Happiness and Personality Traits of Care Professionals: A Comparative Analysis of Nurses in Kerala

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Nurses serve as inevitable professionals in health care delivery system. Happiness is a basic human attribute and is an indispensible factor in organizations. The quality of patient care is strongly associated with the levels of satisfaction and happiness of the nurses. The present study delineates the level of happiness of nurses in Kerala and their personality dispositions on work and happiness. A cross sectional study has been undertaken among 474 nurses. The study establishes a positive correlation between happiness and personality traits. It reveals the sectoral, gender and generational difference in happiness levels of nurses.

1. Introduction

Happiness is one of the determining factors in any organization leading to better personal and performance outcomes. Studies reported that happiness induces self-esteem, social relations and organizational commitment. It also helps in maintaining a supportive organizational environment. Studies also reveal that happy people have less burn out and absenteeism and are less likely to leave their jobs. Most of the researchers argue that happy employees are more productive in the workplace.

Statement of the Problem

Nurses from the state of Kerala are noted for their professionalism across the world. They do a laudable work within the state as well as in many foreign countries. The nurses are one of the inevitable groups of professionals in the health care delivery system in providing safe, affordable and quality services to the people. This has given a special recognition to the profession in the state of Kerala and a greater number of nurses are attracted to the profession traditionally. Though the number of nurses in Kerala is on the increase, their quality has become a serious concern. The recent changes in the health care system in Kerala are characterized by a large scale commercialization of this sector leading this service into a well established industry. The increasing trend of privatization of this sector is bringing serious workplace challenges to the professional nurses. This is in tune with the evolving informalisation of labour across the world. Ultimately these lead to massive exploitation and human rights violation among the nurse professionals. Long hours of duty, frequent night duty, poor nurse-patient ratio, deputing for non-nursing jobs, heavy exploitation of trainee nurses and low remuneration are reported to be some of the issues of Nurses in Kerala (Balaraman Committee report). The recent protests and campaigns initiated by nurses in Kerala is an indication to the gravity of issues confronted by them. All these lead to a declining attraction towards the nursing profession in the state and in turn create serious decline in the quality of care offered by the health care sector. As Nurses hold a pivotal position in the healthcare system the quality of patient care is strongly associated with the levels of satisfaction and happiness of the nurses.

Even though there are several studies attempting to assess the happiness levels of nurses in other countries, such studies based on Indian context are very limited. Also examining the inter-relationship between happiness and personality of nurses is worth studying because the types of interventions to address the issues confronted by them possessing different personality traits require a different perspective. Thus a study on happiness levels and personality of nursing professionals in Kerala becomes relevant.

2. Review of Related Studies

Prasad et. al. (2016) conducted an empirical study of the Happiness of Doctors in North Bengal. It was revealed that the most satisfied work attributes were different from the most important attributes contributing happiness at work among the respondents. The study concluded that salary and interesting nature of the work were the most important attributes that affected workplace happiness of doctors while safety, location of work or workload as the least important factors affecting their happiness. Another study by Rajasekhar and Sharda (2016) investigated correlation between locus of control and happiness among postgraduate students in India. They reported a strong significant positive correlation between happiness and locus of control among the respondents. Students with internal locus of control were found to be happier than those with external locus of control. In a comparative study by Sharma and Garg (2016) among Private Sector IT Professionals from Jaipur, it was found that there is a significant difference between male and female private sector IT professionals on Psychological Distress (GHQ). At the same time, there is no significant difference reported between the male and female private sector IT professional on life satisfaction, happiness and measures of forgiveness. There was no difference between males and females in the experience of happiness.

The literature is enriched by happiness studies across different countries in the world. In a study by Chaiprasit and Santidhirakul (2011) analysed the happiness at work of employees in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Thailand. It was found that the relationship between five independent variables (job inspiration, organization's shared value, relationship, quality of work life, leadership) and happiness at work was positive. Relationship, quality of work life and leadership were three elements that led to happiness at work and important predictors of happiness at work. Erol (2015) assessed the psychological well-being, happiness and educational satisfaction among a group of university music students in Turkey in which it was concluded that depression, stress and anxiety had a negative impact on happiness. However, there was a positive relationship between students' GPA's and happiness levels.

The relationship between happiness and personality traits has been established by several studies across different occupational groups in various countries. For example, Soto (2015) attempted to examine longitudinal relations of the Big Five personality traits with three aspects of subjective well-being: life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect among Australian residents. This study established significant correlations between subjective well-being and four personality traits namely Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism. The first three traits are positively correlated with subjective well being whereas the Neuroticism has got a negative correlation.

Some other studies proved a strong association of personality traits like extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness with happiness. Chamorro-premuzic et.al. (2007) conducted a study on the happiness and personality by analyzing mediating role of trait emotional intelligence. Four of the Big Five, namely stability, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, were positively correlated with both happiness and trait Emotional Intelligence, which explained 18% of unique variance (over and above age and the Big Five) in happiness. Grant (2009) revealed that Extraversion, neuroticism and conscientiousness correlated similarly with both subjective and psychological well-being, suggesting that these traits represent personality predispositions for a general level of well-being. Similar is the finding of Bahiraei et.al (2012). They established significant relationship between all personality dimension and happiness among Iranian students. Extraversion followed by neuroticism has the highest correlation with happiness. The results of showed that neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness were major predictors of students' happiness, respectively.

Whereas the findings of Woo and Ahn, (2015) found to be little different, which showed that the linguistic characteristics of extroversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience have significant relationship with the different meanings of happiness manifested by the level of arousal in the texts. Brajša-žganec (2011) in a study explored the relationship between personality, social desirability and the components of subjective well-being namely life satisfaction, positive affects and negative affects among University students of Croatia. The results confirmed previous findings that personality, specifically extraversion, emotional stability and conscientiousness, represent strong predictors of subjective well-being.

The personality traits extroversion was found to be positively correlated with happiness while neurotism was established to be negatively correlated. Furnham and Cheng (1999) carried out a comparative study on personality as a predictor of mental health and happiness among the students from Britain, China (Hong Kong) and Japan. Correlation analysis in all three countries showed extraversion to be a major correlate of happiness while neuroticism was shown to be a correlate of mental health. Studies from Iran also support this. For example, Nooshin et.al (2011) concluded that there was a positive direct relation between extroversion and happiness; and a negative direct relation between neuroticism and happiness among the employees of Kermanshah University of Medicine Science. While studying personality and self-esteem as predictors of happiness and depression among High School students Malekiha (2012) found that there was significant relation between personality traits (Extroversion and intuition) and happiness which confirms the previous research that self-esteem was most powerful direct predictor of both happiness and depression.

According to Hu (2005) extraversion and neuroticism were significant predictors of happiness among Chinese university students as well. Gleckel (2015) undertook a study on Friendship quality and personality as predictors of psychological well-being in emerging adults. It was found that personality dimensions accounted for a significant amount of variance in each aspect of well-being. Moreover, friendship quality predicted happiness, belongingness, and anxiety, above and beyond the influence of personality. Another study by Arab et. al. (2016) proved that level of stress, anxiety and depression among medical students in Iran is high that have negative correlation with their level of happiness.

Robbins et.al. (2010) concluded that individual differences among old adolescents in England in the levels of concern for the happiness of others are associated with gender, neuroticism scores and extroversion scores. Francis (2014) also established that happiness among Female Undergraduate Students in Israel is associated with high extraversion and with low neuroticism and that there is a positive association between happiness and religiosity.

Recently, Ford et .al. (2016) carried out a study on personality, humor styles and happiness which proved that happiness was positively correlated with four personality traits: extraversion, locus of control, self-esteem, and optimism. The study concluded that people high in extraversion, locus of control, self-esteem, and optimism are

happier because they engage in positive humor in daily life. Another study by Salary and Reza (2013) concluded that there was a significant correlation between neuroticism and happiness among university students. There was a positive and significant correlation between extroversion and happiness.

However, not many studies on happiness among nurses specifically in Indian context are available leaving studies like Kumari and Sharma (2016). This was a study among undergraduate students of Sonepat to analyse personality traits and mental wellbeing. It was concluded that Neuroticism, Extraversion and Openness to experience were significant predictors of Mental Well-Being. It implies that the predisposed personality traits are important determinants of Mental Well-Being. Extrovert individuals and individuals having openness to experience would have a good score on Mental Well-Being scale. The individuals having high score on Neuroticism would score low on Mental Well-Being scale.

3. Research Methodology

The present study aims at delineating the level of happiness of nurses in Kerala by comparing their inter-generational and sectoral differences. This study also explores the personality dispositions of nurses with regard to their work and happiness. A cross sectional study has been undertaken among the nursing professionals in the state of Kerala, the southernmost state of India. A total of 474 nurses belong to different generations, sector, and locations have been selected as samples for the study by applying multistage sampling method. Happiness has been measured using Oxford Happiness Scale and the personality traits are measured by using Big Five Personality test (shorter version). Reliability of the scales was checked by finding out the Cronbach's alpha values. Cronbach's Alpha for happiness scale was 0.761, and for personality trait assessment the value was 0.673. Various statistical tools like Students t test and Correlation Analysis have been applied for analyzing the data.

Profile of the Respondents

An equal number of respondents represent private and govt. sector hospitals. 95 per cent of the respondents were females and the rest male nurses. Around 58 per cent of the nurses belong to hospitals having a bed size of 51 to 300. Another 21 per cent were from small hospitals having bed strength of less than 50 while 5 per cent of the respondents were from large hospitals with more than 500 beds. Approximately 78 per cent of the respondents were married whereas 15 per cent unmarried. About 70 per cent of the nurses having qualification of General Nursing (GNM), and another 24 per cent were bachelors in (BSc) nursing. Around 63 per cent of the nurses belong to the Gen Y (born between 1981 and 2000) category and the rest in Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980). Gen Y are popularly known as Millennials.

Happiness of Nurses

The overall analysis reveals that the mean value of happiness among the sample is 4.113 on a scale of 1 to 6. This shows that the happiness level of the nurses working in the state of Kerala is just above the median value of 3.5 indicating that their happiness is at a moderate level.

Sector wise data indicates that nurses in the private sector are less happy compared to their counter parts in the govt. sector. The mean score for private sector was 3.989 while for the govt. sector it was 4.237 (table 1). Student's t test supports this inference according to which the difference in mean score of happiness between private and govt. sector nurses is significant at 1 per cent level (p value is 0.000). This difference can be attributed to the concerns in conditions of work offered in the private hospitals in the state. The nurses are seriously worried about the job insecurity and poor salary in the sector.

Table 1 *Comparative Analysis of Happiness across Sector, Gender and Generation*

Variable		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T value	P value
Sector	Private	237	3.989	0.568	0.037	-4.857	0.000**
	Govt.	237	4.237	0.543	0.035		
Gender	Male	21	3.836	0.499	0.109	-2.295	0.022*
	Female	453	4.126	0.569	0.026		
Generation	Gen Y	295	4.023	0.568	0.033	-4.497	0.000**
	Gen X	179	4.261	0.541	0.040		

**significant at 0.01 level   * significant at 0.05 level

Female nurses were found to be happier than their male counterparts. This difference in happiness level between male and female nurses were also proved statistically significant at 5 per cent level, as per the results of student's t test (p value is 0.022). More or less similar finding was reported by Chui and Wong (2015) in a study

carried out in Hong Kong and Sharma and Gulati based on an Indian context (2015). Generation wise analysis reveals that happiness levels of nurses belonging to the Gen X (mean score 4.261) are higher than those in the Generation Y (4.023). Results of t test substantiate this inference at 1 per cent level of significance. This is in conformity with the findings of Sengupta (2016) in India context.

Personality Traits of Nurses
There are diverse perspectives on personality assessment. The current study used the big five factor popularly known as **OCEAN** framework to measure personality traits.

Openness to Experience (O): Openness to experience has been described as the depth and complexity of an individual's mental life and experiences (John & Srivastava, 1999). It is the personality trait of searching for new experience and intellectual pursuits.

Conscientiousness (C): Conscientiousness is a trait that can be described as the tendency to control impulses and act in socially acceptable ways, behaviors that facilitate goal-directed behavior (John & Srivastava, 1999). It is characterized by honesty and perseverance. Conscientious people excel in their ability to delay gratification, work within the rules, and plan and organize effectively.

Extroversion (E): This trait is concerned with where an individual draws their energy and how they interact with others. In general, extroverts draw energy or "recharge" from interacting with others, while introverts get tired from interacting with others and replenish their energy from solitude. It is the personality trait of seeking fulfillment from sources outside the self or in community.

Agreeableness (A): This trait describes how well people get along with others. While extroversion concerns sources of energy and the pursuit of interactions with others, agreeableness concerns one's orientation to others. It is a construct that rests on how a person generally interacts with others. It reflects the extent to which individuals adjust their behavior to suit others.

Neuroticism (N): Neuroticism is the one Big five factor in which a high score indicates more negative traits. It is a personality trait of being emotional. It encompasses one's emotional stability and general temper.

The data from the study reveals that the mean value of Extroversion (3.576) is the highest among the various traits of personality among the nurses followed by Conscientiousness (3.504) and Openness to experience (3.209). Psychologists give some typical attributes of people possessing different traits (Lebowitz, 2016). For example, people high in extroversion tend to seek out opportunities for social interaction, where they are often the "life of the party." They are comfortable with others, gregarious, and prone to action rather than contemplation. Those who are high in conscientiousness are likely to be successful in school and in their career, to excel in leadership positions**,** and to persistently pursue their goals with determination and forethought. An individual who is high in openness to experience tend to have a love of learning, enjoys the arts, engages in a creative career or hobby, and likes meeting new people.

The mean score of agreeableness trait was 3.103. Those who score high in agreeableness tend to be well-liked, respected, and sensitive to the needs of others. They likely have few enemies, are sympathetic, and affectionate to their friends and loved ones, as well as sympathetic to the plights of strangers. The mean score of Neurotism (2.956) was reported to be the lowest indicating that the negative feelings among the nurses are relatively less. Individuals who score low in neuroticism are more likely to feel confident, sure of themselves, and adventurous. They may also be brave and unencumbered by worry or self-doubt. (Lebowitz, 2016). Thus the personality traits of the nurses were found to be relatively matching with the requirements of a care professional. This is evident from the high score of Extroversion, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness.

Table 2 *Personality Traits of Nurses across Different Sectors*

Personality Trait	Sector	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T value	P value
Extroversion	Private	237	3.449	0.911	0.059	-2.811	0.005*
	Govt.	237	3.703	1.045	0.068		
Agreeableness	Private	237	3.144	0.931	0.060	0.917	0.360
	Govt.	237	3.063	0.972	0.063		
Conscientiousness	Private	237	3.285	0.823	0.053	-5.237	0.000*
	Govt.	237	3.724	0.993	0.064		
Neurotism	Private	237	3.095	0.987	0.064	3.216	0.001*
	Govt.	237	2.810	0.940	0.061		
Openness	Private	237	3.059	0.725	0.047	-3.887	0.000*
	Govt.	237	3.359	0.939	0.061		

*significant at 0.01 level

Data in the table 2 shows that there is significant difference (at 1 per cent level) in all the traits of personality except agreeableness between the nurses working in the private and govt. sector hospitals. The nurses in the govt. sector are having higher scores for Extroversion, Conscientiousness and Openness compared to those in the private sector. In the case of Neurotism, nurses in the private sector are having a higher score indicating a comparatively negative personality among nurses in this sector. Leon (2017) in Peru reported only higher score of openness among those belonging to public sector.

Table 3 *Personality Traits across Different Gender*

Personality Trait	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T value	P value
Extroversion	Male	21	3.357	0.673	0.147	-1.039	0.290
	Female	453	3.586	0.999	0.047		
Agreeableness	Male	21	2.976	0.844	0.184	-0.626	0.532
	Female	453	3.109	0.957	0.045		
Conscientiousness	Male	21	3.024	0.955	0.208	-2.416	0.014*
	Female	453	3.527	0.931	0.044		
Neurotism	Male	21	2.905	0.861	0.188	-0.230	0.818
	Female	453	2.955	0.979	0.046		
Openness	Male	21	3.357	0.761	0.166	0.816	0.415
	Female	453	3.202	0.855	0.040		

significant at 0.01 level

It is found that there is no much difference in the four traits namely Extroversion, Agreeableness, Neurotism and Openness traits experienced by the male and female respondents. Only the Conscientiousness trait of the personality has got a significant difference between the male and female nurses. This inference is supported by the results of the student's t test (table 3). This is in conformity with the findings of Rubinstein (2005) where female students scored high in agreeableness and Conscientiousness.

Table 4 *Personality Traits across Generations of Nurses*

Personality Trait	Generation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T value	P value
Extroversion	Gen Y	295	3.414	0.923	0.054	-4.697	0.000**
	Gen X	179	3.844	1.033	0.077		
Agreeableness	Gen Y	295	3.163	0.914	0.053	1.746	0.081
	Gen X	179	3.006	1.006	0.075		
Conscientiousness	Gen Y	295	3.312	0.892	0.052	-5.941	0.000**
	Gen X	179	3.821	0.926	0.069		
Neurotism	Gen Y	295	3.027	0.961	0.056	2.150	0.032**
	Gen X	179	2.830	0.985	0.074		
Openness	Gen Y	295	3.132	0.768	0.045	-2.531	0.012**
	Gen X	179	3.335	0.962	0.072		

**significant at 0.01 level

There is a significant difference (at 1 per cent level) in all the traits of personality except agreeableness among the nurses belonging to the Generation X and Y (table 4). The nurses in the Gen X are having higher scores for Extroversion, Conscientiousness and Openness compared to those from the Gen Y. Bargavi et al (2017) also concluded more of similar inferences based on an Indian IT employees study. In the case of Neurotism, nurses in the Gen Y are having a higher score indicating a comparatively negative personality among nurses belong to this Generation.

Table 5 *Correlation between Happiness and Traits of Personality*

		Extroversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neurotism	Openness
Happiness	Pearson	0.262**	0.189**	0.394**	-0.184**	0.091*
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.047
	N	474	474	474	474	474

**significant at 0.01 level   * significant at 0.05 level

Correlation analysis reveals that the happiness of nurses is significantly correlated with all the traits of personality (table 5). Neurotism exhibits a negative correlation with happiness while all other traits had a positive correlation. Conscientiousness demonstrated the highest correlation with happiness score where as openness the lowest. Thus it can be inferred that the happiness and the traits of personality among the nurses from the state of Kerala are interrelated.

4. Suggestions and Recommendations

One of the most important inferences from the study is that the private sector nurses are less happy than their public sector counter parts. This is in tune with the happenings in Kerala where the nurses in the private sector hospitals are in a continuous agitation during the year of 2017-18. They demand for basic minimum wages and supportive working conditions. Even though the state government has brought out a reasonable package for the nurses in the private sector, most of the hospital authorities are not willing to pay the same. Still many of the nurses are yet to receive the revised salary package because of the unwillingness from the part of their management. They continue to be the victims of exploitation in many forms. The government has to ensure that the package is implemented by all the private hospitals in Kerala. Another finding from the study reveals that nurses belonging to millennial generation are not as happy as those in the generation X. Millennial nurses deserves a different set of approach as they are highly wired, connected and unconventional. This is further evident from the analysis of personality traits of nurses from both the generations where significant differences are found in almost all personality traits between nurses belonging to Gen X and Gen Y. Efforts should be taken by the hospitals to engage them positively.

5. Conclusion

Nurses in the private sector health care institutions in the state of Kerala are in an awakening stage. The state govt. has taken a positive measure of fixing basic wages for the nurses in private hospitals, which is a welcome response in this regard. But the management of the institutions is not completely willing to implement this, which in turn will be a setback to hope of these professionals. The findings of the present study confirm the plight of nurses in the state of Kerala. It highlights that the nurses in the private sector are not much happy reflecting the concerns of their conditions of work. The study also establishes that there are generational differences in the happiness levels and personality traits of nurses in Kerala. It was also inferred that the personality trait and happiness of nurses are inter-related. Hence it is important to take care of the happiness of care professionals as they are devoted to ensure the wellbeing and happiness of others around them.

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