

Psychological Well Being of First Year College Students

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ABSTRACT

Well-being is a dynamic concept that includes subjective, social, and psychological dimensions as well as health-related behaviors. It is often thought of as one of the hallmarks of the liberal arts experience, resulting from educational encounters that both guide students in the search for meaning and direction in life and help them realize their true potential.

Within the framework of the research, 100 students from a wide variety of disciplines, of mean age 21 were surveyed. The study methods were Ryff well-being inventory which consists of series of statements reflecting the six areas of psychological well-being, combination and self developed open questionnaire with recent records of academic. The Results of the study show, that majority of students have middle level of well-being; do not have depression and average self-evaluated academic performance. The research also revealed that the students, who have medium or high level of academic performance, have high index of well-being, purpose of life and personal growth on scale. Also, those students who carry task oriented coping strategy, have high index of well-being, and personal growth on the scale.

Keywords: *Well being, Academic performance, Psychological Dimensions, Coping Strategies.*

Introduction

Psychological well-being is the subjective term that means different meanings to different people. Psychological well-being resides within the experience of the individual (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976). Level of positive affect outweighs the level of negative affect in someone's life (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976; Diener, 1984). Along with contextual influences psychological capital shapes the perception of well being. Operationally psychological capital can be defined as: "An individual's positive psychological state of development and is characterized by: Having confidence (self efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; Making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding

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now and in the future; Persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success.” (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007).

Meaning of Psychological Wellbeing

Psychological well-being is perhaps the most widely used construct among psychologists and mental health professionals. However, there is still no consensus regarding the operational definition of this construct (Khan and Juster, 2002). Yet, many theories of well-being have been proposed and an extensive body of empirical research using different indices of this construct has been conducted. However, theorists have found that the concept of psychological wellbeing (PWB) is much more complex and controversial. Practically speaking, psychological wellbeing serves as an umbrella term for many constructs that assess psychological functioning (Girum, 2012).

Psychological well-being is about lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Sustainable well-being does not require individuals to feel good all the time; the experience of painful emotions (e.g. disappointment, failure, grief) is a normal part of life, and being able to manage these negative or painful emotions is essential for long-term well-being. Psychological well-being is, however, compromised when negative emotions are extreme or very long lasting and interfere with a person’s ability to function in his or her daily life (Huppert, 2009). Ryff’s (1989) defined well-being is the optimal psychological functioning and experience. Shek (1992) defines psychological well-being as that ‘state of a mentally healthy person who possesses a number of positive mental health qualities such as active adjustment to the environment and unity of personality’

Significance of the Study

18-25 years of age is a period of transition in which a person is faced with challenges and difficulties that may throw them into confusion and troubles. However, it is also a period where young men and women could be prepared for adult life ahead. Understanding the well-being of young adults and the factors that contribute to it will help towards clarifying and defining ways to better help prepare for their life. One of the questions that have gained interest in the study among this age group is whether there is difference in psychological well being between males and females (Roothman, Kirsten & Wissing, 2003). Therefore an understanding of psychological predictors of some of the components of well-being can provide a framework for developing more effective interventions to cushion the components of wellness.

Operational Definitions

Psychological well-being:- Individual meaningful engagement in life, self- satisfaction, optimal psychological functioning and development at one’s true highest potential. It has six dimensions that are autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationship with other, purpose in life and self-acceptance of individuals (Ryff, 1989).

Broad Objective

To assess the psychological well being of college students

Hypothesis

H₁: $\mu =$ There is a significant influence of psychological well being on academic performance of college students.

Methods

The following chapter describes the methodology used to conduct the study. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between self-reported psychological wellness and academic success in college students. In addition, the study sought to determine if the relationship between wellness and academic success differs by gender and academic program. Also examined was whether the factors of wellness could be used to predict academic success.

Research Design

The study is descriptive in its nature which involves comparative survey and co-relational analysis. It is descriptive since it attempts to assess the level of psychological well-being among male and female college students. It is also co-relational, since it correlates the independent variable of psychological well-being of college students with some selected dependent variables such as academic performance, age, sex and grade level and comparative since it compares the status of psychological well-being. In order to achieve the stated objectives, both qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collection were used.

Tools

1. Demographic Questionnaire: The respondents were asked to provide information regarding their gender, age, grade level, parental status, class, stream of subject and the current living place. The demographic questions gathered basic information about the participants' college/university, program of study, and student classification.

2. Psychological Wellbeing Scale: In order to assess the psychological wellbeing of the respondents the researcher employed the Ryff Psychological Wellbeing scale medium form which consists of 84 questions.

The scale consists of a series of statements reflecting the six areas of psychological well-being: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with others, Purpose in Life and Self-acceptance. Each sub-scale consists of 14 items. Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement. The test retest reliability of the sub scales ranges from 0.81 to 0.85 and the internal consistency ranged from .87 to .90 (www.Liberal_arts.wabash.edu).

3. Interview Schedule: A qualitative semi-structured interview was designed to explore the conditions and situation that could promote the students' psychological well-being. The aim was to allow the respondents to inform the study from their point of view, using their words (Lofland et al., 2006). A semi-structured interview guide consisting of themes and questions was written in English.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher visited different target colleges and asked permission from the administrators to conduct research. After permission had been granted, survey questionnaires were distributed to the different classes identified as samples in the study. The students whose mother or father was absent were asked to consider someone who served as the father or mother figure in their family. The collected filled-out questionnaires were then encoded and analyzed using t-test for independent samples. A letter requesting participation, motivating the research, was included. Ethical aspects regarding the research were discussed with the participants.

The questionnaires, as well as instructions on how to complete each, were included in the students' official study material, which they received when they registered for the course in research methodology. Students were requested to submit the questionnaires with their first assignment, and they provided written consent to participate by signing and submitting a consent form with the completed questionnaires. Students were required to indicate their student number on their questionnaires so that their final examination score could be retrieved at the end of the year. They were, however, assured that their anonymity and confidentiality would be protected and that their results would only be reported on in a group format. They were also assured that their results would not be used to influence any decisions about their studies in the course, but only for research purposes.

Data Analysis

Data collected through semi-structured interviews were analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The procedure outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied in this analysis and consisted of the following steps: Transcribing and familiarization with the data, reading re-reading and noting down initial ideas, searching for themes, and producing the report. These were discussed and codes identified to provide the basis of a coding framework. Data was then systematically coded with two members of the research team independently coding a sample of transcripts. Discrepancies were checked, discussed and clarified. Data was stored and coded using SPSS. Following an initial thematic analysis, further in depth analysis was conducted using an interactive process and drawing upon relevant theory were appropriate (Kelly, 2010).

Descriptive statistical measures mean and standard deviation were used to see general pattern of psychological wellbeing of the respondents according to sex, age and grade level. T-test was computed to determine whether there is a significant mean difference between male and female in their psychological wellbeing.

Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to provide information whether the independent variables and dependent variables correlate with each other and to measure the degree of relationship between variables.

Results and Findings

Comparing the amount of psychological well-being amongst the students of the first and the last academic years reveals a statistical significant difference between both groups on students' total score of psychological well-being ($t=-3.43$) and the factors of self-esteem ($t=-4.05$),

environmental mastery ($t=-5.27$), and self-acceptance ($t=-2.15$). Furthermore, comparing the level of psychological well-being between the female and male students of University indicates a significant difference only in the factor of self-esteem ($t=1.36$).

First-generation status is associated with lower self-acceptance and marginally lower levels of personal growth, but there are no such differences among the other four PWB dimensions or the overall well-being index. Several other variables are significantly related to most or all dimensions of PWB. Specifically, women have higher levels of well-being than men on all dimensions except autonomy. The consistency of these differences is somewhat surprising, since research on adults has shown that women tend to score higher than men on only two dimensions of well-being: positive relations with others and personal growth (Ryff, 1989, 1991). The strong patterns of these gender differences may reflect that this early stage of adulthood, and these observed differences may narrow or disappear over time. Conversely, it is also possible that the observed differences reflect, cohort or generational effects, which would imply that these differences persist over time.

In general, students from low-income families exhibit similar patterns of overall well-being to students from middle-income families. Specifically, being from a low-income family is negatively related to autonomy, but it is also associated with greater purpose in life and marginally greater self-acceptance. In contrast, significant PWB benefits are apparent for students from high-income families. Controlling for all other variables, these students have greater environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, self-acceptance, and overall PWB than do students from middle-income families. When these effects are considered with the findings for first-generation students, it seems that facing socioeconomic adversity does not contribute to greater PWB among incoming college freshmen; in fact, the opposite is true.

Age also plays a powerful role in predicting well-being. Being at least 20 years old at the beginning of freshman year is negatively related to autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance. These age trends differ from those that cover a broad age range of adults (Ryff, 1989, 1991; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998), and the explanations for these trends are probably also specific to college student samples. For instance, people who decide to enter college after taking at least a year off after high school may be more likely to have specific career-related reasons for doing so, which contributes to their higher levels of purpose in life. Similarly, in their more deliberate choice to attend college, these non-traditional students may be seeking the control and autonomy that are often associated with occupations that require an undergraduate degree (Kohn, 1969; Kohn & Schooler, 1983). Moreover, these older adults may not be satisfied with or accepting of their current self, which may be part of their motivation for returning to college.

Changes in Psychological Well-Being during the College Years

Many of the precollege variables that consistently predict changes in PWB are also related to entering levels of PWB. When controlling for a variety of precollege characteristics and college experiences, men, and students who had relatively low high school GPAs tend to have lower gains in PWB than do women. The negative patterns for first-generation students are stronger for changes in PWB than for incoming PWB; relative to other students, first-generation

students exhibit decreases in autonomy, personal growth, positive relations with others, and overall well-being. Thus, first-generation students face not only greater subjective difficulties in adjusting to college (Terenzini et al., 1994; Zwerling & London, 1992), but also diminished psychological well-being during the freshman year.

In contrast to patterns at the beginning of freshman year, degree aspirations are negatively associated with gains in environmental mastery, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, and overall well-being. It is possible that students who intend to pursue a post-bachelorate degree face additional pressure to succeed, and this pressure causes them to feel unsure about their ability to control their environment and to have less time and energy to spend on interpersonal relationships. Moreover, whereas non-traditional-age students entered college with lower levels of PWB, these students experience greater gains on four of the six dimensions during college than do traditional-age first-year students. Thus, the college environment may provide the sorts of opportunities for growth that these students may have sought upon entering school.

Perhaps surprisingly, students who attend research universities experience greater gains in positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance than do students who attend liberal arts colleges. Importantly, these differences are not suppressor effects that result from controlling for college experiences. It may be that the substantial social and academic options at these larger institutions afford students greater opportunities to find themselves, their friends, and their purpose in life. Since the analyses control for a variety of pre-college characteristics, it seems somewhat unlikely that these institutional findings are the product of selection effects (i.e., differences among students who choose research universities versus liberal arts colleges).

Drawing upon the framework proposed by Gurin and colleagues (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002), it is possible that students who have taken only one course are at a point of disequilibrium, in which they are attempting to reconcile their previous attitudes and worldviews with those presented in their diversity course. By taking multiple courses, students are then able to work through these issues and become more at ease with these new perspectives, which then contributes to improved well-being (Bowman, 2008).

Conclusion

Clearly, colleges and universities should work toward facilitating meaningful relationships among all students. As Allport (1954) and many others have argued, merely creating the opportunities for social interaction and engagement (e.g., through residence halls) is not sufficient for facilitating meaningful relationships, particularly across racial/ethnic groups. Instead it is critical that students form quality relationships with one another while minimizing hostile interactions across diversity. These findings suggest that programs about group dynamics and conflict mediation—whether based in the curriculum or co-curricular activities—may be useful for improving students' interpersonal relationship skills and subsequently, their psychological well-being.

Psychological Well-Being and College Adjustment

An important characteristic of PWB is that it gauges well-being in a variety of contexts or aspects of one's life. That is, participants respond to general questions about autonomy, personal

growth, and relations with others, regardless of where “autonomy” occurs or who the “others” are with whom one has relationships. However, particularly for full-time, traditional-age students, college life should play a key role in informing participants’ responses and self-perceptions. For instance, a student who is having trouble making friends on campus would probably rate herself lower on positive relations with others. In addition, these negative experiences can also affect her acceptance of self (through wondering whether something is “wrong” with her), her ability to master her environment (since interactions with others play a key role in shaping one’s surroundings), and her purpose in life (especially if she has awkward relationships with students who are in her field of study). Indeed, this study indicates that the quality of interpersonal relationships with other students has a significant effect on all six dimensions of well-being. Thus, for many students, the college environment shapes and contributes to numerous facets of psychological well-being.

This study was conducted to examine the relationship of psychological well being and academic performance among young adults. The first research question examined the relationship between the factors of wellness as outlined by the 6F-WEL inventory and first semester grade-point average. Descriptive statistics and correlations were used to explore this relationship. First semester grade-point average spanned across a wide range across participants. This was to be expected as the students were all diverse who typically have a wide variance in academic success in the first semester (Tinto, 1993). Total wellness and the other factors of wellness were similar in their mean score as well as their variance. The lowest scores were found in the area of physical wellness ($M = 69.96$), while the highest scores were in the area of social wellness ($M = 91.88$). None of the factors of wellness was significantly related to academic success as defined by first semester grade-point average. It is worth noting that the coping factor of wellness, although not significant, had a slightly negative relationship to first semester grade-point average. This is opposite of the expected outcome that individuals with higher levels of coping skills perform well in the classroom environment.

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