



शोध भूमि

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Influence of Gender and Locality on the Psychological Well-Being of Undergraduate Students

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The psychological well-being of undergraduate students is a major concern in contemporary higher education. This study investigates the significant and distinct influence of gender and locality of residence (urban vs. rural) on the psychological well-being (PWB) of undergraduate students, a population facing intense developmental and environmental pressures. Recognizing that PWB is a crucial predictor of academic success and social adjustment, this research utilized a Descriptive Survey Method with a sample of 100 undergraduate students from Varanasi city. They shape students' vulnerabilities, coping mechanisms, and overall adjustment to university life.

The transition to university is a critical developmental period, marked by demanding academic, social, and autonomy challenges. Consequently, undergraduate psychological well-being is a central and global concern for higher education institutions. The rising rates of anxiety, depression, and stress—a form of psychological distress—are a growing and concerning trend. Given that well-being is a strong predictor of academic success, social adjustment, and life satisfaction, research should move beyond general observations to identify specific, varied factors.

This study explores the hypothesis that students' psychological well-being is not uniform but is profoundly influenced by key sociodemographic variables:

gender and locality of residence (urban vs. rural). A substantial body of literature suggests these factors are powerful social determinants of health, shaping how distress manifests, how coping mechanisms are adopted and what sources of fulfillment are found. While gender is known to affect vulnerability, with female students often reporting higher rates of internalizing disorders, locality adds complexity through its influence on resource access, community support, and socioeconomic stability.

Gender and locality are powerful social determinants of health that collectively shape the mental health landscape of undergraduate students. Evidence shows that female students are disproportionately affected by internalizing disorders, while the effect of locality is mixed and highly contextual, significantly mediated by socioeconomic status (SES), resource availability, and community resilience. Therefore, effective support for student mental health requires moving past a one-size-fits-all model. A holistic framework is essential for developing gender-sensitive and locality-informed interventions and targeted programs that address the distinct challenges faced by diverse student groups, ultimately fostering a more supportive and inclusive educational environment.

The research investigates how gender and locality influence the psychological adjustment of undergraduate students.

Key word : Psychological Well-being, Psychological adjustment, **Gender and Locality**

The Influence of Gender on Psychological Well-being

Gender is a significant and complex factor in student mental health, showing specific differences in how students are vulnerable and how they cope. A growing body of research has underscored the profound and often complex role of gender as a key determinant of mental health outcomes. While psychological distress is a widespread issue in higher education institutions, it is not experienced uniformly across all student populations. Instead, significant disparities emerge when examining well-being through a gendered lens, revealing distinct patterns of vulnerability and resilience. Consequently, the influence of gender on the psychological well-being of undergraduate students is a multifaceted and critical area of study. Extensive research consistently indicates that female undergraduates report greater psychological distress—including anxiety, stress, and depression—compared to their male peers (Chauhan & Dhar, 2019; Bhasin et al., 2010; Shruti, V.V., 2024). This gap is often linked to the pressures of societal gender roles and distinct emotional sensitivities. Furthermore, gender appears to influence the primary sources of well-being; studies suggest that males often derive fulfillment from areas like autonomy and self-acceptance, while females find greater satisfaction in positive social relationships and personal growth. This creates an

academic paradox, where female students, despite achieving higher grades, frequently experience more internal distress (Voyer & Voyer, 2014). Finally, gender profoundly impacts help-seeking behaviour. While females show higher rates of internalizing disorders, male students face unique struggles with emotional suppression and are more hesitant to seek psychological help, which clearly indicates the need for gender-sensitive support systems.

The Impact of Locality on Psychological Well-being

In addition to gender, the locality of a student's residence can significantly affect their social and psychological adjustment. Locality or location of residence can be seen as a major factor in determining individual social and psychological adjustment either by providing a number of facilities or posing a number of challenges. Student's hometown—whether it's a city or a rural area—affects their mental health, mainly because of differences in available resources and the type of community they are in. Quality of schools and educational opportunities within a locality also impact self esteem, academic achievement and overall psychological well being. The social dynamics and peer culture within a locality significantly influence adolescents' sense of belonging and self worth. Family support and instability, which is often affected by the socioeconomic conditions of a locality, play a key role in adolescent well being. High levels of crime and violence within a locality can lead to anxiety, stress, and a reduced sense of security among adolescents. While locality plays a significant role, individual characteristics and coping mechanism also impact adolescent psychological well-being. Understanding the specific challenges faced by adolescents in different localities can inform targeted intervention aimed at promoting mental health and well-being.

Research on this impact yields mixed findings, highlighting its high context-specificity. Some studies suggest students in rural areas are happier because they have stronger social support (Bhat, 2018). However, other studies find that urban students fare better, likely because they have easier access to education and healthcare (Kawa & Shafi, 2015; Shaheen, 2016). Complicating this, some research finds no significant difference between the two groups (IJIP, 2023). Crucially, Socioeconomic Status (SES)—often tied to locality—acts as a strong predictor, with students from lower strata consistently reporting worse well-being. That said, where you live also affects your resilience. While urban areas offer more resources, some evidence suggests rural communities may help students feel a greater sense of control and belonging, which can build better coping skills (Koneru &Yenagi, 2024).

Significance of the study

The study of psychological well-being among undergraduate students is critically needed because this phase represents a significant and vulnerable developmental

transition marked by intense academic pressures, evolving independence, and career anxieties. In the context of India, this need is amplified by an escalating mental health crisis, as evidenced by alarming statistics from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), showing thousands of student suicides annually due to academic stress and failure. Furthermore, surveys consistently reveal widespread anxiety, with over 65% of students reporting stress related to exams. Researching student well-being is key to establishing effective support systems and fostering lifelong resilience. It's also vital for understanding the complex, dynamic nature of well-being, particularly how factors like gender and sociocultural contexts shape mental health outcomes. By exploring the unique challenges faced by male and female students, as well as those navigating the urban-rural divide, this study will pave the way for creating targeted interventions, supportive academic environments, and institutional policies that ensure the holistic development of future generations.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the difference in psychological well-being between male and female undergraduate students.
2. To study the difference in psychological well-being between rural and urban undergraduate students.

Hypothesis of the study

1. There is no significant difference in the psychological well-being between male and female undergraduate students.
2. There is no significant difference in the psychological well-being between rural and urban undergraduate students.

Research Design and Methodology

Research Method

A Descriptive Survey Research Method was utilised to investigate the psychological well-being of undergraduate students.

Population of the Study

The population for this study is comprised of undergraduate students from colleges affiliated with Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi.

Sample and Sampling technique of the study

The sample selection utilized a two-stage simple random sampling technique. Initially, the lottery method was used to select 10 affiliated colleges from 133 affiliated colleges of Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith in Varanasi. Participants were then selected from these institutions using the simple random sampling technique. The final sample was composed of 100 undergraduate students, with a gender distribution of 42 boys and 58

girls. Geographically, the sample included 56 students from rural areas and 44 from urban areas

Tool for data collection

Psychological well-being was assessed using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS), an 18-items instrument that measures six dimensions of well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

Hypothesis Testing

Psychological Well-being of undergraduate Male and Female

- ❖ To find out whether the psychological well-being of undergraduate male and female students significantly different or not, mean, standard deviation and t-test value were calculated and shown in Table No.1.

Table No.1

Variables	Total no. of students	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation(SD)	t- value
Male	42	93.52	9.316	3.056
Female	58	87.57	9.830	

Table No.1 represents the mean psychological well-being scores for male and female undergraduate students, which were 93.52 and 87.57, respectively. The corresponding standard deviations for these groups were 9.316 and 9.830. A calculated t-value of 3.056 exceeded the critical t-test table value at the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, Null Hypothesis No.1, stating " There is no significant difference in the psychological well-being between male and female undergraduate students," is rejected. This finding is supported by earlier studies (Anjuman, 2021; Geetha & Girija, 2014; Perez, 2012; Rathi et.al. 2007), which reported significant gender differences in psychological well-being. However, Kotar (2013) found no statistically significant gender difference among college students.

Psychological Well-being of Rural and Urban Undergraduate students

- ❖ To find out whether the psychological well-being of undergraduate urban and rural students is significantly different or not, mean, standard deviation and t-test were calculated and presented in Table No.2 .

Table No. 2

Variables	Total number of students	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t- value
Rural	56	95.18	8.214	3.527
Urban	44	88.72	9.726	

Table No.2 indicates that the mean psychological well-being scores for rural and urban students were 95.18 and 88.72, respectively. The standard deviations for these groups were 8.214 and 9.726 respectively. The calculated t-value of 3.527 exceeds the t-test table value at a 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, Null Hypothesis No. 2, “There is no significant difference in the psychological well-being between rural and urban undergraduate students,” is rejected.

Similarly, Venkateshen (2020) and Bhat (2018) discovered that factors such as educational attainment, employment opportunities and social support systems differed across regions and influence the well-being of youth.

Findings

1. The mean psychological well-being score for undergraduate male students was 93.52, which is greater than the mean score for female students, calculated at 87.57. The results indicate a significant difference in the psychological well-being between male and female undergraduate students.

The possible reason for this may be that male undergraduate may score higher on certain dimensions of psychological well being, like autonomy and self acceptance. Societal expectations can some time place different pressure on male and female, which could affect their perceived level of stress. Studies indicates that male are more likely to engage in activities perceived as increasing autonomy. Another reason could be that female are more likely to seek help for mental health issues and to openly discuss them.

2. The mean psychological well-being score for rural undergraduate students was 95.18, which is higher than the mean score of 88.72 for urban undergraduate students. The results show a significant difference in the psychological well-being between rural and urban undergraduate students.

The possible reason for this maybe the stronger community ties. Rural community often poster is stronger sense of belonging and social support. These close net relationships can provide a buffer against stress and contribute to a sense of security. Another possible reason could be Rural environment typically offers greater access to Green space and natural setting. Exposure to nature has been linked to reduce stress, improved mood, and enhanced cognitive function. The slower pace of life

and ability to spend time outdoors can be very beneficial for mental health. Urban environment characterised by noise pollution, overcrowding and a fast-paced life style, all of which can contribute to stress and anxiety. Rural areas often a slower, less hectic place of life, which can be more conducive to relaxation and well being.

Conclusion

The Study concludes that psychological well-being in undergraduate students is significantly and distinctly influenced by both gender and locality (urban vs. rural), necessitating the rejection of both null hypotheses. Effective student mental health support can't be a one-size-fits-all approach. We need a holistic framework to develop gender-sensitive and locality-informed interventions and targeted programs that address the distinct challenges faced by diverse student groups, thereby fostering a more supportive and resilient academic environment.

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