

Coping Strategies and Religiosity as Predictors of Mental Well-Being Among Israeli-Palestinian Teachers

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study examined whether coping strategies and religiosity predict mental well-being among Israeli-Palestinian teachers. Using a convenience sampling technique, data were collected from 415 Israeli-Palestinian teachers who completed an anonymous online survey including the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, the Brief-COPE, and the Arab Scale for Religiosity. Descriptive findings showed moderate to high levels of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, lower levels of avoidant coping, and generally high levels of mental well-being and religiosity. Correlation analyses indicated small positive associations between mental well-being and both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, whereas religiosity showed a strong positive association with mental well-being. Multiple regression analysis revealed a significant overall model explaining 9.1% of the variance in mental well-being. Religiosity emerged as a significant, unique predictor, while coping styles and demographic variables showed relatively small effects. The findings suggest that religiosity may serve as an important protective resource for teachers' mental well-being, whereas coping contributes in expected but more modest ways. The study highlights the value of culturally responsive approaches to supporting teacher well-being in the Arab educational context in Israel.

Keywords: Mental well-being; coping strategies; religiosity; Israeli-Palestinian teachers

Introduction

Teaching is widely recognized as a demanding and stressful profession. Teachers are expected to manage instructional responsibilities, student behavior, emotional demands, workload, and ongoing institutional pressures, all of which may affect their psychological functioning and overall well-being (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Sokal et al., 2020). Teacher well-being is especially important because it influences not only teachers' own health and job satisfaction, but also classroom climate, teaching quality, and student outcomes (Awwad-Tabry et al., 2023; Rahmi, 2024). Mental well-being refers to positive psychological functioning, including emotional balance, optimism, life satisfaction, and a sense of purpose (Diener et al., 2010; Ryff, 1989). In educational settings, maintaining teachers' mental well-being is essential for sustaining resilience, motivation, and effective teaching.

One important factor related to mental well-being is coping. Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioral efforts individuals use to manage stress and adapt to difficult situations. According to Lazarus and Folkman's framework, coping is often divided into problem-focused coping, which aims to address the source of stress, and emotion-focused coping, which aims to regulate emotional distress (Chang et al., 2006). A third commonly examined category is avoidant coping, which includes efforts to withdraw from, deny, or disengage from stressors and is generally associated with less favorable psychological outcomes (Fu et al., 2020). Research suggests that problem-focused coping is usually linked to better adjustment and well-being, whereas avoidant coping tends to predict greater distress and poorer mental health (Agbaria & Mokh, 2022; Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013; Wang et al., 2022). Emotion-focused coping presents a more complex pattern. Some strategies, such as acceptance, emotional support, and positive reframing, may help individuals regulate distress and restore balance, whereas others may be less adaptive depending on the situation (Fu et al., 2020). Among teachers, coping style has been shown to play a meaningful role in occupational well-being, although its effects may depend on both the type of coping used and the broader work context (Aulén et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Teacher well-being is shaped not only by individual coping resources but also by broader occupational and contextual conditions. Previous research has shown that poor well-being among teachers is associated with burnout, absenteeism, lower job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and reduced teaching effectiveness, whereas stronger well-being supports instructional quality, commitment, classroom climate, and student outcomes (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Studies have further suggested that teacher well-being is influenced by the interaction between personal resources and structural factors, such as support, workload, school climate, and work–family conflict (Awwad-Tabry et al., 2023; Levkovich & Shinan-Altman, 2024). These issues

are especially relevant in the case of Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel, who work within a social and educational context shaped by minority status, structural inequality, and ongoing professional pressures (Abu-Hussain, 2023). Prior research suggests that Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel may experience elevated levels of stress due to both school-related demands and broader social conditions (Abu Nasra & Arar, 2020; Levkovich & Shinan-Altman, 2024). Such findings suggest that well-being among Israeli-Palestinian teachers should be understood within both psychological and sociocultural contexts.

Another factor that may support mental well-being is religiosity. Religiosity refers to the extent to which religious beliefs, values, and practices shape a person's life and daily behavior (Ellis et al., 2019). A growing body of research suggests that religiosity may serve as a protective factor by promoting meaning, hope, emotional comfort, and social connectedness, while reducing stress and psychological distress (Kim-Prieto & Miller, 2018; Papanikolopoulos & Kaprinis, 2022; Sista et al., 2021). One explanation for these associations is that religiosity provides a broad interpretive framework through which individuals understand hardship and uncertainty. Religious beliefs may help people perceive stress as meaningful, manageable, or temporary, while religious practices may promote patience, emotional regulation, and a sense of belonging through communal life (Ramsay et al., 2019). These functions may be especially relevant in Arab and Muslim contexts, where religion often plays a central role in daily life, family relations, and community identity. In such settings, religiosity may influence not only emotional well-being directly, but also the ways people respond to stress.

Despite the relevance of these factors, limited research has examined the combined role of coping strategies and religiosity in predicting mental well-being among Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel. Most previous studies have focused either on coping and teacher well-being more generally or on religiosity and mental health in other populations. The present study therefore sought to address this gap by examining whether coping strategies and religiosity predict mental well-being among Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel. Based on the literature reviewed, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Problem-focused coping will be positively associated with mental well-being.

H2: Avoidant coping will be negatively associated with mental well-being.

H3: Emotion-focused coping will be positively associated with mental well-being.

H4: Religiosity will be positively associated with mental well-being and will explain unique variance beyond coping styles.

Method

Participants

The sample included 415 Israeli-Palestinian teachers working in schools in Israel. Most participants were women (77.3%). Their ages ranged from 23 to 72 years ($M = 44.21$, $SD = 9.05$). Participants reported an average of 18.60 years of teaching experience ($SD = 9.40$), indicating that the sample was largely composed of experienced teachers. Most participants identified as Muslim (91.1%). In terms of educational attainment, 31% held a bachelor's degree, 62% held a master's degree, and 7% held a doctoral degree. Most teachers were employed full-time (79.0%) and were married (89.2%). Participants represented different educational settings, with 43.4% teaching in high schools and 12.8% working in kindergartens.

Measures

Demographic variables questionnaire

This instrument was created by the researcher and included self-reported questions of gender, age, seniority, social status, educational institution, academic degree, and religion.

Mental Well-Being

Mental well-being was assessed using the *Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale* (WEMWBS) (Tennant et al., 2007). The scale consists of 14 items that measure positive aspects of mental health and psychological functioning. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*none of the time*) to 5 (*all of the time*), with higher scores indicating higher levels of mental well-being. Sample items include "I've been feeling optimistic about the future," "I've been feeling close to other people," and "I've been able to make up my own mind about things." In the present study, the scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .78$).

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies were measured using the *Brief-COPE* (Al-Mansouri, 2014), adapted from Carver's original scale (1997). The instrument includes 28 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*I haven't been doing this at all*) to 4 (*I've been doing this a lot*). For the purposes of the present study, the coping items were grouped into three broader dimensions: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidant coping.

Problem-focused coping included active coping, planning, and seeking instrumental support. A sample item is: "I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in". However, emotion-focused coping included emotional support, acceptance, positive reframing, and religion. A sample item is: "I've been praying or meditating". Lastly,

avoidant coping included self-distraction, denial, behavioral disengagement, venting, and self-blame. A sample item is "I've been criticizing myself". These broader categories were used to capture general coping tendencies relevant to the study aims. Current Internal consistency coefficients were acceptable for all three dimensions: problem-focused coping ($\alpha = .74$), emotion-focused coping ($\alpha = .76$), and avoidant coping ($\alpha = .71$).

Religiosity

Religiosity was measured using the *Arab Scale for Religiosity* (Abdel-Khaleq, 2016). The scale consists of 15 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale and was designed for Arab Muslim populations. It assesses religious beliefs, commitment, values, and daily religious practices. A sample item is: "My religious beliefs are behind my behavior and my approach to life." This research reported high internal consistency for the scale ($\alpha = .94$).

Research Procedure

Data were collected during the 2026 school year using a cross-sectional research design. The study included Israeli-Palestinian teachers working in Arab towns and villages in northern Israel, who were recruited through a convenience sampling technique. It lasted one month. Participants completed an anonymous online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. Before completing the survey, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. Participation was voluntary, and only those who agreed to participate completed the questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. First, descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, minimum values, and maximum values, were calculated for the main study variables. Next, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among coping strategies, religiosity, and mental well-being.

The assumptions of multiple regression were checked before interpreting the results. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as all VIF values ranged from 1.047 to 2.989 and tolerance values were acceptable. Demographic variables were entered as control variables to examine whether coping strategies and religiosity predicted mental well-being after accounting for background characteristics. The analysis was conducted as a standard multiple regression, not a hierarchical regression. The overall model explained 9.1% of the variance in mental well-being, indicating a small effect size.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Means, standard deviations, and score ranges were calculated for the main study variables. As shown in Table 1, participants reported moderate-to-high levels of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. In contrast, avoidant coping was reported less frequently. Teachers also reported relatively high levels of mental well-being and religiosity.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Minimums, and Maximums for the Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Problem-focused coping	3.13	0.43	1.00	4.00
Emotion-focused coping	2.91	0.36	1.00	3.90
Avoidant coping	2.31	0.38	1.00	3.40
Religiosity	3.76	0.78	1.00	5.00
Mental well-being	3.73	0.56	1.50	5.00

Overall, the descriptive findings suggest that the teachers in this sample tended to rely more on adaptive forms of coping than on avoidant strategies. In addition, they reported generally positive levels of mental well-being and relatively high religiosity.

Correlations Among the Study Variables

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the associations among coping strategies, religiosity, and mental well-being. As presented in Table 2, problem-focused coping was positively associated with emotion-focused coping, avoidant coping, mental well-being, and religiosity. Emotion-focused coping was also positively related to avoidant coping, mental well-being, and religiosity. Religiosity showed the strongest positive correlation with mental well-being.

Table 2: Pearson Correlations Among the Study Variables (N = 415)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Problem-focused coping					
Emotion-focused coping	.517**				
Avoidant coping	.140**	.372**			
Religiosity	.120*	.179**	-.035		.
Mental well-being	.100*	.099*	-.055	.273**	

*p < .05, ** p < .01.

The findings indicate that teachers reporting greater use of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping also tended to report slightly higher mental well-being. Avoidant coping showed a small negative association with mental well-being. Religiosity was the variable most strongly associated with mental well-being, suggesting that higher religiosity was linked to better psychological functioning in this sample.

Regression Analysis Predicting Mental Well-Being

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether coping strategies and religiosity predicted mental well-being after controlling for demographic variables. The predictors entered into the model were problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, avoidant coping, religiosity, seniority, age, education, and gender.

The overall regression model was significant, $F(8, 404) = 5.03, p < .001$, and explained 9.1% of the variance in mental well-being ($R^2 = .091$). As shown in Table 3, religiosity emerged as the strongest positive predictor of mental well-being ($\beta = .254$). Problem-focused coping ($\beta = .052$) and emotion-focused coping ($\beta = .071$) showed weak positive associations with mental well-being, whereas avoidant coping ($\beta = -.075$) showed a weak negative association. The demographic variables such as seniority, age, education, and gender had only very small effects in the model.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Predicting Mental Well-Being

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig
Problem-focused coping	.068	.073	.052	.929	.354
Emotion-focused coping	.109	.094	.071	1.158	.247
Avoidant coping	-.110	.076	-.075	-1.441	.150
Religiosity	.183	.035	.254	5.227	.000
Seniority	.000	.005	-.008	-.092	.927
Age	-.004	.005	-.056	-.684	.494
Education	.007	.049	.007	.141	.888
Gender	-.082	.066	-.061	-1.239	.216

$R^2 = .091, F(8, 404) = 5.03, p < .001$.

Taken together, these results suggest that coping strategies and religiosity were related to teachers' mental well-being, although the overall explained variance was modest. Among all predictors, religiosity stood out as the most meaningful contributor, indicating that teachers with stronger religious commitment tended to report better mental well-being.

Discussion

The present study examined whether coping strategies and religiosity predict mental well-being among Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel. In general, the findings provide partial support for the study hypotheses and extend the literature on teacher well-being in a culturally specific and underexamined context. The results suggest that both coping and religiosity are relevant to teachers' mental well-being, although religiosity emerged as the strongest predictor in the model. This pattern is consistent with broader research showing that teacher well-being is shaped by multiple personal and contextual resources rather than by a single factor alone (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Levkovich & Shinan-Altman, 2024).

The first hypothesis proposed that problem-focused coping would be positively associated with mental well-being. This hypothesis was supported, although the relationship was relatively weak. Both the correlation and regression results showed a small positive association between problem-focused coping and mental well-being. This finding is consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's coping framework, which suggests that active efforts such as planning, problem solving, and seeking practical support can help individuals manage stress more effectively when stressors are perceived as controllable (Chang et al., 2006). It also aligns with previous studies linking problem-focused coping to better adjustment and lower psychological distress (Agbaria & Mokh, 2022; Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013). At the same time, the modest size of the effect suggests that, within this context, problem-focused coping may support well-being but does not appear to be a strong independent contributor.

The second hypothesis predicted that avoidant coping would be negatively associated with mental well-being. The findings supported this expectation in direction. Avoidant coping showed a small negative association with mental well-being, which is in line with previous research indicating that avoidance-based strategies, such as disengagement, denial, and self-blame, are generally linked to poorer psychological outcomes and greater stress (Fu et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2022). Although avoidance may provide temporary emotional relief, it often prevents individuals from addressing the source of stress, which may weaken long-term adaptation and lower well-being over time (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2013). In the current study, the negative effect was modest, yet it followed the expected theoretical pattern.

The third hypothesis proposed that emotion-focused coping would be positively associated with mental well-being. This hypothesis also received limited support. Emotion-focused coping showed a small positive relationship with well-being, but the effect remained weak. One possible explanation is that emotion-focused coping includes a wide range of responses that are not equally adaptive. Some strategies, such as acceptance, emotional support, and positive reframing, may help teachers regulate distress and restore emotional balance. Other responses, however, may be less effective depending on the situation (Fu et al., 2020). Thus, the relatively weak association observed here may reflect the mixed nature of this broader coping category rather than a consistently beneficial effect.

The strongest finding in the study concerns religiosity. The fourth hypothesis, which proposed that religiosity would be positively associated with mental well-being and explain unique variance beyond coping styles, was clearly supported. Religiosity emerged as the strongest positive predictor in the regression model and showed the strongest bivariate association with mental well-being. This result is consistent with previous literature suggesting

that religiosity may operate as a protective psychological resource by fostering meaning, hope, emotional comfort, and social connectedness (Kim-Prieto & Miller, 2018; Papanikolopoulos & Kaprinis, 2022; Sista et al., 2021). It also corresponds with findings from Arab and Muslim contexts showing that religiosity may strengthen resilience and support psychological adjustment in the face of adversity (Akbar & Keten, 2024; Egbaria, 2024).

This finding carries important theoretical implications. While coping strategies reflect how individuals respond to stress in particular situations, religiosity may function at a deeper interpretive level by shaping how stress is understood, endured, and managed. Religious beliefs and practices may help teachers maintain hope, regulate emotional reactions, and view difficult experiences within a broader framework of meaning and trust. In this sense, religiosity may serve not only as an individual characteristic, but also as a culturally grounded meaning system that supports well-being in a more comprehensive way (Ellis et al., 2019; Ramsay et al., 2019). This interpretation may be especially relevant for Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel, whose daily lives are shaped by both professional demands and a broader social context marked by minority status and structural inequality.

At the same time, the relatively weak effects of coping in the regression model deserve attention. One possible explanation is that teachers often face chronic and structurally embedded stressors that are not easily reduced through individual coping efforts alone. Workload, institutional expectations, limited resources, and emotional labor may all affect well-being regardless of whether teachers use adaptive coping strategies. This interpretation is supported by research showing that teacher well-being is strongly influenced by job demands, school climate, support, and burnout-related pressures (Awwad-Tabry et al., 2023; Hascher & Waber, 2021; Sokal et al., 2020). For Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel, these pressures may be intensified by broader educational inequalities and social stressors, which may limit the protective impact of individual coping strategies (Abu-Hussain, 2023; Abu Nasra & Arar, 2020).

The modest proportion of variance explained by the model further supports this view. Although coping strategies and religiosity were significantly related to mental well-being, much of the variance remained unexplained. This suggests that teachers' mental well-being is shaped by a broader range of factors not included in the present study, such as school leadership, work-family conflict, emotional exhaustion, social support, and access to psychological resources (Lange & Kayser, 2022; Wang et al., 2017). Teacher well-being should therefore be understood as a multidimensional outcome that reflects the combined influence of personal, occupational, cultural, and systemic factors.

The findings also have practical implications. First, teacher support programs may benefit from strengthening adaptive coping skills, including planning, problem solving, constructive support-seeking, and positive reframing. These skills may help teachers manage daily pressures more effectively and reduce reliance on avoidant responses. Second, interventions designed to promote teacher well-being in Arab schools should be culturally responsive and attentive to teachers' values and lived realities. In this context, religiosity may represent a meaningful source of emotional support, resilience, and purpose that can be acknowledged within well-being initiatives. Finally, efforts to improve teacher well-being should not focus only on individual adjustment. Sustainable support also requires attention to organizational and structural conditions, including workload, fairness, professional support, and school resources (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Salavera et al., 2024). In sum, the findings suggest that religiosity plays a particularly important role in supporting mental well-being among Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel, while coping strategies contribute in theoretically meaningful but comparatively modest ways.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of the present study. First, the study relied entirely on self-report measures, which may increase the risk of shared-method variance and socially desirable responding. Participants may have responded in ways that reflected personal beliefs or social expectations rather than their full day-to-day experience. Second, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal conclusions. Although coping strategies and religiosity were examined as predictors of mental well-being, the direction of these relationships cannot be determined with certainty. It is possible, for example, that teachers with higher levels of mental well-being are more likely to use adaptive coping strategies or to engage more consistently in religious beliefs and practices.

A third limitation concerns the sample. The study focused specifically on Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel, and most participants were women and Muslim. Although this focus is an important strength of the study, it may also limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational, cultural, or religious contexts. In addition, the model explained a relatively modest proportion of the variance in mental well-being, suggesting that important predictors were not included. Previous research indicates that teacher well-being is also shaped by factors such as burnout, school climate, leadership support, work-family conflict, and job demands (Hascher & Waber, 2021; Lange & Kayser, 2022; Wang et al., 2017). These factors may account for additional variation in well-being beyond coping and religiosity.

Future research would benefit from using longitudinal designs to better understand how coping, religiosity, and mental well-being influence one another over time. Such designs could clarify whether religiosity and coping

function as stable protective factors or whether they change in response to teachers' emotional and professional experiences. It would also be useful to examine coping at the level of specific strategies rather than broad categories, since some coping responses may be more adaptive than others even within the same domain (Fu et al., 2020). In addition, future studies should consider including other relevant variables such as burnout, resilience, school climate, social support, work–family conflict, and leadership style in order to develop a more comprehensive model of teacher well-being. Qualitative or mixed-methods studies may also offer deeper insight into how Israeli-Palestinian teachers understand stress, how they draw on religion in everyday life, and how they experience well-being within the social and educational realities of their communities.

Conclusion

The present study examined the contribution of coping strategies and religiosity to mental well-being among Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel. The findings showed that problem-focused and emotion-focused coping were positively associated with mental well-being, whereas avoidant coping showed a negative association. Most notably, religiosity emerged as the strongest positive predictor of mental well-being, even after accounting for coping styles and demographic variables. These results suggest that religiosity may function as an important culturally grounded protective resource for teachers' well-being.

At the same time, the modest explanatory power of the model indicates that teachers' mental well-being is shaped by a broader range of occupational, social, and structural influences. Coping strategies matter, but they do not operate in isolation from the realities of teachers' work and lives. For Israeli-Palestinian teachers in Israel, mental well-being appears to reflect the combined influence of personal resources, cultural meaning systems, and the wider educational context in which they work. Supporting teacher well-being in this context, therefore, requires an integrated approach that strengthens adaptive coping, recognizes culturally meaningful sources of resilience, and addresses the organizational conditions that contribute to chronic stress.

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Declaration for Human Participants: This study has been approved by the Elahlya High School, and the principles of the Helsinki Declaration were followed.

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