

Research Paper

## A Study of Psychological Well-Being Among Adolescents in Relation to Meaning in Life and Personal Growth Initiative

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### ABSTRACT

Meaning in life and personal growth are the essential developmental construct among adolescents, perhaps more than in any other life period due to its transitional characteristics. During this changing period, adolescents typically strive to achieve an integrated view of themselves, including their patterns of beliefs, goals, identity formation, and motivation. Understanding Meaning in life influences adolescents' cognitive and emotional processes and provides a unique contribution to the sphere of well-being and happiness. Moreover, it results in Personal growth initiative (PGI), an active and intentional desire to grow in salient areas. Personal growth initiative safeguards adolescents to cope better with transitions in life and is considered a key element of adolescents' essential positive growth and well-being. The present study aims to examine the relationship between Meaning in Life, Personal Growth Initiative, and psychological well-being among adolescents. It also explores the critical predictors of psychological well-being among adolescents. One hundred samples were taken by using a purposive sampling technique. Meaning in life questionnaire, personal growth initiative scale-II, and Ryff psychological well-being scale were used to collect data. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and regression analysis were used to analyze the results. The study's findings propagated the positive and significant relationship between meaning in life, personal growth initiative, and psychological well-being among adolescents. In addition to this, meaning in life and personal growth initiative both emerged as critical predictors of psychological well-being. Furthermore, the presence dimension of MIL and planfulness dimension of PGI emerged as significant predictors of psychological well-being among adolescents.

**Keywords:** *Meaning in Life, Personal Growth Initiative, Psychological Well-being, and Adolescents.*

According to Carr et al. (2021), one of the primary goals of positive psychology is to improve one's well-being. In contrast to the general approach, positive psychology places a strong emphasis on psychological disorders, maladaptive aspects of human functioning, and the detrimental impact of stress, depression, and anxiety. It emphasizes human virtues and positive aspects—understanding and fostering the elements that allow

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individuals to enhance their well-being. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) suggested that understanding and promoting the factors that will enable individuals to strengthen their well-being is essential for effectively treating and preventing psychopathology. Therefore, it is important to consider psychological well-being is more than the absence of symptoms of psychological illness.

### ***Psychological Well-Being***

There are two main approaches to well-being in the literature: the hedonistic approach (which focuses on subjective well-being, which is defined as life satisfaction and is associated with high levels of positive emotions and low levels of negative emotions) (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and eudemonistic approach (which is concerned with psychological well-being and includes six aspects of wellness related to optimal functioning: self-acceptance, healthy interpersonal relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth) (Ryff, 1995; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Psychological well-being, broadly defined as happiness, life satisfaction, and self-growth, represents one of the most critical aspects of efficient psychological functioning. However, a lot of research shows that happy people have a lot of advantages, they have better physical health, relationships with others, and high achievement motivation (e.g., Amholt et al., 2020; Lyubomirsky et al. 2005). Psychological well-being is commonly based on a combination of positive affective states such as happiness (the hedonic perspective) and optimal personal and social functioning (the eudemonics perspective) (Deci & Ryan 2008).

Furthermore, Ryff and Singer (1998) coined the term "human flourishing," while Felce and Perry (1995) define it as a compilation of objective descriptors and subjective assessments of physical, material, social, and emotional well-being. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), humans suggest that individuals have three essential psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The satisfaction of these needs leads to both subjective well-being and psychological well-being.

As per epidemiological data, adolescents have a higher prevalence rate of any psychological disorder than any other age group (Alonso et al., 2004; Iahikawa et al., 2018; Stagnaro et al., 2018; National Health Institute, 2019). It could be related to the fact that adolescents are transitioning from infancy to adulthood, which brings a slew of physiological, psychological, and social changes, intensifying worry, insecurity, and perplexity (Arnett, 2014; Arnett et al., 2014). Adolescent psychological well-being entails being content and contented with life, as well as a comprehension of a wide range of positive feelings. Furthermore, adolescents with the absence of psychopathology have better academic performance, social skills, and adjustment. This stage of life establishes the foundation for future personality development and is a vital era for personal growth during which life goals, values, direction, and purpose are formed (Savage Jessica, 2011; Berman, Weems, and Stickle, 2006). As a result, it is critical to comprehend adolescent well-being and the essential factors, such as meaning in life and personal growth initiative. These factors will help clarify and define approaches to assist adolescents in their life planning better.

### ***Meaning In Life (MIL)***

Meaning in life is viewed as contributing significantly to one's well-being. However, seeing one's life as meaningful and valuable is an essential aspect of well-being (Greenberg and Arndt, 2012). Frankl (1972) described life's meaning in terms of the will-to-meaning, which

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he defined as the innate drive to provide as much meaning to one's existence and actualize as many values as possible. He saw the desire for purpose as a core human motive.

Meaning in life can be considered an individually designed cognitive system that gives personal value to individuals (Wong 1989). The operationalization of life's meaning is a cognitive personality trait embedded chiefly in human cognition and varies by individual. It encourages people to explore important parts of their lives and plays a vital role in pursuing goals.

According to Steger et al. (2006), life's meaning can be divided into two categories: the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. The former refers to how meaningful people feel their lives to be, while the latter reveals how deeply people are searching for purpose in their lives. Both dimensions have a distinct personalities and reflect opposing perspectives on life (Steger, 2009).

Several researchers have found a positive relationship between meaning in life and life satisfaction (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992) and psychological adjustment (Thompson et al., 2003). Furthermore, persons with a high level of meaning have much more positive emotions (King et al., 2006) and fewer adverse effects like depression and anxiety (Chamberlain and Zika, 1988, Riichiro and Masahiko, 2006). Finding purpose in life and developing a coherent philosophy of life, on the other hand, are crucial challenges that arise during adolescence (Erikson, 1982, Steger et al., 2012). Unfortunately, most research has been primarily focused on adult populations, with little emphasis on adolescents' purpose in life concerning well-being.

Recent research has found that having a sense of purpose in life has positive effects on psychological and academic adjustment (Kiang and Fuligni, 2010) and is a protective factor against health risk behaviors and psychological distress among adolescents (Brassai et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is critical for adolescents confronted with new situations and experiences. It aids in the interpretation and organization of their experiences by highlighting essential components of their personal and social lives and providing more profound meaning to their lives (Kiang and Fuligni, 2010; Reker, 2005). This deeper meaning would be a beneficial and fruitful approach to improving adolescent well-being.

### ***Personal Growth Initiative (PGI)***

In addition to this, developmental psychologists point to personal growth initiative as a critical component of psychological well-being, particularly for adolescents.

Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) can be described as: "the intentional and active desire to grow in areas that are important for a person" (Robitschek, 1998; Robitschek et al., 2009). PGI is a set of general skills for personal development. Furthermore, enhancing themselves can be used for various career paths and life phases (Robitschek & Kashubeck, 1999). Christine Robitschek defined a personal growth initiative as "deliberate engagement in attempting to change oneself."

The personal growth initiative has been linked to a wide range of human functioning, including adaptive and maladaptive. Adolescents with high levels of personal growth initiative also tend to have high adaptive coping skills, precisely a reflective coping style. They are better able to cope with transitions in life because they know how to make changes

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in themselves. PGI encourages teenagers to seek out challenges and opportunities for growth that will lead to the attainment of life goals and personal fulfillment (Robitschek, 1997).

Personal growth initiatives prevent adolescents from developing distress symptoms, decrease the intensity of distress occurrence, or smooth the progress of healing from distress. For example, adolescents who are high in personal growth initiatives might be better at recognizing a straightforward approach to counter the situation, undergo more assertiveness in their capability to determine the problem, and consequently feel less distress. This elucidation implies that personal growth initiatives restrained psychological distress. Alternately, adolescents high in personal growth initiative may be capable of looking forward to difficulties and keenly effort to avert the problems from happening than individuals low in personal growth initiative.

### ***Purpose of the study***

Adolescence is a developmental stage in which teenagers struggle to make sense of the world, have an identity crisis, and have an unclear future perspective. This stage is marked as a period of “stress and storm.” However, adolescents’ have more psychological and physical issues than any other age group. Various researchers highlight meaning in life, and personal growth initiatives construct a protective shield for adolescents to deal with negative aspects of this competitive world and provide adaptive coping abilities and a precise viewpoint to navigate this world smoothly.

Unfortunately, despite the significance of psychological well-being among adolescents, very little literary work has been found. Therefore, it is necessary to promote the positive personal construct like meaning in life and personal growth initiative to enhance the psychological well-being among adolescents.

### ***Objectives:***

- To examine the relationship between meaning in life along with its dimensions (presence and search) and psychological well-being among adolescents.
- To examine the relationship between personal growth initiative along with its dimensions (planfulness, readiness, intentional behavior and using resources) and psychological well-being among adolescents.
- To examine the relationship between meaning in life and personal growth initiative among adolescents.
- To explore the critical predictors of psychological well-being among adolescents.

### ***Hypotheses:***

H1: There will be positive relationship between meaning in life along with its dimensions (presence and search) and psychological well-being among adolescents.

H2: There will be positive relationship between personal growth initiative along with its dimensions (planfulness, readiness, intentional behavior and using resources) and psychological well-being among adolescents.

H3: There will be positive relationship between personal growth initiative and meaning in life among adolescents.

H4: Personal growth initiative and its dimensions (planfulness, readiness, intentional behavior and using resources) will predict psychological well-being among adolescents.

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H5: Meaning in life and its dimensions (Presence and Search) will predict psychological well-being among adolescents.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### ***Participants:***

The sample consisted of 100 adolescents (47 male and 53 female). They were selected from various schools in Aligarh city through the purposive sampling technique. The age range of the sample comprised 15-21 yrs.

#### ***Instruments***

- **Meaning in life questionnaire (MIL):** The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MIL) developed by Steger, M. F., et al., (2006). The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) measures the presence of meaning in life, that is the subjective sense that one's life is meaningful, and the search for meaning in life, reflecting one's drive and orientation toward finding such meaning. It consists of two subscales: presence and search for meaning in life. Scale consists 10 items, all the items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1, "absolutely untrue" to 7, "absolutely true". The overall meaning in life score can be obtained by summing responses to all 10 items (resulting in a maximum score of 70). A score can also be calculated for the presence subscale by summing responses to items 1,4,5,6, and 9 (with a maximum score 35), similarly, scores for the search subscale can be calculated by summing participant responses of items 2,3,7,8, 10 (with a maximum score 35). Higher scores indicate higher levels of presence or search for meaning in life. The internal consistency of the MIL questionnaire, cronbach's alpha of the scale and subscales were .90 and .88 respectively.
- **Personal growth initiative scale (PGIS-II):** It developed by Robitschek et al. (2012). The PGIS-II is a 16-item Likert type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It consists of four subscale readiness for change, planfulness, intentional engagement, and using resources. The internal consistency of overall scale is ( $\alpha = .90$  to  $.94$  and each of the subscale is ( $\alpha = .73$  to  $.91$ ).
- **Ryff's Psychological well-being scale:** It developed by Ryff and Keyes (1995). The well-being scale consist of 18-items rated on 7-point likert type scale. It consists of six dimensions: self-actualization, autonomy, personal relationship, personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life. The internal consistency of the scale was .82 and the sub-scales range between .71 to .78.

#### ***Procedure***

The participants taking part in the study were personally contacted to participate. They were given the questionnaires, and standard instructions were written on them. Rapport was built with them to make them comfortable and debriefed about the entire study. They were warmly thanked for their cooperation. All the tools were scored according to their respective manual instructions. The researcher checked the Cronbach alpha of the scales.

#### ***Statistical analysis***

The responses collected from the participants were subjected to various statistical measures by using SPSS. To analyze the data Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to find out the relationships among meaning in life, personal growth initiatives and psychological well-being and regression analysis was used to find out the predictors of psychological well-being.

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**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*Table 1: Showing descriptive statistics of participants age, meaning in life, personal growth initiative (PGI) and psychological well-being among adolescents (N=100).*

VARIABLES	N	MEAN	SD	MIN	MAX
AGE	100	18.22	1.08	15	21
PGI	100	15.45	2.08	5.31	19.05
MIL	100	55.42	6.55	38	68
PWB	100	86.72	11.05	53	106

From table 1 it can be observed that the mean age of the participant was 18.22 with a standard deviation of 1.08. In addition to this, the mean score of personal growth initiative (PGI) was 15.45 with a standard deviation of 2.08. The mean score of meaning in life (MIL) was 55.42 with a standard deviation of 6.55. And the mean score and standard deviations for psychological wellbeing (PWB) were 15.23 and 2.87 respectively.

*Table 2: Showing correlation coefficient between Personal growth initiative (PGI) its dimension, Meaning in life (MIL) its dimensions and Psychological Well-being of adolescents.*

	PGI	P-PGI	R-PGI	IB-PGI	UR-PGI	MIL	P-MIL	S-MIL	PWB
<b>PGI</b>									
Correlation	1								
sig. (2-tailed)									
<b>P-PGI</b>									
Correlation	.84**	1							
sig. (2-tailed)	.000								
<b>R-PGI</b>									
Correlation	.88**	.67**	1						
sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000							
<b>IB-PGI</b>									
Correlation	.87**	.62**	.68**	1					
sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000						
<b>UR-PGI</b>									
Correlation	.84**	.61**	.64**	.67**	1				
sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000					
<b>MIL</b>									
Correlation	.35**	.26**	.36**	.28**	.28**	1			
sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.007	.000	.004	.004				
<b>P-MIL</b>									
Correlation	.32**	.26**	.31**	.26**	.25*	.94**	1		
sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.008	.001	.007	.01	.000			
<b>S-MIL</b>									
Correlation	.32**	.21*	.35**	.24*	.27**	.86**	.65**	1	
sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.032	.000	.015	.006	.000	.000		
<b>PWB</b>									
Correlation	.44**	.44**	.37**	.35**	.37**	.31**	.29**	.26**	1
sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000	.000	.000	.000	.002	.003	.007	

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

PGI= personal growth initiative, P-PGI= planfulness, R-PGI= readiness, IB-PGI= intentional behavior, UR-PGI= using resources, MIL=meaning in life, P-MIL=presence, S-MIL=search, PWB= psychological wellbeing.

Table 2 shows the positive correlation between between meaning in life (MIL) and psychological wellbeing  $r = .31$  at .01 level of significance. Presence ( $r = .29$ ) and search ( $r = .2$ ) dimensions of MIL also positively correlated with psychological wellbeing among adolescents at .01 level of significance. Hence, H1 stated that there will be positive

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association between meaning in life along with its dimensions (presence and search) and psychological wellbeing among adolescents is accepted.

Table 2 further indicate the positive association personal growth initiative (PGI) and psychological well-being  $r=.44$  at .01 level of significance. Dimensions of PGI i.e; planfulness, readiness, intentional behavior and using resources are also positively correlated with psychological wellbeing. Correlation coefficient value of each dimension of PGI (planfulness, readiness, intentional behavior, and using resources) with psychological wellbeing are  $r=.44$ ,  $r=.37$ ,  $r=.35$ ,  $r=.37$  respectively which is significant at .01 level. Therefore, H2 stated that there will be positive relationship between personal growth initiative along with its dimensions and psychological wellbeing among adolescents is accepted.

Moreover, table 2 also shows that PGI and MIL are also positively correlated with each other  $r= .35$  significance at .01 level. Therefore, H3 stated that there will be positive relationship between personal growth initiative (PGI) and meaning in life (MIL) among adolescents is accepted.

**Table:3 Showing the results of stepwise regression analysis considering personal growth initiative (PGI) and its dimensions (Planfulness, readiness, intentional behavior and using resources) as a predictors of psychological well-being among adolescents (N=100).**

Predictor variable	Standardized B	Multiple R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F	p
PGI	.449	.449	.201	.193	24.68	.000**
Planfulness	.445	.445	.198	.190	24.18	.000**

\*\* $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); \* $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed)

*Predictor variable: PGI and its dimensions (Planfulness, Readiness, Intentional Behavior and Using Resources). Criterion variable: PWB*

Table 3 shows that personal growth initiative emerged as a potent predictor of psychological wellbeing among adolescents. The square of multiple correlations ( $R^2=.201$ ) shows that 20% of variance in psychological wellbeing was explained by personal growth initiative among adolescents. By considering the F value of personal growth initiative ( $F= 24.68$ ,  $p < .01$ ) it can be concluded that personal growth initiative contributed significantly in predicting psychological well-being. Furthermore, among the four dimensions (Planfulness, Readiness, Intentional Behavior and Using Resources) of personal growth initiative, only Planfulness dimension emerged as a critical predictor of psychological well-being among adolescents. The square of multiple correlations ( $R^2=.198$ ) shows that 19% of variance in psychological wellbeing was only explained by planfulness dimension of personal growth initiative among adolescents. By considering the F value of planfulness dimension of personal growth initiative ( $F= 24.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ) it can be concluded that planfulness dimension of personal growth initiative contributed significantly in predicting psychological well-being.

Hence H4 stated that personal growth initiative and its dimensions (Planfulness, Readiness, Intentional Behavior and Using Resources) will emerge as predictors of psychological wellbeing among adolescents is accepted.

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**Table:4 Showing the results of stepwise regression analysis considering meaning in life and its dimensions (presence and search) as a predictor of psychological well-being among adolescents (N=100).**

Variable	Standardized $\beta$	Multiple R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F	P
MIL	.310	.310	.096	.087	10.44	.002**
Presence	.295	.295	.087	.078	9.35	.003**

\*\* $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed); \* $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed)

Predictor variable: Meaning in Life and its dimensions (presence and search for meaning in life)., Criterion variable: PWB

Table 4 shows that Meaning in life construct can predict psychological wellbeing among adolescents. The square of multiple correlations ( $R^2=.096$ ) shows that 9.6% of variance in psychological wellbeing was explained by overall meaning in life among adolescents. By considering the F value of overall meaning in life ( $F= 10.44, p < .01$ ) it can be concluded that overall meaning in life contributed significantly in predicting psychological well-being among adolescents. Moreover, among the dimensions of meaning in life (presence and search), presence dimension of meaning in life emerged as a potent predictor of psychological wellbeing among adolescents. The square of multiple correlations ( $R^2=.087$ ) shows that 8.7% of variance in psychological wellbeing was only explained by presence dimension of meaning in life among adolescents. By considering the F value of presence dimension of meaning in life ( $F= 9.35, p < .01$ ) it can be concluded that presence dimension of meaning in life contributed significantly in predicting psychological well-being.

Hence, H5 stated that meaning in life and its dimensions (presence and search) will emerged as predictors of psychological wellbeing among adolescents is accepted.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study's primary objective was to investigate the relationship between meaning in life and psychological well-being among adolescents. From both the hedonistic and eudaimonic perspectives of well-being, having a sense of meaning and purpose is related to general well-being. This study showed the significant relationship between meaning in life and psychological well-being among adolescents. This result is consistent with the previous research. Kiang and Fuligni (2010) reported that adolescents having a sense of meaning in life is positively associated with psychological well-being and academic adjustment. Moreover, Brassai et al. (2011) also suggested that purpose in life protects against unfavorable health conditions and psychological disorders.

This study extends the previous research, which examined the presence and searches for meaning in life (Steger and Frazier, 2006; Zika and Chamberlain, 1992). This study also highlights that presence and search dimensions of meaning in life are positively related to adolescents' psychological well-being. Earlier research suggested that the search for meaning in life correlated with depression, lower life satisfaction, and other psychological issues (Steger et al. 2006, 2009). However, this study suggested that for adolescents who already have some level of meaning in their lives and still drive towards the search for a more profound purpose in life, the search for meaning in life has a positive link with well-being among adolescents. These findings are in line with the study of Park et al. (2010), who suggested that the search for meaning was positively related to a high level of life



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satisfaction, happiness, and less depressive symptoms among individuals who have a presence of meaning in their life. Therefore, presence and search for meaning in life might play a significant role among younger generations than the adult population.

Furthermore, this study also revealed a significant positive relationship between personal growth initiatives and psychological well-being among adolescents. It shows that adolescents who have PGI skills reported a higher level of psychological well-being, which leads to life satisfaction, happiness, and higher achievement motivation. PGI provides adaptive coping strategies to adolescents to deal with adverse and challenging situations and protect them against significant life impairments. These findings are consistent with the previous research, which suggested that individuals with a high level of PGI are experiencing lower levels of psychological issues, less self-discrepancies, and a greater level of well-being, hope, and life satisfaction (Guse & Vermaak, 2011; Wilson & Somhlaba, 2016). In addition to this, Robitschek and Kashubeck (1999) and Ayub and Iqbal (2012) also reported that PGI is positively related to psychological well-being and negatively to psychological distress. Moreover, among the four dimensions (Planfulness, Readiness, Intentional Behavior, and Using resources) of PGI, planfulness emerged as a potent predictor of psychological well-being among adolescents.

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The result of the present study has provided new information about the linkage between meaning in life, personal growth initiative, and psychological well-being. In previous studies, explorations of these variables in adolescents are nearly missing. The relationship between meaning in life, personal growth initiative, and psychological well-being give an idea that adolescents' positive tendencies are worth noticing and essential for a fully functioning being. The present study's findings imply the development of interventions programs that are explicitly designed to enhance the well-being of adolescents by strengthening their positive personal abilities.

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