

## **Perceived Evaluation of Recreational Programmes in the Bhutanese Public Sector**

*Pema Tshoki\**

### **Abstract**

*A recreational programme for employees is an activity outside the work that helps in wholesome development and overall wellbeing. This study assesses the effectiveness of such programmes on Bhutanese civil servants. A total of 293 civil servants who enrolled in the recreational programmes initiated by the Royal Civil Service Commission participated in this study. The questionnaire consisted of four outcome variables namely physical, mental, social wellbeing and productivity. An independent t-test result showed a significant difference in the participation and opportunities between younger and older cohorts. Participants were mostly from Thimphu and their favourite activity was mindfulness-related programmes. Overall, findings indicated a positive impact of recreational programmes on the participants' wellbeing and productivity.*

**Keywords:** Mental wellbeing; Physical wellbeing; Productivity; Recreational program; Social Wellbeing

### **Introduction**

Today, an office is not just a place to sit and work. A modern workplace requires a relaxing contemporary environment that helps employees deal with stress and cope with the demands of the job. One-way employers can boost morale, increase motivation and enhance job satisfaction is through recreational programmes (Akmal et al., 2012). It helps in developing a positive company culture and increases its goodwill as well. Recreational programmes play a significant role in nurturing the enthusiasm of the employees, especially those in their new careers. Recreational activities can bring in numerous benefits including stress reduction and an increase in job satisfaction (Goetzel & Ozminkowski, 2008). The trend of implementing

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\* Centre for Bhutan & GNH Studies, Thimphu, Bhutan. Contact: pematshoki@moe.gov.bt

workplace recreation programmes has been gaining momentum and the public service sector of Bhutan has recently adopted a few within the RCSC.

In Bhutan, Government ministries and agencies still follow rigid regulations and traditional settings affecting productivity and the overall wellbeing of the employees. The study by Tshiteem and Max (2006) has revealed that the Public Service Happiness (PSH) had declined between 2010 and 2015 indicating less happy civil servants. In those years, there was a huge decline in government satisfaction and government performance from 62 percent to 44 percent (Tshiteem & Max, 2016). This results in a high turnover rate and losing highly qualified candidates from opting to join the civil service. In the last 5 years, 929 civil servants resigned of which 66 percent left service by choice (Royal Civil Service Commission, 2019).

Understanding this, RCSC started a scheme through their Support Desk and Welfare Scheme programmes (Royal Civil Service Commission, 2015). To address the challenges faced by civil servants in their productivity level, overall health and to meet their needs for leisure activities, RCSC implemented recreational programmes. However, the effectiveness of these programmes has not been documented. To fill up the gap, this research was conducted with the aim to assess perceptions on the benefits of the participant's wellbeing and productivity in the Bhutanese civil service. It is envisaged that the findings from this study could encourage the public sector to organise more recreational activities and implement them frequently to promote mental, physical, social wellbeing and productivity among the Bhutanese public servants.

There are five programmes implemented by the RCSC to enhance mental and physical health with the social benefits of networking (RCSC, 2019), a marathon was organised to bring the civil servants together and to become fit to deliver effective and efficient public services. 'Hoops for Health' was started in November 2019 realising the importance of gender equality and women empowerment. A basketball hall is booked every Friday to enhance a healthy lifestyle amongst female workers. More recently, a 'Future Leadership Mentoring Program' began to help in professional development of young civil servants. It is projected that the wellbeing of an employee is elevated through mentoring services from highly qualified bureaucrats, who prepare the cadres for future management and leadership roles (Future Leadership Mentoring Framework, RCSC). As a first step towards training the whole of the public service servants under the 'Search Inside Yourself' mindfulness program, a total of 250 employees were trained. The effectiveness of this programme has been scientifically tested and proven by Google to help people grow through mindfulness and emotional intelligence. Moreover, it reduces stress, raises productivity, develops focus and encourages interpersonal relationships

enhancing physical, social and mental wellbeing (Tan, 2012). Another recreational programme known as 'Mindfulness Retreat' was conducted by limiting the participants only to senior employees of high leadership positions. The list was narrowed to only 13 males and females. Participants learned ways to improve their psychological wellbeing and emotional intelligence.

## **Literature Review**

Recreation has always been a part of human life and history, however, there is no fixed definition to it. Combining different scholarly definitions succinctly, this paper defines 'recreational program' as 'activities apart from work that helps in the wholesome development of a person including his or her physical, mental, social wellbeing and productivity.'

### **Physical Well-being**

Physical activity is perceived to be one of the contributing factors to wellness. Recreational programmes were instituted in corporations because the health care costs were too expensive to bear and it was cheaper for the employer to conduct sports activities than bear medical costs (Akmal et al., 2012). Falkenberg (1987) studied employee fitness programmes in which the results showed that the majority of its participants had given above average performance, lesser absenteeism and more commitment to work.

### **Mental Well-being**

Empirical research has clearly indicated that unstable mental health can have detrimental effects on overall wellbeing and productivity. Hence, many international organisations focus on the mental health of an employee and conduct programmes for them to maintain their sanity. If a government organisation like the RCSC conducts programmes to improve mental wellbeing of civil servants, employees' attitudes, patriotism and sense of belonging shall be escalated (Shinew & Crossley, 1988).

### **Social Well-being**

Having a strong network of social support and relationships results in emotional security and stable emotional health (Mei, 2009). Offsite outings such as the mindfulness retreat camps newly implemented by RCSC are expected to improve self-management and social skills in a civil servant. These types of programmes are used in development of interpersonal communication, networking skills and overall cohesiveness amongst different hierarchy levels, varied organisations and multiple groups (Arubayi & Aruoren, 2015).

## **Productivity**

Ho (1997) states that companies adopt recreational activities with the objective to improve work efficiency, increase employee morale and have a good reputation by outsiders. Connors (1992) also found out that leisure activities improve employee morale, health and job performance.

## **Gender**

According to Allen (2005), women who had indulged in recreation and games were passed harsh remarks by society for extending their working hours. It is observed that men have higher participation in recreational activities than women because of constraints that females undergo including family responsibilities, social inequalities and sexual violence (Tivers, 1989).

## **Age**

In his study Russel (1987) figured those individuals were more satisfied and experienced a high-quality life if they had participated in recreation activities during their employed years.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Research Design**

A quantitative method was adopted for this study and was conducted in the capital city of Bhutan, Thimphu in 2019.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study included those who had experienced the recreational programmes organised by RCSC. The wellbeing division of the RCSC assisted in providing the list of participants for each recreational program. The number of participants in the Marathon was 1500, in Hoops for Health it was 37, and 240 in Search Inside Yourself, 60 in Future Leadership Mentoring Programme and 21 in Mindfulness Retreat. The sample size for the study was extracted from a population of 18,858. Using the Taro Yamane formula, a total of 329 samples was estimated.

$$n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$$

Where n = sample size, N = population size, e = level of significance

$$n = 18858 / (1 + (0.05)^2)$$

Therefore, n = 329

**Table 1**

*Calculated Sample Size from Yamane Formula*

Recreational Program	No. of Participants	Percentage
Marathon	265	80.7
Hoops for Health	7	2
Search Inside Yourself	43	13
Future Leadership Mentoring Program	11	3.2
Mindfulness Retreat	4	1.1

A confidence level of 95 percent and a margin of error of 0.05 were assumed for further calculations and analysis. A simple random sampling was used to avoid bias and neglect in representation. The first 330 participants were selected using the =RAND() formula. The response rate of the survey was 91 percent with 293 research participants of which 54.6 percent were male and 45.4 percent were female.

## **Procedure**

The caveat of the research includes the researcher not being a part of the recreational programmes. That is why a systematic investigation was carried out. An unstructured interview was conducted with one participant from each programme through which the researcher could understand their experience, personal and professional developments. This information also greatly helped in editing and formulating the adapted questionnaire model.

The questionnaire and the pilot test survey were chosen from Cser (2010) who used them for his doctorate study. Furthermore, minor changes suggested on the questionnaire model from the six pilot participants were taken into consideration and changes were made accordingly. An extensive survey was conducted by e-mail via Google docs, personal meetings with participants living in Thimphu Thromde and telephone calls were made if they had failed to respond to the questions. Though locating the participants individually was difficult, it was not so bad as all had access to mobile phones, email and the internet.

## **Instrument Selection**

The model which fitted the objective of the study best was by Caroline Muthoni Mbaabu (2013). A few additions were made to the statements in the model to be relatable in the Bhutanese context and to match the study variables. Participants' perceptions were numbered with the help of a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. The model's coefficient alpha is 0.728 which means it is adequately

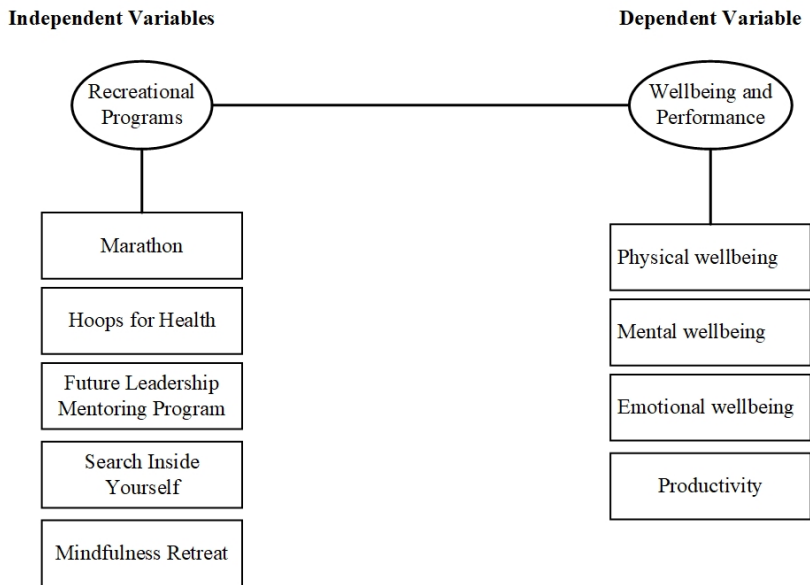
reliable for data collection (Mbaabu, 2013). Besides, the psychometric reliability test called Cronbach Alpha was also conducted by Mbaabu to test its reliability and internal consistency, the pre-test further validated the questionnaire model (2013).

### **Reliability of the Variables**

The variables for measurement of recreational programmes are physical, mental, social wellbeing and productivity. A Cronbach's test was carried out to check how well the statements correlated with each other. It was also used to measure their internal consistency. All variables showed strong test scores with strong correlation as all scores were above 0.70 standard number.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework of the Study*



With this, the study put forwards the hypotheses below:

H1: Recreational programmes have no impact on physical, mental, social wellbeing and productivity.

H2: Equal opportunities are not given to males and females.

H3: Equal opportunities are not given to all age groups.

## **Result**

### **Respondents Characteristics**

To test the null hypothesis which suggests that gender has no effect on opportunities received by participants in recreational programmes, an independent t-test was carried out. Before that, the individual mean was found for each group. The result shows a higher mean in female participants ( $M=1.24$ ,  $SD=0.605$ ) than male participants ( $M=1.17$ ,  $SD=0.423$ ) which means females received higher opportunities than males in terms of participation in recreation. To further validate this finding, the t-test result failed to reject the null hypothesis.

**Table 2**

*Gender of Participants*

Variables	Description	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	160	54.6
	Female	133	45.4

As Hoops for Health is a programme that targets female civil servants hence, the same procedure was followed again. Using the same data but excluding Hoops for Health this time, females ( $M=1.17$ ,  $SD=0.5$ ) have a slightly lower mean than males ( $M=1.15$ ,  $SD=0.4$ ). The result from the independent t-test also shows that there was no significant difference in the opportunity rate  $t(291)=-0.29$ ,  $p>0.05$ . This finding fails to reject the null hypothesis which proves that both males and females are given equal opportunities to participate in recreational programmes.

**Table 3**

*Opportunities for Males and Females (for all programmes)*

Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	1.17	.423	.033
Female	1.24	.605	.052

**Table 4**

*Opportunities for Males and Females (without hoops for health)*

Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	1.15	.407	.032
Female	1.17	.495	.043

## **Other Characteristics of Participants**

The frequency statistical function was used to investigate the number of participants from each position level in the public service. The younger cohorts of the public service belong to the PMC (Professional Management Category) and the senior and older employees in the EXS (Executive and Specialist Category). The largest number of participants were from PMC and the least from EXC (Table 5). This rejects the hypothesis of equal opportunities given to all age groups to participate in recreational programmes. The same function was used to measure the participation level from each dzongkhag. It is found that the highest number of participants lived in the capital followed by Punakha and Paro.

**Table 5**

*Characteristic Distribution of Participants*

Variables	Description	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Position Category	EX	8	2.7
	ES	8	2.7
	PMC	184	62.2
	SSC	79	27
	OC	16	5.4
Place of Work	Thimphu	242	82.6
	Paro	14	4.8
	Punakha	16	5.5
	Samdrup Jongkhar	5	1.7
	Trashigang	2	.7
	Pema Gatshel	1	.3
	Trashi Yangtse	1	.3
	Sarpang	4	1.4
	Samtse	1	.3
	Zhemgang	1	.3
	Mongar	1	.3
	Chukha	3	1
	Dagana	1	.3
	Outside Bhutan	1	.3

## **Overall Attitude of Participants on Recreational Programmes**

The respondents had no preferred time of their day for conducting recreational activities. 'Partly on office time' option received the highest answers which would be useful information while organising activities. The information from Table 6 reveals that participants' favourite choice of activity is physical activities like exercise followed by meditation. Programmes of interest could be generated using this data.

**Table 6**

*Respondent's Preferred Time and Activity*

Variable	Description	Frequency
Preferred Time	Solely on Personal Time	62
	Partly on Office Time	96
	Mainly on Office Time	23
	No preference	112
Preferred Activity	Exercise/physical activity	212
	Different mindfulness activities	162
	Team building	140
	Health promotion seminars	76

**Assessing the Impact of Recreational Programmes on Physical, Mental, Social Wellbeing and Productivity**

*Wellbeing and Productivity*

The summary statistics of productivity and different factors affecting wellbeing (mental, physical, social) are shown in Table 7. These dependent variables were scored out of 5 to check the effectiveness of recreational programmes. All of the variables were observed to have a positive effect on an individual's overall wellbeing as the mean score was higher than 2.5. For further clarity, each variable was scored individually where social wellbeing ranked the highest ( $M=4.02$ ,  $SD=0.57$ ). It was followed by mental wellbeing ( $M=3.94$ ,  $SD=0.56$ ), productivity ( $M=3.86$ ,  $SD=0.6$ ) and physical wellbeing ( $M=3.8$ ,  $SD=0.59$ ). This mean score explains that recreational programmes have shown an impact on their participants in terms of measuring the variables.

**Table 7**

*Mean of Mental, Physical, Social Wellbeing and Productivity (N= 293)*

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mental Wellbeing	3.9454	.56322
Physical Wellbeing	3.8055	.59285
Social Wellbeing	4.0273	.57726
Productivity	3.8626	.61421

Means of each statement under different variables were calculated to analyse the strongest statement. Under Mental wellbeing, respondents strongly felt they were mentally capable of fulfilling a variety of tasks ( $M=4.06$ ,  $SD=0.7$ ). Then, under physical wellbeing, participants agreed the most with the statement that said recreational programmes made them physically active ( $M=4.18$ ,  $SD=0.67$ ). Likewise, under social wellbeing, respondents strongly

resonated with the statement, “I enjoyed bonding and sharing time with participants and managers during the recreational programmes” ( $M=4.11$ ,  $SD=0.67$ ). Lastly, under productivity, most respondents resonated with the statement that said recreational programmes helped improve their morale at work ( $M=3.89$ ,  $SD=0.72$ ). In this regard, the research rejects the hypothesis which states recreational programmes have no impact on physical, mental, social wellbeing and productivity.

**Table 8**

*Reliability Score of Variables*

Variable	Conbrach's alpha	No. of items
Mental Wellbeing	0.756	4
Physical Wellbeing	0.796	5
Social Wellbeing	0.845	5
Productivity	0.839	4

## **Discussions**

The research aimed to identify a significant relationship between recreational programmes conducted by RCSC and its benefits related to mental, physical, social wellbeing as well as productivity. Two of the null hypotheses were rejected as a significant relationship was drawn and one null hypothesis failed to be rejected as gender had no impact as both males and females had received equal opportunities. However, this was not the case in studies conducted in international journals. Hayes et al. (2019) conducted a gender analysis of wellbeing of doctors at the workplace whereby they found out that women spend more time than men in household chores and childcare, hence, giving them less work-life balance and opportunities to participate in recreational programmes. Furthermore, in prior research projects by Aronsson and Blom (2010) and Turpin et al. (2004), women showed higher presentism than men in worksite wellness programmes.

It has been found that there is a positive correlation between morale and leisure activities (Wright 1982). Shinew and Crossley (1988) and Akmal et al. (2012) noted that employees with high morale (loyalty, enthusiasm and dedication) are more likely to be productive. Similarly, maybe variables relatable to the Bhutanese context like *Tha Damtsey* and *Ley Jumdey* could have shown significant relationships with recreational programmes. *Tha Damsig* is a Dzongkha word for personal ethics. *Ley Jumdey* refers to karma or the cause-and-effect system of the universe. It is believed to be basic values that a person, more so a Bhutanese ought to have. However, as these programmes are fairly new, further research needs to be conducted to investigate the effectiveness and changes brought by recreation activities in the Bhutanese public sector.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

When a civil servant participates in a recreational program, it affects him or her in some way. The study found that the five recreational programmes conducted by the RCSC so far have positively affected its participants with a beneficial impact on physical, mental, social wellbeing and productivity. The study has also established that opportunities were equally provided to male and female public servants however; Thimphu residents took the demographic advantage by receiving more opportunities than that of rural residents. The research offers a better understanding and provides depth to the recreation programmes which the RCSC has thoughtfully curated for the Bhutanese public servants to be happier and healthier.

With this, the study puts forward the following recommendations to make the recreational programmes even more impactful.

### **Accessible to All**

The public service sector should make every recreational programme available for all genders, ages, positions and dzongkhags. According to findings, 'lack of time' and 'no opportunities' topped the list. Varatharaj and Vasantha (2012) in their research also found lack of time to be the biggest hindrance to participation in recreational activities. RCSC could address time, opportunities, childcare facilities factors. In terms of timing preference, as the participants chose 'partly on office time', office timings could end an hour late or start an hour early where the spare time is solely devoted to leisure activities. Another example of a practical solution is providing crèche when parents are involved in recreation. RCSC could collaborate with other agencies like NCWC (National Commission for Women and Children) in establishing quality crèche so both genders could participate in recreational activities. Programmes like Hoops for Health should be implemented for both genders.

### **Proper Dissemination of Information**

Distributing information on the recreational programmes lies greatly on good communication. The success of a programme depends on its distribution of information. Use of social media platforms is highly encouraged as it is an effective tool for sharing information. Spreading news from a top-down approach would also be effective. Berry, Mirabitoto and Baun (2010) said when leaders are a part of the program, subordinates readily participate and it also involves sensitivity and a high degree of creativity.

## **Seek Feedback and Criticism**

Receiving feedback and constructive criticism is a robust tool for improvement. Successful recreational programmes seek opinions on their current and future activities (Zula, 2014). In Bhutan, it has been noticed that the feedback of a programme is collected only at the end of it. Instead, it would be more useful to collect feedback during and after a program.

## **Regular Activities**

It was viewed that the activities were too small to see its effects or changes in development. Therefore, programmes like the marathon should take place half-yearly or quarterly to reap the full benefits of physical exercise. Mindfulness retreat programmes should also take place frequently.

*Acknowledgement:* I would like to extend my thanks to RCSC for trusting me with the data of their programme participants. I am also grateful to each and every one who took part in my survey and made this study meaningful.

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