

# Exploring Happiness at Work among Female Workers in a Male-Dominated Nickel Smelter Industry: A Qualitative Case Study from Central Sulawesi, Indonesia

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## Keywords:

*Female workers  
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## ABSTRACT

Happiness at Work is increasingly recognized as central to employee well-being, yet its construction within male-dominated heavy industry remains underexplored. This study examines how happiness at work is experienced by female workers in a nickel smelter industry in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study design, in-depth interviews were conducted with two female employees working within a high-risk and masculine organizational context. Data were analyzed through iterative coding informed by grounded theory procedures. The findings indicate that happiness at work is relationally constructed through interconnected dynamics: professional recognition and empowerment, supportive social relationships, engagement in challenging tasks that foster flow, and adaptive responses to organizational and operational pressures. Rather than representing the absence of stress, happiness emerged as a negotiated psychological experience shaped by competence validation, belonging, and resilience within demanding industrial conditions. As a context-specific case inquiry, this study provides situated insight into women's lived experiences and underscores the importance of inclusive supervisory practices and gender-sensitive organizational support in heavy industry.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the modern workplace, happiness at work is increasingly recognized as a critical factor for organizational sustainability and individual well-being. This concept encompasses employees' positive experiences with the meaning of their work, their engagement, and their satisfaction with the organization [1]. While closely related to constructs such as well-being, job satisfaction, and work engagement, happiness at work in this study is approached as an experiential and affective evaluation of work that emerges within specific relational and organizational contexts.

In line with that, Wesarat et al. [2] defines workplace happiness as an individual's satisfaction with their work and life, which is closely related to subjective well-being, positive experiences, and the quality of workplace relationships. The study emphasizes that happy employees tend to be more productive and demonstrate a stronger work commitment. Furthermore, Joo et al. [3] found that job happiness not only reflects positive experiences at work but also encompasses work engagement, career satisfaction, and subjective well-being. Happiness increases when employees perceive organizational support and possess psychological capital such as optimism, hope, and resilience. Chronologically, the literature on happiness at work has evolved from predominantly hedonic perspectives emphasizing positive affect and satisfaction toward more eudaimonic perspectives highlighting meaning, growth, and self-actualization in work roles. These findings confirm that a supportive work environment and opportunities for self-development have a significant impact on the quality of the work experience.

From an organizational ethics perspective, Castellanos-Redondo and Nevado-peña [4] emphasize that job happiness is also influenced by the quality of an ethical, safe, and humane work environment. In this context, happiness at work is not only about positive feelings about work, but also the relationship between individual well-being, organizational culture, and happy management practices that place workers at the center of business sustainability. However, while these principles establish a theoretical basis for job happiness, a more comprehensive

understanding recognizes the variation in experiences across employee groups. This is important because individual happiness and well-being are often not uniform, but can be substantially influenced by demographic and contextual factors. Mousa et al. [5] explained that women have different perceptions of workplace happiness compared to their male colleagues, and that gender factors are important moderators in work experiences.

For women, job happiness is not only related to professional achievement, but also to the social and structural dynamics that characterize the workplace. Research shows that women's perceptions of workplace happiness differ from those of their male colleagues, indicating that gender factors play a significant role in the work experience [5]. The dominant issue is that structural challenges such as gender inequality, wage gaps, and the glass ceiling are realities that substantially reduce women's well-being, so that fair, equal, and non-discriminatory treatment becomes the main determinant of their happiness in the workplace [6]. This shows that work happiness cannot be understood only through individual factors, but also through social and cultural conditions in the workplace.

This suggests that work happiness cannot be understood solely through individual factors, but also through the social and cultural conditions of the workplace. However, the complexity of the challenges women face in achieving work happiness significantly escalates when their roles are in industrial environments traditionally dominated by men. In this study, the term "male-dominated" refers to organizational contexts characterized by a higher proportion of male workers and the prevalence of masculine work norms, rather than implying a uniform or monolithic industrial culture. Structural factors such as inequality and the need for non-discriminatory treatment [6]. It becomes even more stressful when faced with the extreme physical operating conditions synonymous with heavy industry. In this context, the industrial environment, characterized by physical demands, long working hours, and remote locations, acts as a multiplier of stress that impacts happiness at work. Empirically, research in masculine sectors such as construction confirms that the top challenges faced by women include long working hours and gender-based discrimination [7]. In addition, the existence of

women in a "man's world" exacerbates the challenges through issues of social isolation, lack of support, and the need to adapt to a strong patriarchal culture [8]. Rather than treating these patterns as universal, this study approaches them as contextually shaped experiences emerging from the interaction between organizational structures, gendered expectations, and everyday work practices. Therefore, these demanding operational conditions create a challenging scenario, where efforts to maintain workplace happiness for women come face-to-face with structural and physical risks.

Demanding working conditions are particularly evident in the high-risk heavy industry and extractive industries. Research in the oil and gas industry shows that continuous operational rhythms, long working hours, shift work systems, exposure to demanding physical environments, and remote work locations create a work context that significantly increases workers' vulnerability to burnout, reduced well-being, and mental health disorders [9]. These operational characteristics not only cause physical stress but also have psychological impacts through accumulated fatigue, limited recovery, and reduced social support due to work isolation [10]. This intensive work pattern is particularly relevant to the context of the nickel smelter industry in Indonesia, which operates with a 24-hour production cycle and high performance demands, making worker psychological well-being a crucial issue for the industry's operational sustainability.

In this specific context, women face not only operational demands but also socio-structural barriers. Cardador et al. [11] Research shows that women in masculine jobs often experience a status-leveling burden due to their visible minority status, making them vulnerable to excessive supervision, unrealistic performance expectations, and biased social judgments, ultimately requiring them to engage in gendered labor to prove their competence. In addition to these intense structural and performance pressures, the interpersonal dimension of daily interactions is also a critical variable in determining women's happiness at work.

Interpersonal factors, particularly the quality of relationships and daily interactions at work, play a significant role

in shaping women's happiness and psychological well-being. Social support gained through healthy relationships with coworkers and superiors has been shown to be positively correlated with job satisfaction and happiness, and serves as a psychological resource that protects individuals from work stress (Mérida-López et al., [12]). Furthermore, Bourezg et al. [13] showed that for women, the quality of work relationships, both horizontal and vertical, was a significant determinant of job satisfaction and positive affective experiences at work. This finding indicates that women's experiences of work happiness are shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the patterns of social interactions consistently experienced in their daily work lives.

The quality of interpersonal interactions is strongly influenced by the organizational context, where diversity and inclusion values and policies play a crucial role in shaping supportive work relationships and positive work experiences for women. O'Brien et al. [14] emphasized that inclusive and gender-sensitive organizational practices are the foundation for creating a work environment that supports well-being. This finding is reinforced by Adisa et al. [8], which shows that organizational justice and social support are determining factors for women's well-being in masculine sectors. In line with this, Campos-garcía [6] confirms that women's experiences of work happiness are strongly influenced by the interaction between individual factors, work culture, and socio-organizational structures that shape gender dynamics in the workplace. This study specifically highlights that equal, fair, and non-discriminatory treatment is a key determinant of women's well-being. Thus, women's work happiness reflects the harmony between personal characteristics, the quality of the work environment, and fair and inclusive organizational policies.

This issue becomes increasingly relevant in the context of Indonesia's nickel smelter industry, including the nickel downstream industrial area in Eastern Indonesia, which is developing as a national center of mineral processing activity. The present study specifically focuses on a single case located in Central Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, and does not aim to generalize findings to all industrial areas in Eastern Indonesia. This industry is generally characterized by high-risk work, continuous operating schedules, and intense performance demands, as found in various

studies of the extractive and heavy industry sectors. The literature shows that sectors with male-dominated work cultures often give rise to specific organizational dynamics such as masculine norms, social relational challenges, and role adaptation needs that can impact women's work experiences [8], [11]. In this context, women working in the nickel smelting industry potentially face unique work experience dynamics, such as those related to access to social support, role expectations, or perceptions of the work environment. However, research on women's work happiness in the nickel smelting industry in Indonesia remains very limited. Most existing studies focus on occupational safety, health, operational processes, or productivity, leaving women's psychological experiences and subjective well-being largely unexplored.

In addition, studies that specifically examine happiness at work among female workers have mostly been conducted in the context of the service, office, or light manufacturing sectors, such as the study by Bansal et al. [15] which highlights the role of mindfulness, family support, and work-life balance on the happiness of female workers in a corporate environment, as well as research by Abrar-ul-Haq et al. [16] which analyzes the factors of women's well-being in modern companies. Similarly, Usha & Ramkumar [17] focus on women's happiness in the plantation sector through a sustainable HRM approach. While relevant, these contexts do not fully represent the risky, masculine environment of the nickel smelter industry. No studies specifically examine women's workplace happiness amidst physical risks, 24-hour production rhythms, a dominant masculine culture, and their gender minority status. Addressing this literature gap, there is an opportunity to build upon previous approaches that generally examine these factors independently. There is a need for a study that integratively explores how individual, interpersonal, and structural dimensions intersect for female workers in heavy industry. Building on this perspective, this study positions workplace happiness as a dynamic, contextually constructed psychological process rather than a static feeling. Building on this perspective, this study positions workplace happiness as a dynamic, contextually constructed psychological process rather than a static

feeling. It comprehensively examines how individual resources, social relationships, and organizational inclusivity interact to shape how women interpret and sustain work happiness amidst the harsh operational demands of a nickel smelter.

Considering these gaps, research focusing on the nickel smelter industry in Eastern Indonesia is both logical and important. This region, particularly Central Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, and North Maluku, has been identified as a national nickel smelter growth hub, with rapid and large-scale expansion of the processing and refining industry [18]. Nevertheless, this study treats Central Sulawesi as a specific empirical setting with distinctive organizational and socio-cultural dynamics, rather than as a homogeneous representation of Eastern Indonesia. In addition to being a region with a growing female worker penetration rate, this region also represents a unique combination of extreme operational demands, a masculine work culture, and complex local socio-economic dynamics, as highlighted in academic studies on nickel downstreaming in Sulawesi and Maluku [19]. This combination of factors makes Eastern Indonesia an ideal and critical setting for understanding how women construct work happiness amid intense structural, cultural, and physical pressures.

Therefore, exploring women's workplace happiness in Eastern Indonesia's nickel smelter industry (particularly Central Sulawesi) is crucial to address this gap. Utilizing a case study approach, this research examines how women navigate operational stress and masculine work cultures. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research question: How do women construct and interpret happiness at work within a high-risk nickel smelter industry historically dominated by men? Ultimately, the findings aim to provide an empirical basis for more inclusive and gender-sensitive HR policies.

## **2. METHOD**

This research used a qualitative approach, using a case study design, to explore the phenomenon of workplace happiness among female workers in a nickel smelter industrial area in Eastern Indonesia. A qualitative approach was chosen because of its ability to understand the phenomenon from the subject's perspective within a natural context. [20], exploring and understanding the

meaning attributed by individuals or groups to a social problem [21]. A specific case study design was used to focus the research on a single case, namely the experiences of female workers in a masculine work environment in the industrial area. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, this case study emphasizes contextual and in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life setting. This design allows for an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon (happiness at work) within a real-life context [22],

Although multiple data sources are commonly associated with case study research, this study primarily relied on in-depth interviews as the main data source to capture participants' subjective meanings and lived experiences. This design is also able to capture the socio-cultural nuances that shape the participants' experiences in their entirety [20], so that their subjective meanings and experiences regarding happiness at work can be explored in depth. This study was conducted at one of the companies located in the Nickel Smelter Industrial Area in Eastern Indonesia. More specifically, the study was situated in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, which represents a rapidly developing nickel-processing industrial region. The study involved two female participants working at different tenant companies within the region. The limited number of participants was intentional, as the study aimed to obtain rich, in-depth, and context-bound insights rather than broad representational coverage.

To accommodate the participants' geographic locations and busy work schedules (roster or shift systems), in-depth interviews were conducted online to ensure flexibility and efficiency in data collection. The data collection process took place from August to November 2025.

The subjects of this research were determined through a purposive approach, which is the deliberate selection of participants based on certain considerations relevant to the research objectives. In qualitative research, participant selection is not aimed at statistically representing the population, but rather to gain an in-depth understanding from individuals deemed to have

rich experience and knowledge related to the phenomenon being studied [23].

With these considerations, this study involved two female participants. The inclusion criteria set included: (1) being an active female worker working in the smelter operational area, (2) having worked for at least one year in the mining area, and (3) being willing to participate in in-depth interviews. The first subject (S1) was selected because she works as an Admin in the Development Department, while the second subject (S2) works as an OHS Officer (Safety Officer). The selection of subjects from two different work backgrounds was specifically carried out to gain a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the experience of happiness at work in the nickel smelter industrial environment. A total of two participants were included in this study, with identity details as listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Subject details

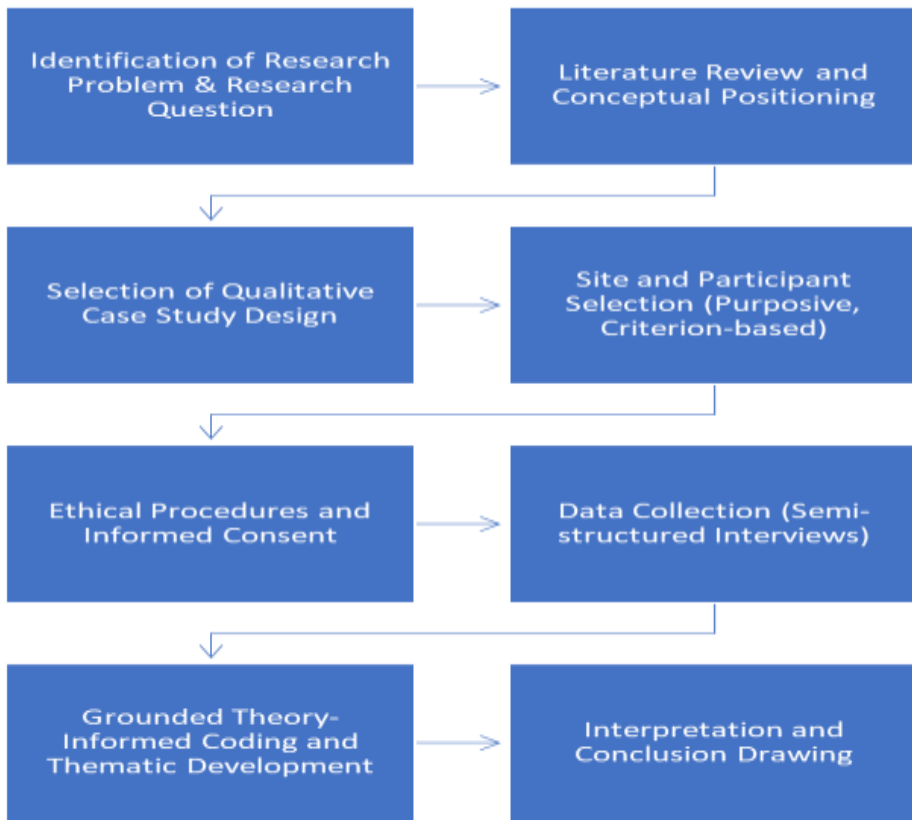
<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Years of service</b>
S1	26	Admin Department	1 year
S2	26	Safety Officer	3 years

The primary data of this research were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. This technique was chosen because it provides ample room for exploration of the participants' subjective experiences. Sugiyono [23] stated that semi-structured interviews allow researchers to dig up information flexibly but remain focused. In line with this, Patton [24] emphasize that in-depth interviews are effective for understanding complex experiences that cannot be captured through structured instruments, while Kvale & Brinkmann [25] stated that qualitative interviews aim to understand the informants' lives through open dialogue. Interviews were conducted online with two participants. The online method was chosen to ensure the feasibility and efficiency of data collection, adapting to shift work schedules and limited access in heavy industrial environments. Each interview lasted approximately

60–90 minutes and was conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality and participant comfort. Data collection tools included notebooks, voice recorders, and digital documentation in the form of screenshots/photos during the online interviews. The

use of this visual documentation, as explained by Sugiyono [23], helps increase the validity of data in qualitative research. Data analysis in this study was carried out using thematic analysis informed by grounded coding procedures, rather than applying grounded theory methodology as a full theory-generating framework. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of meaning related to workplace happiness, rather than developing a formal substantive theory.

This method is a systematic qualitative research method to develop a theory or an in-depth understanding of phenomena derived directly from field data through a series of structured procedures. [26]. The core analysis process applied in this study follows systematic coding stages [27], which operationally includes three main steps. The first step is data reduction and initial/open coding, in which interview narratives are broken down into basic concepts. The second stage is focused/axial coding, in which the initial coding is refined and grouped into more focused and directed categories [27]. The final step is theory development/conclusion drawing (selective coding), where the focused categories are then connected to build a systematic descriptive narrative and draw conclusions [26]. The entire thematic analysis process, from coding to drawing conclusions and verifying data, was conducted manually. The choice of manual analysis was based on the limited number of informants, which allowed the researcher to remain close to the data [27], capturing subjective meaning reflectively, and thereby maintaining the depth and validity of the resulting findings.



**Figure 1.** Research Flow Chart

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the experiences of job happiness among two female workers working in a nickel smelter industry characterized by a masculine culture. The two participants (undergraduate and postgraduate) had different positions, length of service, and task exposure, but both were in the same work context and location: a fast-paced work rhythm, a majority of male workers, high safety standards, and an organizational structure that demands precision and emotional stability. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using a grounded approach through a process of initial noting, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The analysis resulted in five main themes regarding participants' job happiness, and each theme contained

sub-themes that represented the participants' lived experiences in depth.

### **3.1 Happiness as a feeling of empowerment and recognition**

In this theme, participants described feeling empowered, valued, and recognized for their competence within a predominantly male work environment. These experiences were reflected in how they spoke about being able to demonstrate their abilities and maintain professionalism in daily tasks. Participants described that feeling happy at work was closely related to their ability to demonstrate competence and maintain professionalism in a predominantly male environment. They repeatedly emphasized that work results and consistency played a central role in how they were treated and recognized by colleagues. Recognition was described in several forms, including acknowledgement of performance, being invited to express opinions during discussions, and receiving supportive treatment from male colleagues, as expressed in the following narrative:

*"But over time, I learned that working among men wasn't a challenge for me. My competence, commitment, and the results I delivered far outweighed any gender issues or gender differences in the workplace."(S1\_b.29-32).*

*"So, besides expressing my opinion from a female perspective, I also received advice from a male perspective, and that's where I felt emotionally happy because my coworkers helped me."(S2\_b.144-148).*

*"Then they took care of me as a woman among them."(S2\_b.167-168).*

From these accounts, both participants linked feelings of happiness to being acknowledged by male colleagues. S1 referred to the importance of work results in shaping how she was treated in the workplace. S2 described feeling emotionally happy when her opinions were heard and when colleagues provided advice and support. She also mentioned being "taken care of" in ways she perceived as attentive and considerate. Overall, participants associated happiness at work with feeling confident in their abilities

and experiencing respectful and supportive interactions from colleagues. These elements were repeatedly mentioned when they described moments of satisfaction in their work.

### ***3.2 Social Connections as a Source of Comfort and Survival***

This theme presents participants' experiences related to social relationships in the workplace and their daily work dynamics. Participants described supportive relationships within their departments as part of their everyday work experience, highlighting mutual support, open communication, and regular meetings. One participant used the term "green flag" to describe relationships in her department, referring to minimal conflict and cooperative teamwork. Participants also mentioned opportunities to raise concerns during monthly departmental meetings, where work-related issues could be communicated directly to supervisors and receive responses from colleagues and supervisors. In addition, they described attention and assistance from male coworkers in both operational tasks and informal interactions. These accounts were shared alongside descriptions of demanding routines and the dynamics of working in a male-dominated industrial environment.

*"The good thing about my department is that we support each other with our Chinese employees. If I may say so, our relationship in my department is very healthy. I mean, when people say, some of our environments are green flags, some are red flags, right? My colleagues and I have a very green relationship."(S1\_b.121-127).*

*"Okay, I think they care. Especially those in my department. I guess I've been overly complimentary about my department. So, there's this thing called monthly meetings. We always hold them at the end of the month. They're department-specific, and our manager requested them. So, if there are any complaints, they can be raised during those meetings."(S1\_b.356-361).*

*"The inspiration probably comes mostly from the emotional meaning of happiness and togetherness, from the attention of fellow team members, and also from them taking care of me as a woman among them."(S2\_b.164-168).*

In describing their work routines, both participants referred to colleagues as sources of assistance and emotional reassurance, especially when facing demanding tasks or unexpected situations. For S1, a sense of security emerged from organizational validation through responsive aspiration forums, creating a representational voice experience where women's voices were heard and valued. Meanwhile, for S2, the "taking care" attitude and guidance from male colleagues were not interpreted as reinforcing gender stereotypes, but rather as an inclusion mechanism that provided emotional stability. Overall, the quality of social relationships, from safe spaces to cross-gender attention, fostered a strong sense of belonging, making participants feel like an integral part of a caring and inclusive work community.

### **3.3 Happiness from Flow Challenges and Experiences**

The participants described that their feelings of happiness were often connected to challenging tasks rather than the absence of workload. They spoke about administrative and operational demands as part of their daily responsibilities. Participants described moments when they became deeply focused on their tasks, particularly during translation projects or safety monitoring. They reported losing track of time, setting personal targets, staying on standby beyond regular hours when required, and feeling highly involved in their work activities. They also mentioned that high-risk operational environments and unexpected assignments were part of the work situations they experienced.

*"Usually when I'm assigned a translation project, as I said, I'm the one who sets the deadlines. So sometimes, for example, when we're translating, we target a folder, and we'll finish it in two weeks. We target three documents a day. So it's like we just flow, even my friends join in, without paying attention to the time. Suddenly, it's this time, it's break time, it's time to go home, because we're focused on that."(S1\_b.203-210)*

*"Maybe what I think is getting carried away in the flow of work, unscheduled work can be said to be sudden work where the safety team is expected to oversee the work*

*from start to finish, even taking time outside of work, there I think it feels more responsible as a safety team just like that because there is indeed a sudden job that expects us from the safety team to be on standby outside of the existing plan."*(S2\_b.187-195)

*"It's a challenge, yes. It seems like the challenge is more interesting. I've found the work environment and atmosphere at this company to be very different from the challenges I encountered in the mining industry at my previous job. This is because the work I'm doing now is very high-risk, as the fabrication work involves heavy machinery, electrical equipment, noise, and other factors."*(S2\_b.196-204)

*"Secondly, I want to learn more, because my department actually handles almost everything related to other departments. So, it's like I'm learning a lot from my department, I mean, I want to improve my skills before considering the next plan."* (S1\_b.444-450)

Commitment to self-development reflects the experience of mastery, the feeling of mastering something previously challenging. Across interviews, participants repeatedly linked challenging assignments and high work demands with feelings of engagement and learning. They described these experiences as meaningful and motivating.

### ***3.4 Adaptation to Organizational Dynamics and Work Environment***

Participants described several challenges related to organizational changes and work environment conditions. These included changes in supervision, shifting administrative regulations, night shift assignments, and experiences of working as the only woman in certain operational contexts. S1 described feeling uncomfortable when there were changes in supervision and administrative instructions. She explained that task directions and regulations sometimes shifted, requiring her to adjust her work procedures. Meanwhile, S2 described challenges related to night shift duties in the operational area, where she was often the only

woman present and had to work in conditions with limited lighting and high operational activity.

*"So, recently, my boss changed. My supervisor, my supervisor, changed, and sometimes he's a bit fickle in assigning tasks."(S1\_b.82-83)*

*"What makes it uncomfortable is that sometimes HR makes the rules. For example, during a socialization like this, suddenly we've already created the administration for the whole thing, as if representing the department, and then they suddenly say there's a change."(S1\_b.248-251)*

*"Perhaps right now, the most challenging part of my work environment is the night shift. Of course, it's the night shift, because I'm the only woman, and there are practically no women on the night shift, so I'm practically the only one. Well, that's the challenge, with minimal lighting at that time. So, to put it in a negative light, perhaps when I'm monitoring, there might be a lot of catcalling."(S2\_b.45-54)*

*"But the challenge is probably there, using more physical effort, because the testing is done in a furnace, so you have to climb around." (S2\_b.61-63)*

Participants also mentioned regular departmental meetings where work-related concerns could be communicated. They described raising complaints about shifting instructions and operational difficulties during these meetings. They also referred to colleagues and supervisors when explaining how work-related issues were discussed in daily interactions.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Findings Across Categories

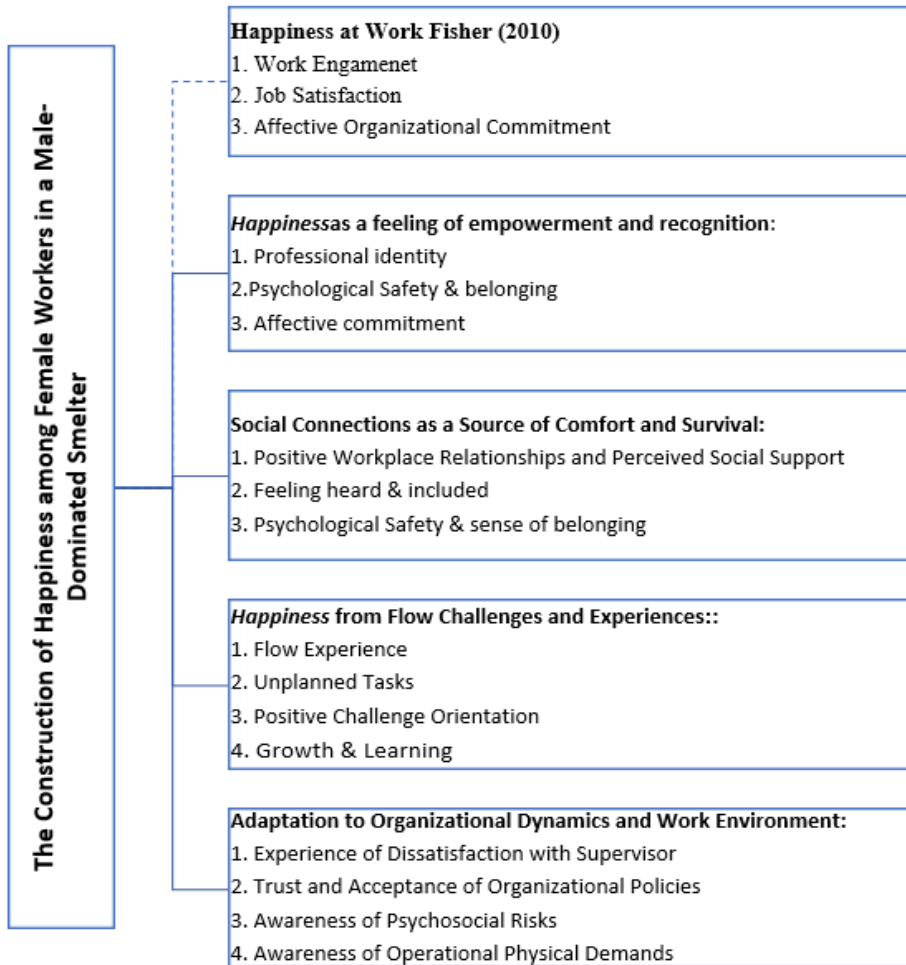
<b>Selective Coding</b>	<b>Axial Coding Collection</b>	<b>Verbatim Responses</b>	<b>Row Number &amp; Respondent</b>
<b>Theme 1:</b>	Professional Identity	<i>But over time, I learned that working among men</i>	(S1_b.29-32)

Selective Coding	Axial Coding Collection	Verbatim Responses	Row Number & Respondent
<b>Happiness as a feeling of empowerment &amp; recognition</b>		<i>wasn't a challenge for me. My competence, commitment, and the results I delivered far outweighed any gender issues or gender differences in the workplace.</i>	
	Psychological Safety & Belonging	<i>So, besides expressing my opinion from a female perspective, I also received advice from a male perspective, and that's where I felt emotionally happy because my coworkers helped me.</i>	(S2_b.144-148)
	Affective Commitment	<i>Then they took care of me as a woman among them.</i>	(S2_b.167-168)
	Positive Work Relationship & Social Support	<i>The good thing about my department is that we support each other with our Chinese employees. If I may say so, our relationship in my department is very healthy. I mean, when people say, some of our environments are green flags, some are red flags, right? My colleagues and I have a very green relationship.</i>	(S1_b.121-127)
<b>Theme 2: Social Connections as a Source of Comfort and Survival</b>	Feeling Heard & Included	<i>Okay, I think they care. Especially those in my department. I guess I've been overly complimentary about my department. So, there's this thing called monthly meetings. We always hold them at the end of the month. They're department-specific, and</i>	(S1_b.356-361)

Selective Coding	Axial Coding Collection	Verbatim Responses	Row Number & Respondent
<b>Theme 3: Happiness from Flow Challenges and Experiences</b>	Psychological Safety & Belonging	<i>our manager requested them. So, if there are any complaints, they can be raised during those meetings.</i>	(S2_b.164-168)
	Flow Experience	<i>The inspiration probably comes mostly from the emotional meaning of happiness and togetherness, from the attention of fellow team members, and also from their taking care of me as a woman among them</i> <i>Usually, when I'm assigned a translation project, as I said, I'm the one who sets the deadlines. So sometimes, for example, when we're translating, we target a folder, and we'll finish it in two weeks. We target three documents a day. So it's like we just flow, even my friends join in, without paying attention to the time. Suddenly, it's this time, it's break time, it's time to go home, because we're focused on that.</i>	(S1_b.203-210)
	Flow Experience (Unplanned Tasks)	<i>Maybe what I think is getting carried away in the flow of work, unscheduled work can be said to be sudden work where the safety team is expected to oversee the work from start to finish, even taking time outside of work, there I think it</i>	(S2_b.187-195)

Selective Coding	Axial Coding Collection	Verbatim Responses	Row Number & Respondent
<b>Theme 4: Adaptation to Organizational Dynamics &amp; Work Environment</b>	Positive Challenge Orientation	<p><i>feels more responsible as a safety team just like that because there is indeed a sudden job that expects us from the safety team to be on standby outside of the existing plan.</i></p> <p><i>It's a challenge, yes. It seems like the challenge is more interesting. I've found the work environment and atmosphere at this company to be very different from the challenges I encountered in the mining industry at my previous job. This is because the work I'm doing now is very high-risk, as the fabrication work involves heavy machinery, electrical equipment, noise, and other factors.</i></p>	(S2_b.196-204)
	Growth & Learning	<p><i>Secondly, I want to learn more, because my department actually handles almost everything related to other departments. So, it's like I'm learning a lot from my department, I mean, I want to improve my skills before considering the next plan.</i></p>	(S1_b.444-450)
	Experience of Dissatisfaction with Superiors	<p><i>So, recently, my boss changed. My supervisor, my supervisor, changed, and sometimes he's a bit fickle in assigning tasks</i></p>	(S1_b.82-83)
Trust & Acceptance of	<p><i>What makes it uncomfortable is that</i></p>	(S1_b.248-251)	

Selective Coding	Axial Coding Collection	Verbatim Responses	Row Number & Respondent
	Organizational Policies	<i>sometimes HR makes the rules. For example, during a socialization like this, suddenly we've already created the administration for the whole thing, as if representing the department, and then they suddenly say there's a change.</i>	
	Awareness of Psychosocial Risks	<i>Perhaps right now, the most challenging part of my work environment is the night shift. Of course, it's the night shift, because I'm the only woman, and there are practically no women on the night shift, so I'm practically the only one. Well, that's the challenge, with minimal lighting at that time. So, to put it in a negative light, perhaps when I'm monitoring, there might be a lot of catcalling.</i>	(S2_b.45-54)
	Awareness of Physical Operations Demands	<i>But the challenge is probably there, using more physical effort, because the testing is done in a furnace, so you have to climb around.</i>	(S2_b.61-63)



**Figure 2.** Thematic Relationship Diagram

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a direct answer to the research question by demonstrating that women in a high-risk, male-dominated nickel smelter industry construct happiness at work not as the absence of hardship, but as a dynamic and agentic process of negotiating competence, belonging, and resilience. Specifically, workplace happiness is constructed through adaptive identity negotiation, relational anchoring with colleagues and supervisors, and the development of psychological ownership

under structural and gendered constraints. Rather than emerging from reduced demands or structural comfort, happiness is actively constructed through continuous identity work, relational security, and adaptive engagement with operational and gendered pressures. This interpretation extends dominant perspectives on happiness at work by situating it within a context of structural adversity rather than organizational ease. This aligns with research by Olckers et al. [28], who highlight the link between job happiness, work engagement, and psychological ownership. However, the present findings suggest that in a high-risk, male-dominated industrial context, psychological ownership functions not only as a motivational driver but also as a mechanism for sustaining professional legitimacy and emotional stability under gendered pressures. Feelings of responsibility, autonomy, and social connectedness enable participants to assert competence and maintain happiness amidst structural and relational challenges.

Furthermore, although the findings of Al-Taie [29], suggest that gender moderates the antecedents of happiness at work, the present study demonstrates how this moderation operates within a high-risk, male-dominated industrial context. Rather than merely experiencing different predictors of happiness, participants actively reconstructed the meaning of happiness through competence assertion and relational positioning within masculine organizational structures. In this setting, gender does not simply influence what drives happiness, but intensifies the need for strategic adaptation in order to sustain it. Thus, happiness is not only moderated by gender, but it is also actively negotiated through it.

In interpreting the sources of happiness, participants emphasized the experience of feeling empowered through demonstrating competence. Happiness emerged when participants successfully shifted their identity from simply being "women" to being "professionals" whose performance was recognized. This finding aligns with Rafnsdóttir & Weigt [30], which shows that women in heavy industry derive psychological satisfaction when their efforts to navigate masculine culture result in recognition of their competence and professional legitimacy. This finding is

reinforced by Rydstrom [31], who highlights how women in heavy industry develop a sense of empowerment when they successfully challenge gendered social boundaries through superior work performance. Consistent with recent findings in the oil and gas industry, recognition of women's competencies plays a crucial role in improving psychological well-being, job satisfaction, and commitment to persist and thrive in a masculine-dominated work environment. When women's professional contributions are valued based on the quality of their work and recognized as an integral part of the team, they report increased self-confidence, work meaning, and professional legitimacy [32]. However, unlike prior studies that position recognition primarily as an outcome of inclusion, the present findings indicate that recognition functions as a psychological stabilizer in structurally unequal environments. In this study, professional legitimacy was not automatically granted but continuously earned and defended. This dynamic highlights a more effortful construction of happiness compared to organizational contexts where gender parity is more established.

Supportive social connections were identified as a key foundation for sustaining work happiness in a tough industrial environment. Work environments that participants referred to as "green flags" provided a sense of security that was a prerequisite for feelings of happiness. Referring to the findings of Mutsuddi & Poulouse [33] This inclusive social support from colleagues and superiors serves to create psychological safety, allowing participants to express themselves without fear, and allowing positive emotions to grow. Participants' happiness also depends heavily on a strong sense of belonging to their work group. Consistent with the findings of Rubin et al., [34] This sense of belonging mediated the relationship between the work environment and psychological well-being; that is, participants felt happy not solely because of the work itself, but because they felt like an integral part of a caring community.

Furthermore, participants interpreted these positive social relations as a protective mechanism that maintained the stability of their happiness from external threats. Jansen et al. [35] call this phenomenon an adaptive strategy for "surviving well," where social connections become a source of energy for maintaining positive affect amidst the pressures of underground mining. The existence

of this social support becomes even more vital for maintaining work happiness, given the context of the mining industry, which, according to Iradukunda et al. [36], is vulnerable to gender bias and career barriers. Thus, the team solidarity experienced by participants served as a shield that neutralized these potential stressors, ensuring that work happiness was maintained. What distinguishes these findings from prior organizational happiness research is the protective function of belonging in a hazardous industrial context. Social connectedness in this study was not merely associated with well-being enhancement, but acted as a buffer against gendered vulnerability and operational risk. This suggests that in high-risk industries, belonging serves both emotional and survival-related functions.

In addition to social factors, participants' happiness also stemmed from the dynamic challenges that triggered the flow experience. This study found that high workloads and sudden situations were actually converted into intrinsic satisfaction through full engagement (absorption). This pattern aligns with the concept of work-related flow as explained by Zito et al. (2015) through the WOLF Inventory, which emphasizes three main components: absorption, work enjoyment, and intrinsic work motivation. These three components are strongly reflected in participants' narratives, particularly when they describe moments of "losing time," enjoying challenges, and feeling capable of completing demanding tasks in a masculine work environment. Furthermore, Ilies et al. [38] emphasized that utilizing personal strengths at work is a crucial psychological mechanism that drives employee engagement and flourishing. These findings provide an interpretive framework for the participants' experiences in this study, where physically and coordinatively challenging tasks are interpreted as arenas for mastery and self-actualization. Thus, work happiness does not arise solely from reduced work demands, but from an individual's ability to utilize personal strengths to meaningfully navigate those demands. This extends flow theory by demonstrating that in extreme and gendered industrial contexts, absorption is not only linked to optimal experience but also to identity affirmation. Flow becomes a mechanism through which

participants momentarily transcend structural marginality and reaffirm professional competence.

This study also revealed adaptability factors in dealing with organizational dynamics and environmental vulnerability. Participants faced bureaucratic uncertainty, such as sudden regulatory changes, as well as the physical risks inherent in mining work. These findings confirm Botha and Cronjé's [39] and Iradukunda et al., [36], which highlights that female workers in core mining positions face unique OHS challenges and gender barriers, including physical and social safety risks. Despite this, participants demonstrated high resilience by developing adaptive coping mechanisms, including adherence to safety procedures and psychological detachment during off-hours. Participants' proactive approach to addressing structural barriers confirms that they are active agents in creating their own emotional stability. These findings suggest that resilience in this context is not merely a dispositional trait, but a contextually cultivated competence shaped by structural demands and minority positioning.

The peak of the meaning of happiness experienced by participants culminated in a sense of pride in the organization and a drive to contribute further (institutional pride). The findings suggest that mining organizations should go beyond comfort-based interventions, emphasizing professional legitimacy, structured recognition systems, and psychologically safe teams. Gender-sensitive leadership training, transparent task allocation, and peer support are crucial for enabling women to navigate operational challenges competently and visibly. Happiness was not only experienced internally through autonomy and job satisfaction but also developed into an emotional attachment to the organization, reflected in participants' desire to recommend the company to those closest to them. This finding indicates a value congruence between individuals and organizations. In line with [40] job happiness plays a role in strengthening affective commitment through increased job satisfaction, where employees feel valued, humanized, and proud to be part of an organization that cares about their well-being.

While these findings provide important insights into how women build happiness at work and navigate structural challenges, it is crucial to recognize the contextual and subjective nature of

these experiences. In this regard, several limitations should be noted. The findings are based on a limited number of participants at a single nickel smelter site, which may affect transferability to other industrial or cultural contexts. Additionally, the qualitative design emphasizes the subjective construction of experience and does not measure the longitudinal stability of happiness. Future research could examine male perspectives, multi-site industrial settings, or incorporate mixed-method approaches to strengthen generalizability.

Overall, this study contributes theoretically by reframing happiness at work as an agentic, resilience-based construct within structurally demanding environments. Empirically, it provides context-specific insight into how women in male-dominated heavy industries actively construct well-being through competence negotiation, relational security, and adaptive engagement. Contextually, it expands the literature by demonstrating that adversity does not preclude happiness but rather reshapes its meaning.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study shows that happiness at work among female workers in the nickel smelter industry, as reflected in the experiences of two participants within one specific industrial site, is shaped by the interaction of personal experiences, relational support, and the demands of a masculine work environment. Happiness is not understood as the absence of stress, but as a positive experience that arises when workers feel empowered, valued, and able to navigate challenges in a high-risk work context. Rather than representing a universally stable condition, these findings describe how happiness was narratively constructed and negotiated within a particular socio-organizational setting.

Happiness at work develops through self-confidence, professional recognition, and affirmation of competence amidst male dominance. Recognition may coexist with hierarchical and gendered organizational structures, indicating that empowerment in this context is relational and contingent rather than fully autonomous. Social support, a psychologically safe environment,

and a strong sense of belonging also provide a buffer against operational and gendered risks, strengthening participants' emotional stability.

Furthermore, operational challenges can lead to experiences of flow, which reinforce a sense of competence, mastery, and deep engagement in work. These experiences also serve as an adaptive coping mechanism, allowing participants to maintain well-being despite physical risks, shift work, and complex organizational dynamics. Given the small-scale qualitative design (n=2) and focus on a single site, these findings should be interpreted as context-bound. Future research with more participants, multiple industrial sites, and mixed-method approaches is needed to further explore these patterns.

Practically, the findings suggest the importance of fostering inclusive supervisory practices, transparent communication, gender-sensitive safety policies, and structured recognition systems to support women's professional legitimacy, psychological security, and emotional well-being in male-dominated, high-risk industrial settings. Theoretically, this study contributes by illustrating how happiness at work in heavy industry is relationally constructed, dynamically negotiated, and intertwined with resilience and identity affirmation, rather than being merely an individual affective state.

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