

# **Leisure Satisfaction and Psychological Distress: A Comparative Study of Working and Non-Working Indian Youth (18-30)**

**VAISHNAVI BHARDWAJ<sup>1</sup> AND ALKA PANDEY<sup>\*2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Undergraduate Fellow and <sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor

Department of Psychology, School of Liberal Education

Galgotias University, Greater Noida (U.P.) India

**\*Corresponding Author**

## **ABSTRACT**

Mental health is a rising concern in Indian youth, and leisure activities work as a coping strategy in reducing stress. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of leisure satisfaction on psychological distress among working and non-working young adults. Data was collected through online survey method from 120 participants (18 to 30) using the Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS) and Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). The findings revealed a significant moderate negative correlation for the overall sample, which suggests higher satisfaction in leisure activity corresponds to lower level of psychological distress ( $r = -0.465$ ). This correlation is stronger in non-working group than the working group, ( $r = -0.596$ ) versus ( $r = -0.263$ ). The study provides a helpful insight for educators, mental health specialists and individuals themselves in including healthy leisure practices as a part of daily life.

**Keywords:** Coping Mechanism, Stress, Anxiety, Mental hygiene, Quality of Life, Preventive Health

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, with the advancement of competition and perfectionism in work, rising mental health concerns can be observed among young adults. Indian youth is facing psychological distress like stress, depression, anxiety, etc. (Murthy, 2017), especially during the transition from being an educator to becoming an employed adult. The expectations come with the transition is actually contributing to psychological distress among them; and as India has a large amount of youth population, it becomes extremely challenging for psychologists or mental health specialists to reach the entire population comprehensively. Therefore, there is a vital need to help them cope with this accumulated stress. While a certain level of stress can be important, prolonged or excessive stress can negatively affect psychological well-being and may lead to anxiety-related problems which is very common around youth today. One of the strategies to address this gap in professional mental health support, it

is important to look at a person's lifestyle patterns and their personal preferences, impacting their mental health conditions. However, maintaining psychological well-being is difficult for many young adults due to the way society has structured their life. But it has been observed that when a person is satisfied with their leisure, it serves as a protective buffer against the stress, and this satisfaction can come from different areas based on the leisure domains one chooses to pursue, such as social, physical, education, etc. These activities depend entirely on a person's subjective experience. For instance, a person can derive satisfaction for these activities in five minutes, whereas others may require more than an hour for the same level of satisfaction. While this study focuses on maintaining psychological well-being, it does not substitute clinical interventions and mental health professionals from their work. It serves as a supportive resource in their treatment process, or we can say it can be a help in the treatment process, and also for sub clinical level of psychological distress, it is strictly not

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recommendable for severe clinical conditions which only need specialist attention. This study is a prevention of daily generated stress, rather than a treatment of chronic psychological disorders. Given the increasing pressure on Indian youth, the present study focuses on the working and non-working youth in India, aiming to investigate the comparative dynamics about how these groups influence their leisure satisfaction on daily psychological distress. Additionally, this study seeks to validate whether leisure satisfaction actually has an impact on psychological distress, aim to validate previous research prior to exploring, the specific details of its main objective findings.

### Rational of the Study:

Despite extensive historical studies on leisure activities and psychological well-being, there remains a significant empirical gap in Indian context of research. The previous studies aim to understand impact of leisure activities on psychological well-being or the working and non-working group separately in the context of leisure satisfaction and psychological well-being. The existing literature is not so flexible and aims to focus on one separate group, the working group is more explored in this area as compared to the non-working group. This study makes a difference by focusing on comparing working and non-working group together in the context of leisure satisfaction and psychological distress- well-being scale was not used in order to break the trend, filling the gap and making the research more accurate and provide a more accurate, unique and flexible perspective on mental health dynamics.

### Objective of the study:

- To study daily leisure activity participation among working and non-working young adults.
- To study comparison of psychological well-being, stress, and anxiety among working and non-working young adults.
- To examine whether Higher engagement in daily self-focused activities will be negatively related to stress and anxiety among young adults.
- To examine if Higher engagement in daily self-focused activities will be positively related to psychological well-being among young adults.

### Hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1 ( $H_1$ ):** There is a significant negative correlation between leisure satisfaction and psychological

distress among both working and non-working young adults.

**Hypothesis 2 ( $H_2$ ):** There is no significant difference in the levels of leisure satisfaction and psychological distress between working and non-working young adults.

### Literature Review:

Leisure activities are conceptualized as non-work activities a person enjoys to perform in their discretionary time for their own enjoyment, relaxation, motivation, and interest. Historically, leisure activities were stigmatised as waste of time and people who used to perform them were misperceived to be unfocused and not serious for their careers. But with time and awareness, these misconceptions gradually diminished. Having established the conceptual framework of leisure, let us examine its role as psychological buffer for our mental health or mind. The understanding of leisure satisfaction is extensively conceptualised in Beard and Ragheb's Research (1980), focuses on evaluating how much a person enjoyed their free time. Prior research primarily utilized quantitative measures of free time, another contemporary study by Kim *et al.* (2024) bridges the gap between classical theory and modern application. This study was done on 316 middle-aged adults to examine the impact of leisure activity on both leisure domain satisfaction and life domain satisfaction and their overall effect on subjective well-being. This study investigated gender groups of men and women, revealing that men's well-being driven by relaxation and women's entirely dependent on psychological satisfaction. Beyond gender, another critical classification can be observed in the previous research, which is occupational groups, that is working and non-working. It studied about the conflict between work and leisure, mainly family time, in men and women (Newman *et al.*, 2014). The study findings revealed that work and family are constantly in competition. Another contemporary study bridges the gap by shifting the focus from work and leisure to work and boredom. This study by Alarnazi (2025) in Saudi Arabia, looked at how leisure satisfaction and leisure boredom can predict if workers feel burnout at their jobs. The finding revealed that the workers who were satisfied with their leisure, they were less likely to feel burnout at work, while if a person is bored during their free time, burnout actually increases. India has a large youth population and rising mental health concerns have been observed in Indian youth, as in India,

therapists and psychological specialists are significantly limited, which is creating a need to have a positive lifestyle intervention so an individual can develop coping strategies. Recent Indian research was done in Himachal Pradesh by Singh *et al.* (2018) highlights a strong link between low leisure physical activity and rising rate of depression among Indian youth. Its findings reveal that those with low leisure activity showed depression symptoms, which proves that leisure directly acts as a buffer to mental health. However existing study highly focuses on youth population, the role of occupational status in influencing mental health is still unexplored. This study aims to provide evidence on how employment status influences the mental health in young adults.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design:

This research adopts a descriptive and comparative correlational approach to study the impact of daily leisure activities on psychological well-being, stress, and anxiety among working and non-working young adults. By utilizing the comparative framework, this study differentiates between the two groups based on their leisure activity engagement and psychological distress. The study aims to describe and understand the relationship between daily leisure activities and psychological well-being. No manipulation of variables is involved.

### Variables of the Study:

The independent variables are gender (male and female), employment status (working and non-working) and engagement in daily self-focused leisure activities, while the dependent variables are psychological well-being, stress, and anxiety.

### Sampling:

The sample consisted of 120 young adults; 60 participants were working young adults, and 60 participants were non-working young adults. Equal gender representation was maintained in both groups, with 30 males and 30 females in each group to reduce sampling bias.

### Sampling method and age range:

Convenience sampling method was used to recruit participant via social media and professional networks and the age of the participants ranged from 18 to 30

**Table 1 : General distribution of sample**

Category	Group	Male	Female	Total
Employment status	Working	30	30	60
	Non-working	30	30	60
Total		60	60	120

(Table 1).

### Tools used :

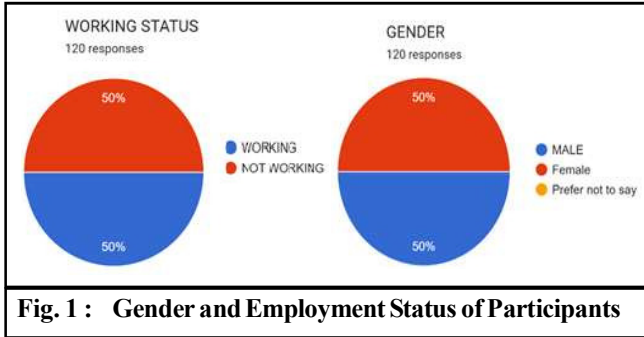
Two standardized scales were used in the present study: the Leisure Satisfaction Scale (LSS-24) and the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). Both scales have established reliability and validity and were appropriate for the context of the study. LSS-24 was introduced by Beard and Ragheb (1980). It was a shortened version of the original scale and used a five-point Likert scale, which focuses on the six leisure dimensions. The dimension namely psychological, educational, social, relaxation, physiological, and aesthetic. K10 is a tool used to measure psychological distress in the population, introduced by Ronald C. Kessler and his colleagues (1992). This scale includes 10 questions related to stress, anxiety, and depression rated on five-point Likert scale ranging from “none of the time” to “all of the time.” Total scoring can range from 10 to 50. In addition, some demographic information was also taken in two sections: one includes basic demographic information, while the other includes questions related to leisure activities.

### Procedure:

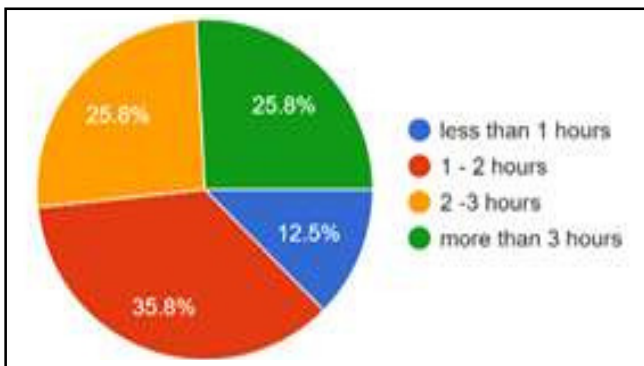
Data were collected using an online survey method. A Google Form was prepared with five sections. The first section included instructions and statements conforming to confidentiality to establish rapport with participants. Participants were informed that the survey was voluntary and research-based and were asked to answer all questions. The second section collected demographic information and leisure-related questions. The remaining sections included the two scales, which were presented without naming to avoid response bias. The form was distributed using convenience sampling to 120 young adults, as specified in the sampling section. Upon completion of data collection, responses were compiled and analysed using statistical software to obtain descriptive and inferential results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One hundred and twenty young adults participated, split evenly into those employed and those not. Among each employment group, gender distribution was made equal with thirty men and thirty women. A structured design enables examining links between Leisure satisfaction and psychological distress. Patterns emerged more clearly due to consistent sample sizes across categories (Fig. 1).



When examining participants' daily free time, a noticeable trend emerged. Approximately 35.8% stated they enjoyed between one and two hours each day. In contrast, 25.8% indicated their spare time exceeded three hours. Meanwhile, just 12.5% reported having less than sixty minutes. Such outcomes highlight differences in availability for personal pursuits. It turns out, more people have one to two hours free time than any other group. This distribution helps in shaping an understanding around daily leisure capacity (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2 : Daily free time among participants (N = 120)**

### Descriptive Statistics:

As shown in Table 2, the working group has a higher mean score ( $M = 87.63$ ) than the non-working group ( $M = 81.08$ ), while the standard deviation score of the working group was lower ( $SD = 19.95$ ) than the non-working

**Table 2 : Mean and Standard Deviation of Leisure Satisfaction across Employment Groups**

Group	M	SD
Working	87.63	19.95
Non-working	81.08	20.71

group ( $SD = 20.71$ ).

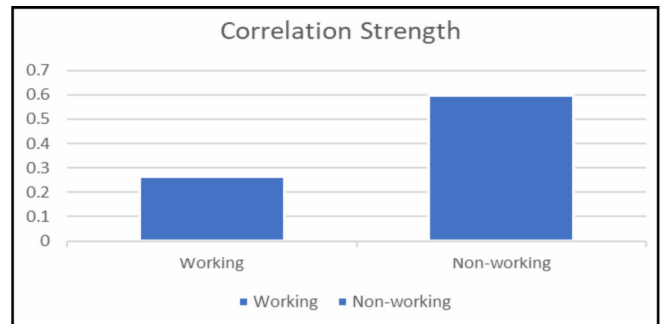
### Correlation Analysis:

Pearson's correlation was conducted to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between leisure satisfaction and psychological distress among working and non-working young adults.

**Table 3 : Pearson's Correlation between leisure satisfaction and psychological distress**

Group	r
Working	-0.263
Non-working	-0.596
Overall	-0.465

As shown in Table 3, a negative correlation between the working and non-working group was established, where the non-working group exhibits stronger negative correlation ( $r = -0.596$ ) while the working group exhibits a weaker correlation ( $r = -0.263$ ). The overall correlation for the entire sample was moderate ( $r = -0.465$ ) (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3 : Correlation between LSS and K10 among working and non-working groups**

### Probability and Significance:

Statistical analysis was confirmed using two tailed p value

Table 4 shows, the two-tailed p-values for the working group is significantly higher ( $p = 0.042$ ), while for the non-working group it was much lower ( $p = 4.91 \times 10^{-4}$ ), and for the overall sample it was extremely low ( $p = 8.23 \times 10^{-5}$ ) suggesting that the relationship was highly reliable.

**Table 4 : Two-Tailed p-Values results for Correlation Analysis**

Group	P
Working	0.042
Non-working	$4.91 \times 10^{-7}$
Overall	$8.23 \times 10^{-8}$

**Fisher Z:**

As shown in Table 5, the Fisher's Z ( $Z = 2.23$ ), the corresponding p-value confirms that the difference in correlation of psychological distress and leisure satisfaction between working and non-working groups is statistically significant.

**Table 5 : Fisher's Z Test Results for Correlation Analysis**

Z	2.2313604
Z p	Significant

This research examined how enjoyment of spare time links to emotional discomfort in 120 younger adults, categorized equally based on employment status. A clearer pattern appeared: those who felt better about their leisure activities tended to show fewer signs of inner tension ( $r = -0.465$ ), pointing toward a calming role for recreational pursuits. Yet outcomes shifted once employment entered the picture. People with jobs rated their leisure moments more favourably ( $M = 87.63$ ), despite carrying heavier stress loads; their leisure activities had only a small effect on reducing stress ( $r = -0.263$ ), possibly due to energy drained by professional duties. In contrast, those not working displayed a sharper decline in distress alongside rising leisure satisfaction ( $r = -0.596$ ), implying unoccupied hours allow recreation to function more fully as an emotional buffer. Still, findings echo some earlier work. From Ponde and Santana in 2000 comes evidence: time spent freely may ease feelings of worry or sadness, a trend noticed here too. In line with that, studies by Iwasaki *et al.* (2005), around 2005, showed calm pursuits and shared hobbies tend to quiet inner tension - this mirrors what appeared in those not currently working. As Lin (2020) pointed out more recently, taking part in free-time actions helps emotional balance, backing up the clearer link found within jobless individuals. Yet stress stayed higher among workers, even when they enjoyed their downtime - a sign duty tied to jobs might weaken how much relief leisure brings. The results are in line with findings of Caldwell (2005).

One reason might lie in how job commitments limit downtime relief for young workers. Instead of easing

strain, daily work routines could reduce the calming effect of free-time activities.

Those not employed face fewer time constraints, allowing greater mental gains from hobbies despite less enjoyment. It turns out the presence of a job alters how leisure influences emotional well-being. What matters is not just taking part in relaxing moments, but whether work obligations interfere. Psychological rewards from rest depend heavily on having real freedom between tasks.

One result of this research points to a shift toward organized, reachable pastimes through targeted initiatives. Where learning takes place, jobs exist, or communities gather, chances to enjoy downtime might lower inner strain for younger people. When employment is present, handling hours wisely, managing pressure, then blending rest into routine could strengthen overall balance. Without work, steady involvement in playful pursuits may guide mood stability and internal resilience forward.

A limitation exists within this work. With only 120 individuals involved, the scope remains narrow, affecting broader application. Information relied on personal accounts, opening room for distortion. Because responses came from one moment in time, conclusions about cause cannot be drawn. Later studies may look into wider groups across varied backgrounds.

Extended observation periods might add clarity. Factors like group aid or neighbourhood assets could influence how free-time activities affect tension levels.

Overall, feeling good during free time tends to lower emotional strain. Yet, whether someone works shapes how strong that effect is. For youth without jobs, taking part in fun activities brings more noticeable relief. Those with employment still carry tension, even if they enjoy their off hours. This shows that job demands and rest periods must both be weighed. Mental well-being programs for younger people need to reflect such differences. One size does not fit all.

**Conclusion:**

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the effect of leisure satisfaction on psychological distress among working and non-working young adults under 18 to 30 age group. Leisure satisfaction is observed to provide a short term relief from daily psychological distress among non-working adults, while results show that working adults do enjoy their leisure time just like non-working, but it's not sufficient to reduce their daily

psychological distress because of the level of stress they have on a daily basis and the lack of time they have to focus on their leisure activities than non-working adults. This study may not give a significant result for working groups but proves to be highly significant for non-working groups. This study also suggests the importance of leisure satisfaction in working groups, suggest a need for introducing more free time or performing interested activities as an organisational practice, which reduces mental burnout among employees. While this study provides a clear foundation, future research could the explore longitudinal effect across the different industries.

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