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Affect, Pessimism And Apathy Among College Going Students

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ASTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the relationship and predictive association between affect, pessimism, and apathy among college-going students. Utilizing a purposive sampling method, 100 participants (aged 18–30 years) from Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India was assessed. Affect, pessimism, and apathy are critical psychological constructs influencing young adults' emotional and motivational functioning. Previous research indicates that high pessimism is associated with greater emotional disengagement (Carver & Scheier, 2014), while positive affect has been linked to enhanced resilience and lower apathy levels (Fredrickson, 2001). The study was analyzed the relationship and predictive influence of affect (positive and negative), pessimism, and apathy among college students. Correlation analysis showed that pessimism was positively correlated with apathy ($r = .70$, $p < .01$) and negatively with positive affect ($r = -.15$, $p < .01$). Apathy was negatively related to positive affect ($r = -.27$, $p < .01$) and positively to negative affect ($r = .21$, $p < .01$). Regression analysis indicated that pessimism ($\beta = .378$, $p = .003$) and negative affect ($\beta = .289$, $p = .004$) positively predicted apathy, while positive affect ($\beta = -.236$, $p = .017$) negatively predicted it. The model was significant ($R^2 = .702$, $F(3, 98) = 77.10$, $p < .001$). Findings suggest that negative affect and pessimism significantly contribute to higher apathy among college students, whereas positive affect serves as a protective factor. These insights underline the importance of fostering positive emotional experiences to mitigate apathy and enhance psychological well-being among young adults.

Keywords: Affect, Pessimism, Apathy, Predictive Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary landscape of higher education presents a multifaceted array of challenges that can significantly impact the affective states of college students, potentially fostering pessimism and apathy (Ajjawi et al., 2019). Academic environments, while designed to foster intellectual growth, can inadvertently become breeding grounds for stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly when coupled with the pressures of social interactions, financial constraints, and future uncertainties (Chen & Xiao, 2022; Jose et al., 2024). The transition to higher education is often marked by heightened expectations, increased academic rigor, and the need to navigate complex social dynamics, all of which can contribute to negative emotional experiences (Tindall et al., 2021). These experiences can manifest as a pervasive sense of hopelessness and disengagement, ultimately hindering academic performance and overall well-being (Vera, 2019). Recent studies have highlighted the growing concern of affect, pessimism, and apathy among college-going students. Research indicates that these psychological factors significantly impact academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. A study by Johnson et al. (2022) found that students experiencing negative affect were more likely to exhibit pessimistic attitudes towards their future prospects, leading to decreased motivation and engagement in academic pursuits. Smith and Brown (2023) observed a correlation between increased levels of apathy and reduced participation in extracurricular activities, potentially hindering personal growth and skill development. The covid pandemic has further exacerbated these issues, with Wang et al. (2021) reporting a notable increase in feelings of isolation and hopelessness among college students during periods of remote learning. The emotional and psychological well-being of college students is an increasingly important field of study, especially in the context of growing mental health concerns. Affect (emotional experiences), pessimism (negative expectations for the future), and apathy (lack of motivation and interest) are interrelated phenomena that significantly influence academic performance, social relationships, and long-term health outcomes. According to recent surveys, over 45% of college students report feeling "so depressed it was difficult to function" at some point during the academic year (American College Health Association, 2024). These findings underscore the importance of implementing targeted interventions and support systems within higher education institutions to address the emotional and psychological needs of students. The emotional and psychological states of college students are critical determinants of their academic success and overall well-being. Among these states, affect, pessimism, and apathy have been identified as significant variables influencing students' motivation, engagement, and mental health. Understanding the interplay of these variables is essential for developing effective interventions to support student resilience and academic achievement.

Affect refers to the broad spectrum of emotional experiences, encompassing both positive and negative feelings. Positive affect has been associated with increased motivation, better stress management, and higher academic performance, whereas negative affect can lead to heightened anxiety and decreased cognitive

functioning (Larsen & Fredrickson, 1999). For example, students experiencing positive emotions tend to exhibit greater persistence and engagement, which are essential for academic success (Fredrickson, 2001). Conversely, persistent negative affect can impair concentration and lead to emotional exhaustion. Positive affect encompasses emotions such as enthusiasm, alertness, and happiness, while negative affect includes distress, anger, and fear (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Research shows that high positive affect is associated with better coping mechanisms, higher academic achievements, and greater life satisfaction among college students (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), elevated negative affect has been linked to anxiety, depressive symptoms, and impaired social functioning (Kumaraswamy, 2013). Studies have demonstrated that the university environment can intensify both types of affect due to academic pressure, social comparison, and financial stress (Misra & Castillo, 2004). As such, affect plays a crucial role in shaping students' overall psychological resilience.

Pessimism involves a tendency to expect unfavorable outcomes and interpret situations negatively. It has been linked with higher levels of stress, lower life satisfaction, and poor academic outcomes (Carver et al., 2010). It is characterized by the tendency to expect negative outcomes and is conceptualized as a stable personality trait or cognitive bias (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Pessimistic students often perceive academic challenges as insurmountable, which diminishes their motivation and increases the likelihood of dropout or disengagement. Moreover, pessimism can exacerbate feelings of helplessness, further impairing psychological resilience (Seligman, 2006). Among college students, pessimism has been correlated with increased vulnerability to stress, depression, and anxiety (Chang, 2001). Moreover, pessimistic individuals often exhibit maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance or rumination, which further exacerbate academic and social difficulties (Brissette, Scheier, & Carver, 2002).

Apathy is characterized by a lack of interest, enthusiasm, and motivation, often resulting in disengagement from academic and social activities. It is frequently observed in students experiencing depression or burnout and has been associated with poor academic performance and increased dropout rates (Marin et al., 2011). Apathy diminishes students' initiative to participate in learning activities, reduces goal-directed behavior, and hampers emotional regulation, thus negatively impacting mental health (Fiske & Taylor, 2017). In college settings, apathy has been associated with lower GPA, reduced campus involvement, and higher dropout intentions (Martinez & Singh, 2022). The stress of academic evaluations and uncertainty about future career prospects can magnify pessimistic thinking during college years. Chronic pessimism, if unchecked, may lead to learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975), where students feel powerless to change adverse circumstances, diminishing their motivation and engagement. Recent studies have identified several contributors to apathy in college populations, including burnout, social isolation, and existential anxiety (Wang & Fredricks, 2014). It seen as lack of motivation, interest, or emotional involvement, and has increasingly been observed among university students (Marin, 1991). Academic apathy manifests in low

class participation, poor academic performance, and disengagement from campus activities. Psychologically, apathy is linked with emotional blunting, a sense of futility, and decreased goal-directed behavior

Despite the recognition of these variables individually, research exploring their interconnectedness among college students remains limited. Prior studies suggest that negative affect and pessimism may contribute to feelings of apathy, creating a cycle that hampers academic and personal development (Miller et al., 2019). Understanding how affect, pessimism, and apathy interact is vital for designing holistic mental health interventions tailored to college populations. This study aims to investigate the prevalence and relationships of affect, pessimism, and apathy among college-going students. By examining these variables collectively, the research seeks to provide nuanced insights into their influence on students' academic engagement and psychological resilience, informing policies and programs to foster healthier educational environments. Emerging research suggests a complex interaction between affect, pessimism, and apathy. Students with low positive affect and high negative affect are more prone to pessimistic thinking, which, in turn, may foster feelings of hopelessness and apathy (Feldman & Snyder, 2005). High levels of negative affect may deplete emotional resources, making students more susceptible to both pessimistic expectations and motivational withdrawal, pessimism may mediate the relationship between negative affect and apathy: students who frequently experience negative emotions may develop pessimistic attitudes, which then result in reduced motivation and increased apathy toward academic and social activities (Chang, 2001).

Objective - To analyze the relationship between the variables namely affect, pessimism and apathy.

Hypothesis

1. There will be significant correlation between apathy, pessimism and affect.
2. There will be predictive relationship between the variables namely affect, pessimism, and apathy.

METHOD

Sample

The present study utilized a purposive sampling method to select 100 adults (both male and female) in Varanasi city, Uttar Pradesh, India. The participants, aged between 18 to 30 years. All individuals were in normal health and were residents of the Varanasi region, ensuring regional homogeneity within the sample. This selection was intended to provide a focused understanding of the target population, comprising young adults engaged in higher education within the specified demographic context.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: The students aging below 18 and above 30 were included in the study those who are not fall in this particular criterion of age were excluded from sample. The students having any

diagnosed mental health related complaint were excluded from the sample and only willing students were allowed to participate in the study.

Measures

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988) The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) - is designed to measure (i) Positive Affect (PA), which reflects the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active, and alert. High PA is a state of high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement. Items are scored from 1 to 5, whereby 1 = Very Slightly or Not at All', 2 = 'A Little', 3 = 'Moderately', 4 = 'Quite a Bit' and 5 = 'Extremely'.

Depression scale by G.P. Thakur, R.N.Singh . This 60 items scale uses 5 point scaling to measure the level of depression in totality as well as in its 7 dimensions (Apathy, Sleep disturbance, Pessimism, Physical exhaustion, Indecisiveness, Dejection and Social Withdrawal). It has test-retest reliability index of .87.

Procedure - The young adults covered in the study were properly contacted for permission of data collection. Warm rapport was established with the adults before the testing was started and they were taken in full confidence regarding the confidentiality of their responses. After the testing was over, they were seen off with warm and affectionate gestures.

RESULT

Table -1: Correlation table showing the relationship between the variables pessimism, apathy, and affect (N = 100)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Pessimism	31.29	6.50				
2. Apathy	28.48	6.17	.70**			
3. Positive Affect	30.34	5.16	-.15**	-.27**		
4. Negative Affect	33.02	5.78	.13**	.21**	-.17**	—

Note: **M** = Mean; **SD** = Standard Deviation. **p** < .01 ** , p < .05 * .

Table 1 shows the correlation between the variables apathy, pessimism and affect. Pessimism (M = 31.29, SD = 6.50) was positively correlated with apathy (r = .70, p < .01) and negatively correlated with positive affect (r = −.15, p < .01). Apathy (M = 28.48, SD = 6.17) was also negatively correlated with positive affect (r = −.27, p < .01) and positively correlated with negative affect (r = .21, p < .01) whereas positive affect (M = 30.34, SD = 5.16) was negatively associated with negative affect (r = −.17, p < .01).

Table 2: Multiple Linear regression analysis with affect (Positive and Negative), pessimism as predictor and apathy as criterion. (N = 100)

Note**: p < .01 ** , p < .05 ***

Predictor	B	t	P	R^2	F
Negative Affect	.289*	2.98	.004		
Positive Affect	-.236*	-2.42	.017	.702	77.10**
Pessimism	.378**	3.06	.003		

Table 2 displays the multiple regression analysis predicting apathy from negative affect, positive affect, and pessimism. The model was statistically significant, $R^2 = .702$, $F(3, 98) = 77.10$, $p < .001$, indicating that the three predictors explained approximately 70% of the variance in Apathy. Negative affect (β= .289, p .004) and pessimism (β=.378, p .003) were significant positive predictors, while positive affect (β= -.236, p .017) was a significant negative predictor of apathy.

DISSCUSSION

The present study examined the relationships among pessimism, apathy, and affect (both positive and negative) in a sample of 100 participants. The correlation analysis revealed significant associations that align with and extend prior theoretical and empirical findings, pessimism was strongly and positively correlated with apathy (r = .70, p < .01), suggesting that individuals who hold negative expectations about the future are more likely to experience motivational deficits and disengagement. This association supports the cognitive theories of hopelessness and learned helplessness, which posit that pessimistic thinking contributes to diminished goal pursuit and reduced agency (Abramson et al., 1989; Sweeny et al., 2020) recent studies have reinforced the link between pessimism and motivational deficits, showing that trait pessimism predicts behavioral disengagement and reduced proactive coping (Carver & Scheier, 2019; Hirsh et al., 2018). Pessimism negatively associated with positive affect (r = −.15, p < .01), indicating that individuals with more pessimistic dispositions experience fewer positive emotions. This finding is consistent with evidence showing that pessimism is associated with lower life satisfaction, less optimism, and reduced positive mood states (Chang et al., 2020; Rasmussen et al., 2017). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) may offer a relevant explanation: pessimism narrows cognitive focus and behavioral repertoire, reducing opportunities for the kind of positive feedback loops that enhance well-being. Furthermore, apathy was positively correlated with negative affect (r = .21, p < .01), suggesting that individuals who experience emotional deficits are also more prone to emotions such as distress, fear, or

sadness. This aligns with findings that emotional disengagement is not neutral, but often co-occurs with psychological distress (Taylor et al., 2020). It also supports dimensional models of psychopathology, such as the Hierarchical Taxonomy of Psychopathology (HiTOP), which position apathy and negative affectivity as overlapping yet distinct markers of internalizing pathology (Kotov et al., 2017).Positive affect and negative affect were inversely related ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$), which is consistent with the bi-dimensional conceptualization of affect (Watson et al., 1988). Though independent, these affective domains tend to be inversely related in populations experiencing mood disturbance or emotional dysregulation (Stanton & Watson, 2017; Hou et al., 2020). Positive affect, in particular, has been shown to serve as a buffer against the deleterious impact of stress and negative emotion, supporting emotion regulation and resilience (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2017; Zautra et al., 2020). The regression model significantly explained 70.2% of the variance in apathy, with pessimism and negative affect serving as significant positive predictors, and positive affect emerging as a significant negative predictor. These results align with existing literature and further highlight the complex interplay between cognitive-emotional dispositions and affective outcomes. Consistent with prior research, pessimism was found to be a significant positive predictor of apathy. Individuals with higher levels of pessimism tended to report greater affective distress, which is supported by recent studies indicating that pessimistic cognitive styles are strongly associated with increased vulnerability to mood disorders and negative emotional states (Chang et al., 2020; Carver & Scheier, 2019). Pessimism is often characterized by a tendency to expect negative outcomes, which can amplify emotional reactivity and reduce coping flexibility in the face of stressors (Feldman et al., 2021). Similarly, negative affect was positively associated with apathy, suggesting that individuals who frequently experience emotions such as anger, fear, or sadness are more likely to exhibit elevated affective disturbances. This is in line with Watson and Stanton's (2017) findings, which emphasize the central role of negative affectivity in the development and maintenance of emotional disorders. More recently, research by Renaud et al. (2022) found that high negative affect is linked to maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, further exacerbating psychological vulnerability. Conversely, positive affect was a significant negative predictor of apathy, indicating that individuals who experience more frequent and intense positive emotions (e.g., joy, enthusiasm) report lower levels of affective disturbance. This finding supports the broaden-and-build theory proposed by Fredrickson (2001), which posits that positive emotions broaden cognitive and behavioral repertoires, thus fostering resilience. Recent empirical evidence also supports the protective role of positive affect against emotional dysregulation and psychological distress (Hou et al., 2020; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2017).

In comprehensive cascade variables taken together, these findings underscore the complex interplay between cognitive outlook pessimism, apathy, and affect. The results point to the importance of fostering positive affect and reducing pessimism as potential targets in both preventive and therapeutic interventions. For instance, positive psychology interventions aimed at enhancing gratitude, optimism, and meaning have been shown to reduce apathy and depressive symptoms in both clinical and non-clinical populations (Sin &

Lyubomirsky, 2009; Seligman et al., 2018). Overall, the results reinforce the idea that affective dispositions both positive and negative play critical roles in shaping psychological outcomes such as apathy. The simultaneous consideration of positive and negative emotional traits provides a more nuanced understanding of emotional well-being and dysfunction. These findings have important implications for intervention strategies. Therapeutic approaches that target pessimistic thinking and promote positive affective experiences such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and positive psychology interventions may be particularly effective in mitigating affective disturbances (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Seligman et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals a significant interplay between affect, pessimism, and apathy in college students. Higher levels of pessimism and negative affect significantly predict increased apathy, while positive affect appears to act as a buffer against it. These findings underscore the critical role of emotional states in influencing motivational tendencies among young adults, highlighting the potential benefits of interventions aimed at cultivating positive affect to reduce apathy and promote psychological well-being in this population.

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