

Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

Programme Director: Vivian Hill

**Creating Space in a Busy and Complex System – Exploring the
Factors that Impact How Educational Psychologists Support
Teachers with Work Related Stress**

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Student Declaration and Word Count

I, Ahmar Ferguson confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Excessive levels of stress as a consequence of high workload continues to be the primary reason why teachers leave their profession. Despite the ability that Educational Psychologists (EPs) have to work with schools to support mental health and well-being, EPs are not routinely commissioned by schools to undertake activities that supports teachers to manage work related stress. This study sought to explore the factors that impacted how EPs worked with teachers to reduce stress. The study did this by exploring the views of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and EPs.

The research employed a mixed method approach, which combined qualitative and quantitative data in two distinct phases of data collection. A total of 49 SENCOs and 56 EPs were recruited for the study. Phase one of the study involved EPs and SENCOs completing an online questionnaire. Data from the first phase of the study was then analysed to inform the follow up semi-structured interviews which would form the second phase of the study. A total of five EPs and five SENCOs were recruited for the second phase of the study.

Findings from both phases of the study confirmed that EPs and SENCOs believed that teachers continued to be overly stressed due to high workload, and that the Covid-19 pandemic had exacerbated teacher stress. SENCO uncertainty of the EP role, and the limited access that schools have to EPs, were cited as significant barriers impeding SENCOs from commissioning EPs to do work that would reduce teacher stress.

The key findings are extensively discussed in the final chapter, and implications for both policy and practice are outlined as a result. The study concludes that EPs should be afforded a greater role in supporting teachers to reduce and manage stress. However, the study argues that equal consideration needs to be given to the systems and processes that cause teachers' stress in the first place.

Impact Statement

This research investigated the factors that impact how Educational Psychologists (EPs) support teachers to manage work related stress. The study did this by exploring and then comparing the views of EPs and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs). The research underlines the importance of the SENCO/EP relationship, and demonstrates how the relationship between the two professions impacts the type of work that EPs undertake in schools.

The study demonstrated that EPs can play a greater role in supporting teachers to manage work related stress, but there are specific barriers that need to be overcome if this is to happen on a wider scale. Firstly, the study provided evidence that SENCOs are uncertain about the breadth of the EP role and uncertain about the type of work that EPs are capable of undertaking. The study asserts the need for SENCOs to be upskilled in their knowledge of the EP role, in order for them to be better informed about the best way to utilise the EP time that they have available.

One of the ways that the upskilling of SENCO knowledge could be achieved is through the refinement of initial SENCO training. Staggeringly, nowhere in the DfE's 2014 learning outcomes for the national award for SEN Co-ordination does it specifically mention EPs. It is a glaring omission that knowledge of one of the key professionals able to support schools to manage their SEN need is not an important component of the SENCO training. Therefore, it is important that knowledge of the EP role is included as part of the initial SENCO training.

EPs, and the profession of Educational Psychology, should also do more to promote the breadth of their skills and expertise. As evidenced by the findings of the present study, SENCOs do not typically have a thorough understanding of the EP role. At the individual EP level, this means that EPs cannot engage with schools assuming that SENCOs are equipped

with a full knowledge of the EP role. This means that individual EPs need to establish a base level of knowledge with SENCOs, in order for the EP/SENCO relationship to be built upon the foundation of a shared understanding of the EP role.

There is also a need for the UK's Government literature to reflect the breadth of the EP role more accurately. Much of the government literature espouses a very narrow perception of the EP role, and is disproportionately weighted towards pupil assessment (DFE, 2015; DFE, 2019). If SENCOs and other education professionals are to have a holistic understanding of the EP role, then the government literature needs to be more reflective of the type of support that EPs can offer.

If schools require greater access to EPs in order to reduce excessive teacher stress, then it will be important for the government to facilitate policies that ensure that significantly more EPs are being trained than there are currently. One of the ways this could be achieved is by the government providing more funded training placements on DEdPsy courses.

Excessive teacher stress continues to be a challenge, and teacher stress levels have only increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In light of this, beyond EP input, it would be sensible to consider how teacher workload, and subsequently teacher stress, could be reduced. This could be achieved by conducting a national review of the expectation and everyday practice of teachers, with the view of reducing unnecessary workload.

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1.0 Introduction

The retention of qualified teachers in the United Kingdom (UK) continues to be a challenge for the education system (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). High workload is commonly cited as the primary reason why teachers feel stressed and subsequently leave the profession (DFE, 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Teachers have described high workload as: excessive marking and planning, an expectation to teach outside of the timetable, and continuously reading and responding to emails (McCarthy, 2019; Shernoff et al., 2011). Considering these factors, there may be a role for Educational Psychologists (EPs) to support schools at an individual and group level to better manage some of the processes that impact upon teacher work related stress.

High levels of stress impede teachers' ability to provide the best quality teaching for their pupils (Bermejo-Toro et al., 2016). In addition, elevated stress hinder teachers' capacity to provide emotional and pastoral support to pupils (Shernoff et al., 2011). Considering this, and with the knowledge that work related stress impacts upon teachers' well-being (Bermejo-Toro et al., 2016), it is important to evaluate and assess the systems in place that support and/or hinder teacher work related stress and affect their well-being. (Roffey, 2012; Sokal et al., 2020).

A coherent case has been made for EPs to undertake work that supports mental health and well-being in schools (Gillard et al., 2018; Hill, 2013; Squires, 2010; Squires & Dunsmuir, 2011). Educational Psychologists are qualified to offer teachers therapeutic support, training, offer different perspectives through consultation, supervision, and facilitate supervision groups (Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019). Given the scope of work that EPs are able to undertake, it seems sensible to propose that EPs could play a greater role in supporting teachers to manage work related stress (Andrews, 2017).

However, recognising the impact of traded Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) and EP time allocation provides an insight into some of the barriers that impede EPs' ability to do more to support teacher work related stress (Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019; Lee & Woods, 2017; Marsh & Higgins, 2018). The amount of EP time that schools have, and the perception of the EPs primary role, contribute to why statutory and pupil focused casework are prioritised, in place of work that could more directly support teachers with work related stress (Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019; Marsh & Higgins, 2018).

1.1 On-going Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

At the end of 2019, a new respiratory virus labelled Coronavirus-19 (Covid-19) was first identified in Wuhan China. The impact of the virus would go on to be felt throughout the world (Zhao et al., 2020). In March 2020, the UK government called for a national lockdown which resulted in all schools closing at relatively short notice (Kim & Asbury, 2020). The closure of UK schools in March 2020 exposed a number of concerning disparities and inadequacies in the education system (Schleicher, 2020). Most pupils who attended private school (97%) had access to a computer at home, while only one in five of pupils who received free school meals¹ had no access. In addition to the disparity in the lack of access to computers, private schools were providing more online lessons in comparison to state schools (Harris, 2020). It should be noted that while schools were closed for the vast majority of pupils, schools remained open to provide face to face learning for the children of key-workers (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Key-workers were identified as people who worked in health and social care, education, key public services, transport, local and national government, food and necessary goods, utilities, communication and financial services and public safety and national security (Farquharson et al., 2020).

¹ Pupils are eligible for free school meals if their parents receive state support and earn below a certain threshold.

There were significant differences in the quality of the provision available during the first lockdown (between March 2020 and June 2020), which was dependent upon the resources of each school (Harris, 2020; Schleicher, 2020). Quality of online provision notwithstanding, there were also issues around access to broadband, availability of laptops, teacher training and unclear Government expectations (Harris, 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020; Schleicher, 2020); all of which contributed to creating additional challenges for teachers. This increasingly challenging work context led to confusion and stress for teachers, which had an adverse impact on their well-being (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Teachers who had previously reported feeling stressed due to high workloads (McCarthy, 2019; Shernoff et al., 2011) became even more stretched as a result of the sudden shift to online learning, the varying access that pupils had to computers, and the general uncertainty of what would happen next (Kim & Asbury, 2020).

In seeking to better explore and understand the role that EPs have in supporting teacher work related stress, it is important to consider the following: understanding what is meant by mental health and well-being, the perception of the EP role, the traded service delivery of Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) in England, the literature around teacher stress, what approaches have been used to support teacher stress, the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the UK education system and the impact on education and the EP/SENCo working relationship.

1.2 Mental Health and Well-being

Definitions and operationalisation of the term ‘mental health’ are often dependent on the body or organisation that is using the term (Cyranka, 2020; Galderisi et al., 2015; Manwell et al., 2015), so it is important to be aware of which definition, and the context in which it is

being used. The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes mental health as “*A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.*” (WHO, 2001, Mental health section, para.1). The definition used by the WHO, and adopted by the UK Government, has been praised for moving towards a positive conception of mental health, rather than defining it as simply the absence of mental illness (Cyranka, 2020).

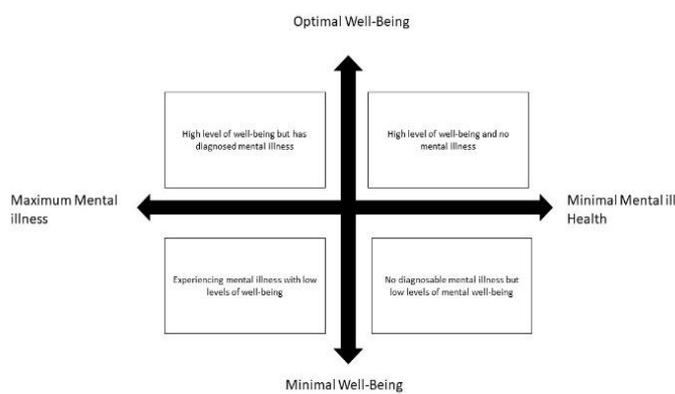
Mental health has traditionally sat within the medical paradigm, which typically signifies that problems are located at an individual level and can be supported primarily by accessing specialist services like Clinical Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Mental Health Therapists and medication (Carr, 2015; Klerman, 1977). By contrast, Educational Psychologists typically work by applying eco-systemic² frameworks (Cooper & Upton, 1990; Kelly et al., 2017) which, alongside exploring individual factors, consider the impact and interaction between the various wider social contexts that surround a person (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Christensen, 2010; Neal & Neal, 2013).

As with the definition of mental health, there is much discourse surrounding the definition of well-being (Boekaerts, 1993; Diener, Lucas, et al., 2009; Diener, Wirtz, et al., 2009; Dodge et al., 2012; Kagan, 1992; Keyes et al., 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Distinctions have been drawn between different aspects of well-being, contending that there are two discrete types of well-being, Subjective Well-being (SWB) and Psychological Well-being (PWB) (Diener, Wirtz, et al., 2009; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Topp et al., 2015). Subjective Well-being is described as having an emotional component of the balance between negative and positive

² The eco-systemic perspective is "a way of thinking and organizing knowledge that emphasizes the interrelatedness and interdependency" between individuals and social systems (e.g., families, groups, organizations, communities, societies) (Queralt, 1996, p. 17).

affect³ and an evaluative component in terms of life satisfaction. Psychological Well-being is described as a person's perception of their engagement with the existential challenges of life (Keyes et al., 2002; Linley et al., 2009). For the purposes of the present study the terms mental health and well-being are used interchangeably and are characterized as a combination of PWB and SWB and the mental health definition provided by WHO.

Figure 1 Dual Continuum Model of Mental Health



The Dual Continuum Model of Mental Health provides a framework for understanding the interaction between mental health and well-being (Franken et al., 2018; Keyes et al., 2002). The model details that people can sit and move between the four quadrants indicated above. The dual continuum model illustrates that one can have a diagnosed mental illness but have high levels of well-being, and illustrates that one can have no diagnosed mental illness and have low levels of well-being. The model shows that the optimal state (flourishing) is to have high levels of well-being with no mental illness, and that the minimal state (languishing) is to have a mental illness alongside low levels of well-being (Keyes et al., 2002). The dual

³ Positive affect" refers to one's propensity to experience positive emotions and interact with others and with life's challenges in a positive way. Conversely, "negative affect" involves experiencing the world in a more negative way, feeling negative emotions and more negativity in relationships and surroundings. (<https://www.verywellmind.com/positive-affect-and-stress-3144628>)

continuum model has a large research base that asserts its efficacy (Karaś et al., 2014; Keyes et al., 2002; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010).

The dual continuum model of mental health was developed by Corey Keyes. The model is theoretically underpinned by Maslow's Theory of Motivation (Maslow, 1943) which asserts that human needs are hierarchical, and dependant on previous needs being met. The Dual Continuum Model provides a framework to characterise where an individual may be situated in relation to their mental health and well-being. The structure of the model accepts the premise that it is possible for individuals to move between the different quadrants. The notion that a person's state in the model can be transient supports the idea that there are facilitating factors that can either maintain one's state or encourage movement between states. Thus the model can be used by professionals to interpret where an individual sits within the continuum, and what work or intervention would be necessary to either maintain an optimum state or move away from minimal states (Iasiello & van, 2020).

Mental health professionals like Clinical Psychologists, Psychiatrists and Mental Health Therapists typically work at the acute end of mental illness (Allen, 1981; McPherson & Feldman, 1977; Twining, 2005). On the other hand, EPs typically, but not exclusively, work along the well-being axis, making them comparatively better placed to support teacher well-being (P. Cooper & Upton, 1990; Edmondson & Howe, 2019).

1.3 The Role of EPs

The perception of the EP role has been keenly debated inside the profession of Educational Psychology (Kelly et al., 2016; McCaslin & Hickey, 2001; O'Donnell et al., 2011). The work of EPs' covers a broad spectrum and involves individual, group, systemic, family work and research (Mangal, 2007; Hill, 2013). The core elements of applied EP practice are: consultation, assessment, intervention, training and research (Cameron, 2006).

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice⁴ (SEND CoP, 2015) raised challenges for EPs. By explicitly stating that EPs should play a significant role in the statutory assessment for Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), the legislation both protected and determined the role of EPs (Buck, 2015; Palikara et al., 2019). The legislation supported a particular interpretation of the EP role: that the EPs' primary function is for pupil assessment (Buck, 2015; Palikara et al., 2019).

Palikara et al. (2019) wrote about the disconnect between EPs and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), and the different expectations about the scope of the EP role. The authors asserted that many SENCOs viewed the EP role as one that is primarily individual child assessment focused and are thus less inclined to use EPs to support other areas of school functioning. The view of the EP role, as articulated by Palikara (2019), is no surprise when considering that much of the Government's literature concerning the duties of EPs explicitly references assessments and EHCPs, but is not so vociferous about the role that EPs can play in supporting schools in other areas, like managing work related stress (DFE, 2015; DFE, 2019).

From the present discourse there appears to be a need to better articulate the evolution of EP practice, so that SENCOs and other stakeholders are fully cognisant of the scope of support that EPs can offer (Lee & Woods, 2017). The understanding of the EP role has been cited as a barrier to EP engagement in work outside of the core pupil assessment role (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Palikara et al., 2019). However, one of the primary barriers preventing EPs from undertaking work outside of pupil assessment is the limited EP time that schools have available (Lee & Woods, 2017; Rumble & Thomas, 2017). This further highlights the

⁴ The set of statutory guidelines for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities.

importance of understanding and exploring how, if at all, EP time is allocated to do work that supports teachers' capacity to manage work related stress.

1.4 Educational Psychology Service Delivery Models – Traded and Non-traded

Alongside the issues around an understanding of the wider scope of the EP role, EP service delivery models can act as a potential barrier that unintentionally disincentivises SENCOs from using EPs to support schools in areas outside of core pupil assessment (Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019; Lee & Woods, 2017). In England, statutory EP assessments are free at the point of delivery where agreed with the local authority. Increasingly, if schools wish to involve an EP for non-statutory assessment, they are required to purchase such time from Educational Psychology Services (EPSs). Schools can also use private providers, adding to an already complex work context. Consequently, as a default position schools typically commission what is viewed as 'traditional' EP core non-statutory assessment support, rather than whole school training, the delivery of interventions or staff support groups (Andrews, 2017; Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019; Lee & Woods, 2017).

As part of measures intended to give schools greater financial independence, the UK Government of 2012 decentralised Special Educational Needs (SEN) funding in England. The redirected funding previously sent to Local Authorities (LAs) directly to schools (DfE, 2012). This change in funding required LAs and EPSs to re-evaluate how EPSs would be funded, as a result of the substantial decrease in financing from central government. The change in school funding in 2012 (DfE, 2012) led to a series of events that resulted in more traded EPSs in England (Lee & Woods, 2017). Because of the increase in traded and partially traded EPSs, many schools no longer had EP support that was free from the point of access. Many schools were then required to buy into the LA EPS or use private providers, as opposed

to the previous model where EP support was more broadly accessible as part of the LA provision.

Whether operating in traded or non-traded contexts, LA EPs are allocated a number of schools that they are assigned to work with. Each school is typically given an allocation of EP time that is inclusive of school visits and administration work (Imich, 1999; Marsh & Higgins, 2018). Some schools working in a non-traded context have reported that they need to use EP time primarily for assessment work and, therefore, do not have sufficient EP time available to use for other types of work (DfE, 2019). While schools working in a traded context are able to buy extra EP time, that in itself can cause difficulties. Buying into an EPS can change the dynamic of the working relationship, with the commissioner (school, SENCo etc.) potentially feeling more empowered to be directive in the type of work they want the EP to undertake. Schools that view the EP's primary task as pupil assessment are therefore likely to direct work towards individual pupil assessment, rather than other types of systemic interventions (Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019; Lee & Woods, 2017).

There is still conjecture within Educational Psychology as to what the opportunities and restrictions are for EP practice, as a result of the traded model of EP service delivery. Some authors have reported that there is increased scope for greater EP involvement in supporting schools in areas outside pupil assessment, while others report the opposite findings (Lee & Woods, 2017; Marsh & Higgins, 2018; Norwich, 2013; Rumble & Thomas, 2017). For example, Lee and Woods (2017) contended that the brochures that EPSs produced in order to encourage schools to buy into their packages, enabled schools to see a wider variety of ways that they could utilise EP time. However, within the same Lee and Woods (2017) paper the authors highlighted that traded and partially traded EPSs present the ethical dilemma that schools will have unequal or limited access to EPs as a consequence of the varying amounts of EP time that they are able to purchase.

Given that there is a mixed picture about the types of work that EPs are commissioned for, and coupled with the impact of potentially increased teacher stress as a result of the pandemic, it is important to obtain a contemporary understanding of the role that EPs have played in supporting teachers to manage work related stress.

2.0 Literature Review

The following section will review the literature as it relates to teacher work related stress, EPs support of teachers' work-related stress and well-being, the on-going Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on teacher stress, and the relationship between SENCOs and EPs. This section also details the search strategy, and culminates in the presentation of the current study and its research questions.

2.1 Search Strategy

The databases of ProQuest, PsychInfo, Google Scholar and Taylor and Francis Online were searched to find appropriate literature. The search was concerned with exploring research that documented teacher work related stress, how EPs support teachers to manage work related stress, the EP/SENCO relationship, and the covid-19 pandemic and its impact on teacher work related stress. Variations of the following key terms were used to identify relevant literature: 'Educational Psychologist', 'Stress', 'Teacher', 'SENCO', 'Well-being', 'School', 'Covid-19', 'Help' and 'Manage'. Combined Boolean operators were used to narrow down the searches, for example: 'Educational Psychologist' and 'Teacher stress', or 'Covid-19' and 'Teacher stress'.

To ensure that the literature reviewed was contemporary, only papers published between the year 2000 and 2021 were reviewed. To ensure that the literature referring to EPs reflected the distinct UK context, it was decided that only papers that documented a UK experience of EPs would be reviewed. The searches were conducted between the 4th of April 2021 and the 15th of April 2021.

After screening papers for appropriateness, a total of twelve papers were selected to be used as part of the literature review. The papers were then organised and put under the relevant headings for clarity of synthesis and understanding (Wakefield, 2015).

2.2 Teacher Work Related Stress

Government data on the analysis of teacher, supply retention and mobility, has shown that there are on-going issues with teacher retention as a result of work-related stress (DfE, 2018; Long & Danechi, 2021). High workload is commonly cited as the primary reason why teachers feel stressed, and subsequently leave the profession (DFE, 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). High workload has been described as excessive marking and planning, an expectation to teach outside of the timetable, and continuously reading and responding to emails (McCarthy, 2019; Shernoff et al., 2011).

Figure 2 Adapted Model of Teacher Work Related Stress

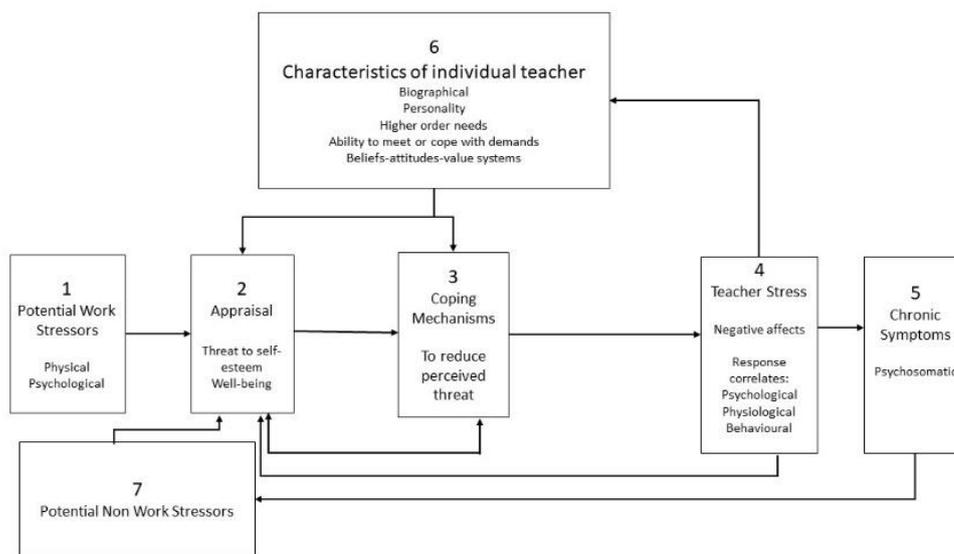


Figure 2 shows an adapted version of Kyriacou and Sutcliff's (1978) model of teacher stress. Their perspective on stress has become the dominant model used in psychological research (Kyriacou, 2001; McCarthy, 2019). The model considers the objective reality of the challenges that teachers face: like the volume of work that they must undertake, or time constraints. In addition, the model considers the subjective interpretation of the challenges that teachers face, by taking into account how the individual teacher perceives the level of

challenge. The subjective interpretation of the challenge is a product of the resources available and the perception that the teacher has of their ability to cope with meeting the challenge (Kyriacou, 2001; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; McCarthy, 2019).

The model begins with potential work stressors, which incorporates physical and psychological stressors (Box 1, Figure 2). Physical stressors include aspects like high noise levels and rushing between classes. Psychological stressors encompass aspects like the demands for high quality work, and poor relationships with colleagues. The model recognises that aspects like marking numerous test/examination papers or workbooks can be a mixture of physical and psychological stressors (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978).

The critical stage of the model is at the appraisal stage (Box 2, Figure 2). It is the appraisal stage that determines whether, and to what degree, teachers experience stress. The interplay between the potential work stressors (Box 1, Figure 2), the characteristics of the individual teacher (Box 6, Figure 2) and the coping mechanisms (Box 3, Figure 2), determine the existence or extent of teacher stress. It is also recognised that non work stressors (Box 7, Figure 2) like family, partner or friendship disagreements can impact the appraisal process.

The model places an emphasis on the appraisal stage, which differs from teacher-to-teacher dependent on their individual characteristics (Box 6, Figure 2). The model accepts that, as a result, there will be variation in different teachers' ability to cope with the same demands. Although the model does account for objective factors (e.g. the number of workbooks to mark), it ultimately relies on teacher perception, which is subjective. However, it is clear from the literature that a significant number of teachers report that the demands placed on them supersede their ability to cope, causing them stress, and leading to many leaving the profession as a result. This further highlights the need to examine what more can be done to support teacher stress (McCarthy, 2019; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). It is perhaps at stage

two and three of the model, supporting teachers to appraise and better cope with potential stressors, where EPs would have the greatest impact in supporting teachers to manage work related stress.

However, it is acknowledged that stress is not always recognised as producing a negative outcome. In some instances, optimal levels of stress can support individuals to become more creative and produce enhanced performances (Avey et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the present study adopts the definition of stress, overly stressed and work-related stress as when individuals feel that the demands placed on them supersede their ability to meet them (Kyriacou, 2001; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; McCarthy, 2019). Therefore, all references to stress are in relation to excessive stress, and not optimal levels of stress.

The adapted model of teacher work related stress provides a simple framework for EPs and teachers to follow. Another strength of the model is that it can be used as a way for EPs to support teachers to manage the objective and subjective challenges of their role that lead to stress. This can be achieved by EPs supporting teachers to develop healthy appraisal systems and coping mechanisms. However, the danger of the model is that it has the potential to place the burden of dealing with stress solely on the individual teacher. It could be argued that by placing the responsibility of stress management on individual teachers, even with the support of EPs, it ignores the systemic aspects of stress and risks tackling only the symptoms, and not the root causes.

2.3 Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is an important component in helping to understand teacher behaviour and motivation (Andreou & Rapti, 2010). Self-efficacy has several working definitions, but it can be explained as a person's confidence or perception of their own ability to implement an action or behaviour that will produce their desired result or outcome (Bandura, 1997; Giallo

& Little, 2003). In education, self-efficacy would relate to a teacher's belief in their ability to impact both personal and pupil related outcomes. Teacher self-efficacy in relation personal outcomes could include their ability to respond to changes in the curriculum and manage their workload (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). Teacher self-efficacy in relation to pupil outcomes includes their ability to manage pupil behaviour and improve pupil academic outcomes (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000).

Self-efficacy can be a useful predictor of teacher effort and persistence, so in regard to high workload and subsequent work related stress, lower self-efficacy could predict lower levels of teacher effort and persistence (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Giallo & Little, 2003). If teachers have low levels of self-efficacy, then they are less likely to believe that they can constructively impact work related outcomes. If the aforementioned is true, then teachers could be less likely to be persistent in the face of continuous challenge, further underlining the importance of teacher self-efficacy. Teachers with lower self-efficacy can end up unintentionally causing or aggravating work related challenges, by implementing counterproductive work management strategies (Giallo & Little, 2003).

A study conducted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) sought to explore the merits of using self-efficacy as a predictor of teacher engagement and teacher stress. The study had a broad scope and sought to examine the relationship between secondary school teachers' perceptions of potential stressors and their teaching self-efficacy. In addition, the research was interested in gathering teachers' experiences of emotional stress, exhaustion, engagement, and their motivations for leaving the profession.

The study recruited 523 teachers from nine randomly selected secondary schools. The potential stressors examined were: discipline problems, student diversity, time pressure, poor student motivation, conflict with colleagues, value conflicts, emotional stress, and lack of

supervisory support and trust. Participants were asked to complete a self-report questionnaire where they indicated their experience of each item. Item responses were rated on a six-point scale that ranged from ‘completely disagree’ to ‘completely agree’.

Teacher self-efficacy was measured by using the Norwegian Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). The self-efficacy scale had six dimensions that were measured by four items each. The dimensions measured were ‘self-efficacy for...’: instruction, adapting education to individual students’ needs, motivating students, keeping discipline, cooperating with parents and colleagues, and coping with changes and challenges. Participants responded to individual items through a seven-point scale. The item responses ranged from ‘not certain at all’ to ‘absolutely certain’.

The authors analysed the data by first estimating zero order correlations⁵ between the study’s variables, and then conducting confirmatory factor analyses⁶ on the seven stressors. The results of the study found that the correlation among the seven potential variables were weak to moderate. Skaalvik and Skaalvik postulated that their findings indicated that a single source of stress did not necessarily generalise into other sources of stress. They contended that their findings were an indication that each source of stress needed to be appraised separately, and not as a combination.

A critique of the Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) study is that it was perhaps too ambitious in the number of stressors that it sought to explore. The volume of stressors explored, combined with the method of analysis, may explain why the data showed weak to moderate correlations among the potential stressors. Conversely, the lack of correlation among the different stressors could be seen as a positive finding, as it provides evidence that issues relating to

⁵ A zero-order correlation is a simple association between two variables that does not control for the influence of other variables <https://dictionary.apa.org/zero-order-correlation>

⁶ A confirmatory factor analysis is a form of analysis that tests how well a measured variables represent the number of constructs (Moore, 2012).

teacher stress should be addressed by exploring specific contributing factors separately, and not together. This is important as it suggests that future studies exploring teacher stress should be cautious of including too many variables.

Giallo and Little (2003) examined the relationship between self-efficacy in classroom management, preparedness and classroom experience. The study recruited 54 primary school teachers and 25 trainee teachers. All the participants in the study had less than three years' experience working in schools. The study required teachers to complete self-report questionnaires that were designed to assess their self-efficacy in the previously mentioned areas. The authors used *The Teacher Self-Efficacy in Behaviour Management and Discipline Scale*, *The PrepCon Questionnaire* and *The Rating Scale for Measuring Teachers' Perception of Problem Behaviours* as the measures of the study (Cains & Brown, 1996; Emmer & Hickman, 1991; Safran & Safran, 1985).

The study reported that preparedness and classroom experience significantly impacted teachers' sense of self-efficacy in classroom management. The authors found that participants who felt more prepared, as a result of their knowledge and skills, had a higher sense of self-efficacy than those who were not. Whilst there may be few practical EP interventions capable of addressing the discrepancies in teacher experience, there nonetheless remains an argument that more could be done to support teachers to be and feel more prepared. It is in this area of teacher preparedness that EPs could contribute to reviewing, evaluating, and supporting the systems in place that assist elements of teacher self-efficacy, and by extension impact on teacher's ability to manage work related stress.

Hepburn and Brown (2001) sought to articulate the importance of determining who was responsible for solving problems caused by teacher stress, as the answer would have important implications for how the problems would be dealt with. The authors conducted

semi-structured interviews with 15 Scottish secondary school teachers and 42 secondary age pupils. The data collection had two stages. Stage one involved the authors observing multiple school environments to identify a range of themes to explore in the second phase of data collection. Stage two of the study consisted of semi structured interviews with pupils and teachers. Data was analysed using textual analysis informed by discursive psychology⁷ (Potter, 2003).

One of the key findings of the study was the authors note of caution about workplace interventions that were grounded in the idea of stress management, and the potential negative implications that could occur as a result. The report commented on the efficacy of measures like ‘Stress Management Training’ and ‘Employee Assistance Programmes’, which they argued could be viewed as mollifying, as they failed to address broader questions of organisational change. The authors argued that the demand for individuals to seek to adjust their own existing work practices, rather than challenge problems that are inbuilt within the working system, shift focus onto the symptom, rather than the root cause.

The study serves to illustrate that while there are benefits to schools engaging with the idea of work-related stress. There are also dangers that the root causes of work-related stress are not tackled, and are replaced with tokenistic gestures like one off ‘Stress Management Training’ that only operate at a superficial level (Hepburn & Brown, 2001). While the arguments made by Hepburn and Brown (2001) have merit, they speak only of systemic changes that, at best, would likely be tackled over a period of years. However, the authors have omitted some more immediate ways that schools could engage with teacher work related stress. For example, it could be argued that there is value in schools contracting EPs to

⁷ Discursive psychology is the study of psychological issues from a participant's perspective.

support teachers through interventions like supervision support groups (Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019).

A paper by Perryman and Calvert (2020) explored what inspired teachers to enter the profession, why they left teaching and what reasons could make them consider returning to teaching in the future. 1200 participants were recruited via the University College London (UCL) and Institute of Education (IOE) databases of former trainee teachers. Participants were recruited by email and invited to complete an online questionnaire. The data was analysed using bivariate and multivariate statistical analysis. Bivariate analysis examines the relationship between two data sets with a pair of observations taken from a single sample (Warner, 2008). Multivariate analysis explores multiple variables to ascertain if one or more of them is predictive of a particular outcome (Warner, 2008). A word cloud⁸ was also used to analyse the frequency and prevalence of words.

The study found that the three main reasons for teachers entering the profession were: wanting to make a difference, wanting to work with children, and the love of teaching a particular subject. The study reported that the three most common reasons for teachers leaving the profession were: wanting to improve their work life balance, finding the workload was too high, and the target driven culture. In respect to their last research question, the study found that workload, improving work life balance, and not feeling valued were the factors that would need to be changed in order for them to consider returning to teaching.

The paper provides contemporary evidence that the management of high workloads continues to be significant challenge for teachers. The study also provides evidence to suggest that it is necessary to evaluate the systems in place that are designed to support teachers. It could be postulated that EPs could play a significant role in supporting schools

⁸ A word cloud is visual representation of the frequency of words, where the most frequently recorded words appear bigger and the least frequently recorded words appear smaller (Heimerl et al., 2014).

and teachers to evaluate and put in place measures designed to reduce issues relating to workload and subsequent work-related stress. In so doing, EPs would be supporting the management of stress at the systemic level.

The study by Male (2003) explored teachers' experiences of managing pupils with challenging behaviour, by examining the relationship between challenging behaviour, teacher stress, and behaviour management strategies used. The study recruited 70 teachers, who worked in a specialist provision in London. The study included teachers who had a range of experience, as the age of the participants ranged from 28 to 52 years old.

The participants completed a questionnaire that measured multiple aspects of teacher experiences and responses to challenging behaviour. The first set of questions obtained data on the participants' general perception of challenging behaviour. Participants had to respond using a 4-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 (unconcerned) to 4 (very stressful). Items contained questions that asked the participants how worried they were about challenging behaviour and how stressful they found dealing with challenging behaviour. The participants were shown five vignettes of different pupils, who each presented with a distinct form of challenging behaviour. The five types of behaviour described in the vignettes were: aggressive, destructive, self-injurious, disruptive, and stereotypic/self-stimulatory behaviour. The participants were then invited to respond as to how challenging they found the behaviour depicted in the vignette. The final set of questions asked the participants to respond to items in relation to a specific pupil that they had worked with. The questions were designed to explore how the pupil's behaviour made the teacher feel, and also what behaviour management strategies the teacher would use.

The study found that teachers were concerned about challenging pupil behaviour. The study also found that teachers experienced managing challenging behaviour as stressful. The

data showed that teachers in the study found destructive and disruptive conduct the most difficult behaviour to manage. Participants of the study found behavioural and communication strategies to be the most effective forms of intervention. Regarding the participants' emotional reaction to the difficult behaviour of a particular pupil, teachers stated that they felt frustrated, at a loss, upset and exhausted.

The findings of the Male (2003) study are important, as it presents empirical evidence that teachers experience managing challenging behaviour as stressful. The study also presents evidence that demonstrates that managing challenging pupil behaviour can negatively impact the emotional state of teachers. Additionally, the study raises questions about the safeguarding of the well-being of teachers who regularly have to manage challenging and difficult behaviour (Giallo & Little, 2003). Once again it could be argued that EPs are capable of making a contribution to support teachers in this area, as EPs have the necessary expertise that enables them to offer credible explanations for the drivers of challenging behaviour and provide recommendations as a result (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; P. Cooper & Upton, 1990).

The literature reviewed in this section demonstrates that teachers experience stress as a consequence of their work. The concept of teacher self-efficacy and the adapted model of teacher stress provide a useful framework for where and how teachers could be better supported to manage stress. However, the literature repeatedly points towards the dangers of focussing solely on individual teachers and ignoring the systemic causes of stress. It is therefore important that the schools and teachers are supported to evaluate systems that could be put in place that support teacher stress.

2.4 EPs Support of Teacher Work Related Stress and Well-being

A study conducted by Sharrocks (2014) evidenced an example of EPs working with schools to support teachers with work related stress. The study sought to assess the impact and efficacy of a weekly intervention that was designed to promote well-being. The intervention, named 'Chill and Chat', involved members of staff from one primary school accessing a room away from the school building. The drop-in sessions were facilitated by an EP, a Specialist Behaviour Teacher and a Higher-Level Teaching Assistant. Once in the room, participants of the study were provided with relaxation activities (hand massages and stress balls), alongside a general social area, and a space away from pupils and work. The intervention ran for 8 weeks and had a mean attendance of 14 members of staff per session. Although the study was not exclusively designed for teachers, it was teachers who made up the majority of the participants that took part.

Data was collected via three focus groups, which were held intermittently throughout the study. One focus group was held at the start of the intervention, another at week three, and the final focus group was held one week after the completion of the 8-week intervention. One of the key findings of the study indicated that participants felt that the school saw well-being as the responsibility of individual members of staff. Participants of the study reported that the school leadership indicated that they believed that failure to employ coping skills was an indication that members of staff were not good enough. This is another finding that illuminates the dangers of locating stress solely at the individual level. It absolves the system, and in this case the school, of any responsibility to deal with or support the problem of teacher stress.

The Sharrocks (2014) study is limited by the small number of participants that took part in the study, and in conjunction with the study being conducted in one school, this makes it

harder to generalise the findings confidently. In addition, it was not made explicitly clear how many participants took part in the focus groups that yielded the study's key findings. Despite this, the findings of the Sharrocks (2014) study were in line with the previous literature reviewed, as they highlighted the importance of addressing systemic factors alongside the concerns of individual teachers.

A study conducted by Cooper and Woods (2017) provides evidence of EPs working directly with senior members of school staff. The study involved nine Headteachers, and aimed to explore a strength-based development tool with participants in order to influence and support leaders in school. The nine Headteachers completed a strength based self-report assessment online, the "Realise2 Introductory Profile", and then received a structured debrief by an EP, to facilitate discussion around their individual profile. Feedback was gathered from five of the Headteachers, using a combination of semi-structured interviews and a Likert-type rating scale. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

It should be noted that Headteachers were recruited from schools that were categorised as 'in need' by the School Improvement Service⁹, opening the possibility that participants would have a higher than typical engagement with the process as their schools were in greater need of additional support. However, the study collected and analysed both quantitative and qualitative data, adding to the robustness of its findings. The data indicated that the intervention positively impacted Headteachers' awareness and use of their strengths, their well-being, and their performance. The study unearthed that Headteachers found engaging in a reflective process with an EP to be valuable over and above completing the assessment in isolation.

A chance to look at it properly, otherwise it might be something that you did and put in a drawer... being critical of myself but bringing perspective to that as well and

⁹ The School Improvement Service provides support for teaching and learning across all key stages and subjects and supports school leadership and management.

thinking about how I could move forward ... it facilitated my thinking. It's really important to take an hour of really good quality time to talk about it. (Head teacher A). (Cooper and Woods, 2017 p.39)

In addition to Headteachers recognising the value of EP input and the impact that the process had to their well-being, none of the headteachers in the study questioned whether the use of the intervention was an appropriate prioritisation of EP time. The study provides evidence of EPs input being valued by Headteachers, and a commentary on how EPs are currently impacting well-being in schools. Despite the strengths of the study, as with the Sharracks (2014) study the low participant numbers meant that the findings could not be confidently generalised.

A paper written by Roffey (2015) set out to make the case that EPs have an important role to play in supporting pupil and school well-being. Although teacher well-being was not the explicit focus of the article, Roffey did highlight the significant role that EPs can have in supporting teacher well-being, and the subsequent impact that this can have on the wider school community. It should be noted that the author is a practising EP, so the article and arguments articulated were made distinctly from an EP perspective. The unique EP lens through which Roffey creates her arguments is a valuable insight into how EPs view the nature, impact, and scope of their work.

Roffey recognised that language and understanding were important components of the operationalisation of well-being in schools. Roffey articulated that strength-based communication where actions and effort are praised have a positive impact on self-concept and, by extension, well-being. It was argued that EPs have an important role in acknowledging, validating and supporting teachers. Roffey suggested that one of the ways that this could be done is for EPs to engage in therapeutic conversations with teachers, whereby EPs could employ their psychological expertise to support teacher well-being. The

article strongly concluded that, both individually and as a profession, EPs should be agents of change for well-being. For EPs to engage with teachers as set out by Roffey (2015) then it relies on the commissioners of EP work (SENCOs) having a thorough understanding of the type of support that EPs can offer. It highlights the importance of understanding how SENCOs view EP input in supporting teacher well-being.

A paper written by Bennett and Monsen (2011) sought to critically evaluate four problem-based approaches used in schools that can be facilitated by EPs. While the paper did not contain any new empirical data, it does provide a helpful overview and evaluation of four approaches that can be implemented to support teacher practice, and by extension reduce teacher work related stress. The four approaches that were evaluated in the paper are: Circles of Adults, Teacher Coaching, Collaborative Problem-solving Groups, and the Staff Sharing Scheme. It is helpful to have an understanding of each of the four approaches as they provide examples of some of the ways that EPs can be utilised to work with teachers to support their well-being and reduce stress. The following section provides a brief outline of the approaches as described by Monsen and Bennett (2011), before commenting on the authors evaluation.

Circles of Adults was the first of the approaches to be evaluated by the paper. The intervention was described as a process to facilitate problem solving for adults who work directly with pupils with what is now known as Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) difficulties.¹⁰ The approach involves a one-off meeting of professionals which is facilitated by two external professionals that are familiar with the process. The aim of the 90-minute session is to support professionals dealing with challenging pupils to feel differently about their challenges, and provide new approaches to support in overcoming them.

¹⁰ Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) was previously known as Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD).

Teacher Coaching was described as an approach designed to support teachers, and particularly teachers who regularly manage challenging pupil behaviour, to deal more effectively with their own emotions. The approach involves individual 45-minute sessions between a teacher and the coach. The procedure involves following a 10-stage framework, whereby the coach and teacher work collaboratively to explore, identify and review potential solutions.

Collaborative Problem-solving Groups is an approach designed to support groups of teachers who are concerned about addressing challenging pupil behaviour to better understand the social and emotional aspects of pupil behaviour. The approach involves regular meetings with a trained facilitator to support the sessions. A member of the group presents a case, the group enquire and elicit further information about the case, and then the group engage in a joint exploration of the case with the presenter.

The Staff Sharing Scheme is a whole staff approach designed to support school staff to be more efficacious in managing challenging pupil behaviour, by developing staff problem-solving skills and understanding of behaviour. The approach involves three phases: a needs analysis, five 2-hour training sessions, and a subsequent fortnightly or monthly staff sharing meeting phase. Phases one and two are facilitated by a trained facilitator, whereas phase three is facilitated by staff within the school.

All of the interventions reviewed by Bennett and Monsen (2011) demonstrate sensible approaches that EPs could apply when working with teachers to reduce elements of work-related stress. However, Bennett and Monsen (2011) noted a key critique for all except one of the interventions was that there was little to no empirical data to support the efficacy of the interventions. For three of the four approaches, the time taken to implement and facilitate the interventions was also cited as a potential concern. This issue of time poses a challenge for

EPs, as despite the potential benefits of applying the approaches outlined in the Bennett and Monsen (2011) paper, SENCOs' proclivity to commission pupil assessment based work (Ashton & Roberts, 2006) makes it less likely that they would have the necessary EP time available to commission time intensive interventions.

The literature reviewed in this section provides some evidence that EPs are capable of and in some cases were already undertaking work that impacts teacher well-being and stress. Once again, the importance of the need for EPs to work systemically alongside working with individual teachers was raised. Several of the studies had problems with generalisability due to their small geographical spread, and low participant numbers. In addition, the amount of EP time and how its direction was prioritised were raised as potential barriers to teachers accessing EP support.

2.5 The Covid-19 Pandemic and its Impact on Teacher Stress

A study by Allen et al. (2020) sought to investigate the impact of teacher well-being in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors used a longitudinal teacher survey to obtain data during the 2019/2020 academic year. The data used in the report came from the Teacher Tapp survey app. Participants were a self-selecting group of teachers, including primary and secondary school leaders. A total of 8000 teachers took part in the survey. At different time points throughout the 2019/2020 academic year, participants were asked '*On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel about work today?*' (Allen et al., p.6). Participants were also asked questions about their well-being, including their views on the impact Covid-19 was having on their well-being.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the study found that the proportion of teachers experiencing extremely high work-related anxiety spiked in the week before lockdown, and again in the

week that school re-opening was announced in June 2020. Head teachers, compared to other senior leads and class teachers, showed particularly pronounced increases in anxiety, with 21% reporting that the experience of school closures due to Covid-19 made them more likely to leave the profession.

Conversely, the study found that for class teachers, after the initial spike in anxiety, by the end of March 2020 the work-related anxiety of class teachers in England had returned to its pre-Covid level, and was slightly below pre-Covid levels throughout April. In fact, the study reported that the impact of lockdown was not associated with higher levels of work-related anxiety for teachers. The authors hypothesised that one inference that can be made from this finding is that although the change in day-to-day activities may have impacted aspects of teachers' well-being, it may not have caused it to materially deteriorate overall. The study did not have a qualitative element to it, so the authors were unable to explore their hypothesis further.

The study provided evidence to conclude that work related anxiety rose most significantly in Headteachers when compared to class teachers and other senior school leads. The study illustrated the complex picture in both the way, and the extent, that school closures impacted on school staff well-being; with class teachers reporting significantly lower levels of work-related anxiety than Headteachers. Whilst the study illustrates some of the impact of school closures for teaching staff, the lack of qualitative data meant that questions exploring why experiences differed remained unanswered.

A study by Kim and Asbury (2020) sought to explore the changes to teachers' working practices due to the school closures as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions. The study involved 24 teachers across primary and secondary schools, and spanned a range of seniority. Participants engaged in semi structured interviews in which they were asked to recall stories

of three key scenes that took place during the first 5–6 weeks of lockdown: a low point, a high point, and a turning point. The data was thematically analysed, and 6 themes were identified, (1) *uncertainty*, (2) *finding a way*, (3) *worry for the vulnerable*, (4) *importance of relationships*, (5) *teacher identity*, and (6) *reflections*.

The study found evidence to indicate that teachers felt overwhelming anxiety and panic within the first days after the government's announcement that schools would close to most pupils.

So within a 24 hour period, we were trying to cope with the fact that we were going into lockdown; cope with the fact that the schools were shutting but not really know what that meant; not knowing what hours that meant we were working and trying to get our heads around what work we could deliver, very quickly, and still teach the children that were in school that day because it was still open and it was still normal. (Kim and Asbury, 2020, p.9).

Conversely, the study also reported evidence that suggested that teachers had seen some net benefits as a result of the school closures. Most participants reported that they were less busy and pressured than before. Participants commented that they were able to use the extra time in beneficial ways like having time to appropriately plan, and spending a higher ratio of time working with pupils one to one.

The study concluded by emphasising the importance of protecting teachers' ability and capacity to fulfil their role. Indeed, maintaining low levels of work related stress is central to enabling teachers to maximise their capacity to fulfil their role (McCarthy, 2019; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). However, the study by Kim and Asbury (2020) covers an extremely specific period of time during the early stage of the pandemic, so it does not provide an account or narrative of how the present circumstances have evolved as the course of the pandemic developed.

The literature reviewed in this section provides evidence that teacher well-being has, in some cases, been negatively impacted by the changes and restrictions brought in as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Allen et al., 2020). It is therefore important to contemplate and evaluate how teachers are supported considering the additional challenges as a consequence of Covid-19. The literature identified the need for a contemporary understanding of the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had on teacher stress. Where changes in teacher well-being have been found to be comparatively small, or indeed positive, the efficacy of this evidence is restricted by limitations in the respective studies. The literature was also unable to demonstrate how teacher stress and well-being had developed over the course of the pandemic. In addition, the literature reviewed highlighted the benefits of employing mixed method approaches when undertaking exploratory research.

2.6 The Relationship Between SENCOs and EPs

The role of the school SENCO was made formal in the UK Government's *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs* (DfE, 1994; henceforth, 'the CoP'). Although individual schools had already begun to put staff in place to oversee the provision of Special Educational Needs (SEN), the CoP outlined explicit roles and responsibilities for SENCOs, and made the role a statutory requirement (Mackenzie, 2007). Since the CoP, there has been consistency in the broad understanding of the SENCOs remit, there is variability in the interpretation of the SENCO role as it relates to some specific aspects (Mackenzie, 2007). For example, some SENCOs sit within a school's senior leadership team while others do not (Rosen-Webb, 2011). This variability has implications for the relationship and subsequent work that is and can be commissioned between SENCOs and EPs (Andrews, 2017; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Young, 2017). SENCOs that sit within a school's senior leadership team typically have more influence on schoolwide systems and

policies than those who do not, which has a direct impact on the ease in which EPs can work with or challenge systemic practice (Andrews, 2017; Rosen-Webb, 2011).

Ashton and Roberts (2006) examined the relationship between SENCOs and EPs by exploring what they thought the valuable aspects of the EP role were. The primary research questions were concerned with answering what was valued about the EPs by SENCOs and by EPs, and answering whether SENCOs or EPs could identify any aspects of the EP role as being unique to EPs. The research conducted by Ashton and Roberts (2006) was able to provide useful information about the perception of the EP role as viewed by the two key participant groups of the present study, SENCOs and EPs.

The study's participants comprised of 22 SENCOs and eight EPs who were each asked to answer three questions via an online questionnaire. The first two questions aimed to explore which EP activities and skills were valued, and the third question was concerned with answering whether the valued aspects of the EP role were unique to EPs, or similar to other services. The questionnaires were analysed using content analysis.

The study found that advice giving, statutory assessment and individual assessment were the aspects of the EP role that SENCOs valued most. In contrast, the study reported that the EP/school relationship, changing perspectives, and valuing pupil's views were the aspects that EPs valued most about their role. This disconnect provides further data as to why EPs may be disproportionately commissioned for some types of work over others.

In addition, the study reported that SENCOs viewed statutory assessment and the use of standardised tests as the unique contribution that EPs make. EPs, however, had no prevalent response to what they viewed as their unique contribution. However, the paper reported that many of the EPs thought that applying their psychological skills through consultation, to help teachers find their own solutions, was valuable to schools. This once again highlights a

disconnect between EPs and SENCOs and further underlines the importance of understanding why EPs and SENCOs have such divergent views about the EP role.

The Ashton and Roberts (2006) study provides an insight into the important relationship between EPs and SENCOs. Once again, the small geographical spread of participants and the low participant numbers meant that the findings could not be confidently generalised. Despite the challenge with generalisability, it remains one of the few pieces of research that explores the EP/SENCO relationship. Whilst ultimately the authors were able to obtain a valuable insight into the relationship and dynamics at play between SENCOs and EPs, the method of data collection and analysis limited the depth of information gained. Ashton and Roberts (2006) made a commendable start at exploring this important relationship, but more research is needed to provide both a contemporary and comprehensive understanding of the EP/SENCO relationship.

A more recent, doctoral study undertaken by Andrews (2017) sought to examine how EPs and SENCOs viewed the role that EPs had in supporting mental health and psychological well-being in schools. The Andrews (2017) study was had the whole school community as its focus and not explicitly teachers. The study explored the primary research question by conducting semi-structured interviews with four EPs and three SENCOs. Alongside the Ashton and Roberts (2006) study, it is one of the few studies that explicitly explores the EP/SENCO relationship.

The interviews in the study were conducted face to face and the data was analysed using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis yielded seven themes. One of the themes identified illustrated that there were different perceptions of the EP role by those who were within the profession of Educational Psychology, and those who were not. Another of the study's themes spoke about the barriers that prevent EPs from engaging in work in the field of mental

health and well-being. Lack of EP time, the nature of service delivery, and the impact of the government were all cited as significant barriers. A strength of the study was the commissioning of a working party after the themes had been generated. The aim of the working party was to review the themes and consider the implications with the participants.

One of the primary conclusions of the study was that there was a discrepancy of knowledge between SENCOs and EPs about the nature of the work that EPs were able to undertake. The EPs in the study were able to articulate how they could contribute to supporting mental health and psychological well-being. However, the SENCOs in the study had not considered that EPs could contribute to mental health and psychological well-being and saw the EPs primary role as the assessment of pupils. The present study seeks to build on the Andrews (2017) study by recruiting a higher number of participants and commenting on the changes in working practice as a result of Covid. In addition, the present study aimed to adopt a data collection and analysis approach that, alongside a greater sample size, could allow for the findings to be more widely generalised than previous studies.

2.7 Summary of Literature

The literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrates that teachers experience stress as a consequence of their work, and that in some cases the Covid-19 pandemic had exacerbated the existing issues of stress. The literature made clear that supporting teachers with work related stress should involve EPs working with whole school systems, and not just with individual teachers. The adapted model of teacher stress and teacher self-efficacy were recognised as useful frameworks for EPs working with teachers to draw from.

Teacher's levels of work related stress is an important component to the success of schools, and is a key indicator of teacher well-being (Bermejo-Toro et al., 2016; Roffey, 2012).

Teacher work related stress was an area of concern before the Covid-19 pandemic, but the

pressures put on teachers as a result of Covid-19 have only exacerbated pre-existing levels of stress (Allen et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Sokal et al., 2020). The previous studies relating to Covid neither provided qualitative data that could explore research questions in more depth, or provided contemporary data that could evidence how practice evolved as the pandemic developed. In light of this, consideration should be given to the systems and interventions in place that support teachers to manage work related stress.

It was apparent that very little research had been undertaken that compared the views of EPs and SENCOs. This is important as SENCOs are typically the primary commissioners of EP work (Ashton & Roberts, 2006), but the literature suggested that SENCOs were not fully informed of the breadth of the EP role. Perhaps unsurprisingly, EPs were able to articulate how they contributed to the promotion of mental health and well-being, whereas SENCOs could not.

Much of the literature reviewed contained small sample sizes and were located in small geographical areas (e.g., a single LA, or an individual city, such as London). Because of this, the studies could not confidently generalise their findings. It was therefore important for the present study to recruit a large number of participants over a bigger geographical area, in order to be able to generalise the findings confidently.

Contemporary EP practice includes employing methods like consultation, solution focused approaches, group supervision and staff training (Edmondson & Howe, 2019; Kelly et al., 2016). It could therefore be argued that EPs are well placed to improve teacher self-efficacy and thus support teacher well-being through the previously mentioned methods of practice (Cooper & Upton, 1990; Edmondson & Howe, 2019; Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019).

Due to the nature of EPS service delivery, there are barriers that make it challenging for EPs to support teachers to manage work related stress at the individual level, primarily due to the allocation of EP time (Atkins et al., 2017; Law & Woods, 2019). Nevertheless, there is still scope and opportunity for EPs to support teachers manage work related stress at the group and systemic level through SENCo commissioned work and whole staff initiatives (Atkins et al., 2017; Bennett & Monsen, 2011; Law & Woods, 2019). The issue of teacher stress has come into even sharper focus due to the impact of the pandemic (Allen et al., 2020; Harris, 2020). However, EPs' proclivity to adopt eco-systemic practices (Cooper & Upton, 1990), could provide a useful opportunity for EPs' to apply their expertise to support teachers' to better manage work related stress.

2.8 The Present Study

The present study aimed to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the factors that impact how EPs support teachers with work related stress in primary schools. Due to the difference in the way that primary and secondary schools operate and the distinct experiences that EPs have working in the two sectors (Fox et al., 1990; James et al., 2014), it was decided that only primary school SENCos would be considered for the study.

The research aim was considered within the context of the Covid-19 Pandemic, and sought to investigate what impact the pandemic had on how EPs worked with primary school teachers. The study aimed to explore the aforementioned factors by comparing the views of EPs and SENCos - casting further light on the role that EPs play within the domain of well-being, and enriching the evidence base as to how this is currently achieved. For the purposes of the present study, the term 'direct work' was defined as any type of work where EPs and teachers interact, thus encompassing face to face and virtual work.

It has been shown that there are currently few studies that explore the impact of the relationship between EPs and SENCOs. It was therefore hoped that the present study would add an important contribution to a currently limited evidence base. To support the findings of the present study to be more widely generalised, the primary researcher aimed to recruit a large sample of EPs and SENCOs. In addition, the primary researcher wanted to recruit participants who worked in a variety of contexts (e.g., traded, non-traded) throughout the UK. The Covid-19 pandemic placed unique pressures on teachers, so there was value in obtaining contemporary perspectives on the systems and interventions in place that supported teacher work related stress.

The previous studies reviewed here that have explored the EP/SENCO relationship have done so by gathering one type of data, quantitative or qualitative. The present study's methodology was designed to facilitate a richer data collection and analysis by involving a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data. The explorative quantitative phase of the study was designed to inform the qualitative second phase of the research. The present study examined the research aim by exploring the relationship between SENCOs and EPs. The present study had one primary research question (RQ), with three subsidiary research questions. Below are the four research questions of the study:

RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCOs Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?

RQ2- What Does That Support Look Like?

RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?

RQ4- How Has Covid Impacted How EPs Work with Teachers?

3.0 Method

The following chapter sets out the present study's epistemological position, theoretical framework, and study design. This chapter asserts the primary researcher's reflexivity and how data in the study was collected and analysed.

3.1 Epistemological Position

Epistemology is the nature of knowledge and concerns the perspective one takes as to the nature of reality (Crotty, 1998). One's epistemological position sets the framework for understanding how meaning and reality are constructed. There are a number of epistemological positions that a researcher could adopt. For example, objectivist epistemology denotes that meaning and reality exist separately to consciousness (Crotty, 1998). It was decided that an objectivist position would be inappropriate for the present study as the study was concerned with exploring the perceptions of EPs and SENCOs without the need for their perceptions to be objectively accurate.

Conversely, Social Constructionism is a perspective that implies that people interpret the structural and operational reality of an activity or event based on the meaning that they apply to it. It is the idea that objective reality can be constructed by the meaning that people or society place upon said event, action, setting or task. Social Constructionism is the view that two people could experience the same event, action, setting or task, but could both arrive at separate conclusions based upon the different meanings that have been developed as a result of the distinct social interactions that they have had (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gallimore et al., 1993).

For example, an EP that conceptualises their role to comprise of solely working with staff is likely to have a different value assessment of their work compared to the SENCO who

conceptualises the role of the EP to work solely with the pupils. While the event, or in this case, the work carried out, may have been the same, the significance of it could be appraised differently due to the different beliefs and values that each of the participants hold. While the aforementioned, crude example is hypothetical, it serves to illustrate how reality can be socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Powell & Kalina, 2009; Rose et al., 1966).

It is acknowledged that there are recognised criticisms of applying a Social Constructionist position to research. One of the primary criticisms of the Social Constructionist position is that it denies the existence of environmental factors, and so consequently does not provide solutions to managing them (Burningham & Cooper, 1999). However, as Burningham and Cooper (1999) wrote, many of the criticisms of the social constructionist position stem from extreme characterisations that are in reality not the interpretation of the position adopted in the majority of empirical research. The present study recognises and accepts the contribution of environmental factors in the social construction of reality.

As the literature indicates that there are various interpretations and understandings of the EP role, it was decided that the present study would assert a Social Constructionist position. The present study was concerned with exploring the perspective of the experiences of two specific groups (EPs and SENCOs), so an epistemological position that considered the interaction of the two groups, and its impact on co-constructing their respective realities was deemed to be appropriate.

For the present study it was therefore important to explore the views of SENCOs and EPs as two distinct groups, and reflect on the social interactions and structures that contribute to each group's construction of reality. All four of the study's research questions were considered first from the unique perspective of SENCOs, and then unique perspective of EPs.

The two views were then compared to obtain a holistic understanding of the research aims and research questions.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

In line with the Social Constructionist epistemological position, Bronfenbrenner's (1977; 2005) Bioecological theory, is the theoretical lens through which the present study was viewed. It is often referred to as the PPCT model to reflect the process, person, context, and time components (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The model is able to explore social constructions by exploring the different systems that are present in an individual's environment, how the systems interact, and how those systems and their interactions influence an individual's perspective, experience, and subsequent behavioural responses. As the model offers a framework for observing the impact of various interactions, it sat comfortably with the Social Constructionist perspective and the aims of the present research.

In the PPCT model Bronfenbrenner (2005) recognised that human development takes place as a result of proximal processes as a consequence of systematic interactions between a person and their environment. In addition, Bronfenbrenner (2005) recognised the importance of personal characteristics that can influence proximal processes. For example, a person's age, gender, education and emotional resources are all likely to impact how a person interacts with their environment. The PPCT model reflects on the importance of context in relation to interconnected systems which are outlined below. Lastly, the PPCT model talks about the influence of time and how the processes that occur in a person's environment can change or evolve over time. This means that the model can be used to interpret changes over longer periods of time like years and decades and can also be used to interpret changes over shorter periods of time like weeks, days or hours.

Bronfenbrenner (1977; 2005) identified four primary systems present in the environment that influence an individual's experience: the Microsystem, the Mesosystem, the Exosystem, and the Macrosystem. The Microsystem is the system that includes people and organisations that most directly impact an individual's experience. This group typically consists of family, school and friends. For the purposes of the study, teachers are represented as the individual at the centre of the model. The Microsystem of the present study consists of the school SENCO, the EPs, and the parents.

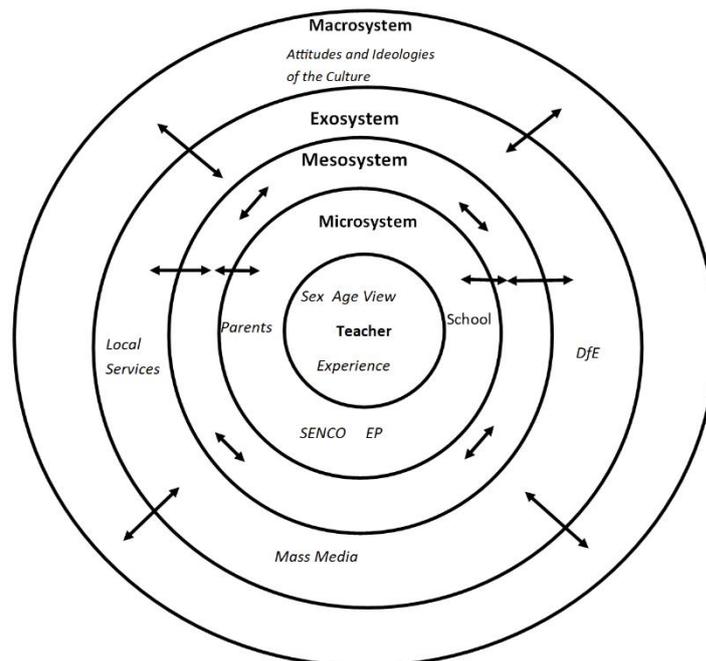
The Mesosystem signifies the interaction between the different elements of the Microsystem; how the SENCO interacts with the EP, how the EP interacts with the SENCO, how the parents interact with the school, and so forth. The Mesosystem was a crucial component of the PPCT model that supported the interpretation of the data. This is because it is at the Mesosystemic level where the impact of the EP/SENCO interaction could be observed.

The Exosystem can be viewed as an extension of the Mesosystem. The Exosystem is the overarching social structure that does not directly interact with an individual, but influences the settings where an individual is present. For example, the Department for Education (DfE) could assert a new educational strategy which impacted the way that schools had to operate. As a result of the new strategy, teachers would be affected by having to change their teaching practices, which would therefore impact the everyday experience of teachers. While in this example the teachers would not have been in direct contact with the DfE, they would still be impacted by it, as the DfE influences the practice of the schools that they work in.

Lastly is the Macrosystem, which refers to the wider cultural context that an individual exists in, including (but not limited to): legal systems, political systems, economic systems, and ethnicity. Changes and developments at the Macrosystemic level can have significant

implications for developments further down the model. To take political systems as one example, the UK is widely accepted to operate under a democratic system, where a leader of a political party can lead the government after acquiring the necessary votes from UK citizens (Hall, 2011). By contrast, in China, there is one political party that maintains control of the government, and its leaders are selected internally by the party and not the Chinese citizens (Dittmer, 2003). If the UK were to change its political system to one similar to China, it would have a fundamental impact on the culture of the country, and subsequently impact all other layers of the PPCT model (Inglehart, 2020; MacKuen & Brown, 1987).

Figure 3 Adapted PPCT model



While there are clear benefits to applying the PPCT model, it is not without its criticisms. One of the more superficial criticisms is that the model does not pay enough attention to biological factors, positioning the individual as playing a passive role in their own development and experiences (Christensen, 2010). Christensen (2010) wrote critically about

the lack of attention that the model gave to the individual. Christensen also put forward the idea that resilience should be a dimension captured in Bronfenbrenner's theory, as resilience is a key determinant in understanding a person's capacity to manage.

However, the criticism that Christensen and others have levelled at Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model has itself been called into question (Tudge et al., 2009). A study conducted by Tudge et al. (2009) concluded that scholars had misused and mischaracterised Bronfenbrenner's model. Tudge et al. stated that in his later writings, Bronfenbrenner was self-critical of his earlier work for not paying enough attention to the role that the individual had in their own development. They state that in Bronfenbrenner's later writings he explicitly acknowledged the importance of biological factors, and paid more attention to the personal characteristics that individuals bring to social situations. He later incorporated these factors into his model. Tudge et al. (2009) argued that academics and practitioners who critique the PPCT model for underplaying the importance of biology and personal characteristics do a disservice to the development of the model.

3.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is concerned with a researcher's ability to reflect, analyse and be forthright about the intersubjective dynamics between themselves and the subject they are researching (Finlay & Gough, 2008). Reflexivity involves a researcher's awareness, assessment and reassessment of their own background, assumptions and positioning in relation to how they interpret data in their research (Finlay & Gough, 2008; Patnaik, 2013). Reflexivity is seen as an important component of qualitative research (Patnaik, 2013). By demonstrating reflexivity, a researcher adds further credibility to the trustworthiness and robustness of their findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Finlay & Gough, 2008).

To demonstrate the primary researcher's own reflexivity, the values, beliefs and experiences that relate to and potentially impact the present study are outlined below.

Having worked in Primary education for 10 years as a Learning Mentor, the primary researcher had direct knowledge and experience of the impact that work related stress has on teachers. After a subsequent five-month spell of working in mental health, and with regular access to supervision, the primary researcher began to have a deeper interest in exploring how systemic practices could be developed that would support teachers with work related stress.

Before the primary researcher's DEdPsy training, they were an Assistant Educational Psychologist (AEP). A large part of their role was to deliver Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) training to support staff. In addition to providing the initial training, the role involved providing termly group supervision for ELSA groups. The supervision groups were an opportunity for ELSA's to problem-solve together about issues that had come up during the course of their work, supported by an EP. The success of the supervision groups led the primary researcher to consider what comparable system(s) could be put in place to similarly support teachers.

As part of the DEdPsy training, the primary researcher had both written about and experienced the disconnect that can occur between the perception of the EP role between EPs and schools. The primary researcher had been part of meetings where SENCos and teachers had been surprised about the scope of work that EPs were able to undertake. As a result of these experiences, the primary researcher was keen to explore whether the schools they worked with were fully aware of the type of support that EPs could offer.

The design of the present study was developed with reflexivity in mind. In addition to providing rich data that would support answering each of the research questions, the first stage of data collection involved analysing quantitative data in the form of descriptive

statistics. Unlike thematic analysis, where the evaluation of data can be influenced by a researcher's own experience (Braun et al., 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012), descriptive statistics provide an objective quantification of participant responses that is not dependent on the researcher's interpretation (Marshall & Jonker, 2010). The analysis of the data in phase one would go on to inform the semi-structured interviews undertaken during phase two of the study.

When analysing the qualitative data in phase two of the study, the primary researcher ensured that the process was conducted over a period of four weeks. This allowed sufficient time for the amending and refining of themes. In addition, the time spent analysing the qualitative data ensured that the primary researcher could obtain and utilise feedback from the study's supervisors, to further amend and refine the themes.

Another way the primary researcher sought to be reflexive when conducting the present study was by ensuring that the principal supervisor had access to the individual codes that contributed to the themes produced in phase two. The principal supervisor is not a practising EP, so by giving them access to all of the codes and engaging them as part of the reviewing process, it would act as an additional safeguard. As a non-EP, the principal supervisor was in a unique position to observe if the themes generated were reflective, or if they appeared to be driven by the primary researcher's personal narrative.

3.4 Study Design

To critically explore the four research questions, the present study employed a mixed methods approach which combined the acquisition and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The present study had two distinct data collection and data analysis phases. Both phases of data collection were designed to provide data that would contribute to answering all four of the study's research questions. This design allowed for both an initial foundational level of understanding of the research questions in the first phase, and then a

subsequent deeper exploration and understanding of the research questions in the second phase (Kelle, 2016). Mixed method approaches to research are recognised as a thorough approach when undertaking explorative research (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018; Kelle, 2016; Malina et al., 2011; Terrell, 2012).

The quantitative aspect of the study in phase one required participants to complete an online survey. It was hoped that the data obtained during phase one would provide initial answers to the study's four research questions. The questionnaire was designed to explore EP and SENCo views. The data analysed in phase one would provide the foundation for the questions to be explored in phase two. The qualitative aspect of the study in phase two involved follow up semi-structured interviews that would be informed by the findings of the first phase. It was hoped that the data obtained during phase two of the study would provide greater depth to the findings of the first phase.

Research suggests that mixed method approaches are particularly useful when studies are exploratory rather than hypothesis driven, and that the sum of the data yielded is richer, which ultimately makes it easier to answer research questions (Johnson et al., 2007). It is also suggested that mixed method designs are useful when the research is exploring different perspectives and viewpoints (Johnson et al., 2007). Johnson et al (2007) argued that quantitative and qualitative research together produce information that is most likely to inform practice as the triangulated data is richer and more robust. As the aim of the present research was to explore different perspectives with a view to informing practice, a mixed method approach was deemed to be appropriate. The evaluation of both data types would be given equal consideration when answering the study's four research questions.

3.5 Phase One - Survey of EPs and SENCOs

Phase one of the study was conducted online through the distribution of a survey that was created using the program Qualtrics¹¹. The survey was sent to primary school SENCOs, qualified EPs, and year one and year two Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) throughout the UK. Details of the participant criteria, production of the survey, participant sampling, data collection and data analysis for phase one are described below.

3.5.1 Participants

3.5.2 Eligibility

The 105 participants of the study were primary school SENCOs and EPs. As the SENCO and EP data was to be analysed separately, it was not contingent for the participants to be working together in order for them to be eligible for the study. As SENCOs are typically the primary commissioners of EP work, they were well placed to provide information on the type of work that EPs undertook in schools that supported the management of teacher work related stress. Equally, as EPs were the other group of interest in the study, it was important to obtain their views and include them as participants. As mentioned previously, due to the difference in the way that primary and secondary schools operate and the distinct experiences that EPs have working in the two sectors (Fox et al., 1990; James et al., 2014), it was decided that only primary school SENCOs would be considered for the study.

Teachers were not included as participants for the present study. Due to the conditions set out in the previous chapter, teachers do not routinely have direct access to EPs. The specific LA, school, and SENCO/EP relationship are essential determinates as to whether or not class teachers have direct access to EPs (Andrews, 2017; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Young, 2017). These conditions are variable and subsequently impact the frequency that class teachers work with

¹¹ Qualtrics is an online programme that enables users to design, publish and distribute questionnaires.

EPs. In addition, as EPs are capable of undertaking work at a systemic level, it is possible for EPs to impact school practices that support teachers, without class teachers being aware of the contribution that EPs have made. It is for these reasons that class teachers were not included as participants in the present study.

All qualified EPs were eligible to take part in the study, as well as TEPs who were in year two or year three of their training. Year one TEPs were ineligible to take part in the study as they did not have experience undertaking EP work before the Covid-19 Pandemic. This meant that year one TEPs would not have been able to compare pre-pandemic work with present working practices. All primary school SENCOs were eligible to take part in the study, with no further inclusion criteria set other than the need for them to be presently working in a primary school setting.

Whilst it was desirable it was not an imperative that SENCOs had experience of working in their role pre-Covid for them to participate in the study. This was partly due to the acknowledgement that the primary researcher's access to potential SENCO participants was much lower than their access to potential EP participants. As EPs regularly engage in research (L. Cooper & Woods, 2017; P. Cooper & Upton, 1990; Gillard et al., 2018; Hoyne & Cunningham, 2019), it was thought that as a group they'd be more willing to engage with the study, so a less restrictive inclusion criteria was placed on SENCOs to ensure that the number of EP and SENCO participants were proportionate. In the final sample only 12 of the 49 SENCOs who completed the survey, had been in their role for less than a year.

3.5.3 Sampling

The present study used purposive sampling to recruit participants. Purposive sampling is the deliberate selection of participants due to the unique knowledge or experience that they have of the phenomenon of interest (Etikan et al., 2015). The EPs in the study were recruited

through an introductory email that outlined the aims and participation requirements. The email was initially sent to three London based Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPs), who then cascaded the participant request to their teams. The research was picked up by the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) who featured the request for participants to their members on their 9th July 2021 virtual newsletter (see Appendix A). In addition, the primary researcher used their own professional and social media networks to gain access to a greater number of participants, further increasing the geographical spread.

The SENCOs in the study were recruited in a similar manner, using an introductory email which outlined the research aims and participation requirements. The email was initially sent to the SENCOs through their link EPs. The request for participants was also sent to SENCOs via SENCO forums, where the research information was cascaded to a wider pool of potential participants. As with the EPs, the primary researcher made use of their professional and social media networks to gain access to a greater number of participants.

Overall, the study recruited a total of 105 participants. 35 EPs, 21 TEPs and 49 SENCOs completed the online survey. The participants of the study were representative of 57 LAs throughout the England, Scotland and Wales. Two independent EPs completed the survey. A small number of participants (three) indicated that they worked across multiple LAs. It should be noted that the majority of the participants recruited worked in England. The complete list of LAs represented in the study can be found in Appendix B.

Table 1. *Number of research participants recruited in the study*

Participant Group	Number
EPs	35
SENCOs	49
TEPs	21

The participants had a varied amount of experience working in their roles. 27.62% of the participants had been in their role for a year or less. 40.96% of the participants had been in their current role for between two and five years. 31.43% of the participants had been in their role for six years or longer. The data serves to illustrate that the participants of the study were representative of a variety of professional experience.

3.5.4 Development of the Survey

The survey was designed using the online software Qualtrics. The four research questions were key in determining what items would be appropriate to include as part of the survey. The survey items were developed by considering the recommendations of keeping questions short and simply worded, as well as ensuring that there were minimal items that required participants to submit lengthy responses (Punch, 2003). In addition, the visual presentation of the survey was carefully considered to ensure that the answer options were coherent and clearly labelled. For example, ensuring that answer options only had one unit of measurement and did not confuse participants by having both a worded and numerical value (Artino & Gehlbach, 2012; Gehlbach & Brinkworth, 2011). It was hoped that keeping the questionnaire simple in its design and straightforward to answer would encourage a greater number of participants to be recruited and engage with the first phase of the study.

It is noted that it was possible that keeping the survey simple to answer could have led to participants being careless in their engagement with the survey, and as a result not considering their responses thoughtfully (Curran, 2016). However, it was judged that as the topic of the research impacted and had implications for EPs and SENCOs, that in itself would act as a counterbalance to keep the participants appropriately engaged whilst completing the survey.

Items one to three of the questionnaire captured participant data relating to their role, the LA they worked in and the number of years that they had been working in their current role. Items four to six were designed to elicit EP and SENCo views on teacher stress and the perceived impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had on teacher stress. Items nine and ten were designed to explore EP and SENCo views on the EP role that EPs play in reducing teacher stress (RQ1). Items eleven, twelve and fourteen explored what EPs and SENCos, believed EP support to teachers currently looked like and what they would like it to look like (RQ2). Item thirteen was designed to preliminarily explore RQ3 by exploring if there were other types of work that EPs and SENCos would have liked to have seen commissioned but were unable to. Items fifteen to eighteen were designed to explore if EPs and SENCos felt that EP work with teachers had changed as a result of the pandemic and if EPs and SENCos felt that teachers had less access to EPs because of the pandemic (RQ4).

To ensure that the survey was fit for purpose, the survey was initially run as a pilot study to determine whether adaptations would need to be made. Pilot studies are recognised as an important means of testing research materials before they are utilised in the main study (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). While it is acknowledged that completing a pilot study does not guarantee the success of the main research, it is accepted that pilot studies play a valuable part in ensuring that research materials are fit for purpose (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

A total of nine participants completed the pilot survey. The primary researcher used his professional networks to aid recruitment for the pilot. The participants were made up of seven TEPs and two SENCos who all worked in and around the London area. The majority of the participants had limited experience in their roles, with 88.89% having been in their role for two years or less.

As there was an unequal number of EPs recruited compared SENCOs, the data from the two professions was analysed together for the pilot study. The data in the pilot study confirmed that the participants felt that teachers had been overly stressed over the past year, and that teacher stress had increased during the pandemic. The data also revealed that participants believed that workload and Covid-19 were the primary source of teacher stress. In addition, eight of the nine participants recorded that EPs did have a role in reducing teacher stress.

Several of the participants noted that there was an issue recording a response for questions fifteen, sixteen, seventeen and eighteen. As a result, the primary researcher made amendments to the survey on Qualtrics so that participants of the main study would be able to accurately record responses for those questions. No other problems were identified with the survey. The data obtained in the pilot was deemed as capable of answering the study's research questions, so no further changes to the survey were made. The final version of the survey had a total of 18 items that participants could respond to, and is presented below. The complete pilot data can be found in Appendix D.

1) I am a SENCO/Year 2 TEP/ Year 3 TEP/ Qualified EP

SENCO/QUALIFIED EP/YEAR 2 TEP/YEAR 3 TEP

2) Please state the local authority that you work in.

3) I have been in my current role for

A YEAR OR LESS/2 YEARS/ 3 YEARS/4 YEARS/5 YEARS/ 6 YEARS OR MORE

4) Do you feel that teachers you have worked with have been overly stressed?

YES/NO/NOT SURE

5) What do you think is the primary source of their stress?

6) Do you feel their stress levels have increased or decreased during the pandemic?

INCREASED/DECREASED/STAYED THE SAME

7) How stressed do you think teachers were BEFORE the pandemic?

NOT AT ALL/ SLIGHTLY STRESSED/ MODERATELY STRESSED/ VERY STRESSED

8) How stressed do you think teachers have been DURING the pandemic?

NOT AT ALL/ SLIGHTLY STRESSED/ MODERATELY STRESSED/ VERY STRESSED

9) Are there clearly defined routes for teachers to receive direct support from EPs?

YES/NO/NOT SURE

10) Do you feel that EPs have a role to play in reducing teacher stress?

YES/NO/NOT SURE

11) What type of direct work have EPs/you done with teachers in the past year?

Consultations/Staff training/Group supervision/support sessions/1:1 supervision/support sessions//Other

12) What type of work would you say that teachers have found to be the most helpful in reducing stress?

Consultations/Staff training/Group supervision/support sessions/1:1 supervision/support sessions/Other

13) Are there any types of work that you'd have liked (EPs) to do with teachers that were not commissioned?

YES/NO

14) If you answered YES, what type of work would you have to have been commissioned?

15) Has the nature of EP work with teachers changed as a result of the pandemic?

YES/NO/NOT SURE

16) If you feel that the nature of EP work with teachers has changed as a result of the pandemic, please briefly state how

17) As a result of the pandemic do you think that teachers have more or less access to EPs?

MORE/LESS/THE SAME/ NOT SURE

3.5.5 Data Analysis

The data from the online surveys was analysed using simple descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics have been recognised as a well-suited way of presenting numerical data in a manner that is easily digestible to readers (Marshall & Jonker, 2010). The simplicity of descriptive statistics allows research to be used to inform and be a part of evidenced based practice (Marshall & Jonker, 2010). The study made use of Qualtrics' automatic analysis system whereby responses were categorised into percentages. The use of percentages enabled the data to reflect the degree to which the two participant groups felt about particular items.

Although the survey was designed so that EPs and SENCOs could complete the same questionnaire, the EP and SENCO data were analysed separately. The separate analysis ensured that the two participant groups could have their distinct perspectives captured and allowed for their data to be compared with one another.

The three open ended items in the survey were analysed using principles of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). The responses were first organised into codes e.g. 'high workload', and then a count of the frequency of the code was recorded. The frequency of the code was recorded to ensure that the prevalence of the code and the responses of the participants were accurately reflected and recorded by the study.

3.6 Phase Two - Semi-Structured Interviews and Analysis

Phase two of the study involved the primary researcher conducting semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to further unpick the data that had been obtained in phase one of the study. As the items in the phase one survey were predominantly closed questions, it was thought that the semi-structured interviews would allow the participants to provide more in-depth responses through the use of open-ended questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Qualitative research is recognised as being useful for providing rich data that reflect how participants see, think or feel about a particular subject or issue (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually with EPs and SENCOs. Details of the participant sampling, production of the interview questions, and data collection and data analysis for phase two are described below.

3.6.1 Participants

The last section of the survey in phase one, gave participants the option to write their email addresses if they were happy to be contacted for a follow up interview. A total of 23 EPs and 22 SENCOs wrote their email addresses and indicated that they would be happy to take part in the next phase of the study. EP and SENCO participants were randomly selected from the list of emails with no other inclusion criteria necessary other than their declaration of interest. Potential participants were emailed to thank them for their interest and to arrange a suitable

time to conduct the interview. An example of the email sent to prospective participants can be found in Appendix E.

To allow for equal weighting at the analysis stage, it was decided that there would be an equal number of EP and SENCo interviews conducted. Due to time pressures and the relatively slow response rate to the follow up emails, a decision was made to complete the recruitment of phase two once five EPs and five SENCos had committed to take part in the follow up interviews. The final sample of phase two comprised of five SENCos and five EPs (two qualified EPs and three third year TEPs). Most of the participants of the second phase of the study worked in and around the London area. All five of the EP participants and four of the SENCos worked in London or Essex LAs. The only participant in the second phase who worked outside of London was a SENCo who worked in a LA in the midlands.

3.6.2 Development of the Interview Schedule

The semi-structured interview schedule was developed after analysing the data from the online surveys. The key findings from the survey data were used to construct the interview schedule which was to be presented to both EPs and SENCos to aid further exploration of the research questions. The key findings of phase one and the first version of the interview schedule was then sent to the primary researcher's supervisors for feedback. The feedback received asked for more of the key findings obtained in phase one to be explored in the interview schedule. As a result, the interview schedule was amended and refined, and a pilot was conducted.

The pilot was conducted for a variety of purposes. The semi structured interviews were to be conducted in the Autumn Term of 2021 in a context where different schools, LAs and individuals had different interpretations and attitudes towards Covid-19 and the government guidelines. For this reason, it was decided that the interviews would be conducted online via

the online video conference software Zoom. Zoom was selected as the online medium as there was an evidence base that argued its efficacy in qualitative research (Gray et al., 2020). It was important for the primary researcher to obtain first-hand experience of using the software specifically for the purpose of conducting an interview, and ensure that the software performed as expected. It was equally important that the proposed interview questions were trialled to ensure that the wording allowed the participants to sufficiently elaborate and produce responses that answered the research questions, and added further depth to the data obtained during phase one of the study. A total of two TEPs and one SENCo took part in the interview pilot. The participants of the pilot interviews commented that they were unsure how to answer the third question, and expressed that some additional guidance in the framing of the question would be helpful. The primary researcher was satisfied after completing the pilot that the participant responses sufficiently answered the each of the research questions, and added further depth to the findings obtained during phase one of the study. After the pilot, the interview schedule was refined again to produce the final set of questions. Below are the final four questions that were asked during the interviews.

- 1) EPs felt quite strongly that they had a role to play in reducing teacher stress, whereas there was more of a mixed picture with SENCos. Why do you think there was such a difference in the perception of the role?
- 2) In your view, what do you think are some of the barriers that prevent EPs from working directly with teachers?
- 3) How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted your work with EPs/schools? What have been some of the opportunities? What have been some of the challenges?
- 4) What do you view as the primary role of an EP?

3.6.3 Data Collection

All ten of the interviews were conducted online through Zoom. Each interview took an average time of ten minutes to complete, and EPs and SENCoS were asked the same set of questions. All the interviews took place between October 2021 and November 2021, and were conducted at the end of the working day. As with phase one of the study, the EP and SENCo data in phase two were analysed separately to allow for each groups' distinct perspective to be preserved and to allow for comparison.

Each interview was recorded, and the primary researcher made use of Zoom's automatic audio transcription. The Zoom interview transcription was then transferred to Microsoft Word, checked for accuracy against the interview recording, and manually amended as necessary. To preserve anonymity, each of the participants were named in the transcription by their role and a number, e.g. SENCo 1. An example of a transcribed SENCo and EP interview can be found in Appendix F1 and F2.

3.6.4 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data that involves identifying and reporting patterns in data, and is commonly used within qualitative research (Braun et al., 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). The five key stages of thematic analysis are familiarisation, code generation, identifying themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes (Braun et al., 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). This five-stage process was followed when analysing the data in phase two.

The first of the five stages is familiarisation. The familiarisation stage commenced when the primary researcher began to revise the automated Zoom transcription and check for errors. The Zoom transcription was then converted onto Microsoft Word, where the data was formatted in preparation for the generation of codes. In this way, the primary researcher was

able to become more familiar with both the audio and the written content of data. This familiarisation process supported the development of codes as it enabled the primary researcher to begin to see links between different parts of the text.

The NVivo12¹² software was used to aid in the development and organisation of codes. After the familiarisation stage, codes were generated by grouping sections of text together. Generating the codes from the interview transcripts helped to organise, reduce and make sense of the volume of data. After the initial codes were generated, they were examined to look for patterns.

Once patterns had been identified, several codes were brought together to form broader themes. When the initial codes and themes were generated, the process of reviewing the themes took place, and the data was re-examined to explore whether there was sufficient evidence to support or refute the proposed themes. The reviewing process took place over a period of two weeks, to allow for sufficient reflection on the themes.

As part of the final defining and naming stage, the primary researcher obtained feedback on the initial codes and themes from the research supervisors. Appendix G1 shows the initial codes and themes that were generated. The feedback received suggested that the number of themes and codes could be reduced, and that some of the themes could be more concisely and appropriately named. For example, the theme ‘EP confidence in how the EP role should be interpreted and operationalised’ was thought to be too verbose and could be cut down in order to make it clearer. After the initial codes and themes had been reviewed against the feedback, some were amended and others were consolidated to produce a reduced number of codes and themes. The final codes and themes were then defined and named so that they were

¹² NVivo is a software package that can be used to analyse qualitative data (Welsh, 2002).

succinct, and presented in a way that supported the understanding of the data. The final thematic map and contributing codes can be found in Appendix G2.

As outlined above, the five-stage process was followed to produce themes for the EP and SENCo interview data. The EP and SENCo data were analysed separately to produce overall themes for SENCos and overall themes for EPs. Analysing the EP and SENCo data separately allowed for the development of independent discrete themes for EPs and SENCo, while also enabling the comparison of similar or divergent themes.

3.7 Ethics

Ethical approval for the present study was obtained in June 2021 from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at the UCL Institute of Education. All participants of the present study were made explicitly aware that all data would be confidential, and that while the results of the overall study would be freely shared, information on specific participants would not be shared. Participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary, and information collected would be kept securely on an encrypted USB stick. Full details of the ethics forms and processes can be found in Appendix H.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Overview

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. Phase one findings are presented with tables, the relationship to the relevant research question, a short description, and a summary of the key findings. Phase two findings are presented through thematic maps, below which the themes and sub themes from the EP and SENCo interviews are explained. The relationship to the relevant research question(s) is represented via a bracket next to the corresponding table or theme.

4.2.1 Phase One Survey Data

Table 2. *In the past year do you feel that teachers you have worked with have been overly stressed?*

(RQ4- How has Covid impacted how EPs work with teachers?)

Participant Group	Yes	N	Not Sure	N	No	N	Mode	Range	Mean	SD
								(1 = Yes, 2 = Not Sure, 3 = No)		
EPs	92.86%	52	7.14%	4	0%	0	Yes	1	1.07	.260
SENCos	95.92%	47	0%	0	4.08%	2	Yes	2	1.08	.400

The findings presented in Table Two demonstrate that both EPs and SENCos overwhelmingly believed that teachers had been overly stressed in the past year. The evidence, perhaps unsurprisingly, provides further empirical data that teachers had been overly stressed. Table Two reveals a coherency of observation between SENCos and EPs.

Table 3. *What do you think is the primary source of their stress? EP Responses*

(RQ4- How has Covid impacted how EPs work with teachers?)

Code	Code Frequency
Uncertainty	7
High Workload/Unrealistic expectations	41
Covid-19	24
Online Learning	5
Parent/Carer Pressure	4
Pupil Well-Being	10

The findings presented in Table Three illustrate what EPs thought was the primary source of teacher stress. Inspection of Table Three shows that EPs thought that high workload, unrealistic expectations and Covid-19 were the primary sources of teacher stress. Parent/carer pressure was the least prevalent response given by EPs.

Table 4. *What do you think is the primary source of their stress? SENCo Responses*

(RQ4- How has Covid impacted how EPs work with teachers?)

Code	Code Frequency
Government/Leadership	5
Uncertainty	6
High Workload/Unrealistic expectations	24
Covid-19	14
Online Learning	4
Parent/Carer Pressure	1
Pupil Well-Being	7

The findings presented in Table Four demonstrated that SENCos, like EPs, felt that high workload, unrealistic expectations, and Covid-19 were the primary sources of teacher stress.

As with the EP data, parent/carer pressure was the least prevalent SENCo source cited.

Tables Three and Four once again demonstrated a coherency of observation between SENCos and EPs.

Table 5. *Do you feel teacher's stress levels have increased or decreased during the pandemic?*

(RQ4- How has Covid impacted how EPs work with teachers?)

Participant Group	Increased	N	Decreased	N	Stayed the Same	N	Mode	Range	Mean	SD
								(1=Increased, 2=stayed the same, 3= decreased)		
EPs	96.43%	54	0%	0	3.57%	2	Increased	2	1.07	.375
SENCos	83.67%	41	0%	0	16.33%	8	Increased	2	1.33	.747

Table 6. *How stressed do you think teachers were BEFORE the pandemic?*

(RQ4- How has Covid impacted how EPs work with teachers?)

Participant Group	Very Stressed	N	Moderately Stressed	N	Slightly Stressed	N	Not at All	N	Mode	Range	Mean	SD
									(4=Very Stressed, 3=Moderately Stressed, 2=Slightly Stressed=2, 1=Not at All)			
EPs	23.21%	13	67.86%	38	8.93%	5	0%	0	MS	2	3.14	.554
SENCos	22.45%	11	69.39%	34	8.16%	4	0%	0	MS	2	3.14	.540

Table 7. *How stressed do you think teachers have been DURING the pandemic?*

(RQ4- How has Covid impacted how EPs work with teachers?)

Participant Group	Very Stressed	N	Moderately Stressed	N	Slightly Stressed	N	Not at All	N	Mode	Range	Mean	SD
									(4=Very Stressed, 3=Moderately Stressed, 2=Slightly Stressed=2, 1=Not at All)			
EPs	83.93%	47	16.07%	9	0%	0	0%	0	VS	1	3.84	.371
SENCos	67.35%	33	30,61%	15	2.04%	1	0%	0	VS	2	3.65	.522

Tables Five, Six and Seven demonstrate that EPs and SENCOs shared a similar view on the levels of teacher stress before and during the pandemic. Table Five illustrates that both SENCOs and EPs overwhelmingly felt that teacher’s stress levels had increased during the pandemic. Table Six provides evidence that the majority of EP and SENCO participants felt that teachers were moderately stressed before the pandemic, and inspection of Table Seven shows that the majority of EP and SENCO participants felt that teachers were very stressed during the pandemic. The data suggests that pre-pandemic teachers were already operating at a moderate level of stress, but during the pandemic teachers went from being moderately stressed to very stressed.

Table 8. *Are there clearly defined routes for teachers to receive direct support from EPs?*

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCOs Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress? RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?)

Participant Group	Yes	N	Not Sure	N	No	N	Mode	Range	Mean	SD
EPs	37.50%	21	55.36%	31	7.14%	4	NS	2	1.70	.601
SENCOs	24.49%	12	14.29%	7	61.22%	30	No	2	1.90	.621

Inspection of Table Eight shows that the majority of both the majority of both participants were either unsure or felt that there were no clearly defined routes for teachers to receive direct support from EPs. However, there was a small but clear proportion of both participant groups who felt that there were clearly defined routes for teachers to receive direct support from EPs. Whilst the overall direction of thought between EPs and SENCOs was once again coherent (no clear routes for direct teacher access to EPs), both participant groups were not as unanimous in their views as they were for the previous questions.

Table 9. *Do you feel that EPs have a role to play in reducing teacher stress?*

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCOs Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress? RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?)

Participant Group	Yes	N	Not Sure	N	No	N	Mode	Range	Mean	SD
EPs	98.21%	55	0%	0	1.79%	1	Yes	1	1.02	.134
SENCOs	32.65%	16	24.49%	12	42.86%	21	No	2	2.10	.872

Table Nine provides one of the key findings of the study, and demonstrates the first major divergence in the EP and SENCO responses. EPs overwhelmingly responded that EPs had a role to play in reducing teacher stress. However, inspection of the SENCO responses demonstrates that SENCOs were not as clear if EPs had a role in reducing teacher stress. Only 32.65% of the SENCO participants answered that they felt that EPs had a role in reducing teacher stress, compared to 98.21% of the EP participants who felt that EPs did have a role in reducing teacher stress.

Table 10. *What type of direct work have EPs/You done with teachers in the past year?*

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCOs Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?; RQ2- What Does That Support Look Like?)

Answer	EP/SENCO	N
Consultations	33.33%	85
Staff Training	24.71%	63
Group Supervision/Support Sessions	13.73%	35
1:1 Supervision/ Support Sessions	16.86%	43
Other	11.37%	29

Table Ten shows the combined responses of EPs and SENCOs to the most prevalent types of direct work that EPs had done with teachers over the past year. Table Ten demonstrates that consultations and staff training were the most prevalent types of direct work undertaken

by EPs. However, it is important to note that the combination of 1:1 supervision and group supervision accounted for 30.59% of the EP and SENCo responses.

Table 11. *What type of work would you say that teachers have found to be the most helpful in reducing stress?*

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCos Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?; RQ2- What Does That Support Look Like?; RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?)

Answer	EP	N	SEnCo	N
Consultations	22.73%	25	22.73%	15
Staff Training	9.09%	10	24.24%	16
Group Supervision/Support Sessions	26.36%	29	12.12%	8
1:1 Supervision/ Support Sessions	33.64%	37	16.67%	11
Other	8.18%	9	24.24%	16

Table Eleven shows the EP and SENCo responses to the type of work they felt that teachers had found to be the most helpful in reducing stress. The responses in Table Eleven show a clear divergence of thought between EPs and SENCos. 60% of EPs felt that 1:1 or group supervision had been the type of work that teachers had found most helpful in reducing their stress, conversely only 28.79% of SENCos felt that 1:1 or group supervision had been the type of work that teachers had felt most helpful in reducing teacher stress. 46.97% of SENCos felt that consultations or staff training had been the most helpful type of EP work in reducing teacher stress. Whereas 31.82% of the EP participants agreed that consultations and staff training had been the most helpful.

Table 12. *Are there any types of work that you'd have liked (EPs) to do with teachers that were not commissioned?*

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCOs Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?; RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?)

Participant Group	Yes	N	No	N	Mode	Range (1 = Yes, 2 = No)	Mean	SD
EPs	73.21%	41	26.79%	15	Yes	1	1.27	.447
SENCOs	46.94%	23	53.06%	26	No	1	1.53	.504

Table Twelve shows the EP and SENCO responses for whether there were any types of work that they would have liked EPs to have been done with teachers that was not commissioned. EPs overwhelmingly responded that they were other types of work that they would have liked to have done with teachers (73.21%). However, SENCOs were split in their view as to whether or not there were other types of work that they would have liked to have commissioned as 46.94% answered yes and 53.06% answered no.

Table 13. *If you answered Yes, what type of work would you have liked to have been commissioned? EP Responses*

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCOs Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?; RQ2- What Does That Support Look Like?)

Type of Work	Count
Staff Supervision (Group and 1:1)	26
Coaching	5
Staff Training	3
Systemic Support	8
Circle of Adults	1

Inspection of Table Thirteen demonstrates that EPs would have primarily liked to have done more 1:1 and group supervision with teachers.

Table 14. *If you answered Yes, what type of work would you have liked to have been commissioned? SENCo Responses*

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCos Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?; RQ2- What Does That Support Look Like?)

Type of work	Frequency
Staff Supervision (Group and 1:1)	7
Coaching	6
Staff Training	9

Inspection of Table Fourteen demonstrates that staff training was the most prevalent response for the type of work that SENCos would have liked to have commissioned. However, the prevalence was not overwhelming, as staff supervision and coaching were not too far behind.

Table 15. *Has the nature of EP work with teachers changed as a result of the pandemic?*

(RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?; RQ4- How has Covid Impacted how EPs Work with Teachers)

Participant Group	Yes	N	Not Sure	N	No	N	Mode	Range	Mean	SD
EPs	62.5%	35	21.43%	12	16.07%	9	Yes	2	1.59	.826
SENCos	44.9%	22	18.37%	9	36.73%	18	Yes	2	1.73	.758

Table Fifteen shows the EP and SENCo responses to whether they felt the nature of EP work had changed as a result of the pandemic. The majority of EPs felt that their work with teachers had changed. However, the SENCO responses were more mixed. 46.9% of SENCos

felt that the nature of EP work with teachers had changed, 36.73% of SENCOs felt that it hadn't changed, and 18.37% of SENCOs were not sure as to whether or not it had changed.

Table 16. *If you feel that the nature of EP work with teachers has changed as a result of the pandemic, please briefly state how. EP Responses.*

(RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?; RQ4- How has Covid Impacted how EPs Work with Teachers?).

Code	Code Frequency
More Virtual Work	13
Less direct and face to face work with staff/pupils	5
Greater focus on mental health and well-being	10
Less opportunity for informal conversations	3
Increased statutory work	2

Inspection of Table Sixteen shows that EPs felt that more virtual work and a greater focus on mental health and well-being were the most prevalent changes to their work with teachers as a result of the pandemic.

Table 17. *If you feel that the nature of EP work with teachers has changed as a result of the pandemic, please briefly state how. SENCO Responses*

(RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?; RQ4- How has Covid Impacted how EPs Work with Teachers?)

Code	Code Frequency
More Virtual Work	8
Less direct and face to face work with staff/pupils	15
Greater focus on mental health and well-being	2

Inspection of Table Seventeen shows that, like EPs, SENCOs felt that there had been more virtual work as a result of the pandemic. However, the most prevalent SENCO response was that there was less direct and face to face work as a result of the pandemic.

Table 18. *As a result of the pandemic do you think that teachers have more or less access to EPs?*

(RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?; RQ4- How has Covid Impacted how EPs Work with Teachers)

Participant Group	More	N	The Same	N	Less	N	Unsure	N	Mode	Range	Mean	SD
									(1=More, 2= The Same, 3= Less, 4= Unsure)			
EPs	26.79%	15	28.57%	16	26.79%	15	17.86%	10	TS	3	2.36	1.069
SENCOs	4.08%	2	63.27%	31	26.53%	13	6.12%	3	Less	3	2.35	.663

Table Eighteen shows the EP and SENCO responses to whether teachers have more or less access to EPs as a result of the pandemic. Table Eighteen shows another divergence of opinion between EPs and SENCOs. Inspection of the Table demonstrates that EPs did not have a homogeneous view as to whether or not teachers had more or less access to them as a result of the pandemic. However, SENCOs were quite clear (63.27%) that teachers had less access to EPs as a result of the pandemic.

4.2.2 Summary of Phase One

Findings from phase one of the study indicated that both EPs and SENCOs felt that teachers had been overly stressed over the past year. The EP and SENCO responses made it clear that while they believed teachers were *moderately* stressed before the pandemic and they believed that teachers had become *very* stressed during the pandemic. Both EPs and SENCOs attributed the increase in teacher stress due to a high workload and the Covid-19 pandemic.

There was a clear contrast of what the two participant groups thought about EPs role in reducing teacher stress. Educational Psychologists were very clear that they had a role to play in reducing teacher stress. However, SENCOs were a lot less sure if EPs had a role in reducing teacher stress. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the scale of the divergence, the majority of both participant groups felt that there were no clearly defined routes for teachers to access EP support.

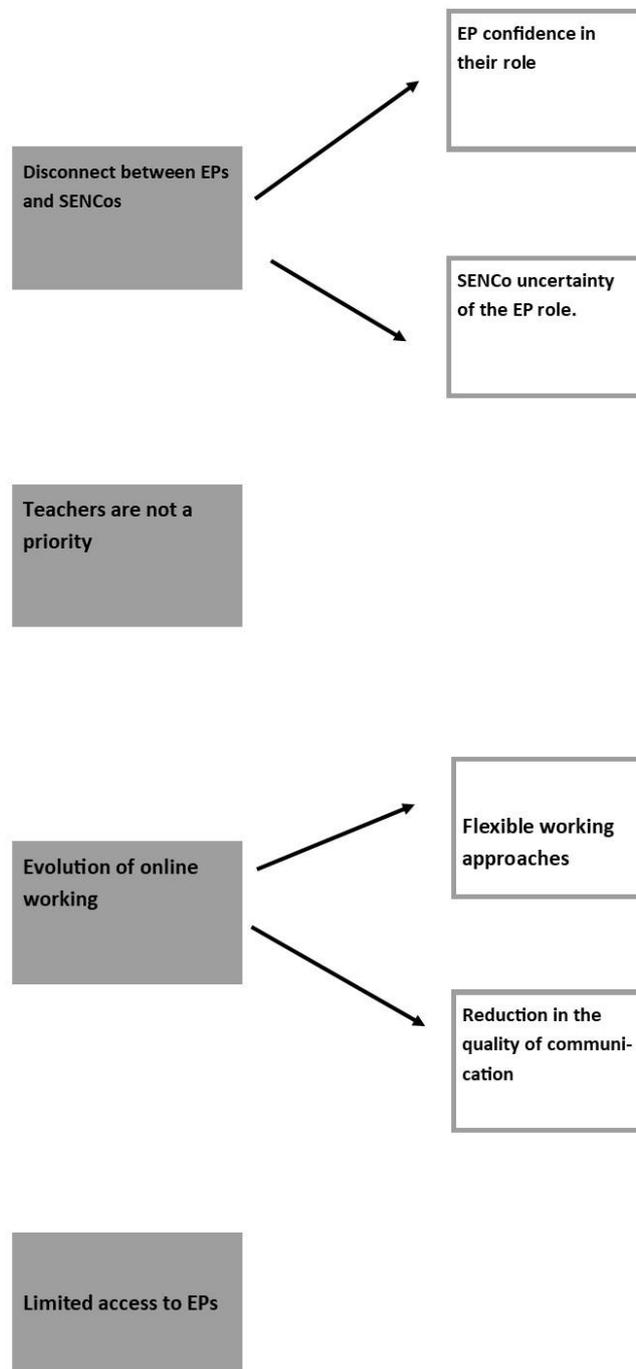
EPs identified 1:1 and group supervision as the work they'd undertaken that had the biggest impact in reducing teacher stress. While SENCOs identified consultations and staff training as the EP work that had the biggest impact in reducing teacher stress. The perception of the impact of EP work with teachers was another point of divergence between the two participant groups.

Both EPs and SENCOs reported that the nature of EP work had changed as a result of the pandemic. SENCOs were particularly clear that they felt that teachers had less access to EPs as a result of the pandemic. Both EPs and SENCOs reported that there was less face-to-face work with pupils and teachers, and that there was a greater focus on mental health and well-being.

4.3 Phase Two Thematic Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews - EP Data

Four overarching themes were identified across the EP interviews. The themes identified were 'Disconnect between EPs and SENCOs', 'Teachers are not a priority', 'Evolution of online working' and 'Limited access to EPs'. Two of the overarching themes yielded corresponding sub themes which served to add greater detail to the overarching theme. A thematic map illustrating the themes and sub themes is presented in the figure below. The themes identified illustrate some of the key findings of the study.

Figure 4 Thematic map illustrating themes and sub themes



4.3.1 Theme One: Disconnect between EPs and SENCOs

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCOs Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?; RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?)

Theme One exemplifies one of the key findings of the study and illustrates the lack of coherency between the EP and SENCO understanding of the EP role. Theme One produced two sub themes that served to give greater detail and further underpin the overarching theme. The essence of Theme One was that EPs and SENCOs were working from different agendas due to the level of understanding that each group had about the EP role. Theme One provides further information as to why EPs in phase one of the study were certain that they had a role to play in reducing teacher stress, and why SENCOs were less sure.

4.3.2 Sub theme: EP confidence in their role

Across the EP interviews, it was clear that the participants had a clear and strong view of their role, both in general terms, and more specifically in how the EP role related to reducing teacher stress. EPs consistently expressed confidence in how they perceived their role, and were assertive as to how their time could be used to have the greatest impact. Drawing from their knowledge of psychology, EPs were able to reference different examples of how they had applied their skills to support teachers:

“I think that EPs would immediately be able to think of things that they could do, which would help alleviate stress, like drop-in sessions in the school organising calls whatever it might be...”. (Male EP, 1 line 12-14).

“...the therapeutic benefits of consultations... That can then reduce teachers stress if they're worried about a particular child or a particular issue, that consultation can have real benefits.”. (Male EP, 1 line 16-19).

EPs consistently and firmly expressed that they viewed their primary role as working systemically, and not just with individual pupils. EPs were very clear that in addition to and often above individual pupil assessment, they viewed their role as supporting the whole school system. EPs expressed frustration at what they perceived to be the limited way in which their skills were employed:

“...they [SENCOs] want to discuss individual cases which is really not a good use of my time.” (Female EP, 1 line 44-45).

“But now I would say that our role is to create space in what is a very busy and complex system. Whatever we are we creating that space for, whether it is stopping and thinking, reflecting learning unpicking, problem solving. Whatever we are using that space for... I would say, is our job you know, and we can fill that space with training or supervision or consultation or assessment or whatever we're doing, but I really am clear about that at the moment. I would say our job is creating space and holding space for people that are in the education system...” (Female TEP 2, line 103-109).

4.3.3 Sub theme: SENCO uncertainty of the EP role

In stark contrast to the previous sub theme, EPs expressed frustration that SENCOs were not fully cognisant of the depth of the EP role, and felt that contributed to what type of work was commissioned:

“Another barrier would be more lack of knowledge on what EPs can actually do in terms of supporting them [SENCOs]. So, I think if they don't have that information and they don't have to kind of almost first-hand experience of it.” (Male TEP 1, line 51-53).

There was frustration that as a consequence of not having a full understanding of the EP role that some SENCOs were using EPs in a limited way. EPs expressed that SENCOs had an understanding of the EP role that put EPs in the position of gatekeepers to resources, and that the only way to access those resources was through commissioning an EP report:

“I imagine that's where the big difference lies, because I think a lot of SENCOs still see EPs as potentially gatekeepers to resources they see them in the old, traditional way of doing one to one work with a child and writing the report.” (Male EP 1, line 22-25).

However, there was also a strong view that EPs needed to do more to support SENCOs to understand the full breadth of the EP role. EPs acknowledged that the profession of Educational Psychology, and individual EPs, could do more to upskill SENCOs knowledge of the EP role:

“but then that would be something that maybe EPs need to be more clear about in terms of how we communicate our role with SENCOs and convey everything that we can sort of offer because suppose there is a lot to it, and maybe some of it just gets lost along the way when things are so busy and hectic in schools.” (Female TEP 1, line 33-37).

“And I think that we sometimes are not clear about what we do and like if I think about my team at work. We all practice in such different ways that it's very difficult, I think, for us to kind of market ourselves as a profession as EPs and say this is what we can provide.” (Female TEP 2, line 14-17).

4.3.4 Theme Two: Teachers are not a priority

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCOs Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?; RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?)

Theme Two exemplifies one of the other key findings of the study, that EPs feel that teachers are not viewed as a priority in terms of how SENCOs use EP time. EPs expressed that SENCOs have different priorities to them, and that those priorities are often about commissioning individual casework. EPs acknowledged that pupil assessment was routinely prioritised over work that could be done with teachers:

“...in terms of SENCOs I find it really interesting that they did think that way, but I would imagine it's something to do with priorities... yeah, I do wonder about priorities ... whether it's something that a SENCO would actually prioritise.” (Female TEP 1, line 32-38).

“Schools needing to buy hours, and therefore the priority hasn't been on school and teachers well-being... So yeah, I would say that that's the thing it is priorities, I think it's a lot more on like direct case work.” (Male TEP 1, line 16-17 and line 80-81).

It was a regularly repeated view that EPs felt that their time was primarily used for individual case work or assessments that would go towards EHCPs. This reinforced the EPs position that teachers were not viewed as a priority are for the use of EP time:

“They [SENCOs] have erm sort of other things on their mind usually about kind of individual children and EHCs and all sorts of things.” (Female TEP 1, line 38-40).

“Speaking to other EPs as well I'll say that most of the time schools within my service is all based on like casework, thinking about you know, how do we get a child an EHCP?” (Male TEP 1, line 68-70).

4.3.5 Theme Three: The evolution of online working

(RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?; RQ4- How has Covid Impacted how EPs Work with Teachers?)

Theme Three relates to how EPs felt the nature of their work changed during the pandemic. This was initially explored in phase one of the study, and the data in this section provides additional information as to what that change looked like. The overarching theme produced two sub themes, which were: ‘Flexible working approaches’ and ‘Reduction in the quality of communication’. The two sub themes are explained further below. The themes and sub themes in this section provide additional information on how the nature of EP work with teachers had developed.

4.3.6 Sub-theme: Flexible working approaches

One of the positives expressed by EPs about the evolution of online working was that it provided a greater level of flexibility. EPs mentioned that in some cases it was easier to arrange meetings due to people no longer having to travel to all be in the same space. It was also expressed that it was easier for some parents to attend meetings as they were able to log in at work and take less time off as a result. One EP mentioned that working online had given him access to vulnerable groups who were otherwise not physically attending school. In some cases, flexible working approaches meant that EPs were able to employ hybrid methods of working, where meetings involving parents could be conducted online and other types of assessment could be facilitated in person:

“You know the positives like, for example, you know meeting. Being able to meet someone even you know, even in the very busy hectic schedule, you know you'll be able to just spend an hour... doing it you give each other, like 100% of your attention.” (Male TEP 1, line 101-105).

“Because I worked remotely, I was able to almost access those that are those vulnerable children that you know that wouldn't be comfortable meeting a professional in school, but they would be able to meet remotely... so I'll say that you

know there are like certain groups of the population that remote working has given access to.” (Male TEP 1, line 114-117).

It was also expressed that, as a result of the pandemic, schools had become more open to the idea of commissioning different types of EP work. This is another finding that is congruent with one of the findings in phase one of the study, where EPs reported that schools had placed a greater emphasis on mental health and well-being. During the semi-structured interviews, EPs expressed that as a consequence of having to think more creatively about the use of EP time due to the pandemic, SENCOs had become amenable to the prospect of working with EPs in a variety of ways:

“I think it has opened people's eyes to online working and being a bit more flexible and how we approach things.” (Female TEP 1, line 107-108).

“What's been interesting as times gone on, and I don't know if it's because schools are either listening to what I'm saying or feel like they have a bit more breathing space or whatever it might be, but some more of my schools are saying we'd like to do some training, we'd like to do some other things, we don't want to just use your time as one report for one child...that's exactly what I want to hear, that's great.” (Male EP 1, line 78-82).

4.3.7 Sub-theme: Reduction in the quality of communication

One of the drawbacks mentioned as a result of working through the pandemic, was the reduction in the quality of communication. This was expressed as both a challenge of getting in contact with key stakeholders, and as an acknowledgement of some of the limitations of online meetings. EPs postulated that school pressures relating to the changes brought in to manage the pandemic were impacting on SENCOs' ability to respond to them in a timely manner. While EPs acknowledged that there were benefits from being able to conduct

meetings online, EPs did concede that remote meetings limit the depth of interaction that could take place:

“...just communication and being able to get a hold of people, needing to get things organised has been challenging... like even just sort of emailing SENCOs and things like that. It's taking a lot longer to get a response to these days and I don't know why. Whether they're just like so overwhelmed with other things that are happening in school.” (Female TEP 1, line 86-90).

“I think it's been more limiting with remote work, specifically like remote consultations.” (Male EP 1, line 86-87).

4.3.8 Theme Four: Limited access to EPs

(RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?)

Theme Four provides an even greater insight as to why EP work is commissioned in the way that it is, and why SENCOs have different priorities to EPs. There was an acceptance that schools had a limited access to EP support. This limited access was expressed in a variety of ways, one being a challenge in terms of the length of time it takes to build a trusting relationship between an EP and a school. EPs commented that it was typically only once a trusting relationship had been established that SENCOs became more amenable to commissioning a wider variety of EP work:

“The first thing that popped into my head was bloody time, so it takes flipping ages to get say the right people...Getting the bigger cogs in the system in the same room that's really difficult, even more so in, say, a secondary school or a big school.”
(Female TEP 2, line 43-46).

The limited access that schools had to EPs was assertively expressed in terms of how little EP time a school had available, and the number of statutory assessments that EPs have to undertake. From a schools' perspective, EPs commented that they felt that schools did not have the appropriate amount of EP time available to meet their needs. In addition, and compounding the lack of EP time that schools had available, was that EPs themselves felt that they were only able to offer limited time to schools as consequence of the high demand for statutory assessments:

“I think it's just statutory load and time. So um, so in my in my case, for example, for non-statutory work in a school I have six hours a year in (one) primary school.”

(Female EP 1, line 33-34).

“It could also be true of EPs as well, in terms of EP time, depending on what they, what else they have to do as well.” (Female TEP 1, line 54-55).

As a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions brought in as a result, EPs expressed that different schools had different attitudes about external professionals visiting the school site. The different views meant that some schools had more access to face-to-face EP support than others:

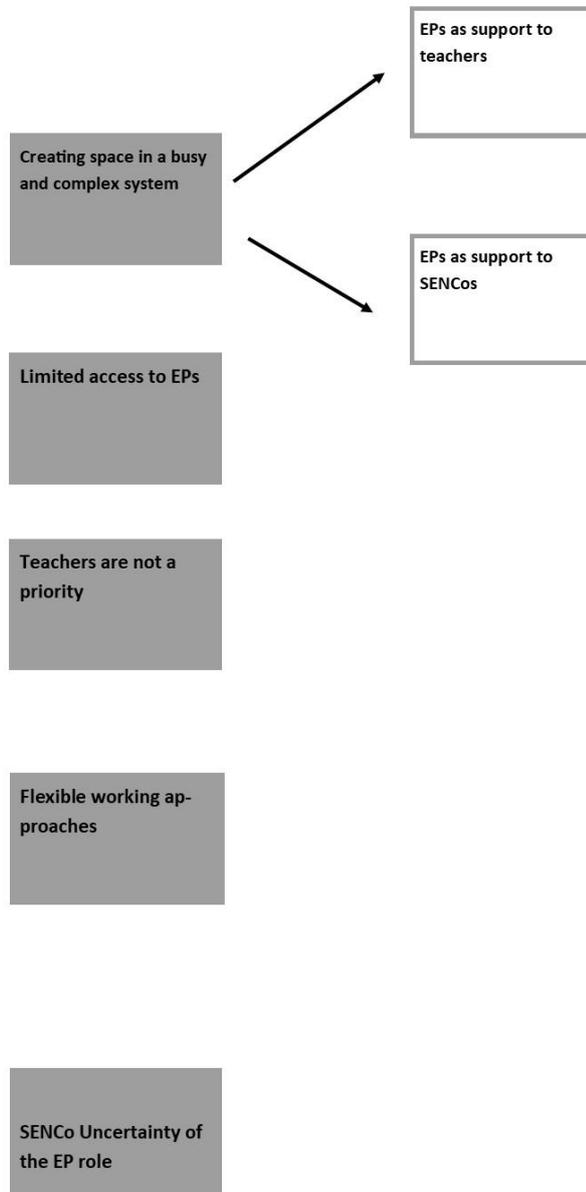
“I guess the opportunities were, for you know for schools, who welcomed you back quite soon. I was quite eager to go back in so that was really good. If they wanted me to go in that worked really well... But it doesn't always work like that, because some schools still don't really want visitors, they're not looking to have visitors.” (Female EP 1, line 81-85).

“...schools have completely sort of shut off doors to visitors... even though they were open themselves sometimes they weren't able to have people in.” (Female TEP 1, line 100-101).

4.4 Phase Two Thematic Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews - SENCo Data

Five overarching themes were identified across the SENCo interviews. The themes identified were: ‘Creating space in a busy and complex system’, ‘Limited access to EPs’, ‘Teachers are not a priority’, ‘Flexible working approaches’ and ‘SENCo Uncertainty of the EP role’. One of the overarching themes yielded corresponding sub themes, which served to add greater detail to the overarching theme. It is acknowledged that the theme ‘Creating a space in a busy and complex system’ was part of an EP quotation but the primary researcher felt that it perfectly summarised what many of the SENCos articulated. A thematic map illustrating the themes and sub themes is presented in the figure below. The complete thematic map including the themes, sub themes and generated codes can be found in the Appendix G2. The themes identified, particularly in comparison with the EP themes, serve to illustrate some of the key findings of the study.

Figure 5 Thematic map illustrating themes and sub themes



4.4.1 Theme One: Creating space in a busy and complex system

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCOs Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?)

Theme One captures the way in which SENCOs felt that EPs worked with school staff, and produced two sub themes that illustrate how SENCOs and teachers discretely benefitted from EP support. The theme ‘Creating space in a busy and complex system’ highlights how SENCOs perceived and valued EPs contribution in reducing teacher and SENCO stress. Despite the uncertainty that SENCOs expressed in phase one about the role that EPs had in reducing stress, this theme demonstrates what SENCOs view as the positive impact that EPs can have when working with themselves and teachers.

4.4.2 Sub-theme: EPs as support to teachers

SENCOs expressed that one of the ways that EPs help to reduce teacher stress was by direct work with teachers, like one-to-one supervision or training. It was generally acknowledged that SENCOs believed that EPs were capable of providing valuable support to teachers that would have a positive impact on their well-being:

“It could be more direct work in terms of supervision or yes drop-in sessions and things like that.” (SENCO 1, line 18-19).

“Staff request support, and so we do rely on our EP to do of a lot of training.”
(SENCO 2, line 100).

“I think there are so many issues erm stressing teachers that your input alone I’m sure would be beneficial.” (SENCO 4, line 40-41).

In addition, SENCOs articulated that EPs helped to reduce teacher stress by providing support to pupils and undertaking assessment work. It was expressed that obtaining a greater

understanding of the origins of a pupil's problems reduces the load on the teacher. SENCOs commented that through EP involvement, teachers were able to use the assessment information to improve their engagement with pupils, and employ recommended strategies. In so doing, the pupils challenges would be better supported, which in turn alleviates an element of pressure on teachers:

“It depends on what you understand by well-being. If well-being is done via the work that EPs do with the children. EPs give us recommendations, we follow them, that child, you know improves behaviour, learning so that obviously has a knock-on effect on the teacher's well-being.” (SENCo 4, line 13-16).

4.4.3 Sub-theme: EPs as support to SENCOs

In addition to SENCOs identifying examples of EPs supporting teachers, SENCOs also recognised how EPs had acted as a support to them. One of the ways that SENCOs reported that they were supported by EPs was by making use of EPs expert advice. SENCOs articulated that they found value and comfort in being able to seek advice from a professional that was highly qualified:

“I look to an EP because they're more highly qualified than I am.” (SENCo 2, line 52-53).

“The primary role of an EP I would say is to give expert advice.” (SENCo 5, line 47-48).

SENCOs also expressed that the conversations they had with EPs helped them to explore different hypotheses and arrive at the correct understanding. The SENCOs acknowledged that there were typically a number of different explanations for a pupil's presentation, and that working with EPs was the optimum way of being confident in their understanding:

“they're able to spot things that I might have overlooked, or teachers might have overlooked, or parents might have overlooked.” (SENCo 2, line 53-54).

“...there's lots of different hypotheses out there, so it's to hypothesise and to come back with ways forward.” (SENCo 1, line 109-110).

SENCoS reported that it was important that they had someone that they could share their thoughts and co-review the next steps with. The notion that the SENCo role could be quite solitary was expressed by a number of participants during the interview. In juxtaposition, SENCoS expressed that they viewed EPs as professionals that they could share ideas with and receive feedback that they valued. It was also expressed that SENCoS use EPs as a resource to support their thinking when they feel stuck:

“... as the SENCo it's quite isolating because you don't get anybody else to sound off ideas against and sometimes that is what you need...” (SENCo 2, line 27-29).

“I think sometimes we're so busy so bogged down with things that we kind of get to a stage where we can think any further, so EPs help us sort of untangle the mess that we sometimes get ourselves into.” (SENCo 4, line 119-121).

4.4.4 Theme Two: Limited access to EPs

(RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?)

Theme Two is the first of the cross-over themes, as it was a theme that was also identified in the EP interviews. It was clear that SENCoS felt that schools had limited access to EPs and that this limited access impacted all areas of EP work, including EPs work with teachers. As with the EPs, SENCoS also mentioned not having enough EP time and the lack of EP availability due to high EP workloads as significant challenges.

“And you know it's money, it's a big thing as well, like you know we buy packages and then we might figure that halfway through the year actually that's not enough.” (SENCo 2, line 21-23).

“So, what do we want? Individual children number one. A training number two. Staff well-being number three. Oh, sure there isn't enough time or money for that so that falls off the list, and I think that's because we don't we don't prioritise our well-being because we think that we can soldier on, because we always do. And that's I think because it's limited (EP time) and we don't put ourselves first.” (SENCo 4, line 64-68).

“I often feel guilty... and I know you've [EPs] got 101 other things that you haven't got time for anyway, but you need to do this as well.” (SENCo 3, line 21-22).

SENcos reported that one of the challenges they experienced working through the pandemic was the limited amount of EP contact that they had. This was another finding that was congruent with the EP interviews. In many cases EPs were not able to physically enter school buildings. SENcos reported that the lack of face-to-face contact limited the amount of pupil assessments that EPs could undertake. In addition to, and compounding all of the above, SENcos recognised that there was an on-going issue regarding the backlog of historical statutory assessments:

“It was difficult, I mean obviously they [EPs] had their own protocols, they weren't allowed to come in...in times like that and it's so it's so stressful and they're [EPs] so busy that you don't have time to think outside the box about alternatives and there was an element of that certainly from me that I probably didn't think enough about alternatives of what they could offer during that time.” (SENCo 1, line 66-67 and line 77-80).

“You had children waiting an extended period of time to receive an assessment.”

(SENCo 2, line 82).

4.4.5 Theme Three: Teachers are not a priority

(RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCos Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?; RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?)

Theme Three illustrates another of the key findings of the study, and is the second cross-over theme identified. SENCos expressed that they had different priorities to EPs. SENCos consistently related that they believed the assessment of pupils to be the primary role of the EP, and typically what they used EP time for. Because SENCos identified pupil assessment as their main priority, and coupled with the previously mentioned limited access to EPs, teachers were viewed as being much further down the list of priorities for the use of EP time. Even SENCos who were amenable to the idea of using EP time to work with teachers expressed that they were unable to do so due to the lack of overall EP time that they had available:

“The primary role, I suppose, is the assessment of children, that's how I view the primary role.” (SENCo 2, line 97-98).

“We're under the cosh to get children assessed and to get the EHCPs and for me that is often what I need from EPs.” (SENCo 1, line 21-22).

“We are saying okay, so if we have limited resources i.e. we only have an EP for nine hours ... how do we want to use that? And we always tend to prioritise children and training because training also has an impact on children, so we always put ourselves last in the queue.” (SENCo 4, line 57-60).

4.4.6 Theme Four: Flexible working approaches

(RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?; RQ4- How has Covid Impacted how EPs Work with Teachers?)

Theme Four illustrates what SENCos felt were the opportunities of working with EPs during the pandemic. Theme Four is another cross-over theme. However, unlike the EPs who also identified some challenges associated with working flexibly, SENCos unanimously viewed working flexibly as a positive. Just like the EPs, SENCos expressed flexibility as both the way in which EPs could be accessed (online/remote working) and the type of work that they commissioned EPs to undertake. SENCos consistently articulated that they had been more inclined to commission staff training on topics relating to mental health and well-being:

“All sorts of training ...Like as an hour set you could log on any time and watch the hour training.” (SEnCo 3, line 69-71).

“We took opportunity to do some additional training, especially in areas that we felt were going to have an impact, with a full return of all children. So that was in terms of emotion coaching and attachment awareness.” (SEnCo 2, line 77-79).

4.4.7 Theme Five: SENCo uncertainty of EP role

(RQ1 What Do EPs and SENCos Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?; RQ3- What Are the Barriers to That Support?)

Theme Five is another theme that serves to illustrate one of the key findings of the study, and is the final cross-over theme. SENCos expressed that they were uncertain about the breadth of the EP role. SENCos articulated that the uncertainty of the breadth of the EP role was also shared by teachers and parents:

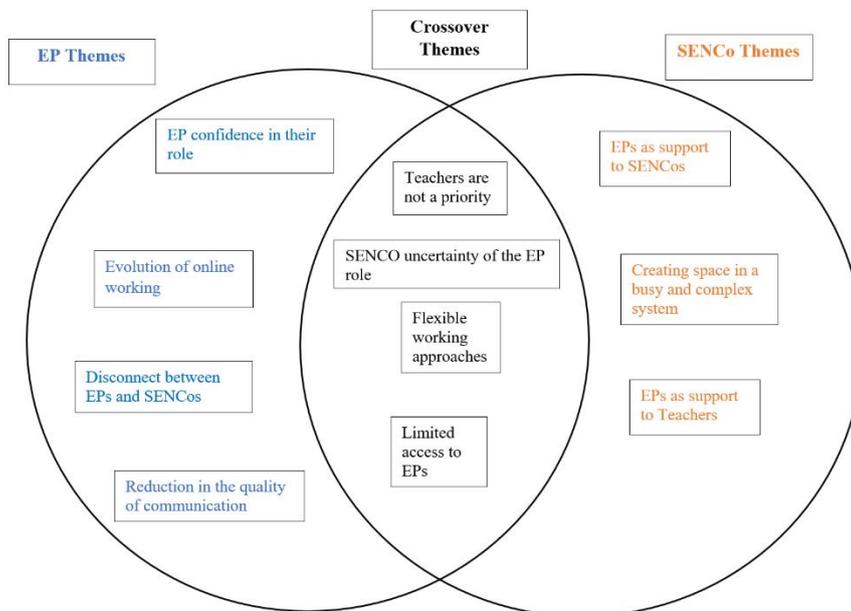
“I think that it needs to be really clear for SENCOs but also for the teachers too that they understand the role of the EP. I think teachers and SENCOs and myself to a degree, possibly don't fully understand what the role of the EP is or could be and that's quite important.” (SENCo 1, line 49-52).

“Parents, know they've got this Educational Psychologist and they might not have even got Dr in front of their name but they're like, oh my God, you know my child, is something really wrong with my child?” (SENCo 2, line 117-119).

“I've always even from the very beginning, when I first started doing the SENCo role I found it hard to be really clear about the range of things that EPs can offer.” (SENCo 1, line 47-49).

4.5 Summary of Phase Two

Figure 6 EP, SENCO and Cross-over Themes



The figure above illustrates the EP, SENCO and cross-over themes. A total of eleven themes and sub-themes were identified across the EP and SENCO interviews. The EP theme ‘The

disconnect between EPs and SENCOs' and the crossover theme 'SENCO uncertainty of the EP role', provide a deeper insight as to why EPs and SENCOs had contrasting views of the EP role in reducing teacher stress, as identified in phase one.

Both the EP and SENCO interviews provided data that confirmed that EPs and SENCOs not only had a different understanding of the EP role, but that EPs and SENCOs had different priorities for EP work. Both participant groups identified that the assessment of pupils was routinely prioritised over direct support for teachers. In addition, it was clear that EPs and SENCOs both believed the dearth of available EP time and the general limited access to EPs impacted the priority of work and type the of work that SENCOs commissioned.

In relation to the impact of covid, both EPs and SENCOs identified greater flexibility as a positive aspect. The ability to work remotely and the commissioning of staff training relating to mental health and well-being were mentioned as positive highlights. However, limited access to EPs and a reduction in the quality of communication were identified as the negative developments.

Despite SENCOs clearly expressing a lack of knowledge about the breadth of the EP role, they did identify valuable examples of how EPs had supported to reduce both SENCO and teacher stress.

5.0 Discussion

The following chapter discusses each of the study's research questions in relation to the findings and previous literature whilst considering the findings wider implications. The results are also discussed in relation to how they fit within the bioecological theoretical framework that was set out in the Method chapter. Finally, this chapter reflects on the strengths and limitations of the study, as well as considering implications for future practice.

5.1 RQ1- What Do EPs and SENCOs Think About the Role That EPs Have in Supporting Teachers to Manage Stress?

Building on the literature reviewed in the previous chapters, phase one of the present study found further evidence to support the view that teachers are still experiencing a high level of stress. In addition, phase one of the study found evidence to suggest that, alongside the impact of Covid-19, high workload was the primary source of teacher stress. It is important to note that, unlike previous studies that have explored teacher stress through the self-reporting of teachers (Allen et al., 2020; McCarthy, 2019; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Sharrocks, 2014), the present study provides confirmatory evidence of both the high level of teacher stress and the reasons behind this stress, as observed by two independent professional roles. This distinction is important as it demonstrates that it is not only teachers themselves that believe that they are overly stressed due to their workload, but that there are other professionals within the education system who share that same view.

To holistically appraise the data in response to RQ1, it is first important to consider the distinct understandings of the EP role that EPs and SENCOs have. One of the main findings of phase one of the study indicated that EPs were very clear that they had a role to play in supporting teachers to manage stress, whereas SENCOs were comparatively less sure. Phase

two then expanded on this, showing that the root of the stark divergence of opinion was in the different understanding of the EP role that the two groups held.

In phase two of the study, both the EP and the SENCo data yielded themes highlighting that SENCos had some uncertainty as to the breadth of the EP role. This finding is important as it confirms that both EPs, and SENCos themselves, believe that SENCos do not fully understand the scope of the EP role. If we accept that SENCos have a narrower understanding of the scope of the EP role, it is therefore logical to assume that they would be more likely to use EP time in a limited way.

The contrast between the two groups' understanding of the EP role, and by extension the understanding of the role that EPs can play in reducing teacher stress, can be explored by reflecting on multiple levels of the PPCT model. EPs, as the individual at the centre of the model, expressed clearly in phase one and two that they believed they had a role in reducing teacher stress. This view was confirmed almost unanimously in phase one, with 98% of EP participants indicating that they had a role in reducing teacher stress. The sub theme 'EP confidence in their role', yielded in phase two, further substantiated the EPs' view of a broad interpretation of their role.

Within the Microsystem of the PPCT model are schools, SENCos and parents. Phase one of the study evidenced that SENCos were, at best, uncertain about the role that EPs could play in reducing teacher stress. Interestingly, in phase two it was intimated that parents also shared an uncertainty about the EP role.

The data yielded in phase two also indicated that teachers may also share this lack of understanding of the EP role, and the potential benefits of working with an EP to reduce stress:

“I know in my experience... is that you know, I was a teacher (I) live with a teacher and I get how things are at the moment. ... I also know what I thought when I was a teacher. I might have thought, when I was a teacher you guys coming in don't really know what it's like. And I'm not sure before I did this as a job, how well I would have thought EPs could support in well-being because I didn't understand the role.”

(Female TEP 2, line 24-30).

“I mean something that I'm thinking about, but I don't know how to word it really is about whether people see the benefit of it. Like whether teachers, individual teachers that are asked to give up that time, whether they feel like they actually get something out of it and I'm thinking about my sort of my own experience as a teacher when I did work with an EP at one point where I didn't necessarily understand what had happened, or why it had happened...” (Female TEP 1, line 62-67).

So, within the Microsystem, all of the previously identified groups (SENCos, teachers, parents) had a limited understanding of the EP role, which in turn holds implications for the interactions that take place at the Meso-Systemic level. The findings support the view that the EP role is well understood within the profession of Educational Psychology, but is concerningly less understood by the professionals and clients that EPs most frequently interact with. The finding that people outside the profession of Educational Psychology have limited knowledge of the EP role is congruent with the current literature (Andrews, 2017; Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Palikara et al., 2019). If SENCos as the primary commissioners of EP work, are not cognisant of the breadth of the EP role, then it makes it less likely that EP time would be used with the specific purpose of reducing teacher stress. This finding helps us to further understand how the dearth of understanding at the Micro-systemic level impacts how EPs are viewed, and subsequently what type of work goes on to be commissioned.

Despite the challenges relating to the lack of understanding of the EP role, it is important to note that in phase one of the study 32% of the SENCo participants indicated that they felt that EPs did have a role to play in reducing teacher stress. Further still, in phase two of the study SENCos identified, through the sub themes ‘EPs as support to SENCos’ and ‘EPs as support to teachers’, some of the ways that EPs currently work to reduce both SENCo and teacher stress. However, the fact that 68% of SENCos were either unsure, or felt that EPs did not have a role to play in reducing teacher stress, lays foundation to the argument that more could be done to support SENCos understanding of the EP role.

At the Meso-systemic level, it could be argued that EPs and EPSs could do more to increase SENCos’ understanding through the various direct interactions that they have with SENCos, such as planning meetings and LA-wide SENCo training. There is also an argument that more could be done at the Exo-systemic level. Local Authorities and the DfE could play a greater role in upskilling SENCo knowledge through initial/refresher SENCo training, and the publication and circulation of literature about the skill set and potential application of EPs.

It is evident that EPs can contribute to reducing teacher stress, having been recognised by both EPs and SENCos in each phase of the study. However, the present study revealed that there is a disconnect between EPs and SENCos over the understanding of the EP role. In general, the SENCo understanding of the EP role led to SENCos being uncertain about the role that EPs had in reducing teacher stress. Unsurprisingly, EPs knowledge of their role led to them being confident in their assertion that they could contribute to reducing teacher stress.

5.2 RQ2- What Does That Support Look Like?

Phases one and two of the study yielded data that provided an insight into the type of support that EPs offered that contributed to reducing teacher stress. Consultations (33%), followed by

1:1/group supervision (26%) and then staff training (24%) were cited as the most frequent types of direct work that EPs had undertaken with teachers. Interestingly, the divergence came in the view of the type of work that SENCOs and EPs believed teachers found to be most helpful in reducing their stress. 46.97% of SENCOs felt that consultations or staff training had been the most helpful type of EP work in reducing teacher stress. Conversely, 60% of EPs believed that teachers felt that 1:1 and group supervision had been the most useful type of work in reducing stress. Without the direct contribution and opinion of teachers, it is difficult to objectively conclude what form of EP support teachers found to be the most useful in supporting them to manage or reduce their stress. However, it is sensible to postulate that if SENCOs believe that consultations and staff training are the most efficacious ways of using EP time to reduce teacher stress, then those would be the types of work that SENCOs would more readily commission. This highlights the need for there to be discussion between EPs and SENCOs on the optimum way of using EP time to reduce teacher stress.

As evidenced by the crossover theme 'Teachers are not a priority', the different understanding of the EP role has resulted in SENCOs and EPs having different work priorities. It is sensible to assert that two different work priorities would result in two different appraisal criteria. The different appraisal criteria, provides a reason for why SENCOs and EPs have different views about the type of work undertaken that teachers find to be the most helpful in reducing stress.

In addition to the previous point, SENCOs and EPs have different and distinct training, knowledge and every day work experiences. The combination of these factors results in EPs and SENCOs working from distinct and different frames of reference. For example, an EP with knowledge of a wide variety of systemic practice could more easily see how individual or group work with teachers would have a positive impact on the wider school community, whereas a SENCO may not. A SENCO that is continually working in a 'busy and complex

system' may be more inclined to see the benefits of the type of EP work that is more obviously systemic, like staff training, and work that sits within the 'traditional' view of EP work, like consultations for the purposes of pupil assessment. It is likely that a confluence of the aforementioned factors explain why EPs and SENCOs have different views on the type of work that they feel is the most useful for reducing teacher stress.

Interestingly in phase two of the study, EPs identified that consultations were a beneficial way of reducing teacher stress. EPs mentioned that helping a teacher to better understand the needs of a pupil, and consequently supporting teachers to make modifications and better relate to pupils, was a noteworthy way of reducing teacher stress. This idea of helping teachers to better understand the needs of their pupils as a way of reducing stress was echoed by SENCOs.

Alongside recognising approaches like group and 1:1 supervision, EPs were keen to express the importance of working systemically as a way of supporting teachers to manage stress. EPs expressed that using their expertise to create thinking and reflection spaces for teachers was an important part of helping to reduce stress. In phase two of the study, SENCOs also recognised the benefit of EPs holding 1:1 and group supervision sessions with teachers. Furthermore, SENCOs recognised that EPs supported them to manage stress simply by being a professional within the education system that they could share their thoughts with and receive expert advice from. SENCOs expressed that EPs were able to help them to untangle their thoughts when they felt stuck or lost.

Reflecting on Kyriacou and Sutcliffe's (1978) model of stress, both EPs and SENCOs gave responses that supported the view that EPs are able to support teachers at appraisal and coping mechanism stage. The modes of EP support identified (consultations, training, group/1:1 supervision) are types of EP input that are equally able to support teacher's

appraisal and coping mechanism. For example, when an EP is conducting a piece of training teachers could be given new information about SEN which furthers their understanding and thus develops their ability to appropriately appraise pupil behaviour. In addition, the same training could provide teachers with practical ways of better managing behaviour which would support the development of teachers' coping mechanisms. The findings of the present study illustrate that EPs are capable of making a valuable contribution when supporting teachers to better appraise potential stressors and manage stress via the development of additional coping strategies.

While consultations, 1:1/group supervision and staff training were cited as the most prevalent types of work that EPs had undertaken, it is interesting to reflect on the different hierarchy of importance that SENCOs and EPs put on the work that they believed most reduced teacher stress. It is once again important to consider the two groups' different understanding of the EP role but this RQ has also highlighted the role of the different appraisal frameworks that SENCOs and EPs work from.

5.3 RQ3- What are the Barriers to That Support?

It is impossible to accurately answer RQ3 without reflecting on the facts unearthed when answering RQ1. This previous RQ highlighted that one of the biggest barriers that teachers have to accessing EP support is the oversimplification and misunderstanding of the EP role. If SENCOs are not fully aware that EPs are capable of undertaking work intended to reduce teacher stress, then they are unlikely to commission EP work to that effect. This finding illustrated the work that needs to be done at the Meso-systemic and Exo-systemic levels to increase knowledge of both the EP role and the types of work that EPs are able to undertake.

Lack of knowledge of the EP role notwithstanding, there are other factors to consider when presenting some of the barriers that prevent EPs from doing work that supports teachers to

manage work related stress. In phase one of the study, 55.36% of EPs and 61.22% of SENCOs reported that there were no clearly defined routes for teachers to receive direct support from EPs. Again, this is perhaps unsurprising given that there is an acknowledged discrepancy in the understanding of both the EP role and the type of work that EPs are able to undertake.

Phase two of the study unearthed two crossover themes that illustrated significant barriers impeding EPs from undertaking direct work with teachers that aimed to reduce or manage stress. The first of the aforementioned themes was 'Limited EP access to EPs'. As with the Andrews (2017) and Bennet and Monson (2011) studies, in the present study both EPs and SENCOs mentioned the lack of EP time as a challenge. SENCOs in particular mentioned that they did not feel that they had adequate EP time available in order to support them to meet the needs of their respective schools:

“You know you can afford to buy a certain number of days or whatever, but and those have to be prioritised.” (SENCo 1, line 37-38).

“Preventing EPs from working with teachers, I think, mainly is money.” (SENCo 4, line 55-56).

Given this time restraint, the substantial number of England's Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) operating under a traded or partially traded model (Lee & Woods, 2017) paints a concerning picture, as it indicates that the level of EP support that LAs or individual schools are able to obtain is dependent on their financial capacity. This opens the door for vast discrepancy in individual school's access to EP support, that is at least partially dependent on factors outside of the needs of their pupils, teachers or whole school needs. Simply put, it denotes that richer schools and richer LAs are able to buy in more EP time, while poorer schools and poorer LAs are not. This is an important reflection, as it indicates

the potential for a vast amount of unmet pupil, teacher and school need that is solely a reflection of the LA or school financial capacity.

When reflecting on the limited access to EPs, it is important also to consider the paucity of EPs currently practicing in England. There are around 24,413 schools in England¹³ and an estimated 4,546 practicing EPs, not all of whom work in the public sector (DfE, 2019). Additionally, it should be noted that the geographical spread of EPs is not equal, as some parts of the country (particularly London and the Southeast) have a higher number of EPs to access than others. This lack of EPs in relation to the number of schools has meant that in some locations, there is a greater level of need than there are EPs available to meet that need (DfE, 2019).

“You know, we think that'd be really useful for us and then it's very difficult sometimes to get them in because they're you know, they're very thinly spread among you know multiple schools,” (SENCo 2, line 25-26).

“Then also obviously the SENCos are very much aware of time constraints around EP capacity, so they just you know, they may just feel that there is no way that she's going to be able to help us with that because she's just don't have the time.” (Female EP 1, line 15-18).

The amount of work generated due to unmet needs, and the lack of EP capacity to undertake that work, was a thread that was picked up by both EPs and SENCos during phase two of the present study. In particular, the prevalence of statutory assessments was cited as a driving factor in the commissioning of EP work. Both EPs and SENCos articulated that an increase in

¹³ www.besa.org.uk

the need for statutory assessments has meant that EPs had less time available to carry out work that was not linked to assessment:

“We're under the cosh to get children assessed and to get the EHCPs and for me that is often what I need from EPs.” (SENCo 1, line 21-22).

“And then I think there was also the increasing statutory work during lockdown. There's little time to do anything else.” (Female EP 1, line 68-69).

“Speaking to other EPs as well I'll say that most of the time schoolwork within my service is all based on like casework, thinking about you know, how do we get a child an EHCP.” (Male EP 1, line 68-70).

The limited access that schools have to EPs also has a direct relationship to another significant barrier and crossover theme ‘Teachers are not a priority’. The combination of the limited EP time that schools acquire, the general paucity of EPs, and the demand for statutory assessments has meant that pupil assessment is prioritised over all other types of work. As a result, both EPs and SENCos expressed that there was a disconnect in the priorities that EPs and SENCos have:

“The primary role, I suppose, is the assessment of children that's how I view the primary role.” (SENCo 2, line 97-98).

It could be reasonably argued that pupils, and indeed pupil assessment, should be a priority area of work for EPs, and that this in and of itself should not be a point of contention.

However, in the present study EPs and SENCos recognised not only the types of work, but also the value of EPs undertaking work that reduced teacher stress. Since it is recognised that both work focusing on pupils and teachers is beneficial, the current lack of prioritising of teacher focused work is a barrier.

The previous literature and the findings of the present study assert that teachers are overly stressed due to their workload, and that EPs can play an important role in supporting them. It is clear that SENCo uncertainty of the EP role, the limited access to EPs, high statutory assessment demand, the paucity of EPs, and the lack of teacher prioritisation, all combine to form significant barriers that impede EPs working with teachers. It is less clear how the nature of EP work with teachers would develop if some or all of the aforementioned barriers were challenged or worked through. It is likely, as there is still a significant need to support teachers with work related stress, that challenging the current barriers would lead to a more holistic use of EP time.

5.4 RQ4- How has Covid impacted how EPs work with teachers?

Both phases of the study provided important information about the impact of Covid-19 in relation to teacher stress and the nature of EP work with teachers. Phase one of the study presented strong evidence that teachers have been overly stressed, and that the Covid-19 pandemic had been a significant factor in the increase of teacher stress levels. Both EPs and SENCos reported that teachers went from being moderately stressed the year before the pandemic, to very stressed during the pandemic. This is a finding that is congruent with the other contemporary literature on teacher stress and the pandemic (Allen et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020).

In phase one of the study, 62.5% of EPs and 44.9% of SENCos reported that the nature of EP work with teachers had changed because of the pandemic. EPs and SENCos had contrasting views about whether teachers had more or less access to EPs as a result of the Covid-19 restrictions. EPs gave a variety of responses, whereas the majority of SENCos reported that teachers had less access to EPs. It is important to note that access to EPs was not specifically defined as either face to face or virtual, so there is a possibility that individual

interpretation of the term 'access' played a part in the discrepancy of opinion between the two groups. EPs and SENCOs did align on the view that virtual work had increased, and this was explored further in the second phase of the study.

Flexible working approaches was a crossover theme that was identified in phase two of the study. EPs and SENCOs recognised that one of the positive impacts of Covid had been the ability to work more flexibly. Flexibility was defined as both an increase in the ability to work virtually, and a change in the type of work that EPs were commissioned to undertake.

The increase in virtual work that was signalled by EPs and SENCOs in phase one was then explained by the qualitative data captured in phase two. EPs and SENCOs reported that virtual working had made it easier to arrange and facilitate meetings and training. As society moves to the next phase of living with Covid-19, it will be important to consider which elements of these flexible working approaches EPs and SENCOs will continue to develop, and which parts will be dropped entirely:

“I think it has opened people's eyes to online working and being a bit more flexible and how we approach things.” (Female TEP 1, line 107-108)

“We also could engage really easily with pre-recorded training sessions which our EP did for us.” (SENCo 2, line 76-77).

It was also recognised by both EPs and SENCOs that the pandemic has led to the commissioning of a greater variety of EP work. It is in the area of commissioning that perhaps there is an opportunity for EPs to continue the diversification of their work. During the pandemic, SENCOs had been more amenable to using EP time to work with teachers, commissioning work like whole school training on mental health and well-being. It is acknowledged that the first year of the pandemic was a very specific context, which meant that it was more difficult for schools to use EP time for pupil assessment. However, it is

possible that the diversification of the EP work that was undertaken during the first year of the pandemic aided SENCOs to see the value in using EPs to support schools in areas outside of pupil assessment:

“Two of my schools commissioned pieces of work around questionnaires that I designed to assess and explore teacher and student well-being which would never have happened outside the context of the pandemic.” (Male EP 1, line 68-70).

EPs and SENCOs also identified a number of challenges as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Both groups recognised that the Covid-19 restrictions impacted the amount of face-to-face contact that EPs could have in schools. Schools, LAs and EPSs all had different policies in relation to what were deemed to be safe working practices. These different policies meant that schools had unequal access to EPs, as some were permitted to undertake face to face work, and some were not:

“It was difficult, I mean obviously they had their own protocols, they weren't allowed to come in.” (SENCO 1, line 66-67).

“Because some schools still don't really want visitors, they're not looking to have visitors.” (Female EP 1, line 84-85).

Reviewing the data obtained in both phases of the study provides evidence that the restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the type of work that EPs undertook with teachers. While the restrictions meant that there was a reduction in the amount of face-to-face contact, working approaches developed to become more flexible. The greater flexibility led to a wider variety of EP work being commissioned.

5.5 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The present study was able to recruit 105 participants, which included 49 SENCOs and 56 EPs. The participants were representative of 57 LAs throughout England, Scotland and Wales. The number and geographical spread of the participants enabled the present study to provide a more representative snapshot of EP and SENCO views when compared to previous studies. In addition, the number of participants recruited for the present study significantly exceeds that of previous studies that sought to explore the EP and SENCO relationship (Andrews, 2017; Ashton & Roberts, 2006).

The present study provides some evidence to suggest that teachers are overly stressed due to their high workload, and that the Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated teachers' stress levels. Unlike previous studies that had unearthed this finding through exploring the views of teachers (Allen et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020), the present study captured this evidence from other professionals within the education system. In so doing, the data captured in the present study adds some weight to the argument that teachers' workload is too high.

In a time of changing working practices as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the present study provides an insight into how the EP and SENCO work dynamic has developed. The study presents empirical evidence of both the opportunities and the limitations of this development of working practices. In addition, it is one of the few studies conducted that specifically explores the relationship between EPs and SENCOs, therefore enhancing the depth of the literature in this area.

Interestingly, one of the limitations of the present study is linked to one of the study's strengths. The large geographical spread of participants means that the study cannot make confident assertions about particular LAs. It is also acknowledged that the majority of the

participants of the present study worked in England. Therefore, the findings of this study are significantly more representative of the views held in England than in other parts of the country.

The present study cannot confidently assert that the views obtained provide a definitive representation of SENCo and EP views, rather that the views obtained reflect a snapshot of views held in a variety of areas. In contrast, the primary researcher acknowledges that the majority of the participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews worked in London LAs. Having the majority of the participants in phase two working in one geographical area does not devalue the findings of the qualitative data, but it is accepted that the views expressed may not be representative of other parts of the country.

While terms like ‘overly stressed’ and ‘direct work’ were determined and explained in previous chapters, it is acknowledged that the participants of the study did not have access to the primary researcher’s definitions. This meant that participants brought their own interpretations to the terms. As a result, the primary researcher cannot confidently assert that the participants interpretation of the terms were the same as the definitions outlined in the present study.

Limitations specifically regarding the survey should also be noted. The findings of the survey relied upon self-report data. Participants were asked to provide their own subjective view in responses to items presented in the survey. As a consequence, the data obtained during phase one of the study has limited objectivity (Robins et al., 2009). While the research did not set out to achieve complete objectivity, it is an important limitation to consider in regard to how the data should be interpreted.

5.6 Future Research

The present study demonstrates the importance of the EP/SENCo relationship and how the relationship has implications for the way that EP time is used. To date, very little research has been undertaken that explores the EP/SENCo dynamic. As such, further research looking into the EP/SENCo relationship would be valuable, as it would contribute additional knowledge to what is currently a limited evidence base.

Research into this relationship with an experimental design would be particularly valuable. One of the significant barriers raised by the present study was the lack of SENCo knowledge of the EP role. Therefore, studies that seek to upskill SENCo knowledge of the EP role and assess the impact of this input on the commissioning of EP work would significantly enhance the current literature.

The present study focused on exploring the factors that impacted how EPs currently and could further support teachers with work related stress, and it did that by examining the relationship between SENCos and EPs. However, it would be beneficial for future research to explicitly focus and examine the relationship between EPs and teachers. It would be useful to explore teachers' experiences of and reflections on working with EPs, and which types of EP involvement that teachers felt was most helpful.

The present research included participants from a variety of LA contexts, and from across a variety of regions throughout the UK. It would be beneficial to conduct further research with a similar design to the present study, but with participants who work exclusively in one region or LA. In doing so, the research would be capable of asserting confident conclusions about the views and perspectives of EPs and SENCos in that particular region or LA. A replication of this small-scale study across other regions would serve to deepen our understanding of how context affects findings.

5.7 Implications for EP and SENCo Practice

The present study highlights a number of implications that are relevant to both EP and SENCo practice. One of the key findings of the study was that education professionals, and in particular SENCos, were not fully aware of the breadth of the EP role. It is evident that this narrow interpretation of the EP role has been an important factor in the type of work that EPs are commissioned to undertake. If the skills of EPs are to be more fully utilised than they are currently, a vital component of that will be the upskilling of SENCos. As SENCos are typically the primary commissioners of EP work, it is imperative that they have a full understanding of the EP role in order to for them to make better use of the support that EPs can offer.

One of the ways that the upskilling of SENCos' could be achieved is through the refinement of the initial SENCo training. Staggeringly, nowhere in the DfE's 2014 learning outcomes for the national award for SEN Co-ordination were EPs specifically mentioned. It is a glaring omission that knowledge of one of the key professionals who are able to support schools to manage their SEN need is not an important component of SENCo training. If SENCos are not taught about the importance of the EP role at the initial training stage, how can they reasonably be expected to make the best use of EP time? As evidenced by the present study, if SENCos are unsure about the EP role, this can contribute to a limited and narrow use of EP time and expertise. Therefore, it is important that knowledge of the EP role is included as part of the initial SENCo training.

The aforementioned points notwithstanding, there is also a case to be made that EPs, and the profession of Educational Psychology, need to do more to promote the breadth of their skills and expertise. Given the findings EPs cannot engage with SENCos on the assumption that SENCos are equipped with the full knowledge of the EP role. This means that individual

EPs need to establish a base level of knowledge with SENCOs, in order for the EP/SENCO relationship to be built on a foundation of a shared understanding of the EP role.

In addition, it is important that the profession of Educational Psychology does more to promote a better understanding of the EP role. It can do this at the individual level, as set out above, but there is also room for the profession as a whole to promote the understanding of the EP role at the systemic level. For example, EPs can promote their role at the systemic level by engaging in local and national SENCO forums, playing an active role in SENCO training courses, and ensuring the wider publication and promotion of EP related literature.

As touched upon previously, there is also a need for UK government literature to reflect the breadth of the EP role more accurately. As outlined in the introduction of the present study, much of the government literature to date espouses a very narrow perception of the EP role, and is disproportionately weighted towards pupil assessment (DFE, 2015; DFE, 2019). As SENCOs are not explicitly taught about EPs during their initial training, government literature becomes an even more important source of information about the EP role. If SENCOs and other education professionals are to have a holistic understanding of the EP role, then the government literature needs to be more reflective of the type of support that EPs can offer.

The present study unearthed that the participants felt that the limited access that schools had to EPs was a significant barrier to the more holistic utilisation of EPs in schools. This limited access is driven by several factors. One of the primary factors, as confirmed by government literature, is the paucity of EPs working in the UK (DfE, 2019). If schools are going to achieve greater access to EPs, then it will be important for the government to facilitate policies that ensure that significantly more EPs are being trained than there are currently. One of the ways this could be achieved is by the government providing more funded training placements on DEdPsy courses.

As suggested by the findings of the present study, excessive teacher stress continues to be an evident challenge. In line with the literature (Allen et al., 2020; McCarthy, 2019; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Sharrocks, 2014), teacher stress levels appear to have increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In light of this, it would be sensible to consider how teacher workload, and subsequently teacher stress, could be reduced. This could be achieved by conducting a national review of the expectation and everyday practices of teachers, with the view of reducing unnecessary workload.

5.8 Conclusion

Through an exploration into the factors that impact how EPs support teachers with work related stress, the present study provides a valuable insight into the value and importance of the EP and SENCo relationship, and how that relationship influences the work that EPs undertake with teachers. The study suggests that teachers are still operating under elevated levels of stress, and that high workload is still the primary source of teacher work related stress. Despite significant barriers, it is evident from the findings presented here that EPs do have a role to play in supporting teachers, and the systems around teachers, to reduce and manage their stress.

The study also highlights the importance of a comprehensive understanding of the EP role. The lack of understanding of the EP role was highlighted as one of the key barriers preventing EPs from undertaking activities that would support teachers to manage their work related stress. If EPs are to have a greater role in supporting teachers, then more needs to be done to make professionals fully aware of the breadth of the EP role.

The limited access that schools currently have to EPs lays foundation to the argument that more needs to be done to ensure a significant number of new EPs are encouraged and trained to join the current workforce. The present paucity of EPs is a significant barrier to teachers

obtaining direct access to EP support. That being said, as highlighted by the present study, EPs *are* presently able to provide teachers with systemic support through LA/ whole school training, and by supporting the people around teachers: the SENCOs, pupils and parents.

The evolution of online working has created unique opportunities for schools and EPs to work more creatively and flexibly. This has resulted in a greater variety of EP work being commissioned and, in at least one case, has given EPs' access to previously hard to reach groups. This new working dynamic presents an opportunity for EPs to encourage SENCOs to continue to use EP time creatively, despite the fact that the harshest Covid-19 restrictions have now been removed.

The present study argues that EPs should be afforded a greater role in supporting teachers. However, while it is evident that EPs could be doing more to support teachers to manage work related stress, to focus solely on the EP contribution and ignore the wider context would be to treat the symptom and not the root cause of the problem. Given that high workload of teachers was cited as the primary source of their stress, while EPs can play a supporting role, equal consideration needs to be given to the systems and processes that are causing teachers stress in the first place. As long as the solution to managing stress as a result of a high workload continues to largely fall to teachers, as opposed to tackling the high workload itself, talented teachers are likely to continue to leave the profession irrespective of the support that is put in place. The present study argues that alongside the greater involvement of EPs, a wider evaluation and consideration of schools' expectations of teachers should be undertaken, with the view to reducing teacher workload and consequently reducing teacher stress.

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Appendix A: Association of Educational Psychologists their 9th July 2021 Virtual Newsletter



AEP Mail <enquiries@aep.org.uk>
09/07/2021 17:19



To: ahmarferguson@hotmail.com



**Weekly update - current affairs, news from the
profession & the association
9 July 2021**

[Visit the AEP website](#)

[View EP Job Vacancies here](#)

[View external courses & conferences here](#)

TEP member research : Working with teachers to reduce stress

*I am just about to finish my second year of study at the IOE and soon to be a Year 3 TEP. **The main purpose of the research is to explore how EPs and SENCos view EP input in managing work-related teacher stress in primary schools. I am also interested in exploring how the pandemic has impacted on the work that EPs do to support teachers.***

I've got two stages of data collection, the first being a questionnaire that I am sending out to EPs and SENCos, so that I can compare and contrast the responses. I am aiming to recruit SENCos, current Year 2/3 TEPs and qualified EPs.

The questionnaire takes a couple of minutes to complete and I am aiming to recruit as many EPs (and SENCos) as possible. I would be very grateful if you could help by completing the questionnaire, linked below & share within your networks.

[Take the questionnaire here](#)

Appendix B: List of Local Authorities Represented in the Study

Local Authority	Number of Participants
Islington	2
West Lothian	1
Derby	1
Walsall	2
Isle of Wight	1
Cornwall	1
South Ayrshire	1
Warwickshire	2
Leicestershire	2
Gloucestershire	2
Thurrock	1
Northamptonshire	2
Hampshire	3
Central Bedfordshire	1
Oxfordshire	1
Croydon	3
Leeds	1
Bromley	1
Richmond	6
Redcar and Cleveland	1

Medway	3
Angus	1
Shropshire	1
Merseyside	1
Birmingham City	2
Portsmouth	1
Torfaen	1
Bath and Northeast Somerset	2
Tower Hamlets	1
Bristol	1
Caerphilly	1
Bracknell Forest	1
Hertfordshire	3
Wolverhampton	2
Dorset	2
Sandwell	1
Haringey	1
West Sussex	1
Stockton on Tees	3
Redbridge	1
Waltham Forest	8
Telford and Wrekin	1
Nottingham City	1
Milton Keynes	1

Dudley	1
Calderdale	2
Stoke on Trent	1
Reading	1
Newham	1
Barking and Dagenham	1
Kent	4
Cheshire West and Chester	1
Coventry	1
Hackney	2
Surrey	2
Barnet	3
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	1

Appendix C: Final Survey Items

18) I am a...

SENCO/QUALIFIED EP/YEAR 2 TEP/YEAR 3 TEP

19) Please state the local authority that you work in.

....

20) I have been in my current role for

A YEAR OR LESS/2 YEARS/ 3 YEARS/4 YEARS/5 YEARS/ 6 YEARS OR MORE

21) Do you feel that teachers you have worked with have been overly stressed?

YES/NO/NOT Sure

22) What do you think is the primary source of their stress?

.....

23) Do you feel their stress levels have increased or decreased during the pandemic?

INCREASED/DECREASED/STAYED THE SAME

24) How stressed do you think teachers were BEFORE the pandemic?

NOT AT ALL/ SLIGHTLY STRESSED/ Moderately stressed/ VERY STRESSED

25) How stressed do you think teachers have been DURING the pandemic?

NOT AT ALL/ SLIGHTLY STRESSED/ Moderately stressed/ VERY STRESSED

26) Are there clearly defined routes for teachers to receive direct support from EPs?

YES/NO/NOT SURE

27) Do you feel that EPs have a role to play in reducing teacher stress?

YES/NO/NOT SURE

28) What type of direct work have EPs/you done with teachers in the past year?

- **Consultations**
- **Staff training**
- **Group supervision/support sessions**
- **1:1 supervision/support sessions**
- **Informal therapeutic conversations**
- **Other**

29) What type of work would you say that teachers have found to be the most helpful in reducing stress?

- **Consultation**
- **Staff training**
- **Group supervision/support sessions**
- **1:1 supervision/support sessions**
- **Informal therapeutic sessions**
- **Other**

30) Are there any types of work that you'd have liked (EPs) to do with teachers that were not commissioned?

YES/NO

31) If you answered YES, what type of work would you have to have been commissioned?

....

32) Has the nature of EP work with teachers changed as a result of the pandemic?

YES/NO/NOT Sure

33) Has the nature of EP work with teachers changed as a result of the pandemic?

YES/NO/NOT SURE

34) If you feel that the nature of EP work with teachers has changed as a result of the pandemic please briefly state how

....

35) As a result of the pandemic do you think that teachers have more or less access to EPs?

MORE/LESS/THE SAME/ NOT SURE

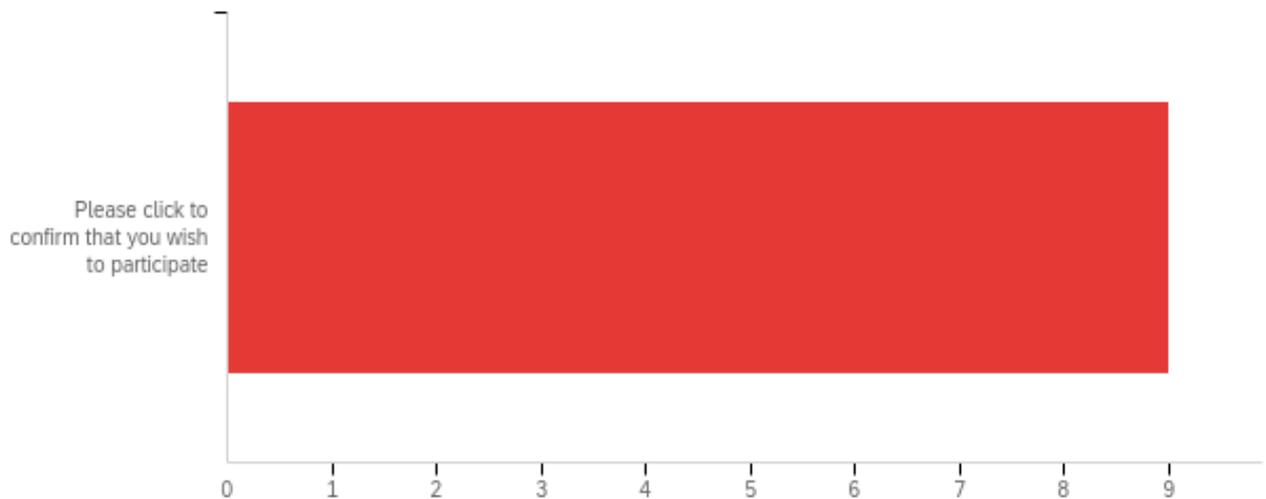
Appendix D: Survey Pilot Data

Pilot Data

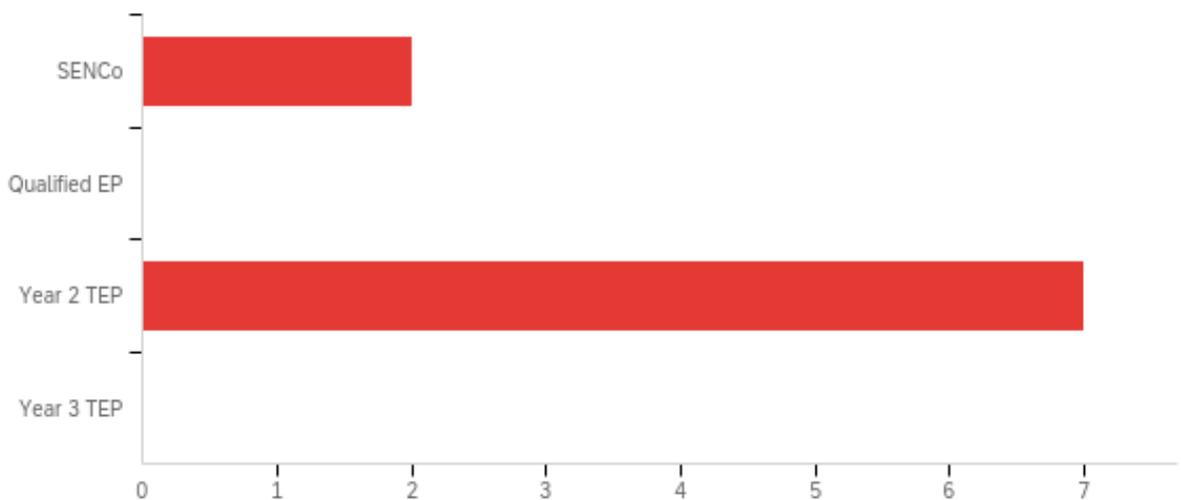
Understanding How Educational Psychologists (EPs) Support Primary School Teachers- Pilot

August 3rd 2021, 7:16 am MDT

Q1 - I have read the information above and fully understand that my participation is voluntary, the information I provide is confidential, and that I am free to withdraw my data at any time.



Q2 - I am a...



#	Answer	%	Count
1	SENCo	22.22%	2
2	Qualified EP	0.00%	0
3	Year 2 TEP	77.78%	7
4	Year 3 TEP	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	9

Q3 - Please state the name of the Local Authority that you work in

Please state the name of the Local Authority that you work in

Waltham Forest

Waltham Forest

Richmond and Kingston

Barking and Dagenham

Islington EPS

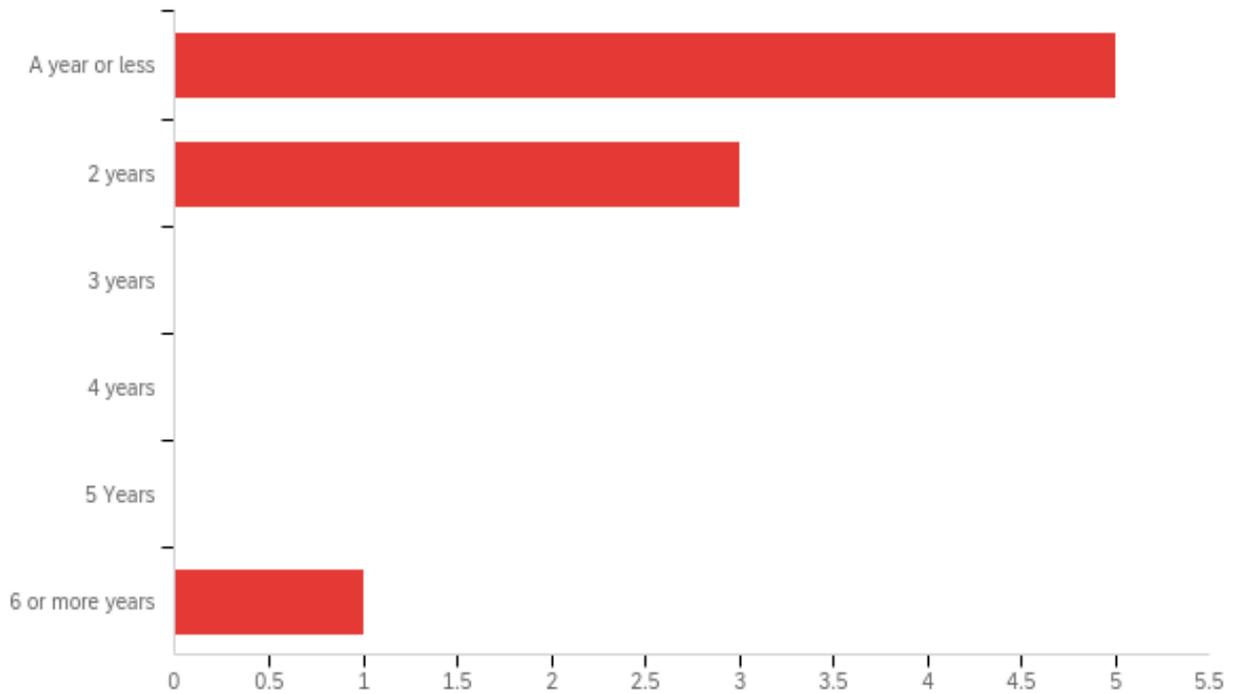
Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea

RBWM

Hertfordshire

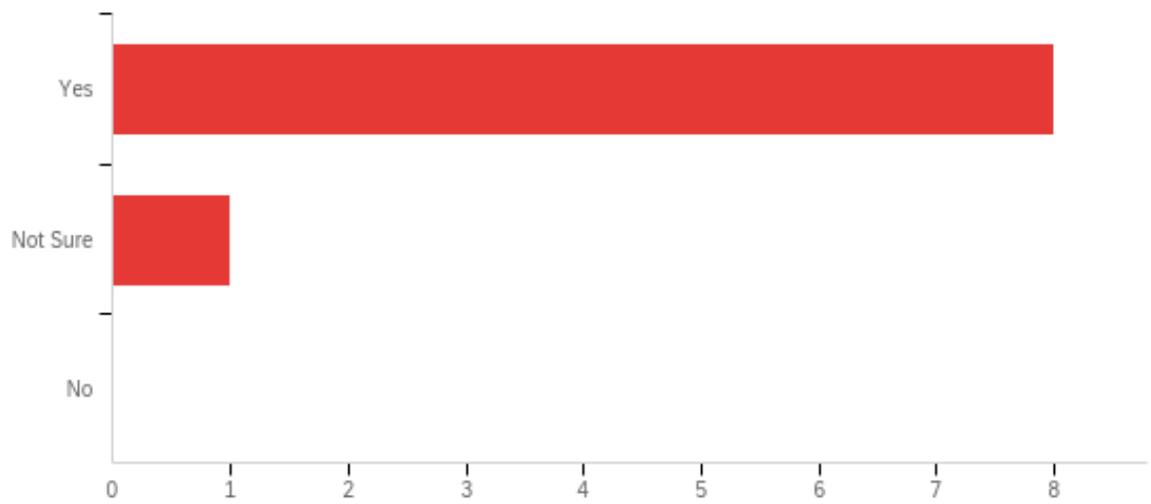
Hertfordshire

Q4 - I have been in my current role for...



#	Answer	%	Count
1	A year or less	55.56%	5
2	2 years	33.33%	3
3	3 years	0.00%	0
4	4 years	0.00%	0
5	5 Years	0.00%	0
6	6 or more years	11.11%	1
	Total	100%	9

Q5 - In the past year do you feel that teachers you have worked with have been overly stressed?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	88.89%	8
2	Not Sure	11.11%	1
3	No	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	9

Q6 - What do you think is the primary source of their stress?

What do you think is the primary source of their stress?

So much to fit into a school day curriculum wise.

Covid related changes to the way we work. Personal Covid related anxieties.

Workload pressure

The pandemic and school closures

Change in guidance, school closures, sporadic school attendances

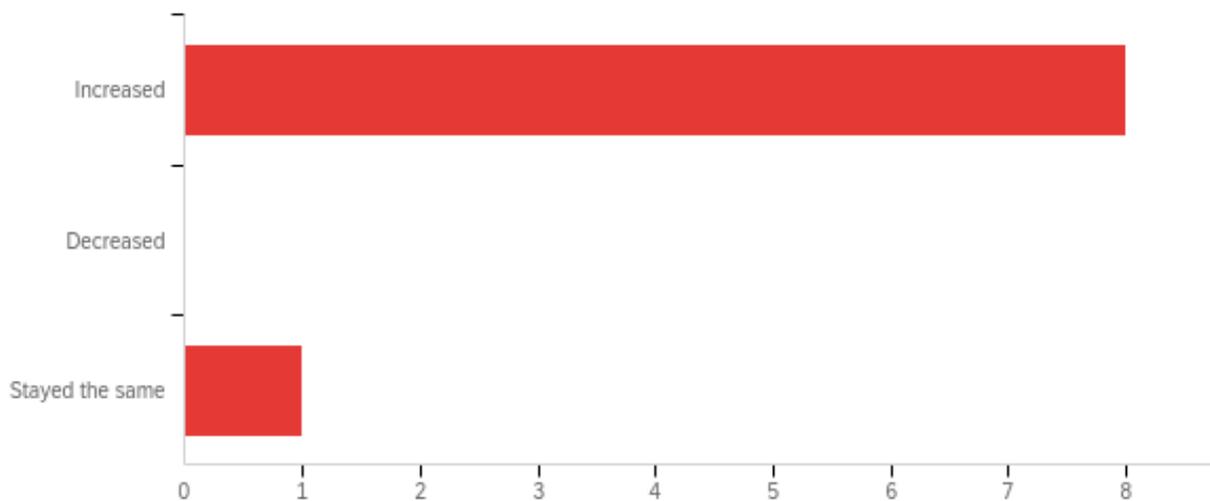
Uncertainty and new ways of working,

administrative tasks

Covid

workload, managing competing demands of the role, pupils in the class who require a lot of support

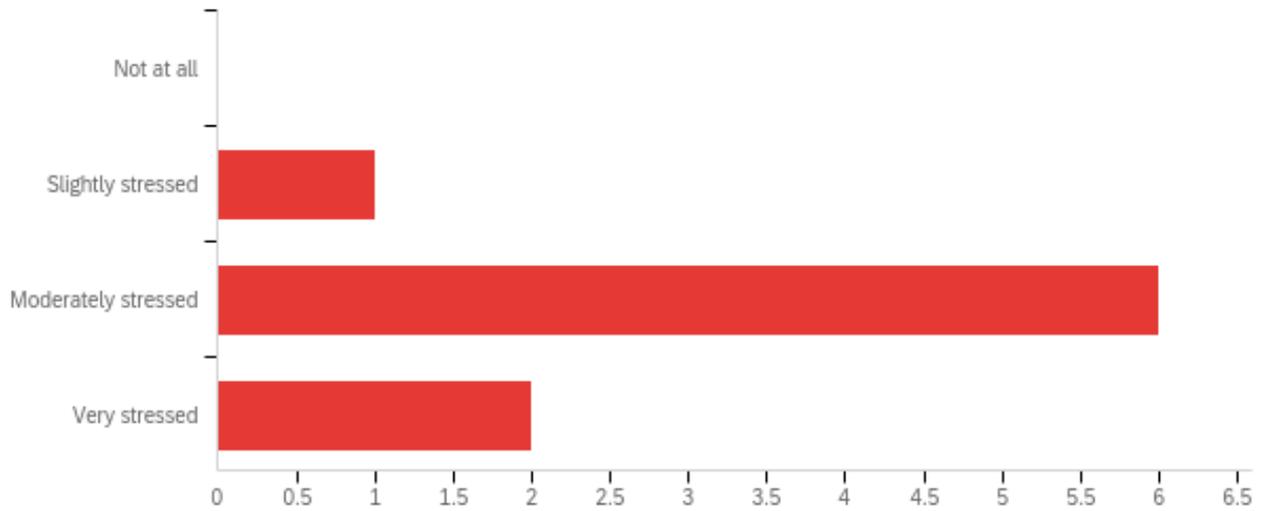
Q7 - Do you feel teacher's stress levels have increased or decreased during the pandemic?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Increased	88.89%	8

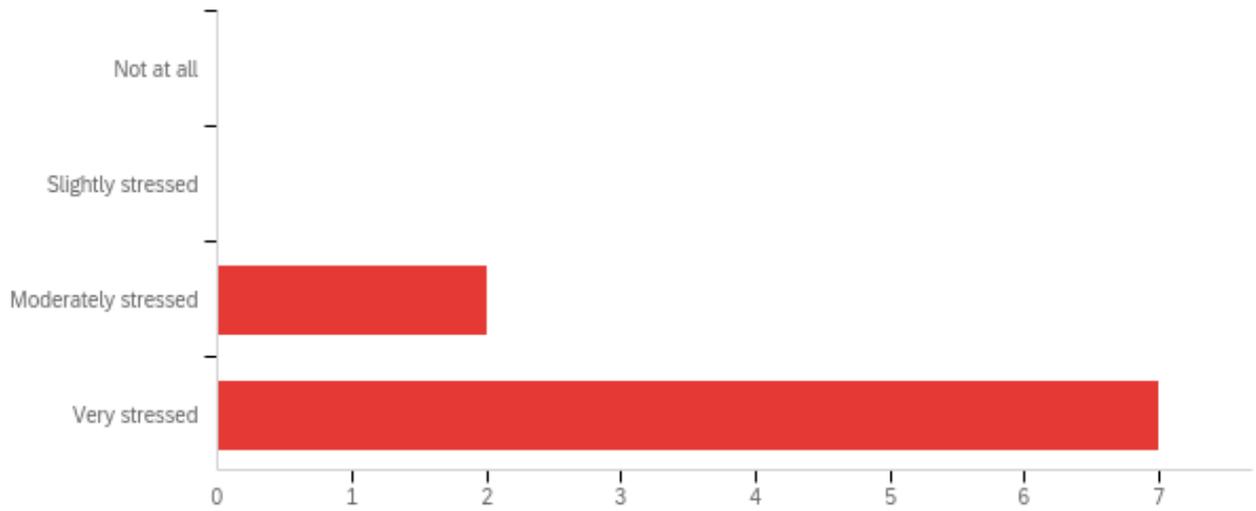
2	Decreased	0.00%	0
3	Stayed the same	11.11%	1
	Total	100%	9

Q8 - How stressed do you think teachers were BEFORE the pandemic?



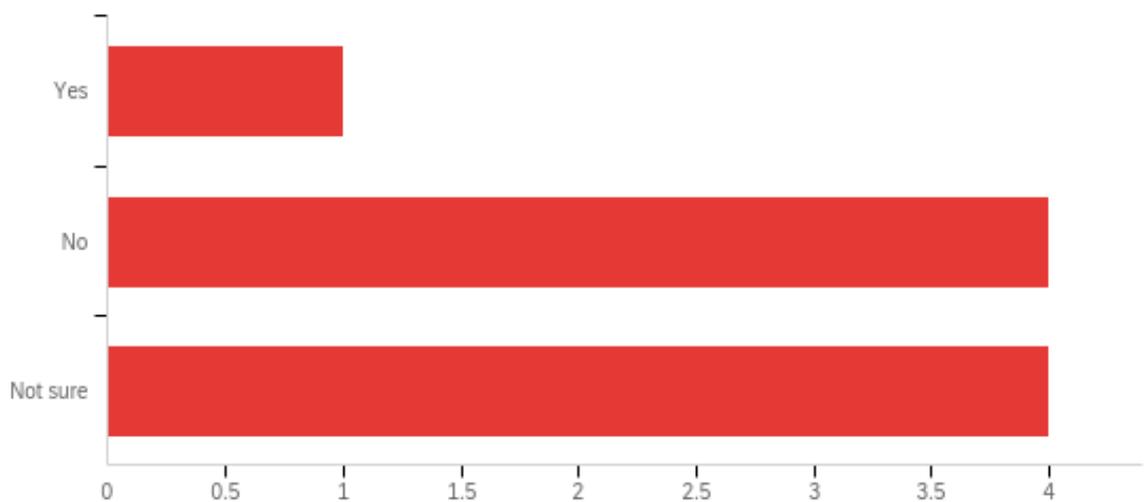
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at all	0.00%	0
2	Slightly stressed	11.11%	1
3	Moderately stressed	66.67%	6
4	Very stressed	22.22%	2
	Total	100%	9

Q9 - How stressed do you think teachers have been DURING the pandemic?



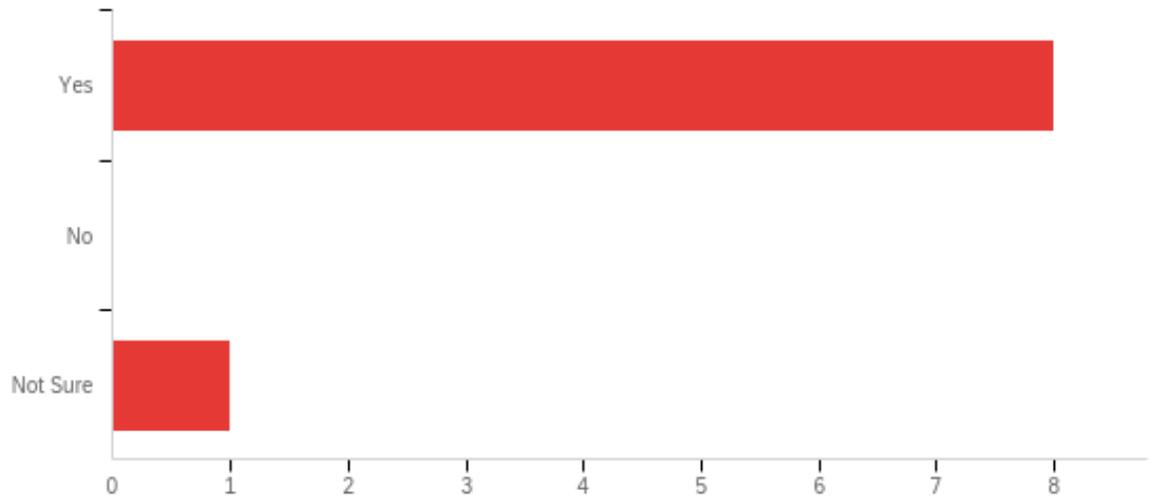
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How stressed do you think teachers have been DURING the pandemic?	3.00	4.00	3.78	0.42	0.17	9

Q10 - Are there clearly defined routes for teachers to receive direct support from EPs?



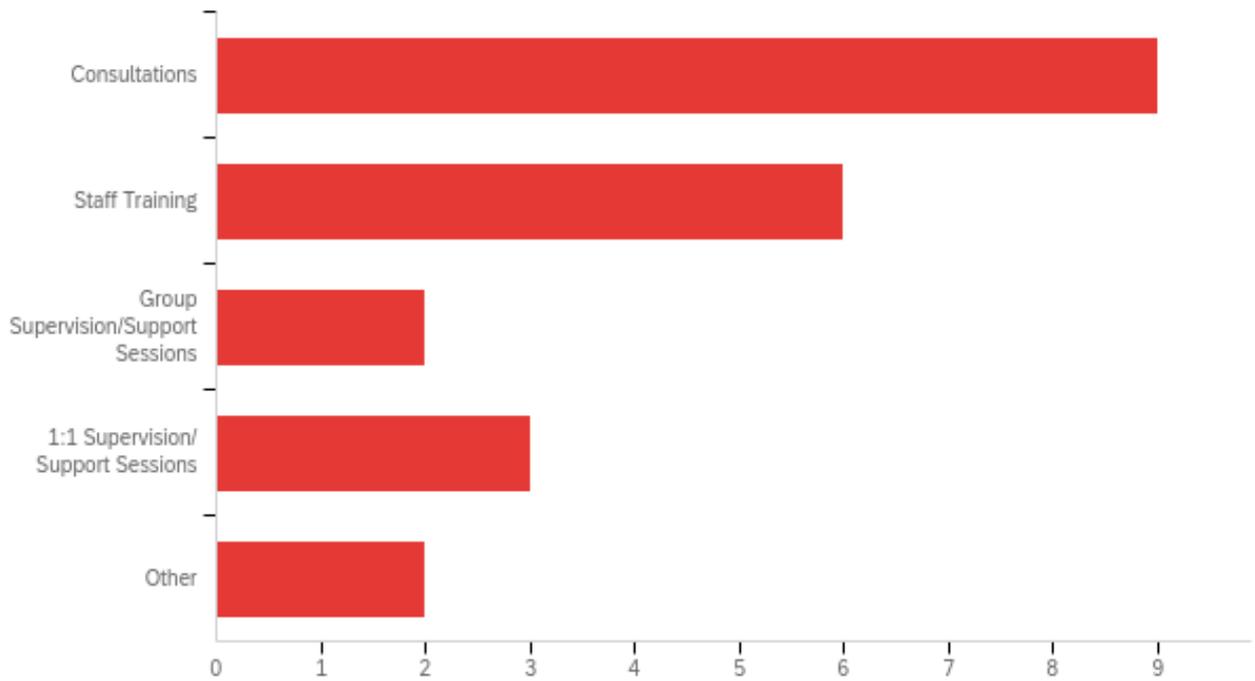
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	11.11%	1
2	No	44.44%	4
3	Not sure	44.44%	4
	Total	100%	9

Q11 - Do you feel that EPs have a role to play in reducing teacher stress?



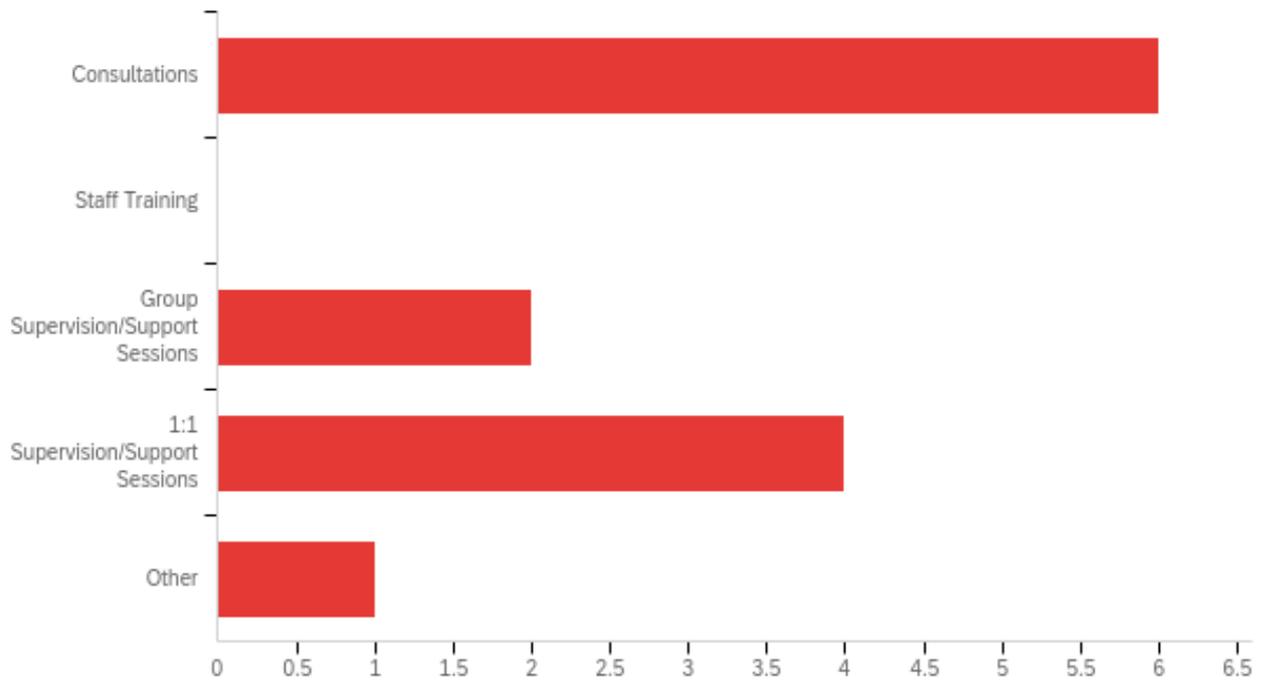
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	88.89%	8
2	No	0.00%	0
3	Not Sure	11.11%	1
	Total	100%	9

Q12 - What type of direct work have EPs/you done with teachers in the past year?



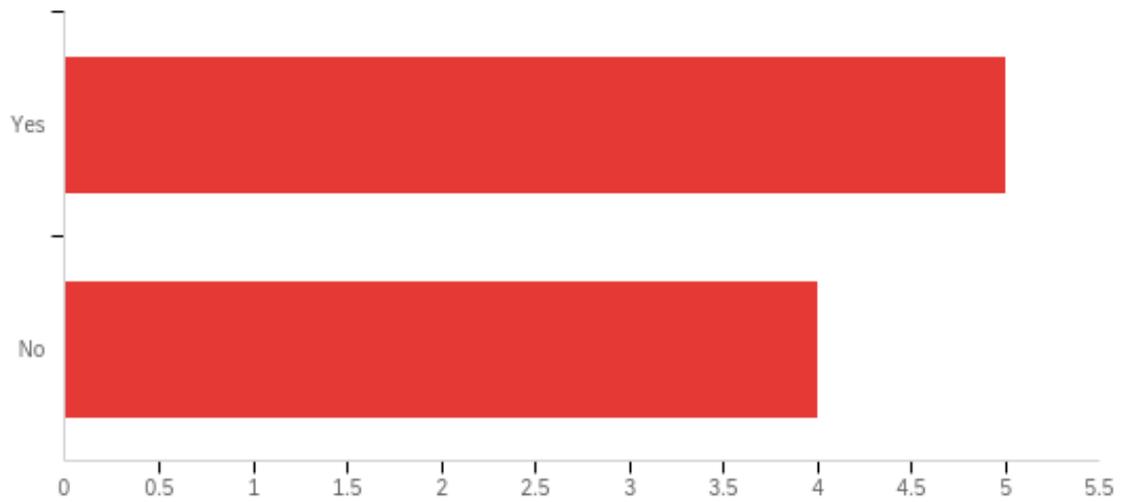
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Consultations	40.91%	9
2	Staff Training	27.27%	6
3	Group Supervision/Support Sessions	9.09%	2
4	1:1 Supervision/ Support Sessions	13.64%	3
5	Other	9.09%	2
	Total	100%	22

Q13 - What type of work would you say that teachers have found to be the most helpful in reducing stress?



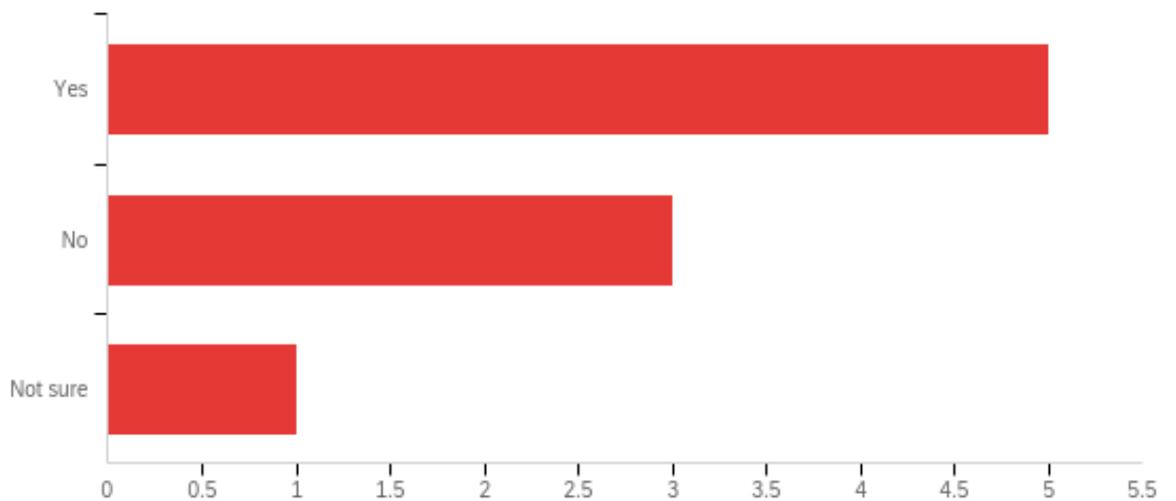
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Consultations	46.15%	6
2	Staff Training	0.00%	0
3	Group Supervision/Support Sessions	15.38%	2
4	1:1 Supervision/Support Sessions	30.77%	4
5	Other	7.69%	1
	Total	100%	13

Q14 - Are there any types of work that you'd have liked (EPs) to do with teachers that were not commissioned?



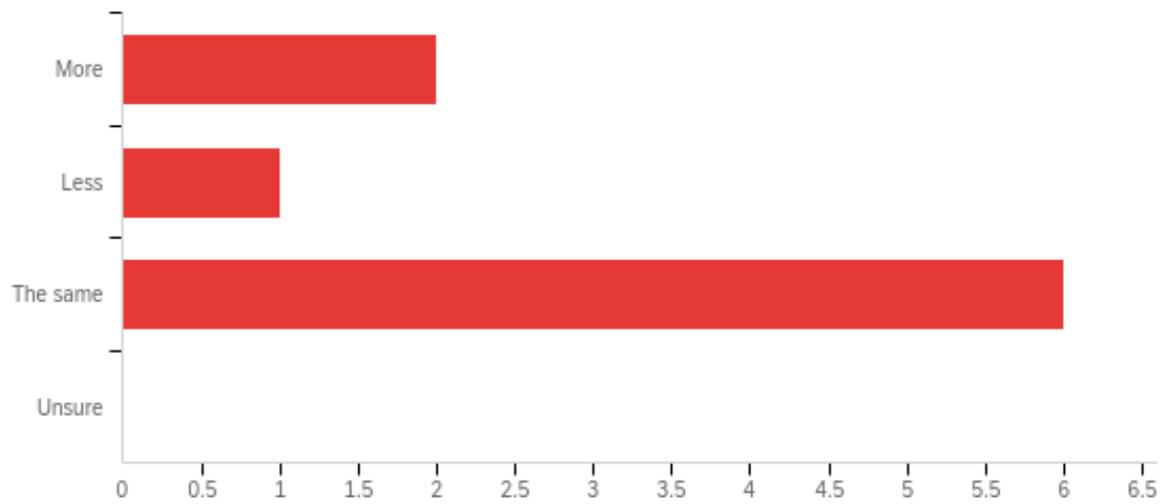
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	0.00%	0
2	No	0.00%	0
	Total		0

Q16 - Has the nature of EP work with teachers changed as a result of the pandemic?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	0.00%	0
2	No	0.00%	0
3	Not sure	0.00%	0
	Total		0

Q18 - As a result of the pandemic do you think that teachers have more or less access to EPs?



#	Answer	%	Count
1	More	0.00%	0
2	Less	0.00%	0
3	The same	0.00%	0
4	Unsure	0.00%	0
	Total		0

Appendix E: Example of Email Sent to the Participants of the Follow Up Interview

Thank you for taking part in the survey for my Doctoral thesis “Understanding how EPs Support Teachers”. Thanks to your contribution we have been able to analyse and unpick a rich set of data.

I am emailing now because you kindly signalled your interest in taking part in a short follow up interview. The interviews will be conducted via zoom and should take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

If you are still happy to contribute, please let me know if you are free on Monday 11th October at 5pm for a 15 minute follow up interview.

Thank you for your participation this far and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,
Ahmar Ferguson
Trainee Educational Psychologist at the Institute of Education

Appendix F1: Transcribed SENCo Interview

1 SENCo 2 Interview (11 mins 30 seconds)

2

3

4 00:00:03.240 --> 00:00:27.210

5 **Ahmar:** Okay, so from the survey that I sent out earlier, EPs responded to it and they were very
6 clear that they felt that they had a role in reducing teacher stress. However, from the SENCos,
7 there was more of a mixed view in terms of what the EP role was. So, I wanted to get your
8 views as to why do you think there was such a difference in the perception of the role?

9

10 00:00:28.620 --> 00:02:58.380

11 **SENCo 2:** Erm I think sometimes when we asked for EP support or help with a particular child
12 and often I'm told oh that's not our bag. You need to refer through a different way. So, for
13 example in LA NAME where I am, we have to go, we have a single point of access.
14 And that's the way that sometimes push us to do that. So sometimes I feel like I am almost
15 being fobbed off. I appreciate they're really busy, and so we just need more of them that's what
16 I feel. Especially at the moment where's obviously everything that's happened during Covid,

17 where we're seeing an increase in in need from you know, with it, with the children in terms of
18 social emotional mental health issues that are presenting. And even though we felt like we were
19 putting things in place, we don't know if necessarily they're the right things so. I mean, I have a
20 good relationship with my EP, but I can feel that sometimes she's unavailable when I need her
21 to be available. And everything is charged. And you know it's money is a big thing as well, like
22 you know we buy packages and then we might figure that halfway through the year actually
23 that's not enough, we need to top it up, and so I think EPs are supportive. I mean they've got a
24 great glossy brochure that they produce, they do X, Y and Z but then everything I feel. You
25 know, we think that'd be really useful for us and then it's very difficult sometimes to get them in

26 because they're you know they're very thinly spread among you know multiple schools. So yeah
27 I guess that's probably, it's more it's more the feeling that, as the SENCo its quite isolating

28 because you don't get anybody else to sound off ideas against and and sometimes that is what
29 you need more than maybe coming in and, and actually you know well, I'll come in and have a
30 look at them well, sometimes I don't need you to do that, I just want to talk things through and
31 see if you can just validate what I'm doing. More in an advisory capacity, so it's different levels
32 of support, and I think they always see it as we need to get in, we need to see the child and we
33 need to invoice you for it well. I would probably sometimes, it's just a conversation I need to
34 have about a particular child, or you know situation. And yeah, maybe that's why it's different.
35 Yeah I might see that role differently.

36

37 00:02:59.040 --> 00:03:09.120

38 **Ahmar:** Thank you for sharing that and I guess, you may have already answered this next
39 question but, in your view, what were some of the barriers that prevent EPs from working
40 directly with teachers?

41

42 00:03:11.040 --> 00:05:26.430

43 **SENCo 2:** Erm. Probably time constraints, the fact that their workload is considerable, and
44 sometimes, I think, we see an EP can maybe help us in getting a diagnosis, for a child, and you

45 know, to provide evidence, and a lot of children with, as you know, autism spectrum disorder.
46 And we're struggling, sometimes with children that we feel should get a diagnosis but they're
47 not receiving a diagnosis, because they the paediatrician saying it's not there's not enough
48 evidence when they've only seen that child for an hour or two hours. And so, some you know,
49 sometimes I feel that an EP report can go some way in in supporting parents and you know,
50 most importantly, the child erm but also maybe to, you know to say well actually to, no it's have

51 you thought about this, we don't think they're displaying signs of autism we actually feel it's
52 more attachment. I suppose, I look to an EP because they're more highly qualified than I am
53 they're able to spot things that I might have overlooked, or teachers might have overlooked or
54 parents might have overlooked. So, it's their expertise, that their barrier sometimes is their own
55 availability, but also we sometimes get resistance from parents so as teachers if we feel we

55 availability, but also we sometimes get resistance from parents so as teachers if we feel we
56 would like an EP assessment done parents can be.
57 You either get them that are demanding an EP coming in, or when we suggest it, no we don't
58 want that, because you're going to label our child and are you saying somethings wrong with
59 our child is that sort of. Yeah, so they're not necessarily barriers that we put up as schools that
60 maybe sometimes we can get a barrier from a parent, that is not willing to engage, you know
61 with it with an EP, so we have to try out my powers of persuasion, in that, in that case. To get
62 that to make them understand why it's necessary. And yeah, I can't think of any more barriers,
63 other than time constraints and usually the children that we're wanting EPs see are those
64 children that may have you know, issues with working with adults cooperatively or actually
65 even attending school is another issue. And yeah, sometimes as a barrier, if you like, yeah.

66
67 00:05:26.700 --> 00:05:43.950

68 **Ahmar:** Thank you, and you know, obviously we've had a very strained last 18 months, so how
69 has the covid pandemic impacted your work with EPs and kind of thinking about maybe some
70 of the opportunities, but then you know also some of the challenges as well.

71

71

72 00:05:45.300 --> 00:07:15.750

73 **SENCo 2:** Yeah, I think, I think the opportunities were, so obviously we did quite, we managed
74 to do quite a lot of staff training remotely you know via teams, so that was a good opportunity
75 that we had. Erm obviously staff who are you know, not in the building, but were also you

76 know that could engage really easily with pre-recorded training sessions which our EP did for
77 us, and so we did yeah we did have. We took opportunity to do some additional training,
78 especially in areas that we felt were going to have an impact, with a full return of all children.
79 So that was in terms of emotion coaching and attachment awareness. And, and that type of
80 thing and in terms of yeah, the negative impact, really it's been that because they were not
81 allowed to come in and work directly with children, you had children who, they were the

82 children that we had in during lockdown and so you had children waiting an extended period of
83 time to receive an assessment. And then obviously you know, a plan and then and then follow
84 up. And so yeah, just things taking a lot longer than, especially those children who were at
85 transition points, so either transitioning you know coming from nursery into main you know
86 into foundation or children more importantly going from year six into secondary that's where
87 we had probably the biggest hit. And in terms of children that we would have liked to have
88 been further down the road in terms of their assessment than they actually were when they went
89 to secondary.

90

91 00:07:18.960 --> 00:07:35.250

92 **Ahmar:** Thank you and the last question arguably the most philosophical question of them all
93 so feel free to answer this in any way. What do you view as the primary role of the EP?

94

95

96 00:07:37.770 --> 00:11:32.100

97 **SENCo 2:** The primary role, I suppose, is the assessment of children that's that that's how I
98 view the primary role. but you know I'm very aware that you know, we use our EP for training

99 or staff. As well if we've got a particular, we've identified a particular need or staff or staff

100 request support, and so we do rely on our EP to do a lot of a lot of training. And I think primary

101 is working with children in order to erm, help us as teachers and SENCoS to understand their
102 needs more effectively, and therefore we can then put in, you know the support that is needed,
103 rather than generically we put in support, because the child's displaying you know X, Y Z and
104 that might not necessarily be what they need, and it could actually cause more harm than good
105 so um. And also, we you know, obviously the recommendations that our EP makes, we you
106 know, obviously we do them and we follow them and we follow it, we know we follow the
107 assess plan do review we do all of that. And, and we have had some really positive outcomes
108 with children, as a result of that. And I think it once staff see that as well they're more likely to
109 take on board what the EP is saying. I sometimes have come up against staff who are saying

110 well they don't work in a class how can expect me to do X, Y and Z when they're
111 recommending these things. But actually, you know if you can get a teacher, to see that maybe
112 tweaking things for that child will have a wider impact and getting them to see things in
113 different in different ways, so and I do feel that you know, I would like to see more Ed Psychs
114 in school, I would. I would like you know I'd really love one in actually in my school because I
115 work in a really massive school. So, I know that's not going to happen, but you know if I could
116 ever make say that would really support, and I think it would help with parents as well.
117 Parents, sometimes you know they've got this educational psychologist and they might not they
118 might have even got Dr in front of their name, and they're like oh my God, you know my child
119 is something really wrong with my child? If you know, especially erm I work in you know, in a
120 city CITY NAME so you have a lot of parents who had really negative experiences themselves
121 or maybe not happy, you know they've not had the right support themselves as children or
122 adults or as parents and therefore they are very wary. And sometimes so it's maybe making a bit
123 more of a, my educational psychologist is absolutely fantastic. The person who comes in and
124 works with us and she's very good at speaking to parents if they, if we feel like there might be a
125 little bit of resistance. She will be happy to speak to them and sort of you know, put their minds

126 at rest about what her actual role is and it's all at the end of the day, it's getting those the best
127 outcomes for those children. Because too many children, I mean I've been teaching for a long
128 time, and I look back over my career and I think, yeah some of those children have been let
129 down by a by system or by teachers being led down the wrong path or having a misconception
130 about how best to manage children and with certain conditions, we're getting more and more,
131 you know, we're getting better all the time, but you still come up against that resistance.
132 Sometimes from teachers, as well as parents in terms of assessing children. And, and that you
133 know, we don't want them going into adult life and thinking, well why didn't someone pick that
134 up when I was at school, that should have been picked up. And teachers often don't want to
135 admit that they're struggling with a child that's you know that's another almost a barrier to
136 working with an EP because parents might say one thing and then the teachers, I will absolutely
137 fine, I don't see it and they just need a bit of firm handling or they just see this, and that's not
138 always the case if they've got some underlying condition that you know they might need
139 support with, not just as a child but as an adult.

140

141

Appendix F2: Transcribed EP Interview

1

Female TEP 2

2

3

4 00:00:03.899 --> 00:00:30.540

5 **Ahmar:** So when I was analysing my first set of data collection erm, it was really clear that
6 EPs very strongly felt that they had a role to play in reducing teacher stress. But SENCOs had a
7 really, really mixed view and kind of where a little less sure, so, in your view, why do you think
8 there was such a difference of the in the perception of the role and what factors, do you think
9 could have resulted in that view?

10



11

12 00:00:32.250 --> 00:02:22.200

13 **Female TEP 2:** I think that's a really interesting question. I think that people don't always
14 understand what we do as EPs. And I think that we sometimes are not clear about what we do
15 and like if I think about my team at work. We all practice in such different ways that it's very
16 difficult, I think, for us to kind of market ourselves as as a profession as EPs and say this is
17 what we can provide. Like even this morning I was looking at something just to find out the
18 timing of a training that I went to go to shadow. And I saw the list of all the other trainings in

19 my local authority that are offered by other teams and they're all stuff I would think to offer.
20 Like really systemic training stuff about supporting leaders and stuff to support wellbeing, so I
21 think it's two things. Maybe the first thing is that people don't always have a clear
22 understanding of our role, and I think that extends to us, as well as the people that we work with
23 or for and then I think it's a lot of other services are providing similar things and it causes a bit
24 of confusion, maybe. I also wonder as well, whether erm, I know in my experience, because
25 kind of part of my spiel at the beginning, is that you know, I was a teacher live with a teacher,
26 that I get how things are at the moment. I know how well received that's been and I wonder
27 how, and I also know what I thought, when I was a teacher, I might have thought, when I was a

28 teacher you guys coming in don't really know what it's like. And I'm not sure how before I did
29 this is job I'm not sure how well, I would have thought EPs could support in well-being because

30 I didn't understand the role.

31

32

33 00:02:23.250 --> 00:02:48.300

34 **Ahmar:** Yeah that's a really interesting point thinking about the two different sides from within
35 the profession and without. What is our role in (well-being), and how does that translate to
36 people outside of the profession, understanding the role. And so, in your view, or maybe you've
37 touched on it already in the answer to your first question, erm, what do you think are some of
38 the barriers that prevent EPs from doing direct work with teachers?

39

40

41 00:02:49.860 --> 00:04:46.110

42 **Female TEP 2:** Erm. I think. Sometimes. So I think there's so many, you know that's such a big
43 question, the first thing that popped into my head was bloody time, so it takes flipping ages to
44 get say get the right people or try and get better people or people that will be kind of a bit more.
45 The bigger cogs maybe in the system, in the room that's really difficult. You know, even more
46 so in, say, a secondary school or a big school. And I think that's a huge barrier immediately my

47 mind went to well-being and being traded I can't necessarily charge or trade, the amount of time
48 it takes to liaise with people to make magic happen.

49

50 And that's really difficult to quantify. Like people know we've all got kind of schools and
51 SENCOs that are a bit more sort of scatty or chaotic that takes work, takes a bit more time to

52 organise you can't necessarily kind of, maybe, maybe I'm doing it wrong, maybe I bloody
53 should be charging for it! But I think that's a huge barrier working in that trading context.
54 I think another barrier is not always being sure how to do it, so not always being sure about
55 what we could do. I think we're very good as EPs at having difficult conversations and gently
56 challenging in a really kind of sensitive and tactful way. But I don't think we always get access

57 to the people that can really make a difference, so if your SENCo's not on the leadership team,
58 for example, but even if they are, you know they're just one person. Then, that can be a bit of a
59 barrier, because often things to do with well-being might be linked to things like workload
60 they're all systemic factors that the leadership team in the school manage and they're the people
61 that we want to be chatting up but we can't always get access to them, so I think that those are
62 some of the barriers.

63

64

65 00:04:47.760 --> 00:05:03.480

66 **Ahmar:** Thank you. Kind of broadening it out a little bit, erm how does how has the Covid-19
67 pandemic impacted your work with schools? And particularly thinking about what some
68 opportunities have been and then what some of the challenges have been?

69

70

71 00:05:04.950 --> 00:06:45.240

72 **Female TEP 2:** It's really funny, so I only came back to work, nearly two weeks ago, and if
73 you'd asked me that question two weeks ago, I would have given you a really different answer

74 actually. So predominantly my work last year, in year two of the doctoral training was online
75 and I didn't know any different and now two weeks in, of being back in schools, I can see how
76 different it is. So, I would have given you a different answer two weeks ago. I think the main

77 thing is in online working you lose those small conversations that you have on the way to the
78 meeting after the meeting in the corridor with someone, that you can use and can be quite
79 impactful. And that, for me, has been the main challenge with the work. You know we're all
80 saying we want to kind of really move things forward and develop people's understanding of
81 the kids that we work with and it's really hard to do that without those little conversations that
82 happen along the way. I think, for me, being that's the biggest sort of impact.

83

84 The positive, though, I will say about Covid is I sat here online I had me notes everywhere

85 around me, no one can see em. And it was really good online for my own professional
86 development to be able to learn how to do stuff. I had all of my prompts, don't forget to say this
87 in your introduction and you know when you're learning, I felt like it was actually a bit of a
88 blessing, because it just looks like you and I are now but I had all of my gunk around me to
89 prompt me. I wouldn't have done that in a face to face consultation, I would have felt I would
90 look like a numpty. So, I think that's a bit of a bonus but it definitely has impacted our work.

91

92

93 00:06:47.820 --> 00:07:04.110

94 **Ahmar:** Thank you. So the last question, arguably and probably the biggest kind of
95 philosophical question of them all and and feel free to answer this as it feels right to you, but
96 what do you view as the primary role or roles of an EP?

97

98

99

100 00:07:06.720 --> 00:08:02.700

101 **Female TEP 2:** Again, I think very differently, prior to coming back to work and working face
102 to face, and I think that's worth noting, I really would have given you a completely different
103 answer two weeks ago. But now I would say that our role is to create space in what is a very
104 busy and complex system. Whatever we are we creating that space for, whether it is stopping
105 and thinking, reflecting, learning, unpicking, problem solving. Whatever we are using that
106 space for I would say, is our job you know, and we can fill that space with training or
107 supervision or consultation or assessment or whatever we're doing, but I really am clear about
108 that at the moment. I would say our job is creating space and holding space for people that are
109 in the education system, so not I wouldn't just say staff I'd say the kids as well as families, the
110 works.

111

112 00:08:04.560 --> 00:08:09.060

113 **Ahmar:** brilliant, thank you very much, all my questions I'll stop the recording now.

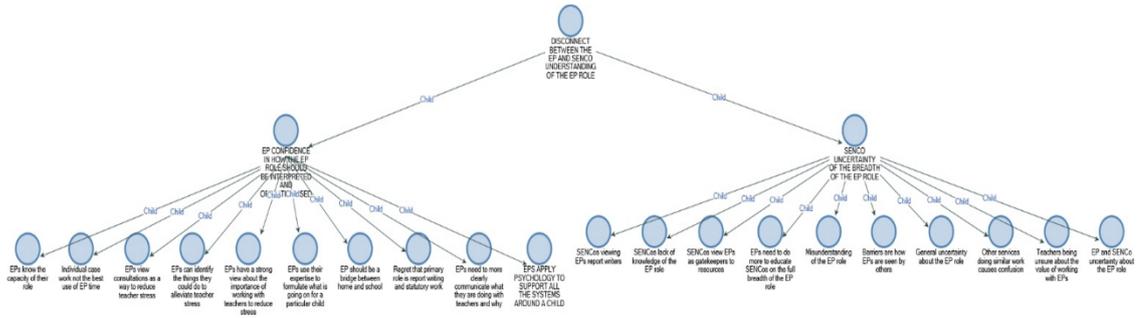
114

115

Appendix G1: Initial SENCO and EP Codes and Themes

Initial EP Themes and Codes

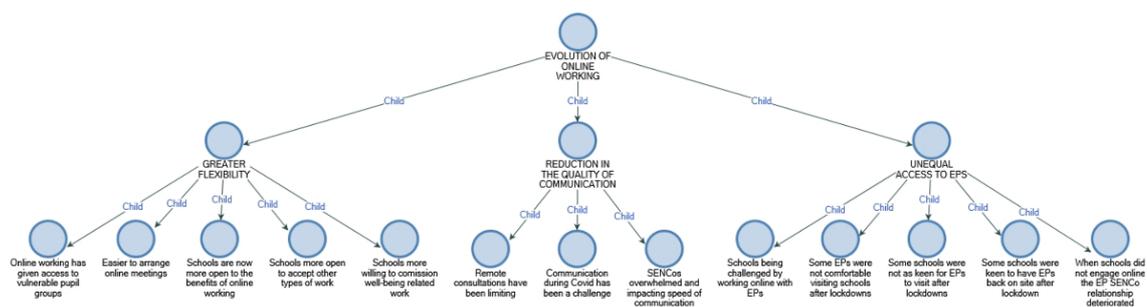
EP Theme 1 and Codes



Theme	Contributing Codes
EP Confidence in how the EP role should be interpreted and internalised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPs know the capacity of their role Individual case work not the best use of EP time EPs view consultations as a way to reduce teacher stress EPs can identify the things they could do to alleviate teacher stress EPs have a strong view about the importance of working with teachers to reduce stress

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPs use their expertise to formulate what is going on for a particular child EP should be a bridge between home and school Regret that primary role is report writing and statutory work EPs need to more clearly communicate what they are doing with teachers and why EPs apply psychology to support all the systems around a child
SENCO Uncertainty about the EP role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SENCOs viewing EPs as report writers SENCOs lack of knowledge of the EP role SENCOs view EPs as gatekeepers to resources EPs need to do more to educate SENCOs on the full breadth of the EP role Misunderstanding of the EP role Barriers are how EPs are seen by others General uncertainty about the EP role Other services doing similar work causes confusion Teachers being unsure about the value of working with EPs EP and SENCO uncertainty about the EP role

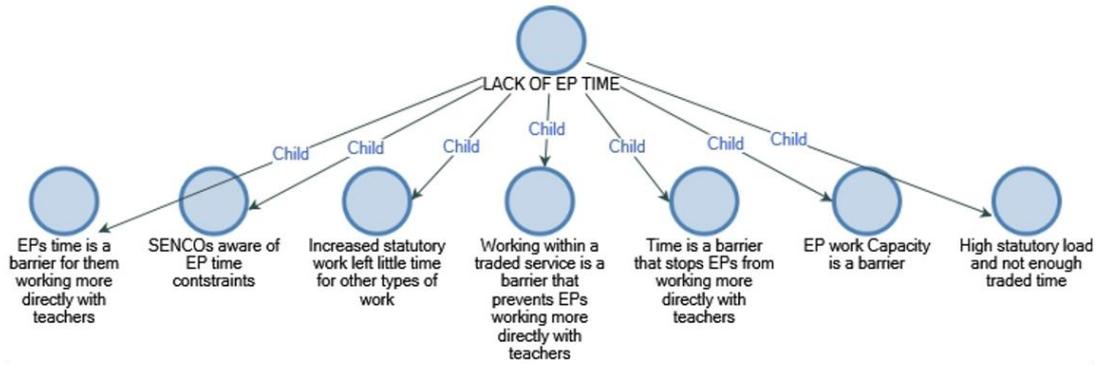
EP Theme 2 and Codes



Theme	Contributing Codes
Greater flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online working has given access to vulnerable groups • Easier to arrange online meetings • Schools are now more open to the benefits of online working • Schools more open to accepting other types of work • Schools more willing to commission well-being related work
Reduction in the quality of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote consultations have been limiting • Communication during covid has been a challenge • SENCOs overwhelmed and impacting speed of communication
Unequal access to EPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools being challenged by working online with EPs • Some EPs were not comfortable visiting schools after lockdowns • Some schools were keen to have EPs back on site after lockdown

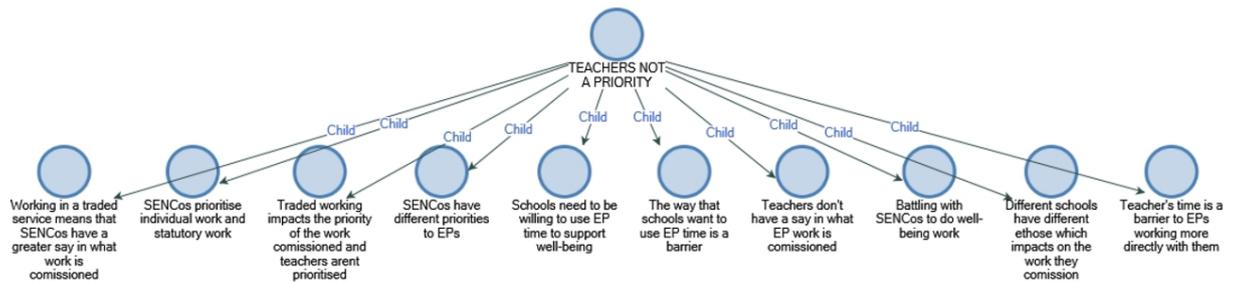
- When schools did not engage online the EP SENCO relationship deteriorated

EP Theme 3 and Codes



Theme	Contributing Codes
Lack of EP time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EP time is a barrier for them working more directly with teachers • SENCOs aware of EP time constraints • Increased statutory work left little time for other types of work • Working within a traded service is a barrier that prevents EPs working more directly with teachers • Time is a barrier that stops EPs from working more directly with teachers • EP work capacity is a barrier • High statutory load and not enough EP time

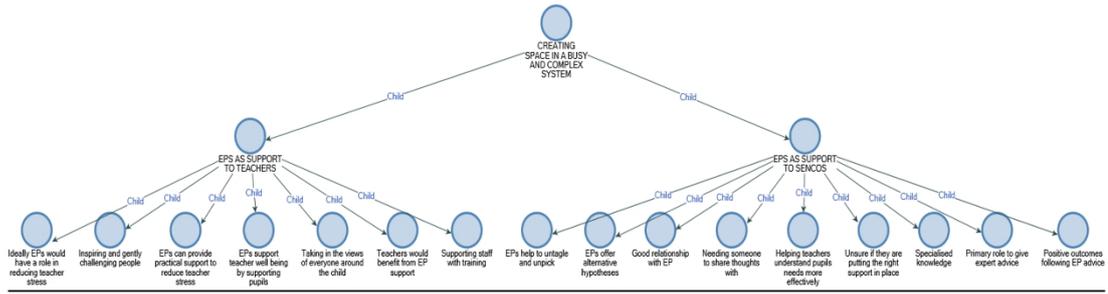
EP Theme 4 and Codes



Theme	Contributing Codes
Teachers not a priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in a traded service means that SENCOs have a greater say in what work is commissioned • SENCOs prioritise individual work and statutory work • Traded working impacts the priority of the work commissioned and teachers aren't prioritised • SENCOs have different priorities to EPs • Schools need to be willing to use EP time to support well-being • The way that schools want to use EP time is a barrier • Teachers don't have a say in what EP work is commissioned • Battling with SENCOs to do well-being work • Different schools have different ethos' which impacts on the work they commission • Teacher's time is a barrier to EPs working more directly with them

Initial SENCo Themes and Codes

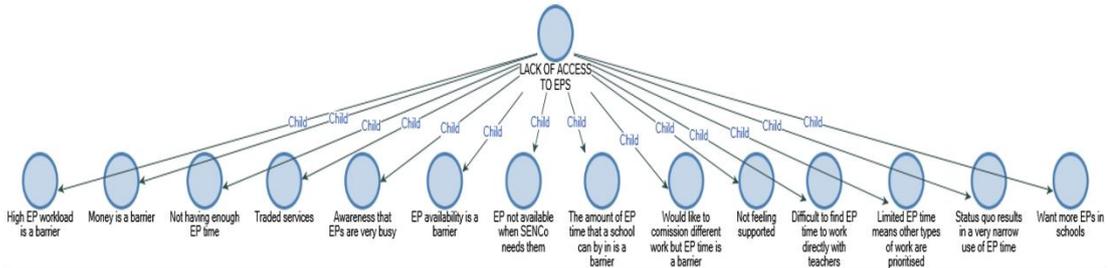
SENCo Theme 1 and Codes



Theme	Contributing Codes
EPS as support to teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideally EPs would have a role in reducing teacher stress • Inspiring and gently challenging people • EPs can provide practical support to reduce teacher stress • EPs support well-being by supporting pupils • Taking in the views of everyone around the child • Teachers would benefit from EP support • Supporting staff with training
EPS as support to SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPs help to untangle and unpick • EPs offer alternative hypotheses • Good relationship with EP • Needing someone to share thoughts with

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping teachers understand pupils needs more effectively • Unsure if they are putting the right support in place • Specialised knowledge • Primary role to give expert advice • Positive outcomes following EP advice
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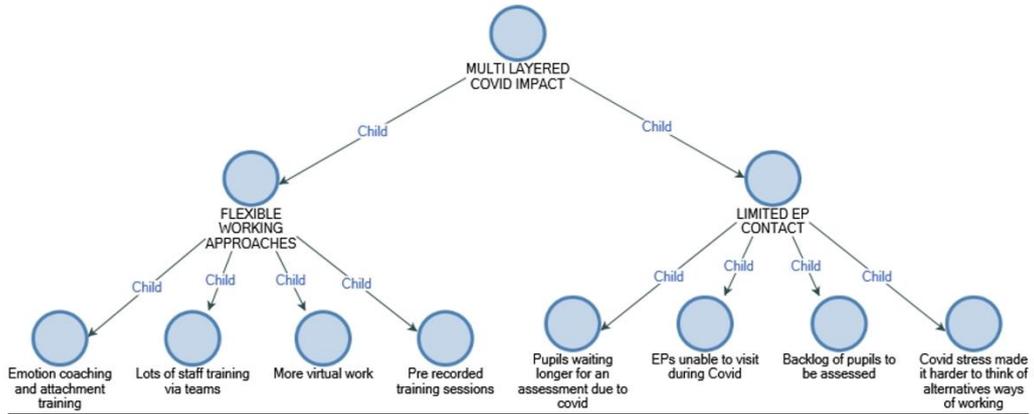
SENCo Theme 2 and Codes



Theme	Contributing Codes
Lack of access to EPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High EP workload is a barrier • Money is a barrier • Not having enough EP time • Traded services • Awareness that EPs are very busy • EP availability is a barrier • EP not available when SENCo needs them • The amount of time that a school can buy in is a barrier • Would like to commission different work but EP time is a barrier. • Not feeling supported • Difficult to find EP time to work directly with teachers • Limited EP time means other types of work are prioritised • Status quo results in a very narrow use of EP time • Want more EPs in schools

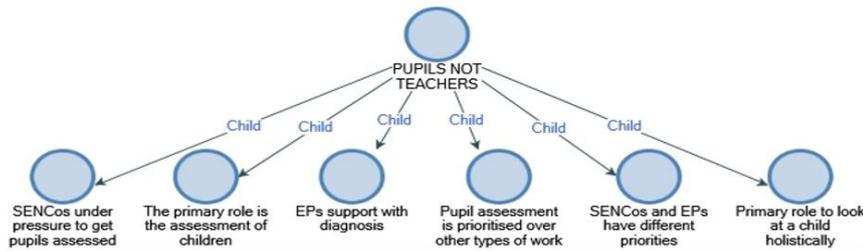
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited EP time means that other types of work are prioritised • Status quo results in a very narrow use of EP time • Want more EPs in schools
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SENCo Theme 3 and Codes



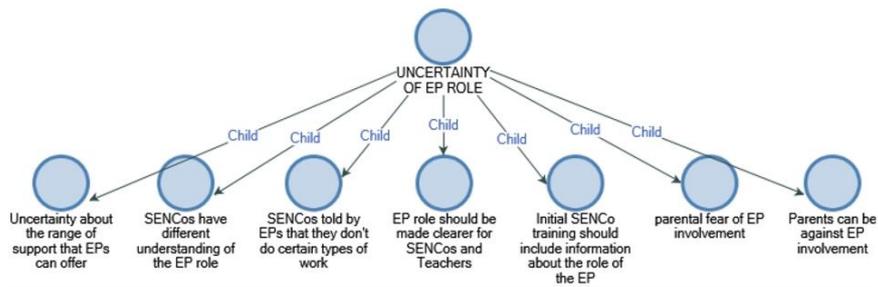
Theme	Contributing Codes
Flexible working approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotion coaching and attachment training • Lots of staff training via teams • More virtual work • Pre recorded training sessions
Limited EP contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils waiting longer for an assessment due to covid • EPs unable to visit during covid • Backlog of pupils to be assessed • Covid stress made it harder to think of alternative ways of working

SENCo Theme 4



Theme	Contributing Codes
Pupils not teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SENcos under pressure to get pupils assessed • The primary role is the assessment of children • EPs support with diagnosis • Pupil assessment is prioritised over other types of work • SENcos and EPs have different priorities • Primary role to look at child holistically

SENCO Theme 5

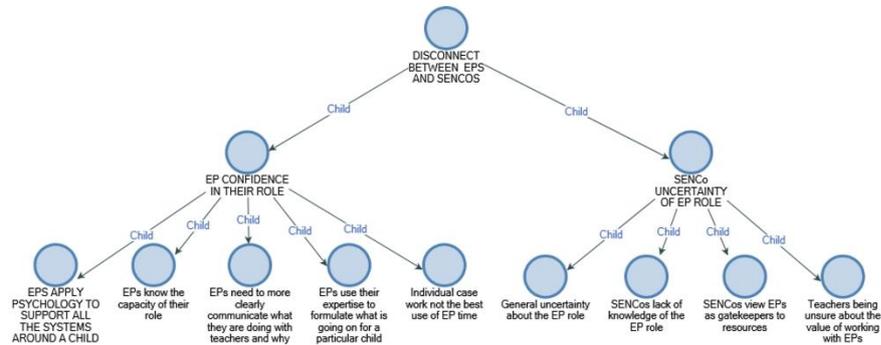


Theme	Contributing Codes
Uncertainty of EP role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty about the range of support that EPs can offer • SENCOs have different understanding of the EP role • SENCOs told by EPs that they don't do certain types of work • EP role should be made clearer for SENCOs and Teachers • Initial SENCO training should include information about the role of the EP • Parental fear of EP involvement • Parents can be against EP involvement

Appendix G2: Final SENCO and EP Codes and Themes

Final EP Themes and Codes

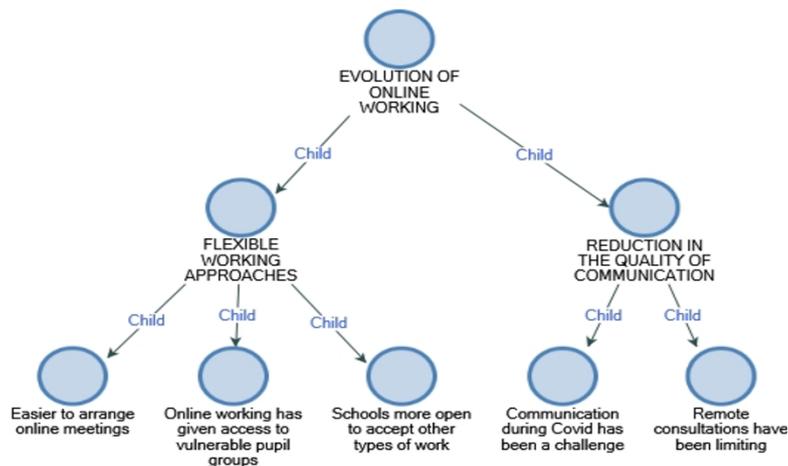
EP Theme 1 and Codes



Theme	Contributing Codes
EP Confidence in their role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPs know the capacity of their role • Individual case work not the best use of EP time • EPs use their expertise to formulate what is going on for a particular child • EPs need to more clearly communicate what they are doing with teachers and why • EPs apply psychology to support all the systems around a child

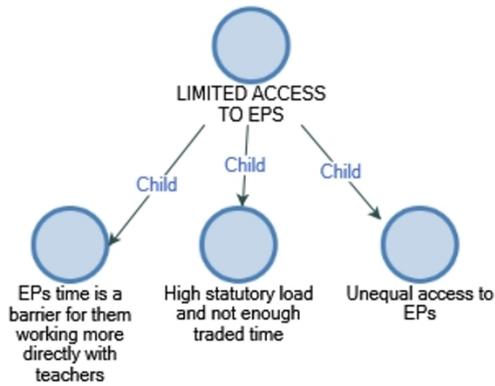
SENCO Uncertainty of EP role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SENCOs lack of knowledge of the EP role • SENCOs view EPs as gatekeepers to resources • General uncertainty about the EP role • Teachers being unsure about the value of working with EPs
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EP Theme 2 and Codes



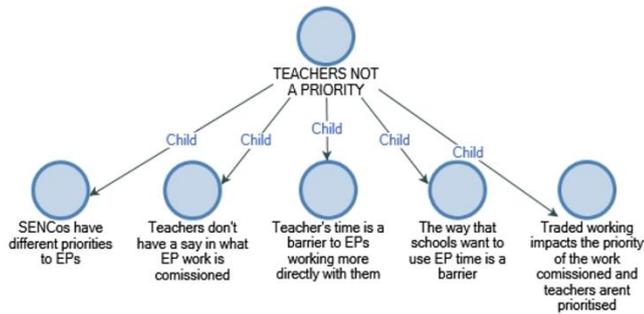
Theme	Contributing Codes
Flexible Working Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online working has given access to vulnerable groups • Easier to arrange online meetings • Schools more open to accepting other types of work
Reduction in the quality of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote consultations have been limiting • Communication during covid has been a challenge

EP Theme 3 and Codes



Theme	Contributing Codes
Limited Access to EPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unequal access to EPs • EPs time is a barrier for them working more directly with teachers • High statutory load and not enough traded time

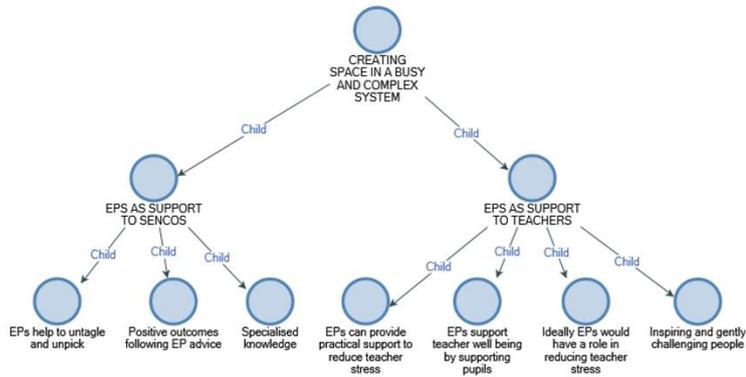
EP Theme 4 and Codes



Theme	Contributing Codes
Teachers not a priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SENCOs have different priorities to EPs • Traded working impacts the priority of the work commissioned and teachers aren't prioritised • The way that schools want to use EP time is a barrier • Teachers don't have a say in what EP work is commissioned • Teacher's time is a barrier to EPs working more directly with them

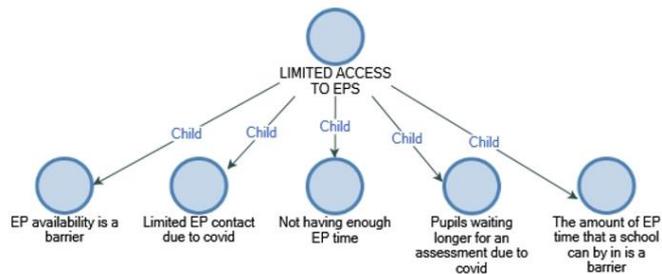
Final SENCo Themes and Codes

SENCo Theme 1 and Codes



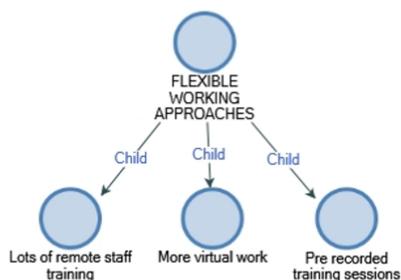
Theme	Contributing Codes
EPs as support to teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideally EPs would have a role in reducing teacher stress Inspiring and gently challenging people EPs can provide practical support to reduce teacher stress EPs support teach well-being by supporting pupils
EPs as support to SENCOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPs help to untangle and unpick EPs offer alternative hypotheses Specialised knowledge

SENCo Theme 2 and Codes



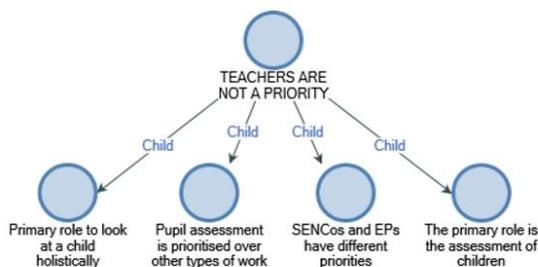
Theme	Contributing Codes
Limited Access to EPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not having enough EP time EP availability is a barrier The amount of time that a school can buy in is a barrier Limited contact due to Covid Pupils waiting longer for an assessment due to Covid

SENCo Theme 3 and Codes



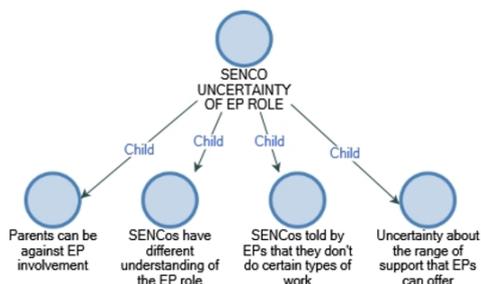
Theme	Contributing Codes
Flexible working approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of staff training via teams • More virtual work • Pre recorded training sessions

SENCo Theme 4



Theme	Contributing Codes
Teachers are not a Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The primary role is the assessment of children • Pupil assessment is prioritised over other types of work • SENcos and EPs have different priorities • Primary role to look at child holistically

SENCO Theme 5



Theme	Contributing Codes
SENCo Uncertainty of EP role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty about the range of support that EPs can offer • SENcos have different understanding of the EP role • SENcos told by EPs that they don't do certain types of work • Parents can be against EP involvement

Appendix H1: Participant Consent Form

Understanding How Educational Psychologists (EPs) Support Teachers

We invite you to take part in a short survey to help us understand how Educational Psychologists (EPs) support teachers.

Who is organising this study?

This research is organised by the Department of Psychology at UCL Institute of Education. The principal researcher is Ahmar Ferguson, DEdPsy student, and the research supervisors are Dr Zachary Walker and Dr Jeremy Monsen.

What are the aims of this study?

This study aims to explore the way in which EPs support teachers. You will be asked a series of questions about the nature of the type of work that is undertaken. Please be aware that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions posed and so please feel free to give your honest opinion. If you prefer not to answer a particular item or find an item distressing, you may leave it blank. The questionnaire should take about 5-10 minutes to complete.

What happens to the information I provide?

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and your responses are anonymous. Participation in this study guarantees confidentiality of the information you provide. No one apart from the researchers will have any access to the information you provide. We will not ask you to write your name on the study materials. Instead we will ask you to create a unique participant identification code. You can use this code if, after completing the study, you wish to withdraw your data. You are completely free to withdraw from the study at any time up to a week after participating, without giving a reason. Once the data is analysed a report of the findings may be submitted for publication. Only broad trends will be reported, and it will not be possible to identify any individuals. A summary of the results will be available from the researcher on request.

Contact for further information

If you require any further information, have any queries or wish to withdraw your data from this study, please contact the principal researcher Ahmar Ferguson (Ahmar.ferguson.19@ucl.ac.uk) or research supervisor Zachary Walker (zachary.walker@ucl.ac.uk).

I have read the information above and fully understand that my participation is voluntary, the information I provide is confidential, and that I am free to withdraw up to a week after participating.

Please tick to confirm you wish to participate

Appendix H2: Participant Debrief Form

Debrief

Thank you very much for taking part in this study.

The main purpose of the research is to explore how EPs and SENCOs view EP input in managing work related teacher stress in primary schools.

You will have been asked a series of questions designed to obtain your view on issues relating to how EPs support teachers to manage work related stress. I am interested in understanding how EPs and SENCOs view their role and responsibility in this area.

Once the study is completed you can request a copy of the report so that you are able to read the results and conclusions in full.

If you have any questions or wish to withdraw your data, please contact the researcher Ahmar Ferguson (Ahmar.ferguson.19@ucl.ac.uk) or research supervisor Dr Zachary Walker (zachary.walker@ucl.ac.uk).

Many thanks for your participation,

Ahmar Ferguson

Principal researcher

You will now create a unique participant code that can be used if you wish to withdraw your data up to a week after participating in this study. **Please make a note of it for your records.**

To create the code, please enter:

- The first two letters of your mother's maiden name
- Followed by the day of the month of your date of birth
- Followed by the last three digits of your telephone number.

For example, if your mother's maiden name is Doe, your date of birth is 28/02/1983 and your telephone number is 758 304, you should enter DO28304



If you have felt distressed by participating in this study please consider contacting one of the organisations listed below:

The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP)

www.aep.org.uk enquiries@aep.org.uk Tel: 0191 384 9512

Education Support

www.educationsupport.org.uk support@edsupport.org.uk Tel: 08000 562 561

Appendix H3: Doctoral Student Ethical Approval Form

Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified **you must be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office before you submit your ethics application for review**. To do this, email the complete ethics form to the [UCL Data Protection Office](#). Once your registration number is received, add it to the form* and submit it to your supervisor for approval. If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

Please note that the completion of the [UCL GDPR online training](#) is mandatory for all PhD students.

Section 1 – Project details

- a. Project title: **An Exploration of How Educational Psychologists Support Primary School Teacher Work Related Stress Before and During the Covid-19 Pandemic.**
- b. Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678): **Ahmar Ferguson 19166174**
- c. ***UCL Data Protection Registration Number: Z6364106/2021/06/200**
 - a. Date Issued: **26/06/2021**
- d. Supervisor/Personal Tutor: **Zachary Walker and Jeremy Monsen**
- e. Department: **Psychology**
- f. Course category (Tick one):
PhD
EdD
DEdPsy
- g. **If applicable**, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.
- h. Intended research start date: **June 2021**
- i. Intended research end date: **March 2022**
- j. Country fieldwork will be conducted in: **UK**
- k. If research to be conducted abroad please check the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(FCO\)](#) and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If

the FCO advice is against travel this will be required before ethical approval can be granted: [UCL travel advice webpage](#)

- I. Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?

Yes

External Committee Name:

Date of Approval:

No **go to Section 2**

If yes:

- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 - Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

Interviews

Focus Groups

Questionnaires

Action Research

Observation

Literature Review

Controlled trial/other intervention study

Use of personal records

Systematic review – **if only method used go to Section 5**

Secondary data analysis – **if secondary analysis used go to Section 6**

Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups

Other, give details:

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination.

Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

[Please see attached research proposal](#)

Section 3 – research Participants (tick all that apply)

- Early years/pre-school
- Ages 5-11
- Ages 12-16
- Young people aged 17-18
- Adults please specify below
- Unknown – specify below
- No participants

Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and Educational Psychologists (EPs)

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC).

Section 4 - Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a. Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?

Yes* No

b. Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?

Yes* No

c. Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?

Yes* No

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 5 – Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

a. Will you be collecting any new data from participants?

Yes* No

b. Will you be analysing any secondary data?

Yes* No

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) **and** if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 8 Attachments**.*

Section 6 - Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

a. Name of dataset/s:

b. Owner of dataset/s:

c. Are the data in the public domain?

Yes No

If no, do you have the owner's permission/license?

Yes No*

- d. Are the data special category personal data (i.e. personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation)?

Yes* No

- e. Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?

Yes No*

- f. **If no**, was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?

Yes No*

- g. **If no**, was data collected prior to ethics approval process?

Yes No*

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If secondary analysis is only method used **and** no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to **Section 9 Attachments**.*

Section 7 – Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

- a. Data subjects - Who will the data be collected from?

[SENCOs and EPs](#)

- b. What data will be collected? Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected

[Gender and years of experience in role](#)

Is the data anonymised? Yes No*

Do you plan to anonymise the data? Yes* No

Do you plan to use individual level data? Yes* No

Do you plan to pseudonymise the data? Yes* No

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

- c. **Disclosure** – Who will the results of your project be disclosed to?

[All participants will have the option of receiving the results of the study.](#)

Disclosure – Will personal data be disclosed as part of your project?

No

- d. Data storage – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick**, encrypted laptop** etc. [encrypted USB stick](#)

**** Advanced Encryption Standard 256 bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS**

- e. **Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution)** – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?

Yes No

- f. How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format?

[Data will be kept securely on an encrypted USB for the duration of the research and write up. The data will be kept securely on an encrypted USB for ten years in line with the UCL guidelines.](#)

Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with GDPR and state what these arrangements are)

No

Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.)

No

- g. If personal data is used as part of your project, describe what measures you have in place to ensure that the data is only used for the research purpose e.g. pseudonymization and short retention period of data’.

Individual data collected via the semi-structured interviews will have an additional layer of protection by using pseudonymization.

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 8 – Ethical Issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

All issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*

- Methods
- Sampling
- Recruitment
- Gatekeepers
- Informed consent
- Potentially vulnerable participants
- Safeguarding/child protection
- Sensitive topics
- International research
- Risks to participants and/or researchers
- Confidentiality/Anonymity
- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality
- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)
- Reporting
- Dissemination and use of findings

As the study will involve reflecting on work related stress it is possible that some participants may become distressed when engaging with the interview. All participants, including participants that become distressed will be directed to appropriate support (therapeutic services and unions) via the debrief form. In addition participants will be made aware of the purpose of the study in order to support their engagement and understand the intention behind the research and subsequent questions.

Participants will be made explicitly aware that all data is confidential and while the results of the overall study will be freely shared, information on specific participants will not be shared. Participants will be given the option of receiving the results of the study once the research is complete. Participants will be made aware that their participation is voluntary, and that the information collected will be kept securely for a period of ten years on an encrypted USB stick.

Please confirm that the processing of the data is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to an individual

Yes

Section 9 – Attachments.

Please attach your information sheets and consent forms to your ethics application before requesting a Data Protection number from the UCL Data Protection office. Note that they will be unable to issue you the Data Protection number until all such documentation is received

- a. Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research (List attachments below)

Yes No

Research Proposal, Consent Form, Debrief Form,

- b. Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee Yes
c. The proposal ('case for support') for the project Yes
d. Full risk assessment Yes

Section 10 – Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.

Yes No

I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.

Yes No

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name Ahmar Ferguson

Date 30/04/2021

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor for review.

Notes and references

Professional code of ethics

You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:

[British Psychological Society](#) (2018) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*

Or

[British Educational Research Association](#) (2018) *Ethical Guidelines*

Or

[British Sociological Association](#) (2017) *Statement of Ethical Practice*

Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the [Institute of Education Research Ethics website](#).

Disclosure and Barring Service checks

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE.

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

Further references

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.

This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Wiles, R. (2013) *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* Bloomsbury.

A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

Departmental Use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor must refer the application to the Research Development Administrator via email so that it can be submitted to the IOE Research Ethics Committee

for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. If unsure please refer to the guidelines explaining when to refer the ethics application to the IOE Research Ethics Committee, posted on the committee's website.

Student name: Ahmar Ferguson

Student department: Psychology

Course: Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

Project Title: An Exploration of How Educational Psychologists Support Primary School Teacher Work Related Stress Before and During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Reviewer 1

Supervisor/first reviewer name: Zachary Walker

Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research? No

Supervisor/first reviewer signature:



Date: June 13, 2021

Reviewer 2

Second reviewer name: Jeremy Monsen

Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?

No

Second reviewer signature:



Date: 14.6.2021

Decision on behalf of reviewers

Approved x

Approved subject to the following additional measures

Not approved for the reasons given below

Referred to the REC for review

Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC:

Comments from reviewers for the applicant:

Once it is approved by both reviewers, students should submit their ethics application form to the Centre for Doctoral Education team: IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk.