

Busy Lives, Meaningful Paths? Exploring, Life Satisfaction, and Meaning of Life of Working College Students

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ABSTRACT

The current trend has seen university students opting for exploration of different experiences including financial aspects due to various reasons. This has led to the increase of freelancing jobs which are easy to obtain for students who are simultaneously studying. This may create a toll on mental and social well-being of the individuals. Therefore, this research intends to study the impact of working part time and study simultaneously on the life satisfaction and meaning of life, and see if there is a gender difference for the same. Life satisfaction refers to your overall assessment of how happy you are with your life. It's a broader picture than just fleeting happiness. Meaning of life captures the sense of fulfilment and direction, it also reflects the desire to discover or create meaning. The study explores the significance of gender difference in life satisfaction and meaning of life. The research involved a group of 80 college students, equally divided by gender (40 male, 40 female), who balanced their studies with part-time freelance work. The standardised tools such as Life satisfaction Questionnaire by Diener and meaning of life Questionnaire by Micheal Sterger are used to measure. The finding revealed that there is significant gender difference in the life satisfaction and presence subscale of Meaning of Life Questionnaire of college students who study and work as well but it was seen that there is no significant gender difference in searching subscale of meaning of life questionnaire.

Keywords: *Life Satisfaction, Meaning of life, College Students, Freelancing, Mental Health*

College life throws a student into a vibrant and demanding world. Stepping away from the structured environment of high school, students encounter a landscape rich with academic challenges and newfound independence. Dorm living or off-campus apartments introduce them to budgeting, meal preparation, and the everyday responsibilities of adulthood. This newfound freedom is both liberating and demanding, forcing them to become resourceful and self-sufficient. Which leads them to opt for part time jobs or freelancing opportunities while they are studying. To ease financial burdens and gain valuable skills, many turn to freelance or part-time work. Both offer income, with part-time jobs providing steady pay checks and freelancing allowing students to set their rates. But the benefits go beyond money. These jobs can develop practical skills (customer service, time management) or hone core skills in a student's chosen field, building a portfolio for future

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opportunities. Balancing work and studies foster strong time management and responsibility, while exploring these avenues can spark career interests and build valuable professional networks. The flexibility of both options allows students to manage their work around their academic commitments, fostering a sense of independence. Freelancing allows individuals to act as their own boss, securing project-based work from a variety of clients. This can encompass writing, graphic design, programming, or any skill they possess. While freelancing offers unmatched flexibility and the ability to tailor work to personal interests, it also demands self-discipline and the initiative to find new clients consistently. Part-time jobs, on the other hand, provide a more structured approach. They involve working a set number of hours per week for a single employer, offering a consistent income stream that can complement studies or other commitments.

Finding meaning in life becomes crucial during this period of self-discovery. It provides a guiding light, fuels motivation, and fosters mental well-being. A clear purpose not only helps students navigate their studies and career choices, but also inspires them to contribute to something larger than themselves. Life satisfaction hinges on a delicate balance. A strong sense of purpose, fuelled by fulfilling academics and supportive relationships, contributes greatly. However, heavy workloads, financial worries, and difficulty connecting can significantly impact well-being. For students facing academic pressure and potential isolation, a sense of purpose can act as a buffer and contribute to greater well-being. Knowing what's important to them and what kind of impact they want to make helps students make informed decisions about their future professions. It steers them towards paths that align with their values and sense of purpose.

Theoretical Framework

Life satisfaction is a way of measuring how well your life stacks up against what you think is important. It's not just about daily happiness, but how fulfilled you feel in the long run. The Balance Theory of Resource Allocation, applied to life satisfaction, suggests that feeling good about your life (or how satisfied you are) depends on your ability to effectively distribute your resources across various areas of life. The research wants to explore the balance in life and life satisfaction of the college students who work and study as well and how well they use the various resources provided to them and the biggest resource being as themselves. Viktor Frankl's "Theory on Meaning of life" suggests that life has a real, objective purpose, not just a personal feeling. We, as humans, have the freedom and the responsibility to live up to our full potential by finding the deeper meaning hidden within each moment. Therefore, this study aims to explore or delve into the meaning of life of working college students. The previous researches have primarily focused on the working college students in relation to academic procrastination, stress, anxiety or exams stress. There are no researches on Indian perspective to explore the life satisfaction and meaning of life of working college students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Amada, et al., (2023) "University Full-Time and Working Students' Life Satisfaction." A study compared life satisfaction of 120 working and full-time students at a Philippine university. Interestingly, full-time students reported higher satisfaction with health, academics, and leisure, while working students felt better about their finances.

Bailey., et al, (2019) The influence of motivation and adaptation on students' Researchers investigated how motivation affects mental health, well-being, and academic performance in

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nearly 200 first-year college students. The study found that students driven by internal motivation, meaning doing things for personal satisfaction, reported feeling happier, having a greater sense of purpose, and achieving better grades.

Rangarajan, et al., (2019) “A Study on Work Life Balance of College Students as a Part Time Worker -with Special Reference to Arts and Science Colleges in Chennai City.” A study examined part-time work and work-life balance among Arts and Science College students in Chennai. The study found a link between needing money to support family (2nd & 3rd year students) and a negative impact on work-life balance.

Ojha, et al., (2017) “A study on life satisfaction and emotional well-being among university students” Researchers at Veer Bahadur Singh Purvanchal University investigated the link between emotional well-being and life satisfaction in college students. Surveying 223 students aged 18-25, they found a positive correlation (.276).

Tessema, et al., (2014) “Does Part-Time Job Affect College Students’ Satisfaction and Academic Performance (GPA)? The Case of a Mid-Sized Public University.” A study on working college students found a surprising link between work hours and well-being. Students were classified based on work hours into five groups: no work, 1-10 hours/week, 11-15 hours/week, 16-20 hours/week, and 21+ hours/week. While students who didn't work had slightly higher GPAs and satisfaction on average. Those who worked less than 10 hours were more satisfied than those who work 11 hours or more.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To study life satisfaction and meaning of life in college students who are working part time.

Objective

- To Understand the life satisfaction and meaning of life of working college students.
- To study the gender difference in Life satisfaction
- To study the gender difference in Meaning of Life

Hypothesis

- H1 – There will be significant gender difference in the life satisfaction.
- H2 – There will be significant gender difference in meaning of life.

Sample Size and Nature

The sample size of the research consists of 80 students (40 males and 40 Females). The age group chosen was 18 to 30 who are college students who do freelancing or have a part time job.

Research Tools

- **Meaning Of Life Questionnaire (MLQ)** - The MLQ by Michael Steger is a 10-question survey that gauges your feeling of purpose (presence) and your active (search) for meaning in life. The MLQ has good internal consistency, with coefficient alphas ranging in the low to high .80s for the Presence subscale and mid .80s to low .90s for the Search subscale.

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- **Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)** - Diner's Satisfaction with Life Scale, measures overall happiness. It consists of 5 items, which are measured using a linear scale of Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The SWLS shows strong internal consistency, meaning questions within the scale measure a single construct (life satisfaction) consistently.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data T-test was used in Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS).

RESULT

Table-1 (life satisfaction) T-Test

	Females	Males
Mean	19.775	17.975
SD	19.2557692	24.3326923
Observations	40	40
Pearson Correlation	0.13358962	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	39	
t Stat	1.85151461	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.03583899	

Table 1 Indicates the Life satisfaction between males and females. A t-test was conducted to know the gender difference between the two groups, males and females. There is significant gender difference in the life satisfaction between males and females. The mean of females i.e. 19.775 is higher than the mean of males i.e. 17.975 with a t-stat of 1.85. This implies that females have higher life satisfaction than males.

Table 2 (P-scale) T-test

	Females	Males
Mean	18.15	17.4
SD	8.84871795	6.04102564
Observations	40	40
Pearson Correlation	0.14939961	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	39	
t Stat	1.33076611	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.09549723	

Table 2 Indicates a t-test was conducted for P-subcales (Presence sub scale) which is a part of Meaning of Life Questionnaire. There is significant gender difference found in the presence sub scale between males and females. The mean of females i.e. 18.15 is higher than the mean of males i.e. 17.4 with a t-stat of 1.33. This implies that females have a higher presence of meaning of life than males.

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Table 3 (S-subscale) T- test

	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>
Mean	23.45	23.575
SD	14.8692308	14.4557692
Observations	40	40
Pearson Correlation	-0.1212878	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	39	
t Stat	-0.1378684	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.44552689	

Table 3 Indicates a T-test was conducted for S-subscale (Searching subscale) which is the part of meaning of life questionnaire. There was no significant gender difference found in the S-subscale of meaning if life questionnaire between males and females. There is not much difference between the mean of females i.e. 23.45 and the mean of males i.e. 23.575 with a t-stat of -0.137.

DISCUSSION

This research was conducted to explore the life satisfaction and meaning of life of college students who are studying and working part time or doing freelancing work. To know if there is any gender difference in life satisfaction and meaning of life of college students. People may engage in Part time jobs and freelancing due to various reasons of their own. There was significant gender difference found in life Satisfaction between males and females. The Average mean of life satisfaction for males and females was 17.97, 19.77 respectively. According the manual of life satisfaction by tells that it falls under the category of slightly dissatisfied. Which tells us that College students who are working and studying as well are slightly dissatisfied with their life. Another study suggested working part-time against your will can hurt your happiness. But, if you have less financial stress and stay active, it might lessen the blow. In other words, financial security and staying busy can help buffer the negative impact of involuntary part-time work on your overall life satisfaction. (Allan, 2020) Subjective well-being captures both your thoughts (like feeling content or fulfilled) and emotions (like happiness or sadness) regarding your life as a whole. (Dolan et al 2008).

There was significant gender difference in P-subscale between males and females. And there was no significant gender difference in S-subscale between males and females. The meaning of life Questionnaire consisted of two subscales searching (S-subscale) and Presence (P-subscale). The Average mean of S-subscale for males and females was 23.575 and 23.45 respectively. The average mean of P-subscale for males and females was 17.4 and 18.15 respectively. Research differentiates between actively searching for meaning and already experiencing a sense of meaning in life (Hodges et al 2008). Interestingly, actively searching for meaning might be associated with temporary challenges in adjusting to college, while feeling a sense of purpose can be beneficial (Trevisan et al 2017).

According to the manual of meaning of life Questionnaire by Micheal F. Sterger it suggests a person who scores below 24 in both Presence and Search aspects, likely doesn't find much meaning or purpose in life and isn't actively seeking it. They seem uninterested in exploring

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what that might be. This lack of direction could lead to general dissatisfaction and a pessimistic outlook. They might experience fewer positive emotions and find themselves feeling anxious, nervous, or even sad more often. While they might seek excitement over tradition, their openness to new ideas could be limited. When faced with important choices, they might rely on intuition rather than careful analysis. Those who know them might describe them as disorganized, tense, and lacking in social engagement or warmth.

Limitation

Time limitations necessitated a focused approach, this study yielded important insights into the core aspects of the variable. Future research can build upon these findings to provide a more extensive analysis. While the current sample size restricts generalizability to the entire student population, it offers valuable insights into the experiences of college students engaged in part-time freelance work. While these tools offer consistency, they may not capture the full range of experiences or cultural nuances relevant to all participants.

CONCLUSION

This study examined potential gender disparities in life satisfaction for college students engaged in part-time work. A sample of 80 participants revealed a statistically significant gender difference. Delving deeper, the analysis indicated a trend towards mild dissatisfaction with life across the board. The "Presence of Meaning" subscale (P-subscale) of the Meaning of Life Questionnaire yielded a significant gender difference, while the "Search for Meaning" subscale (S-subscale) did not. Further exploration suggested a potential dampening of students' interest in exploring life's meaning and purpose. Contributing factors could be the cumulative stress of work and academic demands, coupled with the challenge of achieving a healthy work-life balance. The study proposes mindfulness and gratitude practices as potential tools to cultivate a more positive outlook and enhance work-study balance, thereby fostering personal time for students. Developing effective schedules and avoiding overwork are also recommended strategies to bolster life satisfaction and foster a stronger sense of meaning in life.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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