

Title: Employee definitions of wellness at a higher education institution with a health-focused mission

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Background: Understanding how employees define wellness may be helpful when implementing worksite wellness programs and interventions. This study aimed to understand how employees at a health-focused higher education institution defined wellness.

Methods: One hundred eight employees at a small private college participated in semi-structured interviews to explore their thoughts and attitudes regarding wellness. Of these interviews, 78.7% of participants provided a rich definition of wellness. Transcripts were deductively and inductively coded using the National Wellness Institute's Six Dimensions of Wellness (intellectual, occupational, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual) and other data-driven codes. Proportions of codes across transcripts were calculated, and coding matrices were developed to inform directed content analysis. Demographics were analyzed via descriptive statistics in SPSS version 28.

Results: Study participants included faculty (41.7%), staff (52.4%), and administrators (6.0%). The mean age was 40.7 ± 19.1 , and most identified as White (88.1%) and female (72.6%). All dimensions of wellness were discussed, with physical (e.g., nutrition, exercise, sleep) being mentioned most (> 80%) and occupational (e.g., job satisfaction) being mentioned least (<10%). Many participants (50-80%) used similar descriptors to define wellness, such as 'holistic' and 'balanced.' Finally, the College's health-drive mission of "Spirit, Mind, and Body" was used many times (50-80%) in wellness definitions.

Conclusion: Participants defined wellness predominantly using the physical dimension but also cited the institution's mission in their definition. An institution's mission may impact employees' perceptions of wellness, especially in higher education. Intentional inclusion of health in strategic planning may promote overall employee wellness on college and university campuses.