

The Relationship between Experiencing Awe in Everyday Life and Psychological Well-Being among Young Adults

Karandeep Singh Oberoi^{1*}, Dr. Shivani Bhambri²

ABSTRACT

This research explores the connection between awe experiences and psychological well-being in young adults, with a focus on identifying possible differences between genders. Awe, defined as a response to phenomena that are vast or surpass our understanding, is analyzed for its relationship with well-being facets such as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Utilizing a correlational study design, the investigation relies on self-reported data from a cohort of young adults (N=148). Findings indicate a significant positive link between awe and personal growth ($r=.280, p<.05$), environmental mastery ($r=-.172, p>.05$), and self-acceptance ($r=-.138, p>.05$) were not significant, pointing to awe's varied impact across different well-being areas. Gender analyses showed minor differences in how awe affects individuals, yet these were not significantly pronounced, indicating a complex relationship between awe, well-being, and gender. These insights highlight awe's crucial role in promoting personal growth in young adults while also shedding light on its multifaceted influence on overall psychological health. By underlining the significance of awe in enhancing life satisfaction, this study enriches the field of positive psychology and calls for further investigation into awe's wide-ranging effects.

Keywords: *Awe, Psychological Well-Being, Personal growth, environmental mastery, self-acceptance Gender differences and Positive Psychology*

In the timeless pursuit of happiness, each individual charts a distinct course through life's varied landscapes, seeking solace in moments woven from their own unique experiences.

In the endeavor to cultivate happiness and lead a gratifying life, positive psychology has injected newfound vigor into the exploration of psychological well-being and its associated facets. In recent decades, the question of what really gives rise to psychological well-being has occupied ever more interest. Attention has been paid, in particular, to rooting out happiness, resilience, and well-being by furthering human flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Awe was identified as the deepest positive emotion among the positive emotions explored in this study. Awe, characterized by an intense emotional

¹Undergraduate Student, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

²Assistant Professor, Amity University Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: May 01, 2024; Revision Received: June 08, 2024; Accepted: June 12, 2024

The Relationship between Experiencing Awe in Everyday Life and Psychological Well-Being among Young Adults

response to expansive stimuli, can prompt a sense of self transcendence. While various stimuli, such as beautiful buildings, can evoke awe (Piff et al., 2015), the quintessential awe experience unfolds in natural settings, significantly reshaping individuals' worldview (Joye & Bolderdijk, 2014; Shiota et al., 2003, 2007). Awe, the feeling of wonder and amazement inspired by visually salient experiences, which tends to co-occur with perceived vastness, has been empirically supported as a contributor to psychological health in people, even though little is known about its effects in a young adult population (Keltner & Haidt, 2003). But what effects does such awe-inspiring moments have on our psychological well-being? Exploring the scientific perspective illuminates the awe's transformative impact, highlighting its profound benefits for our mental health, perception of time, and sense of connection with the broader world. Notably, the emotion of awe emerges as a substantial factor influencing subjective well-being, as highlighted by Rudd, Vohs, and Aaker (2012). Ryff (1989) delineates psychological well-being as the pinnacle of an individual's optimal functioning and experience, encapsulating six dimensions: self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and purpose in life. Ryff and Keyes (1995) substantiated that the theoretical model of psychological well-being surpasses single factor and other artifactual models, as well as alternative indicators. This concept exerts a profound influence on emotional and psychological processes, augments mental health, and forges positive social bonds (Asli Azad et al., 2018; Ryff, 1989). Awe exhibits a positive correlation with psychological well-being, with individuals reporting higher levels of meaning expressing enhanced life satisfaction, diminished distress, and heightened engagement in prosocial behavior. The presence of awe manifests a significant affirmative correlation with the overall sense of meaning in life.

This investigation on awe and its relations with well-being seems particularly pertinent to young adults, who are constantly undergoing life transitions, identity formation, and life struggles. A period of life where meaning, belonging, and orientation to one's place in the world are searched out and felt into those processes deeply affected by experiencing awe. Moreover, the prevalence of technology and digital media within the young adult population would raise a question about the accessibility and prevalence of awe experiences within such contemporary settings. This leads to the study on how awe can be stimulated and its influence on the subject of well-being in young adults. The latter could fill an important void in the field and then be used to design relevant interventions aimed at promoting young people's mental health and resiliency strengthening.

The study of awe underscores its potential to enhance psychological well-being, suggesting its integration into therapeutic, educational, and urban environments to boost mental health, creativity, and social bonds. Future research should explore awe's enduring effects, cultural expressions, and its role in mental health treatments, particularly through technology-enhanced simulations and individual responsiveness. Despite its acknowledged benefits, especially among young adults, significant gaps remain in understanding how awe fosters positive emotions and well-being, with most existing studies pointing to correlations rather than causality. The influence of modern technology on the frequency and quality of awe experiences, especially pertinent to young adults, is also underexplored and necessitates further investigation to devise effective awe-based interventions for improved well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between experiencing awe in daily life and the psychological well-being of young adults.

Objectives

- Examine the relationship between experiences of awe and various aspects of psychological well-being in young adults.
- Investigate any gender differences in experiences of awe and their impact on psychological well-being, noting any notable disparities among young adults.
- Determine the nature and strength of the correlation between awe experiences and psychological well-being in young adults.

Hypothesis

Null Hypotheses (H₀)

- H_{0a}: There is no significant correlation between the frequency and intensity of awe experiences and psychological well-being in young adults.
- H_{0b}: Gender does not significantly influence the relationship between awe experiences and psychological well-being in young adults.

Alternative Hypotheses (H_a)

- H_{a1}: There is a significant positive correlation between the frequency and intensity of awe experiences and psychological well-being in young adults.
- H_{a2}: Gender significantly moderates the relationship between awe experiences and psychological well-being in young adults, with noticeable differences between genders.

Variables

Independent Variable: Awe Experiences

Awe experiences, eliciting feelings of wonder and transcendence, are quantified using the Awe Experience Scale (AWE-S) by Yaden et al. (2019). This scale assesses the frequency and intensity of experiences that significantly alter one's worldview, stemming from natural phenomena, art, music, or personal milestones.

Dependent Variable: Psychological Well-Being

Psychological Well-Being encompasses key mental health aspects such as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose, and self-acceptance. It is measured comprehensively by Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB), reflecting an individual's overall mental health and life satisfaction.

Sampling Design

This study collected 148 responses using a stratified random sampling strategy to ensure a representative sample of college students aged 18-25. The target population was divided into strata based on critical demographic factors such as age, gender, and education level, from which students were randomly selected. This sampling approach enhances the representativeness of the sample, improving the generalizability of the findings and allowing for in-depth analysis of subgroups. Such a method is particularly beneficial for examining potential gender differences in experiences of awe and psychological well-being.

The Relationship between Experiencing Awe in Everyday Life and Psychological Well-Being among Young Adults

Research Design

The study employs a quantitative, correlational design to examine the relationship between awe experiences and psychological well-being in young adults, with a specific focus on gender differences. Utilizing standardized instruments, the Awe Experience Scale (AWE-S) and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, this approach enables precise statistical analysis of the naturally occurring relationships. Data collected at a single time point facilitates the exploration of correlations, using Pearson's correlation coefficient to investigate the interplay between awe experiences and psychological well-being.

Tools

The study utilized two principal instruments to quantitatively assess the relationship between awe experiences and psychological well-being in young adults, and to explore potential gender differences.

Awe Experience Scale (AWE-S): Developed by Yaden et al. (2019), the Awe Experience Scale is designed to measure the frequency and intensity of awe encounters. This instrument has demonstrated strong internal consistency and test-retest reliability in previous studies, along with substantial construct validity, making it an effective tool for capturing awe experiences.

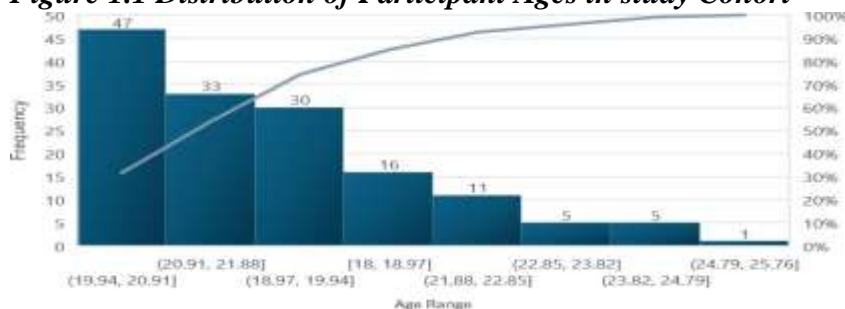
Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB): Complementing the AWE-S, Ryff's Scale evaluates multiple dimensions of psychological well-being, such as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Ryff's research in 1989 confirmed the scale's robust internal consistency (alpha coefficients ranging from .86 to .93) and good test-retest reliability over six weeks (scores between .81 and .88). The PWB scale also exhibits strong convergent validity, correlating well with other established measures of well-being and depression. Factor analysis has further validated the distinctiveness of this scale, affirming its discriminant validity.

Procedure Statistical Design

The study utilized parametric statistical tests optimized for normally distributed data to explore variable relationships. Analyses included Descriptive Statistics, which provided sample characteristics and summarized scores from the Awe Experience Scale and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient measured the relationship between awe experiences and psychological well-being, while T-tests evaluated demographic variations. This methodology enabled a detailed examination of the hypotheses, yielding insights into the interplay between awe experiences and psychological well-being in young adults.

RESULT

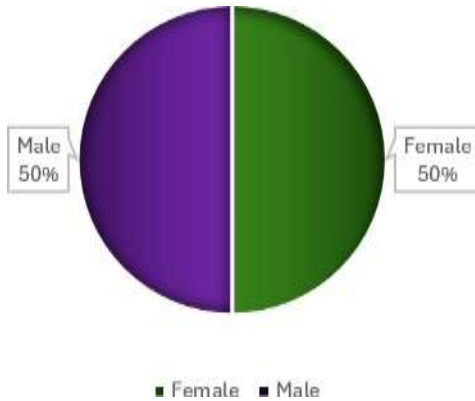
Figure 1.1 Distribution of Participant Ages in study Cohort



The Relationship between Experiencing Awe in Everyday Life and Psychological Well-Being among Young Adults

The majority of participants are in the younger age ranges, with the highest frequency (47) in the 20.91 to 21.88 age range, gradually decreasing as age increases. The graphical line indicates a clear decreasing trend in participation frequency as age increases.

Figure 1.2 Gender Distribution of Study Participants.



The study explored the connection between everyday awe experiences and psychological well-being in young adults uncovered subtle gender-related differences. Both females and males were equally represented in the research, with the analysis spanning various aspects of psychological well-being.

Table 4.1 Gender Differences in Awe experiences and Psychological Well-being Among College Students

VARIABLES	GENDER	SAMPLE	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION	t- TEST	SIG. (2-tailed)
		(N)	(μ)	(σ)	(t)	(α)
Awe Experience	Female	74	126.337	23.623	0.569	0.570
	Male	74	124.027	25.724	0.569	0.570
Autonomy subscale	Female	74	13.527	2.901	-1.908	0.058
	Male	74	14.500	3.290	-1.908	0.058
Environmental Subscale	Female	74	13.851	2.303	0.052	0.959
	Male	74	13.824	3.858	0.052	0.959
Personal Growth Subscale	Female	74	16.256	3.335	1.422	0.157
	Male	74	15.432	3.705	1.422	0.157
Positive relations with others	Female	74	13.702	3.968	1.709	0.090
	Male	74	12.594	3.920	1.709	0.090
Purpose in Life Subscale	Female	74	14.175	3.441	1.690	0.093
	Male	74	13.216	3.465	1.690	0.093
Self- acceptance Subscale	Female	74	14.527	3.903	1.529	0.128
	Male	74	13.500	4.259	1.529	0.128

Both genders show similar mean scores in awe experiences, indicating no substantial difference in how males and females experience awe. In terms of psychological well-being subscales, no significant t-test results ($p > 0.05$) suggest no notable gender differences in psychological well-being dimensions. Autonomy scores are slightly higher in males, while personal growth, positive relations, and self-acceptance are slightly higher in females.

The Relationship between Experiencing Awe in Everyday Life and Psychological Well-Being among Young Adults

Table 4.2 Relationships between Awe experiences and Psychological Well-being among College Students

	Awe Experience	Autonomy Subscale	Environment Subscale	Personal Growth Subscale	Positive relations with others	Purpose of life Subscale	Self-acceptance Subscale
Awe Experience	X						
Autonomy Subscale	-.108	X					
Environment Subscale	-.172*	.469**	X				
Personal Growth Subscale	.089	.406**	.388**	X			
Positive relations with others	-.022	.339**	.434**	.364**	X		
Purpose of life	.194*	.217**	.017	.417**	.258**	X	
Self-acceptance Subscale	-.138	.340**	.484**	.422**	.524**	.218**	X

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

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

Significant positive correlations exist between the Environmental Mastery subscale and almost all other well-being subscales, especially with Self-Acceptance (.484, $p < 0.01$). Awe Experience shows positive correlations with Purpose of Life (.194, $p < 0.05$) but negative correlations with Environmental Mastery (-.172, $p < 0.05$). Positive Relations correlate strongly with Personal Growth (.364, $p < 0.01$) and Purpose of Life (.258, $p < 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the relationship between awe experiences and psychological well-being among young adults, with a focus on nuanced gender differences. Utilizing the Awe Experience Scale (AWE-S) and Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB), the research assesses the frequency and intensity of awe and its impact on various well-being dimensions such as autonomy, personal growth, and environmental mastery.

The findings reveal that females report marginally higher awe experiences compared to males, with means of 126.34 and 124.03 respectively, suggesting gender-specific perceptions and impacts of awe. This aligns with Luo et al. (2023), who note that awe may enhance feelings of connectedness and empathy, particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of well-being subscales, males exhibited higher autonomy scores, while females demonstrated greater personal growth, which Dai and Jiang (2023) associate with awe-inspired self- transcendence and personal development.

Significantly, there were no notable differences in environmental mastery between genders, supporting Dong and Ni's (2020) assertion that dispositional awe equally predicts subjective well-being across genders. However, women showed stronger positive relationships and higher levels of purpose in life and self-acceptance, potentially due to deeper engagement with awe- inspiring experiences (Yuan Du & Jiang, 2023).

The Relationship between Experiencing Awe in Everyday Life and Psychological Well-Being among Young Adults

Statistical analysis indicated no significant overall gender differences in awe experiences ($t(146) = .569, p = .570$), although a marginal difference in autonomy was observed ($t(146) = -1.908, p = .058$), suggesting nuanced impacts of awe on perceived autonomy and control. Correlation analysis demonstrated that awe experiences did not significantly impact autonomy or environmental mastery but were positively correlated with personal growth ($r = .280, p < .01$) and moderately with purpose in life and self-acceptance.

While awe does not uniformly influence all aspects of psychological well-being, it has a significant relationship with personal growth and moderately enhances facets related to purpose and self-acceptance. These insights, substantiated by Yang et al. (2018) and Xiong (2023), suggest that awe can profoundly shape personal development and life satisfaction, warranting further exploration into its extensive effects on human experience. This study enriches our understanding of awe's role within the psychological landscape, highlighting its potential as a catalyst for personal and emotional well-being.

CONCLUSION

In an era where the profound beauty and wonder of the world often slip through the cracks of our busy lives, our study endeavors to cast a spotlight on the understated presence of awe in daily existence, examining its intricate relationship with the psychological well-being of young adults. However, awe's influence on autonomy and environmental mastery was inconclusive, aligning with Yang et al. (2018) who suggest that awe reduces self-focus. The lack of significant correlations with positive relationships and life purpose introduces complex dynamics, hinting at awe's nuanced impact on social and existential dimensions. Despite no substantial gender differences in awe experiences, subtle variations in autonomy and social relationships suggest potential gender-specific effects. Further research with a larger and more diverse cohort is crucial to deepen our understanding of awe's complex effects on psychological well-being and its potential gender-specific impacts. This exploration will not only expand our knowledge of psychological dynamics but also explore new avenues where awe significantly shapes human experiences.

Limitations

This research provides important insights but has notable limitations. Its correlational design prevents determining causality between awe experiences and psychological well-being, making it unclear whether awe leads to better well-being or vice versa. The study's reliance on self-reported data may also introduce bias, affected by participants' moods or desires to present themselves favorably. Additionally, the homogeneity of the sample in terms of age and cultural background limits the generalizability of the findings. The absence of qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, restricts deeper exploration into the personal impacts of awe. Moreover, the study does not account for personality differences that might affect the perception of awe or investigate the variance in awe's frequency and intensity, which could provide further insights into its relationship with psychological well-being.

REFERENCES

- Asli Azad, M., Shariat, S., Farhadi, T., & Shahidi, L. (2018). The prediction of psychological well-being based on self-compassion and self-esteem in caregivers of people with physical, mental, and multiple disabilities in the welfare organization. *Journal of Social Behavior and Community Health*, 2(1), 164-173.

The Relationship between Experiencing Awe in Everyday Life and Psychological Well-Being among Young Adults

- Dong, R., & Ni, S. (2019). Openness to experience, extraversion, and subjective well-being among Chinese college students: The mediating role of dispositional awe. *Psychological Reports, 122*, 431-442.
- Dong, R., & Ni, S. G. (2020). Openness to experience, extraversion, and subjective well-being among Chinese college students: The mediating role of dispositional awe. *Psychological Reports, 123*(3), 903-928.
- Joye, Y., & Bolderdijk, J. W. (2015). An exploratory study into the effects of extraordinary nature on emotions, mood, and prosociality. *Frontiers in psychology, 5*, 119285.
- Keltner, D., & Haidt, J. (2003). Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion. *Cognition and Emotion, 17*(2), 297-314.
- Kim, Y., Nusbaum, H. C., & Yang, F. (2023). Going beyond ourselves: the role of self-transcendent experiences in wisdom. *Cognition and Emotion, 37*(1), 98-116.
- Luo, L., Zou, R., Yang, D., & Yuan, J. (2023). Awe experience triggered by fighting against COVID-19 promotes prosociality through increased feeling of connectedness and empathy. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 18*(6), 866-882.
- Piff, P. K., Dietze, P., Feinberg, M., Stancato, D. M., & Keltner, D. (2015). Awe, the small self, and prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 108*(6), 883-899.
- Rudd, M., Vohs, K. D., & Aaker, J. (2012). Awe expands people's perception of time, alters decision making, and enhances well-being. *Psychological Science, 23*(10), 1130-1136.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*(6), 1069-1081.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989a). Beyond Ponce de Leon and life satisfaction: New directions in quest of successful ageing. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 12*(1), 35-55.
- Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 69*(4), 719.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 5-14.
- Shiota, M. N., Campos, B., & Keltner, D. (2003). The faces of positive emotion: Prototype displays of awe, amusement, and pride. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1000*, 296299.
- Shiota, M. N., Keltner, D., & Mossman, A. (2007). The nature of awe: Elicitors, appraisals, and effects on self-concept. *Cognition and Emotion, 21*(5), 944-963.
- Xiong, R. (2023). Impact of awe on prosocial behavior and authenticity for personal growth and communal well-being.
- Yaden, D. B., Kaufman, S. B., Hyde, E., Chirico, A., Gaggioli, A., Zhang, J. W., & Keltner, D. (2019). The development of the Awe Experience Scale (AWE-S): A multifactorial measure for a complex emotion. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 14*(4), 474-488.
- Yang, Y., Hu, J., Jing, F., & Nguyen, B. (2018). From awe to ecological behavior: The mediating role of connectedness to nature
- Yuan, W., Du, Y., & Jiang, T. (2023). How and when awe improves meaning in life: The role of authentic-self pursuit and trait authenticity. *Emotion*. Advance online publication.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

The Relationship between Experiencing Awe in Everyday Life and Psychological Well-Being among Young Adults

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Oberoi, K.S. & Bhambri, S. (2024). The Relationship between Experiencing Awe in Everyday Life and Psychological Well-Being among Young Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(2), 3331-3339. DIP:18.01.294.20241202, DOI:10.25215/1202.294