
Treat Yourself: Reviewing Empirically-Based Accessible Self-Care Practices

Consentirse: Revisando prácticas de autocuidado accesibles basadas en la evidencia

Bianca P. Cintrón Ortiz¹, Chalice Oquendo Estévez¹, & Adriana Colom Cruz²

¹Carlos Albizu, Mayagüez Campus

²Saga Education

Received: May 7, 2023 / Accepted: December 12, 2023

Abstract

Self-care is the process of providing sufficient attention to one's physical and psychological well-being (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). However, due to a lack of empirical evidence and consensus from the scientific community and an overabundance of widespread misinformation in popular media regarding the definition, there is a lack of a universally accepted typology of self-care. In the present narrative literature review, we focused on self-care practices that are shown to be accessible to underserved populations to either confirm or debunk some of the practices that frequent the media. For this, the self-care practices were divided into the physical category (i.e., physical activity, nature, pet therapy, and sleep) or the psychological category (i.e., mindfulness, journaling, music, social media, and spirituality) and examined 34 scientific journal articles. It was observed that physical self-care practices proved to be most effective in terms of improving or maintaining well-being. On the other hand, some psychological self-care practices showed mixed results or selective effectiveness. For example, journaling may only be effective if the individual is motivated to complete the task (Khanna & Singh, 2021), mindfulness may lead to poor work performance due to lowered self-control (Lyddy et al., 2021), and social media interventions may only be helpful depending on whether the media consumed depicts positive imagery (Haidt, 2000). In conclusion, further research is required to determine how to make these self-care practices more effective and improve individuals' overall well-being.

Keywords: psychology, underserved populations, mental health, self-care, well-being

Resumen

El autocuidado es el proceso de prestar suficiente atención al bienestar físico y psicológico propio (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). Sin embargo, debido a la falta de estudios empíricos y consenso científico, en adición a la sobrecarga de desinformación generalizada en los medios de comunicación con respecto a la definición, se carece de una tipología universalmente aceptada del autocuidado. En esta revisión narrativa de literatura, nos enfocamos en prácticas de autocuidado que sean factibles y accesibles para las poblaciones desatendidas, con el fin de confirmar o refutar algunas de las afirmaciones sobre autocuidado en circulación. Para ello, las prácticas de autocuidado fueron divididas en la categoría física (es decir, actividad física, naturaleza, terapia con mascotas y sueño) o la categoría psicológica (es decir, atención plena, escritura, música, redes sociales, religión y espiritualidad) y se examinaron 34 artículos de revistas científicas. Se observó que las prácticas de autocuidado físico resultaron ser las más eficaces para mejorar o mantener el bienestar. Por otro lado, algunas prácticas de autocuidado psicológico mostraron resultados mixtos o eficacia selectiva. Por ejemplo, escribir un diario puede ser beneficioso solamente si el individuo está motivado para completar la tarea (Khanna & Singh, 2021), la atención plena puede causar bajo rendimiento laboral debido a la disminución del autocontrol (Lyddy et al., 2021), y el efecto de las redes sociales depende de si los medios consumidos muestran imágenes positivas (Haidt, 2000). En conclusión, es necesario seguir investigando para determinar cómo hacer que estas prácticas de autocuidado sean más efectivas y mejoren el bienestar general de las personas.

Palabras clave: psicología, poblaciones desatendidas, autocuidado, bienestar, salud mental

All communications related to this article should be directed to the main author at the following email:
bianca.cintron2@upr.edu

The main objective of the present narrative literature review was to debunk or confirm accessible self-care practices that circulate in popular culture. Beauchamp and Childress (2001) define self-care as the process of providing sufficient attention to one's physical and psychological well-being. However, based on the present review, academics and medical practitioners lack a universally accepted typology of self-care. Despite the scientific community's lack of empirical evidence and consensus, online magazines and personal blogs continuously publish articles ranging from six to eight types of self-care. For example, Polish (2020), in an article published in *Bustle*, claims the eight types of self-care are the following: physical, intellectual, professional, financial, spiritual, social, environmental, and emotional (Polish, 2020). Journalists, black activists, and consumer experts claim that the definition of self-care has become synonymous with practices that do not necessarily have any empirical evidence, like face masks and retail shopping (Allen, 2021; Delaney, 2020; Lorde; 2017; Tolentino, 2017). With self-care becoming associated with consumer culture, certain populations may be excluded from participating in self-care practices, such as underserved populations.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency defines underserved populations as groups that face restricted or absent access to resources or experience disenfranchisement. Such groups encompass socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals who have limited proficiency in English, reside in geographically isolated areas or face educational disenfranchisement, belong to racial, ethnic, or national origin minorities, are women, children, individuals with disabilities, or those with access and functional needs, as well as seniors (2023). As such, the primary purpose of this review

is to list accessible and low-cost self-care practices shown to be effective through empirical and peer-reviewed research rather than popular media and consumer culture.

Method

After making a list of self-care practices frequently found in popular magazines and websites, we performed a narrative literature review (NLR) to identify the advantages and disadvantages of each practice. These practices included physical or external (i.e., physical activity, nature interventions, pet therapy, and sleep quality) and psychological or internal (i.e., mindfulness, journaling, music listening, social media, and religion and spirituality) qualities.

Eligibility Criteria

We included peer-reviewed journal articles published on or after 2000 on the nine practices mentioned above (i.e., physical activity, nature interventions, pet therapy, sleep quality, mindfulness, journaling, music listening, social media, and religion and spirituality). Articles focused on low-cost self-care practices that are accessible. Reviews were prioritized but limited; therefore, quantitative, and qualitative studies were also considered. Seven studies incorporating therapy or clinical treatment were excluded due to inaccessibility.

Information Sources

A search was conducted on the PsychInfo database due to its comprehensive coverage and multidisciplinary content. Selected articles were searched from May to August 2022 and published between 2000 and 2022.

Search Strategy

The search for this narrative literature review was conducted using keywords on PsychInfo. The keywords used during the search were: “wellness” alongside the nine self-care practices mentioned above (i.e., “mindfulness”, “journaling”, “music listening”, “social media”, and “religion” and “spirituality”). Besides “mindfulness”, we also used the keyword “meditation”. Besides “journaling”, we also used the keyword “writing”. We used “music” and “sound” for music listening. Besides “social media”, we also used the keyword “internet”. We aimed to find review journal articles within those categories to familiarize ourselves with existing research and literature. All three research team members searched for peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2000 and 2022.

Selection Process

To select which articles met the inclusion criteria of this NLR, the team reviewed each title to identify if they discussed the effectiveness of self-care practices or the link between these and well-being. Articles that passed this first screening were later assessed and evaluated through their abstracts and full texts for cost-free and accessible self-care practices. Articles that did not meet these criteria were excluded.

Data Analysis

After the preliminary review, all research members diligently read and discussed the empirical journal articles. They were summarized by title, author, year of publication, journal, keywords, research method, sample, variables studied, main findings, and limitations on a Google Sheet.

Results

Through the PsychInfo database, 41 scientific journal articles met the initial eligibility criteria through title assessment. Seven papers were excluded after the second screening due to the identification of possible inaccessibility issues for underserved populations, for a total of 34 articles included in this narrative literature review. Three articles were used to review physical activity, three more for nature interventions, five for pet therapy, five for sleep, three for music, four for journaling, four for mindfulness, three for social media, and four for religion and spirituality.

Physical Self-Care Practices

In the following section, research on the psychological effects of physical activity, pet ownership, nature, and sleep have been grouped because most of these practices require physical movements or external interactions with the environment.

Physical Activity

Research shows that more physically active individuals report greater happiness. A study conducted with older adults demonstrated that those who are physically active ($M = 62.07$, $SD = 17.20$) are significantly happier than those who are not ($M = 37.83$, $SD = 13.31$). It was found that physical activity contributed to increasing perceptions of coping self-efficacy and was associated with lower reported depression (Khazaei-Pool et al., 2015). Moreover, another study (de Oliveira et al., 2019) found that older people who were physically active showed higher quality of life scores, and sedentary older adults revealed higher scores of anxiety ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 3.94$) and depression ($M = 5.81$, $SD = 4.16$) than their active counterparts ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 3.71$; M

= 3.01, *SD* = 3.22).

Finally, Kaczmarek et al. (2021) found that the positive relationship between vigorous physical activity and satisfaction with life was significant, $\beta = .41, p < .01$, and showed no evidence of any focusing effect in undergraduate students. The focusing effect refers to a phenomenon in which individuals

tend to overrate the influence of any single factor (e.g., income, romantic relationships, health, or physical appearance) on their well-being, leading to a bias that may impact the decisions that people make to increase their well-being. However, the same study found evidence of a focusing effect for moderate-intensity physical activity regarding satisfaction with life and positive affect.

Table 1
Characteristics of Reviewed Studies on Physical Activity

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
De Oliveira et al., 2019	200 older adults: 100 recruited at an elderly center and 100 recruited from the same community (Cuiabá, Brazil) but who were not engaged in physical activities	Quantitative: cross-sectional correlational	Physically active older adults showed higher scores of life quality and lower scores of anxiety, and depression than their sedentary counterparts.
Kaczmarek et al., 2021	200 undergraduate students aged 18 to 45 years	Quantitative: correlational	Higher physical activity levels were associated with a positive mood. Physical exercise interventions increased life satisfaction, self-efficacy components, and self-esteem.
Khazae-Pool et al., 2015	120 older adults in public parks in Nowshahr, Iran	Quantitative: experimental	There was a positive correlation between vigorous physical activity and life satisfaction.

Nature Interventions

Interacting with nature has been credited as an effective method for improving well-being. Nature can cause specific reactions in individuals, such as awe, that may predict changes in stress-related symptoms and improve well-being, $b = .06, t(89) = 2.81, p = .006$, in military veterans. The same study found that daily experiences with nature may be linked to undergraduate students' heightened life satisfaction, $b = .61, t(1,440.21), p < .001$ (Anderson et al., 2018). Another study focused on nature

interventions where individuals participated in activities such as gardening, walks, building bird feeders or fences, and conservation.

After nine weeks of such interventions, it was found that participants showed better emotion management and an improved general sense of well-being. This type of intervention may be effective with individuals with a history of mental health issues or lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Richardson et al., 2020).

Another similar intervention prioritized recreational physical activity and in-park physical activity. While the intervention did not significantly affect minutes spent doing

moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, it was found that these park prescription interventions have a significant positive effect on one's quality of life (Müller-Riemenschneider et al., 2020).

Table 2
Characteristics of Reviewed Studies on Nature Interventions

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Anderson et al., 2018	Study 1: 124 military veterans and youth from underserved communities; Study 2: 119 undergraduate students	Quantitative: longitudinal	Study 1: The awe experienced while outdoors predicted improved well-being and reduced stress symptoms a week later. Study 2: Daily experiences with nature are linked to more awe and improved well-being.
Müller-Riemenschneider et al., 2020	145 participants, Singapore citizens or permanent residents	Quantitative: experimental	Park prescription interventions resulted in a better quality of life and more frequent park use.
Richardson et al., 2020	Eight YMCA residents who had recently participated in a Derbyshire Wildlife Trust intervention	Qualitative: interviews	The nature intervention aided in emotion management, improved mental health, and heightened general well-being.

Pet Therapy

Animal-assisted therapy has been shown to facilitate social interactions in children with autism (Solomon, 2010), to decrease “agitated behaviors” in older adults with dementia (Richeson, 2003), and to improve cardiopulmonary pressures, neurohormone levels, and overall anxiety in patients hospitalized with heart failure (Cole et al., 2007). The literature on animal-assisted therapy demonstrates their overall success. Bao and Schreer (2016) found that people with pets have shown higher life satisfaction ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.60$) than those without pets ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.64$).

Additionally, studies have shown both correlational and experimental evidence supporting that viewing one's pet as a family member can improve overall well-being (McConnell et al., 2019). Moreover, dog owners ($M = 4.81, SD = 1.50; M = 4.44, SD = 3.79$), compared to cat owners ($M = 4.11, SD = 1.49; M = 3.79, SD = 1.60$), have shown higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction, respectively (Bao & Schreer, 2016). However, people who experienced the death of a pet in the last year were less happy and satisfied than those who did not have a pet and those who did not experience the loss of one (Brkljačić et al., 2020).

Table 3*Characteristics of Reviewed Studies on Pet Therapy*

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Bao & Schreer, 2016	263 American adults aged 19 to 68 years	Quantitative: correlational	Pet owners had higher life satisfaction than non-owners, but did not differ on other well-being measures, personality measures, emotion regulation, or need satisfaction.
Brkljačić et al., 2020	5034 people (658 acquired a pet in the past year, 272 experienced the death of a pet, and 221 experienced both events).	Quantitative and qualitative: longitudinal	Participants who experienced the death of a pet during the previous year were significantly less happy and satisfied compared with those who did not obtain a pet and did not experience death.
Cole et al., 2007	6 patients with advanced heart failure	Quantitative: repeated-measures experimental design	Animal-assisted therapy improved cardiopulmonary pressures, neurohormone levels, and overall anxiety in patients hospitalized with heart failure.
Richeson, 2003	15 nursing home residents with dementia participated in a daily AAT intervention for three weeks	Quantitative: quasi-experimental	Animal-assisted therapy decreases “agitated behaviors” in older adults with dementia.
Solomon, 2010	Five children with autism	Qualitative: case studies	Animal-assisted therapy facilitated social interactions in children with autism.

Sleep

The literature on sleep has consistently shown links to overall physical health, including diabetes, coronary heart disease, obesity, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and mortality (Jike et al., 2018). More recently, sleep research has examined its effects on mental health. A systematic review by Minges and Redeker (2016) examined six studies involving students from different public and private institutions, from primary to secondary schools. The authors concluded

that delayed school start time “reduced daytime sleepiness, depression, caffeine use, tardiness to class, and trouble staying awake” in adolescent students. Moreover, Gwyther et al. (2022) found that sleep interventions (such as sleep hygiene or assisted sleep strategies) improved sleep quality ($g = 0.62$, 95% CI [0.21, 1.02]) and sleepiness ($g = 0.81$, 95% CI [0.32, 1.30]), while they decreased negative affect on athletes ($g = 0.63$, 95% CI [0.27, 0.98]). A recent study about the bidirectional association between sleep and mood in adolescents found that negative

mood during the day is associated with subjectively worse sleep, $b = 1.30$, $SE = 0.15$, $p < .001$, but objectively longer and more efficient sleep, $b = 0.72$, $SE = 0.30$, $p = .015$ (Kouros et al., 2022).

Additionally, the same study concluded that daily happiness is related to subjectively better sleep, $b = -0.87$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, but objectively less efficient sleep, $b = -0.48$, $SE = 0.24$, $p = .045$. This study demonstrates that although the association with subjective sleep was expected, results with objective sleep show that positive mood may disrupt

adolescent sleep. In contrast, negative moods may lead them to spend more time sleeping (Kouros et al., 2022). Finally, a systematic review synthesized peer-reviewed evidence from 13 studies examining the associations between combinations of physical activity, sedentary time, and sleep duration with mental health indicators among children and adolescents. This study determined that meeting the screen time and sleep duration recommendations had more mental health benefits than meeting the physical activity recommendation (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2020).

Table 4
Characteristics of Reviewed Studies on Sleep

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Gwyther et al., 2021	27 empirical journal articles	Systematic Review	Sleep interventions improve sleep quality and sleepiness in athletes.
Jike et al., 2017	Data from 5,134,036 participants from 137 prospective cohort studies	Systematic Review	Literature on sleep has consistently shown links to overall physical health, including diabetes, coronary heart disease, obesity, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and mortality.
Kouros et al., 2022	311 adolescents	Quantitative: longitudinal study	Negative mood during the day was associated with subjectively worse sleep but objectively longer and more efficient sleep. Daily happiness was related to subjectively better sleep but objectively less efficient sleep.
Minges & Redeker, 2016	Six quantitative studies	Systematic Review	Delayed school start time “reduced daytime sleepiness, depression, caffeine use, tardiness to class, and trouble staying awake” in adolescent students.

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2020	10 quantitative studies	Systematic Review	Meeting the screen time and sleep duration recommendations had more mental health benefits than meeting the physical activity recommendations.

Psychological Self-Care Practices

In the following section, research on the psychological effects of music listening, journaling, practicing mindfulness, social media, and religion and spirituality have been grouped because most of these practices require mental and non-physical activities.

Music listening

Listening to music has proven effective for better sleep quality, well-being, health, and quality of life (Caló et al., 2020; Majeed et al., 2021; Solé et al., 2010). Considering the prevalence and harmful impacts of poor sleep, there is a need to identify potential interventions to improve sleep quality effectively. That potential intervention and indeed self-reported as a sleep aid by young adults is no other than listening to music at bedtime. A recent study found evidence that subjective sleep quality improved after listening to happy ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 2.07$) and sad music ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 2.11$) compared to pink noise ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 2.26$). There was no difference despite the opposite moods

between happy and sad music. The same study observed lower levels of stress and negative affect, with higher levels of positive affect and life satisfaction the morning after listening to music, regardless of whether the music was happy or sad in mood (Majeed et al., 2021).

Another study has shown that community-based music interventions can have an impact on the self-confidence, well-being, and engagement of some disadvantaged young people, thanks to the establishment of a polyhedral approach and the development of a ‘safe feeling’ triggered by the achievement of trust and connectedness, and reinforced by the music space (Caló et al., 2020). Finally, aging is accompanied by a decline in functioning at the physiological and psychological levels—one of the consequences that many older people face as they age is increased social isolation.

A study found that participating in musical activities contributes positively to a more active and satisfactory aging process (Solé et al., 2010).

Table 5
Characteristics of Reviewed Studies on Listening to Music

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Caló et al., 2019	Study 1: 27 young people from Scotland; Study 2: 37 participants involving young beneficiaries of the project, Heavy Sound leaders and workers, educators from	Quantitative and qualitative: longitudinal questionnaires and interviews	Community-based music interventions can have an impact on the self-confidence, well-being, and engagement of some disadvantaged young people.

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
	other organizations, and support/social workers of the young people and school teachers		Feeling safe was the triggering mechanism to observe these effects.
Majeed et al., 2021	62 young adults from a university in Singapore	Quantitative: experimental	Music, compared to pink noise and no sound, improves sleep quality and lowers levels of stress and negative affect. There was no observed difference between happy and sad music.
Solé et al., 2010	83 people over 65 years of age who enrolled in one of three music activities in Barcelona	Quantitative: quasi-experimental	Individuals who were involved in music activities reported a more active and satisfactory aging process.

Journaling

The use of writing techniques or journaling has been studied to improve well-being (Flinchbaugh et al., 2012; Kaczmarek et al., 2015). Gratitude journaling and gratitude letters are two standard writing techniques used for self-care. Both practices have proven to improve well-being effectively, but this improvement can only be caused if the individual is motivated to complete the writing exercises. While both techniques were perceived as beneficial to the participants, they were less likely to complete the gratitude letter exercises due to perceiving them as more complex (Kaczmarek et al., 2015). As such, participants preferred to partake in the gratitude journaling exercises, as they seemed easier to carry through to completion. However, dispositional attitudes and gender also impacted the likeliness of initiation for the writing practices. People with higher dispositional gratitude were more likely to initiate the exercises due to the expected ease and benefits. Positive expectations made

women more likely to participate in gratitude interventions (Kaczmarek et al., 2015). The combination of gratitude journaling and stress management techniques has also been found to heighten undergraduate students' levels of meaningfulness, $F(3, 112) = 3.24$, $p = .03$, and course engagement, $F(4, 111) = 11.96$, $p = .001$. However, it did not affect life satisfaction or classroom-related stress (Flinchbaugh et al., 2012).

However, other studies have concluded that gratitude journaling may be counterproductive, differing from Flinchbaugh et al.'s (2012) findings. Participants in the gratitude journaling group ($M = 14.36$) showed significantly lower well-being than the control group ($M = 16.19$). This may be due to a lack of interest or a negative association between writing exercises and work (Khanna & Singh, 2021). Other studies have also attempted to find links between self-administered journaling and increased self-compassion, though they have not reached conclusive results as they could not be replicated (Williamson & Blackhart, 2021).

Table 6
Characteristics of Reviewed Studies on Journaling

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Flinghbaugh et al., 2012	117 undergraduate business majors from a large Midwestern university	Quantitative: quasi-experimental	The combination of gratitude journaling and stress management techniques heightened undergraduate students' levels of meaningfulness and course engagement. However, it did not affect life satisfaction or classroom-related stress.
Kaczmarek et al., 2015	904 undergraduates (75.6% female) between 18 and 50 years of age	Quantitative: experimental design	People with greater dispositional gratitude anticipated the writing exercises to be easier and more beneficial than those with low dispositional gratitude and later reported better effectiveness of these interventions. Additionally, women were found to be more likely to initiate these gratitude writing exercises.
Khanna & Kamlesh, 2021	238 students from seventh to ninth grade	Quantitative and Qualitative: pretest-posttest experimental design	Gratitude journaling was found to have limited effectiveness due to associating the writing exercises with work.
Williamson & Blackhart, 2021	Study 1: 188 participants from the psychology participant pool at a Southeastern University; Study 2: 366 students from Southeastern and Midwestern universities; Study 3: 86 participants from Southeastern and Midwestern universities	Quantitative: quasi-experimental	There were no differences in self-compassion between groups in Study 1. There were self-compassion differences between online and in-lab groups in Study 2. Study 3 failed to replicate significant findings from Study 2.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has often been referenced as an effective self-care practice. Recent studies have shown that specific mindfulness facets such as “present-moment attention” and “nonjudgmental acceptance” may be correlated to enhanced emotional well-being

for late adults. This may be due to these facets working as buffers against daily stresses instead of helping to boost the mood of the individual (Mahlo & Windsor, 2021). However, other studies have delved into the possibility of mindfulness not being an effective method for aiding individuals' well-being.

Recent research has shown that, although initially, mindfulness seemed to have been positively related to reduced substance abuse, the element of social identification later proved to have held all the explanatory power, and thus, mindfulness was proven to have been ineffective in this environment (Adarves-Yorno et al., 2020). Mindfulness meditation apps (MMAs) have also been studied to determine their effectiveness and helpfulness in adults with varying degrees of depression. It was found that individuals with severe-extreme depression were more likely to use MMAs, $\chi^2(2, N = 726) = 8.08$, $p = .018$. However, individuals with no depression ($Mdn = 8$, range = 8, $n = 60$) rated them more valuable than those with mild-moderate ($Mdn = 6$, range = 10, $n = 63$). and

severe-extreme depression ($Mdn = 6$, range = 10, $n = 107$). The researchers of this study suggest that this may be due to the apps not being designed for individuals with severe depression or that the perceived helpfulness of the apps may be negatively skewed by the condition (Berg & Perich, 2022).

Another study found that, although increased mindfulness may result in lower surface acting, it may also be positively correlated to self-control depletion, which may negatively affect an individual's workplace performance (Lyddy et al., 2021). Considering these results, the benefits, and disadvantages of mindfulness as a self-care practice may have to be weighed and assessed before choosing to implement this method.

Table 7
Characteristics of Reviewed Studies on Mindfulness

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Adarves-Yorno et al., 2020	Study 1: N = 82, Study 2: N = 145, inmates of the largest male maximum security prison in Kenya	Quantitative: correlational	Social identification explained variance in mental well-being and resilience in addition to the variance explained by mindfulness. Study 2 also showed that identification and mindfulness were positively related to reducing substance use. However, when examined together, social identification held all the explanatory power, and mindfulness was no longer a significant predictor.
Berg & Perich, 2022	726 participants divided into no depression, mild-moderate, and severe-extreme	Quantitative: experimental	In general, young adults with severe depression symptoms may view MMAs as viable self-help tools for mental well-being.
Lyddy, 2021	Samples comprised employee-supervisor dyads from property management (N = 209) and management consulting (N = 397) in the	Quantitative: correlational	Mindfulness moderated the relationship between surface acting and self-control depletion. In four Study 2 samples, these replicated the

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
	Midwest region		Study 1 results and found that the mediated relationship between surface acting and five dimensions of employee performance via self-control depletion is moderated by mindfulness at the first stage.
Mahlo & Windsor, 2021	157 participants aged 53 to 86 years	Quantitative: correlational	Specific mindfulness facets such as “present-moment attention” and “nonjudgmental acceptance” may be correlated to enhanced emotional well-being for late adults. This may be due to these facets working as buffers against daily stresses instead of helping to boost the individual's mood.

Social Media

Research has mainly focused on the negative aspects of social media (de Leeuw & Buijzen, 2016), even though using social media before going to bed is not related to lower sleep quality (Das-Friebel et al., 2020). For some adolescents, increased social media use (SMU) was associated with decreased life satisfaction. For others, increases in SMU

was associated with increased life satisfaction. Boer et al. (2022) concluded that it was dependent on one's dependency on social media, $r = -0.39$, $p < 0.001$. Haidt (2000) also found that content showing “unexpected acts of human compassion or virtue” increased feelings of warmth and hope, which in turn may lead to altruistic behaviors (Schnall et al., 2010).

Table 8
Characteristics of Reviewed Studies on Social Media

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Boer et al., 2022	Data from four waves of longitudinal data among 1,419 Dutch secondary school adolescents	Quantitative: longitudinal	For some adolescents, increases in SMU activities were associated with decreased life satisfaction. For others, increases in SMU activities were associated with increased life satisfaction. It is dependent on one's dependency on social media.

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Das-Friebel et al., 2020	129 undergraduate students from the University of Warwick	Quantitative: correlational	Using social media before bed was unrelated to lower sleep quality.
Schnall et al., 2010	59 women from the University of Plymouth	Quantitative: experimental	Elevated participants engaged in altruistic behaviors.

Religion and Spirituality

Recent studies have focused on various religious and spiritual beliefs, including Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, atheism, and agnosticism. The results have indicated that living by one's beliefs, regardless of religion or ideology, is correlated to higher levels of hope, gratitude, positive affect, life satisfaction, and general mental health (Moore, 2017).

Other studies on Christian denominations have investigated spiritual practices, such as spiritual surrender, defined as a method of religious coping in partnership with the object of devotion. Results have demonstrated that, although severe life events are usually tied to lower life satisfaction, spiritual surrender can ameliorate this relationship. Additionally, at higher levels of spiritual surrender, the severity of the life event becomes unrelated

to the reported life satisfaction, $F(3, 337) = 39.75, p < .001$ (Shannonhouse et al., 2023). Spiritual surrender may also affect an individual's health, as observed through decreased levels of reported stress and anxiety regardless of other external conditions such as age, marital status, level of education, and number of children, $p < .001$ (Clements & Ermakova, 2012).

However, Hanks et al. (2020) found that interventions focused on developing and maintaining life purpose were more effective in improving quality of life than spiritual interventions. Nevertheless, the study suggested that these results may be specific for caretakers of individuals with high impairments due to traumatic brain injuries, as previous studies with other populations have supported the beneficial effects of spiritual interventions compared to other alternatives.

Table 9
Characteristics of Reviewed Studies on Religion and Spirituality

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Clements & Ermaakova, 2011	Study 1: 460 undergraduate university students from Southern Appalachia Study 2: 230 pregnant women from Southern Appalachia	Quantitative: correlational	Study 1: Individuals who reported high levels of Surrender to God were found to have lower reported stress and anxiety. Study 2: Women who reported higher levels of Surrender to God had lower stress levels, regardless of

Author(s)	Sample description	Methodology	Findings
Hanks et al., 2020	335 participants enrolled in the Quality of Life in Caregivers of TBI (TBI-CareQOL)	Quantitative: correlational	Interventions focused on the development and maintenance of life purpose and meaning in caregivers of people with higher impediments due to TBI had more beneficial effects on quality of life than spirituality.
Moore, 2016	4667 participants recruited online included atheists, agnostics, Christians, spiritual nonreligious, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, etc.	Quantitative: correlational	Living by one's spiritual values, regardless of the ideological preference or belief, is characteristic of greater mental health.
Shannonhouse et al., 2023	352 Christian participants aged 18 or older who resided in the United States	Quantitative: correlational	While severe life events correlate to lower life satisfaction, Spiritual Surrender can weaken this negative correlation. Higher levels of Spiritual Surrender may even eliminate the correlation between the event's severity and life satisfaction.

Discussion

The recent research on self-care practices has provided a better understanding of how they work and how they should be applied to acquire the most effective results. The present literature on self-care can be divided into physical self-care practices (i.e., physical activity, nature interventions, pet therapy, and sleep quality) and psychological self-care practices (i.e., mindfulness, journaling, music listening, social media, and religion and spirituality). Of the reviewed accessible self-care practices, it was confirmed that physical therapy, nature, pet therapy, sleep, music, and spirituality were the most effective in

increasing well-being (e.g., Khazaee-Pool et al., 2015; Anderson et al., 2018; Bao & Schreer, 2016).

On the other hand, it was debunked that self-care practices, such as journaling, mindfulness, and social media, were completely effective in increasing well-being. Journaling may only be effective if the individual is motivated to complete the task (Khanna & Singh, 2021), mindfulness may lead to poor work performance due to lowered self-control (Lyddy, 2021), and social media interventions may only be helpful depending on whether the media consumed depicts positive imagery (Haidt,

2000).

The results reported in this study should be considered in the light of some limitations. Firstly, given that our narrative literature review explored accessible and practical self-care practices, a number of effective practices may not have been reviewed as they may not have fit into the criteria. Secondly, the methodology of this literature review only focused on APA's PsychInfo database. This may limit access to other resources that may contain valuable information pertaining to the focus of this NLR. Lastly, our review included 18 correlational studies, eight experimental studies, four quasi-experimental, and four systematic reviews. The number of correlational studies may lead to a lack of causation in the analyzed results.

Conclusion

The exploration of accessible self-care practices throughout recent years has identified numerous effective methods to maintain or enhance the well-being of practicing individuals. Notably, the present review underscores the efficacy of certain practices, such as physical therapy, engagement with nature, pet therapy, sleep, music appreciation, and spirituality, in fostering increased well-being.

More research is required to replicate the findings in these studies. We recommend that researchers focus on establishing causality between the practices presented in this review and overall well-being, researching cultural variations on self-care practices' effectiveness, and further exploring combinations of self-care to achieve better well-being. As this field expands, we can achieve a better understanding of how to improve self-care in more effective ways, especially for

communities lacking access and resources.

Compliance with Research Ethics Standards

Financing

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Declaration of conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to report.

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects (IRB)

This work did not require IRB approval.

Informed Consent/Assent

This work did not require informed consent or assent forms.

References

- Adarves-Yorno, I., Mahdon, M., Schueltke, L., Koschate-Reis, M., & Tarrant, M. (2020). Mindfulness and social identity: Predicting well-being in a high-stress environment. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 50*(12), 720-732. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12708>
- Allen, L. (2021). An introduction to self-care and capitalism. Necessary Behavior. <https://necessarybehavior.com/an-introduction-to-selfcare-and-capitalism>
- Anderson, C. L., Monroy, M., & Keltner, D. (2018). Awe in nature heals: Evidence from military veterans, at-risk youth, and college students. *Emotion, 18*(8), 1195. <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000442>
- Bao, K. J., & Schreer, G. (2016). Pets and

- happiness: Examining the association between pet ownership and wellbeing. *Anthrozoös*, 29(2), 283-296.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2016.1152721>
- Berg, D., & Perich, T. (2022). Use of mobile mindfulness apps in young adults with depression: Results from a cross-sectional survey. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 53(1), 42-49.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000411>
- Beauchamp, T. L., & Childress, J. F. (2001). *Principles of biomedical ethics (5th ed.)*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Boer, M., Stevens, G. W., Finkenauer, C., & van den Eijnden, R. J. (2022). The complex association between social media use intensity and adolescent wellbeing: A longitudinal investigation of five factors that may affect the association. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 128, 107084.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.107084>
- Brkljačić, T., Sučić, I., Lučić, L., Glavak Tkalić, R., & Kaliterna Lipovčan, L. (2020). The beginning, the end, and all the happiness in between: Pet owners' wellbeing from pet acquisition to death. *Anthrozoös*, 33(1), 71-87.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2020.1694313>
- Caló, F., Steiner, A., Millar, S., & Teasdale, S. (2020). The impact of a community-based music intervention on the health and well-being of young people: A realist evaluation. *Health & social care in the community*, 28(3), 988-997.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12931>
- Clements, A. D., & Ermakova, A. V. (2012). Surrender to God and stress: A possible link between religiosity and health. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 4(2), 93-107.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025109>
- Clough, J. (2018). Review: Diabetes self-care management practices among insulin-taking patients. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 23(7), 566-567.
<https://doi-org.uprm.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1744987118782319>
- Cole, K. M., Gawlinski, A., Steers, N., & Kotlerman, J. (2007). Animal-assisted therapy in patients hospitalized with heart failure. *American Journal of critical care*, 16(6), 575-585.
- Das-Friebel, A., Lenneis, A., Realo, A., Sanborn, A., Tang, N. K., Wolke, D., ... & Lemola, S. (2020). Bedtime social media use, sleep, and affective wellbeing in young adults: an experience sampling study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 61(10), 1138-1149.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13326>
- de Leeuw, R. N., & Buijzen, M. (2016). Introducing positive media psychology to the field of children, adolescents, and media. *Journal of Children and Media*, 10(1), 39-46.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2015.1121892>
- de Oliveira, L. D. S. S. C. B., Souza, E. C., Rodrigues, R. A. S., Fett, C. A., & Piva, A. B. (2019). The effects of physical activity on anxiety, depression, and quality of life in elderly people living in the community. *Trends in psychiatry and psychotherapy*, 41, 36-42.
<https://doi.org/10.1590/2237-6089-2017-0129>
- Delaney, B. (2020, January 30). We need to move on from self-care to something that cannot be captured by capitalism.

- The Guardian.
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/31/we-need-to-move-on-from-self-care-to-something-that-cannot-be-captured-by-capitalism>
- Flinchbaugh, C. L., Moore, E. W. G., Chang, Y. K., & May, D. R. (2012). Student well-being interventions: The effects of stress management techniques and gratitude journaling in the management education classroom. *Journal of Management Education*, 36(2), 191-219. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562911430062>
- FEMA. (2023). Underserved Populations/Communities. *FEMA Acronyms, Abbreviations and Terms*.
- Gwyther, K., Rice, S., Purcell, R., Pilkington, V., Santesteban-Echarri, O., Bailey, A., & Walton, C. C. (2022). Sleep interventions for performance, mood and sleep outcomes in athletes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.102094>
- Haidt, J. (2000). The Positive emotion of elevation. *Prevention & Treatment*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1037/1522-3736.3.1.33>
- Hanks, R. A., Boileau, N. R., Norman, A. L., Nakase-Richardson, R., Mariouw, K. H., & Carlozzi, N. E. (2020). Spirituality and outcomes in caregivers of persons with traumatic brain injury (TBI). *Rehabilitation psychology*, 65(4), 347-359. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rep0000304>
- Jike, M., Itani, O., Watanabe, N., Buysse, D. J., & Kaneita, Y. (2018). Long sleep duration and health outcomes: A systematic review, meta-analysis and meta-regression. *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, 39, 25-36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2017.06.011>
- Kaczmarek, L. D., Behnke, M., Enko, J., Hoffman, A., Kiciński, M., Paruszewski, J., ... & Dombrowski, S. U. (2021). Would you be happier if you moved more? Physical activity focusing illusion. *Current Psychology*, 40(8), 3716-3724. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-019-00315-9>
- Kaczmarek, L. D., Kashdan, T. B., Drażkowski, D., Enko, J., Kosakowski, M., Szäefer, A., & Bujacz, A. (2015). Why do people prefer gratitude journaling over gratitude letters? The influence of individual differences in motivation and personality on web-based interventions. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 75, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.11.004>
- Khanna, P., & Singh, K. (2021). Stress management training and gratitude journaling in the classroom: an initial investigation in Indian context. *Current Psychology*, 40(11), 5737-5748. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01242-w>
- Khazae-Pool, M., Sadeghi, R., Majlessi, F., & Rahimi Foroushani, A. (2015). Effects of physical exercise programme on happiness among older people. *Journal of psychiatric and mental health nursing*, 22(1), 47-57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpm.12168>
- Kouros, C. D., Keller, P. S., Martín-Piñón, O., & El-Sheikh, M. (2022). Bidirectional associations between nightly sleep and daily happiness and negative mood in adolescents. *Child Development*, 93, e547-e562. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13798>

- Lyddy, C. J., Good, D. J., Bolino, M. C., Thompson, P. S., & Stephens, J. P. (2021). The costs of mindfulness at work: The moderating role of mindfulness in surface acting, self-control depletion, and performance outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 106*(12), 1921–1938. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000863>
- Lorde, A. (2017). A burst of light: And other essays. *Courier Dover Publications*.
- Majeed, N. M., Lua, V. Y., Chong, J. S., Lew, Z., & Hartanto, A. (2021). Does bedtime music listening improve subjective sleep quality and next-morning well-being in young adults? A randomized cross-over trial. *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, and Brain, 31*(3-4), 149. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pmu0000283>
- Mahlo, L., & Windsor, T. D. (2021). State mindfulness and affective well-being in the daily lives of middle-aged and older adults. *Psychology and Aging, 36*(5), 642–659. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pag0000596>
- McConnell, A. R., Paige Lloyd, E., & Humphrey, B. T. (2019). We are family: Viewing pets as family members improves wellbeing. *Anthrozoös, 32*(4), 459-470. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2019.1621516>
- Minges, K. E., & Redeker, N. S. (2016). Delayed school start times and adolescent sleep: A systematic review of the experimental evidence. *Sleep Medicine Reviews, 28*, 86–95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smrv.2015.06.002>
- Mogre, V., Johnson, N. A., Tzelepis, F., Shaw, J. E., & Paul, C. (2019). A systematic review of adherence to diabetes self-care behaviours: Evidence from low- and middle-income countries. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 75*(12), 3374–3389. <https://doi.org/uprm.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/jan.14190>
- Moore, J. T. (2017). Multicultural and idiosyncratic considerations for measuring the relationship between religious and secular forms of spirituality with positive global mental health. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 9*(1), 21-33. <https://doi.org/10.1037/re10000083>.
- Uijtdewilligen, L. (2020). Effectiveness of prescribing physical activity in parks to improve health and wellbeing-the park prescription randomized controlled trial. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, 17*(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-020-00941-8>
- O'Malley, M., Happell, B., & O'Mahony, J. (2022). A phenomenological understanding of mental health nurses' experiences of self-care: A review of the empirical literature. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 43*(12), 1121-1129. <https://doi.org/uprm.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/01612840.2022.2108528>
- Polish, J. (2020). 8 Types Of Self-Care & How To Practice Them. *Bustle*. <https://www.bustle.com/wellness/types-of-self-care-how-to-practice-experts>
- Posluns, K., & Gall, T. L. (2020). Dear mental health practitioners, take care of yourselves: A literature review on self-care. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 42*(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/uprm.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10447-019-09382-w>
- Sampasa-Kanyinga, H., Colman, I., Goldfield, G. S., Janssen, I., Wang, J., Podinic, I., Tremblay, M. S.,

- Saunders, T. J., Sampson, M., & Chaput, J.-P. (2020). Combinations of physical activity, sedentary time, and sleep duration and their associations with depressive symptoms and other mental health problems in children and adolescents: A systematic review. *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-020-00976-x>
- Schnall, S., Roper, J., & Fessler, D. M. (2010). Elevation leads to altruistic behavior. *Psychological science*, 21(3), 315-320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797609359882>
- Shannonhouse, L., McMartin, J., Sacco, S. J., Hall, M. E. L., Park, C. L., Kim, D., Silverman, E., Kapic, K., & Aten, J. (2023). Spiritual surrender: Measurement of an emic Christian religious coping strategy. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice. Advance online publication*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000314>
<https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000314>
- Solé, C., Mercadal-Brotons, M., Gallego, S., & Riera, M. (2010). Contributions of music to aging adults' quality of life. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 47(3), 264-281. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jmt/47.3.264>
- Solomon, O. (2010). What a dog can do: Children with autism and therapy dogs in social interaction. *Ethos*, 38(1), 143-166.
- Richardson, M., Richardson, E., Hallam, J., & Ferguson, F. J. (2020). Opening doors to nature: Bringing calm and raising aspirations of vulnerable young people through nature-based intervention. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 48(3), 284. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000148>
- Tolentino, J. (2017). The Year That Skin Care Became a Coping Mechanism. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-year-that-skin-care-became-a-coping-mechanism>
- Richeson, N. E. (2003). Effects of animal-assisted therapy on agitated behaviors and social interactions of older adults with dementia. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias®*, 18(6), 353-358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/153331750301800610>
- Williamson, J., & Blackhart, G. C. (2021). Efficacy of Guided Versus Self-Induced Learning of Web-Based Self-Compassionate Journaling by College Students. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 134(1), 45-59. <https://doi.org/10.5406/amerjpsyc.134.1.00>