

Invisible Workforce, Visible Distress: Understanding the relationship of Depression, Anxiety and Stress with Well-being in the Indian Female Domestic Help workers (Informal economy)

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Abstract

The Female Domestic Help workers in India form an invisible workforce of the informal economy that is highly oppressed, systematically exploited, and inevitably prone to developing mental health issues. Preliminary research suggests that this group is highly vulnerable to struggles such as acute financial stress, domestic problems, workplace harassment, etc (Sharma and Chandhok,2025). These factors, along with a lack of social support and perceived safety, increase the risk of mental illness. The population of Female Domestic Help workers is undeniably significant and vital, as they support and contribute to society's social and economic fabric in crucial ways. They are, in many ways, an invisible backbone of today's human civilisation. Given the importance of this segment of society, the present research was conducted to examine the relationship between levels of depression, anxiety, stress and the well-being of Female Indian Domestic Help workers. To facilitate this study, a total sample of 117 female domestic help workers was approached from the select districts of the North and South zones of Delhi-NCR. A total of 117 interviews were conducted using the technique of convenience and snowball sampling. The instruments employed to collect data in the present study were the Hindi version of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21) and WHO Well-being Index (1998). The preliminary findings of the study were indicative of the presence and experience of moderate to high levels of distress in the workers (M=18.3). It also indicated mild levels of Depression(M=11.9). Other important findings were reflective of severe levels of anxiety (M=16.6) and low levels of well-being (M=7.40) across both the zones. The results were further indicative of a negative correlation between depression, anxiety, Anxiety, Stress and Well-being. The variables of Depression, Anxiety and Stress were found to be strongly interrelated; they depicted a weak positive correlation with well-being, which was insignificant. This finding is indicative of how Psychological Distress does not significantly predict well-being in this sample. The present study adds to the empirical data concerning the pertinent mental health struggles and issues being faced by the informal community of workers today in India. It lays the foundation and future directives for an immediate and urgent need of psychological interventions and support programmes for the welfare of this underacknowledged population of workers.

Keywords: Indian Female Domestic Help Workers, Well-Being, Depression, Anxiety, Stress

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Female domestic help workers constitute a large share of informal sector workers in India. According to estimates, the number of these workers is around 52.4 million worldwide (International Labour Organisation, 2013). These women face exploitation, abuse and harassment of varying

nature.Chadha (2021) has highlighted that despite being such a crucial workforce of the nation, these human resources remain under-recognised, under-organised, and under-resourced.

It has been found that the Female Domestic Help workers face and suffer from a lot of mental health challenges. The constant and perpetual abuse and exploitation which they are subjected to make them more vulnerable to develop mental health issues like Depression, Anxiety and chronic stress (Sahni and Jaiswal,2019). Domestic help workers are subjected

to extreme forms of unregulated working conditions, under acknowledgment of efforts and low wages. A study conducted in the socio-cultural context of Kashmir (2025) on 400 Female domestic help workers particularly brings forth the insights regarding how these workers suffer from extreme psychological distress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion etc. Hussain(2022) conducted another study in the South Asian context to explore the mental and psychological parameters of the health of the Female Domestic Help workers. The findings of this study were crucial and of utmost relevance for prompt intervention. The are reflective of how 52.4 percent of these workers suffer from Major Depressive Disorder and a seemingly large percentage also suffer from Generalised Anxiety Disorder.

After an intensive review of literature, it was found that the mental health struggles and concerns of Female Domestic help workers remain under-researched and underemphasized as major concerns that require prompt interventions. A framework that incorporates and investigates the various aspects of the mental and psychological functioning of these workers is imperative. The pre-existing literature also lacks research work centric to the region of Delhi. Delhi, being a highly populous metropolitan city that has become a melting pot of informal workers from a variety of contexts and backgrounds, is found to be a major and crucial region for investigation into the psycho-social realities of the workers residing in this region. Therefore, on the basis of this dearth in literature and lack of empirical evidence in the Indian context with respect to these workers, a research study was conducted to explore and assess the mental health concerns existing in this vulnerable and marginalised group of women. An inquiry was made into their psychological and mental functioning with emphasis on Depression, Anxiety, stress, and their potential effect on the overall sense of well-being of the Female Domestic Help workers. Since the psychological factors impacting the overall Well-being of such a significant section of society cannot be ignored, an attempt was made to assess the levels of Depression, Anxiety, Stress and its relationship with the Well-

being of the Female Domestic Help Workers. On the basis of this rationale, the following objectives were proposed-

Objectives:

- 1.To assess levels of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among the Female Domestic Help workers.
2. To assess levels of Well-Being in the Female Domestic Help Workers.
3. To examine the relationship between Stress, Depression, Anxiety and Well-Being in the Female Domestic Help Workers.

To fulfil these objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated-

1. There will be a significant relationship between Depression, Anxiety, Stress and Well-Being among the Female Domestic Help Workers.
2. Depression, Anxiety and Stress will be negatively correlated with well-being.

Sub-hypotheses-

- Depression will be significantly related to Well-being.
- Anxiety will be significantly related to Well-being.
- Stress will be significantly related to Well-being.

Methodology:

Sample

The research study was conducted on a total sample of 117 Female Domestic Help Workers from the North and South Zones of Delhi-NCR. The sample was constituted using non-probability sampling techniques of convenience and snowball sampling.

Tools Used

The following tools were used to gather data from the participants-

1. Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21)- The standardised Hindi version of this scale was used in the conduct of the research survey. The scale enabled the measurement of the traits of Depression, Anxiety and Stress in the Female Domestic Help Workers.

2. WHO Well-Being Index (WHO-5)- The standardised Hindi version of this scale was used to measure the level of Well-being of the Female Domestic Help Workers. It provided a measure of the respondents' subjective well-being.

Procedure

To facilitate the research study, a sample of 117 female domestic help workers from both the North and South regions of Delhi NCR was approached. Along with the preliminary rapport-building, informed consent was obtained before the structured interview was conducted. The study was also approved for its conduct by the Ethical Committee (Delhi Technological University). The survey was conducted using structured interview schedules. Data on the aforementioned measures were collected and further analysed and interpreted for results using Jamovi in R Studio. This was followed by the interpretation and discussion of the results.

Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis was based on the measures and techniques of Descriptive statistics. The mean,

standard deviation and range were calculated for the data spread across each of the measures of Anxiety, Depression, Stress and Well-being. For further analysis of examining the relationships among the variables, Pearson's correlation technique was used to obtain the values of Pearson's correlation for multiple interrelationships among the variables.

Results

The following quantitative findings were obtained-

The Mean scores across measures indicated the following-

- Depression: M=11.9, SD=6.75 (Mild level of Depression)
- Anxiety: M=16.6, SD=9.76 (Severe level of anxiety)
- Stress: M=18.3, SD=9.85 (Moderate level of Stress)
- Well-Being: M= 7.40, SD=4.93 (Low level of Well-being)

Descriptives

	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Well being
N	117	117	117	117
Missing	2	2	2	2
Mean	11.9	16.6	18.3	7.40
Standard deviation	6.75	9.76	9.85	4.93
Minimum	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Maximum	30.0	42.0	40.0	20.0

Fig- Results of Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The following were the results obtained from the correlational analysis:

Significant positive correlations were found among:

- Depression and Anxiety ($r=0.763$, $p<.001$)
- Depression and Stress ($r=0.737$, $p<.001$)

- Anxiety and Stress ($r=.819$, $p<.001$)

No significant correlations were observed between:

- Depression and Well-Being ($r=.065$, $p>.05$)
- Anxiety and Well-Being ($r=0.089$, $p>.05$)
- Stress and Well-Being ($r=0.112$, $p>.05$)

Correlation Matrix					
		Depression	Anxiety	Stress	Well being
Depression	Pearson's r	—			
	df	—			
	p-value	—			
Anxiety	Pearson's r	0.763	—		
	df	115	—		
	p-value	<.001	—		
Stress	Pearson's r	0.737	0.819	—	
	df	115	115	—	
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—	
Well being	Pearson's r	0.065	0.089	0.112	—
	df	115	115	115	—
	p-value	0.484	0.338	0.231	—

Fig-Results of Correlational Statistical Analysis

Discussion:

The research study aimed to assess and explore the prevalence of mental health concerns like depression, anxiety, and Stress in the marginalised group of female domestic help workers, along with their relationships with the levels of Well-being of this vulnerable section. After following the aforementioned rigorous research methodology, the results and findings obtained were quite insightful.

The results based on Descriptive Statistics analysis indicated that the respondents experienced mild to moderate levels of Depression (M=11.9, SD=6.75). The results were also reflective of severe levels of anxiety (M=16.6, SD=9.76) and the level of Stress reported was found to be moderate (M=18.3, SD=9.85). Other results which were obtained on the measure of Well-being were indicative of very low levels (M=7.40, SD=4.93). These quantitative findings are reflective of certain concerning and crucial insights. It portrays the grim reality of these workers which is found to be overwhelmed with psychological and emotional challenges. The particularly elevated levels of anxiety can be understood against the backdrop of highly unstable life journeys, overloaded with unregulated and inconsistent work schedules. This can also be attributed to an intense fear and insecurity associated with the precarious and hopeless lives that these workers have to endure.

The correlational results and findings reveal a strong positive relationship between the among Depression, anxiety and stress. Specifically, depression was highly correlated with anxiety ($r = 0.763$, $p < .001$) and stress ($r = 0.737$, $p < .001$), while anxiety and stress showed the strongest association ($r = 0.819$, $p < .001$).

Contrary to the study's hypothesis, no significant relationships were obtained between Depression and Well-being, Anxiety and Well-being, and Stress and Well-being. These correlations have also found to be weak yet positive, this goes against the conventional understanding of how Psychological distress is related to Well-being.

This unconventional finding can be understood through multiple plausible explanations. One of which is the harsh and predominating impact of socio-economic factors on the quality of life of these workers. The socio-economic factor and excessive hardships might become significant predictors of their overall well-being, overshadowing the impact of mental health concerns. These findings can also be explained through the excessive cultural normalisation of hardships, resilience and adaptation as survival mechanisms. These cultural influences on the existing beliefs and values of these workers might make them less sensitive to the perception of distress, thereby acting as buffers to their overall

subjective Well-being.

Conclusion: The overall findings of this empirical study are suggestive of a complex relationship between psychological distress and Well-being of the Female Domestic Help Workers. High levels of psychological distress exist with low-levels of well-being (M=7.40)

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