

# Exploring Gender Differences in Happiness and Psychological Well-Being Among College Students

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## Abstract

Happiness is one of the fundamental driving forces of human beings, underlying many of their actions, goals, and aspirations. Throughout human history, the pursuit of happiness has remained a central philosophical and psychological concern. In contemporary psychological literature, well-being is broadly understood through two major conceptualizations: subjective well-being (hedonia) and psychological well-being (eudaimonia). So, the study was

conducted to see the correlation between Happiness and Psychological Well-Being among college students, with a focus on gender-based differences. Data were collected from 100 college students using standardized self-report instruments. The findings support the theoretical framework that positions happiness as a critical psychological strength contributing to the psychological well-being of the students. Implications for future research and interventions aimed at enhancing hope to improve mental health outcomes are discussed.

**Keywords:** Happiness, Psychological Well-Being, Gender differences

Happiness is one of the fundamental driving forces of human beings, underlying many of their actions, goals, and aspirations (Krishnanda 1984). Throughout human history, the pursuit of happiness has remained a central philosophical and psychological concern. In contemporary psychological literature, well-being is broadly understood through two major conceptualizations: subjective well-being (hedonia) and psychological well-being (eudaimonia) (Ryan & Deci, 2001). College students frequently encounter academic competition, career-related uncertainty, changing social roles, and the pressure to achieve personal and professional success (Sharma & Gulati 2015). Research based on Diener's framework has demonstrated that happiness is associated with better physical health, stronger social relationships, academic achievement, and effective coping strategies. Among college students, subjective well-being contributes significantly to emotional adjustment, confidence, resilience, and academic motivation (Smyth et al, 2016). Ryff's model includes six dimensions of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryan, 1989 & Keyes, 2008). These dimensions collectively reflect the extent to which individuals function effectively, maintain meaningful relationships, and develop their capabilities, and experience purpose and fulfillment (Ryan & Singer, 2008). Gender Dynamics in Happiness and Psychological Well-Being has emerged as a critical variable in research related to happiness

and psychological well-being. Psychological literature suggests that males and females often differ in emotional expression, coping strategies, interpersonal orientation, social expectations, and responses to stress. These differences inherently influence their experiences of happiness and their overall psychological functioning.

A significant gender- and locale-based difference in psychological well-being among undergraduate students was seen (Kaur, Upreti, & Vig 2025). Female student's revealed greater emotional involvement and interpersonal sensitivity compared to male students. It was further seen that female students demonstrated comparatively higher psychological well-being than male students. Demographic and socio-cultural variables also significantly influence emotional functioning among college students (Kumar & Jaiswal 2024).

Psychological well-being consists of multiple dimensions including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance as well as reflects healthy psychological functioning and effective adaptation to life challenges (Ryff & Keyes 1995). There is a notable variation between male and female students in emotional adjustment, happiness, and psychological well-being which is also associated with socio-cultural expectations, emotional experiences, and gender socialization patterns (Akhtar 2015, Sharma et al. 2021, Bende 2023, Autade 2024, Kumar & Jaiswal 2024).

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To explore gender difference among college students in context of happiness.
- To explore gender difference among college students in context of psychological well-being.
- To observe the gender differences among the various dimensions of psychological well-being.

- To examine the relationship between happiness and psychological well-being among college students.

### **Research Design**

The present study employed a quantitative research approach using a descriptive, comparative, and correlational ex-post-facto research design. The independent variable (IV) was gender (categorical: male, female). The dependent variables (DVs) were happiness and psychological well-being (continuous).

### **Sample**

The sample for the present study consisted of 100 students from various colleges located in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, comprising 50 males and 50 females with the age ranged from 18 to 26 years with the help of convenience sampling method.

### **Tools**

Two standardized self-report instruments were used to examine the variables of happiness and psychological well-being.

***Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ)***: OHQ is a concise, 29-item self-report instrument developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) for the measurement of global subjective happiness. It is a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly Agree*). A single composite score is calculated by averaging all items, with certain negative statements reverse-scored. Higher scores denote greater levels of happiness. The scale possesses excellent internal consistency and strong constructs validity.

***Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB)***: It consists of 54-item which assesses six dimensions of eudaimonic well-being: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance (nine items per dimension). Responses are recorded on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 6

(*Strongly Agree*). Negatively phrased statements are reverse-scored. Higher overall scores consistently indicate greater psychological well-being. The scale possesses high internal consistency and strong test-retest reliability with satisfactory convergent and discriminant validity.

### **Procedure**

Data collection was done digitally using a unified Google Form, which included the demographic section and the two standardized questionnaires. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly upheld throughout the research process. Approximately 10–15 minutes was required to complete the questionnaires by the participants. The responses were screened for missing values or repetitive patterns. The data were then scored according to the respective manuals of each scale. The data were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, specifically the Mean ( $M$ ) and Standard Deviation ( $SD$ ), were calculated to summarize the central tendencies and dispersion of the variables. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences in happiness and psychological well-being. Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was calculated to examine the relationship between happiness and psychological well-being.

### **Result and Discussion**

The present study aimed to examine gender differences in happiness and psychological well-being among college students and to explore the relationship between happiness and psychological well-being. The results are presented below in accordance with the objectives and hypotheses of the study.

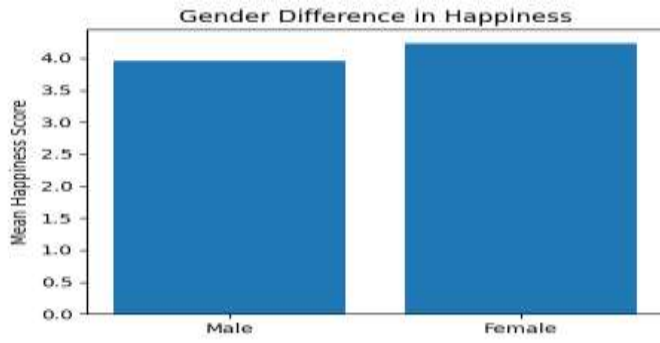
#### **Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics and Independent Samples t-Test for Happiness and Psychological Well-Being*

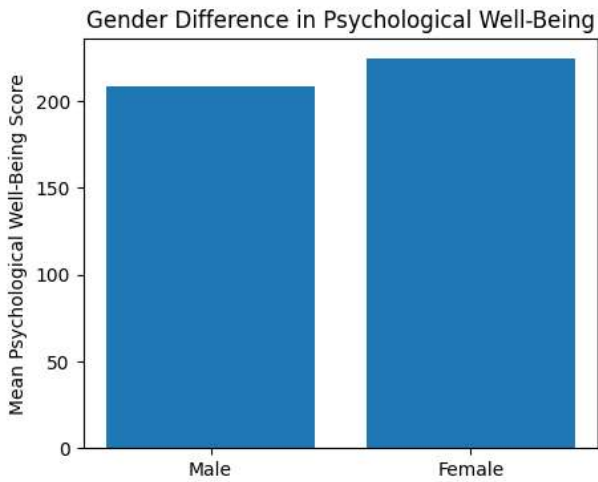
| Variables                             | Male   |       | Female |       | <i>t</i> (98) | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|---------------|----------|
|                                       | M      | SD    | M      | SD    |               |          |
| <b>Oxford Happiness Score</b>         | 3.96   | 0.68  | 4.23   | 0.59  | 2.17          | .033*    |
| <b>Total Psychological Well-Being</b> | 208.68 | 28.97 | 224.66 | 31.26 | 2.65          | .009*    |

$p < 0.05$ .

As shown in Table 1, the results indicated that female students had significantly higher happiness scores ( $M = 4.23$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) than male students ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ),  $t(98) = 2.17$ ,  $p < .05$ . This indicates a significant gender difference in happiness among college students. This finding aligns with the research of Bende (2023) and Autade (2024), who also reported notable variations in happiness between genders, often attributing these to differences in emotional awareness and interpersonal sensitivity. The current disparity may be explained by the higher emotional involvement and social expressivity often observed in female student populations. Similarly, female students scored significantly higher on psychological well-being ( $M = 224.66$ ,  $SD = 31.26$ ) compared to male students ( $M = 208.68$ ,  $SD = 28.97$ ),  $t(98) = 2.65$ ,  $p < .05$ . This finding is consistent with Kumar and Jaiswal (2024) and Akhtar (2015), who suggested that socio-cultural experiences and gender socialization patterns influence psychological functioning differently among males and females. The higher scores among females in this study may reflect an increasing sense of agency and goal-orientation in the modern Indian collegiate environment.



**Figure 1(a)**



**Figure 1(b)**

Figure 1(a) & 1(b) Comparison of Male and Female Students on Happiness and Psychological Well-Being

**Table 2**

Mean Scores for Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being by Gender

| Dimension                    | Male     |      | Female   |      | <i>t</i> (98) | P     |
|------------------------------|----------|------|----------|------|---------------|-------|
|                              | <i>M</i> | SD   | <i>M</i> | SD   |               |       |
| <b>Autonomy</b>              | 35.52    | 6.18 | 37.18    | 6.35 | 1.32          | .188  |
| <b>Environmental Mastery</b> | 35.18    | 5.54 | 37.48    | 5.97 | 2.00          | .049* |

|                           |       |      |       |      |      |       |
|---------------------------|-------|------|-------|------|------|-------|
| <b>Personal Growth</b>    | 35.62 | 7.95 | 38.6  | 7.43 | 1.94 | .056  |
| <b>Positive Relations</b> | 32.58 | 6.48 | 35.26 | 7.56 | 1.90 | .060  |
| <b>Purpose in Life</b>    | 34.36 | 7.22 | 37.44 | 7.58 | 2.08 | .040* |
| <b>Self-Acceptance</b>    | 35.42 | 6.52 | 38.76 | 5.07 | 2.86 | .005* |

$p < 0.05$ .

As detailed in Table 2, the results indicate that female students obtained higher mean scores than male students across all six dimensions of psychological well-being. However, statistically significant gender differences were observed only in certain dimensions. In the dimension of autonomy, female students ( $M = 37.18$ ,  $SD = 6.35$ ) scored higher than male students ( $M = 35.52$ ,  $SD = 6.18$ ). However, the obtained difference was not statistically significant,  $t(98) = 1.33$ ,  $p = .188$ . For environmental mastery, female students ( $M = 37.48$ ,  $SD = 5.97$ ) scored significantly higher than male students ( $M = 35.18$ ,  $SD = 5.54$ ),  $t(98) = 2.00$ ,  $p = .049$ , indicating a significant gender difference in this dimension. Similarly, female students obtained higher scores on personal growth ( $M = 38.60$ ,  $SD = 7.43$ ) compared to male students ( $M = 35.62$ ,  $SD = 7.95$ ). However, the obtained difference was not statistically significant,  $t(98) = 1.94$ ,  $p = .056$ . In the dimension of positive relations, female students ( $M = 35.26$ ,  $SD = 7.56$ ) scored higher than male students ( $M = 32.58$ ,  $SD = 6.48$ ), although the difference did not reach statistical significance,  $t(98) = 1.90$ ,  $p = .060$ . Female students also demonstrated significantly higher scores on purpose in life ( $M = 37.44$ ,  $SD = 7.58$ ) than male students ( $M = 34.36$ ,  $SD = 7.22$ ),  $t(98) = 2.08$ ,  $p = .040$ . Likewise, female students scored significantly higher on self-acceptance ( $M = 38.76$ ,  $SD = 5.07$ ) compared to male students ( $M = 35.42$ ,  $SD = 6.52$ ),  $t(98) = 2.86$ ,  $p = .005$ .

Overall, the findings indicate that female students obtained comparatively higher scores across all dimensions of psychological well-being, with statistically significant gender differences observed in environmental mastery, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

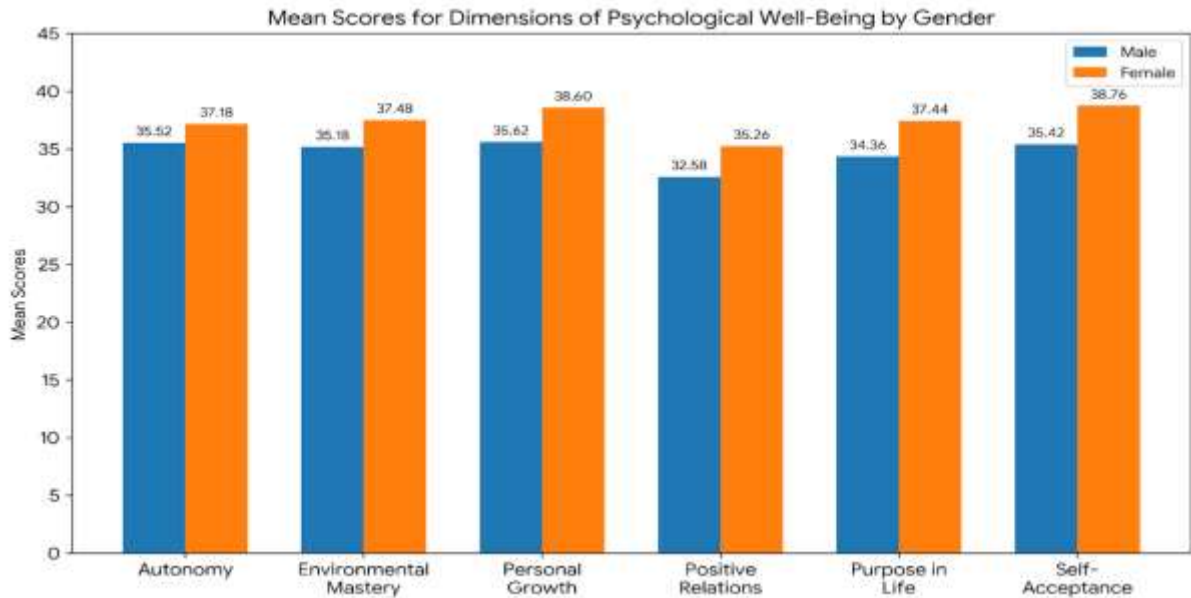


Figure 2 Showing Mean Scores of Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being

**Table 3**

*Pearson Correlation Between Happiness and Psychological Well-Being*

| Variables                                       | <i>R</i> | <i>r</i> <sup>2</sup> | <i>P</i> |
|---|----------|-----------------------|----------|
| <b>Happiness &amp; Psychological Well-Being</b> | 0.7643   | 0.5841                | < .001   |

**Note.** *N* = 100.

As presented in Table 3, the analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant correlation between happiness and psychological well-being,  $r(98) = .764, p < .001$ . The obtained result indicates that higher levels of happiness were associated with higher

levels of psychological well-being among college students. Furthermore, the coefficient of determination ( $r^2 = .584$ ) indicated that approximately 58.4% of the variance in psychological well-being was associated with happiness scores. This is strongly supported by Warrier et al. (2021) and Dogan et al. (2013), who both emphasized that positive emotional functioning and psychological adjustment are mutually reinforcing.



Figure 3 Scatterplot Demonstrating the Positive Correlation Between Happiness and Psychological Well-Being

The statistical analysis revealed that gender significantly influences the well-being of the surveyed cohort. Female students demonstrated significantly higher levels of both happiness and overall psychological well-being compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, the study identified a strong, statistically significant positive correlation between happiness and psychological well-being, leading to the acceptance of the third hypothesis.

### Conclusion

A primary contribution of this research is the coarse identification of specific dimensions—Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance—where female students demonstrated notably higher scores than their male counterparts. These findings may reflect comparatively higher levels of perceived agency and goal orientation among female

students, while also indicating evolving patterns of psychological functioning within the Indian collegiate context. The study provides robust empirical evidence ( $r = .764$ ) for the strong relationship between happiness and psychological well-being among Indian college students. Male students reported significantly lower levels of both happiness and total psychological well-being, which shows a notable gender-based well-being gap.

### **Implication**

The findings of this study offer significant implications for college counselors and student welfare departments, highlighting a serious need for gender-specific interventions to account the lower levels of happiness and psychological well-being reported by male students. As seen that there is a strong positive correlation between happiness and psychological well-being, institutions should adopt holistic wellness programs that prioritize eudaimonic factors—such as fostering a sense of purpose and self-acceptance—to effectively enhance overall student satisfaction. Furthermore, educational policies could benefit from the integration of "life skills" into the curriculum to bolster environmental mastery and positive relations, providing a practical framework for students, particularly those navigating the transition from different states to the collegiate environment.

Future researchers could employ longitudinal designs to establish the quality of these relationships. As the sample size was limited so expanding the sample to include diverse geographical regions and exploring mediating variables like self-esteem or coping strategies would provide a broad understanding of student well-being. Overall, the present study contributes to the growing body of positive psychology research by highlighting the interconnected nature of happiness and psychological well-being.

**Conflict of Interest:** The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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