

The Relationship between Psychological Wellbeing, Perceived Parental Autonomy Support & Empathy Amongst Outstation Indian College Students

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ABSTRACT

Finding out if there is a connection between students' psychological well-being, their perception of their parents' autonomy support, and empathy among those who travel to different cities for school can assist organizations and caregivers in offering these students resilience training and mental health support. The purpose of the study was to look at the connections between empathy, perceived parental autonomy support, and psychological well-being among 122 Indian outstation college students (57 male & 67 Female students), in the age group of 18-23 years from Mumbai city, India. The study uses Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale (Mageau al., 2014), the Psychological well-being scale (Keyes & Ryff et al., 1995), and the Toronto Empathy Scale (Spreng et al. 2009) were used in the study. The data collected was using the appropriate descriptive and statistical analysis. Using correlation analysis, the associations between these variables in the study were examined. These findings contribute to the evidence suggesting an optimal level of perceived parental autonomy affects the overall psychological well-being of students. Furthermore, the study's conclusions showed that a student's general psychological health improves their capacity for empathy, or the capacity to understand the sentiments of others, and vice versa.

Keywords: *Psychological Well-Being, Perceived Parental Autonomy Support, Empathy, Outstation College Students*

In a student's life, the move from secondary to higher education is extremely important. Sometimes for higher pursuits of education, students move across different cities and states to gain exposure. Parental involvement through support & autonomy is the second crucial dimension in parent-child studies, which is closely linked to a child's healthy development. Young people need enough freedom from parental power and control during adolescence so that they can experience themselves as individuals with their wants and feelings, make decisions about their own lives, and accept responsibility for the consequences of those actions. If not given enough opportunities to make independent choices, the student's ability to adjust, and deal with their environment & interpersonal

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Received: April 15, 2024; Revision Received: June 27, 2024; Accepted: June 30, 2024

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relationships suffer. Consequently, their overall sense of psychological well-being is affected. (Ercan Kocayörük et al., 2014)

Similarly, research indicates that India's fast-paced society and quickly changing exposure have made university students there more susceptible to mental health issues. Even though academics are perceived as a beneficial challenge, unfavorable opinions can have a detrimental effect on one's capacity for autonomy, mastery, self-acceptance, and self-growth.

A student's response to college, however, can differ. Some students find college stressful since it's such a big step up from high school, while others find tension stemming from being away from home. While some types of stress are vital for personal growth, too much stress can overwhelm a student and impair their ability to cope, particularly if they are denied the freedom to make decisions for themselves during their most formative years. Prior studies have solely concentrated on school-going and college-bound students; however, it is imperative to concentrate on outstation students who travel for academic purposes, as college students often face increased academic demands, familial dynamics changes, social life changes, and exposure to new ideas and temptations. This affects their capacity to perceive, grasp, and sympathize with people's emotions as well. (Illango, 2018)

College life involves interpersonal relationships, validating emotions, and perspective-taking, contributing to empathy and social support. However, low psychological well-being may affect altruistic and empathetic levels. This study aims to explore these constructs in Indian college students.

1. Perceived Parental Autonomy Support

For this study perceived parental autonomy support has been defined as, encouraging adolescents so that they can be able to enact upon their true personal interests and values i.e., promotion of volitional functioning (Soenens et al., 2007). The roots of this concept come from the Self Determination Theory, where autonomy is a fundamental human desire that is essential for happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy support has also been emphasized by SDT as a parenting tactic that improves children's psychosocial functioning by assisting them in realizing their intrinsic life goals. Style functions as a socializing tool that supports the link between teens' well-being and their perceived need for support. (Lan et al., 2019). SDT research (Grolnick et al. 1997; Ryan and Deci 2000a) explored the aspects of this relationship and found that the satisfaction of three psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) supported and contributed to the teenagers' well-being and lowered their ill-being. (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

2. Psychological Well-being

Psychological Well-Being is closely associated with mental health. Hence, psychological well-being can be defined as the emotional and cognitive evaluation of the quality of life (Ryff, 1995). Ryff & Keyes combined various models from developmental psychology. For instance, Maslow, Rogers, Allport, or Jung conceptualized psychological well-being as life's basic tendencies, self-actualization, or Erikson's psychosocial stages of development. Eventually, a multidimensional model of well-being was created by drawing on the convergence of these several frameworks of positive functioning as the theoretical basis (Ryff, 1989b, 1995). The model includes six distinct components of positive psychological functioning: (Ryff & Keyes, 1995)

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- **Self-acceptance:** Self-actualization, optimal functioning, and maturity are key attributes for good psychological health. High self-esteem leads to strong empathy, deep love, friendships, and complete identification with others, forming deeper connections.
- **Autonomy:** Individuation signifies a functioning individual who evaluates themselves based on personal criteria, liberating them from convention and avoiding common fears, beliefs, and rules
- **Environmental Mastery:** is the capacity of a person to select or create situations that suit their psychological state. Moreover, it is the capacity to creatively alter and manage intricate environments.
- **Life's Purpose:** As life span developmental theories propose shifting objectives in age, such as productivity and emotional integration, it is represented by a sense of directedness and intentionality.
- **Personal Growth:** Achieving optimal psychological functioning requires continuous development and growth, emphasizing the desire to actualize oneself and reach one's potential. A well-functioning person is open to new experiences, constantly evolving and growing. (1989, Ryff)

3. Empathy

Empathy can be defined as *“The capacity to resonate with another person’s emotions, understand his/her thoughts and feelings, separate our thoughts and emotions from those of the observed, and respond with the appropriate prosocial and helpful behavior”* (Radionov & Bošnjaković, 2018). Hence Affective Empathy, Cognitive Empathy, Spiritual Empathy & Social Empathy have been identified as components of empathy.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A study was undertaken to find out how psychologically healthy postgraduate students were. With the use of PWB questionnaires as instruments, the study evaluated associations between demographic variables such as age, field of study, and PWB. The results showed that the study's participants had greater levels of general psychological well-being. Personal growth was the dimension with the highest mean score, followed by autonomy, environmental mastery, healthy relationships, self-acceptance, and a life purpose. Because of the ongoing obstacles that the learning environment presented, students were able to grow personally to a greater extent. (Pandey & Gupta., 2023).

In a similar vein, Gagne.M, 2003 carried out two investigations to investigate how early parental experiences can impact causality orientation, hence affecting people's views toward environmental regulation or autonomy. The relationship between prosocial behavior and autonomy support was investigated in this study. In Study 1, college students reported engaging in a range of banal activities and completed questions regarding autonomy orientation, parental autonomy support, and general need satisfaction. In contrast, study 2 involved volunteer workers who answered questionnaires about need satisfaction at work, work autonomy support, and autonomy orientation. The findings showed that prosocial conduct was substantially correlated with autonomy orientation and just weakly correlated with autonomy support. The effect of autonomy orientation was slightly mediated by need satisfaction, while the effect of autonomy support was mediated. (Gagne.M, 2003)

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Furthermore, numerous investigations have been carried out to comprehend the connection between psychological well-being and empathy. For instance, empathy is also positively associated with psychological well-being, and Perceived satisfaction of psychological needs is positively related to PWB. (Jeon & Chu, 2019). A study was conducted by Shaffer et al, (2010) to understand Attachment, Self-Compassion, Empathy, and Subjective Well-Being among College Students & Community Adults. Findings indicated that empathy towards other college mates served as a mediator in the association between attachment avoidance and subjective well-being. (Shaffer, Ku & Wei, 2010).

Furthermore, Roberts and Bengtson (1993) conducted a long-term investigation to examine the impact of parent-child relationship quality on young adults' psychological health. The youngster in each of the 293 parent-child pairs who took part in the study was a 14-year-old teenager. The results showed that parental-child bonding in late adolescence and early adulthood affected levels of filial self-esteem. In contrast, the researchers found that those with adult roles—like a job, a spouse, and kids—were less impacted by their parent-child connection in terms of psychological health and self-worth. The study discovered that attachment developed early in the parent-child relationship continued to be beneficial psychologically even after the children reached adulthood. (Zyromski & Cripps, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Sample

This study utilized the purposive & snowball sampling methods to collect data. Using an online survey method, data was gathered from college students who shifted to Mumbai to pursue higher bachelor's, master's, or diploma degrees from several metropolitan locations in India. The sample comprised 122 Outstation Students, (57 male students & 67 female students) of 18 to 23 years of age.

Inclusion Criteria

- Equal no. of men and women
- Age range 18-23 years
- Rural graduate or undergraduate, diploma students
- Educated college-going students of India only
- Has spent significant time staying and growing up under both mom and dad.

Exclusion Criteria

- Students shifted out of India
- Any students below 18 years of age & above 23 years.
- Students who have grown up with other relatives or grandparents.
- Students grew up with a single parent only.

Instruments

- **Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale:** The P-PASS scale, developed by Mageau et al. (2015), measures perceived parental autonomy. The scale has 24 items, with scores ranging from 24 to 168. It is valid and reliable, valid across diverse ethnic backgrounds, and has been translated into French. The scale has good internal consistency and predicts general self-efficacy.
- **Psychological Well-Being Scale:** Psychotherapist Carol D. Ryff developed the psychological well-being scale, which was used to gauge psychological well-being.

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(Pandey & Gupta., 2023). The study uses a shortened version of the psychological well-being scale, consisting of 18 items, to measure six aspects of happiness and well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose, and self-acceptance, with participants rating each item. (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). It exhibits a strong positive connection between items and other things, outstanding temporal stability, and internal consistency. With a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.82 for the subscales, statistically meaningful findings are shown. (Bayani and others, 2008).

- **Toronto Empathy Scale:** The Toronto Empathy Scale, created by Spreng et al. in 2009, has been used to test students' empathy. The measure covers a broad range of typical characteristics associated with the emotional dimension of empathy i.e. emotional contagion, emotional comprehension, sympathetic physiological arousal, and specific altruism. (Ntina Kourmoussi et al., 2017). Springeng et al.'s TEQ, published in 2009, has strong validity and good internal consistency, positive correlations with empathy and behavioral measures, and negative correlations with autism symptomatology. (Ntina Kourmoussi & colleagues, 2017)

Procedure

Before the students began entering their information, their permission was sought, and only their initials were disclosed to protect their privacy. Via social media, the researcher distributed the Google form questionnaires. First, a briefing on the study and the privacy of their data was given to the participants. The form then advanced to the next portion only once they provided their informed consent. After the participants' demographic information was gathered (no identifying information would be gathered), those who satisfied the study's inclusion requirements may access the instructions and scales.

The study used online data collection, ensuring participants answered questions and were rewarded for their time. If they had queries or were unable to understand test items, they could contact the researcher.

Data Analysis

The statistical program JASP was utilized to compute the study's data. The significant data was examined using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, and a scatter plot was used as an inferential statistic to assess for linearity.

RESULTS

Table 1 Variable descriptive statistics

Variable	Range	Mean	SD	Variance
PWB	87	87.402	18.271	18.271
Empathy	39	46.975	8.43	8.43
P-PASS	71	101.197	12.763	12.763

Note. N=122, PWB= Psychological Wellbeing, P-PASS= Perceived Parental Autonomy Support

Table 1. indicates the descriptive statistics of the mean, SD, range, and variance obtained from a sample of 122 participants. The mean values for the above-mentioned variables are 101.197, 87.402 & 46.975 respectively. The SD values for P-PASS, PWB, and Empathy were 12.763, 18.271 & 8.43 respectively. The range for values P-PASS, PWB, and Empathy

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were 71, 87 & 39 respectively. The variances for values for P-PASS, PWB, and Empathy were 162.887, 333.813 & 71.066 respectively.

Table 2 Correlational analysis between PWB, Empathy & P-PASS variables (N=122)

Variable	PWB	Empathy	P-PASS
PWB	-		
Empathy	0.295***	-	
P-PASS	-0.021	-0.055	-

Note. PWB= Psychological Wellbeing, P-PASS- Perceived Parental Autonomy Support
*** p <.001, two-tailed

The correlational link between the study's variables is shown in Table 2. Empathy and psychological well-being were found to have a substantial positive association ($r=0.295$; $p<001$), according to the analysis. Additionally, it was discovered that the relationship between perceived parental autonomy support and psychological well-being was not significant, with a r value of -0.021 (Ma et al., 2022). This indicates that perceived parental autonomy support and psychological well-being are negatively correlated. Likewise, it was determined that there was no significant correlation between perceived parental autonomy support and empathy.

DISCUSSION

As a result, the findings contradict the hypotheses that were put forth. It's important to keep in mind that students may feel more confident if they aren't required to make decisions all the time. Studies reveal that little is known about how to support PWB from a self-determination perspective, especially in a communal culture, which is critical to the psychological development of emerging adults. (Lan et al., 2019). Studies reveal that decision-making skills, autonomy, and outside influences all impact psychological well-being. Because of their academic experiences, students face stress, which emphasizes the need for proactive coping techniques to avoid negative results and promote self-determination in a community culture. Therefore, studies on self-efficacy, perceived parental autonomy support, and imitation methods were carried out to bolster this notion. To comprehend the stress responses of 1085 undergraduate university students, the study examined their self-efficacy, perceived parental autonomy support, and coping mechanisms. The findings demonstrated that parental autonomy support and coping mechanisms are not mutually exclusive, and the degree of flexibility in students' stress management profiles differed. (Ilona and others, 2023)

In addition to this, another explanation for an opposite relationship between the proposed two variables could be explained well by the Vitamin model proposed by Warr in 1987. The Vitamin model suggests a non-linear relationship between environmental characteristics and psychological well-being, with job autonomy potentially negatively impacting psychological well-being if it exceeds a certain level of control, indicating a weaker relationship. (Clausen et al., 2021).

According to the second hypothesis, among Indian college students, perceived parental autonomy support and empathy would positively correlate. The two variables did, however, have a negligible negative connection, according to Pearson's r values. As a result, the findings contradict the theory that was put forth. It's possible that individual differences affected the results. There aren't many studies on the connection between empathy and

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parental autonomy support in the Indian community. Although parents can teach empathy to their children, experiences in colleges and other educational settings can profoundly influence students' views and values and even cause them to stop acting with empathy. (Xu & colleagues, 2022).

Secondly, different cultures perceive the notion of autonomy very differently. In India, autonomy is often seen as excessive decision-making independence, with perceptions varying depending on whether it is a student's right or an advantage provided by caregivers. Research has emphasized the mediating role of self-esteem in empathy behaviors across college students (Anh et al., 2022). Hence, individuals with high self-esteem are more capable of handling stress, reducing anxiety and burnout, and developing better communication skills and interpersonal relationships. So, this also means that an individual's high self-esteem and high perceived parental autonomy support might affect their empathy levels (Huang et al., 2019). Additionally, the positive correlation between medical college students' self-esteem and empathy is investigated in Xao X. et al.'s 2019 study. According to this study, while professional burnout may lower empathy levels, improving self-esteem and identifying mediators between empathy and self-esteem may increase empathy in medical students. (Huang and others, 2019)

The third hypothesis proposed a significant positive correlation between the psychological well-being and empathy of Indian college students. The idea was validated by Pearson's *r* results, which showed that students' psychological well-being and empathy levels increase together. The above result is well supported by research on related areas. An investigation was conducted to find out what factors affect undergraduate university students' psychological health. The results could be crucial in creating intervention strategies. The study examined the relationships among university students' psychological well-being, learning preferences, social skills, emotional intelligence, anxiety, empathy, and self-concept. These factors explained the overall variance; the results showed that emotional understanding and personal improvement were the most significant. Furthermore, a significant correlation was discovered between the emotional understanding and empathy component and all psychological well-being dimensions, with the personal growth dimension exhibiting the highest correlation (Yu and colleagues, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The current study advances our understanding of the connection between Indian college students' psychological well-being and empathy. It helps to understand; how mental health & what factors contribute to the holistic mental well-being of students who travel for educational purposes. Similarly, understanding a student's empathy levels is also essential in figuring out how mental health and altruistic behavior interact, the reasons for helping behaviors, and what & why people act in a certain way. As a result, the findings should be utilized to educate parents, teachers, and students about the importance of how a healthy mind can lead to helping & understanding behavior.

However, the study's generalizability may be limited due to its focus on urban students in India's metropolitan cities, and its findings may not apply to other age groups over 23, who may miss out on early education. Moreover, the study used self-report measures, and hence the responses are susceptible to social desirability & fake ratings. The sampling method was purposive and convenient, reducing the results' robustness as the sample does not truly represent the population. In addition to this, only the shorter versions of the scales were

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utilized for evaluating empathy and psychological well-being, which may not be statistically particularly reliable. As a result, future research should consider sample characteristics like age, gender, and culture to understand students' psychological well-being, decision-making, and empathy. It should also explore students' perceptions of parenting styles and attachment styles, as well as their adjustment levels influenced by various courses and living conditions.

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Acknowledgment

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

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Kanakia, P. & Bhansali, N. (2024). The Relationship between Psychological Wellbeing, Perceived Parental Autonomy Support & Empathy Amongst Outstation Indian College Students. *International Journal of Indian Psychology, 12(2)*, 4779-4788. DIP:18.01.427.20241202, DOI:10.25215/1202.427