

## Psychological Safety and Meaning in Work as Predictors of Psychological Well-Being among Working Adults

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examined whether psychological safety and meaning in work predict subjective psychological well-being among working adults in India. A sample of 200 working adults was recruited through convenience and snowball sampling across diverse occupational sectors. The WHO-5 Well-Being Index, Edmondson's (1999) Psychological Safety Scale, and the Work and Meaning Inventory (Steger et al., 2012) were administered. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed a significant model,  $F(2, 197) = 20.1, p < .001, R^2 = .169$ . Meaning in work emerged as the stronger predictor ( $B = 0.377, p < .001$ ), while psychological safety also significantly predicted well-being ( $B = 0.238, p = .030$ ), despite a non-significant bivariate association, suggesting a possible suppression-like effect. The findings suggest that both psychological safety and meaning in work are important workplace factors associated with employee well-being in the Indian context and highlight the value of addressing structural and relational workplace factors to improve psychological health.

**Keywords:** *Psychological Safety, Meaning in Work, Subjective Well-Being, WHO-5, India*

Work is one of the most significant domains of adult psychological life. Blustein (2008) argued that work is at the very essence of the development, expression, and maintenance of psychological health, suggesting that the workplace is not merely a setting where psychological states play out, but an environment that actively produces them. Despite growing recognition of this relationship, the specific workplace conditions that predict employee well-being remain relatively underexplored, particularly in non-Western organisational contexts. The present study addresses this gap by examining two theoretically grounded workplace conditions — psychological safety and meaning in work — as predictors of subjective psychological well-being among working adults in India.

The Indian workplace is an important but comparatively less explored context for this investigation. Sarkar et al. (2024) highlighted the high prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression among Indian employees, emphasising the growing mental health burden in workplace settings. A 2023 industry report by Gi Group Holding India found that only 35% of Indian employees were familiar with the concept of psychological safety, compared to 57% of employers (Gi Group Holding India, 2023). India's organisational culture, characterised by high power distance, hierarchical structures, and collectivist values

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(Hofstede, 1980), may create a context in which workplace psychological conditions operate somewhat differently from those in Western settings. High power distance norms may make employees less comfortable speaking up or expressing ideas that differ from authority, which could limit the natural expression of psychological safety. At the same time, collectivist cultural values that emphasise duty, social contribution, and role fulfilment may strengthen the psychological significance of experiencing one's work as meaningful. These cultural dynamics highlight the importance of examining both psychological safety and meaning in work as predictors of well-being in Indian samples, rather than directly generalising findings from Western research. Despite these considerations, peer-reviewed research identifying specific workplace conditions that predict well-being in India appears relatively limited, and the present study aims to contribute to this emerging area.

Psychological safety refers to a shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking — that one can speak up, ask questions, or admit mistakes without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Newman et al.'s (2017) systematic review confirmed that psychological safety consistently predicts voice behaviour, team learning, and organisational performance. More recently, Loudoun et al. (2025) highlighted the role of psychosocial safety and risk in influencing worker well-being, while Dollard and Bakker (2010) proposed that psychosocial safety climate directly predicts worker psychological health. To the best of the author's knowledge, there is limited published research examining psychological safety or meaning in work as simultaneous predictors of subjective well-being using the WHO-5 in the Indian context.

Meaning in work refers to the subjective experience of work as personally significant, self-clarifying, and contributing to a greater good (Steger et al., 2012). Allan et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis of 44 studies involving over 23,000 participants established that meaningful work is positively associated with life satisfaction, general health, and work engagement. Ward and King (2017) further argued that work fosters meaning in life through goal pursuit, positive social relationships, and contribution to a broader purpose. Despite this evidence, most studies have been conducted in Western samples, and the meaning-well-being association has received relatively limited attention using the WHO-5 in the Indian workplace context.

The present study was theoretically grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which proposes that satisfaction of basic psychological needs — autonomy, competence, and relatedness — predicts well-being. Psychological safety supports relatedness and authentic self-expression by creating an environment where employees feel safe to engage genuinely without fear of interpersonal consequences, while meaningful work satisfies competence and autonomous motivation by providing a sense that one's efforts are worthwhile and self-directed. Although researchers have examined psychological safety and meaning in work independently, May et al. (2004) demonstrated that these are distinct but related conditions of personal engagement — psychological safety determines whether employees feel safe enough to be fully present, while meaning in work determines whether what they do feels worth being present for. Examining them together as simultaneous predictors allows assessment of their independent and combined contributions to well-being, an approach that has received limited attention using the WHO-5 in the Indian context.

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### *Objectives*

The present study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the levels of psychological safety, meaning in work, and subjective well-being among the study sample.
2. To examine the relationship between psychological safety and subjective well-being.
3. To examine the relationship between meaning in work and subjective well-being.
4. To assess the combined predictive value of psychological safety and meaning in work on subjective well-being.
5. To examine the relative contribution of each predictor variable in predicting subjective well-being.

### *Hypotheses*

- **H1:** Psychological safety will be positively associated with psychological well-being among working adults.
- **H2:** Meaning in work will be positively associated with psychological well-being among working adults.
- **H3:** Psychological safety and meaning in work will together significantly predict psychological well-being among working adults.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### *Participants*

A total of 205 responses were collected, 102 via an online Google Form and 103 through physical questionnaire administration. Five responses were excluded because those participants were not currently employed, leading to a final sample of  $N = 200$  working adults aged 18 years and above, currently engaged in paid employment across diverse occupational sectors in India. No restrictions were placed on sector, work arrangement, or geographic location. Participants were recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and no personally identifying information was collected, ensuring complete anonymity throughout the study.

### *Psychological Variables*

The dependent variable was subjective psychological well-being, defined in terms of positive mood, vitality, and interest in daily life over the preceding two weeks. The independent variables were psychological safety, referring to the perceived degree of safety for interpersonal risk-taking in the workplace, and meaning in work, referring to the experience of work as personally significant, self-clarifying, and contributing to a greater good.

### *Measures*

- **Subjective Well-Being:** Subjective well-being was measured using the WHO-5 Well-Being Index (World Health Organization, 1998), which consists of five items rated 0 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater well-being.
- **Psychological Safety:** Psychological safety was measured using Edmondson's (1999) seven-item Psychological Safety Scale rated 1 to 5, with negatively worded items reverse-scored such that higher scores indicate greater perceived psychological safety (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$  in the original validation).
- **Meaning in Work:** Meaning in work was measured using the 10-item Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger et al., 2012) rated 1 to 7, capturing positive

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meaning, meaning-making through work, and greater good motivations (Cronbach's alpha = .93 in the original validation).

Data were analysed using multiple linear regression in Jamovi (Version 2.7; The jamovi project, 2025; R Core Team, 2025). Prior to analysis, assumptions of multiple regression were examined. Collinearity statistics indicated no multicollinearity (VIF = 1.01), and inspection of residual plots suggested that assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were adequately met.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 200)**

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
<b>1. Well-Being (WHO-5)</b>	2.85	1.01	—		
<b>2. Psychological Safety</b>	2.84	0.605	.096	—	
<b>3. Meaning in Work (WAMI)</b>	5.56	1.08	.386***	-.115	—

Note. N = 200. \*\*\* p < .001. The correlation between Psychological Safety and Meaning in Work was not statistically significant (p = .104). df = 198 for all correlations.

Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 1. Well-being scores (M = 2.85, SD = 1.01) fell slightly above the midpoint of the scale. Psychological safety scores (M = 2.84, SD = 0.605) fell below the scale midpoint, consistent with Gi Group Holding India's (2023) finding that most Indian employees report limited experience of psychological safety at work. Meaning in work scores were moderate to moderately high (M = 5.56, SD = 1.08). Meaning in work showed a significant positive correlation with well-being (r = .386, p < .001). Psychological safety showed a non-significant bivariate correlation with well-being (r = .096, p = .174). The correlation between the two predictor variables was small and non-significant (r = -.115, p = .104).

**Table 2 Multiple Regression Results: Predictors of Well-Being (N = 200)**

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
<b>Psychological Safety</b>	0.238	0.109	.155	2.185	.030*
<b>Meaning in Work</b>	0.377	0.061	.396	6.164	< .001***

Note. N = 200. B = unstandardised coefficient; SE = standard error;  $\beta$  = standardised coefficient. R<sup>2</sup> = .169, adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .161, F(2, 197) = 20.1, p < .001. \*p < .05. \*\*\*p < .001.

Multiple regression analysis revealed a significant overall model, F(2, 197) = 20.1, p < .001, R<sup>2</sup> = .169, adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = .161, indicating that psychological safety and meaning in work together accounted for 16.9% of the variance in subjective well-being. Given the low intercorrelation between predictors (r = -.115, p = .104), multicollinearity was not a concern. Results are presented in Table 2.

Meaning in work was the stronger predictor of well-being (B = 0.377, SE = 0.061,  $\beta$  = .396, t = 6.164, p < .001), replicating Allan et al.'s (2019) meta-analytic findings and Steger et al.'s (2012) original WAMI validation in an Indian sample using the WHO-5. Psychological safety also emerged as a significant unique predictor (B = 0.238, SE = 0.109,  $\beta$  = .155, t = 2.185, p = .030). All three hypotheses were supported, with H1 supported within the regression model rather than at the bivariate level.

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### *Discussion of Psychological Safety Findings*

The most notable finding concerns psychological safety — a non-significant bivariate correlation ( $r = .096$ ,  $p = .174$ ) but a significant unique regression coefficient ( $B = 0.238$ ,  $p = .030$ ). This suggests a suppression-like effect: psychological safety contributes unique variance to well-being when considered together with meaning in work, even though this is not visible in the simple correlation. In other words, looking at psychological safety alone may underestimate its role in employee well-being. This finding shows the importance of examining workplace factors together rather than separately.

This pattern differs from Baeva and Bordovskaia (2015), who found a direct positive association between psychological safety and well-being in a Russian educational sample. One possible explanation is the cultural context of the present sample. India's high power distance norms (Hofstede, 1980) may reduce employees' comfort in speaking up or taking interpersonal risks, which may also reduce variation in psychological safety scores. This is reflected in the below-midpoint mean ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 0.605$ ), which may partly explain why the simple correlation with well-being was weak. At the same time, the finding is broadly consistent with Loudoun et al. (2025), and it extends Edmondson's (1999) framework to individual subjective well-being in a non-Western context.

### *Discussion of Meaning in Work Findings*

The strong association between meaning in work and well-being ( $r = .386$ ,  $B = 0.377$ ,  $p < .001$ ) is consistent with Allan et al.'s (2019) meta-analysis and Steger et al.'s (2012) original validation study. It also supports Ward and King's (2017) argument that work contributes to meaning in life through goal pursuit, social connection, and broader purpose. In the present sample, meaning in work was a stronger predictor of well-being than psychological safety.

One possible explanation is cultural context. In India, values such as duty, role fulfilment, and contribution to others may make meaningful work especially important for psychological well-being. The greater good motivations dimension of the WAMI, which reflects the idea that one's work contributes to something beyond personal gain, may be particularly relevant in a collectivist setting. This interpretation is tentative, but it points to the value of more culturally grounded research in this area.

### *Practical Implications*

These findings have practical implications for organisations in India. The strong association between meaning in work and well-being suggests that organisations should give attention to conditions that help employees experience their work as purposeful. This may include role redesign, job crafting programmes, and clearer communication of organisational purpose. When employees understand how their work contributes to broader organisational and social goals, their sense of meaning may increase, with positive effects on well-being.

The findings also point to the importance of psychological safety. In workplaces shaped by high power distance, employees may be less willing to speak up, share concerns, or admit mistakes. This means leaders may need to make deliberate efforts to create a more open and non-punitive environment. Leadership development that encourages openness, supportive responses to mistakes, and respectful communication may help strengthen psychological safety over time.

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Consistent with Fleming (2024), the findings also suggest that structural and relational workplace conditions may be more effective in improving workforce well-being than approaches focused only on individual coping. Together, psychological safety and meaningful work accounted for nearly 17% of the variance in well-being, indicating that the work environment itself is an important factor in employee psychological health.

### *Limitations*

The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation. Although psychological safety and meaning in work were found to predict well-being, the data cannot show whether these factors lead to changes in well-being over time, or whether employees with better well-being are more likely to view their work as safe and meaningful.

Self-report measures may also introduce response bias. This may be especially relevant for psychological safety, because employees in low-safety environments may still hesitate to report their true views, even in an anonymous survey. Convenience and snowball sampling also limit representativeness, and the findings may not generalise to all sectors, organisations, or regions in India.

In addition, pre-existing mental health conditions were not screened, and multiple job holders were not distinguished from participants in single employment. Both factors may have added variability to the dependent variable. The WHO-5 measures hedonic well-being only and does not assess eudaimonic aspects such as purpose, growth, or autonomy, which may also be relevant here. Future research could use longitudinal designs, probability-based sampling, separate analyses of WAMI subscales, and multi-source or objective measures where possible. It would also be useful to examine whether cultural values within India influence these relationships.

## CONCLUSIONS

Both psychological safety and meaning in work were significant predictors of subjective well-being among working adults in India, together accounting for 16.9% of the variance in well-being. The suppression-like pattern for psychological safety suggests that its role may be underestimated when it is examined on its own, especially in high power distance settings where simple correlations may not fully capture its importance. Meaning in work showed a strong and consistent association with well-being, extending existing findings to the Indian workplace context.

Overall, the findings suggest that organisations may be able to support employee well-being by improving both psychological safety and meaningful work. They also indicate that structural and relational features of the workplace may be useful targets for intervention, possibly more so than approaches focused only on the individual.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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