



# INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUALITY AND STEREOTYPES ON TEACHERS' MENTAL HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

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## Abstract

*Teachers' mental health and quality of life significantly impact their effectiveness, yet they face stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion due to demanding workloads and societal expectations. Spirituality is increasingly explored as a coping mechanism, and research on how stereotypes affect teachers' well-being is also growing. While studies have examined burnout, stress, and spirituality, limited research examines the influence of spirituality and stereotypes on teachers' mental health and quality of life. This review examines how spirituality influences teachers' mental health and how societal stereotypes shape their quality of life. Findings suggest that spirituality can enhance teachers' endurance, provide stress relief, and also create a sense of purpose. Although, it may reinforce attitudes that contribute to burnout, as it may serve as both a protective factor and a reinforcing mechanism for harmful societal norms. Stereotypes- such as teachers being naturally nurturing and dedicated beyond limits- impose unrealistic expectations, leading to emotional exhaustion and work-life imbalance. Addressing these challenges requires psychological interventions, balanced spiritual coping, and policy changes to challenge harmful norms and improve teachers' well-being.*

**Keywords:** *spirituality, stereotypes, mental health, quality of life, burnout, education, work-life balance, societal expectations, job satisfaction.*

## Introduction

Education and educators play a paramount role in shaping future generations and influencing their development. Even so, this profession comes with some challenges, demands, issues that can affect a teacher's mental health (Lima et al., 2023). As educators have to influence and manage students and their education, societal expectations, and their own identity, it has been linked with high stress levels. Various stereotypes have been connected with teaching that cause a great amount of psychological impact on teachers and their well-being (Emeljanovas et al., 2023; Chaudhry & Chhajer, 2023). High stress in teachers is correlated with physical and mental health problems, which can have negative job consequences, which are then linked with professional burnout and job turnover of teachers. This impacts the teacher's energy levels, causing emotional fatigue and weariness. Having a sense of spirituality at the workplace, psychological well-being



and a meaningful life are extremely important factors that impact an individual's mental and physical development and overall performance (Prasanna & Palanivelu, 2022). Therefore, spirituality as a coping mechanism has been practised for a long time, although having both positive and negative impacts. Also, how it helps deal with stress caused because of stereotypes also remains underexplored.

### **Spirituality and Its Role in Mental Well-being**

Spirituality plays an essential influence in mental well-being as it serves as a coping mechanism, the faith and connection with the universe and the divine provides a sense of belongingness and comfort (Luchetti et al., 2021). Various researches have talked about the influence of spirituality and religion in managing stress and negative emotions.

Religion involves values, beliefs, practices, and rituals related to the divine; whereas spirituality is more of a broader concept, which includes the individual pursuit for understanding answers to questions about meaning of life, and relationship with the sacred or supernatural (Luchetti et al., 2021; Bozek et al., 2022). Recent research has shown that spirituality and religion have been linked to various different health outcomes both physical and emotional. According to Joseph, spirituality can be understood as “a more general, unstructured, personalized, and naturally occurring phenomenon, where a person seeks closeness and/or connectedness between him/herself and a higher power or purpose” (Bozek et al., 2020). Both spirituality and health-related behaviors were connected with psychological well-being.

### **Stereotypes in the Teaching Profession**

Educators in different fields face a lot of burnout and stress because of stereotypes associated with teaching, expected to always be emotionally available, being nurturing, providing unconditional support, comfort and guidance, etc, which leads to exhaustion because of lack of personal and professional boundaries (Lever et al., 2017).

The stress in the education field is further shown in the high rates of teacher turnover, around 10% of teachers leave after one year, and 17% of teachers leave within five years (Lever et al., 2017). There can be various reasons traced for that however studies highlight one of the major reasons being the expectations from them. One being how teachers end up absorbing student trauma, affecting their well-being as teachers and other school-based staff can experience the stress of compassion fatigue and/or vicarious traumatization (known as secondary traumatic stress— which is the stress caused from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person” (Lever et al., 2017). Compassion fatigue can be the result of experiencing one traumatic case, or the increasing impact over time, which can be the case of some students and the teacher's desire to help and support the student, which over time can impact the teacher's wellbeing.



Bozek et al., (2020) in their study stated that lack of autonomy is a significant contributor to teacher burnout and stress, it connects into stereotypes about teachers being undervalued or expected to self-sacrifice. Teachers who do not feel that they have autonomy over their classroom or that they have a collective influence over school policy are more likely to feel dissatisfaction.

### **Mental Health and Quality of Life in Teachers**

Teachers need to manage their psychological well-being not just for themselves, but to be effective teachers (Chaudry & Chajjer, 2023) as it also impacts the students (Lever et al., 2017). Teachers' well-being and mental health is essential for the quality of education they provide, and their impact on students' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement (Chaudry & Chajjer, 2023).

Stress plays a mediating role in the relationship between social skills, different aspects of psychological well-being, and quality of life. Individuals with better social skills tend to experience less stress, contributing to higher psychological well-being, stress is linked to higher levels of depression and anxiety and reduced life satisfaction (Chaudry & Chajjer, 2023). Teachers capable of managing their emotions are less likely to experience stress, which leads to better psychological well-being.

Teachers and other school staff who experience exhaustion and burnout related to their work are likely to have a number of negative physical and psychological symptoms and consequences, as many of them cannot cope with work stress, leading to stress-related health problems (Chaudry & Chajjer, 2023). They have lower psychological well-being due to significantly lesser perceived control regarding autonomy, authenticity, connection to others, and resilience than other professionals.

Consequences like- Emotional numbing; Feeling “shut down”; Loss of enjoyment; Lack of energy; A sense of cynicism or pessimism; Increased illness or fatigue; Aches and pains; Increased absenteeism, problems with boundaries, facing difficulty making decisions or making poor decisions (Lever et al., 2017; Prasanna & Palanivelu, 2022). Teachers have to handle the learning environment with different types of students, their own identity, and interactions with students (Chaudry & Chajjer, 2023). This impacts their energy levels, resulting in emotional fatigue and burnout.

### **The Role of Spirituality in Teachers' Mental Health & Quality of Life**

- ***Positive Impact Of Spirituality***

Chirico et al., (2020) in their study have talked about how prayer has been considered a form of meditation which leads to psychological and physical state of well-being. Many studies have shown that prayer can have beneficial effects. An Indian study reveals that workplace spirituality helps tackle the negative relationship of stress and health, and positively correlates with health. It acts as a way to cope with the negatives of life and the workplace. A study by Graca & Brandao (2024) highlights that public schools obtained



higher means on the emotional exhaustion and dimensions of depersonalization. Enhancing the spiritual environment can increase job satisfaction and reduce burnout and turnover in workplaces. Religiousness is linked to the low levels of burnout in professions like teaching, medical students, nursing, shelter homes.

Prayer and spiritual connection, and other forms of meditation help in producing physiological changes through the relaxation of body and mind. It helps create a sense of faith with oneself and connect to one's mind (Chirico et al., 2020). Many researchers talk about the effectiveness of mindfulness techniques to lessen job burnout in nurses, teaching and health professions. Among other jobs as well, meditation and spirituality helps increase personal awareness, empathy, tackle stress, burnout, and anxiety. Meditation helps in finding a sense of calm, peace and balance that can help individuals' emotional and overall well-being. It helps in relaxing and coping with stress, learning to stay centered and keeping a sense of inner peace, and managing symptoms of many medical conditions (Mayo Clinic Staff nd.,).

- ***Negative Impacts Of Spirituality***

Although spirituality provides a sense of meaning, some individuals absorb religious or spiritual knowledge in ways that promote increased self-sacrifice, leading to chronic stress and poor mental health outcomes. A strong recognition with self-sacrificial religious practices has been linked to an increased possibility of neglecting personal well-being while serving others (Vieten et al., 2023). Therefore, educators may neglect themselves while trying to provide for their institution and students.

Negative religious coping (NRC), followed by spiritual struggles and feelings of abandonment by the divine or supernatural, has been associated with serious mental health outcomes, conflict between faiths (Kosarkava et al., 2020). Individuals may experience increased anxiety, depression, and inability or struggle seeking support or professional help, as they might think of their distress as a form of divine punishment and internal conflicts and doubts about their faith (Mancini et al., 2023; Suzykiewicz et al., 2022). These struggles may also impact the individual in the workplace, for instance in teaching where the teacher's mental health plays a major role in imparting the best of knowledge.

Research on anxiety, avoidance in adults, and childhood trauma shows that these factors are linked with negative impact of spirituality (Kosarkova et al., 2020). This connection might lead to an inclination for poor coping mechanisms, where individuals rely only on their faith to handle issues which discourage them from seeking professional assistance when needed.

Koci (2022) talks about this self-sacrificial mindset which can contribute to burnout and emotional exhaustion, specifically in professions revolving around caregiving, such as



teaching or nursing, where the workers have to be emotionally available to their students or patients, at times, ignoring their own needs.

### **The Impact of Stereotypes on Teachers' Mental Health & Quality of Life**

- ***Psychological Effects of Stereotypes***

Despite high self-efficacy, where role expectations were unclear, teachers reported low levels of autonomy, felt emotionally exhausted, undervalued, unappreciated, deficient, and inadequate, also increasingly reporting elevated levels of occupational stress, exhaustion, anxiety, and burnout as well as extremely demanding work intensification burdens (Nwoko et al., 2023). This causes higher workload and pressure on teachers' work-life balance. The study (Toom, 2019) underlined the importance to teachers of stepping back for a while from the social interactions with children, due to them being emotionally and even physically burdened.

- ***Emotional exhaustion from unrealistic expectations***

Teachers' stress and burnout is increasing at a worrying rate and side by side, affecting overall satisfaction and professional interest. Teacher's negative emotions led to strong intentions to quit the job amongst primary and secondary school teachers (Nwoko et al., 2023).

- ***Work-Life Imbalance and Burnout***

Emotional exhaustion was found to be a result of teaching and intense interactions with students, emotional intensity, work intensification, and inability to effectively manage professional and family roles (Nwoko et al., 2023). The work environment affected the perceived stress, physical and mental wellbeing, work life balance, and job satisfaction of teachers. Primary school teachers struggled to maintain a balance between personal and professional responsibilities. Male teachers experienced more and stronger emotional burnout, while female teachers were found to experience stronger physical burnout (Toom, 2019).

- ***Gender and Cultural Expectations and stereotypes***

Gender stereotypes about teachers can affect their expectations of students' abilities, which in return influences the student outcomes. Teacher wellbeing is usually affected by stressful incidents of student misbehaviour. When teachers struggle with managing their emotions, it leads to stress. Teachers at times may feel the expectations are unrealistic because of indefinite efforts for limited resources.

Male teachers may fear false accusations of inappropriate behavior, leading to heightened stress and anxiety, and deterring men from pursuing or continuing careers in teaching (Wall Street Journal. 2024). Female teachers encounter sexually aggressive and intimidating behavior from students, which can lead to significant psychological distress and a hostile work environment (Hill, 2025). The notion that individuals become teachers because they are unable to succeed in other professions undermines their



expertise and dedication, leading to diminished professional self-worth (Scianna, 2015). The societal anticipation for women to be nurturing can result in emotional overload, contributing to burnout and diminished job satisfaction, perpetuate traditional gender norms and limit their professional autonomy among female educators (News Exeter, 2023).

### **Relation and interaction between spirituality and stereotypes**

- *Use of spirituality as a coping mechanism*

How teachers use spirituality to cope with stereotype-induced stress. When spirituality reinforces harmful expectations (e.g., self-sacrifice). The role of religious and cultural norms in shaping teacher identities (Toom, 2019).

Toom (2019) finds that the participants go through both supportive and restrictive environments in teaching practice, which allows them to build their identities in different ways. The pre-service teachers juggled new identities and enhanced their ideal identities for their future as teachers. Various social interactions and everyday practices in schools play a key role in the identity construction of teachers, focusing on the important role of teacher identities and their formation, in regards to teaching, and in different surroundings.

USC Today (2023), draws out conclusions how individuals facing mental health issues can use practical coping skills that can be learned through spirituality. Teachers, however, can use faith to manage stress caused because of stereotypes, cultivating hope and strength through it. USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work (2023), highlights that individuals depend on their faith to cope with difficulties in life. Teachers experiencing stress due to stereotypes should turn to spirituality for emotional and mental strength.

- *How stereotypes can have adversely negative effects*

Doe (2018), states that freedom of religion is often put forward to defend human rights violations. This underlines that religious beliefs can cause harmful expectations, such as self-sacrifice, that may emphasize duty and service. Ahmadi & Zandi (2023), talk about religious beliefs significantly influence teachers' professional identities and pedagogical practices. Teachers may integrate their spirituality into their teaching approach, which can be both beneficial and limiting.

Smith & Anderson (2019) highlight how teachers' identities are shaped by factors and surrounding communities, teachers' view of roles and duties are formed because of societal expectations that are influenced by cultural and religious norms.

### **Strategies for Supporting Teachers' Well-being**

Encouraging teachers to engage in self-care activities and establishing boundaries between work and personal life is very important (Vonderlin et al., 2020). Organisations are integrating wellness and self-care into teacher education programs, preparing future



educators to maintain their well-being while managing the emotional demands of teaching.

- ***Promoting Healthy Spiritual Coping Mechanisms***

Spirituality plays an important role in coping with stress, studies have highlighted that spirituality can help promote mental health but also may contribute to negative coping mechanisms. Differentiating between important spiritual practices and the ones that may be harmful is paramount for effective stress management (Roser et al., 2013). Combining professional psychological support with faith-based coping strategies can enhance mental health outcomes. Programs that integrate spirituality into therapeutic practices have been developed to teach practical coping skills and have highlighted the significance of spirituality in various cultures.

Adding spiritual values and holistic approaches in schools is essential for supporting teachers' mental well-being. Organisations should start various special training programs that help in promoting work-life balance, and encourage open communication to reduce stress, enhance social support, and create a positive environment. Spirituality helps in mental health by reducing stress, promoting emotional balance, and providing a sense of purpose (Aziz, 2024). It offers comfort in troubles, and encourages connection through religious beliefs or nature.

- ***Challenging Stereotypes that are Harmful***

Educators face high levels of work-related stress, which leads to various mental health issues like- anxiety, depression, and burnout. Raising awareness is important to create awareness about the unrealistic expectations placed on teachers (American Psychological Association, 2019). Addressing organisational issues such as travel compensation, manageable workloads, and accessible mental health resources is essential (Education Commission of the States, 2020). Institutions are encouraged to foster a culture of self-care and provide support systems to promote educators' well-being.

### **Objectives of the Review**

- To explore the impact of spirituality on teachers' well-being, coping, and stress management.
- To identify both positive and negative impacts of spirituality on mental well-being.
- To examine the effects of stereotypes on teachers' mental health and quality of life.

### **Hypotheses**

- Spirituality acts as a coping mechanism that strengthens emotional well-being in teachers which helps them manage stress and burnout.
- Spirituality may also influence mental health, and increase attitudes that prevent setting boundaries and seeking professional help.



- Negative stereotypes regarding teachers often cause increased stress, emotional exhaustion, as well as reduced job satisfaction.
- Professional and societal stereotypes in teaching lead to formation of unrealistic expectations about teachers which then impact their mental well-being, health and work-life balance.

### Significance of the Study

This review highlights the impact of spiritual coping, stereotypes, and mental health challenges on teachers. It showcases the need and importance for balanced spiritual coping, realistic expectations, and organisational support to improve teacher well-being. The findings urge for policy reforms, workload management, and better mental health resources, which leads to a healthier work environment for educators.

### Findings and Conclusion

The review explored the impact of spirituality and stereotypes on teachers' mental health and overall well-being. The findings show that spirituality can serve as both- a coping mechanism, offering emotional support and stress relief and it can also lead to burnout. The same way, stereotypes create unrealistic expectations about teachers, contributing to emotional exhaustion, work-life imbalance, and decreased job satisfaction.

### Key Findings

#### 1. *Spirituality as a Coping Mechanism*

Spirituality helps in managing stress by providing emotional comfort, and promoting mindfulness (Chirico et al., 2020). Positive ways of coping, such as prayer and meditation, have been associated with improved mental health and reduced burnout (Bozek et al., 2020; Graca & Brandao, 2024). Negative coping, such as feelings of divine abandonment or excessive self-sacrifice, while ignoring oneself, can lead to stress and discourage professional help-seeking (Vieten et al., 2023; Kosarkova et al., 2020).

#### 2. *Impact of stereotypes on mental health*

Educators are expected to be nurturing, emotionally available, and selfless, which can lead to compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion (Lever et al., 2017). Gender and cultural expectations further shape teachers' experiences, with male teachers facing concerns over false accusations and female teachers experiencing emotionally exhausting nurturing expectations (Wall Street Journal, 2024; News Exeter, 2023). Stereotypes regarding teaching prevents educators from setting healthy boundaries, leading to work-life imbalance (Nwoko et al., 2023).

#### 3. *Workplace Stress and Burnout*

High job demands, low autonomy, and unrealistic societal expectations contribute to teachers' stress, leading to mental and physical health consequences (Chaudhry & Chhajer, 2023; Toom, 2019). Teachers with limited control over their classrooms or



institutional policies report higher dissatisfaction and burnout (Bozek et al., 2020). Work-life imbalance, particularly among primary school teachers, leads to increased absenteeism, emotional fatigue, and decision-making difficulties (Nwoko et al., 2023).

### Conclusion

The findings from the review highlight the role of spirituality in teachers' mental well-being— both as a valuable coping mechanism, and promoting tendencies that lead to burnout. Stereotypes create a lot of pressure on teachers, imposing stress and emotional exhaustion. Addressing these challenges requires organisational support, development programs, and a culture and society that promotes self-care and boundary-setting. Practising spirituality in a balanced way- where it helps mental well-being without encouraging harmful self-neglect. Schools and policymakers must work to destroy unrealistic stereotypes and provide proper mental health resources to foster a healthier teaching environment.

### Future Implications

- Longitudinal Effects of Spirituality and Stereotypes- to investigate the long-term effects of spiritual practices on teachers' mental well-being.
- Gender Differences in Spirituality – investigating how male and female teachers differ in their spiritual coping mechanisms.
- Cross-Cultural Perspectives – Exploring how spirituality and stereotypes differ across cultural contexts in influencing teachers' well-being.
- Generational differences in Spirituality – how different age groups practice spirituality, if younger teachers lean towards mindfulness while older teachers rely on traditional religious practices

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