

Health and Wellness for Future Family and Consumer Sciences Educators

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This study explores the role of self-care education in reducing burnout among pre-service family and consumer sciences (FCS) educators. The concept of self-care has evolved into a holistic framework addressing the physical, mental, emotional, social, and professional well-being of educators, particularly those facing high-stress environments. Utilizing a pre- and post-test design, the study measured changes in self-care practices among pre-service educators enrolled in a teacher preparation program. Findings demonstrated statistically significant improvements in physical and academic self-care, underscoring the value of structured self-care interventions in fostering resilience and professional longevity. However, limited changes in emotional and social self-care suggest the need for tailored, long-term approaches. Results emphasize the importance of embedding self-care education into FCS curricula to better prepare educators for the demands of their profession. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts and broader applications across diverse teaching disciplines.

Keywords: self-care, teacher preparation, family and consumer sciences, educator well-being

Teaching is an inherently challenging, stressful profession (Durr et al., 2021). Family and consumer sciences (FCS) educators, who often face additional lab-based demands, are particularly susceptible to burnout characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1999; Kuebel, 2019). This burnout is concerning given an increasing shortage of FCS teachers, a problem exacerbated by high attrition

rates due to occupational stress (Hagan, 2024; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Addressing these growing concerns requires a focus on self-care practices, which are essential for sustaining educators' mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Miller, 2020).

This study investigates how structured self-care practices can mitigate educator burnout among future FCS educators enrolled in teacher preparation programs. By examining self-care strategies implemented during their pre-service training, this study aimed to highlight practices that can bolster resilience among FCS educators, ultimately supporting their professional longevity and effectiveness in meeting student needs.

Literature Review

The FCS Body of Knowledge (BOK) provides a holistic framework for professionals, encompassing individual well-being, family strengths, and community vitality through the integration of basic human needs, life course development, and human ecosystems (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences [AAFCS], 2025; Nickols et al., 2009). Similarly, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs highlights the importance of meeting foundational needs, such as safety, physiological well-being, and belonging before higher-order needs like self-actualization can be achieved (Maslow, 1943). Although these frameworks are traditionally applied to understanding and meeting students' needs, they are equally vital for educators. Recent research underscores that educators must also meet their basic needs to foster professional growth, sustain well-being, and effectively support students (Frei-Landau & Levin, 2023).

The concept of self-care has expanded beyond its initial medical focus to encompass a holistic approach that addresses the well-being of professionals, including teachers, who operate in high-stress environments (Graves & Turgeson, 2022; Miller, 2020). Within the FCS education context, Graves and Turgeson (2022) highlighted the importance of embedding wellness education into FCS standards. This approach not only equips pre-service teaching with coping strategies to manage burnout but also encourages them to model wellness behaviors for students, thereby fostering a culture of resilience and well-being in educational settings.

Some studies have suggested that incorporating self-care practices, such as mindfulness, stress management, and work-life balance, in educator training mitigates occupational stress (Essary et al., 2020; Lawver & Smith, 2014). Lawver and Smith's (2014) study of agricultural teachers, for instance, identified time management and relaxation techniques as effective coping mechanisms for managing occupational stress, offering insight into parallel strategies that could benefit FCS educators.

Moreover, in-service programs that focus on self-care can help educators navigate secondary traumatic stress (STS) that arises from repeated exposure to students' traumatic experiences, which is particularly prevalent in schools serving vulnerable populations (Essary et al., 2020). Providing resources to address STS can improve both educator retention and their ability to create supportive classroom environments (Essary et al., 2020; Stafford-Brizard, 2021).

In sum, fostering self-care competencies among FCS educators is crucial not only for their personal health but also for their professional efficacy. As schools increasingly recognize the need to support teachers' holistic well-being, self-care emerges as a vital practice to counteract the chronic stressors inherent in education (Kuebel, 2019; Stafford-Brizard, 2021). By promoting self-care, FCS teacher preparation programs can build resilient educators capable of sustaining their passion and impact within the classroom.

Problem Statement

FCS educators face high levels of stress and burnout due to the unique demands of their field, which combines hands-on, lab-based instruction with significant emotional and physical labor. Although self-care practices reduce burnout and enhance resilience, many FCS teacher preparation programs lack structured self-care training. This gap in pre-service education may leave FCS teachers ill-equipped to handle the stressors of their profession, potentially leading to higher attrition rates and diminished well-being. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the impact of a structured self-care curriculum on the well-being of pre-service FCS educators, examining whether intentional self-care interventions can enhance their readiness to manage occupational stress.

Research Questions

1. What changes in self-care practices were observed among pre-service FCS educators who participated in a structured self-care training?
2. To what extent did the self-care training program improve specific dimensions of well-being, such as physical, academic/professional, social, and spiritual self-care?
3. How does participation in a structured self-care curriculum impact the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of pre-service FCS educators?

Methods

This study utilized a pre- and post-test design to examine the potential impact of a structured self-care program on the well-being of pre-service FCS educators. The study population included 11 FCS students (aged 18–24) enrolled in *Methods 1* and *Methods 2* courses, which are part of a teacher preparation program spanning the Fall and Spring semesters. These courses incorporated clinical hours designed to simulate FCS educators' teaching responsibilities by providing hands-on experience in planning, teaching, and managing educational environments.

At the beginning of the semester, students completed a survey (provided in the Appendix) to assess their baseline understanding and practices of self-care (Kuebel, 2019). Students were then introduced to self-care concepts through assigned readings and class lecture, which established a foundational understanding of self-care's multidimensional nature (Graves & Turgeson, 2022).

Throughout the semester, students selected and practiced personalized self-care activities aligned with personal and professional self-care frameworks (Lee & Miller, 2013; Miller, 2020). Students documented their reflections on the perceived impact of these activities on their well-being, and many noted that weekly reminders would have been beneficial to maintain consistency. At the end of the semester, students completed a post-survey (in the Appendix) to measure changes in their self-care understanding and practices.

This pre- and post-test approach aligns with established methods for measuring shifts in self-care competencies and well-being in educational settings before and after training (Miller et al., 2018). A paired sample t-test assessed statistically significant improvements in test scores after the training. Cohen's *d* was used to measure how much improvement occurred; a large or small effect: $d = .02$ (small), 0.5 (medium) and 0.8 (large) (Field, 2018). This study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB #12481) and adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving humans.

Results

The study assessed changes in self-care practices among students enrolled in a FCS teacher education program after experiencing an intervention. The focus was on six dimensions: physical, mental, emotional, academic, social, and spiritual as well as omnibus variable total self-care.

While the paired-samples t-test for total self-care did not yield statistically significant results $t(10) = 1.61, p = .136$, the moderate effect size yielded by Cohen’s $d = 0.48$ suggests a meaningful practical improvement. The mean score increased from $M = 61.64, SD = 11.47$, to $M = 66.27, SD = 13.39$, reflecting a mean difference of 4.63, $SD_{\text{difference}} = 9.56$. Paired samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate whether there were significant changes in self-care scores before and after the intervention. The results for each dimension are set out in Table 1.

Table 1

Paired Samples t-Test Results for Pre- and Post-Self-Care Scores Among Pre-Service Teachers (n = 11)

Variables	Pre		Post		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen’s <i>d</i>
	M	SD	M	SD			
Physical *	14.09	4.13	16.18	4.51	2.88	.033	0.68
Mental	8.45	3.17	9.27	3.77	1.27	.213	0.27
Emotional	9.55	1.86	9.64	2.58	0.14	.890	0.04
Academic *	9.00	2.24	10.27	1.79	3.63	.008	1.18
Social	8.45	1.51	8.91	1.58	0.85	.410	0.29
Spiritual	12.09	1.81	12.00	2.83	0.10	.926	0.03
Total	61.64	11.47	66.27	13.39	1.61	.139	0.48

*Note. $p < .05$

While statistical significance was achieved in physical self-care ($p = .033$) and academic self-care ($p = .008$), other dimensions were not significant. Cohen’s d test yielded physical care ($t = 2.88, p = 0.033, d = 0.68$) with a medium effect size, and academic care with an exceptionally large effect size ($t = 3.63, p < .05, d = 1.18$). In the latter, the effect is greater than one standard deviate, which suggests a large effect.

Although not all domains were statistically significant, it is worth mentioning the practical significance of the overall training. Participants’ selection of a variety of self-care activities reflected several key trends:

1. **Physical:** Common activities included walking, yoga, and other forms of exercise, which were frequently reported to improve energy levels, reduce stress, and enhance overall mood. Activities such as taking naps or enjoying leisure activities like movies were used to decompress and recharge.
2. **Mental and Emotional:** Practices like journaling and mindfulness meditation were popular choices with students noting improvements in emotional regulation and stress management. Artistic endeavors, such as painting or crafting, provided emotional relief and promoted self-expression.
3. **Social:** Engaging with friends, family, or pets was frequently mentioned as ways to foster a sense of belonging and happiness.

FCS students largely reported positive outcomes, including improved mood, increased patience, and greater awareness of the importance of self-care. Some noted challenges in maintaining consistency but expressed a desire to continue these habits beyond the scope of the study.

Discussion

These results emphasize the importance of embedding self-care education within FCS teacher preparation programs. Students demonstrated improvements in various aspects of well-being following structured self-care interventions. This finding aligns with research indicating that intentional self-care practices reduced negative experiences during high-stress periods, thus fostering resilience among future educators (Essary et al., 2020; Graves & Turgeson, 2022; Miller, 2020; Stafford-Brizard, 2021). Previous studies underscored that well-rounded self-care practices are crucial for teachers to effectively manage occupational stress, thereby enhancing their capacity for sustainable teaching careers (Kuebel, 2019; Lawver & Smith, 2014; Miller, 2020).

The results contribute to self-care theory by demonstrating the potential for structured interventions to address specific dimensions of well-being, particularly in high-stress fields such as teacher education. These results suggest that structured self-care interventions can enhance the well-being of FCS pre-service educators, particularly in areas related to physical self-care and academic performance.

The lack of statistically significant improvement in emotional ($p = 0.890$) and social self-care ($p = 0.29$) may reflect the need for a larger sample size, more tailored interventions, or longer durations to effectively address these dimensions. Additionally, the trends in self-care practices highlight the importance of providing flexible, personalized options for self-care education. This evidence underscores the potential of self-care education as a valuable component of FCS teacher preparation programs to address well-being needs, foster resilience, and reduce burnout risks, which could contribute to lower FCS teacher attrition rates (Hagan, 2024).

Research highlights that burnout is prevalent among educators with symptoms often manifested due to prolonged stress and inadequate coping mechanisms (Durr et al., 2021; Essary et al., 2020). Structured self-care programs, therefore, represent a proactive approach to preparing FCS educators for the demands of their profession, supporting both their personal well-being and professional efficacy (Graves & Turgeson, 2022; Stafford-Brizard, 2021).

Alignment with FCS Teacher Education Standards

These findings align with the NATEFACS Teacher Education Standards, which call for the intentional integration of wellness competencies into FCS teacher preparation. Standard 5 highlights the expectation that pre-service teachers evaluate and apply strategies supporting physical, emotional, and social well-being (NATEFACS, 2020). Standards eleven and twelve underscore the importance of creating supportive learning environments and engaging in ongoing professional growth, both of which are compromised by educator burnout and unaddressed stress (NATEFACS, 2020).

By embedding structured self-care instruction into FCS methods courses, this study offers a practical model for operationalizing these national standards. Student gain not only relevant competencies but also sustainable practices that enhance resilience and long-term retention. This approach demonstrates how wellness education can shift theory to application, reinforcing its essential role in preparing effective and enduring educators.

Study Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

While study results provide meaningful insights into the potential benefits of self-care interventions for FCS pre-service educators, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the small sample size limits generalizability. A larger, more diverse participant pool across multiple institutions would provide greater statistical power and broader applicability. Second, the study focused exclusively on FCS pre-service educators at a single university. Future studies should include diverse disciplines and institutions to better understand self-care needs across teacher preparation programs.

Additionally, this study primarily relied on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or variations in self-perception. Incorporating additional objective measures of well-being, such as physiological or behavioral indicators, could enhance the robustness of results. Finally, the duration of the intervention was limited to one semester. Longitudinal studies are recommended to explore the sustained impact of self-care education on FCS pre-service educators as they transition into full-time teaching roles. Such longitudinal research is essential to examine changes in FCS teacher self-efficacy during the formative stages of pre-service teacher development (Ma et al., 2024). These avenues for future research would help refine and strengthen the integration of self-care frameworks into FCS teacher preparation programs.

Real-Life Application

The FCS BOK advocates for an integrated approach to wellness that includes self-care, resilience, and adaptability, essential for preparing educators to navigate personal and professional challenges (AAFCS, 2025; Nickols, et. al., 2009). Applying self-care in FCS teacher preparation programs can help foster a culture of wellness, resilience, and sustainability, thus aligning with the core tenets of FCS education. The observed improvements in physical and academic self-care are consistent with prior research indicating that targeted interventions can improve educators' well-being (Graves & Turgeson, 2022). However, the lack of statistically significant changes in emotional or social self-care suggests that these dimensions may require more targeted or prolonged interventions.

The implications for FCS education underscore the necessity of integrating self-care planning and wellness strategies throughout teacher preparation programs and curricula, which can proactively prepare educators to handle professional challenges, benefiting both their personal wellness and professional efficacy (Graves & Turgeson, 2022; Miller, 2020). Training on self-care can foster the development of essential intrapersonal skills, such as time management and healthy lifestyle habits, as well as interpersonal skills for building supportive professional networks, which equip pre-service educators with strategies to cope with the demands of their academic and future professional lives, crucial for long-term resilience (Essary et al., 2020; Kuebel, 2019).

Based on the results herein, the FCS Education program at Utah State University has revised its curriculum in both of its methods courses to support FCS pre-service teachers in developing sustainable self-care habits. The introduction to self-care concepts begins in *Methods I*, where students are co-enrolled in their *Clinical I Experience*, completing 45 hours of practicum work in a secondary classroom. As part of their coursework, students conduct an interview with their *Clinical I* mentor, which involves engaging in meaningful discussions about the mentor's self-care practices, the aspects of teaching that require heightened attention to self-

care, and strategies for achieving a positive work-life integration. This curricular change aims to introduce self-care progressively, aligning with FCS students' growing understanding of a teacher's daily responsibilities.

In the subsequent semester, FCS students continue their development through *Methods II* and *Clinical II Experience*, completing another 45 hours of classroom practicum. During this practicum, the teaching strategy from this research study is implemented, building on students' prior exposure to self-care concepts. By this stage, students have accumulated significant classroom experience and have begun to experience the pressures associated with teaching responsibilities. To help manage these challenges, they are encouraged to implement 10 minutes of daily self-care. This practice not only mitigates feelings of overwhelmingness but also prepares them for the demands of their final student teaching practicum in the following semester.

As noted, future research should explore the long-term effects of self-care interventions, particularly how they influence educators' ability to manage stress and avoid burnout during their early teaching careers. To support the integration of self-care practices for future FCS educators, the following self-care activities can be introduced in FCS teacher preparation programs:

1. **Mindfulness and Meditation Exercises** - Encourage regular mindfulness practices, such as guided meditation or breathing exercises, to reduce stress and improve focus. Mindfulness can be an effective tool in reducing educator stress and supporting well-being (Essary et al., 2020).
2. **Physical Activity** - Promote activities like walking, yoga, or any form of exercise to enhance physical and mental well-being. Physical activity mitigates stress and improves overall wellness in high-stress professions (Lawver & Smith, 2014).
3. **Journaling** - Guide students in maintaining a self-care journal to reflect on their feelings, set goals, and track progress. Reflective journaling encourages self-awareness, which is beneficial for managing stress and processing professional experiences (Miller, 2020).
4. **Time Management and Organization Skills** - Include workshops on managing time effectively and setting boundaries to prevent burnout. Effective time management is essential for maintaining a balance between professional responsibilities and personal well-being (Graves & Turgeson, 2022).
5. **Social Connection Activities** - Encourage students to engage in supportive social interactions with peers, friends, or family, thereby helping them build a support network. Building these connections can mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance resilience (Stafford-Brizard, 2021).
6. **Creative Outlets** - Support creative expression through art, music, or other hobbies to relieve stress and foster self-expression. Engaging in creative activities reduces stress and promotes emotional well-being (Kuebel, 2019).
7. **Healthy Lifestyle Choices** - Promote healthy sleep, nutrition, and hydration habits that contribute to overall wellness. Addressing physical wellness is a foundational aspect of self-care, impacting energy levels and stress resilience (Graves & Turgeson, 2022).
8. **Weekly Reminders or Self-Care Check-ins** - Implementing weekly reminders or self-care reflection prompts keeps students engaged and consistent in their self-care practices. Regular check-ins can serve as gentle reminders to prioritize self-care, reinforcing its importance in their routine (Miller, 2020).

This holistic approach to self-care education not only prepares FCS pre-service educators to manage the demands of their profession but also positions them to model wellness behaviors to students. By fostering a culture of wellness within educational environments, FCS teacher preparation programs can cultivate resilient educators who are equipped to support both their own well-being and that of students.

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APPENDIX

Pre-Service Teacher Self-Care Survey

Instructions: Please rate each statement below based on how well it reflects your self-care practices. Use the scale provided:

Scale: 1 = Never 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Always

Physical - How well are you caring for your body?

1. I am eating well-balanced meals and enough throughout each day.
2. I am drinking enough water.
3. I am active on a regular basis.
4. I take time off when I am sick.
5. I get enough sleep.

Mental - How well are you caring for your mind?

6. I allow time for stillness, such as disconnecting from the stimulation of my normal environment.
7. I take time to explore hobbies and interests.
8. I participate in a form of creative expression, such as making music for fun.

Academic/Professional - How well do you care for yourself professionally?

9. I set maintainable and realistic deadlines.
10. I consistently find ways to be productive and rarely procrastinate.
11. I am able to ask for help when needed.

Social - How well do you address your social needs?

12. I spend time with and communicate with friends, family, and loved ones.
13. I have an easily identifiable support system.

Spiritual - How well do you care for your spirituality?

14. I take time to consider what is important in life.
15. I regularly connect with the things that feel spiritual to me, such as a place of worship or nature.
16. I participate in some form of reflective practice.

Emotional - How well are you caring for your emotional self?

17. I practice mindfulness and/or meditation.
18. My internal dialogue is mostly positive.
19. I am able to identify and seek out positive activities, people, and places.

Note: This survey is designed to assess various dimensions of self-care among pre-service teachers. Results can be used to identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth in maintaining personal well-being.