ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Feasibility and impact of a group wellness intervention for nursing faculty: A mixed-methods study of mindset, connection, and culture

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ABSTRACT

Background and objective: Nursing faculty experience high levels of stress and burnout, yet few wellness interventions tailored to this population have been evaluated. This study examined the feasibility and impact of an 8-week group stretching program on burnout, physical activity, and well-being among academic nursing faculty.
Methods: Twenty-one faculty at Nevada State University completed pre-intervention surveys, with 12 completed post-intervention surveys. A mixed-methods design included the Maslach Burnout Inventory, International Physical Activity Questionnaire, and open-ended qualitative questions. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests assessed quantitative changes; thematic analysis examined qualitative data.
Results: Quantitative analyses showed no significant changes in burnout or physical activity. Qualitative findings revealed reductions in perceived stress, enhanced mindfulness, improved job satisfaction, and strengthened social connection.
Conclusions: Brief, group-based wellness activities foster psychological and social benefits that may precede measurable reductions in burnout. Integrating such interventions into faculty workdays can promote resilience and well-being despite time constraints.

Key Words: Mindfulness, Nursing faculty, Professional burnout, Physical activity, Workplace wellness programs

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing demands and complexity of academic nursing roles contribute to high levels of stress and burnout among faculty, often undermining well-being and job satisfaction.[1] While physical activity is broadly recognized for its health benefits, recent scholarship suggests that workplace wellness interventions may be most effective when they foster community, mindfulness, and a culture of belonging.[2] This study evaluated the feasibility and acceptability of a brief, group-based wellness intervention, examining its impact on psychological well-being, stress mindset, and workplace connection among nursing faculty. Rather than focusing solely on physical activity or quantitative score changes, this research highlights the qualitative shifts that may precede measurable reductions in burnout.

1.1 Review of the literature/background

Burnout among nursing faculty is widespread and increasing. Zangaro et al.[3] reported that approximately 85% of faculty experience moderate-to-high burnout. Contributing factors

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include excessive workload, faculty shortages, and salary disparities.[4] Similarly, Anderson et al.[5] identified low pay, heavy workload, and lack of mentorship as major causes of intent to leave academia. Despite the growing awareness of burnout, few studies have evaluated interventions to reduce it among nursing faculty. There remains minimal evidence on strategies that actively promote physical well-being as a protective factor against burnout.

In a scoping review, Black et al.[6] emphasized that wellness is a multidimensional concept encompassing physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, occupational, financial, and environmental dimensions. Their review of holistic wellness support systems (HWSSs) in nursing academic environments revealed that perceived stress levels decreased when faculty engaged with peers and participated in wellness initiatives. Physical activity was identified as an element that fosters a positive workplace climate by supporting the social dimension of wellness. However, Black et al.[6] also noted that only a small number of HWSS studies focused specifically on nursing faculty, underscoring the need for more rigorous research and clearer reporting of the effects of individual wellness interventions. Their findings highlight the importance of examining specific aspects of wellness, such as physical activity, that may have measurable impacts on faculty well-being and burnout.

Building on this foundation, Perry et al.[2] conducted a descriptive phenomenological study to explore faculty perspectives on the defining characteristics of a culture of caring that fosters belonging, competency, empowerment, and work/life balance. Their findings emphasize that workplace culture is deeply connected to human experience and emotional well-being. Faculty participants expressed that belonging and engagement were critical to their sense of fulfillment and retention. Perry et al.[2] suggested that intentional initiatives, such as team-bonding through group physical activity during work hours, can help create these connections and strengthen a culture of caring within nursing programs. Such findings suggest that physical activity not only supports physical well-being but may also reinforce social and emotional dimensions of wellness in the workplace.

Physical activity itself has been consistently associated with reduced stress, decreased burnout, and improved job satisfaction among nurses.[7] Hallam et al.[8] found that a 50-day workplace physical activity program yielded significant mental health and wellbeing benefits, suggesting that even time-limited, workday-embedded programs can produce meaningful psychological gains. Romero-Carazas et al.,[9] applying the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, found that physical activity mediates the relationship between burnout and job satisfaction, suggesting that regular movement can serve as a personal resource that buffers the effects of occupational stress. Similarly, Kavurmaci et al.[10] demonstrated that eight weeks of yoga, offered twice weekly, significantly reduced burnout and increased job satisfaction among nursing faculty. While these findings are promising, research on workplace-embedded yoga or stretch programs for academic nursing faculty remains limited, and most studies, such as Kavurmaci's, are single-site with small sample sizes.

Overall, the literature supports physical activity (PA) and holistic wellness programs as viable strategies to reduce burnout and enhance job satisfaction among nurses. However, no empirical studies have evaluated the effects of group-based PA programs for academic nursing faculty on burnout, stress, and physical well-being using validated measures. This gap in the literature provides the foundation for the current study, which seeks to examine how group PA may serve as a meaningful intervention to enhance well-being and mitigate burnout among academic nursing faculty.

1.2 Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which posits that workplace well-being is shaped by the balance between job demands (such as workload and emotional labor) and the resources available to employees. Traditionally, physical activity has been viewed as a personal resource that can buffer the negative effects of occupational stress and burnout. However, recent applications of the JD-R model in academic and healthcare settings suggest that resources extend beyond physiological benefits to include social connection, mindfulness, and a sense of belonging within the workplace.

In this context, the intervention was intentionally designed not only to increase physical activity, but also to serve as a restorative pause, providing opportunities for mindfulness, community-building, and emotional support among nursing faculty. By embedding a brief, group-based wellness activity into the workday, the program aimed to cultivate psychological and social resources that are critical for resilience and job satisfaction, even when time constraints limit increases in activity volume.

This study therefore evaluates the feasibility and acceptability of such an intervention, with a focus on its potential to enhance well-being through both direct (physical) and indirect (cultural, psychological) pathways. In addition to assessing changes in self-reported stress, physical activity, Interna-

tional Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ), and burnout, Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), the research foregrounds qualitative outcomes, such as shifts in mindset, perceived support, and workplace culture, as essential precursors to measurable reductions in burnout. By aligning with the JD-R model, this approach recognizes that meaningful improvements in faculty's well-being may first emerge as changes in mindset and community connection, laying the foundation for long-term resilience and professional sustainability.

1.3 Research question(s)

This study addresses the following research questions: How do academic nursing faculty perceive the impact of group physical activity on their stress levels? In what ways do academic nursing faculty experience changes in their physical well-being after participating in group physical activity? Lastly, does implementing group physical activity have a positive impact on academic nursing faculty burnout ratings as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory? By exploring these questions, this research aims to provide insights into how group physical activity can influence stress management, physical well-being, and burnout among academic nursing faculty, offering potential strategies to enhance their overall health and professional sustainability.

2. METHODS & DESIGN

This study employed a mixed-methods design to evaluate the impact of an 8-week physical activity stretching class on stress, burnout, and well-being among academic nursing faculty at Nevada State University. The quantitative component utilized validated survey tools, including the MBI and the IPAQ, to measure burnout and physical activity levels, respectively. The qualitative component involved open-ended questions to explore participants' perceptions of stress, job satisfaction, and well-being. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to the commencement of the study, ensuring adherence to ethical standards for research involving human subjects. In addition to outcome measures, the study assessed the feasibility of implementing a team-based wellness intervention within the constraints of nursing faculty schedules, as well as acceptability and perceived value among participants.

2.1 Sample/setting

A convenience sampling method was used to recruit participants, targeting all academic nursing faculty (N = 38) at Nevada State University. Recruitment occurred via email invitations and announcements during faculty meetings. Initially, 21 faculty members completed the pre-intervention survey, while 12 participants completed the post-intervention survey. For the quantitative analysis comparing pre- and post-intervention MBI scores, only data from the 12 participants who completed both surveys were included. Due to the small sample size and the ordinal nature of Likert-type scale data, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used to assess these paired scores. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

The sample consisted of both full-time and part-time academic nursing faculty members representing a diverse range of ages, years of teaching experience, and academic roles, providing a comprehensive perspective on the intervention impact. The study was conducted on the Nevada State University campus, where weekly 30-minute group stretching classes were held in a designated wellness space. The setting was designed to foster relaxation and engagement, featuring dim lighting and calming elements such as candlelight to create a soothing atmosphere conducive to mindfulness and stress reduction.

2.2 Instruments/measurement

The study utilized three primary instruments to measure burnout, physical activity, and qualitative perceptions among academic nursing faculty. The MBI served as the quantitative measure of burnout and is a widely validated tool assessing three key dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Comprising 22 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale from "never" to "every day," the MBI demonstrates strong psychometric properties, with reliability coefficients typically exceeding 0.80 for emotional exhaustion and above 0.70 for depersonalization and personal accomplishment. The specific version used was appropriate for educators and nursing professionals, ensuring relevance and accuracy in measurement. Complementing the MBI, the IPAQ short form was employed to assess participants' physical activity levels over the preceding seven days. The IPAQ captures the frequency and duration of vigorous and moderate activities, walking, and sedentary behavior, allowing calculation of metabolic equivalent task (MET) scores. It has been validated across diverse populations aged 15 to 69 and is recognized for its international comparability and reliability. To enrich the quantitative data and capture nuanced personal experiences, open-ended qualitative questions were administered. These questions explored participants' perceptions of stress, job satisfaction, overall happiness and well-being, and the impact of the physical activity stretching class on daily functioning and balance. This qualitative component facilitated the identification of emergent themes that reflect the subjective impact of the intervention beyond standardized metrics. Together, these instruments provided a comprehensive mixed-methods assessment of the intervention's effects on faculty well-being and stress management.

2.3 Procedure

The study followed a structured process for recruitment, data collection, and analysis. All academic nursing faculty at Nevada State University were invited to participate through email and faculty meetings. Informed consent was obtained electronically prior to the first stretching session, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality. Data collection occurred at two time points: pre-intervention and post-intervention. Before the intervention, participants completed the MBI via the Mind Garden platform and the IPAQ along with open-ended qualitative questions via Qualtrics. These surveys captured baseline data on burnout, physical activity levels, and perceptions of stress, job satisfaction, and well-being. The intervention consisted of weekly 30-minute group stretching classes held over an 8-week period. Participants attended one session per week, which incorporated guided breathing, intentional movement, and relaxation techniques. At the conclusion of the program, participants completed the same surveys to assess changes in burnout, physical activity, and qualitative perceptions of well-being. All survey responses were anonymized using Qualtrics' anonymize function and Mind Garden's participant privacy settings. Data were securely stored on password-protected computers and cloud-based storage, accessible only to the research team. Quantitative data from the MBI and IPAQ were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to evaluate pre- and post-intervention changes, while qualitative responses were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns and themes related to participants' experiences.

Qualitative data from open-ended survey responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. First, all responses were read multiple times to gain familiarity with the content. Initial codes were generated by identifying key phrases and patterns related to participants' experiences with the physical activity stretching class, its impact on stress, job satisfaction, well-being, and daily functioning. Codes were then grouped into broader themes through an iterative process, with regular comparison across pre- and post-intervention responses to capture changes over time. To establish trustworthiness, multiple strategies were employed: two researchers independently coded the data and compared results to enhance credibility; peer debriefing was conducted to clarify interpretations; and an audit trail was maintained to document analytic decisions. Discrepancies in coding and theme development were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected participant perspectives.

3. RESULTS/FINDINGS

Thematic analysis of qualitative responses revealed several consistent and meaningful themes regarding the impact of the 30-minute group physical activity stretching sessions on academic nursing faculty. Participants described experiencing a marked reduction in perceived stress, characterized by feelings of calmness, decreased tension, and improved stress management in both academic and professional contexts. Many faculty attributed enhanced focus, better daily functioning, and increased energy to components of the intervention such as guided breathing, intentional movement, and structured relaxation. Additionally, participants reported improvements in job satisfaction and overall well-being, highlighting a greater sense of happiness, balance, and an enhanced feeling of community fostered by the opportunity to engage with colleagues in a supportive environment. Socialization and camaraderie emerged as important contributors to sustained engagement and positive experiences. The stretching class was valued for providing a restorative pause from academic demands, promoting both mental and physical health, and facilitating mindfulness within the workday. These qualitative findings suggest that the intervention supported psychological and social resources critical to faculty well-being.

Table 1 summarizes these qualitative themes alongside participants' pre- and post-intervention perceptions, illustrating notable shifts in stress levels, job satisfaction, happiness, focus, and social connection. For example, stress levels shifted from moderate-to-high with some skepticism prior to the intervention to markedly reduced with improved stress management skills post-intervention. Likewise, job satisfaction increased, attributed to enhanced organizational support and collegiality, while happiness and well-being showed clear improvement, reflecting a stronger sense of balance.

Despite these rich qualitative outcomes, quantitative analyses revealed no statistically significant changes in standardized measures of burnout or physical activity. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was conducted to assess pre- and post-intervention differences on the MBI(see Table 2) presents the pre- and post-intervention IPAQ scores, which confirm the absence of statistically significant changes across all activity domains.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while measurable changes in burnout and physical activity were not observed within the study timeframe, the intervention fostered meaningful psychological and social benefits such as improved mindset, stress management, community connection, and job satisfaction. These outcomes may serve as important precursors to longer-term reductions in burnout and enhancements in faculty resilience. The evidence supports the value of brief, accessible, team-based wellness activities integrated into the academic work environment as a foundation for sustainable well-being.

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Table 1. Summary of qualitative themes and observed shifts

Theme	Pre-Survey Summary	Post-Survey Summary	Change/Shift Observed
Stress Levels	Moderate to high; hope for improvement, skepticism	Markedly reduced; improved stress management skills	Significant reduction in stress
Job Satisfaction	Desire for more support and self-care	Increased; attributed to organizational support, collegiality	Enhanced satisfaction and fulfillment
Happiness & Well-being	Hopeful but uncertain; some positive anticipation	Improved; greater sense of balance and well-being	Clear improvement in happiness
Focus & Productivity	Anticipated benefit; some prior positive experience	Realized benefit; improved focus, energy, engagement	Tangible improvements in functioning
Social Connection	Anticipated opportunity for bonding	Realized; strong sense of community and camaraderie	Strengthened social bonds
Valued Aspects	Anticipated relaxation, self-care, break from routine	Structured self-care, mindfulness, affirmation, support	Specific valued elements appreciated

Table 2. International physical activity questionnaire (ipaq) scores pre- and post-intervention

Variable	Pre-intervention Mean (SD)	Post-intervention Mean (SD)	*t* (df)
Vigorous Activity Days/Week	2.00 (2.12)	1.50 (2.02)	0.662 (31)
Vigorous Activity Minutes/Day	26.90 (26.53)	32.08 (36.52)	-0.470 (31)
Moderate Activity Days/Week	1.71 (1.95)	2.42 (2.68)	-0.867 (31)
Moderate Activity Minutes/Day	25.95 (31.09)	27.27 (24.94)	-0.122 (30)
Walking Days/Week	3.81 (2.52)	4.00 (2.49)	-0.210 (31)
Walking Minutes/Day	32.62 (28.22)	39.17 (46.02)	-0.509 (31)
Sitting Hours/Day	6.60 (2.47)	6.82 (2.68)	-0.193 (25)

4. Discussion of findings

This 8-week group stretching intervention for academic nursing faculty reinforced existing findings that time demands, and role complexity often limit engagement in wellness activities. Despite no significant increase in physical activity (IPAQ), participants reported notable improvements in mindset, stress management, job satisfaction, and well-being. Qualitative data highlighted the value of mindfulness, presence, and social connection as primary benefits, rather than changes in activity volume. These results are consistent with literature showing group wellness activities, such as yoga, yield psychological and social gains through enhanced mindfulness and community.[10]

The program's inclusive design engaged both active and inactive faculty, emphasizing that brief, accessible interventions can foster emotional and social well-being. Given persistent workload pressures, wellness initiatives for faculty should be short, integrated into the workday, and prioritize relaxation, mindfulness, and social support. Nursing education leaders can strengthen faculty resilience by embedding team-based wellness activities into workplace culture.

Given that many participants described themselves as already physically active or experienced in self-care practices, the lack of statistical significance may partially reflect a ceiling effect. Additionally, the small sample size has limited statistical power. Even so, qualitative findings revealed meaningful psychological and social benefits that typically precede measurable shifts in burnout.

4.1 Implications

The findings of this study indicate that wellness interventions for nursing faculty are most effective when they prioritize psychological and cultural resources, such as mindset shifts, social connection, and restorative pauses, rather than focusing solely on increasing physical activity. Brief, structured group wellness breaks that incorporate informal socialization to foster a sense of belonging, team cohesion, and mutual support, with community connection emerging as a central driver of positive outcomes. This aligns with recent literature emphasizing the importance of workplace culture and belonging in promoting well-being and reducing burnout among educators.

The intervention's inclusive design attracted both active and less active faculty, demonstrating broad appeal and suggesting that the benefits of such programs extend beyond physical health to encompass emotional and social well-being. Given the persistent time constraints and workload demands faced

by nurse educators, wellness initiatives are most feasible and impactful when they are brief, easily accessible, and seamlessly integrated into the workday. Programs that emphasize mindfulness, relaxation, and social engagement, rather than intensity or duration of physical activity, can support faculty in managing stress and fostering resilience.

Leaders in nursing education should consider implementing and sustaining brief, team-based wellness activities as a foundation for cultivating a culture of care, support, and professional sustainability among faculty. Such initiatives may play a pivotal role in enhancing well-being, strengthening collegial relationships, and building a more resilient academic community.

4.2 Limitations

This study was limited by a small sample size and a single-site design, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other nursing faculty populations and academic settings. The voluntary nature of participation may have introduced selection bias, as faculty members with a greater interest in wellness or physical activity could have been more likely to enroll, potentially limiting the representativeness of the sample. These findings should be interpreted in light of self-selection bias; faculty who chose to participate may have been those already inclined toward physical activity or wellness, which could reduce measurable change. The small sample size also limited statistical power, making it more difficult to detect significant differences. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data, particularly in the qualitative responses, raises the possibility of social desirability bias, where participants may have provided responses, they perceived as favorable or expected rather than fully candid reflections. This bias can influence the validity of findings related to perceived stress, job satisfaction, and well-being. Finally, the absence of statistically significant changes in standardized measures of burnout and physical activity suggests that longer duration or more intensive interventions may be necessary to detect measurable quantitative effects. Future studies should consider strategies to minimize social desirability bias, such as ensuring anonymity, using neutral questioning techniques, and triangulating self-report data with objective measures.

5. Conclusions/Future research

While quantitative measures of physical activity and burnout did not demonstrate significant change within the study period, this pilot reveals that brief, group-based wellness interventions can produce meaningful improvements in faculty mindset, stress management, and sense of community through mechanisms of mindfulness and social connection. These psychological and cultural shifts may serve as indispensable precursors to measurable reductions in burnout and long-term improvements in job satisfaction.

This study advances the conversation in nursing education by highlighting the value of prioritizing culture and psychological well-being over physical activity metrics alone. Future research should explore the long-term effects and sustainability of such interventions, evaluate their scalability across different academic settings, and compare the relative impact of various wellness modalities, such as yoga, mindfulness, stretching, or social breaks, in promoting faculty well-being. Investigating strategies to engage less active or more reluctant participants, as well as assessing outcomes over extended periods, will be essential to fully understand the potential for these programs to reduce burnout and enhance job satisfaction among nursing faculty.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Oddi was responsible for study design, data collection, and drafted the manuscript. Dr. Black and Dr. Eastridge were responsible for data analysis and revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Association for Health Sciences and Education. The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

DATA SHARING STATEMENT

No additional data are available.

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