



Invisible Struggles within Young Minds: Examining the Influence of Loneliness, Stress, Anxiety, and Depression on the Psychological Well-being of University Students

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Abstract

Healthy youth development depends on good mental health, which also paves the way for better mental health and well-being in later years. The current study aimed to investigate the relationship between stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness in young adults and their impact on psychological well-being. A sample of 200 young adults between the ages of 17 and 25 was recruited from a university setting. Participants completed self-reported measures of stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and psychological well-being, including DASS-21 by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995), UCLA loneliness by Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson (1978), and the Psychological Well-Being Scale by Ryff (2007). Results indicated that higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness were significantly associated with lower levels of psychological well-being. These findings highlight the importance of addressing mental health concerns in young adults, as they can have a significant impact on overall well-being. The results of this study have implications for the interventions and support programs for young adults to promote positive mental health and well-being.

Keywords: mental health, well-being, loneliness, stress, anxiety, depression, young adult

Introduction

Mental health is as important as physical health if not more. Good mental health is an essential aspect of healthy youth development. Mental health involves emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It regulates our thinking, feelings & behavior. It has a direct impact on the decisions and choices we make. In The State of the World's Children 2021 report, in UNICEF, it was reported that every seven youngsters between 15-24 years have some sort of poor mental health. Hence, to be able to make healthy and good choices and to be able to lead a healthy lifestyle it is important to give our mental health much-needed attention. This study aims to measure young adults' mental health and well-being in a university setting. The findings of this study will provide insights into the prevalence of mental health and well-being issues among university students and aid in the development of strategies to promote the mental health and well-being of university students.

Psychological well-being refers to a person's overall contentment and fulfillment in life, which encompasses different aspects of their psychological, emotional, and social functioning. Psychologist Carol Ryff developed a popular multidimensional paradigm to assess psychological well-being, consisting of six components. These components are self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, and environmental mastery. "Self-acceptance refers to a person's acceptance of themselves, including both positive and negative experiences. "Positive relationships with others refer to a person's connections with others, such as love, trust, and social support." "Autonomy refers to a person's sense of independence and self-determination. The component of personal growth is about how a person feels about their progress & self-improvement. The purpose of life is about a person's perception of living a meaningful life. And the component of environmental mastery refers to a person's ability to cope with & adapt to their surroundings.

The literature has extensively documented the negative effects of loneliness, stress, anxiety & depression on psychological well-being of an individual.

Loneliness is a multifaceted state that arises when individuals perceive a lack of social connections or meaningful relationships. Loneliness can have a detrimental impact on the well-being of young people by creating a sense of emptiness and a lack of social relationships. Loneliness is a multifaceted state that arises when individuals perceive a lack of social connections or meaningful relationships. Numerous studies have

found that increased loneliness is associated with elevated levels of anxiety, stress, depression, and poor mental health over time (Lindsay et al., 2019). Richardson, Elliott, and Roberts (2017) conducted a study that found loneliness to be significantly linked to an increased risk of depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress. The authors suggest that this relationship may be due to the social and emotional support that individuals receive from their social network. Arslan (2021) revealed that social inclusion was related to lower levels of loneliness and better mental health outcomes, while social exclusion was associated with higher levels of loneliness and poorer mental health outcomes. Moreover, loneliness partially mediated the relationship between social inclusion, mental health problems, and subjective well-being, and fully mediated the relationship between social exclusion and subjective well-being. Bhagchandani (2017) found similar results, highlighting that loneliness negatively affects the psychological well-being of students. These findings underscore the importance of social support and the negative consequences of loneliness on mental health.

Stress is a reaction to perceived threats or challenges that can affect physical, emotional, and cognitive states. Anxiety is characterized by feelings of unease, fear, and excessive worry, while depression is associated with chronic sadness, hopelessness, and helplessness. These issues can significantly impact a person's psychological health, affecting their mood, thoughts, and behavior (Yüksel & Bahadır Yilmaz, 2019). In their study, Liu, Ping, and Gao (2019) observed that a high level of stress or anxiety is associated with a decline in psychological well-being over time among undergraduate students. The authors' research findings suggest that a significant relationship exists between stress and anxiety levels and the reduction of psychological well-being. A similar result was also found by Verma and Mishra (2020), Malne, and Wachholtz (2018).

Rationale

Today, awareness regarding mental health is growing amongst people. As discussed above, the mental health of students has become a growing concern. And despite the growing evidence on the negative effects of deteriorating mental health, there is still a gap in our understanding of the specific ways in which loneliness, stress, anxiety & depression have an impact on psychological well-being. Therefore, an empirical study on the relationship between loneliness, mental health (stress, anxiety, depression), and psychological well-being among young adults would be a valuable contribution to the field of mental health research.

Aim

To study loneliness, stress, anxiety, depression, and psychological well-being among young adults in university settings.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between loneliness and psychological well-being among young adults.
2. To examine the relationship between stress, anxiety, depression, and psychological well-being among young adults.
3. To examine the relationship between loneliness and stress, anxiety, and depression among young adults.
4. To examine the effect of loneliness, stress, anxiety, and depression on the psychological well-being of young adults.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant negative correlation between loneliness and psychological well-being.
2. There will be a significant negative correlation between stress, anxiety, depression and psychological well-being.
3. There will be a significant positive correlation between loneliness and stress, anxiety, and depression.
4. There will be a significant effect of loneliness, stress, anxiety, and depression on psychological well-being of young adults.

Participant

The study employed a convenient sampling method to recruit participants between the ages of 17-25. Participants were recruited from university settings through personal contact and social media platforms, given their accessibility and ease of recruitment. Prior to participation, potential participants received a brief overview of the study and provided written informed consent, acknowledging the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of their responses.

Research design

This quantitative research used self-report measures to study the loneliness, mental health, and psychological well-being of young adults. This is a correlation study in which the relationship between variables was examined.

Materials and tools

Research instruments included the informed consent form, a demographic form, and a self-report questionnaire for the variables. The demographic information included the participants' names, ages, genders, and levels of education.

The UCLA Loneliness Scale is a self-reported measure used to assess subjective feelings of loneliness developed by Russell, Peplau, and Ferguson (1978). The responses to the items on the scale are rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating greater feelings of loneliness.

The DASS-21 (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale) is a self-report questionnaire that measures three related emotional states: depression, anxiety, and stress. The DASS-21 was developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995). The DASS-21 consists of 21 items that measure symptoms relevant to stress, anxiety, and depression on a four-point Likert scale. Each item is designed to assess a specific symptom of depression, anxiety, or stress.

The Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB-42) is a self-report questionnaire that assesses six dimensions of well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The PWB 42 consists of 42 items, each with a five-point Likert scale.

Procedure

A Google Form was created that consisted of different sections of demographics and questionnaires, including the PWB, DASS-21, and UCLA loneliness scale. Participants from university settings were personally contacted. They were asked to fill out the form after giving their informed consent.

Data analysis

The descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses of statistics were employed to examine the variables (loneliness, stress, anxiety, depression, and psychological well-being)

Results

Descriptive results

The descriptive result analysis shown in the table.1 indicates a mild to moderate level of stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness among young adults. Psychological well-being (PWB) is relatively high among the participants.

Table.1. Descriptive results of loneliness, psychological well-being, stress, anxiety, and depression among young adults

Variables	Mean	SD
Loneliness	25.14	14.38
Stress	5.88	3.73
Anxiety	7.34	4.59
Depression	5.64	4.23
PWB	175.14	23.76
N=201		

Correlation analysis

Table 2 shows the correlation matrix for the study variables, which shows a significant relationship between the study variables. Psychological well-being is significantly and negatively correlated with loneliness ($r = -.450, p 0.01$), stress ($r = -.455, p 0.01$), anxiety ($r = -.375, p 0.01$), and depression ($r = -.520, p 0.01$). Loneliness has a significant positive correlation with stress ($r=.526, p<0.01$), anxiety ($r=.451, p<0.01$), and depression ($r=.462, p<0.01$).

Table.2. Correlation between PWB, loneliness, stress, anxiety, and depression among young adults

Variable	Loneliness	Stress	Anxiety	Depression
Loneliness		.52**	.45**	.46**
PWB	-.45**	-.45**	-.37**	-.52**
Autonomy	-.31**	-.30**	-.26**	-.36**
Environment mastery	-.29**	-.16*	-.11	-.27**
Personal growth	-.28**	-.43**	-.30**	-.40**
Positive relation with others	-.53**	-.35**	-.38**	-.39**
Purpose in life	-.10	-.30**	-.16*	-.29**
self-acceptance	-.43**	-.40**	-.36**	-.52**

Regression analysis

The regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictors of psychological well-being. The results showed that loneliness ($\beta=-0.443$, $p<0.01$) and depression ($\beta=-0.430$, $p<0.01$) were significant negative predictors of psychological well-being, while stress and anxiety did not significantly predict psychological well-being. The R-squared value of 0.332 suggests that the model accounts for 33.2% of the variance in psychological well-being. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.319 indicates that the model is a good fit for the data. The constant ($\beta=198.008$, $p<0.01$) was also a significant predictor of psychological well-being.

Table.3. Regression results for loneliness, psychological well-being, stress, anxiety, and depression

Predictor	β	SE	t	Sign.
Constant	198.00	3.08	64.23**	.00
Loneliness	-.44	.11	-.88**	.00
Stress	-.45	.66	-.68	.59
Anxiety	-.63	.500	-.27	.20
Depression	-.43	.565	-.303**	.00
R-square	.33			
ADj. R-square	.31			
F-value	24.38**			.00

*P<.05

**P<.01

Discussion

Adequate functioning in the various components of psychological well-being has a significant impact on youth mental health. Nevertheless, there are several factors that could limit the attainment of psychological well-being, which may consequently increase the likelihood of mental health issues in youth. Studies show that university students are prone to mental health issues like stress, anxiety and depression which have a significant impact on student's life satisfaction. (Asif, S et al., 2020; Pei Boon et al., 2022; Hossain et al., 2022). The results of this study provide important insights into the factors that may influence psychological well-being (PWB) among young adults. The mean score showed mild to moderate loneliness among participants and lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression and relatively moderate to high levels of psychological well-being. The correlation analysis showed that there were significant relationships between PWB and the independent variables (IVs) of loneliness, stress, anxiety, and depression. The regression analysis further supported these findings by

demonstrating that loneliness and depression were significant negative predictors of PWB. The present study aligns with the previous studies reporting that loneliness is negatively correlated with psychological well being of students. (Sharifi, A. F., 2022; Goodfellow, C et al.,2022; Joseph, Vincy et al., 2022). It has long been known that loneliness is a negative predictor of psychological well-being. Previous studies have repeatedly shown how loneliness has a negative impact on someone's mental health. (Lyyra, N et al., 2021;Ntozini, & Abdullahi, 2021; Ishaku et al., 2018; Ishaq, Malik, & Asif, 2018; Rahman et al., 2017).

Loneliness and mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression are prevalent and associated among students. Results also showed that loneliness is significantly and positively associated with stress, anxiety, and depression. The present study aligns with prior research, further highlighting the significant correlation between these psychological factors which is supported by a previous study (Mann, F. et al.,2022; Igbokwe et al., 2020; Ishaku et al., 2018; Oehler, A., 2017). The finding that stress and anxiety were not significant predictors of PWB in this study may be due to a number of factors, including the specific population studied and the measures used to assess stress and anxiety. Identifying loneliness and depression as significant predictors of PWB has important implications for interventions aimed at promoting mental health and well-being. Specifically, interventions that target loneliness and depression may be particularly effective in improving PWB. For example, interventions that provide social support or promote positive social connections may effectively reduce loneliness and improve PWB. Similarly, interventions that address negative thought patterns and promote positive coping strategies may be effective in reducing depression and improving PWB.

Conclusion

The current study revealed that loneliness and depression are significant predictors of psychological well-being and they are negatively associated with it. Addressing youth loneliness is crucial for their overall well-being and can be accomplished through interventions like counseling, mentoring, and other types of social support.

A major limitation was the lack of gender comparison and the small sample size. To generalize the results of the present study, it is important to take into account both the limitations of the research and the cultural background of the university students being studied. In order to further explore psychological well-being, loneliness, and

mental health issues, future studies could focus on comparing gender differences and examining how cultural factors may influence these experiences.

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