



A Mediator's wellness Project

2026

AN MEDIATOR'S INITIATE

The Mental Well-Being and Professional Sustainability of Mediators

Abstract

The modern legal system has actively recognised mediation as one of the foremost mechanisms of dispute resolution. The simple idea of engaging in meaningful

conversation across a table, rather than engaging in disruptive arguments before a court, has the potential to transform the perception of the legal system from exhausting to exhilarating. On paper, this idea appears ideal; however, when it comes to implementation, the burden of the process rests largely on the shoulders of the mediator, a trained professional from a recognised institution.

The active promotion of mediation has led to an increase in the number of mediators. However, rather than focusing solely on producing mediators in large numbers, there is an urgent need to support and strengthen existing mediators, who regularly deal with sensitive, emotionally charged, and mentally exhausting disputes, alongside managing their own personal and professional lives. The responsibilities of a mediator are substantial from the outset, and each mediation demands their full cognitive engagement, emotional regulation, and capacity to understand the dispute while assisting the parties in reaching a mutually acceptable resolution.

While the mediation process often produces positive outcomes for disputing parties, it frequently leaves behind an emotionally and mentally exhausted mediator.

This study focuses on understanding the mental well-being of mediators and exploring measures to promote professional sustainability within the mediation process. For this purpose, responses were collected through the MeWell Questionnaire, administered to mediators ranging from beginners to experienced practitioners. The report adopts an empirical and recommendatory approach to examine the hypothesis concerning the mental well-being and long-term sustainability of mediators in contemporary mediation practice.

Keywords: *Mediation, Mediator's wellness, Professional Sustainability, Practical hurdles.*

INDEX

Sl. No.	Contents	Page No.
1.	Introduction	1
2.	Report Question and Hypothesis	2
3.	Methodology and Data Collection	3
4.	Results and Analysis	4
5.	Key Findings	22
6.	Recommendations	27
7.	Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research	29
8.	Conclusion	30
9.	References	32

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary legal system has developed regarding the understanding and interpretation of the law, but the sheer backlogs, slows its oath towards an sustainable growth of the system, this backlog stirred way to the necessary of an alternative dispute resolution, which simples means “out-of-court resolution, where arbitration and mediation have been actively developed, wherein arbitration resolves a dispute through adjudication and mediation through conversation. The Section 2(h), Mediation Act 2023 defines mediation a process, whether referred to by the expression mediation, pre-litigation mediation, online mediation, community mediation, conciliation or an expression of similar import, whereby parties attempt to reach an amicable settlement of their dispute with the assistance of a third person referred to as mediator, who does not have the authority to impose a settlement upon the parties to the dispute¹ Here, mediation promotes assisting the party towards a solution, clearly highlighting the importance of the mediators. Section 2 (i) of the Mediation Act 2023 defines mediators as a person who is appointed to be a mediator, by the parties or by a mediation service provider, to undertake mediation, and includes a person registered as a mediator with the Council².

Mediation is a process in which parties are given a space to unburden themselves and engage in meaningful conversation. This process requires the complete attention, emotional engagement, and energy of the mediator. The mediator actively involves themselves to assist the parties in expressing their concerns, understanding each other’s perspectives, and ultimately working toward an amicable resolution. In practice, a mediator often handles multiple cases in a single day or over the course of a week. While each mediation demands full professional engagement, the cumulative nature of this work eventually leads to mental and emotional fatigue, particularly when viewed alongside the mediator’s own personal and professional responsibilities.

Legislative frameworks conceptualize mediation as an **assisted conversation**, where the emphasis on “assistance” is central to the process. However, this focus inevitably draws attention to the individual who provides that assistance, the mediator. This raises an important question: *how does one become a mediator?* The process is relatively straightforward. An individual meeting the prescribed age and educational qualifications may approach a

¹ **India.** (2023). *The Mediation Act, 2023* (No. 32 of 2023), § 2(h). Government of India..

² **India.** (2023). *The Mediation Act, 2023* (No. 32 of 2023), § 2(i). Government of India.

recognised centre or institution and complete a training programme, typically consisting of 40–50 hours, to become a certified mediator. While the success of mediation largely depends on the mediator’s experience, skills, and ability to facilitate dialogue, the process of becoming a mediator appears comparatively simple when contrasted with the rigorous selection and training processes required for judicial officers.

With the increasing number of trained mediators, one might assume that disputes would be distributed more evenly, allowing mediators sufficient time to focus on their own well-being. However, in a diverse and developing country like India, disputes increase manifold each day. Despite the growing pool of mediators, parties often seek experienced mediators best suited to the nature of their disputes. An increased caseload may lead to higher remuneration, which is understandably valued by mediators themselves; however, this does not alter the eventual outcome, **the exhaustion and overburdening of mediators**. This situation creates an inherent professional dilemma between workload, remuneration, and mental well-being.

The present research seeks to examine this dilemma and recommend plausible measures to reduce mediator overburdening, without necessarily reducing the number of cases handled. For this purpose, the **MeWell Questionnaire** was circulated, inviting insights and opinions directly from mediation practitioners themselves.

REPORT QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

Mediation requires active attention, emotional regulation, and ethical responsibility from mediators; yet, the institutional framework governing mediation largely focuses on procedure and outcomes. The limited attention given to post-session reflection and the mental well-being of mediators has created a significant gap within the system.

Report Question:

How does the emotional nature of mediation practice affect the sustainable mental well-being of mediators

Hypothesis:

Whether sustained emotional engagement in mediation practice has a measurable effect on mediator well-being over time?

This study examines the above question and hypothesis through an empirical assessment of mediators' experiences, coping practices, and access to institutional support. Using data collected through the *MeWell Questionnaire*, the research seeks to evaluate whether current mediation structures sufficiently recognise and respond to the mental well-being needs of mediators, and to identify measures that may promote professional sustainability.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This methodological framework considered the nature of the research, which seeks to understand the mental well-being of mediators and the adequacy of institutional support systems. The research adopts an empirical approach to capture both measurable patterns and experiential insights from mediation practitioners.

Research Design

The study follows an *empirical, descriptive, and exploratory research design*. It is descriptive in nature as it documents mediators' experiences relating to emotional strain, stress, coping mechanisms, and professional well-being. The exploratory aspect of the study addresses the limited empirical literature on mediator mental well-being, particularly within the context of contemporary mediation practice.

The research does not assess clinical mental health outcomes but focuses on professional experiences arising from the mediation process and institutional structures governing mediation practice.

Sample Size and Respondent Profile

The study is based on responses collected from *40 practising mediators*. The respondents represented a wide range of professional experience, including newly certified mediators as well as experienced practitioners. This diversity enabled the study to capture perspectives across different stages of mediation practice.

Respondents were engaged in various forms of mediation, including family and matrimonial mediation, commercial and business disputes, workplace mediation, community mediation, and court-annexed mediation. The inclusion of mediators from varied backgrounds ensured a balanced understanding of mediation practice across different dispute contexts.

Data Collection Tool – MeWell Questionnaire

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire titled the *MeWell Questionnaire*, developed specifically for the purpose of this study. The questionnaire was designed to assess multiple aspects of mediator well-being, including emotional and psychological challenges, work–life balance, self-care practices, coping strategies, and the availability of institutional support.

The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended questions, using frequency-based response scales, and open-ended questions, allowing respondents to share personal experiences and suggestions. It was circulated through a *Google Form* to mediators across different professional backgrounds, enabling ease of access and anonymous participation. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that the data would be used solely for research purposes.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire were compiled and analysed systematically and are annexed as Annexure 1. Quantitative responses were analysed using *descriptive statistical methods*, to identify trends and patterns in mediator experiences.

Qualitative responses were analysed using *thematic analysis*, through which recurring themes and concerns were identified and categorised. This qualitative analysis complemented the statistical findings and provided deeper insight into institutional gaps and practitioner perspectives. The combined analysis facilitated a comprehensive understanding of mediator mental well-being and professional sustainability.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results of the MeWell Questionnaire are organised thematically to reflect key aspects of mediation practice, including demographic characteristics, emotional and psychological

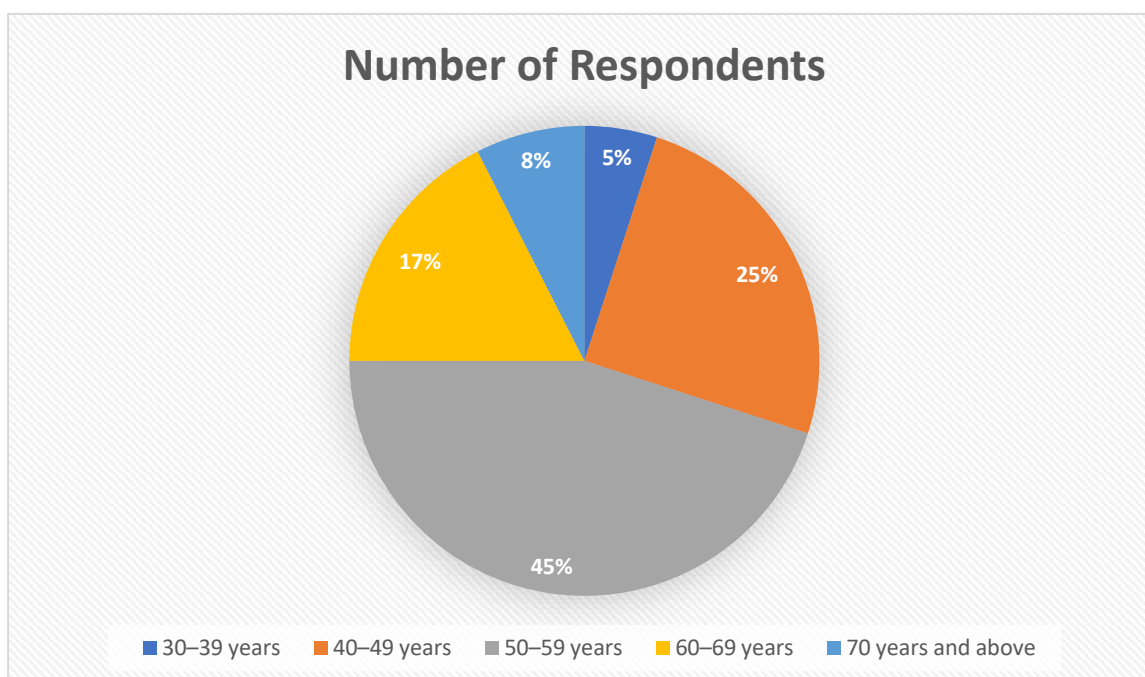
experiences, awareness of mental well-being, coping mechanisms, and the availability of institutional support.

The data has been analysed using descriptive methods to identify patterns and trends in mediators' experiences. Both numerical responses and narrative inputs have been considered to ensure that the analysis reflects not only statistical distribution but also the lived realities of mediators. The findings are presented progressively, moving from general information about the respondents to more specific insights into emotional well-being and systemic gaps within mediation practice.

Demographic and Practice Profile

The demographic characteristics and professional background of the mediators who participated in the study are analysed as a sample group to determine their experience levels and their areas of practice to contextualise the emotional and professional challenges discussed in later sections.

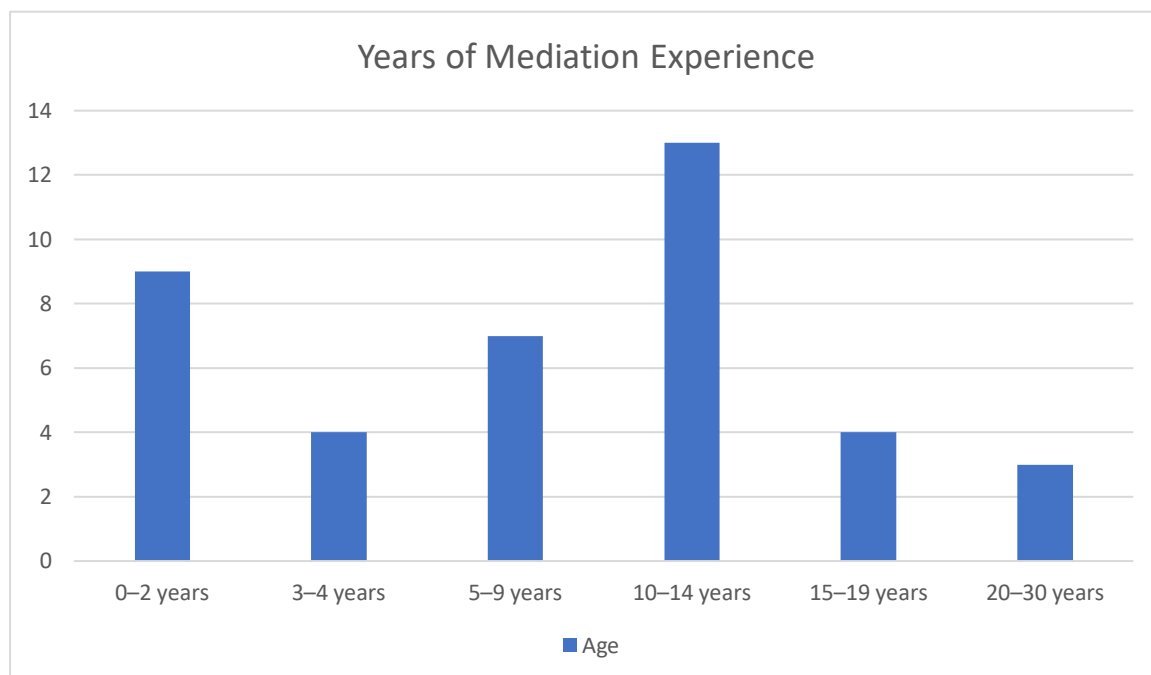
Age Distribution of Respondents



The data shows that a majority of mediators fall within the **50–59 years age group**, followed by those aged **40–49 years**. This indicates that mediation practice is largely sustained by mid-career and senior professionals. The relatively low number of mediators below the age of 40 suggests limited early entry into the profession. This demographic trend highlights a

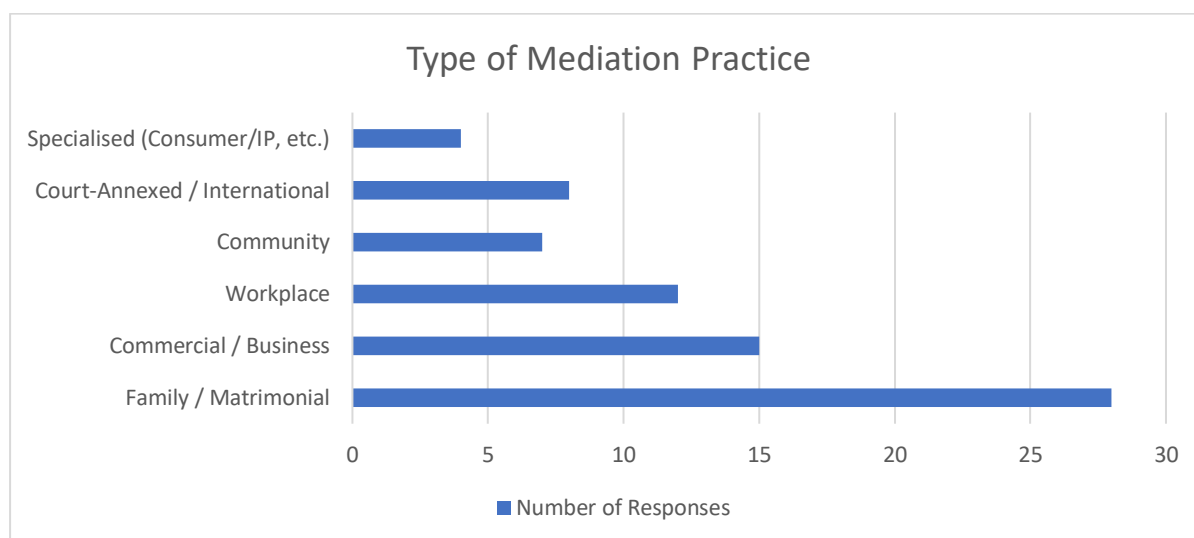
dependence on experienced practitioners and raises concerns regarding long-term sustainability if adequate support mechanisms are not in place. Further, we can see that mediation calls for more youngsters as the profession seeks freshers.

Years of Mediation Experience



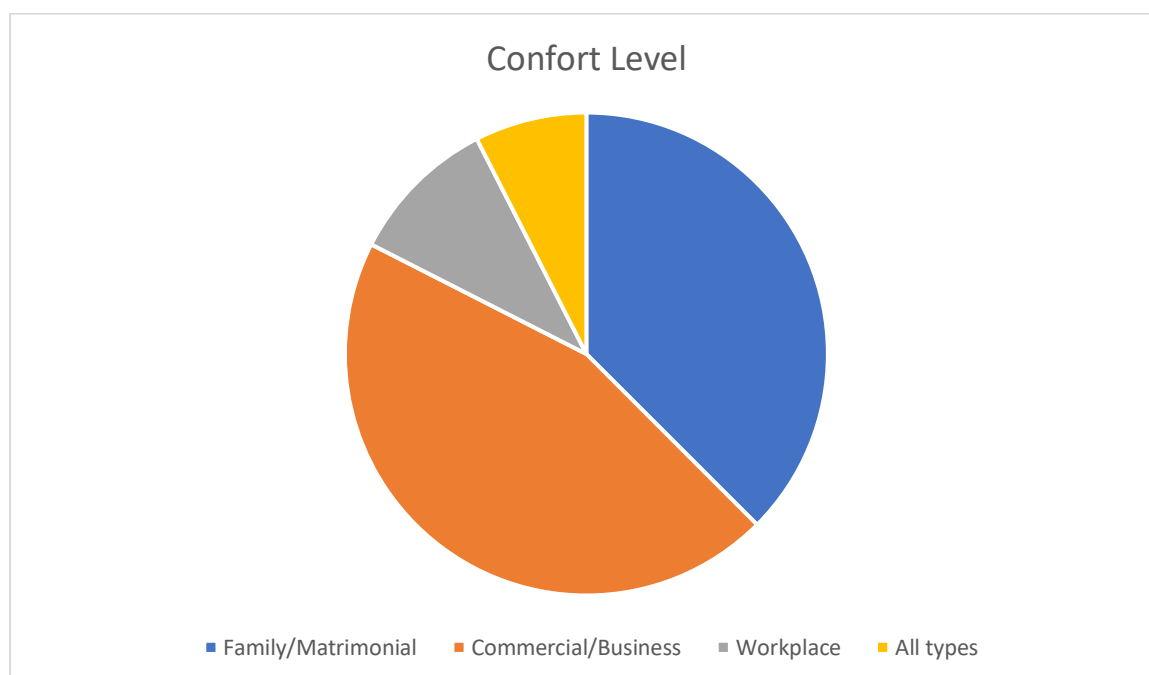
Most respondents reported having 10–14 years of mediation experience, followed by mediators with 0–2 years of experience. This indicates that while new mediators are entering the field, the primary responsibility of handling disputes continues to lie with experienced mediators. Over time, repeated exposure to emotionally demanding disputes may contribute to cumulative mental fatigue, particularly in the absence of institutional support. We can find that the data shows mediator's enter into practice, but only some sustain in a longer term.

Type of Mediation Practice



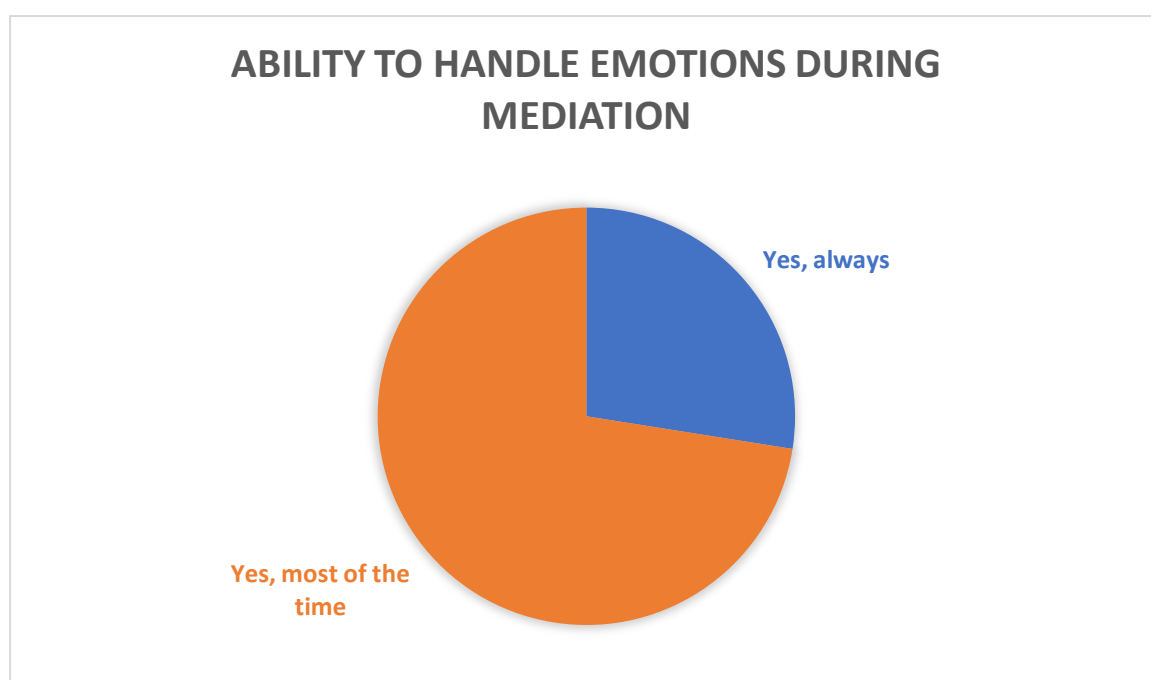
Family and matrimonial mediation is the most common practice area among respondents. Such disputes often involve deep emotional distress, interpersonal conflict, and long-standing relationships, requiring mediators to engage intensely with parties. The dominance of emotionally sensitive practice areas reinforces the importance of examining mediator mental well-being. Further, mediation is considered to be an indelible part of a family dispute and holds the abundant strata in the practice.

Comfort Level in Mediation Practice



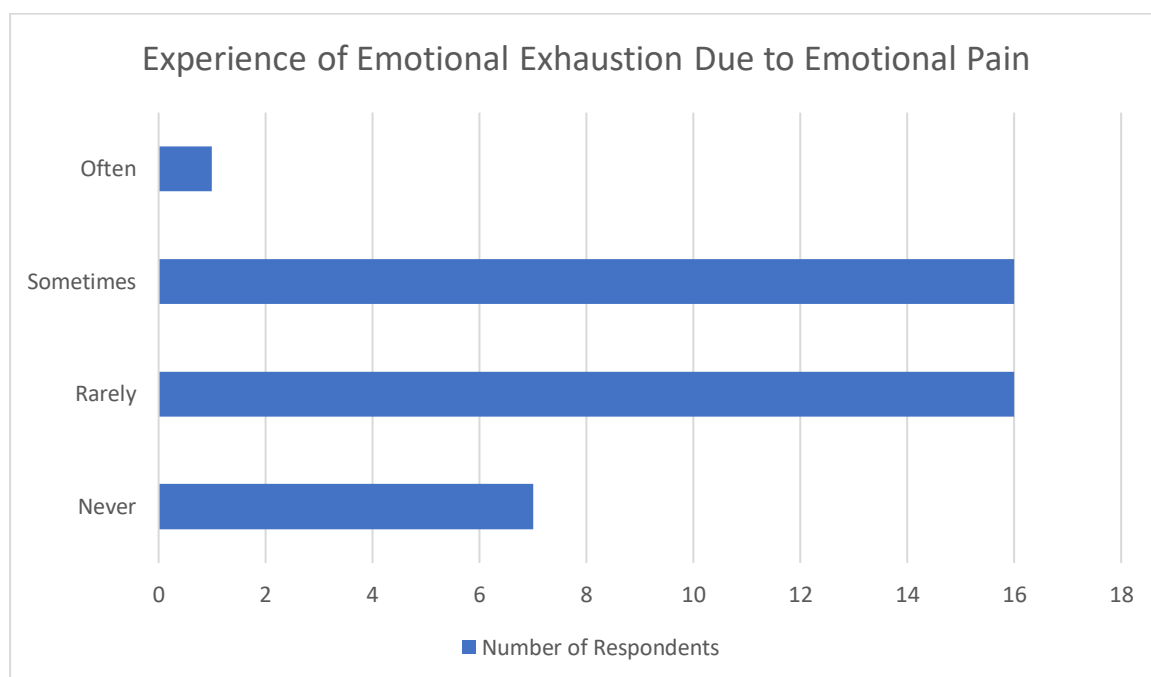
While family mediation is the most practised area, a higher number of mediators reported greater comfort in commercial disputes. This suggests that experience and predictability in certain dispute types may reduce emotional strain. However, continued engagement in emotionally intense cases, even with experience, may still result in long-term stress. Further, we can also infer that even though family mediation is the most common, a larger number of mediator's prefer commercial mediation, suggesting that mediators prefer less exhaustive disputes.

Emotional and Psychological Challenges



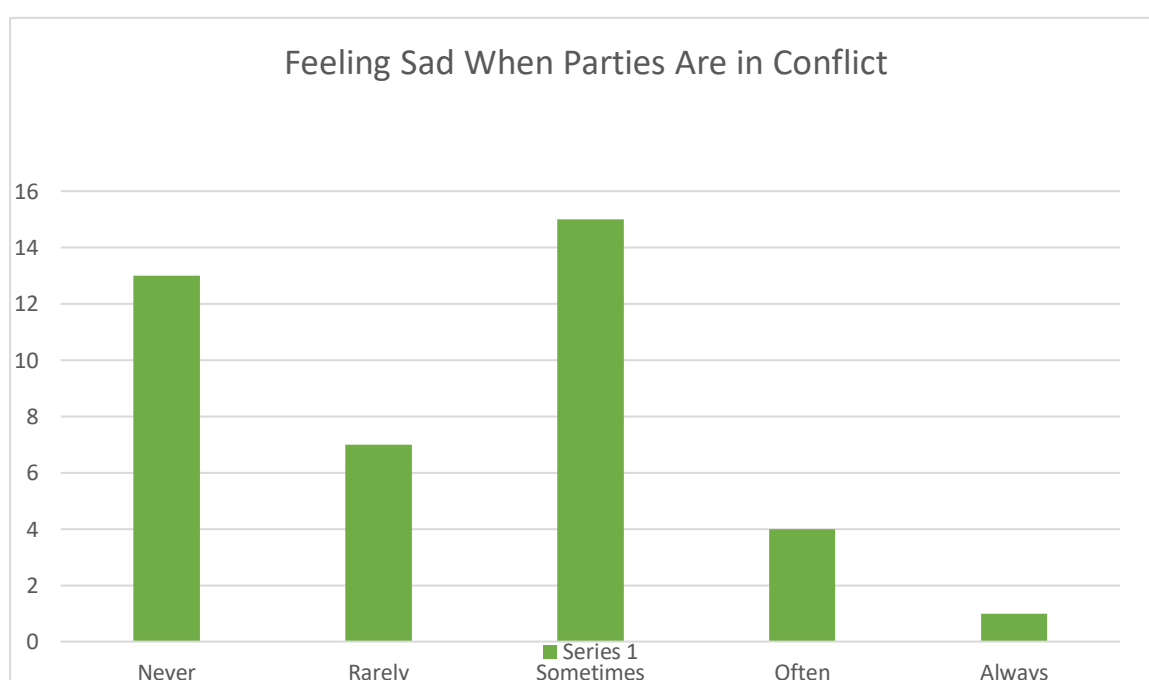
All respondents reported that they are able to manage their emotions either always or most of the time. This reflects a strong sense of professional competence and emotional regulation among mediators. However, the ability to manage emotions does not necessarily indicate the absence of emotional impact, as further data reveals signs of underlying emotional strain. Further, we can also see that a larger number of people suggested most of the time, which indicates that there are times when the dispute demands their emotions, it can be a result of continuous exhaustion, which might result in a hamper in the aspect of keeping emotions at control.

Experience of Emotional Exhaustion Due to Emotional Pain



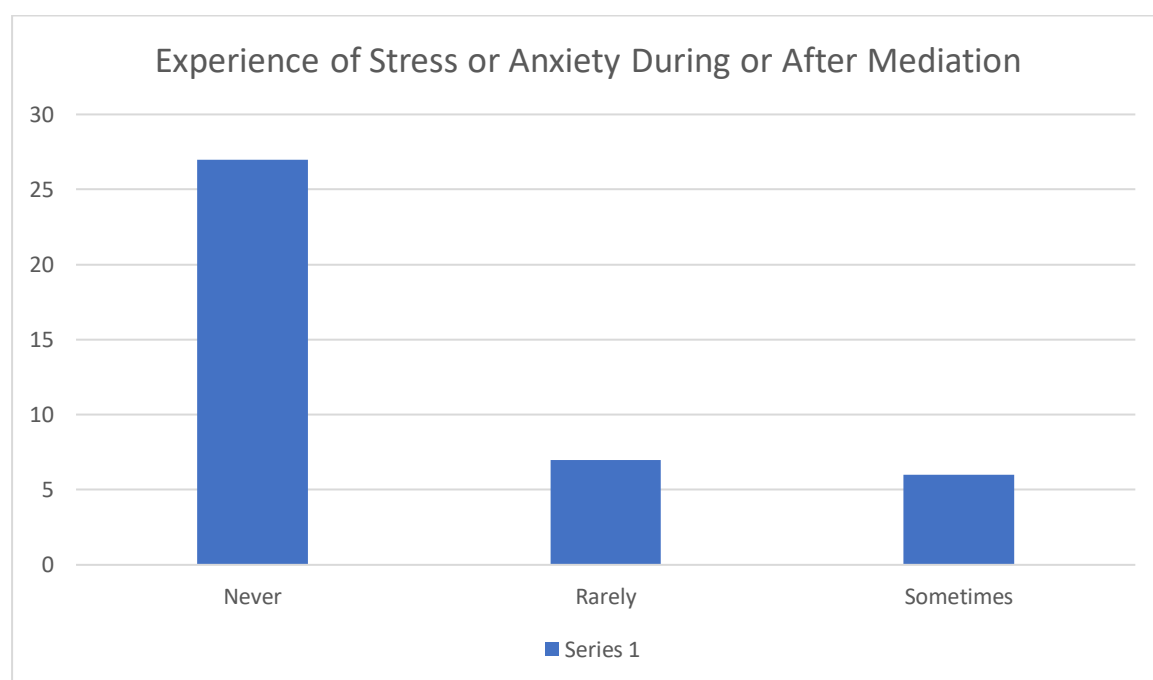
A majority of mediators reported experiencing emotional exhaustion either rarely or sometimes. Although only one mediator reported frequent exhaustion, the data indicate **ongoing emotional fatigue rather than isolated incidents**. This suggests that emotional strain accumulates gradually over time as part of regular mediation practice, and mediators consider emotional burden as a part of mediation itself, and it has been considered as the new “norm”

Feeling Sad When Parties Are in Conflict



More than half of the respondents indicated that they experience feelings of sadness either sometimes or often when parties engage in conflict. This response reflects the inherently empathetic role of mediators, who must actively listen to personal narratives, emotional pain, and unresolved tensions while remaining neutral. Such emotional engagement is not incidental but central to effective mediation. However, repeated and prolonged exposure to distressing stories, intense emotions, and interpersonal breakdowns can gradually heighten emotional sensitivity and vulnerability. Over time, this sustained empathetic involvement may contribute to emotional fatigue, making mediators more susceptible to stress if adequate support and recovery mechanisms are not in place.

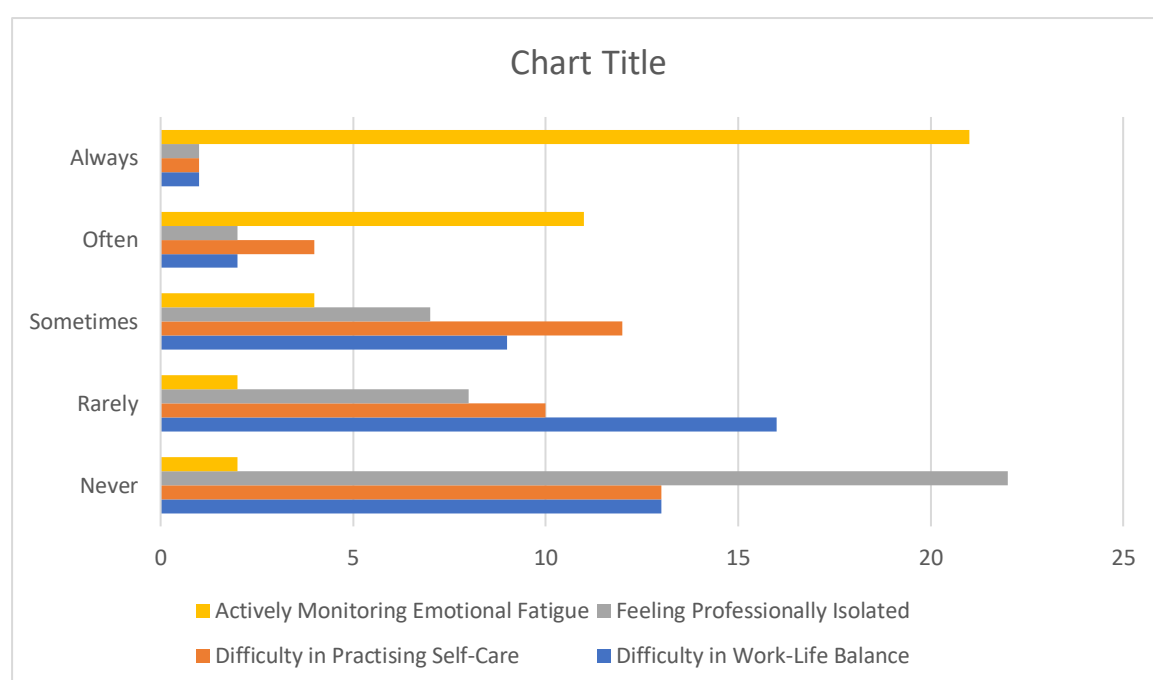
Experience of Stress or Anxiety During or After Mediation



Most mediators reported that they do not experience significant stress or anxiety during or immediately after mediation sessions. This indicates a high level of professional composure and emotional regulation developed through training and experience. However, a smaller but meaningful group acknowledged experiencing stress or anxiety on an occasional basis. Although these experiences may not be intense or persistent, their presence suggests that emotional pressure exists beneath the surface of mediation practice and may not always be outwardly visible or consciously recognised.

Overall, the findings reflect that mediators exhibit strong emotional control and resilience in managing conflict situations. At the same time, recurring experiences of emotional exhaustion, sadness, and intermittent stress reveal that emotional strain is an ongoing aspect of mediation work. These experiences often remain unspoken and normalised within professional culture. The findings therefore underline the importance of recognising mediator mental well-being as a legitimate professional issue that warrants structured attention, rather than framing emotional impact as an individual limitation or personal weakness.

Mental Well-Being Awareness and Self-Care Indicators



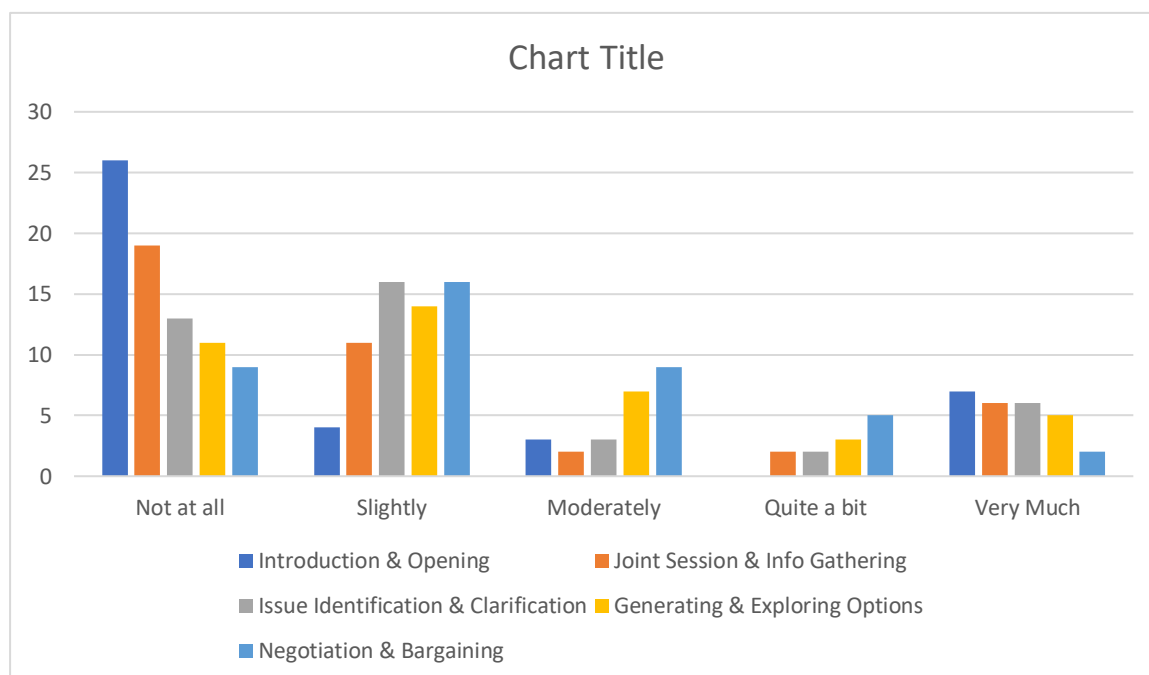
The mediators are deeply aware of their own emotional states and are often conscious of when they feel mentally tired or emotionally drained. This level of self-awareness reflects experience, responsibility, and commitment to the mediation process. However, the data also shows that awareness alone does not always lead to change. Even when mediators recognise emotional fatigue, they often continue working without adequate rest or self-care, largely because professional duties and expectations take priority over personal well-being.

Although many mediators do not feel isolated on a regular basis, the fact that some experience isolation even occasionally is important. Mediation is a profession that involves constant emotional engagement, yet it is often practised alone. Mediators may interact with many people during sessions but still lack spaces where they can openly reflect, decompress, or share their

experiences. This quiet sense of isolation can gradually add to emotional fatigue, especially after handling difficult or emotionally intense cases.

What stands out most is how much responsibility mediators place on themselves. They monitor their emotions, set personal boundaries, and rely on self-regulation to cope with stress. While this shows strength and professionalism, it also reveals a larger gap. The system expects mediators to manage their emotional well-being on their own, without consistent institutional or peer support. Over time, this can normalise emotional exhaustion as part of the job. The findings suggest that for mediation to remain truly humane and sustainable, caring for mediators must become a shared responsibility, not something they quietly manage alone.

Emotional Fatigue by Stage of Mediation



The data shows that during the introduction and opening statements, most mediators experience little to no emotional fatigue. This stage is mainly procedural and allows mediators to focus on explaining the process, setting expectations, and establishing structure. Because emotional issues have not yet fully emerged, mediators are able to remain emotionally neutral and mentally focused. This early phase therefore places minimal emotional pressure on mediators.

As mediation moves into the joint session and information-gathering stage, emotional involvement begins to increase. Mediators are required to listen carefully to the parties'

experiences, concerns, and emotions, many of which are deeply personal. Although a number of mediators still reported low fatigue, the data shows a noticeable rise in slight and moderate emotional involvement. This reflects the growing emotional load created by sustained listening and empathetic engagement.

The issue identification and clarification stage marks a clear shift in emotional demand. At this point, mediators help parties confront underlying problems, conflicting interests, and unresolved tensions. This requires careful emotional management and constant neutrality. The data shows that many mediators experience moderate to high emotional involvement during this stage, highlighting the complexity and intensity of the mediator's role as emotional and relational issues become more pronounced.

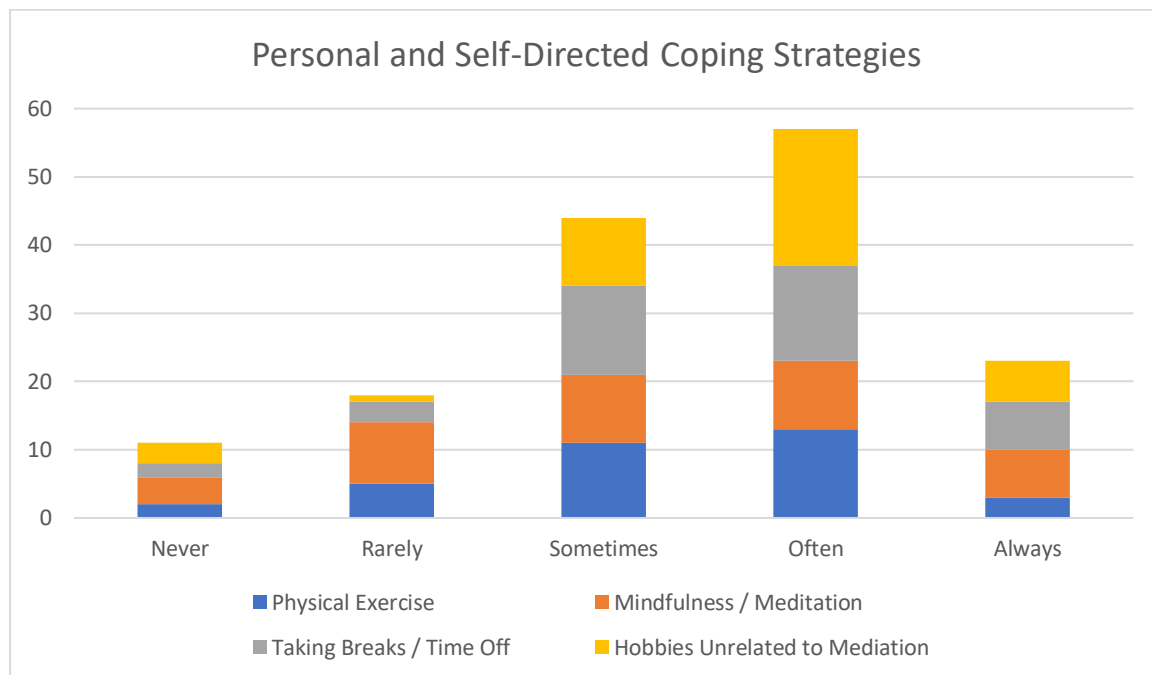
Emotional fatigue becomes more evident during the stage of generating and exploring options. Mediators must guide parties toward possible solutions while managing frustration, resistance, and emotional uncertainty. This stage demands sustained concentration, emotional regulation, and encouragement, which explains the increase in mediators reporting moderate to significant emotional fatigue. The process requires mediators to remain engaged even when parties struggle to move forward.

The negotiation and bargaining stage is one of the most emotionally demanding phases of mediation. Parties often experience pressure, anxiety, and resistance as decisions near finalisation. Mediators must carefully balance emotional sensitivity with strategic facilitation to help parties reach agreement. The data shows continued emotional strain at this stage, confirming that emotional fatigue builds as mediation progresses. Overall, the findings demonstrate that emotional strain is inherent to the mediation process, particularly in its later stages, reinforcing the need for structured support and recovery mechanisms for mediators.

Coping Strategies Adopted by Mediators

The analysis focuses on both personal and professional coping mechanisms, highlighting how mediators attempt to sustain themselves in the absence of structured institutional support.

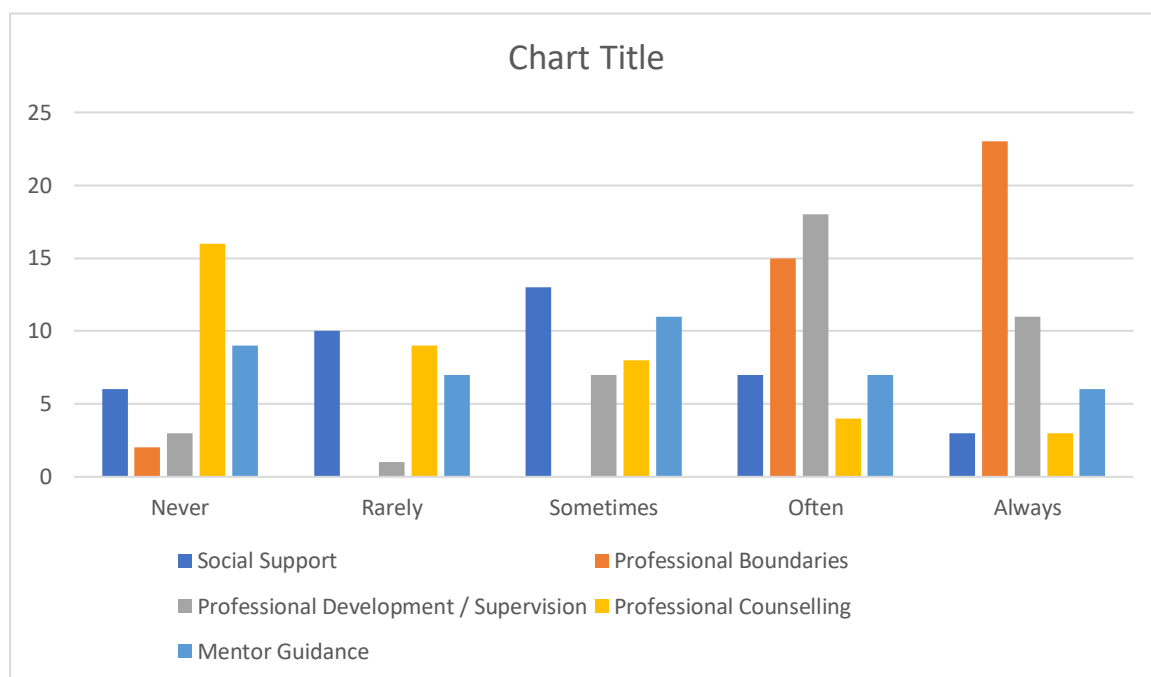
Personal and Self-Directed Coping Strategies



The data shows that mediators mainly depend on personal and self-driven methods to cope with stress and emotional fatigue. Activities such as engaging in hobbies and taking breaks are used most frequently, suggesting that mediators instinctively turn to familiar and accessible ways of finding relief after emotionally demanding sessions. Physical exercise and mindfulness practices are also commonly adopted, although not always on a regular basis. This pattern reflects a conscious effort by mediators to care for their own mental well-being using whatever means are available to them.

Mediators are expected to manage emotional strain largely on their own, without consistent guidance or structured support from institutions or professional bodies. While self-care practices can be effective in reducing immediate stress, they do not address the deeper emotional impact of repeated exposure to conflict. Over time, placing the responsibility of mental well-being solely on the individual mediator can lead to silent exhaustion. While personal strategies are effective to an extent, they place the responsibility of mental well-being largely on the mediator rather than on the system within which they operate.

Professional and Support-Based Coping Strategies



Maintaining clear professional boundaries appears to be one of the most dependable ways mediators protect themselves emotionally. Most mediators consciously draw these boundaries, suggesting a strong sense of responsibility and ethical discipline in their work. Alongside this, many mediators continue to invest in professional development, not only to improve their skills but also to reflect on their practice and remain confident in handling complex disputes.

The data reveals what mediators tend not to rely on. Very few seek professional counselling or structured mentoring, and many have never done so. This absence cannot be seen simply as personal choice. It points instead to deeper issues such as discomfort around seeking help, limited access to suitable support, or a professional environment that values emotional endurance over emotional care. Even social support is used unevenly, suggesting that mediators often carry emotional strain quietly rather than sharing it openly. While this approach fosters independence and resilience, it also leaves mediators without a safety net. When emotional support is not built into the system, resilience can slowly turn into silent fatigue, raising serious questions about the long-term sustainability of mediation practice.

Institutional Support and Training Gaps

The responses predominantly revealed a significant lack of structured mental health support within mediation organisations and associations. Even so, a very small number of respondents reported the availability of any form of institutional support, which was limited to isolated initiatives such as access to a counsellor or occasional skill development, yoga, or meditation programmes. This demonstrated that institutional recognition of mediator mental well-being is often ignored and neglected.

Organisation conveniently considers mediators similar to a machine rather than a human. The data indicated that no mental health support was provided by their organisations or mediation associations by a considerable amount in diverse strata. When asked what type of support they would find helpful, mediators expressed a clear preference for peer-based and practical interventions. A Mediator's Support groups or group discussions are often reflected as the most frequently suggested resource, indicating a strong desire for group or a need of shared reflection, discussion, and collective coping, where like-minded people can help themselves. Some preferred Counselling and psychological training, reflecting an openness to professional mental health support when framed within a structured and relevant context.

There was also an opinion of stress management courses, refresher programmes for mediation processes, and skill-based activities, point towards the need for practical and application-oriented interventions rather than purely theoretical training. A small group of respondents indicated no need for external support, preferring self-work; however, this view was significantly outweighed by those seeking some form of institutional assistance. Overall, the responses highlight a clear gap between mediator needs and available organisational support. A few mediators shared their experience to training and workshops focused on self-care or mental health, where they described them as insightful and beneficial, particularly in areas such as mindfulness, emotional regulation, boundary-setting, and self-reflection. This shows that even a small program, a group-session can have a positive impact on the mediator's awareness and professional sustainability

A considerable number of people expressed interest in attending workshops and training, suggesting mental health training is not a widespread opportunity but a limited comfort. The small number of respondents who expressed disinterest further reinforces that the primary barrier lies in availability, access, and institutional prioritisation rather than lack of acceptance among practitioners.

The findings demonstrate a clear institutional gap in supporting mediator mental well-being. While mediators show awareness, openness, and interest in structured support and training, current organisational frameworks do not adequately respond to these needs. This disconnect underscores the necessity for mediation institutions and associations to integrate regular mental well-being initiatives, peer-support mechanisms, and training programmes as part of professional development, rather than treating them as optional or peripheral concerns.

Mediator Training and Mental Health Integration

The present framework systems have their existing deficiencies and gaps which the current data demonstrates. Out of forty, only five believed that the current training programme adequately addresses the skills and knowledge required to deal with mental health issues in mediation. The majority of participants who answered "Yes" based their decision on training elements which included role plays and emotional intelligence components and general mediation techniques. The respondents' students directly acknowledged that their practical exposure needed improvement. The positive respondents now understand that the current training programs need enhancement to prepare mediators for their emotional practice requirements. The respondents believed that learning through structured mediation processes together with experiential learning would help them achieve emotional readiness and professional confidence.

The majority of respondents revealed their opinion that existing training programs fall short in their ability to tackle mental health issues. The responses demonstrate that the person who answered them experienced serious problems with the product. Mediators consistently pointed out that training is overly theoretical, insufficiently engaging, and disconnected from the emotional demands they face in real mediation settings. The majority of respondents showed that mediation training teaches process and law together with technique while it fails to recognize the emotional and psychological work which mediators must perform. The majority of mediators pointed out that current training programs remain focused on teaching procedures and skills while they fail to address the internal emotional experiences which mediators experience.

Mediators continuously argued that interactive sessions and real-life scenarios and live role plays serve as vital training tools. The respondents showed a preference for international mediation programs over domestic training when they noted that international programs use real situations as training methods instead of using hypothetical scenarios. The people believe

that emotional competencies need to be learned through practical experience as well as introspection with supervised training.

The speaker-dominated training methods receive criticism because they demonstrate crucial weaknesses. The mediators demanded learning spaces which would permit participants to speak reflect and share their actual experiences while they were experiencing frustration with the passive learning models. The mediators view learning as a process which enables people to acquire new skills while they investigate knowledge together with others. The professionals maintain that mental well-being requires continuous backing because one-time certification cannot resolve the issue.

The data reveals that mediation training programs lack clear definitions for mental health elements. The respondents expressed doubts about the definition of mental health which mediation professionals should understand. One respondent provided a thorough explanation of this issue by explaining that mediators decide to work under conditions which create professional pressure and that training should use practical training methods which exist in actual work settings. This situation demonstrates an essential conflict which needs resolution. The mediators want to understand how emotional strain stress and psychological effects link to their work responsibilities although they do not want to become mental health professionals.

The repeated suggestion that mental health is rarely discussed or only mentioned casually suggests that it remains an avoided subject within training programmes. The requests for including psychology emotional regulation and communication skills demonstrate a need for students to gain specific knowledge about mental health instead of receiving generic information about well-being.

The responses demonstrated a clear priority for training mediators to develop their abilities in emotional regulation self-control and neutrality. The mediators highlighted their abilities to control emotions and stay composed during difficult situations while they maintained facial expression control and developed body language for neutral communication. The mediation practice responses reveal essential aspects which define its actual execution. The parties observe mediators at all times and the mediators emotional state determines the mediation process movement and overall environment.

The mediators consider body language and professional behavior together with boundary maintenance as essential skills which serve both protective and operational functions. The skills protect mediators from experiencing emotional overload while they boost their credibility and

work efficiency. The absence of such training forces mediators to develop their skills through trial and error which results in emotional distress for their personal life.

A large portion of respondents supported the inclusion of mindfulness and meditation together with stress management techniques into the educational programs. The mediators did not consider these activities to be optional or external activities which would exist outside main activities. The group structure and practical training method should guide the teaching of these practices according to the study. The detailed reference to the Art of Living's breath and meditation programme shows how respondents value methods that connect emotional regulation to daily practice. The mediators understand that ongoing conflict exposure damages both their physical and mental health therefore they need tools which help them stay balanced while showing compassion without losing their emotional strength.

When asked about familiarity with specific programmes addressing mental health concerns, only a limited number of mediators could identify structured initiatives. The respondents who participated in the survey managed to identify specific programs which included listening skills training and basic counseling and structured mediation training provided by professional organizations. The participants of the study preferred to study listening skills and perception assessment together with experiential learning instead of receiving formal mental health training.

The limited institutional program awareness indicates that mediation training programs either hide their existence or exist as rare instances. The respondents who answered "No" to this question provided program suggestions which confirmed that mental health training needs existence yet current educational programs do not offer any structured programs for mental health education.

The majority of people who took part in the study believed that mental health training would make mediators more effective in their work. The majority of respondents believe that mental health training should become part of mediator training because it would help them perform better during their work. The practical reasons come from actual experiences which people need for their everyday activities. The mediators connected mental health training with benefits which included lower stress levels and less chance of burnout and better mediation results through improved communication and improved neutrality.

The respondents insisted that mediation encompasses both legal matters and human experiences, which involve emotions and social connections. This perspective challenges

narrow procedural views of mediation and reinforce the idea that mediator well-being directly affects the quality of dispute resolution. The respondents who believed that mental health training was not necessary for their work still recognized that this information would help them handle their emotional reactions and cope with client pressures. The benefits which respondents identified for their study go beyond individual advantages. The mediators think that mental health training will make their work more efficient and enable them to balance work and personal life better while providing protection against emotional contamination from others and helping them to conduct their work with moral integrity. The respondents said that mentoring and shared experience mattered because emotional problems become more understandable through professional relationships.

The frequent reference to burnout prevention shows that the mediation field needs protection because unprotected practice leads to emotional exhaustion. The belief that mediator well-being improves outcomes for parties reinforces the argument that mental health support is not a personal luxury but a professional necessity. Most respondents expected an easy time with mental health training implementation but those who anticipated difficulties shared valuable insights into potential problems. The obstacles include insufficient time resources which create greater expenses combined with diverse knowledge backgrounds and challenges that arise from mediators who cross into mental health professional territory. The respondents showed concern about how surface-level understanding would lead to ethical mistakes and generate excessive self-assuredness.

The training design needs to be developed meticulously because the training design has been rejected by these people who uphold the training design but want design development to be executed with precision. The respondents wanted educational programs which met their needs through practical solutions while maintaining ethical principles and needed supervisory support which required specific operational limits. The participants showed that they wanted relevant training but they thought that the educational program might repeat its former overwhelming and unhelpful theoretical content. The research results show that mediation practice requires both mental health training and professional development activities to create a system which protects professionals from stress and enables them to handle their work responsibilities. The field of mediation needs to accept emotional connection as an essential part of professional practice because mediators function as human beings who handle conflicts instead of operating as neutral machines. The concerns require organizations to establish educational programs

which create clear learning paths through appropriate educational materials while maintaining professional boundaries to help mediators work effectively in their roles.

Personal Impact, and Willingness

The extra remarks made by the mediators show important details about the current understanding and treatment of mental well being in mediation work. Many respondents described mental well being as a skill that mediators gradually develop through experience and personal coping mechanisms. Mediators mostly depend on their self taught skills to perform their work because they lack both official training and organizational resources. The collected answers showed that people need to understand their available support systems to handle their personal requirements. The mediators recognized that individuals enter the profession because they have experienced conflicts or trauma which makes them sensitive to emotional matters that occur during mediation work. The availability of counseling services or support systems in this situation helps professionals achieve better work results and enables them to recover their emotional well being through personal development.

The need for mediation support groups emerged as a repeating pattern in the answers provided. Mediators preferred to join peer groups which operated outside of officially scheduled training sessions. The participants regarded those gatherings as protected environments which allowed them to think about their work and deal with their feelings while advancing their professional development. Colleagues would hold informal talks which included sharing personal stories about their work and the contents of different media, to find ways to deal with their emotional pressure.

The respondents defined regular discussions and workshops about mental well being and spiritual growth as essential elements for their practice. The study found that people considered yoga and meditation and mindfulness techniques to be effective methods for achieving emotional resilience and maintaining inner peace and neutrality during high-stress mediation sessions. The skills developed through these practices function as additional resources which help professionals maintain their work performance abilities.

The main theme shows himself through his passion for listening. Mediators explained that active listening creates advantages for both the involved parties and the mediator because it enables better understanding. Effective listening helps parties feel understood while it enables mediators to collect information and keep their emotional state stable. Core mediation skills help with mediator mental well-being because they provide multiple benefits to the mediator.

Mediators face difficulties when their negotiating partners or advocates fail to communicate the dispute details because this situation makes them feel incapable of handling the situation. The mediator faces an external source of stress which contributes to their need for peer support systems to handle their emotional difficulties.

The results show that most mediators do not experience negative emotions which impact their personal relationships but some mediators confirmed their emotional issues while others stayed silent to the question. Some mediators experience emotional triggers which show that mediation work affects their personal well-being even though they do not discuss this topic.

A strong collective interest for shared learning is demonstrated by the numerous mediators who want to take part in talk shows and podcasts. Mediators prefer platforms which enable them to engage in open conversations while sharing stories and building connections with their colleagues. The initiatives provide the mediation community with easily accessible methods which let people discuss mental well-being issues without making them feel especially burdened.

KEY FINDINGS

The survey progressed by understanding mediator's experience and revolved around its nature, time and experience regarding the same and how it influences its emotional and the mediator's exhaustion to find a sustainable practice and the survey noted that:

The Invisible Vicarious Emotional Burnout in Mediation

Most mediators actively address and deal with the emotions of the parties while regulating their own emotions, which makes this entire aspect the core of mediation. It becomes the backbone of the mediation process. Parties with disputes closely connected to their personal lives often become emotionally charged, which affects the session and is frequently identified and discussed by the mediator. In this process, mediators also need to regulate their own emotions, as the very idea of a mediator is to remain a neutral party to both sides. This requires mediators to understand emotions without becoming biased by them³.

³ Grandey AA. When "the show must go on": surface acting and deep acting as determinants of emotional exhaustion and peer-rated service delivery. *Acad Manage J.* 2003;46:86–96

Mediators consistently reported feelings of sadness, emotional fatigue, and heightened involvement, particularly during core stages such as issue clarification, option generation, and negotiation. Yet, despite this emotional immersion, most mediators also reported that they are able to “manage” their emotions. This reveals a deeper truth: emotional control has been normalised as a professional obligation, rather than being supported as a professional need⁴.

The process portrays a picture in which the mediator is required to absorb the excess emotions of the parties and regulate them into a positive environment. In this sense, mediators become the channel through which emotions flow. However, the system has not taken any measures to cleanse or restore that channel. Emotional strain has quietly become part of the job description, even though it is never formally acknowledged in training standards, institutional policies, or professional evaluation.

This invisibility is dangerous. When emotional labour is treated as an unspoken norm, mediators may internalise exhaustion as a personal weakness rather than recognising it as a structural issue. This finding calls for a fundamental reframing: mediator well-being is not an individual concern, but an essential component of ethical and effective dispute resolution.

Self-Awareness Exists, but the Burden of Care Is Mostly Personalised

Most mediators recognise that the mediation process is emotionally demanding and requires sustained concentration. They are expected to regulate their own emotions while simultaneously acting as emotional regulators for the parties. This dual role lies at the core of mediation practice. However, mediators largely carry this emotional burden individually, relying on personal coping mechanisms such as yoga, meditation, or self-help practices. Very few engage in collective or peer-based spaces to process these experiences. Over time, this has become a quiet paradox, not because the burden has diminished, but because mediators have grown accustomed to managing it alone⁵.

The data highlights this paradox clearly. Mediators demonstrate a high level of self-awareness, actively monitoring emotional fatigue and recognising the impact of mediation work on their mental state. Yet, this awareness rarely translates into systemic support or sustainable professional practices. Instead, mediators continue to depend almost entirely on self-directed

⁴ Kovbuz, Valeriya. (2025). Emotional Burnout Among Helping Professionals: A Theoretical Review and Practical Implications. 9-18.

⁵ uglesi K. The consequences of emotional labor: effects on work stress, job satisfaction, and well-being. *Motiv Emot.* 1999;23:125–154

strategies such as exercise, breaks, mindfulness, and personal hobbies. While these methods offer short-term relief, their dominance reveals a deeper structural issue.

Mediator well-being is treated as a personal responsibility rather than a shared professional concern. Institutions focus on training mediators to manage parties and processes but provide little space for mediators to reflect, recover, or receive support themselves. This has fostered a culture of silent resilience, where emotional endurance is expected and rewarded, while emotional sustainability remains unaddressed.

Over time, this approach carries significant risks. Continued exposure to emotional strain without collective support increases the likelihood of burnout, disengagement, and withdrawal from practice, particularly among experienced mediators handling complex disputes⁶. The findings underline the need for a fundamental shift: moving from isolated self-care toward collective care as a professional norm. Recognising mediator well-being as a shared responsibility is essential to ensuring the ethical integrity and long-term sustainability of mediation practice

Existing Training Programs are Procedurally Concrete but Emotionally Incomplete

The study shows that the present mediation training programmes do not adequately address the mental and emotional demands faced by mediators. Only five out of forty mediators felt that the existing training truly prepares them to deal with mental health related issues. Most of them relied on limited elements such as role plays or emotional intelligence components, while still acknowledging that practical exposure is lacking.

For the majority, training remains heavily theoretical and speaker-driven. Mediators repeatedly expressed that what they face in actual mediation rooms is very different from what is taught in training halls. Skills such as regulating emotions, maintaining neutrality, controlling body language, setting clear boundaries, and managing stress are rarely taught in a structured manner. Instead, mediators are left to learn these skills on their own, often through mistakes, experience, and emotional exhaustion⁷.

This creates a serious gap in the system. When training focuses mainly on procedure, law, and technique, it prepares mediators to run a session, but not to handle the emotional weight that

⁶ Jeung DY, Kim C, Chang SJ. Emotional Labor and Burnout: A Review of the Literature. Yonsei Med J. 2018 Mar;59(2):187-193

⁷ Dykeman, J. (2024, May 23). *The crucial role of self-care: Mitigating stress and burnout for conflict resolution practitioners. Understanding in Conflict*

comes with continuous conflict engagement. Many mediators are unsure about what mental health support is expected, what is allowed, and what the system will stand behind them on. The absence of clarity around mental health within mediation training only deepens this uncertainty. They are trained to facilitate conversations but not to protect themselves from the emotional impact of those conversations. Over time, this imbalance makes mediation difficult to sustain as a profession, especially for those who continue to practise over long periods. The findings strongly indicate that unless emotional competence is made a core part of mediation training, the system will continue to rely on individual endurance rather than professional sustainability.

A Strong Demand for Sustainable Support, but not Progress

Mediators are not opposed to mental health support or training. In fact, the opposite is true. Most mediators openly expressed interest in mental health and self-care initiatives and strongly believed that such support would improve their effectiveness in mediation. This willingness cuts across experience levels and practice areas, indicating that the need is widely felt and deeply understood within the profession.

Even mediators who stated that mental health training is “not required” did not dismiss its value entirely. Many of them acknowledged that skills related to emotional regulation, stress management, and handling emotional outbursts would help them perform better. This reflects an important distinction. Mediators are not seeking to become therapists or mental health professionals. Instead, they are asking for practical tools that allow them to remain neutral, focused, and emotionally stable while dealing with intense human conflict⁸.

There is also a clear preference for how this support should be offered. Mediators consistently favoured peer support groups, reflective discussions, mentoring, and practical interventions over theoretical or abstract programmes. They value shared experiences, collective reflection, and real-life learning spaces where emotional challenges can be discussed without judgment. This preference highlights that mediators see emotional sustainability as a relational process, not an individual struggle⁹.

However, despite this strong demand and openness, there has been little meaningful progress. Structured opportunities for mental health support remain limited or absent. Institutions and

⁸ Nussbaum, L. (2018). *Mediator burnout*. *Ohio State Journal on Dispute Resolution*, 34, 1–45.

⁹ Schreier, Lori. (2002). Emotional Intelligence and Mediation Training. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*. 20. 99 - 119. 10.1002/crq.13.

training bodies have not translated mediator willingness into consistent programmes, follow-up sessions, or formal support mechanisms. As a result, mediators continue to rely on personal coping strategies rather than professional systems of care¹⁰.

This gap exposes the core problem. Mental health is not a taboo subject within mediation; silence around it is institutional. The lack of progress is not due to resistance from mediators, but due to inertia within the structures that govern mediation practice. Until this disconnect is addressed, the profession will continue to recognise the need for sustainable support without taking concrete steps to provide it.

Sustainability of Mediation Depends on Active Participation of change from fellow mediators and institutions

The findings of this study indicate that the sustainability of mediation as a professional practice cannot be achieved through individual resilience alone. While mediators demonstrate strong self-awareness, adaptability, and commitment to ethical practice, these qualities are being exercised largely in isolation. Mediators continue to manage emotional strain through personal coping mechanisms, self-learning, and individual discipline. Although these efforts reflect professional maturity, they are insufficient to ensure long-term sustainability without collective and institutional reinforcement.

The data reveals a clear expectation that change must emerge from both within the mediator community and from the institutions that govern mediation practice. Mediators repeatedly expressed the need for peer engagement, reflective spaces, mentoring, and shared discussions. This highlights that sustainability is not merely about reducing workload or improving training modules, but about creating a professional culture where mediators actively support one another. When such spaces are absent, mediators are left to normalise emotional fatigue as part of the profession, rather than addressing it collectively.

At the institutional level, the lack of structured mental well-being initiatives, follow-up mechanisms, and continuing support reflects a passive approach to sustainability. Training bodies and mediation institutions continue to focus primarily on certification, procedure, and outcomes, without recognising that mediators themselves require ongoing care to remain effective. This creates a gap where responsibility for sustainability is informally placed on

¹⁰ Demir, Şamil. (2025). The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Mediation and Inter-Party Empathy Dynamics. 10.5281/zenodo.15616252.

individuals, while institutions remain largely disengaged from the emotional realities of practice¹¹.

Importantly, the findings suggest that sustainability cannot be imposed through policy alone. It requires active participation from mediators as well. Fellow mediators play a critical role in initiating change by breaking the culture of silent endurance, engaging in peer support, and advocating for collective well-being. When mediators begin to view emotional support as a professional right rather than a personal weakness, institutional change becomes both necessary and unavoidable.

This finding underscores that the future of mediation depends on shared accountability. Sustainability will only be achieved when mediators and institutions move beyond passive acknowledgement and actively participate in building systems of support. Without such collective engagement, mediation risks becoming a practice sustained by individual sacrifice rather than professional care, undermining its ethical foundation and long-term viability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Shift from individual coping to collective wellness programmes.

The findings make it clear that mediators are managing emotional strain largely on their own. This approach is unsustainable. Mediation institutions should initiate collective wellness programmes, such as weekly or periodic sessions where mediators can gather for reflection, discussion, and emotional release¹². These need not be clinical in nature, but should function as safe professional spaces where experiences can be shared without judgment. The intent is to reduce isolation, normalise emotional discussion, and distribute emotional labour across a supportive professional community¹³.

2. Introduce regular mental wellness sessions as part of professional life.

Beyond informal gatherings, structured mental wellness sessions should be introduced on a regular basis. These may include guided mindfulness, stress regulation techniques, reflective

¹¹ Mejia, D. (2021). *Mindfulness for legal professionals: An appeal for positive change* (Master's thesis). *Mindfulness Studies Theses*, 44

¹² Bodtker, Andrea & Jameson, Jessica. (2001). Emotion in Conflict Formation and Its Transformation: Application to Organizational Conflict Management. *International Journal of Conflict Management*. 12. 259-275.

¹³ Saud, Jenna & Rice, John. (2024). Stress, Teamwork, and Wellbeing Policies: A Synergistic Approach to Reducing Burnout in Public Sector Organizations. *Administrative Sciences*.

conversations, or facilitated group discussions. The purpose is not therapy, but emotional maintenance¹⁴. Such continuity helps mediators recognise early signs of fatigue, recalibrate boundaries, and remain mentally present in their work. Regularity ensures that well-being is not addressed only after burnout occurs¹⁵.

3. Institutionally acknowledge mental strain as part of mediation practice.

Mental and emotional strain must be openly acknowledged by mediation bodies as an inherent aspect of mediation. This recognition shifts the narrative from personal weakness to professional reality. Institutions should formally include mediator well-being in policies, codes, and professional conversations. Acknowledgement itself acts as validation and encourages mediators to seek support without fear of stigma or professional judgment.

4. Create in-built physical and emotional spaces for mediators.

Mediation centres should provide designated spaces for mediators to pause, reflect, or decompress before or after sessions. A dedicated mediator room is not a luxury; it is a symbolic and practical acknowledgement of emotional labour. Such spaces offer immediate relief and reinforce the idea that mediator care is structurally supported, not personally improvised¹⁶.

5. Integrate mental well-being into the mediation ecosystem, not as an add-on.

Mental well-being must be embedded into the everyday functioning of mediation practice. This includes incorporating discussions on emotional impact into meetings, case reviews, and professional interactions. When mental well-being becomes part of routine professional dialogue, it loses its stigma and becomes a shared concern, strengthening collective resilience¹⁷.

6. Inculcate mental well-being training into mediator training programmes.

Training programmes should explicitly include emotional regulation, neutrality management, boundary-setting, stress awareness, and emotional transference. These skills must be taught alongside procedural and legal aspects of mediation. The intention is to prepare mediators for emotional realities before they encounter them in practice, rather than leaving them to learn through exhaustion and experience¹⁸.

¹⁴ Fox, N., Merwood, A., Gleeson, H., & Bennetts, A. (2024). *How does yoga improve mental health and psychological wellbeing? A systematic review of mediation studies*.

¹⁵ Hinshaw, A. (2016). *Regulating mediators*. *Harvard Negotiation Law Review*, 21, 163–217.

¹⁶ Liu, Jiawei & Zhao, Jianghong & Wang, Zhenhao. (2025). The effect of peer support on psychological rehabilitation in injured collegiate athletes: the mediating roles of resilience and perceived stress. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 16. 10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1567812.

¹⁷ Gibson, B. D. (2024). *Lawyers, trauma, and professional well-being: How the legal community takes back its mental health* (Wake Forest University Legal Studies Paper No. 5026587; forthcoming).

¹⁸ Irvine, Charlie & Farrington, Laurel. (2017). *Mediation and emotions: perception and regulation*.

7. Ensure continuity through refresher and follow-up programmes.

Mental well-being training should not end with certification. Regular refresher programmes and follow-up sessions are necessary to ensure sustained emotional health. As mediators progress in experience and take on more complex disputes, their emotional demands evolve. Ongoing engagement helps mediators adapt, reflect, and remain effective without sacrificing personal well-being¹⁹.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the present study provides valuable insight into the mental well-being and professional sustainability of mediators, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study relies primarily on self-reported data collected through a questionnaire, which may be influenced by personal perception, professional identity, or reluctance to openly disclose emotional vulnerability. Mediators, as trained neutral professionals, may understate emotional strain due to cultural expectations of resilience and composure.

The sample size, though diverse in experience and practice areas, remains limited. The findings therefore reflect trends rather than definitive conclusions applicable to all mediation contexts. In addition, the study focuses on mediators within a single national framework, and cross-cultural variations in mediation practice and institutional support have not been explored.

Future research may expand the scope by adopting longitudinal methods to examine how emotional fatigue develops over time and how sustained mediation practice impacts long-term well-being. Qualitative interviews, observational studies, and comparative international research could provide deeper insight into lived experiences. Further exploration of gender, age, practice area, and institutional affiliation may also enrich understanding. Most importantly, future studies should examine the effectiveness of structured well-being interventions in mediation practice, moving from diagnosis to implementation and impact assessment.

¹⁹ Möslers, Thomas & Poppek, Sandra & Leonhard, Christoph & Collet, Wilfried. (2022). Reflective Skills, Empathy, Wellbeing, and Resilience in Cognitive-Behavior Therapy Trainees Participating in Mindfulness-Based Self-Practice/Self-Reflection. *Psychological Reports*. 126. 003329412210944. 10.1177/00332941221094482.

CONCLUSION

Mediation is often celebrated as a humane and participatory process that transforms conflict into dialogue and resolution. Yet, this study reveals that behind every successful mediation lies an emotionally engaged mediator whose well-being remains largely unaddressed within institutional frameworks. This study brings to the surface an often-overlooked reality of mediation practice: while mediation is designed to reduce conflict for disputing parties, it frequently transfers emotional strain onto the mediator. The findings make it clear that emotional labour is not incidental to mediation; it is central to it. Mediators are expected to absorb, regulate, and transform intense emotions into constructive dialogue while remaining neutral and composed. Yet, this emotional responsibility remains largely invisible within institutional frameworks, training structures, and professional discourse.

Mediators demonstrate high self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and commitment to ethical practice, but these strengths are exercised largely in isolation. The normalisation of emotional endurance has led to a culture where fatigue is silently managed and rarely acknowledged. This silence is not due to denial or resistance among mediators. On the contrary, the data shows a strong willingness to engage with mental well-being support, peer reflection, and structured interventions. What is missing is not awareness, but institutional response.

Training programmes continue to prioritise procedure, technique, and outcomes, while leaving mediators unprepared for the emotional realities of sustained conflict engagement. As a result, mediators often learn to manage emotional strain through experience, mistakes, and personal coping strategies. This approach may produce competent facilitators, but it does not ensure long-term professional sustainability. A system that prepares mediators to conduct sessions but not to recover from them risks burnout, disengagement, and attrition, particularly among experienced practitioners.

The findings also highlight that sustainability cannot be achieved through policy declarations alone. True change requires active participation from both institutions and mediators themselves. Institutions must move beyond certification-focused models and recognise mediator well-being as a professional responsibility. At the same time, mediators must challenge the culture of silent endurance by embracing collective support and advocating for shared care as a professional norm. Sustainability emerges not from individual sacrifice, but from shared accountability.

The future of mediation depends on whether the profession is willing to care for those who carry its emotional weight. A system that values resolution must also value the resolvers. Only by integrating mental well-being into training, institutional culture, and professional practice can mediation remain humane, ethical, and sustainable in the long term. True progress in mediation cannot be measured solely by settlement rates or case disposal figures. It must also be reflected in the well-being of those who facilitate justice through dialogue. Supporting mediators is not an optional enhancement but a professional and ethical necessity. By recognising emotional labour, integrating mental well-being into training, and fostering supportive professional environments, mediation can evolve into a truly sustainable system, one that resolves disputes without exhausting the very individuals who make resolution possible.

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