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Gender and Locale based Variations in Psychological Well-being among Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted over a period of twelve months during (April, 2023 to November, 2024) with data exclusively collected from undergraduate students in the Ludhiana district, Punjab, India to assess psychological well-being and to investigate gender-based and locale-based differences in psychological well-being within this population. The sample consisted of 380 students, equally divided between rural (n=190) and urban (n=190) backgrounds from Ludhiana district and further balanced by gender (95 males and 95 females). Participants were selected through the draw-a-lot method from five representative colleges in both rural and urban areas of the Ludhiana district. Data collection was conducted using a Self-Structured Information Sheet and the Psychological Well-Being Scale by Sisodia and Choudhary (2012). Analysis revealed that male students reported higher psychological well-being compared to their female counterparts. Significant gender differences were observed in the domains of efficiency and mental health, with a higher percentage of boys achieving elevated levels of well-being in these areas. These findings were consistent with the mean score analysis, which highlighted significant gender disparities in these specific domains, while other domains showed no notable differences between genders. Overall, the results emphasized that boys generally experience higher psychological well-being than girls. Further analysis of locale-based differences revealed no significant difference between rural and urban girls, and between rural and urban boys. This highlighted the importance of addressing the underlying socio-cultural, environmental, and psychological factors contributing to these disparities.

KEYWORDS: Locale, gender, mental health, efficiency, disparities, interpersonal relations

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1. INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being is an important part of a young adult's development. People with good mental health are better able to deal with stress, adjust to change, and boldly pursue their personal and professional goals. Access to mental health resources, caring social relationships, and supportive family contexts can all help to improve overall well-being. Young adults frequently experience negative thought patterns during this pivotal phase of life. The combined pressures of academic responsibilities and uncertainty about future employment often lead to psychological discomfort, as they encounter challenges in both educational and relational domains (Asha and Zinna, 2021). Psychological well-being can be understood as a subjective experience marked by happiness, life satisfaction, contentment with personal circumstances, fulfillment in work, a sense of achievement and belonging, along with the absence of distress, as defined by Sisodia and Choudhary (2012). In a similar vein, the concept of subjective well-being has been described as a state of contentment, predominance of positive emotions, and minimal negative emotion, as emphasized by Diener (2000). The concept of "positive psychology," first proposed by Seligman (2002), who viewed psychological well-being as the result of happiness and fulfilment coming together. This definition recognizes that happiness is more than just the absence of bad experiences or sensations; rather, happiness is defined by pleasant feelings, enjoyment, and a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Helen et al. (2012) also, investigated the possibilities for positive psychological elements to exhibit a link with health comparable to that of negative factors, noting that the degree of independence between different psychological states may fluctuate based on the external and internal environmental obstacles individual's encounter.

Psychological well-being is feeling good and functioning effectively. It is one's level of happiness, life satisfaction and feeling of accomplishment (Huppert, 2009). Overall happiness, life satisfaction, and mental and emotional well-being are all components of psychological well-being, which is a complex and multidimensional concept. Positive emotions, autonomy, healthy relationships, low levels of negative emotions, a sense of purpose in life, contentment with one's lot in life, and personal development are some of its essential elements (Dhanabhakyam and Sarath, 2022).

Well-being is commonly understood to consist of two primary components: hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Eudaimonic well-being, often referred to as psychological well-being, is rooted in the belief that individuals experience happiness through a sense of purpose, personal growth, and the ability to overcome challenges. In contrast, subjective or hedonic well-being pertains to feelings of happiness and life satisfaction derived from pleasurable experiences -as outlined by Huta and Waterman (2014). Research examining, gender differences in psychological well-being has yielded mixed findings. Men have been found to score higher in self-acceptance and autonomy, while women tend to score higher in personal growth and positive relationships (Matud et al., 2019). Gender-based variations in psychological well-being scores among students were also noted, indicating difference in the psychological well-being between males and females (Akhter, 2015). In contrast, no significant interaction between gender and place of residence in relation to psychological well-being was observed by Rashid et al. (2020). Socioeconomic status also appears to influence well-being, with considerable differences identified between high- and moderate-income groups, though no significant differences emerged between rural and urban young adults; however, a notable gender disparity was still evident (Sharma and Sahu, 2014). In relation to psychological well-being with youth, Diener (1994) believed that happy marriage, job satisfaction and a meaningful relationship contribute to good psychological well-being among youth. Moya et al. (2015) suggested that if the environment of young people is filled with positive experiences, then it promotes psychological well-being that helps them to set purpose and gives direction to their life. A positive well-being plays an important role in developing the change in individuals and forming their lifestyle. When an individual openly speak about his/her thoughts and views, the satisfaction gained with it helps to create a good mental health i.e. a good psychological well-being is established. Thus, proper investigation understood to be important on the psychological well-being for young adults, the present study was conducted to assess psychological well-being and to investigate the gender and locale based variation among undergraduate students.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted over a period of twelve months during (April, 2023–November, 2024) academic year, with data exclusively collected from undergraduate students in the Ludhiana district. The current study was an exploratory attempt to determine the psychological well-being among undergraduate students. The present study's sample was selected from Ludhiana district's rural and urban colleges. Out of the 13 blocks of Ludhiana district, five blocks were randomly selected by the draw-a-lot method. From these selected five blocks, list of colleges was prepared and then, five colleges were chosen through convenience sampling. Then from these five colleges, a sample of 190 students were selected by simple random sampling. (Sanmati Government College of Science Education and Research, Jagraon; A S College, Khanna; Govind National College, Narangwal; Government College Karamsar, Rara Sahib;

GHG Khalsa College of Education, Sudhar). Similarly, out of the 4 zones of Ludhiana district, one zone was randomly selected by the draw-a-lot method. From these selected one zone, list of colleges was prepared and then, five colleges were chosen through convenience sampling. Then from these five colleges, a sample of 190 students were selected by simple random sampling. (Government College for Girls, Ludhiana; College of Basic Science, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana; Khalsa College for Women, Ludhiana; S.C.D Government College, Ludhiana; GGN Khalsa College, Ludhiana). The sample was equally distributed across both the genders (Girls=95 and Boys=95, in each category). Thus, the total sample for the present study comprised of 380 undergraduate students. Principals of colleges were personally contacted to seek permission to interact with students.

A self-structured information sheet was used to collect the socio-personal characteristics of the selected students. The psychological well-being of students was measured by Psychological Well-Being Scale developed by Sisodia and Choudhary (2012). The tools were pre-tested on 20 non-sampled respondents. The statistical methods used to analyze the data were- frequency and percentages, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, Z-test and t-test.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Assessment of psychological well-being

Table 1 depicts the per cent distribution of undergraduate students across different domains of psychological well-being.

The findings revealed that more than half of students under all domains of psychological well-being fall in moderate category and none of students fell at low level of psychological well-being. It was observed that 85% of students reported a moderate level of life satisfaction, while 15% indicated a high level. Similarly, 73.42% of students demonstrated a moderate level of efficiency, and 26.58% exhibited a high level. Additionally, the majority of students (91.58%) were categorized at a moderate level of sociability, with only 8.42% at a high level. Regarding mental health, 88.95% were at a moderate level, while 11.05% achieved a high level of well-being. In terms of interpersonal relationships, 74.74% were at a moderate level, whereas 25.26% were at a high level. While counting overall psychological well-being it was seen that maximum number of students were at moderate psychological well-being (92.89%). While only 7.11% of students had a high level of psychological well-being.

Table 1: depicts the per cent distribution of undergraduate students across different domains of psychological well-being

Domains of psychological well-being	Overall (n=380)	
	Frequency f	Percentage (%)
Life satisfaction		
High	57	15.00
Moderate	323	85.00
Low	0	0.00
Efficiency		
High	101	26.58
Moderate	279	73.42
Low	0	0.00
Sociability		
High	32	8.42
Moderate	348	91.58
Low	0	0.00
Mental health		
High	42	11.05
Moderate	338	88.95
Low	0	0.00
Interpersonal relations		
High	96	25.26
Moderate	284	74.74
Low	0	0.00
Overall psychological well-being		
High	27	7.11
Moderate	353	92.89
Low	0	0.00

3.2. Investigation of gender-based variation

3.2.1. Overall gender wise per cent distribution

The findings presented in Table 2 illustrated the overall gender-wise percentage distribution across various domains of psychological well-being for girls and boys. The findings showed that there were no significant differences in the life satisfaction domain with 87.37% of girls and 82.63% of boys reporting moderate levels, while 17.37% of boys and 12.63% of girls reported high levels. In the efficiency domain, however, a significant difference ($Z=2.20$, $p<0.05$) was observed, with a higher percentage of girls (78.42%) at the moderate level compared to boys (68.42%). Similarly, at the high level of efficiency, there was a significant difference ($Z=2.20$, $p<0.05$) between boys (31.58%) and girls (21.58%).

Regarding sociability at the moderate level, there was a non-significant difference, with 92.11% of girls and 91.05% of boys. At the high level of sociability, 8.95% of boys and 7.89% of girls were reported. In the mental health domain,

Table 2: Overall gender wise per cent distribution of undergraduate students across different domains of psychological well-being, n=380

Domains of psychological well-being	Girls (n_g=190)		Boys (n_b=190)		Z-value
	Frequency f	Percentage (%)	Frequency f	Percentage (%)	
Life satisfaction					
High	24	12.63	33	17.37	1.29
Moderate	166	87.37	157	82.63	1.29
Low	0	0	0	0	NA
Efficiency					
High	41	21.58	60	31.58	2.20*
Moderate	149	78.42	130	68.42	2.20*
Low	0	0	0	0	NA
Sociability					
High	15	7.89	17	8.95	0.37
Moderate	175	92.11	173	91.05	0.37
Low	0	0	0	0	NA
Mental health					
High	10	5.26	32	16.84	3.60**
Moderate	180	94.74	158	83.16	3.60**
Low	0	0	0	0	NA
Interpersonal relations					
High	56	29.47	40	21.05	1.88
Moderate	134	70.53	150	78.95	1.88
Low	0	0	0	0	NA
Overall psychological well-being					
High	12	6.32	15	7.89	0.59
Moderate	178	93.68	175	92.11	0.59
Low	0	0	0	0	NA

**p=0.01; *p=0.05

the percentage of girls (94.74%) at the moderate level was significantly higher (Z=3.60, p<0.01) than that of boys (83.16%). Conversely, at the high level, the percentage of boys (16.84%) were significantly greater (Z=3.60, p<0.01) than that of girls (5.26%). For interpersonal relations, however, no significant differences were found, as 78.95% of boys and 70.53% of girls reported moderate levels, while 29.47% of girls and 21.05% of boys reported high levels.

Overall, there was no significant difference in psychological well-being between girls (93.68%) and boys (92.11%) at the moderate level, nor at the high level, where the proportions were 7.89% for boys and 6.32% for girls. This suggested that there were no significant differences in the psychological well-being of girls and boys.

The study revealed that males exhibited significantly higher psychological well-being than girls in the areas of mental health and efficiency across various domains of psychological well-being. Additionally, boys outperformed girls in the mean scores for efficiency, mental health, and general psychological well-being, suggesting that boys are superior in these areas. Social norms that encourage boys' independence, self-reliance, and emotional stability may be the cause of this, as these traits positively impact boys' psychological health. Additionally, they could experience less pressure than females to fulfil relationship roles, expectations, and responsibilities-all of which often negatively affect girls. In the similar pattern, Silfiassari (2020) also discovered no significant difference in life satisfaction across genders. Women's psychological well-being is lower than men's, according to Baya et al. (2018). Additionally, women's health issues outnumbered men's, which decreased their level of well-being. Hori (2010) discovered that the degree of family responsibilities and care responsibilities have a greater negative impact on women's psychological well-being than on men's.

3.2.2. Overall gender differences in mean scores

Table 3 illustrates the overall gender differences in mean scores (±S.D) across various domains of psychological well-being. There was no significant difference in the mean score for life satisfaction, with boys (36.07+6.04) showing similar results as girls (35.76+5.58).

In the efficiency domain, however, boys had significantly (t=3.33, p<0.01) higher mean scores (39.82+5.34) compared to girls (38.03+5.08). Non-significant differences were

Table 3: Overall gender differences in mean scores (±S.D) of the undergraduate students across different domains of psychological well-being, n=380

Domains of psychological well-being	Girls (n_g=190) Mean±S.D	Boys (n_b=190) Mean±S.D	t-value
Life satisfaction	35.76(+5.58)	36.07(+6.04)	0.52
Efficiency	38.03(+5.08)	39.82(+5.34)	3.33**
Sociability	33.88(+6.02)	34.72(+6.28)	1.33
Mental health	32.86(+6.06)	36.29(+6.31)	5.39**
Interpersonal relations	39.33(+5.80)	38.42(+5.65)	1.54
Overall psychological well-being	179.88(+21.10)	185.34(+22.19)	2.45*

**p=0.01; *p=0.05

observed in the mean scores for sociability. In the mental health domain, a significant difference was noted (t=5.39, p<0.01), with boys scoring higher (36.29+6.31) than girls (32.86+6.06).

For interpersonal relations, there were no significant differences between the mean scores of girls (39.33+5.80) and boys (38.42+5.65). Overall, the analysis of psychological well-being revealed a significant difference (t=2.45, p<0.05), with boys achieving a higher mean score (185.34+22.19) compared to girls (179.88+21.10), indicating that boys had a greater level of psychological well-being than girls

Despite the lack of significant disparities between rural boys and girls, girls outnumbered boys in practically every category. Nonetheless, rural boys' mean scores in the areas of mental health and general psychological well-being were substantially higher than those of girls, indicating that rural boys enjoy superior psychological well-being. Additionally, the frequency distribution in an urban setting revealed that girls were substantially more prevalent than boys in the areas of interpersonal relationships and mental health. Furthermore, the mean score analysis revealed that while there were no differences in overall psychological well-being, urban boys outnumbered girls in the efficiency and mental health domains. A comparable outcome was demonstrated by Matud et al. (2019) discovered that masculinity had a greater association with psychological well-being than femininity. They also noted that characteristics that suggest independence, assertiveness, strength, individualism, or ambition are linked to higher levels of well-being for both men and women. This indicates that having these characteristics, which denote independence and initiative, is beneficial to one's mental health.

3.3. Investigation of locale-based variation

3.3.1. Overall locale wise per cent distribution

The data presented in Table 4 details the overall percentage distribution of psychological well-being among rural and urban students. It was found that most students from both locales reported a moderate level of life satisfaction, with 89.47% of rural students significantly (Z=2.44, p<0.05) exceeding 80.53% of urban students. A significant difference (Z=2.44, p<0.05) was also noted at the high level of life satisfaction, where 19.47% of urban students compared to 10.53% of rural students reported high life satisfaction. In the efficiency domain, however, no significant differences were observed, with 75.26% of urban students and 71.58% of rural students at a moderate level, and 28.42% of rural students compared to 24.74% of urban students at a high level of efficiency. Similar non-significant results were found in the sociability domain.

Regarding mental health, 90% of rural students reported moderate mental health, against 87.89% of urban students. With 12.11% of urban students and 10.00% of rural students at a high level of mental health, showed no significant difference. For interpersonal relations, 77.89% of urban students and 71.58% of rural students were at a moderate level. With 28.42% of rural students and 22.11% of urban students at a high level, it also indicated no significant difference.

Overall, the moderate psychological well-being level showed that 94.74% of rural students were non-significantly higher than 91.05% of urban students. At the high level, 8.95% of

Table 4: Overall locale wise per cent distribution of undergraduate students across different domains of psychological well-being, n=380

Domains of psychological well-being	Rural students (n_1=190)		Urban students (n_2=190)		Z-value
	Frequency f	Percentage (%)	Frequency f	Percentage (%)	
Life satisfaction					
High	20	10.53	37	19.47	2.44*
Moderate	170	89.47	153	80.53	2.44*
Low	0	0	0	0	NA
Efficiency					
High	54	28.42	47	24.74	0.81
Moderate	136	71.58	143	75.26	0.81
Low	0	0	0	0	NA
Sociability					
High	16	8.42	16	8.42	0
Moderate	174	91.58	174	91.58	0
Low	0	0	0	0	NA
Mental health					
High	19	10.00	23	12.11	0.65
Moderate	171	90.00	167	87.89	0.65
Low	0	0	0	0	NA
Interpersonal relations					
High	54	28.42	42	22.11	1.41
Moderate	136	71.58	148	77.89	1.41
Low	0	0	0	0	NA
Overall psychological well-being					
High	10	5.27	17	8.95	1.39
Moderate	180	94.74	173	91.05	1.40
Low	0	0	0	0	NA

*p=0.05

urban students were found to be non-significantly higher than 5.27% of rural students. Therefore, the results indicated that there was no significant difference in psychological well-being between the two locations.

Analysis of student's psychological well-being illustrated that no significant differences were found between the psychological well-being of rural and urban students but only in the domain of life satisfaction, rural students were significantly higher than urban students. Other researchers also supported the present findings as Additionally, Rathwa (2014) found no appreciable difference between students attending rural and urban institutions in terms of their psychological well-being. Moreover, Chauhan and Dubey (2022) in their research revealed that there were no appreciable variations in late teenage life happiness, productivity, mental health, and interpersonal relationships between urban and rural areas. Nonetheless, Wang and Wang (2016), also added that social networks and sociodemographic traits might be more significant for psychological well-being and satisfaction in life than actual rural or urban locations.

3.3.2. Overall locale differences in mean scores

Data presented in Table 5 puts forth overall locale differences in mean scores (±S.D) of undergraduate students across different domains of psychological well-being. The data presents non-significant differences in the domains of psychological well-being.

Under the domain of life satisfaction, the mean score of urban students (36.06+6.03) was non-significantly higher than rural students (35.77+5.59). The mean score of rural students under efficiency was (39.34+5.10) higher than urban students 38.51(+5.44). Almost, similar mean scores were obtained for the student across locale under the domain of sociability and for mental health. Likewise, the mean score of rural students (39.36+5.54) was found to be non-significantly higher than mean score of urban students (38.39+5.90) under interpersonal relation domain. Furthermore, in overall psychological well-being the mean score of rural students (183.95+21.00) was found to be non-significantly higher than urban students (181.28+22.54). Thus, the data presented that there was non-significant difference in the mean score of rural and urban students.

In similar pattern, Srinath et al. (2005) in their study, also revealed that there was no significant difference in the psychological wellbeing of youths living in rural and urban regions, which confirms the similar research findings. Moreover, Atherton et al. (2022) claimed that personality traits and overall well-being in old age, medium or young age are unaffected by rurality and urbanity.

Table 5: Overall locale differences in mean scores (±S.D) of undergraduate students across different domains of psychological well-being, n=380

Domains of psychological well-being	Rural students (n_1=190)	Urban students (n_2=190)	t-value
	Mean (±S.D)	Mean (±S.D)	
Life satisfaction	35.77(+5.59)	36.06(+6.03)	0.49
Efficiency	39.34(+5.10)	38.51(+5.44)	1.52
Sociability	34.47(+6.03)	34.13(+6.29)	0.53
Mental health	34.99(+6.23)	34.16(+6.58)	1.25
Interpersonal relations	39.36(+5.54)	38.39(+5.90)	1.65
Overall psychological well-being	183.95(+21.00)	181.28(+22.54)	1.19

4. CONCLUSION

Most undergraduate students reported moderate psychological well-being. Boys scored higher in efficiency and mental health, likely due to societal norms promoting independence and resilience. In contrast, girls experienced greater relational pressures affecting their well-being. Rural students reported better psychological health than their urban counterparts, possibly due to stronger community ties, a slower-paced lifestyle, reduced academic and social pressures, and greater familial support commonly observed in rural environments.

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