

## Mental Health and Well-Being of NGO Professionals: A Study of Lifestyle of NGO Professionals in Jharkhand, India

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### Abstract

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) also referred to as Non-Profit Organization, Civil Society Organization (CSO), and Voluntary Service-based Organization that function independently of Government. Those who work at NGOs in project management, policy development, HR, grant writing and fund raising etc. are called NGO Professionals. The life style of a NGO professionals can depends on their behavior, attitude, practice, peer groups and surroundings. Mental health and well-being status of NGO professionals may be related to their lifestyle. The present study describe the lifestyle, job security, mental health and well-being among a sample of 50 NGO Professionals working in Jharkhand which is one of the less developed states of India. A self-administered questionnaire was developed as a data collection tool from "The Simple Lifestyle Indicator Questionnaire (SLIQ)," "The Positive Mental Health Scale (PMH-scale)," and the WHO-5 Well-being Index. The findings of the research implied towards understanding the lifestyle, job security, mental health and well-being status of NGO Professionals, working in Jharkhand. The finding may also draw the attentions of human resource personnel's, board members of NGOs and CBOs, policy makers to make health and well-being policies for such organizations.

**Keywords:** NGO Professionals, Lifestyle, Mental Health, Well-being, Jharkhand

### Introduction

In the charter of the United Nations (1945), Article 71 first used the word "NGO." Before that, an NGO had no formal or fixed definition. It was generally known as a non-profit entity that works independently of government influence and may receive government funding. The activities performed and undertaken by the NGOs are advocacy: providing help and support to the needy; working together for a greater good; and those activities are not limited to any particular issues. An NGO can work on issues such as the environment, health, education, livelihood, gender, and human rights, among others. NGOs work on a multi-dimensional approach to human, social, and psychological development. The Bengal Home Industries Association was India's first NGO, which was formed by Tagore's nephew, Sri Gaganendranath Tagore, to help weavers and artists of the Kolkata handloom, and the NGO was registered under the Indian Companies Act VII (Section 26) in 1917. A significant growth of NGOs started after India achieved independence. Now, a non-governmental

organisation is a non-profit organisation also known as a civil society organisation (CSO) or a voluntary service-based organisation (VSO). Those who work at NGOs as a project coordinator, field worker, social worker, fund-raising officer, policy developer, etc. are known as NGO professionals. Like the government and private sectors, the non-governmental sectors are also growing and attracting youths to build their careers in this field. There are courses like BSW (Bachelor in Social Work), MSW (Masters in Social Work), MRM (Masters in Rural Management), MRD (Masters in Rural Development), developmental studies, NGO management, MBA in Rural Development, etc., where numbers of students enrol every year and mostly who studied from a reputed universities of India, are able to find a job after passing out, but as the field is challenging and the NGO professionals are working with people to help themselves, there are lots of challenges they have to face in their daily lives, too. Sometimes they have to stay in hill stations where they have never been, and sometimes in places where there are still

electricity issues, water crises, communication obstacles, transportation obstacles, etc. Lifestyle, mental health, and well-being status generally deteriorate as a result of this imbalanced life, where they are finding solutions for other people's well-being while they themselves are not. The present study focused on the lifestyle, mental health, and wellbeing of NGO professionals and also analysed their job security status. Job security is another important factor to measure because, in non-government sectors, most of the jobs are contractual and the duration of a project is at least 6 months to 5 years. Even, if the assigned project is for 5 years or more, they must appear in an interview each year to keep their job, either through internal or external recruitment policy. Thus, there is always some insecurity regarding the job, which can be an important factor in psychological distress or well-being.

In 1929, Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler described "lifestyle" as a "person's basic character as established early in childhood" in his book "Problem of Neurosis: A Book of Case Histories. "Lifestyle refers to a person's way of life, his or her attitude toward life, and the activities associated with it. The sociological definition of A "lifestyle" is the distinctive pattern and manner of living that an individual or group uses to meet their biological, economic, emotional, and social needs and that typically reflects their attitudes, beliefs, and values; it is a "way of life." The lifestyle of working professionals depends on their working pattern, environment, and duration of work, as well as their colleagues or peer groups. For working professionals, food habits and physical exercise are not on track most of the time. NGO professionals are not different from them.

There is a variety of research and studies on the mental health and well-being of employees in the private sector, but no such study exists for the professionals working in the development sector in India. According to an article titled "Job at hand: India far behind other nations in public sector employment" from Business Standard, only 2.2 percent of people in India work in the public sector, while the total workforce is 900 million. As per the BLS's report published in 2019, 107.8 million people work in private industries in India. In the development sector, there are more than 3 million registered NGOs in India as of February 2022. The researcher has conducted the study with the NGO professionals of Jharkhand as it is one of the least developed states in India and people have to work by accepting many challenges in daily life like poor communication systems, electricity crises, villages that are underdeveloped, and places where there is no home delivery system, neither for food nor for other things. A mobile network issue is also present. As there are obstacles, many NGOs work in that state to improve the condition and provide support to the needy people, community, village, and districts. At present, there are more than 1381 registered NGOs working.

The objectives of this study were to know the lifestyle of the NGO professionals, their mental health and well-being status, and the job security measures. The researcher also focused on introducing possible solutions to make changes in the policies of the NGOs and also in the lifestyle balance of those professionals.

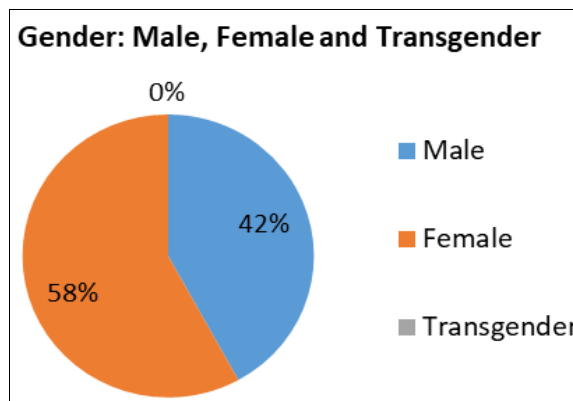
**Research Methods**

The nature of the study is descriptive; the topic is quite relevant to the mental health status of employees in private industries but also quite new as the sample was collected from development professionals only. 50 NGO professionals were

randomly selected from the state of Jharkhand in 2022 for the study. Among them, 21 are boys and 29 are girls. A self-administrated questionnaire was developed as a data collection tool from "The Simple Lifestyle Indicator Questionnaire (SLIQ)," "The Positive Mental Health Scale (PMH-scale)," and the WHO-5 Well-being Index and is shared through a Google Form by mail and WhatsApp to collect the data from respondents.

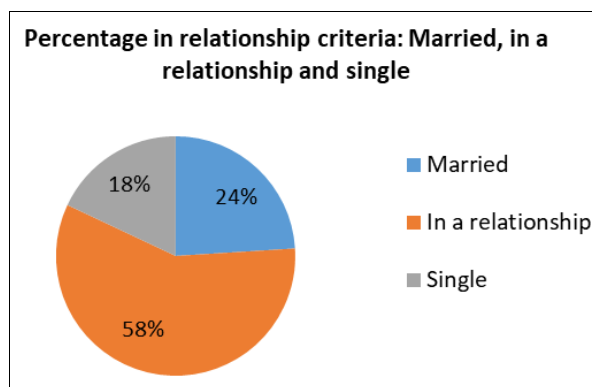
The SLIQ lifestyle score is an eight-question scale developed by Spencer *et al.* The SLIQs have five items: diet, physical activity, alcohol, smoking, and life stress. The measure was first implemented in its current status in 1998 by the WHO regional office as part of the DEPCARE project on well-being measures in primary health care in Europe. After sharing the Google form with the respondents, the researcher explained each of the items and also discussed the responses by telephonic interview. Age range between 25 and 35 years, from a few districts in Jharkhand state, and working in NGOs only were inclusion criteria for participation in the research study; exclusion criteria were: recently associated with NGOs and non-salaried persons. After the data collection, the data was analysed in MS Excel and presented in charts, and diagrams.

**Results and Findings**



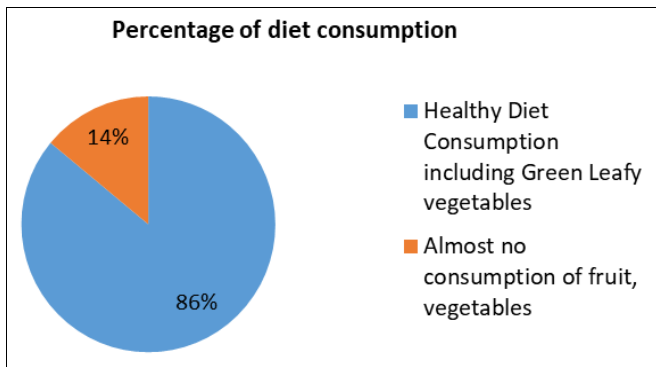
**Diagram 1:** Percentage of male, female, and transgender individuals in the sample group

Diagram 1 shows that there were 42% males and 58% females, and no transgender individuals participated in the sample group.



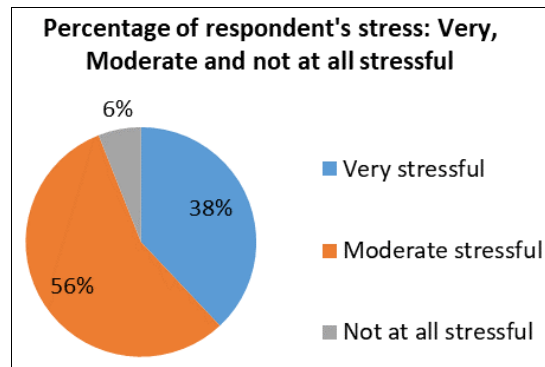
**Diagram 2:** Percentage of married, in a relationship and single individuals participated in the study

Diagram 2 represents that 24% are married, 58% are in a relationship, and 18% are single in the sample study group.



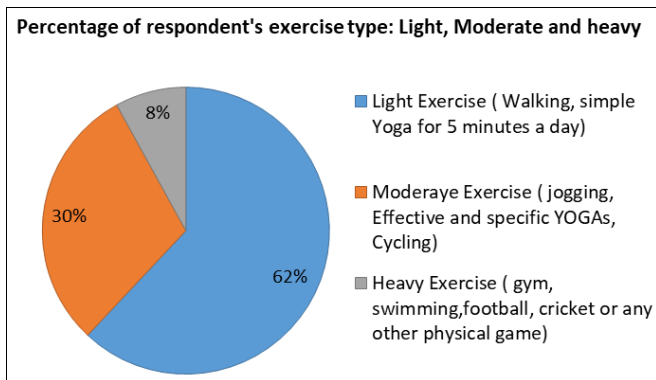
**Diagram 3:** Diet consumption pattern of the sample group

The consumption of a healthy diet is quite good. 86% of people eat a healthy diet, including green leafy vegetables, but 14% do not even consume fruits or vegetables.



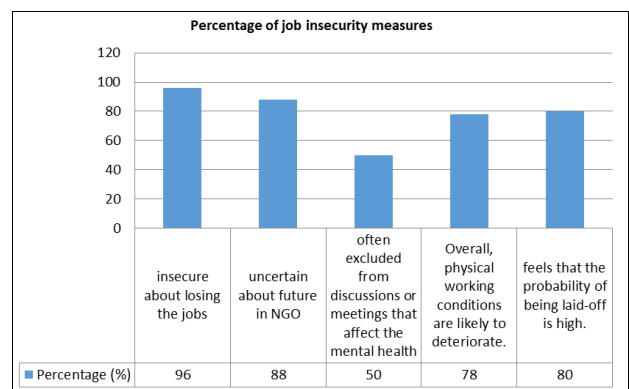
**Diagram 6:** The level of stress among the sample group

As per the diagram 6, the results of the life stress measurement, 38% of people's lives are extremely stressful, and 56% are moderately stressful and only 6% having no stress.



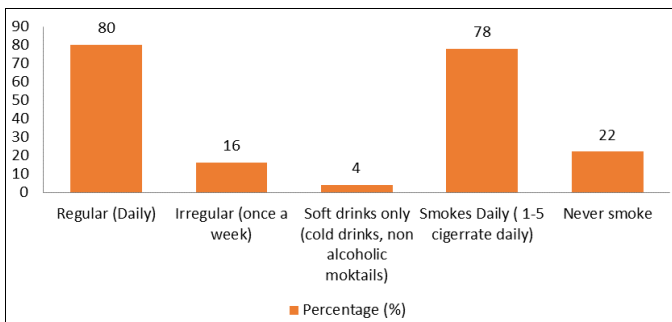
**Diagram 4:** The type of exercise respondents follow in their daily lives

Diagram 4 shows the percentage of exercise in terms of physical activities, 62% engage in light physical activities such as walking, simple yoga etc., 30% engage in moderate exercise such as bicycling, jogging and other household chores, and only 8% engage in heavy exercise, including gym, swimming, outdoor play etc.



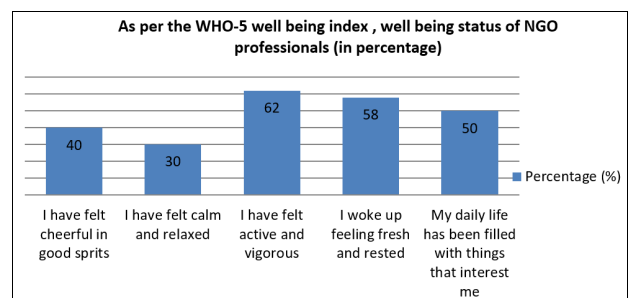
**Diagram 7:** Job insecurity measures among respondents

Diagram 7 shows that 96% of people are insecure about their job, which constantly occupies their thoughts. 88% of respondents said they are concerned about their future financial stability with the NGO they are currently working for, and 50% said they are frequently excluded from discussions or meetings that affect their mental health. 78% of respondents feel that overall, physical working conditions are likely to deteriorate. 80% of the sample group believes that the probability of being laid off is high.



**Diagram 5:** The status of alcohol consumption and smoking habits among the respondents

Diagram 5 shows the percentage of alcohol consumption is quite high: nearly 80% drink alcohol on a regular basis, 16% drink on an irregular basis, like on occasion or with peer groups at the weekend, while only 4% drink only soft drinks and do not consume alcohol. 78% of the population smokes daily, 1-5 cigarettes per day, and 22% have never smoked.



**Diagram 8:** The well-being status of the NGO professionals

The well-being measures as per the last week's status are as follows: 40% of respondents feel cheerful and in good spirits. Only 30% of respondents have felt calm and relaxed, 62% have felt active and vigorous, 58% woke up feeling fresh and rested, and just 50% have had their lives filled with things that interest them.

## Discussion

The current study analysed the lifestyle pattern, mental health, job security measures, and well-being status of 50 NGO professionals who are working in Jharkhand, West Bengal, India. The NGOs' professionals are typically between the ages of 25 and 35. The majority of the total respondents have studied social work, rural development, and management, and there are people from other backgrounds who studied BA, MA, B.Sc., M.Sc., etc. The researcher also discussed the monthly earnings of the respondent from the NGO, and the responses are different for different designations. Those who work at field level as a field worker or social mobilizer are earning between 10,000 and 15,000 rupees per month; in some cases, those who have more than 2 years of experience are earning about 20,000 rupees per month. The professionals who are working as project coordinators or managers or as fund-raising officers are earning from 25,000 to 45,000 rupees per month, and more senior-level professionals who have 3-5 years of working experience in the same thematic area are getting more than 50,000 rupees from the NGO. When asked, "Are you the only earning member of your family?" many people answer yes. And the vast majority of people come from middle-class families. The salary of an NGO professional in India cannot be argued to be very low all of the time, but the issue is fear of losing the job and an insecure lifestyle because if someone is earning a good salary today, they may have to shift and adopt a completely new project, job area, working environment, etc., and that change is very frequent for most professionals.

From the data and during the interview, it has been seen that most of the NGO professionals feel insecure in their lives, and their lifestyle, mental health, and well-being status are also not very smooth. There are challenges; they go through various mental health crises as well as physical crises. NGO professionals are really working hard to make changes in society. They work in a hypothetical context to bring about positive outcomes. But their lives and lifestyles are difficult in most of the situations. While this is a positive side for youth, unemployment is a major issue for many countries, so after earning a professional degree in social work, youth are able to work for a sustainable society with earning opportunities. On the other hand, when young professionals enter development sectors, it requires a great deal of dedication and effort to work for society and people. After a certain time, it develops automatically. So, to gather experience and struggle with such a situation, they mostly lose the opportunity to prepare for government jobs, which are quite secure in terms of job security, and also to establish their own start-up, and the only option remaining is to stick in the development sector, where the salary range is also variable. Salary is determined by experience as well as the NGO's fund availability. Sometimes maybe they are earning more than 50,000 INR, which is quite a good amount for Jharkhand, but sometimes maybe they have to settle for a lower salary also. Daily life challenges are also acceptable at a young age, but later it is quite difficult to accept new challenges, places, and job roles. There is no guarantee that if one starts receiving attention from an NGO, they can continue for as long as the NGO itself depends on the project and mostly on external funding sources.

Most professionals are not able to maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle due to their uncertain working environment. After marriage, it becomes more difficult to maintain a balanced life. If husband and wife both work in the development sector, they have to struggle a lot to find a job in the same place. Otherwise, they have to live their lives in a

long-distance relationship, and managing their children's lives is another challenging situation in such circumstances. Moreover, from the study, it has been understood that job insecurity is one of the major issues for NGO professionals. The development sector provides an excellent opportunity to work for the people, society, and at the grassroots level, and change makers can bring change from the grassroots level to policy making because they deal with real-life situations, interact with people directly, and perceive the real scenario. If more focus can be given to the job sustainability of the NGO professional, more youth will be attracted to this practise-based profession, and we can build a sustainable society.

It was seen that alcohol consumption among them is quite high. Most of the NGOs are working on health promotion, but when we see the health status of the professionals themselves, there are many issues. Diabetes, hypertension, and PCOD among females are all common illnesses, but they are all linked to mental health and well-being as well. In the telephone interview, almost all the girls said they have PCOD. PCOD (polycystic ovarian disease) cannot be cured, but it can be managed through exercise, a high-fibre diet, etc., and by reducing the excess weight. But time management, following a healthy diet and regular exercise are not followed by most male and female professionals.

Workshops, interactive discussion sessions, and relatable group work activities on topics such as alcohol consumption and its side effects, how to manage mental health while working under pressure, and so on, can be organised in the workplace for the health and well-being of professionals. Of course, there are numerous programmes that promote health awareness, but the more we focus on bringing about change in novel ways, the better the results will be. A healthy individual will be more productive at work as well.

The limitation of this study is that the sample size used in this study was small, and the results may not be generalizable. Only limited variables were taken, like age, sex, designation, etc.

## Conclusion

By considering all the factors and related consequences, it can be said that there is a need to emphasise the better mental health and well-being status of NGO professionals. The committee and boards that formulate policies for the organisation can focus on keeping the existing employees and promoting mental health, peace, and well-being in the workplace through various short-term programmes and activities. Thus, we can establish friendly and welcoming development sectors.

The findings of the research implied to understand the lifestyle, job security, mental health and well-being status of NGO Professionals, working in Jharkhand. More contribution towards research should be given in this area. The finding may also draw the attentions of human resource personnel's, board members of NGOs and CBOs, policy makers to make health and well-being policies for such organizations.

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