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Research Article

Exploring The Impact of Psychological Flexibility and Assertiveness on The Well-Being of Female School Teachers in Madanapalle, India

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Abstract

Background: Female school teachers are often subjected to significant stress due to the demanding nature of their profession. This stress can deeply affect their psychological well-being (PWB). While psychological flexibility (PF) and assertiveness (AST) are generally regarded as protective factors for mental health, the specific ways in which these traits interact to influence PWB in teachers, particularly in less-studied regions like Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh, India, remain unclear. Understanding these relationships is crucial, as teachers' well-being directly impacts their ability to effectively provide quality education and manage classroom challenges.

Aims: This study seeks to investigate the relationships between PWB, PF, and AST among female teachers, aiming to clarify how these psychological traits affect well-being in the high-pressure teaching environment.

Methods and Material: The study employed a cross-sectional survey method, utilizing the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale to assess PWB, the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-2) to measure psychological flexibility, and the Rathus assertiveness scale to gather data from female teachers. Regression analysis was performed to explore the influence of PF and AST on PWB.

Results: The analysis revealed that greater psychological flexibility (indicated by lower AAQ-2 scores) was significantly associated with higher PWB. This finding highlights the critical role of PF in enhancing well-being among teachers. Additionally, higher levels of assertiveness were positively correlated with better PWB, although this relationship was less strong compared to the influence of PF.

Conclusions: The study underscores the importance of PF as a key factor in supporting the mental health of female teachers. Those who exhibit higher PF tend to experience greater well-being, suggesting that interventions focused on improving PF and AST, such as through Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) combined with assertiveness training, could be highly effective in promoting resilience and reducing stress in educational settings. These insights are essential for developing targeted support strategies to enhance the well-being of educators, ultimately benefiting the broader educational environment.

Keywords: Regression analysis, Female school teachers, Assertiveness (AST), Psychological Flexibility (PF), Psychological Well-being (PWB)

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INTRODUCTION

Education serves as the bedrock for societal advancement, with teachers playing a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual and emotional foundation upon which societies are built. Their contributions go beyond the mere dissemination of knowledge; they are instrumental in molding individuals' character, fostering critical thinking, and inspiring a lifelong passion for learning [1].

Despite their essential role, the mental health and well-being of teachers are often overlooked. Given the significant influence teachers have on both their students and society at large, it is crucial to prioritize their psychological well-being (PWB). In recent years, there has been growing concern about workplace health, particularly due to the increasing levels of stress and burnout experienced across various professions [2, 3]. Teaching, in particular, is a profession heavily impacted by burnout, which is closely linked to higher rates of absenteeism and turnover [4-7].

Effective and committed teachers are vital to a robust educational system, which in turn is crucial for national development [8]. However, the psychological well-being of female teachers, who play a critical role in shaping young minds, is often neglected. Research indicates that female teachers are more susceptible to

stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion compared to their male counterparts, which can lead to decreased job satisfaction, reduced classroom effectiveness, and even physical health issues [9]. Addressing the unique challenges faced by female teachers is essential for creating a more supportive and inclusive educational environment.

The mental health of teachers has garnered increased attention in recent years, with numerous studies highlighting the challenges they face, such as workload, student behavior, and lack of administrative support [10- 11]. However, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the specific psychological difficulties faced by female schoolteachers. Definitions of well-being vary across disciplines, encompassing physical, subjective, hedonic, and emotional well-being [12,13]. Psychological well-being, often equated with eudaimonic well-being, extends beyond mere happiness and includes positive functioning related to one's sense of mastery, personal growth, and meaningful relationships [14,15].

It is not just the absence of psychological distress but also the presence of positive emotions, meaning, healthy relationships, environmental mastery, engagement, and self-actualization [16,17]

The existing body of research on teacher mental health has laid the groundwork for understanding the complex interplay between the demands of the profession and the well-being of educators. For instance, Maslach and Leiter [18] explored the phenomenon of teacher burnout, emphasizing the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment experienced by teachers [19]. Psychological

well-being is a multifaceted construct influenced by various factors, including subjective experiences, social relationships, and health behaviors [20]. It encompasses positive functioning, meaningful relationships, and a sense of purpose in life, all of which are crucial for the holistic development of individuals and societies [16].

Psychological flexibility (PF) is a core concept within Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and refers to an individual's ability to adapt to changing circumstances, maintain openness to experiences, and align behaviors with personal values [21]. PF is generally associated with better mental health outcomes, as it enables individuals to manage stress and uncertainty more effectively. In the high-stress environment of teaching, the demands placed on PF may help alleviate stress, potentially leading to increased well-being. For female teachers, who often navigate complex personal and professional dynamics, remaining flexible and adaptable can be particularly helpful in diminishing stress and enjoying overall well-being.

Assertiveness (AST) is another psychological trait that significantly influences PWB. Assertiveness involves the ability to express one's thoughts, feelings, and needs confidently and respectfully, which is particularly valuable in professional settings [22]. For female teachers, assertiveness can be both an asset and a source of stress. While it helps in managing classroom dynamics and advocating for oneself, assertive behavior may be met with resistance or conflict, particularly in environments where gender-based expectations discourage such behavior [23]. This can lead to internal conflicts and heightened stress, further impacting their psychological well-being.

Despite the extensive research on PF and AST individually, there is a gap in the literature concerning their combined influence on PWB, particularly in the teaching profession. This gap is even more pronounced in the context of female teachers, who face unique challenges that may alter the impact of PF and AST on their well-being. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing targeted interventions that enhance the psychological well-being of female educators, thereby improving job satisfaction, reducing burnout, and ultimately benefiting student outcomes.

This study aims to explore how PF and AST predict PWB among female school teachers, to provide insights that can inform the design of effective support strategies tailored to the unique needs of female educators. Understanding these relationships is not only important for the well-being of teachers but also for the broader educational community, as healthier, more resilient teachers are better equipped to foster positive learning environments and support student success.

Materials And Methods

The sample consisted of 251 female schoolteachers employed in various schools located in Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh, India. These participants were selected based on their proficiency in English and their willingness to participate in the

study. Exclusion criteria included any pre-existing psychological conditions, as well as extended sick leave or maternity leave. All participation was entirely voluntary and informed written consent was obtained after participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose and significance.

Instruments: Basic data was collected using the instrument developed by the investigators.

Psychological Well-Being (PWB): The psychological well-being of participants was assessed using Ryff's [24] Psychological Well-Being Scale: This instrument measures six key dimensions of well-being: Self- Acceptance, Positive Relations with Others, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth. The scale has shown high reliability, with test-retest reliability ranging from 0.81 to 0.88 and internal consistency coefficients between 0.86 and 0.93 for each dimension [24].

Psychological Flexibility (PF): Psychological flexibility was evaluated using the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II (AAQ-II) developed by Bond et al. The AAQ-II is a 10-item measure that examines an individual's capacity to adapt to situational demands and remain committed to actions that align with personal values, despite difficult thoughts and emotions. This tool has demonstrated good internal consistency with a mean alpha coefficient of 0.84, and test-retest reliability of 0.81 over three months and 0.79 over twelve months [25].

Assertiveness (AST): Assertiveness was measured using the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule, a standardized tool for assessing an individual's ability to express their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs confidently and non- aggressively. This schedule is widely recognized for its reliability and validity in research and clinical settings [26].

Procedure: Data collection was conducted in July 2023 through a cross-sectional survey. The study protocol received approval from the Institutional Human Ethical Committee on January 6,

2023, following earlier approval from the Institutional Ethical Committee on November 14, 2022. Ethical standards, including those outlined in the Helsinki Declaration of 1975 (as revised in 2000), were strictly adhered to throughout the study. Female teachers provided informed written consent for their voluntary participation in the study. The anonymity of the participants was preserved since the data were collected through self-report. Permission for data collection was obtained from the Head of the Educational Institution and the Headmasters/Headmistresses of the selected schools

Participants completed a Teacher's Basic Information Form followed by the PWB, PF, and AST scales. Data collection occurred within the school environment, ensuring participants felt comfortable and secure while completing the surveys.

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics and levels of PWB, PF, and AST among the participants. Pearson's chi-square test assessed the relationships between PWB, PF, and AST. Additionally, linear regression analysis was performed to examine the associations between PWB, PF, and AST. The significance of these relationships was confirmed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) to validate the regression models.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the socio-demographic characteristics of 251 female school teachers in this study. Most participants were aged 36-45 years 119(47.4%) and predominantly identified as Hindu 178(70.9%). Most held undergraduate degrees 119(47.4%), with 126(50.2%) having 1-5 years of teaching experience. The majority taught the State Board syllabus 163(64.9%), with 43% involved in primary education. Class sizes typically ranged from 20-40 students 164(65.3%). (Table 1)

Table 1: Distribution of Female Teachers with their Socio-Demographic Data

Parameters	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age	25-35 Years	83	33.1
	36-45 Years	119	47.4
	> 45 Years	49	19.5
Religion	Hindu	178	70.9
	Christian	58	23.1
	Muslim	14	5.6
	others	1	0.4
Educational Qualification	UG	119	47.4
	PG	108	43
	> PG	8	3.2
	Others	16	6.4
Years of working	1-5 years	126	50.2
	5-10 years	79	31.5

	<10 years	46	18.3
Syllabus	State Board	163	64.9
	CBSE	88	35.1
Class teaching	Primary	108	43
	Middle School	76	30.3
	High School	66	26.3
Class Strength	20-40 Students	164	65.3
	40-60 Students	81	32.3
	>60	6	2.4

Table 2 Distribution of Psychological Well-being, Psychological Flexibility, and Assertiveness of Female School Teachers

The table presents participants' frequency and percentage distribution across three parameters: Most of the female

teachers 146(58.2%) are with Medium Psychological Well-Being (PWB), 104(41.4%) with medium Psychological Flexibility (PF), and 149(59.2%) are non-assertiveness. (Table 2)

Parameters		Frequency(N)	Percentage(%)
PWB	Low (42-126)	91	36.3
	Medium(127-189)	146	58.2
	High (190-252)	14	5.6
PF	Inflexibility (50-70)	98	39
	Medium flexibility (31-49)	104	41.4
	High flexibility (10-30)	49	19.5
Assertiveness	Non-Assertiveness (0 to -90)	149	59.4
	Assertiveness (0 to40)	42	16.7
	Aggressive (40 to 90)	60	23.9

Table 3, Regression Analysis of PWB on PF and AST

Regression Analysis Summary for Psychological Well-Being on Psychological Flexibility and Assertiveness, the model indicates 1.874 times decrease in psychological well-being for every unit increase in psychological inflexibility (lower flexibility). Additionally, 0.269 times decrease in psychological

well-being is associated with changes in assertiveness (non-assertiveness). Psychological flexibility and assertiveness account for 63.4% of the variability in psychological well-being ($R^2 = 0.634$). (Table 3), Most of the female teachers had medium PWB, medium PF, and low Assertiveness

Table 3, Regression Analysis of Psychological Well-being on Psychological Flexibility and Assertiveness

Model Summary ^b								
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			
					F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
.798 ^a	0.637	0.634	18.264	0.637	217.254	2	248	0
ANOVA ^a								
	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.			
Regression	144944.645	2	72472.322	217.254	.000 ^b			
Residual	82728.599	248	333.583					
Total	227673.243	250						
Coefficients ^a								
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	99.0% Confidence Interval for B		

	B	Beta	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	261.269		15.234	15.234	0	216.75	305.788
PF	-1.874	-0.777	-19.95	-19.95	0	-2.118	-1.63
AST	-0.269	-0.088	-2.267	-2.267	0.024	-0.577	0.039

a. Dependent Variable: PWB

b. Predictors: (Constant), AST, PF

Discussion

The present study explored the socio-demographic details, psychological well-being (PWB), psychological flexibility (PF), and assertiveness among female school teachers, and investigated the relationship between PWB and the predictors of PF and assertiveness. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the psychological health of educators, contributing to the existing literature on the subject.

The socio-demographic analysis revealed that the majority 119(47.4%) of teachers were aged between 36-45 years, predominantly 178(70.9%) identified as Hindu, held 119(47.4%) undergraduate qualifications and had 1-5 years of teaching experience 126(50.2%). These findings align with previous research, which suggests that mid-career teachers often face higher levels of stress and burnout due to the demands of balancing professional and personal responsibilities [27].

The data on psychological well-being (Table 2) indicated that a significant portion 146(58.2%) of the teachers exhibited medium levels of PWB, with only a small percentage 14(5.6%) reporting high levels. This is consistent with earlier studies highlighting moderate to low levels of well-being among teachers, particularly those in high-stress environments [28]. Furthermore, most teachers showed 98(39%) low psychological flexibility, which is concerning given that psychological flexibility is a critical factor in managing stress and enhancing well-being [21]. The low levels of assertiveness observed in many teachers 149(59.4%) are also noteworthy, as assertiveness is linked to positive psychological outcomes, which can lead to job dissatisfaction and poor psychological health [29].

The regression analysis (Table 3) demonstrated that PF and assertiveness were significant predictors of PWB, explaining 63.7% of the variance in PWB. Psychological inflexibility had a stronger negative impact on PWB compared to assertiveness. These findings align with those of previous research, which has emphasized the importance of psychological flexibility in maintaining mental health and well-being [21].

The association between PF and PWB suggests that teachers who are less flexible in adapting to changing circumstances and stressors may experience lower levels of well-being. This is supported by Hayes, Strosahl, and Wilson (2011), who assert that psychological flexibility is key in managing psychological distress and promoting mental health [30].

Interestingly, the significant relationship between assertiveness and PWB, though weaker than that of PF, warrants further

discussion. While assertiveness is generally associated with positive psychological outcomes, the weaker association observed in this study might be influenced by the cultural or contextual factors within the teaching profession. Ames (2008) suggests that the context in which assertiveness is expressed can significantly impact its effects on well-being [29]. In environments where assertiveness is not encouraged or is misaligned with cultural norms, it may lead to conflict or stress, thereby reducing overall well-being. These findings suggest a potential difference in the impact of assertiveness on PWB in different cultural contexts, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive interventions that consider the unique challenges faced by female teachers in various regions.

Future research should consider cross-cultural comparisons to determine whether these findings are consistent across different cultural settings or if they are specific to the context of female teachers in Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh, India. Understanding the cultural nuances that influence the relationship between assertiveness and PWB could inform more tailored and effective interventions for improving teacher well-being.

Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendations:

This study has several strengths, including a thorough examination of factors such as socio-demographics, psychological well-being (PWB), psychological flexibility (PF), and assertiveness among female school teachers, offering meaningful insights into their mental health. The study's identification of PF and assertiveness as key predictors of PWB, explaining 63.7% of its variance, highlights the significance of these factors and supports previous research, adding to the study's credibility.

However, there are some limitations to note. The cross-sectional design limits our ability to draw cause-and-effect conclusions. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial in establishing the directionality of the relationships between PF, AST, and PWB. Additionally, the study's focus on a specific group of teachers in Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh, may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or cultural contexts. Future research should consider expanding the sample to include teachers from different regions and cultural backgrounds to determine whether the findings hold across various contexts.

Furthermore, the use of self-reported data may introduce response biases, such as social desirability bias, where participants might underreport or overreport their levels of PWB, PF, or AST. Incorporating objective measures of these constructs, such as behavioral assessments or physiological

indicators of stress, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships among these variables.

Lastly, the study did not account for potential confounding variables such as socio-economic status, support systems, or school environment, which could also influence the psychological well-being of teachers. Future research should include these factors to provide a more nuanced understanding of the determinants of teacher well-being.

Conclusions

This study highlights the complex relationships between Psychological Well-Being, Psychological Flexibility, and Assertiveness among female school teachers. The significant impacts of PF and AST on PWB suggest the need for targeted interventions to support educators' mental health. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies to enhance teacher well-being and, consequently

Additional Information

Disclosures

Human subjects: Consent was obtained or waived by all participants in this study. Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women issued approval AUW/IHEC/WS 22-23/XMT-06. The Institutional Human Ethics Committee of Our University hereby approves your research proposal No. IHEC/22-23/WS-06. Animal subjects: All authors have confirmed that this study did not involve animal subjects or tissue. Conflicts of interest: In compliance with the ICMJE uniform disclosure form, all authors declare the following: Payment/services info: All authors have declared that no financial support was received from any organization for the submitted work. Financial relationships: All authors have declared that they have no financial relationships at present or within the previous three years with any organizations that might have an interest in the submitted work. Other relationships: All authors have declared that there are no other relationships or activities that could appear to have influenced the submitted work.

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