

Psychological Safety: An emerging concept among healthcare professionals.

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ABSTRACT

Psychological safety is an essential concept in the workplace that can significantly impact employees' well-being and performance. It refers to the feeling of safety and comfort individuals experience when they are part of a team or organization. Workers with a sense of psychological safety are more inclined to contribute their ideas, take calculated risks, and make mistakes without worrying about repercussions. In recent years, psychological safety has gained recognition in various aspects of work. It acts as a bridge between different factors and outcomes, influencing their relationship. In simpler terms, it helps to explain how certain factors can affect employee well-being and performance through the lens of psychological safety. Moreover, psychological safety is closely linked to employee well-being and job satisfaction. When employees feel psychologically safe, they experience lower levels of stress and anxiety. They feel valued, supported, and appreciated, contributing to their overall job satisfaction. A psychologically safe work environment fosters positive relationships among team members and with supervisors, creating a sense of belonging and camaraderie. This, in turn, leads to higher employee engagement, motivation, and a reduced likelihood of burnout. Psychological safety in the health sector is paramount in creating a supportive and conducive work environment for healthcare professionals. The study's main aim is to examine the extent to which healthcare professionals (public and private) working in the north Indian region feel safe at their workplace and suggest strategies that can help organizations improve psychological safety. The total number of respondents who participated in the study was 350, and a multistage sampling technique was used to determine the sample size. A statistical package for social science is used to analyze data.

Keywords: *Psychological safety, Healthcare sector, North India.*

SOCIAL IMPACT

Psychological safety is an essential concept in the workplace that can significantly impact employees' well-being and performance. It refers to the feeling of safety and comfort individuals experience when they are part of a team or organization. Workers with a sense of psychological safety are more inclined to contribute their ideas, take calculated risks, and make mistakes without worrying about repercussions (Vevoda et.al, 2016). In recent years, psychological safety has gained recognition in various aspects of work. It acts as a bridge between different factors and outcomes, influencing their relationship. In simpler terms, it helps to explain how certain factors can affect employee well-being and performance through the lens of psychological safety (Maynard et al. 2015). Moreover, psychological safety is closely linked to employee well-being and job satisfaction. When employees feel psychologically safe, they experience lower levels of stress and anxiety. They feel valued, supported, and appreciated, which contributes to their overall job satisfaction. A psychologically safe work environment fosters positive relationships among team members and with supervisors, creating a sense of belonging and camaraderie. This, in turn, leads to higher employee engagement, motivation, and a reduced likelihood of burnout.

Psychological safety in North India's health sector is paramount in creating a supportive and conducive work environment for healthcare professionals. In the healthcare sector, where teamwork, communication, and decision-making are critical, psychological safety is crucial in enhancing employee well-being, collaboration, and overall organizational performance. One of the essential benefits of psychological safety in the health sector is improved communication and teamwork. When healthcare professionals feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to communicate their ideas, thoughts, and concerns openly. This open communication leads to better understanding, collaboration, and problem-solving within teams (Rigotti et al. 2021). When everyone feels safe to share their ideas, diverse perspectives emerge, fostering innovation and creativity (Carmeli et. al. 2018). So keeping into account the importance of psychological safety, this study aims to assess the level of psychological safety in North India's health

sector which includes healthcare organizations operating in the region both public and private sector hospitals from the North region of India.

METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature as its prime objective is to assess healthcare professionals' perceptions regarding the extent to which they feel safe, supported, and comfortable expressing themselves, sharing ideas, and taking risks without fear of negative consequences. The sample technique followed in the study is multistage sampling, total number of respondents selected as sample size is 350. SPSS software is used to analyse the data. Additionally, the study is cross-sectional, as it captures the preferences of healthcare professionals regarding psychological safety at a specific time in various public and private sectors in North India. The survey method has been used to collect the primary data from the healthcare professionals after seeking permission from the concerned medical representatives of the respective organizations. A well-designed survey was developed to investigate the proposed connection highlighted in the study. The questionnaire included a diverse range of items that assessed the psychological safety. The reliability and validity was also checked were the results within acceptable range. The data collected was normal and linear. Research instrument adopted for the study is Amy Edmonson (1996) scale developed for psychological safety, consisting of 7 items. Examples of the items include, "In this organization, I understand what is expected of me" and "Working with members of this organization, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized." For each item of the psychological safety scale, the respondents were requested to indicate the extent of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 as "Strongly Disagree" to 5 as "Strongly Agree"). Table 1 reports the mean score and standard deviation for this scale.

RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for psychological safety

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>1.</i>	<i>Psychological Safety</i>	<i>3.74</i>	<i>.69</i>

The overall result of the study depicts that the healthcare professionals are moderately feeling safe (M= 3.74, SD= .69) in their workplace. In other words we can say mean value of psychological safety was 3.74 representing that employees are feeling somehow psychologically safe at their workplace. The respondents viewed their workplace in a somewhat positive manner and consider it central to their existence. Thus, from this feeling, it is likely to infer that the health professional feel safe at their workplace. Further analysis was articulated to examine whether the healthcare professionals of public sector hospitals feel high level of psychological safety as compare to healthcare professionals of private sector hospitals. In order to assess the same, first descriptive analysis was carried out and then Independent Samples T-Test was performed:

Table 2 Psychological Safety in Public and Private Healthcare Sector

	<i>Category</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>Hospitals</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>3.62</i>	<i>.65</i>
	<i>Private</i>	<i>3.67</i>	<i>.72</i>

As indicated in table 2, the healthcare professionals in the public healthcare sector reported a lower level of psychological safety (M=3.62; SD=.65) than did their counterparts in the private healthcare sector (M=3.67; SD=.72). This clearly reflects that the employees in the private healthcare sector perform their jobs in a superior manner and usually feel safe most of the time in their organizations. This may be attributed to the fact, that the organizations providing a suitable, supportive work environment and clearly expounding performance requirements to their employees augment feelings of safety among them, which in turn will enhance their efficiency and in the long run will lead to the increased productivity and competitive advantage to the organization.

Table 3 Independent Sample T-Test for Employee Psychological Safety

	<i>Category</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
<i>Hospitals</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>3.62</i>	<i>.65</i>	<i>-3.40</i>	<i>.001</i>
	<i>Private</i>	<i>159</i>	<i>3.87</i>	<i>.72</i>		

As per expectations Table 3 reflects that the values of $T = -3.40$ is statistically significant as the $p\text{-value} < .01$. Therefore, there is significant difference in the perception of employees on the basis of their sector of employment. The mean values for employee psychological safety for both the independent groups i.e. healthcare professionals of public ($M = 3.62$; $S.D = .65$) and private ($M = 3.87$; $S.D = .72$) sectors hospitals are significantly different. Thus, hypothesis is accepted.

Implementing strategies for improving psychological safety in the workplace is crucial to creating an environment where healthcare professionals feel safe, supported, and empowered to express themselves. These strategies will help to foster open communication, collaboration, and a culture of trust. Some key strategies for improving psychological safety in simpler terms.

- **Lead by Example:** Leaders play a vital role in creating psychological safety. They should model the behaviors they want to see in their employees, such as active listening, empathy, and respect. When healthcare leaders of public sector demonstrate vulnerability and admit their own mistakes, it encourages others to do the same. Leading by example sets the tone for psychological safety and sends a powerful message that it is valued and embraced within the organization.
- **Encourage Open Communication:** When it comes to ensuring people feel comfortable in their minds, nothing is more important than opening lines of communication and fostering honest discussion. Healthcare leaders of public sector should open up channels of communication so that workers can air their opinions. Team meetings, town halls, and suggestion boxes are all good options for this. Actively listen to employee input, ask for their feedback, and provide a safe space for open and honest conversations. By fostering open communication, you promote psychological safety and create a culture of trust and collaboration.
- **Provide Feedback and Recognition:** Feedback plays a significant role in psychological safety. Public healthcare professionals should provide constructive feedback to employees, focusing on their strengths and areas for improvement. Encourage a growth mindset by highlighting learning opportunities and supporting employees in their development. Recognize and appreciate employees' contributions and efforts, reinforcing a sense of psychological safety and valuing their work. Regular feedback and recognition help employees feel valued, supported, and motivated.
- **Establish Psychological Safety Guidelines:** Create clear guidelines and expectations around psychological safety. Develop a set of behavioral norms that promote trust, respect, and open communication. Communicate these guidelines to all healthcare employees and hold everyone accountable for maintaining a psychologically safe environment. By setting clear expectations, they can create a shared understanding of the importance of psychological safety and provide a framework for desired behaviors.
- **Teamwork and Collaboration:** Collaboration and teamwork are essential for psychological safety. Encourage collaboration among team members and provide opportunities for them to work together on projects and initiatives. Foster a culture where diverse perspectives are valued and respected. Encourage healthcare professionals to share their knowledge, skills, and experiences, promoting a sense of psychological safety within the team. Foster a supportive and inclusive team environment that encourages open dialogue, idea-sharing, and mutual support.
- **Develop Emotional Intelligence:** Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in building psychological safety. Develop and promote emotional intelligence skills among healthcare professionals and leaders. This includes skills such as self-awareness, empathy, and effective communication. Emotional intelligence helps individuals understand and manage their emotions and respond empathetically to others' emotions. By developing emotional intelligence, individuals can better navigate interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts, and foster psychological safety.
- **Provide Training and Development:** Offer training and development programs that focus on communication skills, conflict resolution, and fostering psychological safety. These programs can provide healthcare professionals with the necessary tools and techniques to engage in open and effective communication, manage conflicts constructively, and build trust within teams. Training and development opportunities support the growth of individuals and teams, enhancing psychological safety and overall organizational performance.
- **Celebrate and Learn from Mistakes:** Create a culture where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities rather than failures. Encourage public healthcare professionals to take risks, experiment with

new ideas, and learn from their mistakes. When mistakes happen, provide a supportive environment for individuals to reflect, learn, and share their insights with others. Celebrate lessons learned and highlight the value of continuous improvement. By embracing mistakes as part of the learning process, you foster psychological safety and a culture of innovation.

- **Trust and Respect:** Trust and respect are the foundation of psychological safety. When employees trust their colleagues and leaders and feel respected for their contributions, it creates a sense of security. Trust is built through consistent actions, open communication, and demonstrating reliability. Respect involves valuing diverse perspectives, listening attentively, and treating others with dignity. When trust and respect are present, employees feel safe to express themselves without fear of judgment or negative consequences.

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