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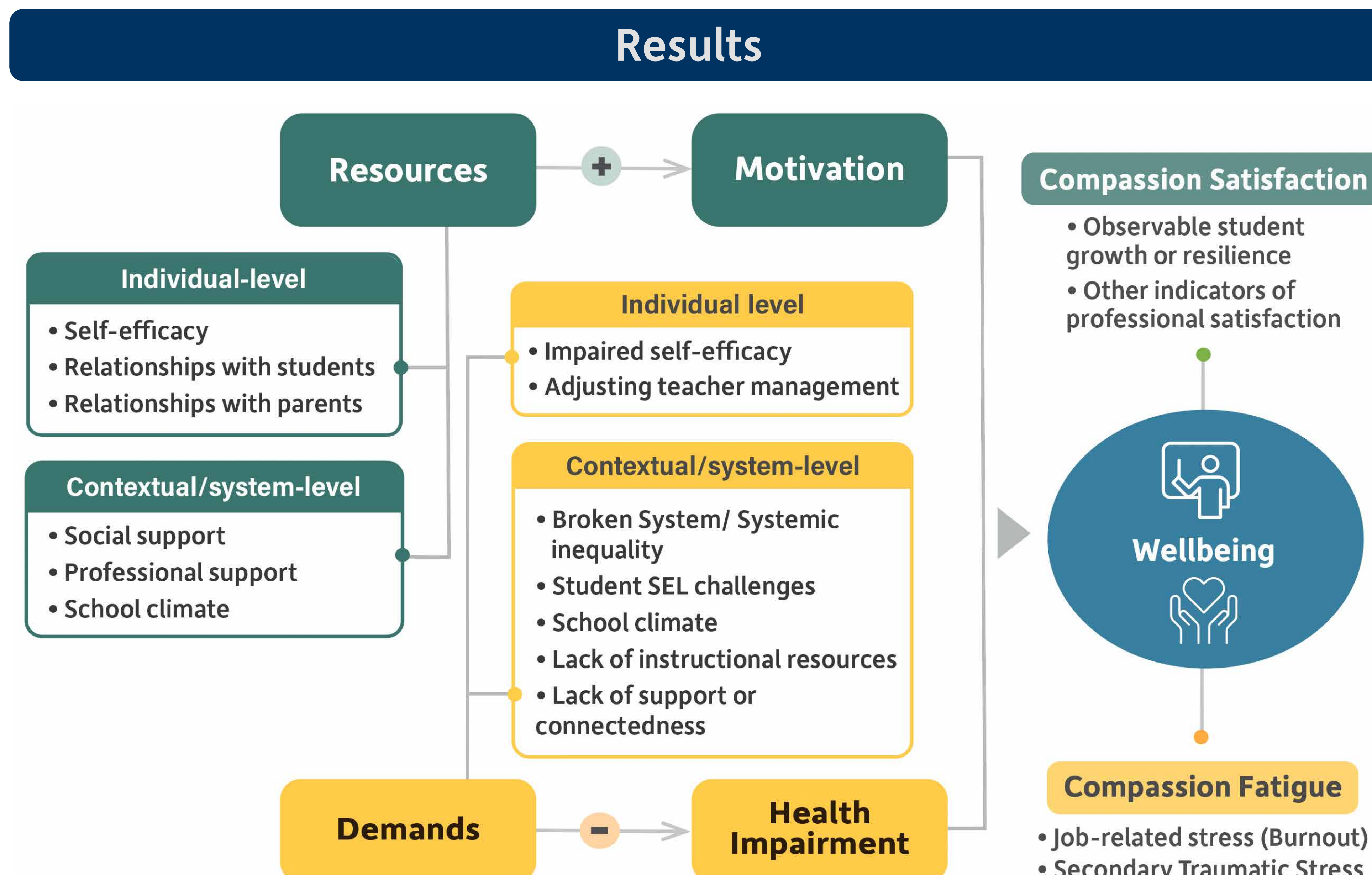Spencer Postdoctoral Fellowship Program*

New Teachers' Risk and Resilience Factors During COVID-19

Abstract

Using the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R model; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), this qualitative study examined new teachers' risk and resilience factors toward well-being and well-being indicators during the COVID-19 pandemic. We conducted semi-structured interviews with first-year K-12 teachers. The thematic analysis highlighted factors which positively and negatively influence new teachers' well-being. Factors essential to supporting new teachers and further reducing their high attrition rates, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, were identified.

Introduction

- Teacher retention, particularly among new teachers, has been a longstanding challenge for the teaching profession and remains a serious threat to the education system in the U.S. (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Kelly & Northrop, 2015).

- Empirical findings spotlight the importance of job resources and demands on occupational stress and teacher retention (e.g., Corbin et al., 2019).

- While there is existing research on risk and resilience factors contributing to new teachers' psychological and professional wellbeing, there is limited research examining these factors in the context of returning to face-to-face, traditional instruction during COVID-19.

- Guided by the JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), the present study explored new teachers' successes and challenges after returning to in-person learning.

Results

Self-efficacy: *I have utmost confidence in my classroom, in my practice, and what I do. Just because I think I'm always open to feedback and [...] constructive criticism to kind of get me where I'm at. Because I used to not be as confident in the classroom, I used to be actually very nervous. I wasn't sure what I was doing was correct or not.*
(Hispanic Middle School Teacher)

Impaired self-efficacy: *I just felt nervous as a new teacher, there were so many different colleagues and just staff, and I just felt just my own nerves like, Oh, I don't really know anyone, anything. I don't really feel comfortable speaking up a little bit.*
(Asian American Pre-K Teacher)

Student SEL challenges: *Students' behavior is disrespectful, I had one kid, for example, with the phone she was so bad, I turned to her, and I said "phone away, please," and she looked right at me dead in the eyes, and turned right back open another app and started texting and kept going with the screen facing me, so I saw what she was doing.*
(Asian Elementary School Teacher)

Methods

Semi-structured virtual interviews were conducted with 20 K-12 early career teachers (16 females, 3 males, and 1 non-binary) from San Francisco Unified School District from November 2021 to January 2022. Data analysis was performed using a descriptive thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Implications

- Using the JD-R model, this study showed risk and resilience factors identified by new teachers during the transition from online to in-person teaching during the pandemic.

- These have been imperative in considering how to effectively support teachers in dealing with occupational stress and job demands, and further reduce new teachers' attrition, particularly during times of crisis.

- The results highlight, in line with the prior literature, that self-efficacy is a salient factor which can both negatively and positively influence new teachers' well-being.

- In addition, new teachers identified students' academic and social-emotional challenges in the context of the pandemic and the lack of various types of resources as risk factors that require more support.

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