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# WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIP AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AMONG EXECUTIVES

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## *Abstract*

*The study examined the relationship between workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing among executives. It also examined the impact of age on these variables. The sample for the study comprised 60 executives working in the junior and middle management levels. Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing. ANOVA was used to examine the impact of age on workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing. The results of the study showed a positive relationship between friendship prevalence and psychological wellbeing factors namely Autonomy, Environment Mastery, Personal Relations, Purpose in Life and Self-Acceptance. The results also indicated significant difference across age groups on Friendship Opportunity, Friendship Prevalence, Autonomy and Self-Acceptance.*

## **Introduction**

People spend considerable amount of time at workplace interacting with colleagues, superiors, and subordinates. In the process, they form relationships with fellow employees. The quality of relationships formed by employees determines the extent to

which they might be able to accomplish important work goals and achieve a greater sense of satisfaction and wellbeing.

Workplace relationships include superior-subordinate relationships, peer-coworker relationships, client-customer relationships, and workplace

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friendships among others (Sias, 2009). Of all the forms of workplace relationships, it is workplace friendships that are especially gratifying. Workplace friendships are multiplex relationships that help employees accomplish a wide variety of work related matters besides providing them with comfort during times of emotional distress.

The pioneering effort of Elton Mayo and the human relations movement illuminated the ubiquity of workplace friendships. People develop friendships to satisfy their basic need for affiliation. Friendships imbibe qualities of goodness, enjoyableness and utility. They exist primarily for enjoyment and satisfaction (Sapadin, 1988) and involve mutual trust, commitment, reciprocal liking and shared interests and values (Berman et al., 2002). Workplaces provide many opportunities to develop friendship. However, having friendship opportunity need not necessarily lead to friendship prevalence at workplace. Therefore, it is necessary to examine workplace friendship in terms of friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence (Nielsen et al) to get a better perspective on the positive contribution they make

during times of increasing work pressures and disruptive competition.

Workplace friendships refer to mutual, involuntary relationships characterized by intimacy, companionship and responsiveness (Kenny, 1994). They are dynamic in nature and keep evolving each day. Workplace friendships permeate the context and add newer dimensions and meaning to the relationship.

Workplace friendships serve different functions. Depending on the intensity of the relationship, workplace friends can act as informational peers, collegial peers and special peers (Kram and Isabella, 1985). Informational peers contribute by sharing information required for accomplishing tasks while collegial peers provide job related feedback that helps in career growth and progression. Special peers on the other hand, provide emotional support and personal feedback. They show greater level of personal commitment, trust and self-disclosure (Isabella, 1985).

Workplace friendship has been extensively researched over the years. Presence of friends at work leads to positive outcomes such as information sharing (Isabella, 1985), improved job performance

(Ross, 1997), and increased intent to stay (Riordan and Griffeth, 1995; Morrison, 2004). People who develop close friendships at workplace report greater emotional comfort and open communication. They show higher levels of organizational commitment (Nielson et al., 2000) and reduced stress (Morrison, 2004). Friendships between superiors and subordinates lead to higher levels of job satisfaction (Straughn, 2006).

Workplace friendships shape work related attitudes and behavior (Riordan and Griffeth, 1995). The multiplex workplace friendships increase employee happiness (Evans, 2014) and help build trust (Meyers et al., 1999). Friends at work provide help, guidance, feedback or information required for performing jobs and handling issues with co-workers, subordinates, supervisors, and clients (Hamilton, 2007). They promote happiness and life satisfaction through instrumental rewards, emotional support and companionship (Hills and Argyle, 2001) leading to psychological wellbeing.

Psychological wellbeing refers to the overall effectiveness of an individual's psychological functioning (Martin, 1984).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), psychological wellbeing is defined 'as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'.

Researchers have examined wellbeing from different perspectives. The hedonic perspective, also called subjective wellbeing focuses on the experience of pleasure and the extent to which individuals are satisfied with various domains of life. The eudiamonic perspective on the other hand, stresses the degree to which people perceive their life to be having meaning and purpose. This perspective emphasizes the optimum level of functioning in individuals. While some researchers argue that psychological wellbeing is largely eudiamonic there are others who see it as encompassing both hedonic and eudiamonic views.

Psychological wellbeing is a multidimensional construct (Keyes et al., 2002), which is considered extremely important. Ryff conceptualized psychological wellbeing as including six factors

namely: social relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth and self-acceptance. These dimensions of wellbeing support mastery of life, emotional health and physical health (Ryff, 1995).

Psychological wellbeing improves job performance, cognitive functioning (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000) and overall human functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001) and leads to better supervisory ratings of performance (Wright et al., 1993).

Employees perform better when they show higher levels of engagement and commitment. Psychological wellbeing has been found to promote higher engagement (Robertson and Cooper, 2010), organizational citizenship behaviors (Bachrach, 2000), and resiliency to handle with possible setbacks. On the contrary, dysfunctional psychological wellbeing hampers self-esteem and leads to depression, alcoholism and substance abuse (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1980). It also has gross financial implications (Quick, Quick, Nelson & Hurrell, 1997).

Review of literature on workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing highlights the innumerable advantages of

these variables on positive organizational outcomes like improved job performance and job satisfaction. The advantages of workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing have a spillover effect and as such contribute towards optimum human functioning. Considering the myriad of benefits organizations could reap by promoting psychological wellbeing, it was felt necessary to examine the relationship between workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing.

## **Method**

### ***Sample***

The sample for the study included 60 executives with experience ranging between 5 to 27 years. The age of the sample ranged from 25 years to 54 years. The sample included men and women in junior and middle management levels. The sample comprised 55 men and 5 women. The sample for the study was chosen randomly.

### **Materials**

The materials for the study comprised: Demographic Form, Workplace Friendship Scale and Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scales. A brief description of the demographic form and the research tools used for the study is provided hereunder:

### ***Demographic Form***

The demographic items included five items: age, educational qualifications, work experience, gender, and marital status.

### ***Workplace Friendship***

Workplace friendship is operationally defined as perceived friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence at workplace. To measure workplace friendship, the researcher used Workplace Friendship Scale developed by Nielsen et al. (2000). This scale provides scores on two dimensions of workplace friendship, namely friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence. It consists of twelve items of which six items measure friendship opportunity and six items measure friendship prevalence. The Cronbach's alpha for workplace friendship scale was found to be 0.93.

### ***Psychological Wellbeing***

Psychological Wellbeing was conceptualized as functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life. For the study, psychological wellbeing was measured using Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scales (RPWBS), which has six dimensions namely, positive relations with others, personal

growth, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Each of these dimensions are measured by seven items each. The test-retest reliability coefficient of RPWBS was found to be 0.82.

### ***Procedure***

The study was conducted using survey method. After reviewing the literature on workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing, the following hypotheses were framed for the study:

- Ho 1: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Autonomy
- Ho 2: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Environmental Mastery
- Ho 3: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Personal Growth
- Ho 4: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Positive Relations
- Ho 5: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Purpose in Life
- Ho 6: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Self-Acceptance
- Ho 7: Friendship prevalence and friendship opportunity would differ across the age groups

Ho8: Psychological wellbeing factors would differ across the age groups

The study was conducted in Hyderabad. The researcher administered the Demographic Form, Workplace Friendship Scale and Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scales to the participants of the study. Clear instructions were given on how to fill the demographic form and the questionnaires used for the study. The participants were informed that the data obtained would be kept confidential and used solely for research purpose. After the participants filled the questionnaires, the obtained data was entered into SPSS software for performing statistical analysis.

Pearson's correlation analysis was worked out to examine the relationship between workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing. ANOVA was used to examine the impact of age on

workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing.

### Results and Discussion

Data for the study was collected from 60 executives working in junior and middle management levels. The age of the sample ranged from 25 years to 54 years. Data was analyzed using the SPSS Software. Descriptive statistics were performed to examine the age wise distribution of the sample. Correlation Coefficient and ANOVA were computed to test the hypotheses of the study. The results obtained are discussed in this section.

The sample was distributed into three groups according to age. Group 1 comprised members falling in the age range of 25 to 35 years while Group 2 and Group 3 comprised members in the range of 35 to 45 years and 45 to 65 years respectively. Figure 1 shows the age wise distribution of the sample.

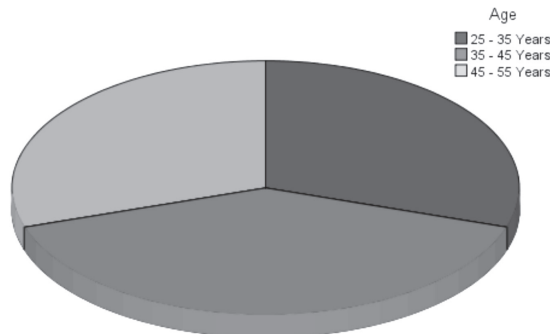


Figure-1: Showing Age-wise Distribution of the Sample

Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between friendship prevalence and psychological wellbeing factors. The results of the correlation analysis indicated a significant positive relationship between friendship prevalence and autonomy, environmental mastery, personal relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance. However, there was no significant relationship found between friendship prevalence and personal growth. The correlation analysis is depicted in Table 1.

The obtained mean for friendship opportunity across the age groups was found to be higher than mean for friendship prevalence. Age-wise distribution of the means obtained for the

sample on friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence is depicted in Figure 2.

Age-wise distribution of the sample on psychological wellbeing factors namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance is depicted in Figure 3.

One Way ANOVA was computed to find out the impact of age on friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence. The obtained F value suggests a significant impact of age on friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence. Table 2 shows the results of ANOVA.

One Way ANOVA was computed to find out the impact of age on the psychological wellbeing factors. The results showed a

***Table-1: Inter-correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship between Friendship Prevalence and Psychological Wellbeing Factors***

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Friendship Prevalence			.				
2. Autonomy	.396**						
3. Environmental Mastery	.311*	.376**					
4. Personal Growth	.219	.421**	.459**				
5. Positive Relations	.591**	.376**	.512**	.571**			
6. Purpose in Life	.313*	.315*	.477**	.441**	.402**		
7. Self-Acceptance	.472**	.557**	.598**	.582**	.578**	.437**	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

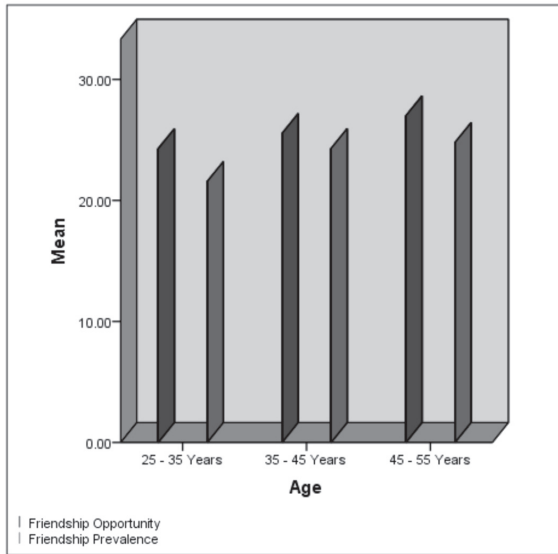


Figure-2: Showing Age-wise Distribution of Sample on Friendship Opportunity and Friendship Prevalence

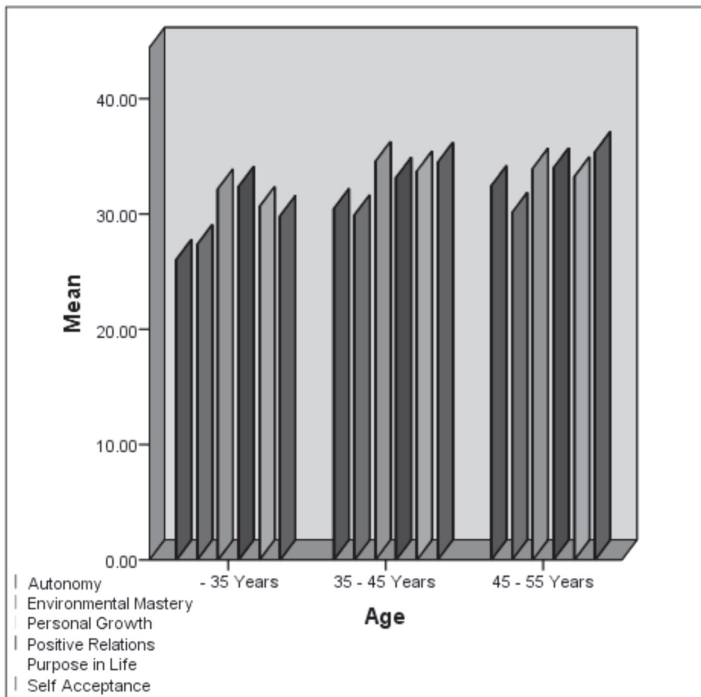


Figure-3: Showing Age-wise Distribution of the Sample on Psychological Wellbeing Factors



**Table-2: Showing Results of One-way ANOVA for Friendship Opportunity and Friendship Prevalence between Different Age Groups**

		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Friendship Opportunity	Between Groups	66.831	2	33.415	3.428	.039
	Within Groups	555.569	57	9.747		
	Total	622.400	59			
Friendship Prevalence	Between Groups	111.669	2	55.835	4.067	.022
	Within Groups	782.514	57	13.728		
	Total	894.183	59			

**Table-3: Showing Results of One-Way ANOVA for Psychological Wellbeing Factors between Different Age Groups**

		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Autonomy	Between Groups	388.386	2	194.193	7.108	.002
	Within Groups	1557.347	57	27.322		
	Total	1945.733	59			
Environmental Mastery	Between Groups	89.989	2	44.994	2.889	.064
	Within Groups	887.611	57	15.572		
	Total	977.600	59			
Personal Growth	Between Groups	60.247	2	30.124	1.274	.287
	Within Groups	1347.403	57	23.639		
	Total	1407.650	59			
Positive Relations	Between Groups	23.372	2	11.686	.414	.663
	Within Groups	1607.611	57	28.204		
	Total	1630.983	59			
Purpose in Life	Between Groups	107.586	2	53.793	2.083	.134
	Within Groups	1472.347	57	25.831		
	Total	1579.933	59			
Self-Acceptance	Between Groups	326.914	2	163.457	4.991	.010
	Within Groups	1866.736	57	32.750		
	Total	2193.650	59			

significant difference across age groups on autonomy and self-acceptance. However, there was no difference between across age groups on environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations and purpose in life. The results of the one-way ANOVA are shown in Table 3.

Based on the results, the following hypotheses of the study were accepted:

Ho1: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Autonomy

Ho2: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Environmental Mastery

Ho4: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Positive Relations

Ho5: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Purpose in Life

Ho6: Friendship Prevalence would have a positive relationship with Self-Acceptance

Ho7: Friendship prevalence and friendship opportunity would differ across the age groups

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study on workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing among executives was

conducted on a sample of 60 executives who were working in managerial positions. The results of the study showed a positive relationship between friendship prevalence and psychological wellbeing factors like autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance. The study further suggested significant difference across age groups on friendship opportunity, friendship prevalence, autonomy and self-acceptance. The present study had some limitations. It could not be conducted on a larger sample size. It did not consider the impact of other demographic factors like age, marital status and job tenure on workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing. The limitations of the study can pave way for further research in the domain of workplace friendship and psychological wellbeing.

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