

An analysis of mental health's influence on the psychological empowerment of high school teachers

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Abstract

This research examines how mental health influences psychological empowerment in Namibian employees, particularly through the experiences of high school teachers working in the Khomas, Ohangwena and Omusati regions. Psychological empowerment was as an individual's internal drive which is displayed through their sense of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact within their work environment. Mental health can be defined as an individual's emotional and psychological state coupled with their social connections which has a great affect on their thought processes and actions at work. This study examines teachers who work in demanding and resource-limited environments while also looking at a crucial group of teachers which is often overlooked. Educators within Namibia often experience psychological strains from the limitations within the school system, the heavy workloads and the societal pressures which makes understanding the effect of mental health on psychological empowerment urgent. The study applied a quantitative method to undermine the relationship between mental health and psychological empowerment. The results indicated a path coefficient of $\beta=0.207$, a t-statistic of $t=2.325$ and a p-value of $p=0.020$ demonstrating a statistically significant positive link between mental health and psychological empowerment. This article explores how these research findings affect theoretical understanding and practical applications specifically in educational while expanding on the academic literature on Industrial/Organisational Psychology in Africa by focusing on sub-Saharan Africa which is often overlooked when looking at contextual differences. The study reiterates that optimal health serves as a crucial aspect of psychological empowerment as individuals who maintain good mental health tend to believe in their ability to impact their surroundings and make important decisions. Through empirical evidence, this study demonstrates that mental health goes beyond the well-being of an individual and rather serves as a key strategic factor for achieving better workplace results in education. The study strengthens theoretical models by demonstrating that mental health positively affects psychological empowerment in the educational environment which can further be studies in order to identify the influencing factors such as spirituality, organisational support and leadership styles. The researchers recommend that educational policymakers implement structured wellness programs and counselling services for high school teachers. Schools should also build a supportive culture which addresses the psychological needs of educators while supporting transparent communication and independence over their work environment.

Keywords: High school teachers, psychological empowerment, mental health, well-being

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1. Introduction

Research in psychology and organisational studies focuses extensively on exploring the connection between mental health and psychological empowerment (Grealish et al., 2017). Psychological empowerment describes how people obtain more control over their work and life situations which leads to heightened motivation and job satisfaction as well as improved overall well-being (Menon, 1999; Zimmerman, 1995). The foundation of both personal and professional life empowerment is dependent on mental health as it includes emotional wellness and the lack of mental disorders (Mathew & Nair, 2022). The state of mental health fundamentally influences the self-belief that high school teachers have of their abilities within demanding educational environments (Janik-Blaskova & Winter, 2025). Educators who maintain strong mental health experience higher levels of psychological empowerment which enhances their work performance, their interactions with students and their levels of job satisfaction (Kush et al., 2022). Understanding this relationship becomes crucial within the high school teaching context as this profession encompasses complex tasks and emotional challenges. Teachers must navigate heavy workloads, large classrooms, scarce resources, a lack of professional development and the emotional demands of meeting diverse student needs, while maintaining positive collegial and parental relationships which together may challenge their mental strength (Kush et al., 2022; Murangi et al., 2022).

1.1 The relationship between mental health and psychological empowerment

The connection between mental health and psychological empowerment generally aligns with the principles of the self-efficacy theory. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy reflects an individual's confidence in their capacity to achieve success within particular circumstances. Higher levels of mental health leads to increased self-efficacy which subsequently boosts an individual's feeling of empowerment. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that individuals with better mental health possess stronger coping skills which subsequently lead to increased feelings of empowerment. Research consistently demonstrates that positive mental health plays a crucial role in fostering psychological empowerment (Grealish et al., 2017; Laschinger et al., 2001; Rahi, 2022). People who experience positive emotions along with stress resilience and emotional balance, demonstrate a higher likelihood of perceiving their ability to influence work and life situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Individuals who experience poor mental health conditions often face stress and burnout which leads to reduce control over their environment thereby reducing their sense of empowerment (Laschinger et al., 2001). Research has been carried out on the relationship between mental health and psychological empowerment in the work environment, but not much research has been carried out within Namibia's educational sector. The majority of the resource has come

from the Western parts of the world which creates a contextual gap on these variables within the Southern African context. There are insufficient empirical studies which combine these variables with workplace agility which represents a teacher's capacity for adaptation, innovation and responsiveness in dynamic educational settings. This study aimed to examine how mental health connects with psychological empowerment among high school teachers in Namibia's Khomas, Ohangwena and Omusati regions.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded on two well-established theoretical models: This study integrates the Psychological Empowerment Theory from Zimmerman (1995) with Biopsychosocial Model by Engel and Romano (Engel, 1977). The combination of these frameworks establishes a strong basis for exploring the relationship between mental health and psychological empowerment in high school teachers. The Psychological Empowerment Theory by Zimmerman (1995) describes empowerment as a complex construct with intrapersonal and interactional elements along with behavioral components. The intrapersonal aspect of empowerment involves personal beliefs about one's capacity to affect results and includes factors such as self-efficacy, perceived competence along with control (Zimmerman, 2000). The sense of autonomy and decision-making ability that educators experience in high-stress work settings plays a vital role in their job satisfaction and overall effectiveness (Dreer, 2023). The biopsychosocial model recognises the complex relationship between biological, psychological and social factors with regards to shaping mental health outcomes with self-awareness as a crucial aspect (Bolton & Gillett, 2019). Rather than viewing mental health as simply the result of biological causes, the biopsychosocial model takes a more holistic approach which acknowledges that psychological experiences and social contexts are crucial in both the development and resolution of mental health issues (Wade & Halligan, 2017).

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative non-experimental, cross-sectional research design to investigate the influence of mental health on the psychological empowerment of high school teachers within Namibia. The population of the study consisted of +2490 Namibian high school teachers teaching grades 8 to 12. Purposive sampling was selected to carry out this study as it serves as a judgmental sampling method where researchers identify participants who exhibit specific traits required for the study (Palinkas, et al., 2015). These participants were directly involved in the educational environment and could therefore provide great insight on the examined variables. The sample consisted of 325 Namibian high school teachers from the Khomas, Ohangwena and Omusati regions.

3. Data collection

The data was collected through a combination of the Psychological Empowerment Instrument developed by Spreitzer (2007); which consists of 12 items, including 4 sub-dimensions namely; meaning, competence, self-determination and impact and the Teacher Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (TSWQ) developed by Renshaw (2020) which consists of 8 items with 3 subscales namely, teaching efficacy, school connectedness and teacher wellbeing. The original versions of the instruments were retained without making any alterations. The original instrument was merged into one questionnaire, consisting of the 5 sections with no alterations to any instrument.

3.1 Data analysis

SPSS 29.0 was used to analyse the descriptive statistics, the mean and standard deviation of the data. A structural equation modeling (SEM) approach was used to analyse the direct and indirect connections between mental health and psychological empowerment. The statistical analysis evaluated the path coefficient between mental health and psychological empowerment using the t-statistic and p-value to determine significance.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The psychological Empowerment Scale obtained a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = .932$ which according to research has been found to be an excellent score and means that there is consistency in the responses for this scale (Forero, 2024; Schrepp, 2020). The Cronbach's alpha based on standardised items obtained $\alpha = .935$ which is also an excellent score. The scale also revealed a moderate positive linear relationships among the inter-correlation of the variable's subscales ranging from .342 to .750. The Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire (TSWQ) yielded a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = .824$ which shows a great reliability value (Forero, 2024). The Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items obtained yielded $\alpha = .823$ which is also a great score Inter-Item Correlation Matrix which shows a low positive relationship between the items as they range between 0.063 to 0.628, which according to Sürücü & Maslakci (2020) is low but acceptable. The Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values also indicate good internal consistency for the constructs and the AVE values for MH (0.679) and PE (0.592) are all above the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) as shown as depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1*Cornbach's alpha and composite reliability*

	Cronb ach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
H	0.765	0.770	0.864	0.679
E	0.932	0.946	0.941	0.592

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion compares the square root of the AVE for each construct with the correlation between constructs. The results presented in the table below indicate that the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs, validating the discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Table 2*The Fornell-Lacker Criterion*

	MH	PE
MH	0.824	
PE	0.328	0.769

These findings confirm the validity of the measurement model used in this study.

The analysis further revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between mental health and psychological empowerment. The relationship displayed a path coefficient of $\beta=0.207$ with a t-statistic of $t=2.325$ and a p-value of $p=0.020$. These results indicate that better mental health conditions create higher possibilities for individuals to achieve greater psychological empowerment. The research shows how mental health serves as an enabling factor that helps individuals build their sense of control coupled with competence and purpose which are fundamental parts of psychological empowerment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

4.2 Discussion

This research provides empirical evidence which supports Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory and the Biopsychosocial Theory. The significant positive correlation

between mental health and psychological empowerment ($\beta = 0.207$, $t = 2.325$, $p = .020$) reveals that psychological well-being strengthens an individual's belief in their ability to manage and influence their professional surroundings. Recent studies indicate that strong mental health leads to increased levels of resilience and work efficacy (Kush et al., 2022). Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory proposes that individuals experience feelings of empowerment when they trust in their ability to influence results and provide significant contributions (Bandura, 1997). Janik-Blaskova and Winter (2025) found that teachers who maintain better levels of mental health have been found to show greater levels of confidence in their decision making and problem solving skills which are crucial aspects of psychological empowerment in education. The foundation of mental health extends beyond parallel concepts as it serves as an essential aspect of empowerment which helps individuals develop purpose, competence and impactful experiences (Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024). The results of this study further support Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transaction Model of Stress and Coping which demonstrates how psychological resources which include mental health, increases the perception of control over the environment of an individual. Teachers who maintain positive levels of mental health have been found to have a stronger ability to handle stressful situations and take charge of their work situations (Kush et al., 2022). Psychological empowerment within teachers is derived from their sense of control which is crucial when they have to handle high workload levels, diverse student needs, educational curriculum changes, technological advances and ever changing classroom requirements (Hacher & Waber, 2021; Kush et al., 2022; Llorente-Alonso et al., 2024). Rogers et al (1997) proposed that psychological empowerment may arise from an individual's belief in their ability to influence their surroundings and outcomes which is strengthened by mental stability.

This study provides valuable insight for practical recommendation for educational frameworks specifically for Namibia. It is crucial for schools to understand how mental health serves as the basis for creating teachers who feel psychologically empowered in stressful work environments. This study indicates that the psychological empowerment of teachers can be significantly strengthened by, wellness programmes, dedicated support services as well as work-life balance initiatives which can improve the mental health of teachers (Rogers et al., 1997). Programmes that support teacher well-being such as counselling services, professional development opportunities, training and mental health educational workshops can increase the personal wellness and professional engagement of teachers (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Psychologically empowered teachers have been found to be more engaged within their work while showing enhanced levels of job satisfaction and proactive contributions to school improvement initiatives (Woodcock et al., 2022). Teachers who experience empowerment

depict greater levels of adaptability and resilience during challenging times while successfully implementing new and relevant teaching practices which boost the achievement levels of students (Lyons, et al., 2013). Research within the discipline of Industrial Psychology supports the connection between psychological empowerment and outcomes such as intrinsic motivation, performance enhancement and burnout reduction (Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer, 1995). This study confirms the theoretical relationship between mental health and psychological empowerment while providing specific guidance to advance both areas. The support of the psychological health of teachers serves as both a strategy for health promotions and a method to develop empowered and adaptable teachers who are able to cope with challenges and are more resilient. The study further indicates that mental health improves the personal beliefs of an individual's power to shape their environment and accomplish their goals (Kush et al., 2022).

5. Recommendations

The researchers recommend that mental health support programs and resources be incorporated in the schools in order to enable schools to support teachers in handling stress and emotional challenges. This will also assist them in working to minimise stressors in the workplace. School administrators should also establish workplaces where teachers can experience psychological empowerment through decision-making opportunities and increased autonomy. Professional development initiatives in schools should also incorporate psychological empowerment techniques which will enable teachers to strengthen their confidence and independence while gaining the autonomy and control of their work environment. Schools should also ensure that they foster a supportive culture which addresses the psychological needs of teachers. Further research should investigate how factors such as leadership styles and organisational culture affect the mental health and psychological empowerment connection. Further research should also be carried out on the different cultural aspects in order to identify if the culture within a specific country can influence the mental health and psychological empowerment of high school teachers. Further research can also be carried out to examine the possible mediating effects that concepts such as spirituality and work satisfaction have on teacher well-being in order to create an all-encompassing framework. The study also made use of self-administered reporting to collect data which could increase social desirability bias despite it being an anonymous study. Future research could therefore gain from integrating assessments from multiple data sources which could include supervisors, colleagues and students.

Conclusion

The study established that psychological empowerment significantly benefits from higher levels of mental health. Teachers who maintain higher levels of mental health have been found to have a greater ability to influence and impact their environment and make impactful decisions which increases their sense of psychological empowerment (Kush et al., 202, Tsang et al., 2022). The implications of these findings add to more than just the theoretical frameworks of the field but also have practical recommendations particularly within the educational environment which remains crucial for developing effective settings for learning.

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