



## POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT IN THE PERUVIAN TOURISM SECTOR

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### KEYWORDS

*Mental health  
Burnout  
Tourism  
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### ABSTRACT

*The COVID-19 crisis and the political conflicts in Peru affected tourism activity, generating psychosocial risks. The objective of the study was to establish the relationship between positive mental health and occupational burnout in employees of the tourism sector in Junín. The approach was quantitative, basic type, correlational level, non-experimental design, cross-sectional descriptive correlational. The sample consisted of 384 collaborators, and the Positive Mental Health Scale and the Occupational Burnout Scale were applied. The results showed an inverse (Kendall's Tau b = -.738) and significant (p-value < .00) correlation between both variables. It is concluded that the better mental health, the less occupational burnout.*

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## 1. Introduction

In the current labor context, factors such as mental health or emotional balance at work represent absolutely necessary aspects for the socio-labor and socio-affective development of workers. The psychological impact of the pandemic was unfavorable at the socioeconomic and health level, due to the conditions generated by the measures adopted by governments. In this sense, the psychosomatic affections that under normal conditions are easily reversed, in the health crisis were extended in time, much more than expected.

In the crisis generated worldwide by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the tourism sector was one of the most affected sectors, showing a significant drop in the flow of tourists from 2020, which in comparison with 2019, decreased by 30%, this percentage was increasing in direct relation to the evolution of the health crisis. In Peru in 2022, according to figures from Promperu and the Ministry of Economy and Finance, tourism represented 2.2 % of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), half of what it generated before the pandemic; in the same context, the jobs generated by tourism decreased from 1.5 million to one million. Tourism is one of the key sectors for Peru's development, along with agriculture and mining, and it was expected that when the pandemic waned, tourism activity would be reactivated; however, this was not possible due to the successive political and social crises; after the vacancy of President Castillo in December 2022, protests and road closures paralyzed tourism, causing a crisis in the sector, with huge economic losses and uncertainty for the population that depended on this activity.

Businesses related to tourism were severely affected by the pandemic, some even had to close permanently, being one of the activities that generated the highest unemployment. The context of labor instability conditioned the performance of employees and their mental well-being, with the risk of occupational burnout. Collaborators in the tourism sector represent a labor mass whose functions require intense and dedicated work practices that are constantly adapted to the cultural diversity of tourists and their needs; contrary to what is thought of this activity, the comforts and luxuries that are the pleasure of users are a distant possibility for the people who attend to them. He and Hao (2022) point out that the mechanism of influence of emotional labor and employee well-being in cross-cultural contexts triggers continuous changes in each other.

The deterioration of the mental health of employees has a negative impact on their work performance, presenting problems of lack of concentration at work and taking more time for the development of their work. Joseph-Sirgy (2019) considers that there is a growing interest in research on the quality of life and well-being of employees, as well as of tourism service users. Precarious work environments represent triggers of negative connotation for the mental health of collaborators, critically affecting all types of professional profile (Llosa et al., 2018). In the workplace, the COVID-19 pandemic had a strong impact on the mental health of employees, generating extreme and highly demanding situations (Ruiz-Frutos and Gómez-Salgado, 2021).

According to Arroyave et al. (2022), the inclusion of the concept of mental well-being in definitions of health has often led to confusion with the terms of mental health because well-being alone can hardly define the state of mind of a person in relation to his or her overall mental health. Currently, mental health studies in the workplace play a central role, since they provide in-depth knowledge of problematic situations that affect the health, social and economic progress of employees (Pérez-Fonseca et al., 2021).

Occupational burnout or burned-out worker syndrome (burnout) consists of an extreme fatigue of the individual identified by organizational behaviors and conditions that are harmful to health and psycho-mental stability (Chavarría Islas et al., 2017); Vidotti et al. (2019) argue that it is caused by the relationship between a high psychological demand, low decision or control over work functions and low reception of social support from other employees or their superiors; i.e., an unpleasant, tense, uncertain and conflictive environment. The symptoms of burnout manifest themselves in three dimensions: First, burnout or emotional exhaustion, characterized by mental and physical fatigue, as well as the feeling of not being able to offer more of oneself to others. Second, depersonalization or cynicism, which manifests itself through negative feelings, attitudes and behaviors, remaining distant and cold towards other people, especially with users or clients. Third, low self-fulfillment or achievement dissatisfaction, characterized by disappointment about the meaning of one's life and personal achievements, disillusionment with work and low self-esteem. In recent decades, research on occupational burnout has increased due to its consequences on the physical and psychological health of employees and its impact on the family and social environment.

Faced with the risks of the socioeconomic context, positive mental health is presented as an ideal way to counteract or mitigate the factors that may cause occupational burnout. Positive mental health consists of a state of psychic stability of the person characterized by the absence of psychological conditions out of the ordinary; it should be understood that positive mental health is more than the absence of conditions, it implies a positive, proactive and resilient attitude in the face of negative circumstances. Jahoda (1958, as cited in Lluch, 2002), identifies positive mental health as a balanced and stable situation in the psyche of the person and not a momentary state with situations of positive effect; similarly, Gómez-Acosta et al. (2020) defines it as the state of well-being in which the subject faces the constant pressures of life without ceasing to be productive and contribute effectively to his/her social environment, identifying his/her own aptitudes. Lluch (2002) based on Jahoda's multidimensional model configures a model of positive mental health composed of six factors: personal satisfaction, prosocial attitude, self-control, autonomy, problem solving and self-actualization; and interpersonal relationship skills.

There is research on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of employees in the tourism sector, such as that of Cheng et al. (2022) who studied the fear and emotional exhaustion of airline tourism employees with respect to COVID-19 in Taiwan; similarly, Claudio-Quiroga et al. (2022) investigated the effects of the pandemic on the emotional stability of tourism workers in Spain; also Sönmez et al. (2020) evaluated the impact of COVID-19 on immigrant hotel and food service workers in the United States; all of them found negative effects of the pandemic on the mental health of the workers. In addition, Moraes-Neves and Graciano (2021) identified that the labor crisis situation produced by the pandemic in the tourism sector was maintained and even worsened in the post-pandemic period.

The objective of the study was to determine the relationship between positive mental health and occupational attrition in employees of the tourism sector in the department of Junín in Peru, as this is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country.

## 2. Development of the research

The research had a quantitative approach, basic type, correlational level; with a non-experimental-transversal, descriptive-correlational design. The population consisted of employees of the hotel tourism sector in the department of Junín, located in the highlands and central jungle of Peru, which included 4740 subjects. The probabilistic sample consisted of 384 collaborators, whose ages ranged from 18 to 60 years, men and women; the sampling technique was stratified, and the inclusion criterion was considered to be collaborators or workers in the hotel sector involved in the tourism industry; collaborators who were not at their work centers at the time of data collection because they were on leave or vacation were excluded; those who did not wish to participate in the study and did not accept informed consent were also excluded.

The survey was used as a data collection technique and two scales were used as instruments:

The Positive Mental Health Scale adapted from Lluch (2002), composed of 39 items that measure the dimensions: personal satisfaction, prosocial attitude, self-control, autonomy, problem solving and self-actualization, and interpersonal relationship skills; the response options are presented on a Likert-type scale with four alternatives. The validity of the instrument was carried out by the judgment of 10 experts who, when evaluated by means of Aiken's V coefficient, reported values between .89 and .95 meaning excellent validity; reliability was carried out through a pilot sample applied to 50 subjects which was evaluated by means of Cronbach's alpha coefficient resulting in a value of .92 which meant excellent reliability. Also, the Occupational Burnout Scale - EDO of Uribe-Prado (2018) was applied, the instrument contains 30 items that measure the dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and achievement dissatisfaction, the response options are constituted in Likert-type scale with five alternatives. The validity of the instrument was performed by the judgment of 10 experts who when evaluated by Aiken's V coefficient, reported values between ,91 and ,96 meaning excellent validity, the reliability was performed through a pilot sample applied to 50 subjects which was evaluated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient resulting in a value of ,95 which meant excellent reliability.

Data collection was carried out in the months of October to November 2022, in person, as an ethical criterion, informed consent was requested from the respondents, and anonymity and objectivity were respected in the evaluation and interpretation of the data.

Data processing was performed by means of descriptive and inferential statistical tests such as cross tables, frequency tables and hypothesis tests, using SPSS 25 statistical software.

### 3. Results

**Table 1. Characterization of the sample: gender**

	f	%
Female	218	56.8
Male	166	43.2
Total	384	100

The study included 384 employees in the tourism sector in the department of Junín, of whom 218 were women, representing 56.8%, and 166 were men, representing 43.2% of the total sample. It is important to note that women work in the sector in greater numbers.

**Table 2. Characterization of the sample: age**

	f	%
18-25	7	1.8
26-30	107	27.9
31-40	224	58.3
41-50	14	3.6
51 to more	32	8.3
Total	384	100

At the time of the study, most of the employees in the Department's tourism sector were between 31 and 48 years of age (58.3%), followed by the 26 to 30 age range (27.9%), with lower percentages in the other age groups. The sector hires young people under 25 years of age, generally at peak seasons and discontinuously.

**Table 3 Statistical results of positive mental health and its dimensions in employees of the tourism sector in the department of Junín - Peru (n=384).**

	Prevalence of positive mental health					
	Download		Media		High	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Positive mental health	79	20.6	15	3.9	290	75.5
Personal satisfaction	39	10.2	42	10.9	303	78.9
Prosocial attitude	51	13.3	62	16.1	271	70.6

Self-control	59	15.4	55	14.3	270	70.3
Autonomy	64	16.7	42	10.9	278	72.4
Troubleshooting and self-actualization	57	14.8	38	9.90	289	75.3
Interpersonal relationship skills	53	13.8	32	8.30	299	77.9

The results in Table 3 indicate that positive mental health was high in 75.5% of employees in the tourism sector in the department of Junín, equivalent results can be observed in the dimensions of personal satisfaction (78.9%), interpersonal relationship skills (77.9%), problem solving and self-actualization (75.3%), autonomy (72.4%), prosocial attitude (70.6%) and self-control. From the results it can be indicated that the work activities in the tourism sector did not have a negative effect on mental health, on the contrary, it strengthened it; however, it was evidenced that more than 10 % of collaborators in this sector had a low level of positive mental health.

**Table 4. Statistical results of occupational burnout and its dimensions in employees of the tourism sector in the department of Junín - Peru (n=384).**

	Occupational burnout syndrome					
	Slight		Moderate		Severo	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Occupational attrition	100	26.0	196	51.0	88	22.9
Emotional exhaustion	110	28.6	230	59.9	44	11.5
Depersonalization	263	68.5	106	27.6	15	3.90
Achievement dissatisfaction	304	79.2	34	8.90	46	12.0

According to Table 4, occupational burnout among employees in the tourism sector in the department of Junín in Peru was moderate (51 %), reflecting rather relaxing and motivating activities for personal development, which is why more than 68.5 % of employees reached slight occupational burnout in terms of depersonalization and dissatisfaction of achievement (79.2 %). The percentage considering severe emotional burnout is low (22.9 %).

**Table 5. Kendall's Tau b correlation coefficient between positive mental health and occupational burnout (n=384).**

	Occupational attrition	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	Achievement dissatisfaction
Positive mental health	-.738**	-.415**	-.152**	-.879**
Personal satisfaction	-.694**	-.410**	-.112**	-.817**
Prosocial attitude	-.676**	-.355**	-.213**	-.734**
Self-control	-.610**	-.377**	-.106**	-.732**

Autonomy	-0.710**	-0.413**	-0.178**	-0.812**
Troubleshooting and self-updating	-0.715**	-0.400**	-0.147**	-0.846**
Interpersonal relationship skills	-0.676**	-0.339**	-0.219**	-0.779**

Note: (\*\*): Highly significant ( $p < ,01$ ).

According to Table 5, the positive mental health of employees in the tourism sector in the department of Junín in Peru was strongly and inversely correlated with occupational attrition (-.738), which implies that the prevalence of high positive mental health was associated with low levels of occupational attrition; equivalent results were found when correlating each of its dimensions. On the other hand, there was a high inverse correlation (-.879) between positive mental health and achievement dissatisfaction, which, unlike emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, achievement dissatisfaction had a high inverse correlation with personal satisfaction (-.817), prosocial attitude (-.734), self-control (-.732), autonomy (-.812), problem solving and self-actualization (-.846) and interpersonal relationship skills (-.779). It has been demonstrated, according to the results, that there is an inverse relationship of high and significant medium level between the variables positive mental health and occupational attrition; in this sense, it can be affirmed that the better the positive mental health, the lower the occupational attrition. The results of the research coincide with the findings of Cheng et al. (2021), who found a negative effect on the mental health of female employees in the tourism sector in Taiwan, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic; they also coincide with the study of Claudio-Quiroga et al. (2022) who determined that the pandemic negatively affected the emotional stability of tourism employees in Spain, with the particularity that women were more sensitive and vulnerable to the crisis. Also Sönmez et al. (2020) found that immigrant hotel and food service workers in the United States had high levels of chronic stress due to the impact of COVID-19, an effect that was intensified by social, political and economic inequalities; This context is similar to the Peruvian context, where political problems exacerbated the crisis in the tourism sector; thus, it is confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the tourism industry globally and this critical state was maintained and even intensified in the post-pandemic (Moraes-Neves and Graciano, 2021). The negative effects on mental health and occupational attrition in employees of the tourism sector were produced by the uncertainty about the possibility of job loss and work overload due to the reduction of personnel to which many companies in the sector had to resort; in this sense, what Ross (2006) affirms is ratified when he maintains that a crisis situation in the tourism industry perniciously generates occupational stress in the employees. Xiong et al. (2023) confirmed that emotional exhaustion explains the harmful effect on the mental health of hotel employees in southern China; this result is analogous to what was experienced in Peru during the pandemic period.

The state of labor and economic instability that affected many tourism collaborators aggravated other problems with similar or greater effects on mental health, such as the high rate of indebtedness; Paredes et. al. (2023) pointed out that seven out of every ten Peruvians have debts from bank loans and personal credits.

Given the problem, and tourism being one of the pillars for the development of Peru, it is necessary that companies in the sector and the State establish strategies that not only seek to reactivate tourism activity, but also to improve the mental health of employees, since they are the ones who maintain direct contact with users, and the satisfaction and loyalty of tourists depends largely on the quality of interaction with the people who provide the tourist service. A collaborator with adequate mental health is characterized by being more productive and more predisposed to generate a positive interaction with the user; Xu et al. (2020) consider that emotional regulation on a medium scale optimizes high-pressure work environments generating positive results; Palma and Ansoleaga (2022) consider that it is relevant to study the emotional demands of workers since they are inevitably linked to their mental health which generates personal satisfaction, therefore, good mental health reduces occupational attrition.

The phenomenon found should not only be addressed at the micro level, at the personal and organizational level; but also requires intervention at the macro level, Moraes-Neves and Graciano

(2021) state that the competent authorities and agencies should implement long-term planning actions that allow the recovery and sustainability of the business sector; similarly, Baum (2018) argues that the sustainable management of human resources is a fundamental axis for the success of tourism policies and planning. Such purpose implies the commitment and collaboration of the government and the private sector in the development of policies and planning strategies for the benefit of tourism.

It was considered a limitation of the research that the instruments applied evaluate positive mental health and occupational burnout from the self-perception of the subject, which could lead to biased or subjective responses; to control this limitation, before the application of the instruments, the purpose of the study and the importance of their responses being sincere and objective were socialized with the respondents, emphasizing the safeguarding of their anonymity.

#### **4. Conclusions**

It was determined that there is an inverse and significant correlation between positive mental health and occupational burnout in collaborators of the tourism sector in the department of Junín in Peru. There is sufficient empirical evidence to support that the higher the positive mental health, the lower the occupational attrition.

It was determined that there is an inverse and significant correlation between the dimensions of positive mental health and occupational burnout in collaborators of the tourism sector in the department of Junín in Peru. There is sufficient empirical evidence to support that the higher the personal satisfaction, prosocial attitude, self-control, autonomy, problem solving and self-actualization, or interpersonal relationship skills, the lower the occupational attrition.

It was determined that there is an inverse and significant correlation between positive mental health and the dimensions of occupational burnout in employees of the tourism sector in the department of Junín in Peru. There is sufficient empirical evidence to support that the greater the dissatisfaction with achievement, the lower the positive mental health.

It was determined that there is an inverse and significant correlation between the dimensions of positive mental health and the dimensions of occupational burnout in collaborators of the tourism sector in the department of Junín in Peru. There is sufficient empirical evidence to support that the higher the personal satisfaction, the lower the achievement dissatisfaction; the higher the autonomy, the lower the achievement dissatisfaction; and the higher the problem solving and self-actualization, the lower the achievement dissatisfaction.

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