

**Teaching through life's challenges – development and implementation of a stress-management intervention to enhance the psychological well-being of primary school teachers in Mamelodi**

by

**ESTHER PULENG KHOTLELE**

submitted in accordance with the requirements  
for the degree

**MASTER OF ARTS IN COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

**SUPERVISOR: PROF MARETHA VISSER**

30 November 2023

## Table of contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Teachers’ stress.....	2
1.3 Research goal and objectives .....	3
1.4 Research methods .....	4
1.5 Description of keywords .....	5
1.6 Chapter Outline.....	6
<b>Chapter 2: Literature review .....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Stress.....	8
2.1.1 Types of stress .....	9
2.1.2 Factors influencing stress.....	11
2.1.3. Approaches and responses to stress .....	14
2.1.4. Impact of teachers’ stress on various areas of life .....	18
2.2 Coping.....	21
2.2.1 Types of coping .....	21
2.3 Psychological well-being .....	23
2.4 Interventions to support teacher well-being.....	24
2.4.1 Stress management interventions.....	25
2.4.2 Local stress management interventions .....	27
2.5 Conclusion .....	30
<b>Chapter 3: Research methodology .....</b>	<b>31</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	31
3.2 Research goals and objectives .....	31
3.3 Research design .....	31
3.3.1 Research type.....	31
3.3.2 Research paradigm.....	32
3.4 Needs Assessment.....	32
3.4.1 Participants.....	32
3.4.2 Data collection for needs assessment.....	33

3.4.3 Data analysis .....	33
3.4.4 Content analysis .....	33
3.5 Development of the intervention .....	34
3.5.1 Theoretical approach.....	35
3.5.2 Description of the intervention .....	36
3.5.3 Exercises performed during the intervention.....	38
3.5.4 Assessment instruments used during the intervention .....	40
3.5.5 Implementation of the intervention.....	41
3.5.6 Feedback from teachers .....	43
3.6 Data analysis .....	43
3.7 Ethical considerations .....	44
3.8 Conclusion .....	44
<b>Chapter 4: Results.....</b>	<b>45</b>
4.1. Introduction.....	45
4.2. Results of the needs assessment.....	45
4.3. Feedback on each session of the intervention.....	49
4.3.1 Session 1 - Stress management .....	49
4.3.2. Session 2 - Bullying and victimisation .....	54
4.3.3 Session 3 - Burnout and time management .....	59
4.3.4 Session 4 - Personal issues.....	63
4.3.5 Session 5 - Relationships and boundaries.....	68
4.3.6 Session 6 – Meaning and accomplishment .....	71
4.4 Evaluation of the intervention.....	76
4.4.1 Process evaluation.....	76
4.4.2 Outcome evaluation .....	78
4.5 Conclusion .....	82
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion of findings.....</b>	<b>83</b>
5.1. Introduction.....	83
5.2. Discussion of findings of the needs assessment .....	83
5.3. Discussion of teachers’ responses to the intervention .....	85
5.3.1 Stress management techniques .....	85
5.3.2 Discussion on bullying and victimisation.....	85
5.3.3. Discussion on burnout and time-management strategies.....	87

5.3.4. Discussion on personal issues .....	88
5.3.5. Relationships and boundaries – good relationships .....	89
5.3.6. Discussion on meaning and accomplishment .....	90
5.4. Theoretical reflection .....	91
5.5. Contribution of this study .....	91
5.6. Limitations of the study .....	92
5.7. The way forward .....	93
5.8. Conclusion .....	93
<b>References.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>115</b>
Appendix A: Ethics approval letter.....	115
Appendix B: Feedback forms – Teachers .....	116
Appendix C: Feedback forms – Facilitators .....	117
Appendix D: Participant Information Letter.....	118
Appendix E: Informed Consent .....	122
Appendix F: Breakdown of Intervention .....	124
Appendix G: Turnitin Similarity Results .....	129
Appendix H: Language Editing (Editors Statement) .....	130

## List of Tables

Table 2.1 Types of stress by timescale .....	9
Table 2.2 Stress-management activities.....	29
Table 3.1 Needs assessment summary .....	34
Table 3. 2 Exercises performed during the intervention.....	38

## List of Figures

Figure 2.1. – Points of intervention and outcomes in the 3 Cs Theory of Teacher Stress.....	17
Figure 4. 1 - Challenges experienced by teachers (n=39).....	45
Figure 4. 2 – Effects of challenges on teachers .....	46
Figure 4. 3 – Coping strategies .....	47
Figure 4. 4 – Desired intervention .....	48
Figure 4. 5 – Stress content presented .....	50
Figure 4. 6 – Content learnt from the session .....	51
Figure 4. 7 – Application of content learnt .....	52
Figure 4. 8 – Session feedback .....	53
Figure 4. 9 – Content presented on Bullying and Victimization.....	55
Figure 4. 10 – Content learnt from the session on bullying and victimisation .....	56
Figure 4. 11 – Application of content learnt .....	57
Figure 4. 12 – Session results on bullying and victimisation .....	58
Figure 4. 13 – Burnout content .....	59
Figure 4. 14 – Content learned during the burnout session .....	60
Figure 4. 15 – Application of information learnt.....	61
Figure 4. 16 – Areas of improvement on bullying & victimisation session .....	62
Figure 4. 17 – Content presented on Personal Issues.....	64
Figure 4. 18 – Content learnt regarding Personal Issues .....	65
Figure 4. 19 – Application of content learnt on Personal Issues .....	66
Figure 4. 20 – Improvements in content presented on personal issues.....	67
Figure 4. 21 – Content presented on relationships and boundaries .....	68
Figure 4. 22 – Content learnt on relationships and boundaries.....	69
Figure 4. 23 – Application of content presented on relationships and boundaries .....	70

Figure 4. 24 – Improvement of the content presented on relationships and boundaries .....	71
Figure 4. 25 – Content presented on meaning and accomplishment .....	72
Figure 4. 26 – Lessons learnt on meaning and accomplishment .....	73
Figure 4. 27 – Implementation of meaning and accomplishment.....	74
Figure 4. 28 – Areas of improvement in the meaning and accomplishment session.....	75

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank God for granting me such an incredible opportunity and carrying me throughout this journey.

My supervisor Prof Maretha Visser for her invaluable knowledge, feedback and patience. Thank you very much for all the support and encouragement.

To my late parents although you may not be here to share this milestone with me, I believe that I have made you proud.

To my husband (John Khotlele) and our two amazing children (Molemo Joshua Khotlele and Oratuwe Abigail Khotlele) thank you so much for the sacrifices made and the unwavering support.

To the M1 Counselling Psychology class of 2022, thank you very much for being part of this intervention and giving it your best.

Finally, I would like to thank every single participant who took a moment out of their busy lives to be a part of this study.

## Abstract

Teachers play an important role in children's development. They have various roles and responsibilities in the school system that can contribute to the experience of stress and negative emotional reactions. The psychosocial implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors such as workload, lack of resources and infrastructure, job insecurity and personal relationship issues increased teachers' stress levels and affect their psychological well-being. The purpose of the research was to develop an intervention that can empower teachers with coping skills to manage stress and improve their psychological well-being. Based on a needs assessment with teachers involving group discussions and a short survey in 6 primary schools in Mamelodi, the Masters' students in Counselling psychology developed a six-session intervention underpinned by the PERMA model of psychological well-being. The six sessions were implemented between June 2022 and October 2022. The sessions focused on the following: 1) stress management, 2) bullying and victimisation, 3) burnout and time management, 4) emotional well-being (personal issues), 5) building relationships 6) competencies and finding meaning. Fifty-two teachers from Tshwane South district, specifically Mamelodi, a low to middle-class community, volunteered to participate in the intervention. Twenty-one teachers formed the core participants, having attended four or more sessions. Data about teachers' experiences during and after the intervention was collected through teachers' and facilitators' feedback forms, as well as a group discussion to explore the outcome of the intervention. The results revealed that teachers indeed experienced stress and some did not have effective coping strategies. They felt the intervention equipped them with coping skills such as assertiveness, using strengths such as humour or creativity to manage stress, time management, self-care and good interpersonal skills. Teachers have begun practically applying these skills in their teaching and personal lives. The data also provided invaluable information on the importance of the involvement of other stakeholders, such as the school management teams, the educational department and parents, in helping address issues affecting teachers' stress, such as learner ill-discipline.

*Keywords:* Stress management, coping, psychological well-being, teachers



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Teachers are central to the growth and development of children. They empower children and the youth with knowledge that can possibly transform their lives and provide better futures, and play an essential role in moulding children into future leaders. However, they face many challenges that can cause stress (Schaufeli, 2003; Schulze & Steyn, 2007; Steyn & Kamper, 2006; Vazi et al., 2013). According to Schneiderman et al. (2005), stress plays a pivotal role in human life and development. They assert that all human beings experience threats to their equilibrium, which require flexibility to adjust to various stressors for their survival. These threats or challenges vary in intensity from person to person and are based on unique environmental contexts. People in the same occupation or role can respond differently to stressful events (threats). Stress is part of life; it inspires good performance, but too much stress can have a detrimental effect on relationships, mood and both physical and mental health (Unicef, n.d.).

Bradbury (2017, p.18) states: "The stories that make our lives meaningful to ourselves and others both follow and reverse the temporal flows of embodied life, making the past and future present." People's lives are shaped not only by their past and current experiences, but also by their environments and the people around them. Maree (2011) adds that experiences are formed not only by the individual, but also by social interaction, culture, language and dialogue. Furthermore, Bradbury (2017) stresses the fact that people's histories and socio-political lives are linked to their personal and psychological worlds, revealing various factors that may contribute to stress. A variety of factors from their past, present and future could therefore affect the stress levels experienced by teachers. For example, the lack of resources in the education system created inequalities, and the limited education facilities available to certain areas resulted in overcrowding of classrooms, which contributed to teachers' stress (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002). This lack of equal opportunities and resources for teachers often leads to demoralisation.

Schulze and Steyn (2007) also highlight poor parent and learner attitudes to learning as one of the reasons for teachers' stress. A lack of parental involvement may be due to parents' limited ability to sufficiently support their children, their own poor education, or dereliction of duties due to difficult life circumstances.

Work overload, curriculum changes, conflict between colleagues and overcrowded classrooms also contribute to teachers' stress. The COVID-19 pandemic in particular was extremely stressful as teachers had to change their methods of delivery in teaching and had to immediately familiarise themselves with online teaching to provide learners with the support needed. In poor

communities where internet accessibility was limited, teachers used WhatsApp to provide this support. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic affected learning standards as teachers and learners grappled with the required adjustments. Landa et al. (2021) highlight the difficulty for learners from South Africa's impoverished rural regions to access online teaching and learning platforms and resources, which resulted in stark disparities in the educational outcomes of students from various socioeconomic backgrounds.

## 1.2 Teachers' stress

No one follows a career path to be miserable, and teachers are often driven by passion and a desire to make a difference. Unfortunately, a career in teaching can be challenging once the limitations begin to show, and teachers who start their careers filled with passion and zeal to be the change makers soon become discouraged due to the many frustrating challenges and limitations they face. This increases stress and affects their well-being. Recent research focusing on teachers' stress highlight its significant effect on their well-being and productivity, which in turn affects learners and employers (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020). Some of the effects of stress are absenteeism (Jackson & Rothman, 2005), lack of performance (Naidoo, 2011; Jackson & Rothman, 2005; Van Wyk, 2006), relational and self-esteem problems (Mansfield, 2020), burnout (Schussler et al., 2015; Vazi et al., 2013) and distress (Schneiderman et al., 2005).

In South Africa, there is an exodus of teachers from the profession for various reasons, including a lack of psychological well-being (Ndende, 2021). The Teaching and Learning International Survey (OECD, 2020) highlights the fact that many teachers experience stress and estimates that almost 40% of those experiencing elevated stress levels are likely to leave the profession. Furthermore, the survey found that 10% of South African teachers indicated that their job adversely affects their mental and physical health. Many scholars confirm the adverse effect of the workplace or environment on teachers' well-being (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Maree, 2021; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; Viac & Fraser, 2020), and Desrumaux et al. (2015) report a direct correlation between teachers' working conditions and their stress levels. The abovementioned stresses can create distress in teachers and affect their performance and ability to teach.

Stress impacts various areas of life, such as physical, emotional and psychological well-being (Schneiderman et al., 2005). Suleman et al. (2018) recommend implementing stress-reducing interventions to promote psychological well-being and improve the efficiency of school principals, and Kundi et al. (2021) and Khatun et al. (2022) hold that improving employees' psychological well-being may benefit their functioning in the workplace. Tang et al. (2019) highlight the importance of

psychological well-being as a critical component of mental health, which requires resilience (coping, emotional control and effective problem-solving skills) as well as hedonic (enjoyment, pleasure) and eudaimonic (fulfilment and purpose) happiness. The psychological well-being of teachers is therefore important if they are to function effectively in their teaching role.

Extensive literature is available on factors that contribute to teachers' stress (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Jackson & Rothman, 2005; Naidoo, 2011; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; OECD, 2020; Steyn & Kamper, 2006) and how it can be alleviated (Czerwinski et al., 2020; Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2020; Shimazu et al., 2003). Other articles reveal that stress reduction or management intervention yields good psychological results in both the international (Czerwinski et al., 2020; Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2020; Shimazu et al., 2003) and local contexts (Johnson, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015). However, limited research has been undertaken on how teachers' stress in the local context can be alleviated through short-term interventions, and this research aims to bridge this gap. The research conducted by Johnson (2015), Taylor et al. (2015) and Versfeld et al. (2022) will be used as examples and will be discussed in Chapter 2. Against this backdrop, this research was undertaken to develop a stress-management intervention for primary school teachers in Mamelodi.

### **1.3 Research goal and objectives**

The goal of this research was to develop an intervention that will enable teachers to manage stress by applying coping skills to improve their psychological well-being. This research sought to answer the question: What interventions can empower teachers with coping skills to manage their stress and improve their psychological well-being?

The objectives were:

To assess teachers' stressors and the methods they currently use to cope with stress;

To develop an intervention to address teachers' stressors by enhancing their coping skills and psychological well-being;

To obtain feedback from teachers after their participation in the intervention to determine whether and how the intervention helped them to cope better with stress.

## 1.4 Research methods

Action research recognises that there are various realities (Groat., 2013) and emphasises the importance of collaboration between the researcher and participants to facilitate change (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is a participatory approach that prioritizes deep reflection, teamwork (between the participants/community and researchers), problem-solving to tackle real-world issues, co-construct new realities (Zuber-Skerritt; 2012) and empowerment (Visser; 2022). Its pragmatic and transformational theoretical foundations highlight how the chosen methods align with epistemological and ontological presumptions. To develop an intervention based on teachers' current situation, the research started with a needs and strengths assessment to identify the challenges experienced by teachers, their existing skills and coping mechanisms, and their readiness to adapt. The recruitment of teachers for this research phase was done in collaboration with an education official at the Tshwane South district office. The official suggested six primary schools close to the University of Pretoria's Mamelodi Campus that could be approached for the needs assessment. Permission was obtained from the principals to hand out a survey and conduct group discussions with teachers. Thirty-nine teachers from six primary schools participated in the needs assessment.

Teachers need a safe space in which to discuss their challenges and share coping mechanisms. Listening to teachers' experiences is necessary to help them find solutions (Maree, 2013) that can help to facilitate change. The group discussion for the needs assessment focused on the main stressors teachers experience as part of their job, how they coped with stressors and whether they were interested in a workshop on how to deal with stress.

The information gained from the needs assessment was then used to tailor plan an intervention that would provide edifying knowledge and coping strategies that might positively impact the well-being and performance of teachers. The programme was developed based on the Positive Psychology approach, which places a significant value on meaning or purpose (Scorsolini-Comin et al., 2013) and asserts that every individual has strengths and resources to be tapped into to help them deal with life's challenges.

The intervention focused on equipping teachers with coping skills needed to deal with challenging or stressful situations and improve their psychological well-being. This was achieved by focusing on their experiences, which Bakirli (2019) defines as experiential learning (learning through experiences), a strategy for adult learning, which she regards as a valuable tool for adults as they can receive and reflect on real experiences by comparing new experiences with what they have previously learned. Brookfield (1995) argues that adults bring a wealth of life experiences to any situation, which forms their point of reference for living. He adds that adult education is a continuous

process of reflection on experiences and that experiential strategies such as games, role-plays and case studies form an important part of adult education. Elements such as games, psychoeducation and reflecting on the teachers' personal experiences therefore formed a crucial part of this intervention. Once developed, the intervention was implemented with a group of teachers to determine its value in helping teachers manage stress by applying their coping skills to improve their psychological well-being.

To recruit teachers for participation in the intervention, the education official posted an invitation on Tshwane South's informal WhatsApp communication platform. Teachers could volunteer to participate by contacting the researcher via WhatsApp, email or telephone. The intervention was presented once a week by master's students in Counselling Psychology—supervised by their lecturer—over a period of six weeks in 2022.

To assess the value of the sessions' content, the participants were asked to complete a feedback survey after each session to indicate how they had experienced it and what they had learnt. During the sixth session, participants participated in a focus group discussion to share their experiences of what they had gained during the intervention. This data was then analysed to determine the value of the intervention. The results from this intervention will add to the knowledge gained about teachers' stressors and strategies that may be applied to assist teachers in the South African context.

## 1.5 Description of keywords

*Stress* - Stress is the result of people's subjective experiences of interactions with the environment that they perceive as endangering their lives and beyond their capacities to deal with (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress can promote good performance, but too much stress can negatively affect one's functioning and health (UNICEF, n.d.).

*Coping* – Coping refers to constant actions taken to rectify stimuli (internal or external) that are viewed as greater than one's own capacity (stress). Carver et al. (1989) describe coping as a response to a threat. They further distinguish between two types of coping: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping focuses on finding solutions to problems or taking action to change the stressor, while emotion-focused coping involved reducing or managing the emotional suffering connected to (or triggered by) the circumstance (Carver et al., 1989).

*Psychological well-being* – Psychological well-being is described as the state of equilibrium between the hedonic (enjoyment, pleasure) and eudaimonic (meaning, fulfilment and purpose) spheres of one's life, which allows one to function optimally. Tang et al. (2019) describe it as a complex

concept that refers to the best possible psychological experience and functioning. This notion of best psychological experience and functioning is supported by Ryff (2018), who asserts that psychological well-being comprises different aspects of positive functioning, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal development, a sense of purpose, good relationships and self-acceptance.

*Teachers* – Teachers are permanently employed educators registered with the South African Council of Educators (SACE). They are employed in schools to teach subject matter to learners.

## 1.6 Chapter Outline

This research will be presented in the following chapters:

### Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter provides background information, the motivation for the research and its relevance, and highlights the research aims and questions.

### Chapter 2 – Literature review

In Chapter 2, the available literature on teachers' stress and stress management interventions in the local and international contexts is discussed so as to provide a better understanding of the construct. An in-depth discussion of the keywords and linkage to the fundamental research are presented with a view to the implementation of a stress management intervention.

### Chapter 3 – Research methodology

Chapter 3 consists of a detailed discussion of the paradigmatic assumptions of the research, the research design, sampling methods and measurement instruments used, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

### Chapter Four – Results

In Chapter 4, the researcher reflects on the feedback obtained from the needs assessment, teachers' responses to the various sessions and the themes that emerged from the participants' evaluations of the intervention.

### Chapter Five - Discussion and conclusion

Chapter 5 contains an in-depth discussion of the results and their implications. This is followed by a conclusion, recommendations for future related research, a discussion of the limitations of the study and challenges encountered during the research process, and suggestions for the way forward.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

Chapter 1 provides information on the background and the motivation for conducting research with a view to developing an intervention to assist teachers in managing their stress and improving their psychological well-being to enhance their functioning as teachers. The aims of the research and research methods are also outlined. A discussion of the literature review as background to the research will follow in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

Quality education is a vital component of any successful society. Teachers/educators are needed to impart knowledge and skills and to be role models for young people in many respects. Teachers continuously shape and empower individuals in various areas of life, whether in their primary, secondary, tertiary or continuous developmental phases. However, this does not happen without challenges. Jelinek (1986, p. 1) states: "At every level in the educational system, stress exists. It is a constant force in the teaching-learning process affecting every participant to some degree." According to Schneiderman et al. (2005), the ability of individuals to adjust to various influential stressors is critical to their outlook.

However, too little time, if any, is spent on educating teachers on how to recognise symptoms of stress and empowering them with coping skills to deal with stressful situations (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2012) which may influence their attitudes towards their work (Schneiderman, 2005).

In this chapter the focus will be on existing literature dealing with key concepts such as stress, coping, psychological well-being and flourishing, as well as the factors that contribute to teachers experiencing stress. Available literature on stress-management interventions in the global and local contexts will also be reviewed to guide the development of an intervention to help teachers to cope with stress.

### 2.1 Stress

Stress is described as people's interaction with environments they perceive as being beyond their coping capacities and possibly even endangering their lives (Cohen et al., 2016; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Since experiences are subjective, the level of stress experienced by an individual will vary depending on the context, the source of the stress (Burke et al., 2019; Jackson & Rothmann, 2005; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; OECD, 2020) and the individual's subjective experience of the stressor. Hence, two individuals may experience the same stressful event and respond differently, or it may have different outcomes.

Cohen et al. (2016) classify stress by using epidemiological, psychological and biological perspectives. The epidemiological perspective defines stress based on an individual's experience of a life event that is rated as threatening and needing adaptive measures. Objective ratings are also used to show how many people collectively assess similar specific events as adverse, which has proved successful in foreseeing disease, disease progression and death. The psychological view highlights the fact that individuals can experience the same stressful event, but have different outcomes, which depend on how each individual interprets and reacts to the event. Therefore, generalising stressful



experiences to specific events may not be realistic. The biological perspective emphasises the effect of particular stressors measured by the distress caused to the physiological system, which is needed to maintain equilibrium (homeostasis) and metabolic control.

Stress is experienced by everyone, however this research will focus on teachers experiences of stress. This entails analysing data that relates to theories or models that make an effort to clarify the factors that influence teacher stress, the effects, and current stress management interventions in the educational environment. Understanding this can help create a working environment that promotes well-being and may positively influence performance.

However, it is crucial to note that stress is not always bad, but can be a positive drive to attain goals and deadlines (Shahsavarani et al., 2015). These authors add that homeostasis is crucial in understanding stress as it maintains equilibrium or stability in the face of ever-changing external events. At this stage it will therefore be worthwhile to discuss the different types of stress people experience.

### 2.1.1 Types of stress

Considering the various perspectives on, and theories about stress and different ways in which people experience stress, it seems sensible to conclude that there are different types of stress. Context, appraisal, impact and response all play a fundamental role in the classification of stress. Based on various elements, Crosswell and Lockwood (2020) summarise the types of stress as follows:

Table 2.1 Types of stress by timescale

Type of stress	Definition	Relevance for health
Chronic stress	Chronic stressors are prolonged threatening or challenging circumstances that disrupt daily life and continue for an extended period of time (minimum of one month).	People under chronic stress are at greater risk of chronic illness, mortality, and accelerated biological aging (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Nyberg et al., 2013).
Life events	Life events are time-limited and episodic events that involve significant adjustment to one's current life pattern, such as getting fired, being in a car crash, or the death of a loved one. Some life events can be positive (e.g. getting married, moving to a new place), and some become chronic (e.g. disability caused by car crash).	Exposure to more stressful life events is linked with poorer mental health in addition to development and progression of cardiovascular disease, as well as mortality due to cardiovascular disease and cancer (Chida et al., 2008; Cohen et al., 2007; Steptoe & Kivimäki, 2013).
Traumatic life events	Traumatic life events are a subclass of life events in which one's physical and/or psychological safety is threatened.	Experiencing a greater number of traumatic events across the life course is consistently associated with worse health and mortality

Type of stress	Definition	Relevance for health
		(Gawronski et al., 2014; Keyes et al., 2013; Krause et al., 2004; Rosengren et al., 2004).
Daily hassles (i.e. daily stressors)	Interruptions or difficulties that happen frequently in daily life such as minor arguments, traffic, or work overload, and that can build up overtime to create persistent frustration or overwhelm.	Greater emotional responses to these daily hassles are associated with worse mental and physical health (Almeida, 2005; Charles et al., 2013; Chiang et al., 2018; Sin et al., 2015).
Acute stress	Short-term, event-based exposures to threatening or challenging stimuli that evoke a psychological and/or physiological stress response, such as giving a public speech.	Greater cardiovascular reactivity to acute stressors has been prospectively associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease (Brosschot et al., 2005; Chida & Steptoe, 2010; Steptoe & Marmot, 2005).

Source: Crosswell and Lockwood (2020)

Based on the information contained in Table 2.1 above, the engagements with the teachers revealed certain types of stress. In the main, while some causes for stress—such as traumatic life events—are present at their workplace, chronic stress and daily hassles are common. The stress experienced by teachers will be discussed in Chapter 4, but it is worth noting here that those stresses arise from various factors that are present in the school environment, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs. It also became evident that teachers' stress levels and their ability to cope are mostly influenced by *personal* stress, as well as *occupation-related* stress, which are explained in line with Crosswell and Lockwood's (2020) summary.

### 2.1.1.1 Personal stress

Many personal factors may result in individuals feeling that their homeostasis is threatened and they cannot cope with the challenge. The death of a loved one, troubled relationships with family and partners, taking care of a sick loved one, moving/relocating, unemployment, etc. are examples of stressors that can result in personal stress that affect both the individual's private life and his or her performance in an occupation. It is worth noting that these stressors were mentioned during engagements with the teachers who participated in this research. This correlates with some of the examples of personal stress listed in Crosswell and Lockwood's (2020) table, i.e., traumatic life events (e.g. loss of loved ones), chronic stress (a financial burden due to unemployment), daily stressors (argument with partner or children) and acute stress (moving to a new area).

### **2.1.1.2 Occupational stress**

Adaramola (2012) describes occupational stress as the adverse physical and psychological reactions that may occur when there is a discrepancy between the demands placed on people by their jobs and their level of control over meeting those demands. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines occupational stress as "the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities, and which challenge their ability to cope" (WHO, 2020, para 1.). Therefore, when teachers feel that the job demands are beyond their ability to control or achieve, this can be described as occupational stress. A recent Teaching and Learning International Survey revealed that ten percent of South African teachers feel that their jobs adversely affect their mental and physical health (OECD, 2020). This seems to be a common experience by teachers, as was also found in this research.

### **2.1.2 Factors influencing stress**

Wettstein et al. (2021) explain that factors such as key life events, daily tasks and work and environmental contexts play a crucial role in the experience of stress. According to the WHO, job stress can be due to various factors, such as poor work systems and management, poor working conditions, unpleasant relationships with colleagues and a lack of support from colleagues and management teams (WHO, 2020), while Adaramola (2012) maintains that stress can affect the performance of an individual, and consequently an organisation's performance and productivity.

Naidoo (2011) completed a thesis on stress management and its impact on the work performance of educators in public schools in KwaZulu-Natal. The thesis focused on the causes of stress and its effects on productivity, management and leadership attributes, and the transformation process. It also included a comparative analysis of the causes of stress identified by Van Wyk (2006) and Jackson and Rothman (2006) in the North-West province, which found similarities in the causes of stress. Naidoo identified the significant causes of stress, such as lack of organisational support, work overload, concern about remuneration, job insecurity and lack of opportunities for professional development, and recommended the implementation of a national and provincial strategy to reduce stress and burnout, which negatively affect teachers and their productivity.

Many of the factors that influence teachers' stress are related to changes in the South African education system, especially after the end of the apartheid era. Bradbury (2017) asserts that people's history and socio-political lives are linked to their personal and psychological worlds. It is therefore vital to reflect on how past experiences in the education system may have impacted and perhaps continue to impact teachers. The impact of the apartheid era system is clear, as is the impact of the

current democratic dispensation, as noted by various authors (Lam et al., 2012; Ndimande, 2013; Nkabinde, 2016). Whether deliberately or not, each dispensation has contributed to the skewed development of learning institutions, which has resulted in factors that cause stress for educators in these institutions. Gustems-Carnicer and Calderón (2012) note that certain experiences in the education environment may cause harmful stress. In the next section, factors that affect teachers' stress arising from the abovementioned changes in the education system will be discussed. The list may not be exhaustive as it focuses only on stress-causing factors that were observed to be prevalent during our engagement with teachers during this research.

### **2.1.2.1. Workload**

The challenges faced by teachers in South Africa include, but are not limited to, work overload (Naidoo, 2011; Steyn & Kamper, 2006; Van Wyk, 2006), excessive administrative work (Steyn & Kamper, 2006), managing ill-disciplined children (Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002) and conflicting roles (Steyn & Kamper, 2006).

Their problems are further exacerbated by the lack of adequate support services, such as social workers, counsellors or psychologists, often exposing teachers to offer support when learners are emotionally troubled or need remedial teaching. This, according to Steyn and Kamper (2006), may influence teachers' stress levels. The various career roles, such as being the head of a department or senior management team member (SMT), may require additional skills and knowledge, which some teachers in those roles may lack and may consequently find that the increased workload causes increased pressure (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Kyriacou, 2001).

### **2.1.2.2. Lack of resources and infrastructure**

The lack of resources and infrastructure due to the provision of poorer facilities, budgets and support (Lam et al., 2012; Ndimande, 2013; Nkabinde, 2016) can also increase stress (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2002; OECD, 2020). Teachers often find themselves having to conduct lessons in overcrowded classrooms, under trees and in dilapidated buildings with few resources, and having to cope with learners' increasingly unruly behaviour, which all can increase their stress levels. As recently as 2010, Moloi (2010) stated that a lack of the necessary resources and poor infrastructure were still creating problems as teachers frequently had to deal with overcrowded classrooms. Activist groups, such as the public interest law centre Section 27, have in the recent past taken the government to court for its failure to provide basic necessities such as water and ablution

facilities (SECTION27, 2022) and learning materials at schools (Nowicki, 2022; SECTION27, 2022). These factors have a negative effect on both teachers and learners and increase levels of stress.

### **2.1.2.3. Personal relationships**

Constant changes (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020; Steyn & Kamper, 2006), an imbalance between work and family life (Steyn & Kamper, 2006) and strained relationships, whether with learners (Schulze & Steyn, 2007), parents (OECD, 2020; Schulze & Steyn, 2007) or colleagues (Du Plessis & Letshwene, 2020) contribute to heightened stress levels. The multiple roles teachers often have to play, as mentioned previously, also blur the boundaries in relationships, which can affect relationships and create a stressful environment. Furthermore, the lack of support by parents who are unwilling or unable to assist their children with academic work leaves teachers having to take full responsibility for children's future, which affects relationships and performance. Bradbury (2017) correctly observes that people's histories and socio-political lives are linked to their personal and psychological worlds. Therefore, when these relationships are strained and not harmonious, people are affected negatively. This results in unruly classrooms, unhappy families and strained relationships with colleagues and parents.

### **2.1.2.4. Job insecurity**

Job insecurity and a lack of career development opportunities (Naidoo, 2011; Jackson & Rothman, 2005), as well as a lack of organisational support (Naidoo, 2011; Van Wyk, 2006) further exacerbate the issue. The constant reminder that teachers (those employed on contracts) cannot be sure that they will receive their next salaries increases their stress levels. Often teachers employed on contracts also do not enjoy the career development opportunities that are available to permanently employed staff.

### **2.1.2.5. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic**

Another recent occurrence that could have exacerbated the stress levels of teachers is the COVID-19 pandemic. Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) detail some challenges associated with COVID-19 that could have contributed to teachers' stress, such as social distancing regulations, fears of not completing the curriculum and having to adjust to online teaching (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Ramrathan, 2020). Recent research by Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021) details how more teachers

reported symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress due to the pandemic. Soudien et al. (2021) highlight the fact that many underprivileged schools in South Africa lacked the resources needed to enable effective online learning (Parker et al., 2020).

Furthermore, many learners in underprivileged homes lacked space (work desk) and did not have access to computers and the internet, and their parents did not have the time or resources needed to provide home schooling. Teachers therefore had to devise innovative plans to keep children learning. CBS News (2020) published an article about how one rural school, Dendron Secondary School in Limpopo, moved final-year (matric) learners in with their teachers to ensure continued academic support and study during lockdown. The added responsibility of not only having to find innovative teaching methods, but to also accommodate and take care of the learners, may have increased the teachers' stress levels.

### ***2.1.3. Approaches and responses to stress***

Kilby and Sherman (2016) assert that while all people experience stress in their lives, they respond to it differently, so that two people can experience the same stressor, but have different responses, role appraisals and coping mechanisms.

Weiten (2017) emphasises that while many people experience stress, some can cope with its effects more effectively than others due to various protective factors that could lessen the impact. According to studies undertaken by Mental Health First Aid USA (2022), protective factors such as positive relationships, significant others, personal and environmental factors, physical and mental health, financial security and spiritual belief are promoters of resilience. Some of these factors, as discussed in detail in Chapter 4, formed part of our intervention intended to provide teachers with coping skills to reduce stress and enhance their psychological well-being. Various approaches and responses to stresses are discussed below.

#### **2.1.3.1 Approach**

The different approaches to understanding stress proposed by various scholars (Herman et al., 2020; Kilby & Sherman, 2016; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Shahsavarani et al., 2015) are discussed below.

##### ***2.1.3.1.1 Response-based view***

The response-based view of stress holds that stress is determined by a person's response to environmental demands. It differentiates between stressors (stimulus) and the stress response, and is

often cited in biological literature (Shahsavarani et al., 2015). This view, Shahsavarani et al. (2015) explain, is associated with Hans Selye's (1976) General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), which identifies three stages of stress response: the alarm reaction, the resistance stage and the exhaustion stage (Tan & Yip, 2018). These stages can explain a person's experiences of a stressful event. 1) The person is initially caught by surprise, which can result in the fight or flight mode. 2) Then, the person uses his/her body resources to reject the change to maintain equilibrium and 3) eventually grows weary from battling the stressor.

#### ***2.1.3.1.2 Stimulus-based view***

The stimulus-based view, as explained by Holmes and Rahe, focuses on assessing the average amount of effort required to overcome a stressful event as being a fair indicator of its severity (Shahsavarani et al., 2015). However, they argue that this explanation of stress can potentially ignore the disparities in how different people perceive the same phenomenon due to individual differences.

#### ***2.1.3.1.3. Transactional-cognitive view***

According to the transactional-cognitive approach, stress is a relationship between individuals and their environments in which the individuals feel that the demands of the environment are pushing and overwhelming their resources, endangering their health (Shahsavarani et al., 2015). In the main, the environments in which teachers work are not products of their own doing; however, those environments contribute significantly to their stress. The study would have achieved its goal if teachers succeed in finding adaptive means and ways to face up to their hostile environments and still function optimally with minimal stress impacts.

Stress, as we know, is an active and progressive process that involves the impact of, and responses to a specific context. This process is similar to the appraisal approach based on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) work. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest that people evaluate both the intensities of the probable threat posed by the situation and their own capacity to deal with it (Cohen et al., 2016). Therefore capacitating teachers with coping skills is crucial if they are to win the battle against stressful events and improve their psychological well-being.

#### ***2.1.3.1.4. Coping as a buffer***

Herman et al. (2020) put forward another approach that views coping as a cushion for the impact of stress, rather than a stabiliser or arbiter. This suggests that issues that cause stress are not necessarily dealt with; rather, stress is temporarily avoided by breaking away into activities that



serve as episodes of brief distraction until the individual's emotions are regulated and he or she can think about ways to resolve issues. This approach is based on the work of Cohen and Wills (1985), who demonstrate how social support functions as a protective factor against the adverse effects of stressful situations on one's health. This is also alluded to by Mental Health First Aid USA (2022), which highlights the importance of relationships with others as protective factors.

Additionally, when analysing universal features of stress and coping (life event measures and approaches to stress), coping may mitigate the direct impacts of stress (Herman et al., 2020). However, when the subtle characteristics of stress and coping are investigated, especially when the coping mechanism is linked to the stressful situation, the coping mechanism may serve as a cushion (buffer) for the personal effects of stress. Different coping strategies are addressed in Section 2.2.

#### **2.1.3.1.5. *Stress mindset theory***

Kilby and Sherman (2016) explain that the stress mindset theory proposes that a person who feels positive about a stressor is likely to experience positive effects, while a negative view will result in negative effects. According to Herman et al. (2020), the stress mindset is not a reaction to a particular stressor or an effort to control or lessen the stressor, but is about understanding one's thought processes about stress in general (absence or presence of stress). Crum et al. (2017) are of the opinion that a positive stress attitude predicts favourable health effects, and effective interventions can change people's mindsets to become more optimistic, and therefore more adaptable.

#### **2.1.3.1.6. *The Coping-Competence-Context (3C) theory of teacher stress***

Herman et al. (2020) incorporated and built upon data from the transactional theory, the stress mindset theory and the prosocial classroom model to create a new framework, the Coping-Competence-Context (3C) model, to conceptualise teachers' stress (see Figure 1). The theory posits three vital interrelated paths to the development and intervention of teacher stress: the coping, competence and context pathways.

The **coping pathway** comprises the teacher's personal traits, thinking processes, interpersonal characteristics and coping mechanisms, which influence stress reactions. The authors refer to earlier research indicating that coping can directly affect how much stress one experiences. The **competence pathway** explains how stress affects instructional strategies, notably teachers' classroom management abilities. The authors explain that stress has a direct impact on how teachers engage with children (warnings or compliments) which, in turn, influences learner conduct and



teacher stress levels. The third pathway, **context**, relates to the school governance system and policies, which could reduce or increase teachers' stress.

In summary, the 3C theory of teacher stress demonstrates specific areas that can be targeted to prevent undesirable outcomes of stress. The Coping and Competence pathways can be changed by providing teachers training in coping, altering their stress attitudes, classroom management skills and teacher-learner connections. Furthermore, the theory draws linkages between each pathway and the effects of teacher stress on teachers and learners.

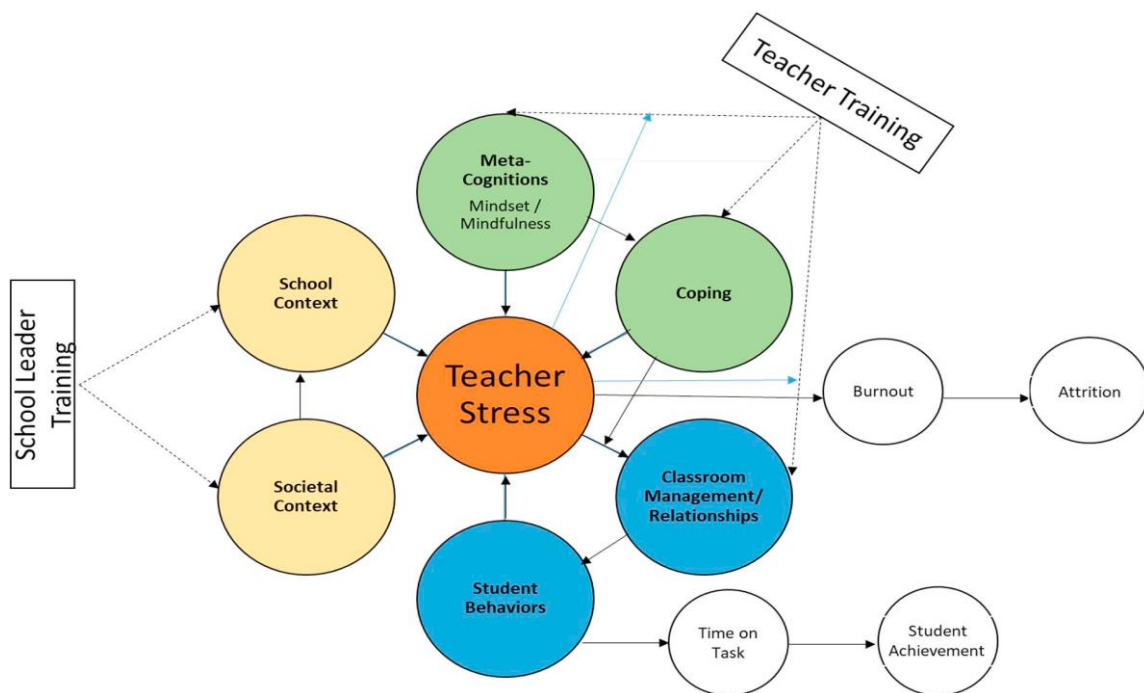


Figure 2.1. – Points of intervention and outcomes in the 3 Cs Theory of Teacher Stress.

The coping pathway is depicted in green, competence in blue and context in yellow (Herman et al., 2020).

### 2.1.3.2 Responses

According to Crosswell and Lockwood (2020), stress responses include pre-exposure, during-exposure, or post-exposure psychological, behavioural, cognitive and physiological responses to the stressor.

#### 2.1.3.2.1 Cognitive or psychological

Cognitive responses include an assessment of the event and the ongoing mental processes surrounding it. Gross (2002) asserts that psychological stress responses include certain emotions brought on by the stressor and the actions taken to control those emotions. Teachers gave examples

of when they became so preoccupied with considering different options that they found it difficult to focus on tasks.

#### **2.1.3.2.2 Physiological**

Physiological responses to exposure to stressful events include bodily responses such as the heart pounding fast, sweating and feeling faint or lightheaded. Some teachers mentioned signs such as increased anxiety, rapid heartbeats and feeling drained.

#### **2.1.3.2.3 Behavioural**

People respond differently to stressful situations. Behavioural responses include excessive smoking, using alcohol, or reaching out to the social network for support (Crosswell & Lockwood, 2020). Some of teachers mentioned that they respond to stressful situations by praying, talking to a friend or drinking, while others avoid going to work.

#### **2.1.4. Impact of teachers' stress on various areas of life**

Some of the effects of stress on teachers are decreased confidence, low self-esteem and relational issues (Mansfield, 2020). A lack of the skills needed to deal with challenges can result in psychological and occupational impairment of the teacher's functioning, which can affect their work performance (Naidoo, 2011; Jackson, 2004; Jackson & Rothman, 2005; Shahavarani, 2015; Van Wyk, 2006), resulting in absenteeism (Jackson & Rothman, 2005) and the decision to leave the profession. Shahavarani (2015) agrees that stress and its impact affect teachers' performance and the school and education system in which they work.

Blascovich and Mendes (2010) argue that although Selye (1976) may have opened the eyes of many researchers to the negative impact of stress, he also underlined the significance of distinguishing between destructive and detrimental distress (stress that negatively affects a person) and constructive or less destructive eustress (stress that motivates or energises a person). Yaribeygi et al. (2017) emphasise the fact that stress has both beneficial and adverse effects. On the positive side, it assists in maintaining motivation and good work performance, which is crucial for survival. However, individuals often focus on the negative aspects because of their impact on health and disease. Elevated stress levels can adversely affect teachers' physical, psychological and social lives (Shahavarani et al., 2015). However, the impact of stress varies from person to person.

Oyserman and Lee (2008) explain that people from traditionally individualistic or collectivistic backgrounds define the relationships between themselves and their environments differently, which affects their self-concept, thinking styles and interpersonal relations. They further

add that South Africans will often follow a collectivistic approach, which emphasises fitting in with the group's social demands (Niemann, 2006; Oyserman & Lee, 2008), working towards common objectives, interdependence and regarding oneself as similar to others (Xiao, 2021). This is a vital aspect as it may explain the varying effects of stress on individuals. People from individualistic backgrounds often have to find resolutions to challenges in isolation, with limited resources and support, which may increase stress levels and impact their psychological well-being. A collectivistic approach offers social support, which serves as a protective factor that helps to moderate stress and maintain psychological well-being. This notion is supported by recent research by Krafft et al. (2023), who point out that nations with predominantly collectivistic backgrounds, such as those in South Africa, experienced better psychological well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic than, for example, the population of Spain with their individually oriented background.

Although stress admittedly affects people in different ways, for the purpose of this study the main focus will be on the adverse effects of stress in various areas of life.

#### **2.1.4.1. Physical and behavioural impact**

Epel et al. (2004) explain that stress can contribute to poor physical health, accelerated ageing and early disease onset, and Schneiderman et al. (2005) mention increased smoking and substance abuse, accidents, sleeping and eating difficulties that can influence a person's health as the behavioural effects of stress. Individuals who work under chronically high stressful conditions or in stressful work settings are much more likely to develop disorders such as immune system dysfunction (high levels of C-reactive proteins), cardiovascular impairment and gastrointestinal complications, hypo-immune dysfunction, medical morbidity and structural abnormalities in the central nervous system, which are all triggered by stress (Yaribeygi et al., 2017). Furthermore, Dragano et al. (2017) state that those who experience an unbalanced effort-reward dynamic at work are more susceptible to coronary heart disease, while Schneiderman et al. (2005) emphasise that a perceived lack of control can result to cardiovascular disease.

#### **2.1.4.2. Psychological and emotional**

According to Schneiderman et al. (2005), exposure to severe and ongoing stressors during the developmental years increases a person's risk of developing anxiety, mood disorders and aggressiveness. They further point out that stressful life events often precede many disorders, such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Other effects, such as low self-esteem,

hopelessness and a lack of motivation, may also be evident. Yaribeygi et al. (2017) state that stress affects memory, cognition and learning. Furthermore, feeling burnt out and exhausted can hinder one's performance. Schaufeli et al. (2020, p 4) define burnout as “a work-related state of exhaustion that occurs among employees, characterised by extreme tiredness, reduced ability to regulate cognitive and emotional processes, and mental distancing. These four core dimensions of burnout are accompanied by depressed mood and non-specific psychological and psychosomatic complaints.” Teachers’ emotional state is important as it affects how they engage in class and it affects the learners, class performance and discipline (Klusmann et al., 2016).

#### **2.1.4.3. Socially**

It goes without saying that unless people are physically and psychologically well, their interest in socialisation and engaging in various activities or initiatives will be low. This can affect areas such as family life, relationships with colleagues, societal participation and marital life, which indicates poor outcomes (Schneiderman et al., 2005). This is especially problematic if one considers the Mental Health First Aid USA’s finding that community or personal relationships form a core aspect of resilience building (Mental Health First Aid USA, 2022).

#### **2.1.4.4. Occupational**

The impact of stress can affect many areas of life, including work performance. Furthermore, many stress-influencing factors may lead to teachers' lack of motivation, attrition (Herman et al., 2020) and absenteeism (Cloete, 2015; Herman et al., 2020). Effort-reward disparity also plays an important role in job strain and can lead to negative physiological effects (Dragano et al., 2017).

Teachers' motivation and mastery skills are linked to learners' learning and motivation (Klusmann et al., 2016). Madigan and Kim (2021) state that there is some proof that teacher fatigue is linked to lower levels of learner motivation and inferior academic performance, and Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) found a connection between teachers' job-related stress and learners' physiological stress regulation. This information reveals the impact that stress has on the ability of teachers to teach efficiently and effectively. However, the impact of teachers’ stress goes beyond the teacher as it also affects the behaviour and education of the learners and the functioning and morale of the school.

Since it is apparent that stress impacts various areas, including the physical, behavioural, occupational, social, cognitive, psychological and emotional aspects of a person’s life, and may

therefore adversely affect optimal functioning, it is essential to equip teachers with coping skills to help them manage stress and increase their psychological well-being.

## **2.2 Coping**

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as the ever-changing behavioural attempts to control inner and outer pressures perceived as being above one's ability to manage. It is the application of psychological and behavioural techniques to minimise the impact of a stressful situation (American Psychological Association, n.d.). The different ways in which people cope can be attributed to their cognitive appraisal of a situation and the coping skills they apply to deal with a stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Salimzadeh et al. (2021) describe coping as a type of emotion regulation that a person employ in reaction to ongoing stress. They further clarify that emotion regulation addresses the expression and experience of both good and negative emotions in stressful and non-stressful settings, while coping largely concentrates on reducing negative emotions in stressful interactions. For the purpose of this study, we refer to coping as the constant actions taken to rectify stressors (internal or external) viewed as overwhelming, or greater than one's own capacity.

When considering coping, it is important to note Crosswell and Lockwood's (2020) view that how people respond to stressful events is sometimes more important for their physical well-being than their exposure to such events. Schneiderman et al. (2005) state that every human being is exposed to stress at various levels, and that trials and challenges that may affect stress levels cannot be eliminated; however, individuals can be equipped with coping mechanisms to manage stress and function optimally.

Coping techniques can be adaptive or maladaptive (Weiten, 2017). Jackson et al. (2010) explain that recognising maladaptive coping techniques may have neuroadaptive benefits that lessen detrimental psychological and physiological states. This means that being able identify unhealthy coping mechanisms enables an individual to better understand what needs to be addressed, which may reduce negative psychological and physiological conditions. It is important to know this when planning interventions for those suffering from chronic stress. With this study the team aimed to help teachers develop adaptive coping mechanisms to apply during challenging times.

### ***2.2.1 Types of coping***

Considering human uniqueness and varying contexts, it is logical that different coping mechanisms will be applied in different situations. Parkes (1994) explains that differences in

personalities and coping strategies are crucial in how the workplace and environment affect mental and physical health outcomes. Coping strategies can be classified into different categories, namely adaptive coping (problem-solving, reaching out for help); maladaptive coping (substance use, binge eating); active coping (emotional regulation – mindfulness); and avoidant coping (escape or denial). Schneiderman et al. (2005) state that physiological challenges and psychological disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and major depression can all be linked to avoidant coping mechanisms.

Two main coping strategies described by Herman et al. (2017) are approach (fight) and avoidance (flight). They explain that approach coping styles comprise techniques that deal head-on with the cause of the problem, while avoidance coping styles, such as substance abuse, involve psychological and behavioural techniques that provide an escape from the challenge and suppress undesired emotions. The following is a description of some of the coping techniques identified by Folkman and Moskowitz (2004):

- a. Problem-focused, which focuses on the issues causing the distress. Examples of this style include active coping, preparation, restraint coping, problem-solving and minimising conflicting activities.
- b. Emotion-focused, which seeks to decrease the bad feelings connected to the issue through positive self-talk, humour, spiritual connection, or acceptance.
- c. Meaning-focused, which entails a person using cognitive techniques to understand and attach meaning to and control a difficult situation.
- d. Social coping (support-seeking) is a stress-reduction strategy in which a person reaches out to close friends and family for moral support or practical assistance.

Kamtsios (2018) and Salimzadeh et al. (2021) identify two coping techniques discussed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) on which this intervention will focus: the problem-focused approach and the emotion-focused (avoidance) approach, this is supported by Freire et al. (2020) who describes the two coping approaches as the approach (active) strategies or evasive (disengaged) strategies. An important aspect of problem-focused coping is the employment of techniques that aim to alter the stressful situation and remove its impact by using techniques such as problem-solving, reaching out for social support and facing the problem head-on (confrontive coping). Kamtsios (2018) further explains that emotion-focused coping focuses on controlling emotions and engaging in cognitive activities that diminish or eliminate the consequences of stress. Cognitive restructuring is a positive coping strategy to change emotional experiences. Coping strategies such as wishful thinking

and escape/avoidance are also emotion-focused strategies (Freire et al., 2020; Kamtsios, 2018; Salimzadeh et al., 2021), but are negative coping strategies.

It is important to note that not all coping mechanisms are adaptive. Some, such as substance abuse, avoidance, suppressing emotions, binge-eating, self-injury, etc., can be maladaptive and thus only serve to sustain a toxic cycle. This intervention seeks to empower teachers with adaptive coping strategies that will enable them to impact the situation positively.

According to Gustems-Carnicer and Calderón (2012), there is a link between the type of coping and psychological well-being, and they explain that an approach such as problem-solving positively impacted the signs of depression, phobic anxiety and general psychological discomfort. At the same time, cognitive and behavioural avoidance coping strategies are linked to a higher prevalence of psychological signs of distress. They argue that coping skills may help reduce psychological difficulties, especially approach-focused coping such as problem solving, as it is linked to positive outcomes for psychological well-being (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2012).

### **2.3 Psychological well-being**

"Psychological well-being is a core feature of mental health, and may be defined as including hedonic (enjoyment, pleasure) and eudaimonic (meaning, fulfilment) happiness, as well as resilience (coping, emotion regulation, healthy problem solving)" (Tang et al., 2019, p.1). Vazi et al. (2013) assert that positive behavioural changes, such as positive coping skills, positive relationships with colleagues and improved problem-solving skills to avert or reduce the effect of stress may increase psychological well-being. This highlights the importance of promoting psychological well-being and not accepting that the absence of visible distress among teachers equals good health.

According to Ryff (2014), six factors contribute to psychological well-being. These include having positive relations with others, autonomy, personal mastery, meaning in life and personal growth. For this study, we describe psychological well-being as the ideal state of balance between one's hedonic (enjoyment and pleasure) and eudaemonic (meaning and fulfilment) spheres of life, which allows one to function optimally. Park et al. (2004) assert that focusing on an individual's strengths to build and enhance coping mechanisms is central to achieving psychological well-being, and Hansen et al. (2015) state that there is a negative correlation between job satisfaction, burnout and disengagement; therefore educators who are more satisfied with their jobs are also more likely to be less exhausted and disengaged. This highlights the importance of an intervention to improve teachers' psychological well-being and flourishing.

Seligman (2011, p.13) states, "I now think that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, that the gold standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and that the goal of positive psychology



is to increase flourishing". He defines flourishing as achieving fulfilment in one's life, completing valuable tasks and developing deeper relationships with others—basically, leading a good life. Furthermore, in two videos, he explains that flourishing equates to PERMA, an acronym referring to Personal emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment (Coursera, n.d., Prof Seligman on PERMA, 2015). Personal emotions form part an individual's day-to-day experiences as some form of emotion will be experienced in any given situation. Engagement will focus on helping teachers to effectively plan and arrange their daily tasks and activities so that they feel less overwhelmed and foster positive emotions, such as hope and motivation. There will also be a focus on relationships and the importance of positive relationships in promoting well-being. Lastly, meaning and accomplishment will be emphasised by the issuing of certificates, which will symbolise having attained the goal of taking care of one's psychological well-being through the stress-management intervention. Seligman (2011) asserts that having or experiencing these elements results in flourishing. Hence, this intervention was built around the PERMA model and was undertaken to enhance the teachers' psychological well-being, which may help them to flourish.

As clearly indicated in the literature that was studied, stress has the potential to adversely affect teachers' lives and performance, possibly influencing their ability to flourish, which pointed to the need for a stress-reducing intervention provided in the form of adaptive coping skills to alter the stress levels from the distress side (mental, physical breakdown) to the eustress side (energised, motivated with an improved focus on making positive changes), which may have a positive effect on the psychological well-being of teachers.

## **2.4 Interventions to support teacher well-being**

Extensive literature has been published on interventions to promote the well-being of employees in various sectors (Asuero et al., 2014; Cloete, 2015; De Angelis et al., 2020; Gardiner et al., 2013; Keeman et al., 2017; Williams, 2020). However, for this research, we will focus mainly on interventions to promote teachers' psychological well-being. Previous studies have suggested various interventions to prevent or minimise teachers' experiences of psychological disorders (Schaufeli, 2003; Schulze & Steyn, 2007; Steyn & Kamper, 2006), while Mansfield (2020) suggests interventions that will increase teacher resilience and mindfulness through models such as BRiTe (focusing on building resilience, relationships, well-being, taking initiative and positive emotions) and PERMA (promoting positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment). Williams (2020) focuses on promoting resilience in teachers by improving their social and emotional intelligence, while Courson (2021) focuses on improving social and emotional support, which might encourage self-



efficacy and promote improved well-being. Different stress-management interventions that promote psychological well-being will be discussed below.

#### ***2.4.1 Stress management interventions***

Hagermoser Sanetti et al. (2020) summarise information from eighteen international interventions to reduce teachers' stress. Eleven of the interventions taught meditation techniques, seven involved relaxation skills, three used yoga and another three taught deep breathing skills, while two focused on increasing social support at school and the last two focused on healthy living and the importance of a healthy diet/exercise. One intervention also taught thought-stopping and another taught complementary and alternative medicine. These interventions were found to enhance psychological health symptoms, mindfulness and personal achievement, and decreased burnout.

The following literature also noted teachers' improved well-being after their participation in stress management interventions:

Czerwinski et al. (2020) implemented a five working day (Monday to Friday) intervention using two groups. The intervention group participated in mindfulness colouring for five days, with a mindfulness colouring video teaching them how to physically colour mindfully. The waitlist control group consisted of teachers who continued their normal work week and did not have a comparable intervention. When the groups were compared after the week it was found that those who had participated in the intervention had lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression and had benefited from using mindfulness-based colouring as a self-help strategy to enhance overall well-being. This effect is confirmed by Flett et al. (2017), who highlight the value of mindful colouring as used by Czerwinski et al. (2020) to enhance well-being.

The usefulness of mindfulness activities is supported by Jennings et al. (2013) and Taylor et al. (2016). The initial sessions involved teaching the participants how to practise mindful-based stress reduction through basic breathing awareness, body scan practices, mindful eating and walking, mindfulness of thoughts and emotions, and role play to practise mindfulness when experiencing emotions such as anger and fear in the classroom and in relation to complex social interactions with colleagues or parents. The following sessions included focusing on mindful-based emotional skills, which involved the introduction of awareness of emotions and their purpose, exploring the experience of unpleasant and pleasant emotions in the body, and establishing mindful coping mechanisms (such as reappraisal and relaxation responses). The focus then shifted to mindful-based compassion and self-forgiveness, which involved skills in taking care of oneself, loved ones, co-workers, learners and people with challenging attitudes. It also included mindful forgiveness exercises focused on forgiving oneself and others for perceived offences under the appropriate

circumstances. Lastly, it entailed teaching mindful listening. This intervention combined the significance of mindfulness activities, the establishment of mindful coping strategies and self-care and compassion.

Schussler et al. (2015) also implemented a mindfulness programme called Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), which focused on enhancing teachers' awareness of how they were carrying stress in their bodies, their response to it and their mental state. The intervention used activities such as mindful observation (which entails the teachers' observations of what was occurring physically and how this influenced their general well-being), a centring activity, which assisted with coping skills in anxiety-provoking situations, mindfulness non-reactivity (being mindful of when and how they react) and acting with awareness to improve wellbeing, thus improving classroom engagement and efficacy. They reported that participants gained a better understanding of their own need for self-care and bodily awareness. Furthermore, participants also showed an improved capacity for becoming less emotionally reactive. Once again, this intervention aimed to improve mindful awareness, self-care and emotional regulation skills.

Shimazu et al. (2003) implemented a five-session intervention to investigate how a stress management programme for teachers affects their coping, social support and stress reactions. The intervention was implemented with 24 teachers employed at four primary schools. The key finding was that there had been an increase in social support received from co-workers. A possible explanation for the increased social support is that, during role-playing or group discussions, participants may have for the first time understood the importance of social support. This relates back to the concept of "flocking" mentioned by Versfeld et al. (2022), who assert that when teachers spend time together during difficult times, connections are strengthened and trust in their ability to educate despite difficulties is improved.

Ansley et al. (2021) implemented an online stress intervention with twenty-five participants. The intervention included psychoeducation on basic self-care, mindfulness, relaxation strategies and cognitive restructuring, as well as routines and relationships at work, conflict management skills and maintaining gains made. The results revealed increased coping strategies, teacher efficacy and self-achievement, and decreased emotional weariness, which benefitted the teachers both personally and professionally.

Frank et al. (2013) also presented an adapted mindfulness-based stress reduction programme over eight weeks in a study that involved 36 high school teachers. Teachers were taught mindfulness skills such as body scan, awareness of breathing, mindful yoga, mindful eating and walking meditation. Each session involved practising meditation, having discussions in small and large groups, and engaging in mindfulness-related activities. The results revealed measurable

improvements in self-control, self-compassion and mindfulness-related abilities, and also significantly enhanced the teachers' sleep quality.

Finally, to provide a holistic strategy to promote wellness, Hepburn et al. (2021) used an integrative yoga practice when they implemented a complementary intervention (CI) with pre-service teachers who afterwards revealed reduced perceived stress and improved awareness. The intervention was created around Ryff's six-factor psychological well-being model, which emphasises the need for self-acceptance, independence, self-realisation, good interpersonal relationships, meaning or sense of purpose and environmental mastery. Some of the content taught included compassion, gratitude, yoga, mindfulness meditation and stress reduction, which resulted in reduced stress and improved awareness. This information and the focus on Ryff's explanation of psychological well-being served as valuable elements to consider in our intervention.

#### ***2.4.2 Local stress management interventions***

Literature on stress management interventions are not common in the local context. The researcher found three research projects about interventions in the local context noted in the literature. Johnson (2015) implemented an intervention for 43 teachers from three schools in the high-risk area (gang area) of the Cape Flats in the Western Cape. The group from one school did trauma release exercises (TREs), another focused on transpersonal psychology (TP) and the third did transactional analysis (TA). Teachers from a fourth school formed a control group. Each session of the ten-week intervention lasted ninety minutes. The main objectives of the stress and burnout intervention workshops were to foster positive attitudes and enhance interpersonal skills. The sessions concentrated on the stressors faced by educators and the coping mechanisms they used. The underlying idea was to emphasise the significance of self-reflection in the context of a psychological sense of community and resolving educator concerns by providing cognitive and emotional or physiological support, combined with social support. Irrespective of the different focus areas in each session, the group workshop structure encouraged collaboration and camaraderie among the participants. Moreover, group discussions generated fresh viewpoints and helped them to develop new perspectives.

Collaboration, which was also an important part of our intervention, was facilitated through group discussions. The research revealed that teachers in the TRE group experienced the emotional benefits of being composed and in charge, and that their perspectives on themselves and their thought processes had changed. The participants in the TA group reported having experienced fresh energy, emotional intelligence, a strong group connection and a sense of being calm and in control.

This helped to lower stress and burnout by reducing feelings of isolation, and the teachers' psychological understanding of their own and learners' behaviour reduced the main source of stress that had been reported, namely classroom discipline. Johnson (2015) reports that 75% of the teachers in the control group experienced more burnout than the TP (69%), TRE (65%) and TA (40%) groups.

Another South African study on managing teacher stress was undertaken by Pelsler (2015) in secondary schools in Mahikeng, South Africa. Pelsler worked with teachers to stress and suggest ways to address it. The causes of stress were indicated as work pressure, lack of career opportunities, a negative job outlook, lack of work accomplishments, poor leadership and management, low remuneration and communication difficulties. Both educators and members of management participated in the research and shared ideas on how to manage stress. The recommendations included the appointment of management members who are adequately qualified for their positions. They wanted the introduction of a reward programme for teachers who excel in their fields. Teachers also wanted training in stress management and recreation programmes, such as aerobics and yoga to relieve their stress. While developing our intervention, we also considered implementing physical activities such as aerobics.

In their research on learner behaviour in South Africa, Rubbi Nunan and Ntombela (2021) draw attention to the fact that learners' unruly behaviour and refusal to listen are affecting teachers' mental health and impacting teaching (Jacob & Aloka, 2023). Such challenging behaviour, which impacts on teaching and learning, should be effectively dealt with to ensure successful learning in the classroom (Jacob & Aloka, 2023).

Ebersöhn (2019) highlights 'Flocking together' as an integral theory, instrumental in the South African context and based on an Afrocentric ideal, i.e. the Relationship-resourced Resilience Theory (RRR). This theory holds that when facing adversities, most South Africans rely on their Ubuntu principles and practise flocking together, which emphasises interconnectedness, communality, interdependence, collectivism, confirmation and reciprocity. Versfeld et al. (2022) implemented an intervention for teachers based on the social connectedness principles of Ubuntu. The intervention provided monthly opportunities for teachers to interact and build relationships by participating in art-based activities (clay modelling, making teacher journey bracelets, framing important relationships, etc.). This was based on the concept *Isithebe*, which is a Zulu term for a woven mat or wooden tray on which people place plates of food for sharing—therefore a gathering area. During the intervention teachers could follow suggestions in the *Isithebe* guidebook (Ebersöhn et al., 2020), for example to hold monthly meetings to talk and bond through art-related activities (instead of food). The intervention focused on how coming together and engaging in art activities promoted connectedness

and well-being. Furthermore, spending time together built relationships and encouraged teacher resilience despite structural inequities.

The interpretation of the data collected by Krafft et al. (2023) revealed that it was possible that the collectivistic nature of South Africans could contribute to positive psychological well-being despite adversities, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The opposite was observed for individualistic countries such as Spain. Versfeld et al.'s (2022) qualitative finding revealed that spending time together encouraged a sense of belonging, safety and trust, and provided opportunities for exchanging tips on future career developmental options, taking care of children and assisting each other in overcoming ongoing challenges, thus promoting well-being and enhancing teachers' resilience and enabling them to continue teaching despite the challenges.

Based on the interventions discussed above, some stress-management activities along with the unique challenges faced by the teachers which it addressed are summarised in the table below:

Table 2.2 Stress-management activities

Stress Intervention Activity	Sources	Challenges addressed by intervention/s
Mindfulness	Ansley et al. (2012); Frank et al. (2013); Hepburn et al. (2021); Jennings (2013); Schussler (2015); Taylor (2015)	Promoted feelings of being grounded and calm
Relaxation	Ansley et al. (2021)	Enhanced psychological well-being
Physical activities (play, aerobics/exercise, yoga)	Hepburn et al. (2021); Pelsler (2015)	Promoted physical health, reduce burnout and promote laughter and positive emotions
Group discussions	Shimazu et al. (2013); Versfeld et al. (2022)	Highlighted universality of experiences and provided possible coping strategies
Spending time together	Versfeld et al. (2022)	Increased social connectedness
Exchanging tips and knowledge	Versfeld et al. (2022)	Provided alternative coping strategies through shared experiences
Mindful colouring	Czerwinski et al. (2020); Flett et al. (2017)	Stress relief
Gratitude	Hepburn et al. (2021)	Reduced anxiety, stress relief, better sleep and increased happiness
Compassion	Hepburn et al. (2021); Jennings (2013); Taylor (2015)	Less critical of self, embracing self, increased social connection
Self-forgiveness	Jennings (2013); Taylor (2015)	Reduced stress and anxiety Improved well-being and productivity
Increasing social support/promoting healthy relationships	Johnson (2015); Shimazu et al. (2013); Versfeld et al. (2022)	Promoted well-being and improved relationships

Cognitive restructuring/Thought stopping	Ansley et al. (2021)	Helped to identify unhelpful thinking patterns and re-structure them
Art-based activities	Versfeld et al. (2022)	Promoted sense of belonging, safety and encouraged teacher resilience
Centring	Schussler (2015)	Reduced levels of anxiety
Self-care	Ansley et al. (2012)	Improved teacher efficacy and self-achievement, decreased emotional weariness

## 2.5 Conclusion

The literature review provided definitions of stress, information on the various types of stress, factors affecting stress and the impact of stress. Coping, psychological well-being and flourishing were described, and the importance of teachers experiencing well-being to promote flourishing was highlighted. Lastly, existing stress-management interventions were explored, focusing on the methods used to manage stress.

This research sought to build on previous research by developing a practical intervention to provide teachers with coping skills to equip them to deal with various life challenges. The literature describes several international stress management interventions, but very little reference to such programmes could be found in relevant South African literature. The researchers' aim was to develop a suitable intervention, mindful of the contextual factors affecting teachers. This required actively collaborating with teachers to help them identify and develop coping strategies they could employ when facing challenges, which may improve their psychological well-being and increase their productivity and efficiency, and this may have a domino effect on the learners, workplace and relationships (Vazi et al., 2013). The research methods used in developing and implementing the intervention will be outlined in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: Research methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the focus will be on the research goals and objectives. The research design, needs assessment, intervention development and implementation of the intervention will be discussed, as well as the feedback received from the participants. This will be followed by a discussion of the data analysis and the ethical considerations relating to this research.

### 3.2 Research goals and objectives

This research, undertaken to develop an intervention that can help teachers to improve their psychological well-being by using coping skills to manage stress, sought to answer the question: What interventions can empower teachers with the coping skills needed to manage their stress and improve their psychological or mental well-being?

The objectives were:

To assess teachers' stressors and find out how they cope with stress

To develop an intervention to address teachers' stressors by enhancing their coping skills and psychological well-being

To obtain feedback from the participating teachers on how the intervention helped them to cope better with stress

### 3.3 Research design

#### 3.3.1 *Research type*

Action research was used as the research design. The philosophy of action research is defined by a participatory worldview (Koshy et al., 2011). It differs from other research approaches as "it is context-bound and involves action designed to change local situations" (Koshy et al., 2011, p.13). Action/emancipatory research acknowledges that there is a variety of realities (Groat et al., 2013) and that research is a collaborative effort between the researcher and participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) with a view to bringing about change to improve the livelihoods of the participants and the greater society (Noel, 2016).



To empower the participants, action research requires the participants and researchers' active and collaborative efforts. It is essential to consider the participants' holistic context and their social, economic and historical backgrounds, which will ensure that the proposed intervention addresses the core issues experienced by the teachers and not just superficial ones. Noel (2016) emphasises that communicating with participants without any barriers is vital to the success of emancipatory research. The researcher draws from the information gathered and the participants contribute to the development of the intervention. Since full participation is required, communication plays a crucial role and, if lacking, it can lead to non-participation. Action research is seen as a cyclic process that can repeat itself until the defined problem has been solved. The steps that can be followed in action research include a needs assessment, the development of the intervention, implementation of the intervention and the evaluation (Visser, 2022). These steps will be followed in explaining the current research.

### ***3.3.2 Research paradigm***

The qualitative research approach was used in this study. Miles et al. (2014) explain that qualitative research seeks to answer questions by drawing meaning from people's lived experiences and social worlds. They emphasise that an essential factor of qualitative research entails authentically capturing the participants' personal meanings, actions and context. This paradigm was deemed suitable for this research since it was by sharing their lived experiences and how they continued to create meaning amid challenges that teachers could help shape the intervention. This is crucial because teachers already have some coping skills that just need to be sharpened. The entire process required a collaborative effort from the researcher and the participants.

## **3.4 Needs Assessment**

In order to develop the intervention based on information gathered from participants, a needs assessment was undertaken at six primary schools with the principals' permission to ensure that the intervention would not be based merely on the researcher's own perceptions regarding the challenges faced by teachers, but on teachers' own lived experiences. The recruitment and data collection processes will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

### ***3.4.1 Participants***

Purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method, was used as the teachers were intentionally selected as relevant sources of information to address the research question. The



population for the study was primary school teachers in the education district of Tshwane South. The official suggested six schools close to the University of Pretoria's Mamelodi Campus, which were approached by the research team. Meetings were held with the principals of the schools, who gave the research team permission to carry out the needs assessment. Teachers were asked to volunteer to participate in groups to discuss the main stressors they experienced as teachers. They were also asked to answer an online questionnaire containing similar questions. Thirty-nine teachers volunteered to participate in the needs assessment and the information they provided was analysed and used in developing the intervention.

### ***3.4.2 Data collection for needs assessment***

School visits were arranged and data was collected during group discussions and obtained from the questionnaires completed by the participating teachers.

The following questions were asked in the forms:

- 1) What challenges or difficulties do teachers experience that can negatively influence their psychological well-being (personal or work-related)?
- 2) How do these challenges influence you as a person? (Your self-esteem, well-being, energy levels).
- 3) What interventions do you think can make a difference?

### ***3.4.3 Data analysis***

The responses to the survey questions were analysed by way of content analysis undertaken by a team of six M1 Counselling Psychology students. This process involved team discussions of every response before the responses were placed into categories that formed the themes on which the researcher focused. By using the themes that had been identified, it was possible to develop an intervention that would address the challenges the teachers faced. The results of the needs assessment will be discussed in Chapter 4.

### ***3.4.4 Content analysis***

Data gathered during the needs assessment was analysed by using content analysis. Elo and Kyngäs (2008) explain that content analysis allows written or oral communication to be examined and categorised according to what was said, which helps the researcher to provide a summarised version of a phenomenon and a guide for action.

Bengtsson (2016) lists four stages to content analysis: Stage 1 is decontextualisation, which involves considering aspects outside of their context. This requires researchers to thoroughly read and acquaint themselves with the data and developing small meaning components. Stage 2 is recontextualisation, which entails making sure that all the information on the content concerning the goal is captured (Burnard, 1991). Stage 3 is categorisation, during which long meaning units are summarised without losing the context, and themes and categories emerge (Bengtsson, 2016). During Stage 4, compilation, the researcher objectively analyses the data from a neutral point of view, but still being able to determine whether the focus will be on the manifest (surface) level or the latent (deeper) level (Bengtsson, 2016). The teachers' responses and communicated contributions were categorised into themes, which are outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Needs assessment summary

Theme	Frequency in percentages
Learner disrespect	22%
Work problems	12%
Lack of parental involvement	11%
Lack of commitment	8%
Workload and fatigue	7%
Favouritism	7%
Bullying and victimisation	7%
Classroom noise	6%
Home problems (personal)	4%
Financial problems	4%
Overcrowding	4%
Learners with learning barriers	4%
Fitness	4%

The needs assessment clearly indicated that teachers experience stress due to various challenges, with some teachers mentioning more than one source of stress. Some teachers used coping strategies such as prayer to cope with stress, while others were simply not coping. Other teachers described maladaptive coping strategies, including avoidance or absenteeism. This highlighted the need for an intervention to better equip teachers with adaptive coping skills so as to enable them to deal with stressful situations and improve their psychological well-being. The needs identified by the teachers were used in the development of the intervention.

### 3.5 Development of the intervention

The intervention was developed using the theory of positive psychology and the challenges mentioned by the teachers who had participated in the needs assessment.

### **3.5.1 Theoretical approach**

Positive psychology can be defined as the empirical study of the elements that promote flourishing and optimal functioning in people, organisations, communities and institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Barlow et al. (2017) explain that positive psychology involves examining one's virtues and strengths, and the environments, procedures and systems that promote well-being and positive psychological functioning. It is crucial to emphasise that it is not intended to ignore negative aspects, such as suffering and tribulations but, as Pawelski (2016) puts it, to offer a parallel emphasis on the good (positive) so that a more comprehensive understanding of the human experience is possible. Providing a shift from the pathological perspective, which often focuses on atypical behaviour or pathology, positive psychology emphasises the fact that human beings are more than just their struggles or pathology, but have strengths and resources which, viewed holistically, could be tapped into to facilitate positive change.

Seligman (2011) states that positive psychology is about well-being, which is measured according to how people are flourishing, which is described by Barlow et al. (2017) as a state of emotional, psychological and social well-being. Guse (2020) emphasises increasing psychological well-being as one of the objectives of positive psychology.

Moving to the current study, Wissing et al. (2020), in advocating for positive education that highlights the importance of well-being amongst teachers and learners, assert that the school is an environment where students develop not only their intellectual abilities, but also character strengths and other skills that enhance their well-being. They add that teachers can become good role models for their students if they are adequately empowered. This intervention is therefore underpinned by the positive psychology modality. The aim is to improve teachers' psychological well-being by providing coping skills to help them to flourish despite life's challenges, and to become role models for their students and communities.

Seligman (2011) introduced the PERMA model (also described in Chapter 2) comprised of elements of positive psychology that serve as building blocks to well-being. He explains that the PERMA model has five quantifiable components and emphasises that they are all essential for well-being. Supporting research shows that independently the PERMA elements are good indicators of well-being in the working environment and positively influence productivity (Donaldson et al., 2020; Donaldson & Donaldson, 2021; Donaldson et al., 2022). Its effectiveness in the working environment and its ability to improve workers' performance makes it suitable for this intervention. The five PERMA model elements, as described by Seligman (2011), are:

- Positive emotions (P) – Promoting positive emotions such as happiness, hope, appreciation, and fulfilment.
- Engagement (E) – Being immersed in what one is doing, for instance being absorbed in presenting a lesson, may be gratifying.
- Positive relationships (R) – Good relationships can positively impact an individual's well-being.
- Meaning (M) - Understanding the purpose of one's life can foster a sense of value or 'worth' and serve as motivation for living or doing certain activities.
- Accomplishment (A) – Focusing on achievements and the skills one has acquired can improve one's self-view and encourage further development.

Seligman (2011) further states that positive psychology aims to enhance flourishing.

Flourishing means ensuring that people are emotionally, physically and psychologically well and have a sense of purpose. This aim is aligned with the project's goals to provide coping skills that will help teachers to manage stress and improve their psychological well-being, which might enhance flourishing.

### ***3.5.2 Description of the intervention***

It is important to note that from the needs assessment, the team could not directly address certain aspects, such as learner disrespect and specific work problems, including departmental problems and parental involvement. However, the focus was on what coping strategies teachers could be equipped with to deal with stressful situations. The intervention thus started with a session on stress management. Bullying and victimisation, as well as burnout were addressed in separate dedicated sessions. Other aspects were covered in the sessions that dealt with personal issues and relationships. Finally, the accomplishment and meaning session completed the intervention by acknowledging the journey the teachers had embarked on by participating in this intervention in order to acquire coping skills that would help them to effectively deal with stressful situations and possibly improve their psychological well-being.

The Coping-Competence-Context (3C) model by Herman et al. (2020), which conceptualises teachers' stress, was used as the background to this intervention. The theory suggests three essential interrelated pathways to the development of an intervention to alleviate teacher stress: the coping, competence and context pathways.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the coping pathway refers to teachers' attitudes, thinking styles and coping mechanisms, which influence their responses to stress (positive or negative attitude,

adaptive or maladaptive coping). The competence pathway relates to teachers' ability to perform and effectively execute their responsibilities in the class (time management, preparation), and the context pathway pertains to the institutional structure and rules that may either diminish or increase teachers' stress.

The 3C theory of teacher stress suggests certain areas that can be targeted to reduce the adverse effects of stress. Empowering teachers with coping skills to help them manage their stress might improve their classroom management abilities and strengthen teacher-student relationships, bringing valuable changes to the competence and coping pathways. The context remains an essential element, and while we may not be able to directly address things such as overcrowding, favouritism and lack of parental involvement, it is important to note that it has a fundamental role.

The intervention, which consisted of six sessions, was developed by focusing on the coping pathway, which had the potential to also improve the competence pathway. During the six sessions, the following themes, based on the needs assessment, were addressed: 1) Stress; 2) Bullying and victimisation; 3) Burnout and time management; 4) Personal issues; 5) Relationships with colleagues, supervisors, learners and parents; and 6) Meaning and accomplishment. Components of the PERMA model were linked to the abovementioned sessions by facilitating experiences of positive emotions, whether by way of exercise and play or mindfulness activities. With regard to engagement, teachers were to be empowered with skills that would help them to be effective in the execution of their work (time management, preparation), improve their motivation for the job and promote fulfilment. To help teachers to achieve the aim of positive psychology, which is to flourish (Seligman, 2011), emphasis was also placed on good relationships, finding meaning in life and developing a sense of accomplishment.

The sessions were based on experiential learning, which is seen as an essential strategy for adult education (Bakirli, 2019). Each session contained some elements of psychoeducation (Bauml, 2006) and learning was built around active participation in discussions, games, self-exploration, or role plays. Each session included one or more coping skills that would help teachers to change stressful situations. Furthermore, each session also included some elements of fun to activate the teachers and to lift their spirits, for example, the balloon and aerobic exercises, which have been proved to promote well-being (Robinson et al., 2019; Van Vleet et al., 2019).

Since group dynamics are used to develop group support and motivation for change, group interaction was an essential aspect of the intervention. Yalom and Molyn Leszcz (2020) describe key principles of group therapy such as universality (the feeling that one is not alone in one's experiences) and modelling (learning from each other) as important for group therapy. These principles are crucial

in any group therapy setting and were consciously used during this intervention to provide an effective therapeutic environment.

### 3.5.3 Exercises performed during the intervention

The table below provides a summary of the exercises performed during the intervention. More detailed information on the intervention breakdown can be seen in **Appendix F**.

Table 3.2 Exercises performed during the intervention

Session	Type of exercise	Supporting literature
Session 1 Stress management	Psychoeducation on stress	(Bauml, 2006); (Cohen et al., 2016); (Selye, 1976)
	Types of coping	(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); (Herman et al., 2020)
	Completion of Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory	(Holmes & Rahe, 1967)
	Balloon activity to lighten the spirits of the teachers – PLAY	(Robinson et al., 2019); (Van Vleet et al., 2019)
	Mindfulness exercise	(Ansley et al., 2012); (Frank et al., 2013) (Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2020); (Hepburn et al., 2021); (Jennings et al., 2013); (Schussler, 2015); (Taylor et al., 2015)
Session 2 Bullying and victimisation	Psychoeducation on bullying, victimisation and assertiveness	(Bauml, 2006); (De Wet and Jacobs, 2013); (Eslami et al., 2016); (Jacobs & Teise, 2019); (Pourjali & Zarnaghas, 2010)
	Video on bullying and victimisation	<a href="https://youtu.be/CZwtJoQAT7I">https://youtu.be/CZwtJoQAT7I</a> (eNCA, 2021)
	Negative Acts Questionnaire	(Einarsen et al., 2009)
	Discussion	
Session 3 Burnout	Psychoeducation and signs of burnout	(Bauml, 2006); (Schaufeli et al., 2020)
	Time management	
	Completing of BAT	(Schaufeli, Desart, et al., 2020)

	Aerobics activity	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enYITYwvPAQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enYITYwvPAQ</a> Jackson (2013); (Sharma et al., 2006)
Session 4 Personal issues	Completion of VIA, self-awareness and strength identification	(Peterson & Seligman, 2004); (Schutte & Malouff, 2019); <a href="https://www.viacharacter.org/account/register">https://www.viacharacter.org/account/register</a> (VIA Institute on Character, 2020); (Schutte & Malouff, 2019)
	Psychoeducation	(Bauml, 2006)
	Regulation of emotions - Mindfulness	(Ansley et al., 2012); (Frank et al., 2013) (Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2020); (Hepburn et al., 2021); (Jennings et al., 2013); (Schussler, 2015); (Taylor et al., 2015)
	Pin-A-Strength-Wall (fun)	(Robinson et al., 2019)
	Singing	(Fancourt et al., 2019)
Session 5 Relationships	Psychoeducation on good relationships	(Bauml, 2006); (Canevello & Crocker, 2010)
	Activity – Broken telephone (to highlight communication failure)	(Hiew et al., 2016); (Ogolsky et al., 2017)
	Activity – Gratitude Letters	(Froh et al., 2009); (Guse, 2020); (Seligman et al., 2005); (Toepfer et al., 2012)
	Mindfulness activity	(Ansley et al., 2012); (Frank et al., 2013) (Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2020); (Hepburn et al., 2021); (Jennings et al., 2013); (Schussler, 2015); (Taylor et al., 2015)
Session 6 Meaning and accomplishment	Meaning activity Video demonstrating the importance of teachers in children's lives Focus group discussion on the value of the intervention Take-away: How to use the new knowledge in the future	Seligman (2011)
	Handing out of certificates = (accomplishment)	Seligman (2011)



	Celebration with food, music and dancing	(Robinson et al., 2019); (Van Vleet et al., 2019)

### 3.5.4 Assessment instruments used during the intervention

#### Session 1: Stress (Holmes-Rahe's Life Stress Inventory)

To measure teachers' experiences of stress, the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory assessment tool was used. This assessment tool hypothesises that stressors can be categorised based on the degree of change they often generate in people's lives (Noone, 2017). The scale includes a list of typical stressful situations and gives each stressor a value according to the seriousness of the expected emotional reaction. A score of 150 is considered favourable, indicating a low level of stress and a low risk of experiencing a stress-related disorder. According to statistics, there is an approximately 80% likelihood of being ill during the next two years if the score is 300 and above.

#### Session 2: Bullying and victimisation (Negative Attitudes Questionnaire – Revised version)

To measure experiences of workplace bullying, the revised version of the Negative Attitudes Questionnaire (NAQ) (Einarsen et al., 2009) was administered. Regarding validity, Einarsen et al. (2009, p.24) state: "Criterion validity was explored by relating the scores on the NAQ-R to a single-item measure of perceived victimisation from bullying, showing high correlations with both the total NAQ-R and scores on the three factors. Targets of bullying scored significantly higher on all 22 items compared to non-targets. The NAQ-R correlated as expected with measures of mental health, psychosocial work environment and leadership, indicating a good construct validity of the instrument. Furthermore, a latent class cluster (LCC) analysis showed that the instrument may be used to differentiate between groups of employees with different levels of exposure to bullying, ranging from infrequent exposure to incivility at work to severe victimisation from bullying and harassment." The NAQ was used interculturally in various contexts (Charilaos et al., 2015; Giorgi et al., 2013).

#### Session 3: Burnout (Burnout Assessment Tool)

The Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) (Schaufeli, Desart, et al., 2020) was administered to measure teacher burnout. Regarding the assessment tool's reliability, Schaufeli, Desart, et al. (2020, p.11) state: "Overall, the internal consistencies of the BAT-C and its four subscales were well above 0.70. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.90 to 0.92 for the subscales (i.e., exhaustion: 0.92, mental



distance: 0.91, cognitive impairment: 0.92, and emotional impairment: 0.90) and was 0.95 for the total BAT-C. For the composite BAT-S, Cronbach's alpha was 0.90, whereas, for psychological and psychosomatic complaints, values for alpha were 0.81 and 0.85, respectively." Various research studies undertaken in different cultures have used BAT as a valuable tool for obtaining information. Angelini et al. (2021) confirm the validity and reliability of the assessment, even in the Italian context. They add that the BAT provides a more complex understanding of the condition by fusing many aspects of the burnout experience. In particular, the ability to measure different burnout symptoms in such a thorough manner also enables the use of much more targeted interventions, primarily focused on those parts that were particularly challenging at that time.

#### Session 4: Personal issues (VIA character strength survey)

The VIA character strength survey (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) (<https://www.viacharacter.org/account/register>) was used to help the teachers to identify their character strengths. The six virtues are wisdom, knowledge, humanity, justice, courage, temperance and transcendence (VIA Institute of Character, 2020). The VIA Institute on Character (2020) intimates that character strengths are positive parts of our personality that make us feel authentic and engaged. If applied correctly, they can serve as motivation to accomplish goals, help to reduce stress, improve work performance, manage problems and strengthen relationships, among other things. Niemiec and Pearce (2021) explain that character strengths are constructive personality attributes that reflect a person's fundamental self, lead to favourable results for the individual and others, and serve the greater good. This is supported by Schutte and Malouff (2019) who assert that the identification and creative application of one's character strengths can enhance well-being, vitality and connectedness, all of which can improve mental health. With regard to reliability and validity, Peterson and Seligman (2004) state that all the scales of the VIA have satisfactory alphas (>.70).

### ***3.5.5 Implementation of the intervention***

#### **3.5.5.1 Participants**

To recruit teachers for participation in the implementation of the intervention, the education official was asked to post an invitation on Tshwane South's informal WhatsApp communication platform. Teachers who were interested in the intervention volunteered by contacting the researcher. A total of 58 teachers responded to the invitation and were added to the WhatsApp group created for the intervention. Fifty-two teachers attended at least one session and 21 attended four sessions.

### **3.5.5.2 Facilitators**

The six sessions were facilitated by M1 Counselling Psychology students who presented the intervention at University of Pretoria's Mamelodi Campus. Each student was tasked with developing the content for one session and then familiarising the other team members with the planned session and discussing further inputs and advice to ensure that the content was backed by evidence and of the required quality. Throughout the intervention the facilitators were conscious of the ethical principles of beneficence (doing what is in the client's best interest) and non-maleficence (the duty to do no harm), as prescribed by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (n.d.).

### **3.5.5.3 Experiential learning**

As previously mentioned, the teachers joined the intervention with a wealth of knowledge and experience. It was crucial for the team members not to act as if they were experts, but to acknowledge that the teachers were experts in their own lives and that growth and development occur during interaction and the sharing of experiences. Yalom and Molyn Leszcz (2020) refer to this as the principle of imparting information, which is a group therapy principle whereby members are encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences and how they handle certain situations, thus providing new perspectives. These aforementioned authors also state that the atmosphere in such a group setting "is one of partnership and collaboration, rather than prescription and subordination" (2020, p.19). This explains the presenters' position, which is that they acknowledge that they are collaborating with the teachers, providing a safe space to learn from each other's experiences and emphasising the importance of experiential learning.

### **3.5.5.4 Sessions over time**

The six sessions were held on set dates, of which the teachers were informed of via WhatsApp. The facilitators were divided into two groups, one of which presented sessions on Tuesdays while the other presented sessions on Thursdays, over a period of six weeks from June to October. The teachers were encouraged to remain in the group they had chosen to join (either Tuesday or Thursday). However, teachers who were unable to attend a Tuesday session were welcome to join the one on the following Thursday. To accommodate the teachers when necessary, flexibility and adaptability was essential. This proved very beneficial as, in one instance, some of the teachers could not attend their session due to strike action in their area, but did not lose out on the information shared in that session by attending the Thursday session.

### **3.5.6 Feedback from teachers**

According to Visser (2022), the purpose of evaluating an intervention is to ascertain what change had been brought about by the intervention and whether the intervention's goals had been satisfied. She explains that this can be done by using surveys and pre- and post-evaluation questionnaires, and that inferences regarding the efficiency of an intervention in achieving its goals can also be deduced from the participants' experiences and observations. The outcome of the intervention was evaluated by using feedback questionnaires and a group discussion.

#### **3.5.6.1 Feedback questionnaires**

After each session, the participants completed the feedback forms (**Appendix B**) to comment on their experience and what they had learnt. The facilitators also provided feedback on the sessions they had presented (**Appendix C**). The results of both these questionnaires are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

#### **3.5.6.2 Group discussion at the end of the intervention**

During the sixth session, the facilitators conducted a group discussion with the teachers. Coghlan et al. (2014) note that focus group discussions are used in qualitative research to improve knowledge about a specific topic or experience. They explain that participants are chosen based on their expertise and share their experiences relating to the topic of the focus group discussion. They explore the topic and interact with one another to clarify their views. The interaction effectively provides a clear understanding of the group's opinions. An audio recording of the discussion was made and the transcription that was later made to capture the information is available on request.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Content analysis was used to analyse the data (see section 3.4.4 under content analysis). Two of the M1 Counselling Psychology students interpreted the data and continuously discussed and reviewed the interpretations to ensure that they were a true reflection of the participants' communicated data. Member checking was done during the focus group discussions to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of what they had said was correct, ensuring data trustworthiness. Pyett (2003) explains that, to ensure consistency, a good researcher continuously revisits the data to verify whether the interpretation accurately reflects the participants' contributions. During this study the researcher therefore continuously reviewed the interpretation to verify it against the participants'

information gathered during discussions and from the feedback forms. The results of the interpretation are discussed in Chapter 4.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

Ethical principles emphasise that no harm should be done (maleficence) and that psychologists should at all times act in the best interest of the client (beneficence) (Health Professions Council of South Africa, n.d.). Furthermore, all people should be respected and treated with dignity (Health Professions Council of South Africa, n.d.). Ethical approval (HUM020/0822) for conducting this specific research was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria on 29 September 2022 (see **Appendix A**). This project is part of a larger project for which ethical approval (HUM010/0332) had also been obtained. Furthermore, the necessary permission to implement the project was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education and the Tshwane South District. Participant information letters explaining all aspects of the research were distributed before the commencement of the project (**Appendix D**). All the participants gave their informed consent (**Appendix E**) to confirm that their participation was voluntary. In the consent form, the teachers were informed that the information they provided would be anonymous and confidential, and would be used only for research purposes. Group norms promoted confidentiality in the group activities. In reporting on the results, no names were therefore attached to the data. The project relied heavily on the teachers' lived experiences in order to develop the most suitable intervention.

The information gathered in this research has been stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office in the Department of Psychology. The electronic data will be stored on a password-encrypted laptop. All the data will be stored for ten years (University of Pretoria, 2017).

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the action research process that was followed in doing the needs assessment, developing the intervention and implementing and evaluating it. The data analysis process and the ethical considerations were also explained. In the next chapter, the results of the implementation of this intervention will be discussed.

## Chapter 4: Results

### 4.1. Introduction

The findings of the study will be presented in this chapter. The results of the needs assessment, which formed the basis for the development of this intervention, will be shared. The feedback received after each session will be discussed, as well as the process and outcome evaluations.

### 4.2. Results of the needs assessment

Visser (2022) asserts that for change to occur during an intervention, participants must collaboratively decide on an agenda or areas of focus that speak to their lived experiences. The needs assessment survey allowed the teachers' voices to be heard and included in the development of the intervention. The results of the needs assessment survey, which was completed by 39 teachers, are discussed in detail below. It is important to note that some teachers gave more than one response to some questions.

#### 4.2.1. Question 1: What challenges do you as a teacher experience that can negatively influence your psychological well-being? (These can be personal or work-related, or both)

The teachers mentioned a number of challenges that they face, as indicated in Figure 4.1. Since these challenges affect their psychological well-being and possibly their performance, they need to be addressed.

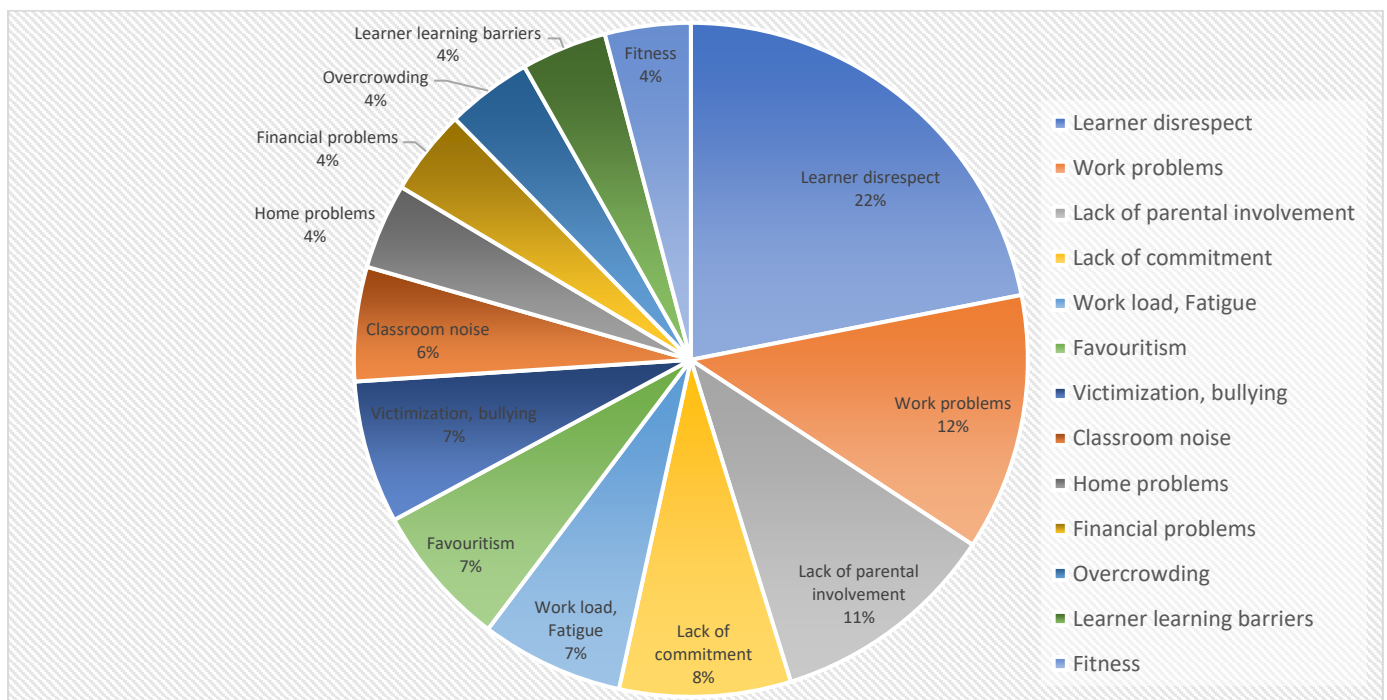


Figure 4. 1 - Challenges experienced by teachers (n=39)

The needs assessment exercise revealed multiple challenges experienced by teachers in the course of their work. The most prominent challenge was learner disrespect, which is most probably due to low levels of discipline. However, this might also be linked to a lack of parental involvement, which was rated as the third most important challenge. The lack of parental involvement suggests that parents may be unaware of their children’s behaviour at school and their performance. The second highest contributor to stress was work-related problems, which may be linked to several problems in the workplace, such as bullying, favouritism, workload, high levels of administrative work and many demands from the district office to attend various workshops while still being expected to meet all deadlines. Although some of these issues may not be addressed directly in the intervention, it is important to equip teachers with coping strategies to mitigate these issues and thus reduce their stress levels and improve their psychological well-being.

**4.2.2. Question 2: How do these challenges influence you as a person?**

It is expected that the abovementioned challenges will impact the lives of teachers. As seen in Figure 4.2, the impact varies from low energy levels to physiological effects, which prevent teachers from functioning optimally.

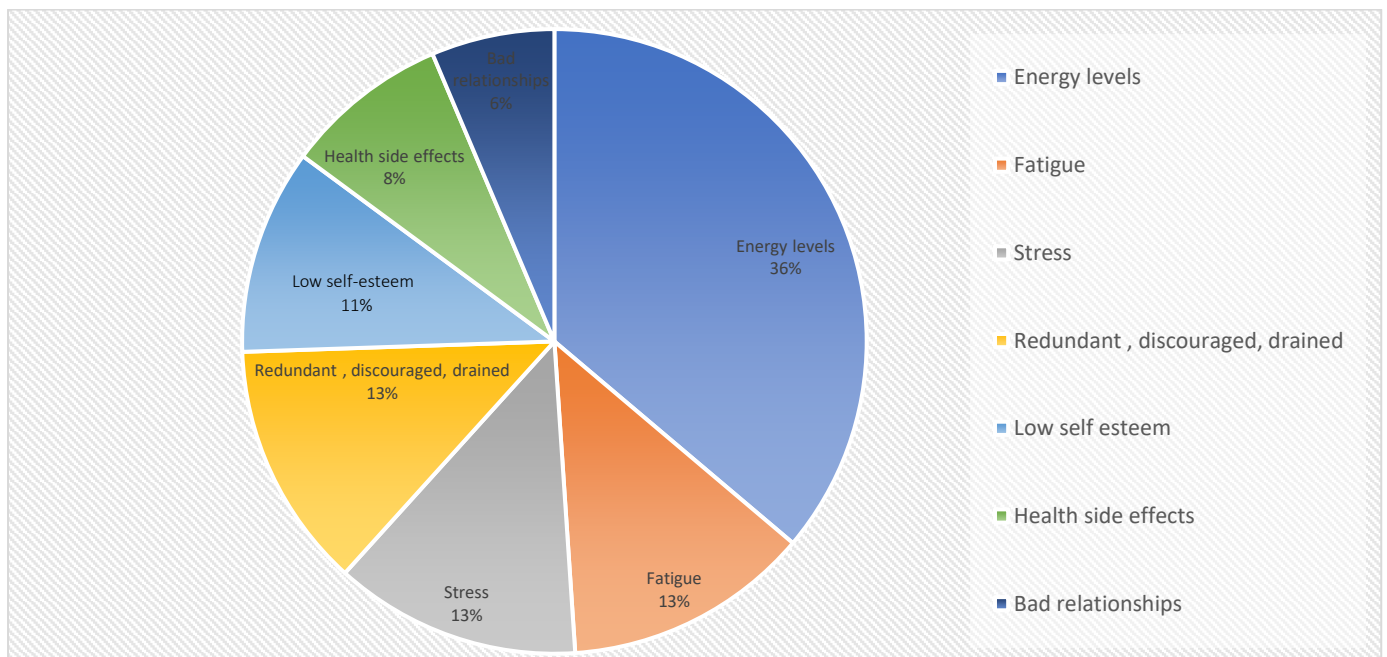


Figure 4. 2 – Effects of challenges on teachers

The challenges mentioned by the teachers often have associated effects. The leading effects, as indicated, is low energy levels, fatigue, discouragement and stress that affect teachers. This indicates the probable presence of burnout. Schaufeli (2020) explains that burnout can coexist with a feeling of depression, causing a decrease in productivity. Teachers who feel discouraged cannot perform

optimally. This may cause them to feel redundant, which will affect their self-esteem. All these conditions impact their stress levels and affect their physical health (Schneiderman et al., 2005).

#### 4.2.3. Question 3: How do you currently cope with these challenges?

Regarding this question, it was interesting to gauge how teachers responded to their challenges, given that the intention was to provide a working intervention for them. Teachers highlighted several beneficial coping strategies to be considered in the development of the intervention (Figure 4.3).

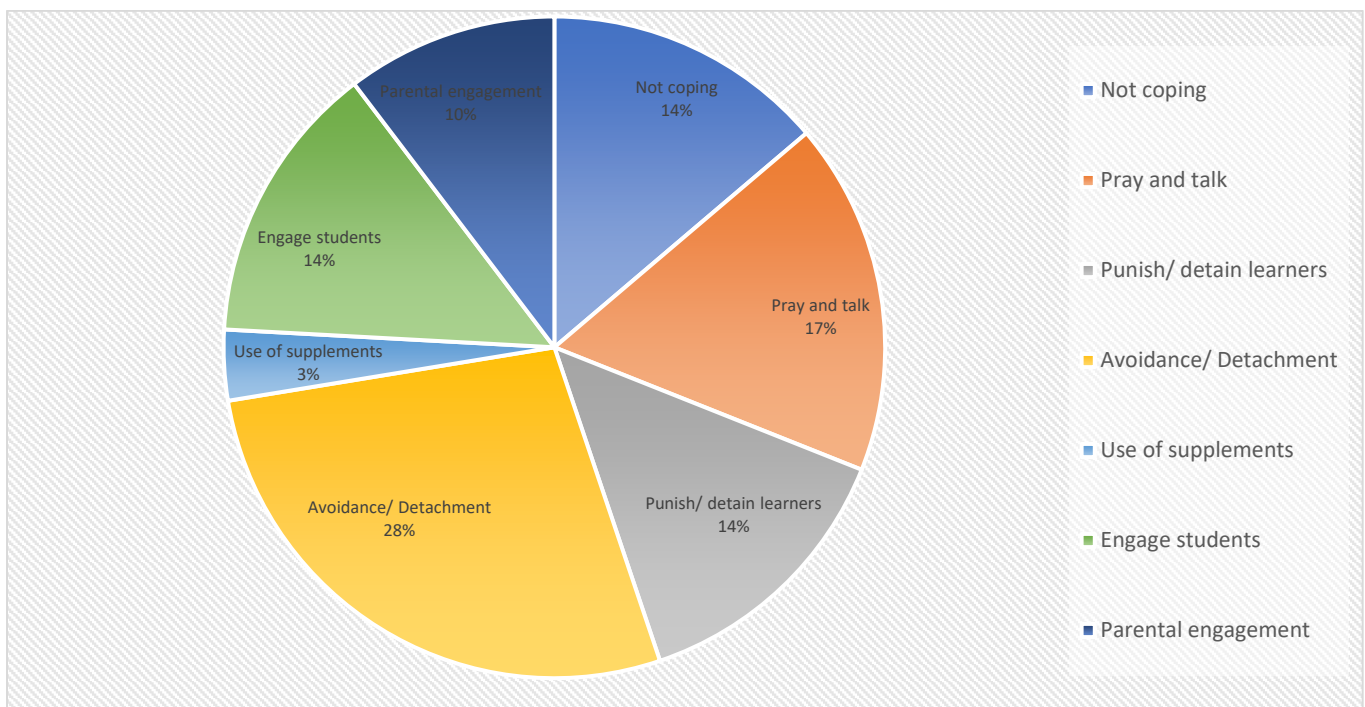


Figure 4. 3 – Coping strategies

Herman et al. (2017) state that when people find themselves in stressful situations, they usually respond by employing certain strategies. The teachers confirmed that they used coping strategies to deal with the challenges they faced. However, it is important to note that the most-used coping strategy employed by teachers (28%) was avoidance/detachment, which Melodia (2020) describes as a maladaptive coping strategy. Another maladaptive strategy that emerged from the results was the use of substances such as alcohol (3%) and simply not coping (14%). However, some teachers did employ certain adaptive coping strategies during stressful situations, such as parental engagement (10%), praying and positive self-talk (17%), which helped them to cope. It is important to differentiate between adaptive and maladaptive coping.

The impact of unruly learners on the teaching process must also be addressed (Jacob & Aloka, 2023; Potgieter-Groot et al., 2012). Jacob and Aloka (2023) emphasise the need to manage unruly



learner behaviour and the need for teachers to be empowered to be able to do so (Potgieter-Groot et al., 2012). The results revealed that some teachers who participated in our research used punishment or detention to discipline learners who behaved badly, and perhaps to lower stress, which is a debatable solution. All of the above emphasise the need to empower teachers with the adaptive coping skills needed to address their various challenges.

#### 4.2.4. Question 4: How can we, as psychologists, help to promote your psychological well-being?

To ensure that the intervention would be suited to the teachers’ needs, it was important to understand what kind of help they required to promote their psychological well-being. Teachers listed some possible solutions (Figure 4.4) and the researcher aimed to evaluate those and integrate them appropriately into the intervention.

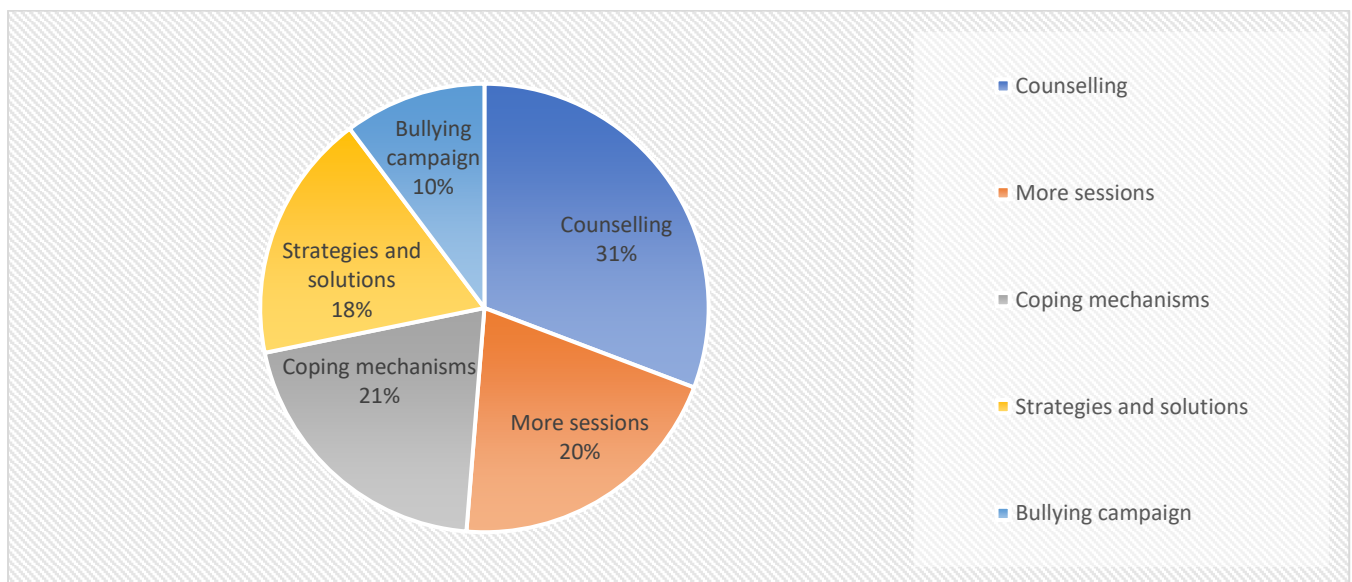


Figure 4. 4 – Desired intervention

The teachers stated that psychological support services were essential to help them deal with their inability to cope effectively in stressful situations. Thirty-one percent indicated that they would like to receive counselling services. They also felt that more counselling sessions were needed and should focus on learning about coping mechanisms. Also, 18% of the responses highlighted the need for strategies and solutions that can empower teachers to deal with various challenges that cause stress and impact their psychological well-being. Teachers also asked for interventions related to bullying. Therefore, the intervention emphasises equipping teachers with coping strategies and problem-solving skills. As recommended in Chapter 5, these results can be used to emphasise the need for readily available school counselling services for teachers and learners.



#### 4.2.5. Summary

At this stage the intervention did not address all the challenges experienced by teachers, for example issues regarding the school system and problems in the community. Focusing on what was within the teachers' control to change, the psychology students discussed the needs assessment results in detail and agreed that, based on those results, the intervention should consist of six sessions that addressed the following topics: Stress management, bullying and victimisation, burnout and time management, personal issues, relationships, and meaning and accomplishment. The content of the intervention was briefly outlined in Chapter 3 and can be seen in **Appendix F**.

#### 4.3. Feedback on each session of the intervention

Since it was important for the research to ensure that the intervention would address the teachers' needs and would have a positive impact, considerable effort was put into consulting relevant literature to find appropriate and relevant theories and models to assist with the development of a suitable intervention. Having achieved this, it was crucial to explore the participants' responses to the questions in the feedback forms completed after each session, which will be discussed in detail below.

The teachers' feedback after each session was analysed to determine whether the content of each session appropriately addressed the teachers' experiences of stress. This data can also be used to understand how the teachers benefitted from the intervention and any areas of improvement.

##### 4.3.1 *Session 1 - Stress management*

This session aimed to help the participants to understand what stress is and how to cope with it. Thereafter, through psychoeducation, coping mechanisms that could mitigate their stress were discussed. The balloon activity that followed was planned to encourage the teachers to think about their goals and write them down on the balloons, after which they had to become physically active by racing towards the finish line while kicking, hitting or using any other action they could think of to get their balloons past the finishing line. This exercise highlighted the fact that although teachers may have a plan to get the balloon to the finish line (i.e. how to achieve their goals), things sometimes do not go according to plan, which may cause stress and frustration. However, it is important for teachers to not be discouraged by the challenges, but to find alternative ways of coping with them to still reach their goals. This was a valuable exercise as it allowed the teachers to explore their goals and aspirations, and to observe how each teacher engaged in the activity differently although they all wanted to ultimately reach the finish line. They also learned that there is no need to compare oneself with others as they are all unique and could strive to attain their goals in their own unique ways. The session was

concluded with a mindfulness exercise. The results of the responses to the four questions were as follows:

#### 4.3.1.1. Question 1.1: What content was presented?

Figure 4.5 depicts the frequency of responses from the 49 teachers who attended the first session. Most of the teachers indicated that the session had focused on coping strategies, stress and stress management, and identifying their stressors and goals.

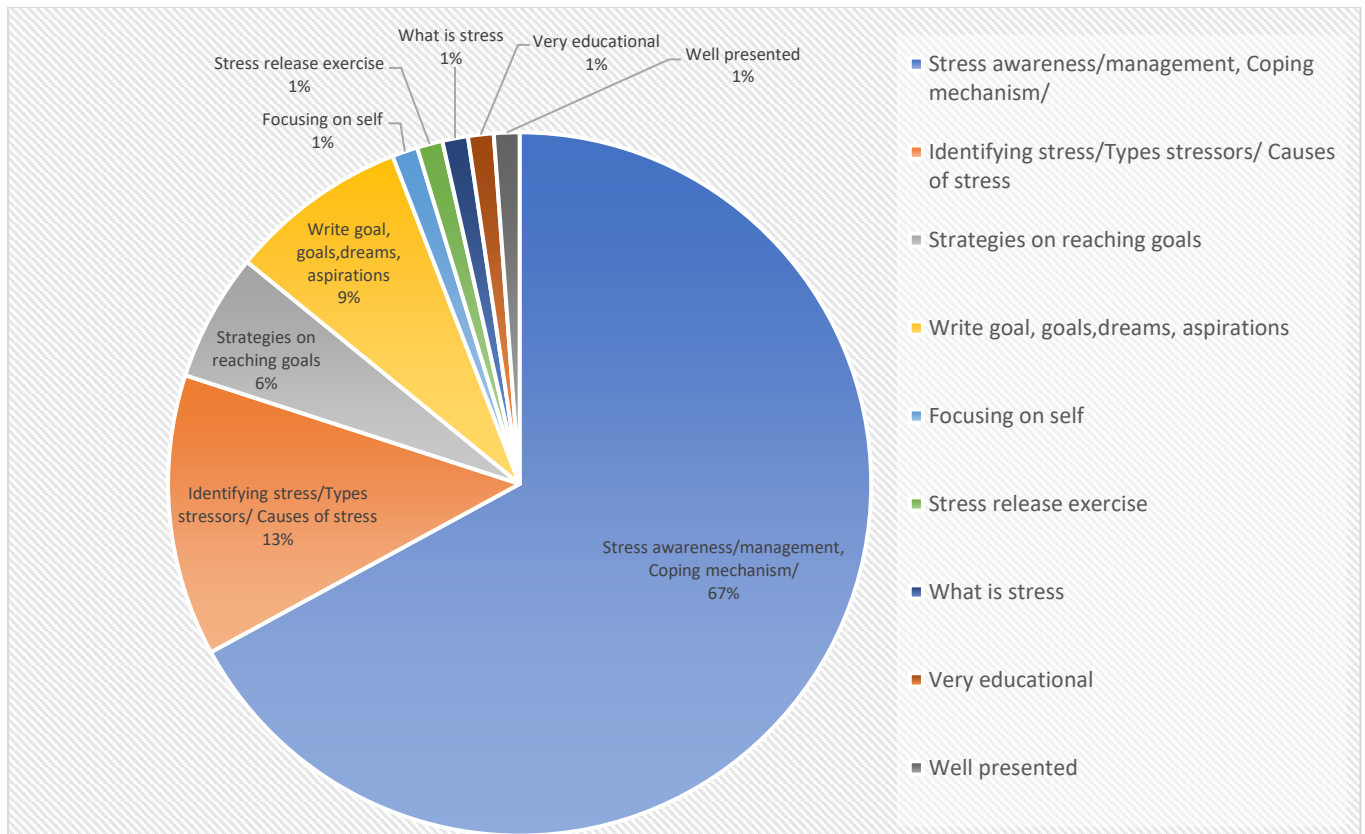


Figure 4. 5 – Stress content presented

The above chart (Figure 4.5) clearly shows that issues identified during the needs assessment stage were addressed in this session. The needs assessment revealed that teachers have stressors that must be dealt with. Therefore, in this session stress awareness, stress management and coping strategies were the most common topics. It is important to understand that people can experience stress without being aware of it. This session equipped teachers with ways of identifying signs of stress and the different types of coping (adaptive and maladaptive), and shared adaptive coping strategies to help them function optimally despite those stressors.

### 4.3.1.2. Question 1.2: What is the most important thing you have learnt in this session?

As can be seen in Figure 4.6, the most important thing the teachers learnt was how to find coping strategies they could use to change their personal situations, how to identify stress and how to incorporate play and relaxation in their daily lives. There was also a focus on goals and the participants were reminded that everyone has challenges/stress and that they are not alone, but should not take responsibility for other people’s stress.

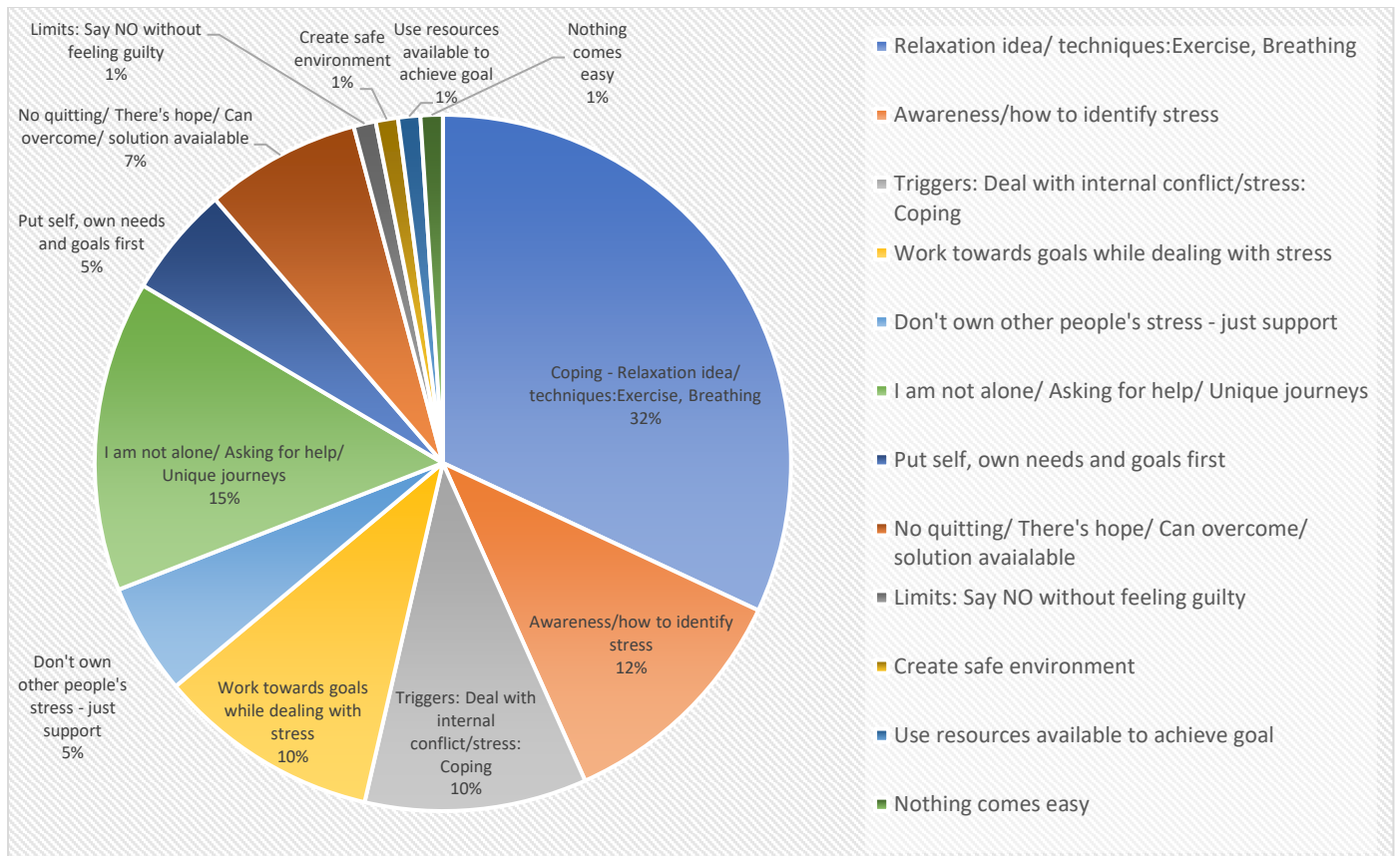


Figure 4. 6 – Content learnt from the session

The highlighting of the important elements that teachers have learnt resonates with their needs assessment, especially with regard to relaxation techniques, the identification of stress, asking for help and dealing with triggers of stress and internal conflicts which, combined, amounted to 76% of the responses. It also became evident that some teachers had thought about giving up on their dreams or goals by quitting teaching because of the stress. The difficulty of working towards one’s goals while dealing with stress, which was mentioned in 5% of the responses, demotivates and can increase stress levels. The balloon activity emphasised the importance of not giving up when facing challenges, but finding alternative means to attain goals. As alluded to in the needs assessment, teachers concurred that asking for help (by talking to friends and praying) to deal with stress triggers (for example

learner disrespect and parental non-involvement), as well as focusing on goals, are important to them. This underpins the importance of the sessions to the teachers.

### 4.3.1.3. Question 1.3 How can you use it in your work or personal life?

This section was intended to help teachers to apply their minds on how they can implement the content they have learnt to help them confront the stressors they face, thereby improving their psychological well-being (Figure 4.7).

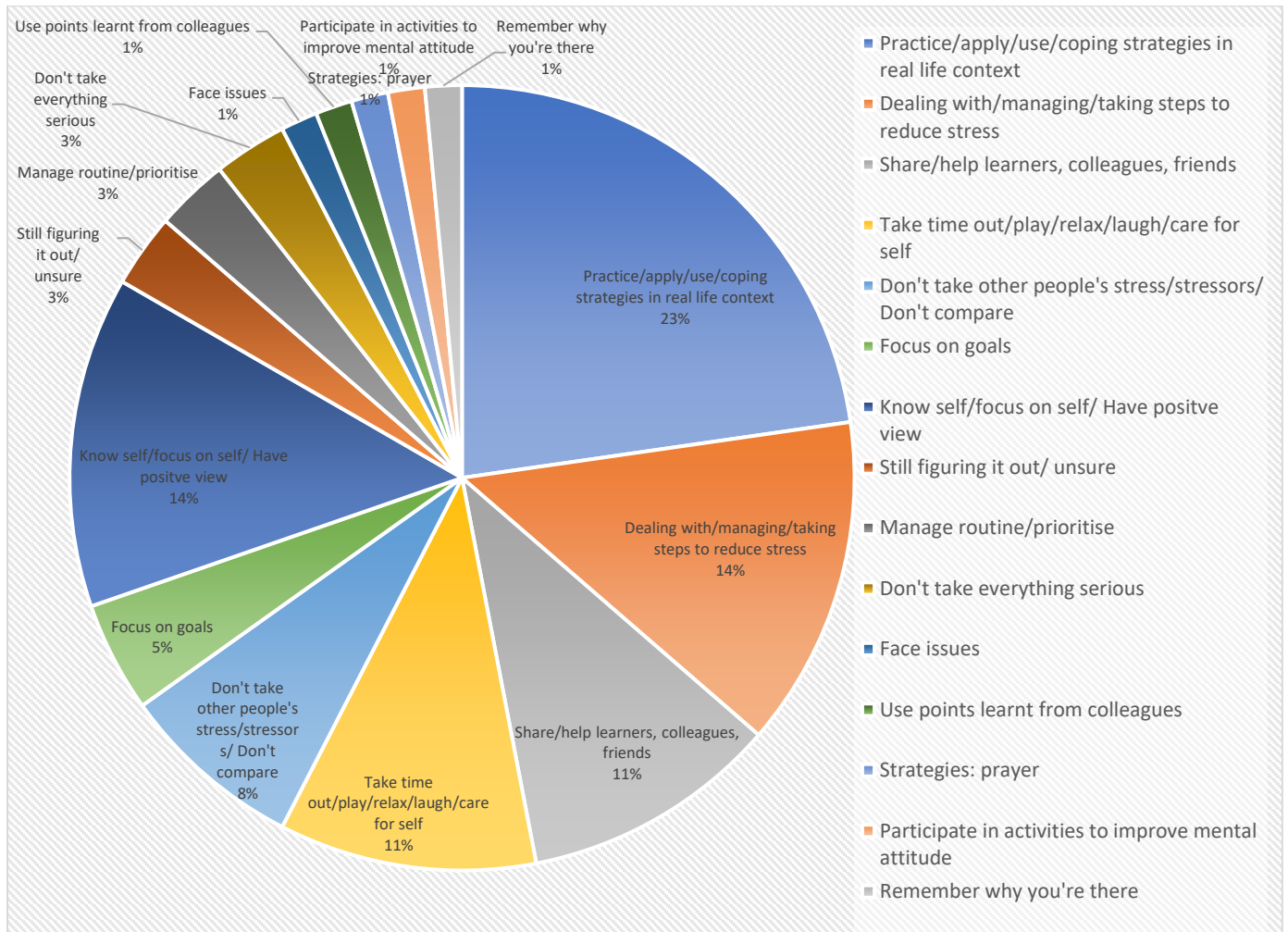


Figure 4. 7 – Application of content learnt

It was important to understand how teachers would apply what they had learnt in their own particular situations. Here they indicated that they understood that there is always a way out in every difficult situation and that they had to start taking the initiative and dealing with problems head-on. Only 1% of responses reflected a willingness to confront issues. Positives can be drawn from these responses as 15% of the participating teachers indicated that they had applied coping strategies in real-life situations and 9% indicated a “focus on the self”, and that they had taken steps to reduce stress. Equally important was that 7% alluded to sharing and helping others as one way of dealing with

stressful situations, while a further 7% mentioned the importance of taking time out to enjoy relaxation activities to recharge and have a different perspective, which confirmed the practical applicability of the content learnt.

#### 4.3.1.4. Question 1.4 How can the session be improved?

Figure. 4.8 depicts teachers’ responses to the content offered. A general overview shows that the session on stress management had been well received. Notably, the figure demonstrates the desire expressed by some teachers to have presentation manuals and more sessions as an indication that they needed further support to help them apply what they had learnt.

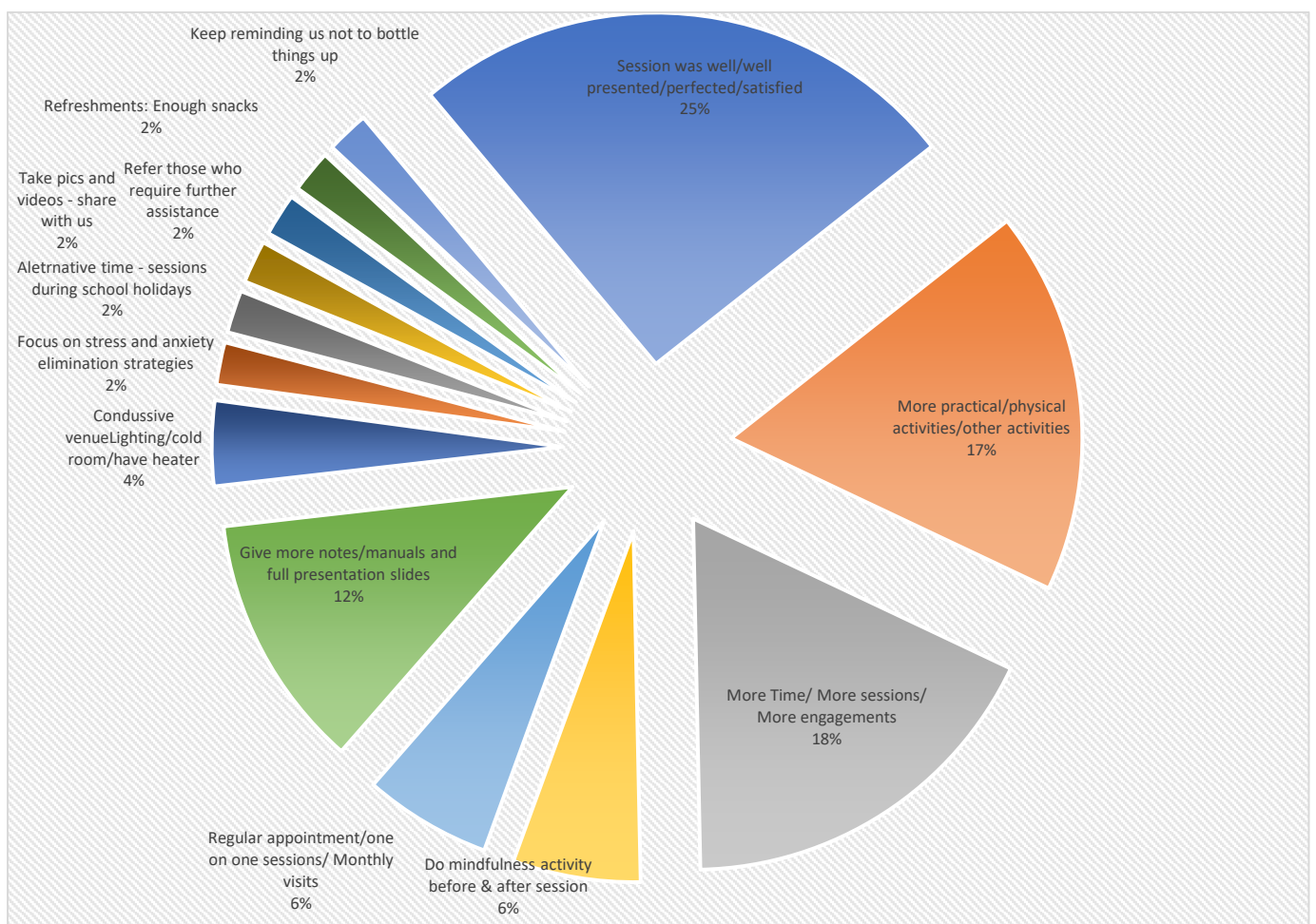


Figure 4. 8 – Session feedback

The above chart presents teachers’ responses at the end of the session. It is important to note the general acceptance and understanding by teachers who felt that the content had been well presented. While 25% percent of the responses indicated that the content had been successfully presented, 9% indicated that the sessions should have been more practical and that more sessions were needed. The

presentation had clearly been important to the teachers and 6% of the responses reflected a need for full presentation slides and manuals that they could study for further understanding and application, as well as for more mindfulness activities. Lastly, teachers indicated the need to focus on stress and anxiety and for referrals and counselling sessions on a one-on-one basis to help them to deal with the stressful situations they face.

#### **4.3.1.5 Stress Management Questionnaire**

To analyse the extent of the stress experiences, the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) was administered during Session 1. The results revealed that most teachers were at risk of a major health breakdown in the next two years. Only 29% of the participating teachers had low susceptibility to stress-induced health breakdowns, while 51% had a 50% chance of major health breakdowns and 20% had an 80% chance of experiencing major health breakdowns in the next two years. Overall, 71% of the teachers present were at risk.

#### **4.3.1.6. Summary**

Session 1 confirmed the stressors teachers faced and the results obtained from the stress management questionnaire supported this. The results also revealed the desire of teachers to manage those stressors and to function optimally, not only in their occupations, but also in their private lives. The intervention was received with enthusiasm and the teachers were hopeful that they would receive help. However, at the end of the session it became evident that more needed to be done when some teachers indicated that they would like to have manuals and slides to study in their own time, as well as further group and individual counselling sessions. This session enhanced teachers' coping strategies, as evidenced by their desire to engage in sessions, focus on their goals and confront issues, and their eagerness to share the knowledge gained with learners, among others. By the end of the session, the teachers had acquired skills needed to identify stress, stress management techniques and coping strategies.

#### **4.3.2. Session 2 - Bullying and victimisation**

In Session 2, the aim was to educate teachers on bullying and victimisation in the workplace with a view to enabling them to identify and manage such behaviour. This topic was essential to promote teachers' psychological well-being and performance. According to findings by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health Safety (CCOHS) (2019), bullying at the workplace impacts employees physically and results in symptoms such as sleep deprivation and loss of appetite. Psychologically, the

symptoms include difficulty concentrating, loss of confidence, helplessness, panic, stress and anxiety (CCOHS, 2019). These symptoms increase teachers' stress levels and negatively affect their psychological well-being. Emphasis was placed on knowing your rights, being assertive and standing up for yourself and others.

The teachers were asked to complete the Negative Attitudes Questionnaire so that the extent of their experiences of bullying or victimisation at the workplace could be analysed (Einarsen et al., 2009). The results will be discussed in section 4.3.2.5.

First, we will look at the results based on the responses to the questions in the feedback forms. It is important to note that for this particular session, the teachers did not manually complete printed feedback forms, but were instead asked to complete the feedback form online, as the session had taken longer than the scheduled time. Although eighteen teachers had attended the session, only ten completed the feedback form online, which was a lesson learnt by the teams. For the following sessions hard copies were again used to gather the information needed. The results of the responses from the ten teachers who completed the feedback questionnaire online are discussed below.

#### 4.3.2.1. Question 2.1: What content was presented?

Figure 4.9 depicts the percentage of each of the responses captured. In this session, the majority of the teachers felt that the content presented dealt with bullying and victimisation, while others also mentioned how to deal with bullying and victimisation and stress management as topics that had been discussed.

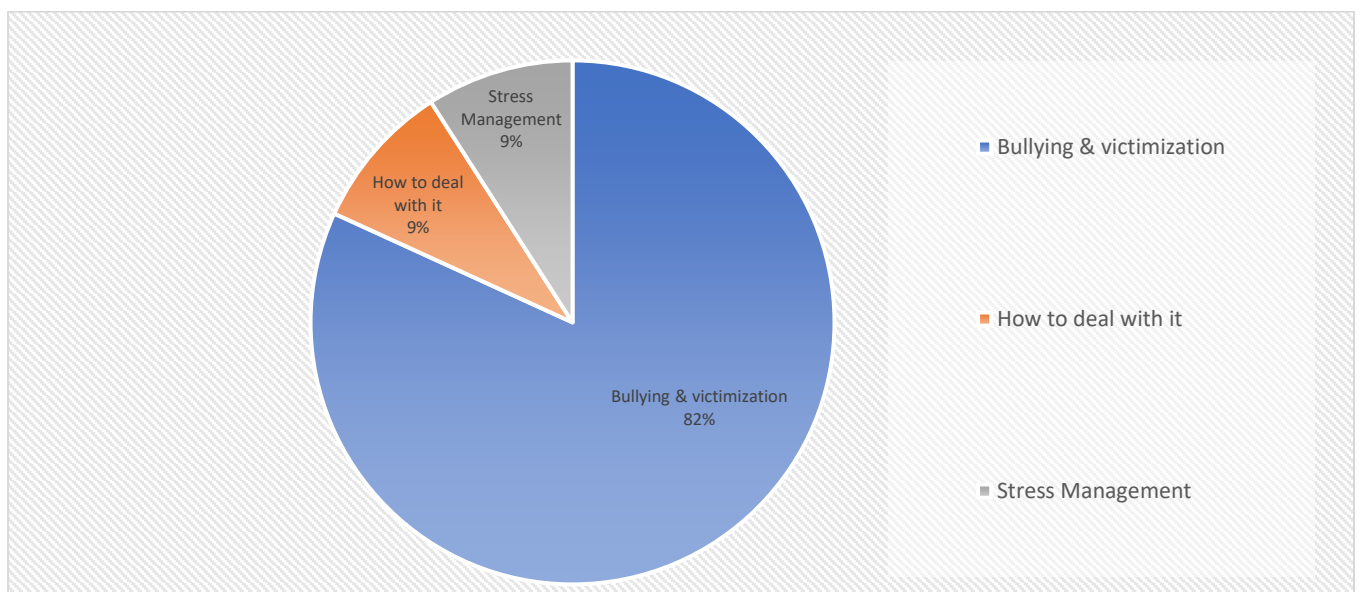


Figure 4. 9 – Content presented on Bullying and Victimisation



The fact that bullying and victimisation lead to undesirable symptoms and stress underscores the importance of this topic. The content presented was clear, as indicated by 82% percent of responses (Fig. 4.9), and was structured in such a way that it incorporated dealing with stress arising as a result of bullying, so that teachers dealing with bullying that is outside their control could also be equipped with skills to manage its effects. Their responses to the following question reflected the content addressed and the teachers’ understanding of it.

**4.3.2.2. Question 2.2: What is the most important thing you have learnt in the session?**

Figure 4.10 summarises some of the responses from teachers, detailing how they can identify and effectively manage incidents of bullying and victimisation.

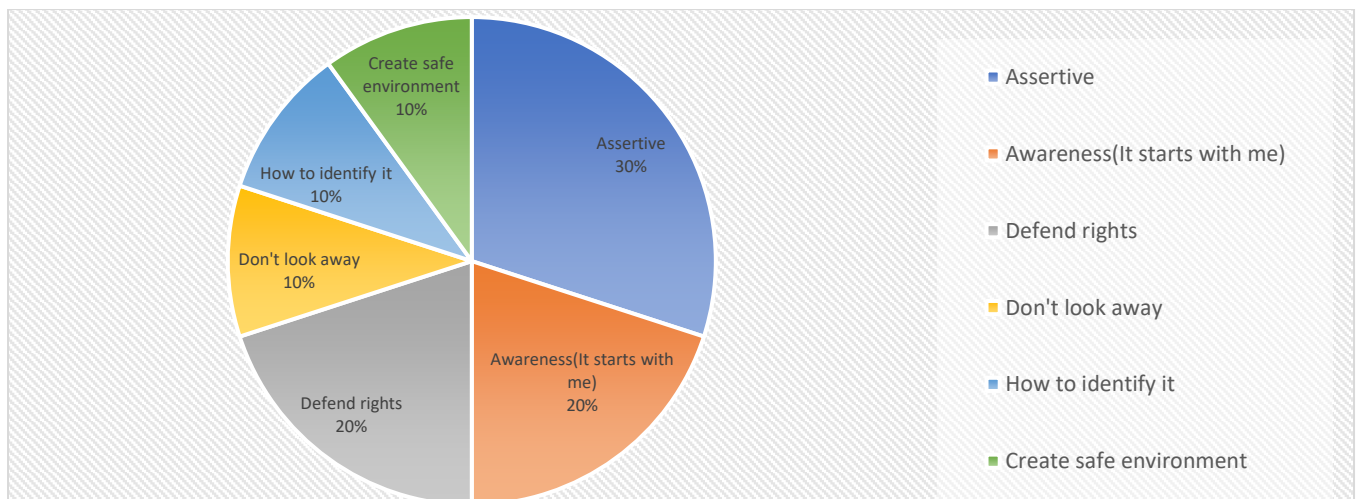


Figure 4. 10 – Content learnt from the session on bullying and victimisation

The participating teachers learned that assertiveness is critical to overcoming bullying and victimisation. This highlights the importance of early warning signs, which can be spotted by conducting awareness campaigns (education) and realising that “it all starts with me”, thereby ending the cycle of bullying and victimisation, whether by colleagues or the School Management Team (SMT) members. Ten percent of the responses indicated that the teachers were able to identify bullying, to take steps to end it (not to look away) and, most importantly, to create a safe space that discourages this phenomenon and improves their psychological and physical well-being.

**4.3.2.3. Question 2.3 How can you use it in your work or personal life?**

The application of the content learned is integral to dealing with bullying and victimisation in the workplace. The teachers reflected on the responses below as ways to apply what they had learnt about how to deal with bullying and victimisation.



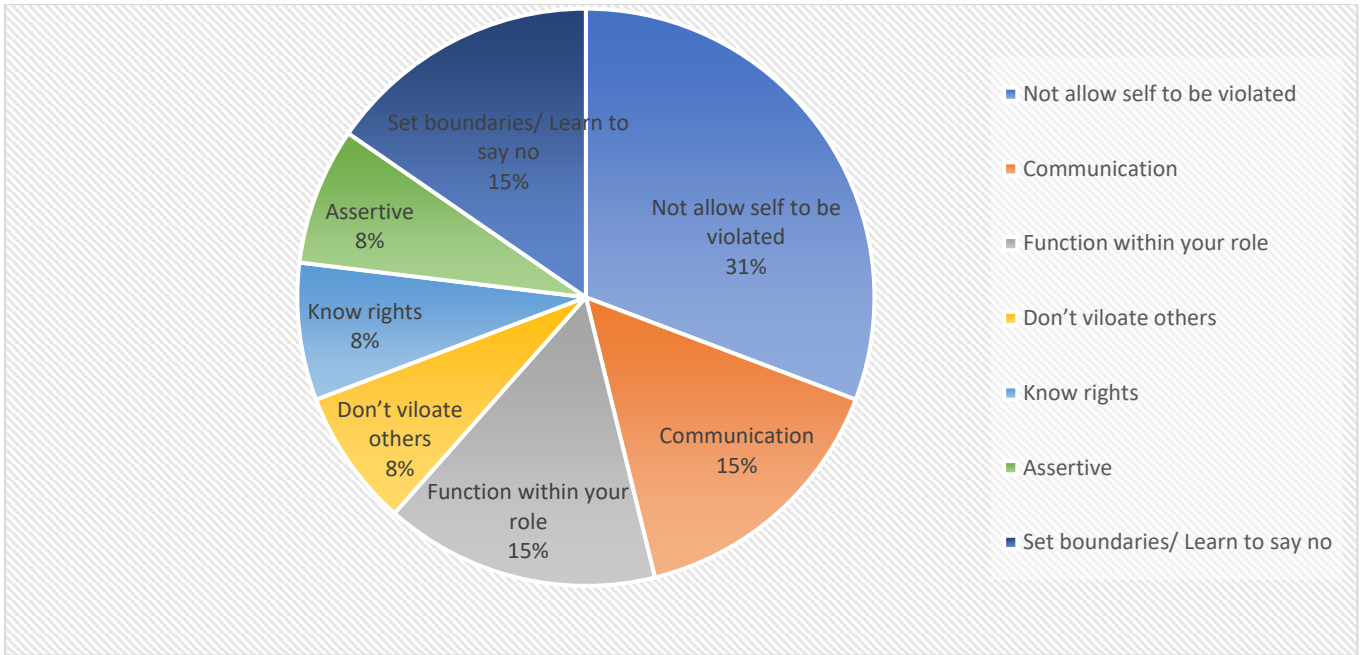


Figure 4. 11 – Application of content learnt

As can be seen in Figure 4.11) above, 31% of the responses indicated that people should not tolerate being violated, which highlights the fact that teachers are serious about stopping the bullying and victimisation. However, this rests highly on teachers knowing their rights and being determined to assert them at all times. At the same time, the responses highlighted the importance of communication (15%) and working in a collective and functioning effectively in your role (15%). Clear and proper communication helps to ensure effectiveness and is beneficial to any teamwork. If you clearly understand your role in the collective and know exactly what is expected of you, you can make a meaningful impact and be productive. The responses also emphasised the importance of setting boundaries and learning to say NO without having to justifying oneself or feeling guilty (15%).

#### 4.3.2.4. Question 2.4 How can the session be improved?

The success of the session was measured by requesting the teachers to comment on the overall presentation of the session. Their responses indicated their desire to learn more and how well they had received the session.

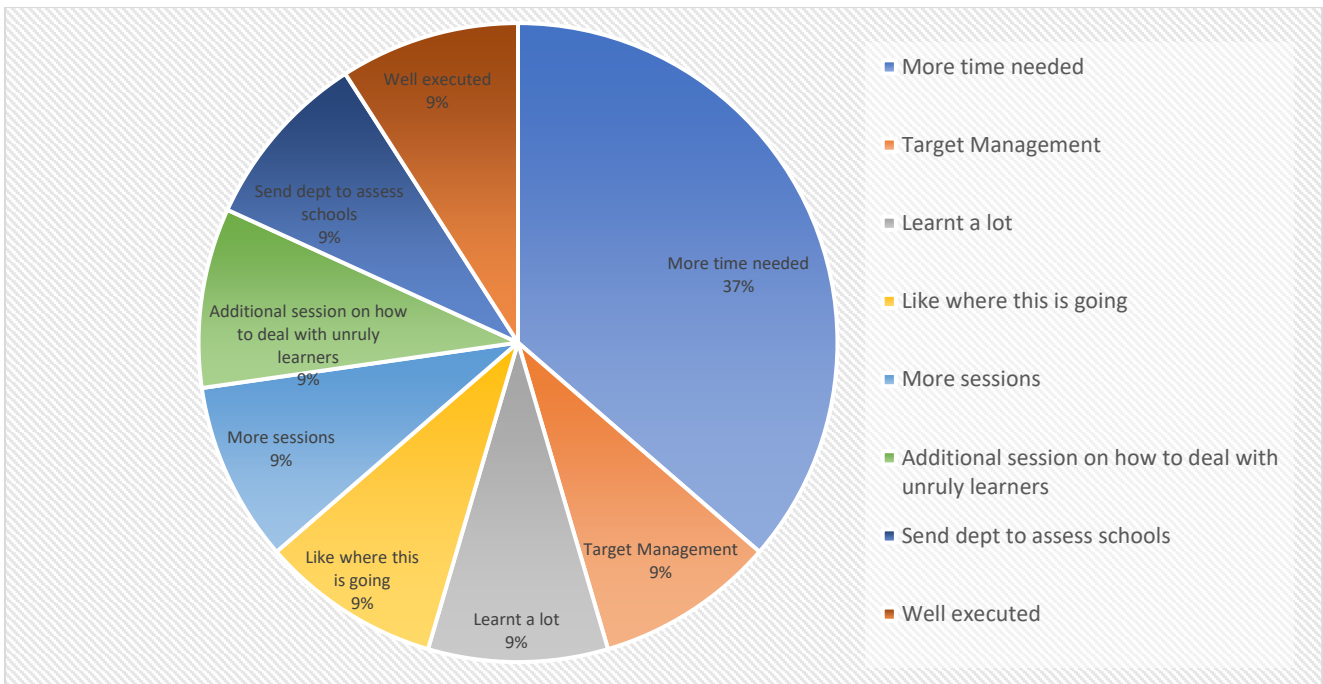


Figure 4. 12 – Session results on bullying and victimisation

The responses indicated that 46% participants felt that more time should have been spent on this topic and that the session should also be presented to school managements, since for transformation to be embraced, managements should encourage changes from the higher level. In their opinion, the creation of a safe and bully-free working environment does not depend on teachers alone, but also requires managements to take a non-negotiable stance by refusing to tolerate any form of bullying and victimisation, and implementing strict measures to discourage such behaviour. The teachers also highlighted the need for additional sessions on dealing with unruly learners, a theme that emerged during the needs assessment. Overall, 27% of the respondents stated that they had learnt a lot, appreciated the content and felt that it had been well presented.

#### 4.3.2.5. Negative Acts Questionnaire

The responses to the questions in the Negative Acts Questionnaire showed whether and how frequently respondents had experienced bullying (Einarsen et al., 2009). While 18% did not answer the question, the results indicated that 59% of the participating teachers had experienced bullying, while 22% had never experienced it. The above figures emphasised the importance of addressing this theme. Furthermore, the scale was found to be valuable in helping teachers to learn more about themselves and identifying negative acts in their work environment.

#### 4.3.2.6. Summary

In general, teachers responded well to the session as bullying and victimisation are factors that contribute to stress experienced in the workplace. The session confirmed the prevalence of bullying and victimisation, supported by the NAQ that revealed that 59% of teachers who completed it had experienced some level of bullying. Teachers felt that this information must be shared with school management to make them aware of the situation and perhaps alter their mindset, and also proposed that representatives of the Department should visit schools to assess levels of bullying. However, what was important was what the teachers gained from the session, such as learning to be assertive, knowing their rights, learning to say no, the value of communication and clear boundaries, and their undertaking to implement these skills, which may help them to cope with and avoid bullying and victimisation.

#### 4.3.3 Session 3 - Burnout and time management

In Session 3, the focus was on burnout and time management. Burnout, according to the World Health Organization (n.d. para. 4), “is a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed”. The session, aimed at explaining to the teachers what burnout is, what signs to look out for, their level of burnout and, most importantly, how to deal with it, which included time management, self-care and exercise as essential skills. The responses received from the 19 teachers who completed the feedback questionnaire are given percentages in Figure 4.13.

##### 4.3.3.1. Question 3.1: What content was presented?

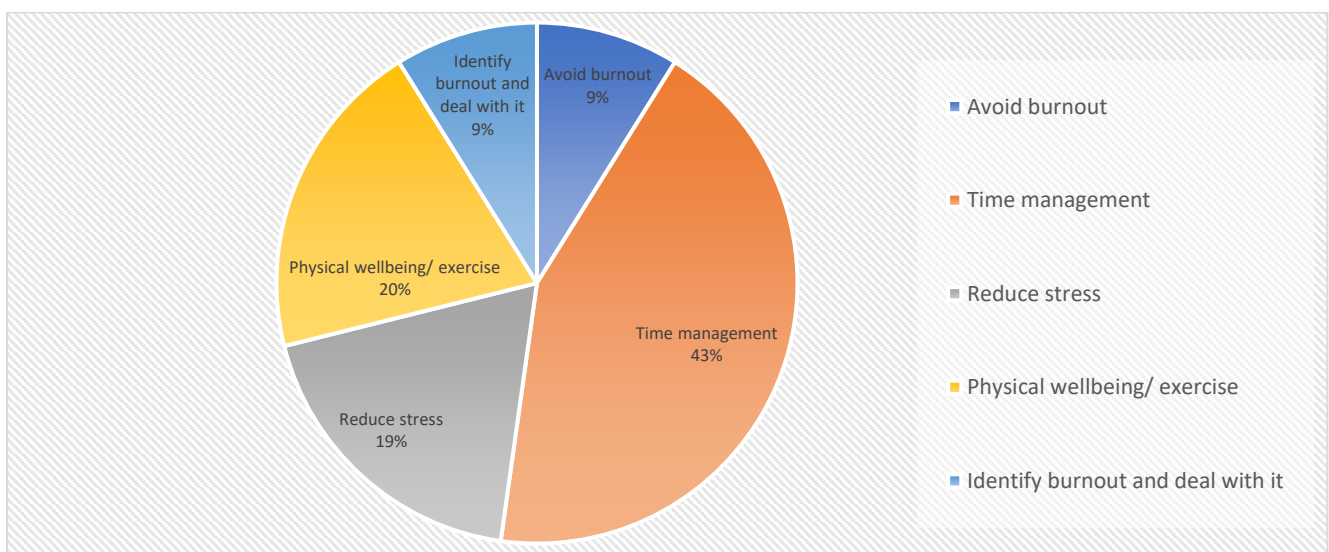


Figure 4. 13 – Burnout content

Figure 3.1 illustrates the teachers’ responses regarding their experience of the content presented in Session 3. Due to a lack of coping strategies such as proper planning and time management, people can feel overburdened with work and unable to cope, which results in some of the following symptoms: feeling drained and unable to complete a task, irritability, difficulty concentrating and poor physical or mental cognitive performance. The session focused on time management as a coping skill to reduce stress and possibly minimise burnout, as indicated by 43% of responses received. Other stress reduction techniques, such as physical exercise and how to identify and manage burnout, were also highlighted. By addressing stress with adaptive coping, burnout might also be alleviated.

#### 4.3.3.2. Question 3.2: What is the most important thing you have learned in the session?

It was important to measure what teachers had learnt from the session. Their responses regarding what they had learnt varied, but also reflected the need for coping strategies to enable teachers to perform optimally in their work.

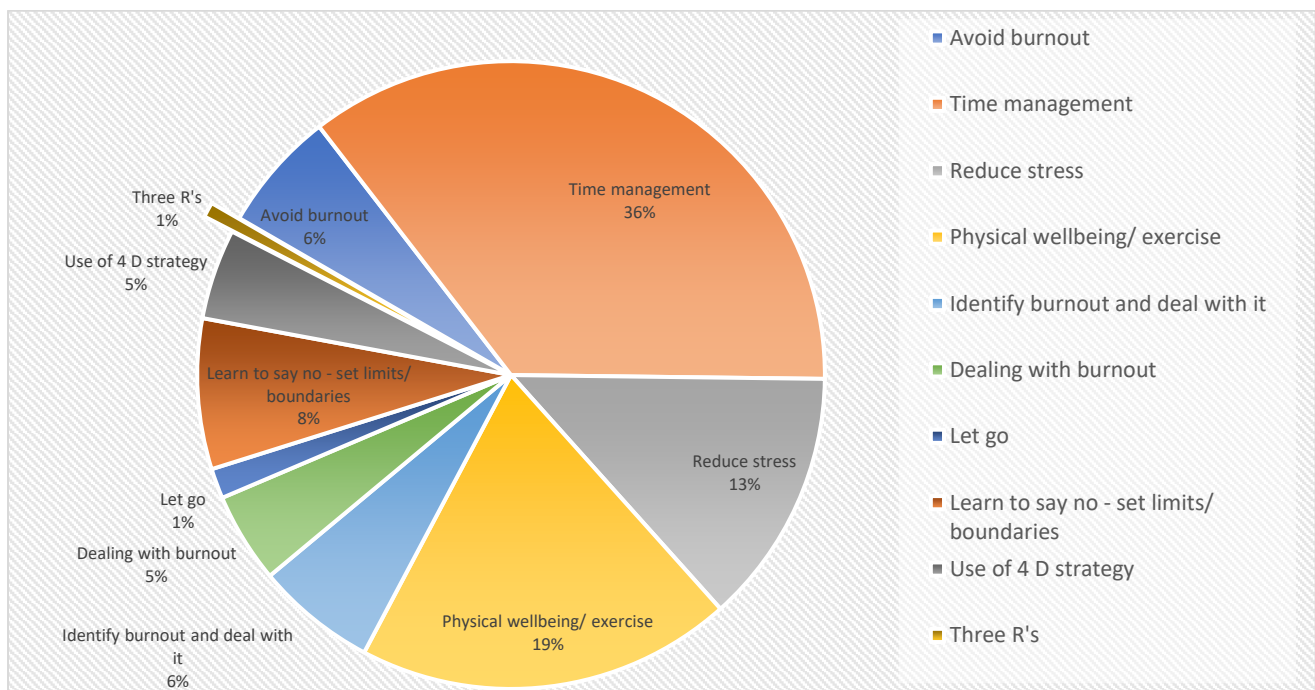


Figure 4. 14 – Content learned during the burnout session

As can be seen in Figure 4.14, the most important things the teachers had learnt, based on their responses, were the value of time management (36%) and physical exercise (19%). These are crucial skills, since with proper planning and time management confidence is gained with regard to their ability to complete. Coping strategies for dealing with burnout, including the 3Rs (recognise, reverse and resilience) and the 4Ds (do, decide, delegate and delete), which emphasise the need to work smarter, not harder, were also highlighted.

### 4.3.3.3. Question 3.3 How can you use it in your work or personal life?

In this session, teachers displayed their understanding of the content learnt and gave input on how they would manage burnout.

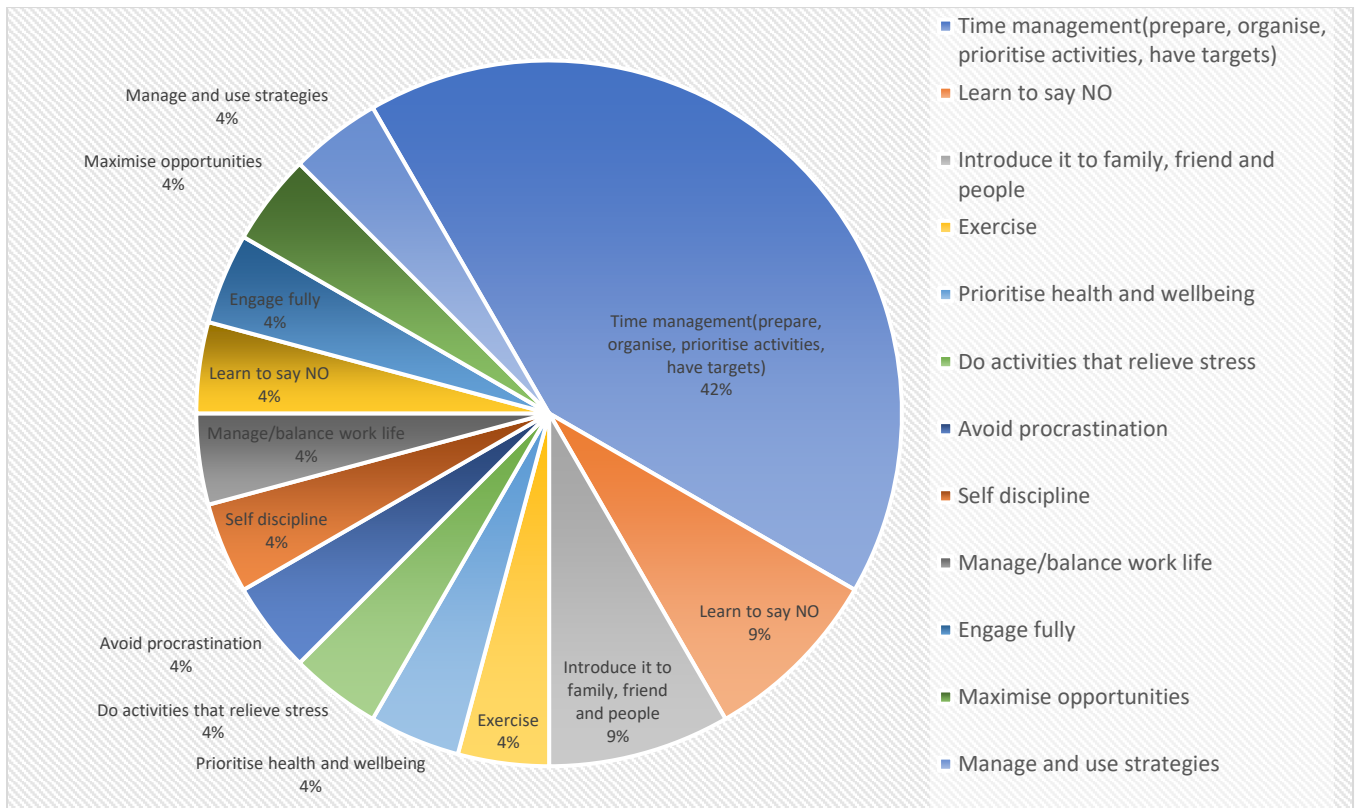


Figure 4. 15 – Application of information learnt

Forty-two percent of the responses pointed to time management as essential for mitigating burnout, indicating that the majority felt overwhelmed by their workloads and struggled to manage their time appropriately. Therefore, the intervention sought to, among other things, remind teachers of the importance of time management and “learning to say no” to ensure that they do not take on more than they can handle, thereby avoiding the feeling of burnout. Another 4% of the responses referred to work-life balance (4%) as important. Without proper balance, there is a risk of succeeding in one area at the expense of another. Finally, teachers mentioned the value of engaging in stress-relieving activities, which promote mental well-being.

### 4.3.3.4. Question 3.4 How can the session be improved?

It was important to gauge from the teachers how the session could be improved to ensure that their needs were best addressed throughout the intervention.

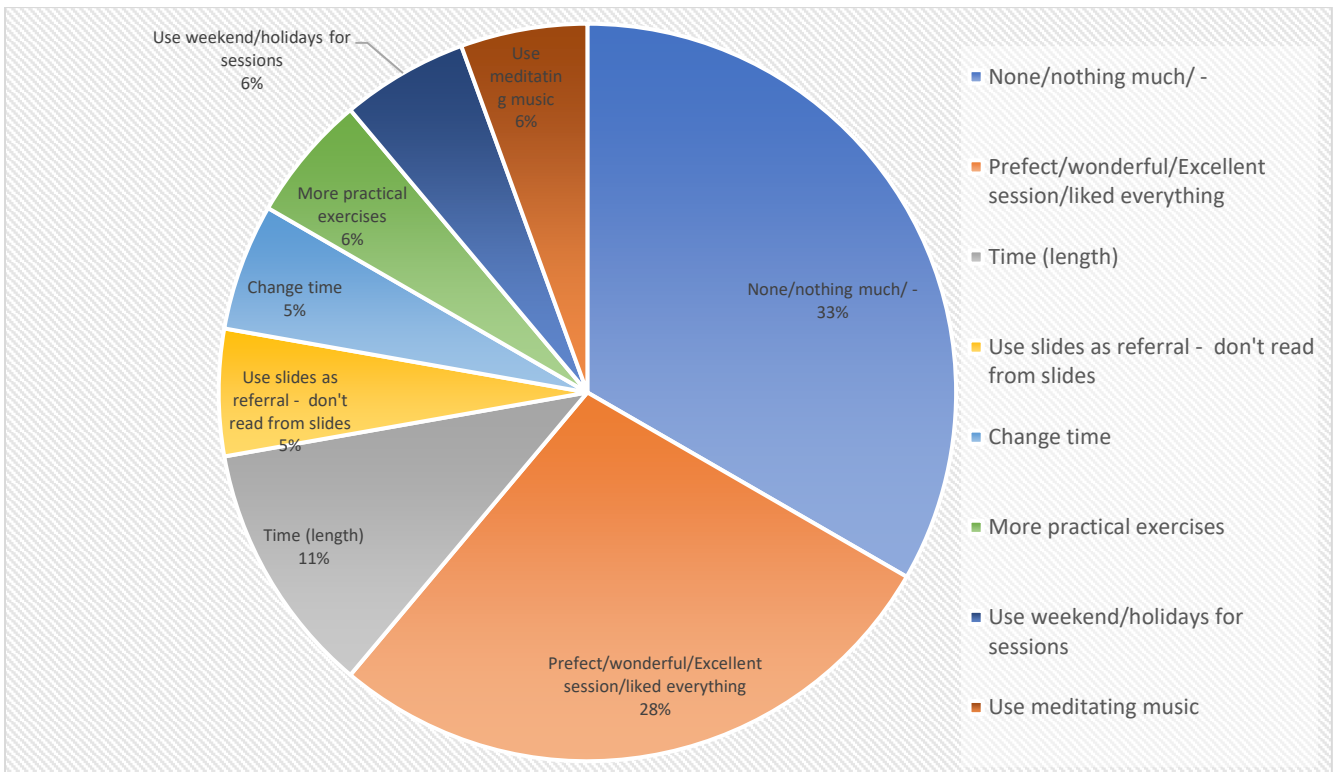


Figure 4. 16 – Areas of improvement on bullying & victimisation session

According to 61% of the responses the content was of a good standard and no suggestions for improvement were made. Eleven percent felt that while the content was relevant for promoting their mental well-being, more time was needed to cover everything, and 5% suggested that the content should be presented at a different time to accommodate them, considering the department's demands regarding the attendance of meetings or workshops. It is therefore important to stress that while the intervention was needed and well received, adaptations to the presentation time had to be made to accommodate the majority of the teachers in group 1. It was decided that group 1 would start their presentation at 14:30 instead of 14:00, which would enable most of the group members to arrive on time. Since the sessions were held after school, which was already late in the day, the teachers felt that there was not enough time to engage in discussions and that, despite presentations being offered on two different days, other work commitments sometimes made it impossible for them to attend.

#### 4.3.3.5. Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT)

The BAT (Schaufeli, De Witte, et al., 2020) was used to determine the burnout levels of teachers participating in the intervention. Focusing on the four dimensions of burnout (Exhaustion, Mental Distance, Cognitive Impairment and Emotional Impairment), the completed BAT questionnaires revealed the following:

**Exhaustion:** Two (12 %) were at risk and one (6 %) was at very high risk. Fourteen (82 %) were not at risk of exhaustion.

**Mental distance:** Six (35%) were at risk, and one (6 %) was at very high risk of mental distancing. Ten (59%) were not at risk.

**Cognitive impairment:** Four (23%) were at risk and one (6%) was at very high risk. Twelve (71%) were not at risk.

**Emotional impairment:** Eight (47%) were at risk of emotional impairment, while nine (53%) were not at risk.

Overall, six (35%) of the teachers were at risk and one (6%) at very high risk of burnout, while ten (59%) were not at risk.

This shows that emotional impairment is experienced more often than any of the other dimensions. However, in all dimensions there were teachers at risk, which shows that the experience of burnout among teachers is real, as was confirmed by the assessment. The intervention therefore focused on mitigating this issue by providing knowledge on identifying emotional impairment and coping strategies to minimise it and probably reduce burnout. The teacher who was at very high risk for burnout was referred for counselling.

#### 4.3.3.6 Summary

Overall, the content emphasised time mismanagement as a contributing factor to stress, which may make teachers feel physically and mentally overwhelmed and unable to complete tasks (burnout). Although other themes, including the value of physical exercise, burnout techniques and learning to say no were strongly recommended as coping techniques, the majority felt that they had learnt mainly about the importance of time management to reduce stress.

#### 4.3.4 Session 4 - Personal issues

During Session 4, teachers discussed how their personal experiences or problems can influence their work life. This session included exploring work-life boundaries (balance), how to deal with personal problems, emotional regulation (mindfulness), self-awareness and the completion of the online VIA character strength survey (<https://www.viacharacter.org/account/register>) (VIA Institute on Character (2020)). The VIA helped the teachers to identify their own strengths and, through the pin-a-strength wall activity, they could share how they were applying, or could apply this

in their lives. The feedback on the VIA will be discussed in section 4.3.4.5. First, however, we will focus on the responses to the feedback questions.

#### 4.3.4.1. Question 4.1: What content was presented?

Responses to this question (in Figure 4.17) helped the researchers to gauge whether the intended content had been delivered in a manner that enabled the teachers to understand the essential elements of the session.

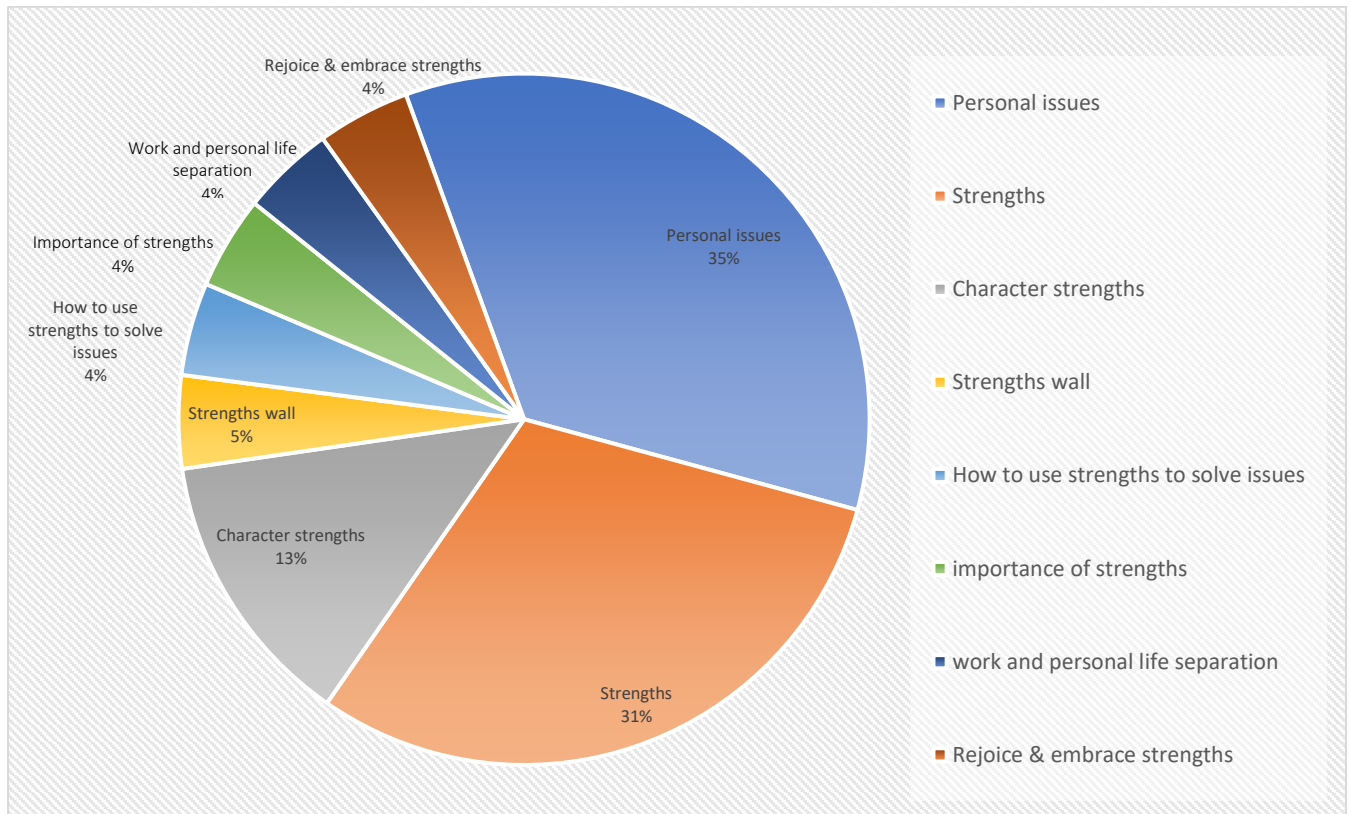


Figure 4. 17 – Content presented on Personal Issues

Figure 4.17 represents the percentages of responses received from the 17 teachers who attended the fourth session. In this session, the teachers identified personal issues (35%) and strengths/character strengths (44%) as the main themes. Some teachers mentioned that personal issues sometimes negatively influenced their ability to use their personal strengths. The pin-a-strength wall was therefore included to help teachers to reflect on how they can apply their strengths in their lives.

#### 4.3.4.2. Question 4.2: What is the most important thing you have learnt in the session?

In this session it was important to ensure that the teachers realised that common strengths, when correctly used, can help them cope with stressful situations they encounter daily.



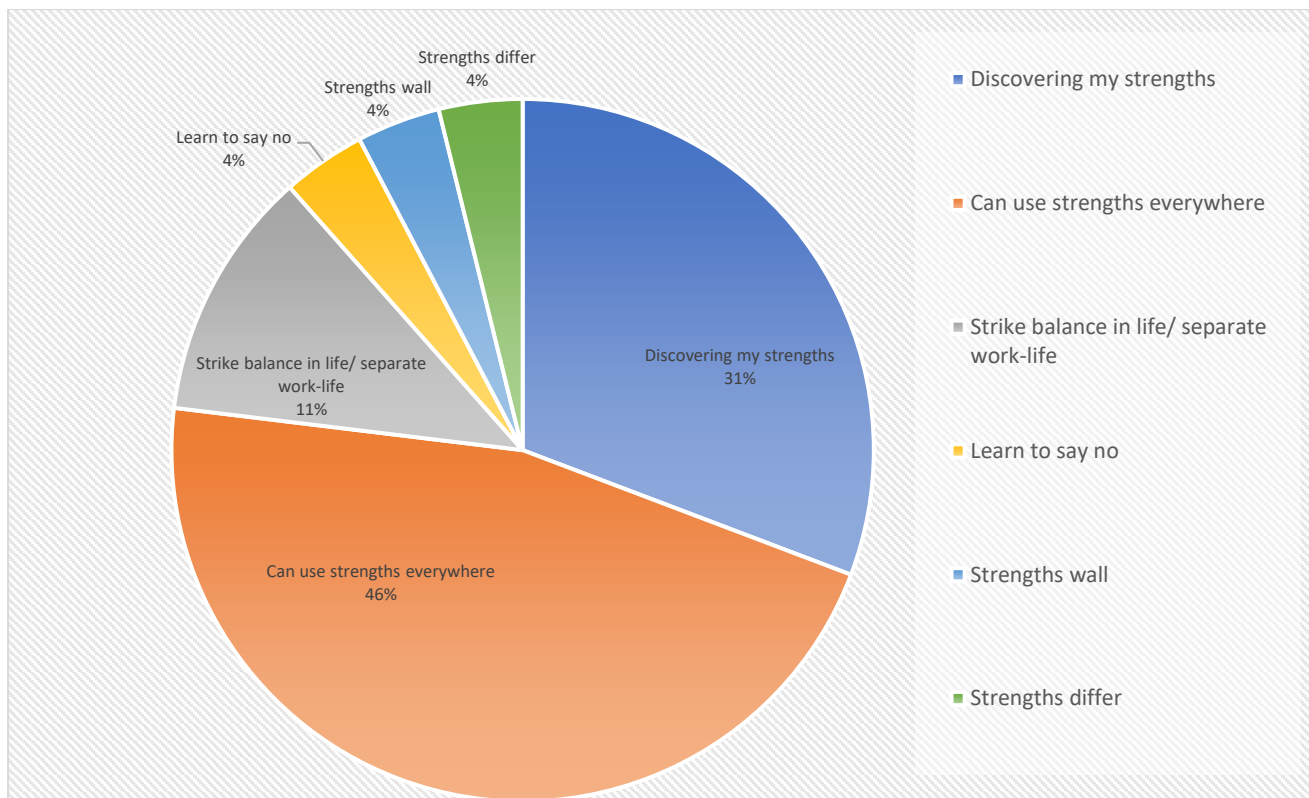


Figure 4. 18 – Content learnt regarding Personal Issues

As can be seen in Figure 4.18, the most important content learnt related to the discovery and use of personal strengths (combined 77%), which can be used everywhere and in any context. The teachers indicated that discovering their strengths had been important and made them feel good. They realised that their strengths were actually tools that could help them overcome life challenges. The session emphasised the value of character strengths for managing stress, ensuring work-life balance (8%) and learning to say no (4%) for enhancing coping.

#### 4.3.4.3. Question 4.3 How can you use it in your work or personal life?

It was essential to measure the application aspect of the presentation and to guide teachers on how to implement their strengths in situations they face. Teachers' responses in Figure 4.19 indicated their willingness to use their strengths and, most importantly, how they would implement them.

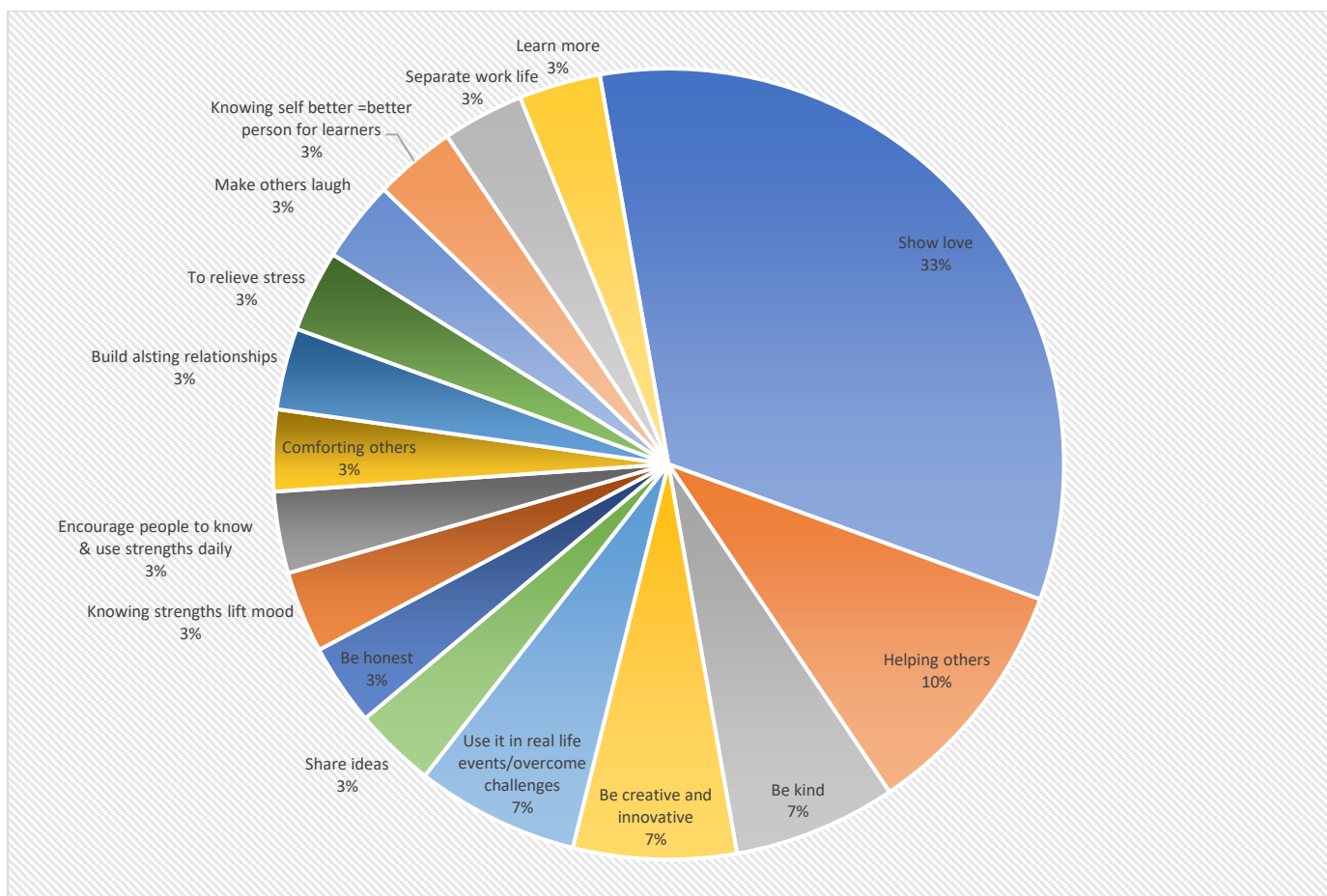


Figure 4. 19 – Application of content learnt on Personal Issues

The participating teachers indicated that they could apply what they had learnt by showing love, as reflected by 33% of the responses. They were willing to use strengths that are critical in diffusing difficult situations and lowering stress levels, such as kindness (7%), rendering help to others (10%), creativity (7%) and humour (3%). One teacher mentioned that she was often regarded as a loudmouth because she always used humour to quell tense situations at work, but that she was pleased to learn that humour was actually a strength. Some of her colleagues in the group then told her that when they feel overwhelmed they go to her and leave feeling lighter and more positive. This intervention was successful as the teachers learnt that certain traits that they did not count as strengths were actually strengths and could serve as coping strategies during challenging times. It was interesting to note that the discussion of personal problems and self-regulation of emotions was not mentioned in the feedback. It seemed that the strengths exercise had been overwhelmingly positive.

#### 4.3.4.4. Question 4.4 How can the session be improved?

Figure 4.20 below illustrates the teachers' responses to the above question.

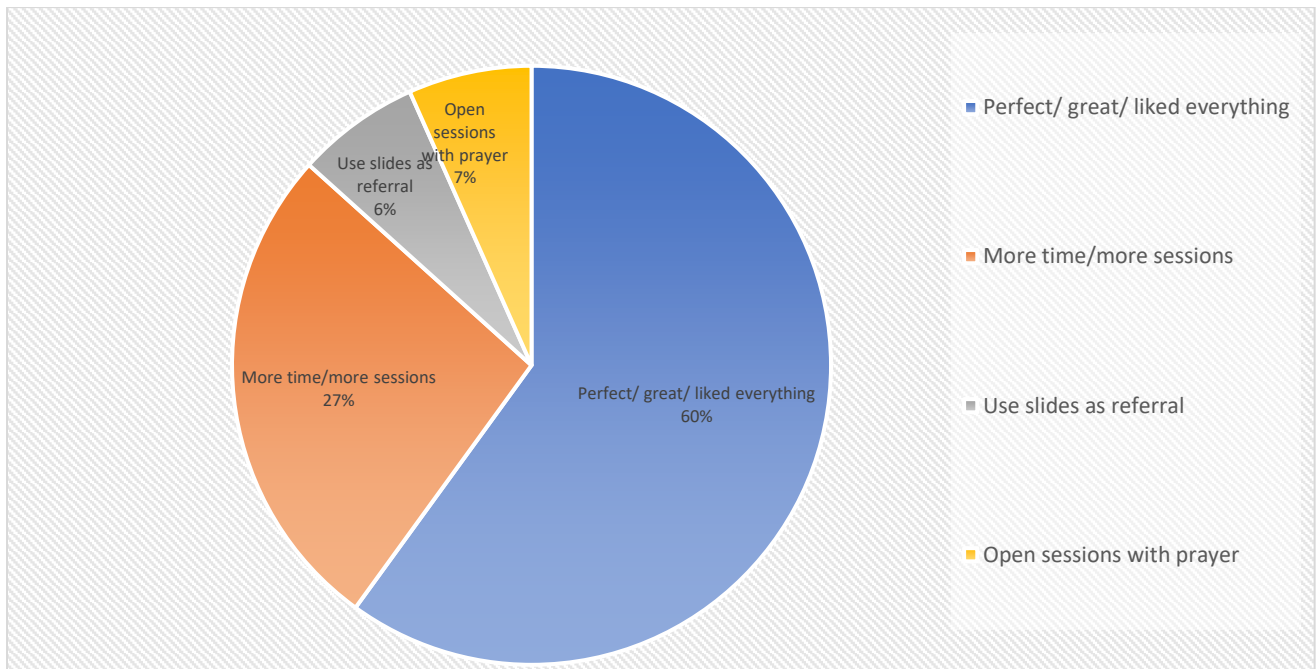


Figure 4. 20 – Improvements in content presented on personal issues

The responses indicated that 60% of the teachers thought that the content presented was good and that they “liked everything”. The content was therefore relevant and spoke to the needs identified by the needs assessment. Some of the teachers (27%) felt that more sessions were required to equip them more, which was an indication that they had benefited from the sessions and the various coping skills shared. This emphasises the importance of the intervention, and especially the realisation that everyone has character strengths that can help them to navigate life’s challenges.

#### 4.3.4.5. Values in action

According to Park et al. (2004), the Values in Action (VIA) character strength survey identifies 24 character strengths, subdivided into six virtues people can possess and express. To make them aware of their character strengths, the teachers were asked to complete the online survey before the session started. Love, kindness, humility, honesty, helpfulness and creativity were among the characteristics they had not previously recognised as strengths.

#### 4.3.4.6. Summary

The teachers realised the importance of using their strengths to cope with stress and the value of work/life balance. They also became more aware of who they really were, their strengths, and how they could apply them in their daily lives to cope with or manage stress, thus positively impacting their psychological well-being.

### 4.3.5 Session 5 - Relationships and boundaries

In Session 5, the aim was to help teachers foster healthy relationships and set boundaries. Brickel (2017, para. 4) states: “Humans are social beings—and the quality of our relationships affects our mental, emotional and physical health.” There is, therefore, no understating of the importance of healthy relationships, which must at all costs be guarded by establishing effective boundaries to accomplish a meaningful life. Effective boundaries are flexible, offering protection while keeping you connected to others (Buck, n.d.). Unhealthy relationships, especially at the workplace, can escalate into a toxic environment with undesirable consequences, such as stress and anxiety. It was therefore vital to help the teachers to focus on establishing and maintaining good relationships and using effective mechanisms to reduce stress and improve their psychological well-being.

#### 4.3.5.1. Question 5.1: What content was presented?

The session was aimed at helping teachers form and foster healthy relationships and build effective boundaries as tools to aid them in leading flourishing lives.

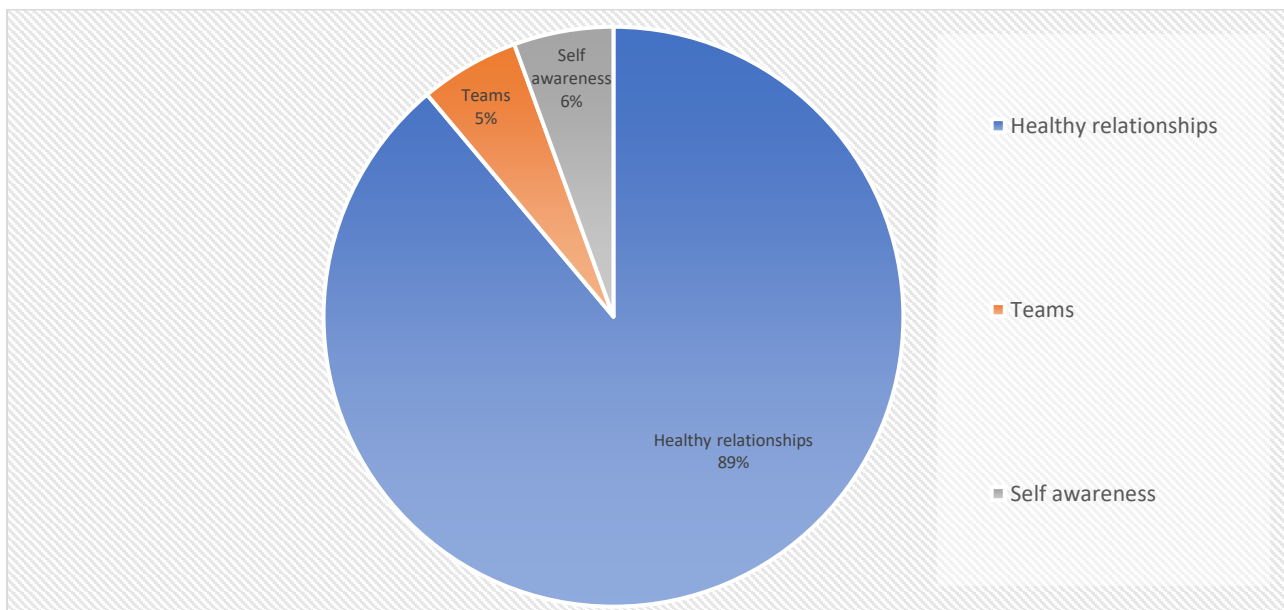


Figure 4. 21 – Content presented on relationships and boundaries

As can be seen in Figure 4.21, the majority of the respondents (89%) indicated that the content covered was healthy relationships. They further indicated that they had learnt about self-awareness and effective team interaction as strategies that contribute to healthy relationships. When people function in ineffective teams—possibly due to unhealthy relationships at the workplace—they may experience undesired emotions, which could contribute to increased stress levels.

#### 4.3.5.2. Question 5.2: What is the most important thing you have learned in the session?

Teachers' responses in this segment reflect their willingness to protect their relationships by applying methods that would promote good relationships in various areas of their lives.

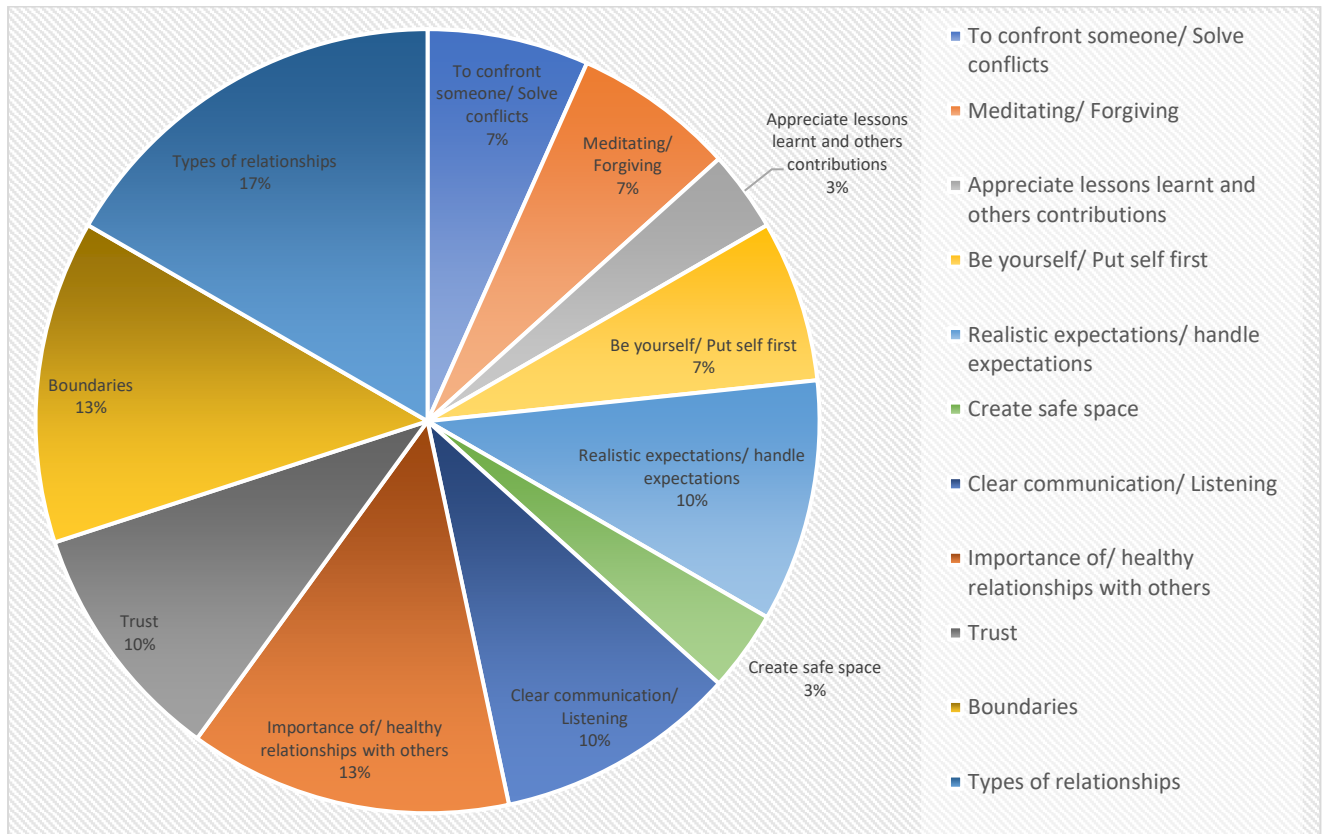


Figure 4. 22 – Content learnt on relationships and boundaries

As can be seen in Figure 4.22, the responses indicated that the most important things about which the teachers had learnt were types of relationships (17%), how to set boundaries (13%), the importance of healthy relationships (13%) and the importance of trust, clear communication and realistic expectations (10%). The teachers clearly appreciated the importance of relationships as a support structure. At the same time, they realised that trust, clear communication and realistic expectations would maintain such relationships.

#### 4.3.5.3. Question 5.3 How can you use it in your work or personal life?

It was important for teachers to reflect on how they would apply the knowledge gained in their current work situation. Their responses are reflected in Figure 4.23.

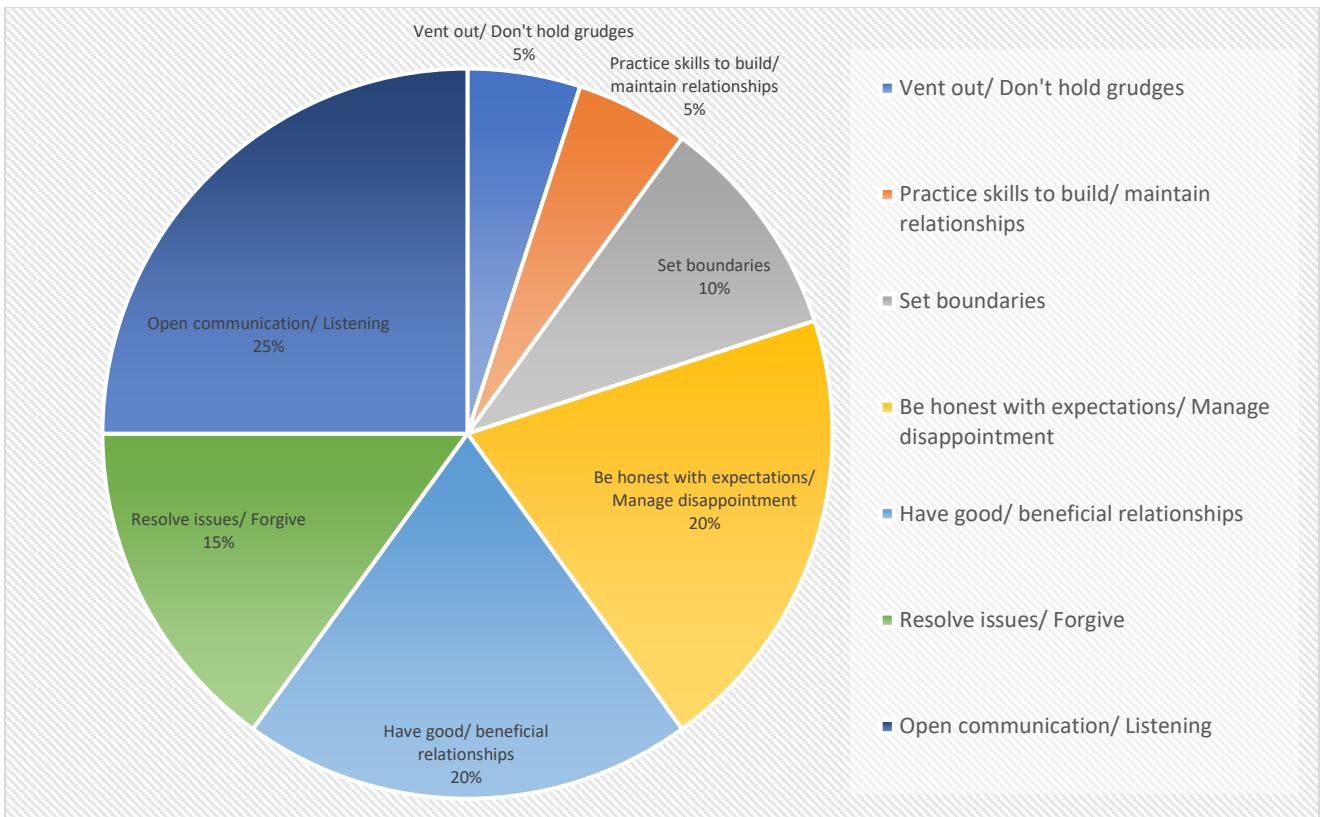


Figure 4. 23 – Application of content presented on relationships and boundaries

The importance of having good and beneficial relationships with colleagues was evident in 20% of the responses, and the importance of communication and listening as means to maintain these relationships in 25%. Honest expectations (20%), resolving issues (15%) and setting boundaries (10%) were mentioned as ways to cultivate healthy relationships.

#### 4.3.5.4. Question 5.4 How can the session be improved?

Since action research is a continuous process during which lessons can be learnt, it was important to identify areas for possible improvement throughout the intervention. The responses indicated the changes that were required to better meet the participants' needs and provide much-needed support.

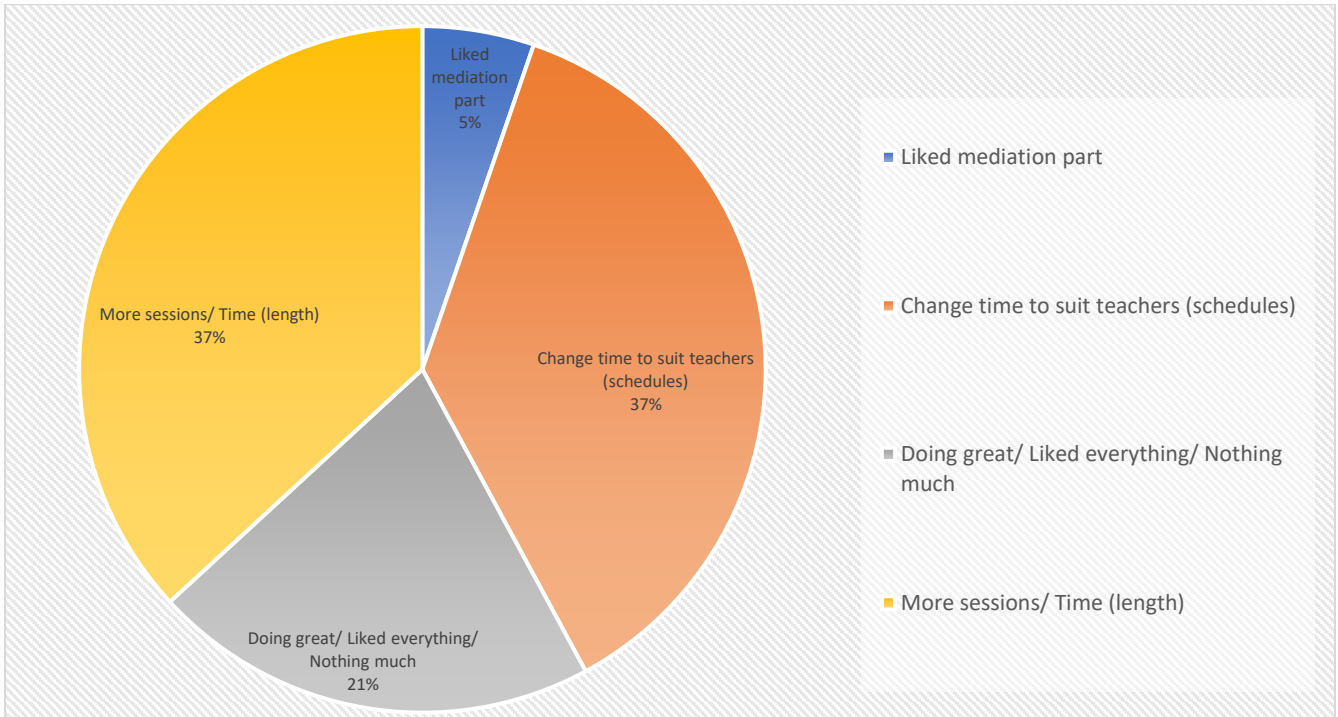


Figure 4. 24 – Improvement of the content presented on relationships and boundaries

Figure 2.24 shows that teachers needed more sessions (37% of responses). Also, teachers felt that the intervention would be better if not implemented after school hours as they were sometimes too tired after the day’s duties. Despite that, 21% of the responses reflected satisfaction with the content and presentation methods. The teachers were generally satisfied, but indicated a need to be accommodated with regard to the session times (e.g. by organising sessions during school holidays when there will be enough time to work through the content). This being said, it is important to note that the team had already made accommodations to the session times, and unfortunately not everyone could be satisfied.

#### 4.3.5.5 Summary

During Session 5, the themes for discussion were relationships and boundaries. The responses reflected that teachers felt that healthy relationships were essential to ensure optimal work performance. They appreciated having learnt more about building effective boundaries, managing expectations, honesty and building trust, clear communication, listening attentively and resolving conflicts.

#### 4.3.6 Session 6 – Meaning and accomplishment

In Session 6, the final session of the intervention, the emphasis was on accomplishment and meaning. People are driven by a desire to achieve their goals, which gives their lives meaning.

According to Seligman (2012), a sense of accomplishment is the outcome of working towards and achieving goals, successfully completing tasks and having the drive to complete the tasks at hand. He suggests that, as a result, people can look back on their lives with pride, which enhances well-being. Teachers were therefore introduced to this session to remind them of their goal—which was to improve their psychological well-being—by providing them with the coping skills needed to manage stress. Having completed the session, they could reflect on their current positions and find meaning in their lives. Session 1, which dealt with stress management, alluded that the attainment of goals reduces stress, and when stress is reduced, psychological well-being is improved.

#### 4.3.6.1. Question 6.1: What content was presented?

In this session during which meaning and accomplishment were introduced as new themes for the conclusion of the intervention sessions, the previous sessions were also reviewed to measure the effect of the interventions presented and their application by the teachers.

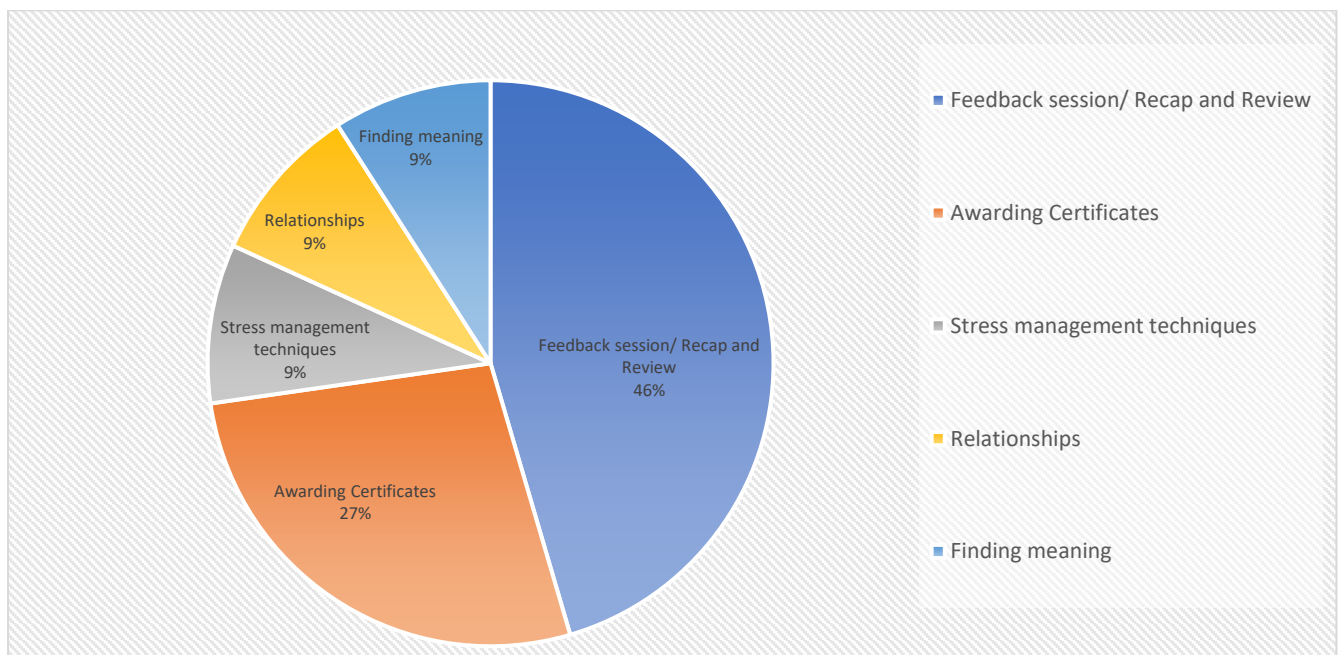


Figure 4. 25 – Content presented on meaning and accomplishment

As reflected in Figure 4.25, teachers described this session as a feedback session (46% of the responses) and issuing of certificates (27% of responses). To them, this meant that they had reached the end of the programme and had achieved their goal. However, this session also included recapping and reviewing the content presented in the previous sessions to remind them of what they had learnt about relationships, finding meaning and stress management techniques.



#### 4.3.6.2. Question 6.2: What is the most important thing you have learnt in the session?

The content presented was extensive and reviewed the previous sessions. This was beneficial as it made it possible to gauge the teachers’ feelings about how the intervention had helped them to improve their psychological well-being. The responses are reflected in Figure 4.26.

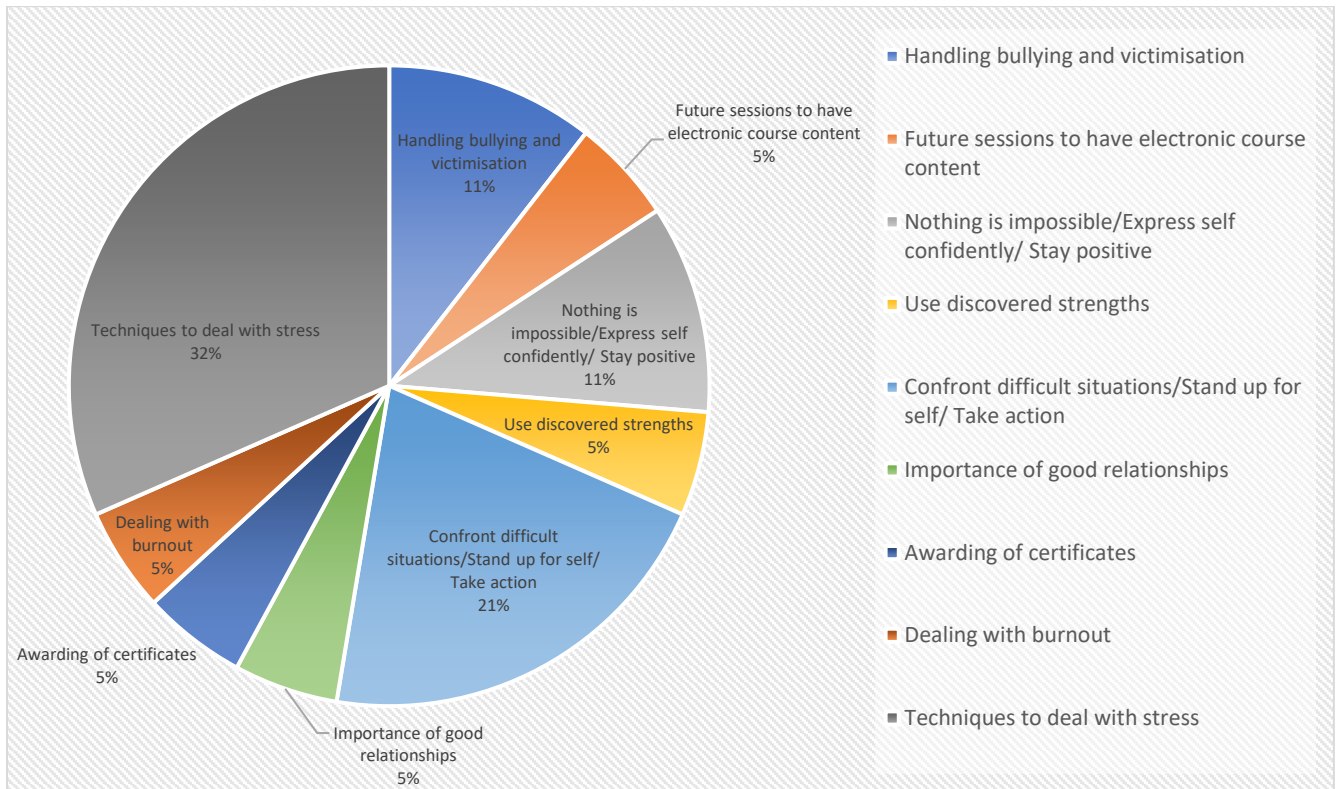


Figure 4. 26 – Lessons learnt on meaning and accomplishment

Session 6 reviewed the content presented in the previous five sessions and the teachers’ responses confirmed their appreciation for being taught the following: stress management techniques (32%); how to confront difficult situations by taking action and to standing up for themselves (21%); how to deal with bullying and victimisation (11%); how to use their strengths to combat burnout (10%); and the confidence to believe that “nothing is impossible” (11%). Being awarded certificates and experiencing a sense of accomplishment was indicated as central to the session by 5% of the responses. Despite this low percentage, it was clear that the teachers felt that having come to the end of their participation in the programme, a reward in the form of a certificate was well deserved and provided a sense of accomplishment (meaning). As previously acknowledged, this intervention could not address all the challenges faced by teachers, but, as depicted in Figure 4.26, various important issues were addressed.

#### 4.3.6.3 Question 6.3 How can you use it in your work or personal life?

As mentioned in the previous session, the teachers felt strongly about the practical application of coping strategies to manage stress and improve their psychological well-being. Their responses are reflected in Figure 4.27.

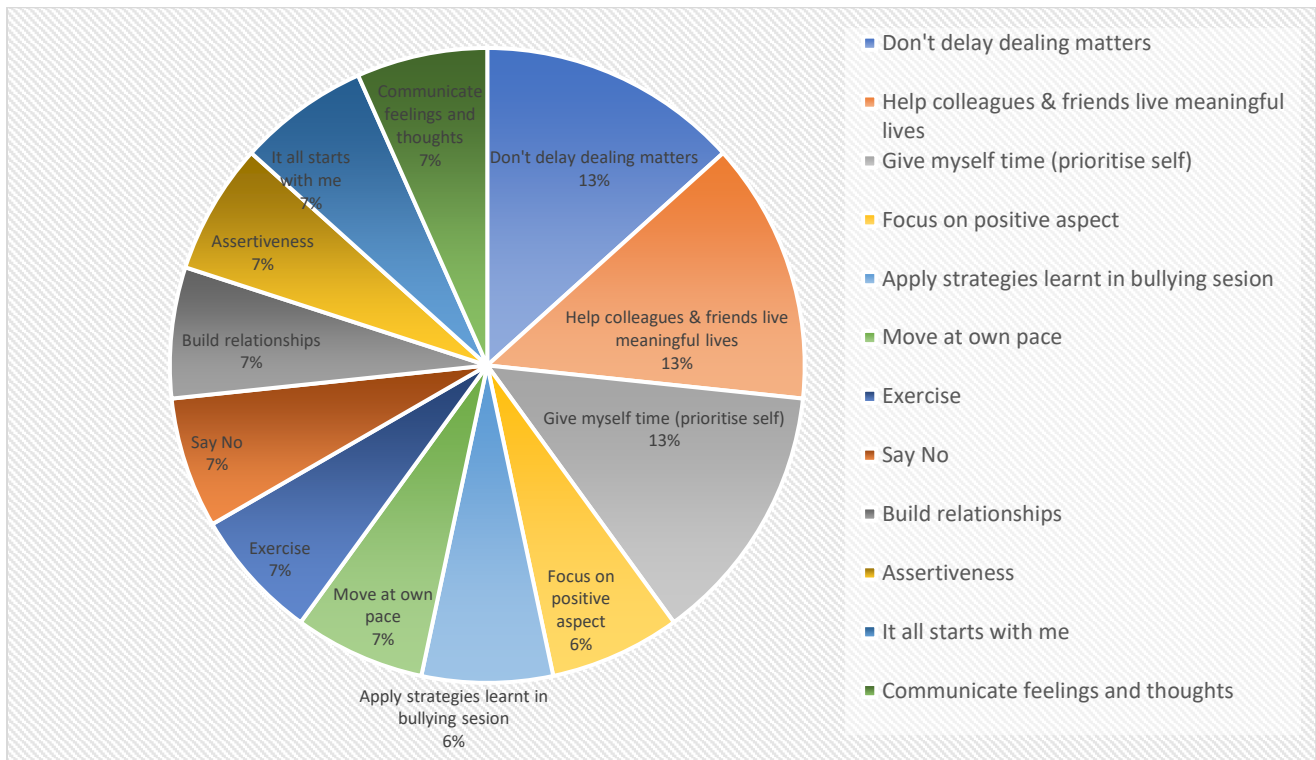


Figure 4. 27 – Implementation of meaning and accomplishment

The responses indicated that the most important lesson the teachers had learnt was that they should attend to issues as soon as they arose (13%); support colleagues and friends to live meaningful lives (13%); and make time for themselves and prioritising self-care (13%). Other important aspects that were mentioned included focusing on positive aspects, exercising, learning to say no and assertiveness, which are all relevant to developing and maintaining a healthy mental state.

#### 4.3.6.4. Question 6.4 How can the session be improved?

The effectiveness of the intervention was analysed. The following responses highlight the main issues (Figure 4.28).

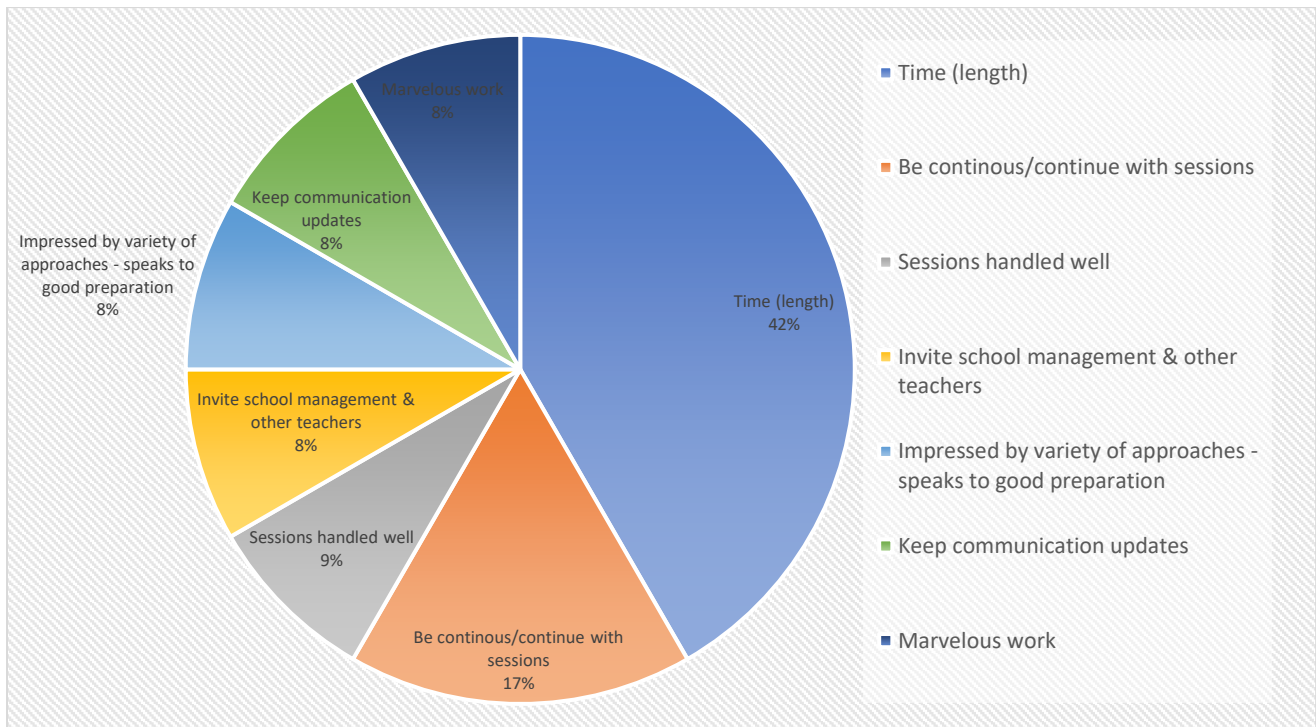


Figure 4. 28 – Areas of improvement in the meaning and accomplishment session

In summary, teachers expressed the need and desire for the sessions to continue so that they could learn more about psychological issues. They also suggested that the intervention should include school management teams and other teachers so as to create an environment in which everyone has these coping skills.

#### 4.3.6.5. Summary

Session 6 focused on putting one’s psychological well-being at the forefront and participating in the intervention to be better equipped to cope with stress and lead flourishing lives. It highlighted a sense of purpose, with the strengths identified and teachers’ eagerness to bring about change by applying their acquired skills. The most important lessons learnt throughout the sessions were also reviewed. There was a strong emphasis on stress management, which indicated that teachers do need strategies that can help them cope with stress. Bullying and victimisation, burnout and time management, dealing with personal issues and maintaining healthy relationships were also reflected upon and the teachers expressed a desire to implement their newly acquired techniques in own their lives to improve their psychological well-being. The coping strategies they indicated they would use included making time for themselves, confronting issues, resolving conflicts, helping colleagues, providing support to learners and being assertive.

## 4.4 Evaluation of the intervention

In evaluating the intervention, content analysis was used to analyse all the data gathered over the research period. Bess et al. (2004) state that the messages being conveyed are the main subject of content analysis. To evaluate the content of the written material, the evaluator lists or codes the concepts, words and phrases that best capture the key components of the programme.

### 4.4.1 Process evaluation

Bess et al. (2004) explain that process evaluation, which helps to clarify how an intervention was planned and implemented, is largely a qualitative approach that describes how and why choices were made and actions were taken. According to Visser (2022), process evaluation can be done by using attendance records, considering the length and clarifying the content of each session and the participant's reactions. Furthermore, she highlights the importance of the facilitators' feedback on the sessions and areas of improvement.

Using this guideline, the intervention used attendance registers to note the teachers present in each session. It is acknowledged that attendance fluctuated throughout the sessions. Although initially 58 teachers expressed interest in joining, only 52 attended the first session, after which there was a school holiday. When the schools reopened, more than half of the original group did not join the sessions again. Of the 23 who did attend, 21 formed the core group that attended four or more sessions. The sessions were presented after school hours and it appeared that the main reason for some teachers staying away was that they were tired after a day of teaching, or were expected to attend departmental meetings. The remaining teachers therefore suggested that the researchers should consider making arrangement to hold the sessions during school holidays (see subsections 4.3.1.4 and 4.3.5.4).

A wide range of topics were covered and the participating teachers' reactions were captured in the response forms they were asked to complete (**Appendix B**).

Furthermore, the facilitators provided input on the impact of the process by commenting on, among other things, the success of their particular presentations (**Appendix C**) and their observations of the teachers' reactions to the content, challenges experienced and recommendations for improvements in future intervention presentations. The facilitators' feedback is discussed in sections 4.4.1.1 to 4.4.1.4.

#### 4.4.1.1. Question 1: Were all the planned activities in the session presented successfully?

In gauging the success of the planned intervention from the facilitators' perspective, all felt that on the whole the presentations had been successful, despite the fact that some of them felt that the

theoretical content was sometimes rushed and should be addressed in future presentations to improve the teachers' understanding of the content. This concern was confirmed by the teachers' request for print-outs of the content presented in some sessions so that they could further study it in their own time.

The facilitators were of the opinion that the sessions on stress management, burnout and good relationships in particular were very successful as several teachers responded well and were keen to learn coping skills to deal with issues.

#### **4.4.1.2. Question 2: How did teachers react to the programme content? Specify teachers' reactions.**

The facilitators rated the teachers' reactions to the content as enthusiastic, insightful and happy about having acquired strength-building and new coping skills. They indicated that they had learnt a lot and would welcome more sessions. The facilitators noted the need for psychological services at schools as the school environment is often demanding.

#### **4.4.1.3. Question 3: What challenges were encountered in implementing the program?**

The facilitators encountered several challenges while presenting the sessions. Sometimes the booked venues were not available on arrival, or classes were being held there, which meant that the facilitators had to quickly find alternative venues before the teachers' arrival. The punctuality of the facilitators helped to prevent cancellations due to logistical challenges.

Selecting the best content for inclusion in presentations was important as the facilitators wanted to ensure that they provided valuable and evidence-based content.

The facilitators found the fluctuating attendance of teachers challenging, but they acknowledged that the time gap between the sessions might have had an impact. They realised that the spacing of the sessions was important to avoid losing some of the participants. This highlighted the need for the involvement of school managements in the sessions—not only should they facilitate teachers' attendance of such interventions, but they should also attend them so that they can be adequately equipped to support the teaching staff.

#### **4.4.1.4. Question 4: How can the sessions be improved?**

A number of suggestions were made on how the sessions could be improved. Facilitators agreed with the teachers' notion that more time was needed to implement the content of the sessions to ensure effective learning. Facilitators also felt that to prepare themselves better, they could have more practice runs of the presentation before the official presentation of a session. They felt that due

to the obvious impact of the self-awareness activity, more attention should be given to topics such as character strengths. The facilitators also realised that if sessions were attended by larger groups, more spacious venues would be better for sessions that include play and exercises. The facilitators agree with the teachers that the involvement of school management could make the sessions more impactful as it would be easier to present them in the school context. Interested teachers might then be allowed time off to attend sessions. To increase attendance, the facilitators felt that more marketing could be done to ensure greater exposure. Furthermore, they felt that teachers should be awarded Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points for attending interventions. The general feeling among the facilitators was that the content had been well presented and had made an impact as the teachers had been equipped with strategies and techniques for coping with and managing stress, and enhancing their psychological well-being.

#### **4.4.2 Outcome evaluation**

Visser (2022) explains that the outcome evaluation process can be done qualitatively by using focus group discussions, and quantitatively by using pre- and post-intervention surveys. For this research, a final focus group discussion was used. The teachers participated in the focus group discussion to explore their experiences of the programme and how it had benefitted them. The following themes from the group discussion were identified and summarised below:

##### **Stress management**

Teachers felt that they had acquired coping skills to manage stress and identify certain triggers they need to avoid. Below is an excerpt from some teachers on the skills gained.

*“I learnt how to deal with the stress, there's always this, but no matter what, and I'm going forth, I know how to carry my stress, I know how to deal with it, I know how to avoid certain issues.”*

Another teacher stated, *“Another thing I have learned this session where we spoke about tactics on how to manage your stress levels. So, I've realized that I'm using those tactics and at the moment, I don't get the stressed anymore like, I know how to manage my stress.”*

##### **Playful activities**

Many of the teachers enjoyed playing and laughing together. The balloon activity highlighted the importance of using simple activities to improve mood and lighten spirits. In reaction to the activity and its impact, teachers said:

*“My favourite session was actually the first one, the one where we were blowing the balloons and you have to write all your problems on the balloon and after that you have to pop the balloon, you have to*

*kill. So, it made me realise that carrying all those problems, the balloon was light but they added. Me carrying all the balloons also made me realise that I don't have to compare myself with anyone. Everyone has his or her own journey."*

*"My favourite part was playing, you know, the balloons and all that, you know, I learned doing things, you know, just colouring a book, things that doesn't really mean anything, you know, I've learned painting things that I didn't know I could do I'm would that in my spare time. And I found that they take away a lot of stress that is in us. Most of the time I'm worrying about what ifs, things that will never ever happen, you know, but if I keep on doing play other things, then I feel good about it things that makes me feel good."*

### **Universality of experiences**

The comfort of knowing that they were not alone and there were others who shared their experiences was observed throughout the sessions. Teachers realised that they need not give up, the testimony of other teachers who overcame such incidents provided hope.

*"I always thought I had problems I'm working in a toxic environment. But listening to each and every one talk about their challenges at work. It made me realize I'm not the only one,"*

### **Confrontation, Bullying, standing up for your rights**

Bullying and victimisation are prevalent in the education sector. De Wet and Jacobs (2013) highlight that this behaviour often leads teachers to quit the profession. Reflecting on the session on bullying and victimisation the teachers said:

*"I just like to talk about bullying. Realised that it starts with me. I'm the one who has to make it stop because if maybe people they see if you are somebody who don't likes to talk they will bully you, so that I have learned that I have to confront the relevant people."*

*"Bullying and victimisation at work and I learnt it's not only happening to me but it's something that is happening across teachers and its quite sad but I'm happy that we learnt the strategies on the bullying at work. What I learnt in that session is that you should engage ourselves with the policies with it because in many cases the bullying stems from not knowing your rights and reading on responsibilities."*

### **Assertiveness**

Being able to freely express oneself and stand up for their rights was a strong topic throughout the session on bullying and victimisation. Teachers explained that at times they would avoid



confronting situations which they were not comfortable with and end up affecting their well-being. However, the intervention equipped them with the skill of assertiveness, and they practically implemented it in their lives. An example below of a teacher who practised assertiveness in one incident.

*“Guys, she said something very important. She said she learnt confrontation that's what I've learned as well. I've noticed that yesterday, I went to a mall and there was these four guys they were harassing a school child in front of everybody, actually I was so upset that these things they happen in front of all the other men watching, including the security. And I was the one that confronted them and no one said anything. But I kept on telling me what you're doing is wrong. This is harassment. And that's all it took to save the poor child. You know, so I felt good, of course, a lot. But I felt good after doing that, because sometimes that's all it takes”.*

### **Aerobics**

Similarly to the playful nature of the balloon activity, the aerobics activity presented during the burnout session highlighted to teachers the easy ways in which one could manage stress and reduce burnout. The teachers reflected on the activity as follows:

*“And uhm the aerobics part....sjoe..(laughing). Tjo, I couldn't do anything I was laughing all the way. But I really enjoyed that and it does relief stress.”*

Another one said, *“I also enjoyed the aerobics part because that day I was so stressed out from work but when we did that I was relieved when I went back home”*

### **Goals/Selfcare**

Being at the forefront of transforming lives in the education industry has played a role in teachers often putting other's (learners') needs before themselves. There is a sense of responsibility not to do any harm and make a positive impact, that little room is left for the teachers to take care of their needs. Through the intervention, teachers learnt that it is okay to be there for others but not at the expense of self. It encouraged them to put their goals, needs and desires first and to care for themselves. One teacher reflected on this skill learnt through the intervention:

*“Put my goals first that's what I've learned, how to manage stress, that what I've learnt. So I've learned to manage my stress to put my goals first.”*

### **Humour**

There is a saying, laughter is the best medicine. This is something often said in passing and it sometimes feels like people do not really grasp the impact it truly has. One teacher through the VIA



strength activity identified that humour is one of her strengths. Before the session, she knew that she loved joking but had not realised how this strength helps her and her colleagues cope with stress and difficult situations. She states,

*“My favourite session is when I discovered that my sense of humour, wow, I was wondering why people like to attach me whenever they’ve have problems, they will come to me and then the next thing when they they’ll say sjoe I feel so good. I don’t know why I came to you. But I feel like you said things that I don’t even know what to say. But the laughter it has kept them going and so it means I’ll use it and use it and use it.”*

### **Creativity and initiative**

Another strength that was identified through the VIA which the teachers had already begun implementing was that of creativity and initiating activities to improve lives. Teachers shared the following:

*“I started a book club for kids and extra classes for Maths I am doing it for free..because eh... ja its getting me excited.”*

*“I started teaching the kids at our school gymnastics, our first session went well, so that me happy.”*

### **Good relationships**

No man is an island. As human beings, we are interconnected in one way or another and that is why it is crucial to ensure that we work towards having good and healthy relationships that can boost and empower us rather than drain and frustrate. The session on relationships emphasised this and teachers were able to reflect on the impact of intentionally creating cordial and mutually beneficial relationships. The reflections below emphasise this:

*“The thing that makes me happy during term 2 when as we closed my learners just surprised me, the last day. They made a party for me, they bought cakes, snacks and also they asked their parents, someone asked her mom to cook a custard for me that make me very happy.”*

Another colleague stated, *“something great that happened to me, this year I bought a cake and enjoyed it with the learners.”*

### **Sharing information & looking beyond self (being there for others)**

Teachers highlighted that they felt the intervention had made a difference in their lives and they could not keep the information to themselves, realising that it might help other people. Describing this they stated:

*“Take away.....uhmmm already I’m sharing the information with the colleagues, not only the colleagues, and my friends.”*

*“I think the SMT and the principals they need it too and maybe you we can also pass the program to the learner because they are also having difficulties out there, so maybe letting them through this program can help as well.”*

These themes are expanded upon in the Chapter 5 (Discussion of findings).

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a review of the development of the intervention from the initial stages, i.e., the needs assessment, the evaluation of each session, and the evaluation of the outcome using the themes from focus group discussion. The results will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion of findings

### 5.1. Introduction

With this study the researcher aimed to develop an intervention to empower teachers with coping skills that would enable them to manage stress and promote their psychological well-being. The themes that emanated from the results in Chapter 4 will now be discussed. First, the discussion will examine the needs assessment results that guided the development of the intervention, after which the focus will be on the teachers' reactions while participating in the intervention.

Macaulay (1999) explains that action research is collaborative and is built upon respectful relationships between researcher and participants. It centres around the co-development and implementation of interventions to address a social problem. Components of the research, such as the needs assessment, were aimed at obtaining input from the teachers regarding their needs, challenges and strengths with a view to developing an intervention tailored to their context and experiences. The collaboration further included the implementation process, during which both the researchers and the participants played active roles. The researchers provided some knowledge and resources to equip the teachers with coping skills, and the teachers attending the sessions actively participated and shared their experiences to enrich the content of the intervention. The results of the needs assessment and the evaluation of the sessions' content will be discussed in the section that follows.

### 5.2. Discussion of findings of the needs assessment

The needs assessment results showed that teachers face many problems, such as learner disrespect (22%), a lack of parental involvement (11%), high workloads and fatigue (7%), favouritism (7%), bullying and victimisation (7%), classroom noise (6%), learning barriers (4%), overcrowding (4%), lack of fitness (4%) and financial problems (4%). All these issues can affect teachers' self-esteem and result in low energy levels and increased levels of fatigue, which can contribute to them feeling discouraged and stressed. The results showed similarities with the findings of other research, which included high workload (Naidoo, 2011; Steyn & Kamper, 2006; Van Wyk, 2006), overcrowding (Moloi, 2010), lack of parental involvement and learner ill-discipline (Jacob & Aloka, 2023; Rubbi et al., 2021), fatigue (Madigan & Kim, 2021) and bullying and victimisation (De Vos & Kirsten, 2015; Jacobs & Teise, 2019) as factors that contribute to stress.

Ill-discipline and unruliness disrupt class preparations and impact the teacher and other learners. Rubbi Nunan and Ntombela (2021) highlight the fact that teachers are being pushed to the verge of mental collapse by learners' constant antics and unwillingness to listen. Jacob and Aloka (2023) emphasise that to ensure that learning occurs effectively in the classroom, it is important to

address all of these troubling behaviours that have an impact on the teaching and learning processes. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of cooperation among systems, such as parents and the Department, which could help prevent this problem. However, if teachers' coping skills and confidence can be improved they might be able to deal better with learners' inappropriate behaviour. The results revealed that some teachers made use of positive coping strategies, such as praying, talking to someone and engaging with learners. However, 28% of the teachers' responses indicated the use of avoidant coping strategies, such as avoiding dealing with issues and alcohol use, while 14% indicated that they felt they were not coping at all. Carver et al. (1989) and McFadden et al. (2021) point out that maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as avoidance, are risk factors for lower well-being and a lower standard of living, while adaptive coping techniques, particularly active coping and help-seeking, are linked to enhanced well-being and an improvement in the quality of the working environment. The intervention therefore aimed to enhance adaptive coping strategies as McFadden et al. (2021) allude to their importance to well-being. At the same time, the intervention sought to discourage the use of maladaptive coping strategies (for example avoidance, which some teachers had mentioned), which are marked as risk factors that give rise to lower levels of psychological well-being (Carver et al., 1989; Holahan et al., 2005).

Following this assessment, a six-session intervention was developed to equip teachers with coping strategies. The intervention was developed to address the coping and competence pathways from the 3C model (Herman et al., 2020) and also targeted some elements of the PERMA model to enhance psychological well-being (discussed in sections 2.1.3.1.6. and 2.3) (Seligman, 2011). The intervention engaged teachers in various activities, such as psychoeducation, self-exploration, mindfulness activities, aerobics, fun activities, self-care, a pin-a-strength wall and the development of peer support, which left them feeling hopeful (positive emotions) and motivated. The importance of good relationships was also emphasised and teachers explored how they could practically apply the content learnt to improve relationships. The various activities helped the teachers to better understand their purpose in life. Having intentionally attended and completed the intervention to promote their psychological well-being by reducing stress through gaining coping strategies, teachers experienced a sense of accomplishment which, as Seligman (2011) explains, may enhance their self-view and encourage development.

A discussion of the findings based on each intervention session follows below.

### **5.3. Discussion of teachers' responses to the intervention**

#### ***5.3.1 Stress management techniques***

The needs assessment revealed that a high percentage of teachers experienced high levels of stress, highlighting the importance of implementing interventions as a preventive strategy to promote teachers' psychological well-being. Session 1 aimed to help teachers identify stress and learn how to manage or cope with it. This was achieved through psychoeducation on stress and types of coping, completion of the stress inventory, the balloon activity to relieve stress and a mindfulness exercise. The importance of stress management for teachers is alluded to by many scholars (Ansley, 2021; Czerwinski, 2020; Flett, 2017; Hagermoser Sanetti, 2020; Jennings et al., 2013; Shimazu et al., 2003; Taylor et al., 2015).

The teachers appreciated the different coping strategies they were equipped with during the session, such as using play to manage stress and talking to others, and the realisation that they are not alone (the principle of universality) (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). This realisation reduced feelings of inadequacy and incompetence in some teachers who initially blamed themselves for their inability to cope, thus normalising their feelings and experience of stress. Teachers indicated that the input of those who had gone through some of the experiences and conquered provided a glimmer of hope and fostered learning in the group. Teachers benefitted from the session through the sharing of experiences and solutions. Information was imparted and the session provided a space for fellow teachers to model their actions, which are important principles of group therapy (Yalom & Leszcz 2020).

Another activity that was well received by the teachers was the balloon activity, because of the meaning it held for each teacher and its playful nature. Teachers became aware of the value of participating in playful activities to manage stress. Towards the end of the intervention they indicated that they had started to use playful and fun activities, such as colouring, reading and painting at home to manage their stress. They realised that they need not always be serious, but can let their guard down every now and again to have fun and play, which will improve their mood and their views on issues. Playing and laughing together also foster social connectedness, which is useful in group therapy (Versfeld et al, 2022).

Overall, the intervention guided teachers on how to conduct themselves in stressful situations and to identify the tools they can use to cope in those situations.

#### ***5.3.2 Discussion on bullying and victimisation***

During the needs assessment discussion, the facilitators were surprised to learn from the teacher's responses how widespread workplace bullying and victimisation actually are, and that this

phenomenon is not restricted to learners only. The CCOHS (2019, para 1) indicates that bullying “is seen as acts or verbal comments that could psychologically or 'mentally' hurt or isolate a person in the workplace”. Bullying can sometimes take subtle forms (CCOHS, 2019), which is more worrying as teachers may not easily notice that they are victims of bullying. During the session, the results of the Negative Attitude Questionnaire alerted the facilitators to the fact that at least 59% of the participating teachers confirmed some experience of bullying, which is high by any standard and indicates a toxic workplace. Bullying and victimisation can give rise to stress-related symptoms (CCOHS, 2019). This revelation highlighted a greater need for interventions to make the teachers’ working environment safe and conducive to positive collegial interactions that promote well-being and performance, rather than cause distress.

According to the teachers, the bullying is perpetrated by colleagues and SMT members, often because they lack the courage to stand up for themselves or say “No”. This type of bullying is mentioned in the research done by De Vos and Kirsten (2015). Since bullying has an impact on the school environment (De Wet & Jacobs, 2013; Jacobs & Teise, 2019), there is a need for a session that focuses on equipping teachers to manage this stressor.

Teachers highlighted that the session had benefitted them in many ways. They indicated that they had been reminded of the importance of standing up for, or defending their rights, which is linked to the important aspect of knowing their rights. Many of the teachers were unfamiliar with their job descriptions, their rights and the policies in place, which made them vulnerable to abuse. They highlighted the need to defend their rights and not to allow anyone to infringe on them. Another skill teachers learnt was to be assertive and to speak up when they feel that things are not right. Assertiveness is the capacity to communicate one's emotions and stand up for one's rights while still respecting those of others (Eslami et al., 2016; Pourjali & Zarnaghas, 2010). Elsami et al. (2016) found that an assertiveness training programme lowered the levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

Describing a practical application of assertiveness one teacher recalled an incident when a young girl was being harassed by four men. The teacher spoke her mind and prevented the child from being victimised, which made her feel proud. This selfless act by the teacher also touched on another crucial group therapy principle, which Yalom and Leszcz (2020) describe as altruism. According to them, this type of selflessness can provide a sense of purpose or meaning in life. In standing up for the young girl, the teacher had applied assertiveness and was altruistic, which may have clarified her role in society and life. This teacher learnt that to prevent bullying she had to speak up. Looking away would not have solved the problem and it was by taking action that she could change the situation.

Teachers also expressed a desire to learn to say “No” without feeling guilty. They also wanted to learn how to stand up for their rights and freely express their feelings. Some teachers explained that

they often agreed to do things they did not really want to do, which invariably left them feeling frustrated and used. This session empowered them to say “No” when they did not feel comfortable about doing something, thus easing the pressure and avoiding any negative emotions. In this session one teacher mentioned how realising that her experiences of bullying and victimisation were not unique made her feel better. She acknowledged that it had been alarming to discover that such forms of abuse were so widespread, but that she felt relieved to hear that some of her colleagues had overcome it, which made her feel hopeful. This once again emphasised the principle of universality.

It was evident that the practical application of skills learnt in the session was appreciated and made a difference.

### ***5.3.3. Discussion on burnout and time-management strategies***

Schaufeli et al. (2020) mention four main dimensions of burnout: exhaustion, mental distance, emotional impairment and cognitive impairment. Exhaustion is described as lacking energy and feeling too drained to undertake any physical or mental task; mental distance refers to separating oneself from work and co-workers; emotional impairment presents as impatience and irritability; and cognitive impairment is observed as memory difficulties, attention deficiencies and poor cognitive performance (Schaufeli, 2020). The results of the questionnaire administered during the session indicated that although not all teachers seemed to be at risk of burnout, a high number of teachers were at risk for emotional impairment and overall 41% of the teachers were either at risk or at very high risk for burnout, which emphasised the need for an intervention.

The teachers benefitted from being made aware of their risk for burnout, and also from the time-management skills they had acquired, which they could use to prioritise or plan in advance. According to Garcia-Lopez (2023), burnout is most frequently the result of ineffective time management. Mitigating burnout, self-care, planning ahead and avoiding over-commitment are possible interventions. Proper time management is therefore important in ensuring that teachers manage their workloads effectively. Some teachers mentioned that they had learnt that to avoid burnout they should remember that they are allowed to say “No”, should avoid procrastination and use self-discipline, among other strategies. They also mentioned learning about the value of exercise in reducing burnout, and about other coping strategies such as time management, using the three R’s approach to recognise the signs, reversing the damage by seeking support and managing stress and then building their resilience by taking care of their physical and emotional health. Other coping strategies learnt included setting boundaries, eating well, getting enough sleep and cultivating their creative sides.



Jackson (2013) asserts that exercise can be a valuable part of a stress management programme as it is helpful for those experiencing various forms of stress. Sharma et al. (2006) highlight the value of regular exercise to improve sleeping patterns and mood, and to relieve stress. During the aerobics activity it was evident that the teachers' mood had improved as they laughed together. They encouraged each other to complete the activity and their interaction improved. They mentioned that they would certainly practise this skill in their lives as it was easy, affordable and did not require too much time, but had great benefits.

Prioritising self was another theme that came to the fore. Courson (2021) states that teachers feel more confident in themselves and their skills when they take better care of themselves. The National Institute of Mental Health (2021) explains that self-care entails making the time to do things that promote physical and mental well-being, and enhance quality of life. Self-care can help an individual to manage stress, reduce the risk of illness and increase energy. The teachers mentioned that they often found themselves putting others (family and learners) first, and then having little or no time left to take care of their own psychological needs. One of the messages they took away from the session was that they should prioritise their own needs and practise self-care, which could reduce stress and improve their mental and physical health.

#### ***5.3.4. Discussion on personal issues***

Personal issues that prevent people from performing at their optimum are a reality. This session aimed to empower teachers with coping strategies such as emotional regulation. However, their feedback indicated that this part of the session had been overshadowed by the strengths exercise. People often look elsewhere for solutions to problems they face, not realising that they themselves actually have the capacity to deal with their daily stressors. Park et al. (2004) introduced the twenty-four character strengths that are used in the VIA and which all individuals can express. It became evident that while the teachers knew about these traits (love, humour, kindness, forgiveness, teamwork, etc.), they were unaware that these are not just traits, but strengths that they can apply, for instance, in order to attain work-life balance, deal with personal problems, attain emotional regulation and have self-awareness about issues that affect them. The VIA character strength survey (VIA Institute on Character, 2020) led teachers to discover their own strengths, thereby aiding them to cope better in stressful situations.

One teacher mentioned that she often used humour to diffuse difficult situations. She realised that this strength was what drew people to her when they needed guidance or wanted to feel better, and that by showing kindness to others she reflected an attitude of care and willingness to listen. The effects



of using this strength not only solved problems for those who needed solutions, but also made her feel good about herself.

Another teacher mentioned using her creativity to make each day more interesting for herself and the learners. Yet another talked about her love for reading that had inspired her to start a reading club for kids. The teachers found a sense of purpose and fulfilment in using their strengths to not only manage their stress, but to also have an impact on their learners and communities. The session on personal issues taught teachers to respond well in different situations by using their strengths as tools to manage stress.

### ***5.3.5. Relationships and boundaries – good relationships***

This session focused on the importance of healthy relationships. Being alone all the time breeds a sense of loneliness and despair that intensifies when faced with difficulties in life (Uchino, 2004). Experiences of joy and a sense of belonging or acceptance are manifestations of the impact of strong social ties. The quality of one's relationships impacts on one's mental, emotional and physical health (Brickel, 2017; Uchino, 2004). In their feedback the teachers mentioned the importance of good and mutually beneficial relationships. It was important for them to be in good relationships that build and improve their well-being, rather than relationships that drain it.

Reciprocity in relationships, which is the feeling that both parties in the relationship benefit, is indicative of a quality relationship (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). Teachers often feel misused by one-direction relationships in which they find themselves ignoring their own needs by agreeing to do favours for others, even if they do so reluctantly. After learning about boundaries in relationships, the teachers mentioned the experience of cordial relationships in their classroom as a result of initiatives implemented by either themselves or their learners. One example of this is the teacher who bought a cake and shared it with her learners. Another mentioned that acknowledgement by the learners made her happy. In both cases the incidents fostered mutually respectful and appreciating relationships, which could potentially have a positive impact on the classroom environment and learning experience.

With the skills acquired during the session on relationships and some reflection, teachers were better equipped to identify healthy and unhealthy relationships and take appropriate steps to promote their own well-being. At the same time, they noted the importance of open communication, not holding grudges and being honest about expectations as essential elements in maintaining relationships in a healthy state. Thus the teachers found a way to effectively reduce their stress levels by avoiding unhealthy relationships which, according to Buck (n.d.), may trigger stress and anxiety.

### 5.3.6. Discussion on meaning and accomplishment

There is no denying that human beings are driven by results that give them meaning, which explains the importance of accomplishment. This issue speaks directly to the goals people set for themselves. Seligman (2011) puts the attainment of goals at the centre of accomplishment, which results in meaning when people achieve what they had set out to achieve. During this session it was clear that the teachers were excited as they realised that they were about to be rewarded for making the effort to attend the sessions. The attainment of goals makes people look back at their achievements with pride. This was not only important to the teachers in their personal lives, but also in their work environment.

In their feedback responses, some teachers mentioned that they had been enabled to better plan their work to ensure that they would achieve results in line with the targets set at the start of each school year. They also mentioned that to ensure that they all perform together, they had to develop an attitude of helping their colleagues and friends by sharing the information they had learnt. Two of the teachers demonstrated the value of what they had learnt by starting a book club and offering extra mathematics lessons to help and give back to learners. It is crucial to note how in both the aforementioned cases the teachers' actions resulted in positive emotions (excitement, happiness). They felt that they had made a difference, which improved their mood and gave them a sense of purpose. Their altruistic behaviour will most likely have a positive impact on their communities and environments. Referring to the socio-ecological theory, Bronfenbrenner (1977) explains that an improvement in the well-being of an individual stands to influence their *meso* and *macro* levels of engagement as well.

The intervention seemed to have created a safe space for teachers to learn in, build a sense of belonging and trust, and discuss their problems without feeling judged. This made them feel as if they were friends. Teachers were socially connected by their experiences and similar contexts and flocking together on the journey of teaching. Versfeld et al. (2022) introduced the concept of “flocking together” to emphasise the importance of social connectedness and shared experiences by creating shared emotional and intellectual resources to enable teachers to support one another and survive challenges. When asked to reflect on the impact of the intervention and whether it should continue, the teachers said that the programme had been beneficial and should continue as it might also help other people. One teacher suggested that the content of the intervention should be made available on a website so that it could be readily accessible to teachers for their empowerment.

These responses by the teachers attest to the positive impact of the intervention and advocate for more of such interventions.

#### 5.4. Theoretical reflection

The use of various activities in effective stress management interventions is supported by previous literature. Although there are many other activities that can be used effectively, we will highlight only those that formed part of our intervention:

- Mindfulness (Ansley et al., 2012; Frank et al., 2013; Hepburn et al., 2021; Jennings, 2013; Schussler, 2015; Taylor, 2015)
- Relaxation (Ansley et al., 2021)
- Physical activities (exercise, play, yoga) (Hepburn et al., 2021; Pelsler, 2015)
- Gratitude (Hepburn et al., 2021)
- Increasing social support and relationships (Shimazu et al., 2013; Versfeld et al., 2022)
- Basic self-care (Ansley et al., 2022) to reduce stress and promote well-being in different areas of one's life.

Some of the unique activities included in this intervention were the balloon activity, identifying triggers of stress, practising assertiveness, the VIA Strengths survey, singing and promoting good relationships. The positive impact of all these activities, aimed at helping teachers cope with stress and enhance their psychological well-being, was evident.

During the intervention, the concept of universality was strongly emphasised. In explaining the concept of universality, Yalom and Leszc (2020, p.15) state: "Many individuals enter therapy with the disquieting thought that they are unique in their wretchedness, that they alone have certain frightening or unacceptable problems, thoughts, impulses and fantasies." They assert that realising that one's experiences are not unique is an influential source of relief. The teachers welcomed the notion of "I am not alone" in this intervention. Being made aware of the fact that others experienced the same problems as they did reduced their feelings of inadequacy and incompetence, and made them realise that they need not blame themselves, as some of them had initially done. It thus normalised the feelings and experience of stress. Furthermore, there was a sense of cohesion, which resulted in peer support throughout the sessions.

#### 5.5. Contribution of this study

In embarking upon this study, it was evident that very few stress management interventions had been implemented to assist teachers in the South African context. A study of the available literature on research and interventions relating to teachers' stress had been conducted in the North-West Province (Pelsler, 2015; Versfeld, 2022), the Free State (Van Wyk, 2006), KwaZulu-Natal (Naidoo,

2011) and the Western Cape (Johnson, 2015). However, there were no published studies reporting on such interventions undertaken in the province of Gauteng. Some of the abovementioned studies, such as those undertaken by Pelsler (2015) and Naidoo (2011), are research studies on the impact of stress and stress management, and not on interventions. This study therefore bridges this gap by developing an intervention for teachers working in low and middle socio-economic communities in Gauteng. Furthermore, the intervention managed to provide mechanisms for teachers to help them to alleviate stress in the short term. The teachers who participated were provided with invaluable information on how to deal with stressful situations in the workplace that are caused by the many challenges prevalent in Gauteng schools. The intervention developed a unique combination of stress management strategies based on literature and integrated it with the theory and practices of positive psychology. This intervention can be further enhanced in future studies to increase its impact on teachers' lives.

## **5.6. Limitations of the study**

An important limitation of the study was the varied and declining attendance of sessions by the teachers. Although 52 teachers attended the first session, the numbers declined due to a gap between the first session (7 and 9 June 2022) and the second session (16 and 18 August 2022), which was caused by the presenter's course schedule and the school holidays in between. Time gaps between presentations may cause teachers to lose interest in continuing their participation. This should be considered in the planning of future interventions. Additionally, the study relied on self-reporting and the results were short-term.

The intervention for each group was presented one afternoon per week after school. In their feedback, the teachers often mentioned the issue of the time the intervention was presented. Many teachers could not attend certain sessions because of other school commitments, meetings or training sessions presented by the education authorities. Some teachers felt that after a long school day they were too tired to attend the sessions and suggested that the intervention should be held during school holidays.

Another limitation was that it might have been better to administer a career- and context-specific stress assessment, rather than the general stress-management questionnaire. The Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI), a short self-report questionnaire for evaluating teacher stress that has been validated for the South African teacher cohort (Boshoff et al., 2018) might have been more appropriate. Lastly, since the goal of the intervention had been to provide teachers with coping skills to reduce stress and promote psychological well-being, using a psychological well-being assessment to assess

teachers' psychological levels pre- and post-intervention would have been beneficial (although this was in fact part of another component of the project and the outcome data forms part of another study).

### **5.7. The way forward**

As a way forward, a peer education system where teachers present the programme, or a few sessions, to fellow teachers in their schools would perhaps be beneficial. The availability of the background to, and the content of the intervention on the World Wide Web would serve as an enabler for teachers all over the country to become involved in stress management. Since the stressors present in the school context and the education system remain the same, teachers need to be assisted with more than coping skills in order to obtain optimal results. Herman (2020) highlights the importance of interventions in the context pathway. This relates to the need for officials in the Department of Education and school management teams to participate in similar stress management interventions so that they can take care of their own health and then create a school environment (context) that will promote teachers' health and well-being.

In the feedback forms, teachers raised the need for one-on-one counselling services, highlighting the possible need for psychologists or counsellors at schools to attend to teachers, which would also provide much-needed relief for the teachers in that the presence of a psychologist would ensure that learners and teachers who require support would be attended to. However, due to the lack of mental health resources, it would be difficult to provide one-on-one counselling at schools. This programme, together with support from teachers, can be implemented at schools as a prevention and promotion strategy to prevent stress and promote the psychological well-being of teachers in their context. Teachers who need additional services after participating in such group interventions could be referred for professional services.

### **5.8. Conclusion**

This research was undertaken to develop an intervention that would enhance psychological well-being through empowering teachers with coping skills to reduce stress. From the discussion, we learned about the various skills and aspects of the intervention that teachers benefitted from. This was linked to research that supports the usefulness of these skills in reducing stress and improving psychological well-being, which provided scientific support for the areas of focus during the intervention. Furthermore, it was concluded that the programme's content contributed to teachers' well-being, as reflected in the lived experiences of teachers communicated after their participation in the intervention. It is important to note that the intervention focused on the teachers, and there is still

an urgent need for school management and representatives of the Department of Education to participate in such interventions to enable systemic change.

## References

- Adaramola, S. (2012). Job stress and productivity increase. *Work, 41*, 2955–2958.  
<https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-2012-0547-2955>
- Algorani, E.B., & Gupta, V. (2022, April 28). *Coping mechanisms*. PubMed; StatPearls Publishing.  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559031/>
- American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Coping. In *APA dictionary of psychology*. Retrieved May 7, 2022, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/coping>
- Angelini, G., Buonomo, I., Benevene, P., Consiglio, P., Romano, L., & Fiorilli, C. (2021). The Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT): A contribution to Italian validation with teachers'. *Sustainability, 13*(16), 9065. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13169065>
- Ansley, B.M., Houchins, D.E., Varjas, K., Roach, A., Patterson, D., & Hendrick, R. (2021). The impact of an online stress intervention on burnout and teacher efficacy. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 98*, 103251. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103251>
- Asuero, A.M., Queraltó, J.M., Pujol-Ribera, E., Berenguera, A., Rodriguez-Blanco, T., & Epstein, R.M. (2014). Effectiveness of a mindfulness education program in primary health care professionals: A pragmatic controlled trial. *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions, 34*(1), 4–12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/chp.21211>
- Bakirli, S. (2019, July 15). *Perspectives of experiential learning in adult education*.  
<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/perspectives-experiential-learning-adult-education>
- Barlow, D.H., Durand, V.M., Stewart, S.H., & Lalumiere, M.L. (2017). *Abnormal psychology: An integrative approach*. Cengage Learning.
- Bauml, J. (2006). Psychoeducation: A basic psychotherapeutic intervention for patients with schizophrenia and their families. *Schizophrenia Bulletin, 32*(1), S1–S9.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/schbul/sbl017>

- Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus Open*, 2(2), 8–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001>
- Berardi, L., Glantsman, O., & Whipple, C.R. (2019, June 21). *Stress and Coping*. Press.rebus.community. <https://press.rebus.community/introductiontocommunitypsychology/chapter/stress-and-coping/>
- Bess, G., King, M., & LeMaster, P.L. (2004). Process evaluation: How it works. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, 11(2), 109–120. <https://doi.org/10.5820/aian.1102.2004.109>
- Blascovich, J., & Mendes, W.B. (2010). Social psychophysiology and embodiment. In S.T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (pp. 194–227). John Wiley & Sons Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470561119.socpsy001006>
- Boshoff, N., Potgieter, J.C., Van Rensburg, E., & Ellis, S. (2014). Occupational stress and mental well-being in a cohort of Black South African teachers. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 24(2), 125–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2014.903069>
- Boshoff, S.M., Potgieter, J.C., Ellis, S.M., Mentz, K., & Malan, L. (2018). Validation of the Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI) in a multicultural context: The SABPA study. *South African Journal of Education*, 38(Supplement 2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v38ns2a1491>
- Bradbury, J. (2017). Creative twists in the tale: Narrative and visual methodologies in action. *Psychology in Society*, 55, 14–37. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-8708/2017/n55a3>
- Brickel, R.E. (2017, March 2). Healthy relationships matter more than we think. *PsychAlive*. <https://www.psychalive.org/healthy-relationships-matter>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 32(7), 513–531. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.32.7.513>



- Brookfield, S. (1995). Adult learning: An overview. In A. Tuinjmans (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Education*. Pergamon Press. [http://www.ict.mic.ul.ie/adult\\_ed/overview.htm](http://www.ict.mic.ul.ie/adult_ed/overview.htm)
- Buck, C.A. (n.d.). *Establishing effective personal boundaries*. Wwww.vumc.org.  
<https://www.vumc.org/health-wellness/resource-articles/establishing-effective-personal-boundaries>
- Burke, A., Austin, T., Bezuidenhout, C., Botha, K., Du Plessis, E., Jordaan, E., Lake, M., Makhafula, K., Makhubela, M., Moletsane, M., Nel, J.A., Pillay, B.J., Stein, D.J., Ure, G., Von Krosigk, B., & Vorster, A. (2019). *Understanding psychopathology: South African perspectives*. (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press Southern Africa.
- Burnard, P. (1991). A method of analysing interview transcripts in qualitative research. *Nurse Education Today*, 11(6), 461–466. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0260-6917\(91\)90009-y](https://doi.org/10.1016/0260-6917(91)90009-y)
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. (2019). *Bullying in the workplace*. Ccohs.ca.  
<https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/bullying.html>
- Canevello, A., & Crocker, J. (2010). Creating good relationships: Responsiveness, relationship quality, and interpersonal goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99(1), 78–106. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018186>
- Carver, C.S., Scheier, M.F., & Weintraub, J.K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(2), 267–283.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.56.2.267>
- Charilaos, K., Michael, G., Chryssa, B.-T., Panagiota, D., George, C.P., & Christina, D. (2015). Validation of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) in a sample of Greek teachers. *Psychology*, 06(01), 63–74. <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2015.61007>
- Cloete, P.A. (2015). *The impact of an employee wellbeing programme on return on investment in terms of absenteeism and employee psychosocial functioning* (pp. 1–97) [MSW].  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2263/53394>

- Cohen, S., Gianaros, P.J., & Manuck, S.B. (2016). A stage model of stress and disease. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 11*(4), 456–463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691616646305>
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T.A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 98*(2), 310–357. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.98.2.310>
- Corey, G. (2013). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (9th ed.). Brooks/Cole, Cengage Learning.
- Cortez, P.A., Da Silva Veiga, H.M., Stelko-Pereira, A.C., Lessa, J.P.A., Martins, J.Z., Fernandes, S.C.S., Priolo-Filho, S.R., Queluz, F.N.F.R., Trombini-Frick, L., & Peres, R.S. (2023). Brief assessment of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies during pandemic. *Trends in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-023-00274-y>
- Coursera. (n.d.). *PERMA - Interview with Dr. Martin Seligman - The science of character*. Coursera. Retrieved February 27, 2021, from <https://www.coursera.org/lecture/teaching-character/perma-interview-with-dr-martin-seligman-j0HF4>
- Courson, L. (2021). *Supporting teachers' social and emotional needs to improve teacher stress* (pp. 1–109). [Doctoral dissertation, Trevecca Nazarene University].
- Crosswell, A.D., & Lockwood, K.G. (2020). Best practices for stress measurement: How to measure psychological stress in health research. *Health Psychology Open, 7*(2), 205510292093307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2055102920933072>
- Crum, A.J., Akinola, M., Martin, A., & Fath, S. (2017). The role of stress mindset in shaping cognitive, emotional, and physiological responses to challenging and threatening stress. *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping, 30*(4), 379–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2016.1275585>
- Czerwinski, N., Egan, H., Cook, A., & Mantzios, M. (2020). Teachers and mindful colouring to tackle burnout and increase mindfulness, resiliency and wellbeing. *Contemporary School Psychology, 25*(4), 535–545. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00279-9>

- Danner, M., Kasl, S.V., Abramson, J.L., & Vaccarino, V. (2003). Association between depression and elevated C-reactive protein. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, *65*(3), 347–356.  
<https://doi.org/10.1097/01.psy.0000041542.29808.01>
- De Angelis, M., Giusino, D., Nielsen, K., Aboagye, E., Christensen, M., Innstrand, S.T., Mazzetti, G., Van den Heuvel, M., Sijbom, R.B.L., Pelzer, V., Chiesa, R., & Pietrantonio, L. (2020). H-WORK project: Multilevel interventions to promote mental health in SMEs and public workplaces. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(21), 8035. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17218035>
- De Netto, P.M., Quek, K.F., & Golden, K.J. (2021). Communication, the heart of a relationship: Examining capitalization, accommodation, and self-construal on relationship satisfaction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.767908>
- De Vos, J., & Kirsten, G. J. C. (2015). The nature of workplace bullying experienced by teachers and the biopsychosocial health effects. *South African Journal of Education*, *35*(3), 1–9.  
<https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v35n3a1138>
- De Wet, C., & Jacobs, L. (2013). South African teachers' exposure to workplace bullying. *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, *9*(3).  
<https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v9i3.190>
- Desrumaux, P., Lapointe, D., Ntsame Sima, M., Boudrias, J.S., Savoie, A., & Brunet, L. (2015). The impact of job demands, climate, and optimism on well-being and distress at work: What are the mediating effects of basic psychological need satisfaction? *European Review of Applied Psychology*, *65*(4), 179–188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erap.2015.06.003>
- Di Nota, P.M., Kasurak, E., Bahji, A., Groll, D., & Anderson, G. S. (2021). Coping among public safety personnel: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Stress and Health*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.3039>

- Dragano, N., Siegrist, J., Nyberg, S.T., Lunau, T., Fransson, E.I., Alfredsson, L., Bjorner, J.B., Borritz, M., Burr, H., Erbel, R., Fahlén, G., Goldberg, M., Hamer, M., Heikkilä, K., Jöckel, K.-H., Knutsson, A., Madsen, I.E.H., Nielsen, M.L., Nordin, M., & Oksanen, T. (2017). Effort-reward imbalance at work and incident coronary heart disease. *Epidemiology*, 28(4), 619–626. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ede.0000000000000666>
- Du Plessis, E.C., & Letshwene, M.J. (2020). A reflection on identified challenges facing South African teachers. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 15(2), 69–91. <https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.10520/ejc-jitl1-v15-n2-a7>
- Ebersöhn, L. (2012). Adding “flock” to “fight and flight”: A honeycomb of resilience where supply of relationships meets demand for support. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 22(1), 29–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2012.10874518>
- Ebersöhn, L. (2013). Building generative theory from case work: The relationship-resourced resilience model. In M.P. Wissing (Ed.), *Well-Being Research in South Africa* (pp. 97–121). Springer.
- Ebersöhn, L. (2019). *Flocking together: An indigenous psychology theory of resilience in Southern Africa*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16435-5>
- Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., & Notelaers, G. (2009). Measuring exposure to bullying and harassment at work: Validity, factor structure and psychometric properties of the Negative Acts Questionnaire – Revised. *Work & Stress*, 23(1), 24–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370902815673>
- Elizabeth Scott, M.S. (n.d.). *Reduce stress with increased assertiveness*. Kwelangatraining.co.za. Retrieved August 27, 2023, from <https://kwelangatraining.co.za/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Reduce-Stress-with-Increased-Assertiveness.pdf>
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107–115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x>

eNCA. (2021, August 22). *Discussion / Workplace bullying*. Wwww.youtube.com.

<https://youtu.be/CZwtJoQAT7I>

Epel, E.S., Blackburn, E.H., Lin, J., Dhabhar, F.S., Adler, N.E., Morrow, J.D., & Cawthon, R.M.

(2004). Accelerated telomere shortening in response to life stress. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 101(49), 17312–17315.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3374002>

Eslami, A.A., Rabiei, L., Afzali, S.M., Hamidizadeh, S., & Masoudi, R. (2016). The effectiveness of assertiveness training on the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression of high school students.

*Iranian Red Crescent Medical Journal*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.5812/ircmj.21096>

Fancourt, D., Warran, K., Finn, S., & Wiseman, T. (2019). Psychosocial singing interventions for the mental health and well-being of family carers of patients with cancer: Results from a

longitudinal controlled study. *BMJ Open*, 9(8). <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2018-026995>

Flett, J.A.M., Lie, C., Riordan, B.C., Thompson, L.M., Conner, T.S., & Hayne, H. (2017). Sharpen your pencils: Preliminary evidence that adult coloring reduces depressive symptoms and

anxiety. *Creativity Research Journal*, 29(4), 409–416.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2017.1376505>

Flook, L., Goldberg, S.B., Pinger, L., Bonus, K., & Davidson, R.J. (2013). Mindfulness for teachers:

A pilot study to assess effects on stress, burnout, and teaching efficacy. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 7(3), 182–195. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mbe.12026>

Folkman, S., & Moskowitz, J.T. (2004). Coping: Pitfalls and promise. *Annual Review of Psychology*,

55(1), 745–774. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.141456>

Frank, J.L., Reibel, D., Broderick, P., Cantrell, T., & Metz, S. (2013). The effectiveness of

mindfulness-based stress reduction on educator stress and well-being: Results from a pilot study. *Mindfulness*, 6(2), 208–216. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-013-0246-2>

- Freire, C., Ferradás, M. del M., Regueiro, B., Rodríguez, S., Valle, A., & Núñez, J. C. (2020). Coping strategies and self-efficacy in University students: A Person-Centered approach. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*(841). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00841>
- Gable, S., & Haidt, J. (2005). What (and why) is positive psychology? *Review of General Psychology, 9*(2), 103–110. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.103>
- Garcia-Lopez, G. (2023, February 8). *Time Management Tips to Address Burnout*. [www.himss.org](http://www.himss.org). <https://www.himss.org/resources/time-management-tips-address-burnout>
- Gardiner, M., Kearns, H., & Tiggemann, M. (2013). Effectiveness of cognitive behavioural coaching in improving the well-being and retention of rural general practitioners. *Australian Journal of Rural Health, 21*(3), 183–189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12033>
- Giga, S.I., Cooper, C.L., & Faragher, B. (2003). The development of a framework for a comprehensive approach to stress management interventions at work. *International Journal of Stress Management, 10*(4), 280–296. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1072-5245.10.4.280>
- Giorgi, G., Ando, M., Arenas, A., Shoss, M.K., & Leon-Perez, J.M. (2013). Exploring personal and organizational determinants of workplace bullying and its prevalence in a Japanese sample. *Psychology of Violence, 3*(2), 185–197. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028049>
- Groat, L. N., Wang, D., & Ebrary, I. (2013). *Architectural research methods*. Wiley.
- Gross, J.J. (2002). Emotion regulation: Affective, cognitive, and social consequences. *Psychophysiology, 39*(3), 281–291. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0048577201393198>
- Guse, T. (2020). Enhancing flourishing -changing for the better. In M.P. Wissing, J. Potgieter, T. Guse, I. Khumalo, & L. Nel (Eds.), *Towards flourishing: Embracing well-being in diverse contexts*. Van Schaik.
- Gustems-Carnicer, J., & Calderón, C. (2012). Coping strategies and psychological well-being among teacher education students. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 28*(4), 1127–1140. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-012-0158-x>

- Hagermoser Sanetti, L. M., Boyle, A.M., Magrath, E., Cascio, A., & Moore, E. (2020). Intervening to decrease teacher stress: A review of current research and new directions. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 25(4), 416–425. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00285-x>
- Hansen, A., Buitendach, J.H., & Kanengoni, H. (2015). Psychological capital, subjective well-being, burnout and job satisfaction amongst educators in the Umlazi region in South Africa. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v13i1.621>
- Health Professions Council of South Africa. (n.d.). Protecting the Public and Guiding the Professions Ethical guidelines for good practice in the health care professions. In *HPCSA*. Retrieved March 29, 2022, from [https://www.hpcsa.co.za/Uploads/Professional\\_Practice/Ethics\\_Booklet.pdf](https://www.hpcsa.co.za/Uploads/Professional_Practice/Ethics_Booklet.pdf)
- Helms-Lorenz, M., & Maulana, R. (2015). Influencing the psychological well-being of beginning teachers across three years of teaching: Self-efficacy, stress causes, job tension and job discontent. *Educational Psychology*, 36(3), 569–594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2015.1008403>
- Hepburn, S.-J., Carroll, A., & McCuaig, L. (2021). Promoting stress management and wellbeing for teachers, a pilot study. *Frontiers in Education*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.744227>
- Herman, K.C., Hickmon-Rosa, J., & Reinke, W.M. (2017). Empirically derived profiles of teacher stress, burnout, self-efficacy, and coping and associated student outcomes. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 20(2), 90–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300717732066>
- Herman, K.C., Reinke, W.M., & Eddy, C.L. (2020). Advances in understanding and intervening in teacher stress and coping: The Coping-Competence-Context Theory. *Journal of School Psychology*, 78, 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2020.01.001>
- Hiew, D.N., Halford, W.K., Van de Vijver, F.J.R., & Liu, S. (2016). Communication and relationship satisfaction in Chinese, Western, and intercultural Chinese–Western couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 30(2), 193–202. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000144>



- Holahan, C.J., Moos, R.H., Holahan, C.K., Brennan, P.L., & Schutte, K.K. (2005). Stress generation, avoidance coping, and depressive symptoms: A 10-year model. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 73*(4), 658–666. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006x.73.4.658>
- Holmes, T.H., & Rahe, R.H. (1967). The social readjustment rating scale. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 11*(2), 213–218. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-3999\(67\)90010-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-3999(67)90010-4)
- Jackson, J.S., Knight, K.M., & Rafferty, J.A. (2010). Race and Unhealthy Behaviors: Chronic stress, the HPA axis, and physical and mental health disparities over the life course. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*(5), 933–939. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2008.143446>
- Jackson, L., & Rothmann, S. (2005). An adapted model of burnout for educators in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education, 25*(2), 100–108.  
[https://ianrothmann.com/pub/educat\\_v25\\_n2\\_a7.pdf](https://ianrothmann.com/pub/educat_v25_n2_a7.pdf)
- Jackson, L., & Rothmann, S. (2006). Occupational stress, organisational commitment, and ill-health of educators in the North West Province. *South African Journal of Education, 26*(1), 75–95.  
<file:///C:/Users/Admin/Downloads/25057-Article%20Text-31774-1-10-20060523.pdf>
- Jacob, L., & Aloka, Peter. J.O. (2023). Identification of problematic behaviors among learners in classrooms by teachers in primary schools South Africa. *International Journal of Humanity Studies (IJHS), 7*(1), 147–158. <https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v7i1.6266>
- Jacobs, L., & Teise, K.L. (2019). Educators' subjective experiences of workplace bullying within a perceived neoliberalist education system. *South African Journal of Education, 39*(4), 1–9.  
<https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39n4a1868>
- Jelinek, C.A. (1986). Stress and the pre-service teacher. *The Teacher Educator, 22*(1), 2–8.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08878738609554886>
- Jennings, P.A., Frank, J.L., Snowberg, K.E., Coccia, M.A., & Greenberg, M.T. (2013). Improving classroom learning environments by Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education



- (CARE): Results of a randomized controlled trial. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 28(4), 374–390. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000035>
- Johnson, S.M. (2015). Reducing teacher stress and burnout in high-risk secondary schools in South Africa using transactional analysis. *International Journal of Transactional Analysis Research & Practice*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.29044/v6i1p70>
- Kamtsios, S. (2018). Burnout syndrome and stressors in different stages of teachers' professional development: The mediating role of coping strategies. *Hellenic Journal of Psychology*, 15, 229–253. <https://pseve.org/publications/journal/hellenic-journal-of-psychology-volume-15/>
- Keeman, A., Näswall, K., Malinen, S., & Kuntz, J. (2017). Employee wellbeing: Evaluating a wellbeing intervention in two settings. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8(8). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00505>
- Khatun, A., Bharti, V., & Tiwari, M. (2022). Effects of work stress on psychological well-being and job satisfaction: A review. In *Revisioning and Reconstructing Paradigms and Advances in Industry 5.0*. Kolkata Press Books. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361486312\\_effects\\_of\\_work\\_stress\\_on\\_psychological\\_well-being\\_and\\_job\\_satisfaction\\_a\\_review](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361486312_effects_of_work_stress_on_psychological_well-being_and_job_satisfaction_a_review)
- Kilby, C.J., & Sherman, K.A. (2016). Delineating the relationship between stress mindset and primary appraisals: Preliminary findings. *SpringerPlus*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40064-016-1937-7>
- Kim, E.S., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2011). Dispositional optimism protects older adults from stroke. *Stroke*, 42(10), 2855–2859. <https://doi.org/10.1161/strokeaha.111.613448>
- Klusmann, U., Richter, D., & Lüdtke, O. (2016). Teachers' emotional exhaustion is negatively related to students' achievement: Evidence from a large-scale assessment study. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 108(8), 1193–1203. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000125>

- Kundi, Y.M., Aboramadan, M., Elhamalawi, E.M.I., & Shahid, S. (2021). Employee psychological well-being and job performance: Exploring mediating and moderating mechanisms. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 29(3). <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-05-2020-2204>
- Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: Directions for future research. *Educational Review*, 53(1), 27–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910120033628>
- Lam, D., Ardington, C., & Leibbrandt, M. (2011). Schooling as a lottery: Racial differences in school advancement in urban South Africa. *Journal of Development Economics*, 95(2), 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2010.05.005>
- Lazarus, R.S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer.
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A practical guide to getting the life you want*. Penguin Books.
- Madigan, D.J., & Kim, L.E. (2021). Does teacher burnout affect students? A systematic review of its association with academic achievement and student-reported outcomes. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 105(101714). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101714>
- Mansfield, C.F. (2020). *Cultivating teacher resilience: International approaches, applications and impact*. Springer.
- Marais-Opperman, V., Rothmann, S., & Van Eeden, C. (2021). Stress, flourishing and intention to leave of teachers: Does coping type matter? *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 47. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v47i0.1834>
- Maree, J.G. (2021). Managing the COVID-19 pandemic in South African schools: Turning challenge into opportunity. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 52(2), 249–261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463211058398>
- Maree, K. (2011). *Shaping the story: a guide to facilitating narrative career counselling*. Sense Publishers.

- Mayisela, S. (2021). “You detain yourself if you detain children”: Educators’ perceptions of detention as an alternative to corporal punishment. *South African Journal of Education*, 41(4), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n4a1968>
- McFadden, P., Ross, J., Moriarty, J., Mallett, J., Schroder, H., Ravalier, J., Manthorpe, J., Currie, D., Harron, J., & Gillen, P. (2021). The role of coping in the wellbeing and work-related quality of life of UK Health and Social Care Workers during COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(2), 815. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020815>
- McGrath, R.E., & Wallace, N. (2019). Cross-validation of the VIA Inventory of Strengths-Revised and its short forms. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2019.1705465>
- Mental Health First Aid USA. (2022, January 18). *How protective factors can promote resilience*. Mental Health First Aid. <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2022/01/how-protective-factors-can-promote-resilience>
- Motseke, M.J. (2012). Stressors of township secondary school teachers: a management issue. *Interim: Interdisciplinary Journal*, 11(1), 73–83. <https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.10520/EJC133594>
- Naidoo, K. (2011). *Stress management and its impact on work performance of educators in public schools in KwaZulu-Natal* [Doctoral dissertation, North-West University]. <https://repository.nwu.ac.za/handle/10394/6882>
- National Institute of Mental Health. (2021). *Caring for your mental health*. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>
- Ndende, T. (2021). *Examining the reasons behind teachers leaving the profession: A case study of uMLAZI Education district* (pp. 1–118). Master’s thesis, [Durban University of Technology]. [https://openscholar.dut.ac.za/bitstream/10321/4309/3/Ndende%20T\\_2021\\_Redacted.pdf](https://openscholar.dut.ac.za/bitstream/10321/4309/3/Ndende%20T_2021_Redacted.pdf)

- Ndimande, B.S. (2013). From Bantu Education to the fight for socially just education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46(1), 20–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2013.750199>
- Ngidi, D.P., & Sibaya, P.T. (2002). Black teachers' personality dimensions and work-related stress factors. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 32(3), 7–15.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/008124630203200302>
- Niemiec, R.M. (2018). *Character strengths interventions: A field guide for practitioners*. Hogrefe Publishing Group.
- Niemiec, R.M., & Pearce, R. (2021). The practice of character strengths: Unifying definitions, principles, and exploration of what's soaring, emerging, and ripe with potential in science and in practice. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.590220>
- Nkabinde, Z.P. (2016). Post-apartheid education in South Africa: A review of progress and pitfalls – ProQuest. *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, 22(2), 82–91.  
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/18197c6b73ea1d9c440dec14b9258442/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2030927>
- Noone, P.A. (2017). The Holmes–Rahe Stress Inventory. *Occupational Medicine*, 67(7), 581–582.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqx099>
- Nowicki, L. (2022). *Eastern Cape parents, teachers, and activists go to court to get education department to deliver textbooks*. News24.  
<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/eastern-cape-parents-teachers-and-activists-go-to-court-to-get-education-dept-to-deliver-textbooks-20220304>
- Oberle, E., & Schonert-Reichl, K.A. (2016). Stress contagion in the classroom? The link between classroom teacher burnout and morning cortisol in elementary school students. *Social Science & Medicine*, 159(159), 30–37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.04.031>
- OECD. (2020). TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and school leaders valued as professionals. In *TALIS*. OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en>

- Ogolsky, B.G., Monk, J.K., Rice, T.M., Theisen, J.C., & Maniotes, C.R. (2017). Relationship maintenance: A review of research on romantic relationships. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 9(3), 275–306. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12205>
- Ozamiz-Etxebarria, N., Berasategi Santxo, N., Idoiaga Mondragon, N., & Dosil Santamaría, M. (2021). The psychological state of teachers during the COVID-19 crisis: The challenge of returning to face-to-face teaching. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.620718>
- Park, N., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). Strengths of character and well-being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 23(5), 603–619. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.23.5.603.50748>
- Parkes, K.R. (1994). Personality and coping as moderators of work stress processes: Models, methods and measures. *Work & Stress*, 8(2), 110–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678379408259984>
- Pawelski, J.O. (2016). Defining the “positive” in positive psychology: Part I. A descriptive analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 11(4), 339–356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2015.1137627>
- Pokhrel, S., & Chhetri, R. (2021). A literature review on impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. *Higher Education for the Future*, 8(1), 133–141. Sage Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631120983481>
- Potgieter-Groot, L., Visser, M., & Lubbe-de Beer, C. (2012). Emotional and behavioural barriers to learning and development in the inclusive education classrooms in South Africa: Developing a training programme for teachers. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health*, 24(1), 59–71. <https://doi.org/10.2989/17280583.2011.639775>
- Pourjali, F., & Zarnaghash, M. (2010). Relationships between assertiveness and the power of saying no with mental health among undergraduate student. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 9(9), 137–141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.12.126>

- Pyett, P.M. (2003). Validation of qualitative research in the “real world.” *Qualitative Health Research, 13*(8), 1170–1179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732303255686>
- Ramrathan, L. (2020). School curriculum in South Africa in the COVID-19 context: An opportunity for education for relevance. *PROSPECTS, 51*(1-3), 383–392. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09490-1>
- Robinson, L., Smith, M., Segal, J., & Shubin, J. (2019, March 21). *HelpGuide.org*. HelpGuide.org. <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/benefits-of-play-for-adults.htm>
- Rubbi Nunan, J.S., & Ntombela, S. (2021). Students’ challenging behavior in Phoenix primary schools, South Africa: Impact on teachers. *Education and Urban Society, 001312452110123*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00131245211012355>
- Ryff, C.D. (2014). Psychological well-being revisited: Advances in the science and practice of eudaimonia. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics, 83*(1), 10–28. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000353263>
- Ryff, C.D. (2018). Eudaimonic well-being. *Diversity in Harmony - Insights from Psychology, 375–395*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119362081.ch20>
- Salimzadeh, R., Hall, N. C., & Saroyan, A. (2021). Examining academics’ strategies for coping with stress and emotions: A review of research. *Frontiers in Education, 6*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2021.660676>
- Santaracchi, E., Sprugnoli, G., Tatti, E., Mencarelli, L., Neri, F., Momi, D., Di Lorenzo, G., Pascual-Leone, A., Rossi, S., & Rossi, A. (2018). Brain functional connectivity correlates of coping styles. *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience, 18*(3), 495–508. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13415-018-0583-7>
- Savickas, M.L., Nota, L., Rossier, J., Dauwalder, J.-P., Duarte, M.E., Guichard, J., Soresi, S., Van Esbroeck, R., & Van Vianen, A.E.M. (2009). Life designing: A paradigm for career

construction in the 21st century. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 75(3), 239–250.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2009.04.004>

Schaufeli, W.B. (2003). Past performance and future perspectives of burnout research. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 29(4). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v29i4.127>

Schaufeli, W.B., Desart, S., & De Witte, H. (2020). Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT)—Development, validity, and reliability. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(24), 9495. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17249495>

Schaufeli, W., De Witte, H., & Desart, S. (2020). *Manual Burnout Assessment Tool*.

<https://burnoutassessmenttool.be/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Test-Manual-BAT-English-version-2.0-1.pdf>

Schneiderman, N., Ironson, G., & Siegel, S.D. (2005). Stress and health: Psychological, behavioral, and biological determinants. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 1(1), 607–628.

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.1.102803.144141>

Schulze, S., & Steyn, T. (2007). Stressors in the professional lives of South African secondary school educators. *South African Journal of Education*, 27(4), 691–707.

<https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC32141>

Schussler, D.L., Jennings, P.A., Sharp, J.E., & Frank, J.L. (2015). Improving teacher awareness and well-being through CARE: A qualitative analysis of the underlying mechanisms.

*Mindfulness*, 7(1), 130–142. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0422-7>

Schutte, N.S., & Malouff, J.M. (2019). The impact of signature character strengths interventions: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 20(4), 1179–1196.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-018-9990-2>

Scorsolini-Comin, F., Fontaine, A.M.G.V., Koller, S.H., & Santos, M.A. dos. (2013). From authentic happiness to well-being: the flourishing of Positive Psychology. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica*, 26(4), 663–670. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-79722013000400006>

- SECTION27. (2022, December 2). *School Sanitation: SECTION27's campaign for dignified school toilets*. SECTION27. <https://section27.org.za/priority-work-areas/the-right-to-basic-education/school-sanitation/>)
- Seligman, M.E.P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.55.1.5>
- Seligman, M.E.P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Atria Books.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (2015, April 7). *Prof Seligman on PERMA*. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/jqqHUxzpfBI>
- Selye, H. (1976). *The stress of life*. New York McGraw-Hill.
- Shahsavarani, A.M., Abadi, E.A.M., & Kalkhoran, M.H. (2015). Stress: Facts and theories through literature review. *International Journal of Medical Reviews*, 2(2), 230–241. Spring. [http://www.ijmedrev.com/article\\_68654.html](http://www.ijmedrev.com/article_68654.html)
- Sharma, A., Madaan, V., & Petty, F.D. (2006). Exercise for mental health. *Primary Care Companion to the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 8(2), 106. <https://doi.org/10.4088/pcc.v08n0208a>
- Shimazu, A., Okada, Y., Sakamoto, M., & Miura, M. (2003). Effects of stress management program for teachers in Japan: A pilot study. *Journal of Occupational Health*, 45(4), 202–208. <https://doi.org/10.1539/joh.45.202>
- Steyn, G.M., & Kamper, G.D. (2006). Understanding occupational stress among educators: An overview. *Africa Education Review*, 3(1\_2), 113–133. <https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC31811>
- Suleman, Q., Hussain, I., Shehzad, S., Syed, M.A., & Raja, S.A. (2018). Relationship between perceived occupational stress and psychological well-being among secondary school heads in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *PLOS ONE*, 13(12), e0208143. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0208143>



- Tan, S.Y., & Yip, A. (2018). Hans Selye (1907–1982). Founder of the stress theory. *Singapore Medical Journal*, 59(4), 170–171. <https://doi.org/10.11622/smedj.2018043>
- Tang, Y.-Y., Tang, R., & Gross, J.J. (2019). Promoting psychological well-being through an evidence-based mindfulness training program. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2019.00237>
- Taylor, C., Harrison, J., Haimovitz, K., Oberle, E., Thomson, K., Schonert-Reichl, K., & Roeser, R.W. (2015). Examining ways that a mindfulness-based intervention reduces stress in public school teachers: A mixed-methods study. *Mindfulness*, 7(1), 115–129. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0425-4>
- Tilbrook, A., Turner, A.I., & Clarke, I.J. (2000). Effects of stress on reproduction in non-rodent mammals: The role of glucocorticoids and sex differences. *Reviews of Reproduction*, 5(2), 105–113. <https://doi.org/10.1530/ror.0.0050105>
- Unicef. (n.d.). *What is stress?* [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org). <https://www.unicef.org/parenting/mental-health/what-is-stress>
- Van Vleet, M., Helgeson, V.S., & Berg, C.A. (2019). The importance of having fun: Daily play among adults with Type 1 diabetes. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36(11-12), 3695–3710. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407519832115>
- Van Wyk, D. (2006). Work wellness among secondary school teachers in the Goldfield region of the Free State Province.[Doctoral dissertation, North-West University]. <https://repository.nwu.ac.za/handle/10394/1180>
- Vazi, M.L.M., Ruiter, R.A.C., Van den Borne, B., Martin, G., Dumont, K., & Reddy, P.S. (2013). The relationship between wellbeing indicators and teacher psychological stress in Eastern Cape public schools in South Africa. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 39(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v39i1.1042>

- Versfeld, J., Graham, M.A., & Ebersöhn, L. (2022). Time to flock: Time together strengthens relationships and enhances trust to teach despite challenges. *Teachers and Teaching*, 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2022.2145279>
- VIA Institute on Character. (2020). *VIA Character Strengths Survey & Character Profile Reports / VIA Institute*. Viacharacter.org; www.viacharacter.org. <https://www.viacharacter.org/>
- Viac, C., & Fraser, P. (2020). Teachers' well-being: A framework for data collection and analysis. In [www.oecd-ilibrary.org](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org). OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/c36fc9d3-en>
- Vilija Malinauskienė, Vytautas Obelenis, & Dopagienė, D. (2005). Psychological terror at work and cardiovascular diseases among teachers. *Acta Medica Lituanica*, 12(2), 20–25.
- Visser, M. (2022). Participatory action research in South African communities. In B.R. Parry (Ed.), *Community Psychology*. Pearson.
- Weiten, W. (2017). *Psychology: Themes and variations* (10th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Wettstein, A., Schneider, S., Grosse Holtforth, M., & La Marca, R. (2021). Teacher stress: A psychobiological approach to stressful interactions in the classroom. *Frontiers in Education*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.681258>
- Waters, L., Algoe, S.B., Dutton, J., Emmons, R., Fredrickson, B.L., Heaphy, E., Moskowitz, J.T., Neff, K., Niemiec, R., Pury, C., & Steger, M. (2021). Positive psychology in a pandemic: buffering, bolstering, and building mental health. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 17(3), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2021.1871945>
- Williams, J.J. & Styles, B.W. (2020). *Promoting resilience in teachers: An examination of a program designed to improve teachers' social-emotional competence*. [Doctoral dissertation, Samford University]. <https://www.proquest.com/pagepdf/2478605068?accountid=12865>
- Wissing, M.P., Potgieter, J., Guse, T., Khumalo, I., & Nel, L. (Eds.). (2020). *Towards flourishing: Embracing well-being in diverse context*. Van Schaik.

World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Burn-out an occupational phenomenon*.

<https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon#:~:text=%E2%80%9CBurn%2Dout%20is%20a%20syndrome>

Retrieved October 11, 2023.

World Health Organization. (2020, October 19). *Occupational health: Stress at the workplace*.

Www.who.int. <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/occupational-health-stress-at-the-workplace>

Xiao, W.S. (2021). The role of collectivism–individualism in attitudes toward compliance and psychological responses during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.600826>

Yalom, I.D., & Leszcz, M. (2020). *The theory and practice of group Psychotherapy*. Basic Books.

Yaribeygi, H., Panahi, Y., Sahraei, H., Johnston, P., & Sahebkar, A. (2017). The impact of stress on body function: A review. *EXCLI, 16*, 1057–1072.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28900385/>

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2012). *Action research for sustainable development in a turbulent world*.

Emerald Publishing.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Ethics approval letter

## Appendix B: Feedback forms – Teachers

### Feedback forms - Teachers

- What content was presented?
- What is the most important thing you have learned in the session?
- How can you use it in your work or personal life?
- How can the session be improved?

## Appendix C: Feedback forms – Facilitators

### Feedback forms – Facilitators

- Were all the planned activities in the session presented successfully?
- How did teachers react to the programme content? Specify teachers' reactions.
- What challenges were encountered in implementing the program?
- How can it be improved?

## Appendix D: Participant Information Letter



### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

#### PROMOTING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF TEACHERS: STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

The Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria present a stress management course for teachers. We invite you to take part in the intervention. Before you decide to participate, it is important that you know what it will involve. Please take some time to read the following information carefully, which will explain the details of this research. Please feel free to ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH?

The purpose of the intervention is to assist teachers to improve their ability to deal with the many challenges they experience and to promote their resilience and psychological well-being. To make sure that the intervention really promotes teachers' wellbeing, we will assess the outcome of the intervention and get teachers' recommendations on improving the intervention.

#### WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited to participate in the intervention, because the principal of your school expressed interest in your school participating in the intervention. You can decide if you want to participate or not.

#### WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

- You are requested to participate in at least four of the six sessions of the intervention for teachers, presented once a month after school at a convenient time and place for teachers. The

sessions will be 60 to 90 minutes long and will be in the form of small support groups focusing on psychological experiences of teachers. The sessions will involve experiential learning and small group participation.

- After each session teachers will be expected to complete a feedback form on what you experienced during the session, what was valuable and what can be changed.
- You will be asked to complete a questionnaire about your own psychological wellbeing before and after the intervention. The questionnaire will take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete.
- After the intervention you can volunteer to be interviewed about your experience during and after participating in the intervention. This information will be used to improve the intervention for future use.

### **CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?**

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without negative consequences.

### **WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

- Anonymity will not be possible as you will participate in a small group. But we can assure confidentiality of your information. In the beginning of the intervention the group will decide on group rules and one of them is that personal information will not be discussed outside of the group. Participants can also decide what they feel comfortable to share in the group.
- All data collected about the intervention will be kept confidential as personal information will not be linked to the opinions of people. The results of the study will be reported anonymously and in group context.
- Only the researchers of this study will have access to your personal information. This information will be kept confidential, except in cases where the researcher has to make a referral to promote your health, such as abuse and suicide risk.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You will benefit personally by learning skills how to care for and promote your own wellbeing despite experiencing challenges. Participation will promote your own sense of well-being. You will also be

able to use these skills to develop your relationships with other people and help others to promote their own psychological well-being. You will thus be able to facilitate wellbeing in your school and family. Additionally, through your feedback about your experiences during the intervention, you will contribute to the development of the intervention to promote future implementation for other teachers.

**WHAT ARE THE ANTICIPATED RISKS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

The risks are low, although you may become aware of personal challenges that you experience. The intervention will be presented by senior Psychology students that can refer you for professional help if needed.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THAT SOME FORM OF DISCOMFORT OCCUR AS A RESULT OF TAKING PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

Should you have the need for psychological assistance during or after the intervention we will refer you to the Education Employee Health and Wellness Centre.

**HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Participant information in hard copies will be locked in the cabinet and electronic data will be kept in a file that is password protected in the Department of Psychology. Information will be stored for 15 years. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

**WHAT WILL THE RESEARCH DATA BE USED FOR?**

The information gathered from the participants will be used to improve the intervention for future use to promote teachers' psychological wellbeing. It may also be used to publish academic papers and to share at national and international conferences to inspire more researchers to attend to teachers' psychological wellbeing.

**WILL I BE PAID TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Unfortunately, you will not be paid to take part in this study but refreshments/lunch will be provided at each session.

There will be no costs involved to you if you take part in this study.

**HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL/ PERMISSION?**



This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria. Ethical approval number is HUM010/0322. A copy of the approval letter can be provided to you on request. Additionally, the project has been approved by the Gauteng Department of Education and Tshwane South district. The letters are available on request.

**HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**


The findings of the research will be shared with the Department of Education and your school principal with the request that they inform all teachers and specifically the participants.

**WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE CONCERN, COMPLAINT OR ANYTHING I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE STUDY?**

If you have questions about this study or you have experienced adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided below. If you have questions regarding the rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the researcher, please contact the Head of the Department of Psychology whose contact details are below or Linda Forson at the Gauteng Department of Education: [linda.forson@gauteng.gov.za](mailto:linda.forson@gauteng.gov.za)

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and in advance for participating in this study.

**Researcher**

Name Surname.....Prof Maretha Visser..... Signature  .....

Contact number.....012 420 2549 / 082 8898338

Email address.....Maretha.visser@up.ac.za

**Head of Department**

Name Surname.....Prof Tharina Guse

*Email address.....tharina.guse@up.ac.za*

## Appendix E: Informed Consent



### Promoting the psychological well-being of teachers

#### WRITTEN CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (**participant name**), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and risks of participation.

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	NOT APPLICABLE
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason, and without any consequences or penalties.			
I understand that information collected during the study will not be linked to my identity and I give permission to the researchers of this study to access the information.			
I understand that this study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance from Research Ethics Committee Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pretoria. The project has also been approved by Gauteng Department of Education.			
I understand who will have access to personal information and how the information will be stored with a clear understanding that I will not be linked to the information in any way.			
I understand how this study will be written up and published.			
I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.			
I consent to being audio recorded if needed.			
I consent that my contribution can be used in research outputs such as publication of articles, thesis and conferences as long as my identity is protected.			
I give permission to be quoted directly in the research publication whilst remaining anonymous.			

I give permission that the data can be used for future research.			
I have sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I agree to take part in the above study.			

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix F: Breakdown of Intervention

Session	Type of exercise	Supporting literature
Session 1 Stress Management	Psychoeducation on stress	(Bauml, 2006); (Cohen et al., 2016); (Selye, 1976)
	Types of coping	(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); (Herman et al., 2020)
	Balloon activity to lighten the spirits of the teachers – PLAY	(Robinson et al., 2019); (Van Vleet et al., 2019)
	Completion of Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory	(Holmes & Rahe, 1967)
	Mindfulness exercise	(Ansley et al., 2012); (Frank et al., 2013) (Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2020); (Hepburn et al., 2021); (Jennings et al., 2013); (Shussler, 2015); (Taylor et al., 2015)
Session 2 Bullying & victimisation	Psychoeducation on bullying victimisation and assertiveness	(Bauml, 2006); (De Wet and Jacobs, 2013); (Eslami et al., 2016); (Jacobs & Teise, 2019); (Pourjali & Zarnaghas, 2010)
	Video on bullying and victimisation	<a href="https://youtu.be/CZwtJoQAT7I">https://youtu.be/CZwtJoQAT7I</a> (eNCA, 2021)
	Negative Acts Questionnaire	(Einarsen et al., 2009)
Session 3 Burn Out	Psychoeducation & signs of burnout	(Bauml, 2006); (Schaufeli et al., 2020)
	Aerobics activity	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enYITYwvPAQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enYITYwvPAQ</a> Jackson (2013); (Sharma et al., 2006)
	Completing of BAT	(Schaufeli, Desart, et al., 2020)
Session 4 Personal Issues	Completion of VIA, Self-awareness and strength identification	<a href="https://www.viacharacter.org/account/register">https://www.viacharacter.org/account/register</a> (VIA Institute on Character, 2020)
	Psychoeducation	(Bauml, 2006)
	Regulation of emotions - Mindfulness	(Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2020); (Jennings et al., 2013); (Taylor et al., 2015)
	Pin-A-Strength-Wall (fun)	(Robinson et al., 2019);
	Singing	(Fancourt et al., 2019)

Session 5 Relationships	Psychoeducation on good relationships	(Bauml, 2006); (Canevello & Crocker, 2010)
	Activity – Broken Telephone (to highlight communication failures and boundaries)	(Hiew et al., 2016); (Ogolsky et al., 2017)
	Activity – Gratitude Letters	(Froh et al., 2009); (Guse, 2020); (Seligman et al., 2005); (Toepfer et al., 2012); Waters et al. (2021)
	Mindfulness Activity	(Ansley et al., 2012); (Frank et al., 2013) (Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2020); (Hepburn et al., 2021); (Jennings et al., 2013); (Shussler, 2015); (Taylor et al., 2015)
Session 6 Meaning & Accomplishment	Meaning activity What have you learnt? What were/is your favourite session? Take away: how to use the knowledge in the future?	Seligman (2011)
	Handing out of certificates = (accomplishment)	Seligman (2011)
	Celebration with music and dancing	(Robinson et al., 2019); (Van Vleet et al., 2019)

Table 4 Exercises Performed During Intervention.

## 1. Breakdown of intervention

### Session 1:

The first session focused on **Stress management**. It included psychoeducation on stress, signs to identify stress and types of coping (adaptive and maladaptive). Additionally, the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory (Holmes & Rahe, 1967) was given for each teacher to complete to assess their stress levels. According to Noone (2017), this scale implies that adjustment to change in life necessitates an effort, followed by an attempt to regain stability. A short stress info leaflet was provided to the teachers to remind them of alternative coping strategies they can practice.

Considering that adjustment to change in life requires effort and means to regain stability, this stress management intervention and session one's focus on stress is essential. Further relevance for focusing on stress and coping abilities is emphasised by many scholars who highlight the adverse effect of stress on teachers' well-being (Cloete, 2015; Herman et al., 2020; Schneiderman et al., 2005;

Shahavarani, 2015; Yaribeygi et al., 2017) and how teachers need to be empowered with coping skills to deal to mitigate stressful situations thus improving their well-being in various contexts (Ansley, 2020; Czerwinski et al., 2020; Jennings et al., 2013; Schussler, 2015; Taylor et al., 2016; Versfeld, 2022).

Moreover, the balloon activity was done to get the teachers to play and lighten the spirit, which improves the mood and is beneficial for well-being (Robinson et al., 2019); (Van Vleet et al., 2019). The balloon activity was aimed at getting the teachers to think about their goals, write them down on the balloon and race towards the finish line while kicking, hitting or any behaviour they thought of. This exercise highlighted to the teachers that although they may have a plan to get the balloon to the finish line (i.e. how to achieve their goals), things sometimes work out differently than planned and may create stress and frustration. However, it is important to not give up because of the challenges but to find alternative ways to cope with the challenges and still reach their goals. This activity was beneficial because it allowed the teachers to consider their aims and aspirations and see how each teacher approached the task differently. Nevertheless, eventually, everyone aimed to cross the finish line. Additionally, they discovered there was no need to compare themselves to others because they were unique and could approach life and achieve their objectives in their own way. The session was concluded with a mindfulness exercise, which scholars agree on its efficacy in reducing stress and improving well-being (Ansley et al., 2012; Frank et al., 2013; Hagermoser Sanetti et al., 2020; Hepburn et al., 2021; Jennings et al., 2013; Shussler, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015).

### **Session 2:**

In session two, a PowerPoint presentation (psychoeducation) on **Bullying and victimisation** was presented, a video from eNCA (2021) <https://youtu.be/CZwtJoQAT7I> discussing the matter was played and the Negative Attitudes Questionnaire-revised version (Einarsen et al., 2009) was administered to ascertain how many if any of the teachers experienced Bullying and Victimisation. The results from the needs assessment revealed that teachers mention bullying and victimisation at the workplace as a challenge which causes them stress.

Jacobs and Teise (2019) emphasise that workplace bullying is prevalent among teachers in South Africa, especially bullying related to their line of work. They elaborate that research reveals that an organisation's culture can either discourage or encourage bullying. This is supported by De Wet and Jacobs (2013), who concluded that workplace bullying is rife in South African schools and calls for institutional and policy solutions and interventions. Hence, this intervention focused on this aspect in the interim while policies are being looked into to provide teachers with skills and knowledge to protect themselves. Looking beyond just the policies, the teachers were empowered to be assertive when they

experience or observe others being bullied. They were empowered to look out for each other and not to keep quiet.

### **Session 3:**

In session three, psychoeducation on **Burnout and Time Management** was given. The teachers were asked to complete the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) (Schaufeliet al., 2020). Through the guidance of the facilitators, the teachers scored their survey to determine their own level of burnout. To address their level of burnout, the teachers were introduced to time management. Additionally, an element of self-care and exercise was introduced. To complete the session, teachers participated in an aerobics session <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enYITYwvPAQ>, as part of healthy living - another strategy or coping technique to overcome stress and burnout.

Jackson (2013) and Sharma et al. (2006) both highlight the value of exercise in promoting well-being. Furthermore, Ansley et al. (2021) emphasise the importance of self-care. To reduce stress, teachers needed to identify improvement areas, such as planning their time better, as reflected in their responses in Chapter 4. The session provided valuable information regarding burnout and coping strategies such as time management and aerobics. Teachers also had lots of fun during the aerobics session, which was beneficial.

### **Session 4:**

Session four entailed introducing **Personal Issues**, which included Work-Life balance, boundaries, how to deal with personal issues, emotional regulation (Mindfulness activity) and self-awareness. Teachers became aware of their capacities and strengths by completing an online VIA character strength survey <https://www.viacharacter.org/>, which helped them identify their strengths. Upon getting their results, teachers were asked to identify the strength or two they would like to share with the group, write it on a piece of paper and pin it on the wall while answering the question, how does it make them feel and how can they use it in their lives? This drew some positive emotions from teachers and made them feel hopeful. Schutte and Malouff (2019) explain that identifying and creatively applying one's character strengths can enhance well-being, vitality, and connectedness, all of which can improve mental health. This is supported by Niemiec (2018), who asserts that working with clients (and our own) character strengths enhances well-being, builds resilience, strengthens connections (relationships), and establishes solid and supportive environments. Identifying their character strengths and using mindfulness activities to regulate emotions, teachers left the session better equipped to manage stress. Furthermore, reflecting on the PERMA model, teachers experienced positive emotions (happiness) and a sense of meaning for the potential they can still attain and do with the discovered strengths, highlighting the relevance of the activity.

### Session 5:

Session five included psychoeducation **on Relationships**. A communication activity (broken telephone) focused on the importance of communicating clearly and how listening plays a crucial role in the communication process. Hiew et al. (2016) and Ogolsky et al. (2017) emphasise that communication is the heart of relationship satisfaction, and it has the potential also to influence positive conflict resolution and sharing of individual victories (De Netto et al., 2021). Additionally, boundaries and the value of having boundaries were discussed, which Buck (n.d.) emphasises is essential in any relationship. Teachers also got an opportunity to reflect on gratitude. They were asked to think of 3 relationships they were grateful for or encouraged to write a gratitude letter. Research reveals that gratitude letters enhance happiness and life satisfaction (Waters et al., 2021). Guse (2020) writes that gratitude exercises involve showing others an appreciation for their selfless acts. Lyubomirsky (2008) expounds that it also entails living in the present, being appreciative of your life as it is currently, and being grateful for all the people and things that have contributed to it. Guse (2020) highlights various studies showing the positive effects of writing gratitude letters (Seligman et al., 2005; Froh et al., 2009; Toepfer et al., 2012). She states, “Doing so seems to contribute to increased happiness and life satisfaction as well as decreased depressive symptoms” (Guse, 2020, p.341). Based on the research mentioned above, these various aspects were included in the relationship section of the intervention. Finally, a mindfulness activity was practised in closing to continue practising emotional regulation. These skills can contribute to good relationships. Mindfulness, as detailed by Schussler et al. (2015), helps individuals to gain a better understanding of their own needs. Other participants mentioned that it helped them to become less reactionary, improving their self-regulation. In other interventions implementing mindfulness activities, Jennings et al. (2013) and Taylor et al. (2016) highlighted that mindfulness helps establish mindful coping strategies, self-care and compassion.

### Session 6:

Session six included an introduction to the session on **Meaning and Accomplishment**. People are motivated by a sense of fulfillment after achieving their goals because it gives their lives purpose. According to Seligman (2012), having the motivation to finish the tasks at hand, working toward and accomplishing goals, and successfully completing activities are all ways to feel accomplished. He suggests that doing so allows people to reflect on their lives with pride, which improves wellbeing. Teachers were very excited about this session as it highlighted their accomplishments and generated a sense of pride. Despite the challenges and hindrances, teachers felt proud to have put their well-being first and equipped themselves with coping mechanisms to manage stressful situations. Receiving certificates was a confirmation of the goal they managed to attain. Later, teachers participated in a



group discussion with reflective questions on what the teachers have learnt. What was their favourite session, and how they would use the knowledge gained in their teaching practice.

### Appendix G: Turnitin Similarity Results

Mini-dissertation Turnitin.docx			
ORIGINALITY REPORT			
<b>5%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>2%</b>
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
<b>1</b>	<b>escholarship.org</b> Internet Source		<b>1%</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>www.researchgate.net</b> Internet Source		<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>dokumen.pub</b> Internet Source		<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>"Educator Stress", Springer Science and Business Media LLC, 2017</b> Publication		<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>ujcontent.uj.ac.za</b> Internet Source		<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>repository.up.ac.za</b> Internet Source		<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>scholarworks.waldenu.edu</b> Internet Source		<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>files.eric.ed.gov</b> Internet Source		<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Submitted to Australian Catholic University</b> Student Paper		<b>&lt;1%</b>

## Appendix H: Language Editing (Editors Statement)

### EDITOR'S STATEMENT

*RIKA OPPER – Translator and language editor*

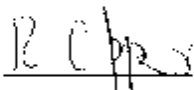
*6 Birkenhead Avenue  
Cape St Francis  
6312*

*Cell phone: 082 532 6015*

### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Herewith I, Rika Opper, confirm that I undertook the language editing of Ms Puleng Khotlele's master's dissertation titled:

**Teaching through life's challenges – development and implementation of a stress-management intervention to enhance the psychological well-being of primary school teachers in Mamelodi**



2 November 2023