Research Paper

Exploring the Nexus of Depression, Meaning in Life, and Family Cohesion in Young Men and Women

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted on suicidal ideation, depression, family cohesion, meaning in life, and interpersonal relationships among male and female young adults. Attempts were also made to assess the relationship between the variables. The sample size was 143 (male – 38 and female – 105). Each group consisted of respondents aged between 20 – 25 years and didn't have any past Psychiatric illness. Beck Depression Inventory-II, meaning in life questionnaire, the family adaptability and cohesion scale were administered to assess depression, meaning in life, and family cohesion. Inferential statistics (student 't' test) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient were used to analyze the data. Results revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female young adults in depression, family cohesion, and meaning in life. A significant correlation was found between selected variables and young adults. The current study found that depression has an association with the presence of meaning in life among both male and female young adults. It also discovered that family cohesion has not been correlated with meaning in life among male and female young adults.

Keywords: *Depression, Family Cohesion, Gender, Meaning in Life, Young Adults*

Depression is a mood disorder that mainly consists of loss of interest or pleasure in day-to-day activities, sleep and eating pattern changes, concentration problems, fatigue, and recurrent thoughts of death. It is also accompanied by negative emotional attitudes, a change in the motivation sphere, cognitive impressions, generally passive behavior, hopelessness, and helplessness. Depression is an emotional state of despondency characterized by negative emotional attitudes, a change in the motivation sphere, cognitive impressions, and generally passive behavior. A person in a state of depression experiences painful emotions: deep sadness, anxiety, and despair. So, depression is the feeling of sadness, helplessness, and hopelessness.

There are several types of depression, like major depression, atypical depression, atypical depression, situational depression, persistent depressive disorder, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, psychotic depression, and many more. Family history and childhood trauma is a big determinant of depression. If a person's family members have depression, the possibility

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of depression is increased for the person. Another cause of depression is a significant and stressful life event, brain injury, and drug use. Sudden job loss, loss of a loved one, and relationship breakup are considered significant life events to produce depression. Some physiological symptoms are associated with depression like gastrointestinal problems, cardiovascular problems, problems related to blood pressure, pain, loss of sexual interest, and many more. Other symptoms of depression are fatigue, sleep problems, appetite pattern change, less productivity, and suicidal thoughts.

According to great cognitive theorist Aaron Beck, depression may come from three perspectives; cognitive triad, negative self-schema, and errors in logic. The cognitive triad includes three forms of negative thoughts, thoughts related to the self, world, and the future. Negative self-schemas mainly consider the beliefs and expectations that are mainly negative. Error in logic leads to wrong decision-making. According to the behaviouristic view, depression is the result of the person's interaction with their situation and circumstances. From their point of view, depression has a stimulus-response mechanism and it also occurs by the reduction of the positive reinforcement. On the other hand, the school of psychoanalysis emphasizes the excessive demands of the superego are mainly responsible for depression. Martin Seligman (1974) explains depression with the help of his 'Hopelessness Theory'. According to the Social Environment Theory, depression occurs when a person is trapped in such social circumstances where everyone rejects him/her, and this becomes a group rejection. This is called social rejection.

Harlow, Newcomb, and Bentler (1986) found meaninglessness in mediating between depression and self-derogation. In a study, La Greca and Harrison found that the presence of positive qualities in a relationship with a best friend protects the individual from social anxiety but not from depressive symptoms. They assumed that positive qualities such as support and self-disclosure are likely to cause the individual to continue talking about the problem and focusing on negative feelings, leading to the persistence of depressive symptoms.

Meaning in life mainly implies the person's ability to understand the nature of their existence and also find the purposefulness and direction of life. It is important for survival, growth, and enlightenment. The first component is the presence of meaning which explains whether Individuals perceive their lives as significant and purposeful. The term refers to the comprehension of oneself and the surrounding world, indicating the understanding of how one fits into the world (King, Hicks, Krull & Del Gaiso, 2006; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan & Lorentz, 2008). Search for Meaning- It refers to the strength, intensity, and activity of people's effort to establish or increase their understanding of the meaning and purpose of their lives ('How can I make my life more meaningful?'; Steger, Kashdan et. al., 2008). The presence of meaning implies some kind of outcome, the search for meaning refers to an active and process-oriented factor. Two studies in healthy populations highlight the need to study the within-person interaction between search for meaning and presence of meaning by demonstrating that searching for meaning has distinct consequences for individuals who have high levels of presence of meaning compared to those individuals having low levels of presence of meaning (Cohen & Cairns, 2012; Dezutter et al., 2013). Both studies showed that if individuals both experience meaning and search for it, the presence of meaning seems to buffer for the negative impact of searching for meaning. The presence of meaning is mainly the outcome and the search for meaning is considered as an active process. Frankl notes that life has meaning under all circumstances and that it is psychologically damaging

when a person's search for meaning is hindered. If someone does not strive to find meaning in his/her life, then sooner or later he will lose his psychological well-being (Frankl, 1967, 1969). Meaninglessness causes a situation called an "existential vacuum". This state can be manifested with symptoms of boredom, depression, and/or aggressive behavior. Maddi (1967) has referred to this situation with the term "existential neurosis", which is differentiated from depression in that it is more closely associated with apathy and less with depressive feelings. The concepts of meaning in life, psychological well-being, and depression are influenced by cultural factors. Culture in mental health care is a multifaceted concept and it can be seen as a dynamic process that links the past to the present and is shaped in part by social, historical, and political forces. Culture is more diverse than race or ethnicity and extends to other areas that tend to receive different and less attention than that received by the dominant culture, such as language, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, and religion (Waite & Calamaro, 2009).

Family cohesion is the indication of the bonding and attachment between the family members. It also describes the closeness, understanding, cooperation, emotional relationship, and communication among the members of the family. There are two significant components of family cohesion: "the emotional bonding members have with one another and the degree of individual autonomy a person experiences in the family system." Family income, the role of every member, family change (divorce, separation, marriage, death) family type, attitude and perception, family norm and support, traumatic event, fear, and uncertainty is an important determinants of family cohesion. According to Neshatdoust depression has a significant negative correlation with relationships with parents and feelings of intimacy and closeness to them, with positive relationships with siblings, and with relationships with friends. Adolescents who grew up in cohesive families may feel more attached to and bear more responsibility for the family (Rawatlal, Kliewer, & Pillay, 2015). They may value family harmony rather than self-autonomy, and this tendency is more prominent in collectivistic cultures (e.g., the Chinese culture) than in individualistic cultures (Dwairy & Achoui, 2010). Jason Tharaldson said that there are '5Rs' that are considered significant to form family cohesion. The 5R is rules, routines, responsibilities, recognition, and recreation. According to family system theory, the system of the family is complex, and dynamic and consists of many subsystems. Green and Werner (1996) suggested that a family with high cohesion should include nurturance, warmth, time spent together, consistency, and physical intimacy. It indicated that if a family has high cohesion, there is a high frequency of contact between family members, and emotional and affective support will be found within a family to create a loving environment for a long time. Kager and his colleagues (2000) proposed that people who have lower family cohesion are more likely to have a lower quality of life and subjective well-being and have more problems in social relationships. The result may imply that individuals who have lower family cohesion learned ineffective communication or interpersonal skills in their families. The skills thus affected an individual's social interactions with others and hence caused problematic social functioning and relationships.

Gender is described as a cluster of characteristics that are mainly associated with a certain biological sex. In this study, the male and female gender is selected. It is also accompanied by the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's anatomical sex. Culture and environment have a strong impact on gender. The crisis of gender identity and gender roles is the main focus area for adults that they are concerned about.

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Purpose of the study

The study aims to find out the association between the genders and the selected variables. The hypothesis regarding the study is stated below –

- H1: There will be a significant difference in depression between male and female young adults.
- H2: There will be a significant difference in meaning in life between male and female young adults.
- H3: There will be a significant difference in family cohesion between male and female young adults.
- H4: There will be a significant correlation among the selected variables and male young adults.
- H5: There will be a significant correlation between selected variables and female young adults.

Sample

For the current study, simple purposive sampling has been used. This sampling method is a nonprobability sampling technique where the sample is treated as a good representative of the population. This sampling method is less costly and more easily accessible to the researcher. The age range of the sample size is 20-25 years. The other inclusion criteria are middle socioeconomic status and minimum qualification of the 8th standard. Only male and female gender participants are included in the study. Those who have any past psychiatric illness and who belong to high and low socioeconomic status have been excluded. Initially, a total of 151 data were collected for the present study. 8 data were excluded according to the exclusion criteria. Finally, 143 data were calculated for further analysis where the numbers of male participants were 38 and the number of female participants was 105.

Instruments

At first, the information schedule was presented which consisted the information like Name, Age, Gender, Educational qualification, Contact Number, Address, Occupation, Socioeconomic status, Past Psychiatric illness, Past significant medical illness, Current physical illness, and face any problem in day-to-day life situations.

To measure the level of depression, the 'Beck Depression Inventory-II' is administered. It was developed by A. T. Beck, R. A. Steer, Brown, and others. This questionnaire consists of 21 items. It has 8 affective and 13 somatic items. This questionnaire is scored on a scale of 0–3 in a list of four statements arranged in increasing severity about a particular symptom of depression. It is a self-administered test. The inventory requires between 5 and 10 minutes to complete. The instruction was given at the beginning of the questionnaire where the participants were asked how they felt in the past two weeks. Scores range from 0 (No symptoms) to 3 (severe symptoms). Each of the 21 items corresponding to a symptom of depression is summed to give a single score for the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II). There is a four-point scale for each item ranging from 0 to 3. On two items (16 and 18) there are seven options to indicate either an increase or decrease in appetite and sleep. 1-week test-retest reliability is high (.93). Internal consistency (coefficient alpha) is .92–.94 depending on the sample. Construct validity was high when compared to the BDI (.93).

For the assessment of meaning in life, the' meaning in life questionnaire' has been selected. It was developed by M.F. Steger and his colleagues and published in the 'Journal of

Counselling Psychology, 53, 80-93. This questionnaire consists of 10 items, where items no. 1, and 4,5,6,9 were fallen under the presence of meaning subscale and items no 2, 3, 7,8,10 were fallen under search for subscale. This is a 7-point scale where 1 indicates 'Absolutely untrue' and 7 indicates 'Absolutely True'. In general completion of the Meaning in life questionnaire takes 3 to 5 minutes. The Meaning in life has good internal consistency with coefficient alphas ranging in the low to high 0.80s for presence subscales and mid 0.80s to low 0.90s for the search subscale.

To measure family cohesion 'the family adaptability and cohesion scale' has been selected. The scale was developed by D. H. Olson and his colleagues. This scale was published in the 'Journal of Marital and Family therapy' 37, 1, 64-80. This scale measures the dimensions of Family Cohesion. It has 62 items with a 5-point Likert rating scale. On the rating scale, 1 indicates 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicates 'strongly agree'. Alpha reliability is best in the range of 0.70 to 0.90.

For the current study, a content form is presented to every participant where formal permission has to be taken from the participants. The assurance is provided for their personal details and data. Anonymity is considered. Confidentiality has to be maintained. It has to be endorsed that the data will be used only for research purposes.

Procedure
At first, the topic was discussed and variables were selected. Then, the hypothesis was formulated and the respective scales and questionnaires were chosen to accurately test the hypothesis. After that, the tests were administered on the selected samples, and data were collected. After the completion of the data collection, the responses were scrutinized first and excluded according to the exclusion criteria. Then the scoring of all the scales was done by hand according to the scoring manual. After that, the statistical treatment was done using SPSS version 16.0. The probability value to be accepted for the test of significance was 0.05 and 0.01 level. Finally, descriptive, inferential, and correlation statistics were done following the hypothesis of the study.

RESULT
From table no1, it can be shown that has to be taken into consideration Suicidal Ideation where male participants scored higher mean and higher SD in comparison with female participants. The obtained t-value shows no significant difference between the two groups. In the presence of the meaning category, the mean value is higher in male participants than female participants and SD value is higher in female participants than male participants. The calculated t value indicates no significant difference between the male and female. In the search for meaning category, it can be found that the obtained mean is higher in male participants and SD value is higher in the female category. Though the t value indicates no significant difference between the two groups.

For the next variable which is Depression, the male participants scored a greater mean than female participants and female participants obtained higher SD than male participants. The t values show no significant differences between the male and female participants. The last variable is family cohesion where the male group obtained a higher mean than the female group and the female group obtained a higher SD than the male group. According to the t value, there is no significant difference between the two groups.

Table 1: The table shows the Mean (M) and The Standard Deviation (SD) and the T value for the selected variables among male and female young adults.

Variables	Male		Female		t value	Level of significance
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Depression	17.05	11.33	16.30	12.53	0.32	0.74
Presence of meaning	24.65	6.09	24.07	6.74	0.46	0.64
Search for Meaning	28.10	4.89	27.65	5.38	0.45	0.64
Meaning in life	52.47	8.87	51.47	8.71	0.60	0.54
Family Cohesion	2.14	34.7	2.10	34.24	0.70	0.47

The table no. 2 shows that there is no significant correlation between meaning and the search for meaning. Then there is a significant negative correlation between the presence of meaning and depression. Lastly, there is found no significant correlation has been found between Meaning in life and Family Cohesion. From the above result table, it can be shown that there is no significant correlation between the search for meaning and depression and Family Cohesion among male young adults. Lastly, it can be observed that Depression and Family Cohesion have been negatively correlated at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 2: The table showing the product-moment coefficient of correlation between the selected variables (among all the possible pairs) among male young adults.

Variables	Presence of meaning	Search for Meaning	Depression	Family cohesion
Presence of meaning		0.21	-0.28*	0.15
Search for Meaning			-0.15	0.04
Depression				-0.39*
Family cohesion				

*** Significant at 0.01 level*
**Significant at 0.05 level*

From the table no. 3 it can be seen that the obtained correlation value indicates the presence of meaning has not been corrected with search for meaning and Family Cohesion. It only has a negative correlation with depression at 0.01 level of significance. In the case of the search for meaning, there has been found no correlation with other variables among male and female young adults. Lastly, Depression has not been correlated with Family Cohesion among female young adults for the present study.

Table 3: The table showing the product-moment coefficient of correlation between the selected variables (among all the possible pairs) among female young adults

Variables	Presence of meaning	Search for Meaning	Depression	Family cohesion
Presence of meaning		-0.06	-0.40**	-0.21
Search for Meaning			0.17	-0.05
Depression				0.08
Family cohesion				

***Significant at 0.01 level*
**Significant at 0.05 level*

DISCUSSION

From the result table:1, it can be shown that, in the presence of the meaning category, the mean value is higher in male participants than female participants and SD value is higher in female participants than male participants. The calculated t value indicates no significant difference between the male and female. In the search for meaning category, it can be found that the obtained mean is higher in male participants and SD value is higher in the female category. This may be because of the cultural effect. In the social context, it can be seen that boys are treated differently than girls in many families. Parents treat them differently because they think that boy child take responsibility in the future. So, the boy child when grown up feels more responsibility and pressure from parents and society to establish him. When the parents and neighbours put emphasis on the male child and give him important positions in society, he realizes the presence of meaning in his life. When he purposefully finds the meaning that is when he goes through the questions about his career establishment, settlement, a success he is trying to search for the meaning of life. Though the t value indicates no significant difference between the two groups. Here, the family or social environment plays a major role. Both the parents of male and female children treat them as an important part of their family and society puts efforts to set the goals and achievements for their respective gender roles. So, Family and society both collaborate making meaning in their life of them and encouraging themselves to search for the meaning of life.

From the result table: 2, it can be seen there is no significant correlation between the presence of meaning in life and the search for meaning in life among male young adults. Many studies showed that if Individuals both experience meaning and search for meaning, the Presence of meaning seems to buffer the negative impact of searching for meaning (Park et al. 2010; Steger et.al. 2009). The presence of meaning in life and depression is negatively correlated among male young adults. Those people who have importance to their lives were less likely to go through depression and other mental health problems. Steger and his colleague (2009) see meaning in life as how people feel their lives have a purpose, and how they comprehend their experiences. Depression has a significant negative relationship with meaning in life this result is supported by Steger and his colleague (2009). For male young adults, there is no significant correlation between the Presence of meaning in life and family cohesion. It can be interpreted differently. It may depend on the type of family of the male participants, moral values, and cultural effects.

From the result table:3, the Presence of meaning in life does not correlate with the search for meaning in life. Bob lew (2020) conducted a study on Chinese University students and found that the Presence of meaning in life and the search for meaning in life have been correlated with each other. This finding is contradictory to the current study. It is negatively correlated with depression in females. Many research findings are there, that support this result. A meaningful life acts as a buffer against experiencing rumination (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008) and depression (Mascaro& Rosen, 2006) and (Feldman & Snyder, 2005). The presence of meaning in life has no correlation effects on family cohesion among female young adults because not always members of the family make the effort to create meaning in their lives. It can be possible that her close friends or partner gave value to her and helped her to build meaning in her life.

From the result table:2 Search for meaning has not been correlated with depression in male adult participants. Search for meaning is also related to spiritual aspects and beliefs. Because of the religious factor, language and other factors search for meaning are not correlated with

depression (Calamaro, 2009). Also, it has no relationship with family cohesion in the present study among male young adults. After a certain age, a male child has to find his meaning and purpose or significance in life. In this large society, they have to establish themselves where family members don't contribute directly. So that is why the search for meaning in life and family cohesion is no longer correlated for this current study.

From the result table: 3, it can be seen that the search for meaning in life has not been correlated with depression among female young adults. Search for meaning is a journey to find own self and happiness. In this journey phase, she may experience motivation, encouragement, and enthusiasm rather than depression.

There is found no correlation between the search for meaning in life and family cohesion. In an adult, life individuals are in a state where they involve themselves in new curriculum and activities. All these processes are done outside of the family. For this type of work, the individual interacts with many other people and learns many things from them. Eventually, they find their meaning in life.

For the next variable Depression, the male participants scored a greater mean than female participants and female participants obtained higher SD than male participants. The reason that lies behind the higher level of depression in male young adults may be the developmental pattern. Hyde (2008) investigated how specific vulnerability factors come online at critical developmental periods in adolescence and interact with them to produce the gender difference effects on depression. Another factor like neurological developmental change, and hormonal change also has a detrimental effect on depression among male young adults.

The t value shows no significant differences between the male and female participants. Here, in the competitive world, male and female young adults are going through the same difficult path, where they face the almost same level of worry, tension, anxiety, and men tan turmoil. Another reason can be their daily stressor which also led them to depression.

From the result table:2, Depression has been negatively correlated with family cohesion among male participants. Research studies showed that a dysfunctional father-child relationship leads to depression (Amelia 2009). Other research findings indicate that relationships with siblings also had a great impact on depression. Good family bonding, healthy communication between family members, mental satisfaction, and cooperative nature also leads to good mental well-being.

According to the table:3, Depression has not been correlated with family cohesion among female participants because depression may have other causes like problems related to college or workplace, body image issues, physical health problems etc.

The last variable is family cohesion where the male group obtained a higher mean than the female group and the female group obtained a higher SD than the male group. According to the t value, there is no significant difference between the two groups. The family members of the male and female young adults are similar and they provide an almost similar type of treatment to their children. The level of Communication and satisfaction that one family member gets from another person in the family has an impact on them.

Another major factor is the size of the sample. In the present study, the sample size was unequal. Whereas compared to the number of female participants, the number of male participants was significantly low. It can be a major cause of the insignificance of the t value. So, in summing up to form of the result, it was seen that male individuals are more prone to depression rather female participants. It can be seen that male individuals put more emphasis and the significance of their lives than females. Family Cohesion is also higher in male young adults. For male young adults, several correlations are significant. In female young adults, several variables were found to be correlated.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the present study that there is no significant difference has been found between the selected variables among male young adults and female young adults. So, the H1, H2 and H3 are rejected. For male young adults, the presence of meaning has been correlated with depression and depression is correlated with depression. H4 hypothesis is partially accepted. A significant correlation was established between the presence of meaning and depression in female young adults. So, the H5 is partially rejected.

The sampling technique and the size of the sample a limitation of the study. The sampling technique that was used in the current study is a non-probability kind of sampling. There may be present an impact of subjective bias, so the obtained result cannot be generalized widely. The number of female participants is much fewer than females which may have a detrimental effect on the t values.

There is a various application of the current study after understanding the different correlates the findings of the study could help to enhance treatment and therapy by a particular age group. Understanding the depression profile, the treatment orientation of young adults could be modified in terms of family relationships and interpersonal relationships. The psychologist may apply the present study findings for counselling and psychotherapy for young adults. The current study might also help in identifying the buffer elements that play a crucial role in mental health problems in both male and female young adults. Following the research, appropriate actions to spread awareness about the variables (meaning in life, family cohesion) that are acting as a cushion against depression have to be taken into consideration.

Limitation of the Study

There are several reasons behind study limitations. However, the most important limitations came from methodological aspects. The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. They are as follows-

- The first limitation of the study is the size of the sample.
- The second limitation is the sampling technique. Samples were selected with the help of purposive Sampling. It was a non-probability sampling method in which there is no way of assessing the probability of the element or group of elements of the population being included in the sample.
- The third limitation is the lack of previous research findings in the area of meaning in life.
- The fourth limitation is that the other significant variables like attribution style, coping strategies, and personality type were not taken into consideration.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.