

# The Well-being of PhD Scholars in Social Sciences: A Systematic Review

Md. Kamran Moquim<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Rashmi Jain<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, D/O Social Work, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, D/O Social Work, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

**Abstract**—This study attempts to enhance the understanding of the well-being of doctoral students in social sciences. This systematic review analyses the factors influencing PhD scholars' well-being, the challenges encountered, and strategies to enhance well-being and academic success. The constituents of well-being identified from the literature are thematically deliberated for a nuanced understanding. By amalgamating recent empirical research and theoretical perspectives, this review aims to provide insights for academic institutions, supervisors, and policymakers to support social science doctoral students better.

**Index Terms**—PhD Students, Research Scholars, Social Sciences, Well-being

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Embarking on a PhD in social sciences is intellectually fulfilling yet fundamentally demanding. Academics take this endeavour to enhance knowledge production, improve practices, and tackle significant social challenges. Nonetheless, the pursuit of a doctorate frequently imposes significant strains on one's mental, emotional, and physical health. (Inouye, K.) For PhD candidates in social sciences, these problems are exacerbated by the characteristics of their field, which often entails the study of delicate subjects, interaction with marginalized groups, and the emotional labour associated with confronting systematic imbalances.

Alongside academic difficulties, social science PhD candidates also have financial constraints due to the lack of scholarships and funding opportunities. Numerous individuals encounter personal obstacles, including the management of familial obligations and the preservation of relationships, which can intensify feelings of stress and loneliness. Moreover, the isolating characteristics of the doctoral phase and the competitive academic environment may result in

insufficient peer support and feelings of inadequacy, often termed impostor syndrome (Pervez, A., 2020).

Comprehending the well-being of PhD candidates in social sciences throughout the doctoral period is essential, as it establishes the groundwork for their future research and professional advancement. Suboptimal well-being impedes academic performance and diminishes researchers' capacity to make significant contributions to their discipline. Addressing these challenges necessitates a comprehensive approach that takes into account institutional regulations, supervisory techniques, and individual coping strategies (Castello, M. et al., 2017). Research findings from other disciplines suggest that doctoral program withdrawal rates can reach 56% due to psychological distress and mental illness (Pyhältö et al., 2012).

This systematic review seeks to consolidate available studies regarding the well-being of social sciences PhD students. This review aims to elucidate the problems encountered, the factors that strengthen resilience and thereby contribute to well-being, and the interventions that can improve well-being, thereby informing efforts to cultivate a supportive academic climate that allows academics to prosper in personal and professional domains.

Research indicates that a mental health crisis in graduate education may be hindering students' careers (Evans et al., 2018). Life as a PhD student is often stressful owing to perceived job insecurity, inadequate compensation, and uncertainty over future employment, role conflict, poor advisor relationships, pressure to publish, isolation, insufficient support systems, and a lack of work-life balance. These stressors can together result in psychological anguish and mental disorders, including depression and anxiety.

Numerous individuals enter academics with zeal, only to encounter the realities and pressures of the job. Doctoral students are increasingly instructed in formulaic research methodologies to optimise publications in prestigious journals, frequently at the cost of genuine knowledge acquisition and critical analysis (Bothello & Roulet, 2019). Doctoral students in management are frequently brainwashed into a "publish or perish" mentality concerning production and output (De Rond & Miller, 2005). The standard practice for securing employment is the publication of peer-reviewed journal publications. This imposes significant pressure on PhD candidates to publish early in their program. Consequently, although PhD candidates in psychology and the hard sciences may produce journal articles, they often do it collaboratively in a laboratory setting under the supervision of their adviser. This is not universally applicable to doctoral candidates in management.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A systematic review is a mechanism for aggregating extensive data to derive findings and recommendations based on the evidence. Systematic reviews are not expedited processes and may require months to finalise, contingent upon the volume of pertinent material. However, they are useful in providing practitioners with an evidence base for their practice, and will become of increasing importance if developments in practice (in whatever field) are to be based on soundly reviewed evidence.

Systematic reviews represent a category of literature review that necessitates standards of rigour comparable to those of primary research. The review presents a clear and logical rationale to the reader. They serve as a basis for evidence-based decisions and practices in research and policymaking. They differ from conventional literature reviews in several aspects of conduct and reporting. Systematic reviews are comprehensive analyses that synthesise research findings to provide evidence-based conclusions on specific topics (Perestelo-Pérez, 2013). This type of research employs explicit and transparent methodologies that adhere to a standardised sequence of stages.

This systematic review adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure

transparency, rigor, and reproducibility. A comprehensive search strategy was employed to identify relevant studies focusing on the well-being of PhD scholars in social sciences during their coursework phase. Database- Scopus, and other open access sources were searched using keywords including "PhD scholars," "doctoral well-being," "social work," "social sciences", "coursework," and "mental health". Studies published between 2015 and 2024 were included, focusing on empirical research and theoretical discussions related to the well-being of PhD scholars in social sciences during their doctoral study period.

*Positionality-* Positionality in research refers to the recognition of the researcher's background, experiences, perspectives, and biases, which inevitably shape the research process, findings, and interpretations. In the context of a research scholar writing a paper on the "well-being of PhD scholars during their PhD journey," positionality becomes an important aspect to acknowledge, as the scholar's own experiences and perspectives may have an impact on the analysis of the data.

*Reflexivity:* The researcher should remain reflexive throughout the research process, acknowledging how their positionality influences their interactions with participants, the way they analyse data, and the conclusions they draw. For example, if the scholar is conducting interviews or surveys with other PhD students, they may need to reflect on how their position as a researcher (whether perceived as an insider or outsider) influences responses.

*Ethical Considerations:* The researcher's positionality also has ethical implications. Since well-being is a sensitive topic, the researcher must be mindful of the potential for harm or discomfort when discussing personal challenges and mental health with participants. The researcher was transparent about their own experiences and biases.

By acknowledging his positionality, the researcher fosters a more reflexive, ethical, and comprehensive exploration of PhD scholars' well-being. The research is carried by a doctoral student himself. Hence, the researcher might have been driven by his own experiences and prejudices in the interpretation and drawing conclusions from the gathered data.

2.1 Search Strategy

The search was conducted across databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar. The search terms included combinations of keywords such as "PhD scholars," "doctoral well-being," "social work," "social sciences," "coursework," "mental health," and "resilience." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine the search, ensuring the retrieval of studies relevant to the topic. After the studies were collected from databases and other searches, the duplicates were removed. The studies imperative to the themes selected for the analysis were 14 that are represented through a table below in Table 1. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the search strategy is detailed below.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To maintain the review's clarity and pertinence, the subsequent inclusion and exclusion criteria were implemented:

- Inclusion Criteria:
  - Research articles and conceptual papers released from 2015 to 2024.
  - Research concentrating on doctoral candidates and the field of Social Sciences.
  - Research examining well-being, mental health, and associated challenges throughout the coursework phase.
  - Articles that have been published in English-language peer-reviewed journals.

- Exclusion Criteria:
  - Research that does not specifically target PhD scholars or the field of social sciences.
  - Non-peer-reviewed articles, including opinion pieces and conference abstracts.
  - Research published in languages aside from English.

2.3 Data Extraction

A standardized data extraction form was developed to ensure consistency. Key information extracted included:

- Study characteristics (e.g., author, year, country, and study design).
- Participant demographics (e.g., sample size, age, gender, and academic year).
- Research focus (e.g., specific aspects of well-being, interventions, or challenges).
- Key findings and implications for practice.

2.4 Quality Assessment

Each study was assessed for quality and relevance using established criteria, such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklists. Studies were evaluated based on their methodology, sample size, validity of findings, and alignment with the review's objectives. Only high-quality studies were included in the final analysis.

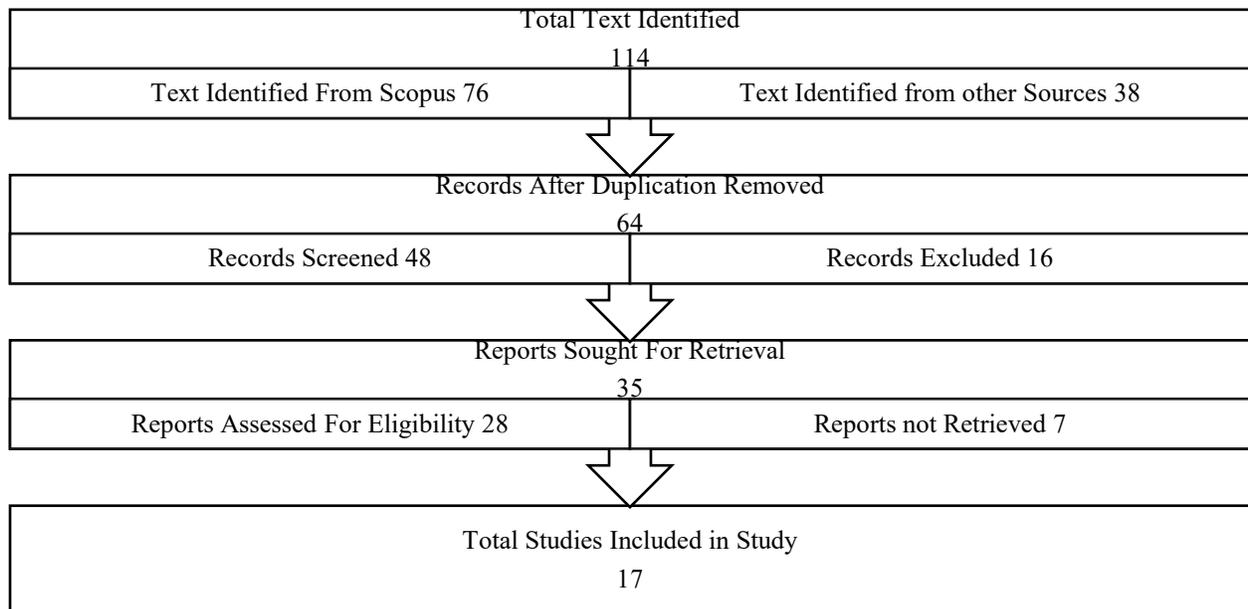


Fig.1 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram.

2.5 Data Synthesis

A narrative synthesis approach was employed to integrate findings across diverse studies. Themes were identified and categorized to highlight common

challenges, protective factors, and strategies for promoting well-being. Where possible, quantitative findings were summarized, and qualitative insights were used to provide contextual depth.

Table 1

S. No	Author	Title	Study Design/Type of Article/Tool	Place	Study Population	Result
1	Acharya, V. et al., 2024	Impact Of Intrinsic Motivation On The Psychological Well-Being Of Doctoral Students – A Multivariate Analysis.	Literature Review	India	PhD Students in Social sciences (n=391)	How personal resources act as moderators and mediators in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model.
2	Allen, H. K. et al., 2020	Substance use and mental health problems among graduate students: Individual and program-level correlates	Online Survey	US	2,683 master’s and doctoral students	Compared with academic doctoral students (ie, PhD students), professional doctoral students (i. e., MD, JD, etc.) were significantly more likely to report high stress levels and moderate or severe anxiety symptoms. Students in the behavioural and social sciences, social work, and arts and humanities disciplines were more likely to use substances and report mental health problems than engineering and business students.
3	Ayers N. et al., 2018	Using learning plans to support doctoral candidates		Australia	Doctoral Students and Post-doctoral students (n=131)	Highlight the value of an individualised learning plan to support doctoral candidates in developing research

						skills to support the thesis, as well as professional skills to enhance their employment opportunities.
4	Beddoe, L. et al., 2024	Mental health struggles of social work students: Distress, stigma, and perseverance	Open-question survey and semi-structured interviews	Australia	Social work students and recent graduates (n=353)	58.4% of respondents had sought medical advice on mental health while a social work student 60% of participants who experienced significant anxiety, stress, or depression chose not to seek medical advice for their mental health
5	Bothello, Joel; Roulet, Thomas J.	The Imposter Syndrome, or the Mis-Representation of Self in Academic Life	Theoretical/Conceptual Analysis	Not specified	Academics experiencing imposter syndrome	Explores how imposter syndrome affects academics' self-perception and behaviour, highlighting the role of organizational culture and identity in perpetuating feelings of fraudulence.
6	Corner S. et al., 2024	Personal interest, supervisory and research community support and dropout intentions among Finnish PhD candidates	Cross-cultural doctoral experience survey Latent Profile Analysis	Finland	PhD Candidates (n=768)	Individuals in the high interest–moderate support and in the moderate interest–moderate support profiles were more prone to consider dropping out from their PhD than in the high interest–high support profile.
7	Ekman, A. et al., 2024	Health promoting resources and lifestyle factors among higher education students in healthcare	Longitudinal design- a web-based questionnaire that included questions about general health, well-being, and healthy lifestyle factors	Sweden	students during the fourth (n=498) and the final (n=343) semester of higher	Students' reports of good general health were associated with well-being, high-intensity physical training, and no sleeping problems. However, only 6% of the students were

		and social work programmes: a survey with a longitudinal multicentre design			education programmes in health and social work	reporting no sleeping problems.
8	Inouye, K., 2022	Developing the PhD thesis project in relation to individual contexts: a multiple case study of five doctoral researchers	Longitudinal multiple-case study	UK	PhD Students (n=5)	The participants adopted three approaches to navigating the construction of the Upgrade document—pragmatic/strategic, idealistic, and realistic/compromising, each reflecting agentive decision-making influenced by prior educational experiences and perceptions of doctoral education, as well as post-PhD career goals.
9	Castello, M. et al., 2017	Why do students consider dropping out of doctoral degrees? Institutional and personal factors	Questionnaire containing doctoral degree conditions questions and an open-ended question on motives for dropping out	Spain	Doctoral Students (n=724)	Women were 1.31 times more likely to consider dropping out than men, psychology students were 2.3 times more likely than law students, and part-time students were 1.29 times more likely than full-time students a third of the sample, mainly the youngest, female, and part-time students, stated that they had intended to drop out Those students who were more likely to consider dropping out were 1.82 years younger than students who said they had not

						considered dropping out
10	Mantai, L. et al., 2022	Identifying skills, qualifications, and attributes expected to do a PhD	Logistic regression		Europe (n=13,562)	Cognitive, interpersonal skills, and personal attributes are trending upwards
11	Van Rooij, E. et al., 2021	Factors that influence PhD candidates' success: the importance of PhD project characteristics	Regression analyses	Netherlands	839 PhD candidates	The quality of the supervisor-PhD candidate relationship, the PhD candidate's sense of belonging, the amount of freedom in the project, and working on a project closely related to the supervisor's research were positively related to satisfaction and negatively related to quit intentions.
12	Khosa, A. et al., 2023	PhD students' relatedness, motivation, and well-being with multiple supervisors	a mix of semi-structured and open-ended questions	Australia	27 PhD students and 10 supervisors	Findings show that students' self-disclosure fosters relatedness and enhances autonomy and competence, with motivation and well-being influenced by their relational needs being satisfied.
13	Sverdlik, A. et al., 2019	Not just a phase: Exploring the role of program stage on well-being and motivation in doctoral students	a large-scale, quantitative survey of doctoral students	54 countries	3004 Doctoral Students	Well-being and motivation are highest during coursework and decline as students progress Highlights the moderating effects of factors such as the number of dependents and employment status on these outcomes

14	Pervez, A. et al., 2020	An Empirical Investigation of Mental Illness, Impostor Syndrome, and Social Support in Management Doctoral Programs	Online Survey	51 institutions in seven countries	113 Doctoral Students	The research indicates that social support, particularly from supervisors and friends, can play a vital role in mitigating symptoms of depression and anxiety, while underscoring the complex interplay between social support, impostor feelings and wellbeing
15	Pyhältö & Keskinen	Doctoral Students' Sense of Relational Agency in Their Scholarly Communities	Cross-sectional survey with open-ended and Likert-scale questionnaire	University of Helsinki, Finland	669 doctoral students in humanities, medicine, and behavioural sciences	Only 30% perceived themselves as active agents in their communities; 70% felt passive or disconnected. Active agency was associated with less exhaustion, anxiety, and intention to quit.
16	Paul Joseph-Richard	Doctoral students' well-being through the lens of social practice theory: a UK-based study	Qualitative study; Social Practice Theory (SPT) used as an analytical framework	United Kingdom	12 Scholars in UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The study found that doctoral students' well-being is significantly shaped by social and institutional practices rather than solely individual factors.</li> </ul>
17	Tanja Milutinovic, Joel D. Katzav, and Krist Vaesen	Equity and inequality in grant evaluation, productivity, and the educational backgrounds of Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions individual	Empirical study using quantitative data analysis of fellowship outcomes, productivity indicators (publications, citations), and institutional prestige.	European Research Area	741 researchers in social sciences and humanities who received MSCA Individual Fellowships (IFs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researchers trained or hosted at highly prestigious institutions were more likely to receive funding.</li> <li>Awarded fellows tended to be more productive and had higher citation counts</li> </ul>

		fellows in social sciences and humanities			between 2014 and 2020	compared to non-awarded applicants.
--	--	---	--	--	-----------------------	-------------------------------------

A complex interplay of challenges and protective factors influences the well-being of PhD scholars in social sciences during their doctoral journey. Inouye, K. et al. in their study analyse how prior experiences shape the drafting of an ‘upgrade document’ that is similar to a ‘term paper’ in India.

The challenges of the language, as well as prior work experiences, mould the expectations and motivation of the researcher. The frequency of the variable that is most profound in defining the well-being of the researcher is the relationship with the supervisor. This relationship affects the relatedness and fosters autonomy and confidence (Khosa et al., 2023). The survey by Mantai, L. et al (2022) reveals that there is an upward trend in cognitive, interpersonal skills, and personal attributes of the researcher in recent times. (Sverdlik et al., 2019) reveals that well-being and motivation are highest during coursework and decline as student’s progress, with the comprehensive examination phase being most challenging. It also finds that students in later phases are more motivated by external pressures. Furthermore, the study highlights the moderating effects of factors such as the number of dependents and employment status on these outcomes.

Ultimately, the research underscores the need for targeted support and resources for doctoral students throughout their academic journey. The journal article by Pervez, A. (2020) explores the prevalence of mental illness, impostor syndrome, and the role of social support among management doctoral students. The study employs both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to investigate these factors. It reveals that management doctoral students face a higher risk of depression, anxiety, and impostor syndrome compared to the general population.

Crucially, the research indicates that social support, particularly from supervisors and friends, can play a vital role in mitigating symptoms of depression and anxiety, while underscoring the complex interplay between social support, impostor feelings, and well-

being. Ultimately, the article aims to provide practical recommendations for students, supervisors, and administrators to address these challenges within management doctoral programmes, while also identifying potential avenues for future research.

### 3. CHALLENGES TO WELL-BEING

- *Academic Pressures:* PhD scholars face rigorous academic demands, including extensive coursework, research responsibilities, and publication expectations. These pressures can lead to heightened stress and anxiety levels. 58.4% of respondents sought medical advice for mental health issues, yet 60% of those experiencing anxiety, stress, or depression refrained from seeking help. (Beddoe et al., 2024)
- *Isolation:* The solitary nature of doctoral research often results in feelings of isolation and loneliness among PhD scholars. This lack of social interaction can exacerbate mental health issues. Social work and behavioral sciences students reported higher rates of substance use and mental health issues than students in engineering or business. (Allen et al., 2022)
- *Emotional Demands:* Engaging with sensitive research topics and vulnerable populations can lead to emotional exhaustion and secondary traumatic stress. Good general health was associated with well-being, physical activity, and improved sleep quality. Our findings indicate that PhD students' self-disclosure regarding personal issues and emotions is contingent upon the responsiveness and quality of support provided by their supervisors. These are identified as crucial factors in promoting students' sense of relatedness within these connections. Significantly, we demonstrate that positive interpersonal attributions correlate with favourable relational outcomes, including reciprocity and goal congruence; however, social penetration is also influenced by contextual factors such as the environment, network, level of formality, and

duration of the relationship. (Khosa A. et al., 2024)

- *Financial Strain:* Limited funding opportunities and the high cost of education contribute to financial stress among PhD scholars. Students reported that financial obstacles significantly hindered their academic success (CGPSS, 2019). The PhD candidates' persistence, and hence their interest in their doctorate, is tested by many hardships faced during the programme, including (but not limited to) high levels of stress, lack of funding and insufficient support (Devine and Hunter, 2016; Castello et al., 2017; Pyhältö et al., 2012).

### 3.1 Protective Factors

- *Social Support:* Strong support networks, including peers, mentors, and family, play a crucial role in mitigating stress. Building a supportive learning environment that cultivates a PhD candidate's personal interest is likely to reduce high dropout rates among the candidates. (Corner S. et al, 2024). Social support is the term used to describe the social resources that PhD candidates believe are offered by their educational setting. The principal sources of assistance for PhD candidates generally include support from doctoral supervisor and support from the research community, encompassing both formal and informal academic relationships (Pyhältö, 2018; Cornér et al., 2018). Supervisory support is a pivotal factor influencing the doctoral experience (De Clerq et al., 2021; Devine and Hunter, 2016), encompassing feedback methodologies (Chugh et al., 2022), fostering and maintaining a PhD candidate's intrinsic motivation for research, and enhancing the aspiration to pursue an academic career (Curtin et al., 2016). Nonetheless, good supervisory support can manifest in several manners.
- *Effective Supervision:* Supportive and accessible supervisors are instrumental in enhancing the doctoral experience. The results indicate that by cultivating PhD candidates' interest and providing sufficient supervisory and the research community offers a means for preventing candidates from discontinuing their doctorate. (Cornér S. et al, 2024). The findings indicate that

effective communication and favourable interpersonal attributions correlate with relatedness and reciprocity in relationships. These attributes promote students' autonomy and competence, yielding beneficial benefits on their motivation and well-being. (Khosa A. et al., 2024)

- *Self-Efficacy:* A strong belief in one's abilities contributes to resilience. Social work doctoral students with high self-efficacy were better equipped to handle academic challenges and maintain well-being. (Mantai L. et al, 2022) The PhD candidates' persistence, and hence their interest in their doctorate, is tested by many hardships faced during the programme, including (but not limited to) high levels of stress, lack of funding and insufficient support (Devine and Hunter, 2016; Castello et al., 2017; Jones, 2013; Pyhältö et al., 2012).
- *Work-Life Balance:* Maintaining a balance between academic responsibilities and personal life is essential. Social work PhD students who effectively managed work-life balance reported lower levels of burnout and higher life satisfaction. Research identifies a third cause for attrition, linked to challenges in balancing personal life with the academic and professional obligations of a PhD program. Certain studies indicate that some students are unable to reconcile both components, whereas others are unwilling to achieve balance if it necessitates compromising significant facets of their personal lives. (Castello M. et al., 2017). The category most commonly cited by students pertained to challenges in achieving an appropriate equilibrium between personal or professional life and their doctorate studies. Nearly one-third of the sample indicated that balance concerns were the primary reason for their desire to withdraw from the degree program. This is a quintessential example of these issues: "The challenge of reconciling the doctoral degree with familial obligations adversely impacts my personal relationships." (Castello M. et al., 2017)

### 3.2 Consequences of Poor Well-being

- *Mental Health Issues:* Prolonged exposure to stressors can lead to mental health problems. Students in the behavioural and social sciences, social work, and arts and humanities disciplines

were more likely to use substances and report mental health problems than engineering and business students (Allen et al, 2022).

- *Academic Attrition:* Poor well-being is linked to higher dropout rates. Individuals in the high interest–moderate support and in the moderate interest–moderate support profiles were more prone to consider dropping out of their PhD than in the high interest–high support profile. (Corner S. et al, 2024)The attrition rate varies between 33 and 70% depending on the discipline, country and the doctoral education system (Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Jiranek, 2010; Wollast et al., 2018)
- *Reduced Research Quality:* The high workload of PhD candidates should be a major point of attention for universities who wish to increase their rates of PhD completion and PhD candidates’ satisfaction. In addition, the ‘match’ between PhD candidate and supervisor is crucial, both personally—a good relationship—and academically, i.e. that the PhD candidate works on a topic closely related to the supervisor’s research. (Van Rooij, E. et al 2021)

These findings underscore the importance of addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by social work PhD scholars to promote their well-being and academic success.

#### 4. LIMITATIONS

The research may have probably not included every publication on the topic which may have a bearing on the final analysis. And, as this phenomenon has rarely been studied in the Indian context, it may have implications for its contextual understanding of the phenomena in India.

The research was initially intended to study the well-being of PhD Scholars in Social work. However, the deficit in the literature led to the broadening of its area to the social science discipline. The aspect of gender has been studied rarely which is profoundly substantiated as in the lack of available literature.

#### 5. DISCUSSION

The coursework phase of a PhD program in social work presents unique challenges that can impact

scholars' well-being. A supportive academic environment, effective supervision, and individual coping strategies are essential to promote mental health and academic success. Institutions should prioritize the development of comprehensive support systems tailored to the needs of doctoral scholars. Vrinda, A. et al in their study on “Impact of Intrinsic Motivation on the Psychological Well-being of Doctoral Students- A Multivariate Analysis” recommend that institutions, supervisors, and practitioners create a Practitioner's learning environment that fosters intrinsic motivation among scholars. The study result highlights interventions to enhance student motivation and psychological well-being to enhance the three psychological needs of scholars, i.e., autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Institutions can enhance the scholar’s autonomy by providing a choice of courses during their coursework stage and by providing an opportunity for research grants and collaboration.

The hedonistic approach followed in the researches has shed light on the major aspects of well-being of PhD scholars; intrinsic- that is motivation, expectation, prior skills and knowledge and the experiences as well as cultural background, and extrinsic factors- like the institutional demands, relationship with the supervisor, the social support and environment, alongside the resources and opportunities for employment. This multifaceted aspect of well-being projects the holistic view of well-being that is still lacking a generalized definition.

#### 6. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- *Policy Development:* Institutions should develop policies that prioritize the well-being of PhD scholars, including access to mental health services and financial support. By cultivating doctoral candidates’ personal interest, including a balanced combination of research, development and instrumental interest with sufficient social support offers a potential tool for buffering study drop out. (Corner S. et al., 2024)
- *Program Design:* Curricula should be designed to balance academic rigor with flexibility to accommodate individual needs. Our study has two primary implications for the advancement of PhD education. Primarily, fostering doctoral

candidates' intrinsic motivation, encompassing a harmonious blend of research, development, and practical interests, along with adequate social support, presents a viable strategy for mitigating attrition in academic studies. Secondly, it appears that investment in research team integration fosters heightened enthusiasm and a favourable support experience among PhD candidates. This may further enhance the study well-being of PhD candidates.

- *Supervisor Training:* Implementing training programs for supervisors to enhance their ability to support scholars effectively. The doctoral experience differs among persons. It is crucial to acknowledge the influence of individual circumstances and objectives on doctoral researchers' viewpoints and practices, especially in the initial phases of the PhD, when they are still cultivating their comprehension of the doctorate process and their ability to influence their research. (Castello M. et al., 2017)

## 7. CONCLUSION

Promoting the well-being of PhD scholars is critical to ensuring their academic success, professional development, and personal growth. This systematic review highlights the multifaceted challenges facing scholars, including academic pressures, isolation, emotional demands, and financial constraints. However, protective factors such as social support, effective supervision, self-efficacy, and work-life balance offer paths to resilience and well-being.

Academic institutions, supervisors, and policymakers have a shared responsibility to provide an enabling environment that prioritizes the mental health and overall development of PhD scholars. Tailored interventions, including comprehensive mental health services, mentorship programs, and supportive supervisory practices, are essential for addressing the unique needs of the scholars. Moreover, fostering a culture of inclusivity and open communication within doctoral programs can empower scholars to navigate their journey successfully.

Future research should continue to explore the longitudinal effects of targeted interventions, cultural and contextual variations, and the intersectionality of

scholars' identities in shaping their experiences. By addressing these dimensions, the field of social sciences can further advance its commitment to nurturing the well-being of its doctoral candidates, ensuring their contributions to academia and society are both impactful and sustainable.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Acharya, V., Gil, M. T., & Acharya, A. K. (2024). Impact Of Intrinsic Motivation on The Psychological Well-Being of Doctoral Students – A Multivariate Analysis. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 19. <https://doi.org/10.28945/5379>
- [2] Allen, H. K., Lilly, F., Green, K. M., Zanjani, F., Vincent, K. B., & Arria, A. M. (2022). Substance use and mental health problems among graduate students: Individual and program-level correlates. *Journal of American College Health*, 70(1), 65–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2020.1725020>
- [3] Ayers, N. L., Kiley, M., Jones, N., McDermott, M. L., & Hawkins, M. (2018). Using learning plans to support doctoral candidates. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 55(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2016.1233074>
- [4] Beddoe, L., Baker, M., Cox, K., & Ballantyne, N. (2024). Mental health struggles of social work students: Distress, stigma, and perseverance. *Qualitative Social Work*, 23(5), 813–832. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14733250231212413>
- [5] Bothello, J., & Roulet, T. J. (2019). The Impostor Syndrome, or the Misrepresentation of Self in Academic Life. *Journal of Management Studies*, 56(4), 854-861. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12344>
- [6] Bring PhD assessment into the twenty-first century. (2024). In *Nature* (Vol. 627, Issue 8003). <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-024-00718-0>
- [7] Castelló, M., Pardo, M., Sala-Bubaré, A., & Suñe-Soler, N. (2017). Why do students consider dropping out of doctoral degrees? Institutional and personal factors. *Higher Education*, 74(6), 1053–1068. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0106-9>
- [8] Cornér, S., Tikkanen, L., Anttila, H., & Pyhältö, K. (2024). Personal interest, supervisory and research community support and dropout

- intentions among Finnish PhD candidates. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-09-2022-0062>
- [9] Gardner, Susan & Gopaul, Bryan. (2012). The Part-Time Doctoral Student Experience. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* Volume. 7. 10.28945/1561.
- [10] Hunter, K. H., & Devine, K. (2016). Doctoral students' emotional exhaustion and intentions to leave academia. In David H. Kahl Jr. (Ed.), *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* (Vol. 11, pp. 35–61). <http://ijds.org/Volume11/IJDSv11p035-061Hunter2198.pdf>
- [11] Ekman, A., Pennbrant, S., Sterner, A., Forsberg, E., Hedén, L., Nunstedt, H., Sundler, A. J., Larsson, M., Larsson, I., Ahlstrand, I., Lood, Q., & Hallgren, J. (2024). Health promoting resources and lifestyle factors among higher education students in healthcare and social work programmes: a survey with a longitudinal multicentre design. *BMC Public Health*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-20506-9>
- [12] Evans, T. M., Bira, L., Gastelum, J. B., Weiss, L. T., & Vanderford, N. L. (2018). Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education. *Nature Biotechnology*, 36(3), 282-284. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nbt.4089>
- [13] Khosa, A., Wilkin, C., & Burch, S. (2024). PhD students' relatedness, motivation, and well-being with multiple supervisors. *Accounting Education*, 33(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2023.2179889>
- [14] Mantai, L., & Marrone, M. (2022). Identifying skills, qualifications, and attributes expected to do a PhD. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(11). <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2022.2061444>
- [15] Pervez, A., Brady, L. L., Mullane, K., Lo, K. D., Bennett, A. A., & Nelson, T. A. (2020). An Empirical Investigation of Mental Illness, Impostor Syndrome, and Social Support in Management Doctoral Programs. *Journal of Management Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562920953195>
- [16] Pyhältö, K., & Keskinen, J. (2012). Doctoral students' sense of relational agency in their scholarly communities. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 1(2), 136–149. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v1n2p136>
- [17] Rond, Mark & Miller, Alan. (2005). Publish or Perish: Bane or Boon of Academic Life? *Journal of Management Inquiry*. 14. 321-329. [10.1177/1056492605276850](https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492605276850).
- [18] Sverdlik, A., & Hall, N. C. (2019). Not just a phase: Exploring the role of program stage on well-being and motivation in doctoral students. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477971419842887>
- [19] Van Rooij, E., Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., & Jansen, E. (2021). Factors that influence PhD candidates' success: the importance of PhD project characteristics. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 43(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2019.1652158>
- [20] Torrance, M., Thomas, G. V., & Robinson, E. J. (1992). The writing experiences of social science research students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 17(2), 155–167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079212331382637>
- [21] Review of the PhD in the Social Sciences. Economic and Social Research Council. (2021). Accessed From: <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/ESRC-180324-Review-of-the-PhD-in-the-Social-Sciences-1.pdf> Accessed On: 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2025