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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONAL WELL BEING AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Background:

Negative automatic thoughts are quick and involuntary thoughts that often involve self-criticism and negative interpretations of situations. These thoughts are commonly linked to emotional distress, especially among college students who face various academic and social pressures.

Objective:

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being among college students.

Method:

A total of 94 college students were selected using convenience sampling. Standardized questionnaires were used to measure negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being. Mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation were used to analyze the data.

Result:

The mean score for negative automatic thoughts was 67.23 (SD = 28.59), while emotional well-being had a mean score of 43.81 (SD = 13.02). The results showed a weak negative correlation between the two variables ($r = -0.234$, $p = .023$). The relationship was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that higher levels of negative automatic thoughts were associated with lower levels of emotional well-being. Although statistically significant, the strength of the relationship was weak, suggesting that other factors may also influence emotional well-being.

Conclusion:

The present study found a weak but statistically significant negative correlation between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being among college students ($r = -0.234$, $p = .023$). These findings indicate that as negative automatic thoughts increase, emotional well-being tends to decrease. However, the weak strength of the relationship suggests that emotional well-being is influenced by multiple psychological, social, and environmental factors beyond negative automatic thoughts alone. Therefore, future research should include additional variables and larger samples to gain a more comprehensive understanding of emotional well-being among college students.

Keywords - Negative Automatic Thoughts, Emotional Well-being, College Students, Cognitive distortions, Mental health

I. INTRODUCTION

Negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being are related to each other for college students, therefore, researchers have shown increasing interest in investigating how the cognitive patterns of college students influence their emotional functioning and overall mental health. Research has shown that negative automatic thoughts develop significant patterns of negative automatic thought processes and emotional experiences as well as their ability to adapt psychologically to stressors had a corresponding and significant effect on those individuals. Negative automatic thoughts are self-criticism and/or pessimistic thoughts that occur spontaneously (e.g., self-doubt) and unconsciously. The negative automatic thoughts of an individual typically reflect distorted views of themselves, others and/or the future. Emotional well-being is defined as the ability of an individual to exhibit positive emotional states (e.g., happiness and satisfaction with life), to have psychological balance, and to cope effectively with life stressors. Each of these constructs impact several aspects of a student's mental health, motivation and adjustment during their time in college. The college years are characterized by multiple academic, social and personal stressors. Students going through these transitions often are under a significant amount of stress.

NEGATIVE AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS : Negative automatic thoughts are fast, and uncontrolled cognitive responses to day-to-day situations that happen spontaneously (without the individual actively thinking about them). People with a negative view of themselves or with pessimistic views about how other people will view them or what will happen to them in the future often exhibit these types of thoughts. Cognitive theories of psychological distress place a significant emphasis on the importance of negative automatic thoughts in causing and continuing emotional distress. One of the earliest and most frequently cited cognitive theories is cognitive theory by Aaron T. Beck, which suggests that there is a close relationship between distorted ways of thinking and psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety. Some examples of cognitive distortions identified by Beck include:

Overgeneralizations - Making broad negative conclusions based on one single occurrence.

Catastrophizing - Expecting to have the worst possible outcome from an event.

Personalization - Blaming oneself for some external occurrence without enough evidence.

Cognitive distortions cause someone to interpret events excessively negatively therefore reinforcing maladaptive emotions/behaviors. Negative automatic thoughts can also originate from deeper cognitive schemas or core beliefs about oneself and/or the environment. For example, an individual who believes that he/she is "not capable of being successful" may interpret a small academic setback as proof of their inadequacy.

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING : Emotional well-being is characterized by the capacity to experience both positive feelings and mental stability or balance while addressing all of life's everyday difficulties in a full and constructive way. An individual who has developed a high level of emotional well-being would usually experience life satisfaction, an optimistic view of the future, as well as positive and effective means to manage daily stressors. Psychologically, there are several components that contribute to one's emotional well-being, including, but not limited to:

A person's ability to effectively regulate their own emotions

A person having positive, meaningful relationships with others.

A person having a purpose and a strong sense of self-worth.

A person's ability to be resilient in adversity.

Individuals who have developed a high degree of emotional well-being typically demonstrate more optimism, adaptability, and psychological resilience when faced with stressful situations. In the study of positive psychology, there are several important factors that significantly contribute to the promotion of mental health and psychological well-being: Positive emotions, life satisfaction, and individual strengths. Emotional well-being is also directly correlated to an individual having effective coping mechanisms, a strong social support system, and healthy self-esteem. These factors enable individuals to more effectively cope with the daily stresses of life. On the contrary, individuals with lower levels of emotional well-being typically exhibit greater stress, less motivation, and have difficulty balancing their personal and academic/educational lives. These negative thought processes that accompany a lower level of emotional well-being will exacerbate these problems.

Significance of the Study

Understanding how positive and negative thinking patterns influence emotions can provide valuable insight into the mental health of college students. This understanding can help psychologists and educators develop effective interventions to promote healthier thought patterns. Such interventions may include cognitive restructuring techniques, psychoeducational counseling programs, and mental health awareness initiatives aimed at enhancing emotional resilience among college students.

Research Gap

Although previous research has extensively examined negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being separately, limited studies have explored their direct relationship among college students, particularly in the Indian context. Furthermore, existing findings show inconsistency in the strength and significance of this relationship across different populations and settings. These gaps highlight the need for further research to better understand how negative automatic thoughts influence emotional well-being among college students.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the present study proposes that negative automatic thoughts influence emotional well-being among college students. Specifically, higher levels of negative automatic thoughts are expected to be associated with lower levels of

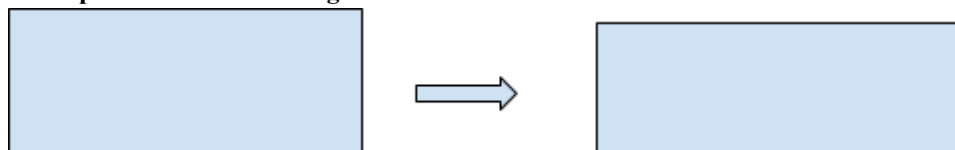
emotional well-being. Negative thinking patterns may adversely affect students' emotional balance, coping ability, and psychological resilience.

Variables:

Independent Variable (IV): Negative Automatic Thoughts

Dependent Variable (DV): Emotional Well-Being

Conceptual Framework Diagram



Negative Automatic Thoughts:

Altınok, A., Katmer, et al., (2025) The research investigated 615 individuals between 5th and 8th grade and evaluated variables of cognition involving thinking styles including irrational beliefs, dysfunctional attitudes, automatic thoughts, and cognitive distortion. In summary, children's automatic thoughts contributed positively to adults having irrational thinking and dysfunctional attitudes. Automatic thoughts contribute significantly to the adult's deeper beliefs, which causes errors in thinking. Thus, automatic thoughts are related to underlying attitudes and beliefs and should not be viewed as separate events. The study demonstrated that automatic thoughts were critical in the understanding of dysfunctional thinking styles during childhood.

Feng, X., Guan, W., et al. (2025) This study sought to utilize an empirical survey method to provide information regarding the relationship between "digital stress" and "professional compromise" for educators in inclusive preschools within China. Utilizing random sampling, a total of 558 of 1,191 teachers participated in the survey with respect to two primary variables (digital stress and professional compromise) and two mediators (negative automatic thoughts and career adaptability). Results revealed that digital stress and professional compromise had a significant correlation. Furthermore, the findings indicated that negative automatic thoughts partially mediated the relationship between digital stress and professional compromise, while career adaptability also served as a mediator. More importantly, the study indicated that there was a chain mediation effect for the study participants (ex. increased digital stress leads to an increase in negative automatic thoughts, decrease in career adaptability, which leads to increased professional compromise).

Aggarwal et al. (2024) This research study was to investigate the relationships between impulsive (automatic) thoughts, emotions, and adult resilience. In particular, the researchers were interested in finding out how an individual's immediate gut reaction, or emotional response, to a stimulus, along with the cognitive processing of those emotional experiences, affects how the individual functions on a daily basis. Researchers used 160 adult human subjects (18 years of age or older) to complete two primary measures; 1) the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire and 2) the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Garnefski, 2006). The results of this research found that subject's experience of rigid/dysfunctional automatic thinking patterns directly impacts their ability to process and thus cope with their emotional experiences, and further, that there is a variety of ways that subjects have used either the same or different strategies to cope with their emotions.

Onofrei et al. (2020) examined the correlations between automatic thought patterns, characteristic negative affectivity, (or level of negative feelings), and one's ability to satisfy their psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness were explored in this study. Automatic thought patterns are negative, self-focused thought processes that hinder positive thought processes as well as the accurate assessment of situations. Characteristic negative affectivity is one's level of emotional sensitivity and dependence on receiving support from others for emotional needs. This research is based on the self-determination theory that identifies three basic psychological needs as necessary to achieve psychological balance and mental wellness: Autonomy, Competence, & Relatedness. The purpose of this research study is to examine if automatic thought patterns and characteristic negative affectivity are related to meeting basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and whether these relationships are gender specific.

Kazdin et al. (1990) examined the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ) in a sample of 250 child psychiatric inpatients aged 6 to 13 to examine its reliability and validity in assessing negative cognitive processes related to depression. Additionally, ATQ scores demonstrated negative correlation with self-esteem. Discriminant validity was suggested by the stronger relationships between ATQ scores than less-related constructs (e.g., prosocial behaviour, positive affect) when looking at depressively-related cognitive processes. Overall, the findings provide evidence that the ATQ is a strong and valuable instrument for identifying negative automatic thoughts in children and provide further understanding of the cognitive mechanisms of childhood depression, and support its use in research and clinical care.

Emotional Well-Being :

Baloglu, Busser, and et al.(2019) The objective of this research was to explore why people decide to go to spas and how those experiences affect their emotional state, well-being, and customer loyalty. To achieve this, 398 spa guests participated in the study; the methodologies for the study were grounded in Self Determination Theory and Broaden and Build Theory to examine the relationships between intrinsic motives for going to a spa, experience quality, emotional well-being, and customer loyalty. The results demonstrated that intrinsic motivation positively impacted the overall quality of the experience at the spa (i.e.,

experience/recreation) and that both memorable experiences & positive improvements in emotional well-being directly correlated with higher levels of customer loyalty. The findings emphasize the continued focus of spas on creating an atmosphere that enhances positive emotional experiences for customers and suggest several practical applications of future strategies, including the use of mobile applications, to provide spas with new methods to create greater customer engagement and loyalty.

Noelke, McGovern, et al. (2016) examined how the temperature affects emotional well-being across the U.S. by examining the survey data from 1.9 million adults, age 18 and above, that was collected from 2008 - 2013. The researchers looked at day to day changes in temperature in the respondents' local areas and how they impacted their responses to emotion. They found that on days with higher than average temperatures there was a dramatic decrease in positive feelings (i.e. happiness and joy) as well as an increase in negative responses (i.e. stress, anger, or feeling tired), especially for older individuals and for individuals with lower levels of education. The researchers concluded that there is a minimal amount of supporting data indicating individuals living in hotter climates exhibited more adaptation to heat than those living in colder areas, advocating that the effects of temperature were independent of the variations in climate from region to region.

Ecclestone and Hayes et al. (2009) investigation of the increasing importance of emotional well-being in education, Ecclestone & Hayes (2009) wanted to know what effect this movement might have on teaching and learning in Britain. Instead of conducting an empirical research study, they utilised a philosophical, political, and sociological literature review to better understand how emotional well-being has become closely associated with successful education and social justice. Ecclestone & Hayes (2009) contend that there is an increasing trend within schools towards the use of therapeutic interventions and a greater emphasis on affective approaches to teaching and developing student attitudes, dispositions and emotional skills. As indicated by the authors, the intense focus on improving emotional well-being at all costs compromises both the development of subject knowledge and the learner's autonomy. Ecclestone and Hayes therefore argue that, in respect to emotional well-being as a primary goal of education, the liberal humanist education agenda may be compromised as well as that such a proposal should be critically examined rather than simply accepted without question.

Fredrickson and Joiner et al. (2002) Investigated the relationship between positive emotion and resilience/psychological well-being; participants (n = 356) completed self-report measures that assessed positive and negative emotions, as well as personal resilience over time (12-month follow-up). The results indicated that participants who reported higher rates/amounts of positive emotions had higher levels of resilience and were more successful in coping with stress than those who did not frequently experience positive emotions. The study also indicated that positive emotions do more than just co-occur with positive outcomes; rather, they build a person's psychological resources over time, therefore enhancing an individual's ability to recover from negative situations. These results provide evidence for the importance of creating positive affect in promoting emotional and psychological well-being

Cognitive Theory Studies :

Omidpoor et al. (2022) This study's goal was to explore if cognitive behavioural therapy could aid girls living in Tehran who are suffering from anxiety or depression due to racing thoughts. Thirty teenagers (14-18 years old) were included in this study; they were randomly assigned into either a CBT group (10 CBT sessions over a 10-week period, attending 1 session/week) or control group (no therapy). Each CBT session lasted 1 hour. The girls in both groups were administered 2 questionnaires (completion of the ATQ-N and the CD-RISC) before the therapy started and after the therapy ended, to evaluate the effectiveness of CBT as an intervention. The researchers evaluated the results of the questionnaires based on Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire - Negative (ATQ-N) & The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC).

Ayhan and Budak et al. (2021) examined the mindfulness of thoughts in individuals with depression is what the researchers explored. In the study, there were 151 participants. They determined the number of participants needed by calculation. The researchers administered two tests: one called the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, which measures how mindful people are, and another test called the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire-, which estimates how many negative thoughts people have. What they learned is that people who are more mindful have negative thoughts. The correlation between mindfulness and negative thoughts is strong. The researchers can be certain that this association is actual because the figures they obtained from the test are statistically significant. Mindfulness really does seem to help people to have negative automatic thoughts.

Pedro et al. (2019) This study investigates to see if self-criticism impacts how women experience Postpartum Depression by changing their postpartum-specific cognition as well as determining if self-compassion has a protective effect on this process. A total of 686 women were recruited for the study (within the first 12 months of having a baby) to fill out self-report measures regarding Self-Criticism, Negative Automatic Thoughts, Metacognitive Appraisals, Self-Compassion, and Depressive Symptoms. The results showed that the more self-critical the women were, the greater the risk of developing postpartum depressive symptoms through a sequential process consisting of more frequent negative automatic thoughts and negative appraisals of those thoughts. Self-Compassion was shown to weaken the relationship between Self-Criticism and postpartum cognitions indicating that self-compassion does in fact provide some buffering effect to postpartum depressive symptoms. Therefore, in order to help prevent and/or treat postpartum depression, self-criticism should be reduced and self-compassion strengthened; thus preventing the potential for developing postpartum depression.

Buschmann et al. (2018) This study looked at how irrational beliefs are related to automatic thoughts and their relationship to anxiety and depression. The subjects of this study were 542 undergraduate psychology students during stressful periods (exams) and surveyed using updated questionnaires regarding their irrational beliefs and components of automatic thoughts. The results

indicate that the belief in "demandingness" is a primary type of irrational belief, while self-downing irrational beliefs affected depressive symptoms only indirectly through automatic thoughts; and low frustration tolerance contributed to anxiety and depression directly, regardless of automatic thoughts. In general, the results support cognitive-behavioral theory; more specifically, Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) supports the theory that irrational beliefs are the cognitive foundation for generating automatic thoughts that create emotional distress.

Studies Among College Students :

Keerthi B Raj et al. (2024) A study of 163 college students (age 18 - 25) was conducted to evaluate the relationship between negative childhood experiences and the quality of one's thoughts and feelings regarding oneself, one's life, or both. The study used three structured survey measures for the collection of data: the Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (ACEQ, 10 items), Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ, 20 items), and Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS, 18 items). Two statistical procedures (Spearman rank order correlation and Mann-Whitney U test) were used to perform the statistical analyses of the data. The results indicated that there was a substantial correlation between adverse childhood experiences and maladaptive thought patterns as determined by the ATQ and PWBS ($r = .65$) and that the respondents' characteristics related to their adverse experiences differed based upon their gender (men > women) where respondents of each sex reported significantly different experiences for 14 out of 16 ACEQ items. Thus, traumatic childhood experiences create a negative perception of themselves, their lives, and/or both for young adults.

Değer and Çakmak et.al. (2022) The researchers of this study analyzed the degree to which adolescents control their emotional thoughts and how those cognitive processes shape adolescents' feelings while they are doing so. The goal of the researchers was to determine how best to assist adolescents in determining why they may be experiencing stress, depression, or anxiety. The researchers collected data on a population sample of 395 high school students located in Diyarbakır, Turkey. Throughout the course of the study, the investigators used various methods to assess participant thought patterns, emotion-related coping strategies, and physical and mental health. The researchers discovered that female students attending the same schools as female students received significantly lower scores on measures of anxiety, stress, and depression than did male students.

Barry, Clarke, et al.(2017) examined ways to facilitate social and emotional well-being for adolescents within schools. A major focus of this research was the impediments to implementing evidence-based practices, as well as explaining the need for creative, long-term strategies that can fit into regular school operations. Utilizing a common elements approach, the researchers examined multiple types of interventions within their pilot study on post-secondary students based upon input from both students as well as teachers about their respective needs. In summary, while many obstacles exist to fully integrate and sustain social and emotional learning programs as a component of a comprehensive school-wide system, through concentrating on a limited number of core, evidence-based strategies could potentially increase the number of youth assisted and/or improve the effectiveness of social and emotional learning interventions. The current study highlighted the need for more robust research studies to identify which approaches provide the greatest assistance in promoting social and emotional development among adolescents.

Judd et al. (2016) looked at how positive and negative automatic thoughts influence the link between positive emotions and resilience in college students. In this study, college men and women completed online measures to assess their emotions, thinking patterns, and resilience. The results showed that students who experienced more positive emotions generally had higher resilience. Thinking style mattered too—students with more negative automatic thoughts didn't benefit from positive emotions as much when it came to being resilient. This suggests that negative thinking can weaken the positive effects of good emotions on a student's ability to bounce back from stress.

Overall, the reviewed studies indicate that negative automatic thoughts are generally associated with poorer emotional outcomes and psychological functioning. While several studies (e.g., Keerthi B Raj et al., 2024; Judd et al., 2016) have reported significant relationships between cognitive patterns and well-being, other findings suggest that the strength of this relationship may vary depending on individual, contextual, and methodological factors. This inconsistency in findings highlights that the relationship is not uniform across all populations and underscores the need for further research, particularly among college students. Thus, existing literature suggests a general association between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being, but lacks clarity regarding the strength and consistency of this relationship in specific populations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objective:

To examine the relationship between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being among college students.

3.2 Hypothesis

H₀ : There will be no significant relationship between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being among college students.

3.3 Research Design

The purpose of this particular project was to carry out an exploratory analysis on the link between automatic negative thoughts and well-being in college students through the application of a quantitative, non-experimental research methodology. In this instance, a correlational method was applied to identify both the negative and positive associations between the two independent variables of this study without manipulative action. A cross-sectional methodology was used to complete this study, collecting data from each of the participants at the same time. This methodology is particularly valuable when examining relationships between various psychological risk factors that exist in a particular population. Using a cross-sectional methodology allows researchers to gather and analyse data efficiently within the specified time frame. Two standardised self-report questionnaires were utilised to gather data: (a) the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ-30); and (b) the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). The ATQ-30 provided a quantifiable measure of the degree of automatic negative thinking, while the WEMWBS provided a quantifiable measure of the level of emotional well-being. Both sets of data collected in this study were analysed through the application of descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential (Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient) statistics. In this research, negative automatic thoughts are the independent variable, whereas emotional well-being is the dependent variable. The researcher used this design to determine whether increased amounts of negative automatic thoughts are associated with lower amounts of emotional well-being for college students. The use of a non-experimental correlational design was appropriate because it allowed for the examination of naturally occurring relationships between variables in a real-world situation. The design is also cross-sectional and nonmanipulative; hence, causal relationships can't be inferred from the data.

3.3 Data Collection

The study consists of 94 participants between the ages of 18 and 25 years who are fluent in English. Participants are selected from college populations using convenience sampling. The demographic profile of the sample includes male and female undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in various academic courses at different universities.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Prior to participation, respondents are informed about the purpose of the study and are required to provide informed consent. Participants are assured that their responses will remain confidential and anonymous, and that the data collected will be used strictly for academic research purposes.

3.4 Tools description

1. Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ-30)

The Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ-30) is a 30-item self-report instrument developed to assess the frequency of negative automatic thoughts associated with depression and cognitive distortions. Respondents rate how often specific negative self-statements occur using a Likert-type scale. Higher scores indicate more frequent negative automatic thoughts.

Reliability :

Cronbach's α typically ranges from 0.94 - 0.98 in various studies, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Some validation studies report Cronbach's $\alpha \approx 0.93$, also demonstrating high reliability.

2. Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS)

The Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) is a 14-item self-report scale measuring positive mental well-being, including aspects such as positive affect, functioning, and interpersonal relationships. Respondents rate statements about their experiences over the past two weeks on a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate greater mental well-being.

Reliability :

Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$ in student samples and 0.91 in general population samples.

Other validation studies report Cronbach's $\alpha \approx 0.87$, indicating strong internal consistency.

3.5 Procedure

Ethics Approval

Before collecting data for this study, the research proposal was assessed by the appropriate institutional ethics committee/departmental review board and received ethical approval to ensure that the study adhered to ethical requirements for research with human participants. Participation in the study was voluntary; therefore, ethical standards for both confidentiality and informed consent were upheld.

Sampling and Participants

Convenience sampling was used to choose participants. A total of 100 college students aged between 18 to 25 years old participated in this study.

Recruitment and Informed Consent

Participants were contacted about participating in the study through online platforms. Participants received informed consent information before they completed the survey. The informed consent document outlined the purpose of the study, that participation is voluntary, their responses will remain confidential, and they can withdraw at any point.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected online via a Google Form survey, which gave participants an opportunity to participate from remote locations.

Demographics of Participants

The first section of data collection was a short demographic section to collect descriptive characteristics of the participants (age, sex and education, etc).

Administration of Instruments

After participants completed the demographics section, participants completed 2 validated questionnaires. The first questionnaire was the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (ATQ-30) which consists of 30 items on a 5-point scale of how often the participants have the negative automatic thoughts. The second questionnaire was the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), which measured the emotional/mental well-behaviour wellbeing of the participants.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

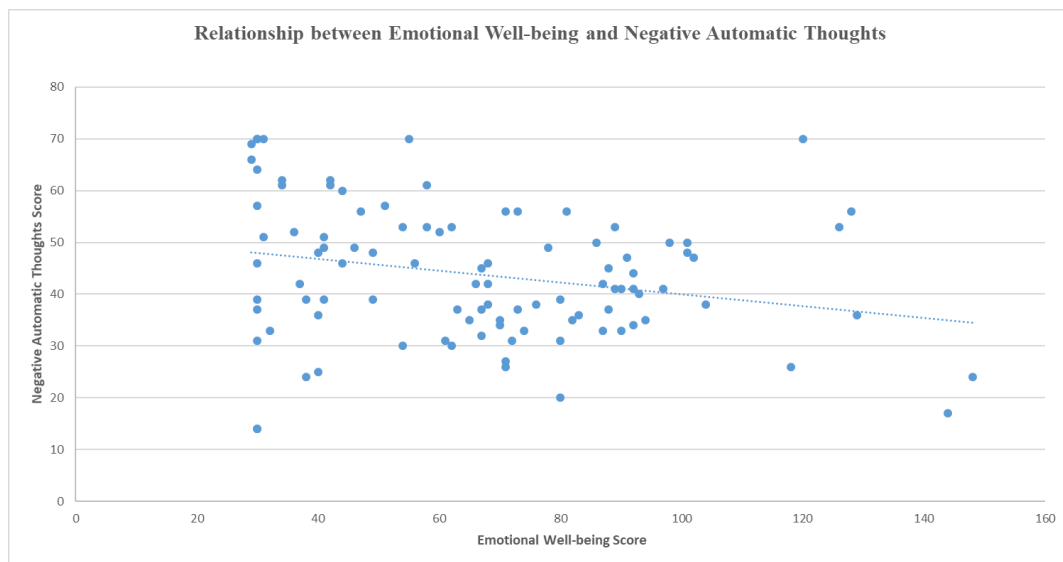
Results of Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable		Mean	Standard Deviation	r	p. value
Negative Thoughts	Automatic	67.23	28.59	-0.234	p.023
Emotional Being	Well	43.81	13.02		

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being among college students. The results indicated a weak negative correlation between the two variables ($r = -0.234$, $p = .023$), suggesting that higher levels of negative automatic thoughts were associated with lower levels of emotional well-being. The correlation was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Descriptive statistics showed that the mean score for negative automatic thoughts was 67.23 (SD = 28.59), while the mean score for emotional well-being was 43.81 (SD = 13.02). Since the two variables were measured using different scales, their mean scores are not directly comparable.

The relationship between the variables is also illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure : Scatter plot showing the negative relationship between emotional well-being and negative automatic thoughts.



Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being among college students. The findings revealed a weak but statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.234$, $p = .023$), indicating that higher levels of negative automatic thoughts were associated with lower levels of emotional well-being. Although the relationship was statistically significant, the strength of the correlation was weak, suggesting that emotional well-being is influenced by several psychological, social, and environmental factors in addition to negative automatic thoughts. Factors such as resilience, coping strategies, personality traits, and social support may also contribute to emotional well-being and explain the relatively small strength of the observed relationship.

Comparisons with Previous Research

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research that has reported a negative association between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being. Studies such as **Keerthi B Raj et al. (2024)** and **Judd et al. (2016)** also found that individuals with higher levels of negative automatic thoughts tend to experience poorer emotional well-being. However, compared to these studies, the present research found a weaker correlation. Differences in sample characteristics, cultural background, research methodology, and the influence of other psychological variables may explain the variation in the strength of the relationship. Nevertheless, the direction of the findings supports the existing literature and highlights the importance of cognitive processes in emotional well-being.

Theoretical Implications

These findings support Aaron T. Beck's Cognitive Theory, which proposes that negative automatic thoughts play an important role in influencing emotional experiences. Individuals who frequently experience distorted or negative thinking patterns are more likely to experience lower levels of emotional well-being. Although the present study found only a weak correlation, the statistically significant relationship provides support for the cognitive theory. At the same time, the findings suggest that emotional well-being is a multidimensional construct influenced by several interacting factors beyond cognition alone, including resilience, personality, environmental influences, and social support.

Developmental Context of College Students

College students experience significant academic, social, and personal changes during late adolescence and early adulthood. Academic pressure, career uncertainty, interpersonal relationships, and adjustment to new responsibilities may contribute to the development of negative automatic thoughts. However, many students also develop adaptive coping strategies, emotional regulation skills, and supportive social relationships that help maintain their emotional well-being. These protective factors may explain why the observed relationship between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being was statistically significant but relatively weak.

Practical Implications

The findings of the study have several important implications for mental health interventions and educational settings. Although the relationship between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being was not statistically significant, addressing maladaptive thinking patterns remains an important aspect of promoting psychological well-being. Interventions based on cognitive-behavioral principles can help individuals identify, challenge, and modify negative automatic thoughts, thereby contributing to improved emotional functioning. In addition, educational institutions can play a crucial role by creating supportive environments that promote mental health awareness and provide access to counseling services. Programs focused on stress management, emotional regulation, and resilience-building can further enhance students' ability to cope with academic and

personal challenges. By adopting a holistic approach that addresses both cognitive and environmental factors, it is possible to support the overall well-being of college students more effectively.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional research design does not permit conclusions regarding causality. Second, convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of college students. Third, the study relied on self-report measures, which may be influenced by response bias and social desirability. In addition, the study examined only two variables, whereas emotional well-being is influenced by many other factors, including resilience, coping strategies, personality, social support, and life experiences. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal research designs, and additional psychological variables to develop a more comprehensive understanding of emotional well-being among college students.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between negative automatic thoughts and emotional well-being among college students and found a weak but statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.234$, $p = .023$). The findings indicate that higher levels of negative automatic thoughts are associated with lower levels of emotional well-being. Although the strength of the correlation was weak, the statistically significant relationship supports the importance of cognitive factors in emotional functioning. The results also suggest that emotional well-being is influenced by multiple psychological, social, and environmental factors beyond negative automatic thoughts alone. Therefore, future research should include larger and more diverse samples and examine additional variables to gain a deeper understanding of emotional well-being among college students.

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