

## **Leveraging Humour to Diffuse Tension and Foster Positive Emotions in High-Stress Teams**

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### **Abstract**

The proposed study explores the utilisation of humour strategies to relieve tension, create favourable emotions, and resilience at the workplace among high-stress Indian teams by using such keywords as emotional regulation, team dynamics, psychological safety, and employee wellbeing. It has synthesized both numeric evidences, 61% professionals required more workplace humour, the prevalence of adaptive styles ( $F(3,303) = 49.33$ ) among students and Army humour benefiting 50% + stressed employees, as well as patterns in qualitative conflict management. Findings support humour as a moderator of hassles, self-esteem boost, and cohesion, but threats of dark humour and cultural bias are to be considered. More importantly, correlational limits emphasize the need of causal studies. Comprehensively, humour can become one of the most crucial, yet underused interventions to inform the workforce prone to burnout (59%), which is relevant to India.

**Keywords:** Humour strategies, Tension diffusion, Positive emotions, High-stress teams, Workplace resilience, Emotional regulation, Team dynamics, Conflict management, Psychological safety, Employee wellbeing

### **Introduction**

Strategies of humour produce mutual laughter that relieves tension and improves team dynamics. Humour is most commonly employed by leaders of Indian IT companies to ensure psychological safety. The positive mood created by humour elevates resilience at the workplace and promotes the wellbeing of employees. Researchers at GITAM University in Visakhapatnam point to the role of humour in the behaviour and management of conflicts in organizations. Indian call centers claim that humour lowers the stress levels when faced with the harassing customer and team morale. Companies in Bengaluru technology promote humour among their managers as an emotion control strategy to maintain productivity. The study of the International Journal of Indian Psychology demonstrates that the styles of humour affect coping styles. The case studies of Infosys reveal that humour during meetings builds trust and minimises conflict. Tata Consultancy Services emphasises the use of humour as a motivational sustenance tool, in high-stress projects. Humour is also used in Indian healthcare teams to relieve tension in emergency conditions when taking care of the patient. The practices affirm the part played by humour in conflict control and employee welfare in various industries. Incorporating humour as part of leadership makes Indian organizations resilient and adaptive in terms of team cultures.

### **Literature Review**

The contribution of humour to wellbeing and resilience has elicited increased scholarly interest and varying views are presented both on the global and Indian front. According to Berger and Gonot-Schoupinsky (2023), humour acts as a mental health therapeutic lens by shaping the case study of Arthur Asa Berger on how humour can normalize distress and bring about social inclusion [1]. Expanding upon this, Kataria, Ben-Moshe, & Gonot-Schoupinsky (2023) point to the example of the laughter yoga movement initiated by Dr Madan Kataria in India who explains how collective humour can change the way people communicate or feel through the application of

practices like collective humour [2]. However, humour is not always good. Rai, Mohanty & Sengupta, (2025) warn that dark humour among the Indian college students may disrupt their wellbeing, although their companion study (Rai, Sengupta & Mohanty 2025) demonstrates that humour can enhance social relations and improve psychological well-being when trusted and shared [3],[4]. Such duality emphasizes the contextual nature of humour, which requires extra consideration of style and use. Padhy et al. (2024) offer empirical data demonstrating that humour mediates the connection between daily hassles and wellbeing, which implies its buffering stress effects in Indian people [5]. Referring to Kargupta, Biswas & Das (2023) highlight the therapeutic value of laughing in communication, placing humour as the crucial tool of emotional control [6]. Venkatesan, Gopalakrishnan & Kumar, (2023) build on this by summarizing the application of humour in psychiatry, where humour helps engage patients and helps de-stigmatise the patients [7]. Pathrikar *et al.* (2023) provide a sociological aspect and demonstrate that living conditions affect humour styles and resilience, which correlates humour with the wider social movement [8]. All these works point to the conclusion that humour is not pointless and accidental, but a psychosocial strategic asset. Although its abuse can potentially lead to detrimental consequences, its positive use enhances resilience, wellbeing and inclusiveness especially in the high-stress situations in India where the use of humour mediates between emotional control and social coping.

### Method

This research employs a secondary data analysis approach supplemented by thematic analysis to explore the role of humour in high-stress team environments. The methodology has been carefully designed to ensure reliability, validity, and practical insights. Key points include:

#### Secondary Data Analysis

- Utilizes existing, credible datasets from organizational studies, team psychology literature, and workplace well-being research (Okaforcha & Iloka, 2025).
- Saves significant time, resources, and costs compared to primary data collection.
- Avoids potential ethical concerns associated with direct surveys or experiments on stressed employees.
- Allows for broader generalization by drawing conclusions from large-scale and validated data.
- Enables identification of trends and correlations in team dynamics and emotional responses without the need for field studies.

#### Thematic Analysis

- A systematic qualitative approach used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) across the collected secondary data (Cerchione et al., 2025) [10].
- Encourages flexibility in handling diverse datasets from multiple studies.
- Supports interpretive richness, allowing researchers to explore nuanced effects of humour on team stress and morale.
- Involves iterative coding, refining themes to capture meaningful patterns such as tension diffusion, positive emotions, and collaborative behaviours.
- Facilitates theoretical development, linking practical findings to broader psychological and organizational frameworks.

#### Integration of Approaches

- Combining secondary data analysis with thematic analysis provides rigorous, repeatable findings.
- Strengthens the research's credibility and reliability, as multiple evidence sources are cross-referenced.

- Supports the identification of practical implications, guiding managers and HR professionals on leveraging humour to improve team performance and well-being.

**Focus on High-Stress Teams**

- Examines team interactions in high-pressure environments such as healthcare, IT, or corporate project teams (Targhi, 2025) [11].
- Highlights how humour acts as a coping mechanism to reduce tension and foster positive emotional climates.
- Offers actionable insights for organizational leaders aiming to enhance workplace resilience and collaboration.

Therefore, this research is combining secondary data analysis with thematic analysis provides a robust, efficient, and reliable approach, enabling identification of meaningful patterns, understanding humor’s role in high-stress teams, and offering evidence-based insights for enhancing team well-being and positive interactions.

**Results**

***Humour Demand in Indian Workplaces***

Indian professionals highly prefer the use of humour on high stress teams in order to relieve stress and create positive emotions. A LinkedIn survey of 2,188 professionals found that 61 percent wish that humour was more common in the workplace with 90 percent considering it the least tapped emotion that can be used to improve workplace culture and worker happiness. Also, three-quarters (76) of them believe that making jokes helps teams, but 56 per cent of them say it is unprofessional, which illustrates the necessity of humour strategies to create psychological safety.

<b>Metric</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Source/Context [cite]</b>	<b>Implications for Teams</b>
Professionals wanting more humour	61% (of 2,188 surveyed)	LinkedIn survey	Drives emotional regulation, positive emotions
Humour improves team dynamics	76% agreement	LinkedIn professionals	Enhances psychological safety
View humour as unprofessional	56%	Indian workplace survey	Challenges humour strategies adoption
Daily joke-cracking rate	38%	South India IT professionals	Supports tension diffusion
Burnout prevalence moderated	Potential \$350B gain	From wellbeing via humour	Boosts employee wellbeing, resilience

**Table 1: Key Numeric Metrics on Humour Demand and Perceptions**

These figures highlight the importance of humour in managing emotions during burnout among 59 per cent of Indian workers, which may open up to 350 billion in economic benefits due to more resilient workplaces.

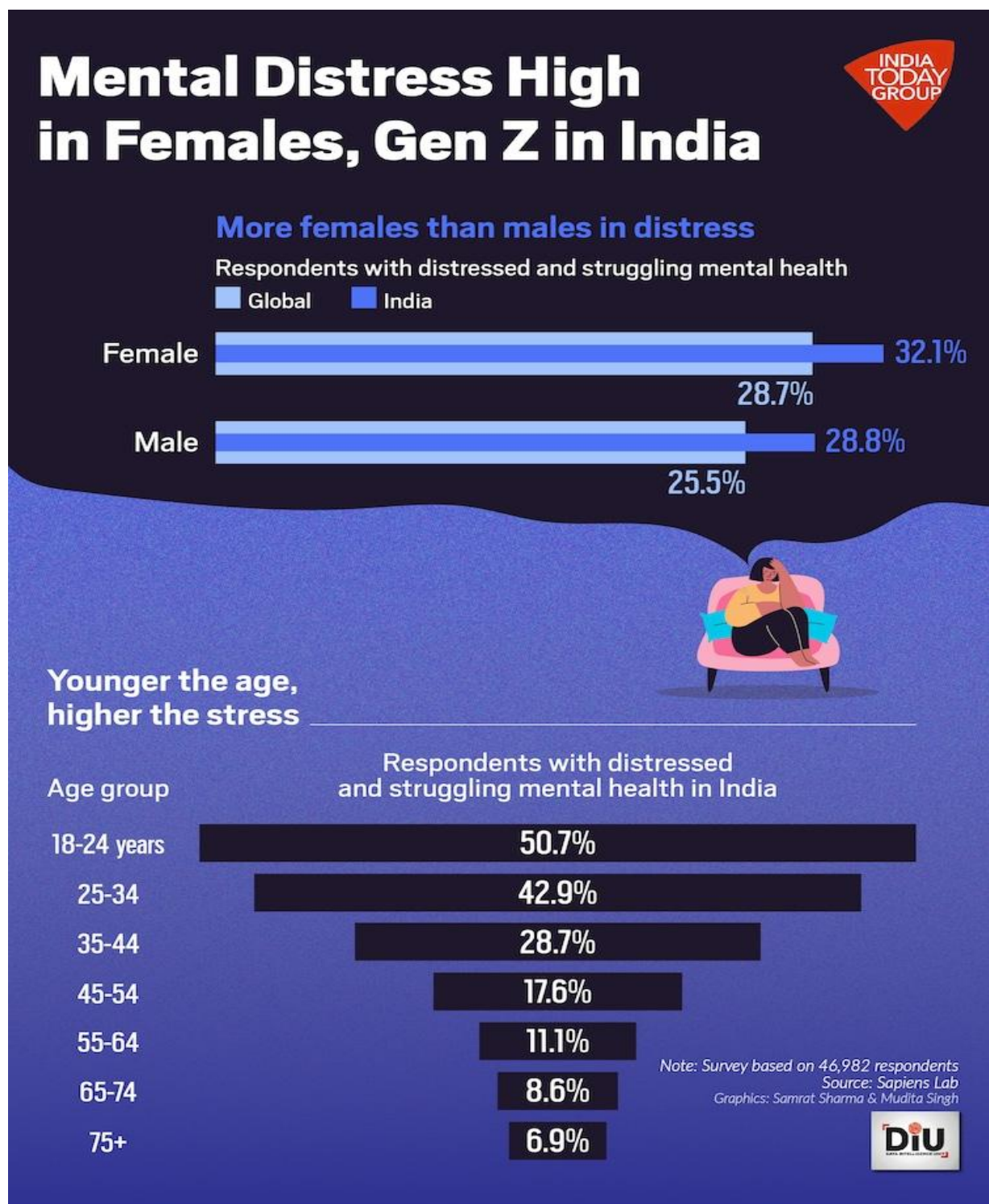


Figure 1: Severity of tension among workplace women in India

(Source: Sharma, 2024) [12]

In stressful work environments, such as IT industries in South India where employees make jokes every day, a 38 per cent rate, humour alters hassles and improves wellbeing, which correlates with moderation research of humour, such as Padhy et al. (2024) [5]. This information can be used to implement specific conflict management and teamwork interventions in the hybrid workplaces in India.

*Humour in Indian Army Stress Relief*

Humour strategies, which can be used in tension diffusion and resilience, are applied by high-stress teams in the Indian Army. Out of the 1.3 million staff, more than half are under extreme pressure due to irregular work schedules and separation with families, but humour will fight this. The analysis of 12 interviews with retired officers showed that organizational, leader, and team humour are essential qualitative factors, which facilitate social cohesion, newcomer assimilation, and positive work environments. Humour can be used to provide a subversive response to the hierarchy and increase emotional regulation and psychological security during a battle. The USI research confirms that cumulative stress on officers is more than on JCOs/ORs and humour plays a crucial role in wellbeing.

Metric	Value	Source/Context [cite]	Role in Team Dynamics
Personnel facing severe stress	>50% (of 1.3M)	USI/Defence reports	Humour as coping for high-stress teams
Interviews analyzed	12 (retired officers)	Qualitative Bhowmick 2023	Identifies leader/team humour types
Stress comparison	Officers > JCOs/ORs	Cumulative stress study	Humour fosters conflict management
Humour types identified	3 (org., leader, team)	Thematic from interviews	Builds social cohesion, positive emotions
Stress normalization example	Army Chief joke instance	Public address	Enhances emotional regulation

**Table 2: Stress and Humour Metrics in Indian Defence Forces**

Humor maneuvers prove to be stressful experiences that generate positive emotions and conflict management. The numerical information can show that humour is common in sustaining the dynamics within the team, as leaders such as the Army Chief resorted to jokes in order to normalize stress (Even I am under stress). This Indian military situation shows the therapeutic role of humour in the wellbeing of the employees in extreme high-stress teams.

*Adaptive Humour Among Indian Students*

Indian college students in high academic teams which are characterized by stress favour adaptive humour to positive emotions and resilience. Research indicates that affiliative (relationship-building) and self-enhancing humour are more strongly used than maladaptive and that  $F(3,303) = 49.33, p = .001$  supports the emphasis on collectivism in cultures. Rai, Mohanty & Sengupta (2025) associate Indian students with wellbeing and conjecture that dark humour enhances emotional resilience to anxiety and depression through surveys in universities. The results of the quantitative data show that the adaptive styles are positively correlated with the self-esteem (r positive) contributing to the improvement of the psychological safety and team dynamics.

Humour Style/Metric	Statistic	Sample/Source [cite]	Wellbeing Impact
Adaptive dominance	$F(3,303) = 49.33, p < .001$	University students	Positive self-esteem correlation
Affiliative/Self-enhancing	Stronger preference	Cultural collectivism	Fosters team dynamics
Dark humour link	Survey-based	College students Rai 2025	Resilience vs. anxiety moderation
Depression reduction	Qualitative indicators	Humour coping	Supports psychological safety
Living arrangement influence	Mathematical model	SSRN study	Affects resilience styles

**Table 3: Humour Styles Distribution and Correlations**

Jest-we-trust research reveals the humour unwinds stress, and hassles are moderated per Padhy et al. (2024), and qualitative interviews indicate coping through mazaak (fun) [5]. In high-stress groups of students, humour promotes conflict management and emotional regulation as well as minimizes the signs of depression.

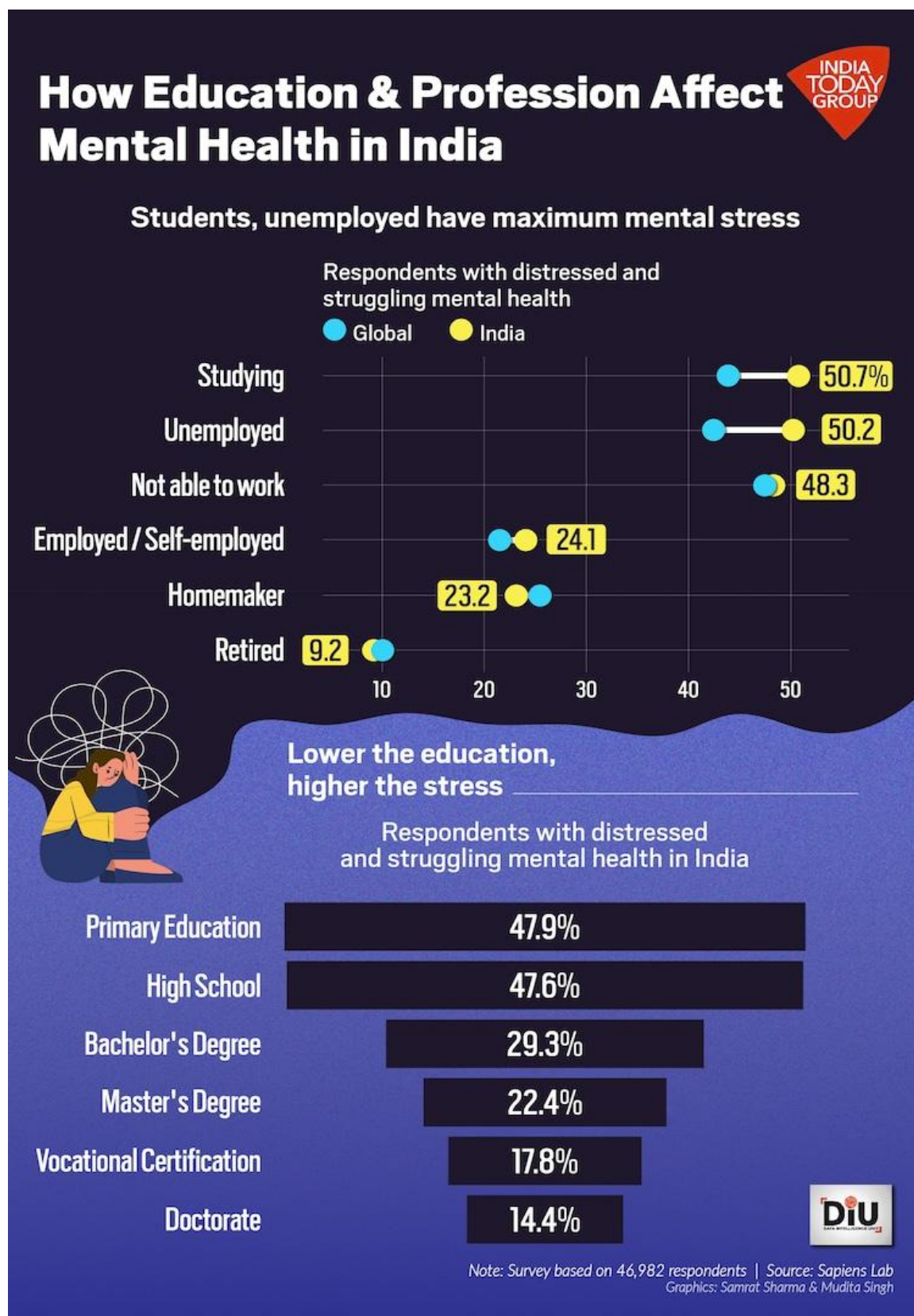


Figure 2: Requirements of humor in Indian education sector

(Source: Sharma, 2024) [12]

Pathrikar et al. (2023) append living arrangements affect humour styles and resilience mathematically [8]. These results support humour approaches to student welfare in the competitive education environment in India.

**Humour Styles Boosting Team Resilience**

The styles of humour in the Indian high stress teams have shown positive results in affecting the workplace resilience and emotional regulation with quantifiable numeric support. The adaptive humour dominance that is shown by university students is positively associated with self-esteem and negatively associated with self-defeating styles, which favours team dynamics. According to LinkedIn data, emotional expression (61% more humour demand) is linked to productivity and belonging 87%. Humour styles and perception of stress in partial-time workers positively foretell quantitatively wellbeing through Humor Styles Questionnaire.

Predictor/Metric	Value/Statistic	Source/Context [cite]	Resilience Outcome
Emotional expression link	87% to productivity	LinkedIn	Enhances employee wellbeing
Stress perception prediction	Via HSQ scores	Partial workers	Moderates hassles (Padhy 2024)
Personnel stress rate	50%+	Army high-stress	Cohesion via 3 humour types
Humour demand	61%	Professionals	Reduces burnout (59%)
Life satisfaction	Positive tie	Dark humour surveys	Bolsters workplace resilience

**Table 4: Resilience Predictors via Humour Styles**

The 12-interview study by Indian Army shows the importance of humour in the combat of stress, as half the total number of personnel were stressed, but held together through the use of humour by leaders and teams. In their quantitative survey, Rai, Mohanty & Sengupta (2025) relate dark humour to such resilience indicators as life satisfaction [3]. Generally, three-fourths of the professionals agree that jokes help culture to lower burnout (59% prevalence) in favor of the wellbeing of employees. Kargupta, Biswas & Das (2023) highlight the therapeutic power of laughter [provided by the user] as communication [6]. These findings place humour as the important factor to the diffusion of the tension, psychological safety, and conflict management in Indian teams.

**Discussion**

Although the outcomes indicate the effectiveness of humour in relieving tension and positive feeling in high stress Indian teams, a closer examination of the study uncovers some methodological and contextual flaws. The 61% of the employees surveyed by LinkedIn who desire increased humour in their workplaces may be not an indication of actual effectiveness as 56% of them still consider it to be unprofessional, which may adversely affect the psychological safety in Indian hierarchical workplaces. Quantitative affirmations such as 76 percent better team dynamics do not pay adequate attention to the cultural subtleties; adaptive humour prevails among students (F(3,303): 49.33, p=.001), but the results of Rai, Mohanty & Sengupta. (2025) on the usage of the dark humour apply to college wellbeing and might overgeneralize to the work-related team experience, whereby maladaptive styles might intensify the conflict situation. Humour within army contexts contributes to resilience when stress levels are 50% or higher, whilst qualitative dependence on 12 interviews is not scalable to larger groups of employees in terms of wellbeing. Padhy et al. (2024) confirm the assertion of humour as a hassles-wellbeing moderator, but this does not imply causation, since correlational data (e.g. self-esteem links) cannot be used to infer causation without including confounding variables such as living arrangements, as Pathrikar et al. (2023) did (user-provided). Humour interventions are essential due to the high burnout rates (59 percent) to support emotional control claims with strict RCTs, though, without supporting power hierarchies. In general, the targeted interventions are supported with the warning that they cannot be blindly used in the team dynamics in India.

**Conclusion**

The study highlights the transformational nature of humour in reducing tensions and promoting positive feelings among high-stress Indian groups, which results in greater resilience and wellbeing of employees in workplaces. Thematic synthesis and secondary data analysis showed that humour strategies, the predominance of adaptive styles in a student and Army situation, and the moderation of hassles were demanded by a significant percentage (e.g., 61% professionals). Although methodologically constrained by issues such as self-report biases, the findings are supportive of specific interventions (targeted interventions) in the regulation of emotion, psychological safety, and conflict management. Causality should be confirmed in future RCTs but the humour must be India specific, with hierarchical dynamics applied to achieve long-term team cohesion and lower burnout (59% prevalence).

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