

## Stress, self-care, and wellbeing: a study on the experiences of educational leaders in NEMSU

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### ABSTRACT

The wellbeing of educational leaders is a critical concern, particularly in resource-constrained higher education institutions. This study aimed to explore the experiences of educational leaders at North Eastern Mindanao State University (NEMSU) by identifying their primary sources of stress, examining the perceived impacts on wellbeing and job performance, and assessing their self-care practices, as well as determining the relationships among these variables. Using a descriptive correlational design, data were collected from 117 educational leaders through a validated survey instrument with a reliability coefficient of 0.828. Descriptive statistics and Spearman rank-order correlation were used to analyze relationships among stress sources, impacts, and self-care. Results showed that administrative tasks, role overload, and limited institutional resources are the main stressors, significantly affecting health, cognitive functioning, job performance, and family life. Self-care practices such as social support, spiritual routines, and work boundaries were moderately practiced but showed no significant relationship with stress reduction or its impacts. These findings emphasize the limits of individual coping strategies and the need for institutional support. The study suggests refining the job demands-resources (JD-R) model and conservation of resources (COR) theory to account for organizational and cultural factors in developing country contexts, with implications for leadership development, stress management, and institutional policy reforms.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Stress, self-care, and wellbeing have become central issues in discussions about educational leadership in recent years. The responsibilities of educational leaders have expanded, requiring them to manage institutional demands, foster positive learning environments, and support staff and students while safeguarding their own wellbeing. These expectations have intensified following the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed the vulnerabilities of leaders in educational settings worldwide [1], [2]. Stress in leadership not only affects the individual but also impacts institutional performance, making this topic both urgent and relevant for investigation.

Educational leadership has evolved beyond administrative tasks to include managing wellbeing in complex, high-pressure environments. The global health crisis highlighted the extent to which educational leaders face psychological and emotional challenges. Scholars have increasingly emphasized the need for

leaders to engage in self-care practices to sustain their effectiveness and prevent burnout [3], [4]. Self-care is now recognized as a fundamental component of resilient and effective leadership, as it helps leaders cope with stress and maintain their wellbeing [5].

Despite increased awareness of these concerns, many educational leaders continue to experience high stress levels, often neglecting self-care and facing reduced wellbeing. The demanding nature of leadership roles, coupled with insufficient organizational support, leaves many leaders vulnerable to mental health challenges and reduced job satisfaction [6], [7]. Studies have shown that when educational leaders fail to prioritize their own wellbeing, their ability to lead effectively diminishes, creating negative consequences for the entire educational community [3], [8]. This ongoing challenge highlights the need for further research on the relationship between stress, self-care, and wellbeing in educational leadership.

While the international literature provides valuable insights into these dynamics, research remains limited in certain regions, particularly in developing countries like the Philippines. There is a lack of studies exploring how stress, self-care, and wellbeing interact among educational leaders in Philippine higher education institutions [9]. The experiences of leaders in state universities, especially those outside metropolitan areas, have been largely overlooked. This gap leaves critical questions unanswered about how cultural, institutional, and resource-related factors influence leadership experiences in these contexts.

Empirical studies from other countries suggest that institutional policies, cultural expectations, and leadership styles significantly shape how educational leaders experience stress and engage in self-care [10]–[12]. However, the extent to which these factors apply in the Philippine context remains underexplored. The absence of research focusing on provincial universities, where resource limitations and socio-cultural factors present unique challenges, further widens this gap. Addressing these knowledge gaps is essential for developing relevant, evidence-based strategies to support educational leaders' wellbeing.

North Eastern Mindanao State University (NEMSU) represents an ideal setting for investigating these concerns. As a state university located in Mindanao, NEMSU faces resource constraints, administrative demands, and community expectations that place significant pressure on its educational leaders. These realities mirror broader challenges faced by leaders in similar institutions across the Philippines. Understanding how NEMSU leaders experience stress, adopt self-care practices, and manage their wellbeing will not only inform institutional policies but also contribute to the limited literature on leadership wellbeing in Philippine higher education.

This study aims to explore the experiences of educational leaders at NEMSU with a focus on stress, self-care, and wellbeing. Specifically, it seeks to: i) identify the major sources of stress experienced by educational leaders at NEMSU; ii) examine the perceived impacts of stress on their wellbeing and job performance; iii) explore the self-care practices they adopt to manage stress; and iv) determine the relationships between sources of stress, impacts of stress, and self-care practices. To address these objectives, this study answers the following research questions:

- What are the major sources of stress experienced by educational leaders at NEMSU?
- What are the perceived impacts of stress on their wellbeing and job performance?
- What self-care practices are adopted by these leaders to manage stress?
- Is there a significant relationship between sources of stress and impacts of stress?
- Is there a significant relationship between sources of stress and self-care practices?
- Is there a significant relationship between impacts of stress and self-care practices?

In line with these research questions, the study tests the following null hypotheses:

- H<sub>01</sub>: there is no significant relationship between sources of stress and impacts of stress among educational leaders at NEMSU.
- H<sub>02</sub>: there is no significant relationship between sources of stress and self-care practices among educational leaders at NEMSU.
- H<sub>03</sub>: there is no significant relationship between impacts of stress and self-care practices among educational leaders at NEMSU.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the interconnectedness of stress, self-care, and wellbeing among educational leaders at NEMSU. By addressing the identified gaps, this research aims to provide evidence-based insights that can inform institutional policies, leadership development programs, and wellbeing support systems. Ultimately, this study contributes to the global effort to promote resilient, effective, and wellbeing-centered educational leadership, particularly within developing country contexts.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The exploration of stress, self-care, and wellbeing among educational leaders has gained significant attention, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed their vulnerabilities and prompted a re-evaluation of leadership practices. This literature review synthesizes recent scholarly works

that investigate the complexities of educational leadership, the vital role of self-care, and their implications for leader wellbeing.

### **2.1. The impact of leadership on wellbeing**

A substantial body of research highlights the connection between leadership responsibilities and the wellbeing of educational leaders. The demanding nature of managing institutions, coupled with the need to cultivate supportive learning environments, often places leaders under significant stress. Studies reveal that many educational leaders tend to neglect self-care as they prioritize the needs of their staff and students, resulting in adverse health outcomes [2], [6]. For example, Durrani and Makhmetova [2] quantitative study in Kazakhstan illustrates how intense workloads and leadership demands lead to the neglect of personal wellbeing. These patterns echo findings in other contexts, where stress contributes to reduced job satisfaction and increased burnout, ultimately impairing leadership effectiveness [3], [6].

### **2.2. The necessity of self-care in leadership**

Self-care is increasingly recognized as essential for maintaining leadership effectiveness and fostering a positive organizational culture. Skousen *et al.* [4] emphasize that self-care and wellbeing should be integrated into leadership training programs. Similarly, the concept of caring leadership highlights that leaders are responsible not only for organizational success but also for nurturing the wellbeing of themselves and their teams [7]. Evidence suggests that self-care practices enhance leaders' resilience, reflective capacity, and emotional regulation, contributing to healthier leadership outcomes [5].

### **2.3. Self-efficacy and emotional regulation**

Self-efficacy plays a central role in shaping how educational leaders manage stress and maintain wellbeing. Leaders with high self-efficacy demonstrate greater confidence in their ability to implement practices that support both personal and organizational wellbeing [13]. Research also links self-efficacy to improved emotional regulation, enabling leaders to navigate stressors more effectively [14]. When leaders feel capable and supported, they are more likely to adopt consistent self-care routines, which positively impacts their leadership effectiveness and school climate [8], [15].

### **2.4. Stress management techniques**

Educational leaders employ various strategies to manage stress and maintain balance. Kilag *et al.* [8] identified key approaches such as emotional regulation and problem-solving as crucial to effective stress management. These skills not only support individual wellbeing but also contribute to healthier organizational environments. Moreover, the presence of formal mentorship systems within institutions has been shown to provide critical emotional support and encourage self-care among leaders [5], [6].

### **2.5. The role of institutional policies**

Institutional support plays a decisive role in shaping leaders' self-care practices and overall wellbeing. Research highlights the importance of policies that promote work-life balance, allocate resources for mental health, and encourage self-care among educational leaders [3], [16]. Institutions that embrace caring leadership principles tend to foster positive wellbeing outcomes for both leaders and the broader educational community [3], [7], [17].

### **2.6. Navigating crisis situations**

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for educational leaders to engage in self-care while navigating complex, high-pressure environments. Global crises amplified stressors faced by leaders, highlighting the importance of adaptive leadership strategies [1], [3]. Hayes *et al.* [3] observed how school principals in the United States prioritized personal self-care during the pandemic, demonstrating that self-awareness and reflective practices are critical to maintaining resilience during crises.

### **2.7. The intersectionality of self-care and leadership styles**

Leadership styles significantly influence how educational leaders approach self-care and manage stress. Transformational leadership, which emphasizes relationship-building and support networks, has been found to create environments where self-care is encouraged for both leaders and their teams [12], [17], [18]. Emotional support systems within organizations enhance leaders' sense of value and empowerment, promoting consistent engagement in self-care practices and strengthening leadership effectiveness [12], [19].

## 2.8. Cultural considerations in self-care

Cultural context is a critical factor shaping leaders' experiences of stress and their approaches to self-care. Studies revealed that cultural expectations around leadership, wellbeing, and personal responsibility vary across settings, influencing leaders' ability and willingness to engage in self-care [10], [11]. Incorporating culturally responsive leadership practices can help address these challenges, enhancing leaders' wellbeing and reducing stress in diverse educational contexts.

The reviewed literature underscores the interconnectedness of stress, self-care, and wellbeing in shaping the experiences and effectiveness of educational leaders. It is imperative that educational institutions integrate self-care practices into leadership preparation and development initiatives. By recognizing the critical role of stress management and self-care, organizations can foster healthier, more resilient leaders, ultimately enhancing educational environments for staff, students, and communities.

## 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in two interrelated theoretical perspectives that help explain the complex interplay between stress, self-care practices, and wellbeing among educational leaders: the job demands-resources (JD-R) model and the conservation of resources (COR) theory. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens through which to understand how the demands of educational leadership contribute to stress and how individual and contextual resources, such as self-care practices, influence leaders' wellbeing.

The JD-R model as defined by several scholars [20]–[22] posits that every occupation, including educational leadership, is characterized by specific job demands and job resources. Job demands, such as administrative workload, role overload, and external mandates, require sustained effort and are associated with physiological and psychological costs, leading to stress and burnout if not adequately managed. This aligns with the findings of this study, which identified overwhelming paperwork, multiple administrative duties, and limited institutional resources as the primary sources of stress among educational leaders at NEMSU. The impacts of these demands, reflected in reduced physical health, cognitive functioning, and job performance, are consistent with the JD-R model's assertion that excessive demands can deplete an individual's energy and impair functioning.

The COR theory further elucidates how stress develops when individuals perceive a threat of resource loss, experience actual resource depletion, or fail to gain expected resources [23]. Within the context of this study, educational leaders reported moderate engagement in self-care practices, particularly those rooted in social support, spirituality, and emotional coping, as means to replenish depleted personal resources. However, the study found a negligible relationship between self-care practices and the reduction of stress or its impacts, suggesting that individual coping mechanisms alone may be insufficient to counteract the resource-draining demands of educational leadership. This observation aligns with COR theory's emphasis on the critical role of contextual and institutional resources in buffering against stress.

Moreover, cultural factors intersect with these theoretical perspectives, particularly in the Philippine context, where spirituality, family ties, and community support are central to coping and resilience [9], [11]. The findings that educational leaders heavily rely on spiritual routines and social support as self-care strategies highlight the cultural embeddedness of resource conservation and coping mechanisms. However, the limited impact of these practices on reducing stress, as evidenced by the study's results, underscores the need to consider both cultural strengths and institutional responsibilities in promoting leader wellbeing.

In sum, the integration of the JD-R model, COR theory, and cultural considerations provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how job demands, available resources, and self-care practices interact to shape the experiences of stress and wellbeing among educational leaders. This framework also emphasizes that addressing stress and promoting wellbeing requires not only individual coping efforts but also institutional interventions that enhance leaders' access to resources and reduce excessive demands.

### 3.1. Conceptual model

The conceptual model in Figure 1 illustrates the interaction among the study's core variables: sources of stress, impacts of stress, and self-care practices among educational leaders at NEMSU. Guided by the JD-R model, it shows how job-related stressors, such as administrative workload and role overload, increase physical, cognitive, and emotional strain. The COR theory explains how these stressors drain personal resources, prompting the need for self-care to restore balance.

This conceptual model is anchored in the JD-R COR theory, which explain how job demands such as administrative workload, role overload, and external mandates contribute to stress and wellbeing outcomes. The model depicts the significant positive relationship between sources of stress and impacts of stress, as supported by the study's findings. It also shows the negligible associations between stress and self-care practices, highlighting that while leaders engage in personal coping strategies such as social support,

spirituality, and emotional self-care, these efforts alone are insufficient to mitigate stress impacts without institutional support. The model also reflects the cultural context, emphasizing the role of spirituality and social relationships as key self-care resources within the Philippine higher education setting.

While the conceptual model draws from the JD-R model and COR theory to explain the interaction of stress, self-care, and wellbeing among educational leaders, the findings suggest important contextual nuances that extend these frameworks. The negligible relationship between self-care and stress reduction, despite moderate engagement in self-care, highlights the limits of individual coping in resource-constrained settings like NEMSU. This indicates that institutional factors may exert a stronger influence on leader's wellbeing than these theories traditionally emphasize. Moreover, the strong reliance on spiritual and social self-care underscores the role of culturally rooted coping mechanisms, suggesting that future refinements of these models should integrate cultural and contextual variables, particularly for application in developing countries. Having established the theoretical foundation and conceptual model that guide this study, the following section describes the research methods employed to examine the experiences of stress, self-care practices, and wellbeing among educational leaders at NEMSU. This includes the research design, participants, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques used to address the study objectives.

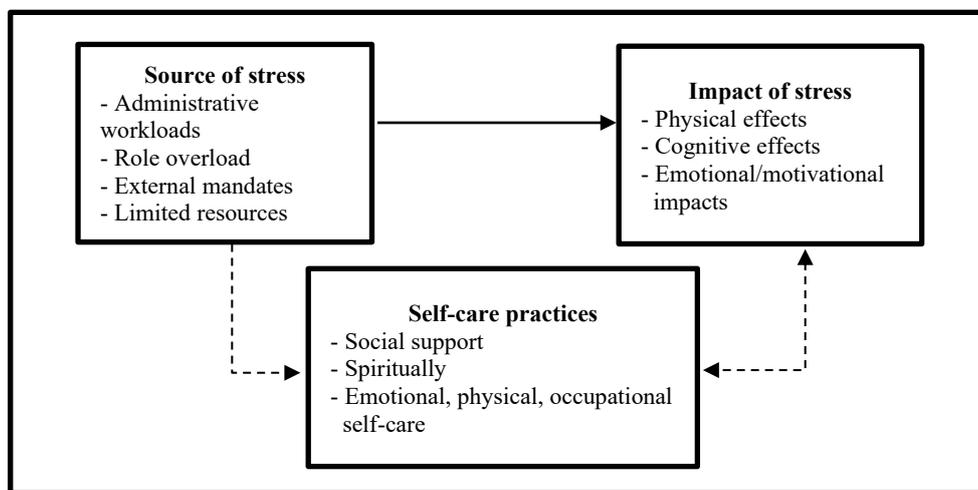


Figure 1. Conceptual model: interrelationship between stress, impacts and self-care among educational leaders

## 4. METHOD

### 4.1. Study design

This study adopted a descriptive correlational design to examine the experiences of educational leaders concerning stress, self-care, and wellbeing at NEMSU. The design was appropriate for determining the relationships among these variables without manipulating them. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data from educational leaders, capturing their perceived stress levels, self-care practices, and wellbeing status.

### 4.2. Population of the study

The target population for this study comprised educational leaders from NEMSU. These included individuals holding formal leadership or supervisory roles across NEMSU's campuses, such as campus directors, deans, department chairs, program heads, and faculty members with administrative functions. The total population was distributed across the university's various campuses, including Tandag, Bislig, Lianga, Cagwait, Tagbina, San Miguel, and Cantilan. For this study, a total of 117 educational leaders participated, representing diverse positions and campuses. This population was selected to capture varied leadership experiences, stressors, self-care practices, and wellbeing perceptions across NEMSU's institutional landscape.

### 4.3. Demographic of the respondents

The researcher collected demographic information from the respondents to gain insight into their characteristics and leadership profiles. Table 1 presents the demographic details of the study participants,

including age, position in NEMSU, campus location, years in educational leadership, total years in service, civil status, and highest educational attainment. Gathering this information provided a comprehensive profile of the respondents, which is essential for understanding their experiences with stress, self-care, and wellbeing. The study included 117 respondents, composed of 58 faculty members with administrative roles (49.57%), 19 department chairs (16.24%), 17 program heads (14.53%), 4 deans (3.42%), 3 campus directors (2.56%), and 16 respondents holding other leadership-related positions (13.68%). In terms of campus distribution, the largest group came from Cantilan Campus (30.77%), followed by Bislig Campus (16.1%), Tandag Campus (14.53%), San Miguel Campus (13.68%), Lianga Campus (8.55%), Cagwait Campus (8.55%), Tagbina Campus (7.69%), while some campuses were not specified.

The respondents represented diverse age groups, with the majority aged 31 to 40 years (36.75%), followed by 41 to 50 years (29.06%), 21 to 30 years (20.51%), 51 to 60 years (11.11%), and a small percentage aged 61 years and above (2.56%). Regarding leadership experience, 34 respondents (29.06%) had 1 to 3 years, 25 respondents (21.37%) had less than 1 year, while 20 respondents (17.09%) each reported 7 to 10 years and 11+ years of experience in educational leadership roles. In terms of total years in service, 40 respondents (34.19%) had been in service for less than 5 years, 32 respondents (27.35%) served for 11 to 20 years, 24 respondents (20.51%) had 5 to 10 years, and 21 respondents (17.95%) had served for more than 21 years. The majority of participants were married (71.79%), while 24.79% were single, and small percentages were widowed (1.71%) or separated (1.71%). As for educational attainment, 51 respondents (43.59%) held a master's degree, 44 (37.61%) held a doctorate, and 22 (18.8%) had a bachelor's degree. This demographic profile provided a clear understanding of the participants' backgrounds, enhancing the interpretation of their experiences with stress, self-care practices, and wellbeing within the context of educational leadership at NEMSU.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

	Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	21-30	24	20.51
	31-40	43	36.75
	41-50	34	29.06
	51-60	13	11.11
	61 and above	3	2.56
Position in NEMSU	Campus director	3	2.56
	Dean	4	3.42
	Department chair	19	16.24
	Program head	17	14.53
	Faculty	58	49.57
	Others	16	13.68
	Campus location	Tandag	17
	Bislig	19	16.1
	Lianga	10	8.55
	Cagwait	10	8.55
	Tagbina	9	7.69
	San Miguel	16	13.68
	Cantilan	36	30.77
Years in educational leadership	Less than 1 year	25	21.37
	1-3 years	34	29.06
	4-6 years	18	15.38
	7-10 years	20	17.09
	11+ years	20	17.09
Total years in service	Less than 5 years	40	34.19
	5-10 years	24	20.51
	11-20 years	32	27.35
	21+ years	21	17.95
Civil status	Single	29	24.79
	Married	84	71.79
	Widowed	2	1.71
	Separated	2	1.71
Highest educational attainment	Bachelors	22	18.8
	Master's	51	43.59
	Doctorate	44	37.61

#### 4.4. Sample and sampling techniques

The study employed purposive sampling to select 117 participants holding formal leadership or supervisory roles within NEMSU. This method was appropriate for targeting individuals with direct experience in managing stress, self-care, and wellbeing in an academic leadership context. Participants

included campus directors, deans, department chairs, program heads, and faculty with administrative duties across various campuses. This approach ensured the inclusion of those most affected by leadership demands, aligning with the study's aim to explore the interconnectedness of stress, self-care, and wellbeing among educational leaders.

#### 4.5. Instrumentation

The study utilized a validated survey questionnaire to assess stress, self-care practices, and wellbeing among educational leaders at NEMSU. The instrument comprised four sections: demographic profile, sources of stress, impacts of stress, and self-care practices, ensuring alignment with the study objectives. Demographic data included age, position, campus, years in leadership, total service years, civil status, and educational attainment. A reliability test using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.828, indicating good internal consistency [24]. This confirmed the instrument's reliability and justified the use of composite mean scores for descriptive and inferential analysis.

#### 4.6. Method of data collection and ethical clearance

To gather data, the researchers administered an online survey via Google Forms, targeting educational leaders across NEMSU's seven campuses: Tandag, Bislig, Lianga, Cagwait, Tagbina, San Miguel, and Cantilan. Prior approval was secured from each campus director. Ethical protocols were strictly followed, including informed consent outlining the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time. Participant anonymity was preserved, with no personal identifiers collected, ensuring confidentiality and respect for respondents' rights throughout the study.

#### 4.7. Method of data analysis

After data collection, responses from Google Forms were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondent demographics and their experiences of stress, self-care, and wellbeing. To examine relationships among variables, Spearman rank-order correlation was applied, appropriate for the ordinal nature of Likert-scale data. This method effectively captured the strength and direction of associations between sources and impacts of stress and self-care practices, allowing for meaningful insights into the wellbeing of NEMSU educational leaders.

### 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study alongside relevant discussions to interpret the findings. The tables summarize the responses of educational leaders at NEMSU regarding their experiences of stress, its impacts on wellbeing and job performance, and the self-care practices they adopt.

#### 5.1. Descriptive analysis

Table 2 presents the mean scores of the different sources of stress experienced by educational leaders at NEMSU. The overall mean of 3.25 with a standard deviation of 1.06 falls under the "neutral" level of agreement, suggesting that, on average, the respondents neither strongly agreed nor disagreed about experiencing significant stress from the identified sources. However, a closer examination of individual items reveals that certain stressors emerged more prominently. Among the six identified sources of stress, administrative tasks recorded the highest mean of 3.58 (agree), followed by role overload with a mean of 3.50 (agree). These findings indicate that educational leaders experience considerable stress from paperwork, documentation demands, and the overwhelming responsibilities of their leadership roles. These results are consistent with previous studies highlighting how administrative workload and multiple leadership responsibilities contribute significantly to stress among educational leaders [2], [6], [25].

On the other hand, stressors such as stakeholder interactions (mean=2.98), external pressures from agencies (mean=3.35), concern for others (mean=3.15), and job security (mean=2.91) were interpreted as neutral, indicating variability in how these factors were perceived across the respondents. While these sources of stress did not reach the "agree" level on average, their means suggest that they still contribute to the overall stress experienced by educational leaders. The high mean scores for administrative tasks and role overload reflect broader patterns in the literature emphasizing how educational leaders face competing demands and are often expected to manage excessive workloads while maintaining institutional performance [3], [5]. Furthermore, external mandates from agencies like Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Department of Budget and Management (DBM), though rated neutral overall, have been previously identified as significant stressors in higher education leadership, particularly in resource-constrained settings such as state universities [26]. The findings also align with the global discourse on leadership stress, which

emphasizes how excessive demands and administrative burdens contribute to emotional exhaustion, diminished job satisfaction, and reduced leadership effectiveness [7], [8], [27]. While some respondents expressed neutrality towards specific stressors, the presence of “agree” ratings for key items highlights the persistent challenge of administrative workload and role expectations for NEMSU’s educational leaders. These results suggest that although not all sources of stress are consistently perceived as problematic, the cumulative effect of administrative tasks and role overload contributes substantially to the stress landscape experienced by educational leaders in the university. These findings underscore the importance of providing institutional support mechanisms to manage workload demands and reduce stress among leaders, consistent with recommendations from recent literature [3], [28].

Table 2. Sources of stress experienced by educational leaders

Theme	Item statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Role overload	I feel overwhelmed by the multiple responsibilities of my position.	3.50	1.01	Agree
Administrative tasks	Paperwork and documentation demand significantly contribute to my stress.	3.58	1.06	Agree
Stakeholder interactions	I frequently experience stress from managing interactions with parents, staff, or students.	2.98	1.09	Neutral
External pressures	Mandates from CHED, DBM, or other agencies add pressure to my workload.	3.35	1.09	Neutral
Concern for others	I feel emotional stress due to the needs and wellbeing of my staff or students.	3.15	1.05	Neutral
Job security	I feel uncertain about the stability or future of my leadership position.	2.91	1.06	Neutral
Overall		3.25	1.06	Neutral

Table 3 shows the results of the perceived impacts of stress on the wellbeing and job performance of educational leaders at NEMSU. The overall mean of 3.38, with a standard deviation of 1.13, falls under the “neutral” level of agreement based on the Likert scale. This suggests that, on average, respondents neither strongly agreed nor disagreed that stress had considerable impacts on their wellbeing and job performance. However, variations in the mean scores across individual items provide further insight into how stress affects these leaders. The physical effects of stress recorded the highest mean of 3.71 (agree), followed by cognitive effects with a mean of 3.43 (agree). These findings indicate that many educational leaders experience physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, and poor sleep due to work-related stress. Furthermore, stress was reported to impair decision-making abilities and focus, both of which are critical for effective leadership. These results are consistent with previous studies showing that prolonged stress exposure among educational leaders leads to physical exhaustion and reduced cognitive functioning, ultimately impairing leadership effectiveness [3], [29].

Table 3. Impacts of stress on educational leaders

Theme	Item statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Work-to-home spillover	My work stress affects my ability to be fully present at home.	3.23	1.10	Neutral
Emotional effects	I often feel anxious, irritable, or emotionally exhausted due to work-related stress.	3.28	1.20	Neutral
Physical effects	I experience physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, fatigue, and poor sleep) because of stress.	3.71	1.11	Agree
Cognitive effects	Stress impairs my decision-making or ability to focus.	3.43	1.09	Agree
Motivation	I feel a loss of passion or drive in my work due to stress.	3.23	1.17	Neutral
Overall		3.38	1.13	Neutral

Other indicators of stress impact, including emotional effects (mean=3.28), work-to-home spillover (mean=3.23), and motivation loss (mean=3.23), were interpreted as neutral, suggesting that while these effects were present, they were not experienced at consistently high levels across all respondents. Nevertheless, these stress outcomes, even when moderate, have been documented in previous research as precursors to burnout and decreased job satisfaction among educational leaders [5], [6]. The findings highlight that physical and cognitive effects of stress are more immediately noticeable and impactful on the daily functioning of educational leaders compared to emotional or motivational factors. These results reflect broader patterns observed in educational settings where leaders often continue to fulfill their responsibilities despite experiencing physical strain and cognitive fatigue [2], [7], [30].

The neutral overall interpretation suggests variability in how stress impacts are experienced, which may be influenced by factors such as individual coping capacities, access to institutional support, and workload distribution. Nonetheless, the presence of significant physical and cognitive impacts reinforces

concerns raised in the literature about the toll of stress on educational leaders, particularly in demanding environments like NEMSU, where resource constraints and institutional pressures are prevalent [3]. These results emphasize the need for the university to recognize and address the physical and cognitive consequences of stress on its educational leaders. Implementing stress management programs, promoting self-care practices, and providing institutional support may help reduce these impacts and enhance overall leadership wellbeing, as advocated by recent research [31], [32].

Table 4 presents the self-care practices adopted by educational leaders at NEMSU to manage stress. The overall mean of 3.70, with a standard deviation of 0.96, falls under the “agree” level of agreement based on the Likert scale. This indicates that, in general, the respondents moderately engage in self-care practices to cope with the demands and stress associated with their leadership roles. Among the different dimensions of self-care, spiritual self-care recorded the highest mean of 4.15 (agree), followed closely by social support (mean=4.09, agree) and emotional self-care (mean=3.92, agree). These results suggest that the respondents actively rely on spiritual practices, support from family, friends, and colleagues, and engagement in hobbies or leisure activities to manage their stress. These findings are aligned with previous studies emphasizing the role of spiritual grounding, social support, and emotional outlets in enhancing resilience and promoting wellbeing among educational leaders [5], [8].

Table 4. Self-care practices of educational leaders

Theme	Item statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Physical self-care	I regularly engage in physical activities (e.g., walking, exercise) to manage my stress.	3.56	1.05	Agree
Occupational self-care	I establish clear boundaries to avoid work interfering with personal time.	3.67	0.90	Agree
Emotional self-care	I engage in hobbies or leisure activities that help me recharge emotionally.	3.92	0.93	Agree
Social support	I seek support or talk with family, friends, or colleagues when stressed.	4.09	0.82	Agree
Spiritual self-care	I practice spiritual or religious routines that help me cope with stress.	4.15	0.94	Agree
No time for self-care	I often neglect self-care because of my work demands.	2.79	1.14	Neutral
Overall		3.70	0.96	Agree

In addition, the respondents reported moderate engagement in occupational self-care (mean=3.67, agree) and physical self-care (mean=3.56, agree), reflecting efforts to establish work-life boundaries and participate in physical activities such as exercise or walking. These practices are known to contribute positively to stress management and overall wellbeing, as highlighted in prior research [4], [14]. However, it is notable that the item “no time for self-care” recorded a mean of 2.79, interpreted as neutral, suggesting that despite moderate engagement in self-care, some respondents acknowledge instances when work demands prevent them from consistently prioritizing their wellbeing. This is consistent with literature indicating that leadership responsibilities and institutional pressures often create barriers to effective self-care among educational leaders [33], [34].

The high mean scores in spiritual and social support reflect the cultural and community-oriented context of NEMSU, where leaders may lean on faith and interpersonal relationships as coping mechanisms. This observation aligns with findings that highlight the role of culturally rooted self-care practices, particularly in Philippine educational settings, in managing stress and enhancing wellbeing [10], [11]. Overall, the results suggest that while educational leaders at NEMSU actively engage in various self-care practices, challenges such as time constraints hinder their ability to fully integrate these practices into their routines. This reinforces the need for institutional policies that not only encourage self-care but also create enabling environments where leaders have the time and resources to consistently prioritize their wellbeing [4], [35].

## 5.2. Correlation of variables

Table 5 presents the Spearman rank-order correlation results showing the relationships among sources of stress, impacts of stress, and self-care practices among educational leaders at NEMSU. The analysis revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between sources of stress and impacts of stress ( $\rho=0.594$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). This finding suggests that as educational leaders experience higher levels of stress from various sources, the negative impacts of stress on their wellbeing and job performance also tend to increase. The triggers for this significant relationship can be directly linked to the specific stressors and impacts reported by the respondents. As shown in the survey results, the most prominent sources of stress included feelings of being overwhelmed by multiple responsibilities (mean=3.50) and the significant demands of administrative paperwork (mean=3.58). These stressors are consistent with previous

studies indicating that role overload and administrative burdens are major contributors to elevated stress levels among educational leaders [3], [6].

Table 5. Correlation between variables

Variables		Spearman rho (p)	Magnitude	Sig. (1 tailed)	Interpretation
Source of stress	Impact of stress	0.594**	Moderate	<0.001	Significant
Source of stress	Self-care practices	-0.036	Negligible	<0.350	Not significant
Impact of stress	Self-care practices	0.14	Negligible	<0.440	Not significant

Interpretation of magnitude: 0.00–0.10=negligible; 0.10–0.39=weak; 0.40–0.69=moderate; 0.70–0.89=strong; 0.90–1.00=very strong. \*\*p<.001 indicates statistical significance.

Furthermore, institutional pressures such as external mandates from agencies like CHED and DBM (mean=3.35) and concerns about job security (mean=2.91) add to the leadership stress burden. These organizational demands, coupled with the emotional strain from caring for staff and students (mean=3.15), create an environment where stress levels are likely to rise, ultimately leading to negative impacts on leaders' wellbeing. The impact of stress results further support this interpretation. Respondents reported experiencing physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, and poor sleep (mean=3.71) and cognitive challenges like impaired decision-making and reduced focus (mean=3.43). These findings demonstrate how elevated stress levels, triggered by work-related demands and institutional pressures, directly contribute to diminished physical and mental wellbeing among educational leaders at NEMSU.

In contrast, the analysis showed a negligible and non-significant relationship between sources of stress and self-care practices ( $\rho=-0.036$ ,  $p=0.350$ ), as well as between impacts of stress and self-care practices ( $\rho=0.140$ ,  $p=0.440$ ). These results indicate that self-care practices reported by the respondents do not significantly influence or buffer the effects of stress. Despite the respondents demonstrating moderate engagement in self-care practices such as physical activity, emotional self-care, and spiritual routines (overall mean=3.70), these efforts may not be sufficient to offset the impacts of stress arising from their leadership roles. These findings align with research suggesting that while self-care is essential, it may not independently mitigate the negative consequences of excessive stress without adequate institutional support and manageable workloads [4], [5]. The absence of significant relationships between self-care and stress outcomes highlights the need for NEMSU to explore more comprehensive support mechanisms that address both individual coping practices and organizational stressors.

### 5.3. Biggest source of stress experienced by educational leaders

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the biggest sources of stress as reported by educational leaders at NEMSU. Most respondents, 72 out of 117 (61.5%), identified overwhelming paperwork and deadlines as their primary source of stress. This result is consistent with the earlier findings in Table 2, where administrative tasks recorded the highest mean score, confirming that documentation requirements, deadlines, and related bureaucratic processes place a significant burden on educational leaders.

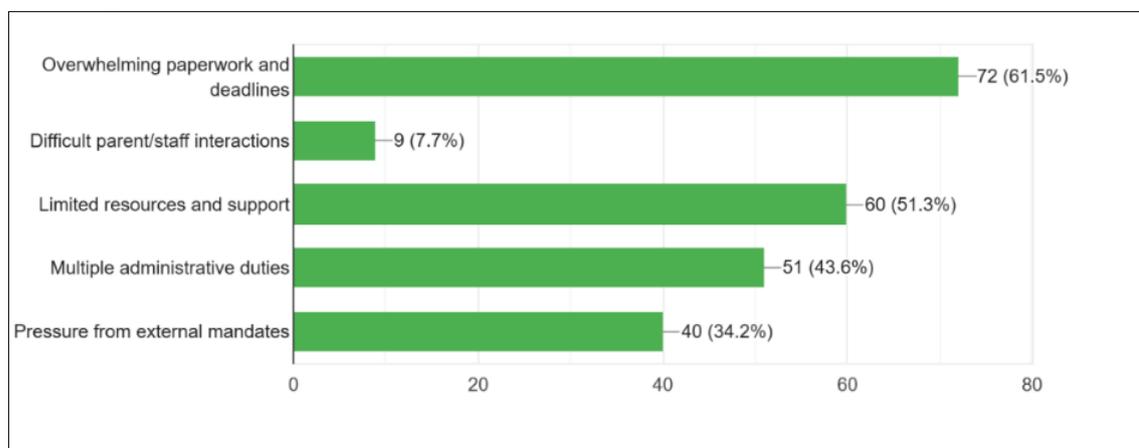


Figure 2. Biggest source of stress

Following this, limited resources and support were reported by 60 respondents (51.3%), while multiple administrative duties were cited by 51 respondents (43.6%) as significant contributors to their stress. These results reflect the ongoing challenges that educational leaders face in managing their roles with inadequate institutional support and an accumulation of responsibilities. Previous studies have emphasized that limited resources and excessive administrative workload are among the leading contributors to stress in higher education leadership, particularly in developing country contexts such as the Philippines [36]. Additionally, pressure from external mandates, such as directives from government agencies like CHED and DBM, was reported by 40 respondents (34.2%) as a significant source of stress. This aligns with global and local research indicating that educational leaders often operate under rigid regulatory requirements, which can create additional strain and reduce their capacity to focus on strategic leadership tasks [6], [7].

In contrast, only 9 respondents (7.7%) identified difficult parent/staff interactions as their biggest source of stress. While such interactions can be challenging, the low percentage suggests that relational issues may not be as prevalent or as significant as structural and institutional stressors within NEMSU. Overall, these findings reinforce the literature highlighting that administrative workload, resource limitations, and external pressures are central to the stress experiences of educational leaders [2], [5]. The predominance of organizational and systemic stressors underscores the need for institutional reforms aimed at reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, providing adequate support, and promoting leadership wellbeing.

#### 5.4. Impact of stress on job performance of educational leaders

Figure 3 shows the self-reported effects of work-related stress on the job performance of educational leaders at NEMSU. The most common impact reported was reduced focus or productivity, identified by 80 respondents (68.4%). This finding is consistent with the results presented in Table 3, where cognitive effects of stress, such as impaired decision-making and concentration, received high mean scores. Reduced focus and productivity are clear indicators of how stress directly undermines the ability of leaders to perform their responsibilities effectively.

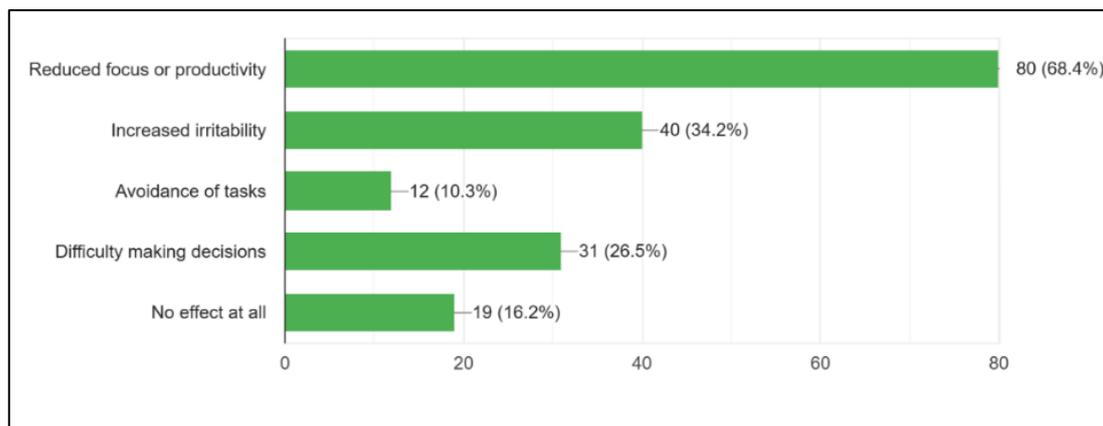


Figure 3. Impact of stress on job performance

Increased irritability was the second most reported impact, cited by 40 respondents (34.2%), followed by difficulty making decisions, and reported by 31 respondents (26.5%). These outcomes reflect how stress affects not only cognitive functioning but also emotional regulation and leadership effectiveness. Research has consistently shown that heightened stress levels among educational leaders can impair emotional stability and decision-making capacity, which are critical for managing teams and institutional operations [8], [14]. Interestingly, avoidance of tasks was reported by 12 respondents (10.3%), while 19 respondents (16.2%) stated that stress had no effect at all on their job performance. These responses suggest variability in how stress manifests among educational leaders, which could be influenced by individual coping strategies, resilience levels, or differing workloads. Similar patterns were observed in previous studies where some leaders exhibited adaptive coping mechanisms that allowed them to maintain performance despite stress, while others demonstrated task avoidance as a maladaptive response [4], [5].

Overall, the data confirms that stress significantly affects the cognitive and emotional functioning of educational leaders at NEMSU, with reduced productivity, irritability, and impaired decision-making being the most common consequences. These findings align with global literature emphasizing that stress

compromises leadership performance, especially in environments where administrative workload and institutional pressures are high [3], [6]. The results underscore the importance of implementing stress management programs and leadership support initiatives within NEMSU. Such interventions are essential to help leaders maintain focus, regulate emotions, and make sound decisions, thereby enhancing both individual wellbeing and institutional effectiveness.

### 5.5. Impact of work stress on home and family life

Figure 4 presents how work-related stress affects the home and family life of educational leaders at NEMSU. The most common impact reported was poor sleep or health, experienced by 66 respondents (56.4%), followed by less time for family, cited by 58 respondents (49.6%). These results reflect how occupational stress extends beyond the workplace and directly affects the physical wellbeing of leaders and their capacity to engage with their families.

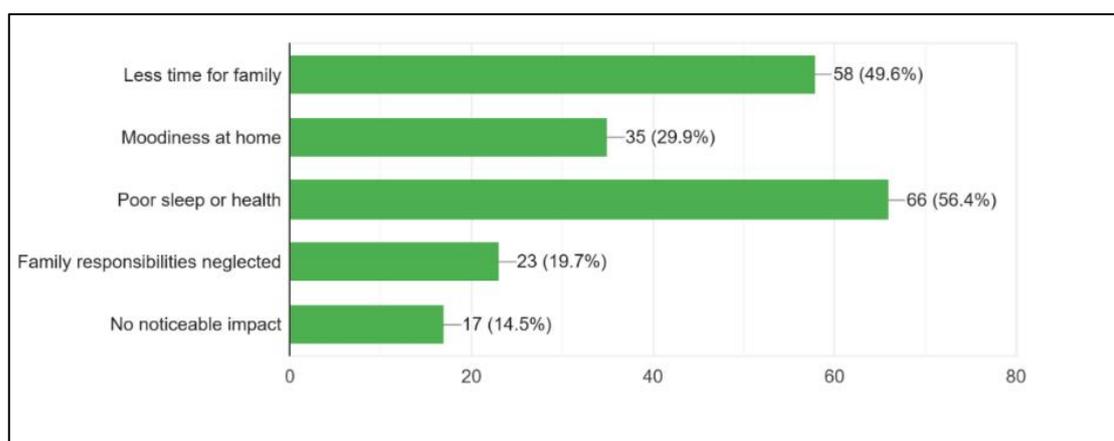


Figure 4. Impact of work-related stress on home and family life of educational leaders at NEMSU

The high percentage of respondents reporting poor sleep or health is consistent with earlier findings in Table 3, where physical effects of stress such as headaches, fatigue, and poor sleep received the highest mean score. This supports previous studies emphasizing that prolonged exposure to leadership stress often results in physical health deterioration, which, in turn, affects both professional and personal life [3], [5]. In addition to health concerns, nearly half of the respondents indicated having less time for family due to work-related stress. This reflects the classic work-home spillover effect, where occupational demands interfere with personal relationships and family responsibilities. Prior research has shown that when leaders are overburdened by administrative duties and role overload, they often sacrifice time and emotional presence at home, contributing to strained family dynamics [2], [8].

Moodiness at home, reported by 35 respondents (29.9%), and neglect of family responsibilities, reported by 23 respondents (19.7%), further demonstrate the emotional and behavioral consequences of stress that extend beyond the workplace. These findings echo global studies emphasizing that unmanaged stress leads to irritability, emotional exhaustion, and withdrawal from family responsibilities among educational leaders [6], [7]. On the other hand, 17 respondents (14.5%) reported that work stress had no noticeable impact on their home or family life. This variability may be attributed to individual coping mechanisms, personal resilience, or effective boundary-setting practices, as highlighted in literature discussing protective factors that help mitigate the spillover effects of stress [4].

Overall, the findings indicate that work-related stress among NEMSU educational leaders significantly affects not only their professional performance but also their physical health, family relationships, and emotional wellbeing at home. These results underscore the importance of promoting work-life balance initiatives and institutional support systems to help educational leaders manage stress and maintain healthy family relationships.

### 5.6. Self-care strategies of educational leaders

Figure 5 presents the self-care strategies utilized by educational leaders at NEMSU to manage stress. The most reported strategy was spending time with loved ones, identified by 70 respondents (59.8%), followed closely by prayer or meditation, and reported by 69 respondents (59%). These findings reflect the

importance of social support and spiritual practices as primary coping mechanisms among educational leaders, which align with the cultural context of the Philippines, where family ties and spiritual beliefs play a significant role in promoting individual wellbeing [10], [11]. Additionally, setting work boundaries was reported by 61 respondents (52.1%), and exercise or physical activity was utilized by 59 respondents (50.4%) as self-care practices.

These results demonstrate that while educational leaders engage in self-care, the most common practices are focused on emotional, social, and spiritual wellbeing, with physical and occupational self-care also present but to a slightly lesser extent. These findings are consistent with earlier results in Table 4, where high mean scores were reported for social support, spiritual routines, and emotional self-care, confirming the reliance of leaders on these coping strategies. The importance of setting work boundaries is well-supported in the literature, with studies highlighting that maintaining clear boundaries between professional and personal life is essential for preventing burnout and promoting psychological wellbeing among educational leaders [4], [5]. Similarly, regular physical activity has been identified as a beneficial strategy for stress management and overall health, which is crucial for leaders facing high workloads and institutional demands [8], [14]. Notably, only 2 respondents (1.7%) reported not using any self-care strategies.

While this percentage is small, it underscores the importance of promoting awareness of the need for self-care among all educational leaders, particularly for those who may neglect personal wellbeing due to work demands or lack of access to resources. Overall, the results indicate that educational leaders at NEMSU actively engage in a variety of self-care strategies, with a strong emphasis on social connections, spirituality, and setting work boundaries. These findings reflect global research emphasizing that self-care is a multidimensional process that requires both personal commitment and institutional support to be effective in managing stress and promoting leadership wellbeing [7].

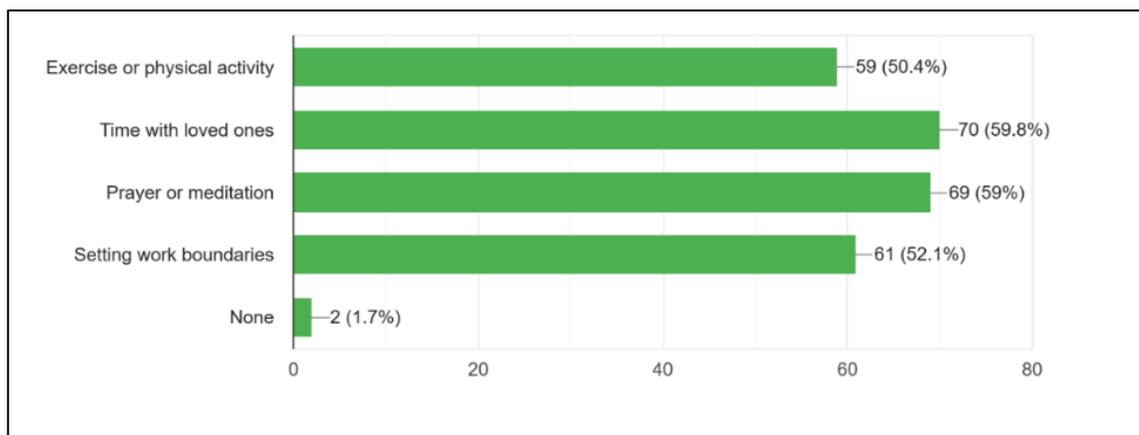


Figure 5. Self-care strategies utilized by educational leaders at NEMSU

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the sources of stress, impacts on wellbeing and job performance, self-care practices, and the relationships among these variables among educational leaders at NEMSU. The findings show that administrative workload, role overload, and limited institutional resources are the primary sources of stress, confirming that leadership stress is largely organizational and structural in nature. Stress most strongly manifests through physical strain and cognitive impairment, including fatigue, poor sleep, headaches, reduced focus, and impaired decision-making, and these effects extend to home and family life. Educational leaders reported moderate engagement in social support, spiritual routines, emotional self-care, and boundary-setting practices, reflecting culturally grounded coping strategies. However, correlation analysis revealed no significant relationship between self-care practices and either sources or impacts of stress, while a moderate and significant relationship existed between sources of stress and impacts of stress. This indicates that individual coping efforts alone are insufficient to counteract persistent institutional demands.

These findings have important implications for leadership development and institutional policy. They underscore the need for systemic interventions, including workload rationalization, administrative streamlining, improved staffing support, and formal wellbeing programs. Leader wellbeing should be recognized as an institutional responsibility rather than a personal obligation. This study is limited by its

cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data, and focus on a single university, which may restrict generalizability. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches, conduct comparative studies across institutions, and evaluate organizational interventions that reduce chronic leadership stress. Overall, this study contributes evidence from a developing country context showing that educational leader wellbeing is primarily shaped by organizational conditions rather than individual self-care, highlighting the necessity of structural and policy-driven support systems to sustain effective and resilient leadership.

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This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

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R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

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Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

## INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

## DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [EDGP], upon reasonable request.

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*Stress, self-care, and wellbeing: a study on the experiences of educational leaders in ... (Nemesio G. Loayon)*

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