

Self-Management and Development: Perceived Stress Management with Cost-Effective Self-Care Strategies for Well-Being among Women Educators.

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Abstract

Women educators frequently experience significant work-related stress due to demanding workloads, emotional labour, and the challenge of balancing professional responsibilities with household and caregiving roles. This study evaluates perceived stress levels and examines the acceptability and effectiveness of cost-effective mindful self-care strategies aimed at promoting holistic well-being among women educators. Using a descriptive cross-sectional design, data were collected from 120 participants through a structured questionnaire covering stress, self-care practices, and well-being indicators. Results revealed moderately high stress levels, with lack of personal time and difficulty balancing work and home emerging as major contributors. Although participants reported irregular use of self-care techniques, they consistently rated these practices—such as deep breathing, micro-breaks, stretching, grounding exercises, and sleep hygiene—as highly effective in reducing stress. Holistic well-being across emotional, mental, physical, and social domains was moderate overall. The findings highlight a strong willingness among women educators to adopt and sustain simple, low-cost self-care routines if institutional support and structured guidance are provided. The study underscores the importance of integrating mindful self-care into professional development and workplace wellness initiatives to strengthen resilience and enhance overall well-being among women educators.

Keywords: Holistic well-being, Low-cost interventions, Mindful self-care, Women educators, Perceived stress

1. Introduction

Teaching is a highly rewarding but stressful profession as numerous studies have shown around the world. According to Kyriacou (2001), teaching was found to be one of the most stressful jobs especially when it comes to workload, student behavior and the pressure of the administration. The modern literature also proves that the burden of modern-day teachers is even greater, as they have to cope with curriculum reform, classroom management, and accountability system changes, not to mention the accelerated process of digitalization (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2015). Other gendered stressors experienced by women teachers are societal expectations, work-family conflict, and unequal allocation of unpaid care work, which is found across educational stress literature (Klassen and Chiu, 2010; Bottiani et al., 2019). Unmanaged chronic stress is a contributing factor to emotional exhaustion, low job satisfaction, poor physical and psychological health, and increased teacher turnover, which ultimately lowers the quality of education and stability of the education system (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

Frameworks of self-management and self-development have thus been found to be key means of assisting educators to sustain resilience and deliver sustainable professional performance. In these models, mindful self care, which is conscious, reflexive awareness of one physical, emotional, and social needs, has become the focus of empirical support. Breath awareness, body scan, and short meditative pauses are demonstrated to provide better emotional control and less rumination, which facilitates a more positive interaction with others and classroom operations (Flook et al., 2013). In addition, the incorporation of low-cost self-management interventions, such as

micro-breaks, basic ergonomic postures, routine activities of peer-support, time management, sleep hygiene, and brief physical exercise, is consistent with the suggestions of context-sensitive and accessible interventions in school settings (Frank et al., 2015; Diaz et al., 2019). These are strategies that can be done within a short time by the teachers who do not need to undergo extensive training and need not invest a lot of money in them.

Irrespective of this possibility, the available literature is sparse on the perceived effectiveness, acceptability, and scalability of cost-effective mindful self-care measures, especially in women teachers working in a resource-limited environment. A lot of published evidence is based on the structured clinical interventions such as MBSR or measures teacher burnout based on the quantitative measures without considering the everyday and low-cost coping practices that would be employed by educators themselves (Roeser et al., 2013; Lomas et al., 2017). The above gap elucidates the necessity of gender-sensitive, context-based research, which will examine mindfulness-based self-care using the lived experiences of women teachers.

The current research fills this gap, looking at how female teachers view stress and how a set of cost-effective mindful self-care practices can help improve a holistic well-being. Holistic well-being is presented as a multidimensional construct of emotional, cognitive, physical and social aspects of readiness, which altogether lead to individual and professional functioning (WHO, 2020). The proposed study will attempt to answer the following questions: (1) which stressors do women educators perceive as important; (2) how useful, viable, and sustainable are particular low-cost mindful self-care practices; and (3) what makes these strategies continue to be practiced or not.

This study will educate institutional wellness policies, professional development programs, and peer-support systems through the use of the experience of women educators as the focus, as well as concentrating on low-resource interventions that are both available and accessible to everyone. The practical implications might involve the incorporation of a brief mindfulness training into the faculty meeting schedule, the integration of micro self-care activities into daily routine, as well as the creation of a peer-based system of encouragement, which will help eliminate stigma around mental health. Finally, helping women teachers to learn how to cope with stress by practicing self-care is both a personal gain and a business countermeasure to the sustainability of workforce and quality of education.

2. Review literature

Mindfulness-based interventions have become more visible as an easily available stress-reducing method in teachers. Initial pilot studies on modified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (mMBSR) was done by Flook, Goldberg, Pinger and Davidson (2013) in their work that focused on teachers. Their pilot project showed that teachers who received a course of 8 weeks of interventions experienced significant negative perceptions of stress and self-compassion. It is often used as an example of the first study to demonstrate that mindfulness programs can be practically implemented in a school setting and produce quantifiable benefits as far as teacher well-being is concerned.

On this basis, Roeser, Schonert-Reichl, Jha et al. (2013) carried out one of the most effective randomized controlled trials of teacher mindfulness training. In their report, the authors demonstrated that they had improved in emotion regulation, occupational self-compassion, and stress in classroom settings. Physiological benefits were also found with better cortisol control by teachers. Due to being school-timed and teacher-appropriate, the present research yields empirical evidence to the idea of integrating mindful self-care in the routine educator schedule.

In the same manner, Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia and Greenberg (2013) examined the other formal mindfulness intervention, Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program, which is aimed at educators. Their quasi experimental analysis indicated a lot of decrease in distress, time urgency and burnout, and enhancement of emotional support in the classroom. The work of Jennings et al. is still fundamental in its position that the benefits of mindfulness go not only in the well-being of teachers but also the quality of teacher-student interaction.

Frank, Reibel, Broderick, Cantrell and Metz (2015) tested a more condensed model of the mindfulness training. They tested a reduced version of MBSR program, which had fewer hours of work compared to the traditional procedures. Findings indicated less stress and anxiety, which proved that even brief and low-cost mindfulness-based interventions can be effective among busy people, such as teachers. Their results can be of particular importance to the development of cost-effective self-care plans in low-resource learning institutions.

Filling the gaps in the literature, Klingshirn and Mitchel (2020) conducted a review of existing mindfulness-based programs utilized with educators and they came to the verdict that even the shortest intervention of 4-6 weeks is able to produce a significant impact on reducing stress. Their synthesis underlined that micro-practices, short bursts of meditation, attentional breathing, and mindfulness pauses, are more accessible to teachers compared to full-fledged MBSR interventions, particularly with women educators who have to multi-task with a significant amount of work and family life.

Simultaneously, Lomas, Medina, Ivztan, Rupprecht and Eiroa-Orosa (2017) carried out a systematic review of the literature regarding mindfulness in the workplace, including educators. They indicated that there were steady psychological functioning improvement, stress, and emotional well-being. Notably, they emphasized that mindfulness proves effective especially when programs are low-cost, self-practice based or a combination of peer-support elements.

The research beyond the framework of the regular mindfulness programs provides evidence of the value of micro-breaks and fast self-care strategies. One such example is a study by Kim, Park and Kim (2018), where brief mindful breathing sessions that take less than five minutes helped a great deal to reduce acute stress levels and improve attentional control. Though not restricted to teachers, their findings have a solid application in terms of implementing the so-called micro self-care strategies into the routine of a teacher without any financial or structural assistance.

Diaz, Glass and Ardoin (2019) also examined the concept of brief mindfulness strategies by teachers as part of the school day among educators in particular. Their qualitative research revealed that the most sought-after practices by educators were the minuscule price-free ones, which do not need much preparation, like mindful grounding or 1-minute breathing resets. Female teachers especially, said they appreciated those strategies that can be incorporated within the tight schedules they had between classes.

Kidger, Brockman, Tilling and Campbell (2016) studied a peer-based mental-health support intervention among the teachers at the school-system level. They discovered that structured peer-support model positively influenced the well-being of teachers and perceived stress. This is not a mindfulness program per se, but their results support the relevance of low-cost and community-based self-care programs that increase the coping capacity of educators.

In educational psychology, gender-specific aspects of teaching stress have also been a popular topic of discussion. According to Klassen and Chiu (2010), workload stress, emotional labor and workfamily conflict levels were found to be very high in women teachers as compared to men. Equally, Griffith, Steptoe and Cropley (1999) noted that women teachers were disproportionately also chronic symptoms of stress related to teaching as well as the domestic load. These results highlight the importance of gender-specific stress management models that can appropriately meet the multi-role needs of women teachers.

In more recent research, Bottiani, Duran, Pas and Bradshaw (2019) investigated the differences in teacher stress and burnout by gender by revealing that women teachers indicated higher levels of emotional exhaustion and more stress related to the roles of student and emotional support. Their research correlates the importance of women educator interventions to be more focused on emotional strength and daily coping abilities- areas where mindfulness and self-care practices are systematically depicted to be successful.

To add to the findings, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) found that time pressure, disruptive student behavior, and emotional exhaustion were the most effective stress predictors in the case of teachers. In their sample, women teachers indicated that they had a heavier overall burden of stress, which underlines the necessity of self-caring practices that are hectic, fast, and economically viable to overcome the accumulating stress on a daily basis.

Collectively, these articles demonstrate stable evidence that mindfulness-based interventions, micro-level self-care strategies, and peer-support models can play a major role in alleviating perceived stress among educators. Most importantly, they also emphasize socially essential considerations of gender, women educators are more vulnerable to occupational stress and time-bound, and emotional work is more likely, which is why low-cost and short-term mindful self-care techniques are especially helpful to this group.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the key perceived stressors in women educators in various teaching environments and professional jobs.
2. To evaluate the perceived usefulness, feasibility, and acceptability of cost-effective mindful self-care interventions including brief mindfulness meditation, micro-breaks, breath awareness, grounding and low-cost lifestyle modifications.
3. To evaluate the connection between mindful self-care practices and holistic well-being (emotional, mental, physical, and social well-being indicators).
4. To assess the degree to which women teachers are planning to embrace and maintain such economical mindful self-care habits as their daily routine.
5. To produce evidence-based policies to apply to schools, administrators, and policy formulation to implement low-cost self-care and mindfulness-based practices in teacher development and wellness programs.

4. Scope of the Study

- The research is only about women teachers, such as the schoolteachers, lecturers and female faculty members in formal institutions of education.
- It uses perceived stress as opposed to clinical diagnosis hence fit in workplace based wellness assessment.
- The study will be restricted to cost-effective and available mindful self-care interventions that do not necessitate any special training, costly resources, and time-consuming commitments.
- It deals with total well-being in terms of emotional, psychological, physical, and social well-being, which is a holistic approach to wellness.
- The study collects data in terms of perception-related answers, which makes it possible to assess the acceptability, viability, and possible sustainability of mindful self-care practices.
- Geographical area is limited to a specific region or group of institutions (according to your study sample) so as to give contextual meaning and be able to interpret the results specifically.

5. Limitations of the Study

1. Self-reports are also vulnerable to response bias, social desirability bias, or subjective measurement of stress and well-being.
2. The effectiveness of mindful self-care strategies is also evaluated in the study but not the long-term physiological or behavioral results.
3. The study is done in a particular area or sample that may not be generalizable to the women teachers in other settings or countries.

4. The research fails to measure external variables like personal life events, change of workload in institutions, and administrative pressure, which can affect the level of stress.
5. Since the interventions are self-reported and low-cost, variability in practice quality, frequency and compliance may also affect perceived perceptions.
6. The design lacks the pre- post experimental comparison thus being more exploratory and perception based than causal.

6. Methodology

Data regarding perceived stress and mindful self-care practices in women educators was collected in a structured questionnaire. The tool in question discussed four major areas, namely the demographic profile; perceived stress levels; cost-effective mindful self-care strategies; and holistic well-being indicators. Based on the literature available on mindfulness and teacher well-being and validated scales, items were created. To ensure a clear and consistent representation of perceptions, the questionnaire contained Likert-scale, checklists, and short options as the total sample of the survey was 120 women educators employed in schools, colleges, and higher education institutions. Teachers of primary, secondary and tertiary levels were included in the study with different years of teaching experience. Institutional notices and staff-room visits were used to recruit respondents with wide representation of teaching levels and workloads to ensure that people with different workloads and levels were represented in the study. Self-administered questions were sent via paper and through links via the internet which were distributed by institutional coordinators. The response was voluntary, confidential, and informed consent. The respondents were provided with proper instructions and the responses on the five-point Likert scales were summarized in terms of frequencies, percentages, and means of the items and domains. To allow a domain-level interpretation, composite mean scores were obtained in the categories of holistic well-being and perceived stress. Qualitative recommendations will be offered in optional comment boxes that were coded thematically to glean information on desirable self-care behavior and practical difficulties. Standard spreadsheet tools and simple descriptive statistics were used to perform data analysis.

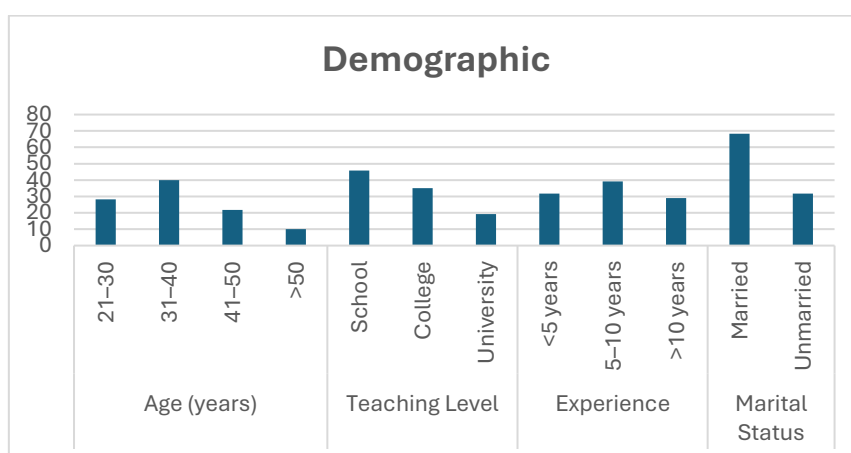
7. Results

The demographic profile of the responding 120 women educators showed that the largest group of respondents was between 31–40 years of age (40%), followed by those aged between 21–30 years old (28.3%). Thus, most respondents were at the early or middle part of their career, while only 10% were over 50 years old. Regarding teaching level, nearly half were employed in school settings (45.8%), with 35% in college and 19.2% in university settings, which presents broad representation across educational sectors. Teaching experience ranged from 39.2% of participants having 5–10 years of experience, 31.7% with less than 5 years, to 29.1% with more than 10 years of teaching experience, suggesting a balanced mix of novice, mid-career, and senior educators. Finally, the majority of respondents reported being married (68.3%), with 31.7% self-reporting as unmarried, reflecting typical demographic trends among working women in the education sector. Overall, this sample represents a diverse group in terms of age, experience, and institutional affiliations, which provides a comprehensive basis for examining stress and self-care perceptions.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of women educators (N = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	21–30	34	28.3
	31–40	48	40.0
	41–50	26	21.7
	>50	12	10.0

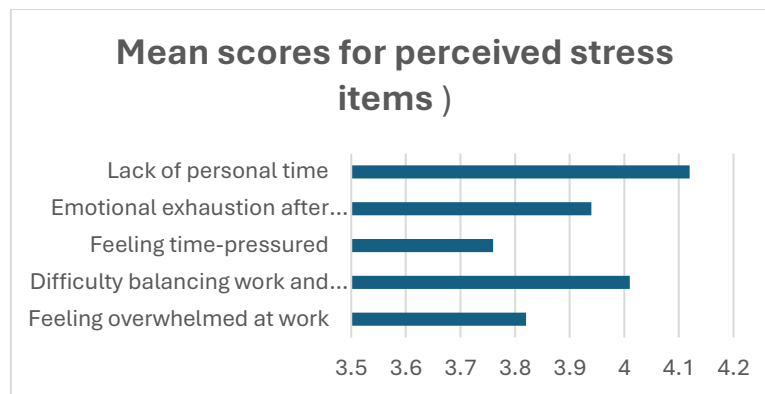
Teaching Level	School	55	45.8
	College	42	35.0
	University	23	19.2
Experience	<5 years	38	31.7
	5–10 years	47	39.2
	>10 years	35	29.1
Marital Status	Married	82	68.3
	Unmarried	38	31.7



The perceived stress scores reveal that women educators are experiencing moderately high levels of stress, while the overall mean score of 3.93 indicates substantial pressure in their professional and personal roles. Of the individual items, the highest perceived stress was related to lack of personal time ($M = 4.12$) and difficulty balancing work and home responsibilities ($M = 4.01$), reflecting the important challenges women educators face in managing dual roles. Emotional exhaustion after teaching was also rated high ($M = 3.94$), indicating considerable emotional strain associated with daily teaching tasks. Feelings of being overwhelmed at work ($M = 3.82$) and time pressure ($M = 3.76$) further add to the accumulation of stressors. The consistently high mean scores across all items bring into focus that stress among women educators is not only multifaceted but also pervasive, influencing emotional, physical, and time dimensions of daily life.

Table 2. Mean scores for perceived stress items (N = 120)

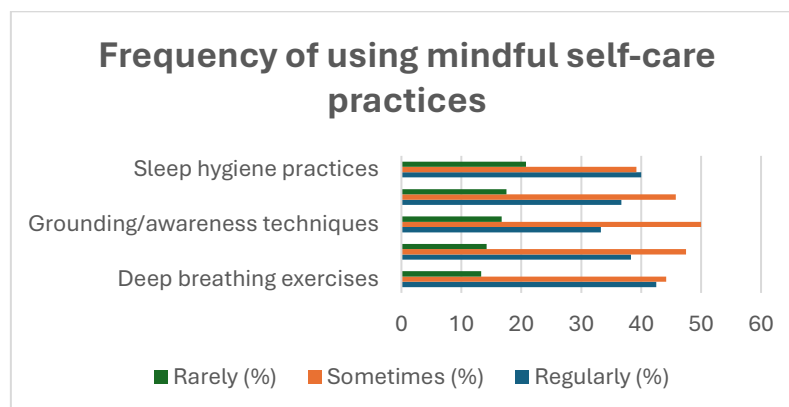
Item	Mean (M)	SD
Feeling overwhelmed at work	3.82	0.91
Difficulty balancing work and home	4.01	0.88
Feeling time-pressured	3.76	0.93
Emotional exhaustion after teaching	3.94	0.90
Lack of personal time	4.12	0.82
Overall Perceived Stress Mean	3.93	—



The frequency of mindful self-care practices amongst women educators indicates that these strategies are generally well-accepted, yet the level of their usage is irregular. Deep breathing exercises were the most widely practiced technique: 42.5% used them regularly and 44.2% used them sometimes, which suggests a wide familiarity with this simple method of managing stress. Short micro-breaks were also used regularly by 38.3%, though nearly half - 47.5% - practiced them only occasionally, possibly indicating that such practices are constrained by perceived time pressures. Grounding or awareness techniques showed the highest occasional use at 50%, though with a regular use rate of only 33.3%. Similarly, body stretching on changing activities was used regularly by 36.7% of participants, although nearly half used it only sometimes at 45.8%. The sleep hygiene practices showed a mixed pattern, with 40% applying them regularly but an equal 20.8% hardly ever doing so, pointing to difficulties in sustaining consistent night-time routines. Overall, the findings indicate that women educators recognize the value of simple, low-cost mindful self-care strategies; however, many utilize them irregularly because of patterns in their workload, pressures of time, or lack of structured reminders.

Table 3. Frequency of using mindful self-care practices (N = 120)

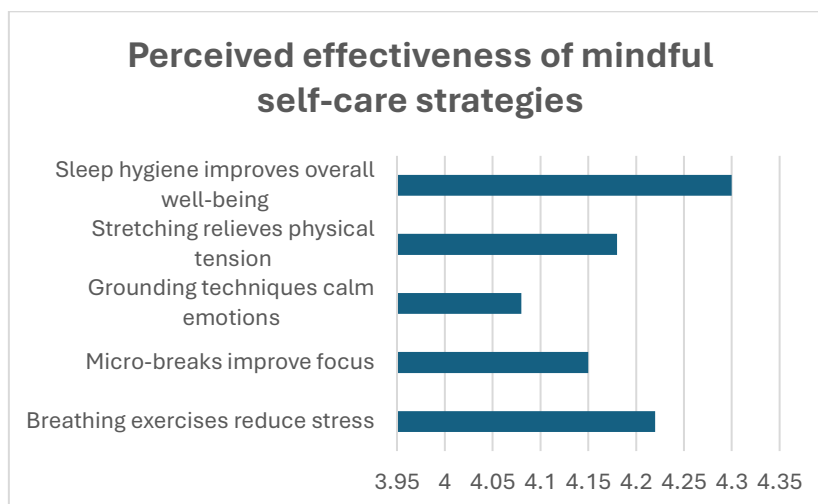
Practice	Regularly (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)
Deep breathing exercises	42.5	44.2	13.3
Short micro-breaks	38.3	47.5	14.2
Grounding/awareness techniques	33.3	50.0	16.7
Body stretching between tasks	36.7	45.8	17.5
Sleep hygiene practices	40.0	39.2	20.8



The perceived effectiveness scores suggest that women educators perceive mindful self-care strategies as highly effective, with an overall mean of 4.19, reflecting strong confidence in their impact on stress management and well-being. Of the individual items, sleep hygiene practices were rated the most helpful (M = 4.30), suggesting adequate rest is strongly associated with improved overall wellness. A high rating of effectiveness was given for breathing exercises (M = 4.22), emphasizing their worth as an immediate and accessible tool to reduce stress. Stretching to relieve physical tension (M = 4.18) and micro-breaks to enhance focus (M = 4.15) were similarly perceived as helpful, demonstrating the utility of simple and low-cost techniques to support daily functioning. Grounding techniques, although slightly lower, still scored strongly (M = 4.08), demonstrating that educators find meaning in emotional-centering strategies. The consistently high mean scores across the items demonstrate that women educators report practical and positive impacts of the practice of mindful self-care and believe such strategies play an important part in supporting holistic well-being.

Table 4. Perceived effectiveness of mindful self-care strategies (N = 120)

Strategy	Mean (M)	SD
Breathing exercises reduce stress	4.22	0.74
Micro-breaks improve focus	4.15	0.78
Grounding techniques calm emotions	4.08	0.81
Stretching relieves physical tension	4.18	0.76
Sleep hygiene improves overall well-being	4.30	0.70
Overall Effectiveness Mean	4.19	—



The mean for holistic well-being reveals that women educators experience moderate levels of overall well-being. The overall mean is 3.69, indicating a balanced but not optimum state of key domains. The mean score for emotional well-being is 3.65, interpreted to mean that educators cope fairly well with their emotions; however, stress and workload pressures still have an impact on emotional stability. Mental well-being had a slightly higher mean of 3.72, reflecting a positive mindset but also areas where cognitive strain and mental fatigue persist. Physical well-being was the lowest rated domain (3.58), interpreted to reflect that physical tiredness, limited rest, and insufficient time spent on activities that promote self-care could be common experiences. Social well-being received the highest rating, 3.81, interpreted as good, revealing strong interpersonally supportive networks and positive social connections within personal and professional ecologies. Taken together, results indicate that while women educators experience moderate holistic well-being, chronic stressors continue to impact emotional,

mental, and physical domains, reinforcing the importance of steady self-care and institutional support necessary for enhanced wellness.

Table 5. Holistic well-being domains (N = 120)

Domain	Mean (M)	Interpretation
Emotional well-being	3.65	Moderate
Mental well-being	3.72	Moderate
Physical well-being	3.58	Moderate
Social well-being	3.81	Good
Overall Well-Being Mean	3.69	Moderate

8. Major finding

1. **Middle stress levels in the female teachers:** The majority of the respondents indicated moderate stress levels, mostly workload, pressures of time, balancing between work and personal life. The strongest stressors were identified to be lack of personal time and emotional fatigue.
2. **Self-care habits spread extensively but not adopted as routine:** Although simple self-care practices, including deep breathing, brief micro-breaks, and stretching, were widely used by many educators, a considerable percentage of them performed frequently but not routinely, suggesting partial and not complete integration of mindful self-care in daily life.
3. **Much perceived effectiveness of low-cost mindful practices:** Breathing exercises, micro-breaks, and sleep hygiene were rated as highly effective by the respondents in decreasing stress and emotional balance. These strategies were considered as good since they do not demand a lot of time, money or external assistance.
4. **Medium level of holistic well-being with a possibility to improve:** Overall, the scores on emotional, mental and physical well-being were moderate; this indicates that despite the fact that educators practice some self-care, they are subjected to chronic stress, which in turn impacts their overall well-being. The social well-being was rated a little higher because of favourable peer relationships.
5. **High intentions to embrace and maintain self-care measures with effective guidance:** The open remarks showed that the women educators are quite open to adopting mindful self-care practices in their routines provided institutions are able to offer simple orientation, reminders, and encouraging settings. Respondents said that they should have formal support and regular consciousness-raising activities.

Conclusion

The researchers show that the perceived stress levels among women teachers are moderately high, most of them motivated by workload, the emotional labor, and lack of combination between professional and personal duties. In spite of these pressures, respondents are proactive participants in the diverse cost-effective mindful self-care techniques and they see these coping techniques as effective and efficient in dealing with day-to-day stress. Deep breathing, micro-breaks and grounding exercises, stretching and sleep hygiene were not only common but also rated very high in terms of effectiveness in increasing emotional resilience and mental clarity. Nevertheless, it is also found that the practice of self-care is inconsistent and overall healthy living, especially emotional and physical health, are moderate which means that stress levels still affect the general well-being. Notably, the high intentions demonstrated by the involved parties to pursue and maintain mindful self-care practices present a major opportunity to institutions to help teachers to maintain themselves by implementing low-cost programs, training embryos, and providing a positive work atmosphere. On the whole, the paper highlights the fact that mindful self-care is a viable, available, and powerful method of fortifying holistic well-being in women educators, should it be held up by habitual awareness, institutional support, and a culture of valuing mental health.

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