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Exploring Professional Identities and Well-being of Middle Leaders in Early Childhood Education: Gauteng North District

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of middle leaders within the selected schools of Gauteng North District, with a particular focus on their professional identities and well-being. The study was conducted in the Gauteng North District, concentrating on the Foundation Phase of three primary schools. The theoretical framework guiding this study incorporates Hettler's Wellness Model, which emphasises health promotion, education, and workplace wellness programmes. The study employed a purposive sampling method to select a population comprising both female and male middle leaders with backgrounds in early childhood education, specifically from semi-rural schools. The analysis utilised a thematic approach, allowing the researcher to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns in the data. The study's findings confirm that middle leaders face stress and burnout due to high job demands and limited resources. As they construct and navigate their professional identities, middle leaders constantly negotiate their roles within complex school environments, significantly affecting their well-being. It is recommended that support systems be enhanced, specifically targeting Foundation Phase teachers, to align resources with job demands and promote the well-being of middle leaders.

Keywords: Professional Identity; Well-being; Middle Leaders; Early Childhood Education

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of middle leaders within the selected schools of Gauteng North district, with a particular focus on their professional identities and well-being. The study was conducted in semi-rural primary schools, focusing on the Foundation Phase. Middle leaders are formally appointed leaders with accountable responsibilities who operate between senior leaders and teachers with an expectation that they positively impact teaching and

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student learning (Lipscombe et al., 2023). Middle leaders occupy an intermediary position between senior management and teachers (Gear & Sood, 2021). Middle leadership is often the first promotion for teachers from teacher to leader, and how middle leaders perceive themselves as leaders and how the formative process of professional identity underpins their practices can make a significant impact on a leader (De Nobile et al., 2024). Middle leaders manage pedagogical and administrative tasks and hence are not held accountable for the overall functioning of schools, whereas principals bear organisational responsibility for all aspects of schools' operations (Allababidi & Davids, 2024).

The professional identities and well-being of middle leaders in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) phases are important to their effectiveness and the general success of educational institutions. Their professional identity and well-being are shaped by various factors, including personal, professional, and organisational dynamics, which are influenced by global and regional contexts (Suarez & McGrath, 2022). The professional identity and well-being of middle leaders in the ECE phases are deeply intertwined and significantly impact their effectiveness in their roles (Gibbs, 2024). Research in other countries noted that middle leaders in ECE phases often experienced professional identity conflicts as they transitioned from teaching to leadership positions (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

At the same time, according to Leithwood and Jing (2022) the well-being of middle leaders in ECE phases is increasingly recognised as a critical factor in their ability to perform their roles effectively. Within the South African schooling context, it is assumed that the professional identities and well-being of middle leaders in ECE phases are influenced by various contextual challenges unique to the country with significant obstacles that impact their abilities to fulfil middle leaders' roles effectively (Williams & Burgess, 2025). The research question that led to the development of the paper was: How do middle leaders in ECE in Gauteng North District schools construct and navigate their professional identities, and what impact does such behaviour have on their well-being?

Middle leaders in South African schools play a crucial role in bridging the gap between administration and teaching staff. They are essential in translating policies into practice and ensuring effective teaching and learning (Nkosi, 2022). However, middle school leaders do not hold full responsibility for schools compared to administrators. Instead, they negotiate their work between teacher colleagues and principals, and they can be either teachers or non-teachers (Thien et al., 2024). To effectively manage teachers and support staff, middle leaders should possess diverse leadership skills, including effective communication and decision-making (Montecinos, 2025). Collaboration is also key within teams, as it promotes shared vision and mutual accountability among teachers (Pillay, 2023).

Professional identities are important for middle managers to uphold. The professional identity of middle leaders in South Africa is shaped by their agency, which empowers them to make decisions and implement innovative practices that address resource constraints and socio-economic challenges in their schools

(Nkosi, 2023). Professional identities serve as a foundation for professional development, motivating teachers to pursue opportunities that improve their instructional practices and align with their professional goals (Dlamini et al., 2024). A strong middle leader's professional identity promotes confidence and commitment, which enhances teachers' ability to deliver impactful lessons and adapt to the diverse needs of learners (Mthembu, 2024). Middle leaders have the potential to play a fundamental role in ensuring the quality of teaching, as it directly influences how educators perceive their roles, responsibilities, and relationships with students (Smith et al., 2022). Within serving crucial roles to strive for expected professional identities, middle leaders are expected to support educators' well-being.

The well-being of middle leaders in the South African educational space is a complex issue influenced by psychological health, which encompasses their ability to manage stress and maintain emotional balance amid demanding roles (Mahlangu, 2021). Focus on middle leaders' well-being is crucial; it is also important to consider the broader systemic issues within South African education that may hinder their effectiveness, such as resource limitations and institutional support (Schafer & Duignan, 2024). The well-being of middle leaders is a critical area due to the impact on the middle managers' professional performance and the overall quality of education (Hegseth et al., 2025).

Middle leaders work closely with teachers whose well-being is influenced by their motivation, teaching effectiveness, and job satisfaction, which affect student outcomes and school environments (Karakus et al., 2024). Based on the literature expositions regarding professional identities and middle leaders' well-being, this study aims to explore the professional identities and well-being of Early Childhood Education (ECE) middle leaders in Gauteng North District schools.

2. Literature review

In exploring the professional identities and well-being of middle leaders in Early Childhood Education (ECE), it is essential to consider both the positive and negative dimensions of their experiences. The sub-sections below present a balanced view of the existing literature, starting with studies that highlight the strengths and affirming aspects of professional identity, followed by research that reveals the challenges and tensions faced by the middle leaders. The discussion then shifts to the well-being of middle leaders, similarly, categorised by negative and positive findings. Finally, the review concludes with the theoretical foundations in leadership and management that underpin the understanding of their roles and experiences within ECE learning environment.

2.1 Professional identities: studies on positive findings on professional identities

Professional identity is an important trait for middle leaders to maintain. A study by Zulu (2024) highlighted that a well-developed professional identity from middle leaders contributes significantly to a successful long-term career whereby resilience and job satisfaction are promoted even in challenging environments. It was equally important to note that Govender's (2023) study found that the

professional identity of middle leaders encouraged teachers to engage in self-reflection concerning their values and beliefs. This development not only strengthened their sense of purpose but also enhanced their ability to navigate the evolving educational landscapes. Another study by Mthembu and Chummun (2022) concluded that middle leaders' professional identities were strengthened by collaboration with peers and participation in professional learning communities since they were provided with platforms for shared problem-solving and mutual support.

An additional study by Dlamini et al. (2024) revealed the human aspect attached to the professional identities of middle leaders. It was mentioned that personal values played a pivotal role since middle leaders viewed their profession as a calling driven by a commitment to making a difference in the lives of learners and their communities. The sense of purpose encouraged engagement and a deep connection to their roles even under the difficult circumstances of their everyday work experiences.

2.2 Professional identities: Studies on negative findings on professional identities

The literature search also provided different results from those obtained from the studies referenced above. Research into the professional identities of middle leaders indicated that gaps in knowledge and limited educational experience pose significant barriers to middle leaders' confidence and efficacy (Stone & Stone, 2024). Another study by Edwards-Groves et al. (2025) indicated that middle leaders felt underprepared to address professional identities and well-being-related issues in broader educational contexts since many highlighted the lack of comprehensive tailored training for their evolving responsibilities. At the same time, Ferri and Bonometti's (2024) study findings also addressed the issues about the professional identities of middle leaders. They reported professional isolation and inconsistent management structures with unclear role boundaries, which led to frustration among middle leaders.

Eisenbach and Frydman (2024) also contributed study findings indicating that middle leaders experienced uncertainties about their roles, which hindered the establishment of cohesive team dynamics within schools. At the same time, they also expressed the need to cultivate positive collaborative relationships with teachers to eventually shape and strengthen their professional identities. For instance, middle leaders expressed the need for training in counselling skills to align with their roles, which often involve emotional and behavioural support.

2.3 The well-being of middle leaders: negative studies

The well-being of middle leaders has been a subject of significant concern, with several studies highlighting the challenges they face. Middle leaders often report experiencing considerable stress due to their dual roles, where the pressure to manage both the welfare of their teams and meet academic expectations leads to burnout (Mthembu & Chummun, 2022). The overwhelming demands, such as long working hours and the constant struggle to balance strategic decision-making with day-to-day management, have been shown to negatively impact their emotional and mental well-being (Ndlovu, 2024). The lack of sufficient

support from senior leadership, as highlighted by Baxter and Ehren (2023), intensifies feelings of inadequacy among middle leaders, leading to heightened stress levels, diminished job satisfaction, and a decline in overall well-being, which ultimately affects their effectiveness in both administrative and teaching roles. Moreover, the conflicting demands of their roles, where administrative responsibilities often overshadow teaching and leadership duties, contribute to high levels of work-related anxiety and physical health issues (Dube et al., 2023).

Furthermore, overcrowded classrooms and persistent staff shortages exacerbate these challenges, making it even more difficult for middle leaders to manage workloads effectively. The inability to provide adequate support to teachers and learners in such constrained environments further heightens stress levels, undermines leadership effectiveness, and negatively impacts the overall quality of education.

2.4 The well-being of middle leaders: positive studies

Literature highlighted the positive effects of middle leaders' well-being in ECD schools. It was found by Zulu (2024) that middle leaders were able to rely on their skills and knowledge to create meaningful learning experiences, which led to them demonstrating adaptability and resilience in overcoming barriers such as limited infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms. Similarly, Pillay (2023) reported on transformational leadership style practices that were able to positively impact middle leaders' well-being. Collaboration and shared decision-making played a crucial role in empowering middle leaders and reducing their feelings of isolation.

According to Kahneman and Deaton's (2022) study, their findings mirrored those by Pillay's (2023) and Zulu's (2024) studies. The authors claimed that middle leaders experienced tension, worry, and sadness, which influenced the quality of their roles as middle leaders. Despite encountering such challenges, which also include role ambiguity and resource limitations, middle leaders demonstrate remarkable resilience and dedication. Their commitment to excellence and their willingness to confront challenges head-on contribute significantly to the overall success and effectiveness of teaching and learning initiatives within universities (Ghamrawi et al., 2024c).

2.5 Theoretical foundations in leadership and management

Hettler's Wellness Model was considered to ground an understanding of ECE middle leaders' well-being. Hettler's model is a comprehensive framework for understanding and promoting holistic well-being in individuals, particularly in professional environments (Hettler, 1984). The model focuses on six dimensions of wellness: physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, and occupational wellness. Each of these dimensions interacts with and influences one another to achieve a balanced and fulfilling life. The occupational wellness component relates to job satisfaction, work-life balance, and alignment of personal values with professional responsibilities, which is important for maintaining comprehensive well-being in the workplace. For instance, when middle leaders experience a healthy work-life balance and meaningful engagement in their roles, they tend to exhibit higher job satisfaction and overall well-being (Hettler, 1984). This model

is useful in understanding how different factors, such as stress management, social support, and personal growth, can influence professional identity and emotional resilience. In this paper, Hettler's Wellness Model was applied to explore how middle leaders' experiences, including their support systems and work-related stressors, affect their physical and emotional well-being.

3. Material and Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology, together with purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which is particularly helpful for exploring the complex experiences of middle managers in the ECE foundation phase. Researchers engaged 2 male and 9 female participants to gain a broader understanding of the professional identities and well-being of middle leaders. The researcher collected data from the participants through focus groups and in-depth interviews.

3.1 Ethical Consideration

After explaining the purpose and nature of the study, the researcher asked all participants to sign an informed consent form to address ethical considerations.

3.2 Data analysis

The data analysis process entailed the verbatim transcription of 11 recorded interviews with middle school managers. Utilising an interpretive paradigm, the researchers focused on understanding participants' subjective experiences and perspectives. This approach enabled the identification of key themes, patterns, and insights related to how middle managers navigate their emotional and physical well-being. By emphasising the significance of participants' responses, the study provides a deeper understanding of their challenges and coping strategies.

3.3 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness can be established using the five criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Credibility was established through direct quotations from the participants (Connelly, 2016). Furthermore, the current study is deemed dependable as the researcher generated similar findings from a group of participants with similar conditions. The researcher demonstrated the confirmability of the study by providing rich quotes from the participants' responses that depict each emerging theme (Cope, 2014).

4. Findings

This section presents the findings and themes that emerged from the interviews. The findings of this study revealed that middle leaders face challenges related to their professional identity and well-being. To protect the identities of participants and minimise potential bias in the interpretation of findings, pseudonyms were assigned to each individual. The pseudonyms were systematically generated using the first letter of the participant's respective schools, followed by a numerical identifier based on the total number of participants per school. Furthermore, pseudonyms consist of three letters, followed by a number to denote

middle leaders. For example, participants from Buhlebusile Primary School were assigned pseudonyms beginning with "Bil," those from Hlanganani School were designated as "Hay," and participants from Kusasa Combined Primary School were labelled as "Ked." The distribution of participants across the schools was as follows: Buhlebusile Primary School (Bil) and Kusasa Combined Primary School (Ked) each had four participants, while Hlanganani School (Hay) had three participants. The naming of schools and participants was done randomly to maintain confidentiality and avoid any implicit bias in the interpretation of findings. The themes that emerged from the study are discussed in the following sections.

4.1 Workload and Dual Roles

The workload and dual role theme emerged from the following participants: Ked-1, Bil-2, Hay-3, and Ked-2. The findings indicate that middle leaders face significant challenges in balancing their dual responsibilities of teaching and administrative duties. The following accounts from participants provide insight into their experiences.

Ked-1: "I was excited about the promotional post, but it just came up with a lot of responsibilities, and considering that I must still teach the same amount of learning areas I taught while I was still in PL1".

Bil-2: "Taking on this position has been both an opportunity and a challenge. While I appreciate the leadership role, the workload has significantly increased, yet my teaching responsibilities remain the same as before. Balancing administrative duties with a full teaching load is just too much for me, making it difficult to satisfy both roles the way it is expected."

Ked-2: "When I stepped into this role, I expected new challenges, but the workload has become just too much. Managing both administrative tasks and a full teaching schedule leaves little room to support teachers and learners effectively."

4.2 Impact of policy changes on professional identity

The theme of the impact of policy changes on professional identity emerged from the following participants: Hay-1, Bil-2 and Bil-3, and Ked-2. The findings highlight that policy changes remain a critical issue for middle leaders in schools, as evolving educational policies frequently reshape their roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority. Participants expressed, in various ways, a perceived decline in their autonomy and professional agency. One middle leader stated:

Ked-2: "I've said for a few years now that we do not educate children; we train them to pass government-inspired tests."

Two participants expressed similar concerns about their lack of control, particularly in curricular matters, which further affected their prestige, status, and professional authority. Their responses were as follows:

Bil-2 and Bil-3: "It's almost like part of your professionalism is taken away from you because so many decisions are made for you".

Hay-1: *"Why on earth am I spending all my weekends and my evenings putting all this effort into it when nobody actually cares what I do?"*

4.3 Well-being and Mental Health

The well-being and mental health theme emerged from the following participants: Ked-2 and Ked-3, and Hay-3. The findings reveal that the well-being of middle leaders is a significant concern, as many expressed difficulties in managing the demands of their roles. Participants highlighted the emotional and psychological strain associated with their responsibilities. The following sentiments were shared regarding this theme:

Ked-2 and Ked-3: *"There is a lot of paperwork that needs to be attended to daily, taking away a lot of teaching time... I am so worried about those poor learners that I can't assist them to my satisfaction. We are just doing injustice to these children. I don't think I need this position anymore".*

Hay-3: *"The lack of sufficient teachers is making it difficult for us to provide quality education. Overcrowded classrooms and excessive responsibilities are taking a toll on our mental and physical well-being."*

4.4 Support for At-Risk Learners

The support for at-risk learners' theme emerged from the following participants: Hay-3, Bil-1, and Ked-2. The findings indicate that providing adequate support for at-risk learners remains a significant challenge for middle leaders, particularly in full-service schools, where learners face diverse learning barriers. The following statements reflect the emotions and experiences shared by the middle leaders:

Hay-3: *"Even though it is a fully serviced school, we don't have qualified teachers who are trained to handle special cases... They just don't know how to deal with different kinds of learning barriers".*

Bil-1: *"Working with new teachers can be frustrating at times, as they often struggle to follow guidance. When issues arise, the responsibility just falls on me as the departmental head, making it even more important to push for continuous training and support."*

Ked-2: *"It is also hard to work with these newly young teachers... they don't want to take instructions, they do as they wish, and when the district officials come, they blame me as the departmental head".*

4.5 Resource and Staffing Shortages

The resource and staffing shortage theme emerged from the following participants: Ked-2 and Hay-1. The findings reveal that staff shortages, particularly the presence of unqualified Foundation Phase (FP) teachers, pose a significant challenge for middle leaders. As a result, they are often required to step in as teachers while simultaneously managing their leadership responsibilities. This dual burden places considerable strain on both their professional and personal lives. The following statements reflect the experiences shared by the middle leaders:

Ked-2: *"We lack resources to carry out our duties as departmental head in the Foundation Phase... At times I improvise by spending my own*

money to buy whatever we want to use”.

Hay-1: “Another major challenge is the appointment of educators who are not specifically trained for the Foundation Phase. It so much frustrates us as middle leaders, but we do our best to manage with the limited resources and staffing we have”.

5. Discussions

Building on the exploration of professional identities and well-being, it is necessary to dig in deeper into the contextual factors that shape the day-to-day realities of middle leaders in Early Childhood Education. The following subsections examine key challenges that influence both identity formation and well-being, including the demands of workload and managing dual roles, the impact of ongoing policy changes, and concerns around mental health. The discussion considers the responsibilities middle leaders carry in supporting at-risk learners, as well as the persistent issues related to limited resources and staffing shortages. These factors together shed light on the intricate environment in which middle leaders carry out their roles.

5.1 Workload and Dual Roles

Workloads and dual roles became a theme that was responded to by the middle leaders who were identified for the paper. The theme led to the conclusion that middle leaders faced difficulties in striking a balance between their workload and their dual roles and responsibilities. This finding is in line with the one obtained from the literature. A study by Dube et al., (2023) reported that middle leaders were conflicted with the demands of work-related roles where administrative responsibilities often overshadowed teaching and leadership duties.

Dube et al., (2023) was corroborated by Mthembu (2024) with an assertion that workload and dual roles often lead to work stress, which significantly impacts the work-life balance of middle leaders. Ndlovu (2024) further aligned the study findings with those of Dube et al., (2023) and Mthembu and Chummun (2022). The study report indicated that workload was established to be a factor that impacted the work-life balance of middle leaders and mentioned that there was also a lack of clarity on the defined roles for the middle leaders in schools.

5.2 Impact of policy changes on professional identity

One of the key themes that emerged from the study was the impact of policy changes on the professional identity of middle leaders. The findings indicated that middle leaders experience significant frustration due to frequent policy shifts, which negatively affect their professional identity. This aligns with existing literature, reinforcing the argument that policy instability disrupts role clarity and leadership effectiveness. A study by Ferri and Bonometti (2024) highlights that the professional identity of middle leaders is inconsistent due to frequent policy changes that hinder curriculum implementation.

Similarly, Fernet et al. (2014) and Pillen et al. (2013) postulate that irregular policy changes can severely undermine the professional identity of middle leaders. The findings from Fernet et al. (2014) further confirmed those of Ferri and Bonometti

(2024), emphasising that ongoing policy changes erode middle leaders' sense of identity and professional stability. The study report specified that constant policy changes were confirmed to be an element that influences the professional identity of middle leaders, ultimately affecting their decision-making and leadership practices.

5.3 Well-being and Mental Health

Well-being and mental health emerged as a theme in the responses of the middle leaders identified for this study. From the theme it was deduced that middle leaders faced challenges with their well-being and mental health. The literature reviewed verified the study reports. A study report by Leithwood and Jing (2022) reported that middle leaders were entangled in heightened stress levels, which led to a decline in their general well-being. Adams (2019) agreed with Leithwood and Jing (2022), maintaining that the excessive demands placed on middle leaders, including administrative overload and instructional responsibilities, contribute to increased stress levels, ultimately compromising their well-being and professional effectiveness. The study report revealed that workload overload and unclear role expectations negatively impacted well-being and mental health.

5.4 Support for at-risk learners.

Support for at-risk learners emerged as a key theme in the responses of the middle leaders identified in the study. Findings indicate that many middle leaders struggle to effectively support at-risk learners due to a lack of specialised training and insufficient resources. This finding aligns with the literature, reinforcing the challenges in providing adequate support for learners with specific barriers. A study by Edwards-Grove et al. (2025) highlights a significant gap in teacher training for supporting learners with diverse learning needs.

Similarly, Pokhrel and Behera (2016) found that many learners with learning barriers do not receive specialised or professional support, worsening disparities in education. The study also revealed that inadequate training in supporting at-risk learners poses a significant challenge for middle leaders, ultimately hindering their effectiveness in promoting inclusive learning environments.

5.5 Resource and Staffing Shortages

Resource and staffing shortages emerged as a theme in the responses of the middle leaders identified in the study. The findings indicate that middle leaders face significant challenges due to inadequate staffing and limited resources, which hinder their ability to fulfil their roles effectively. This conclusion aligns with existing literature, reinforcing the widespread impact of these shortages on middle leaders.

A study by Zulfiqar et al. (2025) and Zamiri (2024) confirmed the lack of adequately trained teachers and insufficient resources in schools. Zamiri's (2024) findings were further supported by Eisenbach and Frydman (2024), who asserted that the lack of adequately trained teachers compromises education quality and impedes student academic progress. Similarly, Sibuyi et al. (2024) aligned their findings with those of Zulfiqar et al. (2025) and Zamiri (2024), emphasising that resource constraints and staffing shortages limit student engagement and pose

significant challenges for middle leaders in managing and supporting teaching and learning effectively.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the question, “How do middle leaders in ECE in Gauteng North District schools construct and navigate their professional identities, and what impact does this have on their well-being?” The findings reveal that the professional identities and well-being of middle leaders in early childhood education are deeply influenced by the multifaceted and demanding nature of their roles. Constantly balancing teaching responsibilities with administrative duties contributes significantly to stress, emotional fatigue, and a sense of professional strain, all of which directly impact their sense of identity and overall well-being.

Although professional development is recognised as a vital support mechanism, its effectiveness is often diminished by the disconnect between formal training and the on-the-ground realities faced by middle leaders. The additional responsibility of supporting at-risk learners, coupled with insufficient specialist training and limited resources, further challenges their ability to fulfil both pedagogical and leadership functions.

Persistent staffing and resource shortages also exacerbate these pressures, often leaving middle leaders feeling unsupported and overwhelmed. These conditions hinder their ability to develop and sustain a strong, positive professional identity and maintain their mental and emotional well-being.

This study is important as it highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions that acknowledge the unique position of middle leaders in ECE. Strengthening their professional identities and promoting their well-being requires collaborative efforts from educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders to provide adequate resources, role-specific professional development, and structured support systems. Such measures are essential for enabling middle leaders to thrive in their roles and contribute meaningfully to quality education in the early childhood development sector.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings supported by the empirical data and literature review, the following recommendations are proposed to address the challenges faced by middle leaders in Foundation Phase schools:

- (i) **Redefining roles and responsibilities:** To mitigate the stress associated with dual roles, it is crucial to redefine and clarify the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders. A reduction in teaching duties for those with administrative responsibilities should be considered.
- (ii) **Tailored professional development:** Professional development programmes should be redesigned to align more closely with the practical challenges faced by middle leaders in the Foundation Phase. Training should be relevant, ongoing, and integrated into the school schedule to

prevent encroachment on personal time. Workshops should focus on practical skills that directly address the needs of middle leaders with opportunities for follow-up and support.

- (iii) **Improved resource allocation and staffing:** To address resource shortages and staffing challenges, schools should receive adequate funding to ensure that Foundation Phase classes are staffed with qualified teachers and that sufficient resources are available. Investment in teacher training and recruitment, particularly in low-income contexts, is necessary to alleviate the pressures on middle leaders.
- (iv) **Promotion of well-being and mental health:** Senior management and district officials must prioritise the well-being of middle leaders. Strategies such as regular mental health check-ins, access to counselling services, and the implementation of wellness programmes can help mitigate stress and promote a healthy work environment. Reducing administrative burdens, such as paperwork, can also provide middle leaders with more time to focus on their core responsibilities.
- (v) **Enhanced support from senior management:** Middle leaders require more robust support from senior management to cope with the demands of their roles. The envisaged support could include regular consultations to discuss challenges, collaborative problem-solving approaches, and the provision of additional resources where needed. A proactive stance from senior management can ensure that middle leaders are not left to navigate their challenges in isolation.

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