



## Comparing Special Education Teachers' Psychological Wellbeing Based on their Demographics

Dr. Muhammad Akram<sup>a</sup>, Dr. Nazir Ahmad<sup>b\*</sup>, Dr. Rozina Sewani<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Associate Professor Institute of Education & Research, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. <sup>b</sup>Associate Professor/HoD Department of Education, Fatimiyah Higher Education System, Karachi, Pakistan. <sup>c</sup>Associate Professor, Department of Education and Social Sciences, Iqra University, Karachi, Pakistan

\*Email: nazirahmed@fhes.fen.edu.pk

**Abstract:** The purpose of the study was to compare the psychological well-being of special education teachers in Pakistan based on their demographic variables. Psychological well-being is described as a collaboration of positive effects and ideal functioning of persons in individual and social areas of life. Overall, 364 special education teachers were selected using the convenient sampling technique. The psychological well-being questionnaire developed and validated by Akin et al. (2012) was employed to compare the psychological well-being of sampled teachers. The study explored that female teachers demonstrated higher levels of psychological well-being, married teachers were better than unmarried teachers in their psychological well-being, and more experienced teachers were better than less experienced teachers in psychological well-being in special education schools. Further, the study revealed that Senior Special Education Teachers perceived higher psychological well-being than Junior Special Education Teachers. The recommendations are given at the end of the study.

**Key words:** Personal growth, purpose in life, Autonomy, Self-acceptance, psychological wellbeing

### 1. Introduction

Psychological Well-being (PWB) is related to human psychology, which involves social and health-related behaviours and issues (Deci & Ryan, 2008). PWB involves judgment about employees' satisfaction levels and interaction of positive effects in life. Therefore, individuals with a greater level of PWB are supposed to feel better satisfaction in their lives (Rathi, 2009). PWB includes the autonomy of employees in decision-making (Guo et al., 2022), environmental mastery, a desirable environment in which an employee works with comfort (Maqsood et al., 2023), and a positive relationship in which an employee feels sympathy and affection (Hsu & Barrett, 2020). Further, PWB also involves a meaningful life in which individuals have positive aims and goals (Ryff & Singer, 2008), personal growth that develops openness in an employee, which leads him to continuous development (Fadaee et al., 2021), and self-acceptance which involves an optimistic attitude of the employees toward their own-self. Therefore, PWB of teachers, particularly in special education schools, is required as it is most difficult to teach disabled students at the school level with a low level of psychological well-being.

Various studies have been conducted to measure psychological well-being in the general school context in Pakistan. Naheed et al. (2000) examined teachers' psychological well-being and found favorable attitudes towards their psychological well-being. In another study, Malik and Noreen (2015) found that organizational support has a mediation role in the PWB of teachers. Similarly, Suleman et al. (2018) revealed a positive linkage between job stress and the PWB of teachers in general schools. However, very few studies have been conducted to measure the teachers'

psychological well-being in Pakistan's special education context. Fadaee et al. (2020) found that autonomy is the main contributor to the PWB of teachers in special schools. Further, Maqsood et al. (2023) also explored the fact that the purpose of life is essential for PWB of special education teachers.

The background of the study explored that various studies have been conducted globally to examine the teachers' psychological well-being in special schools (Fu et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2022; Hsu & Barret, 2020). The previous studies showed a wide gap in examining the PWB of teachers in special schools by comparing their demographic variables. Therefore, it was most required to examine and compare the PWB of teachers, especially in special schools in Pakistan. The study at hand was conducted to compare the psychological well-being of special education teachers based on their demographic variables in Pakistan to fill the prevailing gap in the literature.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1 Psychological Well-Being of Special Educators**

Educating children is an extremely sensitive and stressful job. Teachers in special education typically face more difficult circumstances that may negatively impact their well-being at work. Because a greater attrition rate hurts the growth of the special education sector, well-being is a crucial component in reducing teachers' intentions to quit the profession (Fu et al., 2021; Ma & Deng, 2019; Wang, 2017; Akram, Khan, & Ahmad, 2022). There are multiple reasons, but the key reasons affecting this development are that teachers in special schools are stressed, experiencing job dissatisfaction and psychological disorders, and their job engagement and psychological well-being are comparatively low (Edward et al., 2018; Fu et al., 2021; Gu et al., 2022). The PWB of teachers in schools is correlated with students' performance (Erden et al., 2023; Giorgi et al., 2011; Harding et al., 2019). Therefore, it is imperative to enhance their well-being because it benefits both the staff and the success of the students and schools (Fu et al., 2021; Hascher & Waber, 2021).

According to the literature, factors that are linked with and contributed to the PWB of teachers either general or special education teachers include self-efficacy of teachers (Jeon et al., 2018; Ortan et al., 2021; Zee et al., 2016; Xiyun et al., 2022), teachers' self-esteem (Cheung et al., 2021; Espinoza-Diaz et al., 2023; Sakac & Maric, 2018), teachers' job satisfaction (Answer et al., 2015; Jacob & NC, 2021; Jamil et al., 2024; Ortan et al., 2021; Toropova et al., 2020; Zee et al., 2016), work engagement (Cheung et al., 2021; Fu et al., 2021; Jeon et al., 2018), emotional intelligence (Espinoza-Diaz et al., 2023; Fu et al., 2021; Kamboj & Garg, 2021; Xiyun et al., 2022), professional development and training (Chan et al., 2022; Gast et al., 2022; Kumar, 2023; Leyser et al., 2011), relationship with colleagues and students (Cheung et al., 2021; Jing & Wei, 2023) and personal growth (Chan et al., 2022; Lazarus, 2019).

The main focus in this research was the six dimensions of the PWB of teachers (personal growth, autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, positive relations, and purpose in life) as described by Ryff (1989) of the special education teachers in comparison to their demographics (gender, marital status, teaching experiences, cadre and designations). Addressing the factors is crucial because the literature shows that psychological capital positively connects with job engagement and job well-being, which supports creating and maintaining favorable working circumstances for special education teachers (Guo et al., 2022). According to the literature, PWB differed significantly between male and female instructors. The comparison of special and regular education teachers based on gender uncovered two key findings: first, female teachers showed more PWB than male teachers and second, female teachers have a more positive attitude towards their jobs in education to teach disabled children than male teachers (Lazarus, 2019; Ramdas, 2019; Sadaiah & Rao, 2021; Tribhuvan, 2020). Contrary to these findings, a Chinese study also shows that male teachers in special education schools report higher PWB than female teachers (Fu et al., 2021).

The PWB of teachers working in regular and special education settings is also connected with their meaning in life (personal growth) and satisfaction with life. Instructors in the special schools reported a higher search for life's purpose than instructors in the general education environment. In addition, compared to female instructors, male teachers expressed a greater need for purpose in life (Maqsood et al., 2023). Whereas female teachers in special education institutions have a significantly higher life satisfaction level than male teachers (Yayuz et al., 2019). On the contrary, male and female teachers have similar associations between perceived relatedness with students, autonomy support, and organizational commitment (Collie et al., 2020). While some studies also showed that the autonomy of male teachers is greater than that of female instructors in special schools (Fadaee et al., 2021).

Another demographic variable that may affect special educators' psychological well-being is their marital status. In general, marital status is connected with better PWB, but the benefits vary across positive and negative dimensions,

with remarried and never-married women benefiting more with technology integration (Hsu & Barrett, 2020; Ali et al., 2023). Married and unmarried special education teachers face many factors affecting their work-life balance and PWB, including a sense of humor, pay, relationship with parents, professional training, backing system, health, job stress, job demands, job resources, job commitment, and beliefs about social, emotional learning and setting boundaries between personal and professional self (Henke, 2023; Jeon et al., 2021). In China, marital status is one attribute that affects the burnout of special education teachers. Marital status also significantly affected depersonalization reduced personal achievement, and emotional fatigue of special school teachers (Sang et al., 2022; Aslam, Iqbal, & Ahmed, 2022). Married teachers have significantly higher mental health, emotional intelligence and psychological well-being in general education than unmarried teachers. Their mental stress is directly related to job stress levels (Akram et al., 2020; Ji et al., 2021).

Job experience is another demographic which shows that teachers with longer tenure have higher well-being than those with shorter tenure (Aldosiry, 2020; Forostian & Sokolova, 2021; Sadaiah & Rao, 2021). Special education teachers experience significant psychological distress with longer teaching experience protecting against distress (Olagunju et al., 2020; Dilshad, Shah, & Ahmad, 2023). Teachers with extensive work experience have the highest levels of psychological well-being, while those with less experience have a higher purpose in life (Voyushina & Postnikova, 2019; Naeem, Ali, & Ahmed, 2022). Other key factors influencing the PWB of teachers working with students of special needs include psychological and pedagogical support, training of teaching staff, mastering special knowledge, methods, technologies, emotional intelligence, motivation, knowledge, experience, and personal qualities (Potapiuk & Koseniuk, 2023; Sayko, 2020).

## 2.1 Hypotheses

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Male and female teachers of special education schools do not significantly differ on their psychological wellbeing.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Married and unmarried teachers of special education schools do not significantly differ on their psychological wellbeing.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Teachers of special education schools with varying teaching experience do not significantly differ on their psychological wellbeing.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Junior and Senior Special Education Teachers of special education schools do not differ on their psychological wellbeing.

## 3. Methodology

It was a quantitative research study that employed a causal-comparative design. The researchers selected 364 teachers working in special schools in Punjab using a multistage random sampling technique. The psychological well-being questionnaire developed and validated by Akin et al. (2012) was employed to compare the PWB of sampled teachers. A pilot study on 30 teachers in 4 schools was conducted to examine the reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha reliability of .86 proved it was a reliable instrument.

## 4. Results

Table 1: Description of the Sample (N=364)

Demographics	Levels	n (%)
Gender	Male	218 (59.89)
	Female	146 (40.11)
Marital Status	Married	240 (65.93)
	Unmarried	124 (34.07)
Teaching Experience (in years)	1 to 15 years	222 (60.98)
	16 and above	142 (39.01)
Position (Designation)	Junior Special Education Teacher	130 (35.71)
	Senior Special Education Teacher	234 (64.28)

Table 1 showed that out of 364 teachers, 218 (60 %) were male and 146 (40 %) were female. Further, 240 (66 %) were married teachers and 124 (34 %) were unmarried teachers, while 222 (61 %) were 1-15 years experienced teachers and 142 (39 %) were 16 or more years experienced teachers. Furthermore, 130 (36 %) were Junior and 234

(64 %) were Senior Special Education Teachers from special education schools.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Psychological Wellbeing of Special Education Teachers

Factors	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1 Autonomy	2.40	6.20	5.10	0.635
2 Environmental Mastery	2.30	6.00	4.61	0.403
3 Personal Growth	2.40	13.60	4.00	0.702
4 Positive Relations with others	1.50	7.10	5.72	0.798
5 Purpose in Life	2.30	15.40	4.01	0.860
6 Self-Acceptance	1.60	6.40	4.46	0.560
Teachers' Wellbeing (Overall)	2.90	6.30	4.64	0.658

Table 2 showed that the maximum mean score was found for the factor "positive relations with others" (M=5.72, SD=0.798), while the lowest mean score was for the factor "personal growth" (M=4.00, SD=0.702). Overall, all the teachers' psycho well-being (M=4.64, SD=0.658) was found to be above average on all the factors of psychological well-being

Table 3: Gender-based Comparison: Psychological Wellbeing of Special Education Teachers

Factors	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	P
1 Autonomy	Male	218	4.101	0.640	362	-0.355	0.032*
	Female	146	4.122	0.584			
2 Environmental Mastery	Male	218	4.382	0.473	362	-0.638	0.034*
	Female	146	4.776	0.420			
3 Personal Growth	Male	218	3.782	0.823	362	0.340	0.054*
	Female	146	3.854	0.584			
4 Positive Relation	Male	218	5.264	0.856	362	-2.476	0.002*
	Female	146	5.758	0.664			
5 Purpose in Life	Male	218	4.066	0.930	362	0.084	0.042*
	Female	146	4.152	0.598			
6 Self-Acceptance	Male	218	4.148	0.601	362	-2.592	0.016*
	Female	146	4.886	0.454			
Teachers' Wellbeing (Overall)	Male	218	4.160	0.354	362	-1.783	0.052*
	Female	146	4.698	0.267			

To compare the PWB of male and female teachers of special schools, t-test for independent sample was performed and psychological well-being of female teachers were found better than male teachers in autonomy,  $t(362)=0.355$ ,  $p=0.032$ , environmental mastery,  $t(362)=0.638$ ,  $p=0.034$ , personal growth,  $t(362)=0.340$ ,  $p=0.054$ , positive relation,  $t(362)=2.476$ ,  $p=0.002$ , purpose in life,  $t(362)=0.084$ ,  $p=0.042$ , and self-acceptance,  $t(362)=2.592$ ,  $p=0.016$ . Overall, the psychological well-being of female teachers was also significantly better than male teachers of special education schools,  $t(362)=1.783$ ,  $p=0.052$ .

Table 4: Marital Status Based Comparison: Psychological Wellbeing of Special Education Teachers

Factors	Marital Status	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig.
Autonomy	Married	240	5.10	.656	362	2.349	.002*
	Single	124	4.67	.654			
Environmental Mastery	Married	240	5.57	.463	362	1.785	.005*
	Single	124	4.64	.470			
Personal Growth	Married	240	5.62	.732	362	-2.450	.004*
	Single	124	4.44	.563			
Positive Relation	Married	240	5.55	.710	362	1.866	.043*

Purpose in Life	Single	124	5.34	.835	362	-2.432	.024*
	Married	240	5.55	.628			
Self-Acceptance	Single	124	4.78	.905	362	1.504	.021*
	Married	240	5.79	.574			
Well-being (Overall)	Single	124	4.63	.770	362	.603	.041*
	Married	240	4.77	.328			
	Single	124	4.60	.454			

\*p< 0.05 level (2-tailed)

To compare PWB of married and unmarried teachers of special schools, t-test for the independent sample was used, and psychological well-being of married teachers was found better than unmarried teachers in autonomy,  $t(362)=2.349$ ,  $p=0.002$ , environmental mastery,  $t(362)=1.785$ ,  $p=0.005$ , personal growth,  $t(362)=2.450$ ,  $p=0.004$ , positive relation,  $t(362)=1.866$ ,  $p=0.043$ , purpose in life,  $t(362)=2.432$ ,  $p=0.024$ , and self-acceptance,  $t(362)=1.504$ ,  $p=0.021$ . Further, unmarried teachers' psychological well-being was significantly better than married teachers of special education schools,  $t(362)=0.603$ ,  $p=0.041$ .

Table 5: Experience Based Comparison of Special Education Schools

	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Experience</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1	Autonomy	1-15 years	222	4.82	0.713	362	4.672	0.000*
		16 & above	142	5.34	0.362			
2	Environmental Mastery	1-15 years	222	4.68	0.520	262	1.136	0.032*
		16 & above	142	5.55	0.385			
3	Personal Growth	1-15 years	222	4.34	0.920	262	1.167	0.041*
		16 & above	142	5.18	0.435			
4	Positive Relations	1-15 years	222	5.32	0.964	362	4.702	0.000*
		16 & above	142	5.76	0.523			
5	Purpose in Life	1-15 years	222	4.26	1.044	362	4.645	0.000*
		16 & above	142	5.76	0.543			
6	Self-Acceptance	1-15 years	222	4.53	0.564	362	0.041	0.005*
		16 & above	142	5.48	0.444			
Teachers' Wellbeing (Overall)		1-15 years	222	4.48	0.393	362	0.457	0.023*
		16 & above	142	5.52	0.178			

In Table 5, To compare PWB of more experienced and less experienced teachers of special education schools, t-test for the independent sample was performed, and psychological well-being of more experienced teachers was found better than less experienced teachers in autonomy,  $t(362)=4.672$ ,  $p=0.002$ , environmental mastery,  $t(362)=1.136$ ,  $p=0.032$ , personal growth,  $t(362)=1.167$ ,  $p=0.041$ , positive relation,  $t(362)=4.702$ ,  $p=0.000$ , purpose in life,  $t(362)=4.645$ ,  $p=0.000$ , and self-acceptance,  $t(362)=0.041$ ,  $p=0.005$ . Further, overall, the psychological well-being of more experienced teachers was also found to be significantly better than less experienced teachers of special education schools,  $t(362)=0.457$ ,  $p=0.023$ .



Table 6: Designation Based Comparison of Special Education Teachers

Factors	Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	P
1 Autonomy	JSET	194	5.34	0.743	362	-0.540	0.001*
	SSET	170	5.95	0.643			
2 Environmental Mastery	JSET	138	4.54	0.523	362	-0.553	0.044*
	SSET	226	4.77	0.501			
3 Personal Growth	JSET	138	3.87	0.727	362	0.370	0.002*
	SSET	226	4.76	0.712			
4 Positive Relation	JSET	138	5.46	0.853	362	-2.316	0.004*
	SSET	226	5.82	0.782			
5 Purpose in Life	JSET	138	4.04	0.853	362	0.117	0.001*
	SSET	226	4.82	0.762			
6 Self-Acceptance	JSET	138	4.33	0.684	362	-1.435	0.001*
	SSET	226	4.96	0.575			
Teachers' Wellbeing (Overall)	JSET	138	4.25	0.375	362	-1.538	0.002*
	SSET	226	5.34				

In Table 6, a t-test for independent samples was conducted in order to compare the psychological well-being of Junior and Senior teachers of special schools. The results showed that the psychological well-being of Senior teachers was found to be superior to that of Junior teachers in the following areas: autonomy  $t(362)=0.540$ ,  $p=0.001$ , environmental mastery ( $t(362)=0.553$ ,  $p=0.044$ , personal growth  $t(362)=0.370$ ,  $p=0.002$ , positive relation  $t(362)=2.316$ ,  $p=0.004$ ), purpose in life  $t(362)=0.117$ ,  $p=0.001$ , and self-acceptance  $t(362)=1.435$ ,  $p=0.001$ . To add insult to injury, the psychological well-being of senior teachers was significantly higher than that of junior special education teachers, as indicated by the statistical analysis  $t(362)=1.538$ ,  $p=0.002$ .

#### 4.1 Discussion

The study aimed to compare the PWB of special education teachers through gender, marital status, experience, and designation. The study revealed that female teachers' well-being was better than male teachers in special education schools. In comparison, the psychological well-being of teachers was better than that of less experienced teachers in special education schools. Furthermore, the study also explored the psychological well-being of well beginners, which was better than that of junior teachers in special education schools.

Some studies found that psychological well-being differed between male and female teachers, and the PWB of female teachers was better than that of male teachers. Further, female teachers have a more positive attitude towards their jobs in education to teach students with disabilities than male special education teachers (Lazarus, 2019; Ramdas, 2019; Sadaiah & Rao, 2021; Tribhuvan, 2020; Haider, Ahmad, & Ali, 2024) which is in line with the given study which explored that female special education teachers are better in showing the PWB than male special education teachers. There are more studies with similar findings that female teachers are better than male teachers in showing a greater need for purpose in life (Maqsood et al., 2023) and satisfaction with life (Yayuz et al., 2019).

Marital status also significantly affected depersonalization and emotional fatigue and minimized the personal achievement of special education teachers (Sang et al., 2022). Some studies revealed that in the general education context, married teachers have significantly higher mental health, emotional intelligence and psychological well-being than Cowell-being unmarried teachers (Akram et al., 2020; Ji et al., 2021; Khoso, Oad & Ahmad, 2023), which is also in line with the given study. Further, some other studies revealed that teachers with longer tenure have higher well-being than those with shorter tenure (Aldosiry, 2020; Forostian & Sokolova, 2021; Sadaiah & Rao, 2021; Jabeen, Ali, & Ahmad, 2023). Special education teachers experience significant psychological distress, but experienced teachers can handle the situations effectively (Olagunju et al., 2020; Ahmad et al., 2023). Another study found that teachers with extensive work experience have the highest levels of psychological well-being (Voyuwell-beingstnikova, 2019; Thomas, Khan, & Ahmad, 2022). All these studies are in line and confirm that experienced teachers implement the PWB effectively.

#### 5. Conclusion

The study aimed to compare the PWB of special education teachers through their demographic variables. It revealed

that female teachers were better for showing psychological well-being than male teachers, married teachers were better than unmarried teachers, and more experienced teachers were better than less experienced teachers. Senior special education teachers were better than junior special education teachers.

### 5.1 Recommendations

The study found that to show psychological well-being, special education teachers (male teachers, unmarried teachers, less experienced teachers, and junior teachers) were left behind, which might further affect their performance in special education schools. Therefore, the district authorities and policymakers should address their concerns and uplift their psychological well-being, which is most required to teach disabled students. Further, some training sessions might also be arranged by the district authorities to maximize the level of PWB of special education teachers in Pakistan.

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