



The Role of Self-Care in Promoting Psychological Well-Being among Guidance and Counseling Teachers: A Review of Empirical Studies

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: May 4, 2026; **Revised:** May 27, 2026; **Accepted:** June 3, 2026

KEYWORDS

Self-Care;
Psychological Well-Being;
Guidance and Counseling
Teacher;

ABSTRACT

Teaching is recognised as a profession with high emotional and psychological demands that increase the risk of burnout and declining mental health. This study aims to systematically review the role of self-care in promoting teachers' psychological well-being (PWB) based on empirical research findings. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach was employed to analyse peer-reviewed articles indexed in international databases, using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data were analysed through identification, screening, quality appraisal, and thematic synthesis processes. The findings indicate that self-care practices, including self-compassion, mindfulness, emotion regulation, physical activity, and social support, are positively associated with higher psychological well-being and function as protective factors against stress and teacher burnout. In conclusion, self-care represents an essential mental health promotion strategy in educational settings. This review contributes, both theoretically and practically, to strengthening positive psychology approaches within guidance and counselling practices.

KATA KUNCI

Perawatan diri;
Kesejahteraan Psikologis;
Guru;
Bimbingan dan Konseling;

ABSTRAK

Profesi guru memiliki tuntutan emosional dan psikologis tinggi yang meningkatkan risiko burnout dan penurunan kesehatan mental. Penelitian ini bertujuan meninjau secara sistematis peran self-care dalam meningkatkan psychological well-being (PWB) guru berdasarkan studi empiris. Penelitian menggunakan metode Systematic Literature Review (SLR) dengan menelaah artikel ilmiah terindeks pada basis data internasional yang dipublikasikan dalam rentang tahun tertentu sesuai kriteria inklusi dan eksklusi. Analisis dilakukan melalui proses identifikasi, penyaringan, evaluasi kualitas, dan sintesis temuan penelitian. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa praktik self-care meliputi self-compassion, mindfulness, regulasi emosi, aktivitas fisik, serta dukungan social berkorelasi positif dengan peningkatan PWB dan berperan sebagai faktor protektif terhadap stres dan burnout guru. Kesimpulannya, self-care menjadi strategi promotif kesehatan mental yang relevan dalam konteks profesi guru. Penelitian ini berkontribusi memperkuat integrasi pendekatan psikologi positif dalam praktik bimbingan dan konseling pendidikan.

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession is recognised as one of the most emotionally and psychologically demanding jobs. The success of character development and student academic achievement is significantly influenced by teachers'

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22460/quanta.v10i2.7280>



discipline, motivation, and professionalism in performing their duties (Da Rince et al., 2021). Excessive work demands, chronic stress, lack of support, and weak personal resources such as resilience are the primary triggers. The impact extends beyond teachers' health to the quality of learning and the sustainability of the teaching profession, making it crucial to address this issue seriously within the education sector. These conditions create work-related stress that, over time, can lead to burnout or psychological disorders, characterised by emotional exhaustion and even a decline in work performance (Maslach et al., 2001). On the other hand, teachers are the main driving force in creating well-being-friendly schools, which is achieved by enhancing their own competencies (Kurniawan et al., 2025; Meshko et al., 2026).

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model is a job design framework that explains how job characteristics influence employees' well-being and performance (Bakker et al., 2023; Bakker & Mostert, 2024; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). From the perspective of the Job Demands–Resources (JDR) Model, the teaching profession is characterised by high job demands, including administrative pressure, emotional involvement with students, academic targets, and the need to adapt to changes in the education system. When adequate psychological or social resources do not balance these demands, teachers are vulnerable to burnout and a decline in psychological well-being. In this context, self-care can be understood as a personal resource that helps individuals maintain adaptive emotional regulation, psychological recovery, and professional functioning.

Teacher burnout is a growing concern, reflected in the high emotional demands of the teaching profession. This phenomenon of teacher burnout is prevalent across various countries and educational levels. Findings from several countries indicate high prevalence rates of “clinical” burnout, stress, high emotional distress, and depression (Agyapong et al., 2022, 2024). Meanwhile, several studies have also found that school teachers are at high risk for work-related burnout (Belay et al., 2023; García-Carmona et al., 2019). In Singapore, patterns of work and emotional stress emerged through narrative accounts rather than large-scale surveys (Sohail et al., 2023). The variation in burnout prevalence across countries indicates that teacher burnout is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by contextual factors such as work culture, the education system, institutional support, administrative demands, and social expectations regarding the teaching profession. This underscores that teachers' mental health is a multidimensional issue requiring a comprehensive preventive and promotive approach. Various studies have reported rising levels of psychological stress, work-related anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and a decline in psychological well-being among educators. These conditions underscore that teachers' mental health is no longer an individual issue but a systemic challenge in the world of education. However, a gap has been identified: some interventions require considerable time, and there has been limited exploration of interventions focused on excessive workload (Agyapong et al., 2023).

From the perspective of positive psychology, an individual's mental health is understood not only as the absence of psychological disorders, but also as optimal psychological functioning. This concept is known as psychological well-being. According to Ryff & Keyes (1995), psychological well-being is a state in which a person lives with self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, the ability to manage one's environment, a sense of life purpose, and continuous personal growth. In addition to Ryff's eudaimonic approach, contemporary positive psychology also emphasises flourishing, resilience, and positive functioning as indicators of an individual's ability to cope, thrive, and maintain optimal quality of life in the face of life's and work's demands (Donaldson et al., 2022; Kern et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2021). Psychological well-being also plays a role in an individual's ability to cope with stress, maintain emotional stability, and sustain adaptive psychological functioning (Mulawarman et al., 2024). Teachers with high psychological well-being tend to have a strong sense of work meaning, resilience to professional pressures, and better adaptability to changes in education. Therefore, psychological well-being serves as a crucial indicator for comprehensively understanding teachers' mental health. In this context, self-care is viewed as a personal resource that can help teachers maintain psychological well-being, manage work-related stress, and enhance their adaptive capacity in fulfilling their professional roles.

Self-care is a set of physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual practices shown to be associated with lower stress and less severe burnout. Some literature highlights that the definition of self-care for educators remains inconsistent and is often narrowed down to “extra activities,” rather than a basic need related to work structure and organisational justice (Kneller, 2024; Lemon, 2021; Slemon et al., 2021; Turgeon-Brown, 2025). Self-care is the ability to care for oneself through awareness, self-control, and independence to achieve, maintain, or improve optimal health and well-being (Martínez et al., 2021; Tulu et al., 2021). Self-care encompasses behaviours an individual engages in to promote health, prevent illness, manage symptoms or diseases, and restore health, with or without the assistance of healthcare professionals (AuJla & Narasimhan, 2023; Riegel et al., 2021). In practice, self-care is understood as healthy behaviours such as managing diet, physical activity, sleep and rest, maintaining

mental and emotional health, building supportive relationships, and avoiding risky behaviours (Mills et al., 2018). Additionally, self-compassion is considered a crucial psychological component of self-care practices. According to Neff (2003), self-compassion encompasses self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, which help individuals respond adaptively to stress and maintain psychological well-being. Self-compassion serves as an internal resource that channels the benefits of self-care toward improved mental, physical, and relational health. Thus, in the context of the teaching profession, self-care is not merely the maintenance of physical health but also encompasses emotional regulation, stress management, mindfulness, self-compassion, work-life balance, and the pursuit of social support as efforts to maintain psychological well-being amid high professional demands.

In general, studies indicate that self-care practices such as mindfulness, self-compassion, emotional regulation, physical activity, and social support contribute to improved psychological well-being among teachers. These practices help reduce stress and burnout, increase job satisfaction, and strengthen adaptive coping capacities in the face of professional pressures (Abbas et al., 2025; Wong et al., 2025). A study on the psychological well-being (PWB) of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers found that those with higher PWB reported better self-care and self-compassion (Roberts et al., 2023). Additionally, physical activity, mindfulness/meditation, gratitude exercises, therapeutic techniques, self-care planning, work boundaries, creative relaxation, healthy eating, and social support were identified as key components of self-care that teachers can practice (Abou Assali & Al Abdouli, 2024; Avola et al., 2025; Dando et al., 2023; Kendrick et al., 2024; Lemon, 2021). Self-care is positioned as a personal resource within the Job Demands–Resources model, helping teachers balance high demands with personal resources, thereby maintaining teaching-related well-being (Civil et al., 2025; Dando et al., 2023; Liepina & Martinsone, 2022). These empirical findings indicate that self-care serves not only as an individual coping strategy but also as a protective factor. Research findings remain more focused on reducing burnout than on the broader development of positive psychological functioning; consequently, self-care as a collective practice, supervision, school culture, gender and equity perspectives, and systematic integration into teacher education remain relatively under-explored and represent important areas for further research.

Research on teacher burnout, psychological well-being, and self-care has grown rapidly; however, most studies have been conducted in isolation and have focused on individual variables or specific interventions. To date, few studies have systematically integrated empirical findings on how self-care practices contribute to improving psychological well-being among teachers across various educational contexts. However, the diversity of self-care practices and the scattered nature of research findings across various study contexts highlight the need for a systematic empirical synthesis to gain a more comprehensive understanding of self-care's effectiveness in supporting teachers' psychological well-being. Based on this discussion, this article aims to review and synthesise empirical findings regarding the role of self-care in enhancing teachers' psychological well-being, including the dominant forms of self-care used, the mechanisms through which they contribute to psychological well-being, and their implications for the development of evidence-based teacher well-being interventions. Based on these objectives, this study is formulated as the following research question (RQ1): RQ1: What is the role of self-care in enhancing teachers' psychological well-being? RQ2: What forms of self-care are implemented to enhance teachers' psychological well-being? RQ3: Which aspects of psychological well-being are most influenced by self-care practices among teachers? This review aims to identify effective self-care practices, examine the relationship between self-care and psychological well-being, and outline practical implications for the development of evidence-based teacher well-being interventions.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design.

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to identify the role of self-care in enhancing teachers' psychological well-being. Article selection followed a specific procedure using the PRISMA flowchart. This diagram illustrates the stages, from article identification through database searches, title and abstract screening, eligibility assessment via full-text screening, and finally the selection of articles meeting inclusion criteria for further analysis. This study began with the formulation of research questions (RQs). The research questions in this article were established as the first step in developing a systematic literature review (SLR) to guide the entire review process in a systematic and transparent manner (Lame, 2019). The search process was conducted using keywords across several research databases. The selected articles were then analysed using the PRISMA method and screened based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to address the established research questions. The research questions developed in this study are:

- 1. RQ1: What is the role of self-care in improving psychological well-being among teachers?
- 2. RQ2: What forms of self-care are implemented to improve psychological well-being among teachers?
- 3. RQ3: Which aspect of psychological well-being is most influenced by teachers’ self-care practices?

The findings from the first stage of the article selection process were the identification of relevant literature, conducted by accessing the databases Scopus, ERIC, Sage Journals, and SpringerLink. The search yielded 1,924 articles, with the following breakdown: Scopus: 51; Eric: 18; Sage Journals: 695; and SpringerLink: 1,160. Additionally, the articles were filtered using an automated tool to exclude duplicates based on publication date, article type, subject, journal, and language. The article screening was then continued using the automated tool, resulting in 1,907 articles. Subsequently, the articles were screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria, resulting in 143 articles. Of these, 122 articles were excluded for failing to meet the criteria. Consequently, 21 eligible articles remained. Thus, the study selection process is illustrated in the PRISMA flowchart as follows:

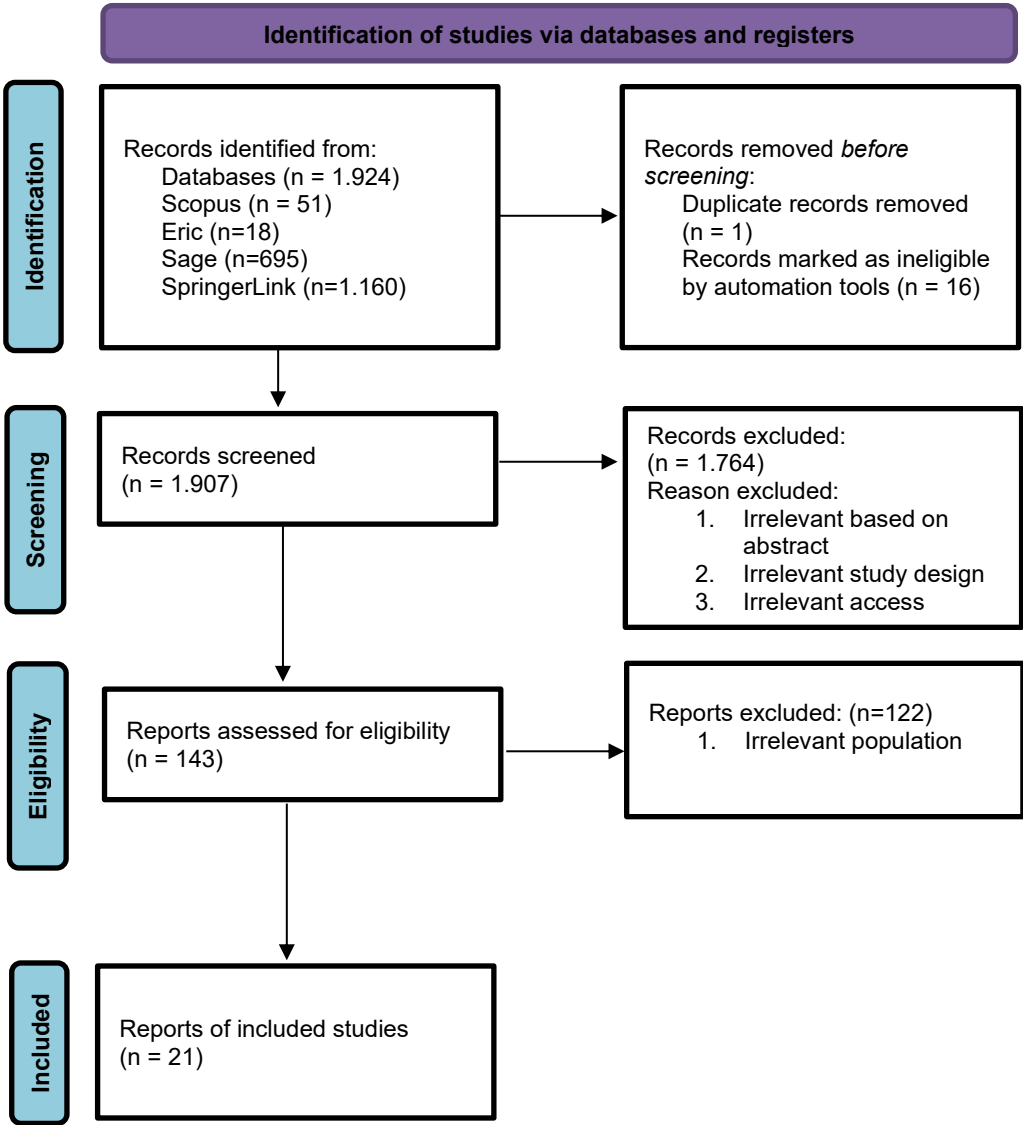


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

2.2 Study Location and Year.

This study collected data through a review of scientific articles and documents in online databases such as Scopus, ERIC, Sage Journals, and SpringerLink. The literature reviewed focused on themes supporting the role of self-care in enhancing teachers’ psychological well-being. The studies reviewed were conducted in various

countries, including the United Kingdom, Sweden, Turkey, Ireland, Iran, China, Kenya, the United States, Chile, Peru, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Australia. The publication year was limited to 2021–2026, ensuring that the identified articles are relevant to current circumstances and conditions. The results of the review regarding the number of articles by year are as follows: 2021 (n=0), 2022 (n=1), 2023 (n=5), 2024 (n=7), 2025 (n=7), and 2026 (n=1).

2.3 Population, Sample, or Research Subjects

This study utilized data sources such as Scopus, Eric, Sage Journals, and SpringerLink. The focus of this study was to examine self-care, a key factor in improving psychological well-being among teachers, as identified in empirical articles; therefore, conceptual articles, editorials, conference proceedings, and non-empirical studies were excluded from the selection process.

2.3 Data Collection

The data collection process involved several stages to ensure the relevance and quality of the sources, including the use of the following databases: Scopus, ERIC, Sage Journals, and SpringerLink. The article selection process followed PRISMA guidelines, including identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion. The keywords developed for the search process are listed in the table below:

Tabel 1. Keyword

Database	Keyword
Scopus, Eric, Sage Journals, and SpringerLink	("self-care" OR "self care" OR "self-care practice" OR "self-care intervention") AND ("psychological well-being" OR "psychological wellbeing" OR "mental well-being") AND ("teacher" OR "educator")

2.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic synthesis, grouping research findings into the following main themes: the concept of self-care, self-care practices, the relationship between self-care and psychological well-being, and implications for teacher well-being interventions. The analysis process included data extraction, thematic coding, categorisation, and synthesis of findings across studies. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) in qualitative data, both in primary research and in systematic reviews (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Thus, this approach helps organise scattered evidence into a clear conceptual picture, identify research gaps, and support the development of new theories.

2.5 Research Procedure

This research procedure consists of several stages, as follows:

1. The initial stage of SLR research is developing the research question (RQ). This research question can assist in literature searches and extraction. The RQ is formulated based on five elements, known as PICOC: 1) Population (P); 2) Intervention (I); 3) Comparison (C); 4) Outcome (O); and 5) Context (C).
2. Defining the literature search by selecting search keywords and specifying the databases to be used, namely Scopus, Eric, Sage Journals, and SpringerLink. Then, establish inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles.
3. The process of identifying articles involves searching scientific databases using a combination of relevant keywords. All articles found are then collected, and duplicate data is removed. The article search process was conducted using the predetermined keywords.
4. The screening process was based on titles and abstracts to ensure the articles were relevant and aligned with the research focus. The review was conducted in accordance with the inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that all articles met the requirements. The following are the inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Tabel 2 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Years	2021 to 2026	Before 2021
Population	Teachers and educators	Other than teachers and educators
Dokumen types	Research articles	Books, proceedings
Language	English	Other than English
Access	Open access	No access

Study Design	Empirical Study	Literature Review
5. The data extraction phase involves identifying key information from each article, including the author, year of publication, study design, participant characteristics, forms of self-care practices, and main findings related to teachers’ psychological well-being. 6. The final stage involves synthesizing the research findings through thematic grouping and comparative analysis across studies to produce a comprehensive understanding of the role of self-care in improving teachers’ psychological well-being.		

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

This synthesis indicates that the relationship between self-care and psychological well-being among teachers does not manifest as a single, linear relationship, but rather as a multi-layered, multidimensional relationship that is strongly influenced by the work context. In the 21 studies reviewed, some examined this relationship directly through constructs such as mindful self-care, self-compassion, professional self-care, personal self-care, and stress-management techniques. Others examined constructs strongly related to self-care, such as mindfulness, grit, self-management competence, organisational support, psychological resilience, compassion satisfaction, and emotional detachment. Thus, the emerging findings not only indicate that self-care is associated with reduced stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue, but also that its effectiveness is often mediated or enhanced by relational and organizational resources, such as social support, the quality of teacher–student relationships, supervision, and the work climate (Estrada-Aroaz et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2024; Lee & Chae, 2025; Lombard et al., 2025; Manning et al., 2024; Maratos et al., 2024; McDonald et al., 2024; Osman et al., 2024).

Table 3. Study Characteristics

No	Author and Year	Country/ Study Context	Purpose /Focus of Study	Design/ Method	Participant s/Sample	Forms of Self-Care Studied	Aspects of Psychological Well-Being Studied	Key Findings
1	Maratos et al. (2024)	UK; elementary school staff	Examining the role of self-compassion and physiological responses in teacher burnout	Correlational- psychophysiological	57 elementary school staff	Self-compassion, self-reassurance, and their opposite, self-criticism	Stress, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment , HRV	Self-compassion emerges as a protective resource; self-criticism predicts depersonalization
2	Bjärehed and Bjärehed (2025)	Sweden; school teachers	Analyzing compassion fatigue and its predictors	Quantitative survey	170 teachers	Professional self-care; particularly work-life balance and cognitive awareness; quality of teacher–student relationships	Reduced compassion, general well-being, job satisfaction	Better self-care and teacher–student relationships are associated with lower compassion fatigue
3	Cook-Cottone et al. (2025)	General multiethnic sample	Validating the MSCS 2.0 and factors of mindful self-care	Instrument validation survey	10,257 respondents; ethnically balanced sample of 5,242	Eight factors of mindful self-care	Present-moment centeredness, trait/state mindfulness	Supportive structure, mindful awareness, self-compassion, and mind-body practice most strongly predict present-

								moment centeredness
4	Huang et al. (2024)	Virtual EFL learning context	Testing the effect of teacher support on learning outcomes	Quasi-experimental	85 EFL learners	Indirect; teacher support as a relational resource	Students' academic immunity and academic enjoyment; not teachers' well-being directly	Teacher support enhances language progress, academic immunity, and academic enjoyment
5	Işıkgöz (2025)	Turkey; physical education teachers	Examining the relationship between mindfulness and sustainability competencies	SEM survey	852 physical education teachers	Intrapersonal and interpersonal mindfulness	Teacher well-being was not measured directly; mindfulness was positioned as an intrapersonal resource	Intrapersonal mindfulness is stronger; the relationship is moderated by gender, school level, and education
6	Liu and Xie (2025)	China; elementary school teacher	Assessing the effects of happiness training on burnout and teaching effectiveness	Explanatory sequential mixed methods	200 elementary school teachers + 5 teacher narratives	Well-being interventions/stress regulation strategies, emotional recovery, work-life balance	Burnout, teaching effectiveness, job satisfaction, work meaningfulness	Happiness training reduces burnout and improves teaching effectiveness; narratives indicate recovery, purpose, and balance
7	O'Toole and Dobutowitsch (2023)	Ireland; elementary and middle/high school teachers	Examining the role of compassion in attitudes toward trauma-informed practices	Quantitative survey	377 teachers	Self-compassion, compassion satisfaction	Secondary traumatic stress, burnout, professional quality, attitudes toward trauma-informed practices	Compassion satisfaction is the strongest predictor; followed by self-compassion
8	Moosavi et al. (2026)	Iran; EFL teachers	Examining the effect of teaching grit on psychological well-being	Sequential explanatory mixed methods	150 EFL teachers + 30 interviews	Indirect; grit as a psychological resource	Psychological well-being, resilience, management of emotional strain/burnout	Grit predicts well-being; key themes: resilience, sustained motivation, and emotional regulation
9	Shi and Guo (2025)	Rural China; English teachers	Examining organizational support and resilience on occupational well-being	SEM survey	350 rural secondary school English teachers	Indirect; organizational support, resilience, potential for mindfulness training as an	Occupational well-being	Organizational support has direct and indirect effects through resilience

implication								
10	Johnson et al. (2024)	Kenya; teacher-counselors and CHVs	Identifying determinants of TF-CBT feasibility	Causal configuration analysis	Lay counselors (teachers and CHVs) in the context of elementary schools	Indirect; work stress, burnout, fatigue, job satisfaction as implementation factors	Burnout, fatigue, job satisfaction, implementation feasibility	For teacher-counselors, implementation climate and leadership are the most decisive factors for feasibility
11	McDonald et al. (2024)	English; EBSA context	Developing a brief, parent-focused intervention for EBSA	Qualitative person-based co-design	Phase 1: 10 parents + 7 practitioners; Phase 2: 4 parents + 3 practitioners	Self-care modules to improve parents' well-being and self-efficacy	Parental well-being, self-efficacy, quality of home-school relationships	Intervention positions self-care as the foundation of family support in the school context
12	Roberts et al. (2023)	United States; early childhood educators	Identifying the well-being profiles of early childhood educators	Quantitative person-centered analysis	133 early childhood educators	Self-care, self-compassion	Psychological, financial, and health well-being	The greatest differences between groups were found in self-care and self-compassion
13	Van Klompenberg (2023)	United States; elementary school music teachers	Exploring factors influencing music teachers' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic	Group case study	3 elementary school music teachers	Self-care, social support, resilience strategies	Mental health, well-being, anxiety, resilience	Self-care and support contribute to resilience during the pandemic
14	Osman et al. (2024)	England; elementary schools	Exploring teachers' and parents' perspectives on self-care education	Qualitative interviews	9 elementary school teachers + 9 parents	Self-care education (hygiene, common illnesses, mental well-being)	Mental well-being; teacher readiness	Self-care is considered important, but teachers feel they need training and resources
15	Manning et al. (2024)	England; secondary school teachers	Analyzing facilitators and barriers to the use of technology for stress management	Qualitative longitudinal	8 teachers; 6 followed up	Digital self-care, apps/wearables for stress management	Work-related stress, well-being, opportunities for recovery	Technology can help manage stress, but it is hindered by time constraints, stigma, connectivity issues, and a lack of privacy

16	Flores et al. (2022)	Chile; school teachers	Analyzing the impact of COVID-19, spirituality, and social-emotional strategies on well-being	SEM survey	624 teachers	Social-emotional strategies applied by the teachers themselves	Life satisfaction, depression, anxiety, stress, teacher well-being	Social-emotional strategies and spirituality are associated with life satisfaction, but are not directly related to mental health
17	Estrada-Araoz et al. (2023)	Peru; elementary school teachers	Examining the relationship between technostress and psychological well-being	Correlational survey	169 teachers	Indirect; digital disconnection and healthy technology use recommended as self-care	Psychological well-being (self-acceptance, autonomy, relationships, purpose/projects), fatigue, anxiety, skepticism	Technostress is negatively associated with psychological well-being
18	Dando et al. (2023)	Saudi Arabia; educators/healthcare professionals	Examining the relationship between mindful self-care and mental well-being	Quantitative survey	91 educators/health professionals	Mindful self-care	Mental well-being	Mindful self-care is associated with a fairly strong positive relationship with mental well-being
19	Najjarpour (2024)	Iran; EFL teachers	Developing a model of self-management competence for EFL teachers	Qualitative grounded theory	19 EFL teachers	Self-regulation of emotions, self-awareness strategies, behavior management, and classroom performance	Teacher well-being implicitly through emotional regulation and professional functioning	The emotional dimension and self-regulation strategies form the core competencies that underpin well-being
20	Lee and Chae (2025)	South Korea; middle school teachers	Testing a visual imagery-based writing program and CBT for teacher well-being	Qualitative intervention	10 middle school teachers	Reflective writing, mindfulness, emotion regulation, self-reflection	Psychological well-being, stress management, resilience, authenticity	Program enhances self-understanding, emotional regulation, and resilience
21	Lombard et al. (2025)	Australia; High school year coordinators	Assessing the prevalence of compassion fatigue and risk/protective factors	Correlational survey/hierarchical regression	228 Year Coordinators (the abstract section shows a different N)	Personal self-care, professional self-care, social support, emotional detachment	Burnout, secondary traumatic stress, compassion satisfaction, teacher well-being	Self-care, social support, compassion satisfaction, and emotional separation are protective against compassion fatigue

The general characteristics of the reviewed studies are presented in Table 1. Methodologically, the studies were dominated by quantitative cross-sectional surveys, including the use of SEM and hierarchical regression, but also included mixed-methods studies, qualitative studies, one qualitative CBT-based intervention and reflective

writing study, one instrument validation study, and one theoretical article. Geographically, the research spans diverse contexts, including the United Kingdom, Sweden, Turkey, China, Ireland, Iran, Chile, Peru, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Australia, Kenya, and the United States. In terms of participants, most studies focus on elementary and secondary school teachers, EFL teachers, Year Coordinators, music teachers, physical education teachers, and early childhood educators, although several articles in this corpus serve as conceptual foundations or supporting contexts rather than direct tests of the self-care–psychological well-being relationship among teachers (Bjärehed & Bjärehed, 2025; Işıkgöz, 2025; Jieyu & Yanhua, 2025; Lee & Chae, 2025; Liu & Xie, 2025; Lombard et al., 2025; Manning et al., 2024, 2024; Moosavi et al., 2025; Najjarpour, 2024; O’Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023; Roberts et al., 2023; Van Klompenberg, 2023).

Findings across studies indicate that self-care primarily functions as a protective factor and regulatory mechanism that helps teachers maintain their psychological well-being under high work stress. In the most direct studies, self-compassion has been shown to act as a personal resource, associated with more adaptive physiological responses to stress and lower levels of depersonalization. In contrast, self-criticism increases vulnerability to burnout (Maratos et al., 2024). In another study, professional self-care, particularly life balance and cognitive awareness, was associated with lower levels of compassion fatigue and higher well-being (Bjärehed & Bjärehed, 2025). A similar pattern emerges among Year Coordinators in Australia, where personal self-care, professional self-care, social support, and emotional separation act as protective factors against burnout and secondary traumatic stress (Lombard et al., 2025). Thus, self-care in this literature appears not merely as an additional activity but as a resource that mitigates the emotional demands of the teaching profession.

This protective role is also evident when self-care is examined through mediating pathways and contextual support. Among English teachers in rural China, occupational well-being is influenced not only by direct organisational support but also through psychological resilience as a mediator of the “. For music teachers during the pandemic, self-care is only effective when accompanied by support, connection, and resilience, which together mitigate anxiety and psychological fatigue (Van Klompenberg, 2023). Findings by Lee and Chae (2025) also reinforce that self-reflection, emotional expression, and rational observation in visual image-based writing programs can enhance self-understanding, stress management, and resilience. This means that self-care does not always work directly; in many studies, it becomes effective by strengthening resilience and emotional regulation, or by providing space for psychological recovery that was previously unavailable.

Nevertheless, the findings are not entirely consistent. Flores et al. (2022) found that the social-emotional strategies implemented by teachers themselves were associated with life satisfaction but did not have a direct relationship with mental health. This variation is significant because it suggests that self-care may be reflected more quickly in evaluative dimensions such as life satisfaction or subjective well-being than in more severe psychological symptoms. A similar finding is reported in the implementation study by Johnson et al. (2024), which indicates that burnout, fatigue, job satisfaction, and organisational context influence teachers’ capacity to implement psychological interventions. In other words, self-care and well-being cannot be separated from the broader work environment, as organisational pressures can undermine the protective effects of individual-level strategies.

The self-care practices identified across the 21 studies can be grouped into several main patterns. The first is mindful self-care and mindfulness. Dando et al. (2023) found a fairly strong positive relationship between mindful self-care and mental well-being, while Cook-Cottone et al. (2025) demonstrated that supportive structures, mindful awareness, self-compassion, and mind–body practices are the strongest components of the mindful self-care construct. In the context of teachers, mindfulness also emerged in Işıkgöz’s (2025) study as an intrapersonal resource, and in Lee and Chae’s (2025) study as part of reflective writing practices that aid in emotion management, self-clarity, and resilience. This pattern suggests that the most consistent form of self-care is not merely relaxation, but directed and repeated self-awareness practices.

Second is self-compassion and forms of emotional-reflective self-care. In Maratos et al. (2024), self-compassion is a central variable associated with both physiological and psychological coping. In O’Toole and Dobutowitsch (2023), self-compassion, along with compassion satisfaction, predicted a more positive attitude toward trauma-informed practices. In Roberts et al. (2023), self-care and self-compassion were the primary differentiators between early childhood educators with more positive and less positive well-being profiles. Meanwhile, Lee and Chae (2025) demonstrate that self-reflection and self-emotional awareness can pave the way for authenticity and optimism. Overall, the literature on emotional self-care includes self-compassion, reflection, emotion regulation, and the cultivation of more adaptive self-narratives.

Third is professional and relational self-care. Bjärehed and Bjärehed (2025) identify work-life balance and cognitive awareness as the most relevant aspects of professional self-care for mitigating compassion fatigue.

Lombard et al. (2025) expand on this by distinguishing between personal self-care and professional self-care, and demonstrate that both work in conjunction with social support and emotional detachment. In Manning et al. (2024), self-care also appears as digital practices and technology-assisted stress management, although school norms, time, and private space heavily influence its effectiveness. Meanwhile, Van Klompenberg (2023) demonstrates that self-care among music teachers during the pandemic is closely linked to social support, connections, and recovery habits that help maintain resilience. Thus, self-care in the teaching profession is also relational and organisational, not merely intrapersonal.

Fourth is a cognitive-regulatory form of self-care based on self-competence. Najjarpour (2024) indicates that self-management competence in EFL teachers is built upon self-emotional regulation, self-awareness strategies, behaviour management, and classroom performance management. Moosavi et al. (2026) add that grit functions as a psychological resource that supports adaptability, optimism, and long-term commitment, thereby helping teachers maintain psychological well-being. According to Jieyu and Yanhua (2025), psychological resilience serves as a crucial pathway that bridges organisational support with occupational well-being. These forms are not always labelled as self-care, but they function as professional self-care mechanisms because they help teachers manage demands, maintain psychological energy, and reduce the risk of burnout.

The aspects of psychological well-being most frequently influenced by self-care practices are stress and burnout, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue. This pattern is particularly prominent in the studies by Maratos et al. (2024), Bjärehed and Bjärehed (2025), O'Toole and Dobutowitsch (2023), Liu and Xie (2025), and Lombard et al. (2025). In addition, job satisfaction and general well-being also appear repeatedly, particularly in Bjärehed and Bjärehed (2025) and Liu and Xie (2025). Several other studies emphasise occupational well-being (Jieyu & Yanhua, 2025), mental well-being (Dando et al., 2023), as well as life satisfaction and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress (Florest et al., 2022). Thus, the most dominant outcomes in the literature are reductions in work-related distress and improvements in psychological-work functioning, rather than merely abstract indicators of happiness.

However, the reviewed studies also indicate that self-care not only influences negative symptoms. Several studies demonstrate its impact on resilience, optimism, self-understanding, authenticity, purpose, relationship quality, and professional effectiveness. Lee and Chae (2025) demonstrate improvements in self-understanding, emotional regulation, and future orientation. Moosavi et al. (2026) highlight adaptability, optimism, and professional commitment. Van Klompenberg (2023) demonstrates that self-care and support foster music teachers' resilience. O'Toole and Dobutowitsch (2023) even emphasise that compassion satisfaction is associated with work meaning and teachers' readiness to engage in practices that are more sensitive to student trauma. Therefore, the aspects of psychological well-being influenced by self-care in this literature encompass both distress reduction and strengthening teachers' professional and relational capacities.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this systematic review indicate that self-care is best understood as a multidimensional protective resource that supports teachers' psychological well-being within demanding educational contexts. Across the reviewed studies, self-care was associated with lower levels of work-related stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and emotional exhaustion, while also being linked to resilience, self-understanding, professional meaning, compassion satisfaction, and teaching effectiveness (Bjärehed & Bjärehed, 2025; Lee & Chae, 2025; Liu & Xie, 2025; Lombard et al., 2025; Maratos et al., 2024; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023; Roberts et al., 2023). However, the evidence suggests that self-care should not be interpreted merely as a set of isolated wellness activities. Rather, it functions as a personal and professional resource that helps teachers regulate emotional demands, recover from stress, maintain professional boundaries, and preserve their capacity to function effectively in school settings.

The Job Demands-Resources model provides a strong theoretical explanation for these findings. According to the JD-R model, employee well-being is shaped by the interaction between job demands and job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). In the teaching profession, job demands may include emotional labour, workload, classroom management, administrative pressure, digital overload, role expectations, and repeated exposure to students' academic, behavioural, and psychosocial difficulties (Agyapong et al., 2022, 2023; Estrada-Aroaz et al., 2023; Johnson et al., 2024; Manning et al., 2024; Maslach et al., 2001). When these demands exceed teachers' available personal and organisational resources, they may contribute to stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, and reduced psychological well-being (Agyapong et al., 2022; García-Carmona et al., 2019; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023; Sohail et al., 2023). Conversely, self-care, self-compassion, resilience,

social support, organisational support, and professional boundaries may operate as personal and job resources that buffer the negative effects of job demands (Bjärehed & Bjärehed, 2025; Jieyu & Yanhua, 2025; Lombard et al., 2025; Maratos et al., 2024; Van Klompenberg, 2023; Danguilan et al., 2025).

To strengthen conceptual precision, this review positions self-care as a multidimensional construct consisting of seven interrelated dimensions: physical self-care, emotional self-care, cognitive-reflective self-care, relational self-care, professional self-care, spiritual-existential self-care, and digital self-care. Physical self-care encompasses health-related routines, rest, recovery, and physical activity. Emotional self-care includes self-compassion, emotion regulation, stress recovery, and reduced self-criticism. Cognitive-reflective self-care involves mindfulness, reflective writing, self-awareness, and self-management competence. Relational self-care encompasses social support, collegial connections, and supportive teacher–student relationships. Professional self-care includes work-life balance, role boundaries, supervision, professional detachment, and emotional separation. Spiritual-existential self-care involves meaning-making, values-based reflection, spirituality, religiosity, and gratitude. Digital self-care refers to healthy technology use, digital boundaries, and strategies for managing technostress (Cook-Cottone et al., 2025; Dando et al., 2023; Estrada-Aroaz et al., 2023; Lee & Chae, 2025; Lombard et al., 2025; Manning et al., 2024; Najjarpour, 2024).

This dimensional framework helps clarify several overlapping concepts in the literature. Self-care refers to intentional practices aimed at maintaining, protecting, or restoring well-being (Martínez et al., 2021; Riegel et al., 2021). Coping refers to cognitive and behavioural efforts used to manage internal or external demands that are appraised as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Mindfulness is a form of present-moment, non-judgmental awareness that may serve as one component of cognitive-reflective self-care (Cook-Cottone et al., 2025; Dando et al., 2023). Self-compassion is an emotionally supportive attitude toward oneself during difficulty. It may function as a component of emotional self-care, a mediator between self-care and reduced distress, or an outcome strengthened by mindfulness-based self-care (Maratos et al., 2024; Neff, 2003; Roberts et al., 2023). Resilience is not identical to self-care; rather, it is an adaptive capacity that may be strengthened through self-care and may mediate the relationship between support and well-being (Jieyu & Yanhua, 2025; Moosavi et al., 2025; Van Klompenberg, 2023). Social and organisational support are not self-care in the narrow, individual sense, but are interpersonal and institutional resources that enable self-care to be practised sustainably (Johnson et al., 2024; Lombard et al., 2025; Van Klompenberg, 2023). Religiosity or spirituality may function as spiritual-existential self-care when intentionally used for meaning-making and emotional regulation, but it may also be categorised as a coping strategy or external protective factor depending on the cultural context and study design (Effendi et al., 2025; Florest et al., 2022; Mulawarman et al., 2023).

The reviewed studies support the role of self-care as a preventive and regulatory mechanism. Studies on self-compassion show that teachers who relate to themselves with kindness, common humanity, and mindful awareness may be better able to regulate emotional strain and reduce vulnerability to burnout and depersonalization (Maratos et al., 2024; Neff, 2003; Roberts et al., 2023). Studies on professional self-care show that work-life balance, cognitive awareness, social support, emotional separation, and professional boundaries are associated with lower compassion fatigue and better occupational well-being (Bjärehed & Bjärehed, 2025; Lombard et al., 2025). Studies on mindfulness, reflective writing, and self-management competence suggest that teachers benefit from practices that increase self-awareness, emotional regulation, reflective capacity, and professional functioning (Cook-Cottone et al., 2025; Dando et al., 2023; Lee & Chae, 2025; Najjarpour, 2024). These findings indicate that self-care not only operates after stress has occurred, but may also prevent psychological strain by strengthening teachers' internal and external resources before distress becomes more severe.

From a positive psychology perspective, self-care contributes not only to reducing negative symptoms but also to the development of adaptive psychological functioning. Psychological well-being includes self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Contemporary positive psychology extends this perspective by emphasising flourishing, meaning, engagement, positive emotion, resilience, accomplishment, and positive functioning (Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2011). The reviewed evidence reflects both perspectives. On the one hand, self-care is associated with reduced burnout, stress, anxiety, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress (Bjärehed & Bjärehed, 2025; Maratos et al., 2024; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023). On the other hand, self-care is also associated with resilience, optimism, self-understanding, professional meaning, compassion satisfaction, and teaching effectiveness (Lee & Chae, 2025; Liu & Xie, 2025; Moosavi et al., 2025; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023; Van Klompenberg, 2023). Therefore, self-care should be understood as both a distress-reduction strategy and a flourishing-oriented resource.

This review also explains why work-related burnout, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, stress, and anxiety appear more responsive to self-care than broader dimensions of psychological well-being. These work-related distress outcomes are more proximal to the mechanisms targeted by self-care. Emotional regulation directly addresses emotional exhaustion; self-compassion reduces self-criticism and depersonalization; mindfulness improves awareness of stress responses; reflective practice supports meaning-making and self-understanding; professional boundaries reduce emotional overinvolvement; and recovery practices reduce accumulated psychological strain (Bjärehed & Bjärehed, 2025; Lee & Chae, 2025; Lombard et al., 2025; Maratos et al., 2024; Najjarpour, 2024). In contrast, broader dimensions of psychological well-being, such as purpose in life, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, and flourishing, may require longer-term changes in professional identity, school climate, workload distribution, leadership, and organisational support (Keyes, 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2011). Thus, self-care may show clearer and more immediate associations with distress reduction, while its effect on broader psychological well-being may depend on sustained practice and supportive institutional conditions (Jieyu & Yanhua, 2025; Johnson et al., 2024; Manning et al., 2024).

The reviewed evidence suggests several possible causal or interactional pathways between self-care and teachers' psychological well-being. First, high job demands, such as workload, emotional labour, administrative pressure, digital overload, and exposure to student distress, may increase stress and burnout, which, in turn, reduce psychological well-being (Agyapong et al., 2022, 2023; Maslach et al., 2001; Sohail et al., 2023). Second, self-care practices such as mindfulness, self-compassion, reflective writing, and emotional recovery may reduce burnout by improving emotional regulation, reducing self-criticism, and strengthening psychological recovery (Lee & Chae, 2025; Maratos et al., 2024; Neff, 2003; Roberts et al., 2023). Third, professional self-care, including work-life balance, professional boundaries, and emotional separation, may reduce compassion fatigue by limiting emotional overinvolvement and supporting psychological detachment from work (Bjärehed & Bjärehed, 2025; Lombard et al., 2025). Fourth, social and organisational support may enhance resilience, which, in turn, supports occupational well-being (Jieyu & Yanhua, 2025; Johnson et al., 2024; Van Klompenberg, 2023). Fifth, digital overload and technostress may increase psychological strain, whereas digital self-care may help teachers manage technology-related boundaries and stress recovery (Estrada-Aroaz et al., 2023; Manning et al., 2024). These pathways show that self-care does not function in isolation, but interacts with personal, interpersonal, and organisational resources.

This review proposes a resource architecture to describe the interactions among personal, interpersonal, and organisational resources that support teachers' psychological well-being. Resource architecture refers to a configuration of mutually reinforcing resources, including personal self-care, self-compassion, mindfulness, emotional regulation, resilience, social support, professional boundaries, supervision, and organisational support. Theoretically, this concept is aligned with the JD-R model because it positions self-care and related supports as resources that buffer the effects of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). It is also consistent with the Conservation of Resources theory, which argues that individuals seek to obtain, retain, and protect valuable resources when facing stress and potential resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, resource architecture refers not only to the presence of separate resources but also to how these resources interact and reinforce one another in protecting teachers from psychological strain. This concept avoids treating self-care as an isolated individual responsibility. It emphasises that self-care becomes more effective when teachers work in environments that provide time, psychological safety, collegial connection, supportive leadership, and recognition of emotional labour (Johnson et al., 2024; Lombard et al., 2025; Manning et al., 2024).

Compared with previous reviews that focus broadly on teacher stress, burnout, or well-being interventions, this review contributes by organising self-care into clearer conceptual dimensions and by interpreting the evidence through the combined lens of the JD-R model, positive psychology, and resource-based theory (Agyapong et al., 2023; Avola et al., 2025; Wong et al., 2025). Instead of asking only whether self-care is effective, this review explains how self-care functions, under what conditions it becomes protective, and which outcomes appear most responsive. The findings suggest that self-care is most useful when it is embedded in teachers' professional routines, supported by school culture, and connected to relational and organisational resources (Bjärehed & Bjärehed, 2025; Lee & Chae, 2025; Lombard et al., 2025; Manning et al., 2024; Najjarpour, 2024). This interpretation is particularly relevant to guidance and counselling practice. School counsellors and guidance professionals can use these findings to design teacher-support programs, psychoeducation, reflective supervision, peer-support groups, burnout prevention initiatives, and self-care training that address both individual skills and institutional conditions (Johnson et al., 2024; O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2023; Van Klompenberg, 2023).

However, these findings should be interpreted with caution. Many reviewed studies used cross-sectional designs, which limit causal inference (Bjärehed & Bjärehed, 2025; Dando et al., 2023; Estrada-Aroaz et al., 2023; Lombard et al., 2025). Several studies examined constructs related to self-care rather than self-care itself, such as resilience, grit, mindfulness, teacher support, or organisational support (Huang et al., 2024; Işıkgöz, 2025; Jieyu & Yanhua, 2025; Moosavi et al., 2025). The reviewed population also includes school teachers more broadly, not exclusively guidance and counselling teachers. Future research should use longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-methods designs to examine causal mechanisms, mediating pathways, and cultural differences in how self-care supports teachers' psychological well-being.

4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this study suggest that self-care should be understood and positioned as a crucial multidimensional construct in the development of teachers' psychological well-being, not merely as an activity for rest or personal recovery, but as a professional resource encompassing mindful awareness, self-compassion, emotional regulation, reflective practices, life balance, relational support, and stress management, including within the digital context. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the view that teachers' psychological well-being is shaped by the interaction between job demands and personal and organizational resources, thereby supporting the job demands-resources, resilience, mindful self-care, and self-management frameworks. In practice, the results of this review underscore the need to integrate self-care into teachers' work routines through mentoring programs, emotional regulation training, self-reflection, burnout prevention, and strengthening peer support. From a managerial perspective, schools cannot leave this issue solely to teachers' individual responsibility. Still, they must foster a healthy work culture through supportive supervision, spaces for psychological recovery, work-life balance policies, debriefing, and healthier management of technology use. Methodologically, this review also highlights the need for further research that is more conceptually consistent, stronger in design, and more context-sensitive, so that the relationship between self-care and teachers' psychological well-being can be explained more comprehensively, including direct effects, mediating pathways, and the organizational conditions that enable it to function effectively.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This systematic literature review indicates that self-care is a key factor in supporting teachers' psychological well-being, particularly by serving as a protective resource against work-related stress, burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue. These findings underscore that self-care cannot be understood merely as a personal activity but as a psychological and professional mechanism that helps teachers maintain their emotional capacity in the face of complex work demands. This review also demonstrates that the most relevant forms of self-care for teachers are those integrated into daily professional practice, such as self-awareness, reflection, boundary management, emotional recovery, and the use of relational and organisational support. Thus, improving teachers' psychological well-being cannot rely solely on individual initiatives but requires tangible institutional support through a supportive work environment, supervision, resilience-building, and spaces for psychological recovery. Overall, the findings of this review confirm that strengthening self-care must be positioned as a strategic component of efforts to improve teachers' quality of work life, ensure professional sustainability, and advance guidance and counselling services in schools.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was funded by the Implementation Agreement for Community Service under the DPA Fund of the LPPM, Semarang State University, for the year 2026, contract number 895.8.4/UN37/PPK.11/2026.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualisation, literature search, analysis, writing, revision, and finalisation of the article, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study.

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