

Burnout, Self-Care, and Meal-Skipping Behaviour among School Teachers

Rochelle Dorothy B*, B Dhanil Sherlin** and Divya Dovina***

Abstract

Teaching is a demanding profession, and school teachers experience significant stress from occupational demands and domestic duties, yet their well-being is often overlooked. This study examined the associations between teacher burnout, self-care, and meal-skipping behaviour using a mixed-methods correlational design. The sample comprised 112 school teachers (N=112) obtained from convenience sampling across various school boards. Qualitative data were derived from the short-response questionnaire and structured interviews with 4 school teachers (N=4) for thematic exploration. Measures used were the *Teacher Burnout Scale*, the *Self-Care in Your Workplace Questionnaire*, and a brief self-report checklist assessing meal-skipping behaviour. Descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test, ANOVA, correlation, regression analyses, and thematic analysis were conducted. Findings indicated moderate rates of burnout and self-care, with 59.8% of participants reporting meal-skipping behaviour. Significant differences in self-care were observed across age groups and meal-skipping categories, but burnout did not vary across these groups. A significant inverse relationship was observed between self-care and burnout, with self-care significantly predicting burnout. Qualitative findings highlighted meal-skipping as an outcome of workload pressure, time constraints, and organizational demands among teachers. Findings also indicated that organizational and emotional demands contribute to burnout, which is associated with disrupted health behaviours such as meal skipping and inconsistent self-care under workload pressures.

Keywords: Teacher burnout, self-care, meal-skipping behaviour

Teaching has been identified as a highly stressful job, with over two decades of research suggesting the risk of the development of burnout. Prolonged job stress, expanding workplace demands, contrasted with adverse work conditions, have been strongly linked with teacher burnout (Hakanen et al., 2006; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010, 2017a, 2020). Despite their fundamental role within the academic realm, or perhaps because of it, teachers frequently encounter chronic stress and reduced well-being. A study conducted in Tamil Nadu found that 85% of private school teachers experienced significant stress and 72% reported diminished autonomy in their daily lives, highlighting the poor mental health trends and self-care among teachers (Lavanya et al., 2024).

Burnout is characterised by tension, worry, physical symptoms such as muscular soreness, decreased confidence, low self-esteem, and emotional tiredness brought on by ongoing work-related stress. It is frequently accompanied by behavioural and attitude changes as well as a decline in job performance. Burnout in the teaching profession shows up as tense attitudes toward students, poor reactions to hard teaching conditions, and feelings of insufficient administrative support (Seidman & Zager, 1987; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015). Furthermore, balancing a variety of classroom

demands with administrative duties, institutional resource limitations and broader societal expectations leads to psychological stress, work discontent, depersonalization, reduction in personal achievement, decline in mental health, and decreased efficacy as a teacher (Chaudhry & Chhajer, 2023; Tripathi, 2024).

The act of not eating one or more of the three main meals of the day (breakfast, lunch, or dinner) is known as meal skipping (Pendergast et al., 2016). Meal-skipping behaviour (especially breakfast) was highlighted as a prevalent dietary habit among almost 45% of teachers, aligning with prior studies reporting breakfast as the most frequently skipped meal (Almoraie et al., 2023). Skipping meals has also been significantly associated with raised BP levels and higher risk of metabolic diseases across studies (Cahill et al., 2013).

Intentional behaviours and attitudes that support mental and physical health and lessen stress are referred to as self-care. Beyond doing certain things, self-care entails developing a sympathetic understanding of one's needs and actively looking for resources that promote resilience and wellness (Posluns & Gall, 2020). Physical, social, and emotional techniques, work-life balance, and leisure activities are typical self-care among teachers. These practices have been demonstrated to help reduce stress and safeguard mental health

*MSc Applied Psychology, Department of Psychology (Shift 1), Women's Christian College, Chennai, India(Corresponding author), Email: rochelledorot@gmail.com

**MSc Applied Psychology, Department of Psychology (Shift 1), Women's Christian College, Chennai, India, Email: dhanil.sherlin@gmail.com

***Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Women's Christian College, Chennai, India
Email: divvadovina@wcc.edu.in

(Spiess et al., 2025). Self-care is still not well understood as a protective factor impacting school teachers' daily health behaviours, despite its increasing relevance.

Although psychological well-being and teacher burnout have been the subject of much research, health-related behavioural markers like meal-skipping, especially among Indian school teachers, have received less attention. Existing research has paid limited attention to how stress manifests in daily self-care and eating habits in favour of concentrating primarily on emotional weariness and job-related effects. Additionally, there is still a dearth of empirical research on the connections among burnout, meal-skipping behaviour, and self-care behaviours. In order to fill these gaps, the current study looks at all of these factors in order to offer empirical data for increased awareness to guide interventions for teacher well-being and encouragement of better coping mechanisms.

Method

Hypotheses

H₁: There will be a significant difference in self-care across different age groups of teachers.

H₂: There will be a significant difference in teacher burnout across different age groups of teachers.

H₃: There will be a significant difference in self-care between teachers who skip meals and those who do not skip meals.

H₄: There will be a significant difference in teacher burnout levels between teachers who skip meals and those who do not skip meals.

H₅: Self-Care will significantly predict teacher burnout among teachers.

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach using a correlational research design to examine the relationships among burnout, self-care, and meal skipping behaviour among school teachers. The study aimed to examine the associations between self-care and teacher burnout, as well as differences in self-care and burnout based on meal-skipping behaviour.

Participants

The sample comprised currently employed school teachers from India representing multiple educational boards, including CBSE, ICSE, IB, IGCSE, State Board (Government), State Board (Matriculation) and Anglo-Indian Board. Participants were recruited through professional networks and institutional contacts

using convenience sampling. A total of 116 responses were collected, but due to reported mental health concerns, a final sample of 112 teachers (N=112) was retained.

The sample spanned across 7 boards (CBSE=35; ICSE=8; State Board (Government)=19; IB=3, IGCSE=10; State Board (Matriculation)=38; Anglo Indian Board=1).

Measures

Teacher Burnout was assessed using the *Teacher Burnout Scale* developed by Seidman and Zager (1987). The scale measures four dimensions: Career Satisfaction, Perceived Administrative Support, Coping with Job-Related Stress and Attitudes towards Students. Responses were recorded on a 6-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater levels of burnout. The overall scale and subscale demonstrated relatively good internal consistency ($\alpha = .877$ and 0.779 , respectively). Self-care was measured using the *Self-Care in Your Workplace Questionnaire* developed by Fisher (2016). Using this questionnaire, five dimensions were assessed, namely, Physical Self-Care, Workplace Self-Care, Emotional Self-Care, Interpersonal Self-Care and Cognitive Self-Care. Responses were recorded on a frequency-based scale with higher scores reflecting greater engagement in self-care. The overall scale and subscale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .880$ and $.816$, respectively).

Meal skipping behaviour was assessed using a brief self-report checklist developed for this study. Participants were asked to indicate the number of days per week they skipped meals over the past 3 months. Responses were recorded in a trichotomous format (Equal to or less than 4 days/ More than 4 days/ I don't skip meals). Classification criteria were informed by prior research suggesting that skipping meals on more than four days per week reflects higher meal skipping behaviour (Zahrah et al., 2023). Additionally, a short open-ended question was included to explore participants' reasons for skipping meals. Responses were reviewed and thematically grouped to identify common work-related constraints influencing meal-skipping behaviour.

Ethical Concerns and Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. They were briefed about the study's purpose and procedures, and

informed consent was obtained before data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by removing personal identifiers and securely storing data on a password-protected device accessible only to the researchers. The study involved minimal risk and adhered to standard ethical guidelines.

Procedure

Data were collected using a survey method through both online and offline modes. The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms as well as printed copies circulated in schools. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Data collection was done over a period of three weeks.

Results

Data was coded and analysed using the Jamovi statistical software. Normality was ensured through skewness (MS=-0.4; TB=0.1, SC=-0.5) and kurtosis (MS=-1.8; TB=-0.7; SC=0.1), as

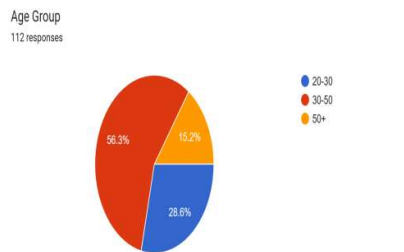


Figure 1 Distribution of Participants Across Age Groups

these values fall between the required skewness range of -1 to +1, and kurtosis range of -7 to +7

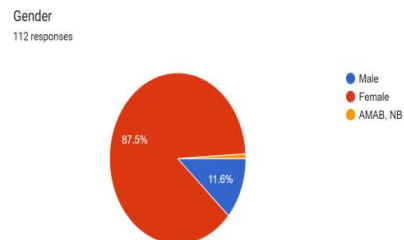


Figure 2 Distribution of Participants Across Gender Groups

(Hair Jr. et al, 1998).

H_1 was accepted since there is a significant difference in self-care based on age.

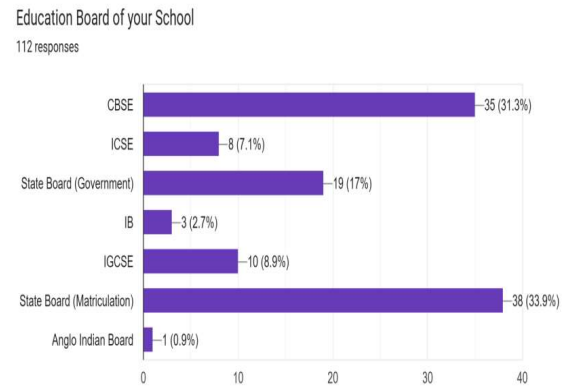


Figure 3 Distribution of Participants Across School Education Boards

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Burnout and Self-Care

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Median
Teacher Burnout	112	55.7	18.4	55.0
Self-Care	112	55.2	11.1	56.0

Note. N = Sample size; SD = Standard deviation

H_2 was not accepted since there is no

Dimensional Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 Dimensions of Teacher Burnout Scale

Dimension	Mean	SD	Range	Mid-point
Career Satisfaction	10.3	5.25	5-30	17.5
Perceived Administrative Support	16.6	7.49	6-36	21
Coping With Job Stress	18.7	6.85	6-36	21
Attitudes Towards Students	10.1	4.26	4-24	14

significant difference in teacher burnout based on age.

Table 3 Dimension of the Self-Care in Your Workplace Questionnaire

Dimension	Mean	SD
Physical Self-Care	10.3	2.80
Cognitive Self-Care	12.5	2.77
Emotional Self-Care	11.2	2.94
Workplace Self-Care	11.0	3.06
Interpersonal Self-Care	10.2	3.06

Frequency Distribution

Table 4 Meal Skipping Behaviour Among Participants

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Skips meals	67	59.8%
Does not skip meals	45	40.2%

One-Way ANOVA

Table 5 ANOVA - Teacher Burnout Across Age Groups

Dependent variable	p	Interpretation
Teacher Burnout	0.065	Not Significant
Self-Care	0.041	Significant

Post-hoc comparisons indicated that Age Group 1 (20-30 years) reported significantly lower self-care scores than Age Groups 2

Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Self-Care and Teacher Burnout Across Meal-Skipping Groups

Table 6 Independent Samples t-Test Within Meal Skipping Groups

Predictor	T	p
Self-Care	-4.641	0.006

Teachers who skipped meals reported significantly lower self-care. Burnout levels did not differ significantly.

significant difference in self-care based on meal-skipping behaviour.

Table 7 Independent Samples t-Test Within Meal Skipping Groups

Predictor	t	p
Teacher Burnout	1.48	0.143

Note. $H_a \mu_2 \neq \mu_1$

H₄ was not accepted because there was no significant difference in teacher burnout by meal-skipping behaviour.

Correlation Analysis

Table 8 Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Between Burnout and Self-Care

		Teacher Burnout
Self-Care	Pearson's r	-0.356
	Df	110
	p-value	<.001

Higher levels of self-care were significantly associated with lower levels of teacher burnout.

Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Table 9 Simple Linear Regression Predicting Burnout

Predictor	t	p
Self-Care	-5.53	< .001

Model Fit: $R = .415$ | $R^2 = .173$

H₅ was accepted since there exists a significant relationship between self-care and teacher burnout ($p = -0.396$).

Qualitative Findings

Table 10 Short-Answer Qualitative Themes - Reasons for Meal Skipping

Theme	Relative Frequency
Time Constraints	High
Workload and Institutional Barriers	High
Physiological Factors	Moderate

Religious Fasting

Low

Teacher Burnout in Relation to Organisational and Emotional Demands

The majority of the participants reported experiencing burnout as a result of both organisational pressures and emotional demands associated with teaching. Many participants expressed a strong intrinsic passion for teaching; however, organisational factors such as administrative workload, lack of autonomy, business-oriented management and time constraints contributed to feelings of exhaustion and reduction in job satisfaction. Additionally, the emotional nature of the profession, such as managing student behaviour, individual needs and meeting expectations from parents and management, further intensified stress. This left participants feeling overwhelmed, drained, and sometimes disconnected from the joy of teaching. A tentative pattern suggested that less experienced participants reported fewer burnout symptoms compared to more experienced ones.

Meal-Skipping in the Context of Workplace Stress

A common pattern across participants was the disruption of regular eating habits, particularly breakfast and lunch, as a result of heavy workload and time constraints. In some cases, the inability to prepare meals and in other cases, work-related disruptions during break times, contributed to meal skipping. Meal skipping was often not a deliberate choice but a necessity driven by prioritising work responsibilities, sometimes accompanied by feelings of guilt for taking time away from tasks. While this was consistent across most participants, some demonstrated deliberate attempts to maintain more regulated eating patterns. More erratic meal skipping patterns were shown among participants with longer work experience.

Self-Care as Intentional yet Difficult to Sustain

Participants engaged in different forms of self-care, including physical, emotional, cognitive, workplace and interpersonal. This included maintaining exercise routines, planning daily activities, practising emotion regulation techniques, and setting interpersonal boundaries. Despite this awareness, self-care was inconsistently maintained due to time limitations and ongoing work demands. Participants also reported engaging in excessive

caffeine or sugar intake to boost energy for work demands, which may undermine sustained personal well-being. While all participants recognised the importance of self-care, their ability to sustain these practices varied, with some demonstrating structured routines and others struggling to implement them consistently.

Discussion

Examining burnout alongside self-care and behavioural practices such as meal skipping provides a holistic understanding of teacher functioning. Such inquiry is particularly relevant in contexts where institutional demands may influence personal well-being and vice versa. Findings on teacher burnout indicate the presence of occupational strain among participants. Based on the dimensions of the *Teacher Burnout Scale*, participant scores reflected varied experiences across domains. Career satisfaction scores indicated differences in professional fulfilment, while perceived administrative support reflected variability in support received from the institution. Scores in the facet of coping with job stress indicated difficulties in managing workload. Attitudes towards students remained relatively stable, indicating sustained relational engagement despite occupational strain.

Participants' responses across all sub-dimensions of the *Self-Care In The Workplace Questionnaire* indicated moderate to high engagement in self-care. Physical Self-Care scores reflected participation in health-related behaviours such as nutrition, rest, and bodily care. Cognitive Self-Care indicated comparatively higher engagement, suggesting the use of reflective and mental coping strategies. Emotional Self-Care scores indicate engagement in emotional regulation processes. Workplace Self-Care scores reflected engagement in occupational well-being, such as boundary setting and stress management in the work environment. Interpersonal Self-Care indicates moderate participation in relational and social support behaviours (Fisher, 2016).

A majority of the participants reported meal-skipping behaviour. Based on the short answer analysis, the dominant reasons behind meal skipping include time constraints, workload and institutional demands, with responses such as "want of time", "poor time management", "bus comes early for pick up" or "urgency to work". This indicates that occupational responsibilities often take precedence over routine health

practices. Other reasons for meal-skipping include physiological factors and religious fasting.

Analyses revealed a significant difference in self-care based on age. The post-hoc analysis suggested that teachers between the ages of 20 and 30 showed relatively lower levels of self-care. Supporting literature suggests that, therefore, perhaps due to inexperience, younger adults show less self-care. (Alghamdi & Sideridis, 2025)

Findings show no significant difference in burnout based on age. This aligns with existing research suggesting that burnout is largely caused by the organisation's functioning rather than personal experiences. (Anastasiou & Belios, 2020)

Significant results were observed in self-care based on meal skipping behaviour. Literature suggests that those with higher self-care do not skip meals, and those with lower self-care tend to skip meals (Çeviker & Şekeroğlu, 2022). The short-answer findings support this finding since most teachers who skipped meals prioritised or were influenced by workload over their own well-being, which has been linked to low self-care, as noted in media reports. (Duggan, 2025).

Research examining the association between meal-skipping and burnout remains limited; however, considering the prevalence of burnout among the participants, this suggests that burnout may persist, irrespective of meal-skipping behaviour. Simple linear regression proved that self-care significantly predicts burnout inversely. Research suggests that teachers engaging in intentional self-care, such as mindfulness, show significantly lower burnout levels, which supports this finding. (Turgeon-Brown, 2025)

The qualitative findings align with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, where organisational pressures like workload and emotional labour deplete teachers' resources, leading to burnout. Emotional exhaustion, a core component of burnout, is exacerbated by administrative demands and student management, aligning with global findings on workload-related stress. Notably, novice teachers report fewer symptoms, consistent with research showing lower burnout in early-career stages due to less accumulated exposure, unlike experienced teachers facing greater cumulative workload demands. (Kariou et al., 2021)

Meal skipping as a stress response mirrors recent studies on associations between food intake disruption and workload, hence suggesting an association between burnout and excessive workload, and meal skipping. Literature confirms that self-care efforts, though recognised, falter under demands, causing coping behaviours such as excessive caffeine reliance or overworking, which further undermine wellness. (Duggan, 2025)

The quantitative findings indicating moderate burnout, disrupted eating behaviours, and variable self-care are supported by qualitative insights highlighting organisational pressures, emotional demands, and inconsistent coping. Together, the findings indicate that institutional structures, rather than individual differences, play a more central role in shaping both burnout and health behaviours. Therefore, it is important to address work-related stress to enhance self-care and maintain a healthy life.

Future Implications and Recommendations

- Incorporating school breakfast and lunch schemes across all schools can decrease meal skipping behaviour. On top of improving self-care, it may also decrease the workload of preparing and packing food for themselves before early work timings.
- Psychosocial wellness programs are critical for school teachers since it directly reduces burnout and provide a platform to learn the right ways of self-care. This effect may eventually cascade to better teaching performance and a positive school climate.
- Integrating teacher welfare and related concepts and strategies in educational psychology syllabi equips graduates not only to aid students but also to support the well-being of teachers. This may bring about well-informed, holistic psychological support from psychologists in schools.
- Proactive strategising in task prioritisation, time management, and goal-setting skills training must be provided to teachers periodically to support optimal functioning, not just in workplaces but also amongst different facets of life.
- Human Resource Management must be treated as a system to improve employee well-being and not just as a recruitment or appraisal system. This way, HR could reduce workload by delegating tasks and spreading out work across the department, hence reducing the teachers' workload to

teaching and related tasks instead of additional administrative tasks.

- Implement clear policies limiting after-hours work and offer flexible roles to help teachers maintain boundaries, reduce burnout, and better balance professional responsibilities with personal well-being.

Limitations

- The study relied on self-report measures, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or recall errors, particularly in reporting meal-skipping behaviour and self-care.
- The convenience sampling technique and focus on teachers from India, particularly Chennai, may limit the generalizability of findings to other cultural or institutional contexts.
- Meal-skipping behaviour was assessed using a brief checklist rather than a standardised assessment, which may not fully capture objective health indicators from dietary patterns or nutritional deficiencies.
- Other potentially relevant variables, such as workload intensity, school type differences, and physical health indicators, were not included and could be explored in future research.
- The small qualitative sample size restricts the strength of thematic inference and generalizability of interpretations.

Conclusion

The present study examined the associations between burnout, self-care, and meal-skipping behaviour among school teachers. Findings revealed moderate levels of burnout and self-care, alongside a high prevalence of meal-skipping behaviour, largely driven by time constraints and occupational demands. Self-care was found to be significantly and inversely associated with burnout, with self-care emerging as a significant predictor of burnout. While burnout levels did not differ based on age or meal-skipping behaviour, self-care varied significantly across age groups and meal-skipping categories, highlighting self-care as a critical protective factor in teachers' well-being. Qualitative results indicated that meal-skipping behaviour occurs due to occupational and emotional demands, leading to prolonged behavioural maladaptive patterns. Overall, the study highlights the need for systemic, organisational, and individual-level

interventions that prioritise teacher well-being as essential to sustainable educational institutions.

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