



A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELF-ESTEEM, PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS AND BURNOUT AMONG BUSINESSMEN AND EMPLOYEES

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Introduction:

Workplaces play a significant role in shaping psychological well-being, identity formation, emotional balance, and overall life satisfaction among working professionals. Occupational roles differ in demands, responsibilities, decision-making autonomy, and reward structures, all of which influence mental health outcomes. Understanding these differences is essential for developing preventive mental health programs, enhancing work-life balance, and improving job satisfaction. The present study examines variations in self-esteem, perceived stress, and burnout between businessmen and employees, two occupational groups that operate within distinctly different work environments.

Self-esteem refers to the individual's overall sense of personal value and self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). It is influenced by perceived competence, social recognition, and autonomy in decision-making. Business owners, often operating independently or in leadership roles, may experience enhanced role control and authority, which can contribute to higher levels of self-esteem. In contrast, employees generally function within structured organizational hierarchies, where performance evaluation, supervision, and job expectations are externally regulated. Such environments can lead to reduced autonomy and contribute to comparatively lower levels of self-esteem (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2023).

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Perceived stress reflects the degree to which individuals evaluate their life circumstances as overwhelming and uncontrollable (Cohen, 1983). In the contemporary economic environment, both businessmen and employees face stress, but its sources differ. Business owners frequently manage financial uncertainties, competition, workforce responsibilities, and accountability for outcomes. These factors may elevate stress levels even though they simultaneously enjoy independence and flexibility (Patel & Singh, 2024). Employees, on the other hand, encounter stress due to time-bound tasks, internal performance pressures, hierarchical constraints, and limited control over decision-making processes.

Burnout, conceptualized through the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Occupational burnout develops when job demands exceed coping resources for a prolonged period. Although businessmen possess greater independence, they also carry continuous responsibility for sustaining operations and managing



outcomes. This can contribute to emotional fatigue and burnout (Sharma, Yadav, & Kulkarni, 2023). Employees, especially in organizational settings that emphasize compliance and output, may also experience burnout when autonomy is restricted and external evaluation remains high. However, the manifestation and intensity of burnout differ based on role expectations, control, and perceived self-efficacy.

Research conducted in the Indian context suggests that professional identity, job involvement, and sense of control significantly influence well-being across occupational roles (Verma & Juneja, 2022). In settings such as Pune, Maharashtra—a rapidly growing commercial and corporate hub—both businessmen and employees encounter fast-paced work environments and competitive expectations. Understanding their psychological well-being is therefore particularly relevant.

The conceptual basis of the present study aligns with the Job Demand-Control Model (Karasek, 1979), which posits that autonomy acts as a protective factor in managing work stress. Businessmen typically operate with high autonomy, which can strengthen self-esteem; however, they also experience high accountability, which can increase stress and burnout. Employees, conversely, function under higher external control and performance supervision, which may reduce self-esteem and elevate stress and burnout, particularly when support systems are inadequate.

In summary, employees often experience low autonomy, frequent evaluation, and hierarchical oversight, contributing to higher stress and burnout and comparatively lower self-esteem. Businessmen, in contrast, generally have greater independence, decision-making authority, and stronger role identity, contributing to higher self-esteem, though the weight of responsibility may also lead to elevated stress and burnout.

Given these theoretical foundations and contextual relevance, the present study aims to compare self-esteem, perceived stress, and burnout among businessmen and employees in Pune, Maharashtra, using standardized psychological assessment tools.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To assess the level of self-esteem among businessmen and employees.
2. To measure the level of perceived stress among businessmen and employees.
3. To examine the level of burnout among businessmen and employees.
4. To compare businessmen and employees with respect to self-esteem, perceived stress, and burnout.

Hypotheses:

The study is based on the following hypotheses:

1. **H₁:** There will be a significant difference in self-esteem between businessmen and employees.
2. **H₂:** There will be a significant difference in perceived stress between businessmen and employees.
3. **H₃:** There will be a significant difference in burnout between businessmen and employees.

Method:

Research Design:

The study employed a comparative research design to examine differences in psychological well-being across two occupational groups: businessmen and employees. The variables assessed included



self-esteem, perceived stress, and burnout. Standardized psychological scales were used for measurement.

Participants:

The sample consisted of **60 participants**, selected through **purposive sampling** from the city of **Pune, Maharashtra**. The sample included:

- **30 Businessmen**, who owned or managed independent business ventures.
- **30 Employees**, working in private or government organizational settings.

Participants ranged in age from **25 to 50 years**. Only individuals with a minimum work experience of **two years** in their respective professions were included. Participants with diagnosed psychiatric conditions or undergoing psychological treatment at the time of data collection were excluded from the study.

Tools Used:

1. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

Developed by Rosenberg (1965), the RSES is a widely used scale for measuring global self- esteem. It consists of **10 items**, rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. Higher scores indicate **higher self-esteem**. The scale has demonstrated high reliability and validity across diverse populations.

2. Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)

Developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983), the PSS-10 measures the degree to which individuals perceive life situations as unpredictable or overwhelming. It contains **10 items**, rated on a 5-point Likert scale from *Never* to *Very Often*. Higher scores reflect **higher perceived stress**.

3. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

The MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) is used to assess occupational burnout. It includes **three dimensions**: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment.

Responses are recorded on a 7-point frequency scale ranging from *Never* to *Every day*. Higher scores in Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization and lower scores in Personal Accomplishment indicate **higher burnout**.

Procedure:

Participants were approached personally and through institutional and business networks. The purpose of the study was explained, and **informed consent** was obtained. Each participant completed the three standardized scales individually. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers. Data collection took place in natural work-related environments or neutral settings to ensure comfort and accuracy in responses.

Statistical Analysis:

The collected data were scored according to standard scoring procedures of the respective instruments. The data were analyzed using **Independent Sample t-test** to compare the mean scores of businessmen and employees on self-esteem, perceived stress, and burnout. Mean, Standard Deviation, and *t*-values were computed. Statistical significance was determined at **p < .05**.



Results:

The present study compared Self-Esteem, Psychological Stress, and Burnout among Businessmen (n= 30) and Employees (n = 30). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent samples *t*-tests.

Table 1: Mean and SD of RSES, PS-10, and MBI Scores among Businessmen and Employees

Variables	Group	Mean	SD
Self-Esteem (RSES)	Businessmen	28.63	4.21
	Employees	22.47	3.89
Psychological Stress (PS-10)	Businessmen	18.10	5.12
	Employees	24.33	6.45
Burnout (MBI – Emotional Exhaustion)	Businessmen	19.22	6.20
	Employees	27.85	7.14
Burnout (MBI – Depersonalization)	Businessmen	6.84	3.41
	Employees	10.67	4.12
Burnout (MBI – Personal Accomplishment) (Higher = Better)	Businessmen	35.90	5.05
	Employees	29.76	6.22

Independent Samples *t*-Test Results

Variable	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Interpretation
Self-Esteem	5.98	< .001	Businessmen significantly higher
Psychological Stress	4.06	< .001	Employees significantly higher
Burnout – Emotional Exhaustion	4.76	< .001	Employees significantly higher
Burnout – Depersonalization	3.94	< .01	Employees significantly higher
Burnout – Personal Accomplishment	4.12	< .001	Businessmen significantly higher

Interpretation of Findings:

1. Self-Esteem

Businessmen scored **significantly higher** in self-esteem than employees. This suggests that **greater role autonomy, decision-making authority, and perceived control** enhance self- worth among Businessmen.

2. Psychological Stress

Employees reported **significantly higher psychological stress**, likely due to **external evaluation pressure, hierarchical supervision, and limited autonomy** in organizational structures.

3. Burnout

Employees demonstrated **higher burnout** on Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization. Businessmen, in contrast, reported **greater Personal Accomplishment**, indicating **stronger role ownership and goal-driven motivation**.

Discussion: The purpose of the present study was to compare Self-Esteem, Psychological Stress, and Burnout among Businessmen and Employees. The results indicate clear and statistically significant differences between the two occupational groups.



The finding that **Businessmen scored higher on Self-Esteem** aligns with existing research suggesting that occupational roles involving **greater autonomy, flexibility, and decision-making authority** are positively associated with self-worth and identity strength. Businessmen typically exercise control over work planning, goal-setting, and pace, which enhances their sense of personal agency. This supports prior observations that **internal locus of control and role ownership** contribute to improved self-evaluative beliefs (Singh & Srivastava, 2022).

In contrast, **Employees reported significantly higher levels of Psychological Stress**. This is consistent with studies indicating that jobs with **external performance evaluation, hierarchical supervision, and limited role flexibility** tend to generate elevated stress responses (Kumar & Thomas, 2023). Organizational expectations, pressure to meet deadlines, and reduced autonomy can contribute to a chronic stress environment.

Similarly, **Employees demonstrated higher burnout**, particularly in the dimensions of Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization. Burnout has been shown to be more prevalent in structured institutional work settings where individuals feel replaceable and have limited influence over decision-making processes (Maslach & Leiter, 2021). Emotional Exhaustion may occur as a result of prolonged work demands, while Depersonalization reflects psychological distancing used as a coping mechanism.

However, **Businessmen exhibited significantly higher scores in Personal Accomplishment**, suggesting that their work roles provide a stronger sense of goal completion, ownership, and identity reinforcement. Entrepreneurial environments typically reward persistence and innovation, leading to a **greater internal reward experience** even in the presence of work pressure. This finding aligns with earlier work indicating that **meaningful self-driven roles reduce burnout effects** (Patel & Raj, 2024).

Overall, the pattern of findings suggests that **autonomy and control are central psychological variables** influencing self-esteem and stress outcomes across occupations. While Businessmen face uncertainty and workload intensity, their ability to make independent decisions appears to buffer against burnout. Conversely, Employees may benefit from structured support systems, but **lack of autonomy increases vulnerability** to stress and emotional fatigue.

These findings highlight the need for organizations to **enhance employee autonomy, participation in decision-making, and recognition practices**, to reduce stress and prevent burnout. At the same time, Businessmen may require support in **work-life balance and stress management**, as entrepreneurial work can involve irregular routines and risk pressure.

Conclusion:

The present comparative study examined Self-Esteem, Psychological Stress, and Burnout among Businessmen and Employees. Findings revealed that **Businessmen demonstrated higher Self- Esteem and greater Personal Accomplishment**, whereas **Employees reported significantly higher Psychological Stress and Burnout**. These results emphasize the central role of **work autonomy, role control, and decision-making freedom** in shaping psychological well-being. Although Businessmen face high workload and uncertainty, their independence appears to buffer emotional strain. In contrast, Employees may experience pressure arising from



hierarchical supervision, structured work demands, and limited control, contributing to stress and emotional exhaustion.

The study reinforces the importance of **occupation-specific mental health support strategies**. Promoting autonomy, recognition, and participation in workplace decision-making may reduce stress and burnout among Employees. For Businessmen, structured approaches to **work-life balance and stress regulation** are advisable.

Implications of the Study:

- Workplace Policies:** Organizations may reduce burnout among Employees by increasing autonomy, role clarity, and participatory decision-making.
- Stress-Management Training:** Professional stress-management, mindfulness, and coping- skills programs can benefit both occupational groups.
- Counselling and Support:** Regular psychological well-being check-ins may help prevent chronic burnout.
- Entrepreneurial Wellness Programs:** Business owners may benefit from guidance on time management, delegation, and boundary-setting.

Limitations

1. The sample size was limited to 60 participants, which may constrain generalizability.
2. The study relied on **self-report scales**, which may involve subjective bias.
3. The study included participants from a **specific geographic region**, limiting cultural variability.

Suggestions for Future Research:

1. Conduct studies with **larger and more diverse samples** across multiple regions.
2. Incorporate **physiological indicators of stress** (e.g., heart rate variability, cortisol levels).
3. Examine gender, age, and organizational culture as **moderating variables**.
4. Extend research to other occupational groups such as healthcare workers, educators, and industrial workers.

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