

Self-care as a Predictor of Job Satisfaction amongst Educators

Macey D. Kohls, Jordan S. Amundson, Kenzie J. Hedlund and Jennifer M. Joy

Abstract

Teaching has been found to be among the most stressful occupations in terms of work-related stress. Given recent findings on a potential link between self-care and increased job satisfaction, exploring the benefits of self-care amongst educators is valuable. The purpose of our study was to examine if self-care is a predictor of job satisfaction for educators. Fifty-seven educators across the state of Nebraska participated in a survey in which they rated various indicators of self-care and job satisfaction. The results suggest self-care is a significant predictor of job satisfaction for educators in Nebraska. This indicates that the greater education system should place more emphasis on self-care, not only for current educators, but also for students enrolled in teacher education programs.

Key Words: Self-Care, Job Satisfaction, Educators, Turnover, Retention

Educators are trained professionals who work with students every day to support their success. Though educators have a vital role in child development, many teachers choose to leave the profession due to high levels of work-related stress and lack of job satisfaction. Thus, we were interested to see if teacher self-care could lead to improved job satisfaction.

Turnover in Education

Johnson et al. (2005) examined 26 different occupations in terms of psychological well-being, physical health and job satisfaction, and concluded teaching was the second most stressful occupation. Schmidt and Jones-Fosu (2019) characterized 93% of teachers are highly stressed when evaluating levels of burnout, stress, efficacy, and coping. Furthermore, impacts of teacher stress can be systemic impacting the students as well (Schmidt & Jones-Fosu). For example, Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, and Reinke (2018) had teachers rate their levels of stress, burnout, efficacy, and coping. The students in their classrooms were also administered the Woodcock Johnson Academic Achievement Test—Third Edition to measure math and reading scores. The results showed that the teachers in the high stress, high coping, and low coping classes were associated with the poorest student outcomes (Herman et al.). Finally, Ronfeldt, Loeb, and Wykoff (2013) found teacher turnover negatively impacted student achievement in the areas of mathematics and English language arts.

Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008) found 25% of teachers leaving the profession. Dupriez, Delvaux, & Lothaire (2016) found high exit rates in first-year teachers. This may be further evidence as stress as factor

Macey D. Kohls, Ed. S, NCSP;
Jordan S. Amundson, Ed. S, NCSP;
Kenzie J. Hedlund, Ed. S, NCSP;
Jennifer M. Joy, PhD, NCSP

given that first year teachers have increased burdens of planning and getting acquainted to a new role. Could self-care and increased self-efficacy be the cure to this systemic problem? Betoret (2006) indicates educators with a high level of self-efficacy and resources for coping mechanisms experience lower levels of stress and burnout than their counterparts with low self-efficacy and little or no access to these resources. Teachers perceived confidence in classroom management, emotional exhaustion, engagement, and commitment to teaching can all influence teacher well-being, whereas self-efficacy may be a protective factor by minimizing job stress (Dicke, Stebner, Linninger, Kunter, & Leutner, 2018).

Thus, we would argue that to retain teachers an emphasis should be put on increased job satisfaction. And, in order to enhance job satisfaction, the key may be related to better self-care.

Job Satisfaction

Several factors centered on social support and perceived goal attainment positively impact job satisfaction and teacher longevity. Clemons and Lindner (2019) studied teacher longevity and success in the secondary agricultural education classroom and found that developing their program, attaining professional goals, managing their time as an advisor, and developing friendships with other advisors were highly related to their success and longevity as agricultural educators. Olsen and Huang (2019) found both teacher perceptions of principal support and teacher perceptions of teacher cooperation were very strongly and positively correlated with job satisfaction for all educators. Finally, Sass, Seal, and Martin (2011) showed teachers who perceived strong support from administration were more likely to think they could positively impact their students; thus, instilling teachers with higher levels of job satisfaction.

Sangganjanavanich and Balkin (2013) explored burnout and job satisfaction among counselor educators and found emotional exhaustion to be a significant predictor of burnout. Educators who scored higher in burnout also scored lower in job satisfaction (Sangganjanavanich & Balkin). **Selbst and Zultanky (nd) express self-care as a clear remedy for burnout and compassion fatigue. As educators, counselors, and other nurturers of the self-growth of others, we need to remember the importance of self-care.**

Self-Care

Acker (2018) found that self-care improves job satisfaction among social workers. Bloomquist, Wood, Friedmeyer-Trainor, and Kim (2015) found professional, emotional, and spiritual self-care predicted lower levels of burnout, while professional and emotional self-care predicted higher levels of satisfaction. Other researchers found having sufficient coping resources—including strong levels of self-care and social support—could help to mitigate the effects of work stress to positively influence physical and mental health (Yang, Ge, Hu, Chi, & Wang, 2009).

Examining five areas of self-care amongst practicing psychologists (i.e., professional support, professional development, life balance, cognitive awareness, daily balance) and their impact on life satisfaction, researchers showed self-care is an effective means of stress reduction when done on an ongoing basis (Rupert & Dorociak, 2019). Additionally, participants who partook in 12 hours of mindful activities such as yoga, self-management, aroma therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and acupuncture reported lower feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression as a result of the self-care they experienced (Tsang et al., 2015). Reiser and

McCarthy (2018) implemented a mindfulness intervention for teachers and participants reported lower levels of occupational stress, anxiety, and burnout. They also noted increases in the areas of mindfulness, self-compassion, focused attention, and working memory capacity, among others.

While self-care is valued in educational professions, it is not frequently prioritized or practiced (Bloomquist et al., 2015). Additionally, not all self-care has been found equal in protective impact against stress. Sanford and Frey (2018) cited the difference between *superficial care*, disregarding responsibilities in the name of attending to one's own mental health, and *whole-self-care*, using deeper reflection techniques to address triggers for longer-lasting effects. These researchers recommend employing coping strategies to handle stress and attack the trigger rather than reactively treating stress symptoms (Sanford and Frey, 2018).

In general, self-care allows people to nurture themselves and remain committed to making a positive difference in the midst of making sacrifices and contributing to their field (Cardinal & Thomas, 2016). The aim of the present research was to advance the understanding of the relationship between self-care and job satisfaction within the realm of education. We hypothesize higher levels of self-care will predict increased job satisfaction for educators.

Current Study

The current study aimed to examine if self-care is a predictor of job satisfaction for educators. Because careers in education have been linked to high levels of stress and burnout, we sought to better understand the relationship between self-care and job satisfaction. The research question was, "Is self-care a significant predictor of job satisfaction for teachers?"

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited from schools across Nebraska. Through the recruitment efforts, 57 educators volunteered to participate in the study. Participants reported to be teachers of grades Kindergarten through Grade 12. The genders of participants were reported to be 81% females and 19% males. Ethnicities were identified as follows: 98% White and 2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander/Asian. The participant's teaching experience varied and was reported as follows: 2% less than one year, 16% one to five years, 18% six to ten years, 19% 11 to 15 years, 5% 16 to 20 years, and 40% more than 20 years.

Instruments

Participants read and signed an informed consent which included the purpose of the study, procedures, an expected time that it would take to complete the survey, voluntary participation, and contact information of the researchers.

Self-care. An overall measure of self-care, adapted from the Academic Success Center, Oregon State University, was utilized for the first portion of the survey. The measure consists of 17 Likert-type items. Higher scores indicated higher levels of self-care.

Job Satisfaction. The second portion of the survey analyzed job satisfaction and was based upon a single question: Are you satisfied with your current job?

Procedures

After receiving IRB approval, participants were recruited by contacting schools' principals who then distributed the informed consent, self-care survey, and the job satisfaction survey to the school's employees. All surveys were converted to the online software program, Qualtrics. An email was then sent out to educators containing an introduction to the researchers, a statement that participation was voluntary and the Qualtrics link. In order to access the survey, participants first had to give consent. Upon giving consent, participants were directed to the surveys. After completing the surveys, the educators were thanked for their participation. Data were analyzed using SPSS via regression analysis to determine if self-care is a significant predictor of job satisfaction.

Results

A simple linear regression was conducted to see if self-care was a predictor of job satisfaction. The results revealed the following: There is a large positive relationship ($R = 0.539$) between job satisfaction and self-care. Self-care accounts for 29% of the variance in job satisfaction for these teachers ($R^2 = 0.29$). Self-care is a significant predictor of job satisfaction in teachers, $F(1, 56) = 22.5, p < .01$.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to evaluate whether or not self-care was positively or negatively correlated with job satisfaction. Kaiser and the National Institution for Education Statistics (2011) indicated that 10% of teachers in public schools leave the profession after one year and an additional 12% leave after two years due to burnout. As teachers and psychologists, we believe it is imperative to find better ways to support teachers and other nurturing professions. Self-care has been seen as a protective factor for job satisfaction. Better job satisfaction can increase longevity in these professions.

Participants for this study included educators working in schools across Nebraska; following a letter of introduction explaining the study, self-care and job satisfaction surveys were distributed via email by principals to educators in their buildings. Once data were collected, SPSS was utilized for the analysis. Results from this study indicate that self-care is a significant predictor of job satisfaction amongst educators in Nebraska.

Limitations to the study include sample size and diversity of the population. Future research may include a larger, more diverse population of educators across varied states and countries. Furthermore, group data could be aggregated to determine whether differences exist between novice and veteran teachers. An analysis of self-care/job satisfaction throughout the school year might also reveal chronological fluctuations. Additionally, research could be conducted to determine what forms of self-care appear to have the strongest impact on job satisfaction.

The findings of this research indicate that the greater education system should place more emphasis on self-care amongst educators in order to increase job longevity and overall levels of satisfaction. This emphasis may be particularly effective if introduced to students enrolled in teacher education programs; by educating future teachers on the importance of self-care and its relationship to job satisfaction and career longevity, they may be encouraged to begin building sustainable habits prior to entering the field that will continue to benefit them—as well as their future students—as their careers progress. Current school staff and administrators

would also benefit from recognizing the relationship between self-care and job satisfaction in order to promote healthy habits amongst current educators. The more that the education system highlights that self-care practices benefit not only the educators themselves but can also support student achievement, the more efficacious the education system can be in giving children the tools they need to achieve future success.

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