POWERup – Promoting the Occupational Well-being of EducatoRs: Initial concept and development

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Occupational stress and burnout among teachers and educational staff is a serious societal issue. In the UK, teaching is classified as a high-stress profession with 25% of teachers saying they feel very or extremely stressed due to work. According to the Department for Education, in 2016 for every 1 teacher retiring, 4 left the profession. This month, the Education Support Partnership (the UK’s only charity focused on supporting educators’ mental health and well-being) announced that over the last 12 months their helpline experienced a 28% increase in overall calls and a 57% increase in the number of cases assessed as ‘at risk’ of suicide. This problem affects teachers’ mental health, well-being, and retainment in the profession, and it also causes a negative knock-on effect for pupils’ learning. Something needs to be done, and POWERup (Promoting the Occupational Well-being of EducatoRs) aims to address the problem of occupational stress and burnout through the development of a smart phone app for use by educators and schools.

POWERup would offer the most current evidence-based strategies to support educators across a range of known stressors (e.g., classroom management, supporting pupils with special educational needs). Due to its digital nature, POWERup would have the ability to be responsive rather than static, with a focus on optimising its effectiveness over time through on-going monitoring and evaluation. POWERup would connect educators and researchers in a way that facilitated enduring knowledge exchange. Educators, who have neither the time nor the access to search academic databases for research evidence, would have direct access to up-to-date information and strategies based on rigorous research. Researchers, who are removed from the daily classroom environment, would have real-time data providing unique insights into stressors teachers are currently worried about, how they are using the strategies on the app, and subsequently how effective it is. Through this synergy, POWERup would address the serious problem of occupational stress and burnout and ultimately support healthier and happier school environments. As this project is in its initial conceptualisation and development stage, the purpose of presenting it at this event would be to hear input from a variety of people about their thoughts on the idea, any suggestions for app content, barriers/facilitators to using the app, and other important considerations.