

Mental Health Quotient (MHQ) is as Crucial as Intelligence Quotient (IQ): A Holistic Approach to Human Potential



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Abstract

Recognizing mental health as a crucial state of well-being fundamental to coping, realizing potential, and societal contribution, as defined by the World Health Organization, this paper addresses the need for comprehensive assessment frameworks that extend beyond traditional illness-focused models. The pervasive influence of mental health on cognitive, social, and interpersonal functioning, particularly within rapidly transforming societies facing unique demographic and socio-cultural shifts, underscores the necessity for nuanced tools to understand the full spectrum of mental states. This research provides a foundational overview of one such framework, the Mental Health Quotient (MHQ). Employing a conceptual review methodology, this paper synthesizes information gathered from authoritative sources including WHO guidelines, official MHQ documentation, peer-reviewed articles, and relevant scholarly books. The primary purpose is threefold: to introduce the Mental Health Quotient (MHQ) as a distinct conceptual tool; to delineate its specific structure and constituent components based on available descriptions; and to explore its potential significance and applications in diverse settings, ranging from individual self-awareness and clinical practice to broader organizational and public health initiatives. By examining its structure and theoretical underpinnings, the analysis concludes that MHQ offers a potentially valuable, multi-dimensional approach to conceptualizing and assessing mental well-being. It represents a structured effort to capture mental resources and capacities, thereby contributing a more holistic perspective compared to purely psychopathological assessments. This synthesized overview highlights MHQ's relevance for advancing both the theoretical understanding and the practical promotion of mental health across various domains, offering a potentially useful lens for future research and application.

Keywords: Mental Health Quotient (MHQ), Intelligence Quotient (IQ), Mental Well-being, Workplace

Introduction

Mental health is indeed a vital dimension of our overall human existence, meaning much more than just the absence of mental illness. The World Health Organization defines it in a positive sense, as a state of well-being wherein individuals can manage life's difficulties, realise their personal potential, participate effectively in work and learning, and contribute actively to their commu-

nities. Such positive functioning is essential not only for personal fulfilment but also for strong social bonds and societal advancement.

However, traditionally, the focus within many systems has often been centred on diagnosing and treating mental disorders. While necessary, this focus on pathology can inadvertently lead to overlooking the assessment and nurturing of positive psychological resources, the inherent

strengths and coping mechanisms that underpin resilience and flourishing. As such, there is a growing recognition of the need for frameworks that provide a more balanced and holistic assessment, capturing the full range of human mental experience from distress to optimal functioning. To address this need, various models aiming to conceptualise and measure broader mental well-being have been put forward. The Mental Health Quotient (MHQ) stands as one such contemporary framework, designed to offer a structured, multi-faceted view of mental capabilities. Understanding such newer approaches is of increasing importance in a world actively seeking better ways to promote psychological well-being. Therefore, the following sections are dedicated to introducing the MHQ concept, outlining its structure and constituent parts according to current descriptions, and considering its broader significance and practical relevance for better understanding and cultivating holistic mental health.

Objectives

- To properly list out the different parts and factors which make up the MHQ tool, based on its official papers.
- To clearly explain the main thinking and basis for the MHQ model.
- To highlight how MHQ's measurement approach differs from usual psychological tests that mostly look at deficits.
- To detail the range of mental functions and positive qualities that the MHQ framework intends to capture.
- To examine the claimed benefits of using the MHQ for improving self-awareness and guiding wellness planning.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a secondary research methodology, synthesizing credible and diverse sources to analyze the Mental Health Quotient (MHQ), with a focus on its relevance in India. Key government documents—such as the *Economic Survey 2024–25*, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare reports, and National Mental Health Day releas-

es—provide policy insights and national mental health priorities. Institutional publications from Sapien Labs (2021–2024), including the *Mental State of the World* reports, offer essential data on MHQ's design, application, and findings. Sources from the World Health Organization (WHO) and Indian programs like NHM and Tele-MANAS contextualize MHQ within global and national frameworks. Additionally, academic literature in psychology, cognitive science, and psychometric assessment informs the theoretical foundation of this study. This integrative approach allows a critical review of MHQ's validity, utility, and potential integration into India's mental health landscape, especially in policy and digital intervention domains.

Literature Review

Global mental health data, notably from Sapien Labs' *Mental State of the World Report 2024*, reveal a continued decline in well-being post-pandemic, especially among youth. The Mental Health Quotient (MHQ), used to assess over a million individuals globally, evaluates both dysfunction and positive functioning across six core dimensions. Its policy relevance is underscored by its mention in India's *Economic Survey 2024–25*, which linked workplace culture and lifestyle factors to national productivity and mental health, based on MHQ assessments. Traditional tools rooted in DSM/ICD frameworks often fall short by emphasizing disorders and neglecting positive traits. While advanced models like RDoC offer neuroscience-based research frameworks, practical population-wide tools remain essential. MHQ, developed by Sapien Labs through analysis of 126 tools and RDoC integration, fills this gap effectively. Validated and scalable, it aligns with WHO's holistic health vision and India's mental health priorities, establishing itself as a robust instrument for national well-being tracking.

Understanding the Mental Health Quotient (MHQ)

Definition and Scope: A Functional Perspective: The Mental Health Quotient (MHQ) represents a significant advancement in psychologi-

cal assessment, offering a comprehensive metric designed to evaluate an individual's mental state holistically. It assesses 47 distinct parameters meticulously organised across six fundamental domains: Mood and Outlook (encompassing emotional regulation, positivity, and future perspective), Social Self (covering self-perception in social contexts, interpersonal skills, and relationship quality), Drive and Motivation (reflecting goal-orientation, initiative, and perseverance), Cognition (including core functions like memory and attention, as well as complex abilities like planning and problem-solving), Adaptability & Resilience (measuring the capacity to cope with change, stress, and setbacks), and Mind-Body Connection (acknowledging the interplay between mental state and physical health).

Critically, the MHQ diverges from traditional symptom-checklist approaches prevalent in mental health diagnostics. Instead of solely cataloguing symptoms associated with disorders, its primary focus lies on evaluating an individual's functional capacity – their practical ability to navigate daily life – and the real-world impact of their mental state on their overall functioning and effectiveness. This functional orientation provides a more dynamic and practical understanding of mental well-being.



Fig. 1: Graphical representation of six components of MHQ

(Image Source: Economic Survey of India-2024-25, Govt. of India)

The MHQ Scale: Beyond Binary Labels

The MHQ utilises a continuous scoring scale ranging from -100 to +200. This range allows for a nuanced categorisation of an individual's current state, moving beyond simple 'ill' or 'healthy' la-

bels. Scores are interpreted across a spectrum: Distressed and Struggling (typically indicating significant functional impairment and potential clinical concern, falling in the negative range), Enduring (representing individuals coping but facing challenges, often near the zero baseline), Managing (indicating adequate functioning), Succeeding (reflecting robust well-being), and Thriving (representing optimal mental functioning and resilience, in the upper positive range).



Fig. 2: MHQ scale score and related conclusions

(Image Source: Economic Survey of India-2024-25, Govt of India)

It is essential to understand that the objective measured by MHQ is not the attainment of perpetual happiness, which is an unrealistic human expectation. Rather, the focus is on assessing an individual's inherent functional capability and psychological resilience – their resources and ability to cope effectively and maintain productivity even amidst the inevitable stresses, adversities, and fluctuations inherent in life. A high MHQ reflects this capacity to manage challenges constructively.

MHQ vs IQ: Complementary Dimensions of Potential

For decades, the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) has been a standard metric, offering valuable insights into cognitive abilities and predicting academic and, to some degree, professional success. However, IQ provides only a partial view of human capability. The MHQ complements this by assessing crucial aspects of emotional and social intelligence. Research suggests MHQ serves as a stronger predictor for critical life skills such as effective emotional regulation, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the deployment of healthy coping mechanisms under stress. These competencies are arguably fundamental for long-term well-being and sustainable productivity, extending beyond the cognitive skills measured by IQ. Therefore, considering both IQ and MHQ offers a significantly fuller, more rounded picture

of an individual's overall potential and functional capacity in real-world settings.

Mental Well-being in India - A Current Overview

Alarming National Trends: India, home to approximately 18% of the global population, faces a mental health burden that appears disproportionately high. Data highlighted by the WHO indicates a significant impact, estimating the burden due to mental disorders at 2443 Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) per 100,000 population. DALYs represent the total years lost to premature death and years lived with disability, making this a stark indicator of the collective suffering and functional impairment caused by mental health issues. National statistics and various studies consistently point towards concerning trends, with suicide rates, particularly among young adults and specific vulnerable groups, remaining a major public health issue. Furthermore, stress-related disorders, anxiety conditions, and depressive symptoms are reported with high prevalence, especially among the youth navigating academic pressures, career uncertainties, and rapid societal changes.

The Significant Treatment Gap: A critical challenge compounding India's mental health situation is the vast treatment gap. Official figures indicate a severe shortage of trained professionals, with only about 0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 people, far below the WHO recommendation of at least 3 per 100,000. This scarcity extends to clinical psychologists, psychiatric social workers, and counsellors, particularly outside major urban centres. Consequently, estimates suggest that between 70% and 92% of individuals suffering from various mental health disorders do not receive adequate care. This gap is driven by multiple factors: persistent social stigma attached to mental illness prevents help-seeking; a widespread lack of awareness and mental health literacy means symptoms often go unrecognised or are misunderstood; and insufficient infrastructure, including accessible and affordable mental health facilities, creates physical barriers to care, especially in rural and semiurban regions.

Socio-economic Factors Influencing Mental

Well-being: Mental well-being in India is shaped by complex socio-economic and cultural influences. A key barrier is the widespread lack of awareness and understanding of mental health. Misconceptions seeing mental illness as weakness or moral failure persist, especially in rural areas, discouraging open dialogue and timely help-seeking. Stigma remains a significant obstacle despite growing awareness campaigns.

Culturally, emotional endurance and reliance on family or spiritual figures are often preferred over professional psychological support, which is still viewed with hesitation or shame. This mindset, coupled with a shortage of affordable mental health professionals, particularly outside urban centers, limits access to care. Urbanization brings additional stressors-isolation, work pressures, long commutes, and high living costs contribute to anxiety and burnout, undermining work-life balance. Social media, while connecting users, also exacerbates mental distress through constant social comparison, cyberbullying, and emotional dependency on digital validation. Its excessive use disrupts real-world interaction, physical activity, and sleep are critical components of mental well-being.

Addressing these factors requires enhancing mental health literacy, integrating education into schools, expanding community-based support, and promoting culturally sensitive, accessible mental health services across India.

MHQ Insights from Sapien Labs Survey (Cited in Economic Survey 2024-25)

Survey Context and Demographics: To understand the interplay between lifestyle, work factors, and mental state in India, a dedicated survey was conducted online by Sapien Labs during October–November 2024, as referenced in the Economic Survey 2024-25. This targeted survey involved 5,233 internet-enabled individuals across the working-age group (18-64 years). It specifically utilised the MHQ assessment to correlate various lifestyle parameters (like diet, exercise, family bonds) and work-related factors

(like work culture, hours, remote work status) with measured mental well-being scores.

Key Findings on Work and Lifestyle Factors: The survey yielded significant insights into factors influencing MHQ scores in the Indian context-

Workplace Relationships: The quality of interpersonal dynamics at work emerged as highly impactful. Individuals reporting the best relationships with their managers and peers registered MHQ scores approximately 100 points higher than those reporting poor relationships, highlighting the critical role of a supportive social environment at work.

Meaningful Work: A strong sense of pride and purpose derived from one’s job was associated with substantially higher well-being, boosting MHQ scores by around 120 points compared to those lacking motivation or meaning in their work.

Work Setting: Interestingly, fully remote workers exhibited MHQ scores about 50 points lower than colleagues working in hybrid or fully in-person arrangements, suggesting that the social interactions and structure of office environments may contribute positively to mental well-being for many.

Working Hours: Long working hours showed a clear detrimental effect. Individuals working 12 or more hours per day had MHQ scores nearly 100 points lower than those working minimal hours (≤ 2 hours/day), quantitatively challenging the ‘hustle culture’ ethos.

Lifestyle Habits: Personal choices significantly correlated with mental well-being. Frequent consumption of ultra-processed or junk food, over-use of social media (especially during free time), and weak family bonds were all associated with notably lower MHQ scores, reinforcing the link between holistic lifestyle habits and mental state.

MHQ and Productivity Link

The survey data powerfully illustrated the direct correlation between mental well-being, as measured by MHQ, and tangible work output, quantifying the economic impact:

1. Individuals in the Distressed range (MHQ -100 to -50) reported losing approximately 15 workdays per month due to poor mental health (absenteeism and presenteeism).
2. Those in the Succeeding range (MHQ 100–150) lost only about 3 days per month.
3. Individuals in the optimal Thriving range (MHQ above 150) reported minimal productivity loss, averaging just 2 days per month.

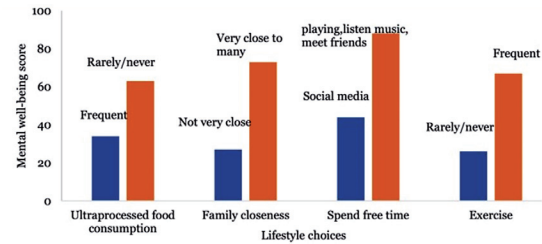


Fig. 3: Mental Well-being

Graphics Source: Economic Survey 2024-25, Govt of India

These figures clearly demonstrate that lower mental well-being translates directly into significant losses in productive work time, reinforcing the argument that population mental health is a critical economic factor.

Government Initiatives and Policy Framework

The Government of India has acknowledged the growing challenge of mental health and has implemented several policies and programs aimed at improving care and access:

National Mental Health Policy (2014): This landmark policy established an overarching vision for mental healthcare in India, emphasizing an inclusive, accessible, affordable, and rights-based approach. It aimed to integrate mental health into all aspects of public health and social development, promoting prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation while combating stigma.

Mental Healthcare Act (2017): This progressive legislation replaced the outdated 1987 Act and fundamentally shifted the paradigm towards a rights-based framework. It legally ensures access to mental healthcare as a right, protects the dignity and confidentiality of persons with mental illness, decriminalized suicide attempts, prohibited electroconvulsive therapy without an-

esthesia, and mandated government provision of accessible and affordable treatment.

National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) & District Mental Health Programme (DMHP):

Launched earlier but strengthened over time, the NMHP aims to ensure the availability and accessibility of minimum mental healthcare for all. Its key implementation arm, the DMHP, operates in the majority of districts (reportedly 767), providing essential services like outpatient/inpatient facilities, counselling, outreach programs, and training for general healthcare staff to detect and manage common mental disorders at the community level.

Ayushman Bharat: Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) / Ayushman Arogya

Mandirs: This flagship program focuses on strengthening primary healthcare. Over 1.73 lakh Sub-Health Centres (SHCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs) have reportedly been upgraded to 'Ayushman Arogya Mandirs'. These centres integrate basic mental healthcare, including screening, provision of essential psychiatric medications, basic counselling services, training for primary care physicians (Medical Officers), and establishing clear referral pathways to higher centres for complex cases.

Tele-MANAS Platform: Launched nationally in October 2024, the Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States (Tele-MANAS) initiative leverages technology to overcome geographical barriers. It provides a toll-free, mobile-based mental health support service offering basic counselling and specialist consultations through video calls. It aims to connect individuals, particularly in underserved areas, with mental health professionals, with initial rollouts reported in states like Karnataka, J&K, and Tamil Nadu, and plans for nationwide expansion.

Education and Early Intervention Strategies

Addressing mental health effectively requires a strong focus on prevention and early intervention, particularly among youth:

School-Level Awareness: Integrating age-appropriate mental health curricula into the school

system is increasingly recognized as vital. Such programs can equip students with essential life skills to manage anxiety, stress, examination pressures, and common behavioural issues. Furthermore, school-based initiatives play a critical role in normalizing conversations around mental health, reducing stigma from a young age, and promoting help-seeking behaviour among students, teachers, and parents

Parenting Guidance and Screen Time Management:

Concerns about the impact of excessive screen time and social media on youth mental health, as articulated by experts like Jonathan Haidt in "The Anxious Generation," are gaining traction globally. His work highlights how the "phone-based childhood" may be detrimental to healthy development. India can observe and potentially learn from policy discussions in countries like Australia and Sweden, which are reportedly considering stricter regulations or bans on smartphone/social media access for children under 16. Effective strategies likely involve educating parents on responsible technology use, promoting digital literacy, and encouraging balanced lifestyles for children.

Community-Based Preventive Approaches:

Fostering mental resilience requires community-level efforts beyond formal education. Promoting outdoor play, participation in group activities (sports, arts, cultural events), and strengthening family time and bonding are crucial. These activities enhance social connection, provide physical health benefits that support mental well-being, reduce dependence on technology for engagement, and build crucial socialemotional skills, acting as protective factors against mental health challenges.

The Interplay of Lifestyle, Work Culture, and MHQ

Lifestyle's Profound Impact on MHQ: The link between lifestyle choices and mental state, quantifiable via MHQ, is increasingly evident. Research consistently shows that balanced, nutritious diets (low in ultra-processed foods), engaging in regular physical exercise (which releases endor-

phins and reduces stress hormones), and pursuing meaningful hobbies and leisure activities (providing engagement, relaxation, and a sense of accomplishment) strongly correlate with higher MHQ scores and overall psychological resilience. Conversely, poor diet, sedentary behaviour, and lack of fulfilling activities are linked to lower well-being.

Workplace Culture as a Key Determinant: The workplace environment significantly shapes employee mental health. Factors repeatedly identified as major influencers include manageable workload, positive and supportive relationships with managers and peers, having a sense of purpose and meaning in one's role, adequate autonomy, and clear communication. Toxic work cultures characterised by excessive pressure, lack of support, poor communication, or bullying directly contribute to stress, burnout, and lower MHQ scores, impacting both individual well-being and organisational productivity, as evidenced by the Sapient Labs survey findings cited earlier.

Policy Recommendations for Improvement: Based on the evidence linking work culture and lifestyle to MHQ, several policy-level interventions, both at organisational and potentially governmental levels, could be considered:

- **Enforce Reasonable Work-Hour Limits:** Implementing and enforcing guidelines or regulations around maximum working hours, overtime, and the 'right to disconnect' can help prevent burnout and promote better work-life balance, directly addressing findings about excessive desk time lowering MHQ.
- **Promote Flexible and Hybrid Work Models:** While fully remote work showed slightly lower MHQ in the cited survey, well-structured hybrid models offering flexibility combined with opportunities for in-person connection could potentially balance employee autonomy with social needs, supporting better well-being. Policies encouraging or facilitating such models could be beneficial.
- **Encourage Annual MHQ Assessments:** Promoting the use of validated tools like MHQ

for annual, anonymous assessments within organisations can provide valuable data for monitoring workforce well-being trends, identifying specific stress points or at-risk groups, and designing targeted, evidence-based interventions and support programs proactively.

Results and Discussions

Emergent findings clearly illustrate India's significant mental health burden and critical challenges in treatment access, compounded by underlying issues of stigma and low awareness. The analysis strongly links functional well-being, measured by MHQ, to key workplace dynamics—such as manager/peer relations, sense of purpose, and working hours—alongside personal lifestyle factors including diet, technology use, and family bonds. Most significantly, a direct correlation is observed between lower MHQ scores and substantial losses in work productivity, highlighting tangible economic consequences for the nation. The recent specific reference to the MHQ assessment in the national Economic Survey 2024-25 signifies crucial high-level acknowledgement of these interdependencies and validates the relevance of adopting functional mental health metrics for achieving national development objectives.

Suggestions and Findings

Key conclusions confirm MHQ as a validated measure reflecting functional capacity, offering superior insights compared to mere symptom tallying. Findings strongly indicate workplace culture (relationships, purpose, workload) and specific lifestyle habits (diet, activity, tech use, social bonds) significantly determine population mental well-being. While foundational policies like the Mental Healthcare Act exist, notable implementation gaps limit their reach. Suggestions arising include promoting wider adoption of functional assessments like MHQ across health, education, and corporate sectors for accurate baselining and progress tracking. Prioritising the creation of psychologically safe, supportive work environments via concrete policies and practices is crucial. In-

tegrating holistic lifestyle guidance with mental wellness support within primary care (e.g., Ayushman Arogya Mandirs) and community initiatives is vital. Finally, improving the accessibility and integration of platforms like Tele-MANAS while strengthening community-based support systems is highly recommended.

Conclusion

It is evident that the MHQ framework offers thinking beyond conventional IQ scores or purely clinical diagnoses; it crucially aids in understanding an individual's real-world functional capabilities. For India, effectively addressing its significant mental health challenges and bridging the treatment gap is not merely a social obligation but also intrinsically linked to national economic advancement. Employing tools like MHQ appropriately, driven by data insights, enables more targeted and impactful decisionmaking within educational institutions, healthcare systems, and corporate environments. Disseminating accurate mental health information, actively reducing stigma, ensuring effective ground-level policy implementation, and promoting healthier lifestyles are critical collective responsibilities. Ultimately, investing strategically in population mental well-being, informed by comprehensive metrics like MHQ, is fundamental to unlocking the nation's vast human potential and achieving genuine, sustainable progress.

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