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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL BEING AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Psychological well-being is about lives going well because the combination of feeling good and functioning. Individual with high psychological well-being is happy, capable, well-supported, satisfied with professional and personal life effectively. The entrance to the undergraduate course is an important transitory period for young people. Understanding the well-being of young adults and the factors that contribute to it will help towards clarifying and defining ways to better help to prepare for their lives. Present study has been undertaken to compare the dimensions of psychological wellbeing among undergraduate male and female students of selected colleges of Cachar district, Assam. A total of 77 undergraduate students were enrolled for the study using non probability sampling technique. To assess the psychological wellbeing, Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale developed by Carol D Ryff is used. Findings of the study revealed that majority of the participants (92.2%) belong to the age group of 18-20 years. Among the participants majority i.e. 71.4% were female. The mean total score of psychological wellbeing between male and female students didn't reveal any significant difference but statistically significant differences were found between male and female students in some of the dimensions of psychological well-being, i.e. in self-acceptance ($p < 0.05$), autonomy ($p < 0.01$) and positive relationship with others ($p < 0.01$). The study concluded that there exists a gender difference in the various dimension of psychological wellbeing. There is a need to develop policies and strategies intended to increase the well-being of students to achieve greater gender equality.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Huppert, "Psychological well-being is about lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively" (Kantariya AS, 2017). It can be explained by two traditions i.e. the hedonistic tradition, where the focus is on happiness, generally defined as the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect and the eudaimonic tradition, where the focus is on living life in a full and deeply satisfying way. Psychological well-being is usually conceptualized as some combination of positive affective states such as happiness and functioning with optimal effectiveness in individual and social life (Deci E and Ryan, 2008). An individual with high psychological well-being is happy, capable, well-supported, satisfied with professional and personal life. Psychological well-being indicates physical and mental wellness.

Having a positive psychological well-being (PWB) is crucial for successfully navigating a new environment, engaging in meaningful relationships, and realizing one's fullest potential throughout one's lifespan (Allport, 1961). The entrance to the undergraduate course is an important transitory period for young people. According to Cleary et al 2011 (as cited in Torrano H et al 2020) through this transition, students face new challenges, such as making independent decisions about their lives and studies, adjusting to the academic demands of an ill-structured learning environment, and interacting with a diverse range of new people. However, it is also a period where young men and women could be prepared for adult life ahead. Understanding the well-being of young adults and the factors that contribute to it will help towards clarifying and defining ways to better help prepare for their life (Punia N and Malaviya R, 2015). In addition, many students must, often for the first time, leave their homes and distance themselves from their support networks.

A student reacts to college in a variety of ways. For some students, college is stressful because it is an abrupt change from high school and for others separation from home is a source of stress (Udhayakumar P and Illango, 2018). Gender is also an important social determinant of health (Manandhar M. et al, 2018). Mental health reveals consistent differences between females and males (Seedat S, Scott KM, Angermeyer MC et al, 2009). Gender differences in psychological well-being are important because of the many efforts being made in contemporary society to empower all individuals to achieve self-actualization and utilize their full potential (CoronusJV, 1990; Kantariya AS, 2017). Current studies on the existence of gender differences, including those related to psychological well-being reflect contradictory result and a distinct lack of consensus. Various Studies about the differences between women and men on well-being have not yielded consistent outcomes (Ferguson LJ, 2016). Results have demonstrated few gender differences in psychological well-being, although women reported having experienced positive and negative emotions with greater frequency and intensity than men (Matud MP, López-Curbelo M, Fortes D, 2019). Understanding the well-being of young adults and the factors that contribute to it will help towards clarifying and defining ways to better help prepare for their life. One of the questions that have gained interest in the study among this age group is whether there is difference in psychological wellbeing between males and females (Roothman B, Kirsten DK, Wissing M, 2003). The present study has been undertaken to compare the dimensions of psychological wellbeing among undergraduate male and female students of selected colleges of Cachar district, Assam.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

A descriptive cross sectional design was employed in the present study. A total of 77 undergraduate students were enrolled for the study using non probability sampling technique. The study was conducted in two selected colleges of Silchar city of Cachar district i.e., Cachar College and Radhamadhab College. Students undergoing degree course of Science, Arts and Commerce stream were included in the study. Students underwent major live events past 6 months and histories of major psychiatric illness were excluded for the study. Data were collected in the month of February 2020. A pre validated socio demographic datasheet is used to collect socio demographic data. It consists of age, gender, religion, education, domicile, occupation, monthly family income, type of family, number of sibling, birth order etc. To assess the psychological wellbeing, Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale developed by Carol D. Ryff is used. It consists of 42 items with six-point scale ranging from 1 to 6. The tool yields mean scores in six dimensions of psychological wellbeing namely, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. There are no specific scores or cut-points for defining high or low well-being. The ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee and written permission was taken from the Head of the institutes. Written informed consent was taken from each study subject. Self report technique was used to collect the data from each study subject. Before data collection, the students were explained about the purpose and significance of the study. They were also been informed about the privacy and confidentiality of their information.

The statistical package for social science (SPSS) 20 versions was used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were done for socio demographic data and Independent 't' test is used for inferential analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1 revealed that majority of the participants (92.2%) belong to the age group of 18-20 years. Among the participants majority i.e. 71.4% were female and most of the participants were from Arts background (71.4%) and 35.1% were studying in First semester. According to birth order, most of the participants were the first child of the families. Majority of the fathers of the participants were educated up to high school level i.e. 36.4% followed by 33.8% that studied up to higher secondary. Similarly, majority of mothers of the participants were also educated up to high school level (36.4%). And 1.3% of mothers were illiterate. Table 2 revealed that mean score of dimensions of psychological wellbeing of male participants are 29.4+2.5, 24.6+4.9, 27.1+3.7, 25.7+3.4, 25.1+4.7 and 30.0+3.6 for autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, relationship with others, purpose of life and self acceptance respectively. The mean score of dimensions of psychological wellbeing of female participants are 26.6+3.9, 26.7+4.3, 26.2+4.1, 28.6+4.5, 26.5+4.5 and 27.3+5.3 for autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationship with others, purpose of life and self acceptance respectively. Table 3 revealed a significant difference in mean score of autonomy ($p < 0.01$) and self acceptance ($p < 0.05$), where male students scored higher than the female students in the dimension positive relationship with others female students scored higher ($p < 0.01$) than male participants.

DISCUSSION

Within the framework of present study, 77 students of different discipline within a age group of 18-25 years were surveyed. Most of the participants in the study were between the age group of 18-20 years and female. Majority of them were from Arts stream. The purpose of this study was to compare the dimensions of psychological wellbeing among undergraduate male and female students. Male and female groups in this study had similar age and educational level. Though the mean total score of psychological wellbeing between male and female students didn't reveal any significant difference but statistically significant differences were found between male and female students in some of the psychological well-being dimensions, i.e. in self-acceptance, autonomy and positive relationship with others. Persons with high score in self acceptance possesses a positive attitude toward the self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life. In the present study it is revealed that male students scored higher in self acceptance than female students. The existence of lower scores for women, as compared to men, in self-acceptance has also been found in studies conducted in individualistic countries, such as the United States and in Japan as cited in the studies conducted by Matud MP et al 2019, Ahrens CJC et al 2006 and Karasawa M et al (2011). Persons with higher score in autonomy are self-determining and independent and they are able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways. Present study showed score difference in this regard between male and female students where male students scored higher than female students.

Table 1. Distribution of participants according to socio demographic characteristics (N=77)

Variables		Frequency	Percentage %
Age of students	18-20	71	92.2
	More than 20	6	7.8
Gender	Male	22	28.6
	Female	55	71.4
Stream	Arts	55	71.4
	Science	10	13
	Commerce	12	15.6
Birth order	First child	27	35.1
	Second child	13	16.9
	Third child	15	19.5
	Fourth or more	22	28.6
Residence	Own house	69	89.6
	Rent house	8	10.4
No of sibling	One	13	16.9
	Two	23	29.9
	Three	21	27.3
	Four	20	26.0
Education qualification of student	1 st semester	27	35.1
	2 nd semester	17	22.1
	3 rd semester	17	22
	4 th semester	16	20.8
Education qualification of father	Primary	4	5.1
	Middle	13	16.9
	High school	28	36.4
	Higher secondary	26	33.8
	Graduation and above	6	7.8
Education qualification of mother	Illiterate	1	1.3
	Primary	9	11.7
	Middle	10	13
	High school	38	36.4
	Higher secondary	16	20.8
	Graduation and above	3	3.9

Table 2: Mean, standard deviation and standard error of mean of dimensions of psychological wellbeing (N=77)

Psychological well being	Mean		Standard deviation		Standard error of mean	
	Male (n ₁ =22)	Female (n ₂ =55)	Male (n ₁ =22)	Female (n ₂ =55)	Male (n ₁ =22)	Female (n ₂ =55)
Autonomy	29.4	26.6	2.5	3.9	.54	.52
Environmental mastery	24.6	26.7	4.9	4.3	1.06	.59
Personal growth	27.1	26.2	3.7	4.1	.79	.56
Positive relations with others	25.7	28.6	3.4	4.5	.74	.61
Purpose of life	25.1	26.5	4.7	4.5	1.02	.60
Self-acceptance	30.0	27.3	3.6	5.3	.77	.71

Table 3. Comparison of mean of dimensions of psychological wellbeing (N=77)

Psychological wellbeing	Gender	Mean	t value	df	P value	Significance (2 tail)
Autonomy	Male	29.4	3.05	75	.003**	
	Female	26.6				
Environmental mastery	Male	24.6	-1.807	75	.075	
	Female	26.7				
Personal growth	Male	27.1	.841	75	.403	
	Female	26.2				
Positive relations with others	Male	25.7	-2.697	75	.009**	
	Female	28.6				
Purpose of life	Male	25.1	-1.207	75	.231	
	Female	26.5				
Self-acceptance	Male	30.0	2.211	75	.030*	
	Female	27.3				
Total Psychological wellbeing Score	Male	162.23	-.007	75	.994	
	Female	162.25				

Significant at 0.05 level of significance

** Significant at 0.01 level of significance

In a country like India, where gender bias is still prevalent in many parts of the country and females are not given same amount of rights and opportunities, therefore it is not surprising to see a score difference among male and female regarding autonomy. Similar result has been observed in the study conducted by Matud MP et al (2019). Persons with high score in positive relationship with others can make warm satisfying, trusting relationships with others; is concerned about the welfare of others. They also have strong empathy and affectionate in nature as they understand better the give and take of human relationships. The present study revealed that female students have better score than male students in the dimension positive relationship with others and congruent with the study findings of the study conducted by Matud et al (2019). On the other hand this finding is contradictory to the result of the study conducted by Kantariya AS (2016). The present study didn't reveal any significant difference in dimension personal growth which is contradictory to the study findings of the study conducted by Matud et al 2019. Few studies conducted in different parts of the world also revealed contradictory result. No gender differences were found in term of all the dimensions in psychological well-being in the study conducted by Salleh NAB and Mustaffa CB (2016). The study conducted by Hasan M (2019) also reported no significant difference on psychological wellbeing with respect to gender. Similar findings also revealed by study done by Kantariya AS (2016) among post graduate students. The study has few limitations. The samples were drawn using non probability sampling technique; a large size of sample using probability sampling can help in generalization of result. There are many other factors such as culture, roles played also may play important role in psychological well being (Ahrens CJC et al 2006, Karasawa M et al 2011). There is a need for further evaluation in this regard.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that there exists a gender difference in the various dimension of psychological wellbeing. Male students scored better in self acceptance and autonomy than the female students whereas female students scored significantly better in positive relationship with others. This indicates that a gender difference is affecting the wellbeing of the students. Therefore there is need that families should accept their children wholeheartedly whether male or female and raise them without any bias so that they can enjoy the good wellbeing state. Females should be given the same amount of rights and opportunities that males are enjoying and vice versa. Psychiatric nurses can help educating the families in this regard. The results of this study have many practical implications and may be useful in developing the policies and strategies intended to increase the well-being of students to achieve greater gender equality.

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