

Gender Differences in Flourishing among Emerging Adults of Kashmir: A Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to examine gender differences in flourishing among emerging adults of Kashmir. Flourishing was operationalized as per Mental Health continuum model by Corey Keyes (2009). According to him there is a widely held misconception that mental health is the opposite of mental illness; while in reality; Mental health is not mere absence of mental health issues but presence of emotional, psychological and social well-being. He called this complete state of mental health as flourishing. Emerging adults are those who are in the age range of 18-25 years, pursuing higher education; yet to be settled in career, still in the phase of exploration and experimentation and dependent on parents. They are the ones who are in prime age and preparing towards adulthood responsibilities. This term was coined by Jeffrey Jenson Arnett, according to him there is a youth bulge and emerging adults are the assets of any nation and the quality of emerging adults raised by any nation determine its progress. It is in this backdrop the present study was conducted to assess flourishing among emerging adults of Kashmir. Another important aim of the study was to explore gender differences in flourishing. Data was collected from 700 emerging adults studying in three universities of Kashmir- IUST, University of Kashmir and Central university of Kashmir. Data was collected by using 14 item MHC-SF (mental health continuum, short form) by Corey Keyes, 2009. Data was analyzed by using SPSS 26.0. In order to realize the objectives, descriptive statistics were analyzed followed by t test. Descriptive analysis revealed that 18.1% emerging adults of Kashmir fall under low, 65.55% fall under average and 16.1% fall under high category in terms of flourishing. Low flourishing is the red signal, it indicates presence of symptoms of depression and if left un-intervened can turn into clinical diagnosis. Regarding gender differences in flourishing, males were found to score higher than females in two dimensions: emotional and social well-being, while as no significant mean difference was found in psychological well-being. Results have implications for researchers, clinicians, parents and teachers that flourishing of emerging adults be prioritized and gender gap in mental health be addressed with proper interventions like equal opportunities, harassment free environments and autonomy support. Future researchers should work on developing interventions that can boost flourishing and study various risk and protective factors that could influence flourishing.

Keywords: *Flourishing, Mental Health, Gender, Emerging Adulthood, Eudaimonic Well Being*

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Flourishing is when an individual perceives that their life is going smoothly. It includes both hedonic and eudaimonic well being; feeling good and functioning well. There are various models of Flourishing including Seligman's PERMA, Diener's 3 factor model, Huppert & So's flourishing model and Corey Keyes' Mental Health continuum model (MHC) and MHC is the most empirically supported model. The present study is also grounded in it. According to Keyes, mental health is not mere absence of mental illness but the presence of emotional, psychological and social well being and this complete state of mental health is called flourishing. In his words, 'Flourishing is the pinnacle of good mental health'. He identified three components of Flourishing: emotional well being, psychological well being and social well being. Emotional well being is defined as being happy, interested and satisfied with life. Psychological well being is defined as presence of positive relationships, purpose in life, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth and autonomy. The social well-being entails social contribution, social integration, social growth, social acceptance and social coherence. It is in this backdrop that the present study was planned and flourishing was assessed among emerging adults (18-29 years age group); who are the assets for any nation but at the same time most vulnerable to mental health issues as well. They are in their prime age and are the ones who are about to navigate the journey of adult life. Since previous researchers were most interested in adolescents; their emotional and psychological challenges, emerging adults were getting neglected and the new spark of research interest in this area was ignited by Jeffrey Jenson Arnett and today springer publishes an exclusive journal on "Emerging adulthood" related issues. Since 2010; it has published around 600 studies with more than 6200 citations in scientific literature. This has led to the development of APA recognised research society called "*SSEA: Society for Study of emerging adulthood.*"

LITERATURE REVIEW

An intensive literature review was conducted to explore the risk and promotive factors of flourishing and some of the prominent factors that were conclusively found to increase flourishing are : positive and autonomy supportive relationships(Whitaker, 2022; Lewine S, 2021) meaning and purpose in life(Kadir A et al.,2021 ; Wissing P, 2019; Routledge & Taylor, 2020; Yngve A,2015), positive psychological strengths: confidence, competence, character, connection and caring(Milonos D et al, 2023; Novak M et al.,2023; Kadir & Rusyda, 2022; Oneyka S, 2022) ; life skills like emotional intelligence(Plessis M, 2023; Sagrikaa R, 2023; Rey L, 2019) positive personality traits: extraversion & conscientiousness (Pradhan S, 2023; Gaurav & Banerjee, 2021) ; high self esteem, self regulation and strong religious faith.(Nelson & Walker, 2013). Risk factors include low self worth, low self regulation, poor emotional intelligence, identity crisis, unhealthy social and romantic relationships, high neuroticism and low self care. Fatame M et al (2024) conducted a study and found that hardiness, positive family connections, purpose in life and metacognitive efficiency are significant psychosocial correlates of flourishing in the later life.

Regarding differences in flourishing with respect to gender research is inconclusive, it depends on sociocultural context. Some researchers were unable to find any gender difference in flourishing. These include (Shariff et al.,2022; Freguson, 2016; Waterman et al., 2010). However majority of the researchers have found that males experience more flourishing than females. These include (L Ren, 2021; Fortes et al., 2019; Matud M, 2019; Singh K, 2015; Keyes et al., 2007). There are few researchers who have found that females experience more flourishing lives; these include (Feunte et al,2020; Aswini & Amriti, 2017)

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Objectives of the study are:

- To assess flourishing among emerging adults of Kashmir.
- To study gender differences in flourishing among emerging adults of Kashmir.

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected from 700 emerging adult university students selected purposively from three universities of Kashmir (Central university of Kashmir, University of Kashmir and IUST). Data was collected by using a standardized scale MHC-SF (corey, Keyes, 2009). MHC- SF is a 14-item scale to assess flourishing. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was found to be 0.86. Data was analysed by using SPSS 26.0. Descriptive analysis were conducted followed by t test.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

| VARIABLE | MEAN | SD | SKEWNESS | KURTOSIS |
|---------------------------------|------|-----|----------|----------|
| <i>Emotional Well Being</i> | 3.70 | .90 | .589 | .05 |
| <i>Psychological Well Being</i> | 3.97 | .70 | .870 | 1.0 |
| <i>Social Well Being</i> | 3.47 | .88 | .428 | .36 |

The above table indicates that data is normally distributed as indicated by skewness and kurtosis values which are within acceptable threshold limits of + - 3.

Table 2 Frequency Distribution

| Variable | Low(%) | Average(%) | High(%) |
|---------------------------------|--------|------------|---------|
| <i>Emotional wellbeing</i> | 16.7 | 62.8 | 20.5 |
| <i>Psychological well being</i> | 15.7 | 64.9 | 19.4 |
| <i>Social well being</i> | 18.4 | 62.2 | 19.4 |
| <i>Flourishing Total</i> | 18.1 | 65.88 | 16.1 |

The above table indicates that majority of the emerging adults fall under average category in flourishing. However, it is pertinent to mention here that low flourishing is a red signal. Low category ones are floundering; who have depressive symptoms, poor psychosocial functioning and dissatisfaction with life. 18.1% of the sample fall under floundering category which means 121 emerging adults out of 669 are struggling with mental health issues which is an alarming situation.

Table 3 Comparison of Mean Differences in Flourishing with respect to Gender

| Variables | Gender | N | Mean | SD | Df | t value | P |
|--------------------------|--------|-----|------|-----|-----|---------|------|
| Emotional well being | Male | 257 | 3.83 | .86 | 667 | 3.14 | .002 |
| | Female | 412 | 3.61 | .91 | | | |
| Psychological well being | Male | 257 | 3.98 | .73 | 667 | .325 | .745 |
| | Female | 412 | 3.96 | .68 | | | |
| Social well being | Male | 257 | 3.58 | .81 | 667 | 2.60 | .009 |
| | Female | 412 | 3.40 | .92 | | | |

The above table indicates that there is a significant mean difference in emotional well -being and social well-being dimensions of flourishing; It shows that males have higher emotional

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and social well-being than females while as no significant mean difference was found in psychological well-being with respect to gender.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to assess flourishing among emerging of Kashmir and to examine the gender differences in flourishing. Descriptive analysis found that majority of the emerging adults fall under average category in flourishing however 18.1 % were found to fall under low category which means 121 out of 669 emerging adults (18-29 age group) are struggling with mental health issues; thereby it becomes imperative that mental health screening be done at educational institutions so that high risk cases are identified at earliest and provided right kind of mental health support services. Besides various steps should be taken to promote flourishing. Parents, teachers, mental health practioners, government all stake holders have a role to play. Autonomy supportive, healthy and positive parent –child and teacher- child relationships can help in increasing life skills and reducing psycho emotional burden which will enhance flourishing. Government should introduce practical and professional courses on life skill building, stress management and mental health promotion besides providing talent hunts and extra curricular avenues to youth which will help them channelize their energies into healthy ways and protect them from engaging in unhealthy and risk taking behaviours like drugs etc.

Regarding gender differences in flourishing, results of the study found that male emerging adults scored higher in emotional and social well being dimensions of flourishing than female emerging adults. This finding is in line with the previous studies done by L Ren, 2021; Fortes et al., 2019; Matud M, 2019; Singh K, 2015; Keyes et al., 2007) who also found that males experience more flourishing than females. This can be attributed to the fact that males experience more liberty and social valuation than females; besides there are more avenues of social participation and extra curricular activities for males which contributes to their emotional and social well being.

Delimitations & Suggestions for Future Research

No intervention was provided to enhance flourishing. Data was collected by using questionnaires only. Future researchers should conduct intensive interviews with youth so as to identify the risk and protective factors of flourishing that are culture specific and professionals should come up with interventions that will enhance flourishing and redress mental health issues of the youth. Parent and teacher training programmes should be organised to equip them with skills so that they can become more mindful of how they can promote flourishing by being emotionally warm and autonomy supportive while realising the detrimental impact of harsh and negative approach on mental health of emerging adults.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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