

# Mental Health and Happiness of University Employees in West Bengal: An Inquiry

A synopsis of PhD thesis

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## Chapter outline

Chapter 1:	Context of the Study
Chapter 2:	Problem of the Study
Chapter 3:	Method and Procedures
Chapter 4:	Result and Interpretation
Chapter 5:	Discussion

This chapter introduced the concept of mental health and happiness, their interrelations, importance of the phenomena in present-day context as well as significance of the present study.

### **Introduction**

In recent few years, mental health and happiness in workplace is being highlighted as an integral part of any organization around the globe because mental health and happiness both are materially necessary for the development of an individual as well as being recognized as an important criterion for community and national development. Research showed that the importance of mental health and happiness is immense in any workplace including higher education institutions across the globe including India as these are the key factors for productivity at workplace (Bubonya et al., 2017; Thompson & Bruk-Lee, 2021), and therefore many countries have identified gross domestic happiness among citizens as of primary importance rather than gross domestic product (Balasubramanian & Cashin, 2019). In workplace, employees' mental wellness, happiness and job satisfaction reduces the likelihood of quitting job (Pelly, 2023), increase cooperation among the employees (Kun & Gadanez, 2022) as well as contributes in the development of the organization (Kundi et al., 2020).

Mental health does not indicate only the absence of mental illness, rather it is a state of wellbeing and a feeling of completeness in its own. On the other hand, happiness has always been a valuable goal in life and an individual spends the entire life striving for it (Mauss et al., 2011). But its perception and recognition differs (Milovanska-Farrington & Farrington, 2022) from people to people. Most of the people would agree that mental health is a critical component in achieving happiness through a state of wellbeing & feeling good about self. From the World Health Organization's definition "state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (World Health Organization, 2004) it is perceived that mental health is a necessary condition for building healthy social relationship which is instrumental in all domains of our life including workplace. Therefore, taking proactive steps into improving worker wellbeing and prevent mental health issues are crucial things to be considered with utmost importance. But,

many other countries than India as a whole, and particularly in workplace, mental health is frequently ignored and neglected. than the physical health although both are inextricably linked.

### **Importance of Mental Health and Happiness**

Maintaining a healthy balance between work, personal life, and recreational activities is critical for mental health. Overworking or ignoring one's personal well-being can have a bad impact on one's mental health. A positive attitude and the capacity to focus on strengths and opportunities rather than flaws or dangers can help with mental health capacity to openly and honestly discuss thoughts and feelings is also critical for maintaining healthy relationships and regulating emotions. As a result, it is possible to say that mental health exists on a continuum. Mental health, like physical health, can range from great to bad.

The importance of mental health in the workplace cannot be overstated, and it has profound implications for both employees and organizations. Employees dedicate a significant portion of their lives to their work, making a supportive and mentally healthy work environment crucial for their overall well-being. When organizations address employees' mental health needs, it enhances their sense of value and job satisfaction.

Recently, there has been a significant increase in the visibility of accolades such as healthy workplace awards, employee choice awards, and recognition as 'top workplaces' in the media. Both small businesses and large corporations are acknowledged for their excellence in providing tangible perks and psychological support to employees, enhancing business productivity, and demonstrating a commitment to social responsibility.

### **Rationale of the study**

Being inquisitive about two major components of productivity and work-life balance, the researcher found pertinence in conducting a study on mental health and happiness of employees at workplace in the domain of higher education institutions (HEI). Further, the researcher has chosen to study on West Bengal as it is the state of domicile of the researcher where he has observed several instances of employees burnout, strikes, and other agitations between the administration and employee's unions. Literature studies have also led to the fact that, though was a few studies on mental health and happiness of teachers and students at higher education institutions in West Bengal, but no studies were conducted on the non-teaching employees of higher education institutions who forms a major stakeholder of any HEI which reinstates a knowledge gap in the domain of the present area of research.

This chapter describes the literature review, knowledge gap, major research questions, objectives, delimitations and hypotheses which have led the researcher to select and move forward with the problem of this research.

The researcher had chosen a total of 100 database entries combined from EBSCOhost, ERIC, ProQuest and Crossref in the last thirty years, mostly empirical, for selecting relevant research studies out of which he reviewed 30 relevant empirical studies on workplace wellbeing and mental health to identify the knowledge gap for the present study.

### **Research Questions**

- a. How much happy the employees are in public state universities of West Bengal?
- b. How healthy the employees are when their mental health is concerned?
- c. How do demographic and workplace related factors cause variation in employee's' happiness and mental health?
- d. Is happiness and mental health of employee's related to each other?

### **Delimitations of the study**

- a. The study was conducted only with employees of six public state universities in West Bengal namely, Jadavpur University, Presidency University, Rabindra Bharati University, University of Calcutta, University of North Bengal and Vidyasagar University.
- b. Only non-teaching employees of these universities were studied.
- c. No personal details were collected from the employees except their gender and age.
- d. A few information regarding the employment and academic qualification were obtained from the participants.
- e. Happiness and mental health were only measured in terms of self-reported questionnaire.

## **Objectives of the study**

- a) To quantitatively assess mental health of the non-teaching employees at public state universities in West Bengal.
- b) To quantitatively measure happiness of the non-teaching employees at public state universities in West Bengal.
- c) To check if mental health and happiness of the participating employees varies in terms of their demographic characteristics and employment profiles.
- d) To find out if there is any relationship between employee's mental health and happiness.
- e) To recommend ways for betterment of mental health and happiness of employees at public state universities in West Bengal.

## **Hypotheses**

- H<sub>0</sub>1:** Mental health of the employees are significantly correlated with their age.
- H<sub>0</sub>2:** Mental health of the employees do not significantly vary by their gender.
- H<sub>0</sub>3:** Mental health of the employees do not significantly vary by their by their employment designation.
- H<sub>0</sub>4:** Mental health of the employees do not significantly vary by their by their level of employment designation.
- H<sub>0</sub>5:** Mental health of the employees do not significantly vary by their by their nature of employment.
- H<sub>0</sub>6:** Mental health of the employees do not significantly vary by their by their educational qualification.
- H<sub>0</sub>7:** Mental health of the employees do not significantly vary by their by their years of work experience.
- H<sub>0</sub>8:** Employee's happiness and mental health is not correlated to each other.
- H<sub>0</sub>9:** Happiness of the employees are not significantly different from the general adult population (Global Happiness Score = 4.3).

- H<sub>0</sub>10:** Happiness of the employees are significantly correlated with their age.
- H<sub>0</sub>11:** Happiness of the employees do not significantly vary by their gender.
- H<sub>0</sub>12:** Happiness of the employees do not significantly vary by their by their employment designation.
- H<sub>0</sub>13:** Happiness of the employees do not significantly vary by their by their level of employment designation.
- H<sub>0</sub>14:** Happiness of the employees do not significantly vary by their by their nature of employment.
- H<sub>0</sub>15:** Happiness of the employees do not significantly vary by their by their educational qualification.
- H<sub>0</sub>16:** Happiness of the employees do not significantly vary by their by their years of work experience.

This chapter describes the method and procedures followed in the study. The researcher has adopted various techniques to structure the work by complying with different theoretical assumptions in educational research.

### **Methods, Population and Sample**

The population proposed for the present research consisted of all the non-teaching employees of the 35 state universities (state public university) which is little more or less 3,500 in number. The population estimation was adjusted based on AISHE 2020-21 data where there is mention of 34,892 non-teaching employees working at all higher education institutions comprised of colleges and universities. Also, the average number of non-teaching employees was mentioned to be 22.2 in West Bengal having 1411 colleges of all categories. Therefore, an estimated 31,324 non-teaching employees are working in colleges and the rest 3,568 employees are working in the universities including 29 public state universities as per AISHE 2020-21 statistics. Therefore, the population size of the present study roughly 3,568 to 4,000. A total of 328 participants responded from six universities, out of which 4 are located in metropolitan areas (M) and 2 are located in urban areas (U) of West Bengal. All the six universities namely Jadavpur University (M), Presidency University (M), Rabindra Bharati University (M), University of Calcutta (M), University of North Bengal (U) and Vidyasagar University (U) which all are more than 40 (forty) years old and have been running in full academic strength. The campuses of the universities from where the non-teaching employee's data were collected, are located several districts i.e., Kolkata, South 24 Parganas, Darjeeling, Paschim Medinipur. Participation of the non-teaching employees in this study varied across universities with Jadavpur Universities being on top with 92 participants followed by the University of North Bengal (64), Rabindra Bharati University (59), Vidyasagar University (51), the University of Calcutta (44) and Presidency University (18).

The required sample size for 4,000 population size at 95% confidence level, 0.05 margin of error and 0.25 population variance is 351. Therefore, this study covered 93.4% of the required sample size from 6 out of 35 public state universities. The researcher followed the convenient sampling method to select samples from the population.



## **Variables**

The variables in this research was considered based on some theoretical assumptions of employees' mental health and happiness as well as influenced by recent researches conducted in these fields. Some classificatory indicators i.e., gender, age, highest educational qualification were considered as demographic variables and nature of employment, level of employment designation, years of work experience was considered as workplace related variables. All the demographic variables and workplace related variables mentioned earlier were considered as independent variables in this study as the researcher assumed these indicators may have effect in variation of the dependent variables i.e., mental health and happiness of the employees.

## **Instruments for data collection**

The researcher has primarily made use of two standardized scales for collection of relevant data. One is Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and the other is Mental Health Continuum (Short Form). Both the scales were administered with an information schedule seeking basic data on the participants which were later treated as independent variables

## **Procedure & Analyses**

The researcher opted for collecting the data entirely through paper-n-pencil mode across four districts of West Bengal. No personal information including name, email id or phone number were collected in the data collection forms to maintain anonymity of the participants' data. A statement of purpose was mentioned at the beginning of the forms, followed by a section for obtaining consent from the participants.

The researcher has personally approached the non-teaching employees of different universities for obtaining data. A total of 385 university employees were approached for this purpose out of which 342 responded. It was found in the data cleaning stage that, 14 participants did not complete the questionnaires and therefore excluded from the main data. Hence, the rest of the 328 participants' data was considered as final and constituted the sample of this study. A tabulation sheet was prepared in Microsoft Excel from the datasheets collected through paper-n-pencil mode. Further, the data was cleaned, and items renamed as per the criteria of variables. No addition or omission of data was made in both the tabulation sheets. Statistical analyses were done using IBM SPSS 20 software.

The results and interpretations of all analyses are presented in this chapter. The findings from the study are presented independently, then compared for clarity. Both descriptive and inferential data were addressed in each study. Parametric inferential statistics, such as the Student's t-test (for equal variance), the Welch's t-test (for unequal variance), one-way analysis of variance, etc., were performed using the mean and standard deviation first calculated for descriptive statistics.

Some highlights of the finds are as follows.

- a. The study included 328 non-teaching employees from six West Bengal public state universities. It was determined that the employees did not have a great deal of mental health or mental wellbeing ( $m=40.53$ ), and the average score on the measuring instrument was below 60 percent (max score=70). It indicates a lack of mental health among the personnel of the universities included in this study.
- b. The mental health status of male employees is superior to that of female employees. Overall mental health ( $m=41.80$ ,  $sd=14.579$ ); emotional wellbeing ( $m=10.928$ ,  $sd=3.28$ ); social wellbeing ( $m=13.08$ ,  $sd=6.47$ ); and psychological wellbeing ( $m=17.78$ ,  $sd=6.85$ ) among male employees. However, a test of statistical significance found that the mental health of university personnel does not differ significantly by gender.
- c. It was found that those non-teaching employees those who hold the job as a senior peon possess a good quantity of mental health or mental wellbeing ( $m=54.00$ ,  $sd=1.41$ ) in the areas of Overall Mental Health, ( $m=2.00$ ,  $sd=1.41$ ), Social Wellbeing and ( $m=22.00$ ,  $sd=2.83$ ), Psychological Wellbeing. Sorters, however, have the worst mental health (mean = 34.10, standard deviation = 5.77), the lowest Social Wellbeing (mean = 8.92, standard deviation = 2.54), and moderate Psychological Wellbeing (mean = 14.25, standard deviation = 5.19). In terms of Emotional Wellbeing, non-teaching employees who are sorters are found to have a greater degree of mental health or mental wellbeing (mean = 11.75, standard deviation = 1.89), whereas senior peons (mean = 10.00, standard deviation = .00) are found to have the worst mental health and wellbeing. However, a test of statistical significance revealed that the mental health of university personnel does not differ significantly by job title.

- d. In terms of Overall Mental Health, Group C personnel ( $m=41.68$ ,  $sd=14.82$ ) possess a greater degree of mental health or mental wellness than Group D ( $m=37.70$ ,  $sd=12.61$ ) and Group B ( $m=40.62$ ,  $sd=20.12$ ) employees. In terms of Emotional Wellbeing, Group D personnel ( $m=11.01$ ,  $sd=3.24$ ) have greater mental health or mental wellbeing than Group C ( $m=10.42$ ,  $sd=3.59$ ) and Group B ( $m=10.69$ ,  $sd=3.38$ ) employees. Group C employees ( $m=13.18$ ,  $sd=6.30$ ) possess a greater amount of mental health or mental wellbeing than Group D employees ( $m=11.33$ ,  $sd=5.63$ ) and Group B non-teaching employees ( $m=10.92$ ,  $sd=10.01$ ). In addition, it was discovered that the mental health of university personnel varies greatly with their employment status.
- e. Contractual non-teaching employees of six public state universities in West Bengal have better mental health or mental wellbeing based on the following sub dimensions: ( $m=49.99$ ,  $sd=17.97$ ; Overall Mental Health); ( $m=12.03$ ,  $sd=3.42$ ; Emotional Wellbeing); ( $m=16.31$ ,  $sd=7.84$ ; Social Wellbeing); and ( $m=21.65$ ,  $sd=7.78$ ; Psychological Wellbeing). In addition, the mental health of contractual staff at West Bengal's state universities as a whole is markedly more advantageous.
- f. It was discovered that non-teaching workers with a Post Graduate Diploma have superior mental health and mental wellness ( $m=60.29$ ,  $sd=14.59$ ; Overall Mental Health); ( $m=14.29$ ,  $sd=1.25$ ; Emotional Wellbeing); and ( $m=26.00$ ,  $sd=7.72$ ; Psychological Wellbeing). In addition, an inferential statistical test revealed that mental health changes considerably with the educational level of employees.
- g. Those non-teaching employees with less than five years of work experience have a high level of mental health or mental wellbeing, as measured by four dimensions of mental health: ( $m=49.73$ ,  $sd=19.12$ ; Overall Mental Health); ( $m=11.23$ ,  $sd=4.17$ ; Emotional Wellbeing); ( $m=16.68$ ,  $sd=8.00$ ; Social Wellbeing); and ( $m=21.83$ ,  $sd=8.03$ ; Psychological Wellbeing). Between 10 and 20 years experienced non-teaching employees from the aforementioned categories ( $m=35.10$ ,  $sd=4.17$ ; Overall Mental Health); ( $m=10.23$ ,  $sd=4.36$ ; Social Wellbeing) and ( $m=14.23$ ,  $sd=4.73$ ; Psychological Wellbeing) are less satisfied than employees with less than 5 years of experience, between 5 and 10 years of experience, and more than 20 years of experience. It was also discovered that newly hired personnel at public state universities in West Bengal have much better mental health.

- h. As per the measures of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, employees at public state universities are considerably less happy than the typical adult population worldwide.
- i. The happiness of university personnel likewise increases dramatically with age.
- j. The survey included 328 non-teaching workers from six West Bengal public state universities. The happiness scores of female employees ( $m=4.17$ ,  $sd=0.35$ ) were found to be higher than those of male employees ( $m=4.07$ ,  $sd=0.35$ ). In addition, it was discovered that female university staff in West Bengal are substantially happier than their male counterparts.
- k. Those non-teaching employees who hold the rank of Senior Peon ( $m=4.95$ ,  $sd=0.12$ ) are the happiest ( $m=4.95$ ,  $sd=0.12$ ) when compared to all the other employees listed above. It was also determined that the least satisfied non-teaching staff are those who occupy the post of Senior Assistant ( $m=4.02$ ,  $sd=0.46$ ). In addition, a statistical inference test revealed that employees' contentment varies with their job titles.
- l. Group C ( $m = 4.10$ ,  $sd = 0.36$ ) non-teaching employees are the happiest of the three subcategories, but the happiness of employees does not vary considerably with their employment level seniority.
- m. The results indicate that permanent non-teaching staffs at six public state institutions in West Bengal are significantly more happy than contractual non-teaching personnel ( $m=4.15$ ,  $sd=0.36$ ) in West Bengal's public state universities.
- n. Those non-teaching employees of six public universities in West Bengal with a Post-Graduate degree ( $m=4.31$ ,  $sd=0.60$ ) were found to be the happiest, while those with a Post-Graduate diploma ( $m=3.69$ ,  $sd=0.27$ ) were found to be the least happy. In addition, a test of statistical significance found that employees with greater levels of education are happier in West Bengal's public state universities.
- o. Those with job experience between 5 and 10 years are the happiest non-teaching employees ( $m=4.17$ ,  $sd=0.38$ ), followed by those with work experience between 10 and 20 years ( $m=4.12$ ,  $sd=0.30$ ) and more than 20 years ( $m=4.11$ ,  $sd=0.38$ ). It was also discovered that a university employee with intermediate experience (between 5 and 10 years) is much happier than newly hired employees and those with relatively more experience.

This chapter summarizes the significant findings on mental health and happiness of university employees based on different work-related variables. Detail discussion of the results is presented in this chapter followed by limitations and recommendations.

### **Discussion**

There are a handful of research work have already been done related to this research work but a scarcity was identified by the present researcher in the field of higher education especially among the employees of universities run by state government in West Bengal. As this state has seen in recent few years, an unprecedented challenge in job market, employment opportunities, employees agitation and strikes, the present research focused on only two of the many integral reasons behind employees dissatisfaction at workplaces. Considering the experience of the researcher while interacting with the employees of universities apart from collection of required data, it can be said that both are crucial in maintaining a healthy organizational structure and productivity in any organization including higher education institutions.

### **Limitations of the study**

- a. The study could only address the employees of universities in West Bengal, therefore a significant number of non-teaching employees under colleges were left unattended.
- b. The study could not cover all the 35 public state universities in West Bengal. The newly established universities in West Bengal could not be studied due to unavailability of proper staffing pattern.
- c. All the non-teaching employees of six public state universities could not be approached due to unavailability on the days data collection. Even, not all the employees agreed to give response to the research questionnaires and the researcher could not help it.
- d. The study could not approach the officers of the universities except one or two at Jadavpur University.
- e. Mental health and employees of the universities were measured in general terms, workplace mental health was not measured in this study.

- f. More type of scales on mental health and happiness could have been used to triangulate the responses of the employees.
- g. The instruments for measuring mental health and happiness was self-reported only, therefore, observation of the said phenomena could not be done.
- h. Interviews with the employees could have fetched more accurate data and better understanding about their mental health and happiness which the researcher was unable to make it.

### **Recommendations**

Addressing the lack of mental health among university personnel requires a multi-faceted approach. Universities should prioritize mental health awareness, provide access to counselling services, create supportive and inclusive environments, and work to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health. Additionally, individuals should be encouraged to seek help when needed and to prioritize self-care and stress management strategies.

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