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# Impact Of Self-Affirmation Technique On Work Stress And Lifestyle Among School Teachers: A Community-Based Empowerment - A Pilot Study

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***ABSTRACT***

***Introduction:*** *Teachers are crucial in the teaching- learning process. Teachers' positive attitudes and cheerfulness have a direct influence on students. Our schools need mentally healthy teachers who can manage work stress and adapt to the school environment. Research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Self-affirmation approach on job stress and lifestyle among teachers from higher secondary schools.*

***Methods*** *A time series design was used, with measurements taken immediately after intervention, two weeks after intervention, and six weeks after intervention. This research involved Higher secondary school teachers working in the Thrissur district.*

***Result:*** *Socio-demographic data have been analysed using percentages and frequencies. A paired samples T-test compared work stress and lifestyle values before and after the intervention, with P ≤0.05 indicating significance. All information analysis was performed using SPSS software. Outcomes showed that, in the experimental group, the mean pre-test lifestyle score of teachers was 72.17 ± 1 and the immediate post-test score was 91.33 ± 4.17. The lifestyle scores two weeks after intervention and six weeks after intervention were 91.50 ± 4.79 and 94.17 ± 3.49, respectively, reflecting a significant increase in lifestyle scores from pre-test to post- test immediately and between the two follow-ups. The teachers' mean pre-test work stress score was 2.83 ± 0.12, dropping to 2.49 ± 0.17 immediately after the intervention. The scores after two and six weeks were 2.07 ± 0.18 and 2.33 ± 0.08, respectively.*

***Discussion:*** *This demonstrates a significant reduction in stress from pre-test to post-test immediately and 2 weeks after intervention, with a slight increase in six weeks after intervention compared to the previous measurements. Thus, the self-affirmation technique effectively reduced work stress and improved lifestyle among higher secondary school teachers. Further research is needed, and incorporation of this technique into work stress management strategies should be considered to help address mental health issues among teachers.*

***Keyword:*** *Self-Affirmation Technique; Work Stress; Lifestyle; School Teachers; A Pilot Study*

## INTRODUCTION:

Work stress among higher secondary school teachers is a significant issue that impacts their well-being and effectiveness. Various factors, including demographic variables, organizational climate, and job demands, contribute to this stress. Gender, marital status, and age significantly influence stress levels among teachers. However, factors like professional qualifications and years of experience do not show a significant impact on stress levels[1 2].

Teachers experience high stress levels in environments with inadequate autonomy, poor recognition, and limited opportunities for innovation[2]. Additionally, a lack of classroom control and working outside one's subject area increases stress and fatigue[3].Teachers face stress from role overload, ambiguity, and conflict, as well as from unreasonable group pressures and poor peer relations[4]. Work stress negatively affects

teachers' psychological well-being, leading to issues like fatigue and depressed mood[5]. The effects are made worse by high job strain, which is defined by high demands and little control [6].

School teachers' work stress can negatively affect their well-being and lifestyle. Prolonged stress may lead to teacher burnout, which includes emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of reduced personal achievement [7,8]. Stress can also cause physical symptoms like headaches, fatigue, and sleep problems, as well as mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. [8,9]. High stress levels can decrease job satisfaction and increase the likelihood of teachers leaving the profession [8]. Some teachers might turn to unhealthy coping strategies like excessive alcohol use or overeating to manage stress [8]

Teacher stress is associated with the school satisfaction of students negatively and considered teacher caring, indicating that teacher well-being directly impacts student experiences[3]. High stress levels can lead to burnout, emphasized by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, which is prevalent among secondary school teachers[10].

A strong Sense of Coherence (SOC) can mitigate the effects of job strain, reduce perceived stress, and improve mood. A supportive school environment where colleagues also report high SOC can further alleviate stress [10.] Addressing systemic issues within schools, such as improving organizational climate and providing adequate resources, can help reduce stress levels among teachers[3].

Work stress among higher secondary school teachers is influenced by a combination of personal, organizational, and role-related factors. Such stress affects both teachers' psychological well-being and has implications for student outcomes. Protective factors like a strong sense of coherence and supportive school environments can help mitigate these effects. Addressing these issues through systemic interventions like Self-Affirmation Technique is crucial for improving well well-being of teachers and educational outcomes.

Self-affirmation techniques can be valuable for reducing work stress and improving overall lifestyle by promoting a more positive self-image and mindset. Repeating positive statements about oneself can help counter negative self-talk, build confidence, and foster a more resilient approach to challenges [11,12]. Therefore, a pilot study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the Self-Affirmation Technique on work stress and lifestyle among school teachers.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Design and Settings

The external pilot study for this prospective longitudinal research is separate from its main study. The research design employed was a Pre-test Post-test Control Group Time Series Design, and the approach was a Quantitative Research Approach. It was conducted among higher secondary school teachers from September 2024 to November 2024 in the Thrissur district. The study outcomes were measured immediately after the intervention, two weeks later, and six weeks after the intervention.

### Study Participants and Sampling:

The study involves higher secondary school teachers working in the Thrissur district. In the pilot study, Teachers who are taking classes in Higher secondary schools and are willing to participate in the study were considered. Teachers who have any significant medical or surgical ailments and are on Psychiatric treatment have been eradicated from this research. All study samples were recruited on the basis of the criteria of inclusion and exclusion.

The two-phase sampling Technique has been utilized to select the sample. In phase I, A Total Enumeration sampling technique was employed to assess the work stress and Lifestyle of all teachers from the Higher secondary school, and in phase II, Higher secondary school teachers with moderate stress were chosen. The higher secondary school teachers with moderate stress were assigned randomly to the intervention and control groups. After being identified, the teachers were asked to sign a consent and provide their agreement for data collection in phase I itself.

10% of the sample size from such original research has been employed in the pilot trial. The crucial value at a 95% confidence interval, 1.96 with 5% error margin, has been utilized to determine the sample size for the primary investigation.

### Data collection tool and technique

Information has been collected by a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of four sections.

Section A: Socio-demographic proforma:

Includes General profile, Personal profile, and Working profile of the school teachers

- General profile includes age in years, gender, education status, and marital status

- Personal profile comprises monthly family income, area of residence, nature of residence, portion of salary spent, type of family, details of family members, and present health status
- Working profile such as Type of School, Nature of employment, Salary, Subject handled, Classes Taken, Total Number of teachings in years, working hours per day, Size of the class/ no. of students in the class, non-teaching duties assigned, Activities involved beyond school hours

**Section 2: The Teacher Stress Inventory (TSI)**

Given by M J Famian or composed of 49 stress-related items. It consists of

❖ There are 5 stress source factors, namely work-related stressors, professional distress, professional investment, discipline & motivation, and time management.

❖ There are also 5 stress manifestation factors, namely cardiovascular manifestations, fatigue manifestations, gastronomic manifestations, emotional manifestations, and behavioral manifestations.

Alpha estimates ranged from 0.77 to 0.90 for subscales and from 0.91-0.94 for the whole scale. Test-retest reliabilities ranged from 0.27 to 0.99 for sub-scales and from 0.78 to 0.98 for the entire scale. By marking the correct response on the 1–5 rating scale, the respondent completes the inventory. Scores are then added up and divided. The TSI takes about 15 minutes to complete.

**Tool 3: Lifestyle Questionnaire:**

Consists of 32 items that assess the Lifestyle of school teachers under 08 areas based on 4-point Likert rating scale, 'not at all, 'sometimes, 'most of the time, and 'always'. The factors are Diet, Rest and Sleep, Physical Activity, Support System, Addictive Behaviour, Health Responsibility, Mental Health, and daily routine. The evaluated inter-rater reliability was 0.85. The reliability of the equipment was evaluated using Cronbach's α.

**Tool 4: Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (IMI) Scale**

IMI is a multi-dimensional measurement instrument intended to assess the motivation level of the participants. Seven subscale scores are obtained from the instrument's assessment of participants' interest and enjoyment, value and usefulness, felt pressure, perceived competence, effort, tension, and perceived choice during a particular activity. This is only one sub-scale that measures intrinsic motivation. Analysis suggested that the reliability of the interest or enjoyment subscale was high, i.e, $\alpha = .91$

**Ethical consideration**

The proposal for this study was submitted to the Central Ethics Committee, Nitte (Deemed to be University), and ethical approval was obtained before data collection commenced (NU/CEC/2024/644). Teachers in higher secondary schools were informed of the study's goal and obtained approval. The consenting individuals were not compelled to engage in the study and were free to discontinue their involvement at any moment. All of the information gathered was kept confidential, and only researchers had access to it.

**Data analysis**

For data analysis, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software has been used. 95% confidence intervals, estimates, and descriptive statistics were employed in accordance with the guidelines for pilot research analysis.

**Results**

**Socio-Demographic variables:**

Fifteen higher secondary school teachers were recruited for the study; eight were in experimental group, and 7 have been control group. The mean and median age of participants were 42.25 ± 7.23 years in experimental group and 41.14 ±9.72 years in control group, respectively. Lowest and highest ages of teachers were 28 and 55 years respectively. Out of 15 samples, concerning gender, all are female and married. Regarding educational background, 9 (60%) teachers have completed a Master's Degree in Education, M.Ed., and 8 (53.33%) teachers earn more than Rs. 100,000 monthly. Surprisingly, 6 (40%) teachers live in rural areas, and the majority, 13 (86.66%) teachers, have their own house. Regarding the portion of salary spent, 8 (53.33%) teachers spent their salary on paying off housing loans. 14(93.33%) teachers belong to joint families, Regarding the health status of the teachers, 7 (46.67%) have attained menopause, 3 (20%) have hypothyroidism, 2 (13.33%) have other problems, and 1 teacher (6.67%) has diabetes, hypertension, and has undergone surgery, while surprisingly 4 (26.67%) have no health issues. Based on the nature of employment, 12 (80%) are permanent employees Concerning their salary, 8 (53.33%) teachers earn more than Rs. 60,000 monthly, and the majority, i.e., 5 (33.33%), teach languages, while 3 teachers (20%) teach mathematics and other subjects. Surprisingly, biological sciences and physical sciences are taught by 2 teachers (13.33%) only, and social sciences and computer sciences are taught by none.

**Outcome of Work stress**

**Table 1. Distribution of the respondents based on level of work stress before intervention**

| Level of work stress | Scoring range | Experimental (n=8) | | Control (n=7) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Freq. (n) | Percentage (%) | Freq. (n) | Percentage (%) |
| Weak work stress | 1.95 or below | 1 | 12.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Moderate work stress | 1.96 to 3.22 | 6 | 75.0 | 6 | 85.7 |
| Strong work stress | 3.23 or above | 1 | 12.5 | 1 | 14.3 |

The table above (1) outlines the pre-test work stress scores of teachers. Referring to the pre-test work stress scores of teachers in the experimental group, 6 teachers (75.0%) experienced moderate work stress, while one teacher (12.5%) reported weak work stress, and another (12.5%) faced significantly strong work stress. In the control group, 6 teachers (85.7%) reported moderate work stress, and one teacher (14.3%) experienced considerable strong work stress.

**Table 2. Distribution of the samples based on the level of work stress immediately after intervention, two weeks after intervention, and six weeks after the intervention**

| Period | Level of work stress | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Experimental group (n=6) | | | Control group (n=6) | | |
| | Weak (1.95 or below) | Moderate (1.96 to 3.22) | Strong (2.23 or above) | Weak (1.95 or below) | Moderate (1.96 to 3.22) | Strong (2.23 or above) |
| Immediately after intervention | 1 (16.7 %) | 5 (83.3%) | 0 | 1 (16.7%) | 4 (66.6%) | 1 (16.7%) |
| Two weeks after intervention | 3 (50.0%) | 3 (50.0%) | 0 | 1 (16.7%) | 4 (66.6%) | 1 (16.7%) |
| Six weeks after intervention | 0 | 6 (100%) | 0 | 0 | 6 (100%) | 0 |

The table above (2) shows the immediate post-test work stress scores, measured two weeks and six weeks after the intervention for teachers. Regarding immediate post test scores in experimental group, five teachers (83.30%) experienced moderate work stress, one teacher (12.5%) reported mild work stress, and none faced severe work stress. In the control group, four teachers (66.6%) reported moderate work stress, one teacher (16.7%) experienced high work stress, and one teacher (16.7%) reported mild work stress. Regarding two weeks after intervention, in the experimental group, three teachers (50.0%) had moderate work stress, three teachers (50.0%) had mild work stress, and none had severe work stress. In the control group, four teachers (66.6%) reported moderate work stress, one teacher (16.7%) experienced high work stress, and one teacher (16.7%) reported mild work stress. Finally after six week after intervention, in the experimental group, all six teachers (50.0%) experienced moderate work stress, with none reporting mild or severe stress. Similarly, in the control group, all six teachers (100.0%) reported moderate work stress, with no reports of mild or severe stress.

**Table 3. Comparison of scores of work stress between control and experimental groups and also between different measurement time in each group**

| Period | Experimental group n=6 | Control group n=6 | t-value | P-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean + SD | Mean + SD | | |
| Pret test | 2.8 + 0.12 | 2.78 + 0.13 | $0.276^{ns}$ | 0.788 |
| Post-test done immediately after intervention | 2.49 + 0.17 | 2.78 + 0.23 | $1.009^{ns}$ | 0.337 |
| Post-test done after two weeks of intervention | 2.07 + 0.18 | 2.77+ 0.23 | 2.421* | 0.036 |
| Post-test done after 6 weeks of intervention | 2.33 + 0.08 | 2.45 + 0.19 | $0.569^{ns}$ | 0.582 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F-value | 11.195** | 0.929$^{ns}$ | | |
| P-value | 0.003 | 0.451 | | |

** Significant at 0.01 level; ns non-significant

Repeated measures ANOVA has been applied to compare mean scores of pretest work stress, immediate post test after intervention, post test after 2 weeks and 6 weeks in between experimental and control groups. Within experimental group, average pre test stress score was 2.83 ± 0.12, while the immediate post-test score was 2.49 ± 0.17. The score after 2 weeks was 2.07 ± 0.18, and after 6 weeks, it was 2.33 ± 0.08. This indicates a significant reduction in stress levels from pre test to immediate post-test and 2 week post test. However, a slight increase in the score after 6 weeks compared to post-test immediately and the 2 week post-test was present. F-value was 11.195 ***, indicating significance at the 0.01 level. In control group, mean pre-test stress score was 2.78 ± 0.13, and immediate post-test score was 2.78 ± 0.23. The score after 2 weeks was 2.77 ± 0.23, and after 6 weeks, it was 2.45 ± 0.19. This suggests significant difference was not present in between pre test or immediate post test scores. There was slight decrease from 2-week post-test to 6-week post-test. F-value was 0.929 ns, which is not significant.

**Table 4 Results of pairwise comparison of work stress between period in experimental group by using least significant difference test**

| **Periods compared** | **Mean Difference (I-J)** | **Std. Error** | **P-value** | **95% Confidence Interval for Difference** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | **Lower Bound** | **Upper Bound** |
| Pretest vs Post-test done immediately after intervention | 0.333$^{ns}$ | 0.167 | 0.103 | -0.096 | 0.763 |
| Pretest vs Post-test done two weeks after the intervention | 0.759** | 0.123 | 0.002 | 0.443 | 1.074 |
| Pretest vs Post-test done six weeks after intervention | 0.497** | 0.039 | <0.001 | 0.397 | 0.596 |
| Post-test done immediately after intervention vs Post-test done two weeks after intervention | 0.425* | 0.159 | 0.044 | 0.017 | 0.833 |
| Post-test done immediately after intervention vs Post-test done six weeks after intervention | 0.163$^{ns}$ | 0.157 | 0.345 | -0.239 | 0.566 |
| Post-test done two weeks after intervention vs Post-test done six weeks after intervention | -0.262$^{ns}$ | 0.117 | 0.076 | -0.564 | 0.04 |

** Significant at 0.01 level; * Significant at 0.05 level; ns non-significant

Several comparisons of mean differences among distinct points of data collection by use of Bonferroni correction. Multiple points of comparison represented clinically noticeable mean difference of pre-test with post-test done two weeks after intervention was 0.759$^{**,}$ Pretest with post test conducted six weeks after intervention was 0.497** and post test conducted immediately after intervention with post test conducted two weeks after intervention was 0.497** between experimental group and control group, thus proving self- affirmation technique is effective in reducing work stress of school teacher.

**Lifestyle**

**Table 5. Distribution of the respondents based on level of lifestyle before intervention**

| **Period** | **Level of lifestyle** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Experimental group (n=6)** | | | **Control group (n=6)** | | |
| | **Least unhealthy lifestyle (0-42)** | **Moderate unhealthy lifestyle (43-84)** | **Healthy lifestyle (85-128)** | **Weak (1.95 or below)** | **Moderate (1.96 to 3.22)** | **Strong (2.23 or above)** |
| Before intervention | 0(0) | 6(100%) | 0(0) | 0 (0) | 5(83.3%) | 1(16.7%) |
| Immediately after intervention | 0 (0) | 1(16.7%) | 5(83.3%) | 0(0) | 6(100%) | 0(0) |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Two weeks after intervention | 0 (0) | 2(33.3%) | 4(66.7%) | 0(0) | 6(100%) | 0(0) |
| Six weeks after intervention | 0 (0) | 1(16.7%) | 5(83.3%) | 0 | 6 (100%) | 0 |

The table above shows pre-test lifestyle scores of teachers. According to pre-test scores of teachers in experimental group, six teachers (100.0%) had a moderately unhealthy lifestyle. In the control group, five teachers (83.3%) reported a moderately unhealthy lifestyle, while one teacher (16.7%) reported living a healthy lifestyle. In the immediate post-test work lifestyle of teachers in experimental group, one teacher (16.7%) exhibited a moderately unhealthy lifestyle, while five teachers (12.5%) maintained a healthy lifestyle. In the control group, all six teachers (100%) reported a moderately unhealthy lifestyle. The table further illustrates that post-test lifestyle scores 2 weeks after intervention. In experimental group, two teachers (33.3%) experienced a moderately unhealthy lifestyle, while four teachers (66.7%) had a healthy lifestyle. In the control group, all six teachers (100%) reported a moderately unhealthy lifestyle. The table further presents post-test lifestyle scores six weeks after the intervention. In the experimental group, one teacher (33.3%) experienced a moderately unhealthy lifestyle, while five teachers (66.7%) had a healthy lifestyle. In the control group, all six teachers (100%) reported a moderately unhealthy lifestyle.

**Table 6. Comparison of lifestyle scores between the experimental group and the control group**

| **Variables** | **Experimental group n=6** | **Control group n=6** | **t-value** | **P-value** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Mean + SD** | **Mean + SD** | | |
| Pret test | 72.17 + 1.49 | 73.67 + 5.17 | $0.279^{ns}$ | 0.786 |
| Post-test done immediately after intervention | 91.33 + 4.17 | 68.17 + 2.15 | 4.939** | <0.001 |
| Post-test done after two weeks of intervention | 91.50 + 4.79 | 68.67 + 3.27 | 3.937** | 0.003 |
| Post-test done after 6 weeks of intervention | 94.17 + 3.49 | 65.33 + 1.89 | 7.268** | <0.001 |
| F-value | 8.333** | $0.880^{ns}$ | | |
| P-value | 0.002 | 0.420 | | |

** Significant at 0.01 level; ns non-significant

Repeated measures ANOVA were used to evaluate mean scores of pre test lifestyle, post test conducted immediately after intervention, the post test done two weeks after intervention , post test done six weeks after intervention between experimental and control groups. Mean pre test lifestyle score for teachers in experimental group was 72.17 ± 1.49, mean score immediately after intervention was 91.33 ± 4.17. The scores after two weeks were 91.50 ± 4.79, and after six weeks, they were 94.17 ± 3.49, indicating significantly increasing lifestyle scores from pretest to all post tests. In control group, mean pre-test lifestyle score was 73.67 ± 5.17, and immediate post-test score was 68.17 ± 2.15. The scores after two weeks were 68.67 ± 3.27, and after six weeks, they were 65.33 ± 1.89, showing a significant reduction in lifestyle scores over time.

**Discussion**

This current pilot research aims to determine the effectiveness of self-affirmation techniques in reducing work stress among school teachers, as well as in enhancing their lifestyles over a time series pattern. It has been observed that work stress among higher secondary school teachers was reduced immediately after practicing self-affirmation and persisted two weeks post-intervention. Simultaneously, their lifestyles were also improved immediately, two weeks, and six weeks after practicing the self-affirmation techniques among the experimental group. In contrast, minimal changes were observed in the control group. The observed changes in work stress and lifestyle among the experimental group suggest that the self-affirmation technique could be effective in decreasing teachers' work stress and improving their lifestyles. Outcomes from this ongoing investigation align with those of a pilot study, which identified that integrating brief work-related self-affirming implementation intentions (WS-AII) into existing organizational practices enhances the well-being of teachers and other highly stressed workers.

Additionally, the findings of this study showed an increase in domain-related positive emotions (towards teaching) as well as a greater use of positive reappraisal coping strategies, along with a decrease in emotion suppression at the two-week follow-up[13].

Moreover, according to quantitative data, self-affirmation improved the problem-solving abilities of chronically stressed individuals who previously performed poorly. This study offers an innovative approach to enhancing problem-solving skills under pressure and could have significant implications for understanding how self-affirmation boosts academic performance in educational settings, mirroring the outcomes of our pilot study[14].

Remarkably, qualitative research with teacher educators found that self-affirmations help them focus on their positive inner voice, or whispering self, which promotes self-confidence and reassurance that they are caring individuals who look after others and themselves. Participants also reported using self-writing tasks in their middle and high school classrooms or imagining administering them[15].

To ensure that the threat is likely to be prominent and that the intervention could produce a noticeable impact on negative emotions, it's recommended that such interventions be carried out during periods of high stress, such as the start of an academic year or just before an important exam.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of pilot study achieved aim and goals of investigation. Therefore, outcomes describe that self–affirmation effectively decreases work stress of school teachers and improves their lifestyle; consequently, the intervention is feasible and appropriate for conducting a large-scale main study. These findings align with broader public health goals of promoting teachers' well being and fostering healthy academic surroundings for them to teach. Upcoming study must examine cost-effectiveness of the self-affirmation technique compared to other interventions for preventing work stress among school teachers. Additionally, exploring long term effects of self-affirmation on well-being of teachers and academic results would further strengthen the rationale for integrating self-affirmation into school health programs.

**Authorship statement**

This author is a Ph.D. scholar at Nitte (Deemed to be University). All authors have made significant contributions. These include: (1) drafting the article and critically revising it for substantial intellectual content, (2) conceiving and designing the study, as well as data acquisition, analysis, and interpretation, and (3) giving final approval of the version submitted. Statement of authorship: Responsibility for every component of reliability and freedom from bias in the presented information and its subsequent interpretation must be assumed by all authors.

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For this pilot project, no funding was requested. As a requirement for completing the PhD thesis, the pilot study serves as an introduction to the major study.

**Conflicts of interest**

No conflicts of interest present.

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