

Case Study

Concept of Well-Being among Young Women in NCR, India: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

There is a change in the roles of young women in society, their responsibilities have been shifting and so are their concerns. It is important to understand the factors that contribute to their well-being. Well-being can be understood as a phenomenon that leads to a state of equilibrium or satisfaction, which can be influenced by various dimensions like physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and moral functioning. Individuals endeavor to work for their passion, compassion and life satisfaction, from which well-being emerges. However, the perceptions as well as the concept of well-being or wellness is different to every individual and is subjective. The present research study attempted to find out the perceptions of well-being among young women. Young adulthood is known to be a stage of various transitions in term of work, career, identity, social groups, opportunities, goals etc., leading to disequilibrium and uncertainty. Thus, understanding about well-being in this age is important. The study was conducted with a sample of 20 young women (age 18-24 years) residing in Delhi-NCR. It revealed that both external factors (food, shelter, livelihood, safety, education, employability) and internal factors (happiness, self-esteem, empathy, satisfaction, resilience, adaptation) together contributed to overall well-being and well-balanced life. As a consequence of COVID-19 the young women faced many challenges and also discovered their strengths.

Keywords: *Well-being, physical health, mental health, multidimensional approach, Indian young women, COVID-19*

Well-being is a broad concept including many aspects of our everyday life and is influenced by economic resources, relationships, emotional and physical health (Dahl, 2012). It is associated with happiness and includes life satisfaction, a sense of purpose, and ability to manage stress (Bonnie et al., 2015; Dodge et al., 2012). Quality of life which is a major component of well-being has been discussed by many ancient philosophers too e.g., Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. They viewed it as the desirable state that comes from virtuous action, wisdom, and positive life circumstances—i.e., from realizing one's full potential and leading a good and moral life (Hansen, 2011). Finding a sense of meaning by comprehending and interpreting experiences, creates a strong sense of narrative,

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shaping the overall well-being of an individual (Steger, 2012). The concepts of well-being during young adulthood stage becomes significant, as it is considered to be one of the transitional stages, where a variety of roles and responsibilities arise in the formation of a newer future ahead (Christie et al., 2017). In the case of young women in India, who face many challenges, it becomes critical to understand their perceptions of well-being (Malhotra & Shah, 2015).

The stage of young adulthood

The experiences and perceptions of well-being of young people themselves are of special significance (Christie et al., 2017). The period of young adulthood has been defined as extending from 18-35 years such as in Developmental Psychology (Arnett, 2000) or in policies (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2014; United Nations, 1985). The period is unique as individuals go through uncertainties as well as stress related to new roles and responsibilities (Arnett, 2000; Khan et al., 2017). But at the same time this stage has undergone significant change in the present times (Khan et al., 2017). Change in personal demographics, availability of resources, changing attitudes and technology have put across a change in the view (Khan et al., 2017; Myers, 1999).

External and Internal Indicators of well-being

The external indicators of well-being are those that are related to external features like life expectancy, access to adequate medical care, level of education, quality of housing that can provide an objective overview of well-being (Andersen et al., 2003; Cummins, 2000; Hansen, 2011). While self-reported perceptions of well-being are internal and refer to how people experience and view their lives (Diener et al., 2003). Indicators like self-esteem, positive emotions, negative emotions, intrapersonal and interpersonal relations etc., contribute to internal indicators of well-being (Diener et al., 2003; Hansen, 2011).

Women's well-being in COVID-19

Tracing the evolution of women's status and well-being in India, it can be seen that various concepts and concerns have risen, been achieved and modified from time to time. (Saryal, 2014). However, how exactly the concept of well-being plays a role in women's life, remains an important area of understanding since their role, recognition and rights are still evolving and cannot be said to have been fully established (Malhotra et al., 2015; Saryal, 2014). Exploring the field, Malhotra & Shah (2015) found education, skills, training and interventions targeting the physical and social environment are crucial for addressing women's wellbeing, life satisfaction and wellness (Malhotra & Shah, 2015).

While the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the livelihoods of all, women in particular are negatively affected by a variety of socio-economic difficulties globally (Agha et al., 2020) with the COVID-19 crisis making it worse for them (Fortier, 2020). It is known to be leading various psychological and physiological dysfunctions, hampering their well-being (Bordoloi et al., 2020). In a recent longitudinal study, Gopal, Sharma & Subramanyam (2020), found that there is a need of mental health services (Quilter & Taylor, 2020) in Indian society, especially for women and marginalized people (Malhotra & Shah, 2015), as long-running lockdown appears to cause them psychological distress (Gopal, Sharma & Subramanyam; 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Objective:

To explore the experiences and perceptions of well-being among young women.

Research design: Qualitative research.

Sample and techniques: Purposive sampling technique (non-probability sampling). Young women in the age group of 18-24 years were selected. The sample size was 20. The locale was NCR region.

Data Sources: Primary data were obtained by conducting tele-interviews.

Procedure: After obtaining due ethical clearance from the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC), tele-interviews were conducted as per the convenience of the participants, after taking their informed consent. Each interview lasted for about 30-40 minutes.

Data analysis: Thematic analysis using Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview led the participants to reflect on their experiences of well-being under four major dimensions. Further analysis revealed certain variations and commonalities in the participants' experiences and perceptions, as discussed below.

Physical dimension

Physical dimension of well-being refers to basic life amenities such as access to basic foodstuffs, an adequate standard of living, access to primary health care, possibilities for rest and recreation, physical fitness (Dahl, 2012).

- **Access to basic resources:** A wide range of responses emerged regarding access to basic resources. All the participants (20) agreed basic needs of resources were met in their life at the moment. Where food, shelter, and clothing emerged as the primary areas. Interestingly digital devices and internet enabled devices were seen as basic resources by the young women that helped them in studying, work or connecting with people. Internet enabled devices had become important basic needs for the young women.
- **Nutrition:** Every participant shared the importance of eating healthy in order to prevent diseases and stay active. Out of 20 participants, 18 participants followed a three-meal- a day pattern and two of the participants followed no such strict patterns, their meals varied from two-to-three in a day. There was a decrease in the frequency of eating outside, since COVID-19 pandemic. In one of the articles by The Energy and Resource Institute (TERI), in India due to pandemic period corresponding to lockdown, there came a persistent change and impact in nutrition and eating habits, as many of the people started preferring home cooked food, healthier food choices and increased consumption of traditional medicinal food (George et al., 2020). This was found to be somewhat true, as some of the participants also mentioned the use of some multivitamins or food they now persistently consumed, in order to protect themselves and build immunity. Some of these were vitamin C and B12 tablets, lemon or orange juice and *giloy (Tinospora Cordifolia, a medicinal herb) juice*.
- **Fitness and physical activity:** Most of the participants liked physical activity or considered exercise as very important. But as of the participants, only one out of 20 participants went to the gym regularly but in the lockdown period (COVID-19 pandemic) she did regular exercise and yoga with her family members. Others (14) went for walks but not so regularly. And the rest (five) were not so active or regular in fitness or physical activity and believed that going out for college or work or outings were a major part of physical bodily movements they did, though now this was not so. A research

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study explored a relationship between physical activity and psychological well-being, found that regular physical exercise or activity, leads to higher levels of positive psychological well-being and lowering issues like anxiety (Brymer et al., 2017). Also recommended and mentioned in various guidelines, “adults in the age group of 18-64 years should involve in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or do at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity throughout the week, or an equivalent combination of moderate and vigorous-intensity activity” (National Health Portal-India, 2018; CDC, 2020).

- **Menstrual and personal hygiene:** All young women (20) were very concerned about their menstrual and personal hygiene. And for that, the use of various available products like sanitary napkins, cleaning products, daily bathing, washing and changing clothes regularly were reported. Some participants also shared the fact that as they are growing, they are now more particular about self-care routines which they count under personal hygiene. And various online blogs, article, videos etc., have helped them to gain understanding in this area.

Social and Personal Dimension

A social dimension of well-being means the feeling of inclusion and of acceptance in a society, having a healthy comfort level with society, a sense of belonging, social identity and a feeling that one has a contribution to make to society (Keyes, 2002).

- **Self:** Everyone’s ideas and perceptions of self are different, but a common trend emerged from the responses. All the participants at this young adulthood stage considered their current life stage as being challenging to their self, identity, and self-concept. And, all the participants (20), believe that the lockdown period brought attention to their "self" strongly and has shaped their identity. Being more responsible towards self and career was the most common trends found. According to earlier research, some personality traits that are strongly connected and related to well-being are positive self-concept, social identity, optimism, extroversion, and self-esteem (Costa et al., 1980).
- **Social relationships:** Most of the participants (16) shared that they seek comfort in the company of their friends and family, and also when they face problems or challenges. Upon asking further, it was found that family and friends are preferred because they provide comfort, help, understanding, are non-judgmental, and support the participants in many ways. According to Myers (1999), having close, positive, and supportive relationships in one’s life have corresponding positive effects on one’s overall well-being. Individuals have a sense of connectedness which provides a part of their social identity to build a notably positive sense of self.
- **Cognitive dimension:** Cognitive dimension is about having an understanding of one’s surroundings and also have environmental mastery that takes places through experience and knowledge over a period of time. It requires the ability to find a balance between both personal and professional aspects, i.e., being able to comprehend complex life situations and opportunities (Galinha, 2011).
- **Education:** All the participants (20) shared a sense of acceptance and satisfaction regarding their educational journey, but some participants also shared obstacles and difficulties they faced in accessing education. Nineteen participants shared that their major concern is to have stability in terms of career and education. One among them had fulfilled and accomplished her education and career goals, but wished to find a better placement for her career. In a research project by The Economic and Social Research Council (2014), it was found that within all education levels whether low or high, individuals who accounted that they were satisfied with their education level as well as

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have integrated education as part of their identity had a good sense of self and positive psychological well-being.

- **Skills:** Various skills were reported which according to all the participants (20) helped in personal and professional life. The skills that they had included gardening, cooking, painting, coding, poetry, computer skills, dancing, stitching, baking, event planning and finances. Some of the participants brought these skills to practice during the COVID-19 lockdown period.
- **Personal and professional balance:** Perceptions and satisfaction with life were inquired and the participants described their various concerns and views on it. It was found that many participants were in quest to find a balance between personal and professional life. Though everyone had communicated their sense of satisfaction to what they are currently doing in their professional life but at the same time participants shared worries and concern of finding the right opportunity in their professional life. All the participants (20) placed first priority on their professional life which all of them defined as to having a stable and well reputed career opportunity, contributing in a big way to their sense of well-being.

Emotional Dimension

Emotional domain of well-being refers to the internal or say subjective approach to well-being is composed of both positive affect and negative affect (Diener et al., 2003).

- **Happiness and satisfaction:** The definition of happiness is different and unique to all. The participants (20) informed that there are some activities they like to do which help them to have a cheerful mood. These activities were; reading books, taking a nap, talking to parents or to friends, buying things for family, coloring, praying, writing a diary, having a walk, eating healthy, completing all the pending work, cracking jokes, or listening to jokes, meditation, watching movies, going for vacation, traveling, shopping, studying, baking, self-care routine and listening to songs. Some participants also shared that though they like doing such activities, however, at times these activities don't bring joy.
- **Stress and anxiety:** When asked about the feeling of stress and anxiety, most of the participants experienced this emotion. Many of them also mentioned the level of stress and anxiety had increased over the years. Career, future opportunities, workload, health issues, financial issues in the family, and exams were some common causes of stress and anxiety for the participants. All the participants (20) felt a sort of stress and anxiety in COVID-19 pandemic period. The reasons stated were health issues, family concerns, financial loss, unemployability, workload, finding a balance between home & 'work from home', loss of concentration, loss of connection with friends, ill-health of parents and study pressure.

CONCLUSION

Young adulthood is widely considered a phase of rapid changes and establishment of self. Working hard for one's personal well-being or satisfaction becomes vital aspect at this stage. The findings revealed that women's desired goal for their well-being is to be financially independent, make their own decisions in personal and professional life for which having a good education and good mental health are important factors. As stated, the overall defined perception of well-being as explored are to have a good state of both physical and mental health. At the same time, the difficulties brought by COVID-19 pandemic in the life of young women were reflected through their concerns and thoughts. This period, for all the participants was challenging. Prior to the pandemic, having a well-defined career, social life

and mental health was given importance by all. The uncertainty brought about by the pandemic had raised concerns regarding future opportunities, employability, physical health, and affordability of basic amenities. Based on the reviewed studies and findings, it is concluded that future research studies on well-being should include all gender groups (male, female, LGBTQIA+) and their perceptions as a whole, and represent different regions to have deeper insights about a of well-being in a multi-cultural country.

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Conflict of Interest

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