



# A Cross-Sectional Analysis of the Relationship Between Sabbath Practices and US, Canadian, Indonesian, and Paraguayan Teachers' Burnout

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## Abstract

Across different faith traditions, Sabbath day observance shares a close relationship with theological conceptions of rest. Sabbath-keeping, with its promise of rest, may be a valuable spiritual practice in the context of teaching as prior research has consistently documented the adverse effects of teacher burnout. Yet no research has examined Sabbath-keeping and its connections to teaching practices and teacher burnout. We aim to fill this gap with a quantitative study of Sabbath-keeping and burnout among 1,300 teachers in Christian schools throughout the USA, Canada, Indonesia, and Paraguay. We report their conceptions of Sabbath and how those conceptions inform their teaching practice. We find an inverse and statistically significant relationship between Sabbath-keeping and burnout that is robust across several model specifications, suggesting that Sabbath-keeping may be helpful in reducing burnout among educators.

**Keywords** Sabbath · Sabbath-keeping · Burnout · Stress · Wellness · Christian education · Teachers

## Introduction

For several decades, primary and secondary educational researchers have studied the challenge of teacher burnout, defined as mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion due to the stresses of teaching (Farber, 1984; Maslach & Leiter, 1999). These concerns have been exacerbated by the recent COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, in

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part due to new stressors such as transitioning to an online or hybrid teaching format and the health and safety of educators, students, and families (Baker et al., 2021; Kumawat, 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021; Sokal et al., 2020). Teacher burnout is inherently at odds with well-being—both for the individual who experiences it personally and for their broader school community. Left unattended, teacher burnout can lead to several undesirable outcomes, such as the increased likelihood of leaving the teaching profession, poor student performance, job dissatisfaction, low job morale, cynicism, and feelings of personal inefficacy (Chang, 2009; Kim et al., 2017a, 2017b; Madigan & Kim, 2021; Yorulmaz et al., 2017).

As the problem of burnout has magnified, researchers have sought to identify various coping strategies that help teachers maintain psychological wellness (Baker et al., 2021; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Zadok-Gurman et al., 2021). For instance, mindfulness interventions designed to help people to pause, to be more aware of their emotions, and to pay attention to their present moment have increased in popularity. Research of mindfulness interventions suggests that they can reduce job burnout among teachers and other professionals (Hwang et al., 2017; Luken & Sammons, 2016). Research has also found that other spiritual practices such as prayer can ameliorate teacher burnout (Chirico et al., 2020; LaBarbera & Hetzel, 2016).

Researchers, however, have not explored whether Sabbath-keeping has a connection with burnout and teacher wellness. We fill this gap in this paper, weaving theological literature about the Sabbath with the educational literature on teacher burnout and pedagogy. We propose an approach to addressing burnout based on incorporating the concept of Sabbath into teaching practices. Drawing upon particular Judeo-Christian conceptions of the Sabbath (Augustine, 1991; Heschel, 1995; Pieper, 1963, 1965) as well as the emerging scholarship about integrating faith and educational practice (Lee & Cheng, 2021; Smith, 2018; Smith & Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2021), we consider ways in which pedagogy itself can be informed by the understanding of Sabbath. We then document the ways teachers understand the Sabbath and how the Sabbath comes to bear on their personal and pedagogical practices. Next, we empirically examine the relationship between teacher burnout and Sabbath practices. Data come from a cross-sectional survey completed by 1,309 Christian school teachers representing 82 schools in the USA, Indonesia, Canada, and Paraguay. Findings suggest that teachers who incorporate Sabbath into their personal and teaching practices exhibit lower levels of burnout.

In the remainder of this article, we begin by reviewing scholarship about Sabbath and teacher burnout. We then introduce our empirical study's methodology, describing the sample, instrumentation, and empirical strategy. After presenting our findings, we discuss implications for Christian schools and directions for future research.

## Background on the Sabbath and Its Connection to Teacher Well-being and Pedagogy

### Theology of the Sabbath

Theologically, there is a close connection between Sabbath-keeping and rest in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Judaism, Sabbath-keeping was instituted in law at Sinai but grounded in the creation account. Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel (1995) writes that the Sabbath “is not for the purpose of recovering one’s lost strength and becoming fit for the forthcoming labor. The Sabbath is a day for the sake of life” (pp. 14). This conception of the Sabbath hearkens back to Aristotle’s (1885) distinction between amusement and leisure. The former is practiced for instrumental reasons: One engages in amusement for the sake of returning to work. The latter, in contrast, is chosen for its own sake because it is constitutive of the *summum bonum*, that is, *eudaimonia* or human flourishing. Similarly, for Heschel, the Sabbath is practiced for its own sake because it is constitutive of life’s ultimate purpose.

This conception of the Sabbath is further elaborated within the Christian tradition. In his treatment of the topic of festivity, Catholic theologian Josef Pieper (1965) directly draws upon Aristotelian thought and echoes Heschel’s (1995) explanation:

With the death of the concept of human activity that is meaningful in itself, the possibility of any resistance to a totalitarian laboring society also perishes.... It then becomes sheer impossibility to establish and maintain an area of existence which is not preempted by work. For there is only a single justification for not working that will be acceptable even to one’s own conscience. That is, dedication of leisure to something meaningful in itself. (p. 9)

Like Heschel, Pieper rejects the notion that the Sabbath is practiced for the sake of returning to work. For both theologians, work is not primary.

Pieper (1965) further explains that setting aside a weekly day of rest “is meant to serve both to recall the beginning of Creation and to herald future bliss,” suggesting that Aristotle’s conception of the *summum bonum* finds its fulfillment in worship of and communion with the Christian God (pp. 48). Similarly, in articulating Swiss theologian Karl Barth’s explanation of the Sabbath, Cocksworth (2011) writes that “the Sabbath is at the head of the week and the rest of the week is unavoidably restless and plummets further into the abyss of religiosity until we are drawn back to our true agency by resting with God on the Sabbath” (pp. 251–271).

The Judeo-Christian traditions have understood the Sabbath not primarily as something practiced for instrumental reasons but rather for its own sake. This understanding is contrary to the view that life revolves around a five-day workweek in which an individual’s worth is based on economic productivity and Sabbath is practiced for the sake of recharging one’s mental and physical capacities in order to resume work. Instead, as articulated by Heschel (1995), Pieper (1963, 1965), Barth

(as cited in Cocksworth, 2011), and others within the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Sabbath is a horizon from which individuals understand their lives and inhabit the world. Sabbath conveys the first principle that the primary end of human experience is not work but worship of and union with God.

Moreover, the rest offered by the Sabbath is to be understood not merely as a ceasing from labor but in fulfillment of humanity's ultimate purpose, as Augustine (1991) famously wrote: "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You" (p. 3). The five-day workweek and work itself, therefore, is to be subsumed under worship of and communion with God. Practicing the Sabbath is fundamentally the embodiment of this understanding about the relationship between work, God, and humanity's ultimate end.

That said, there are some minor differences across faith traditions in the conception of the Sabbath. With respect to the timing of the day, many Jews maintain that the seventh day is to be remembered as the Sabbath. In contrast, most Christians observe the first day as the Sabbath, continuing the practice of the first-century church, which gathered on Sunday in remembrance of Christ's resurrection from the dead (Carson, 1982). As Pieper (1965) writes, first-day observance is meant to recall to the keeper "divine vitality through Incarnation and Resurrection" (p. 50). This view is consistent with that of many Protestants (Calvin, 2008). Despite these differences, the fundamental understanding of Sabbath as humanity's end is shared.

## Sabbath and Pedagogical Practices

What are the implications of these conceptions about the Sabbath for educational praxis? In writing about Sabbath-keeping specifically for a Christian community, Bass (2005) observes that keeping the Sabbath is not a "single 'act'" because of how all-encompassing the Sabbath is (p. 27). Bass, instead, uses the word *practice* to characterize Sabbath-keeping because unlike disparate acts performed by an atomized individual, practices are "a complex pattern of human activity, engaged in with others over time, in and through which life together takes shape in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world" (p. 27). In other words, Sabbath-keeping is a way of inhabiting the world with others and together embodying the principle that humans were made for rest in God (Dykstra, 2005).

Applying Bass's (2005) insight to not just any Christian community but a Christian school community, the question of how the Sabbath is practiced pedagogically naturally arises. Though one could analogously ask a similar question about how Sabbath and pedagogy are related within school communities that ascribe to other faith traditions, the existing scholarship examining how faith informs educational practice primarily focuses on Christian faith and Christian schools. This body of literature argues that Christian education is distinctively Christian not merely because of the specific content that is found in the formal curriculum—such as Bible class, regularly scheduled chapels, integration of Christian worldview into other content areas—but because it is marked by practices that distinguish the Christian school community from other school communities (Cheng, 2019; Smith, 2018; Smith &

Smith, 2011). This scholarship has explored how practices related to, for example, assessment (Smith et al., 2021), school leadership (Lee & Cheng, 2021), reading (Smith, 2011), building classroom community (Call, 2011), and stewarding the physical space of the school (Skillen, 2020) might be distinctively Christian. However, there has been no discussion about how the ideals of Sabbath can be practiced within the context of teaching and learning.

What practices, then, belong to Sabbath-keeping as it pertains to a school community? One might raise a range of more specific questions regarding the connection between the Sabbath and life within a school community. For instance, in what ways might teachers themselves incorporate Sabbath practices into their professional and personal lives? In what ways might their pedagogical practices reflect the reality that the Sabbath was intended to convey? How might classroom policies and other teaching practices help students to make room for Sabbath in the way they approach their own learning? How can school leadership enable students, teachers, and other members of the school community to practice the Sabbath? We will begin to fill this gap by (a) proposing several pedagogical practices by which faith-based school communities can embody the significance of the Sabbath as articulated by traditional Judeo-Christian thought and (b) empirically measuring its prevalence in a sample of teachers in Christian schools.

## **Burnout and Psychosocial Wellness in Education**

Alongside theological scholarship about the Sabbath and potential implications for educational practice, a separate empirical literature considers the causes of teacher burnout and the means to ameliorate it. Particularly relevant for this study is the research that offers evidence that spiritual disciplines consistent with the more general practice of Sabbath-keeping may help promote wellness and mitigate exhaustion. We turn to a review of this relevant literature and consider its bearing on educational practice.

### **Causes of Burnout**

As a psychosocial construct, burnout has been examined in various professional contexts for decades (Halbesleben, 2006; Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). Educational psychologists initiated the study of burnout in the 1980s. Maslach (1982) is well-known for proposing a three-dimensional conceptual framework of the phenomenon: (1) emotional exhaustion, (2) depersonalization, and (3) low feelings of personal accomplishment. Individuals experiencing burnout, as they overextend their emotional resources, grow increasingly detached from their work, and consequentially lose personal self-efficacy and a sense of purpose. This conceptual framework is quantified by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which has since been widely used to study burnout in education and other sectors (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Primary and secondary education research related to burnout and other measures of psychosocial wellness generally focuses on students and teachers (Brown, 2012; Chang, 2009; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015; Kijai & Totten, 1995; Tuxford &

Bradley, 2015; VanderWeele, 2020; Walburg, 2014). Burnout in this context has been the subject of scholarly investigation in part because of the adverse consequences associated with burnout. Recently, faith-based schools have given increasing attention to issues related to mental well-being, emotional well-being, and burnout (Swaner & Wolfe, 2021). Studies have consistently found that burnout can be associated with higher levels of teacher turnover (Shirrell, 2021), lower levels of student achievement and motivation (Fiorilli et al., 2017; Madigan & Kim, 2021), and higher probabilities of student dropout (Bask & Salmela-Aro, 2013). These consequences underscore the urgency of understanding burnout and its potential causes. Causes of burnout generally fall into one of two categories: environmental factors and subjective factors.

### **Environmental Factors and Burnout**

Environmental factors that contribute to burnout refer to stressors that arise from features of teachers' work environments and climates. For example, LaBarbera and Hetzel (2016) explain that teacher stress may stem from being overburdened with high administrative workloads and classroom-based stressors such as student misbehavior. Difficulty in maintaining relationships with parents and other coworkers may also contribute to stress, especially when educators feel undervalued or lacking in personal agency (Fernet et al., 2014; Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015).

Other research demonstrates an empirical link between lack of social support and feelings of burnout for both students and teachers, especially for early career teachers (Alsup & Moots, 2021; Bettini et al., 2018; Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996; Halbesleben, 2006; Shirrell, 2021). Environmental factors may explain why early career teachers and special education teachers have a greater propensity for burnout (Bettini et al., 2018; Fernet et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2017a, 2017b; Perrone et al., 2019). Even more troublesome is the capacity for burnout to spread among teachers interacting with other colleagues. As Kim et al., (2017a, 2017b) demonstrate, early career teachers seem more likely to experience burnout if their mentors and other colleagues within their social networks themselves experience burnout.

### **Subjective Factors and Burnout**

Subjective factors refer to an individual teachers' perceptions about their own ability to succeed at their jobs. For instance, a teacher's beliefs about his or her ability to handle student misbehaviors (Tsouloupas et al., 2010) and beliefs about whether the amount of exerted effort is worth the reward are connected to feelings of burnout. Teachers who do not feel capable of handling student misbehavior or often judge their efforts to accomplish a goal as insufficient are more likely to experience burnout (Unterbrink et al., 2012). Some research suggests that personality traits moderate the effect of these subjective factors. For instance, teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem are less likely to experience burnout (Aypay, 2017; Bilge et al., 2014; Savaş et al., 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Measures of resilience, coping skills, emotional stability, conscientiousness, optimism, and

extraversion are also negatively correlated with the likelihood of burnout (Alarcon et al., 2009; Brown, 2012; Swider & Zimmermann 2010; Tsouloupas et al., 2010; Tuxford & Bradley, 2015).

### Interventions to Address Burnout in Education

While personality traits may moderate the likelihood of experiencing burnout, there have been widespread efforts to implement programs and practices designed to help all teachers cope with or overcome work-related stress. According to a nationwide survey of US primary and secondary school educators, respondents most frequently reported relying on friends and family, a sense of humor, times of solitude, and a positive attitude to cope with stress (Richards, 2012). Beyond the practices on which individual teachers might already rely, there have been efforts to improve school leadership and to offer programmatic interventions to address teacher burnout. We discuss these two approaches in greater detail in the following sections. We also discuss a third approach unique to faith-based schools that focuses on spiritual disciplines.

**School Leadership and Administrative Support** Research in educational leadership has encouraged school leaders to provide social and material resources for teachers. Proposed strategies include reducing stress-inducing administrative burdens and assisting teachers in their care for students and parents (Perrone et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Other studies underscore the importance of transformational leadership, which can help teachers develop a sense of purpose, increase personal self-efficacy, or sustain a shared organizational vision, thereby ameliorating teacher burnout (Gong et al., 2013; Leithwood et al., 1996; Yorulmaz et al., 2017). Leaders might also make an effort to foster collegiality (Bettini et al., 2018), promote positive relationships with students and parents (Kim et al., 2017a, 2017b), and secure access to counseling (Ates, 2016), all of which presumably decrease the incidence of burnout. Indeed, principals play a significant role in a teacher's decision to leave the profession entirely (Grissom, 2011).

**Mindfulness and Socioemotional Skills Interventions** Aside from improving leadership practices, psychologists and health practitioners have offered professional development opportunities and other programs to improve teachers' ability to cope with stress. Mindfulness programs designed to help teachers build resilience, maintain personal well-being, and manage adversity have burgeoned within the past decade (Sedlmeier et al., 2012). Recent meta-analyses of evaluations of mindfulness programs indicate some modest effects in lowering the likelihood of burnout and improving teachers' abilities to manage the stress-inducing challenges of their profession (Hwang et al., 2017; Klingbeil & Renshaw, 2018; Luken & Sammons, 2016). The use of other coping strategies such as physical exercise are also found to be negatively correlated with stress and exhaustion levels (Elliot et al., 2015). Authors of another meta-analysis conclude that interventions aimed at reducing burnout can lower the



likelihood of emotional exhaustion and improve feelings of personal accomplishment (Iancu et al., 2018).

**Spiritual Disciplines** In addition to improving school leadership and developing psychological interventions, faith-based schools additionally focus on cultivating spiritual disciplines to address teacher burnout (Talley, 2018). Although the practice of spiritual disciplines including silence, solitude, stillness, prayer, reading religious texts, and fasting are connected with the Sabbath, they are not practiced exclusively for the Sabbath. Instead, these disciplines are practiced for the sake of spiritual formation and care of the soul (Plummer, 2009; Willard, 1998). Nevertheless, empirical research suggests the instrumental value of spiritual practices for teacher and student wellness. For example, teachers with religious beliefs often report practicing prayer, meditation, and scripture reading to cope with work-related stress (Hartwick & Kang, 2013). Prayer has been found to be associated with lower levels of burnout for teachers (Chirico, 2017; Chirico et al., 2020; LaBarbera & Hetzel, 2016).

Cook and Babyak (2019) find that teachers who have a stronger connection to the transcendent in daily life experience lower levels of work-related stress. Though one study found evidence that levels of spirituality are significantly and positively related to anger and stress among adolescents (Carlozzi et al., 2010), other research generally provides suggestive evidence that spiritual disciplines help mitigate burnout, especially among teachers. The general consensus of these studies is that individuals who regularly engage in spiritual practices are more likely to exhibit higher levels of mental, emotional, and physical health (Sedlmeier et al., 2012; VanderWeele, 2020).

**Sabbath Practices and Teacher Burnout** Although Sabbath-keeping cannot be reduced to a single act, it is embodied in a set of practices, including conventional spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, and engaging with religious texts. But the Sabbath is more than a set of practices according to Judeo-Christian tradition. It is a way of inhabiting the world with the understanding that life does not revolve around work but communion with God. Under this view, work is properly situated under a larger purpose. Practicing the Sabbath reinforces this understanding of the relationship between work and life, theoretically enabling teachers not to have their lives totalized by work (Bass, 2005; Dykstra, 2005; Pieper, 1963, 1965). For this reason, we hypothesize that teachers who engage in teaching practices informed by the Sabbath are more likely to exhibit psychosocial wellness.

## Research Aims

To our knowledge, no study has empirically tested the relationship between Sabbath-keeping and teacher burnout. Nor has any study explored how teachers understand the Sabbath and how that understanding shapes teaching and learning practices. We contribute to scholarship on Sabbath observance and teacher wellness with a quantitative study of the relationship between Sabbath-keeping and Christian school teachers' health. We also present data describing teachers' conceptions about the Sabbath



and their bearing on teaching and learning. In the next section, we discuss the data and empirical strategy used to investigate these issues.

## Methods

### Sample

To explore this subject, we use data from the Sabbath Study, a cross-sectional survey fielded by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) in January and February of 2021. The researchers obtained permission from ACSI and worked in collaboration with the organization to collect data about Sabbath practices and burnout from teachers in its member schools. This study was also approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Arkansas, where the research team shares an affiliation. In accordance with the approved study protocols, teachers remained anonymous in the survey and their responses were kept confidential. Moreover, teachers were asked to provide consent to participate in the study prior to responding to the survey.

Altogether, a convenience sample of 1,309 Christian school teachers responded to the survey, representing 82 unique schools and four countries, namely the USA, Canada, Indonesia, and Paraguay. The survey included questions regarding teachers' background characteristics, including teaching experience, age, gender, and marital status (see Table 1). On average, teachers in our sample had between eight and nine years of teaching experience, and just over six years at their current school. Most teachers were between 20 and 30 years old, though the mean age was 34.5 years and ranged from 21 to 81 years. Roughly three-quarters of the sample was female and nearly half of teachers were married.

### Survey Instrument

On the survey questionnaire, we queried teachers about a variety of issues related to the Sabbath. Teachers reported whether they keep the Sabbath as well as their

**Table 1** Sample summary statistics

	N (1)	Mean (2)	SD (3)	Min (4)	Max (5)
Teaching experience (Years)					
<i>Overall</i>	1137	8.67	9.27	0	55
<i>At current school</i>	1164	6.07	6.39	0	48
Age	1112	34.54	12.36	21	81
Female	1174	0.75	0.43	0	1
Married	1195	0.45	0.50	0	1

theological views about the Sabbath. We also asked teachers about the ways they use their time on the Sabbath and gauged the way the concept of Sabbath influences their pedagogy. Finally, we administered the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) to obtain a measure of burnout for each teacher. We describe each component of the survey in the sections that follow. Later in the results section, we report how the full sample responded to these items as well as how the two subsamples of teachers who keep the Sabbath and teachers who do not keep the Sabbath responded to the items.

### **Sabbath Views**

We asked respondents how strongly they agree with 11 theological statements regarding the Sabbath on a four-point Likert scale. Included in this item set were statements such as “God commands that we should keep one day in seven holy by resting from our labors” and “We are no longer bound to honor the Sabbath, as Old Testament law has been abolished.”

### **Sabbath Practices**

We then asked each respondent to indicate whether or not they participate in one of 14 different activities on their Sabbath. Some of these items were similar to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (2021) American Time Use Survey Questionnaire. Examples of these activities included participating in church activities, worship, spending time with family, completing work-related tasks, and a variety of leisurely activities.

### **Pedagogical Practices and Sabbath**

We also examined the extent to which Sabbath-keeping informed the teaching practices of our respondents. Using a series of four-point Likert-type items, we asked how frequently respondents engage with teaching practices that pertain to Sabbath-keeping. Included were practices such as assigning homework over the weekend, scheduling exams or major deadlines immediately after the Sabbath, grading, lesson-planning, or checking work email during the Sabbath, and scheduling professional meetings on the Sabbath. All of these examples refer to specific teaching and learning practices that have some bearing on Sabbath-keeping.

### **Copenhagen Burnout Inventory**

To measure teachers’ levels of burnout, we used the personal burnout subscale of the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI), a validated six-item scale used to measure psychosocial well-being (Kristensen et al., 2005). Respondents indicated on a five-point scale how often statements such as “I feel tired” applied to them. Overall, responses demonstrated a high level of internal consistency ( $\alpha=0.86$ ). To compute each respondent’s CBI score, we averaged each respondents’ answers to all six items and then standardized the individual scores to have a mean equal to 0 and standard deviation equal to 1. Higher scores reflect higher levels burnout.

## Empirical Strategy to Test the Relationship Between Sabbath-Keeping and Burnout

To test the relationship between Sabbath-keeping and teacher burnout, we used ordinary least squares to regress the standardized CBI scores of burnout on respondents' self-reported Sabbath-keeping status and a series of covariates. Our regression model can be written as follows:

$$CBI_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{keeper}_i + \mathbf{X}'_i \beta_2 + \boldsymbol{\sigma}'_i \beta_3 + \boldsymbol{\theta}_i + \epsilon_i$$

In the equation,  $CBI_i$  represents teacher  $i$ 's standardized CBI score,  $\mathbf{X}'_i$  is a vector of demographic characteristics including age, gender, and marital status, and  $\boldsymbol{\sigma}'_i$  is a vector of variables that control for teaching experience, including years of overall experience and experience at the teacher's current school. We also include dichotomous variables to indicate the country in which the respondent teaches to control for differences across the four countries in our sample, which is represented by the vector  $\boldsymbol{\theta}_i$ , and  $\epsilon_i$  captures the idiosyncratic error term. Each respondent's self-reported Sabbath-keeping status is captured by  $\text{keeper}_i$ , which is set to 1 for respondents who self-report keeping the Sabbath when asked and 0 otherwise. The coefficient of interest,  $\beta_1$ , is an estimate of the difference in the magnitude of burnout, as measured by the CBI, between teachers who report keeping the Sabbath and teachers who do not.

## Results

### Sabbath Views

Table 2 summarizes the respondents' views about the Sabbath. About 80 percent of the sample agreed that Sunday is the Sabbath. While most teachers in our sample agreed with each statement about the Sabbath, approximately 50 percent of our sample disagreed with the statement, "We are no longer bound to honor the Sabbath, as Old Testament law has been abolished." An additional 15 percent strongly disagreed with the statement.

We also notice some degree of incoherence in respondents' answering patterns. For example, while nearly 95 percent of our sample agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "God commands we should keep one day in seven holy by resting from our labors," responses were more evenly divided between those who agreed and disagreed with the statement "We should abstain from working on the Sabbath." Furthermore, while 85 percent of our sample agreed or strongly agreed to observing "the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath to commemorate Christ's resurrection from the dead," 59 percent agreed with the statement "We keep the Sabbath not on a particular day but by seeking rest every day."

**Table 2** Respondents' views on the Sabbath

	N	Mean	SD	Percent of respondents who			
				Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1 Sabbath-keeping is a priority for our school	1304	3.05	0.75	4	14	56	27
2 Our school community discusses how we can encourage Sabbath-keeping	1298	2.82	0.76	5	25	53	17
3 God commands that we should keep one day in seven holy by resting from our labors	1304	3.50	0.63	1	4	39	56
4 We observe the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath to commemorate Christ's resurrection from the dead	1297	3.23	0.78	3	12	44	41
5 We honor the Sabbath day by participating in public and private exercises of worship	1299	3.54	0.59	1	2	39	58
6 We should abstain from working on the Sabbath	1295	2.64	0.82	6	40	38	16
7 We should abstain from recreations on the Sabbath	1297	2.06	0.66	16	64	17	3
8 Tasks that cannot be done before the Sabbath and that cannot be put off until after the Sabbath are permitted on the Sabbath	1293	2.73	0.68	4	27	59	9
9 Works of mercy such as community service are permitted on the Sabbath	1295	3.15	0.59	1	8	66	25
10 We are no longer bound to honor the Sabbath, as Old Testament law has been abolished	1289	2.25	0.79	15	50	29	6
11 We keep the Sabbath not on a particular day of the week but by seeking rest every day	1296	2.60	0.80	9	33	48	11
<i>Average of Sabbath views</i>	1245	2.90	0.32				

*Note.* Items 10 and 11 were reverse-coded to calculate the average scale score of Sabbath views

## Personal Sabbath Practices

The most common activities on the Sabbath include leisurely activities such as reading, exercise, or other hobbies (91 percent), spending time with family (88 percent), and participating in church activities (83 percent). The vast majority (92 percent) avoids working job shifts but may spend time on chores or errands (84 percent) or catching up on work-related email (49 percent). Most engage in some form of amusement, including streaming TV or movies (79 percent), travel (65 percent), or eating out at a restaurant (63 percent).

In Table 3, we examine whether participation in these activities during the Sabbath differed between teachers who identified as Sabbath-keepers and teachers who do not. Columns 1 and 2 report the percentages of the two respective groups who participate in each activity. The differences in the percentages are listed in column 3 and *p*-values computed from independent *t* tests examining whether the differences are statistically distinguishable from zero are listed in column 4.

Note, first, that a majority of teachers identify as Sabbath-keepers. In our sample, 1,017 teachers considered themselves as Sabbath-keepers, while 282 did not. Comparing the two groups of teachers, we observe that Sabbath-keepers are significantly more likely to participate in or lead church activities than respondents who do not keep the Sabbath (85 percent versus 75 percent). Sabbath-keepers are also more likely than respondents who do not keep the Sabbath to attend an evening service (33 percent versus 25 percent). Sabbath-keepers are relatively more likely to spend time with family or share meals with other church members. They are 6 to 9 percentage points less likely to work job shifts, do chores or errands, check work-related email, and travel on the Sabbath. These differences are statistically significant at conventional levels as indicated by the *p*-values in the last column of Table 3.

## Pedagogical Practices and Sabbath

In Table 4, we similarly examine whether pedagogical practices differed between teachers who report keeping the Sabbath and teachers who report not keeping the Sabbath. Teachers who report keeping the Sabbath are less likely than teachers who do not report keeping the Sabbath to assign student work or do their own professional work over the Sabbath. For example, 65 percent of teachers who keep the Sabbath “never” or “rarely” assign tests or major deadlines on Mondays. In contrast, 55 percent of teachers who do not keep the Sabbath “never” or “rarely” assign tests or major deadlines on Mondays. About half of teachers who keep the Sabbath “never” or “rarely” catch up on professional or work-related email on the Sabbath, while only one-third of teachers who do not keep the Sabbath “never” or “rarely” do the same. The differences in the scale scores for each item are statistically significant at the 0.01 level, as indicated by the *p*-values. These differences between Sabbath-keepers and other teachers are also substantively significant, ranging from 0.18 to 0.60 scale points, which translates to approximately 20 to 44 percent of a standard deviation on these items.

**Table 3** Teachers' personal practices

	Percentage of respondents who keep the Sabbath, (N = 1017) (1)	Percentage of respondents who do not keep the Sabbath, (N = 282) (2)	Difference in percentages (1)–(2) (3)	p-value of differences (4)
<i>Church-related activities</i>				
Participate in church activities	85	75	10	0.00
Lead church activities	60	46	14	0.00
Morning worship	55	53	2	0.63
Evening worship	33	25	7	0.02
<i>Fellowship</i>				
Spend time with family	89	84	5	0.03
Fellowship with others	77	74	3	0.23
Share meal with church members	55	44	12	0.00
<i>Work-related activities</i>				
Work job shifts	6	14	-8	0.00
Complete chores or errands	82	90	-8	0.00
Check work-related email	47	53	-6	0.08
<i>Leisure/recreation</i>				
Stream TV/movies	79	80	-1	0.78
Reading, arts, exercise, hobbies	91	92	-1	0.76
Travel	63	72	-9	0.01
Eat out at a restaurant	63	65	-2	0.44

**Table 4** Teachers' pedagogical practices

	I keep the Sabbath. (N=1,017)		I do not keep the Sabbath. (N=282)		Difference (1) – (4)	p-value of difference (8)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
	(1)	(2)	(4)	(5)		
1	1.06	1.10	1.33	1.17	–0.27	0.000
2	1.12	1.07	1.37	1.12	–0.25	0.001
3	1.71	1.33	2.17	1.49	–0.46	0.000
4	1.61	1.28	2.17	1.42	–0.56	0.000
5	1.55	1.21	2.15	1.37	–0.60	0.000
6	0.46	0.83	0.64	0.91	–0.18	0.002

Teachers responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale: 1. Never, 2. Rarely, 3. Occasionally, 4. Usually, 5. Almost Always



## Copenhagen Burnout Inventory

Table 5 displays measures of teacher burnout based on the CBI. The average scores for each item and the overall score are on the lower end of the scale, indicating that respondents mostly replied “never” or “seldom” to statements such as “I feel tired” or “I feel emotionally exhausted.” However, there is still a significant proportion of the sample that expresses agreement with these statements, especially for teachers who self-report not keeping the Sabbath. Half of teachers who do not keep the Sabbath express agreement with the statement “I feel tired,” compared to 39 percent of teachers who report keeping the Sabbath. There appears to be a substantial proportion of teachers who respond in ways consistent with experiencing some level of burnout, but it is much less prevalent among teachers who keep the Sabbath than among teachers who do not keep the Sabbath.

## The Relationship Between Sabbath-Keeping and Burnout

We used linear regression models to further test whether burnout is less prevalent among teachers who keep the Sabbath. Unlike the results presented in Table 5, the linear regression approach allows us to account for other teacher background characteristics that might explain differences in burnout. Based on the estimates of our models, we consistently observe a statistically significant and negative relationship between Sabbath-keeping and burnout net of other teacher background characteristics such as marital status, years of teaching experience, and gender. That is, teachers who report keeping the Sabbath experience lower levels of burnout. The magnitude of the difference is sizeable—40 to 49 percent of a standard deviation lower for teachers who report keeping the Sabbath compared to teachers who do not report keeping the Sabbath. This finding is significant at the 99 percent confidence level and robust to the inclusion or exclusion of demographic characteristics, teaching

**Table 5** Copenhagen burnout inventory

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Percent of teachers who indicated “Often” or “Always”	
					Sabbath-keepers	Non-keepers
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
I feel tired	2.33	0.79	0	4	39	50
I am physically exhausted	2.20	0.82	0	4	33	40
I am emotionally exhausted	2.19	0.87	0	4	35	45
I think, “I can’t take it anymore”	1.44	0.96	0	4	18	27
I feel worn out	1.68	0.94	0	4	20	30
I feel weak and susceptible to illness	1.13	0.88	0	4	7	11
<i>Overall Burnout</i>	1.82	0.68	0	4		

Teachers responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale: 1. Never or almost never; 2. Seldom; 3. Sometimes; 4. Often; 5. Always. Percent of Teachers who Indicated “Often” or “Always” is the sum of the percent of teachers who replied “often” and the percent of teachers who replied “always.”

experience covariates, and country fixed effects. These findings are summarized in Table 6.

## Discussion

### Summary of Findings

In this study, we aimed to draw attention to the ways the concept and practice of Sabbath might bear on teacher pedagogy and burnout. We described teachers' views of Sabbath as well as their personal and pedagogical practices related to the Sabbath. We also hypothesized that Sabbath-keeping could mitigate the likelihood of teacher burnout and found evidence consistent with this hypothesis. This finding is also consistent with prior research documenting lower levels of teacher burnout among those who regularly incorporate spiritual practices such as prayer (Chirico, 2017; Chirico et al., 2020; LaBarbera & Hetzel, 2016). Our results are particularly salient given the longstanding challenge of teacher burnout, which has recently been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic at the time in which this study was conducted (Maslach & Leiter, 1999; Pressley, 2021).

### Limitations of the Study

Notably, our empirical analysis precludes us from making causal inferences about the connection between Sabbath-keeping and burnout. We underscore this caveat. It may be that certain lifestyles or school policies that are unobserved in our data (a) are associated with lower levels of burnout and (b) simultaneously lend themselves to a greater likelihood of Sabbath-keeping. In this case, it is not clear whether the lower levels of burnout among Sabbath-keepers are attributable to those unobserved factors or to Sabbath-keeping itself. For example, it is possible that certain principals are more effective in providing leadership that both encourages their school communities to keep the Sabbath and alleviates stress-inducing burdens on their

**Table 6** Does Sabbath-keeping ameliorate teacher burnout?

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
I keep the Sabbath	−0.40	−0.48	−0.49	−0.46
Standard error	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
<i>p</i> -value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
<i>Controls variables included</i>				
Demographics	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Experience	No	No	Yes	Yes
Country indicator variables	No	No	No	Yes
<i>N</i>	1298	1069	1025	1015

teachers (Ates, 2016; Bettini et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2017a, 2017b; Perrone et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). In such a case, the association between Sabbath-keeping and lower burnout rates would be spurious and attributable mainly to school leadership practices. We do not have data to account for the role of school leadership practices or a litany of other potential confounding variables in our analysis. Nevertheless, the robustness of the empirical findings to the inclusion of other control variables together with theological insight about practicing the Sabbath offers a compelling case for the ways Sabbath-keeping might help mitigate burnout.

Moreover, we did not collect data about some forms of engagement with the Sabbath such as solitude, silence, and stillness, which have been practiced for centuries by monastics and emphasized in contemporary times (Barton, 2004; Fry, 1998; Plummer, 2009). Future research should investigate both the prevalence of these practices among teachers as well as their potential effects on teacher burnout, teacher well-being, and student outcomes.

### Implications for Practice

More generally, our study offers insights into the ways personal and pedagogical practices moderate the relationship between Sabbath-keeping and wellness. For instance, our findings suggest that teachers' health may not be promoted merely by idle inactivity. Sabbath-keepers are significantly less likely to engage in any work-related activity, including working job shifts, completing chores or errands, using email, and traveling on the Sabbath. However, they are significantly more likely to participate in church-related activities, attend an evening worship service, or spend time with family or church members. These patterns of activity are consistent with theological views that encourage assembling with other believers (Fisher, 2009). Teachers who engage in these kinds of practices are less likely to burn out. Consistent with what theologians have argued, Sabbath rest comes not from being idle but from engaging in practices that help people appropriately understand work and their relation to it. That is, union with God is the ultimate purpose of human existence, not work. Resting from labor and the pursuit of leisure becomes not only practically possible but plausible in the way individuals understand their very existence (Cocksworth, 2011; Pieper, 1965).

Furthermore, the ways teachers interact with the Sabbath in their own lives appear to spill over into the ways they run their classrooms. Specifically, Sabbath-keeping teachers are less likely to complete work-related tasks, such as writing lesson plans, grading student work, or scheduling professional meetings on the Sabbath. They also are significantly less likely to assign homework to be completed over the weekend or to assign major deadlines immediately after the Sabbath.

If Sabbath-keeping can help prevent the incidence of burnout, the benefits of having Sabbath-keeping teachers may extend to their students. First, extending the teacher's longevity in the field and reducing teacher turnover may lead to improved student outcomes, as prior research suggests (Grissom, 2011; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Moreover, by embracing teaching and learning practices consistent with Sabbath-keeping, Sabbath-keeping teachers potentially serve as role models to

their students for how their faith informs an understanding of work, vocation, and rest. Although it may be challenging to model the practice of Sabbath on weekends when school is not in session, teachers can still encourage their students to engage in Sabbath practices by finding opportunities to share the ways they practice Sabbath with their students or making particular pedagogical choices that enable those practices. For example, not assigning homework over the weekend or major tests and deadlines right after the Sabbath are two teaching practices that potentially foster a particular social imaginary regarding the Sabbath. The effects of these pedagogical choices and role modeling on student learning and formation is a question subsequent research could further explore empirically.

Though we observe that Sabbath-keeping teachers exhibit noticeably lower levels of burnout, it is important to point out that a significant proportion of them still seem to experience it. About one-third of them indicated that they experience physical or emotional exhaustion. This is a significant proportion, even if it is less than the respective 40 and 45 percent of non-Sabbath-keeping teachers who reported experiencing the same two types of exhaustion. While Sabbath-keeping appears to mitigate burnout, other forms of care—whether provided by school leadership to ensure a healthy work climate (Ates, 2016; Bettini et al., 2018) or by other support systems such as churches, counselors, and friends (VanderWeele, 2020)—may be necessary. Teacher preparation programs might even consider how to nurture these types of habits and emphasize the importance of Sabbath practices for pre-service teaching candidates.

Moreover, additional reflection on how Sabbath informs professional practice might alleviate the prevalence of burnout. Such reflection is relevant even among self-identified Sabbath-keepers as many of them maintain practices that are inconsistent with their own stated theological views on the Sabbath. For instance, about half of teachers who report keeping the Sabbath still check work-related email on the Sabbath, and many of these teachers agree that Sabbath-keeping at least in part entails abstaining from work. These kinds of inconsistencies raise additional questions about how teachers understand the Sabbath, how they practice it, and how they are tied to burnout. These are questions that would be of value for educators and future research to consider further, especially in light of a growing body of scholarship that has called attention to the ways religious beliefs can uniquely inform pedagogy in educationally beneficial ways (Call, 2011; Lee & Cheng, 2021; Skillen, 2020; Smith, 2018; Smith & Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2021).

Considering workplace contexts outside Christian schools, our findings suggest that employers may be able to address workplace stress, burnout, and their employee's health through spiritual practices that encourage employees to find meaning in their work or connection to their coworkers (Chirico & Magnavita, 2019; Krahnke et al., 2003; Yadav et al., 2022). Mindfulness interventions and a variety of related psychological programs are examples of spiritual practices, which are not necessarily rooted in any faith tradition (Baker et al., 2021; Hwang et al., 2017; Luken & Sammons, 2016; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Zadok-Gurman et al., 2021). However, our work about the Judeo-Christian concept of the Sabbath suggests that employers might be able to promote their employees' well-being by drawing upon spiritual practices directly informed by various faith traditions. More generally, workplace

supports that draw upon spiritual practices and religious traditions may play a key role in addressing mental health challenges for teachers and other professionals in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and other emerging global challenges (Chirico, 2021).

## Conclusion and Directions for Further Research

We consistently estimate a statistically significant inverse relationship between Sabbath-keeping and burnout, a finding that is robust to the inclusion or exclusion of control covariates. This finding presents modest evidence that Sabbath-keeping may ameliorate teacher burnout, and teachers facing stress and burnout may consider personally adopting Sabbath-keeping practices. Likewise, school leaders may consider ways to promote Sabbath-keeping among their faculty and staff to potentially reduce burnout in teachers, thereby promoting their flourishing and longevity in the field.

Further research is necessary to demonstrate the robustness of our findings across other samples and contexts. We do not recommend experimental evaluation of Sabbath-keeping, as compliance with random assignment may require violating participants' consciences, but replication with a carefully matched and sufficiently large sample of Sabbath-keepers and non-keepers may more safely satisfy causal assumptions and identify moderating pathways for how Sabbath-keeping may influence teacher wellness. Qualitative research may also provide additional insight into how teachers precisely spend their Sabbath days or weekends. For example, a small but non-trivial percentage of teachers reported "working job shifts" during their Sabbath (see Table 3). What, exactly, is the nature of the tasks they perform at that time?

Exploring this question would then potentially enable researchers to identify the kind of work teachers do that cause them not to rest on the Sabbath. Similarly, qualitative research aimed at querying Sabbath-keeping teachers to explain how they practice the Sabbath or integrate the practice into their pedagogy would be valuable. This information would potentially enable researchers to provide examples of how teachers might integrate Sabbath practices into their pedagogy and how they might practice Sabbath outside their professional lives. Once these practices are identified, additional empirical work can be conducted to determine whether they have any bearing on student outcomes.

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