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The impact of teacher wellness programming during highly stressful times

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the impacts of participating in a stress-management program on teachers' self-reported stress and well-being. Participants included a small group of new teachers and their assigned veteran teacher mentors from an elementary school in a large school district in Central Virginia. Self-reported stress as it relates to teacher-teacher relationships and physical symptoms increased significantly from pre- to post-test completion. All other stress measures, with the exception of time management, also increased over time; however none of these changes were significant. Teaching efficacy and school connectedness declined over time, while teaching satisfaction increased. These changes were also not significant. Participant feedback suggests that participating in the program was an enjoyable and fulfilling experience due to discovering shared experiences with other teachers and having a space to process. While significant outcomes were not obtained, the results indicate the potential benefit of providing stress and wellness interventions for teachers.

Introduction

Occupational stress in the teaching profession is an ongoing concern in schools. Not only has teaching been identified as a high stress occupation, but these high levels of stress have been shown to be harmful to the well-being of teachers (Hansen & Sullivan, 2003). When teachers experience excessive and prolonged stress, there are major implications for schools and school systems, including, but not limited to, higher teacher attrition rates (Roness, 2011). In fact, teacher attrition is a growing problem. Research shows that between 40% and 50% of new teachers leave the profession within five years. When it comes to first-year teachers alone, the attrition rate has seen a 34% increase between 1988 and 2008, with an estimated 13% of teachers leaving the profession after their first year (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). This results in schools and systems scrambling to meet the needs of their teachers, while maintaining professional standards and the quality of education for students.

One way schools and systems may be inclined to address this need is through direct interventions targeting stress management and other factors related to social-emotional wellness. School-based mental health professionals may be in the unique position to provide this type of intervention, given the training in mental health, counseling, and evidence-based intervention strategies that many professionals have obtained in their training programs. Thus, it is important to explore the potential benefits of an intervention program in meeting teachers' needs to determine how this could fit in to a school's plan to address teacher support and retention.

Review of the Literature

Teacher Stress

To understand how to support teachers, it is important to consider the factors that have been identified as contributing to stress for teachers. A review article by Hansen and Sullivan (2003) defines stress as having three major components: the stressor, the strain, and the appraisal. A stressor is the naturally occurring event in the environment that may elicit a psychological or physiological strain on a person. The amount of strain a person experiences relies on their appraisal of stressful situations; whether they perceive themselves as having control, resources, and competency to manage the stressor. Understanding this relationship is important when identifying occupational stressors.

Occupational Stressors

In addition to providing an understanding of the components of stress, Hansen and Sullivan (2003) also discuss the occupational stressors teachers face. The authors identify role ambiguity, or when teachers experience a "lack of clear expectations, confusing information regarding expectations, or unclear information about how to meet expectations", as well as role conflict, which occurs from receiving conflicting expectations and demands, as factors specific to the role of a teacher that contribute to stress (p. 614). Additionally, workload, lack of time to collaborate with other teachers, lack of resources, lack of support from administration, and classroom management difficulties are also identified as occupational stressors.

Another occupational stressor may be the progression of the school year. A study by von der Embse and Mankin (2020) monitored changes in stress, school connectedness, and self-efficacy on a weekly basis throughout the school year in a large sample of

middle school teachers in Northeastern U.S. Most of the teachers were female and 80% had over six years of teaching experience. Results showed that the teachers experienced more stress as the school year progressed, with a 17% increase in self-reported stress from October to June. During that seven-month period, self-reported school connectedness declined by 20% and self-efficacy declined by 15%. Standardized testing was also identified as a major stressor, with self-reported stress at its peak the week before standardized testing in the spring.

A study by Gonzalez, Peters, Orange, and Grigsby (2017) also examined the impact of stress related to high-stakes, standardized testing on a sample of K-12 teachers from Texas. The group of teachers primarily held Bachelor's degrees and had several years of teaching experience. Half of the teachers in the sample taught at the high school level and about half of taught high-stakes courses. Participants completed survey items assessing stress and self-efficacy related to high-stakes testing. They were then invited to participate in a focus group, where interview content was coded for themes. While teachers who taught high-stakes courses reported no significant differences in self-efficacy than teachers who taught non-high-stakes courses, all teachers reported feeling the influences of high-stakes testing on their perceived self-efficacy. Focus group discussions revealed that routine changes and administrative influence on testing and remediation impacted teachers' self-efficacy. In regard to stress, there was a significant difference in self-reported stress amongst high school teachers who taught high-stakes courses versus those who did not. There was no difference found amongst elementary and middle school teachers, however, focus group data revealed that all teachers felt the impact of stress during testing season. Finally, the data showed a significant relationship

between stress and self-efficacy, where when self-reported stress increased in teachers, their self-efficacy decreased.

The studies presented indicate a number of occupational factors that could be stressful for teachers. Teachers' individual characteristics and appraisals of occupational stressors vary person-to-person and are also important to examine to fully understand teachers' experiences.

Individual Factors & Appraisals of Stress

Research conducted by Jepson and Forrest (2006) examined the role of individual factors that contribute to stress in primary and secondary school teachers from the United Kingdom. On average, the teachers in the sample had been in the profession for 12.5 years. Results revealed a relationship between stress and commitment; the more stress an individual experienced, the less they reported themselves as being committed to the teaching profession. Additionally, there was a difference in perceived stress among primary and secondary school teachers, where primary school teachers had greater perceived stress. In terms of individual factors that contributed to greater stress, teachers who were highly motivated and demonstrated Type A behavior traits reported greater perceived stress. These findings support the idea that individual characteristics impact how teachers will respond to occupational stress.

While teachers in the U.K. may have different stressors within that school system than teachers in U.S. school systems, the link between stress and commitment has been demonstrated in other U.S.-based research studies. Lambert, Boyle, Fitchett, and McCarthy (2019) conducted a study examining stress and job commitment amongst kindergarten teachers around the U.S. The teachers in the study were primarily White

females and had worked in education for more than two years. There was an equal representation of teachers from urban, rural, and suburban schools. Participants completed surveys assessing their perceptions of classroom resources, or "the availability and helpfulness of school support personnel, administrative support, other adults, instructional support materials, and specialized instructional resources", and classroom demands, measured by "students with problematic behaviors, or other student-related demands such as poor attendance, administrative demands, and lack of instructional resources" (p. 14). Survey items also assessed teachers' risk for stress and commitment to the profession. Results showed that teachers who were at a lower risk for stress due to perceived access to classroom resources that met classroom demands also showed greater commitment to the teaching profession and would become teachers again if given the choice to start their careers over. Teachers who perceived classroom resources to be insufficient to meet demands were at greater risk for stress and reported lower commitment to the profession.

Another study by Fitchett, McCarthy, Lambert, and Boyle (2018) examined how teachers' appraisals impacted their stress levels and job commitment, while placing a primary focus on first-year teachers because of their increased vulnerability to experiencing high levels of stress. Data were pulled from two waves of a larger longitudinal study following teachers during the first five years of their careers. Teachers completed surveys with items assessing workplace climate, job preparation, commitment to teaching, the supports that new teachers received, job satisfaction, stress, burnout, and classroom control. Results indicated that first-year teachers who were identified as being at greater risk for stress reported higher levels of burnout, less classroom control, and

lower commitment to the job. Teachers' risk for stress classification was associated with teacher education preparation characteristics and access to first-year teacher support.

Overall, this line of research concerning teachers' appraisals of stress demonstrates how important it is for teachers to perceive that they have access to sufficient support and resources to meet the demands and stressors of the job.

The Shift from Dysfunction to Being Well

While it is important to understand occupational stressors and individual factors that contribute to increased stress in teachers, recent research has shifted to a positive psychology framework. This framework places an increased focus on, not only what contributes to deteriorating mental health, but also what it looks like for an individual to be mentally well. This movement has altered researchers focus to include an examination of the factors that increase and support teacher well-being. Given that this is a newer line of research, it should be noted that much of the work that has been published examines the experiences of teachers in European countries and there is a limitation of studies relevant to the topic of the proposed study that have been done in the U.S. Thus, the following review of the literature includes primarily European studies, but can provide some basis of understanding the correlates of teacher well-being.

Teacher Well-being

To understand the correlates of teacher well-being, the construct must first be defined. Defining well-being, in general, can be rather complex and various researchers have different views of the elements of well-being. Diener (1999) defines subjective well-being as "a broad category of phenomena that includes people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction" (p. 277). Work

from Ryff (2014) defines well-being as having six components that come from earlier psychological theories, such as Maslow's self-actualization (1968) and Erikson's development (1959) theories. Ryff's six components are self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relationships, personal growth, and autonomy. In their exploration into the dimensions of occupational well-being in Dutch teachers, van Horn, Taris, Schaufeli, and Schreurs (2004) adopt a similar ideology, asserting a model of occupational well-being that has five positive and negative domains: affective, professional, social, cognitive, and psychosomatic.

Another view of well-being that psychologists use involves two positive dimensions: hedonic and eudaimonic. Hedonic well-being is characterized by having pleasurable experiences and obtaining satisfaction with life, whereas eudaimonic well-being involves finding meaning and reaching one's full potential (Disabato, Goodman, Short, Kashdan, & Jarden, 2016). For the purposes of this study, teacher well-being will be conceptualized by pulling from this ideology, where positive dimensions are thought to have two domains, as well as that of van Horn and colleagues (2004), since both positive (well-being) and negative (stress) domains will be assessed.

Correlates of Teacher Well-being

A qualitative study by Paterson and Grantham (2016) explored contributing factors to teacher well-being. In the first phase of the study, a small sample of teachers from five primary schools in Scotland completed a survey to determine the well-being profile of each school. Five teachers from the school that reported the greatest well-being profile were asked to participate in a focus group to identify themes and factors that contribute to teacher well-being. The researchers identified themes that encompass

various levels of the ecological systems within a school. Teachers discussed the importance of having supportive relationships with their peers, which is on the macrosystemic level. This could create a greater sense of work-life balance on the exosystemic level, that would, in turn, increase the level of autonomy and competency teachers felt while performing the job on the individual level.

A study by Capone and Petrillo (2020) examined teacher mental health and well-being in high school teachers, and how that varied by job status. A large sample of Italian high school teachers completed a questionnaire with measures of burnout, depression, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and school collective efficacy, which was defined as "teachers' individual perceptions about their schools' collective capabilities to influence student achievement" (p. 1760). Most of the participants were female, had over 10 years of teaching experience, and taught science and literature courses. A little more than half of the participants were permanent teachers, while the rest were temporary. Results showed that teachers who were flourishing reported no more than average levels of depression and burnout. Teachers who reported greater self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and job satisfaction also reported greater well-being. There was a significant difference in well-being by contract type; teachers who had permanent contracts reported greater well-being than teachers who had temporary contracts.

A study conducted in New Zealand by Soykan, Gardner, and Edwards (2019) also sought to explore factors related to teacher well-being, specifically psychological capital and coping strategies. Psychological capital consists of four dimensions: hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy. A large sample of current and former teachers (who had entered into administrative roles) across school levels completed a questionnaire with

measures of psychological capital, coping strategies, well-being, stress, and cognitive appraisal. Analyses showed that teachers who had greater psychological capital (i.e. greater hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy) reported lower stress and greater well-being. Psychological capital in teachers was also positively related to using achievement-oriented coping strategies and healthier appraisals, where stressful situations were seen more as challenges rather than threats.

Previous research has established several factors that contribute to teacher stress and well-being. Since one goal of school buildings could be to support, and thus retain, their teachers, it is important to discover the types of supports schools have put in place. The focus of this review will now shift to an exploration into how schools are intervening to address the issue of reducing teacher stress and enhancing well-being.

Interventions to Support Teachers

Interventions are used in schools to address a wide variety of challenges with academics, behavior, and school climate on individual, group, and systemic levels. The following provides a review of the type of interventions that exist for addressing teacher stress and well-being. It is apparent in examining the literature that interventions to support teachers vary in approach.

In looking at specific interventions and teacher outcomes, one study by Jennings, Doyle, Oh, Rasheed, Frank, and Brown (2019) examined the longitudinal effects of using a mindfulness-based program, Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), on teachers' self-reported physiological distress, emotion regulation, and dimensions of mindfulness. CARE is a comprehensive program that targets the social and emotional competence teachers need to manage stress and the classroom environment.

This program takes thirty hours to complete and is given over the course of six sessions throughout the school year. The teachers who participated in this study were recruited from New York City elementary schools located in high poverty areas. While participants were predominantly female, they were racially and ethnically diverse and were evenly distributed across grade levels. The majority of the teachers had Masters degrees and the average number of years in the profession was 12.5. After participating in the CARE program, the teachers reported decreased physiological distress, and greater mindfulness and emotion regulation skills up to one year post-intervention.

An older study by Neves de Jesus and Conboy (2001) used elements of psychoeducational and cognitive-behavioral approaches when intervening with teachers. A small sample of predominantly female, experienced, primary and secondary teachers in Portugal participated in a stress management course with the goal of decreasing stress and increasing well-being. The course focused on teaching coping strategies, managing irrational beliefs, utilizing relaxation exercises, fostering teamwork and relationship building, and learning skills, such as time management, assertiveness, classroom leadership, and how to manage student behavior. Pre- and post-intervention intrinsic motivation, stress, emotional exhaustion, irrational beliefs, and professional well-being were analyzed for changes. While other changes were not found to be significant, teachers reported significantly decreased stress and increased perceptions of well-being after participating in the intervention.

In recent research by Rombaoa Tanaka, Boyce, Chinn, and Murphy (2020), the effects of an intervention that combined all of the approaches used in the Jennings et al. (2019) and Neves de Jesus and Conboy (2001) studies were examined. A sample of early

care and education (ECE) teachers in Hawaii participated in a ten-week-long professional development program that utilized elements of psychoeducational, cognitive-behavioral, and mindfulness-based techniques to learn technical skills, enhance social-emotional competence, and build relationships with other teachers. Participants were predominantly female, Native Hawaiian, and residents of O'ahu or the Big Island. On average, the teachers reported working in education for about 11.5 years. Teachers completed surveys containing measures of self-efficacy, happiness, burnout, and stress. After the intervention, teachers reported greater happiness and reduced stress and burnout. Additionally, teaching self-efficacy significantly increased post-intervention, and was still observed three-months later.

Recent meta-analyses have examined characteristics that make school-based interventions to reduce teacher stress effective. Iancu, Rusu, Māroiu, Pācurar, and Maricutoiu (2017) examined twenty-three studies to understand the effectiveness of various interventions on characteristics of teacher burnout. They found that intervention effectiveness was small, particularly for interventions that lasted shorter than a month. When effectiveness was used as a moderator variable, results indicated that interventions based in mindfulness, cognitive behavioral principles, and fostering social support positively impacted the emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment characteristics of burnout.

A meta-analysis conducted by von der Embse, Ryan, Gibbs, and Mankin (2019) had a similar goal of determining the effectiveness of teacher stress interventions. Twenty-four studies using psychoeducational, behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, mindfulness-based, or student behavior interventions were analyzed. Contrary to the

findings from the Iancu and colleagues (2019) meta-analysis, results indicated that small to moderate effect sizes were found across intervention type. Studies where interventions were conducted over a 8-10 week time period, with 60-90 minute sessions each time, resulted in significant positive outcomes.

Overall, the research in this review indicates that interventions that last for more than one month, have multiple sessions, and are rooted in psychoeducational, cognitive-behavioral, and mindfulness theoretical principles can have positive impacts on teacher well-being and stress.

The Current Study

Study Purpose

The current study sought to fill several gaps in the literature. First, much of the teacher well-being research has been conducted in European countries. Many of the findings may be presumed to be similar because the U.S. and Europe share Westernized culture; however, the educational systems are different. The current study serves to add to the understanding of American teachers' well-being within our educational system. Second, much of the recent literature on interventions for teachers is rooted solely in mindfulness practices. The intervention that was utilized in this study combined multiple practices, including mindfulness, cognitive-behavioral, and psychoeducational techniques, similar to the intervention conducted in the Rombaoa Tanaka and colleagues (2020) study. Finally, few studies have addressed teacher stress and well-being in a school system recovering from a global crisis, COVID-19. The potential trauma and ongoing educational shifts schools have experienced during the pandemic has likely made an impact on the teaching experience. This could reveal a need for school-based mental health professionals to provide more direct support to teachers in the coming years.

Research Questions

The goal of the current study was to examine the impact of teachers participating in a five-session stress management program provided by a school-based mental health professional. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: Do teachers report a change in self-reported stress after participating in a stress-management program?

RQ2: Do teachers report a change in subjective well-being, as measured by teaching efficacy, after participating in a stress-management program?

RQ3: Do teachers report a change in subjective well-being, as measured by school connectedness, after participating in a stress-management program?

RQ4: Do teachers report a change in subjective well-being, as measured by teaching satisfaction, after participating in a stress-management program?

Methodology

Participant Sample

The university Institutional Review Board approved all research procedures before participant recruitment began. Teachers were recruited from a large school district in central Virginia. New teachers, identified as any teacher who is new to the profession, school building, or district in which the study took place, were recruited. Additionally, veteran teacher mentors assigned to the new teachers were recruited. In total, five participants were recruited. The group consisted of three new teachers and two veteran teacher mentors. Participants were predominantly White (80%) and female (100%). Participant ages ranged from 25 to 53. Classes and grade levels taught include self-contained exceptional education (N=2), 2nd grade (N=2), and 3rd grade (N=1). No monetary compensation or any other reward was offered for participation. Informed consent was obtained before participants began study procedures.

Measures

Stress was measured by a selection of items from the Wilson Stress Profile for Teachers (Luh, Olejnik, Greenwood, Parkay, 1991). The scale is a revision of the scale originally developed by Dr. C.F. Wilson in 1979. While the full scale contains nine subscales with 36 items, only six subscales and 24 items from the measure were used for this study. The subscales used are as follows: Teacher/Teacher Relations, Time Management, Intrapersonal Conflicts, Physical Symptoms of Stress, Psychological/Emotional Symptoms of Stress, and Stress Management Techniques. Items were rated on a 5-point scale to assess the frequency of perceived stressful experiences. (*1 = never* to *5 = very often*). Higher scores indicate a higher level of stress. Example

items include "I have to take work home to complete it" (Time Management), and "Teaching is stressful for me" (Intrapersonal Conflicts). According to Luh et al. (1991) the subscales have moderate to high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .58 to .89. Scores for the entire scale have been previously shown to have strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .91 to .93.

Participants completed the Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire by Renshaw, Long, and Cook (2015) to measure eudaimonic (i.e. purpose, meaning, and fulfillment based) aspects of teacher well-being. This is a single-measure of positive well-being in teachers that specifically examines teaching efficacy and school connectedness. The test developers define teaching efficacy as "appraising one's teaching behaviors as effectively meeting environmental demands," and school connectedness as "feeling supported by and relating well to others at school" (p. 294). The scale consists of eight items rated on a 4-point scale to measure the frequency of teachers' well-being experiences (*1=almost never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=almost always*). Some example items include "I feel like I belong at this school," and "I am a successful teacher". Previous studies have demonstrated that the scale has strong internal consistency using the two-factor model, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .87 to .92 (Mankin et al., 2018).

To capture the hedonic dimension (i.e. pleasure, contentment, happiness) of well-being, participants also completed the Teaching Satisfaction Scale (Ho & Au, 2006) to measure the level of satisfaction teachers have in their role. This scale is an adapted version of the Life Satisfaction Scale (Diener et al., 1985), where the wording is altered to fit teachers' experiences. Example items include "In most ways, being a teacher is

close to ideal," and "I am satisfied with being a teacher." Items are rated on a 5-point scale from *1=strongly disagree* to *5=strongly agree.* The scale has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .77, as well as strong test-retest reliability, with a coefficient of .76.

Study Procedures

A group of principals within the school district where the study took place were emailed by the district's research committee to garner interest in allowing their teachers to participate in this study. A principal from one school indicated that their teachers could be recruited. A list of new teachers and their mentors was obtained from the New Teacher coordinator within that school. These individuals were emailed about the study and were provided with informed consent information. Once informed consent was signed, participants received the pre-test survey. The pre-test survey was created and distributed via QuestionPro survey software containing demographic questions and items from the selected stress and well-being measures. Once informed consent was obtained from all teachers who indicated interest in participating, the first session of the program was scheduled.

The teachers participated in the Teacher Wellness program, created by Dr. Debi-Kipps Vaughan and presented as a skills workshop at the National Association of School Psychologists convention in February, 2009. This program included five sessions spread out over five months, beginning in November and finishing in March. Sessions occurred once per month and lasted about fifty minutes. The overall objectives of the Teacher Wellness Program are as follows:

"1) to provide open communication to identify topics of concern, 2) to encourage empathy, 3) to recognize common themes in order to illustrate that many problems are universal, 4) present risk taking as a way of building trust, 5) to develop group cohesion through mutual self-disclosure, 6) to increase acceptance of differences in others, 7) to achieve interpersonal learning, 8) to respond to the needs and concerns of others, 9) to promote self-improvement as a positive consequence of recognizing weaknesses, and 10) to recognize our potential." (Kipps-Vaughan, 2009)

Each session focused on a different topic and finished with a mindfulness activity such as breathwork, progress muscle relaxation exercises, music, stretching, and guided imagery. *Topic 1: Altering Your Perception* was split into two sessions and centered the benefits of positive thinking. The facilitator led activities and discussions concerning perceptions, the thought-feeling-action triad, and the importance of replacing unhelpful thoughts with helpful ones. *Topic 2: Being Well* addressed stress and raised awareness for making healthy choices. Negative and positive coping strategies were discussed and participants created a wellness plan that they monitored their progress on throughout the month. *Topic 3: Love and Listening* allowed teachers to focus on relationship building by learning how to empathize with others and participate in active listening. The final session covered *Topic 4: Problem Solving* and aimed to equip teachers with problem-solving tools to use when they encounter stressful situations. The facilitator also led a closing activity allowing participants to reflect on their experiences and share their take-aways.

One week after the final session, participants were asked to complete a post-test survey with the same measures included in the pre-test survey. This was also created and distributed using QuestionPro software. In addition, participants had the opportunity to give feedback about the program in the form of open-ended, short answer questions.

Facilitator Qualifications and Preparations

The Teacher Wellness program was be facilitated by the researcher who was a Masters-level school psychology intern. To prepare for the facilitation of this program, the researcher participated in each of the activities prior to leading them. While the Teacher Wellness program was not originally written by the researcher, small modifications were made to the content and activities to promote authenticity from the researcher. The researcher reviewed readings and instructional videos related to facilitating a group therapeutic experience. Additionally, the researcher sought supervision from the research advisor, Dr. Debi Kipps-Vaughan, who created this program and has facilitated it multiple times.

Results

Data were analyzed using a statistical package called SPSS. Descriptive statistics of the outcome variables from pre- and post-test surveys were computed, with data presented in Tables 1 and 2. Pre-test responses to stress measures indicate that teachers reported a mild-to-moderate level of stress in most areas. The domain where teachers reported the highest levels of stress, on average, was time management constraints. Teachers indicated having a significant workload, often not having enough time in the work day to complete it and having to take work home. Intrapersonal conflicts emerged as another area where teachers self-reported higher levels of stress, suggesting that teachers find the job stressful and may hold negative views of themselves when they cannot meet job demands. Pre-test responses to well-being measures show that teachers perceived a moderate level of school connectedness, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction prior to participating in the Teacher Wellness program.

Post-test descriptive statistics reveal that teachers reported mild-to-moderate levels of stress, similar to pre-test data. Regarding specific domains of stress, intrapersonal conflicts still emerged as the area where teachers reported the greatest stress. Responses to well-being measures also yielded scores similar to pre-test data, suggesting a moderate level of perceived connectedness, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics from Pre-Test Survey Measures

Pre-Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Wilson Stress Profile (Luh et al., 1991)					
Teacher-Teacher Relations	5	1.40	2.20	1.85	0.41
Time Management	5	3.40	4.20	3.80	0.46
Intrapersonal Conflicts	5	3.20	4.00	3.60	0.37
Physical Symptoms of Stress	5	2.60	4.20	3.30	0.74
Psychological/Emotional Symptoms of Stress	5	2.80	3.60	3.15	0.41
Stress Management Techniques	5	2.00	3.40	2.55	0.62
Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire (Renshaw et al., 2015)					
School Connectedness	5	3.20	3.40	3.35	0.10
Teaching Efficacy	5	3.40	3.60	3.50	0.12
Teaching Satisfaction Scale (Ho & Au, 2006)					
Teaching Satisfaction	5	2.60	3.60	3.16	0.43

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics from Post-Test Survey Measures

Post-Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Wilson Stress Profile (Luh et al., 1991)					

Teacher-Teacher Relations	5	2.40	2.60	2.45	0.10
Time Management	5	2.80	4.20	3.60	0.71
Intrapersonal Conflicts	5	3.40	4.40	3.80	0.43
Physical Symptoms of Stress	5	3.40	4.00	3.75	0.30
Psychological/Emotional Symptoms of Stress	5	3.00	3.60	3.25	0.30
Stress Management Techniques	5	2.20	3.40	2.95	0.57
Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire (Renshaw et al., 2015)					
School Connectedness	5	3.00	3.60	3.30	0.26
Teaching Efficacy	5	3.40	3.60	3.45	0.10
Teaching Satisfaction Scale (Ho & Au, 2006)					
Teaching Satisfaction	5	2.60	3.80	3.40	0.49

Self-Reported Stress

One sample t-tests were computed between pre- and post-test means of each subscale on the Wilson Stress Profile for Teachers (Luh, Olejnik, Greenwood, Parkay, 1991) to analyze for significant differences between pre- and post-test self-reported stress in teachers. The data are presented in Table 3. A significant difference in pre- and post-test teacher-teacher relationships and physical symptoms were observed. These differences suggest more stress with regard to teacher-teacher relations and more physical symptoms of stress from pre-test to post-test survey completion. Self-reported stress seemed to increase in all other domains; however not to a significant degree. While

teachers reported less stress related to time management, this difference was also not significant.

Table 3

One Sample T-test Data from Pre- and Post- Self-Reported Stress

Scale	t	df	Significance (one-sided)	Mean Difference
Post Teacher-Teacher Relations	12.000	3	<.001	0.600
Post Time Management	-0.562	3	0.307	-0.200
Post Intrapersonal Conflicts	0.926	3	0.211	0.200
Post Physical Symptoms	3.000	3	0.029	0.450
Post Psychological/Emotional Symptoms	0.667	3	0.276	0.100
Post Stress Management Techniques	1.393	3	0.129	0.400

Self-Reported Well-Being

To address whether significant changes in teaching efficacy were observed, one sample t-tests were computed using pre- and post-test means from responses to the corresponding items on the Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire by Renshaw, Long, and Cook (2015). Data are presented in Table 4. No significant differences emerged between teachers' efficacy before and after participating in the Teacher Wellness Program.

Table 4

One Sample T-test Data from Pre- and Post- Teaching Efficacy

Scale	t	df	Significance (one-sided)	Mean Difference
Post Teaching Efficacy	-1.000	3	.196	-.050

One sample t-tests were computed comparing means from pre- and post-test responses to items assessing school connectedness on the Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire by Renshaw, Long, and Cook (2015) to analyze for significant changes. No significant change was observed in teachers' perceptions of school connectedness after participating in the Teacher Wellness Program. Data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

One Sample T-test Data from Pre- and Post- School Connectedness

Scale	t	df	Significance (one-sided)	Mean Difference
Post School Connectedness	-.387	3	.362	-.050

To address the final research question, regarding significant changes in teaching satisfaction, one sample t-tests were computed between means from pre- and post-test responses to items from the Teaching Satisfaction Scale (Ho & Au, 2006). Data are presented in Table 6. Teaching satisfaction increased, but not to a degree that is deemed a significant change from pre-test survey results.

Table 6

One Sample T-test Data from Pre- and Post- Teaching Satisfaction

Scale	t	df	Significance (one-sided)	Mean Difference
Post Teaching Satisfaction	1.257	3	.139	.280

Participant Feedback

       Likert scale and short-answer questions regarding participant perceptions and experiences were included in the post-test survey to obtain feedback. All teacher indicated that participating in the Teacher Wellness program was either "somewhat" or "very beneficial" to them. 80% of participants indicated that they would "sometimes" use strategies learned during the Teacher Wellness program.

       Teachers were able to indicate the most fulfilling part of the Teacher Wellness program, as well as offer feedback to the facilitator, through short-answer questions. Their responses were sorted and analyzed to examine emergent themes. In 80% of the responses, participants indicated that the most rewarding part of participating in the program was discovering their shared experiences with one another, across years of experience and classes taught. Sixty percent of responses indicated having a safe space to process was fulfilling. One participant response suggested that learning new strategies was rewarding. No themes emerged in responses to the facilitator feedback question. Several responses only provided positive feedback to the facilitator. One participant noted that the facilitator created a space that was "very open for discussion, collaboration, and an active listening atmosphere". Another participant indicated that this would be a

good thing to offer on a larger scale to the whole staff of the school building, stating

"there may not be a lot of buy-in at first, but I think people would really enjoy it."

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether a group of teachers reported changes in stress and well-being after participating in a five-session stress management program. Additionally, this study sought to provide the researcher with information and feedback about the benefits of implementing this program and potential ideas for future use.

Historical Context

It is important to understand the context in which this study occurred. School closures as a result of COVID-19 began in March 2020, and for several school districts, lasted until March 2021. Upon reopening for in-person learning in March 2021, the school district in which this study took place only allowed for certain populations of students to return (e.g. exceptional education, English language learners). This means that the 2021-2022 school year was the first entirely in-person school year since 2019. This came with several stressors for teachers and school staff, including, but not limited to, assessing the amount of learning loss that occurred during virtual learning, managing increased social-emotional-behavioral difficulties, and adjusting to the ever-changing safety practices (e.g. masking updates, social distancing changes, student and staff quarantine procedures, statewide bans on safety mandates, etc.). Further, the 2021-2022 school year saw the impacts of two waves of new highly transmissible COVID-19 strains, resulting in increased infections, absences/quarantines, and subsequent staff shortage. All in all, this school year was not the "normal" year that teachers and staff were hoping for, and continuing to manage COVID-19 remained a significant stressor.

Other relevant current events that may have resulted in increased stress for teachers include the ongoing threat of violence, particularly gun violence. In the school district where this study took place, discipline referrals and threat assessments, particularly as it related to student-student conflict, saw a significant increase. A handful of students in this district were victims of gun violence, amongst the backdrop of several mass shootings in the United States in the beginning of 2022. This likely created a level of stress among school staff and teachers, as fear about daily safety emerged to the forefront.

Finally, several changes within the school district were implemented in the 2021-2022 school year, that resulted in increased stress for staff on multiple levels. This included teachers, as they were tasked for the first time to take on the role of interventionists. The school district where this study took place remodeled their reading intervention delivery to place teachers in the interventionist role. This meant that teachers were required to complete several benchmark assessments (beyond the typically required PALS assessment), assign students to intervention groups, implement Tier 2 interventions in reading utilizing curriculum provided by the county, and take progress monitoring data. A lot of stress surrounded this new role related to lack of training, instructional time constraints, and lack of additional resources to provide further support. As a result, instructional time in other areas, including social-emotional learning, was reduced for many classrooms. While teachers and school buildings seemed to adjust to this change by the end of the school year, it still played a role in the level of stress teachers were feeling during the first three months of this study implementation. As conclusions are presented, it is important to keep the historical context in which this study took place in mind, as it

is crucial for understanding the reality of modern teachers and the daily stressors faced during the 2021-2022 school year.

Conclusions

Significant increases in stress as it relates to teacher-teacher relationships, as well as physical symptoms of stress, were observed from pre-test survey completion in October to post-test survey completion in March. All stress measures increased over time, with the exception of time management constraints, even though these changes were not significant. These results are consistent with the findings from the von der Embse and Mankin (2020) study, where self-reported stress in teachers increased significantly from October to June. Stress may not have decreased partly due to some confounding variables, like the progression of the school year, added stressors as it relates to COVID-19, and school climate. On the other hand, participating in the Teacher Wellness program may have had a role in mitigating significant increases in stress, which were not found in the post-test data. Having a space to process stressors with other teachers and connect over shared experiences may have contributed to this lack of significant increase. On the post-test survey, one teacher indicated that "Being able to talk through my problems and stresses with other teachers in a safe environment [was most rewarding]. It helped me let go of some stress and be more positive in my job". These types of conversations were fostered through discussing perceptions, negative and positive coping strategies, as well as check-ins that were a routine part of the beginning of each session.

Significant changes in teachers' self-reported well-being were not observed. Both teaching efficacy and school connectedness decreased slightly. While significant decreases were not observed, these findings are also consistent with the von der Embse

and Mankin (2020) study, where school connectedness and teaching efficacy decreased significantly from October to June. The slight decreases in school connectedness may be related to the increased stress in teacher-teacher relationships that were reported. While eudaimonic measures of well-being decreased, there were minor increases hedonic well-being, as measured by teaching satisfaction. While not a significant difference, teachers reported increased teaching satisfaction from pre- to post-test survey completion. This is important because increased job satisfaction has been shown in the research to contribute to greater overall well-being (Cappone & Petrillo, 2020).

In addition to formal data collection procedures, anecdotal feedback from participants is important to discuss. During the final session of the Teacher Wellness program, participants were invited to reflect on and discuss their experience. During that time, all teachers expressed appreciation for having time to connect with one another and build community. Through various conversations during the program, it had been discovered that teachers missed a sense of community and connecting that their school building used to have, prior to the disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and safety practices. Another theme that emerged from this discussion centered around the difficulty in making real changes.

While general feedback suggested that teachers struggled to make changes that would support reduced stress and greater wellness, several teachers indicated that this experience sparked thought about their work-life balance practices and potential changes they could begin next year. In thinking about the stages of change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997), it appears that teachers may have progressed into the contemplation or preparation phases, where they may have begun in the precontemplation phase.

Finally, teachers discussed taking significant learning away from the Topic 4: Love and Listening, as it relates to the discussion about and practice of empathy and active listening. Some participants offered up real-life scenarios with students, parents, or in their personal lives where utilizing these strategies was beneficial to their communication and interactions. This may indicate a need for this topic to be expanded in future programs, as teachers spoke of the applicability and meaningfulness in their personal and professional lives more so than any of the other topics. Additionally, not all individuals may receive this type of skill training, based on their education and previous professional development opportunities. School-based mental health professionals are well-equipped to share this knowledge and the skills with teachers.

In addition to anecdotal feedback from participants, it is also important to consider insights from the facilitator on implementing this program in a school setting as a school-based mental health professional. Facilitating this program was accompanied by its share of successes and challenges. Challenges that emerged were primarily related to the logistics of facilitating the program in a school building. For example, the facilitator was unable to use their office space as a room for the sessions, as it was shared with other school personnel. While the facilitator was able to coordinate with one of the participants to use their classroom, it was not ideal to be a guest in a space that was meant to foster a therapeutic connection. Additionally, physical distancing practices related to COVID-19 mitigation efforts made it so that participants sat across the room from one another, rather than being able to gather in a circle. This also made it difficult to build connection. While teachers remained busy with afterschool obligations, each session still had an adequate number of participants where the facilitator was able to proceed. Another success was the

receptiveness to the conversations and activities of the program. The role of the facilitator was to allow for the teachers and their needs to lead the session. As a result, this fostered a safe and accepting space for teachers to have the meaningful conversations and processing that was needed. While this resulted in some activities getting skipped, it appears that these important conversations are what made the experience so meaningful for teachers.

Limitations of the Study & Recommendations for Future Research

Significant changes in pre- and post-test stress and well-being measures were not observed, and this is likely due in part to the small sample size used in the study. If this program was delivered on a larger scale using more participants, more significant findings may emerge. Additionally, utilizing a control group may have helped to further understand the impact of teachers participating in such a program. Future studies may opt to include a control group, which may yield more significant findings. Despite the lack of significant findings, participant feedback suggests that participating in this program was enjoyable and fulfilling.

One factor that may have also contributed to the lack of significant changes may be the schedule of intervention delivery. Some studies examining the effectiveness of interventions to support teachers appeared to conduct their interventions in consecutive weeks (Rombaoa Tanaka, Boyce, Chinn, & Murphy, 2020; von der Embse, Ryan, Gibbs, & Mankin, 2019). This particular program occurred once per month, with about three to four weeks between sessions. It may be that interventions that are implemented in consecutive weeks are more effective at reducing stress. Should this program be offered again, the facilitator may consider conducting the program over the span of five weeks,

with one meeting per week, rather than five months. If conducted over consecutive weeks, the intervention would still last for greater than one month, which has been shown in the research to increase effectiveness (Iancu, Rusu, Māroiu, Pācurar, & Maricutoiu, 2017).

While it was not possible for this study, future research may consider utilizing this program with special populations within schools. The original intent of this study was to implement this intervention with a group of first-year teachers, as this is a population that has been identified as being at risk for greater stress and burnout (Fitchett, McCarthy, Lambert, & Boyle, 2018). Unfortunately, the intended population was not available and the study had to be altered. It would still be an area of interest for this researcher to implement this intervention with first-year teachers, as well as other special populations like special educators, school-based mental health professionals, and administrators.

Importance to School Psychological Practice

Facilitating the Teacher Wellness program was a meaningful experience in the development of this researcher's school psychological practice. While training in school psychology training programs centers around supporting students, this opportunity allowed for the facilitator to apply therapeutic and intervention skills to working with adults in a school building. Teachers' social-emotional wellness is as important as the students, and teachers are not able to serve their students fully without first taking care of themselves. This researcher implores other school psychologists to consider where direct work with teachers may fit into their practice, and thus indirectly support students. Incorporating this into the provision of services may address a need within school buildings and systems, and school psychologists are positioned to make a positive impact.

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