellbeing was mixed: fewer than half reported positive job satisfaction, while more than three-quarters intended to remain in teaching over the next five years. These findings describe the coexistence of perceived job demands and workplace resources but do not establish causal or protective relationships. Representative probability-based studies using validated occupational-health instruments and appropriate analytical methods are needed to clarify determinants of teacher wellbeing and actual retention in Sierra Leone.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen occupational-health surveillance for teachers. Education and public-health authorities should consider incorporating teacher workplace-health indicators into existing school-health and workforce-monitoring systems, with nationally representative assessment before national prevalence estimates are made.
- Improve work organisation and professional support. Schools should review workload distribution and the availability of protected time for lesson planning and grading, alongside supportive supervision and feasible professional-development opportunities.
- Assess salary-related and material workplace concerns more comprehensively. Future policy assessment should combine teachers' perceptions of salary adequacy with objective information on remuneration, allowances, living costs and material working conditions.

- Preserve and examine positive workplace resources. Recognition and constructive feedback were commonly reported and should be maintained, while future analytical studies should test whether these resources are associated with job satisfaction, wellbeing and retention.
- Undertake stronger epidemiological research. Future studies should use probability sampling, validated measures of psychosocial work conditions and mental-health or occupational-health outcomes, and multivariable analyses. Longitudinal studies should examine sickness absence, work capacity and actual exit from teaching.

## Declarations

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## Conflict of Interest

The author declares no financial, professional, personal, or other competing interests that could have influenced, or reasonably be perceived to have influenced, the conduct, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of this study.

## Author Contributions

Abu-Bakarr S. Kamara conceived and designed the study, developed the research concept and methodology, coordinated data collection, conducted and/or supervised the data analysis and interpretation, reviewed the relevant literature, and prepared, critically revised, and approved the final manuscript. The author accepts full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

## Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to applicable ethical and confidentiality considerations governing the protection of research participants.

## Consent for Publication

Not applicable. The manuscript does not contain identifiable personal information, images, or other materials requiring individual consent for publication.

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