



## Psychological Well-Being and Life Satisfaction: A Mental Health Perspective among Defence Personnel

Anushree M<sup>1</sup>, Kaushik M<sup>2</sup>, Prashanth M P<sup>3</sup>, Mohsina Sultana<sup>4</sup> & Johnson W S<sup>5</sup>

1. Anushree M, student, Christ College Mysuru, India, Email: [anushree.m@cph.christmysuru.in](mailto:anushree.m@cph.christmysuru.in)
2. Kaushik M, student, Christ College Mysuru, India, Email: [kaushik.m@cph.christmysuru.in](mailto:kaushik.m@cph.christmysuru.in)
3. Prashanth M P, Student, Christ College Mysuru, India, Email: [prashant.mp@jpeng.christmysuru.in](mailto:prashant.mp@jpeng.christmysuru.in)
4. Mrs. Mohsina Sultana, Assistant professor, Department of psychology, Christ College Mysuru, India
5. Mr. Johnson W S, HOD & Assistant professor, Department of psychology, Christ College Mysuru, India

**Abstract:** *The present study examined the relationship between psychological well-being and life satisfaction among defense personnel. The sample consisted of male personnel in active service, primarily within the age range of 35–39 years, with service experience ranging approximately from 16 to 22 years. Participants were serving in the rank of Havildar and were either residing with their families or posted away from them. Data were collected through structured online forms using standardized measures: the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and a 42-item Psychological Well-Being Scale.*

*Preliminary response patterns indicate a predominance of “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” responses across most items measuring psychological well-being and life satisfaction, suggesting generally high levels of perceived well-being and satisfaction among participants. However, comparatively varied responses were observed among personnel residing without their families, including occasional neutral and disagree responses on selected well-being indicators. This variation highlights the possible influence of living arrangements and service-related separation on subjective well-being.*

*Overall, the findings suggest a positive association between psychological well-being and life satisfaction among defense personnel. Higher levels of psychological well-being appear to correspond with greater life satisfaction. The study underscores the importance of psychological resilience, emotional stability, and supportive environments in maintaining life satisfaction within military contexts. These findings may have implications for mental health interventions and welfare policies aimed at enhancing well-being among defense personnel.*

**Keywords:** *Life Satisfaction, Psychological Well-Being, Defense Personnel.*

**Introduction:** Psychological well-being (PWB) is a holistic, multidimensional construct encompassing both feeling good and functioning effectively in life. It goes beyond the absence of mental illness to include positive relationships, personal growth, purpose, and self-acceptance. Psychological well-being (PWB), according to Ryff (1989), is Related to emotions and satisfaction in life. It can be explained on the basis of the difference between “emotions” (positive and negative) and “life satisfaction” (Andrews, 1974; Bryant &

Veroff, 1982; Stock et al., 1986). It is not about constant happiness but the capacity to manage emotions and thrive. Carol Ryff said psychological well-being includes six important dimensions: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relationships, environmental mastery, and autonomy. These dimensions help individuals function effectively and live meaningful lives. In the Indian Armed Forces psychological well-being is considered crucial because mentally strong personnel perform better in critical situations. Good psychological well-being helps defence personnel maintain focus, make quick decisions, and stay emotionally stable during operations.

Life satisfaction is an individual's overall cognitive evaluation of life, reflecting long term contentment across areas such as work, relationships, health, and personal growth. Defined life satisfaction as a cognitive, global evaluation of one's quality of life according to self-chosen criteria, emphasizing that it reflects a person's conscious judgment rather than momentary emotions (Diener, 1984). Expanding on this, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) conceptualized life satisfaction as a central component of subjective well-being and developed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) to measure it, explaining that individuals compare their life circumstances with personal standards to determine satisfaction levels. It is closely related to psychological well being and stress management. A study by J. Pradhan, Vijendra Nath Pathak, Dolly Bansal, and Anu Chaudhary (2020) found that occupational stress is negatively correlated with psychological well-being and quality of life among Indian Army personnel, suggesting that higher stress reduces life satisfaction.

Among defence personnel, life satisfaction is influenced by unique challenges such as operational risk, uncertainty, strict discipline, and family separation. Paul T. Bartone (1998) reported that uncertainty and isolation significantly predict psychological distress in military settings. In India, personnel of the Indian Army, Indian Navy, and Indian Air Force experience life satisfaction shaped by occupational stress, rank, and organizational support, making it an important area for research and intervention

Smarika Dalal & sandeep Singh (2023), examined the Mediating Role of Psychological Flexibility between Optimism and Psychological Well-Being among Defense Personnel in India. Using Cross -sectional research design, the study collected data from 102 Defence Personnel aged 21 to 58 years through convenience sampling. Standardized self-report instruments were administered, including the life Orientation Test – revised (for optimism), the acceptance and action questionnaire (II) (for psychological flexibility) and Ryff's Psychological well-being scale. The findings revealed significant positive correlation between optimism and psychological well-being, optimism and psychological flexibility, and psychological flexibility and psychological well-being. Mediation analysis indicates that psychological flexibility significantly mediated the relationship between optimism and certain dimensions of psychological well-being, particularly personal growth, positive relation with others and self-acceptance. However, the meditating effect was not significant for autonomy, environmental mastery and purpose in life. An alternative model controlling for age and gender also supported the meditating findings. Occupational factors such as combat exposure deployment history, rank, years of service and family separation were not analyzed. These job – specific stressors may influence optimism and psychological well-being and should be examined in future studies.

J. Pradhan, Vijendra Nath Pathak, Dolly Bansal, and Anu Chaudhary (2020) investigated occupational stress, psychological well-being, and quality of life among Indian Army personnel, published in the Defence Life Science Journal. The study employed a cross-sectional design with a purposive sample of 150 male Army personnel across three occupational ranks (Officers, Junior Commissioned Officers, and Non-Commissioned Personnel). The Occupational Stress Index, Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale were administered. Results indicated that officers reported the highest levels of occupational stress, while Junior Commissioned Officers reported higher psychological well-being and quality of life. Occupational stress showed a significant negative correlation with psychological well-being and quality of life, whereas psychological well-being was positively correlated with quality of life. International research also supports these findings.

Paul T. Bartone (1998) examined psychological stress dimensions in peacekeeping operations and found that exposure to uncertainty, isolation and operational ambiguity significantly predicted psychological distress among military personnel. However, the study did not investigate life satisfaction or culturally specific variables relevant to Indian defence settings, also lack of integrated models combining psychological well-being and life satisfaction in the same study.

Ed Diener et al. (1985) Developed the satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) using adult self – report samples and established life satisfaction as a stable cognitive evaluation distinct from temporary emotions. The tool (Diener, 1984) became widely used in later research, including military studies. Ahmadi and Alireza (2007) examined air force personnel through survey methods and standardized stress scales, finding that higher occupational stress significantly reduced job satisfaction and psychological well-being. Chaturvedula and Joseph (2007) assessed Indian Military aircrew using standardized psychological tools and reported that better psychological well-being was associated with improved adjustment, operational performance, and emotional stability. Pawar and Rathod (2007) studied Indian naval personnel through structured questionnaires and found that high occupational stress was linked to psychological distress and lower life satisfaction, highlighting the need for mental health interventions. In the study by Pooja Varma and Ashok Kumar (2020), 93 pre-retirement armed forces personnel (JCOs and NCOs) from ASC center and college, Bangalore were selected through voluntary participation under an ex-post facto design. Data were collected using the mental health index and SWLS and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson’s correlation and linear regression. A significant positive correlation was found between mental health and life satisfaction, with mental health explaining 16% of variance. Participants showed relatively high psychological well-being and moderate to high life satisfaction at the pre-retirement stage.

## Materials and Methods

Rank		Years of service		Age		Residence	
Agniveer	53	0-10	72	20-30	74	With family	61
CHN	3	10-20	45	30-40	48	Without family	73
HAV	39	20-30	14	40-50	12		
Naik Subedar	13	30-40	2				
Sepoy	19	40-50	1				
Subedar	6						
Sub hony LT	1						

## Participants and Survey

Distribution of selected sample by age, rank, years of service and residence

The total sample of research participants were 134. They are categorized based on their age into three groups: 20-30 years, 30-40 years and 40-50 years. The 20-30 years group consisted of 74 individuals. The 30-40 years group consisted of 48 individuals. The 40-50 years group consisted of 12 individuals.

The participants were categorized based on Rank into 7 groups: Agniveer, Company Havaldar Major (CHM), Havaldar (HAV), Naik subedar, Sepoy, Subedar and Subedar Honorary Lieutenant. The Agniveer group consisted of 53 individuals. The CHM group consisted of 3 individuals. The Hav group consisted of 39 individuals. The Naik subedar group consisted of 13 individuals. The Sepoy group consisted of 19 individuals. The subedar group consisted of 6 individuals and The Sub Hony LT group consisted of 1 individual.

The participants were categorized based on Years of service into 5 groups: 0-10 years, 10-20 years, 20-30 years, 30-40 years and 40-50 years. The 0-10 years group consisted of 72 individuals. The 10-20 years group consisted of 45 individuals. The 20-30 years group consisted of 14 individuals. The 30-40 years group consisted of 2 individuals and the 40-50 years group consisted of 1 individual.

The participants were categorized based on Residence into 2 groups: with family and without family. The WITH FAMILY group consisted of 61 individuals and The WITHOUT FAMILY group consisted of 73 individuals.

The cross-sectional study was carried out involving 134 individuals from INDIAN DEFENCE FORCE and who are in service. To examine the life satisfaction scale, The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) was employed, While the Psychological well-being scale ((Ryff, 1989) was used to assess the participants psychological well-being being in different aspects. The participants consisted of 134 participants. All the participants were male.

**Measures and Interpretation :** The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) - developed by Ed Diener and colleagues, is a widely utilized instrument for evaluating life satisfaction. It is a brief questionnaire designed to assess an individual's conscious evaluation of their life as a whole.

The SWLS is developed to quantify the life satisfaction and is employed in research, especially among the age group of 12 and older, including defense personnel. The questionnaire consists of 5- items which examines person's global, cognitive, and judgmental evaluation of their own life satisfaction. It assesses overall well-being based on the individual's own criteria, rather than specific domains like health or finances.

The participants should choose one among the 7 options given. The scoring of each item is done on a 7-point Likert scale: 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for Slightly disagree, 4 for Neither agree nor disagree, 5 for slightly agree, 6 for agree and 7 for strongly agree. The possible range of scores is 5-35, with a score of 20 representing a neutral point on the scale. Scores between 5-9 indicate the respondent is extremely dissatisfied with life, whereas scores between 31-35 indicate the respondent is extremely satisfied.

The psychometric properties of SWLS have shown strong reliability and validity across multiple studies. The coefficient alpha for the scale has ranged from .79 to .89, indicating that the scale has high internal consistency. The scale was also found to have good test-retest correlation (.84, .80 over a month interval), confirming that the scale items effectively examine the life satisfaction among the individuals.

Sample items of the scale include "in most ways of my life is close to my ideal". "The conditions of my life are excellent". Participants respond based on their own experience with the life.

The SWLS has been widely used to assess individual's global cognitive judgements of their overall life satisfaction and to examine its relationship with variables such as mental health, stress, academic achievement and overall well-being.

Psychological Well-Being Scale, developed by Ryff (1989), was designed to assess multiple dimensions of positive psychological functioning. The scale conceptualizes well-being as multidimensional construct and measures six core components: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relation with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. respondent rated each statement on 7-point Likert scale: strongly agree, somewhat agree, slightly agree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly disagree, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree. It typically shows good reliability with coefficient alpha values ranging from .69 to .82, indicating strong internal consistency

Participants are instructed to read each statement carefully and indicate the extent of their agreement by placing a tick next to the appropriate option. The instructions are given to the subject to read questions carefully. How strongly does the subject agree or disagree with the statement? The subject has to record his response with tick mark. The subject should also be informed not to omit any of the item.

Scale involves summing the scores across six dimensions, typically using 1–7-point Likert scale, after reversing negatively phrased items. The negatively phrased items are 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 29, 31, 35, 36, 37, 38 and 40. Higher the total score indicates higher psychological well-being

**Data Analysis ;** The data collected from defense personnel using the psychological well-being scale developed by Carol D Ryff and the Satisfaction with Life Scale developed by Ed Diener were analyzed using various statistical methods. These included the computation of descriptive and frequency distribution table for both psychological well-being and life satisfaction scale. Additional analyses involved Pearson’s correlation to assess relationship between the variables.

## Results

### Case Summary

	CASE					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
<b>Gender and residence</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Cross Tabulation

	Residence			Total
		With family	Without family	
<b>Gender</b>	1	0	0	1
<b>Female</b>	0	1	0	1
<b>Malle</b>	0	60	71	131
<b>Total</b>	1	61	71	133

A cross tabulation analysis was conducted to describe the demographic characteristics of participants. The sample consisted of 132 males (99.2%) and 1 female (0.75%).

(Regarding residence, 45.86% were living with their family and 54.13% were living without their family)

## Correlations

### Pearson’s correlation

		PWB	LS
<b>Psychological Well-Being</b>	Pearson correlation	1	-0.232
	Sig(2- tailed)		0.007
	N	132	132
<b>Life Satisfaction</b>	Pearson correlation	-0.232	1
	Sig(2-tailed)	0.007	
	N	132	132

A Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Results indicated a significant negative correlation,  $r = -0.23$ ,  $p = 0.007$ , suggesting that higher life satisfaction was associated with lower psychological well-being.

### Correlation with domains

		PWB	LS	Autonomy	EM	PG	PR	PIL	SA
<b>PWB</b>	Pearson correlation	1	-0.232	-0.531	0.834	0.692	0.465	0.864	0.802
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.007	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
<b>LS</b>	Pearson correlation	-0.232	1	-0.033	-0.201	-0.278	0.176	-0.344	0.034
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.007		0.710	0.021	0.001	0.044	0.00	0.702
	N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
<b>Autonomy</b>	Pearson correlation	0.531	-0.033	1	0.411	0.256	0.130	0.425	0.192
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.710		0.000	0.003	0.139	0.000	0.028
	N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
<b>EM</b>	Pearson correlation	0.834	-0.201	0.411	1	0.421	0.344	0.677	0.667
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.021	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
<b>PG</b>	Pearson correlation	0.692	-0.278	0.256	0.421	1	0.177	0.549	0.542
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.001	0.003	0.000		0.043	0.000	0.000
	N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
<b>PR</b>	Pearson correlation	0.465	0.176	0.130	0.344	0.177	1	0.259	0.566
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.044	0.139	0.000	0.043		0.003	0.000
	N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
<b>PIL</b>	Pearson correlation	0.864	-0.344	0.425	0.677	0.549	0.259	1	0.579
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.003		0.000
	N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
<b>SA</b>	Pearson correlation	0.802	0.034	0.192	0.667	0.542	0.566	0.579	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.702	0.028	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132

The Pearson product- moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between psychological well-being and Life Satisfaction

Results indicated a significant negative correlation,  $r=-.232$ ,  $p=.007$ , suggesting that higher psychological well-being was associated with lower life satisfaction.

A significant positive correlation was found between psychological well-being and autonomy  $r=.531$ ,  $p<.001$ .

Furthermore, life satisfaction showed negative correlation with environmental mastery,  $r=.201$ ,  $p=.021$ ; personal growth,  $r=-.278$ ,  $p=.001$ ; and purpose in life,  $r=-.344$ ,  $p<.001$ . A positive correlation was found between life satisfaction and positive relations,  $r=.176$ ,  $p=.044$ .

All analyses were conducted with a sample of  $N = 132$ .

This indicates that there is a weak negative relationship between psychological well-being and life satisfaction. In other words, as psychological well-being increases, life satisfaction slightly decreases, and vice versa.

**Discussion:** The present study examined the relationship between psychological well-being and life satisfaction among defence personnel. The major findings revealed a statistically significant but weak negative correlation between psychological well-being and life satisfaction ( $r=-0.23$ ,  $p=0.007$ ). This indicates that higher psychological well-being was slightly associated with lower life satisfaction within the present sample. Domain wise analysis showed that psychological well-being had strong positive correlation with its dimensions, including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relation and self acceptance. However, life satisfaction demonstrated significant negative correlations with environmental mastery, personal growth and purpose in life, while showing a small positive association with positive relations. These results suggest that although participants functioned well psychologically, their overall evaluation of life circumstances may have been influenced by contextual and occupational factors.

Overall, the findings indicate a complex relationship between psychological functioning and cognitive evaluation of life among defence personnel. Contrary to earlier theoretical perspectives proposed by Carol D Ryff and Ed Diener, which generally report a positive association between psychological well-being and life satisfaction, the present study found an inverse relationship. This deviation may be attributed to the unique nature of military service, including strict discipline, operational demands, hierarchical, and prolonged separation from family. Even though many personnel demonstrated resilience and psychological strength, these occupational stressors may influence their subjective life evaluation differently. The higher proportion of participants residing away from their families may also have contributed to variations in life satisfaction scores.

The study is justified by the need to explore mental health constructs within the Indian defence context. While previous research has focused on occupational stress, optimism or quality of life independently, limited studies have examined psychological well-being and life satisfaction together among active defence personnel. Given the demanding and high risk nature of military service, understanding the interaction between these constructs is essential for developing targeted mental health interventions, resilience training programs, and welfare policies. The findings contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from an Indian Military sample and highlight the importance of strengthening psychological support systems to enhance both well-being and life satisfaction among defence personnel.

**Conclusion:** The present study examined the relationship between psychological well-being and life satisfaction among defence personnel. Using standardized measures, namely Ryff's Psychological well-being scale and the satisfaction with life scale developed by Ed Diener. The findings revealed a statistically significant but weak negative correlation between psychological well-being and life satisfaction. While participants generally reported moderate high levels of psychological functioning across dimensions such as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relation and self acceptance, their overall cognitive evaluation of life satisfaction showed variations. The results highlight the complex

nature of mental health within military contexts, where professional resilience and structured functioning may coexist with fluctuating perceptions of life satisfaction due to occupational and personal factors

Despite its contribution, the study has certain limitations. The sample consisted predominantly of male personnel, limiting gender based comparison. The cross sectional research design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Data were collected through self report measures which may be influenced by social desirability bias, particularly within a disciplined military environment. Additionally, the study focused on a specific group of defence personnel, which may limit the generalisability of findings to other branches or para military forces.

Future research should consider adopting longitudinal design to better understand how psychological well-being and life satisfaction evolve over time within military careers. Studies may also include larger and more diverse samples across different ranks, service branches, and living arrangements. Incorporating additional psychological variables such as resilience, coping strategies, and perceived stress could provide a deeper insight into dynamic of mental health among defence personnel. Furthermore, intervention based research aimed at strengthening both psychological well-being and life satisfaction would be valuable in supporting mental health initiatives and welfare policies within defence institutions.

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**Citation:** K. S., (2026) “Psychological Well-Being And Life Satisfaction: A Mental Health Perspective Among Defence Personnel”, *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMRD)*, Vol-4, Issue-04(2), April-2026.