

## Teacher Self-Care as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Counselling Interventions and Work-Related Stress Among Public Senior School Teachers in Nakuru East Sub-County, Kenya

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to investigate the moderating effect of teacher self-care on the relationship between counselling intervention and work-related stress among teachers in the public senior secondary schools of Nakuru East Sub-County, Kenya. The study was anchored on Social Support Theory and utilised a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. A proportionate stratified simple random sampling technique was adopted to select teachers from 19 public senior schools, with proportional representation across the schools. The minimum sample size of 254 was determined using Yamane's [1967] formula at a 95 per cent confidence level and 5 per cent margin of error, of which 178 teachers returned completed questionnaires (response rate = 70.08%). Counselling interventions were the independent variable, teacher self-care was the moderator, and work-related stress (assessed by the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory [CBI]) was the dependent variable. Descriptive statistics, Spearman correlation, and moderated multiple regression analysis with heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors (HC3) were used to analyse the data. Results showed that the interaction between individual counselling and self-care was statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.240$ ,  $p = .042$ ), whereas those for group counselling and psychoeducation were not. The findings show that schools should pair individual counselling with structured self-care promotion rather than treating the two as interchangeable; to counselling research by clarifying that self-care operates as a conditional enhancer; and to teacher well-being in Kenya.

**Key terms:** Counselling interventions, Kenya, public senior schools, teacher self-care, work-related stress.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Work-related stress is now considered an epidemic across professions, yet teaching holds a heavy load due to emotional and bureaucratic strains educators face daily. An estimated 40 per cent of employees worldwide reported they felt stressed at work the previous day, with Sub-Saharan Africa peaking at 47 per cent (Gallup, 2025). A scoping review of the education field by Agyapong et al. (2022) found that teacher stress ranged from 8.3 per cent up to 87.1 per cent in included studies. The impact is not limited to the individual. Depression and anxiety are estimated to account for 12 billion lost working days per year, and they cost the global economy approximately USD 1 trillion per year (WHO, 2024). Further, chronic teacher stress undermines retention, classroom quality, and student outcomes in the education sector. These figures suggest that, although baseline stress rates differ widely, the teaching profession is highly affected, including learners. Local data for Nakuru East Sub-County is required to inform targeted contextual interventions based on these general trends.

Counselling interventions are a practical response. Beames et al. (2023) reported that mental health interventions for teachers in randomised controlled trials (RCTs) had large effects on stress ( $g = 0.93$ ). Notably, substantial evidence for most of it came from high-income countries. In Ethiopia, 58.2 per cent of public secondary school teachers experienced work-related stress (Kabito & Wami, 2020). Focusing on Kenya, Mbwayo et al. (2020) noted that school-based mental health provision is compromised by limited training and the heavy workloads teachers-counsellors face.

Nakuru East Sub-County reflects this pressure. According to Wanjala et al. (2025), 63.5 per cent of the teachers had heavy administrative responsibilities, 71.7 per cent participated in extracurricular activities, and more than three-quarters (77.4%) were involved in guidance and counselling for students in addition to teaching. Given inadequate formal counselling, teachers turn to personal self-care practices, including exercise, prayer, mindfulness, and community support, to manage their ordeals (Akinyi, 2025). The question that is not sufficiently addressed is whether self-care practices amplify the impact of counselling or work independently.

Occupational stress amongst public senior school teachers in Nakuru East Sub-County is a growing challenge in education, alongside non-teaching responsibilities and limited structured psychosocial support. Even though counselling is generally advocated as a lasting solution, school-based support systems do not seem well established to address the pressures teacher-counsellors carry. Particularly, full teaching loads alongside counselling responsibilities (Kabutiei et al., 2022; Mbwayo et al., 2020), alongside inadequate numbers of trained counsellors (Gachenia & Mwenje, 2021). The contextual and empirical gaps, therefore, involve local research that has focused on stressors and working conditions, or on the limitations of guidance and counselling programs, rather than on whether counselling interventions actually reduce teachers' stress (Kabutiei et al., 2022; Mbwayo et al., 2020). Additionally, Wagner et al. (2024) and Elemo et al. (2024) argued that self-care enhances intervention outcomes; this moderating effect has not yet been examined with public senior school teachers in Nakuru East Sub-County. This study addresses these gaps.

The research objective of this study was to determine the moderating effect of teacher self-care on the relationship between counselling interventions and work-related stress among public senior school teachers in Nakuru East Sub-County.

The study tested the following null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): Teacher self-care (moderator) has no statistically significant moderating effect on the relationship between counselling interventions (independent variable) and work-related stress (dependent variable) among public senior school teachers in Nakuru East Sub-County.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Framework

The Social Support Theory was developed through work by scholars such as Sidney Cobb and James House in the 1970s and early 1980s, when researchers increasingly recognised that social relationships shape health and adaptation to stress (Cobb, 1976; House, 1981). It states that support, in emotional, informational, appraisal, or instrumental forms, received from others can shield persons from psychological strain and enhance adjustment under stress (House, 1981). The theory assumes that individuals are better able to manage stress when they believe they are valued and connected to reliable networks (Cobb, 1976). In line with Social Support Theory, supportive relationships can bolster well-being and mitigate stress-induced harms.

Social Support Theory applies to the current study as it justifies the function of group counselling and the modifying effect of teacher self-care behaviours. Group counselling allows teachers to receive empathy and practical solutions from individuals who truly understand the work-related stressors they face (House, 1981). Psychoeducation can also help normalise help-seeking and enhance engagement with supportive networks, and individual counselling can increase teachers' readiness to seek and utilise social supports (Cobb, 1976). Teacher self-care fits within this model, as it frequently involves proactive help-seeking and restorative experiences that facilitate access to support. In Nakuru East Sub-County, social support can act as a buffer against stress. While critics note that Social Support Theory sometimes treats support as helpful when, in reality, it can be mismatched (Lahey & Orehek, 2011), the theory remains relevant because teaching is a relational profession, and counselling works through supportive interpersonal contact.

### Empirical Review

Empirical evidence on the moderating effect of teacher self-care on the counselling-stress relationship is limited. Wagner et al. (2024) indicated that self-care moderates the intervention effects. Wagner et al. reported that a combined teacher intervention involving counselling and self-care or mindfulness training diminished emotional exhaustion, and the effects were stronger for teachers with higher baseline mindfulness skills. Wang et al. (2020) also observed that professional self-care education in graduate school enhanced resilience over time and diminished burnout among beginning social workers in China. Elemo et al. (2024), the regionally closest of these studies, reported that mindful self-care buffered the effect of job insecurity on well-being among academic staff in Ethiopia. The common theme is self-care, enhancing the effectiveness of even support-centric interventions, both as dual products of the same intervention.

In a scoping review of self-care, burnout, and compassion fatigue interventions, Kaapu et al. (2024) warned that self-care interventions can overly individualise responsibility and fail to address sources of stress. In an environment where job stress is largely caused by excessive workload or inadequate institutional support, self-care might not be enough. The counselling itself, rather than self-care, carries the protective effect (Ntumi et al., 2025). Focusing on early-career teachers in Ghana, Ntumi et al. recognised counselling as a mediator and moderator that attenuated the relationship between assessment-related stress and mental

health difficulties. Self-care may enhance (rather than detract from) support-based interventions selectively, not universally, although the magnitude and nature of this effect may vary by professional context.

Importantly, the reviewed studies do not reflect the realities of Kenyan public senior school teachers. They include Austrian teachers (Wagner et al., 2024), Chinese social workers (Wang et al., 2020), Ethiopian university staff (Elemo et al., 2024), and Ghanaian novice teachers (Ntumi et al., 2025). Kenyan public senior schools differ in terms of workload arrangements, capacity to counsel, and institutional support. Wanjala et al. (2025) established administrative burden as a fact. Teacher-counsellors normally teach a full course load (Kabutiei et al., 2022; Mwayo et al., 2020), while qualified counsellors and counselling rooms are a rarity (Gachenia & Mwenje, 2021). The extent to which self-care would enhance the stress-alleviating effects of individual counselling, group counselling, and psychoeducation for public senior school teachers in Nakuru East Sub-County remains an unresolved empirical issue that this study addresses.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study was a quantitative cross-sectional survey design grounded on Social Support Theory. Counselling interventions (individual counselling, group counselling, psychoeducation) were the independent variable, work-related stress was the dependent variable, and teacher self-care was the moderating variable. The study population consisted of 695 class teachers across 19 regular public senior schools in Nakuru East Sub-County, as per Teachers Service Commission (TSC) records. Classroom teachers were the focus because they face work stress firsthand and are the primary targets of school-based counselling programs.

A stratified simple random sampling technique was used. The 19 schools formed the strata. A minimum sample of 254 was calculated using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 95 per cent confidence level and a 5 per cent margin of error. Respondents were allocated to schools by proportional allocation. Within each school, the teacher list served as the sampling frame, with respondents selected by simple random sampling without replacement. Of 254 sampled, 178 completed the questionnaire (response rate = 70.08%). The questionnaire combined researcher-developed counselling items with selected COPE subscales (Carver et al., 1989) and items adapted from the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) (Kristensen et al., 2005), all rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha \geq 0.70$ ). Ethical approval was obtained from KUREC and a permit from NACOSTI; participation was voluntary, anonymous, and based on informed consent.

Data were analysed in R (version 4.5.3) using descriptive statistics, Spearman's correlation (residuals non-normal,  $W = 0.952$ ,  $p = .001$ ), and moderated multiple regression with HC3-robust standard errors ( $BP = 23.66$ ,  $df = 7$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Predictors were mean-centred before forming interaction terms.

### 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The response rate was 70.08 per cent. Descriptive and correlation analyses for the five study variables, namely individual counselling (IC), group counselling (GC), psychoeducation (PE), teacher self-care (SC), and work-related stress (WRS), are shown in Table 1. Self-care had the highest mean (3.69), suggesting that teachers were already engaging in personal coping mechanisms. A moderate mean was also obtained

for work-related stress (Mean = 2.61). Among the counselling types, group counselling had the highest mean ( $M = 3.14$ ), reflecting that the teachers expressed the most positive opinions toward peer-based sessions.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Spearman Correlations**

Variable	Mean	SD	IC	GC	PE	SC	WRS
IC	2.82	1.03	1.00				
GC	3.14	1.03	0.67	1.00			
PE	2.92	1.05	0.63	0.65	1.00		
SC	3.69	0.83	0.52	0.52	0.54	1.00	
WRS	2.61	0.86	-0.02	-0.15	-0.06	-0.07	1.00

Note.  $N = 178$ . Correlations among IC, GC, PE, and SC are significant at  $p < .001$ . Correlations between counselling variables and WRS are not statistically significant (all  $p > .05$ ).

The three counselling dimensions were positively and highly correlated ( $\rho = 0.63$ - $0.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that teachers who used one type of counselling were likely to participate in other types as well. Each counselling dimension was also moderately and significantly correlated with self-care ( $\rho = 0.52$ - $0.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Nevertheless, the two-way relationships between counselling and occupational stress were inconclusive and not statistically significant. The weak bivariate correlations suggest that direct, unconditional relationships are limited.

## Regression Analysis

A moderated multiple regression was conducted to examine the moderating effect of teacher self-care in the relationship between counselling and work-related stress. All continuous predictors were mean-centred before the creation of the interaction terms, and standard errors (SEs) were corrected for heteroscedasticity using HC3-robust SEs. The full model was statistically significant ( $F(7, 170) = 2.19$ ,  $p = .037$ ), and accounted for 8.3 per cent of the variance of work-related stress ( $R^2 = .083$ ,  $Adj R^2 = .045$ ). While the explained variance is modest, the model fit is meaningful in a context where teacher stress is shaped by many factors beyond the counselling–self-care system.

The constants and slopes for the moderated multiple regression model based on HC3-robust estimates are in Table 2. This study predicted that teacher self-care would not moderate the relationship between counselling interventions and work-related stress ( $H_0$ ). Three interaction terms are included to test this hypothesis. The IC  $\times$  SC interaction was significant ( $\beta = -0.240$ ,  $p = 0.042$ ). The interactions for GC  $\times$  SC ( $\beta = 0.200$ ,  $p = 0.104$ ) and PE  $\times$  SC ( $\beta = 0.061$ ,  $p = 0.569$ ) did not reach significance. Self-care did not exert a direct influence on work-related stress ( $\beta = -0.057$ ,  $p = 0.538$ ). The null hypothesis is, therefore, rejected for the IC  $\times$  SC interaction but not for the GC  $\times$  SC or PE  $\times$  SC interactions.

**Table 2: HC3-Robust Coefficient Estimates for the Moderated Multiple Regression Model**

Predictor	$\beta$ (Estimate)	Robust SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI
Intercept	2.606	0.061	42.752	0.000	[2.485, 2.726]
IC (centered)	0.175	0.116	1.506	0.134	[-0.055, 0.405]
GC (centered)	-0.262	0.114	-2.299	0.023	[-0.486, -0.037]
PE (centered)	0.065	0.109	0.595	0.553	[-0.150, 0.280]
SC (centered)	-0.057	0.092	-0.616	0.538	[-0.239, 0.125]
IC $\times$ SC	-0.240	0.117	-2.047	0.042	[-0.471, -0.009]
GC $\times$ SC	0.200	0.122	1.634	0.104	[-0.042, 0.441]
PE $\times$ SC	0.061	0.106	0.571	0.569	[-0.149, 0.271]

Note.  $N = 178$ . All predictors are mean-centred before forming interaction terms. HC3-robust SEs applied. CI = confidence interval.

The significant IC  $\times$  SC interaction ( $\beta = -0.240$ ,  $p = 0.042$ ) suggests that the capacity of individual counselling to reduce stress depends on the teacher's level of self-care. The negative sign indicates that the higher a teacher's self-care, the greater the stress-reduction effect of individual counselling compared to teachers with lower levels of self-care. Self-care is reported to moderate the model in a selective manner.

## Discussion

Results revealed that teachers in Nakuru East Sub-County were practising self-care at a moderate level (Mean = 3.69), with rest and healthy routines (Mean = 3.90), planning (Mean = 3.87), and positive reframing (Mean = 3.75) reporting the highest item averages. Even in the current era of proactive activity, self-care was neither a significant direct predictor of work-related stress ( $\beta = -0.057$ ,  $p = 0.538$ ) nor a consistent moderator of the relationship between counselling and stress. This pattern questions the conventional view of self-care as a moderating factor. Self-care appears to operate more conditionally, strengthening specific forms of support rather than all at once.

The positive IC  $\times$  SC interaction ( $\beta = -0.240$ ,  $p = 0.042$ ) indicates that teachers who were already engaged in self-care were more likely to benefit from one-to-one counselling. Individual counselling relies heavily on a teacher's ability to be reflective and to follow through between sessions. Mindfulness, prayer, and reflective planning, which form self-care routines, prepare a teacher to participate constructively in this process. Without these inner resources, one-to-one sessions may struggle to translate into measurable stress reduction. This aligns with Wagner et al. (2024) and Elemo et al. (2024), who reported stronger intervention effects among individuals with greater baseline self-care.

Group counselling delivers its benefits through shared experience and peer validation, which do not depend on a teacher's private self-care routines. This aligns with the argument of Social Support Theory that group-based support derives its effect from the social environment itself (House, 1981). A different challenge confronts psychoeducation, whereby descriptive results revealed low attendance to the workshop (Mean = 2.23), implying that the dosage was simply not high enough to yield effects at any self-care level. The non-significant moderation here likely reflects underexposure rather than a true absence of synergy.

The findings show that self-care is not a generic enhancer of counselling. It reinforces individual counselling, where the individual's reflective capacity is paramount, but contributes little to group or didactic approaches to stress reduction, whose power to reduce stress is channelled through other means. The relatively low overall variance explained ( $R^2 = 0.083$ ) also reminds us that work-related stress among Kenyan public senior school teachers is influenced by structural constraints such as excessive workload and school-based administrative demands, which are beyond the reach of the counselling–self-care nexus.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** The research sought to establish if teacher self-care moderated the relationship between counselling interventions and work-related stress among public senior school teachers in Nakuru East Sub-County. Results indicate that self-care selectively moderates this relationship. Teachers' individual self-care practices significantly enhance the stress-relief benefits of individual counselling, but they do not enhance those of group counselling or psychoeducation. Self-care was also not a significant direct predictor of job stress. Self-care functions as a context-based resource whose value depends on the type of counselling teachers receive. Counselling and self-care are not substitutes; they function through distinct mechanisms, and the greatest stress relief will likely arise from pairing the right support with the right teacher resource.

**Recommendations:** The TSC and school heads should combine individual counselling with regimented self-care training to deepen counselling support for teachers and school heads. Since the benefit of individual counselling depends on a teacher's existing self-care capacity, programs that foster reflective habits and emotional regulation strategies will ultimately enhance a teacher's return on investment in individual counselling. Also, group counselling should be promoted as a powerful stand-alone intervention since its impact on work-related stress does not rely on further self-care activities. The non-significant findings on psychoeducation appear to reflect under-exposure rather than poor design. Policymakers and the Ministry of Education should integrate psychoeducation workshops into the regular school calendar. Future research should examine these relationships using a longitudinal or mixed-methods design to trace how counselling and self-care interact over time. Self-care may also operate as a mediator rather than a moderator for some forms of counselling, and qualitative inquiry could surface mechanisms that quantitative cross-sectional data cannot detect. Studies in other Kenyan sub-counties would help establish whether the selective moderation observed here generalises beyond Nakuru East.

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