

A Case Study on Mental Health and Happiness of University Employees in West Bengal: Implications for Workplace Well-Being and Institutional Management

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Abstract: This paper presents a case study of mental health and happiness among non-teaching employees of public universities in West Bengal. Drawing on empirical research and the accompanying data set ($N = 328$), the study employs the Mental Health Continuum—Short Form (MHC-SF) and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) to describe levels of well-being, test group differences, and examine the association between happiness and mental health. Descriptive statistics and inferential tests (independent-samples t tests, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation) were run on the full sample. Findings show: (a) average OHQ scores correspond to a per-item mean of 4.11 (on a 1–6 scale), while MHC-SF scores correspond to 2.90 per item (0–5 scale); (b) women report significantly higher happiness than men; men report higher (but not significantly higher) mental health; (c) employment nature, education, work experience, and age groups exhibit statistically significant differences; and (d) happiness and mental health are weakly, negatively correlated ($r = -.13$, $p = .023$). The paper discusses institutional explanations and outlines management-oriented interventions for Indian universities. The data set is provided as supplementary material to ensure transparency.

Keywords: Mental health; Happiness; University employees; Workplace well-being; West Bengal; Case study.

I. Introduction

Universities are not only centres of learning and research but also complex organisations that depend on the coordinated efforts of multiple groups of people. Their performance cannot be measured solely by publications, infrastructure, or accreditation scores; it also depends on the well-being of those who sustain the institution daily. In the Indian context, public universities have historically borne the responsibility of widening access to higher education while simultaneously grappling with funding limitations, staffing shortages, and institutional inertia. Within this environment, non-teaching employees play an indispensable role. Serving in administrative, clerical, technical, and maintenance positions, they provide the silent yet crucial backbone of university operations. Despite this significance, their experiences rarely receive scholarly attention, particularly with respect to mental health and happiness.

The organisational structures of Indian public universities are often rigid, with authority concentrated at the top. While such hierarchies may maintain procedural order, they frequently silence the agency and perspectives of non-teaching staff. Bureaucratic delays, uncertainties around service rules, limited opportunities for promotion, and the daily stress of balancing personal and professional obligations all affect their psychosocial well-being. Research has increasingly demonstrated that these issues are not merely private matters but collective concerns that shape institutional climate, workplace productivity, and even the broader culture of universities (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994). When mental health needs are neglected, absenteeism, low morale, and inefficiencies surface; when employees feel psychologically secure, socially valued, and fairly treated, positive effects ripple outward through student services, administrative responsiveness, and the reputation of the university itself (Warr, 2007).

This study is therefore situated at the intersection of social and managerial concerns. It moves the debate on higher education away from a narrow emphasis on pedagogy or research output and places well-being at the heart of institutional functioning. By concentrating on non-teaching employees, the research addresses a segment of the workforce that is chronically understudied and yet vital for the sustainability of academic institutions. Their mental health and happiness cannot be dismissed as individual dispositions; rather, they are deeply tied to organisational culture, institutional practices, and the socio-economic environment in which public universities operate (Karasek & Theorell, 1990).

The conceptual orientation of this work rests on two interrelated dimensions: mental health and happiness. Mental health is understood here not as the absence of illness but as a positive state of emotional, psychological, and social functioning. The World Health Organization (2014) defines mental health as a condition in which individuals can cope with daily stresses, work productively, maintain meaningful relationships, and contribute to their communities. Such a holistic framework is particularly apt for non-teaching staff, who frequently undertake repetitive yet socially indispensable tasks under scrutiny and pressure. Happiness is treated as subjective well-being, encompassing both hedonic aspects—pleasure and satisfaction—and eudaimonic aspects—meaning, purpose, and personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Psychological research increasingly suggests that true well-being arises when these two facets coexist, allowing individuals to experience both momentary contentment and long-term fulfilment (Diener, Oishi, & Tay, 2018). For non-teaching employees, whose labour is often overlooked in academic narratives, happiness is shaped not only by wages and job security but also by recognition, collegiality, fairness, and the belief that their work contributes meaningfully to the institutional mission.

This conceptual lens also resonates with organisational and management studies, which show that employee well-being is strongly linked to leadership styles and organisational climate. Institutions that cultivate inclusion, fairness, and transparency report higher job satisfaction, while rigid systems generate stress and alienation (Guest, 2017). By centring mental health and happiness in its analysis, this research bridges psychology and management, demonstrating how well-being is both a human concern and a managerial imperative.

The distinctive contribution of the study lies in consolidating doctoral findings on mental health and happiness among non-teaching university staff and reframing them as a management-relevant case study. The analysis is based on a master dataset, presented with transparent statistical methods to ensure replicability and credibility. Such transparency is increasingly demanded in contemporary academic publishing and enhances the practical relevance of the findings (Open Science Collaboration, 2015). Equally significant is the deliberate focus on non-teaching employees, who remain marginal in higher-education research. By centring their experiences, the study positions them as legitimate stakeholders in conversations about policy reform and institutional governance.

The scope of the case study is twofold. First, it identifies and analyses the psychosocial realities of non-teaching employees, capturing how workplace stressors, coping strategies, and institutional practices shape measurable indicators of mental health and happiness. Second, it examines the implications for administrative practice, human resource policy, and service rules in Indian state universities. The findings encourage policymakers and administrators to frame reforms not only in terms of finance or regulatory compliance but also in terms of nurturing institutional climates that enable all categories of staff to thrive.

By situating itself within an applied and cross-disciplinary framework, the study demonstrates how insights from statistics, psychology, and organisational management can be mobilised to address a pressing social concern. It underscores that universities, as knowledge institutions, cannot achieve sustainability or excellence unless they embrace the mental health and happiness of every group that constitutes their community.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The present study draws upon several well-established constructs in psychology to frame its inquiry into the well-being of university employees. Mental health, as measured through the Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (MHC-SF), is understood not merely as the absence of psychological disorder but as the presence of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. This perspective, advanced by Keyes, moves away from deficit models of illness and instead highlights positive functioning. It stresses that individuals are mentally healthy when they experience emotional balance, maintain supportive social ties, and engage meaningfully with their environment. Such an approach is particularly suitable for institutional contexts, where the daily interactions of staff members, their capacity to handle stress, and their ability to find purpose in their work directly influence overall organisational performance.

Happiness, as conceptualised in this research, is measured through the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), a widely used scale that captures global subjective well-being. Drawing on the work of Hills and Argyle, happiness is treated as an integrative construct that encompasses both affective states and cognitive evaluations of life satisfaction. It allows for an assessment of how individuals perceive their own quality of life, the extent to which they feel positive emotions, and the degree to which they are satisfied with personal and professional circumstances. Unlike narrower measures of mood or pleasure, the OHQ provides a comprehensive lens through which to consider an employee's general sense of contentment.

In addition to these measures, the study incorporates the construct of flourishing, which brings together multiple dimensions of human functioning. The flourishing framework here is informed by Seligman's PERMA model—emphasising positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment—as well as Ryff's model of psychological well-being, which highlights autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Together, these theoretical perspectives extend the inquiry beyond surface-level satisfaction to capture deeper aspects of living a meaningful and purposeful life. Flourishing thus integrates the affective, cognitive, and functional elements of well-being, presenting a fuller picture of what it means to thrive in both personal and professional domains.

By drawing from these overlapping frameworks, the study underscores that well-being should not be reduced to the absence of illness or distress. Rather, it is better understood as a dynamic balance of “feeling good and functioning well.” This principle resonates strongly with contemporary organisational psychology, which recognises that positive emotions, meaningful work, and constructive social ties are crucial for sustaining both individual and institutional health. Universities, as knowledge-driven organisations, cannot afford to ignore these dimensions, since the morale and functioning of their employees directly impact efficiency and culture.

The relationship between mental health and happiness has often been assumed to be straightforwardly positive, with numerous studies reporting strong correlations between the two constructs. In many contexts, higher levels of happiness tend to accompany better mental health, and vice versa. Yet the findings of the present research complicate this assumption. Among university employees in West Bengal, the data revealed a weak negative correlation between mental health and happiness. This result is counterintuitive but not without precedent; scattered evidence in global literature points to similar anomalies. Such findings invite careful contextual interpretation rather than dismissal.

One possible explanation lies in the structural and cultural environment of Indian state universities. Job roles are frequently characterised by ambiguity, with overlapping responsibilities and unclear lines of accountability. Employees may develop coping strategies that allow them to maintain surface-level happiness—such as deriving satisfaction from family life, community ties, or small personal accomplishments—while simultaneously struggling with deeper psychological stressors linked to work. Similarly, socio-economic pressures, including stagnating salaries, limited promotion opportunities, and insecurity regarding service conditions, may contribute to chronic stress that undermines psychological well-being even when employees report being “happy” in day-to-day terms. Another factor may be the disconnect between hedonic and eudaimonic elements of well-being: individuals may experience temporary contentment without achieving the sense of purpose and growth that underpins mental health.

The counterintuitive negative association observed here thus does not disprove the broader literature but enriches it by demonstrating that the relationship between happiness and mental health is shaped by context. Organisational structures, cultural norms, and economic conditions mediate how individuals balance emotional states and psychological functioning. For administrators and policymakers, these findings are significant: they suggest that interventions aimed solely at improving happiness scores may fail to address underlying mental health concerns, and vice versa. What is required is a more integrated approach that fosters both contentment and resilience, ensuring that employees are not only “feeling good” but also “functioning well.”

II. Literature Review

The relationship between employee well-being and organisational performance has been extensively studied across disciplines such as psychology, management, and education. A substantial body of global research demonstrates that employees’ mental health and happiness are critical determinants of workplace productivity, commitment, and retention (Diener, 2000; Keyes, 2002; Van De Voorde *et al.*, 2012). Organisations where employees report higher levels of well-being tend to experience lower turnover, stronger engagement, and more collaborative cultures. Conversely, poor mental health or reduced subjective well-being often manifests in absenteeism, presenteeism, and diminished work quality (Harter *et al.*, 2002; Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). In higher education, these dynamics are particularly salient because institutions rely heavily on human capital, where both teaching and non-teaching staff provide the intellectual and administrative scaffolding essential to organisational success (Winefield *et al.*, 2003).

Scholars emphasise that well-being at work cannot be reduced solely to the absence of stress or illness. Instead, it must be understood holistically, encompassing psychological resilience, positive affect, life satisfaction, and a sense of meaning in one’s professional role (Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). Research in occupational psychology highlights that structural variables such as workload, autonomy, role clarity, and supervisor support significantly influence employee well-being (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Within universities, these factors interact with sector-specific challenges such as compliance pressures, bureaucratic procedures, and increasing expectations to deliver high-quality services with limited resources (Kinman & Jones, 2008). Studies from Europe and North America have consistently shown that administrative staff in universities often report higher stress levels due to these competing demands, which, in turn, influence both mental health outcomes and happiness ratings (Winefield *et al.*, 2008).

A second theme in the literature is the role of institutional and social support. Reviews of workplace well-being interventions demonstrate that organisations fostering supportive cultures—through counselling services, employee assistance programs, and collegial work climates—tend to buffer employees against the negative effects of stress (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994). Psychological resources such as optimism, self-efficacy, and social connectedness have also been identified as protective factors that enhance happiness and sustain mental health (Fredrickson, 2001; Luthans *et al.*, 2007). For example, employees who perceive themselves as valued members of a supportive organisation are more likely to report higher job satisfaction and greater life satisfaction, even in high-demand work environments (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

The higher education sector is unique because it involves a dual hierarchy of teaching and non-teaching staff, each with distinct roles and challenges. Teaching staff often receive attention in well-being research due to their academic pressures, performance evaluations, and research outputs (Kinman & Wray, 2013). Non-teaching staff, however, frequently remain underexamined, despite their crucial contributions to institutional stability. These employees manage student services, administrative processes, and logistical functions without which universities cannot operate effectively. Emerging studies highlight that this group often experiences limited recognition, fewer career development opportunities, and restricted decision-making authority, factors that can affect both happiness and mental health (Gillespie *et al.*, 2001).

In the Indian context, research on employee well-being in higher education has grown in recent years, but it remains uneven. Most studies focus on faculty members, examining issues of workload, job satisfaction, and burnout (Padmanabhan & Kumar, 2017). Very few have systematically investigated non-teaching employees, particularly within public universities where job security, resource allocation, and bureaucratic structures differ markedly from private institutions. This gap is significant given the socio-cultural context of India, where factors such as gender, caste, and economic precarity can shape experiences of work in distinctive ways (Chaudhury & Banerjee, 2019). Moreover, regional analyses are rare, with much of the available scholarship drawing on metropolitan or pan-Indian samples.

The present study responds to this gap by centring non-teaching employees of state universities in West Bengal. It acknowledges international insights regarding the links between mental health, happiness, and organisational outcomes, while situating these

within the specific institutional and cultural realities of Indian higher education. By doing so, it adds empirical depth to a relatively neglected field and underscores the need for region-sensitive policies and interventions.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present investigation was guided by a set of research questions designed to explore the well-being of non-teaching employees in state universities of West Bengal. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the overall levels of **mental health** and **happiness** among the target population.
2. Examine whether these levels varied significantly across **demographic** (e.g., gender, age, education) and **occupational** (e.g., designation, nature of employment, years of experience) categories.
3. Assess the degree and direction of the **correlation** between happiness and mental health.
4. Identify whether distinct groups of employees demonstrated significant differences in either construct.

To ensure methodological rigour, the study formulated explicit **null hypotheses**. These hypothesised that there would be *no significant differences* in happiness and mental health scores across demographic or occupational groups (including gender, designation, level, nature of employment, educational attainment, and work experience). In addition, it was hypothesised that there would be *no significant correlation* between happiness and mental health. These null hypotheses provided a conservative basis for testing patterns of association and variation in the data.

III. Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional, descriptive–analytical survey based entirely on primary data collected from non-teaching employees in state universities of West Bengal. The target population comprised administrative/support staff across multiple state universities. A sample of 328 respondents ($N = 328$) was obtained using institutional permissions and on-site distribution of questionnaires, with the intention of capturing broad representation by gender, age band, level/designation, nature of employment, educational qualification, years of experience, and district. Participation was voluntary.

Measures: Well-being was assessed with two validated self-report scales: (i) the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ; 29 items; 1–6 Likert) for subjective happiness, and (ii) the Mental Health Continuum—Short Form (MHC-SF; 14 items; 0–5 frequency) for emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Standard scoring conventions were followed: total scores were computed for both instruments, and per-item means were used for interpretive clarity. Demographic/occupational information (gender, age, educational qualification, level/designation, nature of employment, years of experience) was captured via a structured proforma.

Data collection and ethics: Questionnaires were administered in person (paper) and electronically, after institutional permissions. Informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were ensured; respondents could decline any item without penalty. Only de-identified data were analysed.

Data preparation: Records were screened for completeness and basic range checks. Total OHQ and MHC-SF scores were computed from item responses; derived groupings (e.g., age bands: ≤ 30 , 31–40, 41–50, 51+) followed the analysis plan. For each statistical test, complete-case data were used (listwise exclusion).

Statistical analysis: Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, quartiles, minimum–maximum) summarised distributions for OHQ and MHC-SF. Pearson’s correlation (two-tailed) tested the association between happiness and mental health. Independent-samples *t*-tests examined binary contrasts (e.g., gender, nature of employment), applying Welch’s correction where homogeneity was not met. One-way ANOVA assessed multi-category factors (e.g., education, experience, age band, level/designation) were planned. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed); effect sizes were reported where relevant to aid practical interpretation. Distributional shape and group differences were visualised through histograms, boxplots, bar charts (group means with variability), and scatterplots with fitted line for the OHQ–MHC-SF association. The analyses were performed using standard statistical software, namely R and SPSS; figures were prepared programmatically for reproducibility.

Scope statement: No secondary data were used; all findings derive solely from primary survey responses of non-teaching university employees in West Bengal. The data set is also provided as supplementary material.

IV. Results

The analysis of 328 non-teaching employees across state universities in West Bengal revealed several important trends. Overall, employees reported **moderately high happiness** (OHQ $M = 119.3$; per-item mean = 4.11) but **lower mental health functioning** (MHC-SF $M = 40.5$; per-item mean = 2.90). The distributions of both measures were approximately normal with moderate variation, as shown in Figure 6.1.

A weak but statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -.125$, $p < .05$) was observed between happiness and mental health. In terms of effect size, this coefficient corresponds to a shared variance of only 1.6% ($r^2 = .016$), which falls well below conventional thresholds for small effects (Cohen, 1988). This indicates that although the relationship is statistically reliable, it is practically negligible. In substantive terms, higher mental health functioning does not necessarily correspond with higher self-reported

happiness. Such a paradoxical finding highlights the contextual complexity of well-being in Indian university settings, where structural constraints, role stress, and social expectations may shape these two constructs differently rather than aligning them.

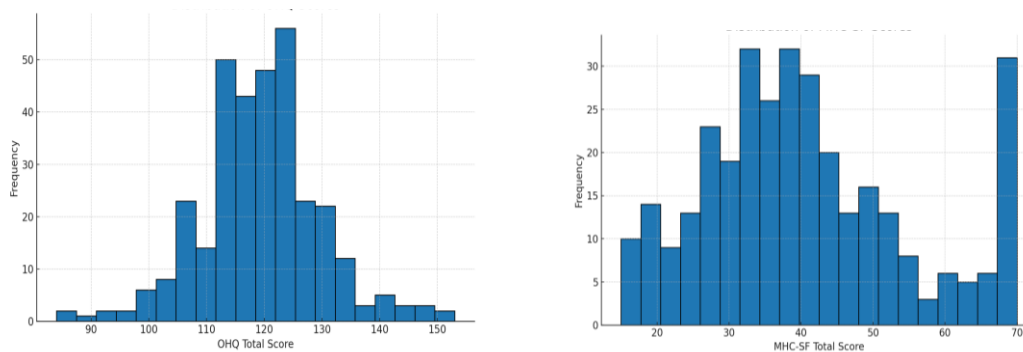


Figure 1. Histograms showing the distributions of OHQ total scores (left) and MHC-SF total scores (right) among non-teaching employees ($N = 328$).

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Gender analysis showed that women reported significantly higher happiness than men ($t = -2.38$, $p = .018$), while men reported somewhat higher mental health scores ($t = 1.76$, $p = .079$), although this latter difference was not statistically significant.

Employment status revealed sharp contrasts. Substantive employees were happier ($F = 6.30$, $p = .003$), whereas contractual employees reported higher mental health ($F = 15.63$, $p < .001$). These differences were statistically significant for both measures, suggesting divergent adaptive mechanisms at play in secure versus precarious employment contexts.

Educational qualification also mattered. Postgraduates were the happiest group, while diploma holders reported the lowest happiness but the highest mental health. ANOVA tests confirmed significant variation across groups for both happiness ($F = 7.59$, $p < .001$) and mental health ($F = 24.85$, $p < .001$). Interestingly, employees with only basic schooling also showed relatively strong mental health compared to graduates.

Work experience produced a mid-career peak in happiness, with employees having 5–10 years of service scoring the highest ($F = 4.18$, $p = .003$). In contrast, mental health declined steadily with increasing tenure ($F = 15.63$, $p < .001$), with new entrants scoring highest on mental health but lowest on happiness.

Age followed a similar pattern: happiness increased gradually across age bands ($F = 3.34$, $p = .020$), peaking in the 41–50 group, while mental health declined significantly with age ($F = 12.73$, $p < .001$). The youngest group (≤ 30) reported the strongest mental health scores despite relatively lower happiness.

By contrast, designation level (Group B, C, D) showed only minor differences, with neither happiness ($p = .353$) nor mental health ($p = .089$) varying significantly.

In sum, the results highlight a nuanced picture: gender, employment type, education, age, and work experience all shape distinct dimensions of well-being, whereas designation itself appears relatively unimportant. Taken together, the evidence suggests that happiness and mental health, while interrelated, are influenced by different structural and personal factors within the higher education work environment.

V. Conclusion

This case study reinforces the complex dynamics between happiness and mental health among non-teaching employees in state universities of West Bengal. The analysis revealed a weak but significant negative correlation, demonstrating that the two constructs, while theoretically linked, may diverge in practice. Such divergence indicates that employee well-being cannot be adequately understood or managed through a singular lens, but requires a dual-dashboard approach that tracks both happiness and mental health simultaneously.

The findings also emphasise the importance of role-sensitive interventions. Contractual staff reported higher mental health scores but lower happiness, whereas substantive employees showed the opposite pattern. This asymmetry suggests that job security, recognition, and coping strategies interact in nuanced ways, requiring policies that are tailored to specific employment categories. Similarly, variations across gender, educational attainment, age, and work experience illustrate that well-being is structured by both personal and institutional factors, rather than being uniformly distributed.

The evidence points to a need for career-stage-aware programming, with early-career employees demonstrating stronger mental health but lower happiness, while mid-career staff reported the highest happiness yet declining mental health. Addressing these stage-specific challenges through counselling services, professional development, and supportive work environments could help balance these contrasting trajectories.

Overall, the study contributes to the growing discourse on workplace well-being in higher education by providing empirical evidence from a regional Indian context. Its key message is clear: to foster resilient and productive university workforces, policy makers and administrators must move beyond one-dimensional models of well-being and adopt integrated, context-sensitive frameworks that account for both happiness and mental health across diverse employee groups. The raw data underlying this analysis is available upon reasonable request, and interested readers may contact the author directly for access.

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