



**SOMATIC TRENDS, PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYEES**

<sup>1\*</sup>Syeda Ayat-e-Zainab Ali, <sup>2</sup>Tamkeen Saleem, <sup>3</sup>Rabab Mahwish Khan and <sup>4</sup>Huda Munawar

<sup>1\*</sup>, <sup>3</sup>Ms Scholar, Clinical Psychology, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup>PhD Scholar, Lecturer, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan.

<sup>4</sup>Ms Scholar, Project Management, Institute of Management Sciences Peshawar, Pakistan.

**\*Corresponding Author: Syeda Ayat-e-Zainab Ali**

Ms Scholar, Clinical Psychology, Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan.

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the study was to investigate or to compare somatic trends, psychological distress and psychological well-being between male and female employees of public and private sector. The sample comprised of 300 male and female employees selected from Pakistan Ordinance Factories, Wah Cantt (N=150 as a public sector); and Hattar Industries, Haripur (N=150 as a private sector) Pakistan. The instruments used to measure Somatic trends, Psychological distress and well-being were 46-items Bradford Somatic Inventory and Mental Health Inventory-38. For hypotheses testing t-test were applied. The results disclosed the fact that employees of private sector exhibit significantly more somatic trends than employees of public sector; but there is in significant difference exist among male and female employees in relation to somatic trends. Female employees exhibit significantly more psychological distress as compared to male employees. Male employees exhibit significantly more psychological well-being as compared to female employees. Public sector employees score significantly high on psychological well-being as compared to private sector.

**KEYWORDS:** Somatic trends, Psychological Distress, Psychological Well-being, Employees, Pakistan.

**INTRODUCTION**

Employees are the backbone of any public or private sector, good and quality health is the basic need of each and every employee regardless of sex differences. Public sector employees are basically elected by the government itself for their organization<sup>[1]</sup>, whereas private sector comprised of non-governmental organization that is not owned by the government itself and where the employees work for their company's owner. Despite of that, there is huge differences exists between public and private sector. Inequity is encounter by many women and men working in different sectors.<sup>[2]</sup> Quality of the job, working hours and schedules, physical environment, overload and many others are some of the factors that vary in public or private sector and that are accountable for employees psychological well-being, physical and mental health related problems such as somatic trends and psychological distress.

Somatic trends are basically the physical shifts in the body that are often accompanied by bodily related complaints. Physical symptoms such as Fatigue, Head and abdominal aches, nausea, fainting, stomach related disturbances, muscle related aches, gastric and sleep problems and many more are the major cause for physician visits.<sup>[3,4,5]</sup> These physical symptoms are often

experienced by employees but sometimes they become distressing and causes hindrance in routine life.<sup>[6]</sup>

Over the years of survey, prevalence related to somatic trends rise with an unvarying pitch or tone. Somatic Problems exists among all communities, groups regardless of class or sex differences. According to Bureau of Labour Statistics (1996) musculoskeletal problems play a prime role in employee illnesses in USA. Somatic trends are more obvious among females in contrast to males.<sup>[7]</sup> Working women experience more somatic health complaints<sup>[8]</sup>; Fatigue, tiredness or weakness are more prominent in females than males.<sup>[9,10]</sup> Both male and female encounter same level of weakness and fatigue regardless of their occupational group.<sup>[11]</sup>

Women report more somatic trends as compared to men in terms of their mean value but there is insignificant difference exists between both these gender.<sup>[12]</sup> Various studies reported that employees who expose to computer related work are at increased risk of confronted with somatic health problems such as neck aches or upper extremity related issues.<sup>[13,14,15]</sup> About a third of time is spend by working population is at work, physical environment such as noise, heavy duties and demands, working hours often contributed in the development of such trends; in particular this kind of exposure is the root

for sleep related issues.<sup>[16]</sup> The prevalence of the somatic trends among both genders depends upon the work exposure at job settings despite of public or private sector. Multiple roles at work contributed in the development of such trends. Most of the studies concluded that men and women experience same level of problems at work settings.<sup>[17]</sup> However, in past gender inequalities are present but now a day's such divergence does not survive.

Regardless of such somatic or bodily related trends, another index for the health state of employees is mental health. Mental Health comprises of Psychological distress or well-being.<sup>[18]</sup> Psychological Distress is characterized by miserable subjective condition<sup>[19]</sup> or negative circumstances related to mental health. Disappointment, Frustration, Boredom, irritability, Suicidal ideation<sup>[20]</sup>, deficit in taking interest, hopelessness, worthlessness in various circumstances are the abstraction of psychological distress.<sup>[21]</sup> Within general group about 5-27% prevalence of psychological distress was found<sup>[22,23]</sup>, but its intensity increases within working population as employees encounter stressful and harmful working state. The rise in job demands, lack of support, in equilibrium in level of rewards are the leading factors for psychological distress at work settings.<sup>[24]</sup> Stressful working conditions leads to distressing state<sup>[25]</sup>, gender differences are found to be consistent with psychological distress<sup>[26]</sup>; Women often report more distress than males.<sup>[27,28,29]</sup> According to US survey, Females undergo 30% more psychological distress than males.

Quality of working life is responsible for mental health of employees; both psychological distress and well-being. Positive or Unequivocal perspective concerning life is Psychological Well-being.<sup>[30]</sup> Well-being is basically comprised by life satisfaction, lack of distress, happy or reliable feelings regarding oneself and for others.<sup>[31]</sup> Public sector employees reported more Psychological well-being than private sector.<sup>[32]</sup> Men significantly score higher on some of the aspects of psychological well-being than females.<sup>[33]</sup> Some studies provide contradictory views regarding gender differences<sup>[34,35]</sup> i-e male and female experience same level of well-being while other states that male exhibit more well-being than women.<sup>[33]</sup>

According to world Health Organization (2001), an approx of 31% mental health problems exists among all sexes regardless of age. The purpose of the study was to investigate somatic trends, psychological distress and psychological work being among employees at workplace. Mostly it is considered that in Pakistan private sectors provide more facilities provisions and opportunities to their employees as compared to public sectors but they demand their high potential extra work more compatibility extended long hours work even on holidays which leads to psychological distress, somatic complains and less psychological wellbeing as compared

to public sector employees. Similarly female employees have to perform dual responsibilities at workplace and marital and family life side and vulnerable to more distress somatic complaints and less psychological wellbeing. Due to lack of proper facilities, beneficiary's employees suffer from severe stress psychological distress, having different somatic complaints. Previous studies mostly focus on causal relationship between psychological distress and psychosomatic complaints or well-being. The current study aims to comparatively investigate somatic trends psychological distress and psychological wellbeing among public and private sector employees. Overall, in all the public and private sectors study is significantly implemented.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

**Study Design:** A study was conducted in Pakistan Ordinance Factories, Wah Cantt (Public Sector) and Hattar industries, Haripur, (Private Sector) Pakistan on the basis of cross-sectional survey research design. Convenience Sampling Technique is used for employee selection.

**Sample:** Three hundred employees

- N=150 (75 Males, 75 Females) Pakistan Ordinance Factories, Wah Cantt
- N=150 (75 Males, 75 Females) Hattar Industries, Haripur

## Objective

The basic aim of the study was

- I. To investigate or to compare differences in relation to somatic trends or psychological well-being between public or private sector employees.
- II. To investigate or to explore differences exists between male and female employees in relation to somatic trends, psychological distress, and psychological well-being.

## Hypotheses

- H1: Employees of private sector exhibit more somatic trends than public sector employees.  
 H2: Public sector employees score high on psychological well-being as compared to private sector.  
 H3: Female employees exhibit more somatic trends than male employees.  
 H4: Female employees exhibit more Psychological distress than male employees.  
 H5: Male employees exhibit more psychological well-being than female employees.

## Tool's Of Study

Self administered questionnaire was used to collect the data.

- **Bradford Somatic Inventory** (Mumford et al., 1991) with 46 items (2 items apply to men only) comprise of three choice format; (a) absent, (b) present on less than 15 days during past month, (c) present on more than 15days during past month; was used to

measure somatic trends. 0, 1 and 2 is used for scoring purposes.

➤ **Psychological Distress and Psychological Well-being** was measure by **Mental Health Inventory-38** (Veit & Ware, 1983). MHI-38 (Global subscales: Psychological Distress (22 items), Psychological Well-being (16 items)) was a six point scale comprise of 1=all of the time to 6=none of the time. For Psychological Distress scale reverse scoring is carried out. Both the tools was used in Urdu Language, as Urdu is native language of Pakistan.

**Procedure**

After gaining approval from the heads of public and private sector, informed consent is taken from the employees individually. Research purpose was explained to each and every employee and every quire regarding research was made clear. Then questionnaires with demographic variables was administered individually to employees and employee was asked to remain honest

while filling the answers. Then, the data was collected, in order to determine the results Statistical Package for social sciences (version, 21) was used and t-test was applied for hypotheses testing.

**RESULTS**

**Table 1: Cronbach's alpha of Bradford Somatic Inventory and Psychological Distress Subscale and Psychological Well-being subscale (N=300).**

Variable	N	$\alpha$
Somatic Trends	300	.92
Psychological Distress	300	.89
Psychological Well-being	300	.72

Reliability analysis of the scales is indicated in Table 1. For entire items of the Bradford Somatic Inventory , Psychological distress and Psychological well-being scale Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is .92, .89 and .72 which indicates high internal consistencies.

**Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values for Somatic Trends between public and private sector:**

	Private Sector		Public Sector		t	p	95%CI	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Somatic Trends	45.91	9.18	26.96	14.50	13.5	.000	16.18,21.70	1.56

Table 2 indicates significant sector differences on Somatic Trends, as private sector reflect more somatic trends as compared to public sector.

**Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values for Psychological Well-being between public and private sector.**

	Public Sector		Private Sector		t	p	95%CI	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Psychological Well-being	59.98	11.05	55.59	9.45	3.69	.000	2.04,6.72	0.42

Table 3 shows significant sector differences on Psychological well-being, as public sector indicates high psychological well-being as compared to private sector.

**Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values for Somatic Trends among female and male employees:**

	Female		Male		t	p	95%CI	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Somatic Trends	37.49	14.41	35.38	16.29	1.18	.23	-1.38,5.60	0.13

Table 4 indicate non significant gender differences on somatic trends, but female employees exhibit more somatic trends than male employees in terms of their mean values.

**Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values for Psychological Distress among female and male employees:**

	Female		Male		t	p	95%CI	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Psychological Distress	100.36	14.48	91.94	19.44	4.25	.000	4.52,12.31	0.49

Table 5 reflects significant gender differences on psychological distress, as female employees report more psychological distress than male employees.

**Table 6: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-values for Psychological Well-being among male and female employees:**

	Male		Female		t	p	95%CI	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Psychological well-being	61.56	10.16	54.01	9.44	6.66	.000	5.31,9.77	0.76

Table 6 indicates significant gender differences on Psychological Well-being, as male employees reflect more Psychological well-being than female employees.

## DISCUSSION

It was found through overview of literature that a difference exists between somatic complaints and psychological wellbeing among private and public sector employees; female employees exhibit more psychological distress as compared to male; Male employees exhibit more psychological well-being than female employees, and male and female employees exhibit same level of somatic trends. The finding of the researches proves hypothesis explained previously. The hypothesis stated that private sector employees exhibit more somatic complaints as compared to public sector employees. The present findings clearly indicate that private sector employees exhibit more somatic complaints than public sector employees i.e.  $p < 0.05$ . Due to extended and long hour's duties, more workload and stress leads to somatic symptoms in private sectors. Previous researches also prove this hypothesis and indicated that exposure to psychosocial risks included depression stress more workload workers develop violent behavior headache body pain and may other problems.<sup>[36]</sup> Similarly a research conducted in private hospital of Japan reported that employees who are working in operation rooms and intensive care units complain about fatigue anxiety and somatic symptoms.<sup>[37]</sup> The Present finding also proves the hypothesis that public sector employees exhibit more psychological well being than private sectors. As indicated above that private employees have more tension and stress that leads to more distress and psychological wellbeing. A study conducted at Tasmania in which it was found that employees who work at private sector of Australia exhibit more psychological distress as compared to other sectors by considering their whole work.<sup>[38]</sup> Whenever talk about gender especially in Pakistan there comes some differences in mind difference of power difference of tolerate level, control, responsibilities, strength. Male is considered dominant in every society especially in Pakistan that has more control more tolerate level and power so he can deal with any situation. Women's have to perform dual role. Managing family and marital life along with job leads them towards psychological distress sadness hopelessness anxiety and somatic problems. The present finding of the research proves the hypothesis that female employees exhibit more somatic trends than male employees and Female employees exhibit more psychological distress than male employees. Psychological distress and somatic symptoms are somehow related.<sup>[39]</sup> Previous researches also prove these findings. A research conducted by NOISH (1984) reported that among male and female who work at multi positions female's exhibits more psychological distress and somatic symptoms are also associated with them.<sup>[40]</sup> The study on general health (GHQ) questionnaire also reported that the percentage of female employees who exhibit psychological distress is more than male. As female employees exhibits more psychological distress sadness hopelessness so they have less psychological wellbeing.<sup>[41]</sup> Another hypothesis stated in the present study that Male employees exhibit more psychological

well-being than female employees also proved. A study conducted at the it department of Chandigarh, found that male employees are much more satisfied with their positions at workplace and they reported more psychological wellbeing than female employees.<sup>[42]</sup> Another study reported that males have mostly very high scores on freely floating anxiety, less stress and depression good mental health and high wellbeing as compared to females.<sup>[43]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Few decades ago life was not much complicated and the percentage of mental problems and other related issues was very low but with the passage of time competition among people was increases and striving for a better and better life becomes problematic for people. It was not limited to family issues but stress and anxiety at workplace leads employees towards distress somatic problems and low wellbeing. Distress and problems at work place do not explain all factors regarding mental health. Regarding literature review and topic of research people were strictly asked questions related to only research topic but still they were explaining many other problems related to mental health. In the context of Pakistani culture private sectors are much more demanding and time taking of employees. So in context of Pakistani companies it was found that the employees of that sector reported more distress less psychological well being and more somatic complaints. Similarly women who are considered weak loss their hope early and are more vulnerable to bodily problems anxiety stress as compared to males. Data was collected through a limited area.

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