



## SCHOOL COUNSELLORS' INSIGHTS ON WELL-BEING

Laly Augustine\*      Dr.Anuradha S\*\*

\*Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Central University of Karnataka.

\*\*Associate Professor of Psychology, Christ University, Bangalore.

### **Abstract**

*School counselling is an innovative recent educational endeavor in India. The aim of this research was to explore the insights of psychological well-being of school counsellors. There have been studies which have used qualitative paradigm too in counselling research. The qualitative design of research was used in this study as the current study aimed at exploring the wellbeing of counsellors engaged in counselling services in school settings. Eight school counsellors participated in this study. Data collected through in-depth interviews was analyzed through thematically within the parameters of Interpretative Phenomenological Approach. The concept of psychological well-being was explored in detail. The findings showed that wellbeing was a state of mind including sound mind, sharp thinking, good personality, inner harmony positive behavior, peaceful mind and satisfaction in life. Wellbeing was found the totality of an individual which incorporated emotional balance, economical fitness and capacity of adjustment. Wellbeing is also found to include the integration of physical, mental, spiritual and social development. The findings of the current study are assumed to serve as a checklist for school counsellors to gauge their psychosocial wellbeing.*

**Key Words:** *Psychological Well-Being, School Counsellors.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The presence and services of psychological counsellors have assumed significance today in the context of the drastic changes that is affecting the everyday life of all human beings especially children. The challenges that arise from changing scenarios should be handled professionally and this necessitates professional school counsellors (Nayak, 2007). Through counselling they can help students build positive attitude towards life, society and nation. Therefore, more than any other time before, school counsellor's service has become imperative today.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF SCHOOL COUNSELLORS**

A school counsellor focuses on the relations and interactions between students and their school environment with the expressed purpose of reducing the effect of environmental, institutional and familial barriers that impede students' academic success. School counsellors know how to listen and help people with misery, hostile behaviour, hopelessness, conflict and poor academic performance (Education Trust, 2000).

Psychological well-being is a subjective feeling of gratification, happiness, satisfaction with life experiences and of one's responsibility in the world of work, sense of achievement, helpfulness, belongingness and beneficial relation with others (Diener, 1984). According to (Ryff, 1995), well-being is a multi-dimensional account which posits six dimensions such as self-acceptance, positive relation with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, goals in life and personal development. Maslow (1970) believed the pursuit in the direction of health as a universal tendency, and Jung (1938) explained that people are impulsively forced toward wholeness and health. School counsellors should have the wholeness in their personal life and hold sufficient knowledge of how to give the same to the clients to accomplish this wholeness.

Myers and Sweeny (2005b) stated that psychological well-being is integrating the spiritual, physical and mental aspects of a person which are interconnected and school counsellors are able to effectively influence the students to move forward in their well-being to a great extent. Lawson and Myers (2011) proclaimed that empathy, compassion and positive role modelling help the professional counsellors engage in effective relationships. It has been seen that good counsellors are better able to engage in positive and helpful relationships with clients. Myers



and Sweeney (2008) confirmed that there is an inadequacy in proper literature to understand the well-being of professional school counsellors.

Satija and Khan (2013) investigated that there was a substantial relationship of a few personality traits with psychological well-being. It was proved that working professionals with privileged mental health appreciably differed from those with lesser mental health on some traits factors. Tena (2012) showed that very few high school counsellors had a role in promoting wellness among students. He also pointed out to the need for further training or on-going formation to implement wellness programmes in the field of school counselling to promote wellness among students as well as counsellors.

Brott and Myers (1999) contributed that school counsellors' identity depends on their values and attitudes. Positive attitudes and values decided their identity and well-being. The outcome also revealed that mental health professionals provide psychological well-being to students. According to Merryman (2012) there was a significant relationship between psychological well-being and perceived wellness of online graduate counsellor education students.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Objective**

To explore school counsellors' insights of psychological well-being ,

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research is especially suited to counsellors because counselling training is congruent with understanding the world views of clients as stated by Mathews and Paradise (1988). Consequently, the researcher chose an exploratory research design of the current study which is qualitative in nature.

### **Sampling and Sample Size**

The researcher selected purposive sampling method for data collection. It guarantees that individuals participating in the study will be relevant to the research design, because here researcher doesn't do random selection. The populations for current study were eight school counsellors from Government and private schools including males and females who have minimum post graduate degree and counselling training.

### **Data Collection**

After the pilot study, the researcher started data collection based on the prepared interview guide. Researcher tried to focus on obtaining subjective interpretation from the personal experience of the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

Researcher used the method of thematic analysis for analyzing the data collected from the in-depth interview. Thematic analysis is an interpretive phenomenological approach in qualitative research methodology. In a study Bruan and Clarke (2006) explained that thematic analysis is not rooted in philosophical position and it is focused on inductive and deductive approaches in text analysis. Qualitative research involves the processes of induction and deduction, especially thematic analysis whereby induction creates themes and deduction verifies themes.

### **Results and Discussion**

Based on these in-depth interviews, the researcher gathered sufficient information on psychological well-being of school counsellors. Under thematic framework, the researcher categorized the marked themes as basic themes, organizing themes and global themes accordingly.



**Table - 1, Insights of Psychological Well-being**

Global theme	Organizing theme	Basic themes
1.Psychological wellbeing	1.1 State of mind	1.1.1 Sound and balanced mind 1.1.2 Sharp thinking 1.1.3 Positive behavior 1.1.4 Good personality 1.1.5 Inner harmony 1.1.6 Satisfaction in life 1.1.7 Peaceful mind
	1.2 Totality of an individual	1.2.1 Perceiving as whole 1.2.2 Adapting and adjusting 1.2.3 Stability 1.2.4 Economical fitness
	1.3 Ability of an integrated life	1.3.1 Physical health 1.3.2 Mental balance 1.3.3 Spiritual development 1.3.4 Psychological growth 1.3.5 Social belongingness

### THEMATIC ANALYSIS - INSIGHTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Under the thematic analysis, the final descriptions are as follows:

**State of mind.** One of the earlier studies claimed that psychological well-being is a state of being well-rounded and balanced (Keyes & Waterman, 2003). This existing finding has closely echoed in the current study. One of the participants of this research said, “*Well-being, a sound mind leads to a healthy body, one who has a sound mind, -- emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually –*” (Participant 1, personal communication, January, 2014). According to the participant, the mind should be healthy enough to have a healthy body. What the participant meant was that a healthy mind which is emotionally, psychologically and spiritually well balanced will mutually support a healthy body. In other words, a healthy body with a healthy mind creates a state of well-being. Balance of mind is one of the most vital characteristics of a developed person. From the participants’ sharing, it could be understood that this balanced state of mind is an attainable phase in human life which leads to the feeling of well-being.

It was very clear that the understanding of psychological well-being is sharp thinking, positive behaviour and a good personality. A person’s ability to behave according to situations also decides the psychological well-being. These two things, sharp thinking and positive behaviour reveal the personality of a person. In short, according to the participants, the psychological well-being is a state of mind and it is a combination of intelligent thinking, proper behaviour and good personality of a person. The study had revealed that personality traits influenced psychological well-being of working professionals (Satija & Khan, 2013). In the current context, it is closely related i.e., good personality is one of the influencing factors of psychological well-being in a school counsellor’s life. “*.....sound behaviour, sound thinking, and a sound personality all together in a favourable environment are psychological well-being*” (Participant 1, personal communication, January, 2014).

One participant shared the view about psychological well-being as a comfortable state of mind which makes one feel free or enjoy the inner freedom. It is absence from tension and stress as we could manage the negatives and positives in life. As our mind is free we could see the facts as it is and act accordingly. “*...person feels*



*comfortable in every aspect and should always feel free, like weightlessness*” (Participant 5, personal communication, January, 2014). A comfortable state of mind is a state of being at ease. In the modern world people live in a tensed atmosphere and earn for a comfortable state or a relaxed mood in their life. So this participant said that an inner freedom was necessary for psychological well-being for an individual, especially a school counsellor. If the person is always in distress or in anguish, he/she will not be able to feel a state of well-being and thus, will not be able to enrich the clients. Bodily health and mental health are the basic factors for the wellbeing condition. But, sometimes, even when an individual faces the struggles of professional life, economic problems and family problems, if he/she is able to stay relaxed, control his emotions and manage the different areas of life, we can say he/she is in a comfortable state. This comfortable state is needed to feel the condition of well-being.

The study of Diener (1984) revealed that psychological well-being is a subjective feeling of happiness. This result is well-matched for the present study i.e., psychological well-being is the capacity of being happy in life and a feeling of complete harmony. Happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being characterized by pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy in everyday life. A person’s ability to stay happy in various situations of life will create in him a psychological well-being. Similarly, the feeling of harmony also reveals a state of well-being of school counsellors. *“One’s own capacity to being happy and it is a feeling of complete harmony”* (Participant 2, personal communication, January, 2014).

Psychological well-being is a kind of life satisfaction. Through school counselling, this participant felt the same in life. Life satisfaction means to feel contented in the present status of life- both in family and social life. Both are complementary and like two sides of same coin. A person with psychological well-being only can enjoy life satisfaction. According to the participant, if we do good things, or help others with a selfless mind, do our responsibilities without fault; there will be a pleasant feeling within us which is called satisfaction. This feeling of satisfaction is the result of our high-quality activities. So as a school counsellor one should feel this state of mind after the counselling. The ability of maintaining satisfaction in the personal or professional life of a person is the basic measure of evaluating psychological well-being; *“...it is a kind of satisfied life”* (Participant 4, personal communication, February, 2014). This finding goes hand in hand with the previous finding of Diener (1984) that psychological well-being includes life satisfaction.

One of the factors contributing to psychological well-being of a person is having a peaceful mind. This was one of the results of this study in which participants said that along with happiness and comfortable state of mind, long lasting peace decides psychological well-being. A person’s capacity to sustain in a state of peace throughout life is considered as being in a state of well-being. *“The word itself gives me a kind of peace, I think it’s a long standing, long lasting peace within ourselves and live with a happy and comfortable mind”* (Participant 5, personal communication, January, 2014).

**Totality of an individual.** A previous study Diener et al. (1999) claimed that psychological well-being is a self-perceived ability to cope with daily life and having a favourable attitude to one's life as a whole rather than their current feelings. This existing theory is proved once more in this study. *“Ability of coping with different feelings, identifying issues and applying possible solutions and perceiving life as a whole”* (Participant 7, personal communication, February, 2014). A person’s ability to cope with all the experiences of life, positive and negative, ability to identify issues and apply possible solutions, and accept any situation of life are considered to be factors creating a state of well-being.

Psychological well-being can be defined as the totality of a person. It covers a person’s cognitive, emotional, social and psychological aspects of life. We should consider all these factors when we measure the well-being of a person. Here, in participant’s view, totality means the ability to keep a balance in the family life, professional, environmental and social life. Totality includes thoughts, deeds, relationships, responsibilities, leaderships and all



other high qualities and abilities. So, well-being includes wholeness or totality of a person's life. "...totality of a person in the family as well as other field" (Participant 4, personal communication, February, 2014).

Waterman (1993) claimed that performance or good functioning articulate with values, commitment, and through which people feel dynamic and genuine leads to well-being. In Waterman's study, good functioning means performance, values and commitment. Hence in the current study, good functioning is presented like a good performance in all the surroundings of a person, coordination of body, mind and psych and ability of handling the emotions. A mentally healthier person can cope with any situation. Psychological well-being helps 'an organism with mind' even to maintain her/his physical, social and emotional wellbeing. School counsellors' analysis was that this ability of good functioning leads to well-being. "*It is a good functioning of mind, body and psych*" (Participant 3, personal communication, January, 2014).

While studying adults, Ryff (1995) found that positive relation with others is one of the dimensions of psychological well-being which has its significance as far as the current study is concerned. The participants contributed that psychological well-being is a skill to keep an interpersonal and intra-personal positive relationships of a counsellor. "...it is all about interpersonal relationships and intra-personal skill of a counsellor" (Participant 2, personal communication, January, 2014), "*Interpersonal positive relationship of a person*" (Participant 7, personal communication, February, 2014). The researcher realized that each individual has his or her own skill to relate with own self and it is called intra-personal relationship. Intra-personal ability is the basic component of interpersonal relationship and these influenced each other. In short, one could uphold these relationships in a healthy manner, and definitely could feel the psychological well-being.

Psychological well-being is also an ability to adapt with all surroundings and situations. At present, it is observed that people struggle to adjust with environment and people around them. This includes even family members. So this definition is very appropriate in the context of psychological well-being. When one person is able to adjust with his or her circumstances without any hesitation or distress, we can conclude that he or she is in a state of well-being. And it is an extraordinary capacity of a human mind. "*It is very much important the ability to adapt with all surroundings, and adjust with any situations*" (Participant 2, personal communication, January, 2014).

In the same study of Ryff (1995) it was clearly indicated that psychological well-being is an empathetic insights with others and their own feelings. Here the researcher could discover the same finding that the school counsellors showed the empathetic insights towards others and their problems. To watch, think or feel through others' eye and understand them well and console them well as much as they can is a special competence of a person. This competence leads to a feeling of psychological well-being. "*trying to understand others' feelings as well as our own feelings*" (Participant 8, personal communication, February, 2014).

The ability to handle emotions in a mature way was considered one of the psychological well-being's factors (Pollard & Davison, 2003). In the current study, psychological well-being is an ability of a person to keep emotional stability in life. And this ability helped the person behave in a mature way in every situation in family or workplace. So this finding is exactly the same as sounded out by Pollard and Davison (2003). "*A person is emotionally fit or stable to handle the environment or situation in which they are and behave in a mature way*" (Participant 1, personal communication, January, 2014).

Participants explained their assurance that one of the elements of psychological well-being was emotional stability. According to them, it was a proper decision making at proper time and for the wellness of oneself and others. Moreover, they said that the capacity of emotional control decided the well-being of a person. That means well-being was the ability to maintain positive and negative emotions equally and reacts according to the need and situation of the context. The emotional fluctuations create problems in life and the capacity to control emotions





make people attractive and it will decide the state of well-being of the person. *“Proper decision making and proper emotional control and live in a mature life”* (Participant 2, personal communication, January, 2014).

One of the factors contributing to well-being was considered to be economic situation. In life, if basic needs are unmet, a person is unlikely to feel comfortable and it causes distress in life. This had proved in hierarchy of needs by Maslow (1970). *“Well-being is a person economically fit, to handle the daily needs and familial needs in which they are, because unless and until these basic necessities are not met, the person do not feel comfortable”* (Participant1, personal communication, January, 2014).

**Ability of an integrated life.** According to Myers and Sweeny (2005b) psychological well-being is an integration of many factors in human life. These factors include the physical, mental, spiritual, social and psychological aspects in life. These factors influence one another and are interconnected and to a great extent determined by the other. So if one factor feels imbalance, it will negatively affect the other factors too. A person’s ability to incorporate these factors in his or her daily life, decides the state of psychological well-being. This existing finding locates echo in the present study of the school counsellors’ well-being proving that psychological well-being is an integrated, balanced life. *“...it is an integration of healthy body and healthy mind”* (Participant 2, personal communication, January, 2014).

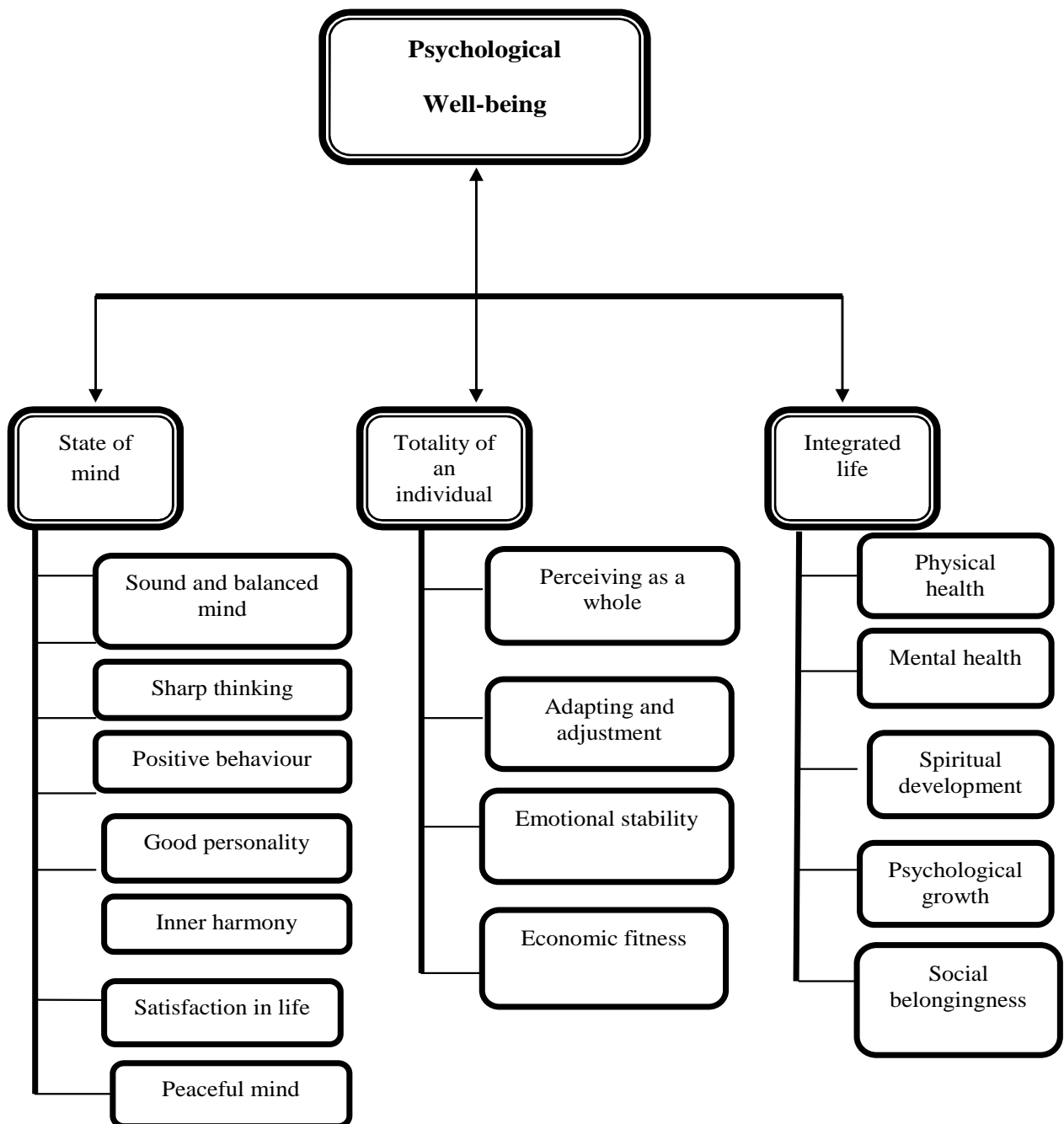
Physical fitness and psychological well-being is closely related. If one has physical disease or illness, it will affect the mind and psych as they are connected with each other. Any of the external negative experiences, e.g., bodily ill-health, directly affects the mind and it impacts the well-being. *“If physically disease or illness, it affect our mind and psych, it connected to each other, any external experience affect the body negatively, it will affect the psychological state negatively”* (Participant 3, personal communication, January, 2014).

A person’s psychological growth depends upon parents’ care, touch, love and attention. If these are missing, there is a possibility to start the psychological problems. School counsellors felt it from their counselling experience; many are facing the psychological issues in their personal life and it affects their academic performance. It was concluded that this psychological development was needed for the well-being state of a person. *“from the first day onwards, when they born in mother’s womb, they need love, care, I mean, from the womb onwards, they need, love, care, touch, attention, they should feel that they are waited for in this world. When that is missing the person or children feel psychological problem”* (Participant1, personal communication, January, 2014).

Well-being is related to social life. If a person is in a state of well-being, it will reflect in his/her family and society too. So this social belongingness is an unavoidable dimension of psychological well-being of a human being. Without society or social relationships one cannot survive or live with a well-being mind. *“Well-being of a human being means well-being of the society. An individual’s well-being is definitely related the well-being of the society, if a person is well and good that will definitely reflect in the family life ,and a good family life will definitely leads to a good social life too”* (Participant 3, personal communication, January, 2014).

### **Conceptual Map of the Findings**

The summary of psychological wellbeing is shown in the following conceptual map.



### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this present research, it was found that psychological well-being is a state of mind of an individual. From the solicited data, it emerges that psychological well-being is a state of mind that reflects a sound and balanced mind, sharp thinking, positive behaviour and a good personality. This also finds expression in inner harmony, satisfaction in life and peaceful mind which were found in different phases of well-being.



Psychological well-being also arises from a person's ability to perceive things as a whole and also his/her skill to adapt and adjust to situations. The study also revealed that a person's state of well-being was linked to his/her capacity of emotional stability.

The ability to maintain an integrated life was seen as the basis for psychological well-being. In this, physical health, mental balance, spiritual development, economical fitness, psychological growth and social belongingness are found to be deciding integration and psychological well-being.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

The explored concept of psychological well-being is closely related to mental health profession. Psychological well-being can be viewed as a gift the counsellor gives to himself/herself. Thus this can be useful for trainers as well as mental health professionals as a source material to assess themselves and others. Teachers also can employ it as motivational literature when they try to guide others. One of the points that emerged from the study is how to keep oneself equipped by striving for inner sense of well-being. The researcher hopes that the study will spur counsellors' interest in the field of positive psychology and related fields to have greater insights of well-being.

### **LIMITATIONS**

This was the first study related to school counsellors' well-being and there were no back-up studies available in India. There were no printed books related to school counsellors' well-being except some information on the internet. There was a study abroad related to school counsellors but none of them covered the well-being of school counsellors; so it was quite difficult to obtain appropriate reviews for this research.

### **SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

School counselling is a fast growing profession and, therefore, one can expect similar studies in future. A possible topic of research could be a study of school counsellors' well-being and their family environment. Such a study will be complementing this pioneer study. Another area worthy of paying attention is to find out the effectiveness of school counselling and it would be a continuation of the present study. There are also many unexplored fields like therapeutic relationship of school counsellor and counselee, life style and wellness of school counsellors.

### **REFERENCES**

1. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 4 (3), 77-101. Retrieved from [eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735/2/thematic\\_analysis\\_revised\\_-\\_final.pdf](http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735/2/thematic_analysis_revised_-_final.pdf)
2. Brott, P.E., & Myers, J.E. (1999). Development of professional school counsellor identity: A grounded theory. *Journal of Professional School Counselling*, 2(5), 339-348.
3. Carl Jung, G. (1938). Psychology and religion: The terry lectures. New Haven: Yale University Press. (Contained in psychology and religion; West East collected works Vol.11 ISBN0-691-09772-0.)
4. Deiner .E., Suh, E.M., Lucas, R.E., & Smith, H.L (1999). Subjective Well-being: three decades of progress. *Journal of Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 276-302.
5. Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Journal of Psychological Bulletin*, 95, 542-575.
6. Education Trust (2000). College of Education, UNC, 9201 University City Blvd. Charlotte, , NC 28223.
7. Keyes, C. L. & Waterman, M. B. (2003). Dimensions of well-being and mental health in adulthood. In M. H. Bornstein & L. Davidson (Eds.), *Well-being: Positive development across the life course. Crosscurrents in Contemporary Psychology*, 477-497. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
8. Lawson, G., & Myers, J.E. (2011). Wellness, professional quality of life, and career-sustaining behaviours: What keeps us well? *Journal of Counselling & Development*, 89(2), 163-171.





9. Lindsay A. Martin. (2012). Multiple role balance, professional quality of life, and wellness among women employed as professional counsellors. (Doctoral dissertation, Cappella University) Available from Proquest LLC. (UMI3509173).
10. Maslow, A.H. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2nd Ed.). Reading, A: Addison- Wesley.
11. Matthews, B., & Paradise, L. V. (1988). Toward methodological diversity: Qualitative research approaches. *Journal of Mental Health Counselling*, 10, 225-234.
12. Myers, J., & Sweeney, T. J. (2005b). The wheel of wellness. In J. E. Myers & T. J. Sweeney (Eds.), *Counselling for wellness* (pp. 7-14). Alexandria, VA: American Counselling Association.
13. Myers, J., & Sweeney, T. J. (2008). The Indivisible Self: An evidence-based model of wellness. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, 61, 270-279.
14. Nayak, A. K. (2007). *Guidance and counselling*. S. B Nangya APH Publishing corporation :New Delhi
15. Pollard, E.L & Davison, P.L. (2003). Child well-being: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Social Indicators Research*, 61(1), 59-78.
16. Ryff, C.D. (1995). Psychological well-being in adult life. *Journal of Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 4(4), 99-104. Retrieved from [cdp.sagepub.com/content/4/4/99.citation](http://cdp.sagepub.com/content/4/4/99.citation).
17. Ryff, C.D., & Keyes, C.L.M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 719-727. Retrieved from [doi.apa.org/journals/psp/69/4/719.pdf](http://doi.apa.org/journals/psp/69/4/719.pdf)
18. Satija, S. & Waheeda Khan (2013) A study of working professionals' mental health in relation to personality at workplace. *Journal of SMS Varanasi*, IX, No. 1, [www.welingkar.org](http://www.welingkar.org).
19. Tena Burnett. (2012). Preparedness to implement wellness strategies: Perceptions of school counsellors, (Doctoral dissertation, university of Arkansas) available from Proquest Information and Learning Company. (UMI No.3504073)
20. Waterman, A.S. (1993). Two conceptions of happiness: Contrasts of personal experiences Eudaimonia and hedonic enjoyment, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64, 678-691.
21. Wendy S. Merryman. (2012). *Relationship between psychological well-being and perceived wellness in online graduate counsellor education students*, (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University) Available from Proquest Information and Learning Company. (UMI No.3544864)
22. Wester, Trepal, & Myers (2009). Wellness of counsellor educators: An initial look. *Journal of Humanistic Counselling, Education and Development*. 48, No. 1 Retrieved from <http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-197926086/wellness-of-counsellor-educators-an-initial-look>