

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES: THE ROLE OF BURNOUT DIMENSIONS

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Abstract. Psychological wellbeing is an important factor in reducing the risk of burnout, especially among employees in the public sector. This study explores the relationship between psychological wellbeing and burnout in civil servants. A total of 553 Indonesian government employees participated in the study, aged 23–58 years ($M = 39.40$, $SD = 9.59$). Psychological wellbeing was measured with the Indonesian version of the PERMA Profiler, and burnout was assessed with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). A Shapiro–Wilk test showed that the data were not normally distributed, so non-parametric statistics were applied. Spearman’s correlations indicated that wellbeing was negatively associated with emotional exhaustion ($\rho = -0.43$, $p < .001$) and cynicism ($\rho = -0.44$, $p < .001$), and positively associated with personal accomplishment ($\rho = 0.46$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that employees with higher psychological wellbeing report fewer burnout symptoms and greater professional efficacy, supporting the value of wellbeing as a psychological resource in public-sector workplaces.

Keywords: psychological wellbeing, PERMA-profiler, burnout, Maslach Burnout Inventory, public sector employees

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing digital transformation in Indonesia’s public sector involves more than just adopting new technologies. It includes significant changes in organizational structure, workflows, and employee mindset (World Bank, 2020). While these reforms aim to improve public service delivery, they also place increasing demands on employees. The need to quickly adapt to new systems, responsibilities, and ways of working may contribute to higher stress levels and increase the risk of burnout.

A recent study by Putra and Erwandi (2025) found that work stress among civil servants is shaped by multiple psychosocial factors, including organizational dynamics and workload. Among these, the most dominant contributor was the employees’ relationship with their organization and work environment (Putra & Erwandi, 2025). Another study by Sumirat and Indrarewa (2023) involving 166 civil servants in Indonesia’s public procurement unit found that higher levels of burnout were significantly associated with lower employee performance. The study revealed that physical and mental work pressure often led to emotional fatigue and decreased motivation.

According to Maslach and Leiter (2016), burnout is a long-term reaction to ongoing emotional and interpersonal stress at work, characterized by three core dimensions: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion refers to the feeling of being emotionally drained and depleted, often resulting in fatigue and a decrease in motivation. Cynicism, also known as depersonalization, involves a negative or detached attitude toward one’s job, colleagues, or service recipients. Reduced personal accomplishment reflects a decline in feelings of competence and achievement in one’s professional role. These dimensions

of burnout can impair not only individual psychological wellbeing but also interpersonal functioning and workplace relationships, particularly when they are embedded within broader organizational stressors.

A cross-sectional study conducted in Taiwan by Wu et al. (2025) further reinforces this framework, demonstrating a significant correlation between burnout symptoms and levels of psychological wellbeing. Their findings suggest that individuals experiencing higher levels of burnout tend to report lower levels of positive emotion, engagement, and relational satisfaction at work, indicating a close link between occupational stress and overall mental health.

According to Seligman (2018), psychological wellbeing can be understood through the PERMA model, which comprises five core dimensions: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. This model offers a multidimensional framework for understanding and enhancing psychological well-being. Each element contributes uniquely to human flourishing and has been empirically validated as a target for positive psychological interventions. Positive Emotion refers to experiences such as joy, gratitude, and optimism; Engagement involves deep psychological immersion in meaningful activities; Relationships pertain to supportive and authentic social connections; Meaning signifies a sense of purpose or belonging to something greater than oneself; and Accomplishment relates to the pursuit and achievement of personal or professional goals. These dimensions are considered independent and measurable, providing a holistic approach to assessing psychological wellbeing, particularly in workplace settings. In line with this framework, previous findings by Wu et al. (2025) demonstrated that Positive Emotion, Engagement, and Relationships were significantly associated with work-related burnout. Given its conceptual robustness and empirical relevance, the PERMA model serves as a strong foundation for examining the relationship between wellbeing and burnout among public sector employees.

Previous research in Indonesia has generally examined burnout and wellbeing as separate constructs. Few empirical studies have directly explored the relationship between these two variables among civil servants, particularly within the context of ongoing structural reforms and digital transformation in the public sector. This study seeks to address that gap by investigating how the dimensions of burnout are associated with psychological wellbeing. A clearer understanding of this relationship could support the development of more targeted interventions to protect mental health during periods of organizational change.

The present study aims to assess the relationship between burnout and psychological wellbeing among public sector employees. By identifying how different aspects of burnout relate to overall levels of psychological wellbeing, this research contributes to broader discussions on occupational mental health in government workplaces. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights not only for academic inquiry in organizational psychology but also for policymakers working to create supportive and resilient public work environments.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between burnout and psychological wellbeing among Indonesian public sector employees. Data were collected over a defined period through an online self-report questionnaire distributed to civil servants working in a regional government office. While responses were not anonymous, participants were informed of the confidentiality of their data, and informed consent was obtained prior to completing the survey.

A total of 553 civil servants participated in the study, ranging in age from 23 to 58 years ($M = 39.40$, $SD = 9.59$). Psychological wellbeing was measured using the 14-item Indonesian version of the PERMA Profiler developed by Elfida, Milla, Mansoer, and Takwin (2021). This instrument assesses five dimensions of wellbeing (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) using an 11-point Likert scale.

Burnout was assessed using the Maslach–Trisni Burnout Inventory, an Indonesian adaptation of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Widhianingtanti & Luijtelaar, 2022), which includes three subscales: Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Personal Accomplishment.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, non-parametric statistical methods were applied. Spearman’s rank-order correlation was used to examine the relationship between burnout dimensions and psychological wellbeing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between psychological wellbeing and burnout among public sector employees in Indonesia. To this end, Spearman’s rank-order correlation was conducted to examine the associations between PERMA wellbeing scores and three core dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and personal accomplishment.

The study involved a total of 553 respondents employed in a regional government office. In terms of gender, 60.2% of participants were male and 39.8% were female. The age of participants ranged from 23 to 58 years. The most represented age group was 40–49 years, comprising 31.5 percent of the total respondents, followed by 30–39 years (26.4%), 20–29 years (23.7%), and 50–59 years (18.3%). The majority of respondents (84.1%) were married, while 15.9% were unmarried.

Participants in this study reported varying lengths of service in their current work unit. The majority (35.1%) had been in their position for 3 to 5 years, followed by 26.4% who had worked for 5 to 10 years. Approximately 15.2 percent of respondents had been in their current unit for 1 to 2 years, while 13.4 percent had a tenure of less than 1 year. A smaller proportion (9.9%) had worked in their current role for more than 10 years. These figures reflect a relatively balanced distribution of tenure, with a notable concentration in the early to mid-career range.

Burnout Dimensions and Gender, Age, Marital Status, and Work Length

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in Emotional Exhaustion across different age groups, $\chi^2(3) = 13.26$, $p = .004$. Participants aged 30–39 reported the highest levels of Emotional Exhaustion, followed by those in the 40–49 age range. However, no significant age-based differences were found in Cynicism ($\chi^2(3) = 2.25$, $p = .522$) or Personal Accomplishment ($\chi^2(3) = 4.01$, $p = .260$).

When analyzed by gender, no statistically significant differences were observed in any of the burnout dimensions. Emotional Exhaustion ($\chi^2(1) = 1.59$, $p = .207$), Cynicism ($\chi^2(1) = 0.26$, $p = .613$), and Personal Accomplishment ($\chi^2(1) = 0.10$, $p = .749$) were reported at comparable levels between male and female respondents.

In terms of work tenure, Emotional Exhaustion differed significantly among tenure categories, $\chi^2(4) = 14.45$, $p = .006$. Employees with 3–5 years of experience in their current unit reported the highest Emotional Exhaustion scores. Conversely, no significant differences were found across tenure groups for Cynicism ($\chi^2(4) = 2.52$, $p = .641$) or Personal Accomplishment ($\chi^2(4) = 2.78$, $p = .595$).

Kruskal–Wallis tests revealed no statistically significant differences in burnout dimensions based on marital status. For Emotional Exhaustion, the test yielded $H(2) = 1.346$, $p = .510$; for cynicism, $H(2) = 0.020$, $p = .990$; and for Personal Accomplishment, $H(2) = 1.426$, $p = .490$. The similarity in mean ranks across married, single, and divorced employees suggests that marital status did not substantially influence levels of burnout in this sample of public sector employees.

Burnout Dimensions and PERMA Wellbeing Scores

Table 1 displays the results of the correlation analysis. PERMA wellbeing scores were found to be significantly and negatively correlated with Emotional Exhaustion ($\rho = -0.431$, $p < .001$) and Cynicism ($\rho = -0.441$, $p < .001$), while showing a significant positive correlation with Personal Accomplishment ($\rho = 0.464$, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that higher levels of psychological wellbeing are associated with lower levels of burnout symptoms, particularly Emotional Exhaustion and Cynicism, and a stronger sense of Personal Accomplishment.

The results show that PERMA wellbeing scores were significantly negatively correlated with Emotional Exhaustion ($\rho = -0.431$, $p < 0.001$) and Cynicism ($\rho = -0.441$, $p < 0.001$), and positively correlated with Personal Accomplishment ($\rho = 0.464$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that individuals with higher psychological wellbeing tend to experience lower levels of emotional fatigue and detachment, and a greater sense of achievement in their professional roles.

Table 1. *Spearman's Correlation between PERMA Scores and Burnout Dimensions (N = 553)*

			Burnout Dimensions			
	PERMA Score		PERMA Score	Emotional Exhaustion Score	Personal Accomplishment Score	Cynicism Score
Spearman's rho		Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.431**	.464**	-.441**
		Sign. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
	Emotional Exhaustion Score	Correlation Coefficient	-.431**	1.000	-.417**	.748**
		Sign. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
	Personal Accomplishment Score	Correlation Coefficient	.464**	-.417**	1.000	-.468**
		Sign. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
	Cynicism Score	Correlation Coefficient	-.441**	.748**	-.468**	1.000
		Sign. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.

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

In addition, Emotional Exhaustion was strongly and negatively correlated with Personal Accomplishment ($\rho = -0.417$, $p < 0.001$) and positively correlated with Cynicism ($\rho = 0.748$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that as emotional fatigue increases, individuals tend to feel more detached and less accomplished. These results confirm the inverse relationship between psychological wellbeing and burnout, highlighting the relevance of fostering wellbeing to mitigate the risk of burnout among public sector employees.

Burnout Dimensions and PERMA Dimensions

Table 2. *Spearman's Correlation between PERMA Dimensions and Burnout Dimensions*

		Burnout Dimensions		
PERMA Dimensions		Emotional Exhaustion (ρ)	Cynicism (ρ)	Personal Accomplishment (ρ)
Positive Emotion		-0.377	-0.348	0.412

Engagement	-0.338	-0.339	0.382
Relationships	-0.304	-0.298	0.346
Meaning	-0.360	-0.351	0.374
Accomplishment	-0.302	-0.311	0.472

Spearman correlation analysis revealed significant associations between the PERMA dimensions and all three components of burnout. Higher levels of Positive Emotion ($\rho = -0.377$, $p < .001$), Engagement ($\rho = -0.333$, $p < .001$), Relationships ($\rho = -0.259$, $p < .001$), Meaning ($\rho = -0.340$, $p < .001$), and Accomplishment ($\rho = -0.335$, $p < .001$) were significantly negatively correlated with Emotional Exhaustion. Cynicism also showed significant negative correlations with Positive Emotion ($\rho = -0.342$, $p < .001$), Engagement ($\rho = -0.319$, $p < .001$), Relationships ($\rho = -0.249$, $p < .001$), Meaning ($\rho = -0.351$, $p < .001$), and Accomplishment ($\rho = -0.309$, $p < .001$). Conversely, Personal Accomplishment was positively associated with all PERMA dimensions, including Positive Emotion ($\rho = 0.365$, $p < .001$), Engagement ($\rho = 0.421$, $p < .001$), Relationships ($\rho = 0.362$, $p < .001$), Meaning ($\rho = 0.415$, $p < .001$), and Accomplishment ($\rho = 0.464$, $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reinforce the inverse relationship between psychological wellbeing and burnout among public sector employees, as previously suggested by Wu et al. (2025) and aligned with Maslach and Leiter's (2016) model. Significant correlations were found between the PERMA wellbeing dimensions and all three dimensions of burnout (Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Personal Accomplishment). These findings suggest that wellbeing is not merely a desirable state, but a protective factor that buffers individuals from psychological strain at work.

From the PERMA model perspective, the strongest positive correlation was found between wellbeing and Personal Accomplishment ($\rho = 0.464$, $p < .001$), which implies that employees who feel more competent, goal-oriented, and accomplished are more resilient to the negative psychological impact of work stress. This supports Seligman's (2018) claim that a sense of accomplishment sustains motivation and reinforces positive self-perception, both of which counteract feelings of burnout.

Conversely, Emotional Exhaustion showed the strongest negative correlation with PERMA dimensions, such as Positive Emotion ($\rho = -0.377$) and Meaning ($\rho = -0.340$). This suggests that employees who experience more joy, gratitude, and purpose in their work are less likely to feel emotionally depleted. The detachment reflected in the Cynicism dimension was also significantly negatively correlated with each PERMA element, particularly Meaning ($\rho = -0.351$) and Positive Emotion ($\rho = -0.342$), highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation and emotional vitality in reducing depersonalization.

These findings align with the Areas of Worklife (AW) model proposed by Leiter and Maslach (2004), which understands burnout not merely as an individual psychological response, but as a systemic issue stemming from a mismatch between the person and key aspects of their work environment. The six domains identified in the model (workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and value) play a crucial role in determining whether an employee thrives or experiences burnout. Notably, when an individual's values and sense of purpose are aligned with their organizational role, the risk of burnout diminishes.

In this study, all five PERMA dimensions were significantly associated with burnout symptoms; however, certain patterns emerged. The Meaning dimension, which reflects having a

sense of purpose and belonging to something greater than oneself, demonstrated consistently strong correlations with Emotional Exhaustion ($\rho = -.340, p < .001$), Cynicism ($\rho = -.351, p < .001$), and Personal Accomplishment ($\rho = .415, p < .001$). This supports the notion that individuals who perceive their work as meaningful are less likely to become emotionally drained or disengaged, and more likely to retain a sense of achievement.

That said, Meaning was not the only dimension with strong correlations. Accomplishment showed the highest positive association with the burnout dimension of Personal Accomplishment ($\rho = .464, p < .001$), while Engagement and Positive Emotion also correlated significantly with all burnout components. These findings suggest that fostering a sense of purpose, progress, enjoyment, and psychological involvement in one's work may collectively act as buffers against burnout, reinforcing the relevance of the PERMA model as a holistic framework for wellbeing in organizational settings.

Similar patterns have been observed in other contexts as well. A Taiwanese study (Wu et al., 2025) also found that wellbeing factors such as Engagement and Positive relationships significantly mitigated work-related burnout, suggesting that these relationships hold cross-culturally. This study contributes to the field by validating these associations within the context of the Indonesian civil service, where organizational reforms, digital transitions, and hierarchical pressures present unique psychosocial challenges.

Intervention strategies based on the PERMA model have gained increasing recognition as effective approaches for promoting resilience and reducing burnout in organizational contexts. The PERMA framework (Seligman, 2018), which encompasses Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment, has consistently shown inverse relationships with burnout dimensions in both current and previous research. Programs grounded in positive psychology, such as strengths-based coaching, positive leadership development, and wellbeing enhancement initiatives, have shown effectiveness in fostering employee resilience, engagement, and mental health across various workplace settings (Van Zyl and Rothmann, 2019). These practices align with the PERMA model by cultivating psychological resources that serve as protective factors against burnout.

In addition, the concept of wellbeing literacy, defined as the ability to understand, express, and apply wellbeing-related knowledge, has emerged as a valuable area for intervention. According to Oades et al. (2021), enhancing wellbeing literacy enables individuals to regulate emotions, articulate their psychological needs, and adopt proactive coping strategies. These skills are essential in buffering against burnout, particularly during periods of organizational change. Taken together, PERMA-informed approaches offer a meaningful foundation for supporting the psychological wellbeing and adaptive functioning of public sector employees during ongoing institutional transitions.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between psychological wellbeing and burnout among Indonesian public sector employees, using the PERMA model as a framework for understanding wellbeing. The results demonstrated significant associations between the five dimensions of PERMA—Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment—and the three key components of burnout: Emotional Exhaustion, Cynicism, and Personal Accomplishment. Employees with stronger wellbeing across these dimensions were less likely to report emotional fatigue and detachment, and more likely to feel a sense of achievement in their professional roles. These results emphasize the importance of cultivating workplace wellbeing,

suggesting that promoting positive affect, meaningful engagement, supportive social connections, a strong sense of purpose, and goal attainment may help buffer against burnout. Overall, this study highlights the relevance of positive psychology models such as PERMA in advancing mental health initiatives within public sector organizations.

DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this study are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution.

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