

Research Paper

## Analysis of Influence of Gender and Religion on Positive Mental Health among the International Students Studying in Gujarat State

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### ABSTRACT

Educational experience holds promises of intellectual growth and cultural exchange, it is imperative to recognize the unique challenges faced by international students, particularly in the realm of mental health. Adjustment to a new academic and cultural environment can significantly impact the psychological well-being of international students. The study investigated the significance of positive mental health among international students in Gujarat state, India concerning gender (male, Female) and religion (Christian, Muslim). Positive mental health encompasses self-acceptance, ego strength, and Philosophy of life. Data was collected from 142 international students studying in Gujarat State through Agashe's Positive Mental Health Inventory (PMHI) psychometric tool. The data was statistically analyzed through a 2x2 factorial ANOVA F test with a significance level of 0.05 to find significant differences in positive mental health among international students. The findings show that there is no significant difference between groups based on gender (Male, Female) religion (Christian and Muslim), and their interaction, as the P-values are all greater than the 0.05 level of significance. **Conclusion:** The findings revealed that the difference in gender and sex can't be a determinant of the Mental health status of international students.

**Keywords:** *Positive mental health, Self-acceptance, ego strength, Philosophy of life, international student, Well-being*

In recent years, the landscape of higher education has undergone a transformative shift, with a notable surge in the enrollment of international students across various regions. (Knight, 2013) While the educational experience holds promises of intellectual growth and cultural exchange, it is imperative to recognize the unique challenges faced by international students, particularly in the realm of mental health. (Luo, 2023). Ayubu (2024) revealed that the adjustment to a new academic and cultural environment can significantly impact the psychological well-being of international students. The study's findings have explored the mental health challenges faced by highlighting the importance of understanding the factors that influence their psychological resilience and overall positive mental health.

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## Analysis of Influence of Gender and Religion on Positive Mental Health among the International Students Studying in Gujarat State

(Chang & Sambasivam, 2022) Positive Mental Health (PMH) reflects a state of mental well-being that goes beyond the mere absence of psychopathology. It encompasses emotional and psychological well-being, and functioning in psychological, social, and societal domains. Positive mental health includes: feeling in control of your life and personal decisions, being able to cope with life's challenges and stresses, functioning well mentally, such as being able to focus while at work, being generally optimistic about life events. this means having hope that good things can, do and will happen in your life, feeling physically healthy, getting enough sleep, feeling like you belong to your community, such as your, school, church, neighbourhood, workplace. (Canada, 2022). According to (Baghoori,2021) study 76% of international students demonstrated optimal mental health without any previous diagnosis/treatment of any mental disorders. In another study conducted by Razgulin, (2023) revealed that overall, 59% of international students had symptoms of depression and 36% of anxiety. Students well-being was sufficient in 56% of the cases. The regression analyses were conducted to test the role of sociocultural adjustment, social support, English reading skills, and the study field for mental health and well-being.

In measuring Positive Mental Health, different attempts have been made to operationalize positive mental health and measure it. Many of these seek to assess indicators like resilience, self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism, life satisfaction, hopefulness, perceptions and judgment about a sense of coherence and meaning in life, and social integration, social well-being, hedonic (positive affect) and eudaimonic (positive functioning), Self-acceptance, and so on. Of the different scales like the Psychological Wellbeing Scale, the Sense of Coherence Scale, the Affect Balance Scale, and the Affect meter, used to measure positive aspects of mental health, mention must be made of the “European Social Survey Wave 3 questionnaire” and the 14-item “Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale”. These scales include both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of mental well-being (Barry MM, 2009). Regards PMHI (Agashe & Helode, 2007) there are three areas/components of measuring the philosophies of human nature; which are; Self-acceptance, Ego strength, and Philosophy of life.

- **Self-acceptance** is the ability to embrace and value oneself despite imperfections, limitations, and personal challenges. Klussman, (2022). It involves recognizing and appreciating one's strengths and weaknesses without judgment or excessive self-criticism. Individuals with high self-acceptance generally have a positive and realistic view of themselves.
- **Ego strength** refers to the resilience and adaptability of an individual's ego or self. It involves the capacity to cope with stress, uncertainty, and life's challenges in a constructive manner. (Letzring,2005). Individuals with strong ego strength are better equipped to maintain a sense of identity and stability during difficult times.
- **A philosophy of life** encompasses an individual's fundamental beliefs, values, and attitudes toward existence and the world (Mifsud 2023). It reflects one's perspective on the meaning and purpose of life, as well as guiding principles that influence decision-making and behavior. (Rivera, 2019). This component explores the broader worldview that shapes an individual's approach to life.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Sample*

For the current study, the participant was selected purposively, where 150 international students were from different universities in the Gujarat state and 142 were qualified for research. Many participants were found in the cities of Ahmedabad, Anand, Gandhinagar,

## Analysis of Influence of Gender and Religion on Positive Mental Health among the International Students Studying in Gujarat State

and Vadodara. all international students had an equal chance to participate and the age range was 16 to 50 years old.

*Table no 1 showing a Demographic*

Categories	Population	
Islamic Religion	Male	36
	Female	35
Christian Religion	Male	36
	Female	35
Total	142 (N)	

### *Hypothesis (Ho)*

- There is no significant difference between Gender (Female and Male) on a measure of Positive Mental Health among International students in Gujarat.
- There is no significant difference between Religions (Muslim and Christian) on a measure of Positive mental Health of international students in Gujarat.
- There is no significant interaction effect between Gender (Male and female) and Religion (Muslim and Christian) on a measure of Positive Mental Health of International students in Gujarat.

### *Design*

The study employed a quantitative scientific procedure of data collection using the standardized Agashe's PMHI to measure the PMH in international students. The procedure, and measures were as follows.

### *Procedures*

To fulfill the present study the participants were contacted Individually. For each participant proper rapport was built and promised confidentiality, as well as the informed consent person data sheet, was provided. After feeling that the participant he/she is comfortable the provision of psychometric tools /psychological scale was provided. Participants started to read the printed instructions on the test paper of the **Positive Mental Health Inventory (PMHI) (2007) by Agashe and Helode** All privacy and a safe free environment were maintained from the beginning of data collection and the end of answering the test. After completing the data collection, the responses of participants on each tool were scored by helping with the scoring key of the manual. It was assured that the participants had filled each item and had not left any blank items. Afterwards, the scales were scored as per the manuals and the scores were tabulated.

### *Measures used*

The Positive Mental Health Inventory developed by Agashe (2007) was used to measure the three aspects of positive mental health. The scale aims to measure the positive mental health of the individual, The Initial draft has 48 items, and after analysis, the final draft has 36 items valid items out of which 12 are for self-acceptance, 12 for Ego strength, and 12 for Philosophy of life. Where all items are answered in the form of True () or False () options. The scale possesses good psychometric properties in both aspects.

## Analysis of Influence of Gender and Religion on Positive Mental Health among the International Students Studying in Gujarat State

### Analysis

The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, and a 2\*2 Factorial Design or Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed. A 2\*2 Factorial Design or Analysis of variance (ANOVA) F test was used to analyse the data with a 0.05 level of significance to find significant differences in positive mental health among international students based on demographic parameters which are gender and religion.

### RESULTS

The current study was designed to measure the positive mental health among the international student with respect to their gender and religion. Psychometric tools employed were categorized into three main aspects: self-acceptance, Ego strength, and Philosophy of life the P value is going to be compared with the Alpha value to determine the presence of significance among the participants.

*Table 1 Two-way ANOVA, Showing the effect of Gender (Male and Female) and Religion (Muslim and Christian) on Positive Mental Health.*

Source of Variation	F	F crit	LoS
Gender	1.381448	3.908741	N. S
Religion	1.141692	3.908741	N. S
Interaction	0.071356	3.908741	N. S

*N.S. -No significant.*

*Note.* Table Indicates the result of two-way independent ANOVA for Positive Mental Health. Results demonstrate the difference between genders where F (1.381 < Fcrit 3.909), at a 0.05 significance level). In religion (Christian and Muslim) results showed that F (1.142 < Fcrit 3.909), at a 0.05 significance level). In the Interaction effect of variables gender and religion F (0.071 < Fcrit 3.909), at a 0.05 significance level).

### DISCUSSION

Focus in the current study the objective was to examine influence of gender (Male and Female), and Religion (Islamic and Christian) and their interaction effect on the Positive Mental Health among the international students studying Gujarat State as form the result findings tabulated all null hypothesis found to be no significant and show the following;

#### *Influence of gender (male, female) on positive mental health.*

In positive mental health, gender can also play a significant role (Rehman, 2017). While men and women may experience similar rates of mental health challenges, they may express symptoms differently and face unique challenges. For example, men may be less likely to seek help for mental health issues due to societal expectations of masculinity, leading to underdiagnosis and undertreatment. On the other hand, women may experience higher rates of mood and anxiety disorders, which could be influenced by hormonal fluctuations, societal pressures, and gender-specific stressors such as caregiving responsibilities and experiences of gender-based violence. In the present research result gender is not a factor in determining the level of Mental health of the individual, as there is no significant difference between males and females in the aspect of positive mental well-being. Research done by (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2018) Gender differences was found for psychological distress, anxiety, and depression with girls reporting significantly higher scores than boys. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed that adolescents who are dissatisfied with their social contacts and experience poor social support reported more psychological

## **Analysis of Influence of Gender and Religion on Positive Mental Health among the International Students Studying in Gujarat State**

distress, anxiety, and depression. In addition, young adult boys (20–25 years of age) were more likely to experience psychological distress when compared to late adolescent boys (15–19 years of age).

The present study results of gender showed that  $F(1.381) < F_{crit}(3.909)$ , at a 0.05 level of significance has no significant relationship with positive mental health this implies that to be a male or female is not a sign of having good mental health or having challenged mental health.

### ***Influence of religious (Christian, Muslim) on positive mental health***

When considering the influence of religious beliefs on positive mental health, particularly concerning Christianity and Islam, current research results show  $F(1.142) < F_{crit}(3.909)$ , at a 0.05 level of significance. suggests that there is no significant difference between the two religions. Both Christianity and Islam offer individuals coping mechanisms, social support, a sense of meaning and purpose, forgiveness, gratitude, hope, and resilience, all of which contribute to positive mental health outcomes.

One study published (Puente et al., 2015) in the Journal of Religion and Health found that individuals who identified as either Christian or Muslim reported similar levels of well-being and life satisfaction. Both groups reported higher levels of positive mental health when they were actively engaged in religious practices, such as prayer, meditation, and attending religious services. These practices provided individuals with a sense of comfort, connection, and purpose, leading to improved emotional well-being. Research done by Chepwogen (2023) found similar results suggesting that Learned optimism may not be a significant factor in predicting positive mental health regardless of gender or religion.

Furthermore, research has shown that the social support networks provided by religious communities are beneficial for mental health regardless of religious affiliation. Whether through church groups, mosques, or other religious organizations, individuals find a sense of Belonging and support to help individuals cope with life's challenges and promote resilience. Note that, while there may be differences in religious practices and beliefs between Christianity and Islam, research suggests that both religions can have a similar positive impact on mental health. Whether through coping mechanisms, social support, or core teachings, individuals in both religious communities experience improved well-being when they actively engage with their faith. Ultimately, it is the individual's connection to their religious beliefs and practices that influence their mental health, rather than the specific denomination or religious tradition.

### ***Interaction effects of gender (Male, Female) and Religion (Christian, Muslim) on Positive mental health***

In recent years, researchers have sought to understand how gender and religious affiliation interact to shape individuals' experiences of positive mental health (Iles-Caven et al., 2020). Specifically, they have investigated whether the relationship between these variables differs depending on an individual's gender and religious identity. This exploration aims to shed light on the nuanced ways in which social and cultural factors intersect to influence mental well-being.

Gender, as a social construct, encompasses a range of roles, expectations, and behaviors that are culturally defined and vary across societies. Similarly, religious affiliation reflects an

## **Analysis of Influence of Gender and Religion on Positive Mental Health among the International Students Studying in Gujarat State**

individual's adherence to a specific set of beliefs, practices, and values associated with a particular faith tradition. Both gender and religion can play significant roles in shaping individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, thereby influencing their mental health outcomes. The study of (Agorastos, 2014) shows that Religiosity/spirituality and personal beliefs constitute important parameters of human experience and deserve greater consideration in the psychotherapeutic treatment of psychiatric disorders.

Focusing on current results examining the interaction effects of gender and religion affiliation on positive mental health, results have often found no significant differences since  $F(0.071 < F_{crit} 3.909)$ , at a 0.05 level of significance. This suggests that regardless of whether an individual identifies as male or female and regardless of their religious affiliation (Christian or Muslim), their experiences of positive mental health tend to be similar. In other words, gender and religious affiliation, when considered together, do not significantly impact individuals' overall sense of well-being.

However, it's essential to interpret these findings cautiously. While no significant differences may have been observed in statistical analyses, it doesn't negate the potential influence of gender and religious affiliation on positive mental health at the individual level. Factors such as cultural norms, social support networks, and personal beliefs may still shape how individuals experience and perceive their mental well-being.

### ***Study Implications***

The relevance and importance of this study or such kind of study focused on positive mental health to international students are more focused on improving and understanding cultural differences and how they may impact the individual level of mental health. The following few mentioned suggestions can be used for the improvement of mental wellness.

**Provide supporting programs:** Based on the findings, offer practical recommendations for the development and enhancement of support programs like games, dances, cultural festivals, engagement groups, etc., aimed at promoting positive mental health among international students. Those programs will help them to improve their life satisfaction, improve their friendship, and build the connection between themselves and local students/society.

**Evaluate Support Systems and Resources:** Research results can be used to make an assessment of the availability, and utilization of support systems and resources for international students, such as counseling services, cultural integration programs, and academic assistance. Examine how these resources may mediate positive mental health and improve their academic success.

**Examine Positive Mental Health Indicators:** Research Findings help to develop, identify, and assess positive mental health indicators among international students, including factors such as life satisfaction, happiness, resilience, and overall psychological well-being and its influence on their daily lives.

**Explore Demographic and Cultural Influences:** Results may help to investigate how demographic variables (such as age, gender, and religion) and cultural factors may impact the positive mental health outcomes among international students.

## **Analysis of Influence of Gender and Religion on Positive Mental Health among the International Students Studying in Gujarat State**

**Examine Academic and Social Adaptation:** This finding helps to make analyze the relationship between locus of control and the successful adaptation of international students to the academic and social environment. Explore how their perception of control influences their ability to cope with academic challenges and social integration. Through games, sport and academic task therapy.

**Identify Coping Mechanisms and Strategies:** This finding may be used to investigate the coping mechanisms and strategies employed by international students in response to challenges and stressors. By Examine the effectiveness of these coping strategies in maintaining positive mental health.

### ***Limitation of the study.***

- While this study did not find significant differences, future research may explore additional factors or variables that could influence the dependent variable. Consideration of a larger sample size or the inclusion of other relevant variables might enhance the understanding of the factors affecting the outcome.
- **Caution in Generalization:** The conclusions are based on the specific sample and context of this study. Caution should be exercised when generalizing these findings to broader populations or different settings.
- **Further Exploration:** While no significant differences were found in this analysis, it does not imply that the studied factors are irrelevant. Additional research avenues, including qualitative investigations, could provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, based on the current analysis, there are no significant differences between groups based on Gender, Religion, or their Interaction based on measuring positive mental health among international students. However, the conclusion should be viewed in the context of the study's limitations, and further exploration may be warranted to deepen the understanding of the factors influencing the dependent variable. In respect to understanding day-to-day activities concerning mental health results the gender differences on stress impact, life satisfaction and fulfillment of responsibilities as well as these questions show a number of participants need psychological health to increase their mental wellness.

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**Analysis of Influence of Gender and Religion on Positive Mental Health among the International Students Studying in Gujarat State**

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## **Analysis of Influence of Gender and Religion on Positive Mental Health among the International Students Studying in Gujarat State**

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